

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0179
Valid 28/04/2025

FLAT
GORSTY HILL UNITED REFORM
CHURCH GORSTY HILL ROAD
UPPER TEAN

CHANGE OF USE OF PART OF THE
BUILDING FROM CHURCH
COMMUNITY ROOM TO GROUND
FLOOR FLAT

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of development
- Design/visual impact
- Highways
- Amenity (including neighbour amenity)
- Coal (Low-risk area)

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

A detached, two-storey, building sitting at right angles to Gorsty Hill Road which rises in level in a north-easterly direction. The application relates to the ground floor of the two-storey building only, and its associated yard space on the north-western side of the building. The site is surrounded by residential properties, and it overlooks the church courtyard/carpark to the south. A pedestrian path is sited at the front of the building, after which the land level drops to the car park where there is a retaining wall.

For the purposes of planning policy consideration, the application site is located within the Upper Tean Development Boundary and Conservation Area. There are no listed buildings / structures which need to be considered. the site is within a low-risk coal development area.

PROPOSAL

Change of use of the ground floor from a Church Community room to a residential flat. The flat would have two bedrooms, a living/dining room area, bathroom, and kitchen. Some external amenity space is to be provided within an existing yard area to the north-western side of the building. A car parking space would be formed at the front of the building, in the area where the path is currently situated. The plans show that railings and a low-level wall would be removed to provide off-road parking for a single vehicle.

The agent has confirmed that the proposed flat would be rented, that it would not be social or affordable unit.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan

SS1	Development Principles
SS2	Settlement Hierarchy
SS8	Larger Villages Areas Strategy
DC1	Design Considerations
DC2	The Historic Environment
C1	Creating Sustainable Communities
T1	Development and Sustainable Transport
Appendix 2	Parking Standards

Checkley Neighbourhood Plan

HSG1	Housing and Site Allocations
HSG 2	Housing Mix

COM 1 Community, Sport and Recreational facilities
DES1 Design
DES 4 Conservation Areas

Supplementary Planning Guidance

1. Design Principles for Development in the Staffordshire Moorlands
2. Space About Dwellings

Supplementary Planning Document

1. Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide

Checkley Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan

National Planning Policy Framework

Including sections;

- | | |
|----|---|
| 2 | Achieving sustainable development |
| 6 | Building a strong, competitive economy |
| 8 | Promoting health and safe communities |
| 9 | Promoting sustainable transport |
| 12 | Achieving well-designed places |
| 16 | Conserving and enhancing the historic environment |

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

84/13400/OLDDC	Demolition of stable block and replacement with church, conversion of public house to meeting rooms and caretakers flat (outline). Approved.
06/01215/FUL	Change of use of ground floor to temporary residential dwelling. Approved.
08/00935/FUL	Extension of time period for temporary residency. Approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice. Expired.
Neighbour consultation period. Expired.
Press Advert: Leek Post and Times. Expired.

Public Comments

One representation received from a member of the public, objecting to the application, comments can be summarised as follows;

- Property has been vacant for at least 5 years.
- Bats are long established within the property.
- Road is narrow with poor visibility in both directions for pedestrians and drivers.
- Not enough turning space or the correct visibility to put a driveway outside of the property.
- Similar proposal was refused close to this site.

Checkley Parish Council

CPC note that the Applicant has not provided sufficient and satisfactory evidence that the community use is no longer viable or that there is convenient alternative provision as required by the Checkley

Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan policy COM1. " COM1: Community, Sport and Recreational Facilities ; Clause 2. Development proposals that would involve the loss of an existing community facility will only be supported where a similar existing or replacement facility will be available in a convenient location for users, or it can be demonstrated in accordance with SMDC Local Plan Policy C1(3) that the community use is no longer needed or viable. " CPC are therefore of the opinion that this Application cannot be approved as the Applicant has failed to demonstrate that a similar existing or replacement facility will be available in a convenient location for users, or that the community use is no longer needed or viable.

Conservation officer (SMDC)

First consultation response was as follows.

Summary of Significance

The proposal would be situated in Upper Tean Conservation Area, which was designated for its rural industrial origins and transformation from cottage industry to factory production through the 18th and 19th centuries. Tape weaving was established in the village and the mills were dominant part of the skyline, but have since been converted and enclosed by residential development. With the exception of mill buildings, buildings are typically 2- to 3 storeys and constructed in red brick walling with Staffordshire blue tiles and slate roofs. The development site is visible on late-19th century mapping (Fig.1) and makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

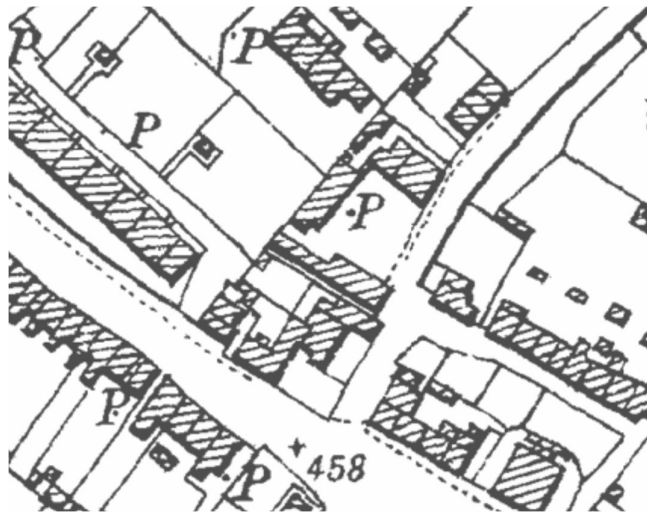


Fig.1 – c.1899-1901 OS map [online] (Staffs HER)

Assessment and Impact

The proposed development would involve the conversion of the community building into residential use, the external works to facilitate this would include blocking up some windows to the front and rear elevation, insertion of new external doors and rendering the whole of the building.

The building currently makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area as it represents a good example of traditional construction in handmade orange-reddish bricks with a pitched blue clay tile roof and is illustrative of traditional, such as the dentilled eaves. Although there have been some modern alterations, such as the porch added to the front and replacement faux sash windows, the building has still retained its historic linear plan form, modest and traditional character.

Render

Whilst no specific details have been provided for the colour, finish and application of the proposed render, this would likely have a harmful impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. It is likely that the projection of the render when applied to the building would subsume architectural detailing, such as window reveals and the dentilled brickwork to the eaves, thus diminish its vernacular character and detailing. In addition, the render would cover the charm, character and patina of age currently presented by the traditional brickwork.

It is noted that there are other examples of rendering within the village and within vicinity of the site. However, these numbers are limited. Some of the rendered buildings are modern late-20th century housing which do not contribute to the area's significance, whilst others are modern inappropriate render applications (e.g. roughcast) and their application has detracted from the building's character. These examples of render elsewhere have a harmful impact on the significance of the Conservation Area and, as their number is limited, they do not form part of the *overriding* character of the area. From a conservation perspective, it would be recommended that the rendering is removed from the proposal to minimise the visual impact on the appearance of the designated heritage asset.

Alterations to windows and doors

It is proposed to infill some windows to the front and rear, the principle of which would likely have a negligible impact on the character of the Conservation Area. However, as set out above, there would be some concerns over the proposed rendering infill of these openings. Subject to the removal of the render from the proposed development, it would be recommended that the windows are infilled with sympathetic colour and finish brickwork.

The application form states that all windows and doors would be replaced with upvc alternatives. From a conservation perspective, upvc windows and doors are often discouraged as they have bulky and shiny frames which cannot authentically replicate the craftsmanship and detailing of historic joinery. Nevertheless, there have been some recent improvements in the design and manufacture of upvc windows and some products are more sympathetic to the historic detailing. It would, therefore, be recommended that further clarification on the proposed detailing of replacement windows and external doors (such as technical drawings and/or manufacturer's specifications) would be provided to illustrate the visual impact of these alterations.

Boundary treatments

Currently there is a modern fence at the rear, running perpendicular to the roadside. The proposed location and block plan (dwg no. 1211-006) mentions the installation of a fence, but no specific details of this have been provided with the submission. Further clarification and details would be required to fully understand the extent of the proposal, or is the existing fence just to remain in situ?

Legislation and Policy

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

The local planning authority should have a desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the Conservation Area (s.72).

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024

In determining applications, local authorities should take account of sustaining and enhancing the significance of heritage assets and putting them to viable uses consistent with their conservation, the positive contribution that conservation of heritage assets can make to sustainable communities including their economic vitality, the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness (par.210).

Any harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within the setting), should require clear and convincing justification (par.213).

Where a proposed development would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal, including securing its optimum viable use (par.215).

Local Development Framework

Consideration should also be given to the following documents and local development framework policies:

- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020) – DC2 The Historic Environment

Conclusions and Recommendations

In summary, the proposal would have a minor-moderate harmful impact on the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. This would be contrary to s.72 of the Act. With reference to planning policies, this would be 'less than substantial harm' to the designated heritage asset (par.215 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). There does not appear to be clear and

convincing justification provided for this level of harm (par.213 of NPPF) and there is a lack of detailed information to determine whether the proposed works would be high-quality to minimise some of the visual impact. We, therefore, object to the proposal from a conservation perspective.

We would recommend the following:

Removal of the rendering of the building from the proposed development

Further technical information on the window and door detailing

Further details on any alterations to boundary treatments

Officer Note: Amended plans have now been received and further Conservation comments are as follows:

Conservation comments addressed and no objections from heritage perspective anymore. The specification provided for a upvc window is a good example and no concerns with the principle of that being used in the building, but some of the windows don't appear to be sliding sashes and there is a bay window as well, so might be good idea to get a window condition still put on any approval.

Suggested conditions:

- Prior to the installation of the windows and doors hereby approved, details of their material, design, specification, method of opening, method of fixing and finish, in the form of drawings and sections of no less than 1:20 scale, shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be carried out only in accordance with the agreed details.

Reason: To ensure the development preserves the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- In relation to the above condition, trickle vents shall not be inserted into the windows and doors hereby approved.

Reason: To preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

- Prior to the infill of the window openings hereby approved, a sample of brick to be used shall be submitted to and agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The works shall thereafter be carried out only in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To preserve the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Waste Services (SMDC)

No representations received during the statutory consultation period.

Environmental Health

No objections subject to conditions. Advise floor plans are amended so sleeping areas both existing and proposed are protected from internal noise transmission

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommendation Summary: Conditional

Site Visit Conducted on: 14-May-2025

Conditions

1. The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the access to the site within the limits of the public highway has been completed.
2. Before the proposed development is brought into use details of the vehicular access to the site within the highway shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The access to the site shall thereafter be constructed in accordance with the approved details before the proposed development is brought into use.

3. The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the access drive rear of the public highway has been surfaced and thereafter maintained in a bound material for a minimum distance of 5m back from the site boundary in accordance with details to be first submitted to and approved in writing by the Local planning authority. The access shall thereafter be surfaced in accordance with the approved details.

Reasons:

ALL To comply with NPPF Paragraph 115, 116; to comply with SMDC Local Plan Policy DC1; in the interests of highway safety.

Important informative to be included on decision notice.

The dropped crossing to the site shall be constructed in accordance with the submitted drawing and SCC Highways requirements. Please note that prior to the access being constructed you require Section 184 Notice of Approval from Staffordshire County Council. The link below provides a link to 'vehicle dropped crossings' which includes a 'vehicle dropped crossing information pack' and an application form for a dropped crossing. Please complete and send to the address indicated on the application form (or email to trafficandnetwork@staffordshire.gov.uk)

Vehicle access crossing (dropped kerb) - Staffordshire County Council

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/transport/staffshighways/licences/>

Notes to Planning Officer

Application is to convert ground floor room into a flat. Site is sustainably located close to Tean village centre. Gorsty Hill Road has no footway but is lightly trafficked and speeds are likely to be low. Driveway is proposed to the side of the building to accommodate a parked vehicle. There does not appear to be any parking for the existing first floor flat. Provision of one space is an improvement over the existing. Works will be required to construct the parking space but no details have been submitted - hence conditions above. As the driveway is above the level of the adjacent car park and any parked vehicle will be very close to the retaining wall, it is strongly recommended that a structural engineer and a geotechnical engineer be consulted to ensure the existing wall can accommodate additional loading or what works will be required to strengthen the wall - prior to the start of any works. Gorsty Hill Road is the unclassified D1201. Turning area is not required. Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Gorsty Hill Road within 50m either side of the property access in the previous five years.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Local Plan policy SS8 identifies the area of Upper Tean as a larger village. Within the larger villages, a range of developments can be supported in principle and this includes housing development. SS8 identifies that some of the instances where housing developments can be supported (applicable to this site) are as follows;

- Increasing the range of available and affordable house types, including for first time buyers and families;
- Supporting the development of housing windfall sites within the village boundaries, subject to wider Local Plan policies

There are no objections to the principle of residential development within a larger village, however all material planning matters must be considered and found acceptable.

Local Plan policy C1 'Creating Sustainable Communities' is relevant in that approval of this application would see a residential use replacing a space currently available for community use. This policy seeks to retain and enhance existing community facilities. Proposals relating to the loss of a community facility should be resisted unless;

a) an alternative facility of the same type and quality that meets the needs of the community is available in the locality or can be provided in an accessible location in the same locality; or

b) a viability appraisal including a marketing exercise by a qualified professional demonstrates that there are no options for continued or shared use as any type of community facility which are financially viable and it can be demonstrated that loss of the facility would not disadvantage local residents.

c) In the case of proposals to change use from one type of community facility to another, the Council will consider the respective benefits of both the existing and proposed uses in terms of their contribution to the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs.

Further information has been supplied in respect of the loss of a community facility space. The agent has submitted the following statement;

Taking into consideration SMDC Local Plan Policy C1 and Checkley Parish Neighbourhood Development Plan policy COM1, there are 2 other facilities that can accommodate the original use of the ground floor of this building. Great Wood Community Hall is approximately 430m from Gorsty Hill Reform Church and it boasts on its own website that it has community facilities for meetings, parties, shows etc.

The Venue is approximately 320m away and although is a Private Venue for hire, it advertises its use for community events as well. Both venues are better suited for use by the community than the property at Gorsty Hill for a number of reasons as set out below:

- Size of venue – Gorsty Hill previously had 3 small rooms for use, with small kitchen and 3 toilets.*
- Both alternative venues have facilities within the building to cater for all sizes of parties/functions.*
- Parking and accessibility – While limited parking appears to be available at The Venue, it is well served by public transport and has better accessibility due to being on flat terrain, unlike the steep incline of Gorsty Hill. Great Wood Community Hall has its own parking facilities and is within short walking distance of the town centre and is more central to the community.*

Further to this Gorsty Hill Reform Church community rooms have not been used as community rooms for over 20 years as shown by the planning history and confirmation that the building hasn't been used for over 5 years by the neighbour's comment. When the applicant purchased the property, it was in a very poor state of repair, with areas being deemed unsafe as the ceiling materials had fallen and plaster on the walls had been removed.

A review of the Great Wood Community Hall website confirms the information provided by the applicant. Great Wood does indeed have a good website, advertising that the main hall (which has fully fitted kitchen, as well as tables / chairs and sound system / disco lights available upon request) is available for hire (£15 per hour) and there is a function room (£10 per hour). The website also advertises a separate meeting room which is equipped with hearing loop, tables and chairs and offers tea/coffee upon request. There are clear booking contact details including mobile phone number, email address and a Facebook link. The Great Wood facility has a larger parking area and it is easier to access the site than the Gorsty Hill building. The Great Hall website has a clear location plan, making the venue easy to find.

The applicant also references another facility called The Venue, High Street, Upper Tean. A Google search reveals that this facility also has its own website with clear contact details including mobile phone number, email address and a facility to submit online queries. The website informs that there is an auditorium, theatre and event space.

Given that there are alternative facilities within the area, it is considered that there is no conflict with Policy C1 of the Local Plan or Policy COM1 (2) of the Checkley Neighbourhood Plan. Together with the fact that residential development can be supported within the Larger Villages, it is considered that the proposal is acceptable in principle.

Design/visual impact

The application is for a change of use of a ground floor space to form 1 residential unit. It is within the Conservation Area as noted above. External alterations include replacement of windows / doors where necessary and the blocking of some windows. Alterations would also include the provision of a parking space which is discussed within the Highways section of this report.

The Conservation Officer initially objected to the scheme due to concern about the application of render, replacement windows and lack of clarity on boundary treatment.

It was originally proposed to render the entire building, however after officer's expressed concerns about this, the applicant will now retain the brickwork. There is some existing render on the north-western facing gable and this is to remain. The applicant has also provided further details concerning the proposed, replacement window frames. The Conservation officer has no objections to the type proposed but does recommend a condition to secure details including materials, design, methods of fixing etc, at a 1:20 scale.

The building sits at right-angles to the road, therefore part of the building is visually prominent within the street scene. For the aforementioned reasons it is considered that the proposal (as amended) is now acceptable and compliant with relevant parts of Policies DC1 and DC3 and DES1 and DES 4 of the Checkley Neighbourhood Plan.

Highways

The scheme is for two-bedroom accommodation together with living, dining, bathroom and kitchen areas. Adopted Local Plan parking standards require one off-road parking space for a two-bedroom property. The application proposes the formation of a single parking space at the front of the building in the area where the path is located that leads to the front of the building. Although the comments of the objector are noted, the County Highways officer has no objection to the proposed parking arrangements (detailed comments can be read within the 'Consultations section' of this report) and requests several conditions. Given there are no objections from the County Highways officer and that the creation of a parking space would not result in undue visual harm there are no material planning objections to this part of the scheme. The use of the ground floor of the building as a single flat in terms of traffic generation would be significantly less than if it were operating as a community facility.

Amenity (including neighbour amenity)

The application proposes some private, external amenity space for future occupants of the flat, which is located to the north-west of the building. At the time of the officer site visit, the external space was unused, overgrown and bounded by fencing and walls. The plan shows the intention to split the external space, allocating some for future occupants of the ground floor flat, and some for use of future first floor flat occupants. The agent has confirmed that the first-floor flat is currently vacant and in need of repair. The location of the proposed dividing fence is in the most logical position. The ground floor flat (the subject of this application) would benefit from approximately 35 square metres of space in addition to its proposed driveway and external access path linking the courtyard with the drive. The upstairs flat would only have a small outdoor area of approximately 20 square metres. Whilst neither of the external amenity spaces would comply with the Space About Dwellings standards (for new builds and/or standard housing estate layouts), it is borne in mind that.

- the upper floor already has consent for use as a flat.
- there are no policy objections to the use of the ground floor for residential accommodation.
- this is an existing building.
- there is no opportunity to increase the outdoor space provision.
- flats do not generally have private, external amenity space.
- use of the building for residential purposes will bring a currently vacant building, within the Conservation Area, back into use with much needed maintenance.
- Residential accommodation will go towards the under supply of housing within the district.

No neighbour overlooking issues are likely to arise. This is an existing building and the comings and goings from a 2-bedroom unit are likely to be less than what might otherwise be the case within a community facility. Existing window / door openings are being used where possible, indeed a number of small windows within the rear elevation are to be blocked up.

The Environmental Health officer has no objections to the scheme, recommending conditions in the event of an approval.

Consideration must be given to the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS). The flat could be a two-bedroom, three-person house or a two-bedroom four-person house. The maximum floorspace

required is 70 square metres, this is easily achieved with the floor area extending to approximately 85 square metres. The double room offers more space than the NDSS requirement of 11.5 square metres floor space and is larger than the required 2.75m wide room. Bedroom 2 complies with the standards.

For all of these reasons the scheme is considered to be acceptable in terms of amenity.

Coal (Low-risk area)

The application site is within a low-risk coal development area. Latest advice contained on the Gov.uk website is that 'If you are submitting a planning application in a Development Low Risk Area then there is no statutory requirement to submit a CMRA to the LPA' however 'the proposed development still lies within a coal mining area and could contain unrecorded hazards.' The advice is that if any coal mining feature is encountered it must be immediately reported to the Coal Authority.

It is noted that the objector refers to the building containing bats, however this application relates to the conversion of the ground floor of the building only, with no changes proposed to the first floor or roof space.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

For the reasons outlined within this report, it is recommended that the application is approved subject to conditions. The scheme is found to be acceptable in principle and in terms of design, visual impact, highways and amenity impact.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Approve.

Case Officer: Lisa Jackson

Recommendation Date: 18.07.2025

X 

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council