

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0176
Valid 16/04/2025

LAND AND BARN AT
BROMLEY EDGE LANE
WINKHILL

PROPOSED AGRICULTURAL
BUILDING AND ACCESS
TRACK

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Landscape character
- Sustainability
- Agricultural justification

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in an elevated position in a very open landscape. The site altitude is 275m or 900 feet ASL and with little higher ground in the immediate surroundings tends to be seen in approaching views as a skyline location.

The land is permanent field grassland bounded by low stone walls with sparse wire fencing.

Recent activity has led to piled limestone hardcore, new steel gates and some trenching to connect services to the land. There was a parked tractor by the existing barn.

PROPOSAL

The proposal involves the construction of a four-bay open fronted portal frame building 18m x 9m with an eaves height 3.65m and a ridge height of 4.87metres. An area of hardstanding along the length of the building frontage is shown as a strip 3m in width. This would merge with a new track of between 4.0m to 7.5m in width to be laid from the road to the west end of the building, a distance of c. 60metres. Not specifically itemised in the application, it appears that connection to services including water are also required.

The accompanying planning statement says:

The applicant purchased the land in April 2024 to form the base of his expanding agricultural business which includes an established sheep flock. The applicant also intends to establish a small commercial store cattle rearing enterprise and requires an agricultural building to provide modern, high welfare winter housing alongside storage of agricultural machinery and straw.

The building would be clad to the exterior as follows:

- Roof sheeting – factory coated coloured box profile metal sheets;
- Vertical side cladding – factory coated coloured fibre cement sheeting coloured Juniper Green;
- Below side cladding to be pre-stressed concrete panels;
- Doors and gates are galvanised finish.

In addition to the Planning Statement the application is accompanied by a BNG assessment and smaller sites metric.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
 SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
 SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
 DC1 Design Considerations
 DC2 The Historic Environment
 DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
 NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
 NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
 T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024)

Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;

Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 6 – Building a strong and competitive economy; 8 – Promoting healthy and safe communities; 9 – Promoting sustainable transport; 11 – Making effective use of land; 12 – Achieving well designed places; 15 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment; 16 – Conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G):

- Space About Dwellings SPG
- Design Principles SPG
- Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018

Local Plan Supporting Evidence Documents:

- Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None

NB – see adjacent and unrelated SMD/2018/0149 at Waterfall Cross to the north east – Erection of single storey agricultural building for use as implement store/stock husbandry – approved.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: **5th June 2025**

Neighbour consultation period ends: **20th May 2025**

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Waterhouses Parish Council – determined not to object but wishes to note its concerns over the potential long term appearance of the property and the possible need for screening in the future.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommends 'acceptance' subject to 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. The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the access track rear of the public highway has been surfaced and thereafter maintained in an appropriate 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.

Application is effectively for widening of an access. Works to widen the access have been partially completed. The gate has been set back. The access has not yet been surfaced. Access needs to be appropriately surfaced to safeguard the highway. At the time of my site visit, the weather was dry but there were ruts and tyre marks adjacent to the highway. Proposal will intensify use of the access. Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Bromley Edge Lane within 215m either side of the access in the previous five years.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

The site is within a relatively isolated location in open rural countryside. The relevant policy by which to derive the principle of development at this location is SS10 for the 'Other Rural Areas' (areas outside of town and village development boundaries). This policy states that:

These areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside.

In planning policy terms this is not a proposal that can be regarded as being “for employment uses”. In terms of agriculture, SS10(2) (second point) refers to “Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises”. Being open agricultural field land, together with a disused small former field barn, this is not in itself the site of an existing farm enterprise. The applicant purchased the 5.5 hectares (13.6 acres) at this location in April 2024. The applicant lives at Marston Montgomery, a direct line distance of some 15km (9 miles) and a probable journey distance of 15 miles. It is likely this would take at least 30 minutes each way.

According to the submitted planning statement the applicant currently has two parcels of rented ground further away still at Alkington, some 5km (3 miles) east of Marston Montgomery. This comprises a 6 acre and 3 acre block or 3.5 hectares in total. Due to the separation distances this land has little if any relevance in justification of the proposed development at Winkhill.

According to the application the land at Winkhill is currently used to accommodate the flock of “approximately 50 breeding sheep” supported with fodder and winter feed bought-in. This would equate to around 4 sheep per acre which is likely to be very much an upper maximum that this elevated and exposed upland grassland could carry. The land is mapped as Grade 4 (poor quality) in the Agricultural Land Classification map of England and Wales (1973). No livestock were found present at the LPA site visit. No information such as CPH number, movement records or flock ownership records have been provided.

It is proposed that the building would be used to accommodate from 13 to 21 head of cattle (depending on age). It is said in the statement that in spring time prior to lambing the building would be used to house the lambing sheep. It is not explained in the statement but it is possible the overwintered cattle would be sold at this point in order to vacate the building. A replacement batch may later be bought-in to repeat the rearing sequence. It is also stated that straw in bulk would be bought-in for bedding which would require storage space and that the building would house a tractor with loader, alongside other equipment and machinery such as a topper, and other attachments.

The store cattle / beef rearing aspect of this proposal is shown not to be dependent upon the land at this location. It would appear to be a fully indoor operation which therefore could be carried on anywhere that has an available building. There is not an ‘essential need’ for this building development to be located in the countryside. Whilst reference is made to housing sheep during lambing it is clear that this is not the main intended purpose of the building. Indoor lambing is not the only way to rear sheep and more commonly in the uplands lambing will take place outdoors. Indeed, the application states that “the applicant has no suitable livestock housing at present to house either cattle or sheep”. This confirms that in terms of the 50-strong sheep flock referred to there is not an “essential need” for the building.

It is also said that the building would be used for “routine livestock handling including TB testing, vaccinations, worming and other animal welfare tasks”. However these too are operations commonly undertaken outdoors using (in the case of sheep) temporary (or semi-fixed) handling pens and handling does not make a building an essential need.

More fundamentally the livestock rearing activities proposed require a daily stockperson’s presence. The requirement is further intensified during lambing which for a flock of this size is likely to take place over about four to six weeks (and potentially longer). Living some 10 to 15 miles away it would appear highly impractical for this applicant to provide the level of livestock care and attention which would be required for managing indoor housed beef cattle rearing and indoor lambing. This further underlines that there is not and indeed cannot be an ‘essential need’ for the development at this location.

Based on the above it is concluded that there is no in-principle policy support for the proposal. There is not an ‘essential need’ and nor can it be accepted that the site is home to an ‘existing farm enterprise’.

Moreover policy SS10(3) is to Enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by [first point]:

Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape;

The main considerations in terms of the detail of the application are chiefly the impact of the design on the character and appearance of the area.

Design and Landscape Character Impact

The building proposed has a highly utilitarian form which although relatively typical of modern 20thC and more recent farm yard buildings would appear wholly out of place if erected in isolation in this prominent open field setting. The application appears to acknowledge the height impacts of the building and speaks of setting the building into the slope but the degree to which this could moderate the visual prominence on this fairly modest slope is likely to be slight.

Adding to the quantum of development would be the area of surfaced track and yard space required. The proposed 3m strip is likely to be an underestimate of the likely need in practice and visual impacts can be expected to spill still further forward into the field. The Parish Council is understandably alert to the overall likely longterm consequences of this proposal for the appearance of the area. Screen planting could potentially assist if successfully carried out and maintained but tree planting is vulnerable to livestock grazing and is always in competition with the primary farming aim. At this location the applicant in any event does not control land along the north elevation aspect which therefore further limits the scope for screen planting.

The location is in the Southwest Peak Gritstone Highland Fringe landscape character type (LCT). It is considered a ‘high’ quality landscape in a Staffordshire county-wide

context (level four on a five point scale where 5 is highest) and one which has the 'highest sensitivity' to landscape change. The site is towards the summit of a broad gently inclined ridge top which marks the boundary with the Peak District National Park, a nationally protected landscape which comes to within 130m of the site.

The small stone field barn is a character feature of the rural area where modest field storage could traditionally be provided remote from a main farmstead nearby. For this small compartment of farm land the capacity of this building to store dry fodder for winter use by outwintered stock deserves to be more closely assessed. In contrast the relatively large proposal building would dominate and consequently detract from the stone barn and would mar the wider characteristics of the setting including the relationship to the character of the area of the stone farmstead at Waterfall Cross 160m to the north east.

In summary the proposed building is out-of-place and out-of-scale and the proposed use of metal cladding would give it an industrialised appearance further at odds with the rural setting.

Due to the open exposed lie of the land the building would have considerable prominence as an intrusion in the landscape that would be visible from public vantages and nearby dwellings.

There would be conflict with policies SS10, DC1, and DC3 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

Sustainability

NPPF paragraph 88 is headed 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy'. For reasons of design as discussed above this proposal does not meet the expectation of NPPF 88 (a) in that it is found not to be a well-designed new building for this location. Whilst there is support at NPPF 88 (b) for "the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses" this must be considered in the round with the wider Local Plan and NPPF policies. A particular concern is that the site is unfeasibly distant from the applicant's home and other land and the introduction of a wholly new farm enterprise to be based in these fields would not represent sustainable development which is a core principle of the NPPF.

Amenity

The development is likely to appear harshly intrusive on the outlook for occupiers of Waterfall Cross but not to the extent that the living conditions would be directly harmed.

Highway Safety

The County Highways advice is that the access from the highway can be made acceptable subject to condition in the event of approval.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The submitted BNG Assessment report finds that prior to the development there is “a single habitat type within the red-line boundary comprising Modified Grassland”. The LPA finds this in line with expectations for this site. The site area is stated as 963m² which is consistent with or possibly slightly larger than the submitted red edge and therefore does not attempt to underestimate the liability. The applicant has relied upon the smaller sites assessment tool to derive a net gain value of 0.0409 habitat units to be provided within the adjacent ‘blue-edged’ land ownership and equating to a +10.63% gain in biodiversity. This is shown in appendix 4 to the assessment as an ‘Enhancement Area’ to include 23 Small Trees (DBH<30cm); 20% Small Leafed Lime; 30% Field Maple; 10% Sessile Oak; 20% Beach and 20% Sycamore. The LPA has no reason to doubt this as being an appropriate and correct measure based on using the smaller sites assessment tool.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

In terms of scale and materials the proposal is found unacceptable in design for this rural location and harmful to the character and appearance of the countryside. Further harm would arise from the inevitable accompanying intensification of the land use in particular due to the creation of hard surfacing for access and to facilitate functional use of the building. With no existing farm establishment there is no on-site stock management presence and with the applicant’s living accommodation being based some 10 to 15 miles or more away the proposal is seen as being unsustainable in concept and location.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : **Refuse**

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 20.08.2025

X 

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council