

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2024/0512
Valid 14/11/2024

EASING VILLA
STILE HOUSE LANE
LEEK

SELF-BUILD CONVERSION
AND ALTERATION OF
DOMESTIC OUTBUILDING TO
FORM 1NO. DWELLINGHOUSE
AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Rural location and sustainability
- Character and appearance
- Design
- Ecology – protected species (bats)

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

Consent was granted for 'alterations to outbuilding and change of use of first floor to ancillary accommodation' 14th May 2025. This work has begun and is largely completed externally.

Previously this was a detached two storey former barn converted to garages at ground floor facing into the curtilage forecourt of Easing Villa but backing on to field to the rear.

The building had a low lean-to timber shed along the rear (north-westerly) elevation effectively within the field. This has now been replaced in brick and tile including traditional inward opening hopper style windows. This lean-to wraps around and merges with a further structure off the east gable end. The building was found to have had the extended layout at least since 2003 (by reference to air photos).

The main two storey building is of obvious age and character and is prominent from the public road (Thornccliffe Road) across the field 70m to the north.

PROPOSAL

The development is proposed as a one-bedroomed dwelling and in the first instance is intended to accommodate the present-time occupier of Easing Villa which it is assumed would be vacated.

In amended plans following discussions, some reduction in fenestration and the omission of a gabled dormer have been agreed. The scheme introduces a more domestic appearance at the ground floor elevation with three large French door

openings. In other respects as a result of the agreed amendments there is some retention of the vernacular aesthetic of the building.

The scheme divides the established associated land of the existing main dwelling and incorporates an element of the adjacent field with the proposal development.

The application is accompanied by a Planning Statement, Preliminary Ecological Report and a Bat and Bird Survey.

To address further matters with regard to bats, additional information was supplied 10th October 2025 which shows a bat loft to be formed in the existing car port building within the site.

BNG

The development is being undertaken as a 'self-build' project and is considered exempt from the requirements of Biodiversity Net Gain on this basis. However, the standard conditions will be required to ensure that this is the case.

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
H1 New Housing Development
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; 5 – Delivering a sufficient supply of homes; 6 – Building a strong and competitive economy; 7 – Ensuring the vitality of town centres; 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

SMD/2020/0543 – alterations to outbuilding and change of use of first floor to ancillary accommodation – approved – underway

Previously, none on record specific to this building. Several concerned with alterations and extensions to the separate 'parent' dwelling.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 24.12.2024

Neighbour consultation period ends: 13.01.2025

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Tittesworth Parish Council – no objection

Leek Town Council [adjacent] – no objection /and not un-neighbourly

SMDC Waste Collection

'No issues'

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommend 'acceptance' noting the application is to convert domestic outbuilding to dwelling.

Easing Villa is currently served by two vehicular accesses. Proposal involves separating these access such that the proposed conversion is served by the northernmost access while Easing Villa is served by the southernmost access.

Both accesses are existing and in current use. Hedge on the frontage of the site appears well maintained which allows for adequate visibility. Stile House Lane is lightly trafficked and speeds are relatively low due to geometry and proximity of the junction with Thorncliffe Road.

There is adequate space within the curtilage of both dwellings to accommodate parking.

Site is not in the most sustainable of locations. There are no footways between the site and A53 Buxton Road. However, building is existing and previously had approval for conversion to ancillary residential.

Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Stile House Lane or Thorncliffe Road within 215m either side of the property access in the previous five years.

Ecology Consultee – Staffordshire Wildlife Trust

A detailed response is provided including a recommended 'holding objection' pending receipt of further information as follows:

1. Descriptions and evaluation of the habitats within the application site and any trees on or adjacent to the application site should be provided and any impacts of the proposed scheme should be assessed;
2. Additional assessment of building/structures and trees on or near to the site in respect of roosting bats should be undertaken and the results used to inform mitigation/compensation measures;
3. Further information / clarification on the proposed bat mitigation and compensation measures are requested, in particular to ensure the proposed dedicated 'bat loft' will continue to support the brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) maternity roost and to confirm that bats will not be left without a roost during the anticipated development schedule;
4. Assessment of the proposed development on other protected or notable species should be undertaken including a desk study as required; and
5. Further clarification of how the scheme meets the de minimis exemption for Statutory Biodiversity Net Gain is required, using the appropriate date for the baseline.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

Proposed Conversion to a new dwelling needs to be determined by reference to SS10 and H1. For housing, Policy SS10 supports the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building provided it is in accordance with Policy H 1.

Policy H1(5) establishes that "in the other rural areas in the open countryside, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted [relevant to this proposal]: (d) The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion".

The building can be considered to meet this primary test and the proposal is therefore capable of being supported in principle. The main issues are travel sustainability of the location; design appearance; associated changes in land use.

Sustainability

The location is a relatively short distance from Leek, some 400m from the edge of the development boundary and c.2km in total to the town centre. There are roadside pavements and street lighting from the 400m point into the town. The initial 400m comprises straight and only moderately inclined roads with reasonable visibility but no lighting or pavement. Whilst it is more probable that occupiers would opt to drive to and from town, either walking or cycling would be realistic alternatives at least some of the time. There are primary, middle and secondary schools at or within about 1.5km

walking distance which (whilst not directly relevant to the application) give an indication of the proximity of the development to the town and its services.

Design

Through agreed revisions the LPA has sought to retain more of the building's original character than was apparent in the plans as first submitted. There remains some compromise with the ground floor elevation facing north west into the proposed garden where a series of three sets of French Doors are proposed. Initially the applicant had wanted this ground floor elevation to be entirely glazed. There is some public visibility of this elevation eg from the Easing Lane / Thorncliffe Road junction with 100m to the north west. This is less critical in the case of the ground floor and can be further screened by garden boundary hedge planting as is proposed within the field.

In terms of space both internally and outside, including parking, the scheme is amply provided for in excess of the Council's minimum requirements.

The proposed additional garden area to be created (c.300m²) is obviously integral to the applicant's concept. On balance it is judged preferable to have a designated and defined area of garden than simply having garden usage 'bleed' into the adjacent field. It will also be possible to require the field boundaries to be planted with native species hedging which will bring both screening and biodiversity benefits.

Amenity

The conversion is at right-angles to the principal front elevation of the main dwelling and the scheme proposes a dividing low wall and screen planting to further separate the properties.

Highway Safety

As confirmed by the HO response, no issues.

Other Matters

Included within the site red edge is land running to the rear (north east) of the conversion building and included within this land is a building labelled as stables. This is pre-existing development currently forming part of the site layout of Easing Villa. Whether this is retained with Easing Villa or 'allocated' to the proposed conversion, as proposed, can reasonably be considered to not have any new or additional planning consequence.

Protected Species

The applicant's submitted bat survey report identified that: "The building was found to provide bats with high roosting value due to the presence of gaps beneath the slates and within the brickwork and additionally, evidence of bats was discovered inside the building, which included low numbers of bat droppings and a maximum count of five bats observed during inspections of the building on 3rd June and 23rd September 2024." At 4.6 of the submitted report it is stated: "Although the number of droppings was low and did not represent the numbers typically associated with a maternity roost, the number of bats observed within the building and those counted emerging from it suggests the roost is used by breeding bats and most probably, the majority of individuals are located in summer beneath the ridge tiles which is why there were few droppings scattered across the floor space."

Notable from the results:

- 13th May 2024 three Brown long-eared bats were recorded emerging;
- prior to a nocturnal survey on 3rd June 2024, four brown long-eared were observed perched on the [internal] roof timbers of the building close to the ridge area;
- Dusk survey 3rd June at least three and possibly up to six brown long-eared bats were recorded emerging;
- Dusk survey 26th June 2024 – at least 11 brown long-eared bats were recorded emerging (and potentially up to 17);
- on 23rd September 2024, the ecologist observed five bats near the ridge area.

The applicant's bat surveyor advises that Natural England licensing must be obtained prior to works.

Addressing the Wildlife Trust's consultation response the LPA finds that points 1, 2 and 4 are somewhat broad in scope and seem to reach beyond the scheme's likely range of impacts and therefore may be considered are not reasonable or necessary requirements to impose.

With the 10th October 2025 additional information supplied by the applicant the LPA can be satisfied that – whilst still subject to Natural England licensing requirements which must follow any permission granted – in terms of the planning assessment there is sufficient information to support the scheme.

Regarding point 5 the LPA is now satisfied the scheme is exempt from BNG on basis of being self-build and the description of the development has been amended accordingly by the applicant / agent to properly reflect this. Conditions will be required to ensure that the proposed development accords with the definition of self build.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

In consideration of all of the above the scheme is recommended for approval.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Approve

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 06.11.2025

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

