

Application Reference No. : SMD/2025/0385 Site Address: Higherland Farm Caverswall Common Lane Caverswall
Staffordshire ST11 9EU Stoke-On-Trent Comments by: peter challinor peter challinor

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Submission: Objection

Comments: Response to Supporting Statements for Higherland Farm Planning Application S/2025/0385

P. J. Challinor 27/11/28 Laburnum Cottage, Caverswall Common, ST11 9EU

I wish to address some of the statements and issues put forward in some of the supporting statements for this planning application.

As of 27/11/25 there have been at least fifty-five different people who have made statements of objection all of whom are local residents or have some social stake in the area e.g. horse riders, owners of paddocks etc. Eleven statements of support have been registered. With regards to the statements of support for the proposed development: two have no comment at all, one is from the father of Mr Termine and two are from immediate family members of Mrs Termine. Eight are from people not living in the immediate area and three are from Weston Coyney / Caverswall. One of these three is from the purchaser of the applicant's previous property (Duskwood) and it makes no written comment. So at least five out of the eleven supporting statements have been put forward by people with known connections to the applicants. Most of the supporting arguments are about the economic benefit that approval of the application will bring to the community.

Economics

The suggested economic benefit stated in the application is minimal at best and would mostly be felt by the applicants. It would do little to add choice to an already saturated local market for the same and similar products. Adding three jobs on site to the local economy could easily be achieved if the applicants were to set up the same business on a different, more suitable brownfield site away from the green belt and the same subsidiary economic benefits stated by supporters would also accrue.

I would like to specifically address some of the supporting comments made by the Managing Director of the Olivetti Group. Some thought and time has obviously been put in to his long report. It is only courteous of me, therefore, to put the same level of thought and time into my response. I do wonder why a construction company based in Leicester would find it necessary to comment on a planning application in the Staffordshire Moorlands. There is obviously some connection between the applicants and Mr Olivetti who states that he has known Lee and Emma Termine for several years.

Although I do not possess the construction industry credentials of Mr Olivetti I do have other key professional experience which modesty prevents me from directly listing. I shall address each of his points in the same order as his own supporting statement and I will quote directly from his statement in blue italics to differentiate between his words and mine.

1. NATURE OF THE BUSINESS - NOT INDUSTRIAL

It is crucial to understand that a landscape stone retail and trade supply business is fundamentally different from industrial operations. This is a retail and trade counter business, not a quarry, not a concrete batching plant, not a recycling facility. The business model involves displaying stone products for customers to select, advising on specifications, and arranging deliveries. The vast majority of customer visits will be by car or small van. This is comparable in nature to a garden centre or builders' merchant - businesses which operate successfully throughout rural areas without causing the impacts some objectors fear.

The definition of minor industry in the UK is very clear. A landscape stone retail and trade supply business can be described as a minor industry, particularly within the context of zoning regulations and local economic classifications. Higherland Stone would fit the description of minor industry as the business would involve the handling, storing, and shipping of goods and materials, as well as distributing and selling them to other commercial businesses and retail customers, which are activities often listed under minor industrial definitions. The core operations of supply and trade therefore fit an industrial classification. With regards to visits being made mainly by car or small van the application states an estimate of no more than 2 cars per day and 15 per day in small van or flatbed trucks. I would ask the question will this small amount of visits really make for a successful business? Do small garden centres only have 2 visits a day by car? Does anyone really think that 2 visits a day by car is common for businesses of this type?

2. TRAFFIC REALITY VS PERCEPTION

As someone who manages major construction logistics daily, I can provide professional insight into the traffic implications. Some objectors appear to envisage constant streams of 18-tonne articulated lorries. The reality is vastly different: Retail stone businesses primarily receive deliveries by 7.5 tonne rigid vehicles, not large articulated lorries. Deliveries are scheduled, not continuous - typically 2-4 supplier deliveries per day maximum. Most customer traffic is cars and small vans collecting materials. Trade customers often collect in their own vehicles rather than requiring delivery. The business model is fundamentally different from high-volume operations like quarries or concrete plants. The proposed new access, turning areas, and hardstanding specifically address highway safety. Professional operators like Lee and Emma will implement delivery management protocols, restricting vehicle sizes where appropriate and scheduling deliveries to avoid peak times. This represents a vast improvement over the previous unrestricted agricultural use where any size of farm vehicle could access the site at any time without planning restrictions.

It is difficult to imagine the MD of a multimillion pound company being involved, or have experience in, the day to day management of operations and logistics required in the running of a small builder merchants such as the one proposed. On the other hand, we have the experience of application objector Mr Comyn, of Church Croft, Caverswall, who was the operations manager for a builder's merchants for 50 years. In his objection he stated:

It is disingenuous to suggest only smaller vehicles will service this site. I spent more than 50 years in the building materials supply trade and as a former branch manager for one of the UK's largest companies, I know that the only economical way for paving and hard landscaping materials and loose or bagged aggregates to be delivered is in full loads. These being on 40 ft articulated trucks of approx 40 tonnes GVW or 3 or 4 axle rigid LGV of 26 tonnes GVW.

In relation to the applicants being professional operators, I would like to know what professional qualifications / experience the applicants have in this type of operation.

Regarding being a vast improvement over the previous, unrestricted agricultural use where any size of farm vehicle could access the site at any time, that is precisely what you would expect in rural operations. The difference being that the frequency of such vehicles accessing that green belt paddock is infinitely less than that proposed in the application. The previous owners who ran an agricultural contracting business for many years at the property used the green barn mainly for storage and maintenance of their machines. The nature of the business meant that they

would leave the premises to carry out contract work on farms elsewhere and then return. However, they would regularly leave their machinery overnight where they would be working the next day. That unrestricted use of vehicles that is referred to was infinitely less than what is being proposed in this planning application. The author is making assumptions that are entirely unfounded in reality. This application absolutely does not represent a vast improvement over the previous use.

Regarding the new access, turning areas and hard standing proposed in the application it clearly does not satisfy highway safety otherwise the SCC Highways would have already found in the applicant's favour.

I include photos taken on Caverswall Common by motorists and myself on 14/11/25 which demonstrates clearly the intention of the applicants to have lorries larger than 18t visiting the site. The lorry pictured below was parked directly outside Higherland Farm whilst being unloaded for over 2 hours. This caused considerable disruption to vehicle flow with cars and lorries having to mount the grass verge to get past. The grass verge was substantially degraded and churned up as a result. The lorry was a curtain sider clearly in the 38 to 44t range. The owner of Higherland Farm was using a forklift truck to offload large pallets of materials during this time. So much for deliveries only arriving on 18t lorries.

3. COMPETITION AND ECONOMIC REALITY

The objection citing Stone Valley's existence fundamentally misunderstands commercial economics and planning policy. Planning permission is not refused simply because a competitor exists - if it were, no new shops, restaurants, or businesses would ever be approved. Competition is healthy and benefits consumers through choice, competitive pricing, and service quality. The construction and landscaping market across Staffordshire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, and the wider Midlands is substantial enough to support multiple suppliers. Indeed, professional contractors prefer having multiple supply options for reliability, pricing, and product range. Stone Valley's existence no more precludes Higherland Stone than the existence of one builders' merchant precludes another.

No objector is saying that planning permission should be refused based solely on the existence of competition. The actual point that is being addressed is the perceived need for a stone merchant on green belt on Caverswall Common. Objectors are directly challenging the economic argument for such a business which is fundamental when assessing whether or not the business offers economic benefit to the green belt area. Guidance in the NPPF sets out a general presumption against development in the Green Belt unless there are exceptional circumstances. This planning application does not meet the criteria for exceptional circumstance since the suggested economic benefit stated in the application is minimal at best. This moves us nicely into the next of the author's points.

4. GREEN BELT COMPLIANCE

Contrary to objectors' claims, this proposal aligns with green belt policy. The National Planning Policy Framework specifically supports the re-use of existing buildings in the green belt for appropriate commercial purposes. This is not new development on green belt land - it is conversion of existing agricultural buildings. The NPPF recognises that sustainable rural economies require businesses, and that converting redundant farm buildings prevents their decay whilst avoiding greenfield development. The proposal involves no new buildings, no extension of the developed footprint beyond existing structures, and includes significant landscape enhancement through tree planting. This represents exemplary sustainable development within green belt policy.

The first two sentences of this statement are incorrect. What it fails to point out is that the National Policy Framework supports green belt development only in exceptional circumstance. This absolutely is a new development on green belt land because it proposes to cover at least half of the existing green belt field in hard

standing, destroying grass verges and broad and linear habitat in the process actually degrading landscape. Will the planting of a few conifers compensate for the wanton destruction of habitat used by a wide variety of wildlife? The development breaches the 2024 Biodiversity legislation and the applied for exemption is clearly not acceptable as it does not meet the De minimis rule for exemption. Moreover, the farm buildings that are referred to are not disused. The applicants currently use them for storage of machinery and materials which support their existing businesses and those same buildings are in no danger of decay having many decades of life left in them as attested to by the former owners of Higherland Farm. The development clearly does not represent 'exemplary sustainable development within green belt policy'. It does not meet green belt policy at all. The author's actual knowledge of the local area and of the site itself seems to be sorely lacking.

5. OPERATIONAL MANAGEMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONTROLS

'Modern stone supply businesses operate to strict environmental standards. Professional operators implement: Dust suppression through water sprays and regular dampening of materials. Hard surfacing to minimise dust generation. Wheel washing facilities to prevent mud on roads. Appropriate operating hours (typically 8am-5pm weekdays, Saturday mornings). Noise management through site layout and operational procedures. Delivery scheduling and vehicle size restrictions where appropriate. Lee and Emma's professional approach and commitment to high operational standards ensure the business will be a responsible neighbour. Planning conditions can further control hours, lighting, and operational matters if officers consider this appropriate.'

Let us assume that the applicants would implement all of the dust suppression methods to minimise dust generation. Where on the original planning application does it mention wheel washing facilities? Where will the contaminated run off go? Even if they did use appropriate dust suppression methods and solve the run off problem how will the issues of excess noise, visual intrusion and reduced air quality from exhaust fumes be addressed? How does site layout on this planning application reduce noise apart from the planting of a few conifers on a small area of the field? Regarding delivery scheduling this shows a lack of experience in managing a builder merchant. Talk to any one managing such an operation and they will tell you it is rarely possible to schedule exactly when deliveries will arrive or leave. It's plainly an ill informed and incorrect statement. The author states that, in his opinion, the typical opening hours for such a business of this type are 8-5 on weekdays and Saturday mornings. I would agree with this. However, the planning application directly specifies operational hours as being 8-4 weekdays only, raising local resident concerns that hours of operation could be sought to be extended in the future.

6. RURAL CHARACTER AND VISUAL IMPACT

'The claim that this represents 'industrial' development is simply incorrect. Agricultural buildings converted to retail and trade supply use maintain rural character far better than allowing them to deteriorate. The proposal includes substantial tree planting which will enhance the landscape. Stone products displayed on hardstanding are visually comparable to other agricultural or commercial rural uses. Many successful rural businesses operate from converted farm buildings throughout Staffordshire - this is established planning practice and represents sustainable rural diversification.'

The buildings listed for change of use are in excellent condition and very unlikely to deteriorate according to the previous owners of Higherland Farm. The current owners still use them on a regular basis. As I mentioned earlier this planned proposal is defined as minor industrial usage. The so called 'substantial tree planting' is no more than 15m of conifers which would not offer any enhancement to the landscape but which would reduce natural light entering the West facing windows of Laburnum Cottage. As previously stated the landscape would actually be substantially degraded by the removal of a very large area of broad and linear habitat and the destruction of a wide area of an existing ditch. I agree that many rural businesses operate from converted farm buildings throughout Staffordshire but I have been unable to find a single stone / builders merchant that is operating in Staffordshire that is situated in the heart of a green belt area which has not already been designated as a large, brownfield industrial estate.

7. GENUINE MARKET NEED

'As a major construction contractor, I can confirm there is genuine demand for additional quality stone suppliers in this region. The construction and landscaping markets across Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Cheshire, and the wider

Midlands are substantial and growing. Current suppliers cannot always meet demand, particularly for specialist materials or during peak building seasons. Additional local capacity reduces transportation distances (benefiting the environment), provides supply chain resilience, and supports the regional construction industry. This is not speculation - this is professional market knowledge from someone operating in the industry daily.

If what is stated here is factual then Higherland Stone should expect far larger traffic flows than they are currently estimating. This statement actually undermines and in part contradicts the author's statement in point 2 where he seeks to minimise the degree of traffic flow. The new business would sit only ½ mile from a similar business at Stone Valley (which has far quicker and easier access via the A520), just over 2 miles from Milton Garden Products (which sits on a major road artery between Blythe Bridge and Stoke-on-Trent), just over 2 miles from B&Q Tradepoint and Huws Gray, and between 3 and 6 miles from at least six other builder's merchants (Wickes, Jewson, MKM, Emery's, Travis Perkins, DJZ Reclamation, Gardiners, etc.). There is no route to the proposed development site which would offer shorter or quicker access. How would transportation distances therefore be reduced? A cursory glance on Google maps would show how spurious this claim is. That is not speculation it is just a fact.

8. ECONOMIC AND EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS

The business will create genuine local employment - sales staff, yard operatives, delivery drivers, administrative roles. It will generate business rates, support local services, and strengthen the rural economy. These are material planning benefits that must be weighed in the planning balance. Rural areas need sustainable employment opportunities, and converting redundant farm buildings for appropriate commercial use represents exactly the type of rural economic development that planning policy encourages.

The business could indeed create some local employment but equally could result in job losses at existing suppliers. It could have similar beneficial economic impacts were it positioned on a more suitable, existing brownfields site. It certainly would not strengthen the local rural economy. Again the farm buildings are not redundant.

9. HIGHWAYS AUTHORITY CONSULTATION

I note Staffordshire County Council Highways have been consulted on this application. Their professional assessment of highway safety, access adequacy, and traffic impact is the appropriate technical evaluation, not speculation by objectors. The proposed improvements to access, visibility, turning, and parking represent substantial investment in highway safety infrastructure that currently does not exist for the agricultural use. If the Highways Authority raises no objection, this carries significant weight in the planning balance.

It is correct that the SCCH are the arbiters of correct technical evaluation. However, that does not mean that the objections submitted by local residents regarding highway safety are not valid and don't carry any merit. The only reason that investment in hard standing and turning circles is included is because it is realised by the applicants that planning would stand little chance of passing without it. Such hard standing and access arrangements would not be necessary for the agricultural use of that land as gated access already exists which has been used by agricultural machinery for access to that paddock and barns for decades. It hence follows that no increase in highway safety would accrue from the provision of yet another gateway onto that paddock and hence it adds absolutely no weight in the planning balance.

Moreover, there has been a substantial reduction in visibility in both directions around the Sandy lane junction with Caverswall Common Lane as a result of the applicants building a new brick wall above regulation height and beyond the original boundaries of the property. This wall has also substantially affected the visibility of the applicants exiting their own property as evidenced by the necessity to install two mirrors on the opposite side of the road. The original gates here were set substantially further back from the road hence offering clear sight in both directions which now no longer exists.

10. ADDRESSING OBJECTORS' CONCERNS

I have read the objections submitted and respectfully suggest they are based on misunderstandings about the nature of the business and significant exaggeration of likely impacts. Claims of 'catastrophic' impacts, constant streams of HGVs, and industrial operations do not reflect the reality of a retail stone supply business. Many objectors

appear to assume this is a quarry or heavy industrial operation - it is not. The comparison with other local businesses in objection letters actually demonstrates that the area already accommodates various commercial activities successfully. Concerns about horse riders, while I understand are genuinely felt, must be balanced against the fact that rural roads throughout Britain accommodate both equestrian users and commercial traffic through mutual consideration and appropriate speeds. The proposed access improvements actually enhance safety compared to the current situation.¿

I have read all of the objection statements and in none of them is there any reference or hint that objectors believe that the proposed development is for heavy industry or quarry type operations. This is significant exaggeration by the author. It is suggested that the objectors are suffering from some type of misunderstanding about the nature of the business. I feel that this is far from the case. Regarding catastrophic impact, I would ask if the author would be happy with the idea of a builder¿s merchants being set up right next door his own house? Would he see that as being catastrophic to the quality of his life? I do not believe that the word catastrophic is inappropriate at all given the huge impact that this development would have on immediate neighbours and locals and again it shows a lack of knowledge of the local area and a total disregard for the strength of feeling voiced against this development. There is also little empathy and understanding shown for the equestrian community, it being dismissed as something that equestrians and motorists must sort out through mutual understanding. It is stated that the proposed access improvements would actually enhance safety. How? There is already wide, gated access to the site and paddock. Access which has been used for decades by agricultural machinery. Hence there is no further need for another set of gates. This position represents a fundamental misunderstanding of road safety and any knowledge of the locality.

In conclusion then, the proposal demonstrably DOES NOT ACCORD WITH PLANNING POLICY. The Caverswall Common area is not identified in the approved Staffordshire Moorlands local plan and hence would need to pass the exceptional circumstance condition in green belt planning rules. Local resident objectors do not have any misconceptions about the nature of the business seeing it actually for what it is; an attempt to turn a green belt site into a brownfield stone merchant purely for profitable gain in an area unsuitable for that type of minor industrial use. The proposed development does not comply with planning policy, does not deliver economic benefit or sustainable RURAL development and it does not address a genuine market need.

Some of the local residents have known the applicants for many years but are still objecting to these plans, so seriously do they take the impact that this proposed development would have on the local area and their everyday lives. Green belt legislation is not overly complex. It is clear and the spirit of its intention is also abundantly clear. Professional planning officers do not need professional insight or advice from third parties on how to interpret planning law. I for one have faith that this planning application will be dismissed based on its own merit and that the well-founded views of the very many objectors to this proposal will be carefully considered.

P. J. Challinor

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