

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0385
Valid 20/10/2025

HIGHERLAND FARM
CAVERSWALL COMMON
LANE
CAVERSWALL

PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE
OF EXISTING BARN
BUILDING, MANEGE AND
LAND AREA SHOWN EDGED
RED ON THE ENCLOSED
APPLICATION PLANS,
TOGETHER WITH NEW
VEHICLE ACCESS, GATEWAY
AND HARDSTANDING
CONSTRUCTIONS WITH
VEHICLE TURNING AND CAR
PARKING AREAS AND TREE
PLANTING, TO FORM A
LANDSCAPE STONE
PRODUCTS RETAIL AND
TRADE SUPPLY BUSINESS,
TO BE KNOWN AS
HIGHERLAND STONE

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the Green Belt
- Local Plan approach to rural development
- Impact on Character and Appearance
- Impact on the residential amenity of neighbours
- Impact on Highway Safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is located in the Green Belt, on the south side of the Caverswall Common carriageway between Sandy Lane and Laburnam Cottage behind a roadside wall with timber fence inserts and a large screening hedgerow boundary. The applicant's dwelling has roadside presentation, the origins of an historic farmstead dating from the 19th Century. There is a patio and small lawn adjacent, to the east of, the dwelling. Beyond that, further to the east, the dwellings curtilage is open to a tarmac yard that provides a small timber stable and is contained by two adjacent lockup sheds to the east, one placed to the northern boundary of the site, and the other to the southern boundary. Between the two sheds there is a widening gap from the edge of the tarmac that provides access, and opens out, to a grassed paddock area. The shed to the northern boundary, the smaller of the two, has an adjoining mono pitch barn to the rear. The shed and the adjoining barn to the northern boundary are craft workshops (a use defined and limited by the terms of legal agreement and condition - planning

permission 00/00139/FUL) and the shed to the southern boundary is an archived document store (planning permission 04/00349/FUL).

The paddock is a wedge shaped area of just less than an acre it is enclosed by livestock fencing and hedgerow. A horse riding arena/manege, 30m by 16m, is provided on the land. A boundary to the east of the paddock is shared with the adjacent neighbour's dwelling and curtilage at Laburnam Cottage.

The red edged application site includes the shed and barn to the northern boundary and the whole of the grassed paddock, including the riding arena, up to the boundary shared with the adjacent neighbour.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed to operate a stone merchant from the site – importing and supplying pre-packed Indian stone, porcelain paving, and associated landscaping materials to both retail and trade customers.

The proposal would involve: the reuse of the shed and adjoining barn on the site's northern boundary for associated storage, loading and unspecified 'operational activities', and the provision of staff facility; the material change of use of the land, including the grassed paddock and the horse arena, to provide vehicular access and parking, and outside storage and display of products; and, engineering operations to construct a new concrete access to the site at the far east of the site, lay a hardcore vehicle turning area, resurface the horse arena with stone hardcore, and to construct a customer parking area for 4-5 vehicles with block pavers.

It is said in the submissions that the business would operate on weekdays only (Monday to Friday, 08:00–16:00) and could employ three staff members in addition to the applicants/company directors who already reside at Higherland Farm.

According to the detail of the submitted plans the access would be constructed from concrete and be 7.3m wide and 10m long and would cross the roadside drainage ditch with 6m radius kerbs. Steel framed timber panelled reinforced gates would be erected 10m to the rear of the carriageway. The hardcore turning area would provide turning space for a 10.5m long fixed bed delivery truck.

Revised plans have been submitted to detail the provision of a concrete culvert arrangement to be set within the drainage ditch at the access crossing. Visibility splays are drawn on the plan and the tracking path of delivery vehicles turning into the highway are shown,

The application claims exemption from BNG requirements under the de minimis criteria. The land has not been surveyed for ecology or biodiversity and an impact assessment has not been provided.

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
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
E1 New Employment Development
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

88/00895/OLD Details of agricultural building for livestock and farm machinery.
APPROVED.
94/00898/OLD Storage barn. APPROVED.
95/00611/OLD Agricultural building. APPROVED.
97/00342/OLD Stable and tack room. APPROVED.
00/00139/FUL Change of use of rural buildings into craft workshops. APPROVED.
04/00349/FUL Use of agricultural building for archive/document building.
APPROVED.
SMD/2014/0070 Formation of Open Air Manege (and Change of use of Land).
APPROVED.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 28th November 2025
Neighbour consultation period ends: 28th November 2025
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

82 items of correspondence are in the objections folder. Some may be duplicate or include supplementary comment from the same objector, others maybe multiple responses from the same households, and a small number might have been misfiled. Nevertheless, a significant number of objections have been received in opposition to this proposal. In summary, the following points are raised:

- The surrounding network includes lanes that are narrow with blind bends unsuitable for large delivery vehicles and customer's trade vehicles grass verges would be churned
- Traffic to and from the site would pose a danger to walkers and horse riders
- The new access would rip a large hole in the hedge that would be damaging to wildlife and the character and appearance of the rural area
- Majority of the grassland would be covered with hardstanding and harmful to wildlife
- The land is Green Belt and the development would be inappropriate
- Noise and disturbance particularly disruptive for those that share a boundary
- Supporters don't live near the site
- More suited to an urban or industrial site

14 responses are made in support of the proposal.

These contributors generally consider the proposal to be for a good start up business that would contribute to rural economy.

Town / Parish Comments

Caverswall CP: Object.

There have been two Parish Council meetings where this application has been discussed and at both meetings over 45 residents attended, with many speaking against the application, we had no one there who spoke in support. After full discussion between the Parish Councillors, we Caverswall Parish Council, wish to OBJECT to this application.

The road infrastructure in the area is not suitable to accommodate the number of vehicles of different sizes this business would generate. Deliveries of materials to the site would require large HGV vehicles which due to their size would cause a danger to other motorists as there are several blind bends to negotiate that means vehicles have to move into the centre of the road to enable them to see round, the brow of the hill is also a danger – but would reassess their decision if these issues were addressed.

The increase in any traffic in the area will make it unsafe for the many horse riders, walkers and cyclists who use the roads and lanes. A small survey done recently identified nine equestrian facilities in close proximity to the application site with approximately 40 horses, many use the roads/lanes around Roughcote Lane, Handley Banks and Caverswall Common Lane to access the nearest bridlepaths.

The site appears to be too small to accommodate articulated vehicles that would be needed to deliver supplies. The application states 8 wheel 18t vehicles, although as recently proven the stone slabs are delivered by 40t articulated lorries.

The land lies within the Green Belt, and this application does not meet the criteria to allow for such a development/business, as specified in Para 154 of the National Planning Policy Framework and therefore should be refused.

The Ecological Report provided with the application is questionable. Residents in the area report much more wildlife activity with Barn Owls regularly seen feasting on the field every night along with other regular wildlife seen in the area.

Noise Pollution. The increase volume of traffic will naturally increase noise pollution in the area as will any noise coming from with the site due to the running of Landscape Stone Product business on the site.

Dust Pollution. Any business of this type will naturally incur dust pollution which would be detrimental to the health of nearby residents, any animals and wildlife.

Roadside Drainage. We agree with Highways that this is a concern and envisage that this will be damaged by any increase in the number of vehicles using the road/lane and especially by large vehicles.

Water main and sewage pipes. These run along the verge at side of the road and over where the proposed new entrance will be located. Constant vehicles, especially heavy vehicles, going over these pipes could cause damage and will affect the whole area if this happens, and would need to be addressed.

Materials falling onto the road. No mention of what happens if stone etc falls onto the road. Should the application receive approval then a Condition of approval should state that the applicant is responsible to keep the highway clear of any debris resulting from products being either brought to or taken away from the site.

Environmental Health

No response within consultation period

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No response within consultation period

Waste Collection

No response within consultation period

Severn Trent

No response within consultation period

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Refusal

Site Visit: 10/11/2025

Caverswall Common Lane is a D classification road (Road No. D1174) with a 60mph speed limit, there are no footways but some streetlighting.

Application does not provide sufficient detail:

New access requires visibility splay showing 2.4m x 215m.

Drainage;

There is a roadside drainage ditch approx. 1 metre deep running along Caverswall Common Lane. Details of drainage works necessary at the proposed new access are required.

Swept Path;

Swept path of the largest vehicle accessing/egressing the site onto and from Caverswall Common Lane.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on the Green Belt

The site is in the Green Belt where development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt unless it is provided for by one of the exceptions that appear in the closed lists at Chapter 13 of the NPPF. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

The proposed development would involve the material change in the use of land, the reuse of existing buildings, and engineering operations. Those are all forms of development where the exceptions can apply, provided they preserve Green Belt openness and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

In this case however, the purpose of the engineering operation and material change of use would be to provide outdoor parking and the storage and display of stone product. This storage and parking on the open undeveloped land would cause countryside encroachment to the east of the dwelling and would be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt in terms of both spatial and visual aspects.

The development would therefore be inappropriate in the Green Belt and harmful to the Green Belt by definition. It would result in harm to openness and countryside encroachment. Substantial weight is attributed to that harm and planning permission should not be granted unless other considerations, amounting to 'very special circumstances', clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harms resulting from the development.

Local Plan Approach to Rural Development

The site is in an 'other rural area' of countryside beyond any defined settlement. It is in a relatively isolated and remote rural location, accessed only by relatively narrow rural lanes.

Here the Local Plan, other rural area strategy policy SS10 applies. The starting point is 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. The policy seeks to support rural economy by enabling the development of business for employment uses where a rural location can be justified, or the diversification of existing farm enterprise.

The development in this case, can not justify a rural location it is more suited to an urban or industrial location. Neither does the site provide existing farming enterprise where the proposed development would diversify.

Specifically, Local Plan employment policy E1 states that new business development should be in employment areas or in or on the edge of town centres. Employment uses (general industrial and storage and distribution), should be located in employment areas. Such development outside of existing or proposed employment areas but within the settlement boundary may also be acceptable when it would not create undue harm to the character, appearance or amenity of the area.

The proposed development would not be compliant with these policies.

Design and Impact on Character and Appearance of the Area

The site and its locality are distinctly rural in character and appearance. Scattered dwellings, small hamlets and occasional farms appear isolated in rolling farmland landscape. Traditional native hedgerows line narrow lanes and provide boundary and enclosure to irregularly shaped field parcels. The open landscape is broken and interspersed with lines of trees and woodland edge.

The prevailing landscape has changed little since the 19th century and many of the properties originate from that period, their age apparent in their architecture and presentation. The dwelling at Higherland Farm and its adjacent neighbour, some 100m further to the east, Laburnam Cottage, are examples. Despite some more recent

alteration and extension their arrangement and principal presentation remain true to their heritage.

Beyond the small grouping of sheds to the side of the applicant's dwelling, the space between Higherland Farm and Laburnam Cottage is observed from the roadside as traditional native hedgerow with paddock and field parcels beyond. In the middle-distance, to the south, occasional cottages sit on lower ground levels within lines and groupings of trees. Incongruous features within this landscape such as suburban brick boundary walls and fences, areas of hardstanding, paved patios, and more contemporary building alterations, are limited and largely concealed behind roadside boundary.

There are intrinsic rural countryside merits and qualities in the character and appearance of the locality and the surrounding landscape. In this context, the proposed access, expanse of hardstanding, and the unsightly storage of materials would introduce incongruous and unsightly features that would lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside. Attempts to provide safe access and turning space for large delivery vehicles with wide dimension, bound surface and concreted culvert, only serves to exacerbate these harmful impacts with engineered development that would appear urban or industrial in character.

The development would not enhance or reinforce local landscape and distinctiveness and would be significantly harmful to the character and appearance of the locality.

In these regards, the proposal would contravene Local Plan policies SS10, DC1 and DC3 and the terms of the NPPF.

Impact on the Amenity and Living Conditions of Residential Neighbours

The application has not been submitted with a noise impact assessment. However, the proposed operations would inevitably involve inherently noisy activities – the manoeuvring of heavy delivery and trade vehicles, the loading and unloading of heavy stone on and off trailers, and lifting and moving stone around the site. Heavy loads would slam and bang as they are set down and reversing alarms are likely to be audible.

The edge of the turning space runs up to the curtilage boundary of the adjacent neighbour at Laburnam Cottage and the area designated for outdoor display and storage is just 20m from the property. There are also neighbouring dwellings to the south of the site, Rose Cottage and Eden Cottage, just 30-50m from the site boundary.

It is likely that noise from the activities and operations would have an unacceptable impact on the living conditions and amenity of these neighbours, causing daily nuisance and disturbance for prolonged periods. There is also likely to be nuisance from site lighting and vehicle headlights.

Local Plan design policy DC1 requires new development to protect the amenity of the area, including residential amenity, from noise and light pollution. The proposed development would conflict with that policy in those regards.

Traffic Impacts of the Development

Considerations in these regards fall into two categories: the first, the direct impact of the proposed use and access construction on highway safety in the locality; and the second, the impact of traffic travelling to and from the development on the wider highway network and the quality of the countryside.

The site would import heavy stone materials in bulk and either export from delivery vehicles or make it available for customer collection. Delivery to the site would be made in 10.5m fixed base lorries, possibly, on the evidence of recent observation or others in similar trade, occasionally arriving in larger articulated vehicles. Customers would presumably arrive to collect in larger trade type vehicles or towing trailers.

Submitted plans detail the construction of a concrete highway access crossing the roadside drainage ditch. The plans show the turning paths of a 10.5m long vehicle within the site. The concrete access would be 7.3m wide, 10m deep from carriageway edge, and return with 6m radius kerbs. The Highway Authority considered the original submission to be lacking in detail – visibility splays not shown, drainage arrangements and crossing not detailed, and the turning path of the delivery vehicles onto and off the highway not shown.

The applicant made a follow up submission to address these concerns. A plan detailing the installation of concrete culvert sections along the ditch and the range of visibility in both directions from the verge are shown on a revised plan. The Highway Authority has not returned additional comments, but it is of note that across the frontage the road is straight and the verge wide and in those regards necessary visibility is presumably achievable without pulling into the carriageway. Similarly, with the introduction of suitable engineering solution to culvert the ditch, the crossing need not obstruct drainage (although as discussed above the introduction of engineering design solutions does exacerbate adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the area).

The follow up access plan does also show the track of a delivery vehicle turning off and onto the highway. However, this evidence does not convincingly demonstrate that a vehicle of this size could turn from the proposed access into the narrow carriageway without blocking the highway in both directions and breaching the grass highway verge on the other side. In fact, the tracking line on the plan does indeed push against the verge. In this rural area farm deliveries etc might occasionally obstruct the highway. However, the proposal would introduce, and depend upon, regular and frequent visits from large vehicles that would cause obstruction, damage the highway verge, and result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety. Local Plan policy DC1 requires development to provide for safe and satisfactory access. In these regards there would be conflict with policy DC1 of the Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

Principles of sustainability are at the heart of planning policy. Generally local and national policy seeks to limit development that generates vehicle trips into the countryside and onto the rural highway network. Specifically, Local Plan policy SS10 requires decisions to enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by, inter alia, limiting uses which generate a substantial number of regular trips in areas that are not well served by public transport. Local Plan Policy T1 seeks to promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally, to be achieved by, inter alia, ensuring that all

new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.

The site is in a relatively remote countryside location. Obviously, with the import and collection of heavy stone building material, deliveries and collections would be made using large and heavy trade vehicles, the operation entirely dependent in those regards. With consideration for the intended opening hours and the considerable extent of site area that would provide storage and display of product and parking opportunity, traffic movements to and from the site could be significant. The surrounding highway network consists of narrow rural lanes with verges; the lanes are connected by a network of public footpaths and bridleways that cross farmland.

An increase in the frequency of larger trade and delivery vehicles using the rural lane network would cause obstruction, damage to the verges and generally impact adversely on the quality of the rural environment enjoyed by users of the countryside.

In these regards the development would conflict with Local Plan policies SS10, DC1 and T1 and the terms of the NPPF.

Biodiversity and Ecology

The applicant claims exemption from BNG requirements under the de minimis criteria. However, the development would adversely affect more than 25 square metres of Biodiversity habitat. 0.2 ha of grassland would be impacted by hard surfaces, and a section of hedgerow would be removed to construct the access.

The development would negatively affect habitat without compensation. There would be conflict with Local Plan policy NE1.

Other Considerations

The development would introduce a new business that would create some employment opportunity, choice, competition and variety for consumers. There would be some benefit to the economy in those regards. However, this is not a matter that would, on its own, clearly outweigh the harm that has been identified above.

The application statement points to a number of rural businesses in the locality. Each of these businesses will have differing circumstances specific to each case. The fact that there are businesses in the rural area is not a matter that justifies the proposed development and would outweigh the harm identified.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The development would be inappropriate in the Green Belt. It would also be harmful to the character and appearance of the rural area, the amenity and living conditions of residential neighbours, highway safety, and biodiversity habitat. There are no considerations to clearly outweigh that harm. There would be conflict with the Local Plan policies listed above and the terms of the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 15th December 2025

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council