

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0419
Valid 16/10/2025

HILLCREST
BLACK LANE
WINNOTHDALE

CHANGE OF USE OF 1 STEEL
FRAMED AGRICULTURAL
BARN TO 1X C3 DWELLING

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Sustainability of the location for a new additional dwelling
- Design
- Character and appearance

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

1. The application land dips from the road and the site of the proposal building is set down behind a bank and a dense Laurel hedge along the roadside verge boundary. The building stands on an obviously previously levelled area slightly cut-in to the slope below the road. Much of the levelled area appears to have been surfaced in hard core but has to varying degrees been allowed to re-colonise with short herb vegetation (grass and other plant species). A dividing fence separates this area from the remainder of the applicant's land. There is a green house, a linear fenced pen with raised planting beds and some amount of incidental and apparently temporary storage. Beyond the fence the land rises gently to a further boundary fence some 100m to the north east. In total the application land as defined by red edge on the 'Site Plan – Existing' drawing extends to c.1ha (2.471 acres).

2. The applicant's dwelling is on the opposite (south west) side of the road in a generous plot. This is one of a loose scatter of some four to five similar dwellings in or around the triangle formed by the junction of Black Lane and Renwick Lane.

3. The application building is found (but for two later lean-to extensions) to correspond with drawings submitted with and approved under application reference 04/01017/FUL [SMD/2004/1359]. See fig. 1 below.

4. The original 2004 application building is 18.3m x 9.1m (166.5m²). The site area of the building was stated in the 2004 application as being 167m². The eaves height is 3.4m and the ridge is just under 4.2 metres. The roof has a dual pitch with 10 degree slope to each long side edge. There is a roller shutter door in the south east gable and (not shown on the 2004 drawings) there is a personnel door to the left side edge of the gable. See fig. 2 below.

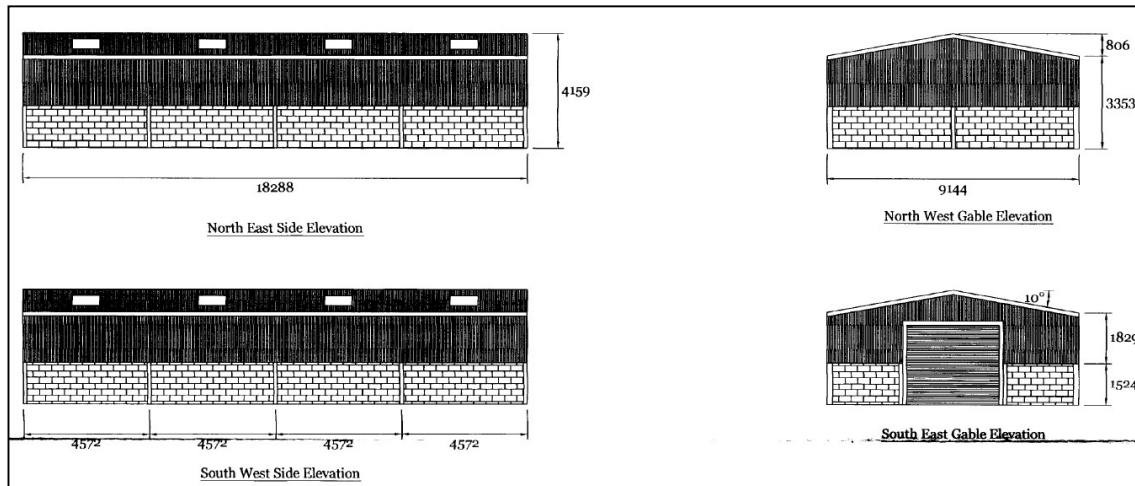


Fig. 1 – drawing extract from approved application reference 04/01017/FUL



Fig. 2 – building as existing 11th July 2025 (LPA photo)

5. There is a timber framed lean-to across the full width of the north west gable which is walled to its long side (c.9m) but fully open to each end elevation. A further make-shift timber framed lean-to occupies part of the main building's north east long-side elevation and is in use as a log store.

6. Access to the site is through an existing wide gateway from Black Lane. As noted, much of the immediate surround to the building is surfaced in rolled hardcore. There is a concrete 'apron' to the south east gable.

PROPOSAL

Plans

7. The application building appears to be represented in the 1:1250 'Site Plan' drawing by a red rectangle 22m x 9m.

8. In the electronic file drawing headed 'proposed plans' a proposed plan layout, elevations and roof plan is illustrated. Erroneously this is titled on the page as 'Existing floor plans and elevations. It is also unhelpfully labelled 'Drawing for information only'. This makes it unclear as to whether this represents the specific design for which permission is being sought or merely indicative as some kind of generalisation.

9. The ground plan area scales as being 16.3m x 8.9m. This is some 6m shorter than the building indicated in the site plan drawing referenced above. It is also some 2m shorter than the actual building existing as approved and illustrated in Fig.1 above.

10. Discrepancies also arise in a second drawing headed on the electronic file with the applicant's name and the words 'floor plan and elevations proposed'. It appears that this is intended to supersede the shorter length proposal building discussed at 9 above.

11. Whilst the eaves height appears to correspond with the eaves height of the existing building the ridge height scales as being c.5.17m and therefore about 1.0m higher than the existing building which appears to have been built in accordance with the 2004 approved plans to height 4.16m.

12. The above discrepancies give rise to significant uncertainty when it comes to assessing the internal floor area but as presented the gross internal floor area scales as being c.8m x 17.4m or 139m².

13. A projecting raised ridge lantern light is shown. Whilst positioned centrally in one elevation drawing and in the roof plan it is shown off-centre in the other elevation drawing. Again the reliability of the drawings is called into question. One bedroom (to the left (presumed south west side) is given a high level slit window and roof light. No window is shown to the righthand (north east) side bedroom – presumably an omission made in error. The bedrooms scale respectively as being approximately 4.7m x 3m, 5m x 3.2m and 6m x 6m.

14. As a change of use of an existing building with no reference to extensions and alterations in the applicant's description of the development the above discrepancies give rise to considerable uncertainty in the reliability of the drawings. Whilst corrections and revisions might ordinarily be invited it so happens in this case that an earlier application DET/2025/0025 failed and was refused in part due to many of the same issues. These were comprehensively set out in the decision report at the time. See for example paragraph 10 which noted: *"Particular confusion arises given that the floor plan drawing shows a ground area measuring 16.14m x 8.8m = 142m² whereas the building to be converted is known to be 166.5m² and the submitted proposed site block plan shows a building 22m x 8.8m = 194m²."*

15. The application is accompanied by a 'structural survey statement', a separate 'planning statement', a 'lighting, parking and materials statement', 'energy and sustainability statement' and a 'biodiversity survey and report'. This latter at section 3 states: *"The proposal seeks planning permission to convert the existing agricultural*

building into a single three-bedroom dwelling. All works will be contained within the existing building envelope. There will be no increase in footprint, height, or overall size, and no encroachment onto undeveloped land. External changes are limited to new doors, windows, and residential finishes appropriate for the conversion. All works will take place on existing hardstanding, meaning there will be no disturbance to soil, vegetation, or surrounding habitats.”

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

16. The application claims exemption from BNG stating in the application form: *“The floor area of the existing barn will be the same as proposed and no external works are to be completed where there would be a loss to bio-diversity.”* On this basis the *de minimis* exemption is claimed on grounds of not affecting more than 25m².

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; 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

04/01017/FUL [[SMD/2004/1359] – Agricultural building – approved

DET/2025/0025 – application to determine if prior approval is required for a proposed barn conversion to dwelling with its own entrance already in place – refused

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11.12.2025

Neighbour consultation period ends: 11.11.2025

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Cheadle Town Council – the Town Council is of the strong opinion that this application should be refused. The steel-framed agricultural barn is essentially just that and does not lend itself to a barn conversion. It is also in a separate field and not attached to any farm or agricultural dwelling. The proposed dwelling would be completely out of character with the vernacular of the surrounding dwellings.

Severn Trent Water

No objection subject to condition to provide drainage plans for subsequent approval.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

No objections subject to conditions.

The application is for the change of use of 1 steel framed agricultural barn to form 1 residential dwelling. The proposed dwelling will have 3 bedrooms. A parking area is shown on the submitted plan, Plan Reference Number TQRQM25160135418177. The parking area is considered sufficient in size to accommodate the parking requirements stated within the Staffordshire Moorlands Parking Standards which are: Detached/Semi-detached property of 3 bedrooms will require 2 spaces (2.4 x 4.8m each space) for residents and visitors.

The access to the proposed dwelling will be via the existing vehicular access which serves the farm barn. However, it is noted that this access is not constructed to a residential standard and therefore requires improvement. Visibility also is currently restricted by the hedge to northwest of the access.

It is noted that the proposed location for this residential dwelling is potentially not in a sustainable location, meaning by this that there are no amenities such as a local shop or access to any medical or educational facilities. All trips to such facilities are more than likely to be made via a private car. The neighbouring roads also have no footway provision and would require any resident to walk within the road should they wish to walk within the immediate neighbourhood.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

17. Despite the contradictions in the submitted drawings and accompanying statements the application is described as a change of use by which it must be understood 'conversion' though not extension which is also apparently included (by reference to the plans) given that part of the details submitted include a 1.0m raised roof ridge.

18. The proposed conversion of the building 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 H1.

19. 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*".

20. As the submitted plans do not illustrate a straightforward 'conversion' but apparently include alteration by raising the roof ridge height the development does not strictly comply with SS10 and H1. The agent refers to themselves as a building surveyor and submits in the structural survey statement that the building is sound and a "a robust and well-maintained structure, entirely fit for its intended conversion". The LPA finds nothing suggesting to the contrary and from a lay perspective the claims made in the structural survey appear credible. The main issue for the LPA is that the building is essentially utilitarian and not built to an accustomed form for a dwelling. In other words it cannot be considered worthy 'architecturally' or in character terms.

21. Under Policy SS10 of the adopted Local Plan the development cannot be supported in principle in the rural area.

Sustainability

22. A further key consideration is with regard to the travel sustainability of the location which is remote. It is reached along narrow single track and unlit rural lanes without pavements. The site is c.2.8km by road from the larger village of Upper Tean where there are some services and some 4km from the town of Cheadle. Future occupants would be overly reliant on private vehicles to reach essential services and by reference to NPPF paragraph 155 (c) the development would not be in a

sustainable location. It would therefore conflict with the NPPF aim of actively managing patterns of growth in support of sustainable transport objectives.

Design

23. As an agricultural building the existing structure is 'of its type' and not especially out of the ordinary. As a dwelling however the building form bears no relation to the Staffordshire Moorlands tradition and would be wholly out of character. In addition the use of its surrounding land would change from low key activities associated with modest farm-type usage to the more significantly noticeable and intrusive impacts inevitably arising from use as a residential dwelling with associated domestic parking, lighting and residential paraphernalia all leading to loss of rural character by urbanisation.

Amenity

24. Despite the confusions in the submitted details it can be accepted that the building would have the capacity to meet the Nationally Described Space Standard (NDSS). A single storey dwelling with three bedrooms, and for six people, is expected to have a minimum gross internal floor area of 95m². This can be comfortably exceeded by perhaps 50m² in the case of this building.

25. Whilst the submitted site plan extends to 1.0ha and could not be accepted as residential land in any event, the necessary minimum 65m² of residential land and necessary parking and turning areas could be obtained, subject to otherwise being acceptable in principle. The submitted location plan indicates a site red edge of 2,400m² which is still excessive but could be reduced further whilst remaining adequate in outside amenity and vehicle space terms.

Biodiversity

26. It is stated in the application that: *The building is of steel portal frame construction with metal cladding and a solid concrete base. It is entirely sealed, with no openings or internal roof voids that would provide shelter or roosting/nesting opportunities for wildlife. No evidence (such as droppings, nesting material, feathers, or feeding remains) of use by bats, birds, or any other protected species was observed. The surrounding area is of low ecological value, being composed of hardstanding and managed farmland with limited vegetation. Based on these observations, the building does not offer suitable habitat for any protected species.*

27. This commentary on biodiversity is provided by the agent and appears not to be based on any professional ecologist's assessment. Paragraph 193 of the NPPF states that: *When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:*

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;*

28. On the information submitted the LPA is unable to determine whether significant harm to biodiversity for example through harm or loss to protected species such as bats could occur or not. It is not correct to say the building is “entirely sealed” as there are gaps where barge boards support the roof troughings, where roof verge tiles are used at the gables and where the vertical side panels of the walls overlap the base walls. The location is also highly rural and verdant and likely in general to be conducive to populations of bat species.

29. The application claims exemption from BNG as not affecting more than 25m² of habitat. However this has not been demonstrated one way or the other with no details given for the external layout of the development and how that may or may not utilise any existing non-habitat areas. Most of the existing external areas appear at least semi-vegetated.

Highway Safety

30. Based on the advice response from SCC Highways there are no issues that can't be addressed by condition save that the location is likely to necessitate unsustainable travel due to occupiers inevitably being reliant on the private car for the majority of trips.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

31. Fundamentally this is not a proposal that can gain support in principle as the building is found not suitable or worthy in architectural and character terms to be converted to a dwelling in the rural countryside.

32. In design the proposed conversion of this utilitarian farm-type storage building to a dwelling using metal sheet cladding for the exterior surface finishes would result in an appearance that bears no relation to the Staffordshire Moorlands tradition and would be wholly out of character as a dwelling in this secluded and sparsely developed rural location. It is therefore found contrary to Local Plan policies SS10, H1, DC1, DC3 and the NPPF.

33. The location of this proposed development is also found as a matter of principle to be unsustainable due to its remoteness from any village, town or other service centre that could provide essential services for residential occupiers at reasonable convenience without undue reliance on the private car.

34. There is significant deficiency in both the clarity and detail of the information provided including in the drawn plans which contradict the basis of the submission by showing extension to the roof height rather than conversion and which do not adequately demonstrate that less than 25m² of vegetated space would be involved in the development. Whilst it is possible that some of these matters could potentially have been resolved by submission of revised plans this would not have overcome the more fundamental in-principle conflict with the Council's adopted policy for the rural areas under SS10. In these circumstances it would have been unreasonable to request additional ecology submission and plan revisions.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : refuse

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 18.12.2025

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council