

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0403
Valid 17/11/2025

ACRE FARM CATTERY
CROWBOROUGH ROAD
LASK EDGE

**TO REPLACE EXISTING
REDUNDANT STRUCTURE ON
PROPERTY WITH A NEW
PURPOSE BUILT CATTERY
UNIT. THE PURPOSE OF THE
NEW UNIT WOULD BE FOR
CAT BOARDING TO ASSIST
WITH OUR EXISTING
BUSINESS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on Green Belt
- Policy Approach to Rural Development
- Impact on Character and Appearance of the Area
- Impact on Residential Amenity
- Impact on Highway Safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The property originates from historic 19th century farmstead, Acre Farm Cottage. However, since the early 1980s the property has provided a boarding cattery business with facilities to the south of the dwelling constructed with planning permissions.

Initially, in 1980 (80/08146/OLDDC), planning permission was granted for a run of 10 cattery pens. In 1982 (82/11084/OLDDC) an additional 30 cattery pens were added, and in 2013 (13/00721/FUL) planning permission was granted to rearrange and improve the facilities providing the 40 pens, of varying sizes and capacities, around a central enclosed courtyard.

A collection of sheds to the rear, south of, the roadside dwelling Acre Farm now stand under planning permission SMD/2013/00722. The sheds include a linear 'goat shed' stable type building, a larger shed with storage and stables on a square footprint (that on observation does appear to be in use to provide additional cattery facility- mesh wire pens are erected around doorways), and the formal arrangement of the permitted cattery pens that form a square perimeter shape around a central enclosed yard. The collection of sheds are surrounded by open undeveloped farmland and the whole of the property is within the Green Belt.



Shed to be replaced



Hardstanding and pens attached

PROPOSAL

The application proposes to replace an existing shed/stable building (that does appear as though it might currently be providing some cattery facility), adjacent to the goat shed, with two linear cattery pens that would be arranged with parallel positioning either side of a central passage between the two facilities. Each facility, pen run, would be 4.3m by 15m (65 sqm).

Each linear pen run would provide 9 pens, adding, in total, another 18 pens to the 40 pens, of varying size, that are already provided on the site.

The applicant seeks to build on a successful business and increase the number of pens and boarders. The business has, additionally, been working with rescue organisations and the capacity increase would provide improved organisation and separation of interests.

Cat litter and waste is collected and binned, collected by the Council's trade waste collection service.

The pens would have a mono pitch roof, be of upvc frame and have toughened glass. Amended plans have been submitted during the course of determination that detail modifications to design, appearance and use of facing materials. The plans now show the buildings to be externally clad with horizontally laid timber cladding and the roof to be profiled fibre cement sheets in Grey. The amended plans also detail reduced glazing at each end elevation.

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

Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan

HCT1: Enterprise and Tourism Development
DES1: Design
INF2: Sustainable Drainage

SMDC Design Guide 2018 SPD

SMDC Design Principles SPG

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

80/08146/OLDDC Erection of boarding cattery. APPROVED.

82/11084/OLDDC Construction of thirty additional cat pens. APPROVED.

13/00722/FUL Replacement stable block and hay, straw and equipment storage building. APPROVED.

This planning permission was to replace an existing stable/store shed type building (that still stands today) with a larger portal framed shed on a square footprint and a full pitch roof. The shed was to have a linear wing that would attach and extend from the southwestern corner of the shed. That linear wing has been erected, the goat shed, to part implement the planning permission, however it is detached and the larger replacement shed has not been constructed.

13/00721/FUL Proposed replacement structures and re-ordering to improve facilities. APPROVED.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 11th January 2026

Neighbour consultation period ends: 11th January 2026
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Biddulph Town Council: Recommend Approval Subject to compliance with Green Belt policy.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions controlling construction times, unexpected contamination and lighting. Guidance provided on animal licensing.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

No Objection subject to condition requiring provision/retention of parking facility.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on Green Belt

The site is within the Green Belt where development is inappropriate and, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt unless it is provided for by one of the exceptions that appear on the closed lists at Chapter 13 of the NPPF. Substantial weight is attributed to any harm to the Green Belt and planning permission should not be granted unless there are other considerations, amounting to very special circumstances, that clearly outweighs the harm to the Green Belt and any other harms that would result from the development.

The list of exceptions includes: The replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces; and, the partial or complete redevelopment of previously developed land which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt.

The existing shed has a roughly square footprint of around 73 sqm, the proposal is to replace the shed with two linear parallel cattery structures, either side of a central passage between the structures, each with a footprint of 65 sqm. In the 2013 application the existing shed was described as stables and equipment store. The replacement, proposed in this case, would be in a different use, provided as cattery facility. The replacement buildings would also be materially larger.

Providing stables and associated storage facilities, the existing building is not for agriculture and, to that extent, the land could be described as previously developed. The proposed replacement would amount to the redevelopment of the land and, although replacement buildings would be materially larger, it would not cause *substantial harm* to the openness of the Green Belt. This is particularly so, because the land already benefits from an extant planning permission (by reason of a start of works) granted in 2013 that could see the existing stables and store shed replaced with a larger store shed that would have a total footprint of 156sqm, which would be larger than that of the existing shed and larger than the combined footprint of the proposed two cattery facilities.



The proposed development would occupy and cover the same footprint that would otherwise be used by the approved development under the 2013 permission. If the proposed development were carried out instead, it would be no longer possible to build the rest of the development approved in 2013.

The proposed development would therefore be the redevelopment of previously developed land that would not cause substantial harm to the Green Belt. The development would not be inappropriate and harmful to the Green Belt.

Policy Approach to Rural Development

The site is on land to the rear, south, of a farmstead that has 19th Century origins. The site is served by rural lane, surrounded by farm land, approximately 1km to the south of the village settlement of Biddulph Moor and 1.5km to the east of Biddulph. The farm began to diversify in the early 1980s with the provision of a boarding cattery business, which has proved successful and expanded from the initial 10 pens to a total of 40. The applicant also attends to a domestically scaled small holding and keeps goats in modest stable provision.

The applicant seeks to build on a successful business and increase the number of pens and boarders. The business has, additionally, been working with rescue organisations and the capacity increase would provide improved organisation and separation of interests.

In the 'other rural areas' of countryside that surround the villages and towns, as defined by the settlement hierarchy at Local Plan Policy SS2, Local Plan area strategy SS10 applies. The Local Plan strategy for these rural areas, SS10, provides 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. Additionally, the strategy seeks to sustain the rural economy by supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises.

Supplementary Local Plan policy E1 'new employment development' states that schemes involving the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, will be

considered favourably where the proposed use does not harm the building's character and/or the character of its surroundings.

Policy HCT 1 of the Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan 'business, enterprise and tourism development' states that outside the settlement boundaries business and enterprise uses to diversify the rural economy will be supported subject to compliance with Green Belt policy and there being no significant adverse impact on the amenities of the rural landscape.

Generally, development plan policy supports and enables rural diversification and sustainable business development that benefits rural economy and would not adversely affect the Green Belt or the character and appearance of the area. The proposed development would find policy support in those regards.

Design and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. In particular, new development should incorporate creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area; and, be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

Local Plan policy DC3 states that development which leads to a prominent intrusion into the countryside should be resisted.

On request from the planning officer, revised plans have been submitted during the course of the application. The plans modify the arrangement and reduce the extent of glazing that would appear on end elevations. Importantly, they demonstrate how the development shall be carried out using external facing materials, horizontal timber cladding and grey fibre cement roofing materials. With these revisions, the simple form and shape of the linear buildings with mono pitch roof arrangement would take on an agrarian character and appearance, that might be similar to a store shed or stable, and present materials that match those of the surrounding buildings in the grouping.

The open face of the pen runs would face inwards, opposite the form of the other building in the pair. Exterior elevations facing outward would have low profile and the simple character and appearance of agrarian sheds similar to those other buildings that surround. The replacement buildings would occupy the footprint of an existing shed and form part of an existing grouping, they would not result in a prominent intrusion into the countryside.

There would not be an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the rural area or prominent intrusion in the countryside and there would be no conflict with the local plan policies in these regards.

Impact on Residential Amenity

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that development protects the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution.

The existing cattery building, to the south and behind the dwelling, is 200m from Molehouse Farm to the east, 400m from Little Hough Farm to the west, and 330m from Ellins Fields Farm to the south. These nearest dwellings are some distance from the property and the wider site and field enclosures are lined with hedge and tree line that provide screening and breakup the views across open landscape.

Cats are not inherently noisy animals and conditions, as they have done on previous permissions, can restrict the use to the boarding of cats. Any feline or waste odours are limited to close quarters and do not drift vast distances across open land, in the same way that cattle slurry can do. Cat litter and waste is collected and binned through the Council's trade waste collection service.

Environmental Health officers recommend a condition to control artificial lighting to prevent glare and increase illumination at adjoining properties.

Overall, the development would not have an unacceptable impact on the amenity and living conditions of the surrounding residents and there would be no conflict with policy DC1 of the Local Plan in these regards.

Highway Safety

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that development provides for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use.

The NPPF states that in assessing applications for development, it should be ensured that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

The proposed development would add a further 18 boarding cattery pens to the existing 40. It must be assumed that with this, there would be an increase to the number of cars that visit the site.

The whole of the property's frontage, between the dwelling and the road, is hard surfaced providing extensive parking space clear of the highway that is served by separate ingress and egress points. Additionally there is driveway to the side of the dwelling that provides access to the sheds to the south of the dwelling and another area of hardstanding adjacent to the grouping of sheds and cattery buildings. The proposed site plan, submitted with the application, details this area of hardstanding as the parking/turning area (yard) for the proposed development. The Highway Authority do not object to the application and recommend a condition requiring this area to be retained as parking throughout the life of the development. The facility is such that all visitors and customers would be able to pull clear of the highway and park safely to

conduct their business, collect or drop off. Turning and ingress and egress arrangements provide for the safe exiting and entering of the highway.

The proposed development would not result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety and it would not conflict with Local Plan policy DC1 or the terms of the NPPF in these regards.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The Environment Act (2021) places a legal requirement on all development, unless otherwise exempt, to compensate for impacts on and loss of biodiversity habitats with the delivery of a 10% net gain on site or, where this can not be achieved, off site, which can include the purchasing credits from a registered habitat bank.

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that policies and decisions should minimise impacts on biodiversity and that development should mitigate or compensate for the loss of habitat whilst delivering enhancement and net gain in habitat.

The applicant claims exemption from the BNG legislation under the terms of the de minimis criteria – the development would impact on less than 25sqm of biodiversity habitat. Although the building would be larger than 25sqm, it would largely occupy the footprint of an existing building that would be replaced and be otherwise built on existing hardstanding.

The building has not been surveyed by an ecologist for bats. However, the building has a relatively low profile, and its roof consists of corrugated sheet – there is no internal loft or roof space. The walls appear to be timber clad concrete block. The building is apparently of very low potential for bat habitat, it does not provide obvious gaps or shelter that would be attractive to bats. Moreover, if the building has recently been used to house cats this would seem to be a deterrent to bats and birds.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The development would replace an existing shed on the site of similar size and footprint. Moreover, the development would be carried out in lieu of larger development that could otherwise be carried out under the terms of an extant permission.

There would be no harm to the Green Belt or the character and appearance of the rural area. There would be some benefit to the rural economy through the improvement and expansion of an existing business.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 19th January 2026

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council