

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0358
Valid 29/07/2025

BUTTERLANDS
EQUESTRIAN CENTRE
BUTTERLANDS FARM
TOP ROAD
BIDDULPH MOOR

DEMOLITION OF EXISTING
STABLE BLOCK AND
REDEVELOPMENT OF SITE TO
PROVIDE A SINGLE SELF
BUILD DWELLING WITH
ASSOCIATED HARD AND
SOFT LANDSCAPE WORKS

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Green Belt
- Character and appearance
- Occupier and neighbour living conditions
- Sustainability

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The proposal would occupy part of a series of connected low key buildings of relatively rudimentary construction with timber support structure and a mixture of timber board and corrugated sheet metal exterior walls. Roofing in corrugated sheet metal. These appear outwardly as simple rural store buildings associated with a wider group of larger buildings of farm-like appearance but latterly in use as a riding school. The east gable of the application building as seen from the road is shown in Figure 1.

Access is from Top Road, Lask Edge via a short 50m lane which serves the riding school and at least one dwelling. The proposal building is the first reached on the right and is seen in plain view from the road. There is a larger store type building on the left and further larger buildings beyond, mostly of later 20thC appearance. The original pre 1900 farm house lies beyond to the right, about 15m north west from the application building. Original pre-1900 farm outbuildings linked with the dwelling gained a certificate of lawfulness in 2011 for use as a dwelling independently from Butterlands Farmhouse.

A second access into the establishment has been constructed following a 2024 consent. This runs parallel to the original access from Top Road but lies 40m to the north.

The first and more substantial of the proposal buildings with dual pitched roof was found to be in use for horse stabling. Next along with mono-pitched roof was a building with an opening to a garage space at the far end in which a car was parked. In the middle section between the stable and the garage an ancillary residential use appears

to have been created. This includes a spa room linked to a sitting room, or leisure room, labelled 'games room' on the as-existing plans. This can be accessed via the garage or, on the rear (northerly) elevation, via openings into garden space linked to the main farm house.

The location is in the open rural area and Green Belt outside of any village or development boundary. Lask Edge is a long prominent north – south ridge of relatively consistent broad flat-topped form. It is a significant defining landscape feature of the Staffordshire Moorlands holding its place with Congleton Edge to the west and Morridge to the east.



Fig. 1

PROPOSAL

The proposal is to demolish the stable element of the existing range and replace it with a two-bedroomed / four person single storey dwelling which internally would provide accommodation c.9m x 10m (less 4m² of verandah). In terms of gross internal floor area it would thus be c.86m².

As first submitted the exterior walls and roof would be finished in bottle green RAL 6007 steel profiled composite sheeting. At the instigation of the LPA a revised plan has been submitted in which the wall would be finished in preservative treated vertical timber boarding and the roof in a 'merlin grey' finish RAL 180-40-50 steel profiled

composite sheet. Windows and doors would be aluminium framed to an anthracite colour finish RAL 7016.

Two large floor to ceiling windows would be placed on the north elevation. The one at the eastern end would be recessed leaving a roof overhang to form a verandah. This window would wrap around the corner to present a similar scale of glazing in the eastern elevation. In an equivalent view to figure 1 the proposed east elevation is shown in figure 2 below. In this elevation the window is not recessed but would be flush with the plane of the elevation.

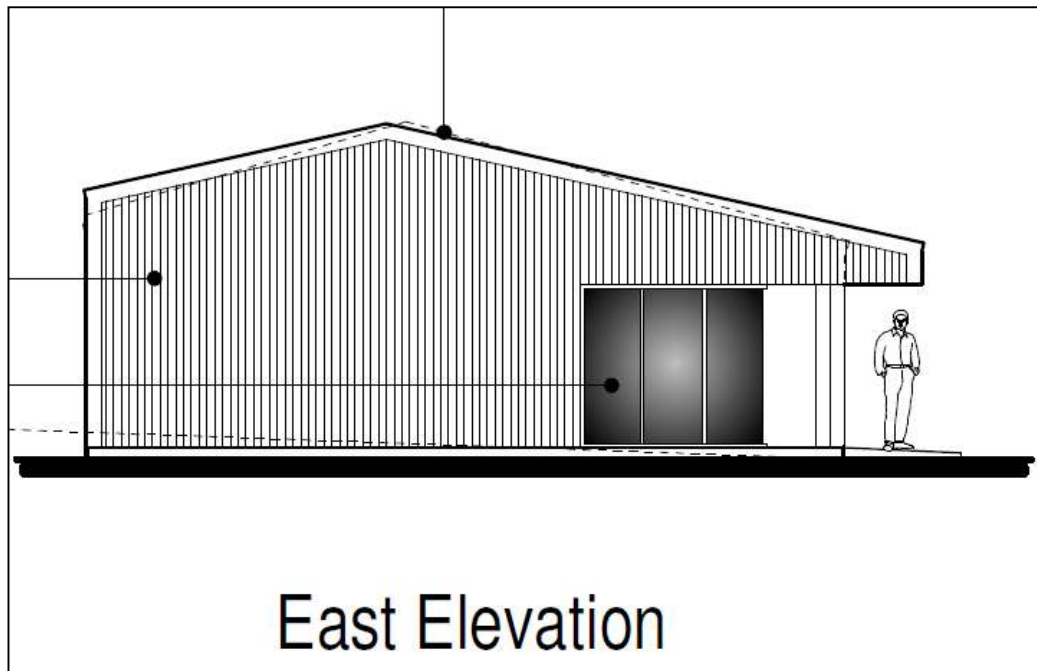


Fig.2

The entrance door would be on the southern elevation but otherwise that elevation would have solely high level horizontal glazing.

There is at present a space of about 11m in width to the front (south) between the proposal building and the stables building opposite. This currently serves to provide access through to a yard which serves the rear of the farm house as well as the dwelling known as Butterlands Barn, and various of the stables buildings. In the proposal a partial area of ornamental planting would be established in front of the proposed dwelling and pull-in parking would be created for two cars. The through access would be moved over to run alongside the opposite building.

From the submitted supporting statement:

(5.9) The proposed dwelling would be sited entirely upon the footprint of the existing stable building and would have an identical footprint of the existing building of 107.5sq metres. The size, scale, form and mass of the proposed dwelling would be identical to the existing and the proposed development would have a overall ridge height of 4.35m which is identical to that of the existing building. There would therefore be no increase in size, scale, bulk or massing

over and above the existing building and therefore would not have any greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development.

A preliminary ecological appraisal has been submitted and this recommended bat activity surveys which have also been duly completed and submitted.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

The application is described in the heading as 'self-build' and the applicant intends to utilise the exemption from BNG that is available on this basis.

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
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; 13 – Protecting Green Belt Land; 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

94/00299/OLD – indoor riding arena – approved

05/01447/FUL [SMD/2006/0290] – Conversion of barn to dwelling and office accommodation in association with existing riding school – refused

11/00494/CL_EXG [SMD/2011/0620] – Certificate of Existing Lawfulness for use of Butterlands Barn as a dwelling independent from Butterlands Farmhouse – approved

SMD/2024/0110 – Retrospective application for change of use of a detached outbuilding into self contained ancillary accommodation – approved [this was a building north of the farm house and is not directly related]

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 26.09.2025

Neighbour consultation period ends: 20.08.2025

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

One representation received raising objection on grounds:

1. Residential development in the open countryside is not supported by policy or need;
2. Overdevelopment of the site is indicated due to the small area of external amenity;
3. Safe access on to Top Road has not been demonstrated as the development will increase residential traffic to the site;
4. No evidenced safe vision splay for egress as Top Road is National Speed Limit at that point;
5. It can't readily be identified if the proposals meet the technical minimum housing standards for a 4 person 2 bed single storey residential unit from the on-screen images.

Town / Parish Comments

Biddulph Town Council – No adverse comments. There were some concerns about incremental over-development and the need to comply with highways recommendations.

Environmental Health

Environmental Health recommend refusal due to insufficient information being provided to address the noise and odour impacts at the proposed residential development; and the suitability of this location for third party residential housing.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommend support subject to condition and to note that the proposed location for this residential dwelling is potentially not in a sustainable location. By which is meant the village has 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

Policy SS1 seeks to ensure that the development and use of land makes a positive contribution to the social, economic, and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Particular reference is made to a well-designed and well-maintained environment with development being undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas.

Policy SS2 sets out the settlement hierarchy for the District and requires that all development shall be of a scale and nature appropriate to the character and role of each area category within the hierarchy according to the individual policies. The categories in the hierarchy and their policies are: towns (policies SS5 /6 and 7); larger villages (SS8); smaller villages (SS9) and the Other Rural Areas – which applies in the case of this application – SS10.

Policy SS10 for the rural areas supports only development which meets an essential local need and supports rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas (or supports sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside).

Subject to Green Belt requirements Policy SS10 provides support for housing strictly as follows [relevant to this application]: Allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with Policy H 1. The relevant requirements under H1 (other rural areas) are set out at H1(5). The only relevant provision under H.1(5) is (e) Proposals to redevelop previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.

SS10(3) is to Enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by [first point]:

Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

In the rural areas outside of the development boundaries Policy SS10(6) establishes that strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government Policy.

Government policy for the Green Belt is set out at section 13 of the NPPF. This establishes that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt. Moreover, the NPPF states that inappropriate development should not be approved except (i) in very special circumstances, or (ii) unless one (or more) of certain specified exceptions is shown to apply – as set out at NPPF paragraphs 154 and 155. Other than in the case of development on previously developed land or grey belt land, where development is not inappropriate, Local Planning Authorities should ensure that ‘substantial weight’ is given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness.

Potentially relevant to this application is the Green Belt exception at NPPF 155 (g):

“limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously

developed land (including a material change of use to residential or mixed use including residential), whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt."

Previously developed land (PDL) is defined. The site would need to have been lawfully developed in order to qualify (which it may be held is not the same as having become lawful with the passage of time). PDL excludes land that is or was last occupied by agricultural or forestry buildings.

The building subject of this application is found to have been present at least since 2003 (in excess of 20 years). No specific planning history has been identified. The agent has since commented in an e-mail that the applicant purchased the site in 1993 and, *"...at that time the building was used for the housing of bullocks. On ownership of the property the agricultural use of the land ceased and the building was used by the applicant for stabling, initially for his own horses but in latter years in conjunction with the established commercial equestrian use on the site"*.

Use of the building will have become lawful by the passage of time but whether it was originally 'lawfully developed' is unknown. Though possibly not with this exact layout, the OS map of 1969 shows a similar sized building close to this position. The applicant's submitted planning statement does not address the origins of the building or its lawfulness or otherwise. It was apparent at the LPA site visit that its current use would appear to be as stabling and the wider site premises appeared evidently equestrian. It appears from the Planning history that Butterlands Farm came into equestrian use at or around 1994 and indeed this is now corroborated by the further information received.

It seems likely (and now confirmed by the applicant) that the application building would originally have been agricultural but on balance of probability it can reasonably be concluded that it will have held an equestrian use for some time in excess of 10 years enabling it to qualify as immune from enforcement action. In the absence of information to the contrary it seems correct to accept the building as 'previously developed land' based on its apparent longterm equestrian use.

Although of somewhat piecemeal or fragmentary construction the building has obvious permanence in terms of its size and anchorage and is certainly not a temporary building.

The proposal plans show a structure of closely similar plan area and section profile to the existing building and therefore in terms of its physical scale the proposal would not cause 'substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt'.

Conclusion on principle

In terms of Green Belt the proposal can qualify as not inappropriate development based on NPPF paragraph 154(g) as representing in this case "complete redevelopment of previously developed land (including a material change of use to residential...) which would not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt".

Grey Belt

Grey belt is defined in the NPPF glossary as being:

For the purposes of plan-making and decision-making, 'grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

It is perhaps likely that on assessment the proposal site would meet the criteria with regard to Green Belt purposes (a), (b) and (d) enabling it to be categorised as 'grey belt'. If so, this would enable the potential for exception under paragraph 155 to be considered. The proposal would need to comply with each of 155 (a), (b) and (c) in order for it to be considered as an exception and thereby appropriate development. NPPF 155 (c) requires that: *"The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to paragraphs 110 and 115 of [the] Framework"*.

Sustainability

NPPF paragraph 110 calls on 'the planning system' to actively manage patterns of growth in support of the sustainable transport objectives as laid out in the preceding section (NPPF 109). These include 109(e) *identifying and pursuing opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use* and 109(f) *taking into account the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure – including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects, and for net environmental gain*.

Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

NPPF 110 also comments that *"...opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both plan-making and decision-making"*.

NPPF 115 states (amongst other things) that it should be ensured that: *(a) sustainable transport modes are prioritised taking account of the vision for the site, the type of development and its location*.

Consistent with the objectives of the NPPF to prioritise sustainable transport modes, the Council's adopted Local Plan Policy T1 seeks development which, amongst other things, reduces the reliance on the private car for travel.

Butterlands Farm (via Top Road and Hot Lane) is a journey distance of 2.0km from the centre of Biddulph Moor which is classed as a 'larger village' in the Council's development hierarchy. This is a notable distance and, given the nature of Top Road which is relatively narrow and not lane divided, has no pavement or street lighting and

is open to 60mph speeds, cannot be considered a comfortable or particularly safe route for walking or cycling. Hot Lane is very narrow with blind corners and again is largely unlit and has no pavement and very limited or absent verge refuge. For these reasons, future occupiers would be discouraged from walking and cycling to access services or public transport opportunities in Biddulph Moor, particularly during hours of darkness and in poor weather conditions. As a result, the future occupants would be highly dependent on the use of private cars for their day-to-day needs.

The agent has drawn attention to a 2019 allowed appeal at neighbouring Woodhead Farm to the south along Top Road. This was for the conversion of a garage to a dwelling. The Inspector noted it to be 1.4km north east of Biddulph Moor and commented: *“Access to the village from the appeal site on foot would require walking along Top Road where there are no footways or lighting. Whilst access could be achieved by walking or cycling, having regard to the distance involved, I consider that some journeys would be likely to make use of the car.”* The appeal site was nevertheless in that case found by the Inspector to be a suitable location. At 2km from Biddulph Moor the future occupants of the present application site meanwhile would be highly likely to depend on private car journeys for their day-to-day needs.

The LPA has been party to other more recent appeal decisions in which comparable poor connections with service centres have led to dismissal. Each case will have its own specific circumstances and must be assessed accordingly. The conclusion here is that Butterlands Farm cannot be considered sustainably located.

Design

The outward design appearance of this new-build development does not conform with the Staffordshire Moorlands rural building tradition for a dwelling as exemplified for example in the Council's adopted Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (2018) which places an emphasis on respecting traditional built forms.

Whilst a timber exterior wall finish can be considered preferable to a profiled sheet metal finish it is still not a typical or characteristic material for a dwelling and the overall design and materials, which would still include a grey metal roof finish and prominent modern large-form glazing, is at odds with the established and predominant characteristic of the area for rural dwellings. Publicly the development would be seen prominently from the nearby Top Road. The development is thus found contrary to policies DC1 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local plan and to the National Planning Policy Framework in particular section 12 with its emphasis on achieving well-designed places.

Amenity

The interior layout shows an 86m² gross internal floor area which would more than satisfy the NDSS requirements for a two bedroom / four person dwelling where the minimum space requirement would be 70m².

Externally the outside space off the north east elevation would provide c.10.5m x 6.1m which is very close to the 65m² minimum adopted Local Plan requirement. Further space would be available off the south elevation.

It is therefore found that the amenities of the dwelling would be sufficiently met. There would also be no obvious conflicts with privacy or amenity for occupiers of the neighbouring dwellings.

The Council's EHO has recommended refusal "due to insufficient information being provided to address the noise and odour impacts at the proposed residential development". Based on the LPA case officer site visit however these details are not found necessary in this case. The dwelling would be grouped with the two existing dwellings. This is not a noisy farm environment but has the relatively serene attributes found in an equestrian centre. The majority of the stabling and resultant manure storage requirement is taking place to the far westerly periphery of the premises.

Highway Safety

The advice of the County Highways Officer is that the proposal can be accepted in highway safety terms. The HO notes this is potentially not in a sustainable location though the LPA finds some confusion or error in the HO commentary that has been provided as Biddulph Moor does appear still to have a functioning local retail outlet as well as some other community facilities such as pub, primary school, village hall and church. The main issue for the LPA is the relative inaccessibility of these services without recourse to the private car.

Other Matters

As the proposal involves demolition of an existing building it is necessary to consider if there are any implications for protected species in particular bats. The survey found no bats recorded emerging from the building during the emergence sampling, confirming the likely absence of roosting bat species. It can be accepted from this that the proposed works are therefore unlikely to impact upon roosting bats and an EPS mitigation licence is not required.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

Whilst acceptable in principle in the Green Belt and on the majority of matters as considered in the above report, including highway safety, and amenity, fundamentally the proposal fails due to being unsustainably located in the rural countryside.

There is also concern that the proposal does not comply with the Council's adopted design guide SPD with regard to the use of materials or the architectural style of the new dwelling.

In terms of LP policy SS10 the proposal would also need to show that there is an 'essential need'. This is achieved where policy H1(5)(e) is met as is the case here. The Council's current undersupply of housing is also to be noted.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : **refuse**

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 21st Jan 2026

X *B.S. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council