

Design and Access Statement

(Prepared in support of a planning application for change of use and associated development in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order and the National Planning Policy Framework.)

1. Introduction

Site Address: Marsh Side Farm, Tan House Lane, Staffordshire

Local Planning Authority: Staffordshire Moorlands District Council

Proposal: Change of use of three existing agricultural buildings to a children's nursery, together with the erection of two permanent tipis and the siting of three repurposed shipping containers to provide toilet facilities and a staff room.

Applicant: Caroline and Matthew Akker

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) accompanies a full planning application (with listed building consent) for the above proposal. The statement explains the design principles and concepts that have informed the development and demonstrates how access for all users has been appropriately addressed.

The DAS has been prepared in a proportionate manner, reflecting the nature of the proposal, which seeks to reuse existing farm buildings and introduce lightweight, low-impact structures within a rural setting.

2. Site Context and Appraisal

2.1 Site Description

The application site is Marsh Side Farm, located off Tan House Lane within the open countryside of Staffordshire Moorlands. The site forms part of an established farmstead and includes three agricultural buildings arranged around a traditional farmyard:

- **Building 1:** A brick agricultural building with a slate roof, historically used for storage.
- **Building 2:** A timber barn with a metal sheet roof.
- **Building 3:** A former brick agricultural building that is currently derelict and no longer in active use.

The farmstead also includes a farmhouse which is a **Grade II listed building**. No works or alterations are proposed to the listed farmhouse, and it does not form part of this planning application.

The site lies within countryside but is **not designated as Green Belt land**.

2.2 Surrounding Area

The surrounding area is rural in character, comprising agricultural land and a small number of residential properties. Access to the site is taken solely from **Tan House Lane**, a no-through rural lane which serves Marsh Side Farm and three additional residential properties: **Tan House**, **The Anthony Cottage**, and **Horseshoe Cottage**.

The limited number of properties served by the lane, together with its no-through nature, results in low levels of traffic and contributes to the quiet rural character of the area. The proposed nursery use is considered capable of operating without causing undue harm to highway safety or residential amenity, subject to appropriate management of access and parking.

2.3 Planning History

[Any relevant planning history to be inserted if applicable.]

3. Planning Policy Context

The proposal has been assessed against the following key policy documents:

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)
- National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)
- Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan
- Relevant design and countryside policies within the Local Plan

The NPPF supports the sustainable growth and diversification of rural businesses, including farm diversification schemes, where they respect the character of the countryside. The Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan similarly supports the reuse of existing rural buildings and the provision of community facilities, subject to appropriate design, access, and amenity considerations.

The presence of a Grade II listed farmhouse has been carefully considered. As no works are proposed to the listed building and the development is confined to separate agricultural structures, the proposal preserves the significance and setting of the listed farmhouse.

4. Design Principles and Concepts

The overarching design approach is to retain and repurpose existing buildings wherever possible and to introduce new elements that are clearly subordinate, reversible, and sympathetic to the rural setting.

Tipis have been identified as the ideal solution to extend the indoor space available. Sourced from The Tipi Company, tipis have successfully been used at environmentally sensitive areas, such as Mother Shipton's cave, (England's oldest tourist attraction dating to 1630), Trentham Monkey Forest and Wasdale National Trust, Cumbria.

They also have a proven track record in Education settings, being used by Little Wellies Day Nursery, The Outdoor Classroom Company, Berkshire College of Agriculture, Kids Planet and Greenhouse Farm nursery.

4.1 Amount

The amount of development proposed includes:

- Change of use of three existing agricultural buildings to nursery-related uses (classroom spaces, play areas, storage and ancillary accommodation).
- Two permanent tipis, each approximately 10.3 metres in diameter, to provide additional covered learning and activity space.
- Three repurposed shipping containers, each approximately 2.5 metres wide by 6 metres long, to accommodate toilet facilities and a staff room.

No additional permanent built floorspace is proposed beyond that required to support the nursery use.

4.2 Layout

The layout has been designed to work with the existing farmyard arrangement. The three converted buildings form the core of the nursery, with outdoor play and learning areas located between and around them.

The two tipis are positioned to create a safe, legible, and engaging outdoor learning environment for children. The shipping containers are sited discreetly between the tipis, forming a functional link that provides essential facilities while also helping to define the nursery area.

Circulation routes are simple and intuitive, with clear separation between pedestrian areas used by children and any remaining farm access routes.

4.3 Scale

The scale of development remains modest and appropriate to the rural context. The existing buildings retain their original scale and massing. The tipis, although visually distinctive, are low-rise, lightweight structures with a circular form that sits comfortably within the open

setting. Their height and footprint are comparable to existing agricultural structures on the site.

The shipping containers are single-storey elements with limited height and are subordinate to the existing buildings.

4.4 Appearance

The proposal seeks to respect the agricultural character of the site:

- Existing brick buildings will be repaired and reused, retaining their traditional materials and appearance.
- The timber barn will remain largely unchanged externally, maintaining its utilitarian farm character.
- The derelict brick building will be sensitively refurbished, improving its appearance while retaining its agricultural identity.
- The tipis introduce a natural, informal aesthetic appropriate to a children's nursery and outdoor learning environment.
- The repurposed shipping containers will be finished in muted, recessive colours to minimise their visual impact.

Overall, the appearance of the development balances rural tradition with a playful and functional design suitable for early years education.

4.5 Landscaping

Landscaping will be kept informal and appropriate to the rural setting. Existing hardstanding and farmyard surfaces will be reused where possible. Soft landscaping may include grassed play areas, natural play features, and planting to enhance biodiversity and provide visual containment.

5. Use

The proposed use is a children's nursery providing early years education and childcare. This use is compatible with the rural location and represents a sustainable form of farm diversification, providing local employment and community benefit while making effective use of existing buildings.

6. Access

6.1 Vehicular Access and Highway Safety

Vehicular access to Marsh Side Farm is taken from **Tan House Lane**, a no-through rural lane serving only four properties. Tan House Lane connects directly to the **A523**, with the junction located within a **30 mph speed limit** area. This provides a clear, legible, and safe point of access to the wider highway network. Sections of the A523 beyond the junction operate at higher speed limits (up to 60 mph); however, these do not affect the safety or operation of the access itself.

The nursery will operate with managed drop-off and pick-up periods, and traffic movements will be limited in scale. Given the small number of properties served by Tan House Lane and its no-through nature, the proposal is not expected to result in unacceptable impacts on highway safety or traffic flow.

6.2 Parking Provision

The application includes the provision of a dedicated on-site car park located on land within the farm holding adjacent to Tan House Lane, close to **Tan House**. The car park will accommodate **up to 12 vehicles** and will be accessed via a clearly defined entrance and exit, allowing for **two-way vehicular movement** between the car park and Tan House Lane.

The car park has been sited to ensure safe manoeuvring within the site, avoiding the need for vehicles to reverse onto the public highway. The level of parking provision is considered appropriate for the scale of the nursery and will assist in minimising on-street parking along Tan House Lane.

6.3 Pedestrian and Inclusive Access

Pedestrian routes between the car park, nursery buildings, tipis, and ancillary facilities will be clearly defined and designed to prioritise safety.

Level or gently sloping routes will be provided where practicable. The development has been designed to provide inclusive access in accordance with Part M of the Building Regulations, including appropriate door widths, circulation space, and accessible toilet facilities.

Outside the Brick Shippon, steps will be placed leading to one door, while a shallow ramp will lead to the second door.

7. Sustainability Considerations

The proposal incorporates sustainable principles, including:

- Reuse of existing buildings, reducing the need for new construction and embodied carbon.
- Repurposing of shipping containers for ancillary accommodation.

- Use of lightweight, low-impact structures (tipis) that are visually and environmentally sympathetic.
 - Potential for natural ventilation and daylighting within buildings.
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8. Community Safety and Welfare

The nursery layout prioritises the safety and wellbeing of children. The arrangement allows for good natural surveillance, clear boundaries between nursery areas and the wider farm, and safe, enclosed outdoor play spaces. The design supports safeguarding requirements while maintaining an open and welcoming environment.

8A. Community, Economic and Rural Benefits

The proposed development will deliver significant **social, economic, and rural benefits**, in line with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan.

Rushton village currently has **no existing nursery provision**, and the proposal will address a clear local need for early years childcare. The availability of a local nursery will reduce the need for families to travel to neighbouring settlements, supporting sustainable travel patterns and improving access to essential community services.

The applicants operate a **successful Ofsted-rated Outstanding nursery** at a farm location in Congleton, demonstrating a proven track record in delivering high-quality childcare within a rural setting. That nursery currently employs **14 members of staff**.

The existing business contributes **in excess of £250,000 per annum to the local economy** through wages paid to employees and contributes approximately **£15,000–£18,000 per annum** to a local café that supplies food for the children. This demonstrates the ability of the nursery model to support local employment and rural businesses.

The proposed nursery at Marsh Side Farm will create **new employment opportunities**, with additional staff to be recruited, providing job opportunities for local residents. The applicants also intend to source food from **local businesses**, supplying meals five days a week, fifty weeks of the year, thereby delivering a consistent and meaningful contribution to the local economy.

The proposal will also support the **ongoing maintenance and long-term viability of Marsh Side Farm**, which extends to just over **8 acres** and is predominantly surrounded by agricultural land. The farm will remain in active rural use, with animals housed on site. The applicants intend to rent the majority of the land to local farmers for grazing and already have **sheep and alpaca owners** wanting to utilise the land.

Overall, the development represents a sustainable form of **rural diversification**, supporting the rural economy, maintaining agricultural land in productive use, and delivering an important community facility.

9. Conclusion

This Design and Access Statement demonstrates that the proposed change of use of existing agricultural buildings, together with the introduction of associated nursery facilities at Marsh Side Farm, has been carefully designed to respond positively to its rural context.

The proposal makes efficient and sustainable use of existing buildings, introduces low-impact and reversible structures, and preserves the setting of the **Grade II listed farmhouse**, to which no alterations are proposed. Highway access and parking arrangements are safe, appropriate, and proportionate, with a dedicated on-site car park and a suitable junction arrangement with the A523.

The development will deliver clear community and economic benefits, including addressing an identified lack of nursery provision in Rushton, creating local employment, supporting local businesses, and securing the long-term maintenance of the farm through sustainable rural diversification.

The proposal accords with national and local planning policy and represents sustainable development. It is therefore considered that planning permission should be granted.

Prepared by: [Name]

Date: [Date]