

PLANNING STATEMENT

**Proposed Conversion of Existing Garage to Ancillary Living Accommodation
at
Upper Foker Farm, Leekfirth, Leek, Staffordshire**

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the conversion of an existing garage building at Upper Foker Farm to provide ancillary living accommodation for the applicants' son and his expectant partner. The proposal is advanced to support the continued and effective operation of a long-established dairy farm and to facilitate generational succession within the farming business.

The application seeks the re-use of an existing, traditional stone-built agricultural structure located within the established farmstead. No new dwelling is proposed, and the accommodation would remain functionally and planning-wise ancillary to the main farmhouse. The proposal has been carefully designed to respect the character of the building and its rural surroundings, whilst addressing a clear functional and operational need arising from the day-to-day demands of the agricultural enterprise.

In accordance with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the application should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The relevant development plan comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted 2020), with the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024) being a material consideration.

2. Site Description and Context

Upper Foker Farm is located within the open countryside of Staffordshire Moorlands, approximately 2.5 kilometres from the market town of Leek. The site lies outside any defined settlement boundary and forms part of a substantial agricultural holding extending to approximately 310 acres.

The farm operates as a working dairy enterprise with around 240 active dairy cows, together with followers and replacement heifers. The holding includes a range of traditional and modern agricultural buildings clustered around the main farmhouse, forming a coherent and established farmstead that has evolved over time in response to operational requirements.

The garage building subject to this application is a traditional stone structure with a pitched roof, already integrated into the farmyard and read in conjunction with surrounding agricultural buildings. It is served by existing access, hardstanding and services and does not occupy an isolated or visually prominent position within the landscape.

3. Description of the Proposed Development

Planning permission is sought for the conversion of the existing garage to provide ancillary living accommodation associated with the main farmhouse. The proposed layout has been designed to deliver a modest and functional form of accommodation appropriate to its ancillary status.

At ground floor level, the proposal provides an open-plan kitchen, dining and living space, together with a downstairs WC and under-stairs storage. At first floor level, the accommodation comprises one double bedroom, one single bedroom and a family bathroom. The single bedroom is capable of lawful occupation until the child reaches the age of 16, in accordance with minimum internal space requirements set out within the Building Regulations.

Whilst family meals will continue to take place primarily within the main farmhouse, the inclusion of a kitchen area within the ancillary accommodation is considered essential given the presence of a newborn child and the practical demands associated with caring responsibilities alongside agricultural work.

No extension to the building is proposed, and the conversion is achieved entirely within the existing envelope.

4. Design and Access Statement

4.1 Design Approach

The design approach is deliberately restrained and conservation led. The proposal seeks to retain the agricultural character of the building and ensure that it continues to read as part of the working farmstead rather than as a separate or suburban form of residential development.

The conversion makes effective use of an existing building, consistent with the objectives of the NPPF 2024 to promote the efficient use of land and the re-use of previously developed and under-utilised buildings, particularly in rural areas where new build development is more tightly controlled.

4.2 Scale, Massing and Appearance

There is no increase in the footprint, height or overall massing of the building. The pitched roof form is retained, and the external envelope remains largely unchanged. Openings are introduced sparingly and are limited to what is necessary to provide adequate light and outlook for the proposed accommodation.

Materials have been selected to reflect the existing palette of the building and surrounding farmstead. Existing stonework is retained and repaired on a like-for-like basis. The roof covering remains slate, with any displaced slates reused where rooflights are introduced. Rooflights are conservation-style units (see image example below), flush-fitting and recessive in appearance. New windows and doors are modest in scale, aluminium-framed and finished in a dark, muted colour to avoid visual prominence.



The infilling of the former garage opening is undertaken in matching stonework to ensure that the elevation continues to reflect its agricultural origins.

4.3 Services and Infrastructure

The existing garage building already benefits from an electricity supply, which can be readily retained and adapted as part of the proposed conversion. Foul drainage can be accommodated via connection to the existing private water treatment plant serving the main dwelling, which is located within the adjacent garden area opposite the application building.

The proposal therefore makes efficient use of existing on-site infrastructure and does not necessitate the provision of new or extended utility connections, reinforcing the sustainable and low-impact nature of the development.

4.4 Access and Parking

The proposal utilises the existing farm access and circulation arrangements. Adequate parking and turning space already exists within the farmyard and no new access points are required. Given the ancillary nature of the accommodation and its occupation by an existing family member already involved in the farm business and currently living in the main farmhouse, the development will not result in any material increase in traffic movements.

Pedestrian access is safe, convenient and appropriate to the setting.

4.5 Inclusive Access

The accommodation is intended for family occupation and provides level access at ground floor level, with essential day-to-day living spaces located on the ground floor. The layout has been designed to provide flexibility and practicality in use.

5. Agricultural and Functional Justification

The proposed development is intrinsically linked to the operational needs of Upper Foker Farm. The scale and nature of the dairy enterprise require constant oversight, particularly during calving periods and early-morning milking operations, which typically commence at around 4:00am. Animal welfare considerations necessitate the ability to respond rapidly to emergencies and changing conditions.

The applicants' son plays an active and essential role in the day-to-day running of the farm and is required to be available on site at very short notice. The provision of ancillary accommodation within the farmstead enables this level of responsiveness and supports the long-term sustainability of the business.

The nearest affordable housing is located in Leek, approximately 2.5 kilometres from the site. Such accommodation is not suitable for a stockman or family member who must be present on site within minutes to assist with calving, early milking and livestock emergencies. Reliance on off-site accommodation would undermine the effective management of the holding.

The proposal therefore supports generational farming, succession planning and the retention of skilled family labour, all of which align with both local and national planning objectives relating to the rural economy.

6. Ancillary Use and Planning Control

The proposed accommodation is intended solely for use ancillary to the main farmhouse and will be occupied by a close family member engaged in the operation of the farm. It will not function as a separate planning unit, and there is no intention for it to be sold, let or occupied independently.

The relationship between the ancillary accommodation and the main dwelling will remain close, with shared family life and facilities continuing to be centred on the farmhouse. The scale and layout of the accommodation reinforce its subordinate role.

Should the Local Planning Authority consider it necessary, the applicant would be willing to accept a planning condition restricting the use of the accommodation to ancillary purposes only, thereby ensuring long-term planning control and preventing the creation of an unrestricted dwelling in the countryside.

7. Ecology and Biodiversity Considerations

A Preliminary Roost Assessment prepared by Eco 360 Ltd (February 2026) has been submitted in support of the application. The assessment categorises the building as having moderate bat roost potential on a precautionary basis due to the presence of some external features. However, the survey confirmed that no bats were recorded, and no evidence of bat activity was identified, including the absence of droppings, staining, feeding remains or DNA. Internally, the building is open, well lit and draughty, with no loft voids or enclosed roof spaces capable of supporting stable roosting conditions.

The proposal involves the conversion and retention of the existing building rather than demolition, and there will be no loss of surrounding habitat or alteration to foraging or commuting routes. External works are limited and carefully detailed.

In this context, whilst the precautionary conclusions of the Preliminary Roost Assessment are acknowledged, it is considered that additional emergence surveys would be unlikely to materially alter the ecological understanding of the site, given the absence of evidence and the limited scope of the proposed works. This approach is consistent with the NPPF 2024, which emphasises proportionality in the consideration of ecological impacts.

Notwithstanding this position, the applicant is committed to precautionary working practices during construction and acknowledges the findings of the submitted ecological appraisal, the applicant is keen to take the opportunity to deliver biodiversity enhancements as part of the proposals, over and above any minimum requirements. In this regard, three bat boxes will be installed on mature trees located opposite the application building, positioned at an appropriate height and orientation to avoid interference with established flight paths and to remain clear of artificial lighting. The precise siting will be informed by best practice guidance and agreed on site.

In addition, the applicant would be pleased to install bird nesting features, such as discreet boxes suitable for common rural species, including swallows or other farmland birds typically associated with agricultural buildings. These measures are proposed on

a voluntary basis and demonstrate a proactive approach to biodiversity enhancement consistent with national and local planning policy.

8. Planning Policy Assessment

The proposal accords with the overarching objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), particularly those relating to the achievement of sustainable development, the support of a strong and competitive rural economy, the effective use of land, and the delivery of well-designed places.

Paragraphs within the NPPF support the re-use of existing buildings in rural areas where this would support economic activity and maintain viable communities, provided that the development respects local character and does not result in unacceptable environmental harm. The proposal meets these objectives by reusing an existing building within an established farmstead and by directly supporting the continued operation of a rural enterprise.

At the local level, the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan supports development in rural areas where it is justified by functional need and where it contributes to sustainable communities without undermining countryside character. The proposal aligns with the development principles set out in Policy SS1, the rural strategy contained within Policy SS10, the design objectives of Policy DC1, and the biodiversity provisions of Policy NE1.

When read as a whole, the development plan supports a balanced and pragmatic approach to development in the countryside, particularly where proposals are modest in scale, make effective use of existing buildings and support rural businesses. This proposal sits comfortably within that policy framework.

9. Conclusion

The proposed conversion of the existing garage at Upper Foker Farm to provide ancillary living accommodation represents a sustainable, proportionate and well-considered form of development. It reuses an existing building, preserves the character of the farmstead and surrounding countryside, and directly supports the operational needs and long-term viability of a substantial agricultural enterprise.

The accommodation is genuinely ancillary, functionally necessary and capable of being appropriately controlled through planning conditions. Environmental considerations have been addressed in a balanced and proportionate manner, and the proposal accords with both national and local planning policy.

For these reasons, the development is considered acceptable in principle and in detail, and planning permission is respectfully sought.