

Introduction

This statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the construction of a barn for agricultural use at The Grange, Whiston Eaves Lane, Whiston, in the Staffordshire Moorlands. The application is submitted by Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy, on behalf of Mr and Mrs John Foster. Other parties with an input to the application are Smytheman Architectural for plans, BiOme Consulting for PEA and BNG reports, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for nature recovery advice.

Site Description

The Grange is a homestead on Whiston Eaves Lane, with a total landholding extending to approximately 5.29 acres. It is in the vicinity of the village of Whiston, bordered by Whiston Eaves lane to the southwest, with arable fields and Whiston Golf Course forming the remaining borders. The Grange stands within the green belt, it is not listed, does not form part of any conservation area, and there are no trees on site subject to preservation orders. The overall contour of the landholding is a slope upwards to the northeast from behind the main dwelling, with the main dwelling sitting on a slightly raised position to Whiston Eaves Lane. The proposed site for the barn is in the lower part of the field behind the main dwelling, its associated outbuildings, and its gardens which run parallel to Whiston Eaves Lane. The landholding at The Grange is currently used for grazing, and has had little maintenance carried out for a number of years. It comprises of two fields with stone walls and hedging in parts creating the boundary. There is a public footpath dissecting the field which contains the application site, from the golf course to neighbouring farmland, and on to Whiston Eaves Lane.

Proposal

The application proposes to erect a purpose built barn for mixed agricultural use, which includes storage of equipment and livestock. The proposed barn would have a footprint of 15m x 10m, with an eaves height of 4m, and a ridge height of 6.7m. It would be constructed from a single span frame with concrete panels to a height of 2m, with the remaining walls to the eaves, vented wooden cladding. The roof would be cladding with translucent sheets. The northeast elevation would have an access door direct to the field and the northwest elevation would have a larger access door, the barn would be served from a farm track off the existing yard.

Justification

The Grange is registered with DEFRA under the CPH number 37/028/0301. Its landholding is currently rented out and used for local dairy cattle grazing. It is the intention of the applicant to add to this, through a new venture in raising surplus billy goats from the UK dairy industry for meat. In principal, the venture is to take billy goats born into dairy herds which would otherwise be euthanized, and bring them on to produce goat meat to serve an emerging market. Full details on this venture can be found in the business plan submitted with this application. The existing outbuildings are of an age where they would not meet modern welfare standards for the keeping of livestock of any sort without

extensive modification, which would be damaging to the character of the building and homestead as a whole. They were not designed for use with modern machinery, or are considered inadequate to store such items securely. With the public footpath running through the landholding there is an increased security risk for farm assets. The proposed barn would mitigate these concerns in its design and function for mixed use agricultural. And enable the successful implementation of the business plan, with more effective land management for nature recovery across the site.

Nature Recovery, PEA and BNG

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Biodiversity Net Gain report in relation to this application, have been compiled by BiOme Consulting.

The PEA has been produced from the results of an extensive desk study and site survey, initially carried out in October 2024, with an updated survey in May 2025. The objective of the Desk Study is to identify any applicable legislation, and any designated sites, granted EPS licences and GCN surveys and licences within 2km of the site. The site surveys consisted of:

- PEA assessment with the objective to identify any potentially valuable habitats, plant species, and the presence and /or potential of protected or controlled species. The site comprises predominantly of cattle-grazed pasture, common grasses dominate, with occasional Creeping Thistle, Common Nettle, Dock, and White Clover. No invasive non-native species of plant (INNS) were observed.
- Bat survey using a Ground Tree Level Assessment method. No features on the application site were identified as being suitable for use by bats.
- Badger activity survey carried out across the site. No evidence of badger activity was present.
- Habitat Suitability Index assessment for Great Crested Newts. The cattle drinking pond in the vicinity of the application site was dry when surveyed in May 2025, the GCN is considered likely absent given the poor suitability of the pond, and the absence of any suitable breeding pond within 0.25km from the site.

The results of the surveys demonstrate that the site is considered to be of limited intrinsic ecological value for habitat, the application will have no impact on nearby sites of ecological interest, and no further surveys are required.

The BNG baseline habitat definition assessment was carried out using the UK Hab system for classification, and DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric guidance for condition, in May 2025. The habitat has been assessed for linear and area habitat value, and enhancement will be achieved through hedgerow and area units. Post construction enhancement of habitat is detailed on Figure 3 of the BNG report and is calculated to result in a net gain of 10.54% for area and 93% for hedgerow. Area enhancement would cover 0.17Ha and be a species rich wildflower mix EM3F Special General Purpose Wildflowers, Linear enhancement would cover 10m and be a species rich native hedging mix with a far superior ecological value to the Laurel on other areas of the site.

On acquisition of The Grange the applicant approached Staffordshire Wildlife Trust for advice. A site visit was arranged with their Head of Nature Recovery Networks and a series

of suggestions were made to enhance biodiversity on the site. In addition to the requirements for BNG, the applicant is keen to install to the proposed barn, nest boxes for various species of bird and bats.

The steps taken as part of this application, comfortably meet the requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain legislation. This is in line with the applicant's intention to improve the ecological value of the property. The applicant is committed to carry out works lawfully and in such a manner to minimise ecological impact in line with the recommendations of the PEA and BNG reports.

Assessment

The planning policy and guidance is consistent in highlighting the Government's commitment for a positive response to planning proposals that would deliver sustainable enhancement of the environment and rural economy. The objective for the applicant is to enhance the economical value of the smallholding and local rural economy, whilst implementing improvements to the landholding for the benefit of wildlife and environment. The barn would provide a functional, purpose built mixed use secure structure for livestock accommodation, and storage of equipment and feed. The proposal would be supported in principal by NPPF chapters 4, 11, 13, 14 and 15, and Local Plan policies SS9, SS10, SS11 and SD2 as a building essential in the countryside, supporting effective land use, enabling protection and enhancement of biodiversity and development of rural enterprise.

The proposed barn has been positioned to the northeast, behind the existing buildings and garden, and does not appear as a standalone or sporadic structure. Its modest overall footprint and height, along with the existing planting, ensure that its visual impact is limited and that its overall massing within the landscape is reduced. The barn has been specifically designed for the purpose of mixed use agriculture and uses standard construction techniques and materials. The use of colour coated and wooden cladding ensures that its visual appearance is appropriate and in keeping with its rural location. Considering the relatively isolated location of the application site, location of the proposed barn in relation to existing structures, planting and finished ground level, it is not considered that the proposal would have an unreasonable negative impact on amenity, neighbouring properties, or neighbouring land use. As part of the application, the planting of native hedgerow and an area of enhancement aims to deliver a net gain to biodiversity which is in exceedance of the BNG legislative requirements. The proposal is considered to comply with the NPPF chapter 12 and Local Plan policies SS1, DC1, DC3, NE1 and NE2 which aim to secure good design and conserve the landscape.

The barn would be accessed via the existing entrance to The Grange with no requirement for additional access to Whiston Eaves Lane. The proposal would not result in significant intensification of the use of the site, it is considered that there would be no conflict with Local Plan policy T1, or the guidance of the NPPF.

Conclusion

A key objective of the applicant during their ownership of The Grange is to revert a primary function of The Grange to that of a smallholding, providing a supplementary income through good, effective use of its assets, with the intention to:

- Contribute to the rural conservation and regeneration of the area
- Enhance the rural economy in the area
- Improve habitat for wildlife and enhance biodiversity in the area
- Contribute to the mitigation of climate change

It is proposed that this will be achieved through implementation of their business plan to produce a quality, locally produced product, while meeting the requirements of BNG legislation and with additional measures taken by the applicant to enhance the ecological value of the site.

In conclusion the barn is modest in size and commensurate with the agricultural needs of the smallholding. It is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture to ensure that the applicant can achieve their objectives. The applicants recognise their responsibilities in proposing a quality development, which compliments The Grange historically and environmentally along with its surrounding area and in line with policy.