

Mr. A. Swithenbank
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Stockwell Street
Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 6HQ

16th March 2025

Dear Arne

ERECTION OF AGRICULTURAL BUILDING – THE GRANGE, WHISTON EAVES LANE, WHISTON

On behalf of my client, Mr. J. Foster, I would be grateful if you would find attached a planning application proposing the erection of an agricultural building on land at the above site.

The application represents a resubmission following the refusal of application SMD/2024/0561 which had also proposed the erection of an agricultural building on the site, but one which was much larger in size, and located further to the northeast within the field. That application had also proposed the formation of a new vehicular access through the field which was to connect with a very large area of hardstanding that was to be provided around the building.

That application was refused for the following two reasons:

1. The proposal is excessive in scale both in the storage building and in the amount of yard and track access proposed relative to the holding and the described needs. New development in the rural areas is only supported where there is an 'essential need' (Policy SS10). This has not been demonstrated here on the scale proposed. Moreover, Policy SS10(3) establishes that priority should be given to protecting the quality and character of the area. This scheme fails in its justification and fails to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the location and its surroundings. The development would step out significantly from the established farmstead building group, considered to be a Non Designated Heritage Asset, disrupting the established arrangement and in turn undermining the historic pattern. The Grange has already seen some expansion in the yard area in recent time along its north east side adjacent to the buildings. The current proposal would appear likely to significantly more than double the developed area and thus 'swamp' the location relative to its existing developed scale to date. It would amount to an un-necessarily large encroachment into hitherto long undeveloped field land.

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The proposal is thus found contrary to Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan policies SS10; DC1; DC2 and DC3 and to the NPPF.

2. Insufficient information has been provided with regard to the baseline ecological condition of the application land, in particular of the grassland species assemblage. Given the proximity of at least one pond and given the extent of ground works involved, consideration needs to be given to the possible implications for protected species such as Great Crested Newts. The proposal is thus found contrary to Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan Policies SS10; DC1 and NE1 and to the NPPF.

This revised proposal has sought to constructively address the concerns raised in the previous application, and encompasses a building with a significantly reduced footprint of 150m² (250m² previously) and a reduced ridge height of 6.7m (7.5m previously). The building has also been re-sited so that it sits much closer to the existing cluster of buildings and behind a row of mature vegetation to its southwest. The proposed means of vehicular access has also been substantially revised, removing the new access that had originally been proposed through the field, and instead proposing to share the existing farm house access, with a much smaller spur leading off that access into a much reduced area of hardstanding. The building is to be constructed with a steel portal frame, enclosed by concrete panels and vertical Yorkshire boarding to its elevations, with a composite sheet roof atop.

An assessment of the proposal in relation to main planning issues is set out below.

Principle of Development

Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and confirms that these areas will provide 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. In determining the previous application on the site the Local Authority concluded that the erection of an agricultural building was supported in principle under policy SS10, but that a clear demonstration of agricultural need had not been provided. The delegated report was critical of there being no indication of intended animal spaces, age group or numbers proposed, and that the building had a lack of ventilation. No internal space divisions had been shown, and it was concluded that the list of implements to be stored would only take up a modest amount of space within the building.

To address these concerns the applicant has reduced the size of the building, and altered its design, and has also prepared a Business Plan to demonstrate the agricultural need for the building. The Business Plan confirms the applicant's intention to utilise the building for the housing of goats to be reared for meat, along with the storage of feed, machinery and implements required for the management of the agricultural land holding.

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The Business Plan explains the proposal in considerable detail and demonstrates why a building of the size proposed is required, having regard to space for the animals and the associated storage requirements. It also explains how the business will operate, and how stock will be rotated before the animals are finished. The Business Plan confirms that a maximum of 38no. goats would be raised on site at any one time.

The information set out within the Business Plan demonstrates a clear agricultural need for a building of the size and scale proposed and consequently we contend that the proposal amounts to an acceptable form of development in the rural area, in accordance with the requirements of policy SS10 of the Local Plan.

Impact on Character of the Area

It is submitted that the revisions to the proposal to reduce the size of the building, to reposition it within the site, to reduce the amount of hardstanding around the building, and to omit the originally proposed vehicular access track across the field, represent substantial improvements compared to the previously refused scheme.

The re-siting of the building further to the southwest will ensure that the building does not appear as visually dominant as the previously refused scheme, which was a much larger building, and also set further up the hillside. That previous application had also proposed significant alterations to form a very large area of hardstanding and new access through the field, which have now been omitted.

The revised siting of the building will result in the building being tucked in behind a row of mature trees, and having a closer physical association to the existing cluster of buildings on the site. The proposal will furthermore have less incursion up the hillside and a much reduced area of hardstanding. Those factors, coupled with the reduction in the overall size and scale of the building will ensure that the development does not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding area. Opportunities furthermore exist to undertake some supplementary landscaping to the southeast of the building to further soften the visual impact of the development if the Local Authority consider this necessary.

Having regard to the considerations set out above it is concluded that the scale, massing, design and layout of the revised proposal is acceptable and will not result in unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS10, DC1, DC2 and DC3 of the Local Plan in this regard.

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Biodiversity Impacts

The revised application is accompanied by a Preliminary Ecological Assessment and Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment prepared by BiOME Consulting. The Preliminary Ecological Assessment does not identify any concerns in respect of impact on important habitats or protected species and furthermore confirms that Great Crested Newts are likely to be absent from the site given there are no suitable breeding ponds within 0.25km of the site. No further surveys are identified as being necessary. A series of recommendations are set out within the report which can be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition.

The Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment confirms that the existing site has a baseline habitat value of 2.34 units, and a hedgerow habitat value of 0.01 units. Through new habitat creation and enhancement of existing habitats the report demonstrates that a 10.54% net gain in terms of habitat units will be achieved, with a 93.00% net gain in hedgerow units. The proposed biodiversity enhancements can be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition and in doing so the development will meet the requirements of policy NE1 of the Local Plan.

Conclusion

Having regard to the considerations set out above it is concluded that this revised proposal has served to constructively address the concerns raised in the refusal of application SMD/2024/0561 and is acceptable in principle, will not have an adverse impact on the character and appearance of the landscape, and will safeguard protected species and achieve 10%+ net gain to biodiversity. We consequently submit that there is a compelling case for this revised proposal to be granted planning permission.

I trust this proposal will be of interest and should you have any queries or concerns with the proposal then please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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