

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0060
Valid 09/02/2026

WRAGG HALL FARM
BIDDULPH PARK ROAD
BIDDULPH

DEMOLITION OF
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING
AND FORMATION OF A NEW
VEHICULAR ACCESS AND
DRIVEWAY TO SERVE THE
NEW DWELLING PERMITTED
UNDER APPLICATION
REFERENCE SMD/2023/0212

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Green Belt
- Landscape
- Neighbour amenity

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

1. The extent of the site marked by red edge is seen in fig.1 in context with the existing buildings at Wragg Hall Farm; the applicant's blue edged land, and the neighbouring Melford Farm adjacent to the south west.

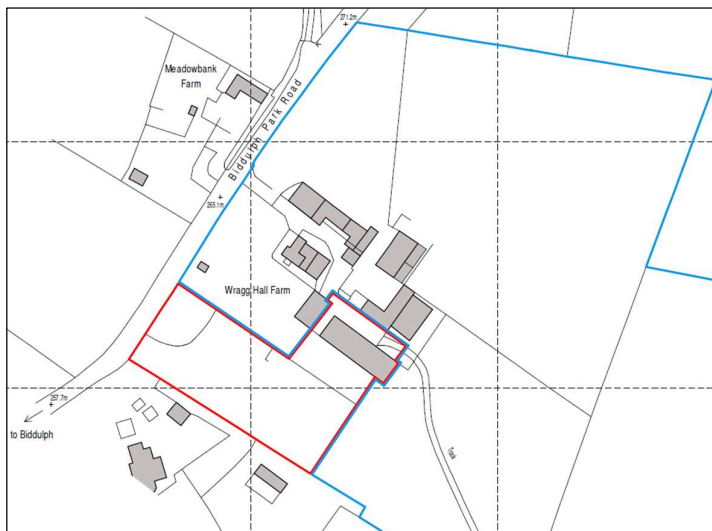


Fig.1

2. The site rises gently to the east from the road. As recently as 2006 the site was part of a larger single field which wrapped around to the north west side of the Wragg Hall Farm house. By 2011 the field had been divided and two medium to large ponds

had been formed and scattered tree planting had taken place. The trees have grown and matured to their present day condition.

PROPOSAL

3. The application seeks consent for demolition of a redundant former agricultural building and formation of a new vehicular access and driveway to serve a new dwelling permitted previously under application SMD/2023/0212 at Wragg Hall Farm. The proposed access and driveway is intended to provide the dwelling permitted under application SMD/2023/0212 with a dedicated and private arrangement rather than the shared arrangement available under the approved scheme. The existing access arrangement would continue to be available to serve the original farmhouse along with its other adjacent barn currently also undergoing conversion to a separate dwelling (SMD/2023/0485).

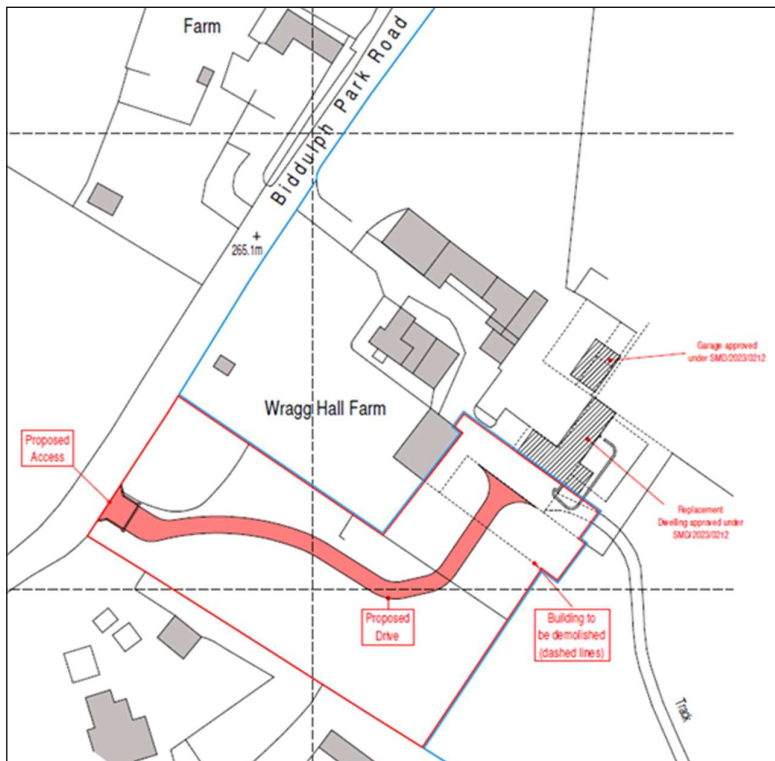


Fig.2

4. According to the submitted statement the proposed access would be constructed from a tarmac apron with a cobbled transition strip leading to the access drive which would remain open and unfenced. The length of the access is stated as 102m. It scales as 9.8m against the road edge narrowing after 2.0m to a width of 6.0m which would continue for a further c.8m before narrowing again to c.3.7metres.

5. In the supporting Planning Statement the agent says:

“The current access is not wide enough for two cars to pass, so in this scenario, a vehicle may be required to wait partially on the highway to allow a car to leave

the access first. This is a very real and existing risk to highway safety and the improvements provided as part of the proposed development are a significant and material consideration.”

“The applicant is willing to sign a unilateral undertaking which would restrict users of the proposed access and driveway to those associated with the new dwelling and its domestic use. All vehicular movements to the existing farmhouse and the barn currently under conversion to the north would, along with all agricultural use of the site be served by the existing access arrangement.

6. In addition to the Planning Statement, an Ecological Impact Assessment (27.01.2026); Arboricultural Impact Assessment (16.01.2026); Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (27.01.2026); Statutory biodiversity metric (12.01.2026); Activity survey for bats (August 2025) and a Tree and hedgerow planting schedule (ref 2022/2674/17 rev A 30.01.2026) have been submitted.

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
DC2 The Historic Environment
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 February 2019

Paragraph(s) 1 – 14;

Section(s) 4 – Decision making; 2 – Achieving sustainable development; 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

87/00348/OLD – alteration of existing dwelling and farm building to form two dwellings – approved

87/01069/OLD – alterations and conversion to form dwelling – approved

05/00132/FUL [SMD/2005/0355] – removal of agricultural occupancy condition from planning approvals 87/00348 and 87/01069 [Land of the current application was included in the red edge of this 2005 application. It is not apparent that the 1987 consents were implemented or, if they were, that there is more than just a single dwelling at the present day.]

There has recently been a series of approvals for conversion and/or replacement of existing farm buildings at the farm yard of Wragg Hall Farm which will result in two additional dwellings. Access in both cases will use the existing farm junction with Biddulph Park Road in accordance with advice at the time from the Highways Authority.

Class Q conversion DET/2022/0040 – approved (13.01.2023) followed by SMD/2023/0212 – *‘Demolition of outbuildings and erection of detached dwelling and garage with associated hard and soft landscaping works and improvements to existing vehicle access’* – approved.

[For the adjacent Class Q conversion nearest the road DET/2023/0020 – approved (07.09.2023) followed by SMD/2023/0485 – *‘Full application for change of use of barn to form single dwelling with associated operational development including alterations and extension, provision of amenity and parking space and hard and soft landscaping works’* – approved.]

SMD/2025/0420 – refused: *Demolition of agricultural building and formation of a new vehicular access and driveway to serve the new dwelling permitted under application reference SMD/2023/0212.*

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 13.03.2026

Neighbour consultation period ends: 04.03.2026

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

8. One representation objecting to the proposal from the occupiers of Melford Farm adjacent to the south west of the application site:

- The revisions address some previous concerns [with refused application SMD/2025/0420] but a number of objections remain.

- While we welcome the offer of a unilateral undertaking to limit the road to domestic traffic, this does not, in our view, address our concerns regarding road safety. As the planning statement points out, it is not safe if vehicles have to wait in the road while others are manoeuvring around entrances. This would be the case around the top entrance to our property and the new access road since they are very close together, so vehicles will have to wait on a fast and potentially dangerous section of the road.
- Since the original planning application was approved with due consideration to access, we cannot understand what has changed such that this additional road is needed. The planning statement says that the applicant does not wish to use a 'substandard' access point such that this new road is now essential, but these are actually separate points.
- We can accept that the current access is less than ideal but that does not mean a new road is essential. Presumably the current access road was not substandard when it was approved, so how has it become so?
- Openness is a consideration. While the inclusion of 5 additional trees is welcome, their position will not reduce the visual impact as seen from Biddulph Park Road. While we are in favour of the planting of trees, there is no doubt that the area being considered is no longer the grazed and open fields it was when we moved in. Despite this, if the access road is permitted we would ask that some underplanting is provided between the common oak and the new road along the initial section, so that it is less visible from our property.
- Change in the landscape. Siting an access road so close to ours, together with the removal of a section of dry stone wall will change the view and 'feel' of the road.
- To summarise, since the development of 2 additional dwellings was approved on the basis of them using the existing vehicular access, we feel that additional encroachment on the once agricultural field is unnecessary and compromises the local landscape.

SMDC Tree Officer Comments

9. There are no objections in principle to the application. The submission includes a tree survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment by Tree Heritage Ltd. (THL-R25-48-2). The report provides comprehensive detail on the tree cover and includes a tree protection plan (TPP). This details the tree protection measures and shows the route of the proposed access through the trees. No encroachment within Root Protection Areas is necessary. The implementation and retention for the duration of the construction period, of the tree protection measures detailed within the TPP should be secured via a suitably worded pre-commencement condition.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Recommendation: refusal

1. Proposed development fails to provide adequate visibility.
2. Conflicting information.
3. Insufficient information.

10.1 Application is to provide a second access to Wragg Hall Farm ostensibly for the use of the dwelling approved under SMD/2023/0212. It is a resubmission of SMD/2025/0420.

10.2 Under SMD/2023/0212 an improvement to visibility at the existing access was secured. This was not to full current standards but was accepted as it was the maximum achievable and a betterment over the existing access which was in use anyway.

10.3 This current access proposal has been submitted using the compromise visibility splay as the basis for the proposal. Visibility splay for a new access onto a 60mph speed limit road is 2.4m x 215m. There is no mechanism apparent that would prevent other uses of the wider site from using the proposed access. While this proposal is an improvement on the previous improvement, this would result in two substandard accesses to a single site which would not be in the interests of highway safety. The original access would still require improvement under SMD/2023/0485.

10.4 The visibility splay to the north, secured for the existing access under SMD/2023/0212 and 0485 is not within the red or blue line of this application. Overall site appears to comprise the original farmhouse and farm buildings, barn conversion approved under 0485 and dwelling approved under 0212.

10.5 Planning Statement, under Highway Safety states: The current access is not wide enough for two cars to pass, so in this scenario, a vehicle may be required to wait partially on the highway to allow a car to leave the access first. This a very real and existing risk.....'. However, the proposed access has a 2m x 2m splay which is not adequate to accommodate two vehicles. The access is not dimensioned but scales at approx 5m between the dry stone walls. This is inadequate usable width to allow two vehicles to pass. While two accesses would reduce this possibility, it appears an extreme solution to an infrequent scenario.

10.6 Planning Statement argues that the access is necessary to avoid vehicles associated with the proposed dwelling (0212) passing by the existing farmhouse. Again, this seems an extreme solution to an infrequent occurrence of a debatable issue. There is no explanation as to why a vehicle passing the existing farmhouse is such a problem as to require a whole new access. In any event, the proposed layout would not prevent a vehicle driving past the existing farmhouse.

10.7 There is no explanation as to why to keep vehicles away from the existing farmhouse (if this application were to actually do that) should be achieved by routing vehicles much closer to the neighbours' dwelling.

10.8 There is no explanation as to why the existing severely substandard access must be retained and cannot be improved as previously proposed, accepted and conditioned. Planning statement asserts that the applicant does not wish to use a substandard access. However, the proposal still retains this access point.

10.9 The existing access is substandard but the obvious solution is to improve the existing access as previously agreed. It does not follow that a new substandard access is required.

10.10 Planning Statement refers to previous highway comment that the proposed location of the proposed access is optimal for visibility. However, it takes this out of context and omits the requirement to permanently close the existing access in the interests of safety. Proposal will result in two substandard accesses to the site. There is nothing to prevent vehicles using either access. Vehicles will still be able to drive past the existing farmhouse. The existing severely substandard access will not benefit from the already agreed improvement.

10.11 The Highways Authority would be looking to achieve:

- visibility splay to current standards;
- access of adequate width to allow two vehicles to pass;
- permanent closure of the existing substandard access; OR
- detailed explanation as to why the existing access cannot be widened as previously proposed and improved;

OFFICER COMMENTS

Principle of Development

11. In its general approach, in accordance with policy SS1, the Council expects the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. When considering development proposals the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF. This means that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Local Plan shall be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

12. 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 area 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 SS10. It is the latter which applies in the case of this application.

13. 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).

14. In the rural areas outside of the development boundaries Policy SS10(6) also 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.

15. NPPF para 154 (h) (ii) provides for 'engineering operations' provided the development would preserve the Green Belt openness and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

16. Whether in principle this proposed development can be considered 'not-inappropriate' in the Green Belt therefore depends on whether it would preserve the Green Belt openness and not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The applicant's planning agent to some extent discusses this under a heading of 'Openness and landscape value' and refers to certain differences in the proposal from the previous refused scheme noting: the length of drive has been reduced from c.127m to c.102m and suggesting a more meandering route would lessen the directly visible development of new driveway seen the road. Various other points of detail are referenced as moderating the impacts compared with the previous scheme (see 7th page of the statement). These however are minor and would not meaningfully overcome the previous concerns that contributed to the previous refusal. It must also not be overlooked that the red edge extent of the development considerably exceeds the red edge that would be required to define the limits of the driveway specifically. This would confer a residential land use in planning terms for a substantial area of ground (4,100m² stated in the application form) with attendant implication for further encroachment into hitherto rural undeveloped countryside.

Discussion

17. Firstly, it is readily apparent that the proposal cannot be considered 'essential' as the dwelling it would serve already has an approved means of access. This aspect of policy SS10 is therefore not met.

18. As regards impact on openness of the Green Belt a degree of judgement is involved but at still in excess of 100m this is not a short section of driveway creation. At the point of entry to the public road the development would lead to loss of drystone wall, loss of green hedgerow and still create a visible broad exposure of the developed track as it climbs the gently rising gradient in its initial stages from the new bell-mouth to be created at the road. This would appear as development with attendant disruption and loss to openness.

19. There would moreover be conflict with the Green Belt purpose 'to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment'. The prevailing arrangement along Biddulph Park Road is for occasional or intermittent access points to the adjacent properties mainly at well-spaced intervals. As it is closely adjacent to Melford Farm which already has two access points this proposal would result in three access points occurring in close succession over a distance of about 40m.

20. Whilst the land is perhaps likely to meet the NPPF definition of 'grey belt' the development would not meet the tests of paragraph 155 as the proposal could not be considered to meet 'a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed'. The proposal would therefore not qualify under NPPF 155 to be considered 'not inappropriate'.

21. In this eventuality, in which none of the exceptions at NPPF 154 or 155 apply and there being no very special circumstances, the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt and is contrary to local and national policy as a result.

22. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and any other harm which in this case would include harm to character and appearance of the area.

23. Turning to the proposed demolition of a long disused and redundant pig rearing shed, which is also part of the application, this removal would result in an improvement to openness but it is not dependent upon the creation of the new driveway access for the demolition to be made acceptable. It appears the developer would be unlikely to want to retain this shed in any event. If necessary, consent for its demolition could be pursued through a 'Part 11' prior notification under the GPDO(2015). However, the removal of this building was in fact approved as part of the earlier consent SMD/2023/0212 and condition 13 required its removal prior to the new dwelling being brought into use.

Conclusion with regard to the principle of the development

24. The development cannot be considered 'essential' as would be required to meet acceptance in principle under LP Policy SS10 and it would also amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt due to its harm to openness and due to conflict with the Green Belt purpose of safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. It does not meet the criteria for exemption under NPPF 154(h). There are no 'very special circumstances' to clearly outweigh these harms and therefore the development cannot gain support in principle.

Design

25. Notwithstanding the points made by the planning agent (as itemised above) the proposal would introduce an additional and significant urbanising characteristic into this essentially verdant rural site with trees.

26. There is already proposed, and approved, a degree of roadside alteration to enable the visibility splay for the current farm access (positioned c.75m to the north east) in order for that entrance to accommodate the previously approved additional dwellings. This latest proposal would require the same or similar again at a second location nearby along Biddulph Park Road but the requirement at the first entrance would remain. This would in effect double the urbanising design impacts. Under the present approved arrangements the impacts of the access improvements for all three dwellings and the farm land are contained at a single location. To meet Highways requirements the initial 5.0m of this further access would be tarmac surfaced and would have a width of c.9.0m at the road edge. That said, it can be recognised that the materials detailing is otherwise appropriate as set out using for example stone walling and stone gate posts but these do not remove the sense of multiple entrance points with resultant erosion of the undeveloped rural character.

27. No design information is provided regarding drainage but the application form refers to surface water disposal via soakaway. On balance it might reasonably be

judged that a series of interventions along the length of the development could be designed to achieve an appropriate capacity and in the event of approval a condition could be attached.

Amenity

28. It does seem that a significant part of the applicant's reasoning for the development is to create a separate access for the SMD/2023/0212 dwelling away from its neighbours in the development cluster at Wragg Hall Farm. It is perhaps then understandable that the neighbouring occupier at Melford Farm should feel aggrieved that the development is instead being proposed in an area closer to their residential boundary in land which up to now has been undeveloped rural field / woodland. The planning assessment can be expected to balance the impacts of the changes with any underlying justification or need for the development and to take into account neighbour impacts but as noted above the planning assessment finds no essential need for the development in planning terms.

Highway Safety

29. The County Highways Officer recommends refusal due to inadequate visibility at the proposed junction with the 60mph C82 Biddulph Park Road. The County Highways response also references in its recommendation conflicting information in the application submissions in that the proposal would replicate in this second location the very issue the applicant says it is intended to resolve at the first location namely a lack of space to allow two vehicles to pass.

Protected Species

30. The Council has not at the time of writing received a consultation response from its ecology advisers. The submitted ecology report concludes at 3.36 and 3.37 that Great Crested Newts are unlikely to be present. The location though is within the District 'green zone' where in general there is moderate habitat suitability and GCN 'may be present'. There is reference to one pond having been examined and found unsuitable but there are others within 500m. Subject to the Council's ecology advisers' recommendations it is likely that in the event of approval consideration would need to be given to imposing conditions to require mitigation measures prior to and during construction.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

31. A professional ecologist's Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been submitted and a Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool has been used to show: *"the scheme will have a net gain of 14.73% habitat units and 14.31% hedgerow units. The trading rules are met and a 10% net gain has been achieved."*

32. As noted above no comments have been received from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust. Therefore, the submitted metric has not been verified. However, given the “in principle” concerns regarding the development officers are minded to refuse the application. In the event of a subsequent Appeal being allowed, the permission would be subject to the statutory condition at which point an updated metric would need to be submitted as part of the mandatory Gain Plan and would be subject to further scrutiny at that point.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

31. The application is demonstrably not essential and is therefore not supported under LP Policy SS10.

32. The development is considered inappropriate in the Green Belt as on evaluation none of the exceptions provided for at paragraphs 154 and 155 of the NPPF are met and there are no very special circumstances. Substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt and any other harm and in this case there would be harm to openness; conflict with Green Belt purpose C to safeguard the countryside from encroachment and harm to the character and appearance of the area from the proliferation of vehicular access points to Biddulph Park Road and the visual impact at odds with the sparsely populated location which otherwise gives rise to relatively few access drives.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : Refuse

Case Officer: Arne Swithenbank

Recommendation Date: 24.04.2026

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council