

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0164
Valid 09/04/2026

BEECH TREE FARM
CLOUDSIDE
CONGLETON

EXTENSION TO AN EXISTING
PORTAL FRAME
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the Green Belt
- Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area
- Impact on biodiversity and ecology

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is a roadside field parcel to the north of a 19th century stone farmstead on Cloudside. The site is in the Green Belt, 3km to the north of Biddulph and 3km to the east of Congleton. The edge of the Peak District can be seen 5km to the east across vast open ancient slope and valley farmland landscape character type.

The rural lane 'Cloudside' follows a contour below, and to the eastern side, of the steeply sloping high ground of the Cloud Common woodland. The open farmland to the east of the road falls away towards the valley and provides far reaching views toward the edge of the Peak District.

To the western edge of the road, cut in to the land below the common, there are a row of large stone built cottages within generous grounds. The Grade II listed Cloud Methodist Church is set on a tier above and behind the cottages.

The applicant's property, Beech Tree Farm, is on the lower ground to the eastern side of the road. The linear form of the original 19th Century stone farmstead is parallel to and follows the roadside, set down behind the stone wall. To the north of the original farmstead agricultural development and outdoor open storage has extended across the roadside land to the front of Beech Tree Cottage, Cloud Methodist Church, and Willow Cottage.

The planning application proposal presented in 2019 was for new development to make use of, and be contained by, a mature row and grouping of roadside trees that would conceal the provision of a new building.

The existing shed that was built after a planning permission had been granted in 2019, has not been built in accordance with the approved plans.

In 2019 a planning permission was granted for a 13.7m by 19m shed to be built for the storage of machinery and fodder. The approved plans show a symmetrical shed with a full pitch roof and openings to the southern elevation, facing the farm house, and the eastern elevation, facing the farmland. A site plan shows how the shed was to be

placed and hidden from the roadside behind an established row and corner of mature roadside trees and contained by a drystone wall, a planning condition required supplementary native planting to the northern end of the building.

The existing shed is 18m wide, it has either been extended with a lean to addition to the western elevation or built as a wider building with asymmetric shape. The shed has openings at its northern end which open onto expanded hardground where part of the established tree line, that provided surround to the northern corner, has been removed and the supplementary planting, required by planning condition, has not been carried out. Instead, the northern end of the building opens onto hardground that has been cut and shaped to provide tracks across the width of the field parcel to provide a standing area for outside storage of trailers, machinery, equipment and materials that is strewn across the land in full view from the roadside, the residential properties opposite and the methodist chapel.

The applicant's modest 2.2ha holding, as detailed on the location plan, provides a roughly rectangular form and arrangement of field parcels with roadside presentation to its narrow western edge and falls in an easterly direction for 200m toward the valley and its bottom edge where its boundary is lined by public footpath Rushton 48.

The land is enclosed by traditional hedgerow and mature tree line. A length of hedgerow that intersected the land at a mid-point has been removed and replaced with wire livestock fencing.

The site is in a landscape character type that extends extensively to the east toward the edge of the Peak Park, described in the 2008 assessment as an 'Ancient Slope and Valley Farmland Landscape'.

Key characteristics can be identified as

- Strongly undulating or sloping landscape cut by small scale steep sided stream valleys
- Small scale mainly ancient irregular fields bounded by trees and hedgerows
- Extensive views from higher ground
- Intimate wooded valleys
- Stone buildings and drystone walls towards uplands
- Isolated properties
- Narrow winding lanes

PROPOSAL

The proposed development is described on the application form as 'extension to an existing portal frame agricultural building'.

It is proposed to extend the existing shed further to the north with an addition that would extend 13m from the northern end of the building. The addition would span just 12m of the 18m width of the northern elevation. It would have a large sloping mono pitch roof that would rise from the lower eave height of its roadside elevation up toward the sheds existing ridge line. Submitted plans appear to be incorrectly drawn, the northern elevation does not line up and accord with the floor and block plan and shows the addition placed on and extending from the other side of the elevation.

It is proposed to make a smaller 10m by 6m store addition to the south facing elevation of the shed.

The application is submitted with a supporting statement that provides information relating to the farming enterprise and the applicant's needs.

A biodiversity impact assessment and enhancement plan has been submitted. Biodiversity value was surveyed in March 2026, that was after groundworks had been carried out, and hedge and trees had been removed.

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
E1 New Employment Development
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

SMDC Design Guide 2018 SPD

SMDC Design Principles SPG

National Planning Policy Framework

Chapter 13 Green Belt

Chapter 15 Natural Environment

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2019/0730 Erection of agricultural building. APPROVED.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 4/06/2026

Neighbour consultation period ends: 4/06/2026

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

A neighbour opposite the site asks that the development is carried out in a way that avoids unacceptable harm to landscape, neighbour amenity, highway safety, and the setting of heritage assets, in accordance with local and national policy.

They submit that previous development has been carried out and the landscaping condition has not been complied with (the planting of native trees to the north of the building) They ask that additional native planting should be secured to the north and west of the fodder store where the building would extend beyond existing tree line. The tree planting should be managed so that uncontrolled growth does not obstruct

views of the landscape and result in overshadowing and loss of sunlight. They say that the existing building is not used for its stated purpose and instead, machinery and trailers are stored in the open and that ground works on the applicant's land have affected the flow of highway drainage resulting in flooding.

The Cloud Methodist Church are concerned that the applicant is, with expanding business, occupying more of the available roadside parking that the parishioners rely on to attend the church.

Town / Parish Comments

Rushton Parish Council: No response within consultation period

United Utilities Ltd

No response within consultation period

Staffordshire County Council Highways

The existing building is currently used during the lambing period and for the housing of livestock. The proposed extensions would provide additional space for the storage of fodder and the proposed general-purpose building would be used for the storage of farming supplies.

Access to the development will be via the current access serving Beech Tree Farm and the existing agricultural building off Cloudside. The red outline plan (Location Plan Amended) encompasses the current access.

The proposal is in line with the existing agricultural use of the land, and it is considered that no significant additional trips will be generated. I have no objection to the proposal (SMD/2026/0164).

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on the Green Belt

The site is in the Green Belt where development is inappropriate and, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt unless it is provided for by one of the exceptions that appear on the closed lists at Chapter 13 of the NPPF.

One of the exceptions provides for buildings for agriculture. The proposed building would be designed and purposed for agriculture, it would be provided for by the exception and for the purposes of the NPPF the building would not be inappropriate development or harmful to the Green Belt.

Local Plan Policy Approach to Rural Development

The strategy policy for the 'other rural' areas of countryside at SS10 of the SMDC Local Plan states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside. To sustain the rural economy the policy supports the limited expansion or development of business. To enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside the policy requires priority to be given to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requires all development to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

It is said in the submission that the applicant owns 28 acres and farms a total of 148 acres. The blue edged land on the location plan, however, runs to just 2.2ha, there is

no indication as to where this other land is located, the application does include any other map, address or description.

It is said that the applicants have a flock of pedigree Suffolk ewes and Tups and a commercial flock of sheep. The applicants undertake all husbandry in hand and lamb from December through until May.

The application submission states that the existing building is said to provide space for lambing and livestock housing. Indeed, during the site visit it was apparent that there were sheep kept inside the building.

However, when the application was submitted in 2019 a supporting statement said that the proposed shed, now used for livestock housing, was required for the storage of fodder and farm equipment, which they complained, in the absence of a secure shed, was vulnerable to theft.

Rather than store equipment in the existing building, this is kept outside, strewn and sprawling across the field on areas of constructed hard ground tracks. It is now said that an extension to the building is required to store fodder and, in the smaller addition, general storage. On that basis, there does not appear to be any intent or prospect of the equipment, that makes the land unsightly and untidy, being brought into the proposed shed extension and the development resulting in a clearance or tidiness of the land.

There is nothing in the applicant's evidence or submission that points to a strong benefit to rural community or economy that might be considered to weigh against the rather disproportionate harms and impacts on the quality and character of the area that are discussed below.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

Local Plan Policy SS10 states that to enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside it is required that priority be given to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requires all development to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape. Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD. Local Plan Policy DC3 requires that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape by resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or would not respect and enhance local landscape character.

The unit is located within an area character type identified in the LSCA as being that of 'Ancient Slope and Valley Farmland', many of the key landscape features, typical of this character type, are identifiable in the locality and views from the road.

It is apparent from the roadside that the applicant's recent activities and development, shows some disregard for the terms of the planning permission previously granted, the character and appearance of the area, and the visual amenity enjoyed by neighbours.

The 35m roadside gap between the northern edge of the building and the fields hedgerow boundary is central to the small grouping of the hamlet, it is highly significant to the character and appearance of the area, the landscape value enjoyed from the road, and the visual amenity and outlook of neighbours that have aspects towards the land. The smaller addition proposed as an extension to the southern elevation would not affect this part of the land and would be concealed by existing tree and shrub cover.

The development that has already been carried out has been detrimental to the character and appearance of the area. The terms of the existing 2019 planning permission required the north facing elevation of the building to be enclosed at its northwestern corner by the line of, what were, the existing trees and additional native planting that has not been carried out. There should have been some containment and screening of the north facing elevation. However, instead, the north facing elevation is exposed and very apparent from roadside to that extent, it makes a prominent intrusion in the landscape and countryside.

Moreover, the openings and feed hopper introduced to this gable, areas of hard ground and access tracks that have been introduced to the north of the building with the sprawl of untidy storage across the land, resulting in an unsightly, untidy and blighted area of farmland. All of the trailers and machinery now stored outside should already be inside the existing building, that was the cited storage purpose advanced with the 2019 planning application.

The proposed development would not bring any improvement and instead would increase the harm. An additional 13m width of building form extending into the field to the north and flanking the roadside would be massively intrusive. The development would close and reduce the sense of openness while obstructing important and quality views of the landscape out from the road and the centre of the hamlet. Any proposal to plant more trees and provide landscaping, either to screen the development or to replace lost biodiversity habitat, would close down and reduce views of the landscape beyond, changing the character of the hamlet. There is also the potential for mismanaged tree growth to overshadow and reduce light to the hamlet and its residents.

The developments carried out on this site – expansion of hard surfaces and private ways, to support outside storage, and the existing shed have materially affected the external appearance of the premises to the clear detriment of the area's character and appearance and the visual amenity of non-farming residents on Cloudside, that have principal outlook onto the application site and the applicant's land. This would be exacerbated with the introduction of the intrusive building extension

The introduction of the building extension to the north would be exposed, unsightly and appear as a prominent intrusion in the countryside, particularly within views from the road. Overall, there would be significant harm to the local landscape and the character and appearance of the rural area, because the development would be of a location, size, scale, character and design that would not protect and enhance the local landscape and distinctiveness of the area. The development would appear as a prominent and dominant unsightly intrusion in the countryside and quality landscape.

Accordingly, the proposed development fails to comply with policies SS1, SS10, DC1 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020 and the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework.

In these regards the adverse impacts would be significant, disproportionately so. They would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any benefits that might be associated with the development.

Impact on the setting of the designated heritage asset

The Grade II Listed Primitive Methodist Chapel sits behind and on a tier above the roadside cottage at Beech Tree Cottage. Of significance to its setting, is the building's location to the edge of the woodland at the centre of the small hamlet grouping, its arrangement with the 19th Century stone cottages, and the open views of the landscape to the east.

When planning permission was granted for a shed in 2019, it was noted that given the separation distance of c.50m coupled – importantly – with the lie of the land, existing tree screening and the interceding buildings of Beech Tree Cottage it is concluded there would be little if any sense of a connection to the setting of the chapel from the development proposed and, it was considered, that no adverse impact on setting would result.

In this case, the proposed extension to the building's northern elevation would not be concealed by, or benefit from, existing tree cover. However, there would remain a separation distance of c.50m from the extended part of the building and the chapel. While the development would extend further across the roadside edge, it would not encroach to the extent that it would overlap the church's front elevation or cause a direct obstruction of the outlook enjoyed from the church/chapel.

In these regards, it is not considered that the development would have an adverse impact on the setting of the designated heritage asset.

There would be no conflict with Local Plan policy DC2 or the terms of the NPPF in these regards.

Highway Safety

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that development provides for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use.

The NPPF states that in assessing applications for development, it should be ensured that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety.

The Highway Authority make the observations that the access to the development would be via the current access serving Beech Tree Farm and the existing agricultural building off Cloudside. They do not consider that there would be any significant additional trips or parking demand generated by the development.

The concerns of the methodist church are noted relative to the demands and competition for roadside parking. However, it is not clear that the proposed building extensions should increase parking requirements to the extent that the development would result directly in increased roadside parking.

Impacts on Biodiversity

The Environment Act (2021) places a legal requirement on all development, unless otherwise exempt, to compensate for impacts on and loss of biodiversity habitats with the delivery of a 10% net gain on site or, where this cannot be achieved, off site, which can include the purchasing credits from a registered habitat bank.

Paragraph 187 of the NPPF states that policies and decisions should minimise impacts on biodiversity and that development should mitigate or compensate for the loss of habitat whilst delivering enhancement and net gain in habitat.

The applicant does not claim exemption from the BNG legislation – the development would impact on more than 25sqm of biodiversity habitat.

However, the site was surveyed for baseline habitat value in March 2026, after the applicant had already carried out unauthorised development and tree/hedge removal that has impacted on and reduced biodiversity habitat (post April 2021). While he has provided a mitigation and enhancement plan, it would not obviously deliver gain or enhancement over and above what should already have been secured via the landscaping condition that is attached to the 2019 permission.

Accordingly, the applicant has not demonstrated that the proposed development would minimise impacts on biodiversity or that there would be appropriate mitigation or compensation for the loss of habitat whilst delivering enhancement and net gain in habitat. There would be conflict with policies NE1 and NE2 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

Other Considerations

An objection raised from the consultation process points to a blockage and backing up of the highway surface water drain. It is alleged that this results from the applicant's unauthorised ground works to the other side of the drain. The application does not seek consent for these ground works and any impact on the drain should not obviously or directly be worsened by the development proposed.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed development would result in significant harm to local landscape, views from Cloudside toward wider landscape, the character and appearance of the rural hamlet, and the visual amenity enjoyed by residential neighbours. The development would be of a siting, size, and scale, that would not protect and enhance the local landscape and distinctiveness of the area. The development would appear as a prominent and dominant intrusion in the countryside that would harm, and obstruct far reaching views of, quality rural landscape. Accordingly, the proposed development fails to comply with policies SS1, SS10, DC1 and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan 2020, and the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework. The adverse impacts associated with the development would be disproportionate; they

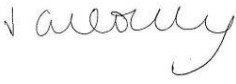
would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any benefit associated with the development.

The applicant has not demonstrated that the proposed development would minimise impacts on biodiversity or that there would be appropriate mitigation or compensation for the loss of habitat whilst delivering enhancement and net gain in habitat. There would be conflict with policies NE1 and NE2 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date:

X 

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council