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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 23 April 2026

by **C Billings BA (Hons) DipTP MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2026

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### Appeal Ref: 6004053

### Leonards Farm, Hot Lane, Biddulph Moor, Staffordshire ST8 7HP

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
  - The appeal is made by Mr Charles Gibson against the decision of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.
  - The application Ref is SMD/2025/0374.
  - The development proposed is demolition of a steel-framed building and derelict farmhouse, and construction of a four-bedroom replacement farmhouse.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Main Issues

2. The main issues are:
  - whether the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) and relevant development plan policies and the effects on the openness and purposes of the Green Belt;
  - the effect of the proposed development on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the setting of a non-designated heritage asset and the Gritstone Upland landscape; and,
  - if inappropriate development, whether any harm by reason of inappropriateness and any other harm, would be clearly outweighed by other considerations, so as to amount to the very special circumstances.

### Reasons

#### *Whether inappropriate development*

3. The appeal site is within the Green Belt and forms part of a small farmstead. The dwelling to be replaced is a traditional, small two-storey stone farmhouse, with pitched roof and chimney, set within a group of farm buildings. It is attached on one side to agricultural buildings, some that are used for residential storage purposes. The disused farmhouse is in a poor state of repair and has not been in use for residential purposes for some years, with the appellant living in a static caravan on the wider site.
4. Paragraph 154 of the Framework sets out that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the stated exceptions applies. In this case, it is proposed to replace the old farmhouse and an agricultural building with a large,

detached dwelling with a roof terrace, offsetting floorspace and volume from the agricultural building as well as the former farmhouse and attached storage sheds.

5. However, exception d) of paragraph 154 only allows the replacement of a building, provided that the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces. The proposed dwelling would be materially larger than the farmhouse it is to replace and the floorspace and volume from the agricultural building to be demolished is not in the same use as the proposed dwelling. Therefore, even if the overall floorspace and volume of the proposed replacement dwellinghouse would be less than that of the existing former farmhouse and agricultural buildings combined, this would not satisfy exception d) of paragraph 154.
6. Furthermore, from my site observations and the evidence provided, the proposal would not satisfy the requirements for exceptions a) to c) and e) to h) of paragraph 154 of the Framework. Consequently, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.
7. In terms of the impact on openness, this can have spatial and visual aspects. It is proposed to remove an existing standalone barn and some single storey structures attached to the former farmhouse. Also, it is asserted that the existing static caravan on the wider site would be removed, but this is more divorced from the location of the proposed new dwelling and the Council sets out that this and other structures do not benefit from planning permission. Notwithstanding these factors, the removal of the buildings and caravan within the wider site would provide some visual enhancement to the appearance of the site and its surroundings, as they are not particularly attractive and some in a state of disrepair.
8. While the existing farmhouse is in a derelict state, it is a traditional small stone farmhouse that has character and it sits within the collection of buildings forming an intrinsic part of the farmstead. Therefore, due to its scale and location, it is not particularly prominent and so, not harmful to the open character of the surrounding rural area. Furthermore, the caravan and the stores to be removed are mostly single storey. Whereas the proposed dwelling would be larger, taller, and bulkier than these existing buildings.
9. Additionally, with the removal of the large freestanding barn and due to the sloping landscape topography beyond it, the proposed dwelling would appear dominant within the landscape from certain viewpoints. Therefore, despite the reduction in building footprint, due to the location and scale of the new dwelling, it would appear more prominent within the surrounding landscape than existing buildings and structures. This would harmfully reduce the openness of this part of the Green Belt in visual terms. Furthermore, by virtue of its prominence and the harm caused to the openness of the Green Belt, the proposal would not assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, which is one of the purposes of the Green Belt.
10. In view of the above, the proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would have a harmful effect on the openness and purposes of it. Consequently, it would conflict with the Framework and Policies H1 and SS10 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (September 2020) (SMLP), which amongst other matters, require new housing in the Green Belt to adhere to national Green Belt policy, including in relation to the replacement of an existing rural building.

### *Character and appearance*

11. The appeal site is in the open countryside within the Upland Gritstone Landscape character type area, as set out in the Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment of the Staffordshire Moorlands. The key characteristics of such character area includes strongly undulating slopes with localised steep sided valleys, open upland plateau with extensive views and scattered large farms with stone buildings.
12. The existing former farmhouse to be replaced is a small property, with traditional features, set within a collection of buildings, where it is not individually prominent within the surrounding landscape. It is part of a historic farmstead with the former stone farmhouse at its core and arranged around a farmyard. It is typical of traditional farmsteads found in North Staffordshire, as recorded in the Staffordshire County Council survey record. Therefore, despite the existing poor state of the farmhouse and that sheds have been erected around it, due to its scale, form, external materials, and traditional farmstead context, it makes a positive contribution to the landscape character of the Upland Gritstone landscape area. Also, it is an intrinsic part of the historic farmstead, which is a non-designated heritage asset.
13. Even though it is proposed to salvage and reuse historic materials and features of the former farmhouse, it would be demolished and replaced with a much larger dwelling. The design of the new dwelling seeks to utilise conventional proportions, inspired by the original farmhouse and, it would include a pitched roof, stone walls, and chimney. However, due to its scale, design and form, including its height, bulky roof, and extensive glazing and roof terrace to the rear elevation, it would not respect the scale and form of the existing dwelling and be at odds with the traditional vernacular. Therefore, it would appear anomalous and unduly prominent within its traditional farmstead setting.
14. Although the new dwelling would replace an existing static caravan, which is visible in the surrounding area, this is single storey and sits much lower in the landscape topography and so, is not that visually prominent from public vantage points. However, in comparison, the proposed dwelling would be a much larger two-storey structure in a different position within the wider site, where it would be much more prominent within the landscape.
15. While the contemporary design features of the new dwelling would be confined to the rear, there are open views across the fields, particular as the land topography falls away beyond the farmstead. As a result, the proposed dwelling would appear unduly dominant and so, incongruous within its setting. This would cause moderate harm to the significance and setting of the non-designated heritage asset, particularly as the original farmhouse would be demolished in its entirety and is a more subdued, yet intrinsic feature of the traditional farmstead. As a consequence, the proposal would also harm key characteristics of the landscape character area.
16. It is asserted to be unviable to retain the current farmhouse, although no substantive evidence has been provided in regard to such. Therefore this, and that the former farmhouse could deteriorate further, does not persuade me that the proposal is acceptable and would not cause harm to the non-designated heritage asset or the character of the surrounding landscape.

17. Even though there are examples of houses with flat roof terraces not that far away from the appeal site, the examples along Hurst Road are in different locations, not on properties in traditional farmsteads. Furthermore, while the roof terrace would be of benefit to its future occupiers by offering attractive open views of the countryside, its design would not be in keeping with its immediate context and setting. Therefore, the terrace flat roof area, together with the proposed uncharacteristic extensive glazing design of the rear elevation, would further elevate the harmful and incongruous prominence of the new dwelling within the surrounding area.
18. In view of the above, the proposed development would have a harmful effect on the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including the setting of a non-designated heritage asset and the Gritstone Upland landscape. Consequently, it would conflict with Policies H1, DC1, DC2 and DC3 of the SMLP and Policy DES 1 of the Biddulph Neighbourhood Plan (December 2023), which require development to have a positive impact and/or respect the character and context of an area, including its heritage and local landscape character. Also, in view of the conflict with Policy H1, there would be conflict with Policy SS10 of the SMLP.

#### *Other Considerations*

19. The proposal would result in a net reduction in built footprint within the appeal site, including removal of buildings that are in a state of disrepair and a larger more modern barn that extends further into the field. Also, the proposed dwelling would not extend out beyond other buildings towards the open countryside and so, would have less spread of development than existing. However, agricultural buildings are common features within the rural landscape and, despite the removal of existing unsightly structures, I have found the proposal would harm the character and openness of the area. In view of such, I give these matters limited positive weight.
20. The removal of the static caravan would enhance the surrounding landscape, although this is outside the application site, set away from the proposed dwelling, beyond other existing buildings and, as asserted by the Council, is not lawful development. Therefore, I give limited positive weight to this consideration.
21. While it is asserted that it would be unviable to renovate and re-use the former farmhouse, no substantive evidence has been provided to demonstrate this and, the farmhouse has remained unoccupied for some years and so, arguably, left to deteriorate. Consequently, I give limited weight to this consideration.
22. While there would be some economic benefits from the construction of the dwelling, this would be limited and short term due to the scale of the development. Also, as the proposal would redevelop the former farmhouse and replace living accommodation in the static caravan, there would be no housing net gain. Therefore, I give limited and no positive weight to these considerations, respectively.
23. The actions and previous advice of the Council, that the new dwelling would be built to modern, energy efficient standards and, that there would be suitable access and no adverse impact on nearby residents, subject to conditions, are matters that do not affect my findings on the main issues. The new dwelling would enhance the living conditions of the appellant by providing a high-quality replacement dwelling, with enhanced outlook to the open countryside, although this would provide personal, rather than public benefits. Therefore, these are neutral matters that do not weigh in favour of the proposal.

## Conclusion

24. As set out in the Framework, substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, including harm to its openness. Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
25. I have found the proposal is inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that it would harm the openness and purposes of the Green Belt. This harm, by reason of inappropriateness and the loss of openness, attracts substantial weight. In addition, the proposed development would harm the character and appearance of the surrounding area, including harm to a non-designated heritage asset and the landscape character.
26. The benefits of the appeal proposal, neither individually nor cumulatively, clearly outweigh the totality of the harm arising from inappropriateness and any other harm in this instance. Therefore, the very special circumstances required to justify the development have not been demonstrated.
27. For the above reasons, the proposal conflicts with the development plan taken as a whole and the Framework, which seek to protect the Green Belt. There are no other considerations that outweigh this conflict and so, I conclude that the appeal should be dismissed.

*C Billings*

INSPECTOR