

PLANNING STATEMENT

**HEATON LOW FARM
RUSHTON SPENCER**

MARCH 2026

Site Address:

Heaton Low Farm, Swythamley, Rushton Spencer, SK11 0RE

Applicant:

Mr. S. Whiteley and Mrs. S. Dartnell

Proposal:

Conversion and alteration of agricultural building to form dwellinghouse

Planning Statement:

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Report Prepared By:

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Mr. S. Whiteley and Mrs. S. Dartnell to prepare a Planning Statement to accompany an application prepared by Arkhi Zero Architects for the conversion and alteration of a former agricultural building at Heaton Low Farm, Rushton Spencer, to form a dwellinghouse.
- 1.2 The existing building comprises a part two storey / part single storey structure of vernacular design, constructed from pale sandstone/limestone with Staffordshire blue clay roof tiles.
- 1.3 The application proposes the change of use and alteration of the building to form a dwellinghouse whose accommodation will comprise an open plan kitchen / living / dining room, entrance hall, utility and w.c. at ground floor with stairs leading up from the hallway to bedroom, bathroom and office at first floor level. The gross internal floor area of the dwelling will be 117 square metres.
- 1.4 The scheme has been designed to prioritise minimal intervention to the building so as to safeguard its historic and agrarian character. The proposed alterations include the replacement of the existing garage doors with a sliding glass door, the insertion of 4no. conservation style rooflights, the replacement of an existing door with a fully glazed panel and the removal of an internal wall.
- 1.5 The building is already served by an existing means of vehicular access which serves an area of hardstanding in front of the building which will provide space for the parking of 2no. vehicles. The existing area of maintained grass to the north/northwest of the building will be retained to provide amenity space for the new dwelling.

2 Site & Surroundings

- 2.1 The application site is located within the rural area and comprises a detached part two storey / part single storey former agricultural building, constructed from pale sandstone/limestone with a Staffordshire blue clay roof atop.
- 2.2 The building is located to the south of Heaton Low Farmhouse which comprises a Grade II Listed Building. Existing areas of amenity space, a driveway and a parking area separate these two buildings from one another.
- 2.3 A further former agricultural building is located to the northwest of the farmhouse which is now in residential use following the grant of planning permission and Listed Building Consent under applications SMD/2004/0464 and SMD/2004/0451.
- 2.4 The site is accessed from the southwest via a shared access which serves all three buildings on the site. Both the farmhouse and the adjacent converted barn benefit from their own areas of parking and turning space to the north / west of the farmhouse.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into account any relevant material considerations.

3.2 The Development Plan for this area comprises the recently adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020) of which the following policies are of relevance to the determination of the application:

3.3 Policy SS1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development Principles' and states that the Council will expect the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands in terms of delivering, in partnership with other agencies and services:

- a mix of types and tenures of quality, affordable homes, including starter homes, to meet the needs and aspirations of the existing and future communities.
- quality local services, including provision for education, healthcare, leisure, community, cultural and tourist facilities in response to anticipated population change and visitor numbers.
- easy access to jobs, shops and transport services by all sections of the community.
- increased economic prosperity and opportunities for employment and greater local capacity with an educated, skilled and flexible workforce.

- a healthy, safe, attractive, active, well-designed and well-maintained environment.
- development which maintains the locally distinctive character of the Staffordshire Moorlands, its individual towns and villages and their settings.
- development that is undertaken in a way that protects and enhances the natural and historic environment of the District and its surrounding areas, including the Peak District National Park, both now and for future generations.
- support development which secures high quality, sustainable environments, efficient and effective use of resources and contributes effectively to tackling climate change and reduced carbon emissions.

3.4 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan relates to the 'Other Rural Areas Strategy' and states 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. The policy confirms that the Council will meet housing requirements by allowing the conversion or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policy H1.

3.5 Policy H1 of the Local Plan relates to 'New Housing Development' and states that all development will be assessed according to the extent to which it provides for high quality, sustainable housing and to which it meets identified housing needs, having regard to the location of the development, the characteristics of the site and the economics of provision. It goes on to state that all new dwellings should aim to provide flexible accommodation which is

capable of future adaptation by seeking to achieve adequate internal space for the intended number of occupants in accordance with the Nationally Described Space standard and delivered to meet accessibility standards set out in the Optional Requirement M4(2) of Part M of the Building Regulations. It also requires that new dwellings must be of sufficient size to provide satisfactory levels of amenity for future occupiers of the dwellings whilst respecting the privacy and amenity of occupiers of existing dwellings.

3.6 Policy H1 also states that in the rural areas, only the following forms of housing development will be permitted:

- a) Affordable housing which cannot be met elsewhere, in accordance with Policy H3.
- b) A new dwelling that meets an essential local need, such as accommodation for an agricultural, forestry or other rural enterprise worker, where the need for such accommodation has been satisfactorily demonstrated and that need cannot be met elsewhere.
- c) Proposals for replacement dwellings, provided they do not have a significantly greater detrimental impact on the existing character of the rural area than the original dwelling or result in the loss of a building which is intrinsic to the character of the area.
- d) The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; or where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets.

- e) Proposals to redevelop previously developed land provided it is not of high environmental value.
- f) The subdivision of an existing residential dwelling provided it is not in an isolated location.

3.7 Policy DC1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Design Considerations' and states 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. In particular, new development should:

- 1. be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area.
- 2. be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.
- 3. create, where appropriate, attractive, active, functional, accessible and safe public and private environments which incorporate public spaces, green infrastructure including making provision for networks of multi-functional new and existing green space (both public and private), landscaping, public art, 'designing out crime' initiatives and the principles of Active Design.
- 4. incorporate sustainable construction techniques and design concepts for buildings and their layouts to reduce the impact of the development.

5. protect the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, overbearing development, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution.
6. promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of biodiversity and geological heritage, where appropriate.
7. provide for safe and satisfactory access and make a contribution to meeting the parking requirement arising from necessary car use.
8. require new developments to be well integrated for car, pedestrian and cycle use as well as other sustainable transport links.
9. ensure that existing drainage, waste water and sewerage infrastructure capacity is available, and where necessary enhanced, to enable the development to proceed.
10. ensure, where appropriate, equality of access and use for all sections of the community.
11. be served by high speed broadband (>30mbps) unless it can be demonstrated through consultation with Next Generation Access Network providers that this would not be possible, practical or economically viable. In all circumstances during construction of the site sufficient and suitable ducting should be provided within the site and to the property to facilitate ease of installation at a future date.

3.8 Policy DC2 of the Local Plan relates to 'The Historic Environment' and states that:

1. The Council will conserve and where possible enhance heritage assets, including their setting in a manner appropriate to their significance. This will take into account the desirability of maintaining and enhancing their significance and will ensure that development proposals contribute positively to the character of the built and historic environment.
2. Protection will be given to designated heritage assets and their settings and non-designated heritage assets as set out in the NPPF .
3. All applications likely to affect heritage assets will require the submission of a heritage statement, including a qualitative visual assessment where appropriate.
4. Where development is likely to affect archaeology, both designated and undesignated, the Council requires the submission of a desk based assessment, and where appropriate, field surveys and trench evaluation by a qualified professional.
5. Where the loss of significance is unavoidable, recording should take place and this should be added to the Historic Environment Record as a minimum, held by Staffordshire County Council.
6. The Council will continue its proactive approach to heritage assets at risk and welcomes development proposals which would result in the sympathetic reuse of these assets in line with NPPF policy.
7. The Council will promote development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings and features which contribute to the character or heritage of an area and those interests of acknowledged importance through the use of Conservation Area Appraisals, Design Guidance and

Statements, Archaeological Assessments, Characterisation Studies and Masterplanning.

3.9 Policy DC3 of the Local Plan relates to ‘Landscape and Settlement Setting’ and states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by:

1. Resisting development which would lead to prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character or the setting of a settlement or important views into and out of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence.
2. Supporting development which respects and enhances local landscape character and which reinforces and enhances the setting of the settlement as identified in the Landscape and Settlement Character evidence.
3. Supporting developments which conserve or enhance the biodiversity qualities of any natural or man-made features within the landscape, such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, walls, watercourses or ponds.
4. Supporting opportunities to positively manage the landscape and use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape.
5. Ensuring that development does not adversely affect the wider setting of the Peak District National Park.

3.10 Policy NE1 of the Local Plan relates to ‘Biodiversity and Geological Resources’ and states that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management

and strict control of development (and having regard to relevant ecological evidence) by (amongst other measures):

- Conserving, and enhancing regional and locally designated sites. The Council will not permit any development proposal which would directly or indirectly result in significant harm to geological and biodiversity conservation interests, unless it can be demonstrated that:
 - a) there is no appropriate alternative site available; and
 - b) all statutory and regulatory requirements relating to any such proposal have been satisfied; and
 - c) appropriate conservation and mitigation measures are provided; or if it is demonstrated that this is not possible
 - d) the need for, and benefit of, the development is demonstrated to clearly outweigh the need to safeguard the intrinsic nature conservation value of the site and compensatory measures are implemented.
- Expecting all development where possible seeks to deliver a net gain in biodiversity proportionate to the size and scale of the development. In circumstances where adverse impacts are demonstrated to be unavoidable, developers will be required to ensure that impacts are appropriately mitigated, with suitable compensation measures towards loss of habitat used only as a last resort where there is no alternative. Where any mitigation and compensation measures are required, they should be appropriately scheduled and managed according to the nature, size and scale of the development so as to minimise impacts that may disturb protected or important habitats and species.

3.11 Policy T1 of the Local Plan relates to 'Development and Sustainable Transport' and states that the Council will promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and accommodates residual development traffic in line with the Integrated Transport Strategy. This will be achieved by:

1. Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.
2. Ensuring that major development is located in areas that are accessible by sustainable travel modes or can be made accessible as part of the proposal.
3. Considering appropriate parking provision on a case by case basis with recourse to the parking guidance set out in Appendix 2.
4. Where appropriate all new development shall facilitate walking and cycling within neighbourhoods and town centres, and link with or extend identified walking or cycling routes. In addition applicants should also consider how their schemes can enhance the existing path network in line with the Staffordshire County Council Rights of Way Improvement Plan and also give consideration to the protection of non-definitive public footpath routes in addition to definitive routes.

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to secure the delivery of sustainable development and sets out policies, *inter-alia*, in respect of the delivery of new housing, encouraging the reuse of existing buildings, securing high quality design, safeguarding heritage assets, ensuring highway safety, protecting habitats and important species, and delivering a net gain to biodiversity. The content of the NPPF has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Design Guide SPD

- 4.2 The adopted Design Guide SPD provides advice aimed at securing the delivery of high-quality built development within the District and provides specific guidance in respect of conversion schemes. The content of the Design Guide SPD has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

SMDC Space About Dwellings SPG

- 4.3 The adopted Space About Dwellings SPG provides advice aimed at securing a high level of residential amenity for both future occupiers of dwellings, and well as neighbouring properties. The content of the Space About Dwellings SPG has been taken into consideration in the preparation of this application.

5 Planning Assessment

Principle of Development

- 5.1 Policy SS10 of the Local Plan confirms that the Council will meet housing requirements by allowing the conversion of existing rural buildings where it accords with policy H1 of the Plan.
- 5.2 Policy H1 of the Local Plan seeks to restrict the delivery of new housing within the rural areas to only a limited number of types of development which includes:

“The conversion of rural buildings for residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; or where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset or would be appropriate enabling development to secure the future of heritage assets”

- 5.3 To demonstrate that the existing building is worthy in physical terms for conversion the applicant has commissioned Northern Structural Services to prepare a Structural Survey of the building to accompany the application. The Structural Survey concludes that the building is suitable for conversion subject to some localised repair and strengthening works.
- 5.4 The high quality, vernacular appearance of the building, its use of traditional materials, its age and its historical association with Heaton Low Farmhouse also renders the building entirely worthy in architectural and character terms for conversion.

- 5.5 The proposal is also considered to represent the optimal viable use of this heritage asset, and will help to secure the long term future of the building. It is noted in this context that there have been two previous attempts to secure consent for the conversion of this building back in 2004 and 2005 which were both refused. Since then the building has continued to lie vacant without a beneficial use, and as evidenced by the Structural Survey, is now showing signs of physical deterioration.
- 5.6 Without a beneficial use the building risks falling into disrepair, which in turn would lead to harm to both the significance of the existing building, as well as the adjacent Grade II Listed farmhouse with which it is historically associated. The beneficial reuse of this building is therefore a notable benefit of the proposed development.
- 5.7 Having regard to these considerations it is concluded that the conversion of the building to residential use is acceptable in principle and fully accords with the requirements of policies SS10 and H1 of the Local Plan.

Design and Layout

- 5.8 The adopted Design Guide SPD states that:

“The guiding principle behind the design of any conversion should be that the character of the original building and its setting should be respected and retained. This means that that in most cases the barn, mill or chapel should afterwards look like a converted barn, mill or chapel, and not like a new house or a new block of flats. When converting traditional buildings, new uses should not normally require the construction of extensions or ancillary buildings. However, if alterations are necessary and approached carefully, it may be possible to bring about a new understanding

of historic buildings by making a clear distinction between what is old and what is new”.

- 5.9 The submitted proposal embraces the above philosophy and has sought to prioritise minimal intervention to the building so as to safeguard its historic and agrarian character. The alterations to the building are very limited in nature and sensitive to the character of the building, making beneficial reuse of existing openings wherever possible. The proposed rooflights are furthermore noted to be consolidated onto the rear roofslope where they will not be visible from the Grade II Listed building that lies to the north.
- 5.10 The minimalist approach also applies to the external layout of the site. To the front of the building, and extending to its northwest, is an existing area of maintained amenity space. That area is to be retained unaltered to serve as amenity space for the proposed dwellinghouse. Similarly, the existing driveway and parking area in front of the building is to be retained unaltered.
- 5.11 The area of amenity space provided is ample for the one-bedroomed nature of the proposed dwelling and far exceeds the minimum recommended standard of 65 square metres. The gross internal floor of the dwelling (117 square metres) also vastly exceeds the minimum floorspace requirement for a two person / one bedroomed dwelling (50 square metres), as dictated by the Nationally Described Space Standards (Policy H1 refers).
- 5.12 The front / north elevation of the existing building furthermore lies in excess of 25 metres from the front elevation of the nearby farmhouse, and also lies at an oblique angle to it. As a consequence the conversion of this building to a dwelling will not derive any conflict with the Local Authority's Space About Dwellings standards.

5.13 The resultant dwelling will continue to look like a converted barn, and not like a new house, and will not affect the setting of the Listed Building. The proposal furthermore requires no outbuildings or extensions to facilitate the change of use to a dwellinghouse.

5.14 The design and layout of the proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, H1, DC1, DC2 and DC3 of the Local Plan and guidance set out within the adopted Design Guide SPD and Space About Dwellings SPG.

Heritage Impact

5.15 The application is accompanied by a Heritage Statement prepared by Avalon Heritage which has assessed the significance of the existing building as a heritage asset, as well surrounding heritage assets, and has also considered the impact of the development upon them.

5.16 The existing building is identified as a late 18th–early 19th century vernacular agricultural building that retains its original rectilinear plan form, has historic sandstone walls and quoins, exhibits some evidence of former agricultural use, and has a group value with the Grade II listed farmhouse and the former Threshing barn beyond.

5.17 The Heritage Statement observes that although altered in the 19th and 20th centuries through the provision of concrete floors, roof replacement and the modern garage addition, the building remains legible as a traditional farm building.

5.18 The Heritage Statement notes that the proposal will secure a viable, long term use of the building, will retain its overall plan form, preserve its external stone elevations and agricultural character, and will introduce contemporary glazing so as to distinguish modern intervention from historic fabric. The proposed

rooflights are also noted to be positioned away principal views and the listed farmhouse.

- 5.19 The Heritage Statement goes on to conclude that the external appearance of the building – which contributes most to its significance and group value – is largely preserved and that the agricultural form, scale and massing of the building will remain intact.
- 5.20 It is also concluded that the proposal will preserve the character and setting of the listed building and will not result in harm to its special architectural or historic interest. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy DC2 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Highway Safety

- 5.21 The application site benefits from an existing means of vehicular access that is shared with the adjacent Farmhouse and the converted Threshing Barn adjacent. The site lies at the end of a no-through road and is not heavily trafficked. No other dwellings are served off it. As a consequence, the introduction of a new dwelling on the site is highly unlikely to give rise to any severe residual impacts to highway safety within the locality.
- 5.22 The proposed dwelling will utilise the existing access and parking area in front of the building, with space provided for the parking of up to 2no. vehicles, which meets the requirements of the adopted Car Parking Standards. The existing area of turning space will also be retained so that vehicles may exit the site in a forward gear. The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policy T1 of the Local Plan in this regard.

Ecology

- 5.23 The application is accompanied by a Bat Presence / Absence Survey prepared by United Environmental Services Ltd. to demonstrate the degree of impact

the development may have on protected species. Following an initial survey of the building it was concluded to have moderate potential to house roosting bats, and having carried out bat activity surveys, the building has been concluded to house two day roosts.

- 5.24 A licence from Natural England will therefore be required to carry out the development, and a series of mitigation measures which also need to be carried out, which are detailed within the report. The survey also highlights the potential for breeding birds with the building and sets out a series of recommendations to safeguard them.
- 5.25 The recommendations set out within the Bat Presence / Absence Survey 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 and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

- 5.26 The presumption in favour of sustainable development is engaged by this proposal on account of the Local Authority being unable to demonstrate a five year deliverable supply of housing as required by the National Planning Policy Framework (2.95 years).
- 5.27 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF dictates that in such circumstances proposals should be determined in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development (the so-called tilted balance) and that planning permission should be granted unless:
- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or*

- ii. *any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well-designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.*

5.28 The proposal will not result in any conflict with policies in the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance, as it has been demonstrated that the proposal will not give rise to any material loss of significance to the building or surrounding heritage assets (paragraph 11(d)(i) of the NPPF refers).

5.29 It is furthermore submitted that no adverse impacts will arise as a consequence of this development to *significantly and demonstrably* outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole (paragraph 11(d)(ii) of the NPPF refers)

5.30 Social and economic benefits will be derived through the delivery of a new dwelling on the site which will make a small, but nevertheless valuable contribution, towards addressing the Local Authority's shortfall in housing. The Local Authority has a long history of housing under-supply which makes any positive contribution towards its housing land supply valuable and worthy of significant weight. The new dwelling will furthermore be delivered via the reuse of a vacant building, for which there is explicit support conveyed by paragraph 125 of the NPPF. Such benefits are therefore considered to carry significant weight.

5.31 This proposal will also derive benefits of to the local economy, both to local tradesmen during the construction phase, and though the expenditure

associated with the creation of a new household. The Local Authority's 'Quantifying the Economic Impact of Development' Report (2017) confirms that each new house constructed in the District generates 4.3 jobs within construction or the associated supply chain.

- 5.32 That same report also confirms that for each new dwelling constructed within the district, there will be a minimum initial one-off spend (in addition to the construction of the dwelling) of £5,000, with a subsequent annual spend of £9.388 per year within the local economy. Adjusted for inflation those figures will now be somewhere in the order £6500 for the initial one-off spend, and £12,300 spend per annum. Such economic benefits lend further weight in favour of the proposed development.
- 5.33 The proposal will also deliver environmental benefits by delivering a new dwelling via the conversion of otherwise redundant asset in accordance with the objectives of paragraph 125 of the National Planning Policy Framework, thereby helping to reduce the amount of greenfield land that needs to be lost to accommodate the Local Authority's housing requirements.
- 5.34 Most pertinently, the proposal will also make beneficial reuse of an otherwise vacant historic building, giving it a viable, long term use that will enable this building to be safeguarded into the future. Such environmental benefits carry significant weight in favour of planning permission being granted.
- 5.35 The collective benefits of the proposed development are considered to be significant and having regard to the considerations discussed in the preceding paragraphs we submit that no adverse impacts will arise to *significantly and demonstrably* outweigh those benefits when assessed against the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole.

6 Conclusion

6.1 The submitted proposal constitutes a sustainable form of development having regard to the following conclusions:

- The proposal entails the conversion and alteration of an existing building that is worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion.
- The design and layout of the development will safeguard the agrarian character of the building and setting of the surrounding area.
- The development will provide an acceptable level of amenity for future occupiers.
- The proposal will not result in any material harm to the significance of the existing building or that of surrounding heritage assets.
- The proposed development will not give rise to any severe residual impacts to highway safety.
- The proposed development will safeguard protected species on the site.
- No adverse impacts will arise to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development when assessed against the NPPF taken as a whole.

6.2 The proposed development is consequently held to meet the requirements of policies SS1, SS10, H1, DC1, DC2, DC3, NE1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (2020), the National Planning Policy Framework, and the Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide SPD and Space About Dwellings SPG.