

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0042
Valid 22/04/2026

**LAND ADJACENT TO BIG
SOUTHLOW FARM LEEK
ROAD
WETLEY ROCKS**

**CHANGE OF USE OF
AGRICULTURAL BUILDING TO
SINGLE DWELLING WITH
PORCH AND GARAGE
ADDITIONS**

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- The principle of the change of use in this location.
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- The impact on residential amenity.
- The impact on highway safety
- The impact on the ecological value of the area

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is just outside of the development boundary of Werrington/Cellarhead in the Green Belt and is on the north side of a row of three modern houses which face Leek Road, A520 main road to the east. The row of houses is attached to the development boundary a short distance to the south. The site is therefore deemed to be within the countryside and there is open land and fields immediately to the north, west and to the other side of the main road to the east although there is also a cluster of dwellings a short distance away to the north of the site and on the other side of the road to the north-east. The site is also in the Green Belt. The land is flat.

The site comprises a single-storey traditional brick and tile agricultural barn with timber windows and has the form of traditional milking parlour but is currently used for agricultural machinery storage. The grassland to the north is within the same ownership of the site and is shown included within a blue edged boundary line and this stretches up to the boundary of the nearest residential property to the north. The fields to the west of the site are also within the same ownership as the site. There are no other buildings on the site but the building has an adjacent yard area also next to the site entrance off Leek Road close to the south boundary of the site.

The proposal would affect a historic barn, which is considered a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA).

The barn is visible on late-19th century mapping, it has a linear plan form and is constructed in red brick walling with a plain clay pitched tiled roof. It is a modest scale building with a simple arrangement and fenestration with some breather holes visible at the gable ends. The building has retained its historic plan form and fenestration and represents an example of local vernacular building construction and modest agrarian building.

PROPOSAL

Planning permission was granted in 2022 to convert the building into a 1 bed room dwelling. That scheme would have been a faithful conversion of the original building without extension and with limited alteration that reuses original openings. There was no evidence on site that the planning permission had been implemented. Rather, a curious form of building alteration, unauthorised by existing consent, has been carried out – the gable end of the building has been removed leaving a broken edge to the tiled roof and brick line. It appears as though attempts have been made to begin to build back the building end with a new brick that is not reclaimed and does not make for a particularly good match to those of the existing building. The new brick line has been set out to provide for a large full height glazing feature and opening in the west facing gable end.

This is a full planning application that proposes a revised scheme to convert the remaining building to a single bedroom dwelling with extension to provide a porch and an adjoining garage. The proposal does not detail or seek consent to rebuild any part of the existing structure. The proposal is largely to repurpose existing window and door openings. However, the proposal does detail the introduction of a large full height glazing feature to the west facing gable end, while the east facing gable and a section of the north facing long side elevation would be concealed by adjoining extension. A garage addition would extend from east facing gable end and, with a linking corridor extension, wrap around the northeast corner of the building and adjoin to a porch addition centrally positioned to north facing elevation.

The access would remain the same. The existing hard standing to the east of the building would be used as a parking and turning area for two cars.

Site plans define the allocated curtilage to a restrained area around the building, with retained paddock area extending, within ownership, to the north.

An Ecology/Bat Report and a Structural Survey Report have also been submitted.

Without invitation or encouragement, the applicant submitted two different option schemes that they hoped might address the Conservation Officer's objection that is set out below. Option D would place the garage and porch extension in a linear line along the building's long side north facing elevation. Option E would place a larger garage extension to the east facing gable end elevation, omit the linking corridor extension, and provide a smaller independent porch addition to be placed centrally on the long side north facing elevation. A further note from the applicant's agent suggests the porch element could be omitted entirely if it would assist considerations.

These options are submitted as possible revisions. The applicant does not confirm that either of these plans should be determined as part of the application. It is therefore the originally submitted plans that are to be under consideration with this determination of the application.

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

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD/2022/0500 - Change of use from Agricultural storage building to single dwelling
– Conditioned by the Highway Authority – Approved by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 4th July 2026
Neighbour consultation period ends: 4th July
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Cheddleton PC: No objection

SMDC Conservation Officer

In summary, the proposal would result in harm to the significance of the Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) as the extensions would subsume its historic footprint and their form, design and appearance would detract from the agrarian character of the building (par.216 of NPPF and policy DC2 of the local development framework). On balance, there does not appear to be clear justification for this level of harm to the historic and architectural interest of the building and, therefore, we object to the proposal from a conservation perspective and recommend it is refused.

[** Following initial comment revision options D and E were forwarded for comment, the response as follows]:

These design options still wouldn't really address the principle of retaining the existing footprint which is key to maintain the historic character and integrity of the building.

Also, the proposed extensions would appear quite domestic in appearance which would further detract from its character. Still would maintain a conservation objection.

SMDC Waste Collection

Bins would need to be presented for collection at the curtilage of the property adjacent to the public highway. There should be sufficient storage space at the dwelling for 3 x wheeled bins and a food waste caddy.

Environmental Health

Construction Impacts (condition)

Land contamination (condition)

Lighting Impacts (condition)

Drainage (Building Standards)

Asbestos (Advisory)

No objection subject to conditions.

Asbestos: A Demolition or refurbishment asbestos survey and risk assessment should be carried out prior to the demolition/renovation of the existing buildings. The enforcing authority for this type of work is the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) and it is recommended that you contact them directly to discuss their requirements:

<http://www.hse.gov.uk/>

Contamination: The site has historically been used as an outbuilding / hardstanding and may have some associated contamination (chemicals / asbestos from old buildings). A full contamination assessment would appear to be onerous, however, it would be advisable that all soft landscaped / garden areas are tested for contaminants (including Asbestos screen) to ensure suitability of use areas conditions are recommended.

Severn Trent Ltd

No response in consultation period

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No response in consultation period

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Conditional

The building is located on Leek Road which is an A classified road (Road No. A520) with a speed limit of 30 mph and 50mph, benefits from a footway and street lighting. Safety cameras are installed on the A520.

There is a bus stop approximately 60m south of the site with a regular bus service to Leek.

The access is an existing access serving the agricultural building. The submitted plan titled Proposed Site Plan, Drawing No. 117-03-04C Rev C, shows that the surface of the access rear of the highway boundary is to be improved in order to bring it up to a standard appropriate for domestic/residential use.

Form X (i)

Staffordshire County Council

Town and Country Planning Act, 1990

Development Management Procedure Order 2015

It was noted at the site visit that the hedge running in northerly direction from the site access is overgrown restricting drivers' visibility and reducing the width of the footway.

it would be beneficial to all road users to ensure the hedges are cut back and regularly maintained.

Parking;

Parking and turning for 2 vehicles is proposed as detailed in the submitted Proposed Site Plan Drawing Number. 117-03 -04C Rev C. The proposal meets with the Parking Standards which state Detached/Semi-detached property of up to 3 bedrooms will require 2 spaces (2.4 x 4.8m each space) for residents and visitors within the curtilage of the dwelling.

The proposed garage with minimum internal dimensions of 3.5m wide by 6m long also meets with the Parking Standards for a single garage which are 3m wide by 6m long. It is considered the proposal will not have a detrimental impact on the adopted highway and therefore there are no objections on Highway grounds to the proposed development subject to the following conditions being included on any approval:-

The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the access and parking and turning area for the proposed dwelling has been provided in accordance with the approved plan titled Proposed Site Plan Drawing Number. 117-03 -04C Rev C, surfaced and sustainably drained and kept as intended for the lifetime of the development.

The development hereby permitted shall not be brought into use until the visibility splays shown on plan titled Proposed Site Plan Drawing Number. 117-03 -04C Rev C have been provided. The visibility splays shall thereafter be kept free of all obstructions to visibility over a height of 600 mm above the adjacent carriageway level.

It was noted at the site visit that the hedge running in northernly direction from the site access is overgrown restricting drivers' visibility and reducing the width of the footway. it would be beneficial to all road users to ensure the hedges are cut back and regularly maintained.

OFFICER COMMENTS

Impact on Green Belt

The site is within 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. Substantial weight is attributed to any harm to the Green Belt and planning permission should not be granted unless there are other considerations, amounting to very special circumstances, that clearly outweighs the harm to the Green Belt and any other harms that would result from the development.

The list of exceptions includes: the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and that the development preserves openness and does not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt; and the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building.

The previous proposal, granted planning permission in 2022, would have provided a faithful restoration and conversion. The development would not have involved any extension or size increase, and it would have reused the building in a manner that would have preserved openness and not conflicted with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

When the application was considered in 2022 a structural survey was provided and the authority concluded, on the evidence, that the building was a solid and traditional brick and tile building. The Building Survey Report stated that the building was in good condition (including its roof) with only relatively minor works needed to repair walls (some re-pointing) and that the building can be converted into a residential use without any significant rebuilding work. The only significant works necessary were said to be limited to internal comprising insulation works, a new floor slab, partition walls and replacement windows and doors.

This position has been undermined somewhat, a significant portion of the building to its western end has been removed and the applicant appears to be in the process of rebuilding a significant portion of the building. A good portion of the building, therefore, was demonstrably not permanent and of substantial construction.

Moreover, the proposal with this application would extend the existing building and increase its size significantly. The application drawings propose the addition of a garage, an external linking corridor, and a large porch. These additions would increase the footprint of the original building by 50%. That would result in a disproportionate addition over and above the size of the original building and the development would not be provided by any of the exceptions at Chapter 13 of the NPPF. In turn the reuse of the building, as proposed, would not preserve openness because it would result in the provision of a significantly larger and bulkier building.

With consideration for the revision options advanced by the applicant, both option D and option E would omit the external linking corridor and place a garage and porch extension in varied arrangements. They would, in each case, increase the footprint of the original building by a lesser amount, some 35%. However, Option D would introduce two large gable projections that would appear as bulky and substantial additions to the building. Option E would disproportionately elongate the building to make for a very long building form. The offer to also omit the porch from the scheme would not resolve the harm in those regards. Neither option would be provided for by the exceptions.

The proposed development, set out in the application drawings, would not be provided for by any of the exceptions at Chapter 13 of the NPPF. It would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and would be harmful to the Green Belt.

Local Plan Approach to Rural Development

For the purposes of the Local Plan 'other rural area' policy SS10 and 'housing policy' H1 both make it clear that in the Green Belt strict control should be applied to development with the application of national policy.

However, both policies do apply further tests to development that would convert or reuse rural buildings in the other rural areas of countryside outside of the settlements.

Policy SS10 and H1 allow the conversion of an existing rural building 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.

The building, prior to recent works, was solid, in decent condition and so physically suitable for conversion. Architecturally, its remaining form, largely, has the obvious character and appearance of a traditional farm building, possibly a milking parlour, with red bricks and a tiled pitched roof. The building should be considered a non-designated heritage asset worthy of restoration, retention and reuse.

An unsympathetic alteration and rebuilding operation is underway. However, if this work was halted, it may be possible, with the selection of an improved facing brick and the reinstatement of original openings, to restore the building so that, with a resubmission of the 2022 application, it could provide a dwelling that was faithful to that previous scheme.

Impacts on the Character and Appearance of the Area and the Non Designated Heritage Asset

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.

In particular, new development should incorporate creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area; and, 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.

The SPD guidance says that in respect of alterations: *"Alterations need to be undertaken with care. Insensitive changes can easily spoil a building. The key to a sensitive approach is to take note of what is there already before preparing the design and to work with and not against the building's character"*.

And, in respect of conversions it says: *"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 in most cases the barn should afterwards look like a converted barn and not like a new house. When converting traditional buildings, new uses should not normally require the construction of extensions or ancillary buildings"*.

The Council's "Design Principles in the Staffordshire Moorlands" SPD also gives advice on barn conversions. It says, inter alia, that:

- *Changing the use of a rural building and resulting changes which destroy its simple rugged agricultural character. This would be contrary to the principle of the Council's policy which seeks to retain rural buildings because of their contribution to the landscape. The historic character of a building is a valuable asset and should be maximised*
- *Conversion schemes should therefore seek to retain as much of the original character as possible.*
- *Schemes for residential conversion should avoid a domestic appearance.*
- *Conversions should be within the shell of the existing buildings. Extensions will be discouraged. Where essential, extensions should be small and unobtrusive, for example, a simple lean-to on a secondary elevation, which reflects the proportions of the main building*

- *Porches are inappropriate in conversions, an internal lobby may be an acceptable alternative*
- *If required garaging should be provided within existing buildings such as car sheds where possible.*

The existing building is a small brick-built farm building with a full pitch tile roof. It is traditional in its form, character, and size. The building was provided in the early 20th century in association with the 19th century historic farmstead of Big Southlow Farm, registered as such in the County survey record of surviving farmstead. The existing form and character of the building makes contribution to the rural surroundings.

The previous proposal would have reused the building without extending it and by making purpose of existing window and door openings. This was identified as a merit of the previous scheme.

The current proposal would involve conversion of the barn and extensions to facilitate the conversion. The extension would be a wrap-around with a projecting gable porch, flat roof addition and pitched roof garage addition. This would be constructed in brick with clay rooftiles for the pitched roof sections. The porch would have glazing to the apex and there would a large expanse of glazing to the flat roof addition.

As set out in the Council's Design SPD's and Historic England's 'Adapting Traditional Farm Buildings' guidance, extensions to historic barn conversions should be avoided in order to maintain the historic integrity and agricultural character of the building.

The proposed extensions would subsume the historic footprint of the building and have an overtly domestic appearance which would be at odds with the modest agrarian character of the building. This would have a harmful impact on the historic character of the building and its vernacular architectural interest.

In addition, the proposed design of window and doors on the principal part of the building would be side-hung casements, the style of which would also be overtly domestic in appearance and detract from the agricultural character of the building.

It is also noted that the red edge for the proposed development includes the paddock to the north which, if also altered to domestic use, could result in visual sprawl from domestic paraphernalia and harm the wider setting of the building. It is not clear if the historic stone boundary wall to the entrance would be retained.

Overall, the proposal would have a harmful impact on the setting and significance of the Non-Designated Heritage Asset.

From the submission, there is not clear justification for the need for an extension as there has been an approval for conversion without extensions previously (ref: SMD/2022/0500). It is also noted that the previous approval included a structural survey to outline that the building was capable of conversion without demolition and rebuilding, but this information appears to be lacking with this current application.

In all these regards there would be harm to the character and appearance of the area and heritage asset. There would be conflict with SMDC Local Plan policies SS10, H1,

DC1 and DC2, the SMDC Design Guide 2018, the Design Principles in the Staffordshire Moorlands SPD and the terms of the NPPF.

Neither of the suggested revisions in the optional submissions would overcome or resolve these harms and objections.

Impacts on the Residential Amenity of Neighbours

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that development protects the amenity of the area, including creation of healthy active environments and residential amenity, in terms of satisfactory daylight, visual impact, sunlight, outlook, privacy, soft landscaping as well as noise, odour and light pollution.

The authority determined that the previous proposal to convert the building without extending it, would not harm the residential amenities or living conditions of nearby residents.

The current proposal to convert, alter and enlarge the building would rely on the same arrangement of window openings along the buildings south facing elevation that presents to the adjacent neighbour.

There is a solid fence of at least approx. 1.8m between the properties that provides screening and views toward the neighbour's upper windows of the neighbouring would be limited to obscure angles.

The current proposal only proposes variation to window arrangement on the west and north facing elevations that do not present toward the adjacent neighbour. The proposed development would not have an unacceptable impact on the neighbour's privacy and living conditions through overlooking from new windows. There would be no conflict with policy DC1 in those regards.

The proposed development would provide floor areas compliant, and more than the thresholds set out in the governments Nationally Described Space Standards for a one-bed dwelling.

To preserve the openness of the Green Belt and the character and appearance of the area, designated curtilage and outdoor amenity space is restrained and limited to an intimate parcel around the building. With consideration of the previous proposal, the authority found that the area of outdoor space, although limited and substandard against Council's Space About Dwellings guidance, would, overall, provide sufficient outdoor amenity space. With this proposal, however, the extensions to the building and the provision of parking space would occupy much of that space, making it less than clear that sufficient outdoor amenity space would be provided for an acceptable standard of living.

In turn there would be an inevitability of residential uses and impedimenta spilling and encroaching out beyond designated curtilage into the wider area of reserved paddock to the north. That would be at the expense of Green Belt openness and the character and appearance of the rural surroundings.

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.

With regard to highway safety, the local highways authority considers the access to the site to be safe for the vehicle movements associated with a 1-bed dwelling and would in any case probably be less than the number of vehicles using the access if the site was to be re-used for agricultural purposes instead of residential uses. The Council parking standards require just one parking space for a 1-bed dwelling, but the existing yard would easily accommodate two parking spaces together with the required amount of turning space needed to enable entry onto the main road in forward gear, in the interests of highway safety.

Biodiversity and Ecology

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 claims exemption from the BNG legislation under the terms of the de minimis criteria – the development would impact on less than 25sqm of biodiversity habitat. Although the building would be larger than 25sqm, it would largely occupy the footprint of an existing building that would be replaced and be otherwise built on existing hardstanding.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed development would be inappropriate development and, by definition, be harmful to the Green Belt because it would not be provided for by any of the listed exceptions at Chapter 13 of the NPPF. Specifically, the proposed conversion and reuse of the building would involve additions that would disproportionately increase the size of the original building and fail to preserve openness. The development would result in conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt through encroachment into the countryside. Substantial weight is attributed to this harm. There are no considerations, amounting to very special circumstances, that would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other harms that would result from the development.

The proposal to alter and significantly extend the small brick farm building, would be harmful to the buildings form, scale, proportions and character, and, in turn, the contribution it makes the rural character and appearance of the surrounding area. The proposal would result in harm to the significance of the Non-Designated Heritage

Asset (NDHA) as the extensions would subsume its historic footprint, form, design and appearance. The additions and alterations would detract from the agrarian character of the building. On balance, there does not appear to be clear justification for this level of harm to the historic and architectural interest of the building. In these regards, the development would be contrary to SMDC Local Plan policies SS10, H1, DC1 and DC2, the SMDC Design Guide 2018 SPD, the Design Principles in the Staffordshire Moorlands SPD and the terms of the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 15th July 2026

X *B.J. Haywood*

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council