

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0354
Valid 28/07/2026

**LAND ADJACENT TO
THORNCROFT FARM
BLACKSHAW LANE
BLACKSHAW MOOR
LEEK**

**APPLICATION FOR
PERMISSION IN PRINCIPLE
FOR A RESIDENTIAL
DEVELOPMENT**

(PERMISSION IN PRINCIPLE)

MAIN ISSUES

- Local and National Policy Approach to the Principle of Providing Housing Development Outside Settlements in Rural Areas
- Impact on Character and Appearance

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site comprises of a broadly rectangular roadside field parcel which extends to some 0.4536 hectares. The landforms part of a larger agricultural field it lies on the southern side of Blackshaw Lane to the east of Thorncroft Farm. The site, which is served by an existing agricultural field gate access in the northeastern corner, is bound on three sides by existing mature hedgerows and the land gradient falls away very gradually from the main Buxton Road in an east to west direction.

The Severn Trent Water Treatment facility for Blackshaw Moor lies to the south - southeast of the site with the Three Horseshoes public house (19th Century origins) and its associated parking areas lying directly opposite on the northern side of Blackshaw Lane.

Beyond this site, 100m to the east on the opposite side of the road and a band of mature roadside trees, lies the main housing settlement of Blackshaw Moor. A grouping of dwellings laid out predominately on the eastern side of the main A53 Buxton Road form a mid-20th Century housing development.

For the purposes of the development plan the application site lies within an 'other rural area' of open countryside that surrounds the villages and towns. The site is within the high ground of surrounding moorland to the north of Leek that extends to the boundary of the Peak District to the north of the application site.

PROPOSAL

The application seeks Permission in Principle for residential development of up to 7 dwellings. The plot which extends to some 0.4536 hectares is 42 metres deep with a roadside frontage of 108 metres. It is anticipated that the development would be laid out in a linear form of ribbon development with each dwelling have a plot size circa 15.5 wide x 42m deep.

All matters of detail would be determined at a later stage. Determination of an application for permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of

development. This is known as Stage 1 and, if approved, a Stage 2 application must follow. This is termed the technical details stage at which point such matters as design, ecology, and highways would be considered.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

A grant of permission in principle (Stage 1) is not within the scope of biodiversity net gain, as it is not a grant of planning permission. However, the subsequent technical details (Stage 2) consent, as a grant of planning permission, would be subject to the biodiversity gain condition.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS9 Smaller Village
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
H1 New Housing Development
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

Adopted Supplementary Planning Documents/Guidance (SPD/G) and Supporting Evidence Documents

- ☐ Space About Dwellings SPG
- ☐ Design Principles SPG
- ☐ Design Guide SPD adopted 21st February 2018
- ☐ Landscape and Settlement Character Assessment (2008)

National Planning Policy Framework Revised (Aug 2026)

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

None

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 1st Sep 2026
Neighbour consultation period ends: 1st Sep 2026
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

Leekfrith PC: No response within consultation period

Staffs Wildlife Trust

No response within consultation period

Severn Trent Water Ltd

No response within consultation period

SMDC Waste Collection

No response within consultation period

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Conditional

Site Visit Conducted on: 12-Aug-2026

No development hereby approved shall be commenced until full details of the following have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.

Application is for PiP for residential development.

Site is close to the junction of Blackshaw Lane with A53 Buxton Road, where vehicles will be stationary or moving slowly. It appears possible that adequate visibility splay can be provided. This must be checked by the applicant and shown clearly on the detailed plans to be submitted as part of a detailed application.

Planning Statement states that the applicant is willing to provide a footway. However, they inexplicably exclude a short length which would require pedestrians to walk in the carriageway or an unsurfaced verge. As this length is highway, a footway can and must be provided - hence condition above. The bus stop on A53 will be used by residents of the development. This footway should also be widened in the interests of pedestrian safety and to encourage use of the bus service.

Site is not in a sustainable location. However pedestrian facilities can be provided to improve this slightly.

Access location is to be determined. Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Blackshaw Lane or A53 Buxton Road within 215m either side of the property access in the previous five years.

OFFICER COMMENTS**Introduction and Background**

The scope of permission in principle applications is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Issues relevant to these 'in principle' matters should be considered at the permission in principle stage. Where permission in principle is granted by application, the default duration of that permission is 3 years. Local planning authorities must specify the location of the site, the type of development and provide an indication of the amount of development the site has permission in principle for.

The amount of residential development must be expressed as a range, indicating the minimum and maximum net number of dwellings (i.e. taking in to account any existing dwellings on the site) which are, in principle, permitted. It is not possible for conditions to be attached to a grant of permission in principle, and its terms may only include the site location, the type of development and amount of development.

In its general approach, in accordance with policy SS1, the Council expects the development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and

environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. When considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the NPPF. This means that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Local Plan shall be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Local and National Policy Approach to Rural Housing Development

As defined by the Local Plan settlement hierarchy at policy SS2, the site has a location that is beyond the recognisable edge or settlement grouping of houses that form the 'smaller village' of Blackshaw Moor some 100m to the east, on the opposite side of the A53. Deliberate efforts to assimilate the 'satellite' mid-20th Century housing development into its otherwise rural surroundings are evident in the form of a wide roadside verge, and a band of mature trees and hedge along roadside to the west, south, and north.

The 'smaller villages' identified and listed at Local Plan policy SS9 do not have defined settlement boundaries. However, the separation distance from the edge of the housing development, the mature roadside planting, the A523, the water pumping station and an intervening field parcel, provide physical and clear separation between what can be recognised as the edge of the 'smaller village' settlement and the application site.

For the purposes of the Local Plan's settlement hierarchy, therefore, the site is within an 'other rural' area of countryside that surrounds the villages and towns. In the other rural areas, policy SS10 applies. These areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The policy places restriction on new build housing development in the countryside to that which has an essential need to be in the countryside in accordance with Local Plan housing Policy H 1 none of which are applicable to the application proposal (affordable housing which can't be met elsewhere, essential workers dwelling, conversion of rural buildings, and previously developed land).

Local plan policy SS9 is applicable to the 'smaller' villages. Here there is some support in a limited way, for new housing development to the edge of or adjoining the boundary of a smaller village, including limited infill schemes of an appropriate scale and character provided that the development would be well related to the existing pattern of development and surrounding land uses (all in accordance with Policy H 1). As discussed above the application site is not to the edge of or adjoining the smaller village settlement it is physically separate and remote from its edge. The exception here does not provide for the proposed development.

Local Plan Housing policy H1 requires that, generally, 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.

However, the updated version of the NPPF (9 Aug 2026) sets out a new national decision-making framework.

Chapter 4 of the NPPF 'Achieving Sustainable Development' includes 'National decision-making policies' which at policy S3 applies a presumption in favour of sustainable development which means that outside settlements, NPPF policy S5 should be applied.

NPPF policy S5 states that only certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements, as set out in a list. These should be approved, unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects, when assessed against the national decision-making policies in the NPPF. The proposed development in this case would not provide limited infilling within groups of houses; an affordable or community led exception site; nor development of land allocated for that purpose in the development plan, and so the proposal would not be provided for by any of these listed forms of development.

In this case, though, the development would make some address of an evidenced unmet need with regard to the provision of housing where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. However, NPPF policy S5 now only makes provision for development in these circumstances where it would be "physically well-related to an existing settlement and be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure".

It is not considered, therefore, that the proposed development in this case would be provided for by that exception. The proposed development would not be physically well-related to an existing settlement, it would be divorced and separated from the settlement and would not be of a scale which can be accommodated taking into account the existing or proposed availability of infrastructure which, in this remote unsustainable location, is not well served by shops, facilities and services.

Additionally, the NPPF also states at policy S5 3. that Development proposals comprising isolated homes, which it defines as those lying outside settlements or groups of houses, should not be approved other than in accordance with policy HO11 (only supported where there is an essential need for a rural worker, enabling development to secure heritage asset, reuse of rural building, subdivision, or exceptional design) none of the HO11 exceptions are applicable here.

NPPF policy S5 then makes it clear that development proposals which do not fall within one of the categories set out in this policy should only be approved in exceptional circumstances, where the benefits of the proposal would substantially outweigh the adverse effects, including to the character of the countryside and in relation to promoting sustainable patterns of movement.

Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

With consideration for the location and amount of the development proposed, the proposal, and a permission in principle, would have an impact on the character and appearance of the area, the rural setting of a tourist attraction (Three Horseshoes PH),

and landscape character and quality. All strands and elements of Local Plan policy converge to provide protection for the character and appearance of the locality through development that relates well to the form and pattern of existing development.

Local Plan policy SS9 (smaller villages) requires new development to reflect and enhance each village's special character and heritage by protecting and enhancing the setting of individual settlements.

Local Plan policy SS10 (other rural areas) requires the Council to Enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside by: Giving priority to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requiring all development proposals to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

In addition, Local Plan housing policy H1, with consideration for housing proposals on unallocated sites, states that in all cases the development would not lead to a prominent intrusion into the countryside or have a significant adverse impact on the character and appearance of the countryside.

Local Plan design and landscape character policy DC1 and DC3 require all development to be well designed and to reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area; and, to protect and, where possible, enhance the setting of settlements by 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.

The NPPF at Chapter 19 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment' sets a national decision making policy N2 which requires that to contribute positively to the natural environment, and support nature's recovery, development proposals should: Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including habitats, landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced.

The application site is part of land described in the 2008 Landscape Character Assessment as a 'Gritstone Highland Fringe'. The landscape type extends into the northeast edge of the district and the southwest of the Peak District. Key characteristics of this landscape type include large scale, steeply sloping, smooth rolling upland landscape with plateaus and steep slopes and valleys; skyline ridges with long distance panoramic views; and, large rectangular fields enclosed in the main with gritstone walls, with some hedgerows.

In this context the site is a rectangular field parcel that forms part of the wider open high ground of plateaued moorland farmland which, on approach from the south, provides extensive uninterrupted views of the Roaches gritstone edge to the northwest.

Within that setting, the discrete housing development of Blackshaw Moor is contained and relatively well screen by mature tree line and hedgerow. Set to the eastern side of the A53, it does not appear within or interrupt views across to the Roaches.

The application site sits within a direct line of sight from a position on the A53, to the south of the Blackshaw Moor Crossroads and the north of the old petrol station, toward the Roaches. A line of housing development would interrupt extensive views across open land toward iconic high-quality landscape feature; it would appear as a prominent intrusion in the countryside in these regards.

The site is also experienced as part of the rural approach as one turns off the A53 toward Tittesworth and the historic hamlet of Meerbrook to the west and it provides rural setting to the Three Horseshoes PH that has its origins as a 19th century Inn and dominates the crossroads with the presence of a remote country hotel.

A row of dwellings on the application site would, in this location, appear disconnected and without any physical connection to an existing settlement or grouping of houses and it would appear oddly appointed and isolated in the rural setting.

Overall, the development would have a detrimental adverse impact on the beauty of the countryside, the rural character of the area and the setting and approach to existing visitor attraction.

There would be conflict with SMDC Local Plan policies SS10, H1, DC3 and DC1 and the terms of the National Planning Policy Framework (Aug 2026).

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites. The provision of the dwellings would make a small contribution to housing supply and there would be some small economic and community benefit associated with the development. However, for the purposes of the NPPF, the development does not fall within one of the categories of development at policy S5 that should be approved outside settlements. Any benefit associated with the proposal does not amount to an 'exceptional circumstance' where the benefits would substantially outweigh the adverse effects to the character of the countryside and in relation to promoting sustainable patterns of movement. In these regards, there is conflict with the terms of the NPPF and policies SS10, SS9 and H1 of the SMDC Local Plan 2020.

With some consideration for the terms of the previous version of the NPPF and the old tilted balance arrangements of paragraph 11d) - the harm to the rural character and appearance of the area and countryside and a reliance on unsustainable patterns of movement would be adverse effects that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date:

X 

Signed by: Jane Curley

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council