

PLANNING STATEMENT

Client: Mr. P & Mrs. M Brown.

Location: The Jubilee Chapel, Ramshorn, Oakamoor, Stoke-on-Trent, ST10 3BY

Proposal: CHANGE OF USE FROM METHODIST CHAPEL (Use Class D1) TO RESIDENTIAL USE AS A SINGLE DWELLING (Use Class C3) INCLUDING THE PROVISION OF A SEPTIC TANK.



INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the change of use from a disused chapel to residential use as a single dwelling.

2 THE APPLICATION SITE AND ITS SETTING

- 2.1 The application site is located on an unnamed road in wooded and pastoral countryside at Ramshorn, Oakamoor. The site contains a disused chapel set in a small area of grass-on-stone surrounded by a wood. The building is built in a traditional style in brick with a plain tile roof. It dates back to 1897 (plaques on the walls). Access to the building is via two rough stone tracks off the Ramshorn to Cotton road. There are two existing sheds in the wood to the north-east of the building.



- 2.2 Although the chapel is relatively small Ramshorn (Ramsor as it was known in the nineteenth century) played an important part in the establishment of Primitive Methodism which was a major movement in English Methodism from about early in the nineteenth century until the Methodist union in 1932.
- 2.3 Primitive Methodism was established in 1807 at an All Day of Prayer (often miscalled a "Camp Meeting") held in the area at Mow Cop, Staffordshire on 31 May 1807. This led, in 1811, to two groups joining together, the 'Camp Meeting Methodists' and the 'Clowesites' led by Hugh Bourne and William Clowes respectively. Ramshorn was one of the first preaching places (not churches) established and was the base for Hugh Bourne's ministry which spread Primitive Methodism across the area including Froghall, Rocester, Mill Dale and Waterhouses. Ramshorn was the centre for a separate circuit which at one time included 28 chapels and it was from the Ramshorn circuit that Primitive Methodism was established in Leek and a separate circuit established there.

- 2.4 In the nineteenth century the land around Ramshorn was largely owned by the Earl of Shrewsbury, a Catholic, and the Primitive Methodists struggled to find a site for a church and it was not until 1897 were they able to obtain a site and build the present chapel which replaced an original building and faces the original site.
- 2.5 The chapel closed in 1967 and after long negotiation was brought by the applicant's father who was responsible for the re-opening of the chapel in 1971. The chapel continued to be used for services although they became occasional until the last services in 2007 and 2009.

3 THE PROPOSAL

- 3.1 The proposed development involves limited external changes to the building consisting of the installation of conservation-style roof-lights on the sides of the building and on the existing lean-to extension at the rear of the building.
- 3.2 Internally, the main changes would be the installation of a first-floor, stairs and a new raised ground-floor level. Other proposed changes include the erection of stud walls to create rooms and the installation of bathrooms and kitchens.
- 3.3 Externally, two car parking spaces would be provided in the north-west of the site. The existing grass area, which is in fact mainly stone hardstanding on which weeds and grass have grown, would become the garden and parking area.

4 DESIGN AND ACCESS ISSUES

- 4.1 Whilst this building is not listed it is a historic asset in that it was built in 1897, is a good example of a typical Methodist chapel of the Victorian period and because of its history. It is a small building with a very simple internal layout. The pews and altar are movable and not fixed.

Impact Assessment

- 4.2 Externally the proposed development would have some visual impact with the installation of the proposed roof-lights although the main features of the building – the walls, roof, windows and front porch - would remain the same. However, it is considered that the visual impact of the changes would be minimal and three of the six roof-lights would be difficult to see because of the trees.
- 4.3 Internally however, there would be considerable change with the removal of the pews and altar and the introduction of a first-floor and the creation of rooms and stairs but the existing interior does not contain any particular features of historical value.

Scale and Layout

- 4.4 The only change to the present layout outside the building would be the creation of two car parking spaces. There would be no change in the scale of the building.

Appraisal Summary

- 4.4 The external appearance of the building would be changed to a degree but the essential character and appearance would remain. Internally, the character of the building would be changed but the building would still retain its essential “chapel” appearance and character.
- 4.5 Core Strategy Policy DC2 sets out the Council’s planning policy for the historic environment in the Moorlands. Namely, the Council will safeguard and, where possible, safeguard the historic environment; resist harmful development; promote development which sustains, respects or enhances buildings; and prevent the loss of historic buildings.
- 4.8 The proposed change of use will safeguard this building for the future; cause no substantial harm; would not harm its historic value or appearance and ensures the beneficial retention of a building which is an important local feature.

5 PLANNING POLICIES

5.4 The Development Plan for the Staffordshire Moorlands consists of the Core Strategy adopted in March 2014.

5.2 The relevant Core Strategy policies are:

- SS6c – Other Rural Areas Strategy;
- R1 – Rural Diversification;
- R2 – Rural Housing;
- DC1 - Design Considerations;
- DC2 -The Historic Environment;
- The Design Principles Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG)

5.3 The content of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) together with the pertinent Development Plan policies are set out in more detail, where relevant, in the “Case for the Proposed Development” on the next pages.

6. THE CASE FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The key issues are:

- Whether the proposed residential use is appropriate in the countryside including the impact on the countryside.
- Whether the proposed alterations and use would harm the appearance, significance and value of the building.
- The shortage of houses and deliverable housing land in the District.
- Sustainability.
- Other material considerations.

6.2 These issues are addressed below:

Whether the proposed residential use is appropriate in the countryside.

6.3 The relevant Development Plan policies are Core Strategy policies SS6c, R1 and R2. Policy SS6c (Other Rural Areas Strategy) states, amongst other things, that the Council will meet essential local needs by allowing the conversion, extension or replacement of an existing rural building in accordance with policies R1 and R2.

6.4 Policy R1 states that:

“Priority will be given to the re-use of rural buildings for commercial enterprise, including tourism uses, where the location is sustainable and the proposed use does not harm the building’s character and/or the character of its surroundings.

6.5 Policy R2 states that only limited housing development would be allowed in rural areas outside the settlement and infill boundaries of the town and the villages and amongst the categories of housing that will be allowed is the conversion of non-residential buildings to residential use where the building is suitable and worthy in physical, architectural and character terms for conversion; and it can be demonstrated that agricultural or commercial use is not viable or suitable. In such cases there will be a requirement for a marketing exercise to be carried out by a suitably qualified professional or other evidence that the building would be unsuitable for a commercial use. Alternatively, where the conversion of a building to residential use would safeguard a building of particular merit marketing would not appear to be required.

6.6 It is contended that the proposed development meets all the requirements of Policy R2; it has been marketed for sale or rent for over 13 months and whilst offers have been received most have been speculators looking to purchase the property with a view to obtaining planning permission for residential use.

6.7 In addition, the building because of its appearance and its history both locally and wider is a building of particular merit. This particular building is a splendid example of a rural chapel with a long local history. It is over 100 years old and Ramshorn was pivotal in the establishment of Primitive Methodism.

- 6.8 The application building has been marketed for sale/let from June 2013 to the present. Please see the submitted marketing report for full details. The marketing report's conclusion is:
- "Despite a good number of enquiries, we have not received any offers to let the property for any commercial purpose. The majority of enquiries from a sale point of view have been from speculators looking to purchase the property subject to planning permission for residential use. All interested parties have been asked to submit offers, with the highest offer being £30,000 which was subject to planning permission for residential conversion which was rejected.*
- The lack of interest in this property for a commercial use is as expected given the location, size and layout of the property. There is also an abundance of more suitable properties available in better locations for commercial activities.*
- We would therefore strongly support an application for conversion of this building into residential use, for which there is a strong and growing demand."*
- 6.9 The marketing exercise has been carried out in accord with the Council's guidelines including a sale board on site and no firm interest has been received for commercial or agricultural use. The marketing provides clear evidence, as required in the relevant part of Policy R2 that the building is unsuitable for a commercial use.
- 6.10 In addition, the building itself is not suitable for commercial use because of its relatively small size; the fact that access is along two stoned tracks which are uneven in places, and its location in an attractive rural position accessible by country lanes and remote from settlements. It is accepted that not all commercial uses need a convenient location or attract significant amounts of traffic or cause noise or other amenity impacts. But many do. It is accepted that some commercial uses such as holiday cottages can be acceptable in a rural location but to be viable the building would need to provide more accommodation, particularly bedrooms. As a building with a single floor there is simply not enough space to provide the necessary accommodation and modern facilities which visitors require. A second floor is necessary. The costs of providing a second floor in this building would make a holiday cottage not viable. Residential use is the only financially viable option.
- 6.11 The lack of interest in renting or buying the building I believe demonstrates the general unsuitability of the building for commercial uses.
- 6.12 Policy R2 also requires that the building is suitable and worthy for conversion in physical, architectural and character terms. Physically, as the submitted structural survey concludes that whilst some work is required the building is of *"substantial construction"* and that *"the structure is sufficiently robust and entirely suitable for conversion with very limited amounts of work required."* In terms of its architecture and character the building is attractive in appearance and character and is a good example of a Victorian chapel.

- 6.13 The supporting text to Policy R2 states that “Policy R2 places particular importance on identifying and safeguarding local character” and that “a building can, over time, become something which is associated with a locality and which makes a valuable contribution to a unique sense of place.” It is contended that this is such a building and it is important that it is retained. The building has not been used as a chapel for a long time (5 years) and even before that it was used on an increasingly occasional basis. If it is to be retained in a good condition it needs a viable beneficial use. The lack of firm interest in either renting or buying the building for commercial use realistically leaves only the option of residential use.
- 6.14 The location of the building is not suitable for affordable housing. The applicants live in the Staffordshire Moorlands and wish to convert the building and live in it with their family which has been associated with the chapel for over 40 years. Policy R2 allows the conversion of buildings of merit in the Moorlands to residential use if it would enable a building of particular merit to be safeguarded. There is no definition of what constitutes a building of particular merit in the Core Strategy but surely if it just meant listed buildings it would say “listed buildings” and not “buildings of particular merit”. The use of the latter term suggests that it is more than just listed buildings and that the term also encompasses other buildings of value and merit. The chapel is a building of merit in architectural and historical terms because of its age, the role of Ramshorn in Primitive Methodism and the fact that it is has been part of the rural community for over 100 years.
- 6.15 This is consistent with the change nationally in recent years encouraging local planning authorities to identify local historical assets although a building can be of merit for more than just historical reasons. Whilst the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Heritage Register Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) does not list any specific buildings it does indicate that although the inclusion of a building or site on the Local Heritage Register does not of itself place any additional planning control upon the site the particular interest would, nonetheless, be taken into account by the Council, in any planning or other decision regarding the site.
- 6.16 Core Strategy Policy DC2 states that the Council will safeguard, amongst other things, significant buildings (both statutory and on a local register) and prevent the loss of buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or heritage of an area through appropriate re-use and sensitive development. The impact of the proposed development on the character and historic value of the building is addressed in the next section of this report.
- 6.17 In summary, there is no firm interest in using the building for commercial purposes as the marketing exercise demonstrates and it is contended that the building is of particular merit for both architectural and historic reasons and its contribution to local character and that as such the conversion of the building is consistent with Policy R2.

Impact on the appearance, significance and value of the building.

- 6.18 The proposed conversion involves the installation of 6 conservation-style roof-lights three of which (on the western side) would be visible. The three proposed roof-lights on the eastern side would be difficult to see because of the nearby mature trees and would have no, or minimal, impact. The three on the west, although they would be visible, would have a limited impact because they would be set into the roof and because of the lack of views of the building from distance. Matters such as boundary treatment and new outbuildings or extensions can be controlled by condition if the Council wishes. There is an existing timber building (well-camouflaged!) in the trees which could house garden equipment.
- 6.19 Externally, the building's appearance would remain essentially unchanged and the building's past history as a chapel would remain clear. Nature evolves; why shouldn't buildings particularly when there are few alternatives?
- 6.20 The appearance of the stoned area which I understand was used for car parking in the past would change as it would become the house's garden but this would improve and enhance its appearance rather than have an adverse impact.
- 6.21 The proposed internal changes would be considerable but the interior at the moment is consists of a plain room.

The shortage of deliverable housing land supply in the District.

- 6.22 The proposed conversion would provide a much needed house in the Moorlands for a local family.

Sustainability

- 6.23 Paragraph 55 of the NPPF accepts that special circumstances for allowing new homes away from settlements include where the development would re-use redundant and disused buildings and lead to an enhancement of the immediate setting.
- 6.24 The NPPF (paragraphs 18-219) taken as a whole constitutes the Government's view of what is sustainable development in practice. Therefore, by definition a NPPF policy such as that in paragraph 55 is sustainable development.
- 6.25 Here the enhancement to the immediate setting would be the retention and protection of the building, retaining a local feature of merit, keeping it in a good condition, stopping the nearby vegetation encroaching on the site, improving the appearance of the area around the building.

Other Material Considerations

6.26 These are:

- Paragraph 55 of the NPPF allows new homes in the open countryside “*where such development would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset....*”
It is contended that this is the case here.
- With regard to Core Strategy policy C1 (Creating Sustainable Communities) the building has not been used as an active place of worship for over five years and the loss of the building for religious use would not disadvantage the local community.
- There is no mention in the NPPF that preference should be given for commercial uses when converting buildings in the countryside.
- Landscape impact (Core Strategy Policy DC3).
The building is located in a heavily wooded area and can only be seen from relatively close-to. As a result, and because the external changes are low-key and minimal, the proposed changes to the building and site would have little impact on the landscape.
- Impact on the surrounding trees
Please see the submitted Tree Survey Report. The eight trees immediately around the building are considered in this report which makes recommendations for removal of some of the trees because of their poor condition or because they are causing damage to the building and recommendations for further action on the remaining trees.
- The proposed car parking would be on existing stoned ground and would use an existing access. As a result the proposed parking would not result in any harm to the trees

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 It is considered that the proposed development accords with the relevant policies in the Core Strategy and the NPPF both of which allow the conversion of buildings to new homes in the countryside. The proposal is in accord with Core Strategy policies SS6C, R1 and R2 in particular and with the guidance in paragraph 55 of the NPPF. In addition, it would make use of a redundant and disused building for which there is no other viable use and provide a good family home for a Staffordshire Moorland family. The District Council is therefore respectfully requested to grant planning permission for this development.