

DELEGATED REPORT

FILE REFERENCE: SMD/2014/0523

MAIN ISSUES:

- Whether or not the proposal can be considered to be appropriate development in the Green Belt and if not what very special circumstances exist which can be considered to outweigh Green Belt policy.
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area.
- The impact on residential amenity.
- The impact on highway safety and traffic.

PUBLICITY/REPRESENTATIONS:

Policy Team: Inappropriate development so very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated.
Highways Authority: No objection subject to conditions.
Severn Trent: No objection subject to standard condition.
One letter of objection has been received from a local resident.

CASE OFFICER ASSESSMENT:

This is an outline application for four houses with the access and layout of development to also be determined and all other matters (scale, appearance/design and landscaping) to be reserved for a future application (if outline approval is given). The site plan shows four new houses placed in a row fronting the road and four new individual accesses and driveways would be created serving each house. The elevation drawings are purely indicative and are not to be determined as part of this outline application. The proposal would lead to the removal of farm buildings. However, there are farm buildings to the rear of the site which are shown to be retained.

Despite the site being on the edge of a large village, the land to the north of the main road is in the Green Belt. One of the purposes of the Green Belt is to prevent the expansion of large urban areas into the countryside and to prevent the merging of such areas into surrounding towns and villages to the detriment of the character of individual settlements. This part of the Green Belt helps to keep the village of Blythe Bridge separate from the city of Stoke and thus protect its character and identity as a separate settlement. The NPPF only allows development in the Green Belt under limited criteria. New houses do not fall under the criteria. One of the criteria does allow "limited infilling in villages, and limited affordable housing for local community needs under policies set out in the Local Plan". In this case the Local Plan (adopted Core Strategy) allows only limited infilling in smaller villages. Blythe Bridge is classed as a large village and is outside of the Green Belt (it is not washed over by the Green Belt contrary to what is stated in the application documents). The review of village development boundaries is not complete and therefore the site is still deemed to be in the Green Belt and outside of the village.

The NPPF does allow limited infilling on brownfield sites. However, the site comprises part of a farm and is therefore not classed as brownfield (contrary to what is stated in the application documents).

Housing on this site is therefore inappropriate development and very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated that are considered to outweigh the operation of Green Belt policy.

The NPPF states that in Districts where a 5 year land supply for housing has not been demonstrated then new houses should be approved in "sustainable locations". The site is just outside Blythe Bridge and therefore can be deemed to be in a sustainable location. However, I do not consider this outweighs the need to protect the open and rural character and appearance of this part of the Green Belt, particularly as this area of Green Belt is valuable in helping prevent the expansion of Stoke into surrounding villages. Despite being on the edge of a large village and with houses to the south, west and east (only the land to the rear of the site remains open), the site itself does have a rural appearance and character as it is part of a farm. There is a rural hedgerow running along the front boundary of the site. There are also a number of trees within the site which add positively to the rural character and appearance of the site. I consider this rural character and appearance would be harmed by new development on the site.

Furthermore, the layout drawing shows development in the same place as existing trees and the new accesses would also lead to removal of parts of the hedgerow. The trees and hedgerow contribute positively to the appearance of the site despite not being the subject of a Tree Preservation Order. It would not be contrary to policy to remove the trees or hedgerow if they are dying or of poor health and adequate replacements would be proposed elsewhere. However, no Tree Survey has been submitted with the application so the quality of the trees or hedge cannot be determined and there is no indication of any replacement planting as part of the application.

The layout of development does not raise any immediate residential amenity concerns in terms of privacy or light provision for surrounding residents or future occupiers of the proposed houses. The standards in the Space About Dwellings SPG can be achieved with the layout of development shown in the drawings.

With regard to traffic and highway safety, the increase in vehicle movements can be accommodated on the A class road running alongside the site. It is a straight section of road and the four new accesses are adequately designed and located in positions which would not cause road hazards. The level of visibility at the access points is satisfactory. The public right of way running alongside the eastern edge of the site would not be affected.

With regard to the ecological value of the site, an Ecological Assessment was submitted with the application and concludes that the proposal would not harm protected species including bats of which no evidence was found during an inspection of the farm buildings proposed to be demolished.

RECOMMENDATION:

REFUSE

Date 22/10/2014

Signed _____
Chris Johnston

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MANAGER COMMENTS:

Date

Signed _____