

LAND AT VERNON AVENUE, AUDLEY
MRS VENA LLOYD

26/00026/PIP

The application seeks permission in principle for the erection of 3-6 dwellings on a parcel of land off Vernon Avenue, Audley.

The site is located within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Enhancement, as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The application has been called in for determination by the Planning Committee by Councillor Lewis in respect of concerns of the impact of the development on the Green Belt and the application of Grey Belt policy.

The 5-week period for the planning application expired on 20 February but an extension of time has been agreed until 6 March 2026.

RECOMMENDATION

Permit, subject to conditions relating to the following matters: -

- 1. Technical Details Consent required from the LPA**
- 2. Technical Details Consent submitted within 3 years of this permission**
- 3. Approved Plans**
- 4. Consent restricted to no less than 3 and no more than 6 dwellings**

Reason for Recommendation

It is considered that the location, type and amount of development proposed is acceptable in principle and these are the only matters which can be assessed in applications for permission in principle. If permission is granted, then an application referred to as a 'technical details consent' would need to be submitted which would consider site specific details.

Statement as to how the Local Planning Authority has worked in a positive and proactive manner in dealing with the planning application

The proposal is considered to be a sustainable form of development in compliance with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Key Issues

The application seeks permission in principle for the erection of 3-6 dwellings on a parcel of land to the north of Vernon Avenue, Audley. The site is located within the Green Belt and an Area of Landscape Enhancement, as indicated on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map.

The Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council Final Draft Local Plan (Regulation 19 version) and its supporting documents were submitted for public examination on the 20 December 2024. Following the examination hearings, the Council consulted on several main modifications to the emerging Local Plan in late 2025. Responses received to the consultation on the modifications proposed have now been shared with the Inspector and the Council awaits further information on next steps on the examination process.

Policies, alongside the schedule of Main Modifications, in the emerging Local Plan are a material consideration in decision taking on planning applications. The weight to be given to each of the emerging policies and allocations will depend on an assessment against the criteria set out in paragraph 49 of the National Planning Policy Framework, as follows:-

“49. Local planning authorities may give weight to relevant policies in emerging plans according to:

- a) the stage of preparation of the emerging plan (the more advanced its preparation, the greater the weight that may be given);*
- b) the extent to which there are unresolved objections to relevant policies (the less significant the unresolved objections, the greater the weight that may be given); an*
- c) the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to this Framework (the closer the policies in the emerging plan to the policies in the Framework, the greater the weight that may be given)”.*

As the Local Plan is at an advanced stage with a focused consultation on Main Modifications from the examination process then moderate to significant weight can be attributed to individual policies dependent on the extent of changes to the Local Plan. These policies and their weight shall be addressed in turn, in the relevant sections of this report.

With regard to applications for permission in principle, only the matter of the location of the development and the principle of development can be considered by the Local Planning Authority. If permission is granted then a second application referred to as a ‘technical details consent’ would need to be submitted which would address site specific details such as highway safety, amenity, ground conditions, biodiversity, visual impact, arboriculture, etc. In addition, applications for permission in principle are exempt from providing a biodiversity net gain assessment, with such assessments to be submitted at technical details consent stage.

While an objection to the proposal has been received which raises concerns relating to issues such as highway safety, drainage, impact on wildlife and amenity, these are matters which fall beyond the scope of this application.

In addition, Audley Parish Council have raised concerns regarding the impact of the development on a site designated as local green space within the Audley Neighbourhood Plan, Local Green Space 91 as noted within Policy ANP11. However, this application site does not form part of the LGS designation and is sited 45m from it. Therefore, there are no concerns in this regard and Policy ANP11 would not be applicable.

Therefore, the only matters in the consideration of the application are as follows;

- Is the principle of housing development acceptable in this location?
- Is the development appropriate within the Green Belt?

Is the principle of development acceptable?

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that “where in making any determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.”

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF states that “Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.”

The application site comprises greenfield agricultural land that is located beyond, but directly adjacent to, the defined village envelope of Audley and is sited on the northern side of Vernon Avenue.

Core Spatial Strategy (CSS) Policy SP1 states that new housing will be primarily directed towards sites within Newcastle Town Centre, neighbourhoods with General Renewal Areas and Areas of Major Intervention, and within the identified significant urban centres. It goes on to say that new development will be prioritised in favour of previously developed land where it can support sustainable patterns of development and provides access to services and service centres by foot, public transport and cycling.

Policy SP3 of the CSS seeks to maximise the accessibility of new residential development by walking, cycling and public transport.

CSS Policy ASP6 states that in the Rural Area there will be a maximum of 900 net additional dwellings of high design quality primarily located on sustainable brownfield land within the village envelopes of the key Rural Service Centres, namely Loggerheads, Madeley and the villages of Audley Parish, to meet identified local requirements, in particular, the need for affordable housing.

As referred to above, the Council's Draft Local Plan has now reached the main modifications stage of the examination process. The policies from the emerging plan most relevant in determining this application are considered to be Policies PSD1, PSD2, PSD3 and PSD4.

Policy PSD1 (Overall Development Strategy) sets out the overall development strategy for the Borough, including housing targets. Within the policy it details at point 4 that the council will encourage efficient use of land through windfall development there the development, amongst other points *"is physically well-related to existing settlement, infrastructure and sustainable transport modes"*. This criterion is not subject to any modifications and so can be afforded significant weight.

Policy PSD2 (Settlement Hierarchy) establishes the settlement hierarchy within the Borough. The application site would be classified as *"Other settlement and rural areas"*. Again, this policy is not subject to any modifications and so carries significant weight. Policy PSD3 details that *"other settlements and rural areas of the settlement hierarchy will be expected to accommodate development in line with the policy approach set out within the local plan but is not a focus of growth for this policy."* Whilst there are modifications set out within PSD3, this criterion has not been modified and so can be afforded significant weight.

Policy PSD4 (Development Boundaries and the Open Countryside) sets that settlement boundaries are defined on the Policies Map and that open countryside is land outside of these defined settlement boundaries. It is noted that this application site would fall within the open countryside. The policy goes on to detail at criterion 3 types of development that would be supported (a-k). Criterion i is the only one subject to modification in terms of reference to Rural Exception sites, which does not apply to this application. The other types of development as listed within the policy include essential rural workers dwellings; agricultural/operational need; development associated with the conservation and enhancement of a heritage asset; proposals for self-build and custom dwellings and exceptional circumstances for isolated homes. These elements of the proposal which this application would be assessed against can be afforded significant weight.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that Plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- i. the application of policies in the 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.

(Para 11(d))

It has been accepted in previous planning appeals that the housing policies contained in the adopted Core Spatial Strategy and saved policies from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2003 are out of date. The emerging Local Plan includes policies relevant to the consideration of housing but the emerging status of the Plan, alongside the Council not being able to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable homes, has an impact on the weight that can be attributed to the aforementioned policies

In the absence of a required housing land supply, the tilted balance outlined within Paragraph 11(d) of the framework is considered to be engaged. Therefore an assessment of whether any adverse impacts of granting planning permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole is required.

On the 1st October 2025, the Audley Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) was made and therefore forms part of the adopted Development Plan. Policy ANP1 states that residential development will be supported in locations within settlement boundaries or infill development within Scot Hay or other gaps in built frontages flanked on both sides by existing housing, providing it does not compromise inappropriate development or the green belt, amongst other things. Neighbourhood Plan Policy ANP9 (Natural Environment and Landscape), states at point 2 that Development should maintain the green landscape settings and separation of the following distinctive settlements: Alsagers Bank, Audley, Bignall End, Halmer End, Miles Green, Scot Hay, Wood Lane.

Paragraph 14 of the NPPF states that in situations where the presumption (at paragraph 11d) applies to applications involving the provision of housing, the adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, provided the following apply:

- a) the neighbourhood plan became part of the development plan five years or less before the date on which the decision is made; and
- b) the neighbourhood plan contains policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement (see paragraphs 67-68).

Whilst the neighbourhood plan is less than five years old, it does not contain policies and allocations to meet its identified housing requirement. Therefore the neighbourhood plan does not comply with the relevant measures outlined within Paragraph 14 and so it cannot be concluded that the adverse impact of allowing development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan is, in itself, likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

Comments received from Audley Parish Council (APC) objecting to the proposed development have stated that the ANP helps to achieve development and evidenced growth and that it positively meets the housing needs for the Neighbourhood Area and its growth strategy. It is accepted that the ANP conducted a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA), however the identified housing requirement was not supported by specific policies and allocations to address this identified need.

Officers sought a legal position in respect of the weight to be given to the Audley Neighbourhood Plan in the recent determination of two applications that went before the Committee on the 3rd February 2026 (Application Refs: 25/0081/PIP and 25/00883/PIP). This advice was relayed to members at the Planning Committee on the 3rd February and is considered to also be directly applicable and relevant to the consideration of this application in respect of the weight to be afforded to the ANP. This legal advice supports Officers recommendations insofar as that in respect of policies in relation to the provision of housing, both of the criteria outlined within Paragraph 14 of the NPPF have not been met and therefore it cannot be concluded that the adverse impact of non-compliance with the ANP is likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

In terms of sustainability, Audley represents a sustainable rural location for new housing due to the services and facilities it contains. It is acknowledged that both local and national planning policy seeks to provide new housing development within existing development boundaries on previously developed land where available.

It is accepted that residential development on this site outside the settlement boundary would be contrary to this preferred approach and the requirements of Policy ANP1 of the NP. However, the application site directly abuts the boundary of the Audley Village envelope. Within Policy SED2 of the Draft Local Plan, Audley is identified as a Rural Centre. The policy notes that *"Rural Centres provide a role in service provision to the local population and contain several essential services and facilities in order to meet the day to day needs of residents. The Rural Centres will meet some of the development needs of the Borough, commensurate with their role as villages and with the type, density and design of development seeking to protect and enhance their rural and historic character. It is recognised that there are differences between these villages in terms of their sizes and available facilities and therefore the scale of development in each area should be relative to its role, function and infrastructure capacity"*.

Whilst the site's location within the open countryside is noted, consideration must be given to the proximity of the site to Audley. Occupants of the site would only have to walk a short distance along existing footpaths to access the services and facilities within the village, all of which are considered to

be sufficient to serve the day to day needs of the potential occupants of the development site. Sufficient access to public transport links is also available.

In addition, it should be noted that the application site sits directly adjacent to Site Allocation AB15 which is allocated within the emerging local plan for residential development of 33 dwellings. The work undertaken as part of the emerging local plan has identified this site as sustainable for new residential development. The application site being considered here lies directly adjacent to this allocated site, and whilst technically beyond the defined village envelope of Audley, occupants of the site would rely on the same pedestrian links and accessibility to public transport as that considered in the allocation of site AB15. It is also not considered that the modest addition of a further 3-6 dwellings would have any impacts on the sustainability credentials of the site.

In the absence of a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, the development of 3-6 dwellings would make a small contribution to the borough's housing supply and based on the location of the site, the development is considered to be within a sustainable location.

Is the development acceptable in the Green Belt?

Paragraph 143 of the NPPF indicates that the Green Belt serves five purposes, one of which is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.

Paragraph 153 of the NPPF states that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

Paragraph 154 of the NPPF states that other than in the case of a number of specified exceptions the construction of new buildings should be regarded as inappropriate in the Green Belt.

Paragraph 155 sets out that the development of homes, commercial and other development in the Green Belt should not be regarded as inappropriate where:

- (a) The development would utilise grey belt land and would not fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan;*
- (b) There is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed ;*
- (c) The development would be in a sustainable location, with particular reference to [paragraphs 110 and 115 of this Framework]; and*
- (d) Where applicable the development proposed meets the 'Golden Rules' requirements set out in paragraphs 156-15.*

Policy PSD5 (Green Belt) within the Draft Local Plan states that development shall not be approved for inappropriate development except in very special circumstances, in accordance with the approach within the NPPF. Elements of this policy are subject to modifications, however in terms of new built development in the green belt, the policy aligns with the provisions of the framework and so for the purposes of this application can be afforded significant weight.

The applicant has submitted supporting information to seek to demonstrate that the proposal complies with criterion (a) above, which relates to the utilisation of 'Grey Belt' land and an assessment as to whether the proposal meets the above criteria is set out below.

'Grey belt' is defined as land in the Green Belt comprising previously developed land and/or any other land that, in either case, does not strongly contribute to any of purposes (a), (b), or (d) in paragraph 143. 'Grey belt' excludes land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

As per the definition above, Grey Belt can include previously developed land or any other land that does not contribute to purposes a), b) or d) of the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt listed at paragraph 143 of the Framework.

These three criteria are:

- (a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;

- (b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- (d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

The application site falls outside of any recognised settlement boundary in the 2011 Local Plan. National Guidance notes that villages should not be classed as 'large built up areas' and this definition should only be applied to towns or larger settlements. On this basis, the proposal meets the definition of grey belt when assessed against the first of the criteria set out above.

In regard to criterion (b), there are no nearby towns within close proximity to the site which would be at risk of merging with the settlement.

Audley is a village, not a historic town, and therefore the proposal accords with criterion (d).

Consideration must still be given as to whether any of the restrictions set out in footnote 7 apply to the site, a list of these restrictions are set out below:

- (a) habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 189) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest;*
- (b) Local Green Space;*
- (c) a National Landscape;*
- (d) a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast;*
- (e) irreplaceable habitats;*
- (f) designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in footnote 75); and*
- (g) areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.*

The site does not fall within any of the criteria set out above.

To conclude, the site comprises Grey Belt land as it does not make a significant contribution to purposes a), b) and d) of paragraph 143 of the Framework, nor are there any policies listed at footnote 7 of the Framework that suggest that development of the application site should be refused or restricted. There is a demonstrable need for the development given the absence of a 5-year housing land supply and the site is otherwise located in a sustainable location.

In light of these conclusions, the proposal comprises appropriate development in the Green Belt and the principle of development is considered to be acceptable.

Reducing Inequalities

The Equality Act 2010 says public authorities must comply with the public sector equality duty in addition to the duty not to discriminate. The public sector equality duty requires public authorities to consider or think about how their policies or decisions affect people who are protected under the Equality Act. If a public authority hasn't properly considered its public sector equality duty it can be challenged in the courts.

The duty aims to make sure public authorities think about things like discrimination and the needs of people who are disadvantaged or suffer inequality, when they make decisions.

People are protected under the Act if they have protected characteristics. The characteristics that are protected in relation to the public sector equality duty are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

When public authorities carry out their functions the Equality Act says they must have due regard or think about the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't
- Foster or encourage good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't

With regard to this proposal it is considered that it will not have a differential impact on those with protected characteristics.

APPENDIX

Policies and proposals in the Development Plan relevant to this decision:

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Core Spatial Strategy 2006-2026 (Adopted 2009)

Policy SP1:	Spatial Principles of Targeted Regeneration
Policy SP3:	Spatial Principles of Movement and Access
Policy ASP6:	Rural Area Spatial Policy
Policy CSP3:	Sustainability and Climate Change

Newcastle under Lyme Local Plan 2011

Policy N17:	Landscape Character – General Considerations
Policy N20:	Area of Landscape Enhancement
Policy S3:	Development in the Green Belt

Audley Neighbourhood Plan

Policy ANP1:	Residential Development
Policy ANP9:	Natural Environment and Landscape

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2025)
National Planning Practice Guidance

Newcastle-under-Lyme Emerging Local Plan (2020-2040 at Main Modifications Stage)

Policy PSD1:	Overall Development Strategy
Policy PSD2:	Settlement Hierarchy
Policy PSD3:	Distribution of Development
Policy PSD4:	Development Boundaries and the Open Countryside
Policy PSD5:	Green Belt

Planning History

None.

Views of Consultees

The **Highway Authority** consider that the proposals will see an intensification of the already inadequate access arrangement, adoptable road layout and pedestrian facilities but note that refusal at this stage would be difficult and so recommend that further information is provided in support of any stage 2 technical detail submission.

County Archaeologist raises no objections to the proposed development

Audley Parish Council object to the application on the following grounds:

- Development would be contrary to Paragraph 12 of the NPPF
- Inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- Development beyond a settlement boundary and conflicts with Policy ANP1 of the Audley Neighbourhood Plan
- Audley Neighbourhood Plan positively meets housing needs
- Contrary to Policy ANP9 of the Neighbourhood Plan
- Consideration should be given to the impact on adjacent Local Green Space 91 and ANP11.

The **County Minerals and Waste Planning Authority** have no comments to make on the proposal.

The **Environmental Health Officer** raises no objections subject to conditions.

Representations

One letter of objection has been received raising concerns regarding increased traffic, loss of farmland and harm to wildlife and rural setting.

Applicant's/Agent's submission

All of the application documents can be viewed on the Council's website using the following link:

<https://publicaccess.newcastle-staffs.gov.uk/online-applications/PLAN/26/00026/PIP>

Background Papers

Planning files referred to
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

23 February 2026