

WESTON MERES FARM, MAER
MR RICHARD ATHERTON

25/00759/FUL

The development seeks planning permission for the erection of a cattle rearing facility and the retention of two silos on land at Weston Meres Farm, Maer.

The site is located within the rural area of the Borough and falls within a Landscape Maintenance Area as defined on the Local Development Framework Proposals Map of the Local Plan.

The 8-week period for the determination of this application expired on the 27th February, however an extension of time until 26th June has been agreed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Subject to the applicant entering into a Section 106 Obligation by the 1st September 2026 to secure the prevention of the implementation of planning permission 25/00075/FUL and to secure the significant on-site Biodiversity Net Gain,

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

- 1. Time limit**
- 2. Approved plans**
- 3. Materials**
- 4. Odour Management Plan**
- 5. Construction hours**
- 6. Ecology Mitigation Measures**
- 7. External Lighting**

Reason for Recommendation

The development would support an existing agricultural business. It is appropriate development within the rural area, and no adverse impacts have been identified. Subject to the appropriate conditions and legal agreements the proposal should be supported.

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

Additional information has been sought and provided and the scheme is now considered to be a sustainable form of development that complies with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Key Issues

The development seeks planning permission for the construction of two buildings to be utilised as cattle rearing facilities together with an associated silage clamp and the retention of two silos.

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. The Inspectors report concludes that the Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan (the Plan) provides an appropriate basis for the planning for the Borough, provided that several main modifications are made to it. The publication of the Inspectors Report marks the conclusion of the examination into the Council's Local Plan. The Inspectors Report and adoption of the Local Plan will be considered by Full Council in due course.

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); and
- 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 examination on the Local Plan has now ended, significant weight can be attributed to individual policies in the Local Plan when considered alongside the modifications concluded by the Inspector.

The main considerations in the determination of this application are as follows: -

- Principle of development,
- Design of the proposals and the impact on the character of the landscape,
- Impact on residential amenity,
- Biodiversity Net Gain and Impact on Wildlife and Biodiversity and
- Highway Safety

Principle of Development

Paragraph 88 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses.

Policy RUR1 (Rural Economy) states that outside settlement boundaries, applications for the expansion of existing rural businesses and the provision of/diversification of agricultural and other land based-rural businesses will be permitted, subject to the following criteria;

Development will be supported where the proposals would:

- a) Facilitate the retention or growth of local employment opportunities or existing services and facilities that support a local need;
- b) Improve the accessibility of a site in terms (where opportunities exist);
- c) Not involve the unsightly storage of, or work on, goods outside of built premises;
- d) Re-use disused buildings of substantial construction that are structurally sound and capable of conversion and that were constructed for and previously used in connection with an authorised activity, and / or, provide new buildings that are of exceptional design-quality that either reflect local character (incorporating design features distinctive to the local area) or are of a contemporary or innovative design;
- e) Conserve and enhance the character and quality of the landscape in accordance with Policy SE 10 (Landscape)
- f) Sustain and enhance the significance of any affected heritage assets (and their settings) in accordance with Policy SE 9 (Historic Environment)
- g) Not have an unduly adverse impact on the operation or amenity of any existing nearby uses;
- h) Not undermine the vitality and viability of rural settlements;
- i) Not result in the loss of a designated community asset;
- j) Not undermine the delivery of a strategic employment allocation;
- k) Not be of such a scale or type of development where its associated impacts would indicate that it would be more appropriately located within a settlement boundary, or designated employment site; and
- l) Be served by adequate infrastructure, in particular, safe access and not have a unduly adverse impact on local roads

The supporting statement accompanying the application, details that the new proposed buildings are to support an existing agricultural livestock enterprise. This would support an existing rural business comprising 300 acres of land within the vicinity in order to run the site as a beef unit. To support this enterprise there is a requirement to provide modern accommodation for the livestock in line with the welfare of the Farmed Animal Regulations. It must also be noted that agricultural development on the site is not new, as historically the farm was utilised for pig rearing until relatively recently.

The applicant has detailed that there would be a maximum of 270 cattle on the farm. However, the buildings proposed would have a capacity of 170 across both buildings which would be split between dairy heifers and beef stores. The numbers will fluctuate during the seasons as the applicant has detailed, that during the summer, for example, the dairy heifers would either not be on site or be out to graze and therefore not within the building.

It is accepted that the proposed development would be used to support an established agricultural business and would ensure that farming operations associated with the business are carried out in a modern way that adheres to the appropriate regulations. On this basis the principle of development is considered to be acceptable, subject to other material planning considerations.

Design of the proposals and the impact on the character of the landscape

Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.

Paragraph 135 of the framework lists 6 criteria, a) – f) with which planning policies and decisions should accord and details, amongst other things, that developments should be visually attractive and sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

Policy DC2 of the CHCMWA Neighbourhood Plan states that a development will be supported provided that, amongst other things, complements local landscape character in terms of urban and built form, spacing enclosure and definition of streets and spaces and maintains and enhances character and appearance of the landscape or existing townscape.

CSS Policy CSP1 states that new development should be well designed to respect the character, identity and context of Newcastle and Stoke-on-Trent's unique townscape and landscape and in particular, the built heritage, its historic environment, its rural setting, and the settlement pattern created by the hierarchy of centres.

Policy PSD7 (Design) of the Emerging Draft Local Plan states that, amongst other points that developments should contribute positively to an area's character and identity, creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness and sense of place in terms of:

- a) Height, scale, form and grouping;
- b) Choice of materials;
- c) External design features
- d) Massing of development
- e) Green infrastructure; and
- f) Relationship to neighbouring properties, street scene, and the wider neighbourhood

The proposed development would be sited on land to the east of the existing farming complex. This is made up of the main farmhouse and a series of brick barns. This development would be sited beyond the current confines of the built elements of the unit but would be directly adjacent to it.

The two new cattle rearing buildings would have the maximum dimensions 64m wide X 16m depth X 7.9m height and are identical in their appearance. They would also sit neatly, one behind the other which it is considered helps to limit the sprawl into this area of agricultural land. It is accepted that the buildings proposed are large in their floor area, however this is driven by agricultural and functional

need and when viewed alongside the existing farmstead and wider landscape it is considered that the proposal would appear a proportionate addition to the building and would not look out of character in this rural location.

Concerns were raised during the application process regarding the appearance and material palette utilised in the proposed buildings. As originally proposed, the entirety of the buildings were to be constructed from concrete panels, timber boarding and fibre cement roofing. Whilst these materials are not unusual for agricultural buildings, it is noted that in this particular case the existing barns and farmhouse are very attractive in their appearance and are largely constructed from facing brickwork. Given the siting of the buildings proposed, and their encroachment beyond the existing building line, the buildings would appear slightly intrusive within views from the wider landscape and whilst this is not considered to be cause for concern, it is considered that the original material palette would exacerbate the siting and scale of these buildings to such an extent that would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area.

As such the applicant has submitted amended plans which introduce an expanse of brickwork on the front elevation of the foremost building as well as the gable end of both proposed building. Arched openings have also been introduced onto the gable ends of the buildings. It is considered that these changes have resulted in the two buildings responding much more positively to the prevailing character and appearance of the existing farmstead and thus will complement the existing landscape far better.

The application also includes the siting of a new silage clamp which would be placed behind the rearmost building. This silage clamp will be typical and functional in appearance, yet its siting behind the new cattle buildings would largely screen this element from wider vantage points. In addition retrospective permission is sought for two silos that are positioned directly adjacent to the existing barn buildings. Whilst tall structures, these are not untypical of agricultural developments and are not considered to harm the character or appearance of the wider area.

A new area of hard surface would also be introduced to support the new buildings and silage clamp as well as a newly formed access drive. Whilst this would be a clear contrast to the existing grassed field and is somewhat an urbanising addition, this would be viewed wholly in association with an established farming enterprise. Therefore, on that basis it is not considered that this element of the scheme would have a significantly detrimental impact on the character and appearance of the wider landscape.

It is considered necessary to attach conditions to any permission granted to secure full and precise material samples. Subject to this condition, and considering the assessment above, it is considered that the development would not have any adverse impacts on the character and appearance of the wider landscape and therefore complies with the relevant policies of the development plan and the aims and objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Impact on residential amenity

Paragraph 135 of the NPPF lists a set of core land-use planning principles that should underpin decision-taking, one of which states that planning should always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Policy SE12 of the Emerging Draft Local Plan states at criterion 1 that “development proposals should demonstrate they will not result in unacceptable harm to the amenities of existing or future residents, businesses, or sensitive uses in the vicinity. Development that would have an unacceptable adverse impact on existing amenity will not be permitted. This includes the consideration of:

- Preventing unacceptable overlooking and loss of privacy.
- Avoiding unacceptable loss of sunlight and daylight.
- Mitigating the overbearing and dominating effect of new buildings. Minimising environmental disturbance or pollution.
- Addressing traffic generation, access, and parking.
- Protecting existing trees and landscaping that contribute to amenity value, and ensuring appropriate replacement or enhancement where necessary

The proposed development is sited within a relatively isolated location, with the closest residential building being the main farmhouse associated with the wider agricultural landholding which is sited 70m to the west of the application site. Beyond this, the closest residential dwellings are sited a further 181m north westwards along the road in a cluster of residential development of Weston Maer and Plum Park Cottages.

It is accepted that the introduction of two new, large cattle rearing facilities would have the possibility of introducing a heightened extent of noise and odour disruption to the site.

In their response to the application, whilst raising no objections the Parish Council have referred to the need to consider the impact of smells from the existing lagoon and to seek clarification from Environmental Health Officers on this point.

The application details that waste would go to a below ground slurry tank which would then be pumped to an existing storage lagoon around 460m northeast of the application site. The slurry tank was previously utilised for the intense pig rearing enterprise on the holding which has now ceased, and so it is considered that there is sufficient capacity to deal with slurry and waste from the application now proposed.

The application is also accompanied by an Odour Report. Environmental Health has raised no objections to the development, and have confirmed that they are happy with the conclusions of the report and given the rural nature of the property that there is more tolerance within communities from rural settings. Conditions should be attached to any permission granted to secure an odour management plan and hours of construction to safeguard residential amenity.

It must be noted that there is an extant planning permission on the barns adjacent to the application for conversion to residential use in line with planning permission 25/00075/FUL. Should this scheme be implemented, this application could not be considered acceptable given that the environmental and amenity impacts on occupants of these barns would be severe. The applicant owns both the application site and the site subject to planning permission 25/00075/FUL and they have confirmed that they do not wish to go forward with the permission to convert the barns. Your Officers have sought legal advice in respect of the most appropriate method to ensure that this planning permission cannot be implemented, and this is to secure this through a Unilateral Undertaking and/or S106 agreement. This would ensure that the objectives of the Council are secured and offers greater protection should either or both parcels of land be sold and no longer owner by the same owner(s).

Biodiversity Net Gain and Impact on Wildlife and Biodiversity

Saved Policy N3 of the Local Plan states that development proposals will be expected to avoid or minimise any adverse effects and, where appropriate, to seek to enhance the natural heritage of the Borough. This includes measure to retain habitats/features of nature conservation and protect them from adverse impacts and to replace habitats/features on at least an equivalent scale where the Council agrees that the loss of wildlife habitats cannot be avoided.

Policy NE1 of the CHCMAW Neighbourhood Plan states that new development will be supported that complements the landscape setting and character of the area, preserves or enhances and does not cause significant harm or degradation to the intrinsic rural character and ecological and environmental features of the area. This includes wildlife areas (including Local Wildlife Sites), Functioning Ecological Units of Maer Pool SSI, veteran trees and mature trees and hedgerows.

Policy SE8 of the Emerging Draft Local Plan (Biodiversity and Geodiversity) states that all development should ensure the conservation, enhancement and restoration of biodiversity and geodiversity, avoiding any significant adverse impacts on condition, and where relevant recovery, of all types of nature conservation sites, habitats, species and components of ecological networks or geological interests including, amongst other points, legally protected species.

The information submitted within the application details that the application site is fully comprised of modified grassland that has been regularly managed and grazed to a low sward throughout the year and there is considered to be of low ecological value.

The application site does however sit within an amber impact risk zone for Great Crested Newts (GCN) as such a consultation response from Naturespace requested the submission of further supporting information, particularly in light of the fact that there are 6 ponds within a 500m distance of the development proposal.

In responding to this request, the applicant has drawn attention to the fact that an ecological assessment that included eDNA surveys for GCN were carried out in association with planning application ref 25/00075/FUL in May 2024 and those results have now been included and shared as part of this application. These results show that there were no positive replicates of GCN found within relevant water bodies and that these results can be applied to this application. In reviewing this information Naturespace raise no further objections to the scheme and are satisfied that the development would not pose a risk to GCN. They have recommended that planning permission should be subject to conditions and informative to ensure best method work practises are utilised during the construction, as well as the recommendations of the ecological statement.

The application is also supported by a bat and barn owl survey that was previously conducted in relation to the proposal to convert barns on the adjacent parcel of land. Roosting bats were identified within the barns alongside the presence of a barn owl and swallows. However, this application site would have no direct impacts on these barns and is located approximately 26m to the rear of these buildings. The buildings are sited on modified grassland which is of low ecological value, some areas of which were historically host to other agricultural buildings. It is considered that suitable mitigation measures can be implemented, including controls over external lighting and suitable construction methods, to ensure no harm would result to protected species. The applicant has been asked to provide clarification on this aspect and this will be reported to the committee through a supplementary report.

Therefore in light of the above Officers are satisfied that the proposed development would not result in any adverse harm to protected species and biodiversity at the site.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is “an approach to development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before”. When applying biodiversity net gain principles, developers are encouraged to bring forward schemes that provide an overall increase in natural habitat and ecological features. The aim of BNG is to minimise losses of biodiversity and help to restore ecological networks. Sites must demonstrate a minimum of a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain as calculated using a Biodiversity Metric and a Biodiversity Gain Plan, with habitat used for net gain to be secured for a minimum of 30 years.

During the course of the application, amendments have been received in relation to the provision of BNG within the control of the applicant. The Draft Habitat and Management Plan accompanying this application is acceptable, and would be finalised and legally secured through the S106 agreement and statutory net gain condition.

Consultation with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has identified errors in the metric and whilst this is not considered to affect the overall BNG output or provision of habitats on the site, the applicant is compiling amendments to address these issues which will be submitted prior to the committee and a supplementary report will be prepared by officers.

Based on the information submitted, it is considered that the application will successfully deliver a BNG of medium distinctiveness habitat on-site and so subject to conditions and a legal agreement to secure the long term management of this, the development is considered to be acceptable.

Highway Safety

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that safe and suitable access to a site shall be achieved for all users and paragraph 116 states that development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts of development would be severe.

Policy IN2 of the Emerging Draft Local Plan states that “new development should make appropriate provision for access by sustainable modes of transport to protect the integrity of the highway network. All development should meet a number of criteria which includes Not cause unacceptable highway safety problems in relation to local traffic circulation and existing parking and servicing arrangements

(1e) and not cause severe residual impacts on the road network, either individually direct and / or cumulatively (1f).

The application would utilise an existing agricultural access directly from the adjacent highway. The access is already constructed to agricultural standards, benefiting from a surfaced entrance point, capable of allowing two vehicles to pass and for larger agricultural vehicles to also access as well as a surface track towards the application site.

Within their application the applicant has detailed that the previous agricultural use on the site related to pig rearing, which at its peak had a capacity of 2000 animals. The vehicle movements associated with this use were far greater than what is currently proposed. The applicant indicates that the following vehicles movements would take place generally to support the agricultural unit;

- For the dairy replacements – 1 load of cattle in and 1 load of cattle out per fortnight.
- For the beef cattle – 1 load of cattle in and 1 load of cattle out per fortnight
- 1 load of concentrated feed in to supplement home produced silage every 2 to 3 weeks
- An occasional load of straw.

It is therefore considered that the vehicle movements associated with the proposal and the access arrangements would not result in any adverse highway safety issues.

The Highway Authority also raise no objections to the proposal.

Therefore in light of the above it is considered that a safe and suitable access can be provided to the site and the development would accord with the requirements of the NPPF, notably Paragraphs 115 and 116 as well as the relevant policies of the development plan.

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

Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED

The scheme has been developed embracing good design and access and it is therefore considered that it will not have a differential impact on those with protected characteristics.

Classification: NULBC UNCLASSIFIED

APPENDIX

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

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

Policy CSP1: Design Quality
Policy ASP6: Rural Spatial Policy

Newcastle-under-Lyme Local Plan 2011 (NLP)

Policy N17: Landscape Character: General Considerations
Policy N19: Landscape Maintenance Areas

Chapel and Hill Chorlton, Maer and Aston and Whitmore Neighbourhood Plan

Policy DC2: Sustainable Design
Policy NE1: Natural Environment

Other Material Considerations include:

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (2024)

Planning Practice Guidance (as updated)

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

Policy PSD1: Overall Development Strategy
Policy PSD2: Settlement Hierarchy
Policy PSD3: Distribution of Development
Policy PSD4: Development Boundaries and the Open Countryside
Policy PSD7: Design
Policy IN2: Transport and Accessibility
Policy IN3: Access and Parking
Policy SE7: Biodiversity Net Gain
Policy SE8: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
Policy SE12: Amenity
Policy RUR1: Rural Economy

Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent Urban Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (2010)

Relevant Planning History

77/05264/N - Erect covered yard for housing of livestock – Permitted

97/00737/AGR - Replacement agricultural building – Permitted

08/00374/FUL - New Boundary Wall – Permitted

25/00075/FUL - Change of use of existing brick barns from agricultural to residential use and associated alterations for refurbishment into a dwelling – Permitted

Views of Consultees

Maer and Aston Parish Council have no objections in principle, however it is requested that odour concerns are investigated in relation to the existing lagoons as well as the size and frequency of additional traffic movement.

Naturespace raise no objections subject to conditions.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust have provided advisory comments on the on-site habitats to be created with regards to the BNG requirements.

Environmental Health Division raise no objections to the development subject to conditions including approved hours of construction and the reporting of unexpected contamination.

Active Travel England and the Environment Agency have no comments to make.

Highway Authority raise no objections to the proposal.

No comments have been received from **Waste Services** and so it is assumed that they have no comments to make on the application.

Representations

None received.

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/25/00759/FUL>

Background papers

Planning files referred to
Planning Documents referred to

Date report prepared

12th June 2026