

**STAFFORDSHIRE MOORLANDS DISTRICT COUNCIL
PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE**

12 August 2021

Application No:	SMD/2021/0296	
Location	Land at Cheadle Equestrian Centre, Eaves Lane, Cheadle, ST10 1RB	
Proposal	Erection of a rural workers dwelling	
Applicant	Jennifer Thompson, Vecthom Sports Horses	
Agent	Sammons Architectural Ltd	
Parish/ward	Cheadle	Date registered: 7 th May 2021
If you have a question about this report please contact: Benjamin Hurst tel: 07738506367 benjamin.hurst@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk		

REFERRAL

The application is before committee at the request of Cllr Mike Worthington.

1. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATION

REFUSE

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

2.1 The site comprises part of a private access road from Eaves Lane and a largely flat area of partly gravelled, partly grassed land, where the proposed dwelling would be constructed. The site is within a larger plot of land owned by the applicant, which includes grass fields, an outdoor equestrian exercise area, an indoor equestrian arena, a stable block, a 2-storey dwelling (Stable Cottage) with garage, and various other buildings and storage areas associated with the equine use. The existing stable building is a timber, American style barn that was built by the applicant, without planning permission, to replace a simple concrete run of old riding school stables.

2.2 The applicant's land is within a valley, which slopes upwards from Eaves Lane in the west, with the gradient increasing significantly to the rear of the 2-storey dwelling to the east of the site. The landscape is predominantly farmland, interspersed with hedgerows, narrow lanes, woodland and occasional buildings.

2.3 Eaves Lane is within the settlement of Cheadle according to the extant proposals map from 1998, the boundary for which is unchanged in this vicinity, in the adopted Local Plan. The countryside that surrounds Cheadle is described in the 'Landscape Character Assessment' (LCA) as *Ancient slope and valley farmlands* and amongst its key characteristics are *Small scale mainly ancient irregular fields bounded by*

trees and hedgerows and Isolated properties. The LCA also identifies a number of incongruous landscape features, which *include Localised industrial and residential development.*

3. THE APPLICATION AND DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL

3.1 The applicant seeks planning permission to build what would be a second dwelling on her land ownership, in an isolated, other rural location that is outside the settlement boundary of Cheadle. She makes the case that it is essential for her to live in the proposed dwelling as a rural worker engaged in the commercial interest of her premises and that the existing dwelling, Stable Cottage, currently occupied by her parents, is not suitable. The application is very similar to an application (SMD/2019/0088) that was refused planning permission and dismissed at appeal less than two years ago. The site of the proposed dwelling would be on the southern edge of the appellant's land, to the west of the stable building, the indoor equestrian arena and other associated buildings. The nearest part of the proposed dwelling would be more than 30 metres from the brick-faced building by the stable and several metres lower than it and the other main Equestrian Centre buildings.

3.2 The proposal would be a 2-storey, four bedroomed brick building (including a room identified on plan as a ground floor office) under a plain clay tile roof. A single storey outrigger to the rear would supplement ground floor space to provide a large open plan kitchen diner and living area; a utility/shower room; a boot room; and an office. A post and rail fence supplemented with a native hedgerow, would enclose and form a domestic curtilage to the front and rear of the property.

3.3 The applicant did not seek any pre application advice from the Council regarding the application. Details of the application scheme can be viewed at:

<http://publicaccess.staffsmoorlands.gov.uk/portal/servlets/ApplicationSearchServlet?PKID=128617>

4. RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 The planning history has particular relevance because it confirms the presence of an 'available' dwelling at 'Stable Cottage' that is already located on site and under the applicant's ownership, registered as land title SF294781. It also references those permissions that provide the authorised status of land uses relating to the equestrian enterprise as a riding school.

78/05665/OLDDC Alteration to old dilapidated farm building to form stables and tack room with loft. Approved (the building that later became 'Stable Cottage').

81/09881/OLDDC Covered Riding Arena and stables (provided inside arena building) for 20 working riding school horses. Approved.

82/11438/OLDDC Conversion of existing stable block into instructor's living accommodation for temporary 2 year period. Approved. ('Stable Cottage')

83/011831/OLDDC Extension to the covered riding area building to form viewing area. Approved.

83/011853/OLDDC Line of 8 stables adjacent to indoor riding arena, to provide for the limit of 20 working horses. Approved.

84/13537/OLDDC Extension to stable block to add one stable and two hay stalls. Approved.

84/13666/OLDDC Instructor's Living Accommodation, renewed temporary permission for 5 years. Approved (Stable Cottage).

85/14412/OLDDC Full conversion to permanent instructor's accommodation in the form of a two storey three bedroom dwelling. Approved (Stable Cottage).

92/1183 Feedstore, foaling box, covered standings, catering and toilets. Approved.

91/0522 pony stalls, tack rooms and office. Approved.

SMD/2019/0088 Erection of a rural workers dwelling. Refused and Dismissed at Appeal.

4.2 Following her purchase, the applicant, without planning permission, removed and replaced the original pre-existing stables with a new timber built 'American barn' style building.

5. PLANNING POLICIES RELEVANT TO THE DECISION

5.1 The Development Plan comprises of:

- The Local Plan Development Document (adopted Sep 2020)

Adopted Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan - Sep 2020

5.2 The following Local Plan policies are relevant to the application:-

- SS1 Development Principles
- SS10 Other Rural Area Strategy
- H1 New Housing Development
- DC1 Design Considerations
- DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
- NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
- T1 Sustainable Transport

Staffordshire Moorlands Design Guide

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

6. CONSULTATIONS

A site notice was posted and displayed on the 18th May, Expired on the 8th June.

14 near neighbours were notified in writing with a letter dated the 18th March.

Public response to consultation

6.1 Two responses have been received. Both object to the proposal and their comments have been summarised below:

- We objected to the original application (SMD/2019/0088) in 2019 on several grounds, and many of these original concerns are still relevant, this is, in essence, the same application as in 2019, and the dwelling would still be very large for the needs of a rural worker.
- Stable Cottage, a large 3 bedroom detached dwelling with a separate garage, is already on site and was initially provided as a dwelling for a worker at the riding centre. Consequently there are already two people living on site.
- The sewerage filtration system will drain on to the sloping side of the valley and the field is often waterlogged in winter. Its natural drainage is downhill onto the poorly maintained unadopted track and public footpath.
- The small bore pipe struggles to provide the three properties with adequate water pressure now, and obviously, the more water demands placed on the system, the worse the problem gets.
- The track is poorly maintained at present, particularly upwards to the property, Plantation House. This is due to a combination of water damage from poor field drainage, and heavy business traffic and delivery vehicles. Expansion of that business, 2 more cars for extra resident workers, construction traffic during the build, and the potential for extra field water can only compound the problem, further detracting not only from the quality of life of the existing owners, but also from the potential saleable value of our respective properties.

Cheadle Town Council

6.4 Object on the grounds of size and scale, its proximity to the Greenbelt and open countryside.

SCC Highway Authority

6.5 No Objection. Eaves Lane is a rural lane with multiple residential properties served off it, an additional dwelling off the existing access track will not have a significant effect on the highway.

Environmental Health

6.6 No objection subject to conditions relevant to working hours, unexpected contamination, methods of demolition and construction, drainage, and lighting.

Coal Authority

6.7 No Objection providing no development is carried out before a scheme of intrusive investigations has been carried out on site to establish the risks posed to the development by past shallow coal mining activity; and any remediation works and/or mitigation measures to address land instability arising from coal mining legacy, as may be necessary, have been implemented on site in full in order to ensure that the site is made safe and stable for the development proposed. The intrusive site investigations and remedial works shall be carried out in accordance with authoritative UK guidance.

Severn Trent Water

6.8 No Objection. There would be minimal impact on the public sewerage system.

7. OFFICER COMMENT AND PLANNING BALANCE

Introduction

7.1 This is a very similar application to the one that was dismissed at appeal less than two years ago, to build a dwelling for a rural worker in an isolated 'other rural' location, outside the settlement of Cheadle, where planning permission should only be granted in exceptional circumstances. With this submission the proposal has been revised to make reductions to the size of the proposed dwelling, make it look more like a traditional red brick 'Moorlands' dwelling, and some additional supporting information has been provided. The approach here, is to follow the considerations point for point, as they were set out by the Planning Inspector, and to consider carefully, against his comments, whether the objections have been addressed to the extent that matters now weight in favour of the development. The main issues are:

- The effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area
- The effect of the proposal on land stability
- Whether the proposal would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside and, if so, whether there is an essential need for a second dwelling to accommodate rural worker(s)

Design and Visual Impact (Character and Appearance)

7.2 The Inspector began his decision by setting out the impact and harm that the development would impose on the character and appearance of the area, before going onto consider whether the development could be exceptionally provided in such a location and, effectively, whether there are factors that would outweigh the extent of that harm.

7.3 The Inspector makes the following concluding comments in respect of the previously proposed development's impacts:

The design, scale, massing and position of the proposed dwelling, would make it a visually prominent feature that would be seen across several hundred metres of open countryside to the east of Cheadle. When seen with the existing equestrian buildings and Stable Cottage beyond, it would have an urbanising effect on the landscape that would detract from its

character and appearance.....Some new tree planting is proposed to the front and side of the proposed dwelling. However, even once mature, this would not satisfactorily screen the dwelling in views from the west, where it would appear as an incongruous feature in the landscape.

7.4 Due to the vegetation and sloping geography of the land, and its position relative to public footpaths and Cheadle, the proposed dwelling would be most visible in views from the west and north. With this proposal the development would occupy essentially the same site and largely the same positioning as that of the previous proposal, albeit some reorientation has turned this proposal so that its front elevation would be square on to the footpath opposite. However, there have been some revisions to the design, scale and massing of the proposed dwelling that must be acknowledged.

7.5 The front elevation of the proposed dwelling, at 11.7m would be slightly wider than that of the previous proposal (11.12m). However, with this proposal the applicant has omitted an adjoining double garage, a central contemporary glazing feature, and used segmented brick arches instead of straight lintels above windows. They have reduced the height and mass of the roof by reducing the eaves height by 0.6m, ridge height by 1.5m, and narrowing the two storey side gable from a width of 8.2m to 6.2m.

7.6 Despite these changes, the design, scale, massing and position of the proposed dwelling, would still make it a visually prominent feature that would be seen across several hundred metres of open countryside to the east of Cheadle. The building would still be seen as a large detached brick dwelling, in an exposed and prominent countryside location, albeit the dwelling would be less large than that of the previous proposal, and there would still be significant harm here. When seen with the existing equestrian buildings and Stable Cottage beyond, it would have an urbanising effect on the landscape that would detract from its character and appearance. This harm is not obviously resolvable by simply reducing the size of the dwelling, because, in this location and positioning any dwelling would appear exposed and prominent.

7.7 For these reasons, the proposed development would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with policies DC1 (design) and DC3 (landscape and settlement setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and with the NPPF, in this regard.

Land Stability (potential presence of close surface coal workings)

7.8 The site falls within a Development High Risk Area according to the Coal Authority (CA). The CA expressed fundamental concern in respect of the previous proposal and a 'coal risk assessment' had not been submitted. The Inspector found therefore, that the development would be at an unacceptable risk from land instability. The property is in an area where the Coal Authority believe there is coal at or close to the surface. This coal may have been worked at some time in the past. The potential presence of coal workings at or close to the surface should be considered prior to any site works or future development activity.

7.9 With this application a 'Coal Mining Risk Assessment', prepared by EnviroSolution Ltd, has been provided. The report identifies that the principal risks to

the development are from the potential presence of unrecorded shallow coal mine workings and possible unrecorded mine entries. It recommends that intrusive site investigations (3, 10m deep, water flushed boreholes) are required to further assess this risk.

7.10 The Coal Authority have confirmed that they have no objection, providing no development is carried out until these investigations have been carried out and any necessary remediation works have been implemented on site in full in order to ensure the site is made safe and stable for the development proposed. Typically, this will involve voids pumped and filled with grout materials, and the Coal Authority do not anticipate any necessary work as being beyond what might otherwise be considered an industry standard.

7.11 Therefore, for the reasons given above, it can be concluded that the proposed development would not be at an unacceptable risk from land instability and therefore there would be no conflict with paragraphs 170, 178 and 179 of the Framework. In these regards, the objection to the previous proposal has been addressed.

Isolated dwelling in the countryside and essential need to accommodate rural worker(s)

7.12 The Inspector then went on to consider whether the previous proposal would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside and, if so, whether there is an essential need for a dwelling to accommodate rural worker(s). The word 'isolated' is not defined in the NPPF. In this case, the proposal would be located a distance to the west of, and at a lower elevation, than the main existing Equestrian Centre buildings and a much greater distance from Stable Cottage. Furthermore, it would be several hundred metres outside the nearest settlement boundary. In the view of the Inspector, the location of the proposed dwelling means it would be isolated and in the countryside. With reference to Policy SS10 (Other Rural Strategy), H1 (New Housing Development) and paragraph 79 of the NPPF, such dwellings should be avoided unless one of the listed exceptions apply, of which only bullet point 5b of H1 or subparagraph a) of paragraph 79, could apply in this case, namely a new dwelling that meets an essential local need as accommodation for a rural worker. Before considering the needs of the business, in respect of this, the Inspector began with the comment:

From the limited evidence, it is not possible for me to reach a firm conclusion regarding all the lawful uses at the Equestrian Centre.

7.13 This became an issue particularly because, shortly after the purchase of the site. The applicant, without planning permission, replaced a simple run of small concrete stables with a larger 'American' style barn with stable stalls within. The work has improved the stabling facility so that larger more valuable horses might be stabled. However, without a planning application the planning authority has not had an opportunity to consider or establish whether the development has introduced changes to the land use that might raise concerns relevant to planning control (e.g. traffic flow, extent of community access and benefit, employment) – in the absence of a relevant planning application, it is not clear whether the site now lawfully provides facility for livery, a riding school, breeding facility, or private pursuit. This of

course makes it difficult and problematic when it comes to assessing the essential needs of a business where elements have not been authorised or established as lawful. This is still a matter that has not been resolved or progressed by the applicant.

The activity and viability of the existing business

7.14 Nevertheless, in the following comments the Inspector considered, in respect of the previous proposal, whether there was a viable business operating at present or that would remain viable for the foreseeable future:

No substantive documentary evidence has been provided in relation to the business before the acquisition of the land that includes the site; or in relation to the business that existed on this land prior to the acquisition of it; or, in relation to the current business, for which the appeal development is sought..... From the submitted statements and anecdotal evidence, I am not satisfied that there is a viable business operating at present or that would remain viable for the foreseeable future

A viable business is something that would be necessary in order to be able to demonstrate that there is an essential need for a second rural worker's dwelling. It is necessary to understand the detail and viability of the business to determine whether there is an essential need for a worker to live in a second dwelling on the site and whether the business can financially sustain the provision of a second dwelling as viable investment. That will involve looking at how the business has arrived and developed to a current position, how it currently trades and suggested projections.

7.15 The land was purchased by the applicant in November 2018. A riding school within this land existed in the late 1970s / early 1980s, with various incremental changes and additions undertaken subsequently, according to the planning history contained in this report. The Cheadle site has only been in the ownership of the applicant for a relatively short period of time and, therefore, a retrospective review of the business origins, before purchase, should assist with an understanding of how it operates and is viable. With this application, some additional evidence had been provided relating to the business before the purchase of the Cheadle property, amounting to the 2017 and 2018 accounts for a business registered as VSH Dressage Ltd, 2018 accounts for an unlimited business referred to as Vecthom Sportshorses, a letter from the equine vet, and a letter from a business acquaintance/customer. The vet has known the applicant for 15 years and is of the opinion that she has built a 'very successful business' over that time, however, he does not qualify that opinion, it is not clear what he considers to be successful. Moreover, he confirms that the applicant has only more recently started to breed quality sports horses. A previous customer, Paula Charlton, appears to be describing an arrangement where over the years the applicant has sourced and imported horses for her stud, this does not confirm an established, profitable and successful breeding programme, and this ties in with the vets assertion that breeding is a more recent venture. Throughout the application process dialogue has remained open with continuing discussion and an exchange of correspondence, providing the applicant with opportunity to supplement their application with additional evidence and explanation.

7.16 Prior to the purchase of Stable Cottage and the Cheadle site, the applicant and her parents lived as a family at Beech Villa at Blackshaw Moor from 2003. In available planning history her parents were stating themselves to be the owners of Beech Villa, up until April 2015 when, in planning applications, the applicant began to state herself to be the owner, after, she says, she purchased Beech Villa from her parents. Retrospective planning permissions were granted at Beech Villa for unauthorised developments already carried out, including a manege and stable barn, the use of both were restricted to private enjoyment by condition which prohibited any trade or business. Despite this, there were three limited companies registered to Beech Villa of which Miss J Thompson was director - Vechtom Sports Horses Agency Ltd, VSH Transport Ltd, and VSH Competition Horses Ltd all of which were dissolved by the end of 2017. The applicant has not submitted any accounts or details that explain these businesses.

7.17 Stable cottage was bought in Nov 2018 for £603,000, funded by the sale of Beech Villa for £555,000 and a business mortgage loan. Currently, active companies for which the applicant is director are listed as VSH Dressage Horses Ltd registered in May 2016, so transferred from Beech Villa to the Cheadle property, and Vechtom Stud Ltd registered in June 2018. The applicant has not provided accounts or details relating to Vechtom Stud Ltd as it is not currently trading, it is discounted as making contribution to existing activity or viability. Additionally, it is said, there is a third business, not registered as a limited company, Vechtom Sportshorses.

7.18 Accounts have been provided for VSH Dressage Horses Ltd made (after tax) £10,285 in yr 1 (as at May 2017), £16,201 in yr 2 (as at May 2018), *Loss £931 (as at May 2019)* *Loss £698 (as at May 2020)*. The applicant explains that the losses referred to in 2019 and 2020 result from a cumulation of animal losses, disruption from business relocation, Brexit, and then the Covid pandemic. It is said that the climate has unnerved people and made them less open to making significant financial investments but also raised issues with transportation and importation cross border boundaries etc for which the business is extremely sensitive to.

7.19 The third business, Vechtom Sportshorses which has been trading since 2017 (according to statements submitted) with pre-tax profits £27,776 (as at March 2018) £26,080 (as at March 2019) £28,352 (as at March 2020) £37,720 as at (March 2021). Appears to be at the core of the applicant's business and profitability. A google search of Cheadle Equestrian Centre or Vechtom Sporthorses links one website of substance Vechtomsporthorses.com. The website appears to describe three strands to the business:

- Livery of varying service levels, from £120 -£200 per week, with options to rent time on the arenas from £20 per horse per hour (13 stables in total, however, website also says "the yard is mostly private of my own showjumpers so there are just a few spaces available making this a non-livery yard")
- Importation of Warmbloods Sport Horses from Europe. The applicant explains that she imports and sells quality sports horses to elite competitors, the horses do not often stay at her yard for long, and her trade varies throughout the year.

- Sales Livery plus 10% commission, the applicant will stable and market a horse for a customer

7.20 Currently there are no horses available for sale through the website. In an exchange of correspondence where queries were raised about the information available, the applicant distances herself from the website, which she says is not up to date, she prefers to point to her Facebook page. The page was created on 4th May 2013. It currently has 12,089 followers and 11,797 likes. The applicant says “the page is constantly updated and several horses (approximately 45) have been listed on here for sale since the start of the year”. However, on review, it is not clear how that detail is extracted from the more general social media exchanges that appear on the page, or whether horses were imported, bred on site, private horses of her own, or horses sold for others.

7.21 The applicant does confirm however, that currently livery is reduced to two customers, one customer stables a horse while it receives training at the centre and the other owns two with both her and her son having training at the centre. The applicant explains that the main reason for the reduction in livery numbers is less to do with the capacity taken by her own private horses, as explained on the website, but mainly due to losses which have occurred as a result of her not living in a suitable dwelling on site. It is said that owners lack confidence and are concerned that if their horses were sick or injured then the centre would be slow to act due to the applicant not living on site.

7.22 It seems clear that stud breeding and foaling has not formed a significant part of business activity or profitability. Vecthom Stud Ltd is not currently trading and VSH Dressage Horses Ltd has been trading at a loss. The applicant accepts such activity has been sparse, in one statement it is explained as a cumulation of animal losses, disruption from business relocation, Brexit, and the Covid pandemic; and in another statement she points directly at losses incurred because she does not live on site and has been unable to deal with problematic foaling.

7.23 The applicant does not discuss in her submissions the predicted build costs associated with the new dwelling, how that would be funded, and deliver return as an investment for the business. Estimated build costs would, it is thought, be at least £300,000, made all the more costly by land stability mitigations to deal with historic coal mining. The applicant anticipates however that should the dwelling be permitted the build would be funded through savings with any shortfall added onto the commercial mortgage.

7.24 In summary and conclusion, the evidence does appear to suggest that the applicant is turning some steady but moderate profit from her livery services, which is limited because capacity is taken by her own private horses; and some trade in mainly horses that she says are imported from Europe, which are sold unbroken and do not need to be stabled by her for any particular length of time. In both of those respects, it is not clear why it is essential to provide a second dwelling on the site to support current business practices as described, which appear to continue to function while the applicant lives off site. There is clearly some business activity on the site but this does appear to be mixed with and against considerable private interest and pursuit as an owner, experienced rider and trainer, for which there is no

specific exception policy to provide a dwelling in the isolated other rural location. There is claim that the applicant's ability to start breeding and foaling her own horses, as a regular source of income, is curtailed because she does not have a dwelling on site. However, there is no evidence to show how such attempts might fair if she had been living on site in the existing dwelling at Stable Cottage, potentially the losses and complications that she refers to might not have occurred. If there was an essential need for the applicant to live on site, the occupation of Stable Cottage would be immediate priority. It is not clear that the profits reported demonstrate a level of viability and profitability to obviously support the further investment and construction of a sizeable dwelling on site. Overall, this application submission does not, in these regards, address the Inspector's objection. This second revised application does not satisfactorily demonstrate that there is a viable business operating on the applicant's land for which there would be an essential need to provide a rural worker's dwelling.

Functional need for a second dwelling to accommodate a rural worker

7.25 There is claimed to be an essential need for just a single worker to live permanently at or near to the Equestrian Centre - the applicant. The reasons for this are to ensure the welfare and security of horses and foals stabled at the Equestrian Centre throughout the day and night, should they become ill, get into difficulties such as becoming cast, or to protect from being drugged or stolen. A response to an animal in such difficulty would be needed in a very short time - a matter of just a few minutes. However, there is already a sizeable dwelling on site under the applicant's ownership. Stable Cottage was originally provided to accommodate the previous owner as a rural worker at the facility. The applicant claims that Stable Cottage would be unsuitable for them to live in for a number of reasons, including the distance from the stables for monitoring and the accessibility to them in an emergency, which would inhibit the welfare and security of the horses. In considering whether 'Stable Cottage' might already provide suitable accommodation and whether there is a functional need for a new second dwelling, the Inspector made the following comments:

CCTV cameras, microphones and alarms would seem to be an effective means of monitoring the welfare and security of the horses throughout the day and night..... the distance [between stable cottage and stables] is just a few hundred metres and could be travelled in a short time, particularly if in response to an emergency in the stables....the eastern entrance to the stable block is significantly closer to Stable Cottage. Furthermore, the concrete steps with a wooden handrail leading from the entrance up to the grass field, and gates on both sides of the field leading to Stable Cottage, indicate that a route between them is both intended and with some basic maintenance undertaken, practical. no substantive evidence has been provided to show that it would not be possible to connect a CCTV system, with microphones and alarms, to Stable Cottage where the images and sounds could be monitored.....

7.26 The proposed dwelling would face in a generally north westerly direction with its side elevation towards the stable block, although partly screened by the proposed garage and by hedge planting on the side boundary. The appellant's stated intention is to be able to monitor the stable block and hear any signs of disturbance from the animals as a result of this proximity, drawing upon their experience in the industry. The short distance between the proposed dwelling and the stable block would also

enable a swift response to be made as necessary. CCTV cameras are installed in the stable block to monitor the animals, with the images currently relayed to an office at the western end of the stable block. To reach the western entrance of the stable block from Stable Cottage would involve travelling along the access drive in a somewhat circuitous route, a distance seven or eight times longer than would be the case from the proposed dwelling. Nevertheless, the distance is just a few hundred metres and could be travelled in a short time, particularly if in response to an emergency in the stables. The eastern entrance to the stable block is significantly closer to Stable Cottage. Furthermore, the concrete steps with a wooden handrail leading from the entrance up to the grass field, and gates on both sides of the field leading to Stable Cottage, indicate that a route between them is both intended and with some basic maintenance undertaken, practical.

7.27 This application still does not provide any substantive evidence to demonstrate why technology systems, could not, wirelessly or otherwise, relay digital images, sounds or alarms to Stable Cottage, perhaps using wifi or data signal. Such a system would presumably be essential to alert any occupant, regardless of where they live, to potential emergency or distress, rather than simply leaving it to chance that they might hear noises in their sleep and wake up. Once alerted to an emergency or distress the response time from Stable Cottage, would be very similar to that of a response from the proposed dwelling. In respect of this, there is no technical evidence that demonstrates there is no data signal coverage or that wireless signals cannot be boosted.

7.28 Stable Cottage is owned by the applicant, who has allowed the dwelling to be occupied by her parents since acquiring it, while she lives off site in nearby settlement. At the appeal hearing one parent was said to be employed part-time in the applicant's business, a role that is not one for which there is an essential need for them to live at or near the Equestrian Centre. However, more latterly with this application, the applicant makes the case that her parents are both elderly and require care. Her mother in particular has medical conditions and disabilities and doctor's evidence has been presented in respect of that. The applicant's preference not to share the dwelling with their parents, and their particular care needs in the future, does not alter the fact that a dwelling house exists near to the Equestrian Centre, which could be used for a rural worker to live in, were there to be an essential need for them to do so. Overall, this application submission does not, in these regards, address or outweigh the planning harm identified in the Inspector's objection. This second revised application does not satisfactorily demonstrate that if there was a viable business operating, it would not be practical with some investment, for Stable Cottage to be used as such a rural worker's dwelling, without a significant risk of harm to any animals

7.29 Moreover, the Inspector made the following comments about the size of the previously proposed dwelling relative to the need for a single rural worker:

the size of the proposed dwelling would be unnecessarily large relative to the stated need for a single rural worker, notwithstanding that parts of the building could be used for personal and business use. That the appellant may want to start a family at some point in the future has no direct bearing on this matter. Furthermore, the appellant's desire to live near to Cheadle and to bring the Equestrian Centre back into productive use do not in themselves constitute an essential need for a large dwelling in the countryside.

7.30 With this proposal, there have been notable reductions in these respects. A roof space media room and an upstairs bedroom have been omitted. The proposed dwelling would however, effectively contain 4 generous bedrooms, including the room identified as a ground floor office, and would also include a large open plan living room, 8 person dining space, entrance hall, and a utility/bootroom space. The size of the proposed dwelling would still be unnecessarily large relative to the stated need for a single rural worker, notwithstanding that parts of the building could be used for personal and business use. That the applicant may want to start a family at some point in the future has no direct bearing on this matter. Furthermore, the applicants desire to live near to Cheadle and to bring the Equestrian Centre back into productive use do not in themselves constitute an essential need for a large dwelling in the countryside.

Other Considerations

7.31 The application form specifies the use of a septic tank to provide for foul drainage and a soakaway to control surface water drainage. The submitted site plan indicates the use of a packaged treatment plant with irrigation to a field in the applicant's ownership. The flow of surface water can be controlled sustainably through use of soakaway, discharging on to land under the applicant's ownership and preventing discharge on to the shared access. There is no reason why drainage can not be dealt with in this manner under the separate building and environmental regulations. There is no issue of harm raised here.

7.32 There has not been any objection from Severn Trent Water. There is no evidence that the supply of mains water, already provided to three properties, including the equestrian buildings. This is effectively a civil matter between land owners. There is no issue of harm raised here.

7.33 The track is privately owned and maintained serving a number of properties, including the equestrian facility that has a history of commercial use. It has the expected character of a stoned rural lane or farm track, and varies in surface condition accordingly. Maintenance is essentially a civil matter between private owners and users. However, it clearly serves a number of properties and over and above existing use, the introduction of an additional single dwelling should not substantially increase maintenance demands.

Conclusion and Planning Balance

7.34 In respect of the previous proposal the Inspector made the following conclusions:

I am not satisfied that there is a viable business operating on the appellant's land for which there would be an essential need to provide a rural worker's dwelling. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence before me that shows that if there was such a business, it would not be practical with some investment, for Stable Cottage to be used as such a rural worker's dwelling, without a significant risk of harm to any animals.....For these reasons, the proposed development would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside, and an essential need for such a dwelling to accommodate a rural worker has not been demonstrated.

7.35 Despite some moderate revision to the proposal and reduction in size and scale, the dwelling would still be a large, visually prominent feature, seen across open countryside to the east of Cheadle. It would, when seen with the existing equestrian buildings and Stable Cottage beyond, have a harmful urbanising effect on the landscape that would detract from its character and appearance, and would in itself appear as an incongruous feature in the landscape. This would therefore conflict with policies SS10, DC1, and DC3 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan and with the NPPF in this regard. The dwelling would be isolated in the countryside and, against that harm and conflict with the development plan, there is no exceptional reason or provision to be made for the dwelling, as an essential need for such a dwelling to accommodate a rural worker has not been demonstrated. The development would, in these regards, conflict with policy SS10 and H1 of the Local Plan and the NPPF, and in this case the rural exception policies do not provide reason to outweigh or set aside the harm identified above.

8. RECOMMENDATION

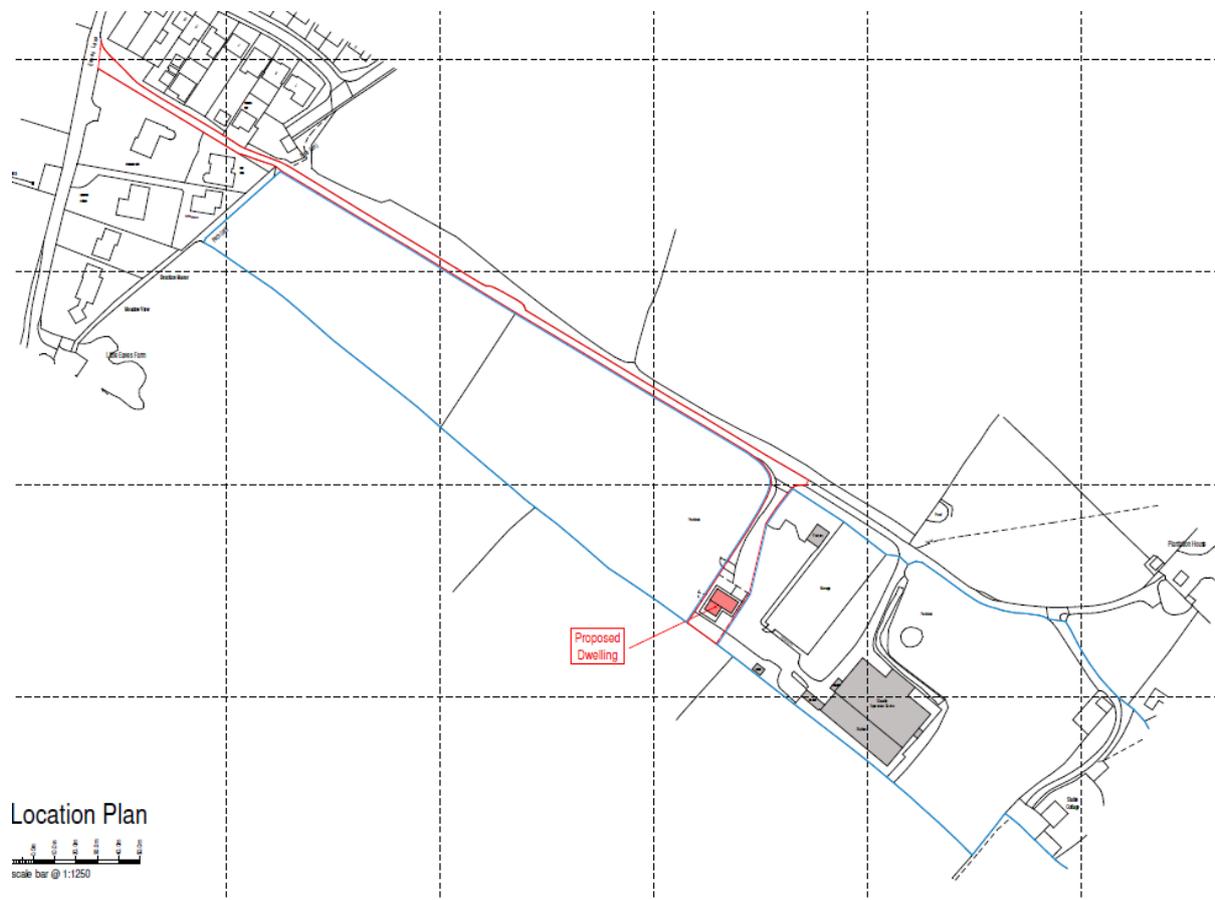
A. That planning permission be REFUSED for the Erection of a Rural Worker's Dwelling, for the following reasons:

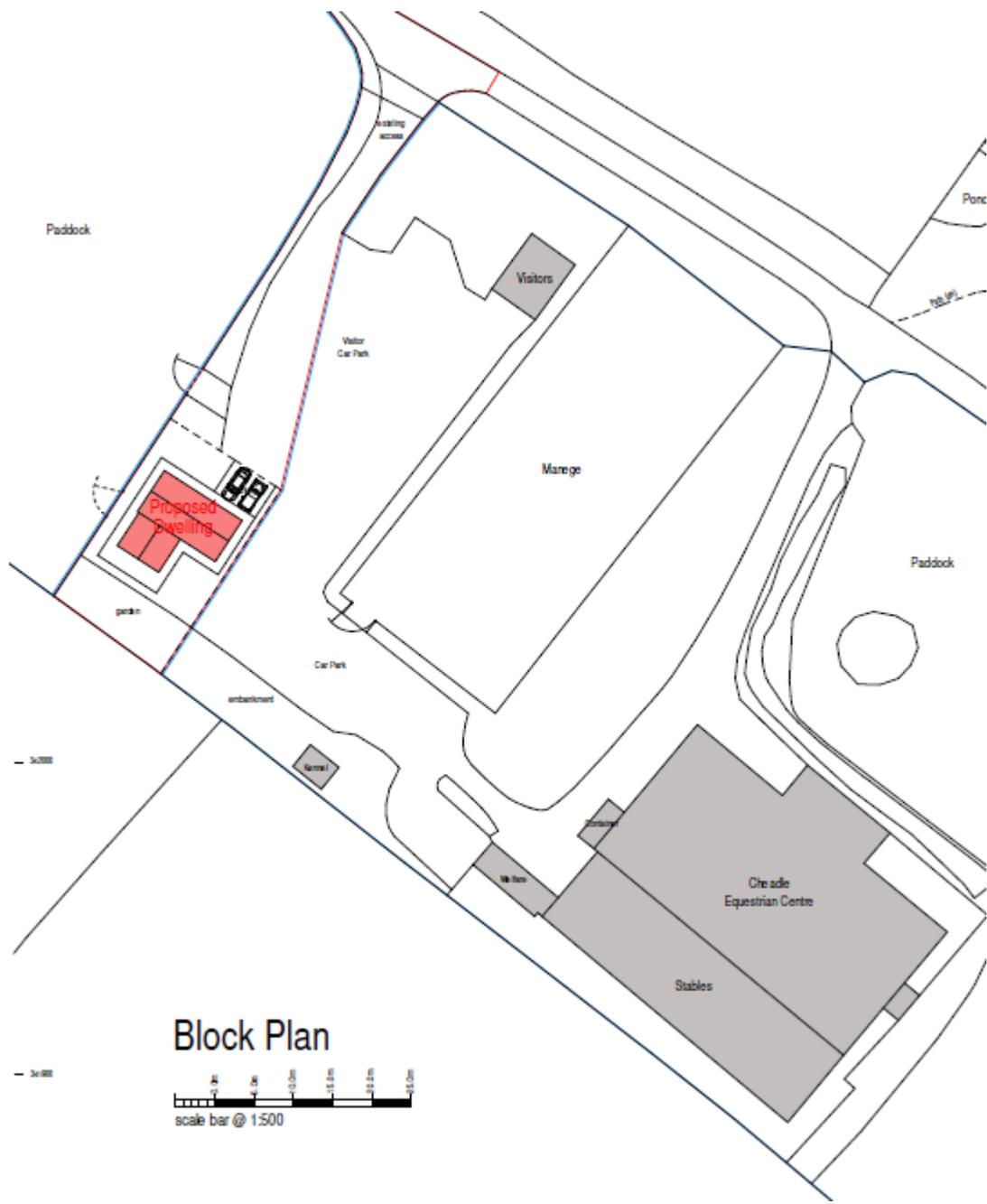
1. The design, scale, massing and position of the proposed dwelling, would make it a visually prominent feature that would be seen across several hundred metres of open countryside to the east of Cheadle. When seen with the existing equestrian buildings and Stable Cottage beyond, it would have an urbanising effect on the landscape that would detract from its character and appearance. This harm could not be mitigated through tree planting or landscaping, because, even once mature, it would not satisfactorily screen the dwelling in views from the west, where it would appear as an incongruous feature in the landscape. For these reasons, the proposed development would adversely affect the character and appearance of the area. It would therefore conflict with policies SS10 (other rural area strategy), DC1 (design) and DC3 (landscape and settlement setting) of the Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan September 2020 (SMLP) and with the NPPF, in this regard.

2. The submitted evidence does not satisfactorily demonstrate that there is a viable business operating on the land for which there would be an essential need to provide a rural worker's dwelling. Furthermore, there is no substantive evidence that shows that if there was such a business, it would not be practical with some investment, for Stable Cottage to be used as such a rural worker's dwelling, without a significant risk of harm to any animals. For these reasons, the proposed development would be an isolated dwelling in the countryside, and an essential need for such a dwelling to accommodate a rural worker has not been demonstrated. Therefore, the proposal would conflict with Policies SS10 (Other Rural Areas Strategy) of the SMLP and with the NPPF, in this regard.

B. In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions/in formatives/planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued,

the Head of Development Services has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Planning Applications Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's Decision.





Block Plan

