Outline application for replacement of timber chalet and two static caravans with one dwelling

Lower Leaches Farm
Ashworth Road
Rochdale
OL11 5UN

Planning Statement

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Application Site

The application site is Leaches Farm, located off Ashworth Road, in open countryside to the west of Wolstenholme, designated as Green Belt in the Rochdale UDP. The farm is located on either side of an access track, which goes on to serve a further agricultural development at Cockshouse. Higher Leaches Farm is on the northern side of the access track, and Lower Leaches Farm to the South.

To the south of the access track is a traditional farmhouse with attached stone barn, set under a continuous stone slate roof. Located to the west of the farmhouse and barn are two static caravans, and a timber chalet, which have been occupied for residential purposes for over 30 years.

To the north west of the farmhouse, across the highway, is a pair of traditional agricultural buildings. The eastern barn is of stone construction beneath a stone slate roof, with the western barn having a grey slate roof. The style and position of window openings in the western barn, suggests that it was historically three cottages.

Proposed Development

Planning permission is sought for the redevelopment of Leaches Farm through the submission of three separate planning applications. This application relates to development at Lower Leaches Farm, and seeks outline planning approval for the replacement of three existing residential units (two static caravans and a timber chalet) to a four-bedroom dwelling.

Planning History

Aerial photography shows the timber chalet and caravans to have been in the same position on site since 2000 (see photographs 1 and 2). However, the three structures were installed on the site in the early 1980s, (the first caravan positioned on site in 1984). The timber chalet and caravans have provided independent residential accommodation for both holiday makers and local workers for over 30 years, with occupation periods extending between short term weekly stays, and longer term lets (up to 12 months).

Photograph 1 - January 2000



Photograph 2 - December 2005



Planning approval has never been sought for residential use of this land, or for the siting of structures upon it. However, a change of use of the land has taken place, with the land on which the timber chalet and caravans are sited changed from agricultural to residential use over thirty years ago. The site would therefore have a lawful residential use under the ten-year rule. Whilst caravans may be regarded as movable structures, in this instance the caravans are permanent structures. They are situated on prepared ground, have been provided with services in the form of an electricity supply, water supply and foul drainage, and have been on site for over 30 years. The timber chalet is a permanent structure on the site (set directly upon stone foundations, and connected to services). All three buildings have been occupied as independent and unrestricted residential units for over 30 years, and would be regarded as being lawful residential properties under the four-year rule.

Planning Policy Background

Policy G4 'Protecting Green Belt Land' of the Adopted Rochdale Core Strategy 2016 restricts development in the Green Belt to those development that are deemed appropriate by national planning policies (unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated). Policy G4 goes on to state that support will be given to those development that involve limited infilling and redevelopment where this maintains beneficial uses and does not harm the Green Belt.

Paragraph 145 of the NPPF sets out that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt is inappropriate, unless the development meets one of a number of exceptions. Those exceptions that are relevant to the proposed development are;

d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;

g) limited infilling or the partial or complete redevelopment of previously development land, whether redundant or in continuing use (excluding temporary buildings), which would:

- *Not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development; or*
- *Not cause substantial harm to the openness of the Green Belt, where the development would re-use previously developed land and contribute to meeting an identified affordable housing need within the area of the local planning authority."*

Principle of Development

It is considered that the proposed development would comply with the exceptions at both points (d) and (g) under paragraph 145 of the NPPF.

With regards to the replacement of a building, in a High Court decision (Tanridge District Council v DCLG) it has been acknowledged that the term 'building' for the purposes of the NPPF, can refer to either singular or multiple structures on a site. This application seeks approval for the replacement of three existing residential dwellings with one dwelling. The existing dwellings cover a footprint of 101 square metres, with the proposed dwelling having a footprint of 98 square metres, therefore the replacement building would be no larger than the buildings it is to replace, complying with the exception at point (d).

With regards to exception at point (g) the proposed development comprises the redevelopment of previously developed land, through the replacement of permanent structures. The existing permanent structures are of a poor-quality appearance due to their design, materials and position on site. Furthermore, the three structures, whilst only covering a total footprint of 101 square metres are spread out across the site, with the distance from edge to edge of the group of buildings being 28 metres at the farthest point. It is therefore considered that the existing buildings impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.

The proposed replacement dwelling would cover a smaller total footprint that the existing buildings, also covering a smaller, more clearly defined area of the site than the existing buildings. The replacement of three buildings with a single building is considered to better protect the openness of the Green Belt than could be achieved by a proposal for three dwellings. It is considered that the replacement dwelling would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt than the existing development, and would serve to improve the openness of the Green Belt.

The application is submitted in outline form, and includes matters of access and layout. Access is to be gained from the access track that runs past the northern boundary of the site, leading to parking and turning facilities for approximately 4 vehicles. The residential curtilage to the property, which would include the parking and turning spaces, and gardens, would be set within the existing boundary to the farmhouse. Whilst matters of design and scale would be dealt with at reserved matters stage, the layout proposes the dwelling to be set back from the frontage of the adjacent farmhouse and barn by over 5 metres, ensuring that the development would complement the setting of the existing traditional development.

Conclusion

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), at section 11, sets out the presumption in favour of sustainable development, making it clear that, 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 the Framework taken as a whole.

As set out in the 'Principle of Development' section of this statement, the proposed development would comply with both of the exceptions set out under paragraph 145 of the NPPF with regards to proposals affecting the Green Belt, and as such there would be no clear reason for refusing the development proposed. Furthermore, there would be no adverse impacts of granting planning permission, that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of granting planning permission in this instance.

The Council is therefore requested to support the application.