

Application No: 19/0334M

Location: BOOTH BANK FARM, REDDY LANE, MILLINGTON, CHESHIRE, WA14 3RG

Proposal: Development of a new residential wing with ancillary office and children's activity space; alterations, extensions and repairs to Booth Bank Farmhouse, access and landscaping at Booth Bank Farm, Millington.

Applicant: Trustees of, Children's Adventure Farm Trust

Expiry Date: 02-Jul-2021

SUMMARY

The application site is the Children's Adventure Farm Trust, an outdoor activity centre based around the Grade-II listed Booth Bank Farmhouse.

The application seeks planning permission for extensions and alterations to the main farmhouse, alterations to the stables building, construction of a new accommodation block, and various other changes to landscaping and parking arrangements.

The application is considered to represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt, would result in harm to openness and encroachment harm, and would result in less than substantial harm to the listed building and its setting.

Nevertheless, the proposal would address a number of operational issues that the Trust currently face, including matters relating to accessibility, inclusivity, accommodation for disabled children and vehicle/pedestrian conflict.

It has also been demonstrated that alternative locations have been considered and justifiably discounted.

On balance, the health, well-being and inclusivity benefits of the proposal are considered to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other identified harm. The application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve subject to conditions

REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application is being considered by the Northern Planning Committee owing to the public interest of the application and the identified harm to a Grade-II listed building.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND CONTEXT

The application site is the Children's Adventure Farm Trust (CAFT), located at Booth Bank Farm, at the junction of Booth Bank Lane, Reddy Lane and Millington Lane. The M56 motorway is to the north of the site. The site is located in the Green Belt.

The site comprises the former Booth Bank farmhouse (Grade II listed), with a converted 'U' shaped stable block to the immediate rear, with open spaces, animal paddocks, and a large sports hall further to the rear. The site also includes various smaller structures, parking areas, and a woodland activity area to the north-east of the site, abutting the motorway.

There is a significant change in levels across the site. The land around the farmhouse complex rises up from the site frontage. The site is situated to the east of Agden Brook, with the south and western portions of the site within flood zones 2 and 3.

While none of the land within the application site is safeguarded for HS2, land to the south and west of the site is safeguarded for this purpose.

The site has residential neighbours to the north and south-east but is otherwise generally surrounded by open fields.

The Children's Adventure Farm Trust

The Children's Adventure Farm Trust is a charity which provides outdoor, farm-based activities for children in the North West, who are disadvantaged, disabled, or both. It is entirely funded by charitable donations. The Charity has been at the current site since 1992.

The Trust operates from the grade II listed farmhouse and the 19th century converted stable block. To the north of the main buildings, there are facilities, including a sports hall, animal enclosures, playground and duck pond.

The Trust provides a variety of programmes for terminally ill, disabled and disadvantaged children across the North West. CAFT caters for children with needs ranging from complex and severe physical and learning disabilities, sensory impairments and terminal illnesses, through to children who act as carers for a family member, those dealing with bereavement and children who have been victims of abuse.

Children may visit for the day or several days, as groups or with schools.

Existing operations

The existing farmhouse provides guest bedroom space for children and their carers, dining facilities for guests and staff, and kitchen and administrative office space.

The converted stable block provides bedrooms, an art room, a sensory room, fundraising office and meeting room. The first floor is accessible by stairs and a lift, but neither is large enough to accommodate modern wheelchairs.

The farmhouse and stable block enclose a courtyard, used in all weathers for outdoor play and organised activities.

Facilities at other areas of the site (including the sports centre and animal paddocks) are located to the rear of these buildings, beyond a steep bank, creating difficulties for disabled children and their carers accessing other areas of the site.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

Planning permission is sought for a range of works around the site. The scheme has been amended during the lifetime of the application. The proposed works and amendments are detailed below:

Farmhouse:

- Alterations and repairs to the farmhouse
- Removal of existing conservatory and other later extensions
- New wraparound side and rear extension/conservatory, this would be a flat-roofed glazed structure, with a green roof.
- Internal rearrangements at ground floor level. The kitchen and dining areas would be re-located into the new extension, along with an accessible WC.

New residential wing:

- Construction of a new accommodation wing in a new two-storey building immediately to the south of the farmhouse.
- The wing would provide a reception, sensory room and art room at ground floor level and accessible bedroom accommodation at first floor level
- The building would be partly set into the slope of the land. It would include a lift to provide wheelchair access across the different levels of the site

Alterations to the converted barns:

- Minor alterations to fenestration
- Internal re-arranging to provide enlarged office and store areas.
- Alterations to the residential accommodation provided and additional bedroom space at first floor level

Other works:

- Alteration of the vehicle accesses into the site and around it. A new turning circle (porous resin-bound gravel) would be formed to the front and side of the farmhouse, and to the front of the new building, with direct access into the complex from this area.

- New pedestrian and wheelchair circulation around the building and site.
- Associated landscaping works.
- Relocation of BBQ structure

Following feedback from the heritage officer during determination, revised plans were submitted with the following changes:

- Reduction of accommodation at the proposed new wing, reducing its size by 57m² floorspace, with the building set 4m further into the hillside to reduce its visible mass.
- Provision of additional bed spaces in the converted barns and corresponding reduction in officer space; changes to the proposed internal layout and external changes to the barns
- Additional removal of a lean-to extension from the farmhouse
- Reduction of the farmhouse extension and set back from the front elevation

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

19/0402M – pending consideration

Listed building consent for Alterations, extensions and external repairs to Booth Bank Farmhouse, to include removal of existing UPVC porch and conservatory, and construction of extended contemporary new extension.

19/4912M – approved – 19 December 2019

Retrospective application for security lighting fixed to existing sports hall, siting of low-level solar lighting and security lighting to footway

10/1012M – approved – 13 March 2012

Erection of proposed machinery store

10/0889M – approved – 26 May 2010

Retrospective planning approval for: parking area - 669 sqm; tarmac area - 666sqm; aviary - 16.38 sqm; climbing frame - 90.25 sqm; fence - 191m length - 2.5m height

09/0277P – approved – 16 February 2011

Variation of condition 6 on application 82087P (retrospective)

09/0273P – approved – 16 February 2011

Variation of condition 3 attached to permission 99/2343P (retrospective)

04/2979P – approved – 25 January 2005

Formation of private pathway for wheelchair access

04/1958P – withdrawn - 17August 2004

Re-surfacing of central section of existing driveway with tarmac

03/1355P – approved – 24 July 2003

Formation of a countryside access trail in place of former go kart track

00/0559P – permitted development – 18 April 2000

Retention of change of use of first floor recreational area to ancillary offices

99/2343P – approved – 5 January 2000
Proposed playground/adventure trail

99/1600P – refused – 6 October 1999
Installation of playground equipment

99/0386P – refused – 26 May 1999
Children's adventure playground

83245P – approved - 31 January 1996
Formation of car park to serve Booth Bank Farm

82503P – refused – 11 October 1995
Retention and surfacing of car park to serve Booth Bank Farm

82807P – approved – 16 August 1995
Sports hall/play barn and ancillary facilities (amended orientation from that approved by 5/77034P of 20 July 1994)

77034P – approved – 20 July 1994
Sports Hall/play barn and ancillary facilities

62912P - approved - 30 May 1990
Change of use from farm buildings to residential accommodation and workshops including extension

62868P – approved – 30 May 1990
Alterations and extensions to building

62867P – approved – 30 May 1990
Outbuildings change of use from farm use to residential/workshop use including extension to provide extra workshop accommodation all materials to match existing

62866P – approved – 30 May 1990
Change of use from residential to institutional residential

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy (CELPS)

MP 1 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development
PG 3 Green Belt
PG 6 Open Countryside
SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles
SC 3 Health and Well-Being
SE 1 Design

SE 2 Efficient Use of Land
SE 3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
SE 4 The Landscape
SE 5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
SE 7 The Historic Environment
SE 12 Pollution, Land Contamination and Land Instability
SE 13 Flood Risk and Water Management
CO 1 Sustainable Travel and Transport
Appendix C – Parking Standards

The Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy was formally adopted on 27th July 2017. There are however policies within the legacy local plans that still apply and have not yet been replaced. These policies are set out below.

Macclesfield Borough Local Plan

NE3 Landscape Conservation
NE11 Nature Conservation
NE12 SSSIs, SBIs and Nature Reserves
NE14 Nature Conservation Sites
NE15 Habitat Enhancement
GC1 New Build
GC10 Extensions to Residential Institutions
DC2 Extensions and alterations to existing buildings
DC3 Design – Amenity
DC6 Design – Circulation and Access
DC8 Landscaping
DC9 Design – Tree Protection
DC10 Landscaping and Tree Protection
DC13 and DC14 Noise
DC15 Provision of facilities
DC17 Water Resources – flooding etc.
DC18 Water Resources – SUDS
DC19 Water Resources – groundwater
DC35 Residential - Materials & Finishes
DC37 Residential - Landscaping
DC38 Residential - Space, Light and Privacy
BE2 Preservation of Historic Fabric
BE15 Listed Buildings
BE18 Design Criteria for Listed Buildings
RT7 Cycleways, Bridleways and Footpaths

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Cheshire East Design Guide

Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2019)

National Planning Practice Guidance

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Countryside and Rights of Way (PROW Unit) – No objection

Environment Agency - No reply

Environmental Health - Noise mitigation measures set out in Intrusive Noise Survey submitted with the application should be implemented in full prior to first occupation. Informatives on construction hours and contaminated land obligations.

Flood Risk – No objection subject to drainage conditions

Millington Parish Council – No comments received at time of writing. Comments on accompanying LBC application state:

The Parish Council feel that the roof of the new building is not in keeping with the existing listed farmhouse or other properties in the Parish, some of which are also listed. Also this is greenbelt land and very close to other residents who obviously came to live in the area to enjoy the views and peace and quiet of the countryside, we don't feel this has been given consideration when these plans were submitted due to the siting and size of the new building.

Highways – No objection

HS2 Ltd – No objection - No part of the red line site boundary is within land safeguarded for Phase 2b of HS2. The applicant should be made aware that part of red line boundary shown on their location plan, is land identified in the working draft Environmental Statement. The land identified is potentially required temporarily during the construction phase to accommodate a construction traffic route. the applicant may want to consider phasing some landscaping works at the boundary to avoid any potential abortive works.

United Utilities - General comments relating to water and drainage.

REPRESENTATIONS

Representations received from 29 addresses. 16 objecting to the proposal, 10 in support and three making general observations. The main points are summarised below:

Objections

Green Belt:

- Development is unnecessary, as the existing buildings and infrastructure, including the sports hall always appear empty
- The proposal is contrary to Green Belt policy. It would result in loss of green land and would be of an inappropriate scale.
- It would have a harmful impact on the rural nature of the area and would result in urbanisation.
- Other smaller schemes in the green belt have been refused

- The proposed facilities (such as fundraising) could be provided in a town location– it is not a farm
- The objectives could be met through less expansive works.
- Development excessive and inappropriate in the Green Belt
- Any need for additional accommodation could be relocated and designed in a manner, which has far less impact on the openness of the Green Belt
- Very special circumstances do not exist
- If approved, other developers may want to build on green belt

Highways safety:

- The surrounding roads are single track, lack parking places and were not built for current levels of traffic
- Recent highway works in the area have turned the roads into a rat-run
- Increased traffic movements would put highways safety at risk
- Poor access to the site and poor visibility

Heritage:

- Inappropriate design, which fails to take account of historic nature of existing buildings
- The development would result in substantial harm to the listed building. the public benefits would be outweighed by the harm of the development
- Heritage is unique
- Design approach would not meet the expectations of paragraph 127. Prominent location of the wing and extension would change the historic pattern and form of the farmhouse.
- Materials not in keeping with 17th century farmhouse

Residential amenity

- Additional traffic and visitors would cause noise and disturbance

Other matters:

- Damage to grass verges, hedges and rural lanes
- Continued building would destroy the essence of the holiday, which is open air, clean unpolluted countryside, green space
- Development would not benefit anyone.
- The character of the rural setting would be destroyed, as the new buildings would dominate.
- Applicants have outgrown the site and should find other accommodation more suitable to their needs
- No justification for further extensions- how long before they return wanting further extensions
- CAFT is a commercial operation, supported by professional fundraisers and should be treated like any other commercial operation

Comments in Support:

- CAFT provides opportunities for children to be in open space, with animals and supported by caring and hardworking team.
- Respite for families
- Development needed to make the farm more accessible and inclusive for all.
- Existing difficulties for wheelchair users to navigate the site, due to layout.
- Development would fit in with the present surroundings
- Proposal will make a huge difference to children who benefit from time at CAFT
- CAFT offers platform for children and young people facing very challenging situations to meet others in similar circumstances
- Development would ensure there is even more space truly accessible to children with disabilities.
- Existing sensory room difficult to access, as lift does not accommodate larger wheelchairs
- CAFT discussed the application in detail with neighbours
- In favour of providing access for visiting children so traffic is reduced
- No objections to delivery area
- Could the land on the opposite side of Millington Lane be used as a car park – reducing traffic on shared access lane
- Proposal would improve the facilities and efficiency of the site, whilst preserving the heritage of the farmhouse

General Observations:

- Design, location and roof materials are a concern
- The building should be relocated elsewhere on the site
- Query regarding whether the existing sports hall is being used to its optimum and whether this could be used to have less impact on the green belt and landscape
- Would like to see road widened before building works begin

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development – Green Belt

The application site lies within the Green Belt. National and local policies attach great importance to green belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The two essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Green Belts serve the following five purposes:

- a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- d) To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

To achieve this, there are restrictions on the types of development which may be carried out. These are detailed within NPPF paragraphs 145 and 146 and reiterated within CELPS policy PG 3.

Development not falling within one of the listed exceptions is inappropriate. NPPF paragraph 143 confirms that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

NPPF paragraph 144 directs Local Planning Authorities to give substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt. It confirms that 'very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

NPPF Paragraph 145 states that all new buildings other than those specifically listed as exceptions should be viewed as inappropriate development. The list of exceptions includes the following, which are relevant to this application:

'b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the original building'

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

These exceptions are also listed within CELPS policy PG 3.

There is no figure in policy for what constitutes 'not materially larger'.

Saved MBLP policy GC12 allows for extensions and alterations of up to 30% increase in floor space, provided the scale and appearance of the house is not significantly altered.

Paragraph 146 sets out the other forms of development, which are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This list includes engineering operations.

There is no statutory definition of openness. However, it is accepted that openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects. The visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume. Openness may also include other factors including the duration of development and the degree of activity likely to be generated.

The development would comprise:

Extensions and alterations to the farmhouse

The proposed works include extensions and alterations to the existing farmhouse. This includes the removal of existing later additions.

The proposed extensions would be single storey and taking into account the demolition works, would not be disproportionate in relation to the original building.

The works to the farmhouse would be not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Alterations to the barns

The works to the barn include minor external alterations and internal re-organising. There would be no increase in the size of the barns. The proposed alterations would have no greater impact on the Green Belt. This aspect of the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Replacement BBQ area

The proposal includes the relocation of the existing covered barbecue structure to make way for the new building. The relocation of this structure can be considered as a replacement building. As it would be the same size and would be in the same use, it would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

New wing

The proposed new building would provide two floors of accommodation. At ground floor level, there would be a reception area, sensory room and art room, as well as toilet facilities and store areas. At first floor level, there would be further bedrooms and a corridor allowing level access onto the playing field beyond.

While part of CAFT's work enables children to take part in outdoor sport and recreation, the facilities within the proposed building would not be purely for these purposes. The sensory room and art studio would be facilities for indoor recreation. The upstairs accommodation would provide bedrooms for visiting children. As such, while the proposed building would facilitate children visiting the site to take part in outdoor sports and recreation, it would not be solely for this purpose and cannot fall within this exception.

As the new building would not fall within any of the exceptions set out within NPPF paragraphs 145 or 146 or CELPS policy PG 3, it would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

As this element is inappropriate development, it is also relevant to consider the impact on openness.

The proposed building would have a footprint of approximately 183sqm, with accommodation laid out over two levels. It would have an overall height of around 7.3m, when measured from the roadside.

The proposed building would introduce a large amount of built form onto an area of the site which is currently largely devoid of development. The introduction of this quantity of development would have an adverse impact on the spatial dimension of openness.

While the building would be set back from the road frontage, due to its two-storey height and length, it would be a prominent feature, which would be visible from public viewpoints, particularly on the approaches from Millington Lane to the south and Boothsbank Lane from the west.

Given its scale, height and prominence, in public views, the proposal would also result in visual harm to openness.

Hard landscaping and parking areas

Paragraph 146 confirms that engineering operations may not be inappropriate. However, this is subject to the proviso that the development would preserve the openness of the Green Belt and would not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

The proposal includes a new parking and turning area accessed off Millington Lane. It also includes a new area for deliveries, footpaths and retaining walls.

As noted above, openness can have both spatial and visual dimensions. Given that the proposal would provide a new access and parking/turning areas, the spatial and visual impacts need to be considered. The degree of activity is also relevant.

The new access and turning circle would be installed on area which is currently a grassed lawn and hedgerow. The installation of a large area of hardstanding on what is currently an undeveloped area of grass would undoubtedly have an impact on the spatial dimension of openness.

In visual terms, the impact of the development would also be harmful. The large turning area would be in a prominent location at the entrance to the site. It would be an intrusive and urbanising feature within the landscape, which would detract from the open character of the site frontage.

The proposed building would also enable the expansion of the existing operation. As such, it is likely that there would be some increase in the levels of activity. That being said, the scale of the increase, is such that it is unlikely that any increase in activity would result in harm to openness.

Harm arising from inappropriate development in the Green Belt

The proposed new building and the proposed vehicular accesses and associated engineering works would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt. Substantial weight is given to this harm.

Harm to openness

The proposed new wing and areas of hard landscaping would also result in harm to openness, both in visual and spatial terms, as detailed in the sections above. The impact of additional activity on openness is likely to be limited.

Effects on the purposes of the Green Belt

NPPF paragraph 134 notes that the Green Belt serves five purposes. The impact of the proposed development against these purposes is considered.

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

The development would not cause harm to this objective, due to the distance between the application site and the nearest large built-up area.

b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;

The development would not cause harm to this purpose.

c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;

The development would result in some harm to this objective. The new build element would introduce built form to an otherwise open and generally undeveloped area of the site. This would comprise encroachment into the countryside.

d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and

As the site is not within the immediate vicinity of any towns, it is not considered that the proposal would cause harm to this purpose.

e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

It is not considered that the proposal would result in harm to this objective. Owing to the nature of the development and the existing CAFT operation, it is considered unlikely that the same development could be delivered on derelict or urban land.

Green belt conclusions

While elements of the proposal are appropriate, as there are also inappropriate elements, the proposal in its totality would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt. Substantial weight is given to this harm, as well as to the harm to openness and the conflict with the Green Belt purpose of preventing encroachment.

In accordance with CELPS policy PG 3 and NPPF paragraphs 143 and 144, the proposal cannot be approved unless 'very special circumstances' exist. This will only be the case, where the potential harm to the Green Belt, by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Heritage

The main farmhouse is a Grade-II listed building, which dates from circa 1670, with later 19th century additions. There also appear to have been various extensions, dating from the second half of the 20th century, following its listing in 1959. These additions include a porch and UPVC conservatory, as well as alterations to fenestration. The porch and conservatory appear to be unlawful, as there is no record of them having received listed building consent.

Immediately to the north of the listed farmhouse is a 'U' shaped stable block. This building is present on the first edition Ordnance Survey map, dating from 1875. It appears to have been subsequently extended.

While the stable building is not listed in itself, it lies within the curtilage of the listed building and pre-dates 1948. It is also within the same ownership. Given these factors, it is considered to be a curtilage listed building.

Listed Buildings are designated heritage assets for the purposes of NPPF chapter 16 and CELPS policy SE 7. NPPF paragraph 184 confirms that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

Paragraph 193 states that:

“When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.

Paragraph NPPF 194 notes that:

“Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.”

In accordance with NPPF paragraph 196, *“where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.”*

CELPS Policy SD 2 Sustainable Development Principles notes that all development will be expected to respect, and where possible enhance, the significance of heritage assets, including their wider settings.

Policy SE 7 notes that the Council will support development proposals that do not cause harm to, or which better reveal the significance of heritage assets and will seek to avoid or minimise conflict between the conservation of a heritage asset and any aspect of a development proposal. In the case of designated heritage assets, SE 7 notes that this will be done by:

- i. Requiring development proposals that cause harm to, or loss of, a designated heritage asset and its significance, including its setting, to provide a clear and*

convincing justification as to why that harm is considered acceptable. Where that case cannot be demonstrated, proposals will not be supported.

ii. Considering the level of harm in relation to the public benefits that may be gained by the proposal.

iii. The use of appropriate legal agreements or planning obligations to secure the benefits arising from a development proposal where the loss, in whole or in part, of a heritage asset is accepted.

Additionally, in accordance with the Section 16 and 66 of the 1990 Act, when making a decision on all listed building consent applications or any decision on a planning application for development that affects a listed building or its setting, a local planning authority must have special regard to the desirability of preserving the building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which it possesses. Preservation in this context means not harming the interest in the building, as opposed to keeping it utterly unchanged.

The application is supported by a Heritage Statement which describes the significance of the heritage asset and assesses the impact of the proposals upon the significance.

The Conservation Officer assessed the proposals and raised concerns. Following on from these concerns, the scale of both the conservatory and new wing have been reduced. The new wing has also been pushed further back onto the site.

These amendments have not addressed the initial concerns raised by the Conservation Officer. Their latest comments are as follows:

Farmhouse extension

“The amendments relate only to the conservatory addition; no significant amendments have been proposed to the new block or wider hard landscaping. Whilst the conservatory has been reduced in size and pushed back from the front elevation, it still remains a large addition which will be prominent in wider views and in my opinion out of scale with this small farm building. The two parts of the scheme are in very close proximity and when read in conjunction will appear overly dominant and incongruous. In the absence of amendments to the hard landscaping and location, scale of the new block I am unfortunately unable to alter my position with regard to this application, and remain of the view that it will cause a high degree of less than substantial harm to the historic building and its wider setting.”

New wing, access and turning circle

“...whilst I have no objection to the design or materials proposed, I cannot agree that the new building respects the height and form of the farmhouse and will not be overbearing. The structure will in my view not read as a single storey addition, it is clearly a two-storey structure, the height although less than the house is greater than that to the stable block. Due to the scale and mass of the building, even in its amended location will result in a structure which would visually dominate the farmhouse. This is additionally compounded by the scale and proximity of the conservatory addition, which would be read in conjunction with the new wing.

The southern garden is to be re-landscaped in order for vehicles to be able access the new facilities, this will require the removal of the existing hedges and some trees and provision of new hard surfacing in brick. Two existing trees will be retained to the centre of the new area. In my view this substantially removes an existing landscaped open area which greatly contributes to the setting of the farmhouse, the removal of the hedges, lawns and opening up of the upper part of the site in conjunction with hard landscaping will radically alter the setting of the building. The green lawns and hedges which currently enhance the setting of the house will be lost beneath hard landscaping and buildings.

In terms of the Framework, the degree of harm, including direct effects and effects on setting, would still be less than substantial, this does not mean that the harm would be minor or unimportant. The Framework states that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource and emphasises the desirability of sustaining and enhancing their significance, I do not feel this would be achieved by this scheme. The proposals would also fail to meet the objectives of SE1 and SE7 of the CELPS and BH5 of the saved policies of the Macclesfield Local Plan.”

The conclusions of the Council’s Conservation Officer in terms of the impact on the listed building and its setting are noted and agreed with. The development would be a prominent feature, highly visible in many of the public viewpoints from which the farmhouse is also experienced. The cumulative impact of the new wing and extension and areas of hardstanding would appear overly dominant and detract from the relatively modestly proportioned listed farmhouse. It is agreed that the development would result in a high level of ‘less than substantial harm’.

The harm needs to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriated securing its optimum viable use.

The public benefits are set out later in this report.

Design

NPPF Chapter 12 deals with achieving well-designed places. Paragraph 124 identifies good design as a key aspect of sustainable development.

Paragraph 126 states that “*planning policies and designs should ensure that, developments:*

- a) *will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) *Are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) *are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) *establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f) *create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users, and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life of community cohesion and resilience”*

Policies SE 1 and SD 2 of the CELPS seek to ensure that development is of a high standard of design which reflects local character and respects the form, layout, siting, scale, design, height and massing of the site, surrounding buildings and the street scene. CELP policy SD 2(1) (ii) states development should contribute positively to an area’s character and identity, creating or reinforcing local distinctiveness in terms of height, scale, form and grouping, materials, external design and massing.

The Council’s Design Officer has reviewed their proposal and has offered their support to the scheme. It is noted that the Conservation Officer did also not raise concerns with the contemporary design of the new wing, or the extensions proposed.

As a standalone piece of architecture, there would be no objection to the development. However, as set out within paragraph 127, high quality design also requires developments to be sympathetic to local character and history.

As set out in the Heritage section above, the Conservation Officer has raised concerns that the development would result in less than substantial harm to the listed building and its setting. Given these concerns, the proposal would not comply with all of the requirements of NPPF paragraph 127c) and CELPS policies SE 1 and SD 2.

Residential Amenity

Saved policy DC 3 requires that new development should not significantly injure the amenities of adjoining or nearby residential property or sensitive land uses due to loss of privacy, overbearing effect, loss of sunlight or daylight, or other forms of disturbance and nuisance.

Saved policy DC38 sets out guideline separation distances for new residential development, including minimum distances between windows, to ensure adequate space, light and privacy.

Some local residents have raised concerns regarding noise from the development and increased activity.

However, it is not considered that the proposed works would result in any material harm to the amenity of neighbouring occupants, including in any of the above considerations. The new build elements would be set sufficiently far from any nearby residences to avoid harm in terms of loss of light, visual intrusion or loss of privacy. It is not considered that the proposals would result in a harmful increase in noise or general disruption.

Highways

CELPs policy CO 1 deals with Sustainable Travel and Transport. It seeks to encourage a shift away from car travel to public transport, cycling and walking.

Saved MBLP policy DC6 relates to circulation and access. It sets out the circulation and access criteria for new development. This includes amongst other matters, the provision of adequate visibility splays, manoeuvring vehicles and emergency vehicles.

A number of concerns have been raised by local residents in relation to the impact of the development on highway safety. These concerns focus on:

- Many of the roads are single lane with no parking places
- Increased traffic following on from recent highways schemes
- Poor access to the site and visibility
- Damage to grass verges, hedges and rural lanes.

Local residents have expressed concerns that the expansion of CAFT would bring additional traffic to these narrow roads, putting the safety of other road users at risk.

It also should be noted that the site is not in a sustainable location, but the use is such that it has to be located within a rural area.

The scheme includes a transport statement, and this has been reviewed by the Council's Highways Officer. They have acknowledged that the proposal would result in a small uplift in traffic movements to and from the site, however, this is not considered to be an issue for highways safety. The off-road parking, turning and minibus access arrangements would be acceptable.

Overall, they have raised no objection subject to an informative on the requirement for a section 184 vehicle crossing agreement.

The concerns of local residents are noted. However, it is not considered that the proposal would adversely affect highways safety. There would be no conflict with saved MBLP policy DC6.

Public Rights of Way

The Public Rights of Way officer has advised that the proposal has the affect Public Footpath Millington No. 11, which follows the route of the driveway through the site, to the side of the sports hall, and enters fields to the east of the site. Whilst none of the proposed works would appear likely to result in a direct effect on the right of way, the PROW officer has provided advisory notes for the applicant regarding any potential changes to the right of way, and

regarding arrangements during the construction phase. These will be included as an informative.

Flood Risk

CELPS policy SE 13 deals with Flood Risk and Water Management. It requires all development to integrate measures for sustainable water management to reduce flood risk, avoid an adverse impact on water quality and quantity within the borough and provide opportunities to enhance biodiversity, health and recreation.

There is a watercourse which runs to the west of the site. A very small proportion of the western-most portion of the site lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3. However, the remainder of the site, including where the development is proposed would be in Flood Zone 1, which is at the lowest risk of fluvial flooding.

The Environment Agency has been consulted on the scheme but have not commented.

The Council's Flood Risk Officer has advised that the principle of the development is acceptable, but that approval should be subject to conditions requiring:

- Implementation in accordance with details of surface water storage/disposal in the Flood Risk Assessment submitted with the application.
- Submission and approval of a detailed surface water drainage design/strategy.

The Flood Risk Officer also advised that advisory notes on the surface water drainage hierarchy, and on the need for consent for any alterations to ordinary watercourses, should be added to any approval.

Subject to these conditions and advisories, the proposal would be acceptable in terms of management of surface water and effects on flood risk.

Nature Conservation

CELPS policy SE 3 deals with biodiversity and geodiversity. It seeks to protect areas of high biodiversity and geodiversity. It also requires all development to aim to positively contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity.

The application is supported by an 'Extended Phase 1 Habitat Survey and Daytime Bat Survey, dated July 2018'. This has been reviewed by the Council's Nature Conservation Officer.

They have advised that, in the event of approval, conditions are required to protect breeding birds and provide ecological enhancements. They have also noted the developer's obligations with regards Rhododendron known to be on the site.

Subject to the above conditions, the proposal would comply with the requirements of CELPS policy SE 3.

Trees

CELPs policy SE 5 relates to Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland. It seeks to protect trees, hedgerows and woodlands, that provide a significant contribution to the amenity, biodiversity, landscape character of historic character of the surrounding area.

Saved MBLP policy DC9 seeks to protect trees and woodlands, worthy of formal protection, from development unless certain circumstances apply.

The application is supported by an Arboricultural Implications Assessment and an Arboricultural Method Statement which include a Tree Survey with accompanying schedule, and a Tree Protection Plan.

The forestry officer has advised as follows:

A total of 4 individual trees are identified for removal and these include 1 Cypress, 2 Holly and 1 Horse Chestnut with 3 groups G2 Apple, G3 Hawthorn and G4 Sycamore. All 4 trees and 3 groups have been categorised as C2.

The removals of the trees are deemed not to be of significant impact as they are chiefly situated to the interior of the site with public amenity limited. In addition the majority have been categorised as C2 due to structural instabilities.

The site enjoys good canopy cover with a healthy combination of tree and shrubs of a varied age range. To mitigate the loss of trees a landscape programme is proposed with planting of extra heavy standard trees, small trees /large shrubs native and ornamental species with new hedgerows planted with native species.

The forestry officer has raised no objection and advised that permission should be subject to conditions relating to tree retention, details of tree protection, and adherence to the submitted details of tree works.

Landscape

CELPs policy SE 4 relates to Landscape. Amongst other matters, all development should conserve the landscape character and quality and should where possible, enhance and effectively manage the historic, natural and man-made landscape features that contribute to local distinctiveness in both rural and urban landscapes.

The proposed scheme has been reviewed by the Council's Landscape Officer, who has advised the following:

In my opinion this scheme proposes topographically-aligned and acceptably-scaled buildings and incorporates sustainable practices such as re-use of excavated soils on site and permeable hard-surfacing. I also find the planting scheme appropriate and its establishment and maintenance has been addressed.

As such it is considered that the scheme would be acceptable in terms of landscape design and effects on the wider landscape. The landscape officer provided further advice on planting arrangements, 'for information only'.

Health, Wellbeing, and Inclusivity

NPPF chapter 8 focuses on promoting healthy and safe communities.

Paragraph 91 states that amongst other matters planning decisions should promote social interaction and be safe and accessible. This paragraph also states that planning decisions should:

- *“Enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling”*
- Amongst other matters, paragraph 92 states that in order to provide social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning decisions should:
- Plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments.
- Take in account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community
- Ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services

At a local level, CELPS policies SD 1, SD2 and SC 3 are of particular relevance.

SD 1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East notes that development should wherever possible, *inter alia*:

- *Provide appropriate infrastructure to meet the needs of the local community including: education; health and social care; transport; communication technology; landscaping and open space; sport and leisure; community facilities; water; waste water; and energy;*
- *Provide access to local jobs, services and facilities, reflecting the community's needs;*
- *Support the health, safety, social and cultural well-being of the residents of Cheshire East;*
- *Contribute towards the achievement of equality and social inclusion through positive cooperation with the local community;*

Policy SD 2 sets out the LPA's sustainable development principles. At vi, it states that all development will be expected to be socially inclusive and, where suitable integrate into the local community.

Policy SC 3 deals with Health and well-being. The following are considered of particular relevance:

"3. Ensuring new developments provide opportunities for healthy living and improve health and well-being through the encouragement of walking and cycling, good housing design (including the minimisation of social isolation and creation of inclusive communities), access to services, sufficient open space and other green infrastructure, and sports facilities and opportunity for recreation and sound safety standards.

5. Protecting existing community infrastructure and ensuring the provision of a network of community facilities, providing essential public services together with private and voluntary sector facilities, to meet the needs of the local community."

The public benefits put forward by the applicant in support of their case primarily revolve around the health, well-being and inclusivity work of the Trust.

As detailed above, The Children's Adventure Farm Trust offers holidays free of charge to disadvantaged and disabled children in the North-west. It has been running from Booth Bank Farm since 1992.

The Trust enables children, who likely would not otherwise have the opportunity to do so, to have a holiday in the countryside. There is no doubt that the Trust as a community facility provides an invaluable service to some of the most vulnerable children and their families.

The Trust has identified a number of areas of the current operation, which need addressing. They state that the application has been submitted for this reason, rather than to grow or significantly expand the existing operation:

1. Safeguarding: *The present situation on site can be dangerous to children and carers. Delivery vehicles and drivers, enter the courtyard to unload goods into the stores and farmhouse where children are playing, creating an immediate risk to the children. In addition, the children need to reach the gym and other attractions up the slope to the east. Able bodied children and carers can use the stepped ramp (1 in 6) behind the farmhouse, but disabled children in wheelchairs have to be pushed up the road around the courtyard buildings by carers, bringing them into immediate conflict with CAFT vehicular traffic, and with the traffic to Booth Bank Cottage.*
2. Access into the site: *Because of the safeguarding issues outlined (...) above, there is the need to separate the children and the vehicles. The vehicle route to the west side of the outbuildings can remain, but the courtyard must be traffic free, with children moving around the site safely. Most particularly, the proposal is to create a new vehicle delivery area to the north side of the courtyard outbuilding by cutting into the hillside and also creating a new goods delivery door into the north elevation. This removes vehicles from the courtyard, whilst the children are removed from the road.*

3. Access around the site: *The farmhouse and the courtyard act as the 'hub' of the CAFT operation, but the gym, farm and animals, barbeque, adventure play facilities, etc are all sited up the slope at 4 metres or more above the lower level. There is therefore the need to create a safe and easily usable route to travel between the two.*
4. Additional accommodation: *The Planning Statement details the need for the facilities of the charity and how it could potentially benefit more children. CAFT, therefore, wish to make a modest increase to the accommodation for overnight stays (children are either day visitors, or overnight/over-weekend visitors) to be able to offer more help and be more efficient. In addition, the charity lives and exists purely by income from donations and additional staff are needed to help to increase these donations; extra admin space is therefore required.*

In April 2020, various addendums to the planning, heritage and design and access statements were submitted. These accompanied the submission of revised plans, which included a reduction in the areas given over to office space.

The planning statement addendum provides further details regarding the existing operational issues, and in particular the shortcomings with the accommodation.

It is stated that at present the trust struggles with a lack of flexibility and lack of disabled accommodation and inclusivity.

The farmhouse accommodates 16 children's bed spaces, which are unsuitable for disabled children. Carers are not able to provide 1:1 care in the farmhouse and bathroom facilities are shared. The second-floor bedrooms are only able to accommodate younger children due to low ceiling heights.

There are two ground floor apartments within the converted stables. These provide up to four children's beds and can accommodate wheelchair users. However, wheelchair users are not able to dine with the rest of the group within the farmhouse, as there is no wheelchair access.

Due to the site's steep topography, wheelchair users have to share the track off Reddy Lane with vehicles visiting the site and the neighbouring property. The courtyard which is the main focus point for activities, is also the area for drop offs and deliveries.

The new wing would provide sensory and art rooms at ground floor, along with the main reception area. at first floor it would provide full accessible accommodation for disabled children and their carers (two suites and four bed spaces). The revised scheme reduces the amount of admin space in the courtyard, replacing it with new accommodation at first floor level for four children plus one carer. The ground floor of the courtyard building would be able to accommodate up to five children, along with carers and siblings. The proposals would enhance the provisions for children with disabilities and create a more inclusive built environment.

The proposed areas of hardstanding would include a new vehicle access and drop off point, an area for deliveries and paths, allowing wheelchair users access to the playing fields and sports hall without having to use the vehicular track. These alterations would reduce the potential conflict between vulnerable users and vehicles.

It is clear that the proposals would address genuine operational issues at the Trust, and that the works would support more efficient, safer, more inclusive, and effective operations at the site, and would support the broader objectives of the charity. The proposals would allow for more visitors, and visitors with a greater range of needs, to benefit from the services that CAFT offer.

The proposal would clearly advance the aims of CELPS policies SD 1, SD 2 and SC 3, in regard to inclusivity, health and well-being. It has the potential to amount to a substantial public benefit and carry great weight in favour of the application. However, the level of weight is in part dependent on the feasibility of alternative schemes and whether the same benefits could be achieved in a less harmful manner.

Alternative Solutions

Following concerns raised by officers, the applicant has provided a more detailed options appraisal, which sets out the site constraints and also looks at alternative locations for similar facilities.

This document includes a site analysis and options appraisal for the new wing. The options considered within the appraisal are briefly detailed below:

Option 1 was for a new building to the north of the barn. This was ruled out in part due to a lack of space and the proximity of the electricity pylon.

Option 2 was for a building at the north of the site adjacent to the boundary with the M56. This was ruled out due to its remote location, lack of connectivity and access and noise from the motorway.

Option 3 was for a building on the playing field to the north of the play area. This was also discounted due to motorway noise and the loss of the sports field area.

Option 4 would be for a building immediately to the south of the sports hall. While this would be close to the sports hall, there was a concern in respect of the loss of the main open field which is used for events.

Option 5 is the current proposal put forwards for the new wing to be located to the south of the farmhouse.

Officers are satisfied based on the options and feasibility information put forwards, that alternatives have been considered. They are also satisfied that there are justifiable operational and inclusivity issues, which have led to the proposed wing being situated in the location proposed.

As above, it is also accepted that the proposed works would enable the Trust to provide enhanced facilities for disadvantaged and disabled children and their families. It is accepted that the nature of the use means that in all likelihood it needs to be located within a rural setting.

In the absence of viable alternatives to provide a similar level of enhanced provision, great weight is attributed to the health, well-being and inclusivity benefits of the proposal.

Other Matters

Securing the optimal future long-term use of the building

It is not considered that it has been demonstrated that the proposed works are necessary to secure the optimal future long-term use of the building. Reference has been made in the submission to the benefits of removing the existing extensions from the building, including the existing conservatory. However, it is considered that the net effect of the proposals would be harmful, even considering the removal of any existing elements.

There is nothing to indicate that the building would not continue to be used by the Trust in the event that planning permission is refused. As such, this is not considered to carry weight in favour of the proposal.

The opportunity exists to improve the ecological value through landscaping and planting which will mitigate against the loss of the small area of existing amenity grassland taken by the new proposed wing. Further recommendations are contained in the report relating to the construction phase and include further mitigation opportunities for example through native species planting and bird boxes.

As these recommendations only seek to mitigate harm which will result from the development, no positive weight can be attributed to such opportunities. Furthermore, CELPS policy SE 3 requires all developments to aim to positively contribute to the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity and geodiversity and should not negatively affect these interests. The provision of ecological enhancements is required to comply with this policy. It is a neutral factor in the assessment of this application.

Planning Balance - very special circumstances including heritage balance

The proposal would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. The NPPF establishes that substantial weight should be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and development should not be approved except in very special circumstances. It would also have an adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt and result in encroachment conflicting with one of the Green Belt purposes. It would also result in a high level of less than substantial harm to the listed building.

Very special circumstances will not exist unless the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm are clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The other considerations, namely the provision of enhanced facilities for disabled children and the benefits to well-being and inclusivity, are significant and carry great weight.

Both CELPS policy SC 3 and NPPF paragraph 91 seek to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places. On-site constraints at the Trust currently restrict the facilities for children in wheelchairs, prevent full inclusivity and result in potential conflict between vulnerable site users and vehicles.

The Trust have reviewed alternative means of addressing the existing issues and have provided this information. Alternative locations have been reviewed and discounted by the Trust. Officers are satisfied that there are justifiable operational and inclusivity issues, which have led to the proposed wing being situated in the location proposed. Alternative locations would not provide the same benefits and would also result in harm to the Green Belt or other material harm.

The extension to the farmhouse and the new wing would result in less than substantial harm to the listed building and its setting. While not reaching the threshold for substantial harm, overall, the level of harm to the listed building and its setting would still be high.

In accordance with NPPF paragraph 196, the Local Planning Authority is obliged to weigh the less than substantial harm against the public benefits of the proposal, including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.

The development would allow the Trust to provide enhanced facilities for vulnerable children. The applicants have also demonstrated that alternative means of providing the requisite accommodation have been considered and discounted. The applicant has also proposed repairs to the listed building as part of the development. This carries modest weight in favour of the development, as a public benefit. To ensure that these repairs are carried out, this will be required by condition. While the level of harm to the designated heritage asset is high, there are also compelling public benefits, which outweigh this harm.

On balance, the public benefits attributed, resulting from the enhancement of the unique offer provided by the Trust, would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other identified harm.

CONCLUSIONS

The proposed development would be inappropriate development in the Green Belt. It would also result in harm to openness and result in encroachment, conflicting with one of the Green Belt purposes.

The proposed extension to the farmhouse, the new wing and the areas of hard landscaping would also result in less than substantial harm to the listed building and its setting.

The proposal would address a number of operational issues that the Trust currently face, including matters relating to accessibility, inclusivity, accommodation for disabled children and vehicle/pedestrian conflict.

It has also been demonstrated that alternative locations have been considered and justifiably discounted.

On balance, the health, well-being and inclusivity benefits of the proposal are considered to clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other identified harm. The application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the application for planning permission be approved subject to the following conditions:

- 1. Commencement of development – three years**
- 2. Development in accordance with approved plans**
- 3. Details of finished levels (pre-commencement)**
- 4. Protection for nesting birds**
- 5. Ecological enhancements**
- 6. Development in accordance with Flood Risk Assessment**
- 7. Submission of drainage strategy and maintenance plan (pre-commencement)**
- 8. Samples of materials**
- 9. Large scale details – extension and new building**
- 10. Metal rainwater goods**
- 11. Schedule of repairs and implementation prior to first use (farmhouse)**
- 12. Submission of landscaping scheme**
- 13. Implementation of landscaping scheme**
- 14. Boundary treatments**
- 15. Retention of trees**
- 16. Tree Protection (pre-commencement)**
- 17. Development in accordance with Arboricultural Implications Assessment**
- 18. Implementation of mitigation in approved Acoustic Report**
- 19. Provision of parking and turning areas**

In the event of any changes being needed to the wording of the Committee's decision (such as to delete, vary or add conditions / informatives / planning obligations or reasons for approval/refusal) prior to the decision being issued, the Head of Planning has delegated authority to do so in consultation with the Chairman of the Northern Planning Committee, provided that the changes do not exceed the substantive nature of the Committee's decision.

