

Application No: 21/3505N

Location: THE PARKES, MONKS LANE, AUDLEM, CHESHIRE, CW3 0HP

Proposal: Change of use from use class C3 (residential) to sui generis (wedding venue) and associated parking.

Applicant: Mr Anthony Parker

Expiry Date: 24-Aug-2021

SUMMARY

The application site relates to the property known as The Parkes which lies within open countryside to the north of Audlem and accessed via a driveway from Monks Lane. The Parkes was formerly part of the adjoining working Dairy Farm, but this former farmhouse has however been separated from the farm complex for some time.

This application seeks approval for the change of use and renovation of The Parkes to a wedding venue. The proposals have been significantly amended during the course of the application. A previously proposed marquee has been omitted, the scale of wedding events reduced, with events to only take place within the house.

Within the Open Countryside Policy EG.2 of the Local Plan encourages the retention and expansion of existing business, particularly through the conversion of existing buildings. Policy NE.15 and CELPS Policy PG6 also allow for the re-use and adaption of rural buildings for a commercial use NPPF (paragraph 84) further states that planning authorities should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development.

The Environmental Health Officer raises no objections to the proposed re-use of The Parkes as a Wedding subject to the recommended conditions. It is considered that the proposed operation of the wedding venue in this location to host relatively small events (60 guests) limited to twice a week, would not result in a significant noise impact that would be harmful to amenity or living conditions of nearby residential properties.

The Highways Officer is satisfied that based on an assessment of the reduced capacity of the venue to 60 guests, and considering the levels of vehicular movements generated by wedding events, the proposals will not have adverse impact on highway safety or cause unacceptable congestion on the local road network.

The proposal would bring positive planning benefits such economic and social benefits through rural diversification and spending in the local economy and complimentary businesses.

Subject to the recommended conditions being imposed, it is considered that the benefits of the proposal outweigh any negative impacts. As such, the proposed application is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Approve Subject to Conditions

REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application has been referred to the Southern Planning Committee by Cllr Rachel Bailey for the following reasons:

Significant concern as to impact on amenity of local residents in terms of access/exit to the site, hours of operation and potential levels of noise.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site relates to a substantial property known as The Parkes, comprising a large former farmhouse, its grounds which includes a tennis court and part of a field on the northern side of the property. The site lies within the open countryside to the north of Audlem.

The Parkes is accessed off Monks Lane, via a private drive. Part of the driveway also accommodates the route of Public Footpath Audlem FP17 which runs northward from Monks Lane.

The Parkes was formerly part of the adjoining working Dairy Farm. The former Farmhouse has however been separated from the farm complex for some time. Farm traffic uses an access road leading off the driveway to the south of The Parkes and was approved under 19/5658N. A small group of traditional farm buildings adjoining the eastern site boundary are within the applicant's ownership, beyond which are operation areas and building of the farm complex.

The farmhouses and its grounds are screened through established wooded boundaries to south and west of the site.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This application seeks approval for the change of use and renovation of this large house and its grounds known as The Parkes for as a wedding venue.

The proposals have been significantly amended during the course of the application. A previously proposed marquee to be sited on the tennis court has been omitted from the application. The scale of wedding events has been reduced, and which will only take place within the house.

The proposed change of use would enable year-round indoor weddings, with up to 60 guests to be held within The Parkes. The venue will also include 4 bedrooms for use by guests.

The proposals include the provision of car parking within the application site. Parking areas are located off the private driveway to the south of the existing tennis court and within a small part of part of a field to the north of the house which will accommodate 70 parking spaces. Grass reinforcement mesh will be used to protect grassy areas used for parking.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is an extensive history of agricultural operations on this site. The most recent of which is relevant to this proposal;

19/5658N - Agricultural determination for a proposed new road 145m in length and 4.5m in width.
Approved 02-Jan-2020

14/5155N - Proposed Agricultural Entrance, Drive and Passing Bays. Refused 23-Dec-2014

POLICIES

Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy

MP1 Presumption in favour of sustainable development
PG1 Overall Development Strategy
PG6 Open Countryside
EG2 Rural Economy
EG4 Tourism
SD1 Sustainable Development in Cheshire East
SD2 Sustainable Development Principles
SE1 Design
SE2 Efficient Use of Land
SE3 Biodiversity and Geodiversity
SE4 The Landscape
SE5 Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland
CO1 Sustainable Travel and Transport

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

Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan

NE.5 - Nature Conservation and Habitats
NE.9 - Protected Species
NE.13 - Rural Diversification
NE.15 - Re-use And Adaptation of a Rural Building for a Commercial. Industrial or Recreational Use
BE.1 - Amenity
BE.3 - Access and Parking
BE.4 - Drainage, Utilities and Resources
RT.9 - Footpaths and Bridleways

Audlem Neighbourhood Plan

The plan was made on the 12 April 2016.

Policy D10: Drainage
Policy D13: Safe Access
Policy D15: Reuse of Redundant Buildings
Policy B2: Redundant Farm Buildings
Policy B6: Tourism
Policy T2: Traffic Congestion and Risks to Road Users
Policy T4: Pedestrian Footways

Policy CW2: Community Facilities and Services

National Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Environmental Health: No objection to amended proposals subject to conditions.

Highways: No objection

Public Rights of Way: No objection subject to access to be made good post construction and standard informatives.

Flood risk: No objection

Audlem Parish Council: Updated comments as follows in respect of the amended proposals;

Acknowledges the revised plans for the proposed wedding venue in Monks Lane. The removal of the need for a marquee should contribute greatly to noise reduction for neighbouring properties. Should the applicants agree to the proposed operating hours suggested by Cheshire East Environmental Services this again reduces both noise levels and impacts on times of vehicles leaving the venue in the early hours.

However, should the applicants have objections to these operating proposals the Parish Council would like the applicants to advise how they intend to limit the impact on neighbouring properties of vehicles leaving in the early hours of the morning.

The Parish Council would have no objections should these conditions be met.

Hankelow Parish Council: Comment as follows (in relation to originally submitted proposals) ;

- The hours of operation for this venue are stated between 0800 hours and 0100 hours. The Parish Council is concerned about the increase in noise levels if this planning application were to be approved on this basis, particularly loud music from the development, and would seek assurance that the music will cease no later than 10.30pm, Sunday-Thursday and no later than 11pm on Friday and Saturday. The Parish Council requests that a noise assessment is carried out before final consideration of this planning application.
- The wedding venue is capable of accommodating up to 300 guests. The Parish Council is concerned about the associated increase in traffic on Monks Lane if this planning application were to be approved and requests that a representative from Highways visit the site to review the Lane and provide an assessment on whether it can accommodate the proposed increased volume of traffic.
- Concern about light pollution and ask that outside lighting should be kept to the minimum required for safety and security. It should be well located and directed downwards and designed to minimise the impact on the environment and on wildlife.

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS:

A total 116 representations have been received which object to the proposal for the reasons summarised below:

- Amended details do not demonstrate that this location is suitable
- Not in keeping with quiet, rural setting and local infrastructure will not support the change of use.
- Inappropriate location too close to residential area
- Detrimental to quality of life
- Noise pollution and disturbance from wedding events, including loud music, fireworks, and traffic noise late into the night/early hours
- Noise will carry across open fields particularly in the evenings and summer months when windows at venue remain open
- Noise levels will have a detrimental impact on the amenities, health/medical conditions of residents of Corbrook Park nursing home which incorporates a dementia unit.
- Excessive noise generation from marquee
- Wedding party traffic/revellers leaving venue would disturb residents late into the night,
- Noise/disturbance from contractors/wedding staff leaving in the early hours.
- Disagree with consultation response of the Council's Environmental Health Officer. As no proper analysis of noise levels resulting from music nor consideration of need for sound proofing/glazing/ windows to be kept shut, or the nature of the entertainment proposed. Irrational to conclude that discos/live music/wedding setting up will have no impact on nearby properties.
- The proposed conditions will not have the effect of reducing the impact to an acceptable level
- Without an effective air conditioning system, even though the proposal is to hold events indoor, if windows/doors are kept open this will result in noise escape
- Increase in light pollution
- Exacerbate existing highway safety problems
- Increase in traffic congestion
- Exacerbate problems of traffic congestion at junction of Heathfield Road and Monks Lane due to traffic movements generated by Audlem St. James School and the school nursery also proposed for expansion
- Monks Lane is a largely narrow single-track, unlit country lane, subject to national speed limit (60mph) beyond the village with several blind bends, including one immediately at the entrance to The Parkes.
- Increase in traffic on Monks Lane and Heathfield Road will result in increased highway dangers to pedestrians, school children and cyclists. These roads are very narrow without pavements, lack passing places and are in disrepair.
- Exacerbate existing highway problems resulting from numbers of large agricultural vehicles travelling between Heathfield Road and The Parkes (farm).
- 14/5155N for an additional access road to be built to Parkes Farm from Monks Lane was rejected because of farm traffic causing severe issues on Monks Lane.
- Additional traffic on A529 and through Audlem
- Hazardous directions to venue will be given SATNAV. If approaching venue from the east of Audlem vehicles will be directed up Heathfield Road past the primary and nursery schools and from the north routed via Monks Lane from Longhill Lane which is a narrow, single track route with very few passing spaces
- Highway & Transport Report inaccurate and underestimates resulting levels of traffic
- Audlem Neighbourhood Plan highlights traffic congestion and risks to road users in Heathfield Road and proposals contrary to policy T2
- The driveway from Monks Lane to The Parkes is a public footpath/right of way resulting in safety risks to users
- Adverse impact on livestock and wildlife
- Number of guests should be restricted to 60 and events limited to 2 per week

- Once venue is established no real assurance there will be no increase in scale, a change of management policy or effective enforcement of the conditions proposed
- Potential for further applications to extend the business.
- No economic benefit to the village and may take business away from venues in the village and others in wider the area
- Proposals are for a hotel given inclusion of 4 bedrooms
- Adverse visual impact of car parking area
- Reduction in property values
- Floor plans do little to inform future use of the building
- Contradictions/Omissions in Design Access and Planning Statement
- Proposals contrary to the objectives and criteria of Policies T2, B2 and CW2 of the Audlem Neighbourhood Plan
- Contrary to Policy PG 6 of Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy
- Contrary to policies of Hankelow Neighbourhood Plan(NB site not within Hankelow Neighbourhood Plan area)
- A Committee site visit is necessary to appreciate how close site is to nearby dwellings and Corbrook Park care home

A total of 3 representations have been received in support of the application for the following reasons;

- Enterprise will bring much needed revenue, jobs and business to Audlem given economic impact over the last 2 years from Covid 19.
- The Parkes is located well away from the village and proposals will not have a detrimental impact
- Provided the stated arrangements are put in place and enforced to protect the environment, these proposals to reuse the building will greatly benefit the local town and businesses and outweigh drawbacks
- With many new young couples moving into the village more this is a perfect location to keep a wedding local
- Audlem village with fantastic local amenities and a beautiful church would benefit from the proposed wedding venue
- Along with the opening of the community pub in Hankelow passing trade, wedding guests etc would support business

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of Development

The development is outside of the settlement boundary and within the open countryside. The proposals relate to re-use of this substantial, former farmhouse to accommodate a wedding venue.

Saved Policy NE.15 and CELPS Policy PG.6 allow for the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings for a commercial use with the relevant criteria being:

Policy NE.15:

- The building is of substantial, sound and permanent construction
- The form, bulk and general design of the building is in keeping with its surroundings

- Any conversion work respects local building styles and materials

CELPS Policy PG.6:

- the building is permanent, substantial and would not require extensive alteration, rebuilding or extension.
- The development is essential for the expansion or redevelopment of an existing business

With the regard to the two Policies above, the existing building is substantial, sound and of permanent construction. Furthermore, the proposed alterations will be minimal, and primarily relate to the renovation of the building, in order to make it suitable for the proposed change of use.

Following on from CELPS Policy PG.6, Policy EG.2 is consistent with the objectives of NPPF (para 84) which states that planning authorities should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity. A positive approach should be taken to sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, particularly through the conversion of existing buildings. However, it should be ensured that development is sensitive to its surroundings and does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads. Further to this, there should not be any conflict with other relevant Local Plan Policies.

Outside the Principal Towns, Key Service Centres and Local Service Centres, Policy EG.2 allows developments that:

- Provide opportunities for local rural employment development that supports the vitality of rural settlements;
- Create or extend rural based tourist attractions, visitor facilities and recreational uses;
- Encourage the retention and expansion of existing businesses, particularly through the conversion of existing buildings

Will be supported where:

- Supports the rural economy, and could not reasonably be expected to locate within a designated centre by reason of their products sold
- Is supported by adequate infrastructure
- Is consistent in scale with its location and does not adversely affect nearby buildings and the surrounding area or detract from residential amenity
- Is well sited and designed in order to conserve and where possible enhance the character and quality of the landscape and built form

In addition, the criteria of ANP policies Policy B2: Redundant Farm Buildings, Policy B6: Tourism and Policy CW2: Community Facilities and Services largely echo the requirements of Policy EG2 above.

It is considered that the proposed development will comply with the first parts Policy EG2 as it provides employment opportunities not only at the site but also with other local services associated with the wedding venue use and will essentially provide a rural based visitor/recreational facility.

In terms of the second part of this policy the proposal would support the rural economy by virtue of being sited in a rural area. The use could not be expected to locate to a designated centre as the nature of the use typically relies on the rural setting. In terms of adequate infrastructure, the Highway Officer has confirmed the road network can accommodate the proposed use without resulting in highway safety or management problems. As addressed in amenity section below the revised proposals will not result in an unacceptable impact on the amenities of local residents.

Further to the above criteria, the development will have a minimal impact on the character or appearance of the existing farmhouse and proposed parking areas would not constitute a significant feature with the landscape given screening from existing woodland/vegetation and the backdrop of the adjacent farm complex and building close to the eastern site boundary. It is therefore considered that the principle of the proposed development is in accordance with Policies NE.15 of the C&NLP, PG6 and EG2 of the CELPS and B2 and B6 of the ANP.

Amenity

Saved Policy BE.1 of the Local Plan advises that new development should not be permitted if it is deemed to have a detrimental impact upon neighbouring amenity in terms of noise and disturbance.

The site lies within a rural setting in open countryside. The nearest dwellings affected by this proposal would be those of Monks Lane about 200m directly to the south of the site across agricultural land. Beyond these dwellings, are properties off Heathfield Road and Monks Lane, and the development (Anwyl) along the A529 Audlem Road/ Cheshire Street, which lie within the Audlem Settlement Boundary around 400m to south and west of the site. In addition several further properties alongside Audlem Road to the north and west, are located between 230m and 350m from the site boundary. Also, the nearest part of Corbrook Park Nursing Home complex is about 180m from the application site boundary and situated to the north-west of the site.

The application has been revised to omit the previously proposed marquee given the potential for significant noise impact, as well as substantially reducing the capacity for the wedding venue. The applicant has confirmed that events will be solely accommodated within this large house. Indicative floor plans have been provided of the building which show dedicated spaces for catering, ceremonies and receptions to accommodate 60 guests.

Further details of the how wedding events will be managed has been provided by the applicant. This states that all guests will be off-site (unless staying) by Midnight. Given the anticipated level of vehicle movements which will be generated by the venue, addressed in the Highway section below, it is not considered that this will result in unacceptable levels of disturbance to nearby properties along surrounding roads, given that typically not all guests will leave the venue at the same time, with departures staggered during the evening.

The applicant has further advised that, "all weddings/celebrations will have a contractual agreement which would be venue specific and ensure no fireworks, lanterns, times of departure etc". In addition, the applicant states that given the nature of the business and the setup times required the venue would host 2 events a week as a maximum.

The Environmental Health Officer has considered the noise impact of the amended proposals, and given their limited scale and nature, does not consider it reasonable to require an Acoustic Assessment to be submitted in support of the application.

It is accepted that some level of noise will be audible from outside the premises on occasions, particularly should windows of the buildings be open. However, given the relatively small scale of wedding events which will be held at The Parkes and given the distance of the premises from the nearest residential properties, the Environmental Health Officer has advised that noise levels would not have adverse impact on the amenities or living conditions of local residents. This is however subject to planning conditions being imposed, including that operating hours of the venue are restricted to between 08:00 hours to Midnight, and also deliveries to the premises limited from 08:00 hours to 18:00 hours.

In addition, conditions are recommended to ensure that all events are to take place within the venue building (farmhouse) with no outdoor music or firework displays. Further conditions are also necessary which restrict the number of a guests at events to a maximum of 60, with no more than 2 events per week (as stated by the applicant).

Importantly the premises would also be subject to the provisions of the Environmental Protection Act, which significantly controls noise nuisance. Furthermore, the wedding venue will be required to be Licensed for the consumption of alcohol and as late-night entertainment/music venue. The Environmental Health Officer has advised that a typical condition of such a Licence is that no music is audible beyond the boundary of the premises.

In terms of addressing potential light pollution from the premises, a planning condition is recommended to be imposed requiring a detailed scheme of the location, specification and level of illumination for external lighting prior to its installation.

Therefore, further to assessment of the amended proposals, the Council's Environmental Health Officer has not raised no objections to the reuse of The Parkes Farmhouse as a wedding venue subject to the planning conditions as set out above. Having regard to the location of the site and nearby dwellings and the scale and nature of the events, the noise impact of the proposed use is not considered to be so significant that it would justify a refusal of planning permission. The proposal is therefore considered to comply with saved Policy BE.1.

Highways and Parking

The proposal is for a wedding venue within an existing property in a rural location to the north of Audlem which is located off Monks Lane and includes off-road parking (70 spaces). The proposed wedding venue was initially to cater for a maximum of 300 guests, but this has since been reduced to 60 guests.

It is recognised that the site is in an isolated location, with a lack of pedestrian and public transport infrastructure to the site but this is typical of many wedding venues, and the proposal will be a car dominated one for access.

It is proposed that the wedding venue will accommodate a maximum of 60 guests and require approximately 10 wedding staff. The staff would arrive prior to, and after, the event and the

Highway Officer considers that the impact of staff vehicle trips on the highway network will be minimal.

The Highway Officer has advised that Car Sharing to a wedding event is usually high, and assuming 2 guests per car then around 30 to 40 vehicle trips would be generated and be spread over a 1 to 2 hour period. At worst, this averages to less than a car trip per minute. In addition, there will be 4 rooms available within the site for the bride and groom and family who would arrive before most other guests.

Access to the site is from Monks Lane which is a minor unclassified road with little through traffic movement. The Highway Officer accepts that forward visibility and carriageway widths are limited in sections, but this however assists in limiting vehicle speeds. The access to The Parkes provides sufficient visibility in both directions and the access bell-mouth is wide enough to allow 2 cars to rest of the carriageway if necessary.

The majority of guests will likely enter Monks Lane via Heathfield Road which the Highway Officer considers is itself capable of accommodating the small amount of traffic that will be generated. The majority of Monks Lane either has sufficient width for 2-way car movement or there are passing bays to allow passing movement. There is a short section which is single car width but given the limited traffic generation is considered acceptable. In addition, the applicant has stated that no more than 2 events a week would take place.

It is also considered that the site can accommodate sufficient car parking (70 spaces to satisfactorily meet the needs of the business.

The Highway officer concludes that the reduced capacity of the proposed wedding venue to 60 guests will result in traffic generation that the local highway network can safely accommodate, and the proposal is therefore considered acceptable in highway terms. A condition is therefore recommended to limit the number of guests for events at the premises to 60 persons.

Therefore it is considered that the level of vehicular movements generated by the proposal will not have detrimental impact on highway safety or cause unacceptable congestion on the local road network. As a result, the proposals accord with Policy BE.3 of the Local Plan and ANP Policies T2 and T4.

Public Rights of Way

Part of the driveway serving The Parkes from Monks Lane is also the route of Public Footpath Audlem FP17. It is not considered that the proposed re-use of the farmhouse or provision of car parking areas within the grounds will have an adverse impact on condition of the driveway or route of the footpath.

It is also common that public footpaths are routed along access drives which in this case serves The Parkes and the adjacent farm complex. Given the levels of vehicle movements expected to be associated with events at the proposed wedding venue, and limited to twice a week, it is not considered the proposals will result in unacceptable safety issues for users of the footpath.

The Council's Public Rights of Way Officer has raised no objections to the proposals subject to a standard informative to prevent the footpath being obstructed, and also and that the surface of the driveway is maintained to its current standard following the implementation of development.

Design

The proposal essentially relates to the re-use and renovation of a large farmhouse with minimal external alteration of the building. Therefore, the proposed alterations to the building are minor and would not be out of character.

The proposed car parking areas adjacent to The Parkes and within a small part of the field to the north, will be largely screened by existing planting/vegetation and would also be viewed against the backdrop of buildings at The Parkes and the adjacent farm complex to the east. Given that reinforcement mesh will be used to protect grassy areas used for parking, and parking areas will not be used intensively, this will ensure that these areas will retain their existing appearance and not constitute an unacceptable visual feature, particularly when viewed from Audlem FP17.

Nature Conservation

The proposals also include the use of two areas of grassland as parking. The Council's Ecologist has advised that this modest impact on biodiversity can be mitigated for with a simple biodiversity enhancement plan.

Ecological Enhancement

Local Plan Policy SE 3(5) requires all developments to aim to positively contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. This planning application provides an opportunity to incorporate features to increase the biodiversity value of the final development in accordance with this policy. A condition should be attached which requires the submission and approval of an ecological enhancement strategy prior to the change of use of grassland to parking on this site, a strategy for the incorporation of features for nesting birds, and native species planting.

Planning Balance & Conclusions

In principle the proposed commercial re-use of the former farmhouses associated with Parkes Farm would accord with Policies EG.2, PG.6 and NE.15. Furthermore as stated by the NPPF (para 84) a positive approach is required to be taken to support economic growth and in create jobs in rural areas, particularly through the conversion of existing buildings.

The Environmental Health Officer raises no objections to the proposed re-use of The Parkes as a Wedding subject to the recommended conditions. It is considered that the proposed operation of the wedding venue in this location to host relatively small events (60 guests) limited to twice a week, would not result in a significant noise impact that would be harmful to amenity or living conditions of nearby residential properties.

The Highways Officer is satisfied that based on an assessment of the reduced capacity of the venue to 60 guests and considering the levels of vehicular movements generated by wedding events, the proposals will not have adverse impact on highway safety or cause unacceptable congestion on the local road network.

The proposals would bring positive planning benefits such economic and social benefits through rural diversification and spending in the local economy and complimentary businesses.

Consequently, subject to the subject to the recommended conditions it is considered that the benefits of the proposal outweigh any negative impacts.

RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE subject to conditions

1. **Time (3 years)**
2. **Plans**
3. **External lighting to be submitted and approved**
4. **2 events per week each limited to a maximum of 60 guests**
5. **Hours of operation - 08.00 Hours until Midnight**
6. **Deliveries to premises between - 08.00 hours and 18.00 hours**
7. **Events to take place within house only**
8. **No fireworks or outdoor music**
9. **Details of parking areas**
10. **Ecological enhancement strategy**

In order to give proper effect to the Committee's intentions and without changing the substance of the decision, authority is delegated to the Head of Development Management, in consultation with the Chair (or in his absence the Vice Chair) of the Southern Planning Committee, to correct any technical slip or omission in the wording of the resolution, between approval of the minutes and issue of the decision notice.

