

F.A.O. Ranald Dods, Planning Officer
Development Management
Planning Housing and Related Services
Scottish Borders Council

15 November 2022

Re: 22/01612/FUL, Ratchill

Dear Mr Dods,

Thank you for your email of 10 November 2022 regarding the proposals for Ratchill. We were surprised to read that Scottish Borders Council do not feel they can support this application, and also we were disappointed that such a strong opposition to the scheme has been expressed.

A copy of your email text is included below:

I am afraid we cannot support the above application. The proposals would not be acceptable in terms of, principally, PMD2 in that its scale, form and design would not be an appropriate addition to the existing building. It dominates the house and, rather than the extension being subservient to the existing house, it is the other way around. The proposal is so large that far from reading like an extension to the property, the proposal reads like a new dwelling.

That having been said, rather than refuse the current application, I suggest it is withdrawn and more modest proposals submitted as a fresh application as the changes required would be significant. Please advise me by close of business 18 November whether or not the application is to be withdrawn, failing which, I will proceed to determination.

We wish to take an opportunity to clarify why we feel strongly that the proposed scheme *is* appropriate, and moreover that it will make an outstanding, positive contribution to the architecture and heritage of the site. Set below is an initial response to the concerns raised in your letter, expanding on the explanations and design arguments already provided in our *Design & Access Statement (DAS)*.

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Our understanding of your letter is that it raises a principal concern over the 'appropriateness' of the proposed development, in particular in relation to the immediately-adjacent *Cottage* building forming part of the complex of buildings on the site. You raise concerns jointly about the "scale, form and design" of the proposed extension. The letter references policy PMD2 Quality Standards makes overall requires development to "...ensure that it does not negatively impact on the existing buildings, or surrounding landscape and visual amenity of the area", and PMD2 (i) and (j) states development must be:

PMD2-i: "...of a scale, massing, height and density appropriate to its surroundings and, where an extension or alteration, appropriate to the existing building".

PMD2-j "...compatible with, and respects the character of the surrounding area, neighbouring uses, and neighbouring built form".

It is our strong assertion that the proposed scheme meets and exceeds the policies on Quality Standards.

For some initial context, the site and proposed extension is not visible from any public place. The buildings are not considered to be of a sensitive or unique character, not least because the Cottage, Byre and surrounding landscaping have been neglected and suffered from numerous poorly-considered alterations over their lifetimes. None are Listed or in Conservation Areas, or have any of these designations nearby. The position of the extension to the side elevation of the furthest-away gable of the building group, has been deliberately located to minimise impacts on the character of the older surviving parts of the farmyard buildings, especially when viewed on approach to the site.

By referring in your letter to the proposed extension being “dominating” or not “subservient” we are firstly concerned that SBC are too narrowly judging the design in relation only to the *Cottage* building onto which it is directly attached, and this has resulted in a perception of over-development and/or over-scaled development.

Reiterating some of the information provided in our DAS, it is vital that we emphasise that the whole collection of buildings at Ratchill forms part of the existing dwelling that is being altered and extended, not just the Cottage. With this in mind, the position and form of the proposed extension was carefully developed as a response to the physical and historical context of the group of buildings at Ratchill:

- The location of the extension on the far west of the site means that it does not impact on the historic pattern of buildings around what remains of the former farmyard, especially on approach to the site up the driveway.
- The extension being placed perpendicular to the Cottage and Byre south elevations, presents its narrow gable end towards the most visible frontages of the buildings, minimising its impact.
- Pushing the main form of the extension forwards of the south Cottage and Byre elevations, and extruding the new pitched roof it northwards, bookends the site mirroring the northern axis wing of the Byre and also the Mill to the east. This directly respects, responds and positively contributes to the site's sense of place.
- The greatest visual impact is felt when viewing the proposals from the field in the west, but the extension here aligns with a historic boundary condition, and other from than wild meadows and woodlands there are no places where this full elevation is regularly viewable.

Your letter also states that the building “reads like a new dwelling”. This again underscores a misreading both of the site context and the proposals. It may be fair to say that the proposed extension reads like a ‘*new building*’, because this is precisely the intent of the design - to establish a new intervention that sits within the wider building group with an obvious distinction between old and new, emphasised by clearly offsetting the main extension from away from the existing Cottage. However, it would be incorrect to suggest it “reads like a new dwelling” as this fundamentally disregards the context of the current dwelling being comprised of several distinct buildings.

Incidentally, we would highlight that there are already two consented schemes for a whole new dwelling on the land at Ratchill (refs. 14/01148/PPP and 11/00231/PPP) which would much more dramatically increase the built footprint of the site compared with the current proposed extension, complete eroding the setting and historical pattern of the existing building group by locating a new house in a previously-undeveloped north-west area of the site, and involving substantial destructive access routes and services installations over virgin ground. The applicants, our clients, are keen to invest in restoring the neglected buildings at Ratchill to form a cohesive family home, with a preference for extending and altering rather than demolishing or starting from new.

In total there are circa 700m² of enclosed existing building footprints at Ratchill. The proposed development includes the removal of circa 68m² from the Cottage - later interventions of poor quality and little architectural merit - and the addition of net 97m² of enclosed building footprint, representing only a 14% increase. However, we reiterate the historical context contained within the *DAS* which clearly shows Ratchill has a legacy of much more substantial ranges of buildings in the past.

Even when focusing solely on the Cottage, we do not agree qualitatively or qualitatively that the extension is over-scaled. Taking the enclosed footprints of the Cottage and extension only:

Existing = 210m²

Existing removed = 68m²

Existing retained = 142m²

Proposed new = 165m². Only 117m² fully enclosed, habitable areas, as the remainder are covered external areas including the carport.

Net increase = 97m², less than 50% increase on the original building. Of this only 42m² of fully enclosed habitable building, only 20% increase on the existing building.

We argue strongly that the scheme *is* highly appropriate in terms of its scale, design and form. The form and expression of the main part of the extension is entirely within the familiar vernacular language of domestic and converted agricultural buildings in rural Scotland and the Borders, and our DAS sets this out in further detail.

- The main body of the extension is a 1.5-storey arrangement, with a traditional double-pitched roof and use of traditional dormer and rooflight approaches to creating usable space on the upper level.
- The width of the main part of the extension (6.4m wide) relates directly to the adjacent cottage and all other buildings on the site (all around 6.2m wide) creating a familiar vernacular scale to the gables.
- Floor-to-ceiling heights at the ground floor are generally 2.4m, relating to normal domestic scales and to the existing eaves levels of the adjacent *Cottage* building.
- The 1.5-storey form is deliberately offset from the gable of the existing *Cottage* building by a section of flat green roof, with fully glazed elevations on both sides. This creates an important visual break at the gable of the existing building, something which the current poor-quality plastic conservatory does not respect.
- The natural sloping topography of the site has been used to knit the proposed extension into its context, capitalising on the higher-level access to the north and stepping down to increase headroom in the living room at the south.
- Proposed external materials are a simple palette of natural stone, timber cladding and corrugated steel, all of which are entirely appropriate and familiar materials used in traditional and contemporary vernacular architecture in rural Scotland. Part of the proposals includes re-cladding the cement-rendered north wing of the Cottage with matching timber cladding to the extension, further reinforcing a holistic design proposal for the site.
- There are larger areas glazing proposed on the ground floor of the extension. However, we would argue that this is entirely in keeping with contemporary architectural interventions of this type, and also reflects the typical scale and proportion of openings in traditional agricultural buildings.

We would be more than happy to provide additional material in support of this application, such as longer elevations and sections through the wider site to illustrate the extension's context in relation to the other buildings.

Your email refers to the proposed extension "dominating" the existing building and criticises the design for not being "subservient". As a matter of policy, we would highlight that nowhere within local SBC or national Scottish Government planning policies or guidance is there a presumption towards "subservient" relevant in order to demonstrate an appropriateness to setting or existing buildings. An exception would be in the case of Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas where relevant other policies and guidance including those from HES would be relevant. However, the site and buildings at Ratchill do not have any of these protected designations, nor would the development impact on any nearby protected designations. Even were it the case that SBC policies demanded subservience from all extension forms, for the reasons given above we disagree that this scheme is "dominating" the existing building(s).

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We hope to have a constructive dialogue with SBC planning regarding this application, so that we can alleviate concerns or misunderstandings about the proposed development.

To facilitate this, we would be grateful if SBC would consider delaying the determination of this application for a brief period beyond 18th November 2022 to allow time for ongoing discussion.

Sincerely,

Thomas Fitzgerald

Associate Architect
For and on behalf of WT Architecture