AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	**REFERENCE**	APA/03/0174
1.1	Proposed Development	"Proposed Rural Workers Dwelling"
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2023/05095
1.4	Applicant	Mr Robert Noad, J.S.Noad & Son, Strangers Corner Farm, Semington
1.5	Site Address	Woodhouse Farm, The Strand, Keevil BA14 6LL

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The application site forms part of Woodhouse Farm. Woodhouse Farm lies immediately south of the A361, opposite The Lamb pub and about a mile due north of Keevil.

2.2 Area and tenure

The farm is run with Strangers Corner Farm at Littleton and the combined unit extends to approximately 243ha (600 acres) of which 500 acres is owned freehold with 40ha (100 acres) held under various short term arrangements and farm business tenancies.

3.0 FARMING PRACTICE

Existing

3.1 The farm is run as a livestock unit, with dairy, dairy youngstock and beef enterprises. The dairy unit is based at Woodhouse Farm and comprises 130 cows. The youngstock and beef units are based at Strangers Corner Farm.

3.2 The dairy cows are calved across the year. Milk is sold wholesale to First Milk. The herd is operated as a "closed" herd so all the replacement dairy cows are progeny of the existing dairy herd. The cows and replacement heifers are all calved at Woodhouse Farm. The cows are accommodated and milked in modern spacious well-ventilated buildings and it is clear that there has been significant investment in the holding in recent years.

3.3 In addition to the dairy cows the business currently operates with:

- 70 in calf heifers
- 190 calves 0-3 months
- 125 stores and heifers 6-12 months
- 65 beef stores 12-18 months

3.4 Day to day management of the farm is conducted by the applicant and a full time farm worker. Forage making and dung spreading are undertaken through the use of agricultural contractors.

Proposed

3.5 The proposal is to expand the dairy herd to 200 milking cows through the admission of the current crop of heifers. The unit has the infrastructure and cow accommodation to farm at that level. The applicant has appointed a new full time herd manager who will run the business at that level and it is intended that worker will occupy the proposed dwelling.

Comments

3.6 The farm is a well established unit and it is clear that there has been a significant level of investment in the business in recent years including a new milking parlour and dairy, new livestock accommodation and a new farm waste system.

Buildings

3.7 The key buildings at the holding include:

- 16:32 milking parlour, with covered collecting yard, dairy and bulk tank
- Loose housing, yards and two adjoining cubicle houses with 300 cubicles.
- The farm waste store, including a separator.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

4.1 There are three dwellings at the farm:

- There is a detached dwelling, just east of the farm buildings, which is occupied by the applicant's mother.
- There is a substantial dwelling adjoining the dairy and parlour. The dwelling is approximately 250 years old and is unoccupied and in a state of dilapidation. The applicant advises that the use as a dwelling was abandoned some years ago. The applicant advises that the building is Listed.
- The subject dwelling, which is in an advanced stage of construction.

4.2 The applicant advises that he lives at Strangers Corner Farm, which is about two miles by road from the application site.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

5.1 The applicant advises he works on the unit full time, together with a full-time worker.

Anticipated if proposals undertaken

5.2 The expansion of the dairy enterprise will raise the labour requirement to three units full time.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the existing dairy business. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in 2012 and was revised in 2021. The NPPF replaces all previous Planning Policy Statements (PPS). In the context of the application for the proposed dwelling, paragraph 80 (a) of the NPPF states:

> "Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless……there is an essential need for a rural worker…..to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside."

6.2 Under the NPPF it is therefore relevant to consider the requirements of the current enterprise and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprise.

6.3 It is the applicant's case that the proposed dwelling is required in association with the current dairy enterprise and its proposed expansion.

6.4 The core enterprise at the farm is the dairy unit. A key element of the production of milk is for the dairy cow to be calved annually. In addition to calving the dairy cows, the replacement heifers also need to be calved. Calving takes place across the year. Each calving can require a scale of intervention from structured or very little inspection right through to complications and veterinary surgery. It is my view that calving forms a key part of the assessment essential need.

6.5 It is my view that the scale and frequency of calving, together with the higher level of care required for neo-natal calves, means that the existing enterprise presents an essential need for a presence at Woodhouse Farm.

6.6 The applicant advises that, to date, the essential need has been met by his mother maintaining a watching brief from her dwelling and then advising him (the applicant) of any out of hours need. The applicant advises that his mother is now 86 and cannot maintain that role. The applicant's representation is the situation with his mother, together with the planned expansion of the herd, means that there is a need for a new dwelling at the holding. I explore that representation further at section eight, below.

7.0 BUSINESS ASSESSMENT

7.1 There is no express reference in the NPPF to an assessment of either an existing or proposed business which will operate in association with the proposed rural dwelling. It is my opinion that such an assessment is critical to forming an opinion on the continuation of the "essential need". In this case the essential need described and recognised above will only continue through the operation of the business. If the business does not operate on a profitable and viable basis then it will fail and the authority would be left with a dwelling but no "essential need" for its presence.

7.2 Following the Government's update to Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), published in July 2019, financial viability is now referenced as a consideration when determining the need for a rural worker's dwelling.

7.3 The applicant has submitted profit and loss accounts and the capital accounts for the last three trading periods. It is clear from the accounts that the business if profitable and has a strong capital position. The level of profit is, in my view, sufficient to enable viability. The capital accounts show a high proportion of net assets.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

8.1 As indicated above, there is, in my view, an essential need at the holding. The next logical step is to explore how that need can be met. There are two extant lawful dwellings at the unit. One dwelling is occupied by the applicant's mother and is therefore not available to meet the essential need. The second dwelling is unoccupied an in a state of dilapidation. The applicant advises that the second dwelling is not considered suitable to meet the essential need. The proposal therefore is to meet the essential need through the proposed dwelling.

8.2 From the scanned versions of the submitted plans the proposed dwelling scales to a Gross Internal Area of approximately 94m^2. The NPPF does not offer guidance on the size of dwelling that would be suitable to meet an identified essential need. The former PPS7 (Annex A) identified that a dwelling should be of a size and cost commensurate to the identified functional [essential] need and should not be excessively large or expensive to the farm business.

8.3 The proposed dwelling is, in my view, not excessively large or costly in relation to the identified essential need.

8.4 I understand the cost of the dwelling will be met from retained funds and will not be reliant on a loan.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

There is an essential need for a presence at the holding. The business is well established, profitable and viable with a strong capital base. The proposed dwelling is not excessively large or costly in relation to the essential need.

I trust the above provides you with the information required. If you require any further information, or clarification on the any aspect of the above, please do not hesitate to contact the writer.

A.M Coke BSc (Hons) MRICS

Note: *This Report has been prepared on information provided by the Applicant and or the Applicant's Agent.*

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