ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION FOR A RURAL WORKER'S DWELLING

1.0	**REFERENCE**	APA/003/164
1.1	Proposed Development	"Erection of rural workers dwelling house".
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2022/04679
1.4	Applicant	Ms Sharon Snook, Siennas Valley Farm, Huttenhall Lane, Chapmanslade BA13 4AS
1.5	Site Address	Siennas Valley Farm, Huttenhall Lane, Chapmanslade BA13 4AS

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The site lies immediately west of Huttenhall Lane and approximately quarter of a mile south west of Chapmanslade. The site is in a valley, in open countryside.

2.2 Land area and tenure

The applicant's freehold land extends to 4.7 ha (11.6 acres) in a single block at the application site. In addition to the freehold land, the applicant also holds 0.75 ha (1.85 acres) of land near Frome, some five miles distant from the site. I understand the applicant's occupation of the away land is under a Farm Business Tenancy.

3.0 FARMING PRACTICE

Current and Proposed

3.1 The land is in use as a smallholding; the applicant has a flock of breeding alpacas, together with a poultry enterprise and two Kune Kune sows.

3.2 The alpacas are kept as a breeding herd. I understand that are currently 31 breeding females plus two stud males. Progeny comprises 20 young males and seven females. The poultry enterprise comprises 100 hens, kept to produce eggs.

3.3 The female alpacas are bred each year. The progeny are reared and sold either as breeding stock or as halter trained pets. The alpaca fibre is clipped annually and the fleece processed for sale as wool and yarn products. The business also offers alpaca "experience" days.

3.4 The Kune Kune sows are bred and the progeny sold as weaners. Eggs from the hens are sold.

3.5 The holding is all in grass. I understand that the away land is also in grass. I understand the applicant is to mow and bale her own hay.

Buildings

3.6 The agricultural structures at the holding comprise:

- A three bay shed, constructed with a steel portal frame, profile sheet cladding to the upper elevations with the lower elevations open. The overall dimensions of the building are approximately 9m x 12m with 4.2m eaves.

- Two mobile timber field shelters

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

4.1 The applicant and her family occupy the temporary dwelling on site. Planning permission for the temporary dwelling has now expired and the subject application is to replace the temporary dwelling with the proposed permanent dwelling.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing and Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

5.1 From the agricultural statement provided by the applicants the alpaca unit will generate a labour requirement of just over one and a half full time units of labour.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the existing farm 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 important to recognise that the majority of day to day tasks associated with good husbandry of the livestock, including alpacas, can be undertaken without a dwelling on site. The important exceptions to this recognition are the care of sick animals and calving. It is accepted that animals which are sick or close to, during or immediately after calving may well require essential care at short notice. Calving dates vary for two key reasons, firstly the females run with the stud and are not artificially inseminated, secondly the gestation period of the individual female can vary very significantly with the animal showing few external signs of birthing.

6.4 Cria, when first born are weak and require attention to ensure they receive colostrum, also that their navel is sprayed with antibacterial/antiseptic spray to prevent infection. In this regard they are no different to other domesticated stock.

6.5 It is my experience that in applying the functional test the Planning Inspectorate has paid close attention to the variability of calving dates and the need for quick intervention at calving. Accordingly there are a number of appeal decisions in which Inspectors have formed the view that the essential need test is met by enterprises of an equivalent size to that practised by the applicant.

6.6 The Council will be familiar with the appeal decisions in relation to the appeals heard for similar proposals at the holding (Inspectorate reference APP/Y3940/W/15/3132117). The proposal was for the introduction of a breeding alpaca enterprise up to 30 breeding females. The Inspector concluded (paragraph 22 of his Report) there was a functional [essential] need for a dwelling on the site.

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 I have had sight of the most recent set of accounts for the business, year ending 2022. The accounts show a profit and it is my view that the level of profit shown enables viability. The 2022 period follows the two previous periods in which a loss was made. It would be reasonable to expect the business to generate losses in earlier years as the flock becomes established.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

8.1 The proposal is to provide a new, permanent, two storey dwelling on the site. The proposed dwelling is shown with five bedrooms and will, according to the applicant's representatives, have a gross internal area of 168m^2. The applicant's representatives advise that the total area and number of bedrooms are required as a result of the applicant's personal circumstances.

8.2 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.

6.3 The proposed dwelling is, in my view, somewhat larger than warranted by the identified essential need and I would suggest a dwelling in the region of 150m^2 GIA would be more commensurate with the identified essential need. In this context it is noted that essential need does not expressly take into account the personal circumstances of the worker concerned. It is beyond the scope of my expertise to offer a view on the applicant's personal circumstances.

8.4 The applicant advises that the cost of the dwelling will be met from her private funds and will not require a secured loan or mortgage. The level of profit identified in the accounts provides an element to provide an annualised allowance to reflect the expected cost of the dwelling.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The business generates an essential requirement for a presence on site. The most recent set of accounts show the business to have generated a profit which enables viability. The proposed dwelling is in my view larger than needed to meet 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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