The Farm Consultancy Group



Planning Statement to Support an Application for the Extension of an Existing Dairy Housing Cubicle Shed to provide coverage for a slurry channel at Court Farm, Gastard SN13 9QP

at Court Farm, Gastard

Prepared for B & MJ Richards

By Holly Greenman of The Farm Consultancy Group

1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by Holly Greenman of *The Farm Consultancy Group* on behalf of B & MJ Richards to confirm agricultural justification for an extension to the existing cubicle housing to be constructed at Court Farm, Gastard Lane, Gastard, Corsham. This report should be read in conjunction with the planning application prepared and submitted by Holly Greenman.

The report has been produced based on information provided by the client, farm records and standard costings data where appropriate.

2. Background

Court Farm is a progressive and well-established dairy farm, with around 490 cows in the milking herd. The family business, B & M J Richards operate across two sites, the main holding at Court Farm, Gastard and another farm site in Broughton Gifford, and farm a total of almost 500 acres of mixed grassland and arable land that is largely used to support the dairy herd and provide forage for their cows. Around 300 of these acres are owned, and the remainder is rented in a mix of Farm Business and Grass Keep Tenancies.

The business retains a large number of it's youngstock, taking these animals through to weaning, but more recently taking more through to finishing for beef animals, and these are kept between Court Farm, along with the dairy herd, and the Broughton Gifford farm. The business keeps an average of 1,000 head of cattle in a mix of ages. More recently, this number is necessitated by the on- going Bovine Tuberculosis status of the farm, preventing any animals being sold at open market, resulting in the farm having to keep and house all its youngstock for longer than if they were able to move and trade freely. The herd has been closed for many years, with all dairy replacements bred in- house to mitigate the risk of bringing in disease from external herds. Milk is supplied to Cadbury's through the Selkley Vale Milk Group, and herd health and welfare is a major priority for the farm and business.

3. The Proposal

The roofing area under proposal will adjoin the existing dairy cubicle housing which lies to the southern end of the farmyard, joining on the southern elevation of the existing building. The building will cover existing slatted concrete, which lies over the top of a slurry channel. The cubicle housing is scraped of excreta and slurry with automatic scrapers to this slatted area, where excreta is then dropped through to the channel and pumped to the nearby slurry store. The business has received support from DEFRA

and the RPA through the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative for grant funding for the covering of this area, owing to the benefits for air and water quality that removing rainwater from this area brings.

The building will be 23.74 Metres wide by 6.096 metres in length, 4.9 Metres to the eaves and 5.731 metres tall to the eaves. There will be no cladding or boarding to the elevations, and will just be a cement fibre roof that covers the yard area beneath.

A plan of the existing buildings and their uses can be found in appendix 1.

4. Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) outlines under Section 84 that planning decisions should enable sustainable growth and expansion of businesses in rural areas, and that development of agricultural businesses should be encouraged.

In the county of Wiltshire, the Wiltshire Core Policy 34 states that development that enables sustainable farming and that allows adaptation of businesses to modern practices should be supported. Given that the proposal is largely addressing the farm's environmental responsibilities, and has been given the support through grant funding, it should be supported by the local council also.

5. Agricultural and Environmental Justification

Government policy is moving away from supporting farmers through direct subsidies linked to their production or farmed area, and is instead focusing funding on improving agricultural businesses, encouraging efficiency and rewarding environmental benefits and improvements. The grant funding that has been secured for the B & MJ Richards through Catchment Sensitive Farming forms part of this initiative. In particular, the covering of the scraping area will specifically support governmental intentions for air and water quality improvements, by reducing run off and soiled yard areas.

Cattle slurry is rich in many essential nutrients for growth, hence it makes an excellent organic fertiliser, but these nutrients can also be extremely harmful to air and water when not managed correctly.
Large open yard areas, as well as big slurry stores, can result in high ammonia emissions, owing to the increased surface area and exposure of excreta particles to the air. When excreta is diluted on a yard by rain water, it obviously takes up a larger area as the water and dung mixes together, and the nitrogen within the slurry can, under the right conditions, turn into ammonium nitrate which volatilises into the atmosphere. This poses a threat to human health when found in concentrated and high quantities and is something that the government are targeting for reduction, particularly from the agricultural sector.

The Clean Air Strategy sets out that all slurry lagoons should be covered by 2027 (though this has not yet been adopted into any policy) and the Richards' recognise that they too will need to cover their stores. Whilst the store is of sufficient size to ensure it is capable of holding all of the excreta produced by their cattle, as well as the run-off from their existing dirty yard areas, they also are aware that by reducing the amount of run-off entering the store, they are able to make more room for slurry produced by cows, thus future-proofing their business as they will not be restricted from expanding their herd owing to the capacity of their store. Essentially, the more of the yard areas can be kept 'clean' or roofed, i.e. no slurry or rainwater reach these areas, then the less needs to enter their slurry store.

There is another benefit to reducing the rainwater content of their slurry, which is one that will be realised immediately and is of a major financial benefit to the farm and environmental consideration, and that is that removing water from their slurry store will result in a more pure, more nutrient rich slurry to apply to their land, and there will be less of it. This means that growing crops can benefit from the nitrogen and phosphate rich slurry without the added water causing nutrient dilution, but also the risk of the slurry leaching straight through the earth into the water course or running off over the ground is also minimised. This is something that farmers need to be more considerate of, timing their applications and using lower amounts of organic fertiliser to reduce the effect on the water bodies.

Organic fertilisers are essential to the growing of forage crops, providing many of the essential nutrients and also promoting soil structure and organic matter development, something which provides a benefit not only to the growing crop but continues to promote yields and benefit soils for years to come. More organic matter rich soils are less prone to erosion, more drought resistant and provide a better base for biodiversity than soils that don't receive regular applications of manure. They also do not have the cost of chemical fertilisers, and so proper use of this essentially waste product can have a huge benefit to the profitability of a dairy enterprise, as well as of course being a more carbon neutral approach than spreading inorganic fertilisers.

All of this is clearly being adopted into farming policy and the new Environmental Land Management Scheme sees subsidy payments focusing around better use and management of nutrients. This all starts with infrastructure improvements such as the Richards' are planning here, and is the subject of this application.

6. Design and External Appearance

The design and appearance of the barn is typical of an agricultural building and indeed will be consistent with other buildings already in situ on the yard. The roof area will be fibre cement sheeting. The design of the building has been done to consider cow health, maximising air flow to maintain an airy, cool environment which is most favourable to high yielding milking cows such as those housed at Court Farm.

7. Conclusion and formal request

This proposal forms a vital next step in the continued progression and improvement at Court Farm, and one that will provide environmental benefits to the farm as well as promoting animal welfare and good slurry management. The applicant's business is acting upon advice given to them through DEFRA and Catchment Sensitive Farming, who support the project and have approved grant funding for the project (pending planning permission). A copy of the approval for the building by the local CSFO can be found in Appendix 2.

The Richards family are hardworking, conscientious farmers who have a resilient and robust agricultural business and are trying to make the necessary improvements that the government is asking of them.

Appendix 1- Building use

Appendix 2- CSFO Support

Court Farm, Gastard
Building Use



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Catchment Sensitive Farming Support for Countryside Stewardship Options and Items that Require CSF Approval

To be completed by Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) for Capital Only or Mid-Tier applicants wishing to apply for options and capital items requiring prior approval from CSF.

This form must be completed by CSF, FaLMA supplier, or the Partner to CSF prior to the application deadline and must be submitted by the applicant to RPA with the completed application form.

Please note: Approved items below should not exceed stated applications limits.

Applicant name	Paul Richards
Farm name	B & MJ Richards, Court Farm, Gastard Lane, Gastard, Corsham, SN13 9QP
CPH number	45/014/0091
SBI Number	106914909
WFD Management Catchment	Avon Bristol and Somerset North Streams – Upper Bristol Avon, Bydemill Brook
River Basin District	Severn (Wessex)
Approval Commissioned by:	
CSF name	Adam Langford
Delivery Coordinator name	Hannah Shell
Form completed by on behalf of CSF:	
Name	Adam Langford
Email Address	Adam.langford@naturalengland.org.uk
Phone Number	07780339341
Additional comments	
Pollutant pressures and priorities in the catchment, as targeted by CS & CSF:	

How the approved options/items relate to the pollutant pressures (justification):

RP28 – Covering open feed yards/scrape passages – Surface Water Nitrates, Phosphate, Sediment

At present the farm runs a system where automatic slurry scrapers push slurry in slatted channel and slurry is the pumped from a reception pit into tin tank lagoons. Whilst this system appears to work well the end of the scrap passage and channel are uncovered meaning rainwater adds to slurry volumes and takes up capacity in the stores. Covering this will reduce rainwater entering the system.

Towards the top of the yard a further cattle shed has a large open feed yard at one end which is contributing to slurry production which is entering an old Earth banked lagoon which it is hoped can be discontinued in due course. Again, covering this area as outlined in this application will prevent rainwater falling on this location and eliminate slurry production. It is hoped this will be the first stage of work to discontinue the use of this lagoon.

Farm Description

Farm Type – Dairy

Location – Gastard, Corsham – Upper Bristol Avon, Bydemill Brook Catchment

Soil Type – Heavy to Medium – Clayey Loam

Connectivity to Watercourse – Approximately 650m from Bydemill Brook

Proximity to Protected Sites – Approximately 2750m to Corsham Railway Cutting (SSSI)

Pollutant Priorities:

- **Surface Water Nitrates**
- **Phosphate**
- **Sediment**

Pollutant pressures on farm – Air and Water: Open yards are leading to unnecessary slurry production during heavy rainfall events putting pressure on storage capacity and facilities.

Source: Open yards

Pathway: Surface Water Runoff

Receptor: Lagoons and slurry system

The following options are approved by CSF for inclusion in a CS Capital Only Agreement:

Option	OS Map Ref	Field Ref	Max agreed total to be applied for	Unit of Measure (ha, m, m^2, units)	Additional notes to be included in agreement document
RP28 Roofing feed yards and scrape passages	**ST8868**	**9510**	**322**	**M^2**	**Roofing over open feed yard and end of automatic slurry scraper passageway**

Any other supporting information or documents – include a map or confirmation you have discussed locations of approved options/items

- Farm visited October 2022
- Farm has longer term plans to discontinue top lagoon and investigate opportunities in Slurry Investment Grant

Photos

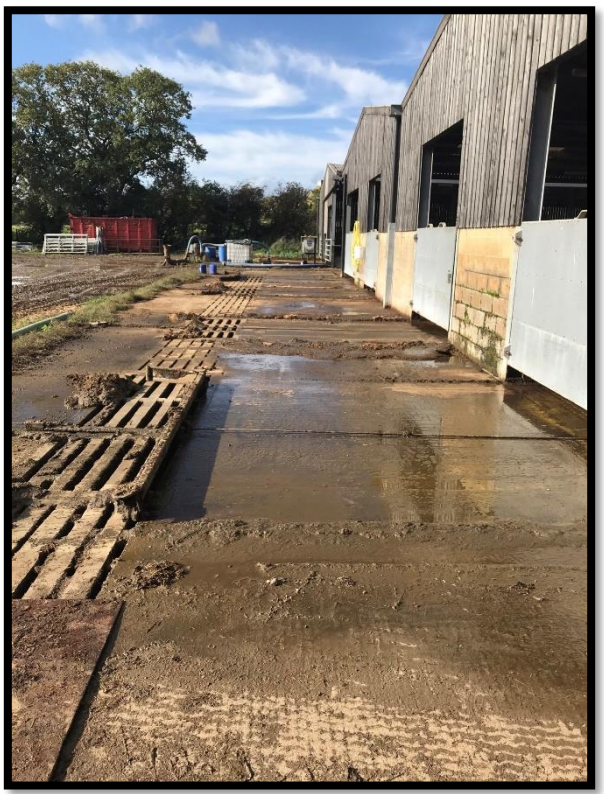

Figure 1 Photo of automatic slurry scrapers and slurry channel to be covered to reduce rainwater entering system

ALERT



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Additional requirements:
Area approved under this application is to be used for feeding and loafing/ collecting only and must not be used for livestock bedding. Check with your local authority and secure all necessary planning permissions prior to commencing work. Evidence of planning approval may be requested at claim stage. All clean roof water must be piped to the clean-water drain/ ditch. If collecting rainwater into a storage tank install an overflow to the clean water drain. The area must be re-measured once work has been completed prior to completing/ submitting the claim form.
Justification to support or decline approval:
The work outlined in this approval form will reduce the amount of slurry produced and the amount that has to be stored and spread. This is part of a wider range of work on the farm including the extension of cubicle housing and slurry channel systems and longer term work to discontinue outdated earth banked lagoon.

Provisional score*:							
High		**Medium**	✓	**Low**		**Zero**	

Form completed by:		
Name	**Adam Langford**	
Signature		**03/11/2022**
Countersigned by CSF where applicable:		
Name		
Signature		**Date**