AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION

1.0	**REFERENCE**	APA/003/0179
1.1	Proposed Development	"Field Barn"
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2023/06274
1.4	Applicant	Mr J.Hall, Hobbs Bottom Farm, Norbin, Box SN13 8JH
1.5	Site Address	Land South of Hunts Hill Cottages, Leigh Road, Holt BA14 6PP

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The application site forms an offlying part of Hobbs Bottom Farm and is owned freehold by the applicant. The site is in open countryside about half a mile due north west of Holt, approximately 100 yards west of Leigh Road.

2.2 Land

2.2.1 Area and tenure

The land at the application site forms part of a block of 18ha (44 acres) which is owned freehold by the applicant. The land is farmed in conjunction with the applicant's main holding which is Hobbs Bottom Farm, Norbin. Hobbs Bottom Farm extends to approximately 101 ha (250 acres) and is held by the applicant under a tenancy within the protection of the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986. The nature of the tenancy and the legislation is such that the applicant has security of tenure for his lifetime. I understand that the applicant and his family have farmed the holding for several generations.

2.2.2 Soil Type and Characteristics

The soil at the application site is classified in the Sherborne association, which is described as shallow well drained brashy clayey soils over limestone.

3.0 FARMING PRACTICE

Existing

3.1 The farm is run as a dairy unit, alongside beef and sheep enterprises. The farm is run on an organic basis, and the offlying land at the application site is registered organic.

3.2 The dairy herd comprises 115 cows, producing organic milk which is sold wholesale. Replacement dairy cattle are homebred and there is a small beef enterprise. At present the cattle are outwintered, however it is proposed to in-winter the cattle in future (see below).

3.3 Land use is the production of fodder and grass for grazing. The block which includes the application site is used as arable land to grow a mixture of peas and barley which is harvested as whole crop cereal silage as winter feed for the cattle.

3.4 The applicant runs a flock of 100 ewes, which are non-organic. The ewes are spiring lambed at Hobbs Bottom Farm, then grazed on the land at the application site. Their non-organic status means they are

restricted to no more than 120 days per year on the organic registered land. The applicant advises that the ewes and lambs spend the rest of the year on land at Melksham.

Proposed

3.5 The proposal is to cease outwintering the cattle at Hobbs Bottom Farm. This is as a result of increasingly wetter winters, along with the requirements of the "Red Tractor" scheme and the organic standards to which the farm must adhere to maintain its organic status. As a result of the change in farming policy, the applicant advises that two buildings at Hobbs Bottom, including one currently used to lamb the ewes, will be occupied by cattle and therefore lambing can no longer take place at Hobbs Bottom. Lambing will instead take place in a proposed new building at the application site. The building will also be used to accommodate a quantity of hay and straw.

Comments

3.6 The farm is a well-established livestock unit.

Buildings

3.7 There are no buildings at the application site. There is an extensive range of relatively modern livestock buildings at Hobbs Bottom Farm. The buildings are primarily in a single group and within the protected tenancy. The applicant also has two very recent buildings on a site just west of the main group of buildings. The parcel of land and the buildings are owned freehold by the applicant. The buildings comprise:

- A five bay shed constructed with a steel portal frame, profile sheet to the roof, spaced timber boarding to the upper elevations and concrete panels to the lower elevations. The building has an internal area of approximately 420m^2. The building is used for storage and lambing. The proposal is for the building to be used to accommodate cattle as part of the move to in-wintering.

- A second five bay shed shed, used to accommodate fodder. The building has a steel frame and a floor area of approximately 200m^2. The proposal is for the building to be used to accommodate cattle as part of the move to in-wintering.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

4.1 The applicant and his family occupy a dwelling which adjoins the farm buildings. There is no dwelling associated with the application site.

6.0 REQUIREMENT FOR PROPOSED BUILDING

6.1 The proposal is to construct a new building at the application site. The submitted plans show the building with steel portal frame, providing five bays, profile sheet to the roof, spaced timber boarding to the upper elevations and concrete block to the lower elevations. The building is shown with the southern (long) elevation open. The overall dimensions of the building are shown as 30m x 15m, with an eaves height of 6m. The proposed building would thus have a floor area of approximately 450m^2 and a volume to eaves of approximately 2,700m^3.

6.2 The applicant advises that the requirement for the building is as a result of the need to use the livestock buildings plus the two freehold owned buildings at Hobbs Bottom Farm (above) to accommodate cattle indoors over winter. As a result of the cattle occupying the buildings, lambing cannot in future take place in suitable accommodation at Hobbs Bottom and the area for feed and bedding storage is also reduced. The proposal identified in the applicant's supporting documents is for a building to accommodate 100 ewes for lambing and to provide storage for 293m^3 of stored hay and straw.

6.3 In order to evaluate the proposal it is in my view necessary first to consider the need for the building and then to consider its appropriateness to the identified need.

6.4 In my view it is highly likely that there is a need to in-winter the livestock at Hobbs Bottom Farm. The need is informed by increasingly wet winters and as the applicant states, the requirements of farm assurance and organic schemes. It is also my view that it is appropriate, for animal management and welfare, to provide covered accommodation for lowland lambing. It is also appropriate to provide covered accommodation for fodder and straw.

6.5 Based on the information provided by the applicant, together with the application of space allocations for livestock it is reasonable that the two buildings identified above will be required to accommodate cattle over winter at Hobbs Bottom. That means the space for lambing will be displaced, as lambing will overlap with the time during which the cattle are housed. On the applicant's own case, the storage requirement for the proposed building is 293m^3 of stored hay and straw.

6.6 Having established the principle of need it is then relevant to consider the requirements associated with that principle. The need is to accommodate 100 lambing ewes. The typical space requirement for lambing is 2m^2 per ewe, which produces an overall requirement of 200m^2 for 100 ewes. For the fodder, the proposed building has an eaves height of 6m. Thus, if the fodder were to be stored to eaves the floorspace required would be no more than 50m^2. Combined , the requirement is therefore 250m^2. The proposed building has a floorspace of 450m^2. It is therefore my view that the proposed building is significantly larger than the required for the need identified by the applicant.

6.7 I would also suggest the following:

- At 6m eaves the building is significantly higher than that required for lambing.
- The building represents a very significant investment in a permanent structure. The need for lambing extends for only a few weeks per year and whilst fodder can require storage it does not, per se, warrant a significant capital investment.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

7.1 Overall it is my view that the proposed building is excessively large in terms of both floorspace and height for its intended function. It also represents a significant capital investment for comparatively low value (storage) and short term (lambing) activities.

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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