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On behalf of:
TAC Page & Partners
Lower Dunge Farm
Bratton Road
West Ashton
Trowbridge BA14 6AX

LOWER DUNGE FARM, BRATTON ROAD W. ASHTON: – PRELIMINARY LANDSCAPE STATEMENT

1. Introduction

1.1 The following statement is based on the findings of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) prepared by WH Landscape Consultancy Ltd (WHLandscape), Report Ref: 25.2049, and sets out its preliminary findings prior to it being formally issued. The LVA is a tool used to identify and assess the likely effects of change resulting from development, both on the landscape as an environmental resource in its own right and on people's views and visual amenity. It is based on the guidelines laid down in the 'Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment third edition' published by Routledge in 2013 for the Landscape Institute and Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment

1.2 Landscape Effects relate to changes to components of the landscape resource as a result of development. Visual Effects relate to the appearance of development, its effect on specific views and on the general visual amenity experienced by users of the landscape. The study area to be considered includes the site itself and the full extent of the wider landscape with the potential to be influenced by the development.

1.3 The application will see the construction of large steel portal-framed agricultural buildings, including a livestock building (approximately 37.8m x 46.0m) and a covered muck store (approximately 30.5m x 41.5m). The buildings will include a concrete apron to their front (totalling 608.5m²), and a 12.2m wide space between the two buildings. The overall site area is approximately 0.41 hectares (ha) and occupies an area of former

arable land to the immediate north west of an existing large agricultural storage barn and associated hardstanding. The three buildings together will form a close-knit group to form a modern farmyard that will be similar in scale and arrangement to others in the locality.

1.4 The proposed buildings will be constructed using a steel portal frame set into concrete footings, enclosed to the rear, and partially to the sides, with 2.2m high precast concrete panels to the lower sections with tin cladding in Juniper Green to their upper sections. Sheeted gates will be used to contain the livestock for the livestock building. The front of the muck store will be largely open. The roof materials will comprise Profile 6R fibre cement panels, finished in a 'natural' colour, with galvanised 180mm gutters. Each building will have several translucent rooflights within the roof. A concrete floor slab will provide the finished floor level for each building. To the rear of the livestock building will be a pair of 12ft sheet gates to provide additional access into the land behind the building.

1.5 Access into the site is to be taken via the existing concrete hardstanding, which itself is accessed via a gated entrance from the minor road to the north – Bratton Road. No changes to the existing access are proposed.

1.6 The site is in the administrative area of Wiltshire Council within the parish of West Ashton. The parish extends from the south-eastern edge of Trowbridge to the north, to the parishes of Bratton and Edington, to the south.

1.7 It is important to note that the Applicant currently has prior approval (as permitted development) for a substantially similar scheme comprised of a livestock building and muck store/silage clamp on land to the south, just off Capps Lane. This has not been constructed, and the proposals at Dunge Farm will be constructed in place of the permitted development. The LVA has found that the location of the proposals, from a landscape and visual perspective, are in a favourable location when compared with the permitted development.

2. The Existing Site Context

2.1 The application site lies to the south east of a large poultry farm – Oakstone Farm – which itself lies approximately 0.5km to the south east of the agricultural hamlet at Dunge which is primarily comprised of Dunge Farm, Grange Farm and Lower Dunge Farm. Dunge Farm is a sprawling complex of farm buildings that include both traditional and modern, larger, buildings, and includes a Grade II Listed farmhouse. As second Grade II Listed farmhouse is found an Lower Dunge farm. To the south of Dunge is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) – a Medieval moated site.

2.2 The site lies within a broad, gently rolling, lowland vale that forms the catchment for the River Avon. The landscape is generally rural in character, although contains significant areas of settlement, including the county town of Trowbridge and the market town of Westbury. Transport corridors include the mainline Plymouth to Paddington railway, and branch lines from Westbury to Bath (via Trowbridge and Bradford-on-Avon) and Swindon (via Melksham and Chippenham). The principal road through the area is the A350 primary route that connects the M4 to the north of the county with the south coast, via the local towns of Chippenham, Melksham, Westbury and Warminster. The B3098 lies to the south of the area, and this connects the villages that lie within the foothills on the northern edge of Salisbury Plain.

2.3 Bratton Road, a minor rural road, lies approximately 15m to the north of the site, separated by a mature roadside hedgerow and verge. The road is the principal means of connection between West Ashton village, and the villages to the south east, including Bratton and Edington. For the most part the road is flanked by verges and drainage ditches, and dense hedgerows that creates visual enclosure, with only occasional glimpsed views across the lowland landscape, although higher ground to the south, where the land rises up into the scarp on the edge of Salisbury Plain, often forms a backdrop in views from the road.

2.4 The application site abuts the existing agricultural development, including a modern agricultural store and hardstanding. Although glimpsed from Bratton Road, hedgerow vegetation is effective in obscuring this from Bratton Road. To the north the poultry farm is substantially screened by mature hedgerow and mixed shelter belt planting, although there are a few small pockets of visibility from surrounding public rights of way, although it is generally well-absorbed into its rural setting.

2.5 There are very few public rights of way within 1.0km of the application site. These include the White Horse Trail / Mid Wilts Way, which is a promoted long-distance route (sections of this close to the site are poorly waymarked, or cross open ploughed fields). To the south there are promoted viewpoints at the White Horse / Bratton Castle which allow far-reaching views across the vale below.

2.6 Beyond the site's immediate environs are numerous isolated dwellings, farmsteads and clusters of settlement that give the landscape a settled farmland character. There are numerous examples of similar agricultural buildings/complexes within this grain of development.

2.7 There are no designated areas of nature conservation value within the site, and very few within the surrounding area although the site lies within the SSSI Impact Risk Zone (established to assess likely impacts on

SSSIs/SACs/SPAs & Ramsar sites) for a number of SSSIs, including Picket and Clanger Woods SSSI, Steeple Ashton SSSI and Bratton Downs SSSI. Salisbury Plain, beyond the study area to the south, includes Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC). There are a few areas of deciduous woodland in the site's environs that appear on the Priority Habitat Inventory (none of this is Ancient or Ancient Replanted). There are no trees with TPOs either within or immediately adjacent to the site which could be affected by the proposed development, and the site itself is made up of former arable land that has been set aside. This has very limited intrinsic ecological value.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

2.8 The site lies within the Rolling Clay Lowlands landscape character type (LCT) of the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment. Key Characteristics are as follows:

- *Gently rolling lowland based on Clay.*
- *Mixed arable and pastoral land use with pasture concentrated around the water courses.*
- *Variable field pattern with network of full hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees.*
- *Presence of streams marked by lines of willows and crossed by modest bridges.*
- *Woodland blocks including some ancient woodland and wet woodland of high ecological value plus scattered mature trees.*
- *Small number of meadows of neutral and unimproved grassland.*
- *Scattered settlement of towns, small villages and farmsteads, many using vernacular materials of brick, half timber, stone, tiles and thatch.*
- *Roads largely minor and rural with a few trunk roads and sections of motorway.*
- *Views vary from semi-enclosed by intact hedgerows, riparian vegetation and woodland blocks to more open with views to the rising scarps of the chalk uplands.*
- *A largely peaceful, rural landscape.*

2.9 Within this LCT there are three distinct landscape character areas (LCAs). The site and its environs lies within LCA 11C: Trowbridge Rolling Clay Lowland which is described as:

'A gently undulating, largely rural area of mixed arable and pasture land. Medium to large rectangular fields are bounded by thick hedgerows with mature hedgerow trees. Combined with scattered woodland blocks (some ancient) and rich riparian vegetation along the stream lines the hedgerows make this a semi-enclosed landscape allowing intermittent views to the steep scarps of the Chalk uplands. Settlement is sparse to the east of the area with scattered nucleated and linear villages and farmsteads. Building materials are red brick and tiles to the east and stone for the older buildings to the west, with some more brick and modern stone in more recent developments. To the west there is more settlement including the southern part of Trowbridge with some

large scale industrial buildings and modern housing estates tending to extend along roads south towards North Bradley, Southwick and Westbury. This western section of the area, which also contains the A350 trunk road and a concentration of railway lines, is considerably less rural and tranquil than the east of the area.'

2.10 The strategy for the Rolling Clay Lowland is to:

'Conserve the peaceful rural landscape with its hedgerow network, rich riparian vegetation, remnant meadows, ancient woodlands and pattern of small villages and scattered farmsteads and to strengthen its character through measures to minimise the urbanising influence of large towns, new settlement and transport routes and to improve the woodlands and farmlands by encouraging management to retain or enhance their biodiversity and historic character.'

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

2.11 Originally published in March 2012, with the most recent revision being in December 2023, the NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced. Of particular relevance to matters concerning 'landscape' and this assessment is Section 15 – 'Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment', specifically paragraph 180, which states that "Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by":

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

and:

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

2.12 Adopted by Wiltshire Council in January 2015, the Wiltshire Core Strategy Development Plan Document replaced the four local plans that formerly covered Wiltshire. The Core Strategy provides a positive and flexible overarching planning policy framework for Wiltshire for the period up to 2026 in order to ensure that any development is of a high standard and is compatible with the character and visual qualities of the area. The following policy is relevant to the character and features of the landscape.

CORE POLICY 51: LANDSCAPE

Development should protect, conserve and where possible enhance landscape character and must not have a harmful impact upon landscape character, while any negative impacts must be mitigated as far as possible through sensitive design and landscape measures. Proposals should be informed by and sympathetic to the distinctive character areas identified in the relevant Landscape Character Assessment(s) and any other relevant assessments and studies. In particular, proposals will need to demonstrate that the following aspects of landscape character have been conserved and where possible enhanced through sensitive design, landscape mitigation and enhancement measures:

- i. The locally distinctive pattern and species composition of natural features such as trees, hedgerows, woodland, field boundaries, watercourses and waterbodies.*
- ii. The locally distinctive character of settlements and their landscape settings.*
- iii. The separate identity of settlements and the transition between man-made and natural landscapes at the urban fringe.*
- iv. Visually sensitive skylines, soils, geological and topographical features.*
- v. Landscape features of cultural, historic and heritage value.*
- vi. Important views and visual amenity.*
- vii. Tranquillity and the need to protect against intrusion from light pollution, noise and motion.*
- viii. Landscape functions including places to live, work, relax and recreate.*
- ix. Special qualities of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and the New Forest National Park, where great weight will be afforded to conserving and enhancing landscapes and scenic beauty.*

Proposals for development within or affecting the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs), New Forest National Park (NFPN) or Stonehenge and Avebury World Heritage Site (WHS) shall demonstrate that they have taken account of the objectives, policies and actions set out in the relevant Management Plans for these areas. Proposals for development outside of an AONB that is sufficiently prominent (in terms of its siting or scale) to have an impact on the area's special qualities (as set out in the relevant management plan), must also demonstrate that it would not adversely affect its setting.

2.13 Wiltshire Council is currently in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, which will cover the period to 2038. The draft Local Plan was submitted to the Secretary of State at the end of 2024. The first stage of hearings in relation to the Duty to Cooperate were held on 24 June 2025. Stage 2 will commence on 11 November 2025, and it is expected that it will be formally adopted in 2026. Until this happens it carries only limited weight, and the current Wiltshire Core Strategy remains in place as the development plan for the district.

3. Landscape and Visual Effects

LANDSCAPE EFFECTS

3.1 The Landscape Value of the study area as a whole is *Medium* based on its generally *good* condition and *moderate* strength of character. Whilst the landscape has intrinsic value as countryside and as productive farmland, the overall Susceptibility to Change of the application site as a component of the landscape is *Medium* in respect of the development proposed. There is an established complex of similar agricultural buildings in the area, and the proposed buildings will combine with the adjacent storage barn to form agricultural complex. Best practice dictates that new agricultural buildings should be located with existing buildings unless site constraints or operational requirements clearly dictate that this is not possible¹. The overall landscape sensitivity of the receiving landscape to this type of development is assessed as *Medium to Low*.

3.2 The proposals will combine with the adjacent land uses to form a farm complex and will not be out of place within the prevailing agrarian context of the receiving landscape. The scale and design of the proposed buildings will be similar to those of the adjacent agricultural building, whilst the external materials used will ensure the buildings appear less stark in their landscape setting when seen from the footpath to the south.

3.3 The existing baseline character of the appraisal site includes an area of former arable land that forms a discreet corner of a much larger arable field. The site lies adjacent to an existing large agricultural storage barn, and near a large poultry farm.

3.4 No new highway access will be created – the site will be served by the existing access to the adjacent barn on Bratton Road. As the site is predominantly flat the proposals will not require any notable ‘cutting-in’, and there will be no notable earthworks nor localised changes in topography. No vegetation will need to be removed for the proposals or to create a new access, and therefore all surrounding hedgerows will remain intact.

3.5 Natural England are only a statutory consultee when proposed development is likely to cause the loss (or likely cumulative loss) of 20ha or more of BMV (best and most versatile land). The proposals will see the loss of approximately 0.41Ha of arable land, which has an Agricultural Land Classification of 3: Good to Moderate (sub-grade not specified), far short of the threshold. Therefore, the loss of this land should be weighed up as part of the planning balance in favour of the benefits in enhancing farming operations at the site.

3.6 The effect on the historic fabric of the landscape will be negligible. There is no intervisibility with any designated heritage assets, nor will the proposed building effect the setting for any local listed buildings. While the construction of the proposed agricultural buildings will result in the loss of a small corner of an arable field, its impact on the wider historic field pattern is considered negligible.

3.7 The development proposals will not conflict with the relevant key issues, strategies, objectives and policies identified in the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment. Furthermore, the proposals will not detract from the defining characteristics of LCT 11C: Trowbridge Rolling Lowland.

3.8 The proposals will increase the size of the existing agricultural complex by approximately one third, leading to an intensification of built form. However, due to the site's baseline character, as well as the site's low-lying position and the proposal's high level of visual containment within the local landscape (see Visual Summary below), the site will not be perceived as an unexpected or incongruous feature in the landscape and will retain the receiving landscape's established character.

3.9 In terms of the landscape resource as a whole therefore, based on the proposed layout provided at the time of writing, the Magnitude of Landscape Effects is assessed as *Slight* and, based on the *Medium to Low* landscape sensitivity, the Overall Level of Landscape Effects is assessed as *Minor*.

3.10 In terms of the wider setting, the proposals will not significantly detract from the surrounding landscape, with the buildings being of a style that is commensurate with the prevailing rural agricultural character of the area. The proposals will not significantly change the pre-development condition of the landscape, and the development is considered to have a *Neutral* effect on the receiving landscape as a whole.

VISUAL EFFECTS

3.11 The Overall Visual Sensitivity of the study area is considered *Medium*, when taking into account the nature of sensitivity receptors/receptor locations. While a large part the visual character of the local landscape is defined by its rural character, and where the proposals will be seen as an expected feature of a 'working' landscape, the vale as a whole forms part of a panorama when viewed from elevated locations on the edge of the scarp at Bratton Castle, the White Horse, and Piquet (Edington) Hill. The sensitivity of receptors in these locations is high where people come to take in the view.

3.12 Due to a combination of roadside hedgerows, pockets of woodland and a flat landscape, the visual envelope of the development will be quite restricted for close- and medium-distance views, with the exception being the White Horse Trail / Mid Wilts Way, which crosses the field to the south of the application site, approximately 26m distant, and from where, for a short section (approximately 360m), the new development will be clearly visible (partly obscured by the adjacent building to the east of this section), regardless of seasonal change.

3.13 However, whilst the proposals will be seen initially as an intensification of agricultural built form, it will not become unduly prominent as a result of the clear association with the existing barn. The proposals will also be seen in the context of the adjacent Poultry Farm which is also partially visible from the promoted route.

3.14 By extending the existing agricultural development to the north west, the proposals will result in a slight change to established visual character in the local area, the effect of this on the visual amenity and visual character of the study area will be limited, with the proposals being read as part of the existing farm.

3.15 From the more sensitive elevated receptor locations to the south, although the proposals will be visible, the effect on the visual baseline will be negligible due to the distances involved (greater than 2.5 km) and the visual blending that will result, where the proposals will be comfortably absorbed amongst other similar agricultural development.

3.16 Overall, the proposals will not be an unexpected or incongruous feature within its landscape context. The receiving landscape is one where agricultural built form is an established visual component, and as such the visual character of the area will not be affected by the proposals. As such the Overall Magnitude of Visual Change is *Slight*, resulting in the Overall Level of Visual Effect being *Minor*.

4. Summary

4.1 The LVA is currently being produced. The desk study and fieldwork analysis for this has been carried out. The LVA will conclude that the application site has the capacity to acceptably accommodate the proposed buildings so that they integrate well into their local landscape setting, maintaining local character and that of the wider rural landscape. Having the proposals situated adjacent to existing building, within a landscape with a flat relatively high degree of visual enclosure, is a logical design choice to lessen the overall impact of the development. The site is visible from a short section of a promoted route to the west, from where the proposals will be clearly visible, and in long-distance views from the south, where filtered elevated views of the new

buildings will be possible, although largely lost amongst other similar pockets of agricultural development. Overall, the site is not notably prominent in the landscape.

4.2 In summary:

- The appraisal site lies adjacent to an existing agricultural building and close to an established poultry farm (in preference to the permitted development site to the south, which is more remote in its setting) within an undesignated landscape.
- Due to the proposed siting, appearance and scale of the proposals, they do not have the potential to affect the setting of any designated heritage assets, scheduled monuments or other designated landscapes.
- The proposed development will not unduly affect views on approach from the north west, south east on approach from Bratton Road, nor from other close- and medium- distance receptor locations to the east or south (the site is visually divorced from land to the north), although it will be clearly visible in close-distance views from the White Horse Trail / Mid Wilts Way for a length of approximately 350m where it crosses the open arable field. The visual effects on this receptor are reduced by the nature of the development and its proximity to existing agricultural buildings.
- The proposed development will not be visible from the wider landscape (i.e., beyond the immediate environs of the site) with the exception of long-distance views from the scarp to the south where the effect on the visual baseline will be negligible due to the distances involved (greater than 2.5 km) and the visual blending that will occur with other similar agricultural developments.
- Overall neither the fabric of the landscape nor the visual character of the area will be affected by the proposals, and the Overall Level of Visual Effect will be *Minor*.

4.3 The overall levels of expected landscape and visual effects on the character and appearance of the landscape are considered acceptable in the context of the proposed development. The development can be undertaken in compliance with the relevant guidance and policies in the NPPF, the Local Plan, and landscape strategies/guidelines set out in the Wiltshire Landscape Character Assessment.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Lines BA (Hons) PG Dip LA ALI PIEMA
(Consultant Landscape Architect)



WH Landscape Consultancy Ltd
Sandcliffe House
Northgate Street
Devizes
Wilts
SN10 1JT



ⁱ Section 8 of the South Devon AONB Planning Guidance