

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/002/0273
1.1	Proposed Development	"Removal of existing caravan and erection of agriculturally tied farm managers dwelling"
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2025/08067
1.4	Applicant	Mr & Mrs B.King
1.5	Site Address	Land at Manor Farm, Collingbourne Kingston, SN8 3SD

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The application site forms part of Manor Farm, Collingbourne Kingston. The site lies in an elevated area about quarter of a mile west of the A338 and church at Collingbourne Kingston.

2.2 Land

2.2.1 Area and tenure

I understand Manor Farm extends to approximately 196ha (485 acres) of freehold land in a ring fence. In addition to the freehold land the applicants also hold 174ha (430 acres) on leasehold arrangements.

2.2.2 Soil Type and Characteristics

The soil at the application site is classified in the Andover 1 association, which is described as shallow, well drained, calcareous silty soils over chalk.

3.0 AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 The applicants purchased the freehold land in 2021 and have since implemented the current set of enterprises. The principal enterprise is a 500 cow dairy herd. The herd is "closed" with all replacement dairy cows homebred. Male calves and surplus females are reared for beef. The land is all in grass, which is utilised to maximise the production of milk from forage.
- 3.2 The dairy cows and replacement heifers are block calved across two periods each year - August to October and from February to April. The cattle are outwintered on the light chalk soil, thus removing the need for extensive winter housing. The cows are milked twice daily through a 50 point rotary parlour and milk is collected every other day. Typical annual milk yield is approximately 5,000 litres per cow.
- 3.3 The beef cattle are also reared from forage and are sold as stores from 12 to 15 months old.
- 3.4 In addition to the livestock enterprise the wider business includes a Bed and Breakfast enterprise at the applicants' dwelling. There is also a horse livery enterprise.

Proposed

- 3.5 The enterprises are now well-established at the farm. The applicants have indicated a modest expansion of the dairy herd to 550 head, however, no significant changes are proposed to the nature of the livestock enterprises.

Comments

- 3.6 The applicants have an extensive background in dairy farming, having commenced their own dairy business first through the County Farms system in Dorset, then moving on to freehold units in Somerset and the current business at Manor Farm. The ethos of the enterprise is to maximise production from forage and outwintering the cattle. In this way the cost of production is kept under very tight control and the capital requirement for the business is significantly lower, through fewer farm buildings and a lesser need for waste storage and management.

Buildings

- 3.7 The applicants have invested in a modern livestock shed which accommodates the milking parlour, collecting yard, dairy and service pens. There is a substantial fodder storage shed a short distance from the dairy building.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicants

- 4.1 There is no permanent dwelling at the application site. The planning application is to replace the mobile home adjoining the livestock shed. The temporary dwelling had a planning permission for three years (Council ref 21/01218) which has now expired. The subject proposal is to replace the temporary dwelling with a permanent dwelling.
- 4.2 The applicants occupy Manor Farmhouse, which lies about quarter of a mile east of the site, out of sight and sound of the farm buildings.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing and Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

- 5.1 The applicants both work full time on the holding and employ two full time and one part time member of staff.

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 revised in 2024. In the context of the application for the proposed dwelling, paragraph 84 of the NPPF states:

“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply

- a) 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 enterprises.
- 6.3 The key enterprise is the 500 cow dairy unit, together with downcalving heifers. Cows and heifers are calved in the autumn and spring, across a period of six months; there is also a requirement to provide close care to

calves being reared to weaning. Calving can occur at any time day or night; for any calving there may be no need for human attendance or the scale of intervention may range up to veterinary surgery.

- 6.4 It is my view that the scale and nature of the enterprise generates an essential need for a presence at most times. In my view the farmhouse, at a quarter mile distant is out of sight and sound of the proposed farm buildings and is not suitable to meet the essential need at the unit.

7.0 BUSINESS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There is no express reference in the NPPF to a financial 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 applicants have provided accounts for the last three trading periods. The accounts show the business to be profitable and it is my view that the level of profit enables viability.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 The applicants advise that they wish to recruit a high calibre full time farm manager, who would run the business day to day. The appointee would occupy the proposed dwelling. It is the applicants’ case that in order to attract a manager of sufficient calibre then the accommodation, which would be provided as part of the role, must be of sufficient quality and should provide for the individual’s family needs.
- 8.2 It is my experience that accommodation will often be provided for such a role and that the type and quantum of accommodation can play a significant factor in attracting an appropriate party.
- 8.3 From the submitted plans the proposed dwelling scales to a Gross Internal Area of approximately 228m². 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.
- 8.4 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 150m² GIA would be more commensurate with the identified essential need. However, please note that this assessment is only in relation to meeting essential need and does not take into account the dynamics of attracting a suitable employee.
- 8.5 The applicants advise that the cost of the dwelling will be met primarily from retained and current profit and that it is unlikely it will require a secured loan.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The enterprise generates an essential need for a presence at most times. The business is both profitable and viable. In my view the size of the dwelling is greater 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.*

APA/002/0273/AMC

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