

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/03/0190
1.1	Proposed Development	Agricultural residential dwelling.
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2026/01112
1.4	Applicant	Mr Louis Hancock c/o Motorworks, Butts Hill, Frome Frome BA11 1HS
1.5	Site Address	Land to the South East of Forewoods Common, Holt BA14 6PJ

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The application site forms part of the freehold owned by Mr Louis Hancock. The wider site, known as Causeway Hill Farm, lies in an elevated position approximately one mile south west of Holt and one mile west of Staverton, south west of the junction of the B3105 and B3107. The wider setting is open countryside with woodland to the south.

2.2 Land Area and tenure

The freehold owned by Louis Hancock extends to approximately 5ha (12 acres) in a ring fence. In addition to the freehold land Mr Hancock has the informal use of approximately 40ha (100 acres) at Mizens Farm, South Wraxall. The land at Mizens Farm is owned by Mr Hancock's wider family.

3.0 FARMING PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 Mr Hancock is an established agricultural contractor. His business is conducted as a sole trader. Contract services include silage making, hay making and straw baling. The business was established by Mr Hancock some 16 years ago and has grown extensively since.
- 3.2 Mr Hancock does not undertake agricultural enterprises for himself, his business activity is through the provision of agricultural services to other farmers and landowners.

Proposed

- 3.3 The proposal is for Mr Hancock to operate a new livestock enterprise in a newly constructed farm building at the freehold land. Mr Hancock will purchase calves at up to two weeks' old in batches of 85 head. The animals will be reared in the new livestock building. The proposal is to rear to weaning at approximately 12 weeks old. Following weaning the calves will be transferred to a farm building immediately adjoining Causeway Hill Farm, where they will be reared through to approximately 225kg liveweight, at which point they will be sold as stores.
- 3.4 The building intended for rearing is owned by an external party. I understand Mr Hancock has agreed a rent and the principle of a Farm Business Tenancy for the building, however the FBT will only be concluded in the event the enterprise proceeds.
- 3.5 The animals will be reared indoors during their time on the farm. They will be bedded on straw, which will require clearing out between batches to avoid disease carry over. I understand the dung will be spread on the wider holding or utilised under "straw for dung" arrangements with wider contacts.

- 3.6 Mr Hancock advises that through his existing business he has many dairy farmers as contacts and he anticipates no problems in sourcing the calves. Whilst the calves will be purchased in batches, the operational proposal is a throughput of approximately 600 animals by year three of the operation.
- 3.7 As part of the planning application a Business Plan has been provided. The Plan sets out the progress of the enterprise from year one to year three. The proposal is to commence the enterprise subject to the grant of planning permission for the dwelling.

Comments

- 3.8 The agricultural contracting business is clearly well established. I understand Mr Hancock has been engaged in agriculture for many years and that it has been a personal ambition to diversify into calf rearing for many years.

Buildings

- 3.9 The buildings at the holding comprise:
- The livestock shed which comprises a portal frame span and lean to, spaced boarding to the upper elevations and concrete panels to the lower elevations.
 - Two fully enclosed storage sheds, used to accommodate agricultural machinery for the contracting business.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

- 4.1 There is no dwelling associated with the freehold land in Mr Hancock's ownership.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

- 5.1 There is no agricultural enterprise on the site at present and therefore no associated labour requirement. Mr Hancock is engaged full time in the contract services business and retains four full time employees, flexing up to 16 people during peak periods.

Anticipated if proposals undertaken

- 5.2 The proposed enterprise presents a requirement for a full time labour unit. I understand the applicant's partner will provide the full time labour for the enterprise.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

- 6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the proposed calf rearing business. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised in 2024. In the context of the application for the proposed dwelling, paragraph 84 (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 proposed enterprise and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprises.

- 6.3 In the context of calf rearing there are a number of aspects which touch on essential need. When first brought onto the holding the animals are very young, with immune systems that are not fully developed. This necessitates close and regular inspection for disease, as well as wider husbandry to ensure the animals are feeding correctly. Feeding systems (artificial milk) are generally automated requiring attention in the event of failure. Injury or distress needs to be addressed quickly and remedied.
- 6.4 Overall it is my view that the presence of very young calves, across the year, as proposed, will generate an essential need for a presence at most times.

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 The applicant has submitted a Business Plan for the proposed calf unit. The Plan sets out the budget gross margin, fixed costs, profit and loss, cashflow and balance sheet requirements for the first three years of operation. In my view the Plan has been based on reasonable assumptions. The costs and returns in the Plan seem reasonable. The Plan shows the business at year three as profitable and the level of profit enables viability.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 The existing, well established, business is the provision of agricultural contract services for external parties and does not concern itself with the direct production of food.
- 8.2 The proposal is to construct a new permanent dwelling to support a new calf rearing enterprise. The proposed new enterprise will generate an essential need for a presence at the site, however it is my experience that the essential need for a new enterprise should, for its establishment period, be met through the use of a dwelling stationed for a temporary period. This would allow the proprietor to demonstrate implementation of the business and for the essential need to be met without the construction of a permanent dwelling. This method is long established and is supported in the PPG referenced above (final bullet point of the guidance). In this case the Business Plan proposes a three year establishment period.
- 8.3 It follows from the above that in my view it is premature to provide a new permanent dwelling for the proposed calf rearing enterprise at the site.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The proposed enterprise will generate an essential need for a presence at the site. The Business Plan which accompanies the proposal appears reasonable and shows the enterprise as profitable and viable at year three. In my view the implementation of the proposed enterprise would be appropriately met through the use of a temporary dwelling in order to demonstrate its implementation across the three year period set out in the Business Plan.

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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