

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/003/0189
1.1	Proposed Development	“Retrospective application for the siting of a static caravan for temporary residential use in connection with agricultural operations at Outmarsh Farm, Melksham, for a period of three years”
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Control Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2025/08409
1.4	Applicant	Mr Robert Vaughan, Outmarsh Farmhouse, Semington
1.5	Site Address	Outmarsh Farm, Semington

2.0 DESCRIPTION

Location

- 2.1 The application site forms part of a wider landholding at Outmarsh Farmhouse, Semington. The site is immediately west of the High Street (the former A350) and lies north and south of the Bus Gate, opposite the entrance to Wiltshire Air Ambulance. The site includes a steeply embanked area which is the former branch railway line, which was discontinued in the 1960s.

Land Area and tenure

- 2.2 The farmed area comprises approximately 2ha (five acres). The freehold of the land is owned by the applicant, Robert Vaughan.

Soil Type and Characteristics

- 2.3 The soil at the application site is classified in the Wickham 3 association which is described as slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clay over clay loam. Note that a significant part of the site comprises the former railway embankment, which is made ground and not separately classified.

3.0 AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 The land is in grass which at the time of my site inspection was being grazed by a small quantity of sheep and a goat. There is a small flock of laying hens in an open pen close to the farmhouse.

Proposed

- 3.2 The proposal is to intensify activity at the site. Farming enterprises will be expanded and developed. The business will be run by Oscar Vaughan. Oscar Vaughan is Robert Vaughan's son. I understand Oscar is currently working abroad and will return to the UK later this autumn.
- 3.3 The development of the enterprise is set out in a “Three Year Development Plan” (now referred to as the “Plan”) which accompanies the planning application. The Plan covers the next three years of the business and sets out the following enterprises:
- The expansion of the ewe flock from 20 head in year one to 30 head in year three. The ewes will be lambed annually with lambs sold.

- The laying hens will initially be increased to 60 head, with eggs sold. The flock will be increased from 60 to 80 head by year three.
- Four beehives will be provided, with honey and wax products sold. The number of hives will be expanded to six by year three.
- There is a small orchard and orchard produce will be developed as a revenue stream.
- Produce will be marketed through local shops, markets and through farmgate sales.

3.4 The stated ambition in the Plan is that by year three there will be a full time labour requirement for the business.

Comments

3.5 I understand that Oscar Vaughan is presently engaged outside of agriculture.

Buildings

3.6 There are two storage sheds close to the farmhouse. I understand one of the buildings is used to lamb the ewes.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

- 4.1 There is a temporary dwelling, subject of the planning application, on the north side for the former railway embankment. The proposal is to retain the dwelling in order to implement the proposed farm business. I understand the temporary dwelling is to be occupied by Oscar Vaughan on his return later this year. At present the dwelling is unoccupied. At present direct access to the dwelling from the public highway is by foot only, however the applicant advises that there is an extant vehicular access, which requires improvement to be operational.
- 4.2 There is an existing permanent dwelling, south of the application site, called Outmarsh Farmhouse. That dwelling is occupied by the applicant. The applicant is engaged full time in his own business which is outside of agriculture.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

5.1 One unit part time.

Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

5.2 The agricultural enterprises (as distinct from the marketing and sale of produce) will in my view present a part time requirement by year three of the Plan.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

6.1 The planning application for the retention of the dwelling is associated with the proposed 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 proposed enterprises and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprises.
- 6.3 In my view there will be a requirement for close care and assistance to livestock during lambing. The Plan does not specify a lambing period but the typical lambing period is not extensive, covering a few weeks in spring. Lambing and the neo-natal lamb can require close supervision, however in this context the number of ewes is very low, with a maximum of 30 head by year three. In my view the associated essential need could only be considered partial.
- 6.4 In my view the remaining enterprises do not present an essential need for livestock husbandry. Clearly they will require inspection and management but those aspects do not equate to an essential need for a presence on the site 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 the Plan. In my experience a business plan for a new agricultural business would typically set out:
- Gross Margins for the proposed enterprises including anticipated outputs and variable costs on a unit basis for each of the proposed enterprises.
 - Proposed fixed costs including electricity, water, property costs, finance costs and any employed labour.
 - Projected profit and loss accounts for the three year period.
 - A summary cashflow for the three year period.
 - Budget capital costs and a Balance Sheet for the project.
- 7.4 The Plan provided sets out in summary the development of the enterprises. There are estimated levels of revenue from the enterprises together with receipts showing previous sales. There is no other budgetary financial information or projections, for example:
- There are no enterprise budgets (gross margins) setting out variable costs.
 - There is no indication of fixed costs.
 - There are no budget profit and loss accounts.
 - There is no cashflow.
 - There is no indication of capital requirements.
- 7.5 In addition to the above there is no indication of demand from local shops and there is no indication of which local markets will be targeted. Whilst there is reference to farmgate sales it is noted that the public highway adjoining the application site is effectively a no through road due to the Bus Gate which lies outside the entrance to the site.
- 7.6 Overall it is my view that the business has not been planned on a sound basis.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 The existing dwelling, Outmarsh Farmhouse, is occupied by Robert Vaughan. Robert Vaughan is engaged in his own full time business and does not plan to be engaged in the proposed agricultural business. On this basis the existing dwelling is not available to the proposed business.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The proposed business does not present an essential need for a presence at most times and does not present a requirement for a full time labour unit (excluding marketing). The Plan does not demonstrate that the business has been planned on a sound financial basis.

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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Date 30 March 2026

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