

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/002/0276
1.1	Proposed Development	"Static caravan for accommodating an agricultural worker"
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Control Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2026/01426
1.4	Applicant	D.L.Lemon
1.5	Site Address	Manor Farm, Wilton, Marlborough SN8 3SP

2.0 DESCRIPTION

Location

- 2.1 The application site forms part of a group of modern farm buildings which lie in an elevated position about quarter of a mile north of Wilton village and just north west of Wilton Windmill. The surrounding land use is agricultural with woodland.

Land Area and tenure

- 2.2 The overall farmed area is approximately 1,214ha (3,000 acres) of which approximately 324ha (800 acres) are owned with the balance held on longer term Farm Business Tenancies and contract farming arrangements.

Soil Type and Characteristics

- 2.3 The soil at the application site is classified in the Andover 1 association which is described as deep calcareous soils in vlees, with shallower silty calcareous soils on slopes.

3.0 AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 The wider business is operated as an arable venture, however, the buildings at the application site (known as "Burial Grove") are used to contract rear heifers for a local dairy farm.
- 3.2 Approximately 160 heifers are based in the buildings at Burial Grove. The animals are brought to the site in-calf and are reared through to calve down and therefore ready for milk production, when they are returned to the origin dairy unit. The animals are housed in the farm buildings over winter and are summer grazed on the adjoining paddocks. Calving takes place spring and autumn, effectively eight months of the year.
- 3.3 Ownership of the animals remains with the supplying dairy unit (Manor Farm, Collingbourne Kingston). The applicant is paid a daily rate for rearing the animals. This is commonly known as a "bed and breakfast" arrangement. At present there is no formally documented contract in place between the parties for the arrangement.
- 3.4 The farming business is managed day to day by David Lemon. Mr Lemon advises that the introduction of the enterprise is to diversify the business away from an entirely arable basis and to provide dung from over-wintering the animals to use as fertilizer on some of the land.

Proposed

- 3.5 The medium-term proposal is to replace the current enterprise with a suckler cow enterprise. The applicant's proposal is to retain 70 breeding cows which will be calved across the year and single suckled. Progeny will be reared through to a finished weight and sold at a maximum of 30 months old.
- 3.6 The proposed suckler enterprise would be run by the applicant's son. At present David Lemon's son is abroad and the expectation is that he will return to the UK within the next 24 months whereupon the suckler enterprise described above will replace the current heifer rearing at the site

Comments

- 3.7 The wider business is a well-established multi-generational farm.

Buildings

- 3.8 The buildings at the application site comprise two large storage sheds, which have been converted to livestock buildings.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

- 4.1 The applicant owns a number of dwellings at Wilton, however there is no owned dwelling (freehold or leasehold) in close proximity to the application site.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

- 5.1 The current enterprise presents a labour requirement for approximately one full time unit

Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

- 5.2 The proposed suckler herd will present a labour requirement in excess of one full time unit.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

- 6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the livestock enterprises (existing and proposed). 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 and proposed enterprises and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprises.
- 6.3 Both the current and proposed enterprises involve calving and the care of very young calves. In my view it is essential to provide a presence on site during calving. It is also important to provide close care for very young calves. In this context calving under both systems will take place across the majority of the year.
- 6.4 It follows from the above that it is my view that the current and proposed enterprises present an essential need, however, please see my comments at section 8, below.

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 profit and loss accounts for the last two trading periods which show the wider business to be profitable and, in my view, that level of profit enables viability.
- 7.4 There is no separate historic profit and loss account for the heifer rearing enterprise. The applicant has presented budgets for the enterprise (gross margins and a budget profit and loss account). The submitted budgets appear to have been planned on a reasonable basis and show the business to be profitable and viable.
- 7.5 It is essential to note however, that the current business is based wholly on a contractual arrangement with a third party. There is no written contract in place and clearly the enterprise will only subsist in its current form if the contracting parties are willing for it to continue. The certainty of that arrangement is clearly lessened without the governance of a written contract.
- 7.6 The applicant has advised that it is his intention to replace the current arrangement with his own suckler herd, as described at paragraph 3.5 (above). The submitted budgets for that enterprise appear to be founded on a reasonable basis. The budgets show the enterprise to be profitable and the level of profit is sufficient for viability.
- 7.7 As indicated above, the applicant’s son will be responsible for the suckler enterprise on his return to the UK within the next two years.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 The application is for a permanent dwelling, in the form of a mobile home. I have explained directly to the applicant that the current absence of a written contract offers insufficient certainty on the continuation of the enterprise in its current form. The applicant is clear that the current arrangement is likely to be replaced by the suckler herd in the next two to three years. Clearly the crucial element of control will pass to the applicant’s business with the introduction of the suckler enterprise.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

- 9.1 The current and proposed enterprises both generate an essential need at the site and there is no existing dwelling of sufficient close proximity to meet the need. Both the heifer rearing and the suckler herd appear to be planned on a sound financial basis. In my view the duration of the heifer enterprise has insufficient certainty to be associated with the permanent stationing of a dwelling. The introduction of the suckler enterprise would enable its control within the wider business.

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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