

**Agricultural Appraisal Report to Support an Application for
a Temporary Rural Worker's Dwelling and Three
Agricultural Buildings at Manor Farm, Easton Piercy,
Chippenham SN14 6JT**

Prepared by Holly Greenman FQA ASAg

On behalf of P&T Reynolds

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Holly Greenman FQA ASAg
Director

Foscote Rural Consultancy Ltd

holly@foscoterural.com
Tel: 07586 396489

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1. Introduction

This report has been prepared by Holly Greenman FQA ASAg of Fosco Rural Consultancy Ltd and has been instructed by Tim Reynolds of P&T Reynolds of Allington Farm, Chippenham to present an application for a new on-site temporary residential accommodation at Manor Farm, Easton Piercy, Chippenham.

The report has been produced based on information provided by the client, farm records and standard costings data where appropriate.

2. Background

P&T Reynolds are a multi-generational family farming partnership comprising Mr Paul Reynolds, his son, Tim, the applicant of this application, and his wife Naomi. The family have been farming at Allington Farm for generations under an Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy, of which Tim Reynolds is the third and final successor. The farm at Allington comprises circa 300 acres in a mix of cereals and forage producing ground, with the main farm holding located here as well as the successful Allington Farm Shop, which has been gradually developed in response to its popularity and success since its opening in 1980.

The partnership is a progressive and well diversified agricultural business, having weathered the changes and volatility of the farming world for decades, expanding the business and farmed area by renting more land locally. Today, the business is farming circa 750 acres across several land blocks, in an approximate 70/30 percent split arable to grassland. A plan of the farmed area can be seen in Appendix 1. The farm has circa 250 head of cattle at any one time, with a 50 head suckler herd, and the remaining numbers made up of bought in calves who are brought onto the farm at circa one month old and kept until finishing. There is also a flock of 300 breeding ewes. Much of the arable cropping is used for animal feed, and the farm shop provides a regular customer base for finished animals, taking roughly 50 beef animals and 400 lambs per annum, with the remaining stock sold finished on the open market.

In 2020, the opportunity to buy Manor Farm, Easton Piercy arose. The business has been farming this land for some 30 years in agreement with the previous owner, whose retirement necessitated the sale

of the land. P&T Reynolds therefore took the decision to invest in this 325 acre farm, ensuring their occupation of the land that had by now become so essential to their wider business. Manor Farm lies circa 3 miles from the main holding at Allington. There is a significant and busy main road and a largely populated village (Yatton Keynell) between the two sites. Whilst this has been manageable in the past when Manor Farm was used largely for arable or forage production, more regular visits between the two are not straightforward, though this shall be addressed more fully later within this report.

The main farmyard at Manor Farm was converted to residential properties and sold by the previous owner, and the only infrastructure left on the holding was a small yard with a circa 500 square metre steel portal framed shed. Originally the Reynolds' intended to erect a grain store here, and bring the bulk of the arable operations to Manor Farm. However, plans changed when yet another block of land, this one 65 acres, adjacent to Manor farm came available for sale and the business instead chose to invest in this "Folly Farm".

As is the nature with buying land and subsequently making plans for agricultural plantings, this whole process has filled several years, during which the British agricultural market has seen several key shifts. Namely, the rising costs of arable inputs making cereal production become increasingly challenging to do viably, and made doubly so by more extreme weather patterns during the growing season.

Secondly, rising and promisingly consistent demand for British meat, particularly beef, has seen a far healthier and robust profit margin on these enterprises when compared with the arable. The business has the benefit of the hugely popular Allington Farm shop providing an opportunity for direct sales to the public. Whilst meat prices obviously must remain reasonably consistent with alternative competing outlets, a premium can be expected on the products sold directly through this on-site store front.

Not surprisingly therefore, the business has pivoted its plans and now intends to establish a beef finishing unit, comprising 2 cattle sheds and a straw barn at Manor Farm. The development enables the streamlining and expansion of the existing beef enterprise currently based at Allington Farm, and makes best use of the new land available to them, in which Manor Farm sits centrally, making this an excellent base for a large and varied grazing block.

The intention in the long – run is to move the beef enterprise entirely to this site, away from the yard at Allington. The buildings at Allington are general- purpose in their structure, and the yard layout presents difficulties with cattle handling and clearing out of sheds, all of which contributes to inefficiencies such as increased labour, vet intervention and inputs into the beef enterprise.

Considerable investment would be needed at the site to improve these inefficiencies, which given that this property is not owned by P&T Reynolds, the business would not necessarily see the long-term benefit of, and would still be challenging and piece-meal, owing to the working around of the original buildings and site constraints.

A new set of cattle housing buildings and supporting infrastructure, plus the accessibility to grazing land, should see the enterprise at this satellite unit become more modern and economical to manage, resulting in a more consistent and faster finishing time for the cattle. As well as positive benefits on the bottom line, better animal welfare and other environmental sustainability standards will be able to be obtained at this unit, that could not be achieved at the existing farm, even if the business had an appetite to invest there.

Such a system, however, demands the presence of a suitable, professional and well-informed farm laborer to be on site to ensure constant monitoring of the animals, and to respond to any emergencies such as illness, or complications during calving. The business has invested heavily in buying land and now intends to improve the infrastructure at this new farm of theirs, and so a temporary dwelling will, for the meantime, enable the evolution of this business as it adopts not only new farmland but also a different farm system, transferring stock, capital and labour from Allington Farm.

3. The Proposal

The proposal is to provide a temporary structure on site, which falls within the definition of a mobile home in Section 29 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968, that is: that the structure must be physically capable of being moved, and that the 'twin' unit must not exceed 20 metres in length, 6.8 metres in width and an internal height not exceeding 3.096 metres

The accommodation will lie near to the livestock housing sheds, within close site and sound so as the occupiers of the accommodation can respond immediately to any needs of the stock within.

4. Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (2025) outlines that planning policies should support sustainable economic growth in rural areas by taking a positive approach to new development. Planning strategies should maintain a prosperous rural economy including policies to support the

sustainable growth of rural businesses. It should promote the development and diversification of agricultural businesses and support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors which respect the character of the countryside.

In the county of Wiltshire, the Wiltshire Core Strategy runs alongside the NPPF, the core strategy outlines a sustainable spatial strategy for future development in the county.

Prior to the National Planning Policy Framework and Wiltshire Core Strategy the Government's policy on the development of the Countryside was detailed in Planning Policy Statement 7 (PPS 7).

The grounds covering planning permission for Agricultural Dwellings were set out in Annex A of PPS 7, this set out the agricultural requirements that need to be fulfilled if a permanent dwelling is to be permitted, these are:

- Clear functional need
- The need relates to full time workers who are predominantly employed within the agricultural sector and does not relate to a part time requirement
- The agricultural activity concerned has been established for at least three years, proved profitable for at least one, are currently financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so.
- The functional need could not be fulfilled by another dwelling either on the unit or locally
- Normal planning requirements are satisfied

The Wiltshire Core Strategy has reintroduced the need for functional and financial tests to be provided. The functional viability is addressed within this report. The financial viability of the enterprise, and of the wider business, is well established and determined, with the proposed change of location from the main holding to this new satellite unit unlikely to present any detrimental or significant alteration to this. Three years of accounts can be made available upon request and are to remain confidential.

5. Buildings and infrastructure

The application proposes two new 507 square meter cattle housing sheds, and a 564 square metre straw shed. This is in addition to the existing cattle shed on site, which also measures approximately 507 square metres.

The site has an existing silage clamp, and the proposed new straw shed will lend its eastern wall to enclosing the second clamp allowing the silage to be stacked higher and creating two large separate clamps, giving a total combined storage space of circa 1,000 square metres, which equates to roughly 2,300 Tonnes of silage storage space, which is sufficient to feed the circa 240 head finishing unit during the winter housed period.

The beneath table shows the total number of animal spaces each shed is capable of providing. For simplicity, batching of young calves in one, 6-12 month old animals in the next and finishing animals in the third shed is assumed, though this obviously is not exact as cattle numbers will not be so linear. This does demonstrate however that the sheds are capable of accommodating the proposed number of animals expected to be on site.

Calving of the suckler cows is done in batches, with half the herd calving in spring, and the remaining in autumn. Alongside this, batches of calves are bought in when good animals at a reasonable purchase cost can be found, so roughly 60- 80 animals under 6 months may be housed at any one time.

These then grow and progress through the sheds, and their spaces filled by other young animals. Average numbers are currently a total of 240-250 head of cattle on the farm at any one time, and this is expected to remain consistent after the herd is transferred to Manor Farm. As can be seen from the table beneath, the buildings and infrastructure available can house this many, with some additional space. Keeping additional space available is essential for TB outbreaks, that may limit the options of moving cattle off the farm, and also enables the Reynold's to sell their animals at the most opportune time in terms of market value.

Livestock Type:		Calves in groups	6-12 Months in Groups	Finishing Cattle 12 Months +	
M2 Requirement:		2.5	4.5	4.8	
Housing Description:	Size (M2)	No. head housing space			
Livestock Type:		Calves in groups	6-12 Months in Groups	Finishing Cattle 12 Months +	
Housing Shed 1	507 Sq m	203			
Housing Shed 2	507 Sq m		113		
Existing Shed	507 Sq m			106	
Total Numbers accommodation space:		203	113	106	Total head space: 421
Silage Stores	1000		Sq M		
	Total Capacity (3M stack)	2308	Tonnes		

6. Functional Test

All figures for labour requirements have been obtained from 'The Agricultural Budget and Costings Book – 97th Edition' (2023) by Agro Business Consultants.

The table beneath illustrates the labour requirement created by the unit once all three cattle sheds are built and operational. This calculation ignores the wider farm responsibilities, such as management of the adjacent grassland and arable land, which would also be part of the job remit in addition to the management of the cattle for any person living on site.

	Numbers of animals/hectares	Standard Man-Days required (per animal/ per ha)	Enterprise Total
Weaned calves (0-3 months)	30	2.63	78.90
Weaned calves (3-6 months)	30	1.63	48.90
Weaned calves (6-12 months)	60	0.81	48.60
Extensive beef animals (12-24 mnths)	120	1.75	210.00
Total Enterprise Requirement			386.40
Allowance for Farm Maintenance		15%	57.96
TOTAL			444.36
	Standard Man Days provided by 1 Person		275
	Total labour requirement		1.62

A labour unit of one person is assumed to work 2,200 hours per year. These total hours are converted into 275 notional 'Standard Man Days' of 8 hours (ABC, 2020).

Based upon the basic level of cattle spaces, with 240 head of cattle being on site at one time, the unit has a labour requirement of 1.62 persons.

In reality, cattle numbers are likely to inflate beyond this number at times, and, as previously mentioned, currently ignores the wider farm management, largely as this is currently already undertaken from a distance.

PPS7 is no longer a material consideration, however, to assist the Council in their decision making the statement required an enterprise to show an essential need for the proper functioning of the enterprise for at least one rural worker to be readily available on site at most times. Paragraph 4 (i) of Annex A referred to the example of animals requiring essential care at short notice, and in 4 (ii) to the ability to deal quickly with emergencies that could otherwise cause serious loss.

The proper functioning of a livestock farm requires that skilled stock attendants are available at very short notice at any time of the day or night. Practically, there is a requirement for two or more people to be available for most tasks involving bovine animals, even small calves.

7. Financial viability of the unit

Although financial viability of an enterprise is no longer a consideration under the NPPF, it is necessary when assessing the viability and longevity of any business that its profitability be considered also. P&T Reynolds is a well- established, multi- generational farming business that has expanded, diversified and recently invested in land and infrastructure away from its rented main farm base.

Accounts of previous years can be made upon request, and show profits that are substantially capable of providing a return upon the inputs deployed within the business, which, in an agricultural setting are land, labour and capital.

Owing to the evolution of the business, the land being previously available to the farm and not a consideration within the functional requirement of the unit, the potential return on land is, for now, irrelevant though this would considered to be the equivalent rental value.

A return on labour should be the labour required to run the unit and its equivalence to a working wage (considered [REDACTED] or approximately [REDACTED] when considering the 1.62 labour units required.

A reasonable return on capital would be expected at 2.5% of the value of infrastructure and stock required to operate. This too is partly accounted for already as livestock, feedstock and equipment is largely already owned by P&T Reynolds and will simply be transferring to new barns, the capital investment into which the farm accounts are able to exhibit the expected return.

8. Proper Functioning

The presence of livestock on a farm necessitates the continued requirement for at least one person at all times to be available to respond to emergencies and provide the around the clock care that those animals require.

Farm Assurance Codes of Practice require that suitable trained persons are available 24 hours a day and the Government's Strategy for Food and Farming states that *'high standards of animal health and welfare are important because they are a vital part of producing safe food and because we care about how animals are treated. High standards are also essential for the economic success of the industry.'*

Appropriately skilled workers will need to be living on site to be available at short notice to manage the animals' health and welfare. The Code of Recommendation for the Welfare of Livestock (Cattle) states that 'no matter how acceptable a system may be in principle, without competent, diligent stockmanship, the welfare of animals cannot be adequately catered for.'

Many of the calves brought to the site will be of an age when they will be transferring from their mother's milk to milk powder. It is important to be able to spot stress in calves from when they change from whole milk to milk powder feeding and train calves to the bucket feeding system. It will prove vital that all housed calves are regularly inspected and monitored as their welfare depends on frequent human attention. Particularly after travelling, calves can be stressed and dehydrated and diligent attention must be taken for several weeks after this in order to minimize calf fatalities and suffering. Calves are susceptible to a number of health problems that require rapid attention such as viral diseases, pneumonia, bloat and scour, all of which need to be detected early and immediately treated if losses are to be avoided. The Code of Recommendation for the Welfare of Livestock (Cattle) states that *'it is particularly important that you watch calves regularly for signs of diarrhea or respiratory disease.'*

The unit will also be housing the 50 head suckler herd, as well as purchased in calves, and so monitoring of calving cows is also essential, both with constant monitoring during birthing, and the new calves and freshly birthed mothers afterwards. At this point, both calves and mothers are susceptible to infection and damage if not handled carefully, and transferred quickly and efficiently into the necessary areas on the unit.

The calves are required to be fed colostrum within the first couple of hours of birth, without which they will not develop the necessary immune system or feeding capabilities to survive on their own.

The Welfare of Farmed Animal Regulations stress that animals which appear to be ill or injured shall be cared for appropriately without delay and that action should be taken immediately if any animals are injured or appear ill or distressed. From a financial perspective it is also vital to the success of the business that any losses are kept to an absolute minimum. Adequate and timely supervision at all times is therefore essential.

To enable good staff to be available on farm 24 hours a day, it is important, in any farming business, that the accommodation is of a sufficient standard, as well as being located closely enough to the main source of their employ to be available immediately. This is particularly pertinent for this enterprise, as calves are delivered at erratic times and hours of the day, and with no one living on site and no suitable accommodation to serve as a rest area this can result in long times spent waiting on farm.

9. Availability of Other Houses

The unit lies near to numerous well-populated rural villages, including Grittleton, Yatton Keynell and Kington St Michael. However, as was evidenced within the functional test and further expanded upon within the Proper Function section of this report, there is a need for a skilled laborer to be available at all times when youngstock are present on farm, and therefore owing to the farm's location this necessitates a dwelling on site. Without the presence of a suitably skilled person on the farm, the business cannot hope to continue to develop or even maintain its current performance.

At present, the beef animals are housed at Allington Farm, where Paul Reynolds lives in an Agriculturally 'tied' property and so he is available to respond to the urgent care needs of the animals. When the animals move, there will be no such provision.

As previously mentioned, though the distance between the two farms is only several miles, the road network is busy and passes through a well -populated village that sees regular traffic issues, particularly around school pick up times. An urgent call could well remain unanswered for 10-15 minutes if poorly timed.

A Rightmove review of 2-3 bedroom properties available for sale or rent within 1 mile of Manor Farm, Easton Piercy yields no results.

The nearest property on the market is advertised at £2.75 Million, which goes some way to demonstrating the desirability and high property values achieved in the area.

Lying near to the Cotswold National Landscape, with excellent commuter links to Bristol, Bath and London, the cost of purchasing or renting a suitable property in the vicinity, if such existed, would be prohibitive to the farming business.

The farm has no other buildings that could be converted for a dwelling, this having been exhausted by the previous owner.

10. Conclusion

This appraisal accompanies a planning application for a temporary rural worker's accommodation at Manor Farm, Easton Piercy along with the expansion of the farm buildings in the form of two purpose-built cattle sheds and straw shed.

The planned investment in the infrastructure shows a strategic and well-considered step for the Reynolds family, who, after investing in the freehold occupation of farmed land intend to continue the investment into their own property, rather than at their current rented property at Allington Farm.

The farming business has seen unexpected changes in recent years and seized the opportunities that have presented themselves to purchase land, expanding upon their farmed area and enabling greater steps to be taken, particularly with their beef enterprise.

As agricultural businesses go, they have a captive and consistent customer base in their own farm shop which can, within reason, guarantee good sale values for a number of their finished animals. They face the cessation of their own agricultural tenancy upon Tim's retirement, and the family are looking to ensure that future generations may have the opportunity to farm as they have.

In terms of the policies set out in the local development plan, the National Planning Policy Framework and accompanying Planning Practice Guidance, it is concluded that there is an essential need for a full-time worker to be available at the site at most times, and that the identified need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit and there is no other accommodation in the area that is suitable and available to meet the functional needs of the enterprise.

