

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/002/0278
1.1	Proposed Development	“Erection of 1no. Rural Worker’s Dwelling”
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Control Central
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2026/03475
1.4	Applicant	Mr & Mrs Tom & Pippa Blanchard, Blanchard Farms, New Barn Farm, Savernake Road, Burbage
1.5	Site Address	Land north of Forest Road, Wootton Rivers, SN8 4NL

2.0 DESCRIPTION

Location

- 2.1 The application site forms part of the applicant’s freehold land. The site is immediately northwest of a group of farm buildings, approximately quarter of a mile north of Wootton Rivers village, in open countryside.

Land Area and tenure

- 2.2 The applicant has a large-scale farm business that spans land owned freehold and leasehold. The total farmed area is approximately 648ha (1,600 acres) and includes Wolfhall Farm, New Barn Farm. The freehold land, of which the application site forms part, extends to 45ha (110) acres at the application site, together with 48ha (120 acres) at New Barn Farm. Wolfhall Farm extends to 142ha (350 acres) and is held on a Farm Business Tenancy with 50 years unexpired. The balance of the farmland, including Cullys and Levetts Farm is held under various short-term arrangements.

Soil Type and Characteristics

- 2.3 The soil at the application site is classified in the Ardington association which is described as deep glauconitic soils.

3.0 AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 The combined business is run as a mixed unit with a dairy unit at Wolfhall Farm, a beef unit at the application site and an arable enterprise. The dairy herd comprises 600 milking cows together with 150 replacements each year. The herd is calved in spring and autumn. All calves are retained and reared through as either dairy replacements or for beef. The arable enterprise extends to approximately 750 acres, including wheat, barley and oats; with forage maize, fodder beet and lucerne for fodder.
- 3.2 The holding is regularly shut down for bovine TB – the applicant advises this has been the case since 2010. Bovine TB is endemic in the UK cattle herd. There is strict legislation on testing for and containment of the disease. Calves which are from TB affected herds are required to be isolated so that they can be monitored for the development of the disease. The places at which the calves are kept have to be physically separate to unaffected stock and that separation extends to the buildings, equipment, feed and labour used in the husbandry of the animals.
- 3.3 To date, the applicant has retained calves at Wolfhall Farm until they are weaned and then transferred them to the farm buildings adjoining the application site. The animals have then been reared through at that site until they are clear of TB restrictions.

Proposed

- 3.4 The proposal is to bring the calves to site when they are one to two weeks old and then rear them through to weaning at which point they will be beyond the 42 restriction period for TB and can be sold as “clean” animals, commanding a significant price premium over TB affected cattle. Calves will be brought to site in two batches, six months apart. The batches will be 200 head and will be transferred over the course of approximately six weeks. The rearing period is approximately 14 weeks to weaning leading to an overall period of approximately five months for each batch.
- 3.5 Whilst on the holding the calves will be bucket reared and will utilise replacement milk through automated delivery.

Comments

- 3.6 The holding is a well-established multi-generational farm. The proposal relates wholly to calves born on the unit and represents a modification to the existing dairy and beef enterprise.

Buildings

- 3.7 The buildings adjoining the application site are three modern steel framed sheds, two of which are used covered yards for livestock and the third as a storage building for bedding straw.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

- 4.1 There is no accommodation associated with the application site. The other dwellings in the control of the business are geographically remote from the application site and comprise the farmhouse at New Barn Farm (owned freehold); three dwellings rented as part of Wolfhall Farm; two further dwellings at Burbage, rented as part of Manor Farm and a separate dwelling rented at Cadley.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

- 5.1 The business employs 12 full time equivalents and one part time unit of labour.

Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

- 5.2 There is no proposal to change the labour input. The expectation is that one of the existing full time employees will occupy the proposed dwelling.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

- 6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the proposed modification to the calf rearing enterprise. 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 enterprise and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprise.
- 6.3 The proposed enterprise will centre on the rearing of very young calves from two weeks through to approximately 15 weeks. Calves will be reared in batches of 200 head and there will be two batches per annum. There will therefore be a considerable number of very young calves housed on the holding across the majority of the year.
- 6.4 Very young calves housed in relatively high numbers can present a need for close husbandry. They can suffer from infectious disease, become injured or malnourished. Early intervention can be required in order to treat affected animals and to avoid the rapid spread of disease. It is therefore my view that the proposed enterprise, when fully implemented, will present an essential need for a presence.

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 three trading periods. The accounts indicate that the wider business is both profitable and viable. The applicant has also submitted gross margins for the proposed calf rearing enterprise. The gross margins indicate a strong level of return. Applying proportionate fixed costs to the supplied gross margins it is my view that the proposed enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis.
- 7.4 The applicant advises that the cost of the dwelling, buildings and associated infrastructure is likely to be met from their own funds, without recourse to borrowing.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 The concept for a TB rearing unit, enshrined in DEFRA regulations, is for it to be farmed in a wholly separate manner to other bovine enterprises. The proposed unit will thus be physically separate to the other farm buildings and will be entirely self-contained though buildings, machinery, feed and labour. It is my view that the proposed location for the unit is appropriate.
- 8.2 At present there is very high demand for TB isolation units and little prospect in the short to medium term that Bovine TB will be eradicated. TB affected calves can be purchased at a very low price and, once clear of TB, can be sold at market value, representing a significant business opportunity.
- 8.3 From the scanned versions of the submitted plans the proposed dwelling scales to a Gross Internal Area of approximately 174m². The 174m² includes a farm office and meeting room, which extends to approximately 26m². I discussed the inclusion of the farm office and meeting room with the applicant and their agent whilst in site. The applicant advised there would be no immediate requirement for the space but that its provision would future proof the unit in the event that it were intensified to a higher prominence in the wider business.
- 8.4 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. In my view the living accommodation excluding the farm office and meeting room is not excessive in relation to the essential need. As indicated by the applicant, there is no immediate need for the additional space and I would suggest the Council needs to form a view on whether it is appropriate to provide it at this stage for the business.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The proposals, when implemented, will create an essential need for a presence at the holding. The wider business is well-established and significant. The business is profitable and the budget for the enterprise at the application site is founded on a reasonable basis and shows profit and viability. Excluding the farm office and meeting room the dwelling is not excessive in relation to 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/002/0278/AMC

/Users/tonycoke/Library/Mobile
Documents/com~apple~CloudDocs/Documents/APA/02
KDC/Appraisals/0278 Forest Road, Wootton Rivers,
Marlborough/rept.docx

Date 10 August 2026

APA Consultants Ltd
Halstead Farm
47 High Street
Easterton
Devizes,
SN10 4PE