

REPORT TO THE EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE Report No. 1

Date of Meeting	1 st August 2013
Application Number	E/2012/1444/FUL
Site Address	Land at Manor Farm, Allington, Wiltshire
Proposal	Erection of dairy unit
Applicant	Mr Richard Oram
Town/Parish Council	ALL CANNINGS
Grid Ref	406839 162844
Type of application	Full planning
Case Officer	April Waterman

Reason for the application being considered by committee

Prior to the May 2013 elections the application was called to Committee by Cllr L Grundy OBE. Cllr P Whitehead, new member for the division, has confirmed the call-in.

1. Purpose of the report

To consider the recommendation to approve an application for full planning permission to erect a new dairy unit, together with hardstanding, access alterations and landscaping. A new single building is proposed to accommodate the whole of the farm's milking herd, a parlour, a dairy and a waste store. The building would contain cubicles for 240 cows, four robotic milking units, a dairy and underground storage for the waste produced by the dairy cows.

2. Report summary

The issue to determine is whether the proposed new building is acceptable in this location, which is in a prominent position within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and adjoins the small settlement of Allington. The impact of the development needs to be assessed in terms of visual interruption of the landscape, traffic flow and volume, disturbance to residential amenity and effect on heritage and biodiversity resources. The judgement to be made is whether there would be harm caused to the environment, and to the enjoyment of it by residents and the public, by the development, and if so whether there is justification, in terms of benefit to the local economy, to offset such harm, and to allow the development to proceed.

3. Site description and background

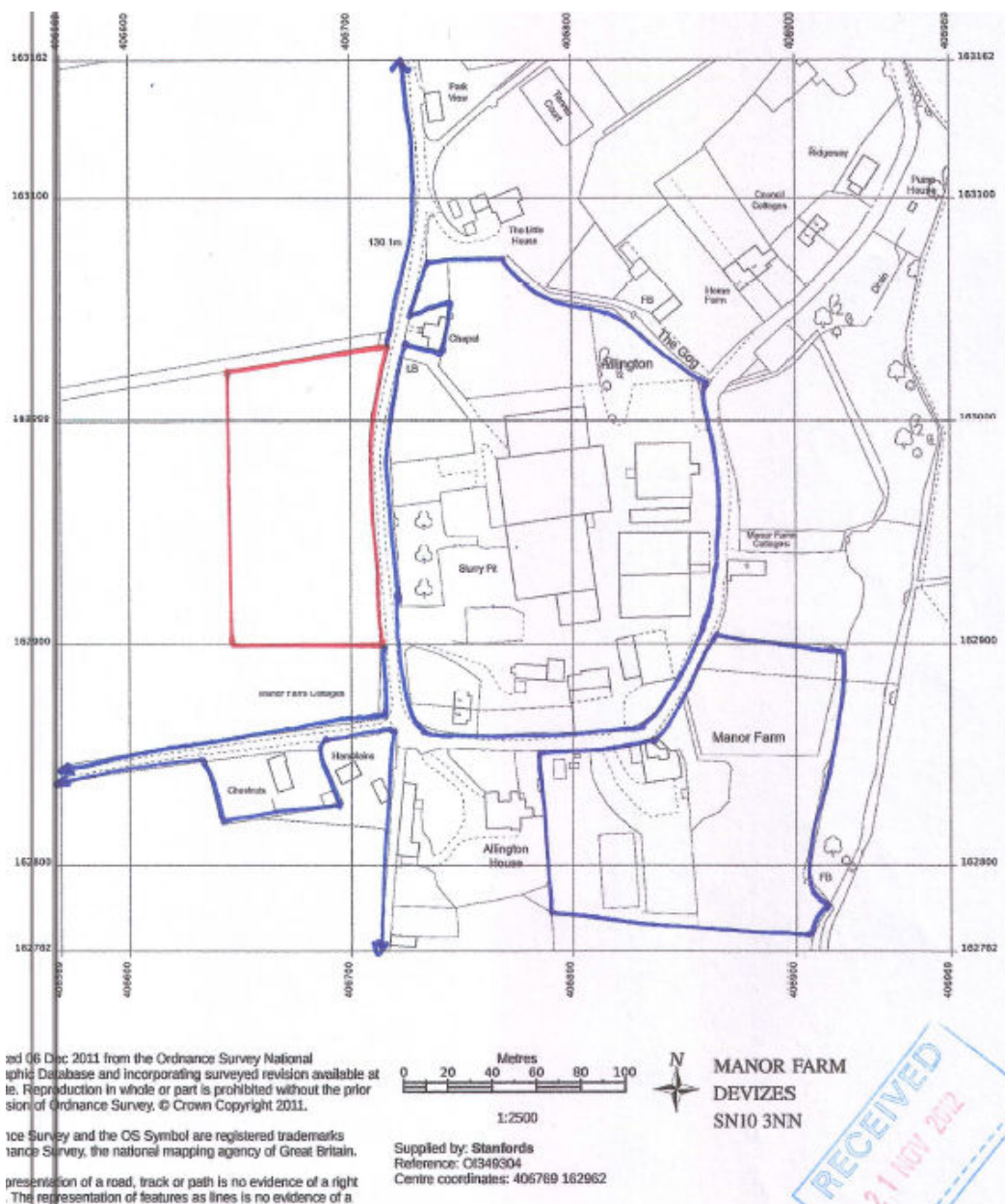
The application site comprises 0.8 hectares of gently sloping grassland to the west of, and directly across the lane from the existing agricultural complex of Manor Farm, Allington. This single width lane forms a loop serving the farm and a number of dwellings comprising this small hamlet, leaving and returning to the south side of the C8 Devizes – Pewsey Road. The site rises gradually (from the west side of the western arm of the loop in the lane)

gaining some 2.5 metres in height from its road surface level to the western edge of the site (a distance of about 70 metres).

The site lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in the Kennet Landscape Conservation Strategy 2005 is covered by the "Vale of Pewsey" landscape character area.

Manor Farm is a dairy and arable enterprise, with a milking herd of 240 cows, all at Allington (of which about 200 are milked) together with 160 young stock and replacements, some kept at Allington. All stock are housed, not grazed. The applicant also owns land and buildings at South Farm, West Overton.

Properties close to the site that are not in the ownership of the applicant include the Bethel Baptist Chapel (a Grade II Listed Building) and a number of dwellings.



4. Planning history

E/09/0644/FUL - Conversion of barn to dwelling for agricultural worker: Refused July 2009

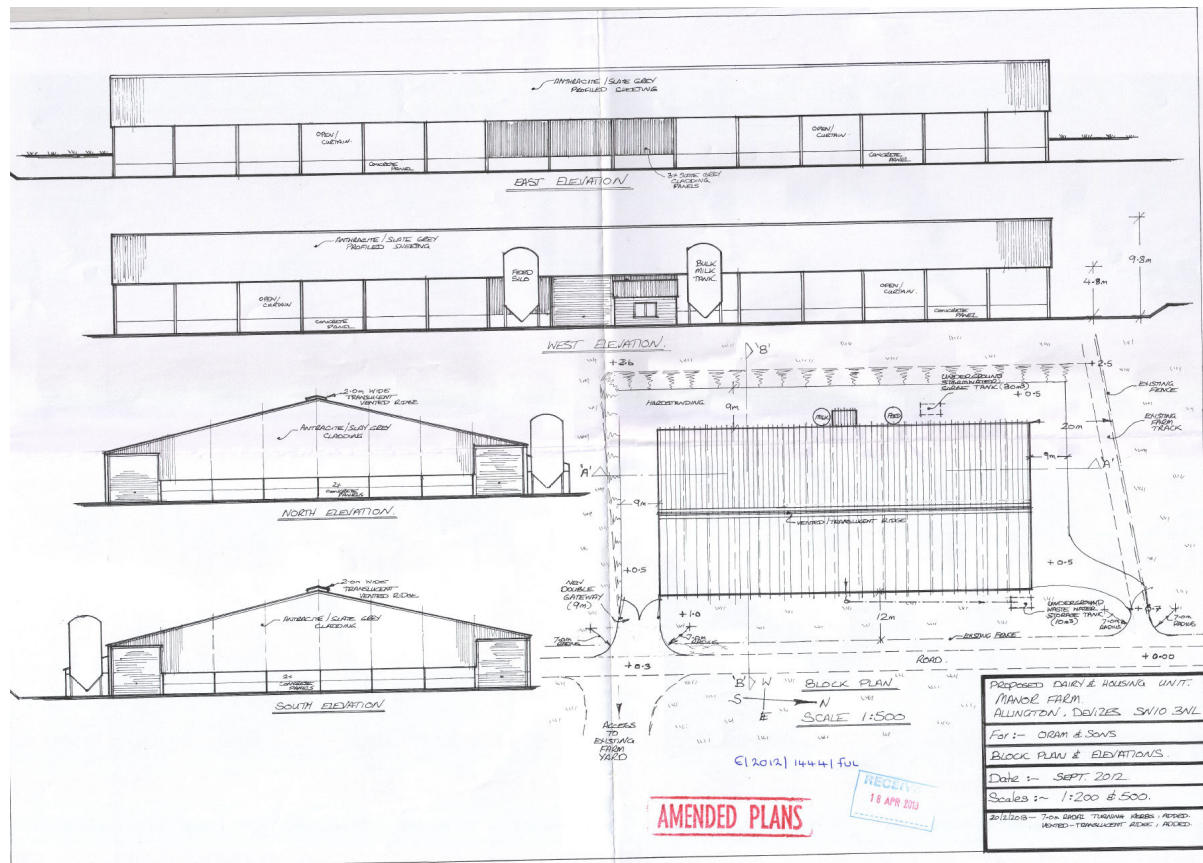
E/09/0600/FUL - Straw barn extension to existing dairy buildings: Approved June 2009

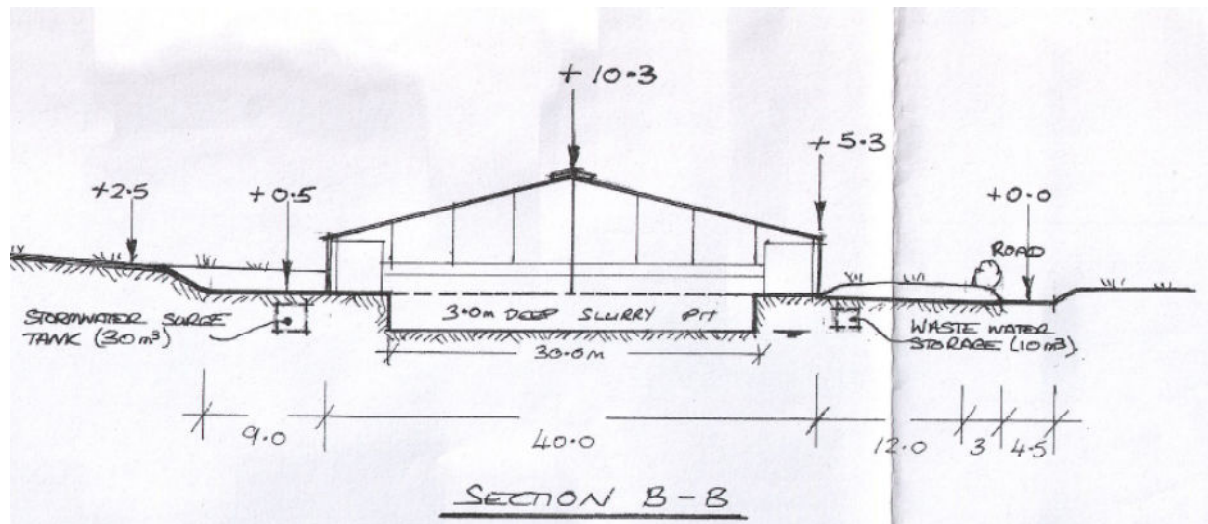
K/58957 - Conversion of barn to dwelling for agricultural worker: Withdrawn summer 2008

K/45643 - Conversion of barn to dwelling: Approved July 2003

5. The proposal

Planning permission is sought for the erection of a 40m x 90m single span building to house an expanded milking herd of 300 cows, robotic milking machines, feed hopper, bulk milk store and underground slurry pit. The proposal includes a hardstanding area around the building, and mitigatory landscape planting. The site would be excavated to produce a level area, with spoil being used to create bunds for tree planting along the lane edge of the site.





The building would be constructed with dark-coloured sheet material roofing, with a canopy ventilation strip along the 9.8 m high ridge length. Concrete sections are proposed for the lower parts of the east and west side walls, with an open ventilation gap beneath the 4.8 m high eaves across which curtains would be pulled. Central sections of the east and west walls would have solid cladding, and the entirety of north and south-facing gable end walls would be solid sheet cladding. Taking the existing road surface level as 0.0, the proposed building would sit on a base +0.5 m, bringing its ridge and eaves heights to 10.3 m and 5.3 m above the level of the loop road respectively.

Waste from the cows would be stored in 3m deep slurry tanks beneath the building, with direct collection through the slatted floor of the dairy.

The planting of tree standards, woodland areas, shrubs, hedging and grass land is proposed, and set out in the submitted landscape proposals and mitigation strategy.

6. Planning policy and guidance

National Planning Policy Framework 2012

Kennet Local Plan 2011

Policy PD1: Development and design

Policy NR6: Sustainability and protection of the countryside

Policy NR7: Protection of the landscape

Wiltshire Core Strategy Pre-submission Document

Core Policy 51 Landscape (to be read together with proposed change referenced 80)

North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2009 - 2014

7. Consultations

All Cannings Parish Council:

No firm decision could be reached.

If the application is passed we would like to see the following:

1. That mature tree screening is in place at all times and in good condition.
2. That the provisions to prevent flooding from the increased concrete apron and roofing are more than adequate.
3. That road improvements be made on the crossing points across the loop road from the existing farm yard to the new development site to prevent erosion.

All Cannings Parish Council (amended plans) :
Comments as above re-iterated.

Bishops Cannings Parish Council:
No objections.

County Landscape Architect

The application site lies within the North Wessex Downs AONB, an important national landscape designation. Development proposals in this context are required to be sensitive to the receiving landscape character, and designed to a high standard. If you have not already done so, I would recommend that you consult the North Wessex Downs AONB Planning advisor, Andrew Lord. The AONB's Management Plan should also be referred to for appropriate guidance.

There is little doubt in my mind that the erection of this large building will be visible within the landscape and is likely to result in various degrees of negative local landscape and visual effect.

Generally, I concur with the findings in the assessment of effects contained within the accompanying Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA). The greatest magnitude of change will be experienced from close viewpoints from the adjoining and approaching lane and from the nearby residential properties located to the north and south of the site culminating in significant negative visual impact. The planting mitigation proposed is necessary, and should be conditioned.

The Devizes to Pewsey Road is an important local road. The stretch of this road sharing inter-visibility with the site is devoid of boundary hedges or hedgerow trees. From this receptor the new building and the ridgeline of the proposed building is likely to register against the skyline, from lower vantage points along this road. A single line of Ash trees is identified as filtering the view of the proposed building from this receptor, however these trees are also identified in the accompanying LVIA as declining in condition. I would recommend additional strengthening and ongoing positive management of this tree line vegetation.

Viewed from elevated and more distant view points within the AONB, the proposed building will be viewed in the context of the existing Manor Farm complex which includes other large modern farm buildings.

The materials and colour of the proposed building including roofing will be important to get right. Bright light colours should be avoided in preference for darker greens and greys. The use of external lighting should be minimal, where essential, the use of directional down lighters should be employed to avoid unnecessary light pollution and visual impacts to the Darker AONB skies. The submitted planning information includes references to roofing materials and lighting. These elements should be controlled by suitably worded planning conditions.

The submitted landscape assessment has recognised that development should mitigate against harmful effects to landscape & important views and visual receptors through use of additional tree and woodland strip planting in order to reduce the negative landscape & visual effects over the medium and longer term.

The planned tree planting (as long as it successfully establishes) should help to filter and obscure views to the building and reduce skyline impacts. However the screening and filtering functions of the proposed new planting are likely to take many years to reach maturity at this relatively exposed site. Suitably worded planning conditions should be used

to ensure that planting proposed as mitigation or enhancement is fully implemented and suitably maintained, including a requirement to replace any failed planting.

I note that the eastern side of the proposed site has an overhead electricity line running over and parallel with the planned hedge and hedgerow tree planting. While hedge planting is likely to be achievable, it may be necessary to push the planned tree planting further into the site, so that canopies can be allowed to grow, without risk of being reduced to pollards by the relevant electricity company as they mature and start to provide a screening function to development.

Development proposed within the AONB should seek to enhance the AONB, I would suggest that apart from the mitigation currently proposed to lessen the visual impact from the new building, a development of this size and nature should also seek to deliver local landscape and biodiversity enhancement within the land in the control of the applicant. The local 'Vale of Pewsey Landscape Character Area' enhancement priorities, are included in Appendix 1 within the LVIA as 'Enhancement priorities', which might typically include additional boundary improvements or land management actions, local biodiversity habitat enhancement.

For example, the line of ash trees to the north of the site are identified within the LVIA report as an important landscape feature, and recognised as providing a useful visual filtering function to the proposed dairy building from the Devizes to Pewsey Road, however, these trees are also described as 'declining' in condition. I would like to see this landscape element, with others such as hedges and hedgerow trees, supplemented and sustainably managed into the future, so that the condition of the local landscape character is being repaired and managed through associated sustainable development wherever possible.

In light of the current national 'Ash Dieback' situation, I would recommend against the specification of Ash trees within this development. The landscape consultant should be requested to substitute the proposed Ash species content for another species typical of the local area.

Landscape Architect (amended plans) :

I note that there are no specific revisions to landscape information, supporting documents or plans to comment on further within the additionally submitted information.

However I would like to take this opportunity to draw your attention to the final appearance of the proposed feed silo and milk bulk tank, as shown on the Block Plan & elevations drawing. These external storage structures are located against the west facing elevation of the building, but also visible from north and south viewpoints. Due to their size and scale it will be important in my opinion that they do not manifest as white or glinting stainless steel focal features silhouetted against the darker / muted building backdrop. It would be beneficial to better understand the colour palette options and finishes available, and condition the final agreement of a suitable colour/finish. I would have a strong preference for a single neutral/muted colour that would not significantly contrast against the building materials proposed for use in the main building.

I note the revision includes the introduction of 7.0 M radius turning kerbs at each of the vehicular entrances. If 7.0m turning radii are required for highway reasons? I question why kerbs up stands are necessary in this rural context, especially off such a minor road. In my view this introduces unnecessary urbanisation of a rural lane. The use of kerb up stands should be resisted, if a hard edge is required as an edge restraint to contain road construction surfacing, crossing the verge, it should be laid flush with the adjacent road surfaces (with no up stands).

Highways:

I refer to the above planning application. I recommend that this application be refused on highway grounds for the reason given below:-

“The application for a new dairy unit does not include sufficient information to enable the transport aspects of the proposal to be properly assessed. The development could lead to an increase in the use of the western junction of the Allington loop road with the C8 class III Devises to Pewsey road which has extremely sub-standard visibility to the east, in which case the development would increase dangerous conditions for road users.”

With reference to the above recommendation, I would comment that 11.18 of the D & A statement states that “there will be no material change to the vehicle movement associated with the existing dairy use”. That may be correct, but the submitted information does not adequately discuss the following:-

The extremely sub-standard visibility to the east from the western junction of the Allington loop road with the C8 where a number of road traffic accidents have occurred. Land ownership in the vicinity of this junction.

The increase in non dairy vehicle movements which may arise from the development given the proposed increase in overall farm floor area.

The number and type of expected daily vehicle movements across the loop road between the old and new farm buildings.

The number and type of vehicle movements arising from the expansion into a beef enterprise (2.10 of the D. & A. Statement).

The number and type of vehicle movements arising from the storage of grain in the existing buildings but which is stated as currently taking place elsewhere (2.10 of the D. & A. Statement).

The number of vehicle movements distributing slurry from the proposed unit (4366 cubic metres (2.5 of the D. & A. Statement,)) and their routeing compared with the current situation.

A detailed Transport Statement should be submitted considering all of the above points.

In the event that this application proceeds towards approval I am likely to require some improvements to the entrance radii at the two access points from the unit to the unclassified road.

Highways (amended plans):

I refer to the above planning application, and to the amended Transport Statement received on 24th May 2013. The Statement provides information on the points of concern raised in my previous comments dated 16th January 2013. Given the conclusions of the Statement that the proposed development would not result in any increase in traffic movements associated with the farm, and that there would be a reduction in movements, I am unable to press for an improvement to visibility at the western junction of the Allington loop road.

I recommend that any grant of permission should be conditioned to cover the following points:-

- Notwithstanding the details hereby approved the southern access to the new dairy unit shall be provided with entrance radii to either side of 5 metres.

- The surfacing of the first 7 metres of each access to the new dairy unit in a well-bound consolidated material (not loose stone or gravel).
- The setting back of the gates to each access to the new dairy unit to a position at least 7 metres from the carriageway edge, with the gates being made to open inwards only.
- Measures to prevent the discharge of surface water from the two access points out onto the public highway.

Environmental Health Officer:

Noise - I have met with the applicant and have visited a similar, although smaller dairy. The aim of this visit was to witness the sound levels that are likely to be produced by the proposed milking robots. The manufacturers of the milking robots have provided some noise data but for reasons previously discussed we do not feel that the information is reliable.

During our visit it came to light that there are some inaccuracies in the 'Proposed floor plan' that has been submitted. The plan shows a plant room in the middle, we have been advised by the applicant that this will not be a plant room but a holding pen. In regards to noise sources it is proposed that there will be 2 x control units and 4 x milking robots. We were advised that the control units will be fully enclosed in 3 1/2 inch thick concrete walls and ceilings. The robots will be enclosed on 3 sides and a ceiling by 3 1/2 inch thick concrete walls. These structures have not been shown on the plans so far but would affect the noise escaping from the development so should be included in the plans.

The visit was useful to give us an idea of the sound levels produced by the robots. Unfortunately, due to the extremely low background levels in the area of the proposal, particularly at night, we require an acoustic survey to be able to make a decision as to whether the sound levels will have an adverse effect on the existing residential properties. The acoustic survey should be carried out in line with BS4142. It is recommended that the target for the report is that the 'rating' level should not be above background. The maximum noise level at night should be below 45dB inside the nearest residential properties.

Due to the unreliability of the noise data that has been provided by the manufacturer the noise consultant may wish to visit a farm where a milking robot is already working. The noise from the existing milking robot can be measured at night when background noise is very low. These measurements can then be used to calculate the likely noise from the proposed 4 milking robots and 2 control units in the proposal.

Unfortunately, without this acoustic report we have to recommend refusal of this application.

Slurry Lagoons - The documents that have been submitted provide limited information on the 'sealed slurry tanks' that will be below the proposed barn. We have visited a similar installation with the applicant to gain a better understanding for the proposal.

While there was not a significant smell emanating from the tank at the farm that we visited, the tank held less than half the volume of the tanks that are proposed to be installed and it included an aerator. Our understanding is that the proposed tanks will not include aerators. The tank that we visited was over 100m from the nearest residential property where as the proposed tanks will be around 50m.

I would like to try to give some perspective on this matter. There is Scottish Guidance that states new slurry storage should not be within 400m of a residential property. The attached UK guidance is for permitted intensive pig and poultry farms, which I accept are different to

the proposal. The guidance sets out that if there is a residential property within 400m of a new slurry store an Odour Management Plan must be submitted with the permit application. Section 2.6.2 gives good information on various methods of managing odour from slurry stores.

The floor of the barn will be slated to allow slurry to drop through into the tanks. The slats will allow any odour from the tanks out into the environment. The footprint of the proposed slurry tanks and therefore the area where odour can escape from is very large. They are also in very close proximity to the nearest residential properties.

Concerns regarding odour are twofold. Due to the farm being in a Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ) the slurry will be stored for months at a time, at the end of the closed period there will be a large amount of slurry in the tanks. Without some sort of aeration the slurry at the bottom will be stagnant and without oxygen, it will therefore digest anaerobically. Anaerobic conditions can lead to high concentrations of odorous substances within slurry which can be released through 'bubbling off' or at spreading. The slurry at the top will have oxygen so will digest aerobically. Over most of the surface there will be no chance for a crust to form, due to the constant addition of more slurry. A crust can reduce the emissions of odour. Specialist advice may be required to assess the suitability of the proposed tanks regarding emissions of odour.

The second concern is potential for excessive odour when the slurry is spread. Storage must facilitate digestion that will minimise odours at spreading.

I accept that the nearby residential properties are already in close proximity to the working farm. However, the applicant needs to provide evidence to show how the design and management of the new tanks will facilitate effective digestion of slurry. Consideration has to be given to the close proximity of residential properties and the huge footprint of the tanks. Specialist advice may be required to provide this evidence. Odour must be minimised during storage and at spreading and so that it does not cause a statutory odour nuisance.

Environmental Health Officer (amended plans):

Further to our previous email correspondence I am writing to confirm the Environmental Control and Protection team's final comments regarding noise and slurry odour management for planning application E/2012/1444/FUL.

We had some technical queries regarding the noise report; these have now been answered directly by the acoustic consultant.

Noise - The submitted acoustic assessment shows that ambient noise levels in the area at night will be raised. At night time some residents may notice this increase. However the resulting sound levels will not be over the levels recommended in guidance such as BS8233 and The World Health Organisation's Guidelines for Community Noise. The predicted sound levels are not at a level where we can recommend refusal of this application.

Should complaints be received about noise from the unit the applicant has outlined measures that may be taken to further attenuate sound escaping from the building.

I recommend that there is a condition attached to any planning permission granted that requires the unit is constructed and managed in accordance with the submitted plans, reports and documents.

I also recommend that in accordance with section 5.15 of the noise assessment a condition to the following effect is attached to any planning permission granted:

“Air compression equipment and associated enclosure to be installed on the western façade of the unit must be designed and constructed so that the sound level does not exceed 65dB(A) 1 metre from the housing.”

Odour Management – As previously advised this department recommends that there is a condition included on any planning permission granted stating that the building, slurry tank construction and slurry management must be in accordance with the documents submitted.

County Archaeologist:

The site of the proposed dairy unit is in an area of potential for the presence of archaeological remains. Allington is referred to as Adelingtone in the Domesday Book of 1086, earthworks survive within the village believed to be associated with medieval settlement and artefacts recovered within the vicinity suggest settlement may date back to Saxon times.

My advice, in line with the National Planning Policy Framework (2012) is that an archaeological condition is attached to any grant of consent to allow for archaeological mitigation to be undertaken. You may like to use the following condition wording:

No development shall commence within the area indicated until:

- a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and
- b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

Further Recommendations: The work should be conducted by a professional archaeological contractor and there will be a financial implication for the applicant.

County Archaeologist (amended plans):

No further comments to add.

County Ecologist:

I have reviewed the relevant documentation, comprising the Ecological Appraisal report by Malford Environmental consulting, dated 16th October 2012, together with the Design & Access Statement and the Landscape Proposals & Management Strategy. I have also reviewed the application against available GIS information on statutory and non-statutory designated sites and protected species.

I agree with the conclusions of the ecological appraisal which found that the site is of low ecological value and therefore no protected or notable species or habitats are likely to be adversely impacted by the development. In addition, there will be no risk of indirect impacts to nearby sites in the wider landscape area since the development, once operational, will have to comply with Environment Agency requirements in respect of slurry storage and waste water treatment.

The ecological appraisal report also gives recommendations for habitat enhancements that will be appropriate to the site and surrounding features, which when implemented will increase the biodiversity interest within the site and immediately surrounding area. I note that these recommendations have been incorporated into the Landscape Proposals and Management Strategy.

I am satisfied that the proposed development will have no adverse effect on ecology at the site and that the enhancement proposals will bring positive benefits for biodiversity. I do not consider it necessary to add any conditions in relation to ecology since the site is of low conservation value and no protected species are present. In addition, the management plan, if agreed by the Landscape Officer, will provide enhancements for biodiversity that are in line with the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

County Ecologist (amended plans)

My previous comments remain valid.

North Wessex Downs AONB Advisor:

The North Wessex Downs AONB Unit although fully supportive of the needs for the new farm building remains unconvinced that it could not be accommodated within the existing farm yard area. Although this is a farmed landscape where farm buildings are a feature of the landscape, every opportunity should be considered to avoid substantial new farm buildings in exposed green field site locations. A rationalisation and redevelopment of the existing farm yard site does appear possible in this case which could deliver the necessary building without the level of landscape harm

North Wessex Downs AONB Advisor (amended plans):

The AONB Unit maintain their position that, although fully supportive of the needs for the new farm building, the AONB Unit considers the only way this substantial building could be accommodated whilst meeting the aims of “conservation” of the natural beauty of the surrounding landscape (as required by the CRoW Act), would be to site it within the existing farm yard area.

The Council’s own Landscape Officer does indicate concerns over the level of localised harm and negative impact that this development would bring and the fact that the proposed landscaping may not be sufficient and may take many years before the level of harm from this development is reduced. Questions have also been raised by the Council’s Landscape Officer (beyond that which could be achieved through planning conditions) over the limited bio-diversity gain and condition of existing landscaping being sufficient to assist in screening this development. It is not apparent that these questions have been addressed to also ensure that this scheme in some way produces some form of “enhancement”, which although limited may at least help screen the development yet further and improve bio-diversity than currently shown in the application.

If this application is to proceed to the Planning Committee the North Wessex Downs AONB Unit requests that members undertake a site visit to fully consider this proposal before forming a decision.

Environment Agency:

No objections, subject to the applicant’s observance of a number of matters outlined in suggested informatives.

Environment Agency (amended plans):

No further comments.

Agricultural Consultant:

The following comprises extracts from the agricultural assessment report commissioned by the Council, hence the incomplete section numbering sequence.

Area and tenure

2.2 The applicants’ freehold ownership extends to approximately 648 ha (1,600 acres),

comprising Manor Farm, Allington and South Farm, West Overton. In addition to the freehold land the applicants run an extensive Share Farming operation.

Existing farm practice

3.1 The farm is run as a substantial dairy and arable unit. The dairy herd comprises some 250 dairy cows, with some 160 other cattle (herd replacements and youngstock). Allowing for “dry cows” (at the end of their lactation) some 200 head are milked at any time. The dairy herd is based wholly at Manor Farm; youngstock and followers are split between Allington and West Overton.

3.2 The dairy cows are “zero grazed” which means that they are permanently housed in the buildings at Manor Farm, without access to grazing land. The cows are loose housed on straw from the arable enterprise. Milk is produced evenly across the year, through a year round calving pattern. All milk is sold wholesale under a bulk contract.

3.3 The arable enterprise covers some 728 ha (1,800 acres), which includes the share farmed area. All cultivations and harvesting are undertaken by employed staff. The farm buildings at Allington have capacity for approximately 2,000 tonnes of cereal, with the balance stored at Wiltshire Grain or sold at harvest.

Proposed farm practice

3.4 The applicants propose a significant change to the dairy enterprise. As detailed below, the dairy complex will be re-located to a new site, a short distance from the current complex of buildings. As part of the re-location the dairy herd will be expanded to 300 head, with some 240 cows in milk at any time. The applicants plan to introduce a bull beef enterprise, to utilise part of the accommodation freed up by the relocation of the dairy unit.

Comments

3.5 The farm is a well established substantial business.

Buildings

3.6 The buildings at Manor Farm comprise a range of livestock and arable buildings. The dairy cows utilise three covered yards, two of which lie either side of the milking parlour. The third covered yard lies almost opposite the parlour and is used to accommodate “dry” cows. The milking parlour is a 20 stall, 20 cluster herringbone unit, with a low internal eaves height.

3.7 There are two grain storage sheds, both of which have ventilated floors, to enable drying. The only other modern structures at the complex are the two silage clamps, along with a five bay shed used as a farm workshop and an adjoining four bay Dutch barn, used to store “straight” feeds to be incorporated in the ration for the livestock.

3.8 The farm waste store adjoins the buildings and has capacity to store three months of slurry and dirty water.

Dwellings owned by the applicants

4.1 I understand that there are three dwellings associated with Manor Farm, Allington, all of which are in the day to day control of the business. The dwellings are occupied by members of the applicant’s family, all of whom work full time on the farm.

Existing labour requirements

5.1 There are a total of six full time labour units on the farm, five of whom are in the applicant’s family, with one full time employee.

Anticipated labour requirements

5.2 No changes are proposed.

Requirement for the proposed building

6.1 The proposal is to provide a new single building that will accommodate the whole milking herd, parlour, dairy and waste store. The building will contain cubicles for 240 cows, four robotic milking units, a dairy and underground storage for the waste produced by the dairy cows.

6.2 The overall dimensions of the proposed building are 90m x 40m, with an eaves height of 4.8m. Internally the building is shown with six banks of 40 cubicles, divided by concreted passages. The central area of the building has the four robotic milking units, together with isolation pens for illness or AI.

6.3 Externally, the gable ends of the building are shown enclosed, with profile cladding to the upper elevations and concrete panels to the lower elevations. The side elevations are shown with vertically movable curtains to the upper elevation and concrete panels to the lower elevation. The roof is shown in profile sheet, with a fully ventilated ridge across the entire length of the building. I understand that the building will be naturally ventilated; the moveable curtains will be raised or lowered according to the ambient temperature in order to maintain an optimal temperature and humidity in the building. The combination of side curtains and the ventilated ridge will allow ventilation through the “stack” effect.

6.4 The applicants advise that, in their opinion, the dairy infrastructure at the unit is inadequate and presents operational difficulties. The applicants’ intention is to keep Manor Farm as a dairy unit for the benefit of the next generation in the family and in their view it is essential that a comprehensive solution should be provided to enable the continuity of the dairy enterprise for at least the next 25 years. In the applicants’ view the proposal meets that objective.

6.5 The applicants have identified three key factors that hamper the operation of the existing dairy complex:

- Reliance on loose housing means that there is an endemic problem with mastitis in the herd. Mastitis means that the cow requires medical treatment and cannot be milked, thus compromising both her health and productivity from the unit.
- The current milking parlour is cramped and inefficient. The parlour offers no natural light. The herd takes some three hours to be milked. The current regime of three times daily milking means that the parlour has to be staffed for some nine hours each day of the year.
- In common with most of Wiltshire, the farm is now wholly within the designated Nitrate Vulnerable Zone (NVZ). The NVZ means that the ability to spread nitrate (from animal waste) is controlled by statute. The farm’s facility to store animal waste requires significant expansion in order to achieve the anticipated increase to five months capacity, as part of the anticipated changes to the legislation for NVZ.

6.6 In view of the combined problems of the existing infrastructure and operation the applicants have determined that the optimum solution is to construct the new dairy complex. In their view the new building will provide a comprehensive solution to the existing problems and will ensure the future of the dairy enterprise at Manor Farm for the next 25 years.

6.7 In the balance of this section of the report I will comment on the suitability of the proposed building for its intended purpose. You have been clear that you require my comment on the issues associated with the building including the proposed location, alternative locations, financial implications and the re-use of the vacated buildings. I comment on those issues at section 7 of this paper.

6.8 The proposed building has a number of functions to fulfil, comprising:

- Appropriate accommodation for 240 dairy cows
- Sufficient storage for the waste from the cows
- Adequate milking facilities
- Meeting the welfare requirements of the dairy herd.

6.9 The proposed unit will operate fully automated milking for the herd. Instead of structured twice or three times daily milking the cows have “ad lib” access to the milking units 24 hours a day. The cows are free to circulate, feed, drink or lay as they require. The configuration of the cubicles means that the animals dung in the passageway between the laying areas; those passages have slats and the dung falls between the slats to underground storage. The slats are scraped by automated scrapers which means that dung in the circulation passages is kept to a minimum.

6.10 It is my opinion that the unit has been correctly sized in terms of the cow lying and circulation area. The underground store for slurry has been correctly sized for five months’ storage from 240 dairy cows. The nature of the storage means that the slurry will break down through anaerobic (without air) digestion. This means that the stored waste will not produce significant odour during its storage. Odour will be produced when the waste is removed and spread on the land, as aerobic digestion will then take place; however, that period will be relatively short.

6.11 The building provides a single enclosed space in which the dairy enterprise will be conducted. In this manner cow flow is simplified and there is no prospect of rainwater coming into contact with dunged areas. Such “dirty water” is a common problem on many dairy units, principally due to open areas of yard and leads to increased polluted water which then has to be stored and spread on land.

6.12 Any livestock that is housed presents a requirement for ventilation. If a building is not adequately ventilated then there is a quick build up of respired air, such a build up increases relative humidity and promotes conditions for bacterial and viral infection. It is therefore essential that the proposed building should be adequately ventilated. Ventilation is proposed through variable cladding to both long elevations of the building, together with a ventilated ridge. It is my opinion that the proposed means of natural ventilation is wholly appropriate to the proposed building.

6.13 Overall the unit presents a modern, low labour solution to dairying. The building does not provide for all the requirements of the herd; there is no area for dry cows and I understand that the existing covered yards will be used for that purpose.

General comments

7.1 You have asked for my comments on a number of issues associated with the proposed development. Firstly, you have asked for my opinion on the location of the proposal. The applicants’ existing buildings represent a gradual expansion of a dairy unit over the last 20 years. Strictly in terms of space required, the new development could be accommodated within the area occupied by the existing farm buildings. The problem is that the dairy would need to remain operational through the period of the development. It is my opinion that the scale and intensity of operation for the existing dairy would make it impractical to use temporary milking facilities to redevelop the farmyard. The existing buildings are framed structures. The spans of the existing buildings and the configuration of the stanchions is such that the existing buildings do not offer sufficient clear span to introduce a new combined parlour and dairy and cow accommodation such as that which is proposed. Retro

fitting the new system in the existing buildings is not, therefore, in my opinion a practical proposition. It follows from the above that it is my opinion that the provision of the new dairy infrastructure can only be achieved through a new build rather than a redevelopment or refitting of the existing facilities.

7.2 Having asserted that a new build is the practical option it is then necessary to consider where the new build should be located. There is sufficient space available for the new build to be constructed on land within the existing "horseshoe" to the north of the farm buildings. I understand however that the land is affected by an underground sewer and the proximity of a Listed building. I have not seen the line of the sewer but I confirm that an adopted sewer will have a sterilisation area either side. I further understand that the applicants' intent is to avoid interference with the setting of the Listed building.

7.3 As indicated previously, the new proposal will still require the use of one of the existing covered yards for dry cows. Feed for the dairy cows will also be stored at the existing farm buildings so it is therefore sensible that the new building should be physically close to the existing buildings at the yard. The proposed location, whilst outside of the horseshoe, does have close physical proximity to the existing buildings.

7.4 The re-location of the dairy complex will release the two main covered yards, which lie each side of the parlour and will no longer be required for the dairy cows. The applicants advise that the northernmost building will be converted to an on floor grain store. At present the farm does not have adequate storage capacity for grain and storage for some 1,000 tonnes has to be rented annually at Wiltshire Grain. The overall floorspace of the northernmost covered yard is 49m x 30m. The floor area of the building is thus 1,470m². The building has a portal frame and could readily be converted to grain storage. Assuming a stored height of 2m the volume available for storage is 2,800m³; or 2,100m³ assuming 75% utilisation. Assuming a crop volume of 1.4m³ per tonne the required volume is 1,400m³; thus most of the building will be required for grain storage.

7.5 The southernmost covered yard will in part be converted to use as an improved store for feedstuffs. The remainder of the building will be used to accommodate bull beef. The bull beef unit will utilise male calves from the dairy herd. The system is entirely indoor, with the animals reared as entire (uncastrated) beef cattle over period of 12 – 14 months. The applicants advise that at maturity the system will accommodate some 140 animals per annum.

7.6 It is my opinion that the proposed grain store, feed store and bull beef unit will be appropriate and practical uses of the vacated covered yards.

7.7 The applicants have asserted that the new dairy unit will offer sufficient improvement in income and cost reduction to pay for itself over 20 years. I have been provided with a copy of the applicants' budget analysis of the proposal, prepared by their dairy consultant. The document has been provided to me directly by the applicants and on a confidential basis, on the understanding that my comments will be restricted to general observations.

7.8 The partial budget in the budget analysis report sets out the increased income from the additional dairy cattle and heifers and sale of straw (cubicles require less straw than covered yards), alongside the additional cost of the loan for the capital to fund the unit, the cost of increased level of feedstuffs and the loss of arable area to provide the additional forage for the cattle.

7.9 The biggest single cost to the business will be the loan capital; the biggest single income to the business will be extra milk sales from the additional cattle. The summary concludes that in cashflow terms the project will be broadly neutral to the business, however it will meet

the stated long term objective of a future in dairy farming for the next generation of the family.

Conclusion and opinion

The proposed building is appropriately designed to accommodate a dairy unit for 240 cows. The proposed building will provide a long term solution to remedy the existing problems with the operation of the dairy enterprise at Manor Farm. Whilst the building could, in physical terms, be located within the existing horseshoe formed by the public highway, the presence of a sewer and a listed building compromise that location. The financial evidence put to me indicates that the building will be largely neutral to the business, but will enable the continuation of the dairy enterprise.

8. Publicity

The application has been publicised by site notices (twice) and direct neighbour notification on three occasions- on the initial receipt of the application; when amended plans were received, and following the submission of additional information on noise and odour emissions, transport arrangements and farm business plan.

In excess of 60 letters of representation have been received, the contents of which state both support for and objection to the proposed development. Some of the representations comprise very lengthy reports which it is not possible to summarise: members are encouraged to look at all comments received via the Council website in order to appreciate the range and strength of opinion expressed in relation to this application.

The following matters are addressed:

The scale and design of the building

The impact of the development on the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Noise issues (livestock and machinery)

Odour problems

Animal welfare of livestock in enclosed buildings

Traffic problems – volume and nature of vehicle movements

Dangerous road network

Light pollution

Surface water run-off

Area prone to flooding

Water course pollution

Industrialisation of the countryside

Unlikely success of the scale of operations (failures elsewhere)

Use of existing yard – to be abandoned? redeveloped?

Lack of justification for project

Effect on wildlife

Effect on enjoyment of countryside (walking, tourism)

Support for local economy

Farming practice progress

Security of future for agriculture

Solution to existing problems

9. Planning Considerations

The planning considerations to address in this case are:

- Principle of development in this location
- Impact on landscape
- Effect on biodiversity
- Impact on heritage assets
- Traffic and access safety and convenience
- Noise and odour emissions
- Residential amenity

Principle of development

The proposal comprises a large building to be sited within a protected landscape, outside the Limits of Development of any sizeable settlement. It also comprises the chosen means of the development and continuance of this established rural land-based business, which is a contributor to the local rural economy. Both environmental and economic facets of a proposal are important in determining whether it represents “sustainable development”, achieving which, according to advice in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 should be the objective of the planning system.

Development in the countryside, and any erosion of the open, rural character of the landscape as a result, should be avoided, unless justified. If such reason for the development is shown, its effect should be minimised by all measures possible.

As can be seen in the assessment of the scheme by the commissioned Agricultural Advisor, the proposal is intended to secure the measured expansion and continuance of this established family farming enterprise. The new dairy, and the re-organisation of the use of existing farm complex buildings would address the problems currently experienced by the business in terms of logistics, stock health and welfare, storage and waste management. The proposal is considered to be feasible in terms of long term financial viability, land and buildings resource management, and compliance with new and foreseen environmental legislation. A range of measures is proposed to reduce the impact of the scheme on the landscape appearance, soil, water and air quality, highway network safety and amenity (especially tranquillity) of the area. Alternative means of achieving the same farming programme appear not to be feasible, because of the need for continuity in milking the dairy herd, and the likely greater visual and operational impacts on the environment that a different location for a new dairy building would have. In this instance, therefore, it is considered that justification has been demonstrated for this substantial agricultural development to take place in this location, and that the mitigation measures proposed, to reduce the impact of the scheme on its environment, are appropriate. The scheme is considered to comprise a form of sustainable development, which is supported by the guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, and accords with the objectives of policy NR6 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

Impact on landscape

It is clear that the proposed building would have a significant impact on close range views of the site from surrounding public and private vantage points (the lane, the C8 Devizes – Pewsey Road, public rights of way and residences). The proposed tree and hedge planting would assist in filtering the appearance of the building, although even with the inclusion of a number of standards among the trees to be planted in the first season, the full effect of the landscaping will not be felt for some years. The choice of trees for planting to all sides of the building should eventually give cover well above its ridge height (10.3 m) with Beech (30 m), Whitebeam (25 m), and Wild Cherry (18 m) all to be used, with smaller Field Maple (9 m) also giving variety in profile. Ash trees are also proposed, but their inclusion is questioned

given recent issues with die-back. The suggested condition would request the amendment of the planting schedule in this regard.

From the C8 road to the north, the existing line of Ash trees performs an important baffle to the site. The suggestion to incorporate some strengthening, and indeed, succession management of any declining specimens, for this belt of trees in the landscape mitigation strategy is sensible, to safeguard this feature for its own sake (as set out in the enhancement priorities for the Vale of Pewsey Landscape Character Area. The suggested condition would address this point.

Longer range views of the new building would group it with the existing development of Allington, and the impact of the extension of the settlement, while noticeable, is not considered to be unacceptable. The substantial vegetation proposed for the site edges would mirror the well-treed character of Allington itself.

With the landscaping measures set out in the submission, and as secured by the suggested conditions, the proposal would accord with the advice set out in part 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, and with the terms of policy NR7 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

Effect on biodiversity

Overall, the scheme would appear to bring the opportunity to enhance the biodiversity resource of the site and its environs, provided the implementation of the landscape strategy is secured. Again, the development would satisfy the requirements of part 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 and of policy PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

Impact on heritage assets

The site, and area as a whole, has potential for below-ground heritage interest, which the recommended condition would identify and secure by record.

The public setting of the Grade II Listed Bethel Chapel, to the north east of the corner of the site, would be only marginally affected by the new building and its landscaping, as there are very limited public vantage points from which the site and the Listed Building would be read together clearly. Existing and proposed tree and hedge cover on both sides of the lane would separate the existing and new structures visually, and it is not considered that the significance of this heritage asset would be compromised or harmed by the proposed development.

The proposal is considered to accord with the guidance included in part 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, and with the requirements of policy PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

Highway safety and access issues

The farm operates a one-way circulation around the loop road through Allington, to minimise the amount of current traffic emerging onto the C8 road at the western junction of the loop road, where visibility is very poor. There would be no requirement to change this practice as a result of the new building. It has been accepted that the nature and volume of traffic that the farm would generate as a result of the development would not exceed, and may even be less than, that currently experienced on the loop road and its junctions, so the development is considered to be acceptable in this regard.

The access and hardstanding requirements of the highways officer can be achieved without harming the character of the lane, and the suggested condition relating to design details of the surfacing, edging etc can also incorporate the wishes of the landscape architect, in terms of minimising the visual impact of the works. The terms of policy PD1 of the Kennet Local

Plan 2011 are satisfied by the proposals in this regard.

Noise and odour emissions

No objections are now raised to the proposed development, given the comprehensive and detailed information submitted by the applicant in relation to the issues raised by Environmental Health Officers. The full implementation and continued compliance with the specified measures can be secured by condition, ensuring that the proposal would accord with the advice in part 11 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 and the terms of policy PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

Residential amenity

Strong and varied opinions have been expressed in relation to this case. Allington is a small settlement, grouped mainly around existing and former farming enterprises, but with the majority of residences not now associated with agriculture. As with many rural settlements, farming is likely to have shaped and enveloped the settlement traditionally, and where agricultural enterprises still operate, the settlement will be likely to continue to be affected by changes in agricultural practice. The scale and location of this proposed building, which would mark the next phase in the evolution of Manor Farm, is, undoubtedly, a step change in that progression, which would have a significant impact on the openness, outlook, and to a degree tranquillity currently enjoyed by a number of nearby residential properties not associated with the farm itself. However, it is considered that the development is justified in terms of its contribution to the prosperity of the rural economy, and that as far as possible, measures are secured that would minimise the visual and disturbance impacts of the development on the amenities of nearby residents. The development is considered to meet the expectations of good development set out in the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, and, on balance, in policy PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

10. Conclusion

This proposal is a significant building project, which intends to secure the long-term future of the agricultural enterprise at Manor Farm Allington. The function of the building is appropriate to its context, and to the operations of the farm as a whole. The case made for the development is satisfactory, in that the feasibility of the project has been demonstrated, and the dismissal of alternative proposals for the siting of the building explained. With any proposed development project there is risk of financial uncertainty, and possible failure of the operation, but it is not appropriate to take a strict precautionary approach to all schemes unless the development would involve the loss of an irredeemable commodity (such as a protected habitat or heritage asset). In this case, it is considered that the balance of probabilities lies with the development, and that the greater likelihood of economic difficulty for the farm would ensue if its existing issues of logistics, storage, welfare and waste management were not addressed.

As a result of its scale the development would have a negative impact on the visual amenity of the immediate area, but the mitigating landscaping measures (both proposed and to be secured by condition) are considered to offset adequately the intrusion of the building into this greenfield site.

Subject to the listed conditions, the proposal is recommended for approval.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be GRANTED, subject to the following conditions:

1. The development hereby permitted shall be begun before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

REASON: To comply with the provisions of Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 as amended by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

2. No development shall commence on site until details of the materials for the walls, curtains, roof, bulk milk tank and feed silo to be used on the development have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011

3. No development shall commence on site until additional details for the management and enhancement of the existing belt of Ash trees to the north of the site have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Details shall include a survey and report of the condition of all specimens, together with measures for the treatment, augmentation or replacement of the trees with new species. A schedule of maintenance for existing and new planting shall be included in the details, which shall form part of the approved Landscape Proposals and Management Strategy. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: In the interests of visual amenity and the character and appearance of the area.

POLICY: PD1 and NR6 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

4. All soft landscaping comprised in the approved details of landscaping shall be carried out in the first planting and seeding season following the first occupation of the building or the completion of the development whichever is the sooner; All shrubs, trees and hedge planting shall be maintained free from weeds and shall be protected from damage by vermin and stock. Any trees or plants which, within a period of five years, die, are removed, or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of a similar size and species, unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority. All hard landscaping shall also be carried out in accordance with the approved details prior to the occupation of any part of the development or in accordance with a programme to be agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority.

REASON: To ensure a satisfactory landscaped setting for the development and the protection of existing important landscape features.

POLICY: PD1 and NR7 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

5. The development hereby permitted shall not be first brought into use until the first seven metres of the access, measured from the edge of the carriageway, has been consolidated and surfaced (not loose stone or gravel). The access shall be maintained as such thereafter.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

6. Any gates shall be set back 7 metres from the edge of the carriageway, such gates to open inwards only, in perpetuity.

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

7. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted access details shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority, which shall show the provision of entrance radii to either side of the southern access of 5 metres, without kerbs, and measures to prevent the discharge of surface water from both access points onto the public highway. The development shall be completed in accordance with these details. .

REASON: In the interests of highway safety.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011

8. No development shall commence within the site until:

- a) A written programme of archaeological investigation, which should include on-site work and off-site work such as the analysis, publishing and archiving of the results, has been submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority; and
- b) The approved programme of archaeological work has been carried out in accordance with the approved details.

REASON: To enable the recording of any matters of archaeological interest.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011

9. No external lighting shall be installed on site until plans showing the type of light appliance, the height and position of fitting, illumination levels and light spillage in accordance with the appropriate Environmental Zone standards set out by the Institute of Lighting Engineers in their publication "*Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light*" (ILE, 2005)", have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved lighting shall be installed and shall be maintained in accordance with the approved details and no additional external lighting shall be installed.

REASON: In the interests of the amenities of the area and to minimise unnecessary light spillage above and outside the development site.

POLICY: PD1 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

10. The development hereby permitted shall be carried out in accordance with the following approved documents and plans:

Application form received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Design and access statement and planning statement received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Ecological Appraisal received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Landscape proposals and management strategy received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Drawing referenced 3636/SK100 received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Soakage calculations received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Location plan received at Wiltshire Council on 21.11.12;
Longitudinal and lateral sections drawing received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;
Amended block plan and elevations received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;
Assessment of noise impact received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;
Odour management plan received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;
Transport statement received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;
Existing yard use statement received at Wiltshire Council on 18.04.13;

REASON: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interests of proper planning.

POLICY: PD1 and NR7 of the Kennet Local Plan 2011.

11. The attention of the applicant is drawn to the contents of the attached letter from Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service dated 10.12.12
12. The attention of the applicant is drawn to the contents of the attached letter from the Environment Agency dated 19.12.12

