

AGRICULTURAL ASSESSMENT OF PLANNING APPLICATION FOR AN AGRICULTURAL DWELLING

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/003/106
1.1	Proposed Development	Stationing of a rural worker's dwelling for a temporary period.
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Management West
1.3	Planning Application No.	14/09500/FUL
1.4	Applicant	Ms S.Snook
1.5	Site Address	Sienna's Valley, Huttenhall Lane, Chapmanslade

2.0 DESCRIPTION

2.1 Location

The site lies immediately west of Huttenhall Lane and approximately quarter of a mile south west of Chapmanslade. The site is in a valley, in open countryside.

2.2 Land area and tenure

The applicant's freehold land extends to 4.7 ha (11.6 acres) in a single block at the application site. In addition to the freehold land, the applicant also holds 0.7 ha (1.77 acres) of land near Frome, some five miles distant from the site. I understand the applicant's occupation of the away land is under a Farm Business Tenancy.

3.0 FARMING PRACTICE

Proposed

- 3.1 The land is in use as a smallholding; the applicant proposes the development of a herd of breeding alpacas, together with a herd of breeding Kune Kune pigs and egg production from a flock of hens, ducks and quail.
- 3.2 The alpacas will be kept as a breeding herd. I understand that 19 breeding females have been purchased, with the intention to develop the herd to 30 breeding females by year four of the proposed business. Progeny will be reared for sale as breeding stock (females and males) along with halter trained pets. The animals will also be kept for fibre production. The fibre will be processed and wool and garments sold.
- 3.3 Kune Kune is a breed of "micro" pig. There are two sows on site and the applicant's intention is to breed them to produce weaner pigs for sale.
- 3.4 The proposal is to introduce the poultry enterprise at year 3 of the proposed business. At this stage it is proposed to produce and retail eggs from 200 hens, 50 quail and 20 ducks.
- 3.5 The applicant keeps two Clydesdales horses and two Shetland ponies on the unit.
- 3.6 The holding is all in grass. The applicant states that the away land is also in grass. I understand the applicant is to mow and bale her own hay.

Buildings

3.7 The structures at the holding comprise:

- A three bay shed, constructed with a steel portal frame, profile sheet cladding to the upper elevations with the lower elevations open. The overall dimensions of the building are approximately 9m x 12m with 4.2m eaves.
- Two mobile timber field shelters
- Three lorry containers

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

4.1 The applicant and her family occupy the temporary dwelling on site. The dwelling is the subject of the planning application.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

5.1 One unit part time

Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

5.2 From the agricultural statement provided by the applicants the alpaca unit will generate a labour requirement of just over one and a half full time units of labour.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the proposed alpaca business. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in 2012 and replaces all previous Planning Policy Statements (PPS). In the context of the application for the proposed dwelling, paragraph 55 of the NPPF states:

“Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside”

6.2 Under the NPPF it is therefore relevant to consider the requirements of the current enterprise and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprises.

6.3 It is important to recognise that the majority of day to day tasks associated with good husbandry of the livestock, including alpacas, can be undertaken without a dwelling on site. The important exceptions to this recognition are the care of sick animals and calving. It is accepted that animals which are sick or close to, during or immediately after calving may well require essential care at short notice. It is noted that calving dates are variable, as the animals run with the stud and are not artificially inseminated. Additionally, calving dates can be very variable, with the animal showing few external signs of birthing.

6.4 Cria, when first born are weak and require attention to ensure they receive colostrum, also that their navel is sprayed with antibacterial/antiseptic spray to prevent infection. In this regard they are no different to other domesticated stock.

6.5 It is my experience that in applying the functional test the Planning Inspectorate has paid close attention to the variability of calving dates and the need for quick intervention at calving. Accordingly there are a number of appeal decisions in which Inspectors have formed the view that the functional test is met by enterprises of an equivalent size to that set out by the applicant.

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 I have had sight of the applicants' business plan for the first five years of operation. The plan sets out the projected costs and returns for the business over period. Source data for the plan is largely from published agricultural management data. The identified sale values for the alpaca appear to be in line with the current average prices indicated on the "Alpaca Seller" website.
- 7.3 Overall, it is my view that the proposed plan, if fully implemented and achieving the costs and returns set out, will demonstrate viability. In this context however it is important to note that the business is largely reliant on the sales revenue from alpacas. In recent years reported sale values for female alpacas have fallen by some 35%, however, values appear to have stabilised over the last twelve months. The whole issue of viability for a new alpaca unit was considered by the inspector in his decision letter for land at Ashley, Box (ref APP/Y3940/A/13/2200283). In his decision (20 November 2013) the inspector's viewpoint was that the proposed business should be given a trial period on the basis that it would be premature to reach a decision on viability (paragraph 20). A copy of the decision letter is attached.

8.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The proposed business is likely to generate an essential requirement for a presence on site. The business plan indicates that the proposed business can attain viability.

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, FAAV

Note: *This Report has been prepared on information provided by the Applicant and or the Applicant's Agent.*

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