8th May 2017
E-mail from Applicant's Planning Agent

Dear Arne

Thank you for the email. I have discussed the content with Mr Hartley given your comments further consideration.

Visual /Landscape Impact and Loss of Agricultural Land
I acknowledge that the proposed track will result in a loss of some agricultural land however this amount is negligible when you consider the operational benefits and grass growth once established. Top soil will be removed so that the finished track level is flush with the existing ground level. Whilst a width of 4m is proposed, over time this will be left to grass over so all that will be seen is wheel runs with a grass centre. The impact of a grassed track is considered to be much less intrusive than an impermeable surface. The applicant would be happy with a condition which stipulates that the track should be left to grass over and not sprayed.

On many farms, it is common to have hardcore gateways and tracks to aid management and avoid damage to the land. Many of these tracks / hardstanding areas are difficult to see as they are grassed over however the farmers still have the benefit of a hard base underneath.

Benefits to Grassland management
I note your concerns regarding the justification, however I cannot agree with your position particularly in relation to fields which are farmed without a track. It is extremely difficult to take a 'broad brush' approach to assessing agricultural justification and I consider this needs to be done on a case by case basis. Farmers have such a variation in management practice which can be as a result of a number of factors including type of enterprise, stocking, stewardship and cross compliance requirements, legislation requirement (in particular Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2008 (the Regulations)), size of agricultural machinery (owned or use of contractors), field layouts, proximity to farm building, land ownership, tenure etc.

In this case, the field access is located along the Northern boundary and there is no means of access at the lower end, therefore once an item of machinery gets down to the lower end of the field and cannot pull up the hill, there is no way out. The applicant is acutely aware of the issues he has had with accessing the lower end of this field with machinery. Whilst there is little evidence of ruts, wheel marks etc in this area, this is because the applicant simply avoids accessing the field when wet (most of autumn and winter and sometimes into Spring) so that it is not damaged by machinery. This is creating significant management problems particularly with the storage and spreading of muck in compliance with his statutory requirements and cross compliance under the Basic Payment Scheme. Practically, he cannot spread bedding muck on this field over the winter period, by the time that this land is dry enough, grass growth is already sufficient that an application of bedding muck does not have a sufficient period to rot down, thus creating issues with bedding muck being baled in fodder (and then a chain of issues with the quality of livestock feed). In addition, spreading on top of a growing grass sword is wasteful.

Whilst I note your comments regarding the size of large weight distributing tyres, my experience is that agricultural machinery has increased significantly in size over the decades and larger weight distributing tyres are used to spread the weight of the ever increasing size of tankers, slurry guzzlers and rear discharge spreaders used by agricultural contractors and larger commercial units. There is an argument to make regarding the 'damage' such large machines are creating to the soil structure

and resulting compaction and many contractors are looking at alternatives (such as pumping direct from lagoons).

In this case, the applicant applies bedding muck using a tractor and side spreader or rear discharge spreader to apply muck to this field which is taken from the livestock buildings elsewhere. As noted previously, the central track will allow the applicant to spread down the gradient of the field and then utilise the track to come back upto the gate. In addition, during very wet ground conditions, muck can be spread directly off the track (each side). I note your comments regarding the position of Point C and the applicant is happy to shorten the track as per the amended plan.

Ground Works
The applicant has commenced work to level the site for the approved agricultural building (which was dealt with under a separate application). I understand that the soil on site is part of this development.

Finally, as you are aware, we have had a very dry Spring with a distinct lack of rain so the ground conditions are particularly dry for this time of year and very unseasonal.

I look forward to hearing from you and I am happy to discuss this further on telephone if you would prefer.

Kind Regards

Craig
Craig Barks
Craig.Barks@bagshaws.com

From: Arne Swithenbank [mailto:arne.swithenbank@staffsmoorlands.gov.uk]
Sent: 28 April 2017 18:05
To: Craig Barks
Subject: DET/2017/0013 Mr H Hartley - Delphouse

Hello Craig
I hope things well with you. You may have noticed I have been allocated the above. I went there this afternoon and put up a site notice. I walked down the field along the proposed line of the track to point C and returned via the westerly perimeter.

I have read your supporting statement. I am not sure whether you have had the benefit of the attached response in relation to DET/2014/0017.

I have to say I find the mooted agricultural justification hard to accept. Reasoning along these lines could be made in relation to many fields but the vast majority are managed and farmed without. If there is any merit in the argument at all it surely does not warrant continuing all the way to C? If the lower lying parts of the field are quite damp at times – there were only very localised hints of this today – a single track is not really going to solve the difficulties.

There is a marked slope to the mid section of the field but I should have thought well within the capacity of modern tractors and trailers with their large weight-distributing tyres etc.

The ground and sward seemed to me that it is likely to be quite productive. The proposed track at 4m x 250m would take a tenth of a hectare out of production which seems completely counter productive to agriculture.

I noted quite extensive amounts of imported tipping to the southerly margin of the field especially around point C. Much of this has been there long enough to become vegetated but there were quantities of brand new tipping perhaps imported as recently as today as it was all very fresh. The vehicles had forged a route around the westerly perimeter. I will discuss with colleagues next week what response or action we should take in relation to the tipping specifically.

To conclude, my view is that the present plan is not reasonably necessary. Whether we could be persuaded by a reduced scheme I am doubtful but that is perhaps where you come in. If we were persuaded I think we'd consider that prior approval was necessary and a prominent straight track down the middle of the field would I think be unlikely to be favoured in terms of siting.

I'd be pleased to hear your thoughts in response to the above.

Thank you,
Arne

Arne D. Swithenbank
Planning Officer and Ecologist
Regulatory Services: Planning Applications
Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
Leek ST13 6HQ