Reading Agricultural Consultants

P. Baker

Land at Coates Farm, Biddulph Moor

Proposed Agricultural Building

Planning and Agricultural Statement

(incorporating Design and Access Considerations)

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1. Introduction

1.01 Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) is instructed by Mr P. Baker to provide an independent planning and agricultural statement in relation to a planning application for a general-purpose agricultural building on land at Coates Farm, off School Lane, Biddulph Moor. The proposed building is intended to support existing agricultural and woodland management activity on an agricultural holding based at Coates Farm and elsewhere in the locality. The intended development is located within the curtilage of the residential property known as Coates Farm and on the edge of the built-up area of the settlement of Biddulph Moor.

1.02 In response to its instructions RAC has had regard to:

(i) the national and local planning policies relevant to agricultural developments;

(ii) information on the relevant land management activity derived from discussions with the applicant; and

(v) standard sources on the design of agricultural buildings.

2. Planning Framework

2.01 The planning context for the proposed development is provided by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2018), and the adopted policies of the Local Plan for the future of Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (2014).

2.02 The NPPF is based on an overarching principle of support for sustainable development. Although policies remain for the protection of the countryside from unnecessary and inappropriate development, the NPPF is supportive of development underpinning a

prosperous rural economy. To this effect the planning process is encouraged (para 83) to promote a strong rural economy through, among other measures, the promotion of:

"---- the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;"

2.03 The presumption in favour of sustainable development is re-iterated in the Local Plan Core Strategy at Policy SS1a and R1. Policy SS6c is concerned with the control of development in the countryside, including Green Belt. The application site is located beyond the built-up boundary of Biddulph Moor in countryside designated as Green Belt. The policy provides for development which:

"--- meets an essential local need, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside."

With regard to sustaining the rural economy, specific reference is made to:

"Supporting the diversification of existing farm enterprises (in accordance with policy R1)"

2.04 Policy R1 sets out the parameters by which all development in the countryside will be assessed. This will be:

"---according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of he countryside, promotes the sustainable diversification of the rural economy, facilitates economic activity, meets a rural community need and sustains the historic environment.

Appropriate development should not harm the rural character and environmental quality of the area or any sites designated for their nature conservation, or historical interest by virtue of the scale, nature and level of activity involved and the type and amount of traffic generated or by other effects such as noise and pollution.

Wherever possible development should be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion. Where new or replacement buildings are involved, development should have minimal impact on the countryside and be in close proximity to an existing settlement."

2.05 Particular restraint on development is applied in the Green Belt. National planning policy identifies that all development in the Green Belt is inappropriate and occasions 'in principle' harm to the Green Belt unless specifically exempted and deemed to be 'appropriate development'. The exempted developments are identified in paragraph 145 of the NPPF and Include *"building for agriculture and forestry".*

2.06 All development is subject to detailed sustainability and design policies which seek to minimise impact on the environment and countryside.

3. The Background and Need for the Proposed Building

3.01 The proposed development relates to agricultural activity being undertaken on two units of land:

2.8 ha (7 ac) – at Coates Farm and including the application site – owned

12.2 ha (30 ac) – at Timbersbrook – owned

Both units are held under Holding Number 37/064/0517.

3.02 This total of 37 acres (15 ha) comprises grassland and woodland used for the production of hay/silage, the grazing of livestock, and the production of logs. The application site is at the operational centre the enterprise and is the location of the only existing building and storage facilities available to the applicant. This comprises a small open fronted lean-to attached to the domestic garage. The latter serves the residential property of Coates Farm. These buildings have an associated area of surfaced hardstanding connected to an entrance onto School Lane and from which an unsurfaced track accesses the land.

3.03 The applicant currently lets the three fields at Coates Farm for grazing on an annual arrangement to a local interest in the process of establishing a starter unit and grazing on the larger unit at Timbersbrook is also rented out in conjunction with a neighbour's land. He currently keeps no livestock due to the absence of any appropriate buildings in which to provide shelter. The larger area of land at Timbersbrook produces conserved forage which is sold off-field; again, due to the absence of appropriate storage facilities. The small lean-to at Coates Farm is used for the production and storage of logs which are primarily consumed by the applicant, with small quantities of surplus sold to local customers.

3.04 At the present time, the applicant's equipment – 2 tractors, a flat-bed trailer, plough, and rotavator- is stored externally. Small tools are stored in the domestic garage (the only secure facility) and fencing materials are stored in the open lean-to.

3.05 The applicant has owned the land units at Coates Farm and Timbersbrook for 42 and 10 years respectively. His management of the land has been undertaken in conjunction with off-farm employment; until recently as the owner/operator of a significant local bus company. He now wishes to devote more time to developing his agricultural interests. As a pre-cursor to this, he has invested substantially in drainage and fencing in the lower land at Timbersbrook and in the drainage and improvement of the land quality of the 2.8 ha adjacent to his home. An additional beneficial consequence of the latter has been the remedying of longstanding flooding problems experienced by his residential neighbours.

3.06 The need for the proposed building arises from the deficiencies which prevent the applicant from increasing his in-hand commitment to the management and use of his land; primarily the insufficiency of secure storage facilities for the vehicles, equipment and materials present and used in farming the land, and to a lesser extent the lack of hay storage or any animal welfare back-up for example at lambing time or in circumstances of sickness. The agricultural equipment is, therefore, stored externally at the application site and subject to

unnecessary and damaging deterioration from weather effects. Storage of tools and dry goods competes with domestic requirements in the garaging.

3.07 While the current operational area is overseen from the applicant's residential property, there is a security concern in relation to theft and damage to vehicles and equipment stored insecurely. Thus far the applicant has been fortunate in not sharing the experiences of many in this respect. However, the risk remains and is increasing as evidenced by the 2018 National Rural Crime Survey. Theft of machinery and equipment is reported by the NFU Mutual as particularly prevalent with the overall cost of rural crime increasing by 13.4% in 2017.

4. The Proposal

4.01 In order to address the above deficiencies and issues, it is proposed to construct an additional small building at the existing operational site serving the applicant's agricultural interests. The proposed building would comprise a portal framed structure some 9m x 12m; a footprint of 108 sq m. It would be 4 m to eave height and 5.26 m to ridge. The walls would be formed of basal concrete panels to 2m with dark green box-profile cladding above. The roof would be similarly coloured fibre cement sheeting and include translucent roof lights. The cladding would be fitted to provide natural ventilation through the walls and at the ridge. Access to the building would be by means of a roller shutter door in one gable.

4.02 The building would sit on a concrete surface which would connect to the existing surfaced operational yard, and thence to the access onto School Lane.

4.03 The existing operational area and building and the proposed building would be screened from the nearby residential properties to the north west by a landscaping scheme to be agreed with the planning authority.

4,04 It is intended that the proposed building be used for the storage of vehicles, machinery and equipment currently in use and of dry goods and materials required in the managing of the land or produced from it and make possible the potential for the occasional housing of livestock to meet animal welfare obligations.

5. Assessment of the Proposed Development

5.01 The above circumstances are re-visited to assess the proposed development in terms of its acceptability against the policy framework discussed earlier.

There is a clear long-term need for the development in connection with the management of an established agricultural holding

5.02 The applicant and his family have a long-established involvement with the management of agricultural land and woodland in the Biddulph Moor and Timbersbrook locality. At the

application site this has persisted for some 42 years. The land is recognised as forming part of an agricultural holding, and there is extant and developing agricultural and woodland management activity on the part of the applicant.

5.03 The applicant is committed to the continuation and development of his land management l activities which make a positive contribution to the maintenance of the local landscape character. The proposed building is, therefore, directly related to the existing agricultural activities and their functional requirements and would enable their more effective management and development.

5.04 The needs for the proposed building was introduced earlier:

General – The building would enable the consolidation of the storage needs of the holding in a single operational location, with attendant functional efficiency benefits. There would be a reduced need for the unsatisfactory use of the domestic area and buildings.

Machinery – The building would reduce/avoid the need for the external storage of vehicle and equipment, which would accord with best practice and reduce adverse visual effects. Unnecessary wear and tear and maintenance costs would be reduced, with commensurate increased efficiency and longer operational life arising in vehicles and equipment.

Livestock (Sheep) – The secure availability of building space would enable the applicant to take in-hand some of the current rented grazing activity and meet the associated statutory animal welfare obligations. Where sheep are outwintered and there is no natural shelter, provision should be made for the occasional housing of vulnerable or sick animals.

Hay – The proposed building would enable the storage of hay without the penalties arising from external storage in relation to loss of quality and digestibility. The timeliness and value of sales would therefore be improved.

Best use is made of existing infrastructure

5.05 The proposed building is co-located with existing storage facilities and an operational yard and would connect to the existing access to the public highway through an existing safe entrance. The site is immediately adjacent to an existing field access to the adjoining agricultural land. The small size of the existing facilities is such that it is not possible to re-organise their use to address the storage needs described previously. Existing storage already requires the displacement of uses from domestic space. No other agricultural buildings are available to the applicant on the land under his control.

5.06 It is considered that effective use is being made of existing storage and related infrastructure and that the application site is the best location at which the maximise the benefits of these to the agricultural and woodland management operations.

The building is scaled to the minimum level reasonably required and is well related to existing buildings

5.07 As indicated above the proposed building is well related to the existing buildings and infrastructure.

5.08 In terms of the scale of the proposed building, it is considered modest in relation to the intended usage. The building comprises 108 sq m of floor space. Not all this space is available for storage as space will be required for the manoeuvring of equipment and materials. The applicant's existing tractors, trailers and other substantive equipment would occupy more than 40% of the building, leaving space for any additional equipment requirements as his in-hand husbandry activities develop. It is reasonable to expect some of the hay crop to be stored in the building to enable the applicant to benefit from selling it at a more profitable period rather selling direct from the field into the worst market conditions. Ultimately the retention of some vacant space during the winter and lambing period to meet emergency requirements for sheep would be prudent. The building would also provide secure storage for small equipment and tools currently located in the domestic garage and the open fronted lean-to.

The design of the building is appropriate to its intended function

5.09 Regard has been had to standard sources of guidance on the design of agricultural buildings which derive from British Standard 5502 Buildings and Structures for Agriculture. The requirements of general-purpose buildings such as that proposed include:

- An open and easily accessed internal space
- Sufficient height to eaves to allow access by larger items (e.g. tractors) and use of mechanical handling equipment, and to provide above ground level storage capacity (e.g. for hay, feed etc)
- Dwarf walls to provide a robust basal structure for support and protection from damage from moving equipment.
- Enclosed clad walls
- Good lighting (roof lights or artificial)
- Hardcore or concrete floor
- Adequate wall and ridge ventilation to prevent condensation where dry goods stored or unhealthy conditions when occupied by livestock
- Secure means of access into building and proximity to effective external vehicular access

5.10 It is considered that the design of the proposed building appropriately reflects these requirements.

5.11 The intended use of the building is unlikely to require a specific foul drainage facility. Roof water will be directed to a water storage tank before any excess is discharged into the recently installed field drainage system serving the adjacent agricultural land and thence to a storm drain before discharging into a local stream. Farm waste would only arise in the event

of the emergency use of part of the building by sheep, which would be dry bedded, and the soiled material disposed of as manure to the land.

There are no unacceptable effects on the amenity of the locality

5.12 The proposed building occupies part of a corner of the curtilage of the residential property of Coates Farm. A existing fence line provides the immediate boundary with the adjoining agricultural land. Across this land to the north west is the residential property, Rock Glen, some 65m distant. This part of a group of four properties in Dan Lane. To the south of Coates Farm, whose existing development and curtilage obscure the proposed building from it is the northern-most residential development in the settlement and associated with Beckfield Close. From the Close a public footpath runs in a north-easterly direction across the applicant's land. The western hedged boundary of the site abuts School Lane. The proposed development, in neither direct or operational terms, has no adverse amenity effects on these considerations.

5.13 There will be no change in operational circumstances at the application site such as could be considered to involve increased noise or odour generation. Similarly, there will be no discernible change in the volume or frequency of existing operational traffic movements associated with the Coates Farm.

5.14 The application site is located in countryside characterised by a pattern of small, irregular grassland field units bounded predominantly by mature hedgerows and hedgerow trees giving a very visually enclosed feel. The immediate landscape is not one which appears to be subject to any specific and significant environmental designation upon which the proposed development would adversely impinge. The site itself lies within the residential curtilage of Coates Farm and has no identified cultural or wildlife significance.

5.15 The proposed building will be visible from the properties in Dan Lane and from users of School Lane. To varying degrees the views of the building will be broken by existing, intervening vegetation and buildings. Existing buildings and vegetation will militate against any visual impacts on users of the public footpath, and no visual effects will be experienced by residents in Beckfield Close.

5.16 A planting scheme comprised of mixed broadleaved small tree/shrub species consistent with those found in the hedgerows of the locality will be undertaken to enhance the existing boundaries of the application site. There is no direct impact from the proposed development on these boundaries. The height of planting in the roadside hedge would be constrained by the presence of overhead cables and the maintenance requirements of the utility company. The planting scheme will be subject to the approval of the planning authority.

5.17 The principal planning constraint to development in the location of the application site is that of Green Belt designation. While the designation seeks, in general terms, to preclude development in order to maintain a separation of urban areas and to safeguard open countryside, agricultural buildings are, in principle, deemed to be 'appropriate development' given that a countryside location is necessary. The proposed building would not introduce any coalescence of development affecting the built-up structure of Biddulph Moor, nor

would it occasion any substantive loss of openness of the immediate countryside setting of the settlement.

6. Conclusions

6.01 It is concluded that there is a demonstrable need for the proposed development to serve an established agricultural holding; the management and future development of which is currently compromised by the lack of adequate storage facilities for its existing vehicles, equipment, dry goods and materials.

6.02 The size, siting and design of the proposed building are consistent with best practice and compliant with the objectives of planning policy.

6.03 The siting and operational characteristics of the proposed building do not occasion any substantive adverse effects on the local landscape or the amenities of local residents.

A.H. Elliott BA(Hons). MSc

Independent Consultant in Rural Land Use and Planning

Associate, Reading Agricultural Consultants
Fellow, British Institute of Agricultural Consultants
Practitioner Member, Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment

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Reading Agricultural Consultants
Beechwood Court, Long Toll, Woodcote, Reading, RG8 0RR
Tel: 01491 684233 rac@reading-ag.com