

Trevor J Williams
Rural Planning Advisor
Derwent
Smithfield Road
Market Drayton
TF9 1EJ

01630 655491
rtdewent@hotmail.com

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Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
For Robin Forrester, Planning Officer

Dear Sir,

Re; 13/00568 Gypsy Hollow, Thorncliffe

Further to your request for an independent agricultural appraisal, I have inspected the holding on 1st August 2103 accompanied by Mr and Mrs Robinson, and report as follows.

Biography.

I have carried out agricultural dwelling and farmbuilding appraisals since 1976, mainly for planning authorities in Staffordshire, whilst I was County Land Agent for Staffordshire County Council, responsible for the management of 130 livestock farms and 10,000 acres of land. I qualified as a rural practice chartered surveyor in 1983 and as a fellow of the central association of agricultural valuers in 1985. Since leaving local government I have practiced as a rural planning advisor and consultant as well as being a working partner in a livestock farm.

Site.

The land off Thorncliffe lane was formerly part of Stonecross Farm. The land now occupied by the applicants was originally divided into paddocks and offered for sale. They first purchased the central paddock and have recently completed the purchase of the two remaining paddocks.

The land is accessed by a trackway leading from the road which remains in the ownership of Stonecross Farm. This track runs across the north of the Robinson's land then turns south and serves as access to a lake which has been quite recently excavated.

The land owned comprises almost 5 acres, and the track together with some rough grazing, amongst trees around the lake, is rented on an informal arrangement, this is an estimated 2.5 to 3 acres or so. An

additional area of about 0.5 acre to the north of the site was mown for a hay crop this year.

Mr Robinson also has the use of about 4 acres of grazing land near Eccleshall, Stafford, owned by his employer.

Agricultural Business.

Mr Robinson informed me that he has occupied various parcels of land in the area for many years, and took the opportunity of purchasing this land to have something permanent to establish an agricultural/equestrian activity.

Livestock.

On the holding at the time of my inspection were;

4 cattle- friesian bulls about 12 months old, which had been reared from young calves. 12 calves were reared and 8 sold last autumn.

1 horse and 2 ponies.

15 laying hens

3 goats

3 ewe lambs.(5 sheep away on rented grazing)

2 pigs.

Cropping.

All the owned land is used for grazing. About 2-3 acres of rented land has been cropped for hay, there being 5 large round bales and 28 small bales in store.

Buildings.

A block of 3 timber stables, one of which is used as a tack room,
4 lorry bodies used for secure storage of feedstuffs, tools and equipment etc.

Hen coops

Farm Machinery.

2 tractors, (1 in use)

Hay bob

Mower

Chain harrows

Flat trailer

Livestock trailer

Various small tools, fencing materials and suchlike

Proposals

The holding is a registered agricultural holding. It is being operated as a "lifestyle" occupation for the benefit of Mr and Mrs Robinson and their son and daughter.

The proposed management is to purchase 6-8 young calves each spring, rear them and sell as "store" cattle in the autumn for finishing. To keep 8 breeding ewes and rear the lambs for sale and for own consumption. To keep 2 pigs, the goats and hens and 1 horse and 1 pony (1 pony is for sale)

It is proposed to erect a portal framed building 13.7m x 9.1m (45x30 feet). This would be in 3 bays, and as shown on the latest amended plan, primarily one bay left open fronted for livestock- mainly the cattle, one bay for fodder (hay) storage, and lambing, and one secure bay for the tractors and small tools. To re-erect the stable block, and retain the hen coops and other machinery within a re-sited farmyard.

Summary

The holding is managed as a "lifestyle" operation and, due to its small size in agricultural terms, is unlikely to show a profit. The numbers of livestock proposed can be kept on this area of land, and hay will need to be bought in for winter feed. The rough grazing available around the lake is suitable for sheep grazing.

The calves will be reared inside, then grazed from spring until sold in autumn. It is normal practice to supplement their diet with purchased concentrate feed. This site is about 250 m above sea level, and exposed, entailing all livestock to be winter housed when weather conditions dictate.

With the stock numbers proposed, it should not result in overgrazing, or harm the appearance of the fields, which are good quality pasture.

It is essential to provide housing facilities for cattle and sheep, and a statutory requirement to provide handling facilities for veterinary care when needed, and for TB testing.

On a holding without a dwelling, security is a problem, and a secure store is necessary for the more valuable items of machinery. Covered storage of hay and straw is essential, and it is normal practice to purchase the hay and straw required for winter feed in the summer months.

I consider there is a genuine need for the proposed building on the holding. Whilst this holding will not be a viable agricultural business, such as to provide an income for the applicants, this, apart from the

horses, is a normal agricultural activity as practised on holdings throughout the area.

Trevor J Williams FAAV (rtd)
Agricultural Valuer, Land Agent and Rural Planning Advisor.