

Our Ref: 8853-SM
Your Ref: P20/V1375/FUL

22 June 2020

For the attention of Susannah Mangion

Vale of White Horse District Council
Planning Department
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Milton
Abingdon
OX14 4SB

Dear Mrs Mangion,

Site: Church Farm, Dark Lane, Sunningwell, Abingdon OX13 6RE

Application: P20/V1375/FUL

Proposals: Temporary farm dwelling (mobile home) with parking

Thank you for your email instructions received on 30 June 2020 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) comments and observations on the above application.

In preparing this response I have had regard to:

- the planning application and associated plans;
- a Planning Statement dated June 2020 prepared by JPPC Chartered Town Planning, the Agent; and
- an Essential Needs Appraisal dated June 2020 prepared by Kernon Countryside Consultants.

I visited the site on 10 July 2020 and met with the applicants, Tom and Chloe Alden. I viewed the holding and the existing livestock handling and housing building and the proposed site for the temporary dwelling (mobile home).

Prior to visiting the site I was provided with a projected Profit and Loss Account for Church Farm Partnership for the years ending 31st March 2020 to 2022.

Background

1. The applicants purchased Church Farm in February 2017 as bare land in poor condition, overgrown with scrub. They have improved the pasture and invested in the land with the erection of deer proof fencing and gates and 3,000 metres of new hedgerow planting.
2. The land holding extends to 39 hectares (96 acres) of owned permanent pasture which provides year round grazing for the applicants deer herd. The land is crossed by two current footpaths and one disused footpath (which I understand from discussions with the applicant may come into use again). The footpaths are fenced with deer proof fencing to protect the livestock and public.

3. The applicants ensure that the deer rotationally graze the land to ensure good grassland management.
4. The applicants will be renting a further 14 hectares (35 acres) of land, privately owned by a partner within the Church Farm Partnership. This land is sited adjacent to the northwest of the owned land and will provide grassland for hay/silage making from 2021.
5. The holding comprises a single livestock building (permitted under P17/V1340/FUL in August 2017) which provides a Gallagher livestock handling system with direct access from the paddocks and an area for housing weaned calves over the winter months.
6. The handling system allows for the safe handling of the deer coming from the paddocks or housing area with herds of 50 deer being split down to smaller groups through the hydraulic gates and pen areas. Calves housed within the barn go through the handling system each month to be checked and the hinds and stags out at grass are checked two to three times a year. Mr Alden detailed that it can take one herd (50 deer) 4 hours to go through the handling system and when separating calves for weaning it can take a whole day.
7. The applicants began with 100 hinds in 2017 and increased by 50 in 2018. The first yearling calves were sold in November 2018.
8. Since purchasing the land the applicants have developed their breeding herd size to the current number of 165 hinds (150 red deer and 15 Sika deer), 160 calves, 150 yearlings and seven red deer stags with a new stag arriving in August 2020.
9. The applicants intend to retain 15 calves a year as home reared replacements to increase the herd size. It is detailed in the Essential Needs Appraisal that they intend to increase to 180 red deer hinds.
10. Calves aged 15-18 months are considered premium quality meat and at this age they are sent off site, either to Dovecote as part of an agreed contract or to Alden Butchers (run by Tom Alden's brother).
11. In addition to the deer herd, the applicants also keep 10 turkeys reared for meat, 15 geese, 20 guinea fowl, 30 hens for eggs and four Cameroon sheep including two lambs.
12. All labour is provided by Tom and Chloe Alden, with additional seasonal labour when required for the handling of deer.

Proposal

13. The applicant's proposal is for the siting of a dwelling (mobile home) for a temporary period. No plans of the proposed dwelling have been submitted however the JPPC Planning Statement notes that it will have a floor area of 125m².
14. The dwelling would be occupied by a full-time worker employed in the farming business. In this case the applicants, Tom and Chloe Alden.

Relevant Planning Policies

15. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (24 July 2018 and updated February 2019).
16. Section 4 is concerned with 'Decision Making' and at paragraph 38 notes:
"Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible."

17. Section 5 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Delivering a sufficient supply of homes' and at paragraph 79 it notes:

"Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside;..."*

18. New Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) titled 'Housing Needs of Different Groups' (July 2019) provides some guidance relevant to paragraph 79 of the NPPF in the section 'How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed'?

These include:

- *"Evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at or in close proximity to their place of work to ensure the effective operation of agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attendance 24 hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- *The degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- *Whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- *Whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site; providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*
- *In the case of new enterprises whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period."*

It further notes that: *"Employment on an assembly or food packing line, or the need to accommodate seasonal workers, will generally not be sufficient to justify building isolated rural dwellings"*

19. Section 6 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Building a strong, competitive economy' and at paragraph 80 it notes:

"planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt..."

20. At paragraph 83 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' it notes:

"Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- b) The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses;*
- c) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) The retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sport venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship"*

21. The Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031: Part Two provides support at Development Policy DP6 for Rural Workers' dwellings.
22. DP6 notes: "*The provision of a rural worker dwelling in the open countryside will be permitted provided that:*
- i. It is essential, and can be demonstrated there is an existing need for one or more permanent full-time workers to be readily available at all times for the rural enterprise to operate viably;*
 - ii. The functional need cannot be met by other suitable and available existing dwellings in the locality of the rural enterprise;*
 - iii. The rural enterprise is economically sustainable, has been established for at least 3 years and is likely to remain economically viable for the foreseeable future;*
 - iv. The size and scale of the dwelling is commensurate with the needs of the rural enterprise; and*
 - v. It respects the landscape setting, local character, and its locality.*
- Development proposals will be required to submit a financial appraisal to demonstrate that criteria (i) and (iii) are met."*

Appraisal

23. It is evident that the applicant's farming enterprise is established but still continuing to develop with plans to increase the breeding herd size.
- Essential need
24. An assessment of the essential need for a rural worker to live at or near their place of work requires:
- an evaluation of the risks involved;
 - the frequency and type of out-of-hours emergency that might arise;
 - the scale and loss that could be incurred should that emergency situation occur;
 - the potential for an on-site worker to identify the problem; and
 - the ability of that resident worker to rectify the problem.
25. Legislation requires that all animals are managed in a manner that accords them freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter; freedom from fear; freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour, and it is accepted that without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be adequately protected.
26. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. The Act also contains a Duty of Care to animals which means anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's needs and its welfare are met. The overall responsibility or 'duty of care' for animal welfare lies with the applicants, Tom and Chloe Alden.
27. An assessment of the existing essential need has been provided in the Essential Needs Appraisal and these can be summarised as follows:
- the close supervision of hinds at calving time;
 - the close supervision of housed deer through the winter;
 - the close supervision of all growing livestock and carrying out of stock tasks when necessary to maintain health of stock;
 - dealing promptly with any unforeseen incidents which can occur at any time of day or night.

28. In addition, there are additional welfare requirements relating to the rutting season (mating) from August to mid November, calving period from May to June and weaning at the end of August each year.
29. Calves are weaned and moved to the livestock building where they are housed from September to June with access to the feeding area. The applicants check on the calves 3 to 4 times a day and each calf is fed 1.5kg of concentrate feed per day with the first feed at 8am.
30. Once the calves are turned out to grass they return to the handling system within a day or two to be wormed.
31. RAC would note that the issue of security is also now acknowledged by the Police and Insurers to be an increasing problem in rural areas and outlying units, especially where buildings, machinery and livestock, are at risk of theft, vandalism or fire. It is accepted that additional emergencies may occur from time to time which includes animals escaping, where immediate action is required to prevent accidents.
32. At my site visit the applicant detailed issues they have with dogs off lead worrying the deer in the fields and a specific incident where a dog owned by residents of a property adjacent to the grazing land, dug below the fence line, got into the field and attacked a pregnant hind.
33. The Essential Needs Appraisal has provided details of the labour requirements on the farm using Standard Man Days (SMD) and notes that all work is carried out by Tom and Chloe Alden and it was confirmed that occasional labour is required for handling days.
34. The Essential Needs Appraisal notes the labour calculations are taken from the Farm Business Survey in the Agricultural Budgeting and Costing Book (90th Edition May 2020). It notes for an implied herd size of 125 deer there is a labour requirement of 15 hours per deer per year (1.87 SMDs).
35. Based on the SMD calculation, the labour requirements can be calculated as 308 SMDs for the hinds alone. In addition, there are 160 calves, 150 youngstock and there will be 8 stags on site by August.
36. RAC considers that there is an essential need for at least 1 full-time rural worker to reside on site to meet the welfare needs of the livestock at Church Farm.

Sustainability

37. The NPPF deals with the concept of sustainable development at a strategic rather than an individual enterprise level. In terms of economic development, it is concerned with contributing to and building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation.
38. Local Plan Policy DP6 requires evidence to demonstrate the viability of the rural business for which the housing is required.
39. In this context RAC considers that any assessment of economic sustainability needs to examine how a business/enterprise is able to utilize its resources to function properly and stay in business. A business has to have sufficient funds available to fund its day-to-day trading (cash flow); has to be profitable in order to reinvest within the business; and/or, show a reasonable return on capital invested.

40. The methodology assumes a reasonable return to land, equivalent to a notional rental value, any unpaid labour equivalent to the national minimum wage, and a reasonable return on capital employed in the business, which in agriculture is 2.5%. For a rural business to be considered financially sound both now and in the long term, the net profit achieved should cover these notional costs plus the annual charges for the build cost of the permanent dwelling.
41. In the applicant's case, RAC would note these notional charges are as follows: notional rent £5,850; unpaid labour £18,500; and return on capital £2,500 (2.5% at £100,000). Build costs have not been calculated.
42. The applicant has provided a confidential three year business forecast 2020 to 2022 which RAC consider to be realistic and produced on a sound financial basis.
43. At my site visit it was confirmed that neither Tom nor Chloe Alden take a wage from the business but they intend to take drawings in the future.
44. I queried the projected turnover and 'other income' that increases significantly in the third year (2022) of the forecast. It was detailed that by this point the applicants will begin selling a significant portion of the 15-18 month premium youngstock to the family butchers operated by Tom's brother (Aldens Butchers based in Oxford) whilst still meeting the requirements of their contract with Dovecote with venison sales to Waitrose (Direct Sales in the Budget).
45. Analysis of the projected forecasts in the business plan and taking account of the above notional costs, it is evident that the farming business would make a loss in 2020, a minimal profit in 2021 and in 2022 the business is clearly profitable.
46. RAC would note that if the Council were minded to approve the planning application for a temporary rural worker's dwelling then the applicant's business plan and developing enterprises would be thoroughly tested over the next three years. However, the applicant needs to be aware that if approval were to be granted for a temporary dwelling, then the enterprises need to have developed as proposed and full financial information would be required. This would be fully scrutinised at the end of the three year period where an application for a permanent residency for a rural worker is submitted. The business will have to have demonstrated that it is profitable, financially viable and sustainable.
47. In the event that at the end of the three year time period and the applicant's business was not proven to be viable, the Council will have the authority to have the temporary dwelling removed and the land restored to its original condition.

Other dwellings

48. Currently the applicants live 10 minutes drive from the farm in Wootton. The applicants will sell their property and it will finance further investment in the farm, likely to be the build costs of a permanent dwelling.
49. RAC is not aware of any other buildings on site that are available and would be suitable for conversion.
50. RAC is not aware of any other dwellings in the immediate locality that are suitable and available for rent or purchase that would meet the identified essential needs.

Summary

51. The applicant's proposal is to site a temporary dwelling (mobile home) at Church Farm to provide accommodation for a full-time rural worker.
52. The proposed dwelling would be occupied by the applicants, Tom and Chloe Alden.
53. It is considered that there is an essential need for a full-time worker to live onsite and be available to meet the requirements of the farm and to ensure that the welfare of the livestock is not compromised.
54. The farming business has been established since 2017 and the applicants have plans for further development of the breeding herd.
55. The applicant has provided a three year business forecast which is considered to be realistic and produced on a sound financial basis.
56. RAC is not aware of any other dwellings in the immediate locality that are suitable and available and would meet the identified essential need.
57. The applicant's proposal is considered to be compliant with National Planning Policy and Local Plan policy DP6.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Olivia Wojniak

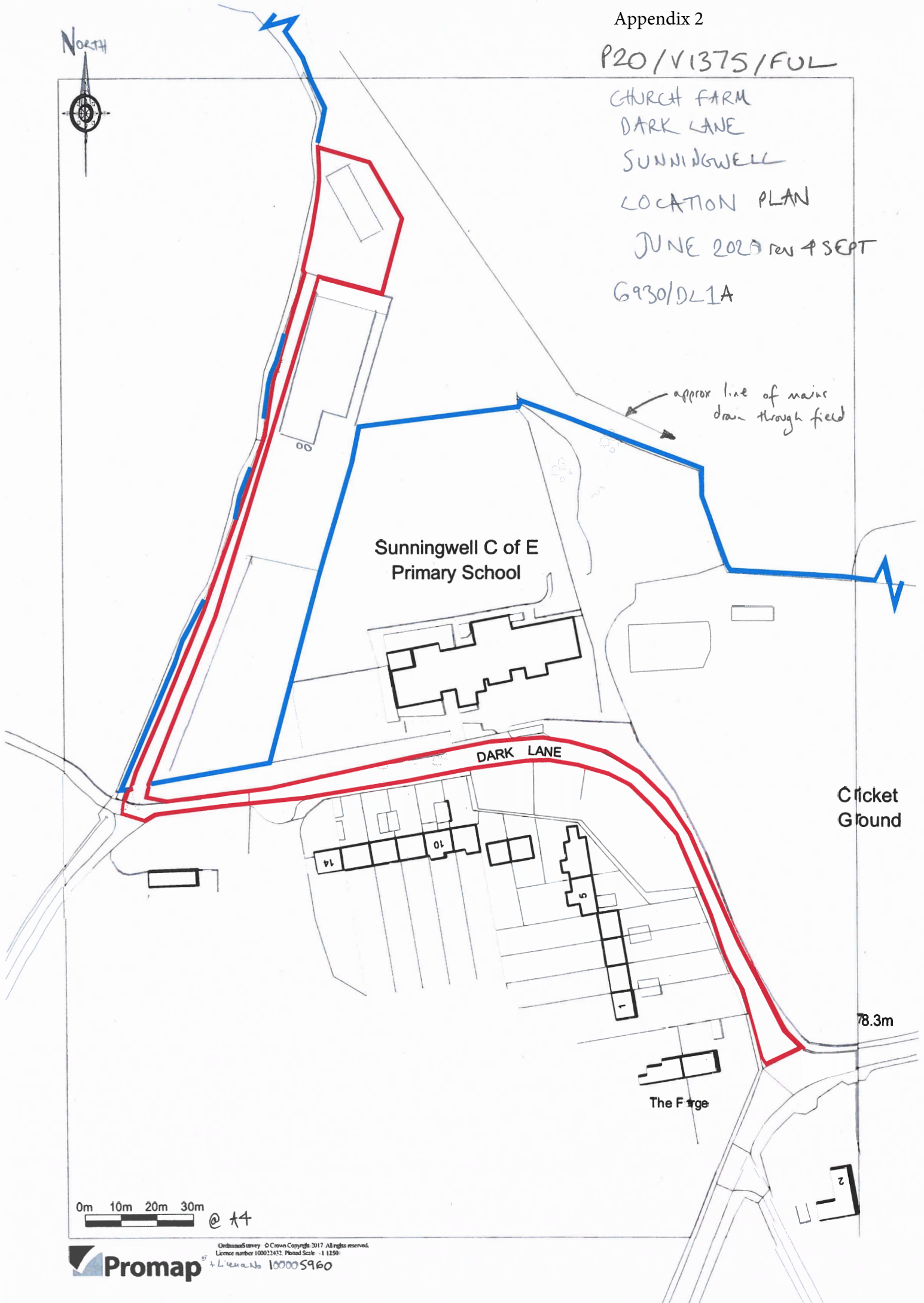
P20/V1375/FUL

CHURCH FARM
DARK LANE
SUNNINGWELL

LOCATION PLAN

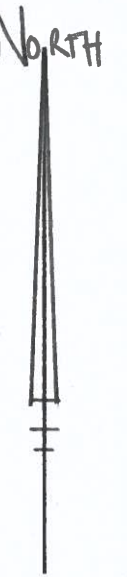
JUNE 2020 rev 4 SEPT

G930/DL1A



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@ 1:4



CHURCH FARM
DARK LANE
SUNNINGWELL

BLOCK PLAN
6930 / BLO

JUNE 2020

1:500 SCALE @ A3

GRASS
FIELD

DEER
FARM

EXISTING
BUILDING

FIELD

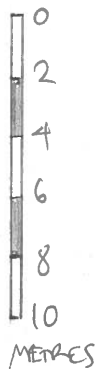
TURNING
AREA
ETC

Sunningwell C of E
Primary School

EXISTING HARD
TRACK ACCESS

DARK LANE

DARK LANE



CHURCH FARM
SUNNINGWELL

PROPOSED SITE PLAN

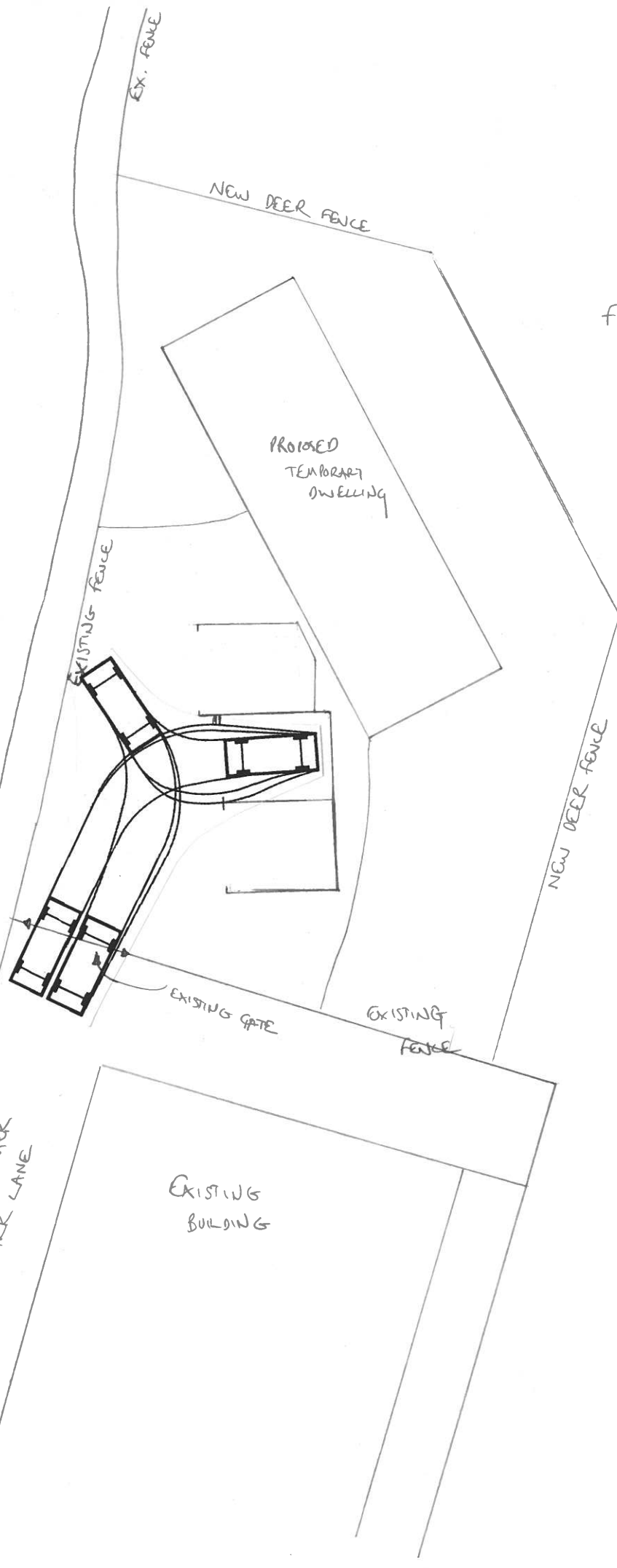
6930/SP1

JUNE 2020

1:250 SCALE @ A4

FIELD

FIELD





READING
AGRICULTURAL
CONSULTANTS

Beechwood Court
Long Toll
Woodcote
Reading RG8 0RR
Tel: 01491 684 233
rac@readingagricultural.co.uk
www.readingagricultural.co.uk

Your Ref: P20/V1375/FUL
Our Ref: 8853-sm2

15 September 2020

For the attention of Susannah Mangion

Vale of White Horse District Council
Planning Department
135 Eastern Avenue
Milton Park
Milton
Abingdon
OX14 4SB

Dear Mrs Mangion,

Site: Church Farm, Dark Lane, Sunningwell, Abingdon OX13 6RE

Application: P20/V1375/FUL

Proposals: Temporary farm dwelling (mobile home) with parking

Thank you for your email instructions received on 2 September 2020 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) provide further comments in response to the Sunningwell Parish Council letter of Objection (dated 21 August 2020).

RAC previously appraised this application (RAC ref 8853 dated 22 June 2020) and concluded:

"The applicant's proposal is to site a temporary dwelling (mobile home) at Church Farm to provide accommodation for a full-time rural worker.

The proposed dwelling would be occupied by the applicants, Tom and Chloe Alden.

It is considered that there is an essential need for a full-time worker to live onsite and be available to meet the requirements of the farm and to ensure that the welfare of the livestock is not compromised.

The farming business has been established since 2017 and the applicants have plans for further development of the breeding herd.

The applicant has provided a three year business forecast which is considered to be realistic and produced on a sound financial basis.

RAC is not aware of any other dwellings in the immediate locality that are suitable and available and would meet the identified essential need.

The applicant's proposal is considered to be compliant with National Planning Policy and Local Plan policy DP6."

In preparing this response I have had regard to the documents and correspondence submitted to the Council following the original appraisal.

I will comment on each part of the further objection received from the Parish Council.

Projected Budget

1. RAC are not accountants, however it was noted in the initial appraisal that a temporary permission will enable the applicant's business to be fully tested in order to prove that the business itself is viable and sustainable. In the event that at the end of the three year time period and the applicant's business was not proven to be viable, the Council will have the authority to have the temporary dwelling removed and the land restored to its original condition. This position is generally adopted by Councils.
2. At my site visit I questioned the term 'other income' and the reason that it increases significantly in the third year (2022) of the forecast. It was detailed clearly that by this point the applicants will have begun selling a significant portion of their 15-18 month premium youngstock to the family butchers operated by Tom's brother (Aldens Butchers based in Oxford) whilst still meeting the requirements of their contract with Dovecote with venison sales to Waitrose (Direct Sales in the Budget).
3. Salaries/wages for the applicant as acceptable as the remaining net profit or drawings. Neither Tom or Chloe currently take a wage from the business but they intend to begin taking drawings from the business. This is considered common practice and seen in many agricultural/rural businesses. This would be identified in the applicant's business accounts (the balance sheet) at the end of the three year period. These accounts would need to be presented when an application for a permanent dwelling is submitted. The £1,000 allocated in the budget covers any seasonal or additional labour however it was explained to me at the site visit that they rely on informal assistance by friends.
4. The purchase or rental of a log cabin will likely be financed through the sale of the applicant's existing residence in Wootton. This is considered acceptable.
5. It is generally accepted that the Cashflow projections are suitable for assessing whether the business has been planned on a sound financial basis. They are considered a standard requirement for a new enterprise. The Profit and Loss account and Balance Sheet as noted above will be applicable after the three years if permission is granted. The applicant's business at this point must be able to demonstrate it is viable and sustainable now and in the long term.

Essential Need

6. The Parish Council refer to the evidence provided in a letter by Ark Vet Centre (dated 1st July 2020) which details that farmed red deer do not require on site accommodation for a worker to provide constant supervision. The Vet accepts that there is a requirement that the deer are checked daily, however their welfare suffers where there is a constant disturbance or intervention.
7. RAC considers that whilst grazing may not have a requirement for a resident full time worker, there is an essential need relating to the housed calves. The requirement is considered to be no different to any farm livestock breeding enterprise where it essential that the welfare of livestock is not compromised.
8. There is a potential risk to animal health for housed livestock and as such the NPPG considers this evidence for the need of an isolated dwelling in the countryside.

Drainage

9. Not applicable for comment by RAC.

Available Dwelling

10. RAC considers that any dwelling that may or may not be available to Church Farm Partnership or Church Farm Holdings Limited will not meet the essential need of the holding as if available they are not considered within sight and sound of the livestock building.

Sight and Sound

11. RAC considers that the proposed siting and location of the temporary dwelling is appropriate as it will be occupied by the applicant as the full-time worker and allows him to react promptly to any emergencies within the livestock building or within the grazing paddocks.
12. The Parish Council comments that the 96 acre land holding with parts being over a kilometre away from the proposed dwelling would not enable the applicant to have sight or sound. However, RAC considers that the provision of the temporary dwelling enables the applicant to react promptly to any emergencies and ensures that the welfare of stock is not compromised. An off-site residential property would not meet that essential need.

Essential Need and Business Viability

13. RAC have been appointed as the agricultural experts by the Council and as such have carried out an independent assessment of the application.
14. RAC still considers that there is an essential need based on the current and proposed increased herd size.
15. The granting of a temporary planning permission for the siting of workers accommodation will enable the business to be tested over a three year period, with trading and profit and loss accounts and balance sheets assessed to ensure that the business is viable and sustainable in the long term.
16. With regards to the second business that the applicant operates in the local area, RAC is unaware of this and will not provide comment on the basis or continuation of this business.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Olivia Wojniak