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Your ref 3/2011/0919
Our ref PG/EVP/ER/3/40/8348/LK
Date 12 January 2012

Mr Colin Sharpe
Ribbles Valley Borough Council
Council Offices
Church Walk
CLITHEROE
Lancashire
BB7 2RA

Dear Mr Sharpe

APPLICATION NUMBER 3/2011/0919
LAYTHAMS FARM, BACK LANE, SLAIDBURN, LANCASHIRE, BB7 3AJ
GRID REFERENCE 369025 452709

I refer to your consultation letter concerning the above application and have the following comments to make.

Introduction

A planning application has been submitted by Mr John Welbank of Rural Futures (North West) Limited on behalf of Mr Martin Wenner for the erection of a new dairy sheep accommodation building, to include a milking parlour, dairy and collecting yard, along with a second building to serve as a cheese processing and storage facility. A site visit was made on 4 January 2012 whilst the applicant, his stockman and his agent were present. The information provided at this meeting, together with written submissions forms the basis of this appraisal.

Agricultural Land

I was informed that the applicant farms a total of approximately 100 hectares (247.1 acres) of which approximately 48 hectares (118.6 acres) of land is owned by the applicant and the remaining 52 hectares (128.49 acres) of land is rented for winter grazing. In addition to the above, the applicant informed me that he had 150 rights on Burn Fell which adjoins Laythams Farm.

I understand that the land owned by the applicant is situated at Laythams Farm, whilst the rented land is situated in Standish and Glossop.

I was told that all of the land is down to grass with some used to take a cut of silage.

E P G Robertson BSc (Hons) MRICS
Senior Assistant Land Agent
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Agricultural Enterprise

The principal enterprise of the applicant is that of a commercial flock consisting of approximately 450 breeding ewes and their lambs, which number approximately 550.

Existing Buildings

There is one existing building situated at Laythams Farm which is a modern type agricultural building used for the accommodation and lambing of the applicant's commercial flock. In addition, there is also a set of sheep handling facilities adjoining the applicant's building.

Proposed Development

The proposed development is to erect two buildings to accommodate the applicant's new business venture which is that of a dairy flock of approximately 300 Friesland milking sheep along with a collecting yard, milking parlour, dairy and cheese processing/storage unit as shown on the plans submitted.

The collecting yard, dairy and parlour will be incorporated within the accommodation building and the cheese processing unit along with the cheese storage facility will be situated in a separate building. I was told that the cheese processing and storage area needs to be situated in a separate building in order to avoid any environmental health issues.

The applicant told me that he wished to develop a dairy flock as he had a keen interest in the production of milk and cheese from sheep. In addition, the applicant stated that the proposal offered a viable diversification opportunity for the farm, having good symmetry with the existing business whilst providing an extra income stream for the unit.

The applicant indicated that the new proposed enterprise will take approximately three years to become fully established with nearly all of the milk produced in the first year going to the bulk milk market and approximately 50% of the milk produced in year two also being sold to the bulk milk market. The applicant stated that it is his hope that all of the milk produced in the third year will be used for the purposes of making cheese. I was informed by the applicant that it was his intention to initially, whilst the business was being established, produce mainly soft cheese due to the relatively short periods that are required to store the produce before its sale, providing a quicker financial return, however, he stated that he eventually wished to produce harder cheeses which provided a greater return but could necessitate a storage period of up to nine months.

In addition to the above, the applicant intends to establish his herd with approximately 100 Friesland sheep and slowly build up his numbers to approximately 300 by the end of the third year. I understand that the off spring of the flock will be retained by the applicant with the gimmers being used as replacements within the dairy business and the tupps being kept on feed for killing or sold for breeding.

Assessment

The proposed development is within areas shown on the Ribble Valley Local Plan as being land outside main settlement/village boundaries and within an area of outstanding natural beauty. Policy G5 of the adopted Local Plan provides guidance concerning development outside the main settlement boundaries and the village boundaries and states that:

'planning consent will only be granted for small scale development which are:

ii) need for the purposes of agriculture or forestry;

With reference to this policy, I consider the following matters should be taken into account when assessing this application:

1. The development is needed for the purposes of agriculture.

The application is for the erection of two buildings to facilitate the creation of a new business upon the unit, that being of a dairy sheep flock. Whilst the proposals will require a different style of stock management to that of the existing commercial flock, the proposed enterprise, in my opinion, is an acceptable use of the applicant's land, being a suitable diversification for the unit.

Whilst the proposal will require the applicant's land to be managed differently, with far more silage needing to be produced to feed the dairy flock, having held discussions with the applicant, his agent and stockman and taken into consideration the scale of the proposed enterprise, it is my opinion that the farm unit would be able to support the proposed enterprise and produce enough forage from the acreage that they have at their disposal.

In terms of the proposed cheese processing and storage facility, the applicant stated that he wished to undertake the entire process on site from the production of the milk to the manufacturing of the cheese. Whilst the processing of milk on site is an infrequent practice and the milk could alternatively be sold from the unit to be processed elsewhere, the proposal to make the cheese onsite is ancillary to the principle enterprise proposed and

is not, in my opinion, inappropriate, especially when taking into consideration the smaller volumes of milk that will be produced by the sheep flock in comparison to a traditional herd of dairy cows.

Taking into consideration the above, it is my opinion that proposal to milk sheep and process cheese at Laythams Farm could be successfully undertaken and therefore, I believe that the two buildings are needed for the purposes of agriculture upon the unit.

2. The design and size are appropriate for the intended use.

The first of the two buildings will accommodate the livestock, dairy, parlour and collecting yard. I was informed by the applicant that the sheep are kept indoors for approximately nine months of the year with lambing taking place inside. Taking into consideration the size of the proposed flock at full operational capacity, the size of the Friesland sheep themselves and the multiple use of the building to include the dairy and parlour, it is my opinion, that the proposed size of the main building is suitable for the intended use.

The design of the accommodation building is of a standard design with the materials suitable for the proposed use and therefore it is, in my opinion, appropriate for its intended use.

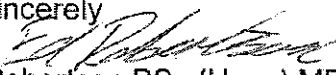
In regards to the design of the cheese processing and storage unit, the building, in my opinion, appears appropriate for its intended use with the size being proportionate to the size of the flock, the volume of milk produced and the requirements for storage of the produce. I assume that the Council will have its own opinion in relation to the external appearance of the proposed building.

3. Siting

In respect of the siting of the building, I am of the opinion that the site is appropriate from an operational point of view given its proximity to the sheep handling facilities and existing agricultural building, therefore keeping the applicant's agricultural operations together. The proposed siting also benefits from good access, being adjacent to Back Lane.

I would be grateful to receive a copy of your Decision Notice in due course

Yours sincerely


E P G Robertson BSc (Hons) MRICS
Senior Assistant Land Agent
on behalf of the Director of Property