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Your ref 3/2012/0140
Our ref PG/EVP/ER/LK/3/12/8402
Date 11 April 2012

Mr Graham Thorpe
Ribble Valley Borough Council
Council Offices
Church Walk
Clitheroe
Lancashire
BB7 2RA

12 APR 2012

Dear Mr Thorpe

APPLICATION NUMBER 3/2012/0140
RADHOLME LAUND FARM, COW ARK, CLITHEROE, BB7 3DF
GRID REFERENCE 366504 445794

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 David Steele of Smiths Gore on behalf of the Duchy of Lancaster for the erection of a dairy cubicle building and new access track. A site visit was made on 26 March 2012 whilst the agent and the farm tenant were present. The information provided at this meeting, together with the written submissions, forms the basis of this appraisal.

Please note that whilst the application has been submitted on behalf of the Duchy of Lancaster, the building will be used solely by the farm tenants, Messrs Variety, who occupy the premises on a long term Agricultural Holdings Act Tenancy. The information outlined below relates to the Variety's farming practices and operations.

Background Information

I understand that Radholme Laund Farm has been occupied by Mr Variety and his family on an agricultural tenancy since approximately 1979. I was informed that the tenant operates a mixed beef and dairy enterprise. I was told that the proposed development is to enable the tenant to increase the level of dairy operations to help create a more economically viable business, which can benefit from economies of scale.

Continued ...

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

I was informed that the tenant farms approximately 291 hectares (719 acres) most of which is in close proximity to the farmstead. Of this land, I understand that approximately 249 hectares (615 acres) is occupied by the tenant on an Agricultural Holdings Act Succession Tenancy from the Duchy of Lancaster, with a further 2 hectares (5 acres) being rented from the Aspinall Estate on a Farm Business Tenancy and the remaining 40 hectares (99 acres) of land being owned by the tenant and situated in Mitton.

Agricultural Enterprise

I was informed that the tenant operates a mixed farming system of beef and dairy, with the principal enterprise on the unit being a commercial dairy herd consisting of approximately 280 cows.

I understand that the tenant's dairy enterprise is predominantly operated from Radholme Laund Farm, whilst the beef cattle are mainly kept at Poultry Farm, which is owned by the tenant and situated in Great Mitton.

I was informed that the tenant currently has approximately 190 head of beef cattle which are sold between 20-24 months of age.

Existing Buildings

A range of traditional and modern type buildings are situated at the application site.

Proposed Development

The proposed development is for the construction of a new dairy cattle building as shown on the plan submitted in addition to a new access track to serve the new buildings.

The tenant stated that an additional cattle accommodation building would allow him to expand his herd to approximately 350 cows, therefore making the business more viable, whilst improving animal welfare standards within the herd by reducing future overcrowding.

Assessment

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

"outside the main settlement boundaries and the village boundaries, planning permission will only be granted for small scale developments, which are :

ii) needed 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.

When considering the proposed expansion, it is important to consider the amount of land available to the tenant to support the increase in dairy cow numbers. In my opinion, whilst the stocking rates of the unit would increase with the proposed expansion of the tenant's herd, I believe that the tenant has a sufficient acreage to support the proposed expansion. The tenant did however confirm that should he find that fodder levels become low as a result of his proposed expansion, it would be the beef enterprise that would be initially reduced.

Having inspected the existing buildings and discussed the current and future plans for the enterprise with the tenants, it is my opinion, that the existing accommodation is currently close to full capacity and will certainly not accommodate any further expansion of the herd. Whilst there is a young stock building situated at Radholme Laund Farm which is currently occupied by beef animals, the building, in my opinion, is unsuitable for a change of use to dairy accommodation, due to the building's traditional design and size.

Although I am aware that the tenant does own a number of buildings at Poultry Farm and these buildings were considered when assessing the application, it is my opinion, due to the nature of dairy farming and the management requirements necessary, these buildings are unsuitable to accommodate any expansion of the dairy herd.

The proposed building would provide a purpose built facility for the expansion of the herd and, in my opinion, will alleviate any problems of overcrowding within the current and expanded herd.

I therefore consider the building to be necessary for the purposes of agriculture upon the unit.

2. The design, scale and materials used for the building are appropriate.

The design of the building is in accordance with the intended agricultural use and as a purpose built building. The open elevation on one side of the building would allow for good ventilation through the building. The cubicle type accommodation proposed is typical for this type of farming enterprise and is, in my opinion, suitable.

The materials proposed to be used for the building are typical for this type of building and are, in my opinion, suitable for the proposed use.

Whilst the number of cubicles contained within the proposed building (120 cubicles) exceeds the proposed expansion of the herd, which is to be increased by approximately 70 dairy cows, the tenant explained that the extra 40 cubicles are necessary as it is their intention to re-arrange the existing accommodation upon the unit to house more animals within the proposed purpose built facility and reduce the levels of dairy cows within the existing dairy building. The space created within the existing dairy building by the re-organisation would be used to accommodate the increased numbers of young stock that result from a larger dairy herd. The tenant also believes that the proposals will increase the overall area available to the dairy cows within the allocated housing area, therefore improving animal welfare standards.

Whilst the number of cubicles does exceeds the proposed increase in dairy cow numbers, taking into consideration the proposed re-organisation of the livestock housing upon the unit in addition to the proposed increase in both dairy cows and young stock and the potential benefits in animal welfare, it is my opinion that the proposed size of the building is acceptable.

3. Siting

Upon visiting the application site, it is apparent that possible positions for a building of this size are limited due to the topography of the land in the vicinity of the farmstead.

The proposed building would be close to the existing cubicle building and parlour and is therefore, in my opinion, suitable in operational terms.

The proposed access track is to serve the new cubicle building and is, in my opinion, necessary due to the unsuitability of the existing tracks caused by their gradients.

Mr Graham Thorpe

10 April 2012

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Ed Robertson'.

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