

Miss Claire Booth
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Your ref: 3/2013/0610
Our ref: CPG/EST/ER/3/12/8673
Date: 1 October 2013

Dear Miss Booth

**APPLICATION NUMBER 3/2013/0610
WITHGILL FARM, WITHGILL FOLD, WITHGILL, BB7 3LW
GRID REFERENCE 370823 441376**

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

Introduction

A retrospective planning application has been submitted by Mr Alan Kinder of Avalon Town Planning Ltd on behalf of Mr D Barnes for the construction of a new earth banked slurry store/lagoon. A site visit was made on 5 September whilst the applicant's agent was present. The information provided at this meeting, together with the written submissions forms the basis of this appraisal.

Background Information and Previous Planning Applications.

Lancashire County Council Property Group has been consulted on a number of previous planning applications at Withgill Farm, the latest being application numbers 3/2010/0747 (erection of a cow cubicle building) and 3/2010/0423 (erection of an earth bank slurry lagoon). I understand that much of the information contained within my colleague's latest report remains relevant and therefore I attach a copy to this report within Appendix 1.

The latest application is for retrospective permission for the construction of a further earth banked slurry lagoon. The applicant considered that a further slurry lagoon was required due to the type of bedding material that is being used by the unit and its affect upon the existing slurry lagoons.

Continued ...

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Current Situation

I understand that the current herd size remains at about 2040 milking cows with an additional 80 heifers. I believe that there has been no change in the applicant's buildings since my colleague's previous visit in July 2012.

Proposed Development

The application is for the retrospective permission for an earth banked slurry lagoon as shown on the plans submitted. The applicant informed me that the need for the slurry lagoon, subject to this application, is required as a result of the bedding system that is used upon the unit which uses a lime ash bedding. The applicant claims that whilst the bedding has improved animal welfare and reduces cases of mastitis, the result of using this material is that more of the material is finding its way into the existing slurry lagoons. As a result of the lime ash settling within the lagoons, it is causing the existing facilities to silt up, therefore reducing capacity.

It is proposed that the latest slurry lagoon is required in order to provide additional and sufficient slurry storage to facilitate a system of emptying the lagoons on a biannual basis, whereby the empty lagoon can have the settled silt (lime ash bedding) excavated and removed.

Assessment

The proposed development is within areas shown on the Ribble Valley Local Plan as being land outside main settlement/village boundaries and classified as Open Countryside. 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 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. Development is essential for the purposes of agriculture.

Withgill Farm is a unique unit given the size of the dairy operations undertaken in addition to the management of the herd which involves the milking cows being kept inside all year round. This type of system results in slurry being collected all year round as opposed to mainly during the winter

months which would be the case with the typical dairy herd where cows are turned out for much of the summer months.

As a result of this management system, a significantly higher volume of slurry will be produced from the unit resulting in an increased demand for capacity within the various slurry lagoons.

Within my colleague's previous report, it was determined that the applicant did not at that time have sufficient storage available upon the unit and therefore the earth banked slurry lagoon, subject to application 3/2012/0423 was granted approval. As the scale of operations has remained constant since the previous application 3/2012/0423, I consider that there is still sufficient capacity upon the unit to hold an appropriate level of slurry.

Notwithstanding the above, due to the herd size and the method of collecting the slurry, I recognise the problems that have occurred through the use of a lime ash bedding and appreciate that this has resulted in a reduction in the true capacity of the lagoons with the bedding silting up the facilities. In my opinion, whilst the additional lagoon, subject to this application, would result in a greater capacity than the unit strictly requires, an additional lagoon would provide the spare capacity needed in order to facilitate one of the four lagoons to be fully emptied and the lime ash removed.

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

I was informed by the applicant's agent that the dimensions of the lagoon subject to this application are 90m x 75m x 5m and will hold approximately 30,205 cubic litres. When taking into account the lagoons that have been granted permission and the spare capacity required in order to empty the lagoons on a rotational basis, I consider that the lagoon, subject to this application is greater in size than strictly necessary, I do not however consider the size of the lagoon is excessive and consider that the volume of the proposed lagoon is proportionate to the applicant's herd size and operations.

In terms of the design, a slurry lagoon is one type of facility suitable for the storage of slurry. Other facilities include slurry tower, underground lagoons and concrete lagoons.

Whilst a slurry tower, is a typical facility for the storage of slurry, with the scale of operation undertaken from the unit, this type of facility, in my opinion, would not be appropriate given that the storage capacity of slurry towers are far less than a lagoon.

In considering other alternative storage facilities, in view of the storage capacity required by the applicant, I consider that an earth banked slurry lagoon is the most economically viable method for the storage of slurry upon the unit, with an underground storage chambers or concrete lagoon of the size needed to be disproportionately expensive.

In my opinion, consultation should be held with the Environment Agency on matters such as the siting and design of the lagoon, e.g. in connection to the soil permeability and whether the membrane is required, although I understand that contact with the EA has been made in this respect.

3. **Siting**

Due to the design of an earth banked slurry lagoon, having wide banking and a fairly shallow depth, a large area is required to site such a facility, limiting its ability to be sited upon the main farmstead. This therefore means that the proposed development would have to be sited upon a greenfield site.

The slurry lagoon is situated next to the other earth banked slurry lagoon on the northern boundary of the farmstead. It is my opinion that the slurry lagoon is situated in an appropriate position in regards to the cattle accommodation buildings and from an operational point of view.

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

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Ed Robertson', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

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