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Planning Officer: Adam Birkett

Planning Application Ref: 3/2017/0313

Description of Development: Outline Application for an Agricultural Worker's Dwelling

Site Address: The Poultry Unit, Tosside Road, Slaidburn BB7 4TP

ADAS Assessment of Planning Application Ref: 3/2017/0313

We have reviewed the above planning application that was submitted by Mr Ian Pick of Ian Pick Associates Limited on behalf of the applicant Mr Richard Robinson for an agricultural workers dwelling at The Poultry Unit, Tosside Road, Slaidburn BB7 4TP.

This appraisal is based on written information received for the planning application and provided by Ribble Valley Borough Council. ADAS has not conducted a separate site visit nor have any site photos been reviewed. The applicant's agent in their Agricultural Appraisal & Planning Statement, dated April 2017 explains that the need for the dwelling is to accommodate the full-time unit manager and family, to enable the manager to reside permanently on-site where the poultry are accommodated.

Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Paragraph 17 states that planning should always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.

Paragraph 28 states that planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable development. It further states that Local Plans should promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses.

Paragraph 55 states that to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. For example, where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby. Local planning authorities should avoid new isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances such as; the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.

Paragraph 56 (Section 7) states that Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people.

ADAS Assessment

Background

The applicant's agent states that applicant, Mr Richard Robinson owns a parcel of land at Tosside Road, which was formally part of Standridge Farm, with the area of land in the applicant's ownership extending to 70.4 ha (174 acres).

It is also stated that since the purchase of the farm, the applicant has invested in the development of a free range egg unit, through the erection of two 16,000 bird egg laying units. The buildings comprising accommodation for the birds, egg handling and packing facility and egg storage.

It is understood that the second unit was under construction as of 1st June 2017 and the business, trading as Robinson Foods Ltd of which R Robinson and Mrs L Robinson are listed as directors, has been trading for 8 years and includes an existing free range egg production business at Lower Edge Farm, Tinkler Lane, Slaidburn.

It is also understood that the units are equipped with automated feeding, watering, lighting and ventilation systems and can accommodate 32,000 hens per flock cycle. The applicant's agent has advised that the flock cycle within the units is 60 weeks with a 4 week clean out/preparation period before the units are re-stocked. The birds are purchased at point of lay (16 weeks of age) and are then housed for the 60 week flock cycle.

Labour

It has been stated that the labour force comprises of three full-time workers, including the applicant Mr Richard Robinson who acts as the unit manager, primarily responsible for stockmanship, egg packing and quality.

Residential Accommodation

The applicant's agent has stated that there are no dwellings on the application site and the applicant currently resides at The Cottage, Lower Edge Farm, Tinklers Lane, Slaidburn. It is understood that this dwelling is some 2km by road from the application site and is therefore not within sight or sound of the poultry sheds.

Planning Application

The application (outline) is for an agricultural workers dwelling at The Poultry Unit, Tosside Road, Slaidburn to enable the applicant, Mr Richard Robinson, as unit manager to be able to reside on-site and to oversee and operate the business.

Financial Data

The applicant has provided unaudited financial statements for the four years ending 30th June 2013, 30th June 2014, 30th June 2015 and 30th June 2016 trading as Robinsons Foods Ltd. It is understood that Robinsons Foods Ltd has been trading some 8 years, with an existing free range egg production business at Lower Edge Farm. It is understood that the business at Lower Edge Farm extends to 16,000 birds (free range hens). With the unit at Tosside Road accommodating 32,000 birds.

It is also understood that the applicant has invested £750,000 into the poultry units at Tosside Road which are being financed via a bank loan.

The applicant's agent has advised that the applicant has a secure long term contract with Chippendale Foods to supply free range eggs. The agent has also advised that the expected construction cost of the proposed dwelling would be in the region of £150,000 and is to be funded through lending from the applicant's bank.

The financial statements show that the business has been trading profitably for the four years covered by the trading accounts. However, it is noted that the financial information that has been submitted pre-dates the operation of the business from the application site.

ADAS Opinion

Planning Application

The application (outline) is for an agricultural workers dwelling at The Poultry Unit, Tosside Road, Slaidburn to enable the applicant, Mr Richard Robinson who is the unit manager, to reside on-site and to be available to the farm to attend to stock as necessary, and to oversee the operation of the unit.

Whilst the NPPF replaced the guidance contained within Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (PPS7) on 27th March 2012. The guidance within PPS7 is still considered to provide a useful point of reference against which applications for permanent essential workers dwellings can be considered.

In particular and in accordance with the NPPF (Paragraph 55) in helping to make an objective assessment as whether or not there is an essential need for a rural worker to live at or near their place of work.

Application of PPS7 Annex A Criteria for Permanent agricultural dwellings

(a) There is a clearly established functional need

The functional need is principally determined by the nature and scale of the enterprises operated and the agricultural systems employed.

It is our opinion that the nature and scale of enterprise presents an essential functional need for a suitably skilled worker to be resident on-site, or in very close proximity to the poultry unit, in order to be available to the business at most times and to respond to emergencies as and when they may arise.

This is in order to undertake the essential husbandry and management of the poultry and to provide for the necessary level of supervision and assistance outside of normal working hours. In particular, with an automated poultry unit it is necessary to be able to identify and attend to any systems failures and other

emergencies that require an immediate and effective response, in order to minimise losses and protect bird welfare.

(b) The need relates to a full-time worker

The business has a labour requirement of 3 labour units (full-time) equivalents and therefore the need relates to a full-time requirement.

(c) The unit and the agricultural activity concerned have been established for at least three years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound, and have a clear prospect of remaining so

It is evident that the business trading as Robinson Foods Ltd has been trading for some 8 years and the development of the poultry unit on the land at Tosside Lane has arisen following the purchase of the land by the applicant.

It is evident that the unit at Tosside Lane has only recently been operational, as the first unit received planning approval in December 2016 (3/2016/0916) and the second unit in February 2016 (3/2015/0723).

The applicant's agent has confirmed that the first unit at Tosside Road was completed in 2016 and the second unit in 2017.

In this respect the business at Tosside Lane is a new activity on a new site and is relatively recently established. However, it is recognised that it forms part of a larger and established unit, which is well-established and is in effect an expansion of the existing business on a new site.

It is also evident that the applicant has made a significant investment in buildings and facilities at Tosside Lane and has a supply contract with Chippendale Foods to supply free range eggs.

The company accounts for Robinson Foods Ltd, show that the business is trading profitably and is able to meet its finance costs from the trading profits. It is our opinion that the business is well established, is trading profitably and is likely to remain so.

(d) The functional need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned;

The applicant's agent has stated that there are no dwellings on the application site and the applicant currently resides some 2km from the site. It is however noted that in an email from the case officer it is stated that the applicant's main family residence is only 500m distance from the application site.

If this is the case then it poses the question as to whether or not the essential functional need, as identified, could be fulfilled by this existing dwelling, if it were (a) suitable and (b) available for occupation by the applicant.

It is considered that it is the needs of the business which are material and not the personal preferences of the applicant.

It is our opinion that the essential functional need, as identified, can only realistically and effectively be met by the provision of accommodation that is either on-site, or within reasonably close proximity, to the buildings used to accommodate the poultry. Reasonably close proximity can be defined as 'within sight and sound'.

(e) Other planning requirements, e.g. in relation to access, or impact on the countryside, are satisfied.

In order to satisfy the functional needs of the business, the dwelling would need to be located in reasonably close proximity to the buildings which are used to accommodate the poultry. The location plan that was submitted with the application shows an indicative siting of the proposed dwelling.

It is our opinion that the proposed siting is a suitable location to provide for the necessary supervision of the poultry unit and to provide for security to the property, as it is situated adjacent to the access road to the poultry unit.

It is advised that should the Authority be minded to grant outline planning permission for an agricultural workers dwelling, it should be subject to a Section 106 agreement to tie the dwelling to the existing land holding and to restrict its occupation to an agricultural worker.

Size of Dwelling

It is considered that it is the needs of the business which are material and not the personal preferences of the applicant. In our opinion it is considered reasonable to provide for a family unit of accommodation for an agricultural worker for occupation by the worker and family. This is in order to be able to attract and retain a suitably skilled and experienced worker.

Whilst the size of dwelling permitted by Local planning Authorities varies across the country, it is our experience that the gross external floor area for an agricultural workers dwelling is typically within the range of 110 square meters to 145 square meters.

Geoff Fairfoull BSc (Hons), MBIAC

Senior Consultant

23rd June 2017