



May 2025

Supporting Agricultural Statement

Permanent Retention of Rural Worker Dwelling

Hambridge Farm

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1 Introduction

1.1 Reading Agricultural Consultants (Ltd) RAC is instructed by Mr Phillips (the applicant) to provide a supporting agricultural statement for the permanent retention of the log cabin to house an existing full-time rural worker in association with the existing livestock business at Hambridge Farm.

1.2 In responding to these instructions RAC has:

- Visited the site in March 2025 and discussed with the applicant the continued need for a rural worker's dwelling and the existing livestock enterprise; and had regard to:
 - the previous planning history of the application site;
 - the applicant's financial accounts for years ending 31 March 2022 to 31 March 2025; and
 - sources of published information and correspondence relevant to the agricultural activities undertaken by the applicant.

2 Planning History

2.1 The application site has been subject to the following relevant planning applications:

- 150837 Erection of Livestock shed and construction of roof to existing barn (part-retrospective). Approved 9 July 2015;
- 180091 Full planning application for the siting of temporary rural worker's dwelling. Approved 23 October 2018;
- 192559 Full planning application for the proposed erection of two agricultural buildings consisting of a livestock building and a storage building. Approved 3 December 2019; and
- 213513 Full application for the change of use of the land for the temporary siting of a rural workers dwelling. Approved 22 March 2022.

3 Background

3.1 Hambridge Farm extends to 6.7 hectares (16.16 acres) of owned grassland and the applicant rents additional land. At the time of the 2021 application for the temporary rural worker's

dwelling, 85.5 hectares was rented in the locality and this has now increased with the addition of summer grazing at Farley Farms (24.2 hectares) and grazing at Eversley (12.1 hectares).

3.2 Since the 2021 application for the further temporary siting of the mobile home the applicant has continued to develop the mixed livestock enterprise in line with that proposed in the business plan.

3.3 As at the time of this planning application the livestock enterprise comprises:

- Pigs – total 30:
 - 4 breeding sows
 - 26 piglets born in March
- Cattle – total 121:
 - 48 x Angus/ 2 x Longhorn Cross (17 months)
 - 50 x Angus/Hereford/Limousin/Simmental
 - 5 x breeding cows
 - 6 x offspring (12 months old)
 - 4 x Highland breeding heifers
 - 2 x South Devon breeding cows with calves
 - 1 x South Devon breeding cow in calf
 - Bull
- Poultry – total 61:
 - 55 laying hens;
 - 6 laying ducks.

3.4 Due to the wet winter, the pig numbers on site have reduced, however the applicant intends to build this number back up to previous levels which were 5 breeding sows and 2 breeding boars.

3.5 Since living on site, in the renewed temporary permission in 2022, the applicant has only lost one calf which was stillborn. By living on site, the applicant was able to save the cow.

3.6 Photographs taken by RAC at the March 2025 site visit are set out below which show the mobile home, livestock buildings, storage buildings and pigs. Further photographs are provided by the applicant showing the latest batch of piglets and the Highland heifers.

RAC Photograph 1



RAC Photograph 2



RAC Photograph 3



RAC Photograph 4



RAC Photograph 5



RAC Photograph 6



Applicant Photograph 1



Applicant Photograph 2



4 National Planning Policy

4.1 Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in December 2024.

4.2 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out the core land-use planning principles that should be adopted and these expressly include:

- A presumption in favour of sustainable development;
- Positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;
- Provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses;
- Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; and,
- Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission.

4.3 Paragraph 39 requires that decision makers:

- should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way;
- work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic;
- social and environmental conditions of the area;
- seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

4.4 Section 5 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Delivering a sufficient supply of homes' and at paragraph 84 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;*

4.5 Section 6 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Building a strong, competitive economy' and at paragraph 85 it notes:

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

4.6 At paragraph 88 '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;..."*

4.7 Section 13 is concerned with 'Protecting Green Belt land' and at paragraph 152 notes:

"Inappropriate development is by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances".

4.8 And at paragraph 154:

"A local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt. Exceptions to this are:

- a) Buildings for agriculture and forestry;; ..."*

- 4.9 New Planning Practice Guidance titled 'Housing Needs of Different Groups' (July 2019) provides some guidance relevant to paragraph 80 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"

5 Local Planning Policy

- 5.1 The Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (adopted January 2010) Policy CP11 – Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside) states:

"In order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment, proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted except where:

1. *It contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough, or in the case of other countryside based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside; and*

2. *It does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from the original buildings; and ..."*

5.2 The supporting text in paragraph 4.58 states:

"Proposals for agricultural workers dwellings will need to demonstrate that they comply with this policy and PPS7..."

5.3 PPS7 was revoked in 2012 following the publication of National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

6 Essential Need

6.1 An assessment of essential need requires:

- an evaluation of risk;
- the risk, frequency and type of out-of-hours emergency situations arising;
- the scale of potential losses should any emergency situations arise;
- the potential for the identification of problems; and
- the ability of a worker to rectify any problems on a timely basis.

6.2 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 that anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure that the animal's needs and its welfare are met. The overall responsibility, or Duty of Care, for animal welfare for all the livestock involved in the current farming activity lies with the applicant.

6.3 The Council has previously accepted that there is an essential need for a rural worker to be on site at Hambridge Farm in approving the temporary rural workers dwelling (Ref: 180091) and its renewal for a further three year period (Ref:213513).

6.4 The applicant has continued to develop the agricultural business in line with the 2018 business plan and the enterprise has recovered from the restrictions imposed due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which was detailed in the renewal application.

6.5 The applicant purchases two batches of 50 calves twice in a financial year (April to March) and rears a total of two batches each year – a total of 100 store cattle are reared and sold each year either direct to other farms for finishing or at livestock auction markets.

- 6.6 As such, the applicant has met the livestock numbers as proposed within the 2018 business plan and continues to meet the essential need and welfare requirements of the cattle and pigs by living on site.

7 Financial Viability

- 7.1 The NPPF has an overarching requirement that all development is sustainable and consistent with development plan policies. This is re-iterated in respect of the positive approach to rural development. Of particular relevance in relation to developing businesses and their housing needs is the economic dimension of sustainability. This has been a longstanding feature of planning guidance on the assessment of rural workers' dwelling proposals, although no longer specifically identified in national policy. Nevertheless, economic sustainability, or the prospect of it, remains central to the assessment process.
- 7.2 In this context RAC considers any assessment of economic sustainability as the ability of the business/enterprise to utilize its resources allowing it to function properly; to have the ability to stay in business; to have sufficient funds available to fund its day-to-day trading (cash flow); and to be profitable in order to reinvest within the business or show a reasonable return on capital invested. No business can be economically viable if, over the medium to long term, its expenditure exceeds income. These three aspects are essential to sound business planning.
- 7.3 It is generally accepted that the standard test for a rural worker is that the business should be able to generate sufficient profit to provide a return to land, labour and capital and to be able to finance the purchase/build cost of the permanent dwelling.
- 7.4 The Confidential Business Plan submitted with the 2018 application projected that the business would return profits in the second and third year of the temporary permission after deduction of labour costs.
- 7.5 As detailed in the 2021 planning application supporting statement, the business was impacted by Covid-19 and in particular by the increased feed costs (relating to closure of the brewery industry and availability of brewers grains) and lower cattle numbers.
- 7.6 Since the 2022 renewal, it has been well documented that the UK agricultural industry, including the applicant's business have and continue to be impacted by world events including the Ukraine crisis, cost of living, energy costs and the livestock disease Bluetongue and Avian Influenza in poultry.

- 7.7 Additional information on the applicant's farming business is provided in a confidential letter from the applicant's accountant.
- 7.8 The Financial Statements for the farm, trading as Hambridge Farm, are submitted on a confidential basis with Trading and Profit and Loss Accounts and Balance Sheets submitted for the years ending 31 March 2022-2025.
- 7.9 The year ending 31 March 2025 shows a net profit with sales increasing from the year ending 31 March 2024 by 75% and as a result the overall net profit of the farming business increasing by over £20,000 between the two financial years.
- 7.10 In addition, the balance sheet demonstrates that the business can support any fluctuations in the market with the business having a positive net worth (current assets minus current liabilities).
- 7.11 The applicant's business has demonstrated itself to be viable and sustainable in the long term and can support the costs of a minimum wage worker through the net profit and drawings taken by the applicant.

8 Alternative Dwellings

- 8.1 The applicant has been living on site since late 2018 after the Council permitted the temporary siting of the mobile home under 180091. There is a continuing essential need on the holding which has been met by the applicant living on site.

9 Conclusion

- 9.1 Mr Phillips seeks the permanent retention of the log cabin as approved under 180091 and 213513 in association with the mixed agricultural livestock business at Hambridge Farm.
- 9.2 Reading Agricultural Consultants has assessed the need for a dwelling on the unit and determined there is a continuing essential need:
- There is an essential need for a full-time worker to be readily available to manage the livestock enterprise and deal promptly with any emergencies at the application site that could otherwise cause serious loss of livestock or impact on the welfare of livestock.
- 9.3 On sustainability it has determined:
- The Accounts submitted demonstrate that the agricultural enterprise is able to return a profit sufficient to cover any notional charges for rent, labour and return on capital invested;

- The business is currently viable and sustainable now and in the long term.

9.4 On the availability of any other suitable accommodation:

- The accepted essential need has been met by the applicant living on site since late 2018 in the mobile home permitted under planning application 180091 and renewed under 213513.

9.5 The applicant's proposal for the permanent retention of the agricultural worker's dwelling to house a rural worker is compliant with national and local plan policy.