

ROSEBARYS FARM, BATH ROAD, TWYFORD, BERKSHIRE RG10 9HX

FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR ESSENTIAL MOBILE HOME FOR AGRICULTURAL WORKERS

1.00 INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

- 1.01 Mr and Mrs Russell run Rosebary's Farm, which is principally concerned with free range egg production and ducks, geese, turkeys and chickens. The business has grown since its inception on site in 2009 and currently involves 2,000 laying hens, 200 turkeys, 100 roasting chickens, 18 laying geese and 72 laying ducks. There are also 13 breeding sows on the holding.
- 1.02 Planning permission for stationing a mobile home on the site was initially granted in March 2019 for a temporary period of 2 years, then renewed in August 2021 for a further 2 years under reference 211934. The permissions were implemented and a mobile home has now been on site for 6 years in the approved position.
- 1.03 NPPG advice is that renewals of temporary permissions should generally be avoided. In this case temporary permissions have been granted for 2 x 2 years to allow time for the farming business to become established, while at the same time recognising that there is an essential functional need for 24/7 onsite presence of agricultural workers (Mr and Mrs Russell).
- 1.04 An attached viability assessment has been carried out and demonstrates that the business is established and has potential to continue to grow and that continued onsite living accommodation is essential.
- 1.05 This application therefore seeks full Planning Permission to retain the mobile home on site for the same purpose (safety, security, care and management of livestock) for use by the site operators/farmers.

2.00 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.01 Rosebary's Farm lies immediately south of the A4 Bath Road on the eastern edge of Twyford, next to a residential part of the settlement. The farm is within a defined landscape compartment with mature hedges and trees along the south, north and west boundaries.
- 2.02 The previously approved mobile home (MH) sits close to houses in Firgrove and is not isolated from the settlement. Barns used to house young birds lie on the southern boundary, with fenced compounds/ outdoor runs close by. An approved access track from Bath Road links the MH and parking area to the access.

- 2.03 The site lies outside a settlement in a rural area. It is in use for agricultural purposes and supplies local customers and clubs with food produced on site.

3.00 PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

- 3.01 The site lies in a rural area in the Green Belt. NPPF paragraph 154 provides guidance on exceptions to the general presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Buildings for agriculture and forestry are listed as exceptions at 154(a). The application involves 'tied' accommodation, to be occupied and used only in association with agricultural activities on the site. However, as it is a mobile Home (caravan) it cannot be considered a building but is instead a use of land for stationing a residential caravan.
- 3.02 Changes of use of land can be considered to be not inappropriate under category 154(h) (v), provided they (i) preserve the openness of the Green Belt and (ii) do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 3.03 In circumstances where some harm is identified, a development such as that proposed in this instance can still be justified under the category of Very Special Circumstances (VSC).
- 3.04 In terms of the location outside a settlement boundary, the NPPG explains at P.84:

84. 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;

The LPA has previously confirmed in officer reports on the two temporary permissions that the site is not isolated and also that there is an essential need for on site accommodation for agricultural workers. Part of this assessment has established that alternative offsite accommodation would be almost certainly be unaffordable and would not meet the need for 24/7 onsite supervision and animal care.

- 3.05 Policy CP11 of the current Local Plan confirms this approach, supporting development which 'contributes to diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the borough'. As described below, an onsite dwelling is an essential element for the success of this farm.
- 3.06 Two previous temporary permissions have been granted, both with very short timescales of 2 years. Each time an application has to be made it involves this small business in additional cost for professional advice. It is now evident that the

business (started in 2009 in very difficult circumstances due to repeated trespass and theft) is viable and sustainable, and indeed is very popular with local customers. A permanent permission for an agricultural worker's dwelling is now required and is justified bearing in mind the business resilience and viability shown by Mr and Mrs Russell in the face of the not inconsiderable national challenges of Covid-19 and bird flu.

- 3.07 The permission sought relates to a use of land and not approval of a specific design of caravan or mobile home, which can be replaced over time at the discretion of the occupier/owner. The parameters defining length, height and width are set out in the Caravans Site Act 1968 as amended and allow a mobile structure of up to 65ft (20m) length, 23.3ft (6.8m) width and internal height of 10ft (3.05m).

4.00 DISCUSSION OF POLICY IN RELATION TO THIS SITE

- 4.01 There are three main planning issues to be considered:

- (i) Functional need/essential dwelling for on-site agricultural worker in a rural location
- (ii) Whether appropriate in the Green Belt
- (iii) Any adverse impacts on local character and landscape
- (iv) VSC and planning balance

These are addressed individually below.

(i) Functional need/essential dwelling for on-site agricultural worker in a rural location

- 4.02 As explained in the previous application and referenced in the attached supporting viability report (Simmons and Sons – May 2025), prior to the applicants living 24/7 on site, there were frequent occasions of trespass, damage to property, theft and animal welfare cruelty by trespassers. Professional advice accepted by the LPAs own experts was that an onsite personnel presence at all times was necessary.
- 4.03 The applicants confirm with satisfaction that there have been no significant harmful incidents since they have been living on site. They are out and about on the site every day from early morning to late evening tending to livestock and also during the night when necessary, because of bad weather or for seasonal breeding events. The ability to react quickly has contributed enormously to successful site operation, the health and welfare of animals and site security.
- 4.04 The NPPG provides a framework for assessment as below. This considers the justification for isolated homes. While this site lies outside the defined settlement

it is not isolated but has similar access to transport and other facilities as the adjoining housing in Firgrove.

Considerations that it may be relevant to take into account when applying paragraph 84 could 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 an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 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.*

Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 67-010-20190722

- 4.05 There is no existing accommodation on site other than the MH and the 4th and 5th bullet points are not relevant. The first three issues are addressed in the submitted Viability report and the authors reach a firm conclusion that the evidence of need is sound. Unfortunately the various fowl kept on site are extremely portable, so the risk of theft is high.

(ii) Whether appropriate in the Green Belt

- 4.06 The NPPF at Paragraph 154(a) recognises that the provision of buildings for agricultural purposes is an exception to the general presumption against development. However, stationing a mobile home on site as is proposed is not a building but a use of land. This can be not inappropriate under P.154 (h)(v), provided the development (i) preserves openness and (ii) does not conflict with the five purposes of including land within the Green Belt.
- 4.07 The proposal is for use of land for siting a Mobile Home for residential use limited to persons engaged in agriculture – a use which is appropriate in rural areas.

- 4.08 Considering the two criteria – (i) The MH is visually very modest due to its location and scale, with direct views from public vantage points obscured by well established trees and hedges. It has already been established on site for 6 years and is well integrated into the landscape of the site, which includes agricultural buildings. It's retention would have minimal impact on openness. It's absence however would prevent the site being used for the established agricultural business. Bearing in mind the prolonged and substantial trespass and theft which occurred before the anyone was living on site (ease of access from A4 and surrounding footpaths) it is likely that any productive alternative agricultural activity would similarly be severely restricted.
- 4.09 In terms of the 5 functions of the Green Belt [criterion (ii)], the continued siting of a MH for occupation by an agricultural worker on the same agricultural unit would not cause harm. The proposed permanent use of the land for stationing the MH is therefore in accordance with the NPPF.

(iii) Any adverse impacts on local character and landscape

- 4.10 The impacts can be readily assessed by observation on site as no change is proposed to the existing arrangement. The mobile home sits close to the western site boundary and is wholly invisible in views from the adjoining A4 London Road, due to well established boundary planting and topography. It forms part of a scatter of structures supporting the agricultural use of the land. The land itself has an informal planted character, with birds and pigs dispersed amongst meadow growth.



Geese grazing in meadow- roosting enclosures to right

- 4.11 The inclusion of a modest home for those maintaining and farming the stock on site is an entirely normal element of a small farmed landscape and will not detract from existing character.



Main shed – raising turkey poults



Landscape – mown areas for fowl grazing between wild growth areas



Outdoor grazing with Herres fencing security – roosting sheds beyond



The Mobile Home occupier by Mr and Mrs Russell, who farm the land

(iii) VSC and planning balance

- 4.12 As set out above, a change of use for a small defined part of the site from agriculture to being used to accommodate an agricultural dwelling falls within the criteria of not inappropriate development in the NPPF. The proposed development is not a building but a use of land, and the mobile home in terms of scale falls within the parameters for a caravan. It is neatly assembled and appears as a small

single storey structure with links to an onsite septic tank, but remains capable of being disconnected from services, lifted and removed from the site. Plans and elevations are provided only to demonstrate compliance with relevant definitions.

- 4.13 In terms of the Planning Balance, very significant weight should be given to the parallel requirements of Paragraph 84 of the NPPG (See P. 4.04 above), which supports development of even isolated homes where 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. The attached report from Simmonds and Sons demonstrates that is the case here. The site is not isolated so the justification of need is even more telling.
- 4.14 Weight should also be given to the fact that the owners have been living on site for around 6 years without any known adverse impacts on neighbours and have now a popular and well established local business, contributing to the local economy.
- 4.15 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF (**Supporting a prosperous rural economy**) additionally provides support for the development of agricultural activities, which in this case concerns the permanent need for onsite living for supervision and care of animals and site security:

88. 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 rural businesses;
- 4.16 Taken with the absence of harm to local character and the farmed landscape, these factors constitute Very Special Circumstances to satisfy any concerns that the scheme conflicts with NPPF Green Belt policy.

5.00 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.01 Mr and Mrs Russell have worked extremely hard over many years to establish a successful agricultural business on site, and that success relies on their (or their successors) presence on site 24/7 throughout the year.
- 5.02 Their home is of modest scale and inoffensive in terms of its impact on the Green Belt and local character. NPPG advice is that once temporary approvals have enabled a business to become established and viable that a permanent permission is reasonable. This application seeks permanent planning permission to station a mobile home on site, for use by any current or future persons engaged in the business (i.e. not to a named occupier).

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