OFFICER REPORT

Case No: 25/00490/FUL Full Planning Application

Proposal: Retention of existing mobile home.

Location: Chestnut Farm Church End Little Catworth

Applicant: Mrs Jemma Daubney

Grid Ref: 510461 272491

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND APPLICATION

This application relates to a site in the countryside between Catworth and Spaldwick, which is accessed via Catworth and Little Catworth.

The proposal is to erect a temporary agricultural workers dwelling (mobile home) for a new agricultural enterprise and to change the use of a small area of land to amenity space and parking and turning area and provide a new access over the grass verge. The home would 2 bedroomed and the floor area would measure 35' x 12' and would be occupied by the applicants and their dependents.

The site is part of a small field which is part enclosed by hedges and fences. The site fronts onto a green lane/unclassified road which leads to Catworth approximately 1.6miles away. The applicants own approximately 84 acres (approximately 34ha) sown to grass of which 12 acres/ 4.9ha to the west is an SSSI (Little Catworth Meadow) which can only be grazed with cattle or sheep between October and April and must then be left to seed after which it can be mown for hay.
The holding is mostly surrounded by hedges. A public path 43/3a runs through the grazing land to the north, there is a byway on the south-east side of holding 219/6 and byway 43/12. The site and holding are classified as Grade 3 agricultural land.

Chestnut Farm extends to 33 hectares (84 acres), all of which is down to grass. The holding was bought by the applicants father in the late 1980's as a greenfield site on which he grazed approximately 300 sheep. The site was left to the applicant in 1997, who at the time lived away and the land was left vacant for several years.

A cattle shed under Part 6 of the General Permitted Development Order in 2018 (18/00945/AGDET) was approved which sought to develop an agricultural enterprise at the site. The building has since been erected.

Planning permission was granted under 18/02748/FUL for the erection of a temporary dwelling as an agricultural workers dwelling and change of use of the land to amenity space and parking in on 7 June 2019.

Planning permission was granted for 2 additional buildings, a livestock store and hay and equipment store. The livestock building has subsequently been constructed, however the hay building is yet to the erected.

The submitted planning statement outlines the following:

- Further investment in the site has been undertaken with the fencing of the land, laying of concrete and installation of electricity and mains water in 2020.

- The applicants began to develop the agricultural enterprises as outlined in the business plan accompanying the mobile home application, however testing showed the grazing land to be of poor quality, with the soil low in phosphates and suffering from a ragwort problem. The numbers of animals able to graze it were therefore substantially reduced. The applicants have since worked hard to bring the land back to a quality suitable for grazing.
- In addition grazing was further reduced as 12.5 acres of the holding are in a SSSI and only able to be grazed 6 months of the year, with 6 acres being a wooded shrub area.
- Due to the above and the impact of COVID, which saw the substantial increase in cost of building materials, the original business plan submitted was unable to be met and development of the agricultural business has been put back.
- To try and improve viability of the livestock enterprises the applicants took over running of the local public house with the intention of producing the meat in house, however they do not have enough stock to make this work. The public house is being sold and will not be available to them following completion.
- Despite best efforts the business plan submitted with the 2018 application was proven to be unachievable at that particular time, and this has been revisited in order to make sure the land can support the livestock numbers now proposed.

The application is also supported by a Business Case which accompanies the Planning Statement.

This application therefore seeks a further temporary permission to give the business the opportunity to develop and become viable.

NATIONAL GUIDANCE

The National Planning Policy Framework (20 July 2024) (NPPF 2024) sets out the three objectives - economic, social and environmental - of the planning system to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. The NPPF 2021 at paragraph 10 provides as follows: 'So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 11).'

The NPPF 2024 sets out the Government's planning policies for (amongst other things):

* delivering a sufficient supply of homes;
* achieving well-designed places;
* conserving and enhancing the natural environment;
* conserving and enhancing the historic environment.

Planning Practice Guidance and the National Design Guide 2021 are also relevant and material considerations.

For full details visit the government website: https://www.gov.uk

PLANNING POLICIES

Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019)

LP1: Amount of Development
LP2: Strategy for Development
LP4: Contributing to Infrastructure Delivery
LP10: The Countryside
LP11: Design Context
LP12: Design Implementation
LP14: Amenity
LP15: Surface Water
LP16: Sustainable Travel

LP17: Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement
LP20: Homes for Rural Workers
LP30: Biodiversity and Geodiversity
LP31: Trees, Woodland, Hedges and Hedgerows

Planning Practice Guidance is also relevant and a material consideration.

Supplementary Planning Document (SPD):
Huntingdonshire Design Guide SPD 2017.
Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment SPD 2007.
Cambridgeshire Landscape Guidelines.

Local policies are viewable at https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

PLANNING HISTORY

Planning permission was granted under 18/02748/FUL for the erection of a temporary dwelling as an agricultural workers dwelling and change of use of the land to amenity space and parking in on 7 June 2019.

CONSULTATIONS

Catworth Parish Council: Approve

CCC Highways: No objection.

Environmental Health: No objection.

REPRESENTATIONS

None received.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES

Principle of development

The site is in the open countryside, where development is generally restricted to protect the countryside from non-essential development and to limit the need for motor journeys. Paragraph 84 of the NPPF advises that LPA's should avoid isolated new 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.

Planning Practice Guidance was provided in July 2019 at Paragraph 010 which deals with the need for rural workers dwellings in the countryside. This states considerations that it may be relevant to take into account when applying Paragraph 84 of the NPPF could include:-
* Evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their placeof 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 planning permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.

In this case the applicants seek a temporary permission for a mobile home to allow their new rural business to develop with a view to a later application for a future permanent dwelling if the business succeeds.

The NPPF does not refer to temporary dwellings but in the absence of detailed guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (2019) or in a Supplementary Planning Document, a consideration of the proposal against policy LP20 Homes for Rural Workers.

The question is if there is an essential need for a rural worker, or workers, to live at their place of work in the countryside. The conclusion about if there is an essential need is based on:
* Clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the business,
* A functional test based on the need for more than a full-time worker
* Evidence that the enterprise is soundly planned financially and
* If no other dwelling could be used, thus justifying the mobile home.

Officers have reviewed the previous permission 18/02748/FUL. It is noted that the LPA sought independent advice on the business case that supported that permission, which ultimately led to the approval of that application on a temporary basis of 3 years

This current application is also supported by a Business Case and a Planning Statement. This has been scrutinised in detail by Officers.

The proposed 3 year plan for the agricultural enterprise states:

Sheep
- Increase ewes: **5 → 20**
- Lambs per year: **8 → 31**
- Lambs finished for meat; ewe replacements retained.

Cattle
- Suckler cows: **7 → 15**
- Calves per year: **6 → 14**
- Heifers retained/sold; bull calves finished or sold for breeding.

Pigs
- Breeding sows: **8 → 10**
- Pigs reared: **158 → 197**
- Onsite butchery reinstated.

Poultry
- Free-range hens: **15 → 35** (egg production 321→748 dozen)
- Christmas turkeys: **15 → 35**

Other
- 4 ha for **grazing liveries** (max 5 liveries, summer only)
- Honeybees + orchard planned; produce to be sold on site or at markets.

<u>Labour</u>
- Currently equivalent of **one full-time worker** between the couple.
- Intention: both become full-time as enterprises expand.

<u>Essential Need for On-Site Accommodation</u>
- Livestock care requires **24/7 supervision**, especially:
    - Lambing, calving, farrowing (pigs)

  - Monitoring vulnerable stock (calves, lambs, piglets)
  - Night-time checks
  - Predator risk, illness, emergencies
- Animal welfare legislation and the **Five Freedoms** require diligent, frequent inspections.
- Security concerns: increasing rural crime, theft, vandalism, activist actions.

Viability Assessment

- Significant capital investment already made.
- Revised business plan predicts **£29,250 profit by Year 3**.
- After housing cost allowance, **£21,600 margin** available to support an agricultural worker.
- Shows confidence in future viability

Given that the site has benefited from a temporary permission for an agricultural workers dwelling, and noting that the granting of that permission was supported by independent advice supporting the business case, and being mindful of the impact of COVID upon such rural enterprises, on consideration of the supporting information for this current application Officers on balance are satisfied that the independent advice is not required in this instance.

It is concluded that the applicants have demonstrated that the mobile home is essential for a 3 years trial as:
* there is clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the business,
* the proposal satisfies the functional test based on the need for more than a full-time worker,
* there is evidence that the enterprise is soundly planned financially and
* there is justification for the mobile unit on the site for the efficient management of the new horticulture/ agriculture enterprise and to assess if the business will become viable.

The proposal for temporary accommodation satisfies the part of Policy LP20 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (Adopted 15th May 2019) in relation to temporary ‘Homes for Rural Workers’ and the accommodation can be permitted to allow time for the enterprise to prove its viability.

Whilst the applicants have sought a 3 year permission, Officers feel that given the history of the site, a 5 year permission in this case is appropriate to ensure the business has the best opportunity to develop and become viable. A functional need for a mobile home and the potential long term viability has been demonstrated. However, there will be a need to re-assess the business at the end of the temporary period to see if the business has developed in the way envisaged. If the business has not developed as anticipated, the requirement for any home for the horticultural/livestock worker(s), will have to be scrutinised thoroughly, especially given that this is a second temporary consent and has also been granted for a longer period of time.

The permission will be subject to a planning condition ensuring that occupation is limited to a qualifying person or the continuing residence of the surviving partner of a qualifying person and any resident dependants. A qualifying person is someone who is solely, mainly or was last working in a rural enterprise.

The proposal satisfies paragraph 84 of the NPF 2019 and will help support an agricultural business in the countryside.

LP10 of Huntingdonshire’s Local Plan to 2036 is also relevant and states: Development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of this plan.
All development in the countryside must:
a. seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:
i) avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural; land (Grade 1 to 3a)
b. respect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and
c. not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others.

The site is Grade 3 agricultural land but it is not known if it is the higher quality 3a. Given the nature of the proposal, the previous permission, the use of the mobile home in association with the rural enterprise, proposal is considered to be in accordance with policy LP10 of Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036.

In conclusion, the dwelling is required for the efficient management of the new agriculture enterprise and the business has potential to be viable. The proposal is therefore acceptable in principle for up to 5 years as adequate justification has been provided. The proposal is also removable, and could be removed at the end of 5 years if the business is found to be unviable. If the business proves to be viable, any future application for more permanent accommodation would be assessed on its own merits.

The proposal is therefore in accordance with polices LP10 and LP20 of the Local Plan as well as the relevant NPPF sections.

*Highway matters

A number of pre-commencement highway conditions were imposed under the previous permission. There is no record of these being formally discharged with the LPA. However, the Local Authority has visited the site and confirmed the access works have been carried out and are acceptable.The proposal is considered to be acceptable in terms of access, traffic and highway safety.

Conclusion:

Taking national and local planning policies into account, and having regard for all relevant material considerations, it is recommended that temporary planning permission be granted.

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CONTACT OFFICER:
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