

acorus®

Proposed Change of Use Of Land for Siting of Mobile Home

PREPARED FOR

Mr and Mrs R Daubney
Chestnut Farm
Little Catworth
Huntingdon
PE28 0PD

February 2025

PREPARED BY:
LOUISE GREGORY
Rural Planning

ADDRESS
Acorus Rural Property Services Ltd
Old Market Office
10 Risbygate Street
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 3AA

DIRECT LINE:
01284 753271

EMAIL:
Louise.gregory@acorus.co.uk

1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been prepared at the request of Mr Richard and Mrs Jemma Daubney of Chestnut Farm, Little Catworth, Huntingdon, PE28 0PD to outline the facts considered relevant for the change of use of land for the siting of a mobile home at Chestnut Farm, Little Catworth, Huntingdon, PE28 0PD .

Information within this report should enable the Local Authority to assess the application in the light of current Government Guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance.

2. SITE VISIT AND INSPECTION

A site visit and inspection was undertaken on 17 December 2024, when Mr and Mrs Daubney were interviewed regarding the rural business at Chestnut Farm.

Following the above Mr and Mrs Daubney developed a business plan, to show how they envisaged the agricultural enterprises to develop over the next 3-4 years.

Information contained within this report is as supplied at that visit and with reference to the business plan, together with personal observations where appropriate.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 General

Chestnut Farm extends to 33 hectares (84 acres), all of which is down to grass.

The holding was bought by Richard's father in the late 1980's as a greenfield site on which he grazed approximately 300 sheep. The site was left to Richard in 1997, who at the time lived away and the land was left vacant for several years.

The applicants applied under Part 6 of the General Permitted Development Order in 2018 for a cattle shed in order to develop an agricultural enterprise at the site. The building was approved and is in situ.

Planning permission was applied 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 2018, which was approved on 7 June 2019 (ref: 18/02748/FUL).

DISCLAIMER
This report is for the sole use of the named client. While it may be shown to other professionals acting for them, the contents are not to be disclosed to nor made use of by any third party without our express prior written consent. Without such consent we can accept no responsibility to any third party.

Planning permission was further sought and 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.

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.

3.2 Stocking

With the grazing land reinstated and improved, the livestock enterprises will be developed as follows:-

Sheep

The applicants purchased 50 ewes in September 2018, but due to the lack of grazing were not continued. It is proposed to reintroduce and increase the number of breeding ewes from 5 in Year 1 to 20 in Year 3. It is anticipated that the number of lambs produced per year will rise from 8 in Year 1, to 31 in Year 3.

Ewe lambs will be retained as replacements, or finished and sold for meat, with all male lambs finished and sold for meat.

Cattle

Breeding cattle were also introduced to the holding in 2018 with 2 of the 13 lost to

calving in a period of 2 years and a further 2 to old age and liver failure.

It is proposed to increase the number of suckler cows from 7 in Year 1 to 15 in Year 3, which will produce on average 6 calves in Year 1 rising to 14 calves in Year 3. Heifers will be retained as replacements or reared and finished for beef. Bull calves will be reared and finished for beef in Years 1 and 2 with a percentage sold as breeding stock in Year 3.

Pigs

Pigs were introduced to the holding in following the installation of mains water in 2021. Weaners were purchased for finishing with a couple of gilts kept for breeding purposes. A further 2 further sows and a boar were purchased in 2022.

Richard subsequently learnt to butcher and there is a former butchers facility onsite that benefitted from a 5 star sign off with Environmental Health. This facility is to be reinstated.

It is proposed to increase the breeding herd number from 8 sows in Year 1 to 10 sows in Year 3, with the number of pigs reared rising from 158 in Year 1 to 197 in Year 3. Of these, approximately a third will be sold as weaners, with two thirds finished on the holding. The finished pigs will butchered locally and to be sold at market and at the farm gate.

Poultry

Free range hens will be introduced rising from 15 in Year 1 to 35 in Year 3. It is anticipated that 321 dozen eggs will be produced in Year 1, increasing to 748 dozen in Year 3. These will all be sold at the farm gate/market.

Free range turkeys will be reared for the Christmas market increasing from 15 in Year 1 to 35 in Year 3, all of which will be sold at the farm gate/market.

Grazing Livery

4 hectares will be set aside for grazing liveries with a maximum of 5 grazing liveries for 20 weeks of the year during the summer months.

Other produce

Honeybees will be introduced with honey sold at the gate. In addition to this orchard trees will be planted with fruit being sold at the gate or at market.

3.3 Labour

Mr and Mrs Daubney are currently employed by the business with the equivalent of one full time job between them. As the enterprises expands the aim is to eventually be both full time.

3.4 Dwellings

There is an existing temporary dwelling at the holding, however due to increase in building costs and poor grazing land the business plan submitted with the original application was unable to be implemented.

With the introduction of mains water, electricity and improved grazing land it is proposed to renew this permission for a further 3 years to give the business time to develop and become viable.

4. REASONS FOR THE PROPOSED DWELLING

Mr and Mrs Daubney explained that the enterprises on the farm require 24 hour on site supervision for the following reasons:-

There are many occasions when assistance and supervision is needed on site outside of normal working hours. This includes both the checking of the breeding animal's general welfare and the monitoring of pregnant animals and their progeny, in particular young calves, lambs and piglets.

The agricultural business cannot be developed without the onsite accommodation. With the ever increasing number of animals constant onsite supervision is required. This will give the applicants the confidence to continue investing in the site to assist in increasing viability.

If there is not 24 hour onsite presence the livestock enterprises would be adversely affected especially if complications occurred outside normal working hours. This would seriously affect the future development of the agricultural business.

Security – the rise in rural crime has severe security implications for rural businesses, the most important being arson, theft of stock and equipment as well as vandalism of gates and fences. These security problems significantly add to the need for 24 hour supervision for welfare reasons.

5. BASIS OF ASSESSMENT

National planning policy is contained within the NPPF as follows:-

"The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives):

a) ***an economic objective*** *– to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;*

b) ***a social objective*** *– to support, strong vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well being; and*

c) ***an environmental objective*** *– to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.*

Paragraph 10 states that *"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).*

With regard to housing, **paragraph 84** states:

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."

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 79 (a) of the NPPF 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 planning permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.

6. ACORUS COMMENTS

6.1 General

This application is for the change of use of land for the siting of a temporary mobile home to support the development of the existing agricultural enterprise run from Chestnut Farm. Due to many reasons outside of their control, including COVID and the substantial increased cost of building, as well as the poor grazing land which has now been greatly improved, the applicants were unable to develop the agricultural business as originally proposed in 2018.

6.2 Evidence of Necessity

The essential need (i.e. what is it about the business that requires someone to be on site at most times of the day and night) is generally based on the grounds of animal welfare and the proper management of the livestock enterprises on the holding.

Any livestock enterprise has supervisory demands arising from:

* the general welfare of the animals involved;

* the management of breeding stock; and

* the management of housed or confined stock.

In assessing the functional need for on-site supervision, both within and outside normal working hours, the following issues are considered to be material considerations:

- In this type of business animals are in need of care by others and that the 'key worker' has the skills and expertise to deal with the problem and prevent it becoming serious.

- In order to manage the venture successfully the care of the breeding stock and the welfare of the animals is paramount. All pregnant stock require close supervision as there are a number of problems that can arise at any time and that need immediate attention, including sickness and other emergency situations.

- Responsibility for the welfare of the livestock is firmly on the 'keeper', i.e. 'the person responsible for or in charge of animals whether on a permanent or temporary basis.'

- It is an offence under the Agriculture (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 to cause unnecessary pain or unnecessary distress to any livestock. The basic requirements for the welfare of livestock are a husbandry system appropriate to the health and, so far as practicable, the behavioural needs of the animals and a high standard of stockmanship. Stockmanship is a key factor; without competent, diligent stockmanship, the welfare of the animals cannot be catered for.

The aim of the current Welfare Code is to encourage all those who care for animals to follow the highest standards of husbandry. Without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be properly protected.

The Code is considered within a framework that was developed by the Farm Animal Welfare Council and known as **'The Five Freedoms'** which are:

Freedom from thirst and hunger – by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
Freedom from discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting place;
Freedom from pain, injury or disease – by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
Freedom to express normal behaviour – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind;
Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

The stock-keeper has the most significant influence on the welfare of animals. Stock-keepers should be knowledgeable and competent in a wide range of animal health and welfare skills, which should include:

- handling skills;
- preventing and treating lameness;
- preventing and treating internal and external parasites;
- giving medicines by injection;
- providing appropriate care to sick and injured animals;
- care of the mother and her young; and
- management of animals to minimise aggression.

The Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations requires that:

All animals shall be inspected by the owner or keeper at least once a day to check that they are in a state of wellbeing. The health and welfare of animals depends on them being regularly inspected. Adequate lighting must be available to enable thorough inspection of the stock.

When there are young lambs/calves/chicks the applicants inspect the animals at least 3 or 4 times throughout the day. When imminent and during the period of birth the pregnant animals are effectively under constant supervision, and this includes many nightly inspections. Inspections 'out of hours' are particularly important as this is when predators are most active. This is also the time when the animals are most restful and abnormal behaviour is easier to pick up on.

All stock-keepers should be familiar with the normal behaviour of the animals in their charge. As an example, fly strike can be caught early by noticing abnormal behaviour. Following the House of Lords ruling *Mirhavedy v Henley*, under the Animals Act 1971 strict liability is placed on the keeper of animals that cause harm.

Badly managed and unhealthy animals will not thrive, and it is essential that the stock-keeper should watch for signs of distress, disease or aggression towards an animal by others in the group. To do this, it is important that stock-keepers have enough time to inspect the stock at different times of the day, check equipment and take action to deal with any problem.

As with all livestock holdings, in addition to complying with the Welfare Codes, there are other instances when emergencies can occur which demand an immediate response and so all stock-keepers should be aware of the importance of regular inspections and be familiar with the animal normal behaviour patterns. It is also important that the overall security of the business and premises are maintained so that if intruders are on the site, their presence is detected and appropriate action taken.

Sheep

Lambing ewes need to be checked regularly both day and night for welfare reasons. Emergency work (usually as a result of ewes lambing) is regularly identified as a result of these checks and sheep may need supervision and attention most of all at night to ensure their welfare. The ewes are lambed within a small enclosure to help with their management.

With small flocks and the loss of key animals can have a significant impact.

Sheep are prolific, and multiple births are common with dystocia and miss-mothering being common problems, therefore a high level of skill is required at lambing. There is good evidence to show that lamb survival is correlated with the supply of adequate supervision at lambing time. The following information details the basic requirements for a worker to be on site at all times:

Lambs can take a long time to be born, and regularly need assistance (an arm needs to be inserted and the lamb pulled). If assistance is not given both the lamb and ewe could be lost.

Ewes which have struggled with lambing and received aid are at risk from metritis and septicaemia and must be treated immediately.

Multiple births can lead to first or second born lambs being neglected by the ewe while she gives birth to the next. These lambs must be highlighted to the ewe (or bottle fed with colostrum as a last resort).

Colostrum is essential for the wellbeing of the new born lamb, it contains immunoglobulin to increase resistance to disease and energy in the form of carbohydrate and fats to maintain temperature after birth. Lambs that do not receive it within 2 hours of birth are likely to die within 72 hours. This is a particular problem with multiple births and colostrum should be milked off and bottle fed to ensure each lamb receives it.

Lambs should be kept warm and ideally be licked and massaged by the ewe. However where they are neglected and get cold they need to be warmed and massaged by hand, or they will die.

Beef Enterprise

Any variations from normal behaviour must be watched and awareness of any change ensures prompt treatment preventing expensive veterinary treatment and deaths. The following should be looked for at all times of day, (whilst calves exhibit diurnal behaviour, it should not be assumed that their needs are any less, outside the period considered to be normal working time).

- loss of appetite
- nervousness
- listlessness
- scouring
- alienation
- panting

Sickness of calves has a direct impact on production and profitability. It is essential that if calves are unwell they receive treatment as soon as possible to prevent death and to prevent disease transfer to others.

Livestock units require a high degree of conscientiousness in stockmanship, and this is especially so where newly batched young calves are concerned because they are vulnerable in terms of their physical make-up, and their susceptibility to infection.

Cows and calves need to be inspected at night when early signs of illness may be observed. The night check provides a valuable quiet time for the stockman to observe the animals closely. This necessitates monitoring during hours of darkness as well as during hours of daylight and during different climatic conditions.

Pig Enterprise

Pigs need 24 hour care especially farrowing sows and their progeny. Supervisory techniques used during and after farrowing can have an effect on production levels, as piglets can easily die from overlay or extremes of temperature.

The problems facing newly weaned pigs are a naïve immune system, changes in digestive physiology brought about by the process of weaning, changes in behavioural physiology and a poorly developed thermoregulatory ability. There can be an infection passed between pigs and, at the same time, they are subjected to stress reactions which arise from normal hierarchical behaviour.

Young pigs after weaning are relatively intolerant of minor variations in the climatic environment and when the various factors mentioned act together, clinical problems arise. This age group of pig therefore represents the greatest challenge to stockmanship and thus ample time is required for monitoring and appropriate action taken.

Free Range Hens/Christmas Turkeys

In the case of free range poultry, like any livestock, there is a need for close supervision. There are a number of specific requirements synonymous to free range hens, including:-

With free-range birds there is the daily requirement to allow the hens out of their poultry

sheds in the morning to range in their pens. Likewise, there is the requirement to ensure that all of the hens have gone to roost in their sheds at dusk, and to shut up the sheds to keep the hens safe overnight. These activities very often happen out of 'normal' working hours and the times vary throughout the year depending on the seasonal changes in day light hours.

Low flying aircraft and balloons can spook the birds and they must be checked immediately to prevent smothering. Loose dogs entering the site and fox attacks panic the birds again leading to smothering. As these instances cannot be predicted and can occur at any time of day or night 24/7 on site availability is required.

The farm will be producing eggs for consumption which need to be fresh and clean.

Whilst the unit is in production (effectively all year) the requirements for management are constant.

General Issues Requiring 24 Hour Security

Security on the site is an ever present and increasing problem. Without there being someone on site 24 hours a day the security of the stock and equipment from theft and vandalism is much greater.

Over recent years there have been a number of security issues on rural sites including the theft of youngstock by vegan activists. Therefore the security on the holding is relevant to the business as break in and vandalism can have a direct effect on animal welfare and business profitability.

The strongest form of deterrent is on site accommodation and day and night supervision.

In addition to the routine care required at most times supervision is also necessary for the following:

* Unforeseen emergencies that could cause serious or total loss of livestock e.g., fire.
* Identification of illnesses which could affect one or more of the animals.
* Security of the unit, which specifically relates to public access into the unit.

The proposed mobile home is to be sited as per the existing, within sight and sound of the livestock.

Based on all the above and given the need to maintain the necessary cover 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, it is considered there is an essential need for a full time worker to be resident on site.

6.3 Confidence the Business will Remain Viable

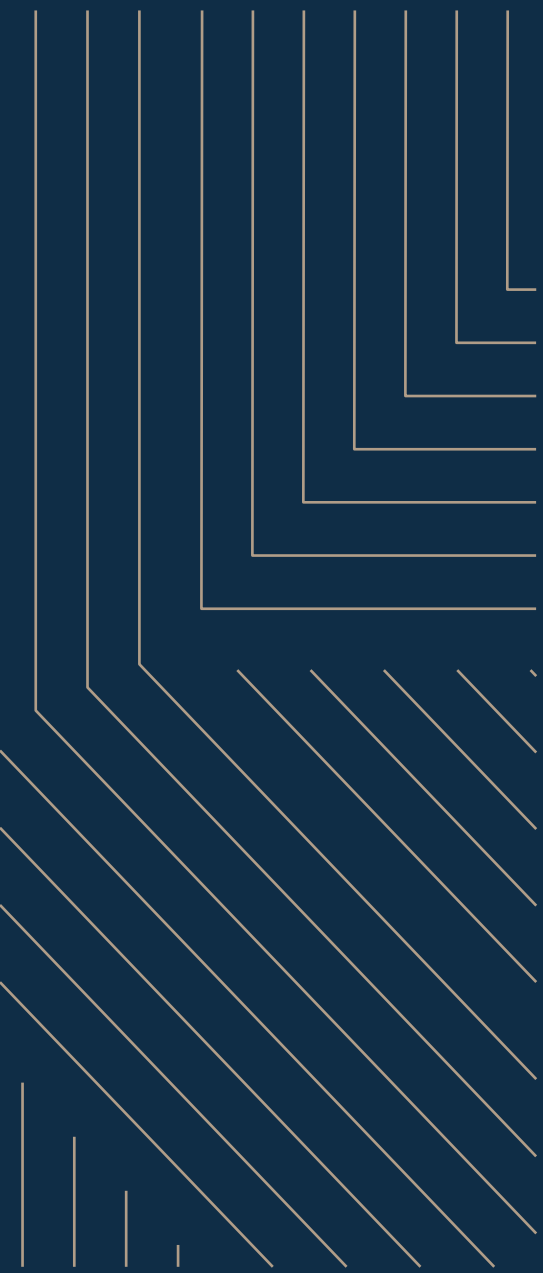
The business has invested heavily in the land with the erection of 2 agricultural buildings, fencing, installation of mains water and electricity and significant improvement of the grazing land. COVID meant that prices of building materials rose substantially and this impacted the cost of development.

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 business plan demonstrates that the business should make a profit of £29,250 by the end of year 3. Allowing for the cost of a modest agricultural dwelling of £150,000 @ 4% over 40 years of £7,650 this would give a margin of £21,600 to cover the cost of an agricultural worker.

6.4 Existing Accommodation

The applicants currently live in the mobile home on site which was approved in 2019 for a period of 3 years. It is proposed to replace that permission with a further temporary permission to give the business the opportunity to develop and become viable.



acorus®

www.acorus.co.uk