

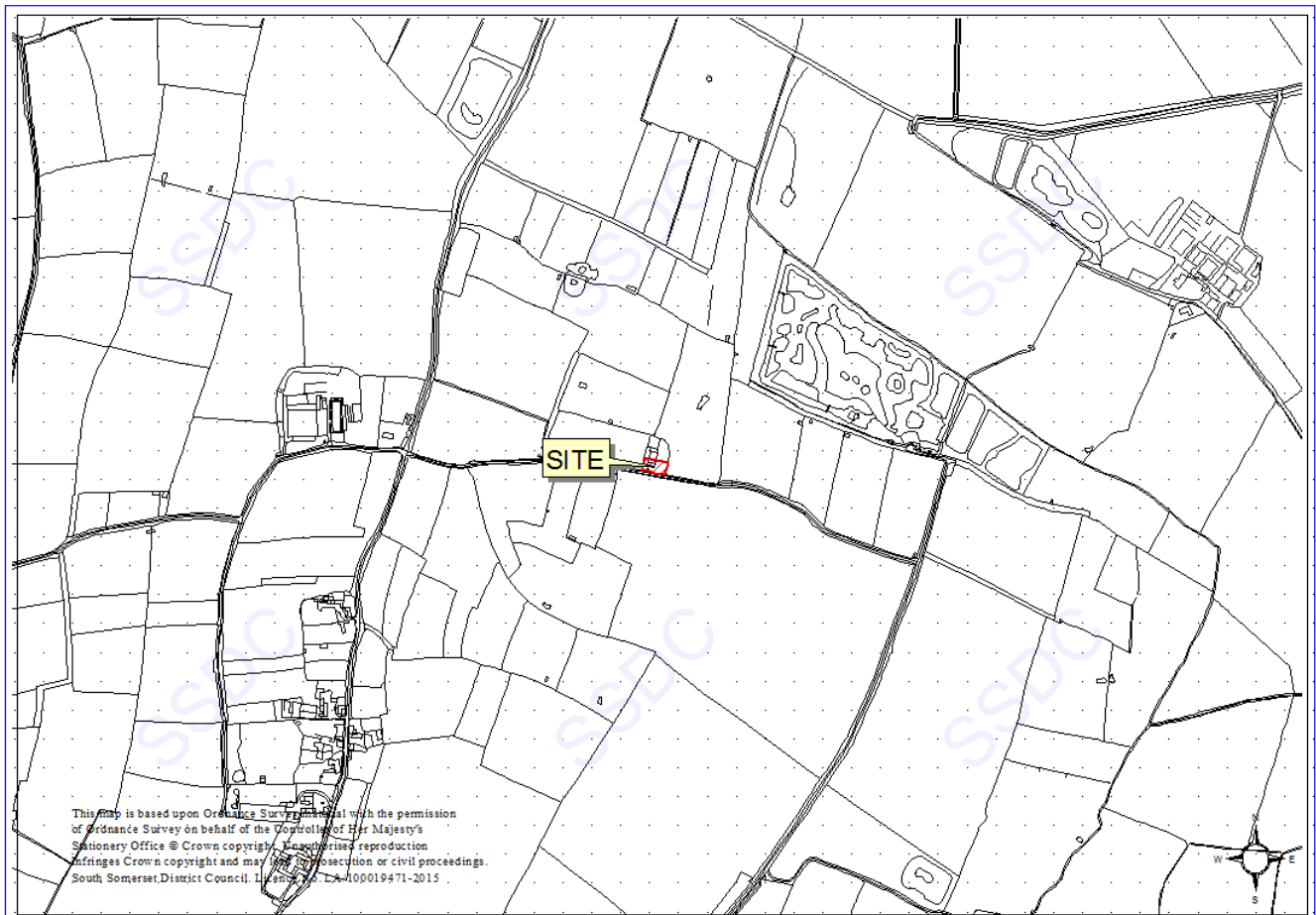
Officer Report On Planning Application: 16/03105/FUL

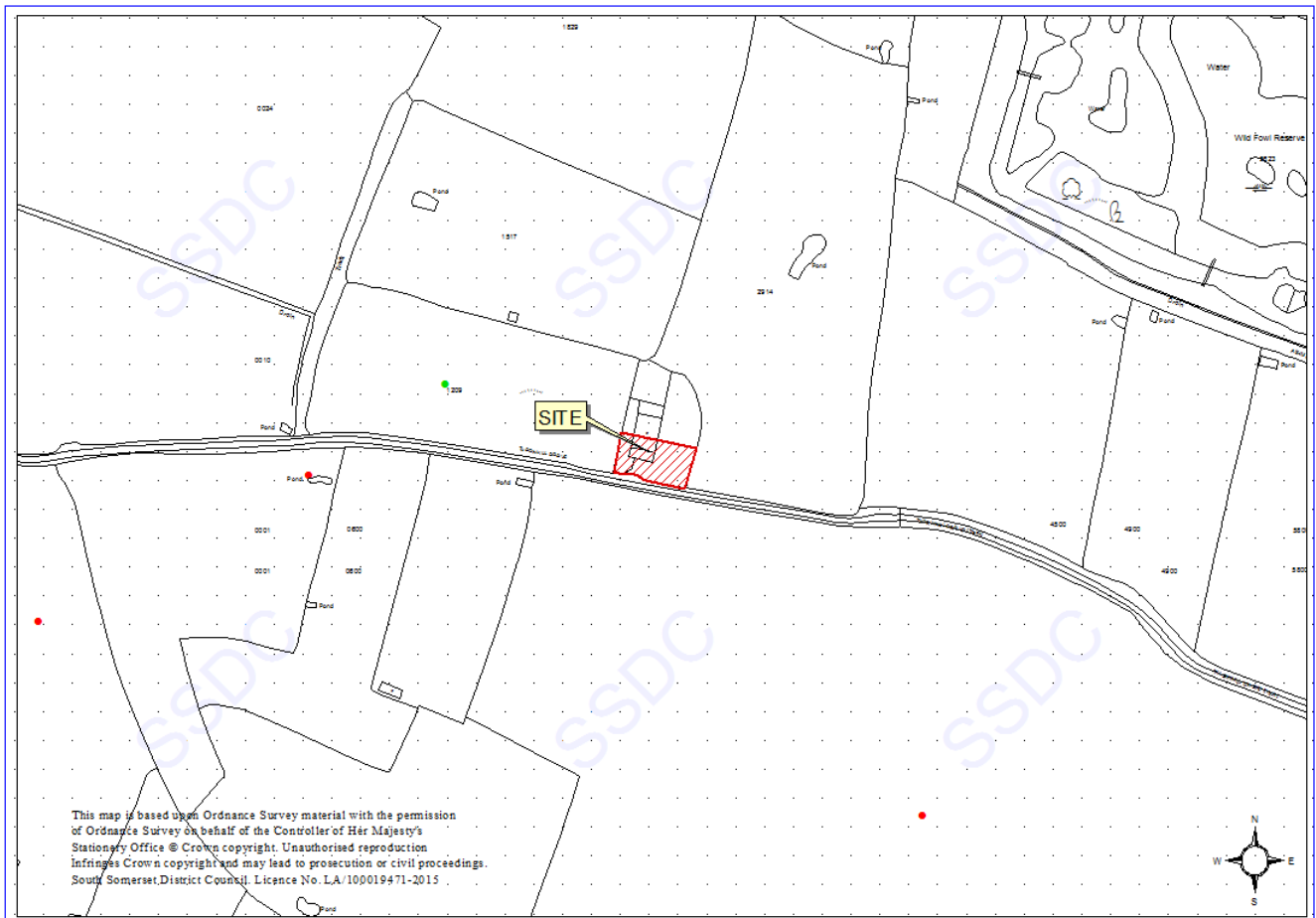
Proposal :	Use of land as a site for 3 caravans for agricultural workers accommodation.
Site Address:	Land Os 1209, Thornhill Drove, Ash.
Parish:	Ash
MARTOCK Ward (SSDC Member)	Cllr Graham Middleton Cllr Neil Bloomfield
Recommending Case Officer:	Adrian Noon Tel: 01935 462370 Email: adrian.noon@southsomerset.gov.uk
Target date :	13th September 2016
Applicant :	Witcombe Farm Partners
Agent: (no agent if blank)	Paul Dance, Foxgloves, 11 North Street, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset TA14 6QR
Application Type :	Minor Dwellings 1-9 site less than 1ha

REASON FOR REFERRAL TO COMMITTEE

This application is referred to committee at the ward members request to enable the issues raised locally to be debated.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL





Witcombe Farm is a very large modern dairy/beef enterprise (c.2,100 cattle in total). The historic farm house and traditional buildings lie to the south in the hamlet of Witcombe. A subsequent farm complex together with an agricultural worker's bungalow (Westover Bungalow) was developed to the north of Witcombe at New Witcombe Farm, and more recently, a very large modern dairy unit has been erected to the east of that.

This application seeks permission for the retention of 3 mobile homes, adjacent to an existing agricultural storage building, to accommodate farm workers, originally 5 units were proposed however this was reduced following concerns about the number of units. The two units removed from this application have been added to the associated application (16/03108/FUL, originally for 1 mobile home, now for 3, thereby maintaining the overall request for 6 mobile homes for agricultural workers.

It is intended to provide temporary 'bunkhouse' style accommodation pending the provision of more permanent accommodation at the dairy unit. In total there are currently 14 staff living on site.

It is advised that 12 staff are needed to staff the 4 shifts that the farm operates, with a further member of staff being on site 24 hours a day to attend to the cow's health and wellbeing. Additionally the farms residential vet lives on site at Westover Bungalow.

The mobile homes are sited to the west of dairy unit at the entrance to the site from Thornhill Drove and are within the consultation distance for the gas pipeline. The application is supported by an agricultural appraisal.

HISTORY

None relevant to this site.

There is an associated application (16/03108/FUL for a further agricultural worked mobile home to the west at New Witcombe Farm

15/02867/S73A – permission granted for the modern dairy unit to the east.

POLICY

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 repeats the duty imposed under S.54A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and requires that decision must be made in accordance with relevant Development Plan Documents unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The policies of most relevance to the proposal are:

SD1 – Sustainable development
HG9 – Agricultural workers
EQ2 – General Development
TA5 – Transport Impact of New Development

National Planning Policy Framework

Part 3 – Supporting a prosperous rural economy
Part 6 – Delivering a wide choice of high quality homes
Part 7 – Requiring good design
Part 11 – Conserving and enhancing the natural environment

CONSULTATIONS

Ash Parish Council – initially objected on the grounds of visual impact and proximity to the gas pipe line. These objections are maintained to the reduced scheme.

Highways Officer – no objection.

Landscape Architect – initially concerned about creating a new residential site in open farm land and suggested the units be moved to the dairy site or to a site with existing residential development.

Environmental Protection Unit – no objection subject to occupation by farm workers only.

Rights of Way Officer – no objection

National Grid – no objection

Health & Safety Executive – originally advised against granting permission. This objection was maintained when the 5 caravans were rearranged on site to move the 2 units in the northern part of the site, corresponding to the 'inner consultation zone' out of that zone. The objection was subsequently withdrawn when they were removed from the application.

REPRESENTATIONS

2 objections received to initial proposal for 5 units:-

- Unsuitable rural location next to working farm building;
- Poor access
- Remote location will not encourage people to integrate;
- If staff are working 24 hours a day there is no need to live on site;
- Flood and pollution risk;
- Retrospective nature of application;
- HSE objection.

No further comments received in relation to amended plans.

CONSIDERATIONS

Principle

It is considered reasonable to accept that this very large scale dairy enterprise will generate new issues that may test the boundaries of the normal application of the Council's policy HG9 regarding new agricultural worker's dwellings in the countryside. This sets out a number tests (functional and financial) that have evolved in response to more traditional family scale farming where the bulk of the work is carried out by the farmer living in the farm house, with, occasionally on larger farms, an additional farm worker dwelling – as evidenced by the development of Witcombe Farm/New Witcombe Farm and Westover Bungalow.

The creation of the new 1000 cow dairy unit with associated heifer and beef rearing, has completely changed the labour requirements of the enterprise. The supporting agricultural appraisal puts the labour requirement at 29 standard man days (SMDs), however, with efficiencies of scale, the farm operates at 23 SMDs. This functional requirement is not disputed.

It is noted that this is a long established dairy enterprise that has recently and heavily invested in a very large modern dairy unit. It is not considered that there are any reasonable grounds to seek to challenge the financial footing of this business.

Having accepted the labour requirement and agreed that this is a financially sound business it is necessary to consider the justification to live on site and the availability of alternative accommodation locally. On the latter point it is accepted that there is no suitable local accommodation - the farm house is occupied by the applicant and the existing bungalow by the resident farm vet and his family. On the former point it is considered reasonable that a dairy unit of this size generate the need for staff to live on site, within 'sight and sound' of the animals.

The question is considered to be how many staff need to be on site?

The Council's normal approach, where the functional and financial tests are met, is to impose an occupancy restriction limiting occupation to agricultural workers (or retired agricultural workers) and their resident dependents. It is perfectly possible for such a dwelling to subsequently be occupied, on a house share basis, by a number of individuals, who, if employed in agriculture at the farm, would not be in breach of the occupancy condition.

The applicant's seek a similar approach here. For a number of reasons to do with the nature of the work, the availability of workers and the terms and conditions upon which suitable candidates can be attracted, the applicant would like to be able to offer accommodation as part of the employment offer. This would not be in the form of a dwelling, but rather as bunkhouse accommodation, similar to a shared house or house in multiple occupation as might be found in town.

Ultimately it is the intention to provide this in the office/ancillary space in the main dairy building, however, in the interim a temporary (3 year) permission is sought to provide basic accommodation in the proposed mobile homes. No accommodation is sought for any resident dependents or retired workers. The accommodation would be solely for current, single, employees.

It is considered that this proposal, and the associated application 16/03108/FUL for an additional 3 mobile homes to the west, is a reasonable proposition, commensurate with the scale and nature of activities at Witcombe dairy and an approach that can be supported in principle by policy HG9. Furthermore conditions couple reasonably be imposed to ensure that the Council retains an appropriate degree of control over the accommodation in terms of timescale and occupancy.

Siting

Whilst the landscape architect's concerns are acknowledged, it is to be noted that the proposed mobile homes are sited adjacent to an existing buildings and that any visual impact is limited by this and further mitigated by the hedging along the drove. It is not considered that the site in contrary to policies HG9 or EQ2.

Whilst it might next to a working farm building, this is not unusual for agricultural workers accommodation and as the EPU officer notes in acceptable in this context. There are not therefore considered to be any objections on residential amenity grounds under policy EQ2 subject to the suggested occupancy condition.

Whilst the HSE originally objected to the siting the removal of 2 of the units from the application, thereby reducing the number of units and avoiding siting them in the inner consultation zone, has resulted in the objection being withdrawn. It would not be justifiable to pursue and amenity objection under policy EQ2 in these circumstances.

The concern about resident's not integrating is noted, however this is nearly always the case with agricultural worker's dwellings with inevitably are in the rural area, often at some distance from established settlements.

Access

The mobile homes share their access with the main dairy building. It is not considered that resident's movements added to the existing traffic levels would in any way be detrimental to highways safety, as such the proposal complies with policy TA5. No concerns are raised by the highway authority.

Other Issues

The site as amended is not in a higher flood zone and there is no reason to expect the septic tank that served the mobile homes to give rise to problems in normal operation.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions.

Justification

Notwithstanding local concerns the proposed mobiles, which would meet a genuine agricultural need, are appropriately sited without detriment to visual or residential amenity or highways safety. As such the proposal complies with policies EQ2, HG9 and TA5 of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028.

Conditions

01. The siting of 3 mobile homes hereby permitted shall be for a temporary period expiring on 31 August 2020. The occupation of the mobile homes shall cease and they shall be removed from site on or before this date. Thereafter the use of the site shall revert to agriculture in accordance with details to be submitted to and agreed in writing by the local planning authority.

Reason: In view of the case submitted with the application and to ensure that the appropriate degree of control is retained over the site.

02. The occupation of the 3 mobile homes shall be limited to those employed full time in agriculture at New Witcombe Farm.

Reason: In view the justification provided for this residential use in the open countryside and to prevent unsustainable development in accordance with policies SD1 and HG9 of the South Somerset Local Plan 2006-2028.

03. The mobile homes shall be sited in accordance with drawings 16/103/03 B and 16/103/04 B received 21 November 2016.

Reason: To clarify the scheme hereby approved as it has been amended.

Informative

01. You are reminded that approval is only granted for the retention of 3 mobile homes. In view of the comments of the Health and Safety Executive you are urged in the strongest terms possible to remove the other caravans from site immediately to avoid enforcement action.
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