

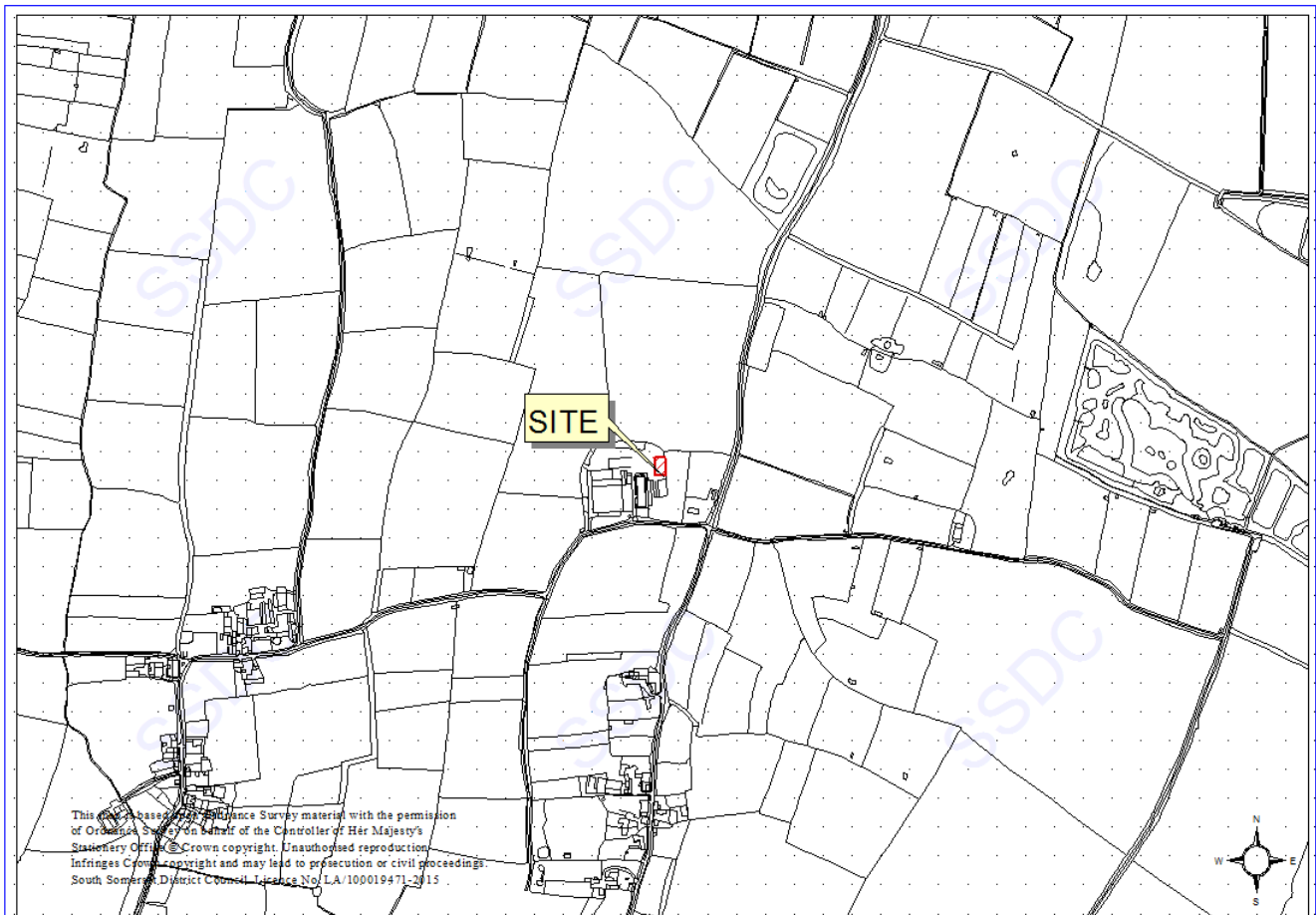
## Officer Report On Planning Application: 16/03108/FUL

<b>Proposal :</b>	Use of land as a site for 3 caravans for agricultural workers accommodation.
<b>Site Address:</b>	New Witcombe Farm, Westover Lane, Ash.
<b>Parish:</b>	Ash
<b>MARTOCK Ward (SSDC Member)</b>	Cllr Graham Middleton Cllr Neil Bloomfield
<b>Recommending Case Officer:</b>	Tel: 01935 462370 Email: adrian.noon@southsomerset.gov.uk
<b>Target date :</b>	13th September 2016
<b>Applicant :</b>	Witcombe Farm Partners
<b>Agent: (no agent if blank)</b>	Paul Dance, Foxgloves, 11 North Street, Stoke Sub Hamdon, Somerset TA14 6QR
<b>Application Type :</b>	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





## **HISTORY**

There is an extensive history relating to the site's development for agriculture in connection with the original dairy/cattle rearing activities

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

There is an associated application (16/03105/FUL) for a further 3 agricultural workers mobile homes to the east near the new dairy unit

## **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** – object on the grounds of visual impact.

**Highways Officer** – no objection.

**Landscape Architect** – no objection.

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

**National Grid** – no objection

**Health & Safety Executive** – no objection.

## **REPRESENTATIONS**

None

## 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 of 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 16/03105/FUL for an additional 3 mobile homes to the east, 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 could reasonably be imposed to ensure that the Council retains an appropriate degree of control over the accommodation in terms of timescale and occupancy.

## **Siting**

It is considered that the siting next to existing buildings mitigates any adverse visual impact. It is not considered that the siting is 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 is 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.

## **Access**

The mobile homes share their access with the existing farm buildings. 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.

## **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 of 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 the amended drawings received 10 March 2017.

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

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