

14<sup>th</sup> November 2018

Our Ref: 8004

Miss Helen Webster  
Planning Officer, Development Management  
North York Moors National Park Authority  
The Old Vicarage  
Bondgate  
Helmsley, York  
YO62 5BP

Dear Miss Webster,

**RE- Erection of Agricultural Storage Building with Associated Hard Standing and Track (Part Retrospective) at Longstones Farm, Sneatonthorpe, Whitby, YO22 5JG**

I confirm receipt of your letter via email reference NYM/2018/0690/FL dated the 12<sup>th</sup> November 2018. This application is under consideration and due for determination on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

Your correspondence sets out that the proposed development does not fully accord with Development Policy 12 (Agriculture). This is principally in respect of paragraph 3 with the site not related physically and functionally to existing buildings associated with the business. You have requested further information relating to agricultural necessity for this particular location and consideration of a landscaping scheme which reduces the visual impact of the proposal on the wider landscape.

Set out below are a series of headings setting out the exceptional circumstances related to the application.

**Diversification**

Over multiple decades the Shardlow family have had to diversify the farm business to make it financially viable. This is in line with national trends seeing smaller farms coming under significant economic pressure with diversification being seen in many instances as the only route to enable businesses to survive. The diversification commenced at Beacon Farm Sneaton through the manufacturing of Ice Cream, pick your own fruit which eventually lead

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Office- Mortar Pit Farm, Sneatonthorpe, Whitby, YO22 5JG

to the café and campsite. There are seasonal variations associated with the café including a Santas Grotto and the selling of Christmas trees during the December period.

The diversification was carried out at considerable financial risk with a huge amount of expenditure on equipment and enhancing the existing buildings through conversion. Thankfully this has created a robust business due to the hard work of the family but has also created employment opportunities within the Park and a much loved tourism destination. The immediate family of Mike and Zoe Shardlow all assist in running the business onsite which is a valued asset in the small rural village of Sneaton.

The visitors to the campsite in particular have had a considerable impact assisting to support the Local Pub which was at one point at risk of closing as it was not financially viable.

The diversification has also included the provision of a small village shop following the closure of the shop on the principle roadway at the end of Sneaton which was a great loss. This is a key facility for many of the residents, particularly the elderly who rely heavily upon it.

The North York Moors National Park through past Local Plans have actively encouraged diversification and at the present time this is through Core Policy H- Rural Economy. This actively encourages new employment development, supporting the agricultural sector and opportunities for diversification plus sustainable tourism based on recreational activities. It is this support of the North York Moors National Park that has enabled the diversification alongside some key development policies such as number 8- Conversion of Traditional Unlisted Rural Buildings. Conversions carried out under this policy at both the Beacon Farm Site and the Longstones Farm site adjacent where the proposed shed is positioned. The development of Longstones Farm into holiday cottages, one of which is specifically designed for people with limited mobility, are a real asset to the National Park with high occupancy rates and many by repeat visitors. The development of the Longstones Farm site had an impact not only in terms of saving traditional buildings that were in disrepair but also removal of some very limited quality agricultural buildings to the north which were much more visible in the wider landscape than the current proposal.

Overall with regards to diversification both the Longstones Farm and Beacon Farm site, have had a very positive impact on the immediate area providing employment, supporting the tourism industry and enabling the provision of a village shop, seen as an essential part of the community. In addition the Shardlow Family assist in organising many of community events, some of which are hosted at Beacon Farm. The most recent being the lighting of the Beacon to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the First World War. Other events have included fundraising for many charities where the whole community gets involved.

### **Agricultural Need**

The majority of agricultural land within the applicants farming business is at Sneatonthorpe. Removal of past agricultural buildings from Longstones Farm as part of the diversification has seen an enhancement in the landscape but unfortunately a number of years on has led to a shortage of suitable storage.

The business side of arable farming has changed considerably meaning that the arable side of the business needs to change accordingly. The proposed storage shed will be utilised for grain, fertilizer and at times some farming machinery. The internal storage of farming implements and fertilizer for example is something that is encouraged by the North York Moors National Park as opposed to these being set in the landscape.

The requirement for grain storage is now more important than ever before in the agricultural sector. Fluctuating grain prices mean that to obtain the best price to make the farming business viable, grain often needs to be stored for prolonged periods of time and then sold when the market conditions are perceived to be at their best. Without such storage there is a real risk that grain is simply sold immediately after harvest and in many cases this leads to reduced prices and the farming business suffering. This is considered alongside the change in regulations for storing grain and the ever increasing standards such as the Red Tractor Assurance Scheme and others ensuring grain is stored in the best environment possible to maintain its quality. The increasing pressure for larger yields (tons of grain harvested per acre) together with meeting the Government requirements for multiple crops, has increased the amount of storage required throughout the arable sector both in terms of the grain harvested and the storage of fertiliser. A key aspect of arable farming, in addition to land management, is product handling. The Red Tractor Assurance Scheme sets out very specific and onerous rules in this respect to ensure the product is of the highest standard from harvest to consumption. This includes traceability, assurance, vermin control, environmental protection, conservation, sustainability, integrated crop management and site/soil management. The current application will aid compliance with the items mentioned, but critically ensure the post harvest treatment and storage rules are complied with in full. This revolves around not only the physical store but also correct maintenance of driers and suitable monitoring of the harvested product in storage.

The applicant and his family have recently purchased additional land at Hawsker equating to approximately 18 acres which will be utilised for arable purposes. This is a considerable investment that doesn't come without risk but is seen as a positive step for the future of the farming business.

The land at the Beacon Farm site is utilised for camping, for growing a small amount of wheat and for grazing animals. The animals, these being goats and highland cattle are an attraction. The wheat is grown specifically to be part of a long running vintage tractor day in

autumn. The tractor day sees traditional farm implements being utilised such as threshers, ploughs, forestry saw bench, etc. This is a well-attended event with dozens of local farmers involved and again a key part of not only the local community but helping to preserve the farming history of the North York Moors National Park.

### **Location**

The current proposed shed location, as per drawing MS101-01 Revision B, came about following negotiations during a prior notification application made to the North York Moors National Park. The initial location was further to the north and set within a hollow.

The current proposed location is as per your email dated the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2018 under reference NYM/2018/0403/AGRP. This is feedback that was received after the prior notification had been under consideration for several weeks. The feedback came in the last week of determination as the 28 day period had been extended on validation but with no written justification or explanation given.

The email of the 7<sup>th</sup> August stipulates that “the relocation of the building would give it a better context and setting (utilising existing woodland screening), reducing its impact in the National Park landscape.” It is therefore difficult at this stage to see why this is now being viewed much more negatively. Some additional landscaping measures will be considered by the applicant in the form of some simple tree planting but the provision of earth bunds or other seem to be excessive and out of keeping.

### **Other Items**

Your recent letter raises queries in respect of drying grain and any other activities. The applicant utilises a small mobile grain drying plant when absolutely necessary during the harvest period. This is usually for around a period of a week but is heavily dependent upon the weather conditions experienced and the moisture content of the grain when harvested. Its use is reliant upon grain prices and any penalties that are put on grain that is sold at a higher moisture level. Giving precise details is therefore impossible. It is emphasised that the applicant, like most farmers, tries to harvest the grain at the lowest moisture content possible to avoid the necessity for drying grain as this is simply an additional overhead putting even more pressure on trying to make the business viable. Grain is only dried when absolutely necessary. Such activity is simply part and parcel of a rural position. The shed is located a reasonable distance away from any nearby residents and is closer to the holiday let accommodation at Longstones Farm. There is nothing at the present time to stop Mr Shardlow drying the grain on the current farm which is closer to many residents. The guests of the cottages are alerted to the fact that they are on a working farm and to expect some agricultural activities.

The existing storage sheds at Beacon Farm have seen diversification for storage of equipment relating to the business, ice cream factory, freezer capacity and for housing animals that are utilised as attractions. The success of Beacon farm as a tourism attraction means that undertaking many agricultural activities on the site would present considerable risk from a health and safety perspective. Having large tractors, trailers and loaders together with grain being picked up by articulated HGV's is simply not feasible. The harvest period clashes with the peak of visitors to Beacon Farm. This is not only in relation to vehicle movements on the site but also HGV movements within the village of Sneaton itself. The entrance simply isn't capable of accommodating the articulated grain wagons that are used throughout the industry to collect grain from farms as it is the most cost effective method of transportation. None of the leading grain purchasers use smaller vehicles.

In the past, approximately 20 years ago, the applicant sought to improve the access at Beacon Farm but the proposals were viewed negatively.

Developing Beacon Farm with additional storage sheds for would therefore not be viable or safe.

The NPPF (National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018)), unequivocally supports the rural economy. Set out below are the key sections of the NPPF that apply to this application:-

### **Supporting a prosperous rural economy**

*83. 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;*
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.*

*84. Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and*

*sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.*

The developments at both Beacon Farm and Longstones Farm over the past few decades fully accord with the aims of the NPPF for a prosperous rural economy. Below are the main items:-

- Village shop retained, despite this not being economically viable by itself.
- Site at Beacon Farm used as a meeting place for many community events.
- Diversification of both farms has increased trade levels of the local pub.
- Tourism destination created.
- Continued expansion of the business.
- Conversion works at both farms to create sustainable business' has lead to the need for a well designed new storage building.

Paragraph 84 clearly states that sites adjacent to or beyond existing settlements may have to be found. The proposed site is immediately adjacent a farmstead and in a position recommended by officers of the North York Moors National Park.

### **Conclusion**

The information set out above clearly demonstrates that this is an exceptional circumstance that has come about due to multiple factors over the years relating to many activities that are supported by the North York Moors National Park. It would be beneficial at this stage to determine what additional landscaping proposals the North York Moors National Park would consider acceptable alongside the past assessment of the site with screening provided by the existing woodland.

At National level the Government continues to support the agricultural sector through changes (increases) to Prior Notification limits on the size of buildings and the conversion of agricultural buildings to dwellings. This follows lobbying by the National Farmers Union. The revised NPPF strongly supports the Rural Sector as already set out.

The work onsite has stopped. Some deliveries of materials for the shed are ongoing as the applicant had to order this well in advance. No works on its construction will occur.

I trust you find the above in order, however should you have any queries or require further information, please do not hesitate to get in touch. I look forward to your response to progress matters.

Yours sincerely,

**Louis Stainthorpe**

**Chartered Building Surveyor**

BSc (Hons), MRICS, RICS Registered Valuer, MCABE

CC Mr Mike Shardlow