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PLANNING CONSULTANCY

Application for full planning permission for the erection of farm worker's dwelling at
Low Pasture Villa Farm, Lockton, YO18 7NU

Mr W Natrass

PLANNING AND AGRICULTURAL NEEDS STATEMENT

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Reference: MF/17/14

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1.0 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 This statement has been prepared on the instructions of Mr W Natrass of Low Pasture Villa Farm to accompany and provide additional information in relation to an outline planning application for the erection of a dwelling to accommodate a farm worker in connection with his dairy and livestock business at the site.
- 1.2 The proposed dwelling would be two storeys comprising around 150-200 sq metres floorspace containing living room, kitchen / dining room, and utility / boot room to ground floor. At first floor there would be 3 no. bedrooms and a bathroom. The roof void would contain storage space. The dwelling would be of brick construction, although materials are to be agreed. All detailed matters are reserved for future consideration.
- 1.3 The application is made to coincide with a planned expansion of the building, and significant investment in the efficiencies of the business. Both Mr Natrass and his son Mr Guy Natrass work full time on the farm at present. However, the intention is for Mr Natrass senior to retire and as such Guy will need to reside at the farm. In any event, it will be shown in this statement that there is an essential functional need for two workers to live at the farm to enable the safe and efficient operation of the farming business.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The application site comprises a farm of around 191 acres of land, 175 of which is eligible for single farm payment and the remainder woodland or bankside. The business is farmed in partnership between the applicant, Mr W Natrass and his wife and son. The farm is predominately dairy, with cattle and sheep and arable contributing to its income. There is one dwelling on the farm and a range of agricultural buildings of varying age and appearance.
- 2.2 The site lies some 1.3 kilometres east of Lockton (as the crow flies) and is situated entirely within the North York Moors National Park.
- 2.3 The site located to the immediate west of the existing farm steading, north of an agricultural track. It comprises agricultural land adjacent to an existing enclosure. A public right of way is located some 80 metres to the north. Access is via a private road (shared with the footpath) leading from the north into the farm steading.

3.0 PROPOSAL

- 3.1 Outline planning permission is sought for the erection of a three bedroom dwelling with associated garage, parking, garden and access. The dwelling would house an agricultural worker employed full time in the dairy and livestock business at Low Pasture Villa Farm (Mr G Natrass, Partner in the farm business). All detailed matters are reserved for future consideration, and this application seeks to establish the principle of the development only.



4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 Planning applications have been made in respect of the farm house, and which are not relevant to the determination of the current application to which this statement relates. In addition, an application for prior approval was made for a slurry store in 2009 and approved (reference NYM/2009/0097/AGRP applies). An application has recently been submitted for a new livestock shed which is pending consideration (reference NYM/2017/0329/FL).

5.0 PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was published in March 2012, and the accompanying Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) was published in 2014. These documents contain the Government's planning policies and guidance.
- 5.2 NPPF imposes a presumption in favour of sustainable development (paragraph 14). This means that where development proposals accord with an up to date development plan, approving planning permission without delay. Where development plan policies are silent or out of date, planning permission should be approved unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the Framework as a whole.
- 5.3 There are three dimensions to sustainable development – it has an economic, social and environmental role, seeking to ensure a strong economy, healthy vibrant communities, and the enhancement of natural and built environments.
- 5.4 NPPF seeks to support a prosperous rural economy by supporting the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, including promoting the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses (paragraph 28). Paragraph 19 more generally refers to economic growth, setting out the Government's commitment to this. It states that planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to business therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth in the planning system. Paragraph 21 states that policies should be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan and to allow rapid response to changes in economic circumstances.
- 5.5 Paragraph 55 of NPPF contains the most relevant policy guidance, and this replaces former advice contained within the now superceded Planning Policy Statement 7 (annex A). This states that new housing in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances, such as the essential need for a rural worker to live permanently at or near to their place of work in the countryside.
- 5.6 The site is within the North York Moors National Park. Paragraph 115 of NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks.

Development Plan

- 5.7 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that:



"where in making any determination under the planning Acts, regard is to be had to the development plan, the determination shall be made in accordance with the plan unless material consideration indicates otherwise".

5.8 The adopted Development Plan for the area comprises the North York Moors National Park Local Development Framework Core Strategy and Development Policies Document (CSDPD) which was adopted in November 2008. The replacement plan preparation is still in its infancy and so in accordance with the implementation section of NPPF should carry minimal weight.

5.9 Paragraph 3.25 of the CSDPD recognises the rural economy as being one of the key challenges of the National Park stating:

"Although farming and forestry continue to play a significant role in the economy and landscape of the Park, the decline in agricultural employment means that there is a need to supplement farm incomes through rural diversification"... "At the same time more traditional forms of farm development such as new agricultural buildings will still be needed"

5.10 Core Policy H states that the rural economy will be strengthened by, inter alia, supporting the agricultural economy.

5.11 Policy J relates to new housing within the plan area generally, and criterion 3 specifically allows new housing in open countryside where there is a proven agricultural need for it (essential for farming, forestry or other essential land management activities). Paragraph 9.14 goes on to advise that proposals for dwellings in the open countryside for people employed in agriculture, forestry and other essential land management activities will be assessed against the criteria set out in Annex A of Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas. PPS7 has now been replaced by NPPF though the principles contained within it continue to be a useful guide or starting point for assessing what is an essential need and how it may be met by development proposals.

6.0 KEY ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS

6.1 Principle of Development and Business Case

6.1.1 The farm to which the application relates is a well-established, successful and viable family dairy farm. The business milks 70 cows and rears its own replacements. There are also fattening cattle, sheep and arable land. The cows are kept currently on a traditional straw based system and milked in a parlour, which is labour intensive. The proposes a new building which along with other changes will signal a departure, to an extent, from the traditional straw based system reducing the need to muck out and dispose of the resultant waste.

6.1.2 The farm is undergoing improvements to processes all of the time, though recent events and the impending retirement of Mr Natrass senior has made it necessary to explore further efficiencies. The globalisation of the milk and cattle markets has placed increasing pressure on prices and farms such as Low Pasture Villa are no longer simply competing with others in the UK and Europe, but with farms all over the world. The technologies available to farms worldwide mean that dairy farms are forever evolving and improving practices, reducing inefficiency and improving welfare. Low Pasture Villa Farm must move with these times and increase output while continuing to maintain the high standards of which they are so proud. The new building will enable the enterprise to increase in size and grow in accordance with the expansion plans for the business, creating economies of scale which currently do not exist. This enables the business to command higher prices per litre of milk, and improve the livestock / labour ratio. Environmental



improvements can be made, and the disposal of waste will comply with necessary legislation in relation to this, including the location of the farm in a NVZ. A further dwelling will enable Guy Natrass to be present at all times, carrying out the fundamental and physically demanding work necessary to ensure the continued functioning of the farm business. Both partners will continue to work in the business short term, although it will be necessary to have two people on hand at all times to deal with calving, emergencies, and general day and night time tasks.

- 6.1.3 NPPF (para. 55) states that new isolated homes in countryside should be avoided 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. It is proposed in this application that it is essential for Guy Natrass to live at Low Pasture Villa Farm permanently, and that there is no other available accommodation nearby that would enable him to do so.

The current farm business

- 6.1.4 The farm business comprises a mixed arable and livestock unit of 191 acres of land, 175 of which is eligible for single farm payment and the remainder woodland or bankside. The agricultural unit is farmed in partnership between Mr Natrass (the applicant), his wife Sue Natrass, and his son, Guy Natrass. Mr Natrass (the applicant) lives on the farm in the existing farm house with his wife. Guy Natrass lives in Thornton-le-Dale some 6 miles from the farm. Together they milk 77 cows (7 dry cows), and fatten 77 head of cattle. They also rear 40 heifers for dairying. The business also includes 114 breeding ewes.
- 6.1.5 The land is used in connection with the livestock enterprises, but the business also grows corn for sale as part of a connected arable enterprise (40 acres).
- 6.1.6 The business employs two full time staff (the applicant and his son, Guy) as well as the applicant's wife on a part time basis. Contractors are used in addition, primarily for field work such as slurry spreading silaging and bailing.

Future plans

- 6.1.7 While not directly relevant to the current planning application, the applicant's intention to develop and invest in the business is a material planning consideration. Thus it would be prudent to set out recent improvements and the long term strategy for the business.
- 6.1.8 As has been set out in earlier sections of this statement, the cows are kept currently on a traditional straw based system and milked in a parlour, which is labour intensive. The applicant prides himself on his high welfare processes and attention to detail. He has in the past, and continues to operate a highly successful farming business. A planning application has been submitted for an additional livestock building which if approved will signal a departure, to an extent, from the traditional straw based system reducing the need to muck out and dispose of the resultant waste. This will also assist in the management of waste in line with NVZ requirements. While this will in the short term not result in an increase in the numbers of livestock, it will improve welfare, because the current sheds are over-crowded. It will also enable better movements and management of livestock in terms of both welfare and disease control.
- 6.1.9 The farm is undergoing improvements to processes all of the time, and it is the intention that improvements to efficiency will enable the applicant to reduce his working hours as he approaches retirement (Mr Natrass is 71 years old). This adds weight to the need for another dwelling on the holding.



- 6.1.10 The globalisation of the milk and cattle markets has placed increasing pressure on prices and farms such as Low Pasture Villa are no longer simply competing with others in the UK and Europe, but with farms all over the world. The technologies available to farms worldwide mean that dairy farms are forever evolving and improving practices, reducing inefficiency and improving welfare. Low Pasture Villa Farm must move with these times and increase output while continuing to maintain the high standards of which they are so proud. The new building will enable the enterprise to increase in size and grow in the medium term in accordance with the expansion plans for the business, creating economies of scale which currently do not exist. This enables the business to command higher prices per litre of milk, and improve the livestock / labour ratio. Environmental improvements can be made, and the disposal of waste will comply with necessary legislation in relation to this, including the location of the farm in a NVZ.
- 6.1.11 The farm is looking to invest in new technologies such as renewable energies and increased automation, but in order to invest further it will be necessary to have an increased on-site presence.
- Functional need for a dwelling
- 6.1.12 The reason a need on the holding exists for a second dwelling is two-fold:
- a) To enable the succession of the farm from the applicant to his son and pave the way for his retirement; and
 - b) To enable proper management of livestock in an effective and practical way.
- 6.1.13 Mr Natrass is nearing retirement and is less capable of managing the more physically demanding tasks of the farm. As he reduces the hours he works, it will be necessary for Guy Natrass to be on hand to deal with the day to day activities necessary for the farm to operate safely and with the highest welfare standards demanded by consumers.
- 6.1.14 It would be unreasonable to expect that Mr Natrass moves out of his home to make way for Guy Natrass and his family (the relevant judicial authority for this being set out in *Keen v SSE & Aylesbury Vale DC (1995)*). It would be just so unreasonable for Mr Natrass to be expected to reside with his parents. In addition, in practical terms Mr Natrass's departure from the business is likely to be very gradual, his expertise and assistance being required on an ongoing basis for the foreseeable future. Succession is critical for a business of this nature and scale.
- 6.1.15 Aside from the applicant's intentions in terms of his involvement in the business, the enterprise requires two workers to be on site at all times for health and safety, and clearly justifies this. This additional dwelling needs to be within sight and sound of the farm buildings so that the occupier can identify and attend to emergencies. Some activities on farm, such as difficult calving and other livestock treatment require the presence of two workers for health and safety reasons, and also to adequately manage the individual animals.
- 6.1.16 The following table sets out the functional requirements of the current farm enterprise in terms of labour, as obtained from *The Agro Business Consultants Agricultural Costing Book (80th Edition, May 2015)*.

Table 1: Low Pasture Villa Farm, labour requirements

Enterprise	Head / number	Man hours per year	Standard Man Days equivalent
Dairy herd (46 smh per head based on a herd <80)	77	3542	442.75
Cattle (fattening beef and heifer rearing (14 smh)	117	1638	204.75
Sheep (4 smh)	114	456	57
Cereal crops	40 acres	88	12
Sub-total		5724	716.5
General management and maintenance (20%)		1148.8	143.3
TOTAL		6872.8	859.8

6.1.17 Based on the above, excluding the arable enterprise labour requirements, the labour needs of the farm business as it currently stands is 6872.8 hours per year. Based on a full time equivalent of 1900 hours per year for a typical agricultural worker, this equates to **3.6 full time members of staff**.

6.1.18 For genuine welfare and safety reasons, it is necessary for at least two workers to be on site at all times for the following reasons:

- To manage milking and feeding of livestock (5am-11am);
- To monitor calving cows which may get into difficulties at short notice and require immediate assistance. Cows at the farm calf all year round. Failure to attend at short notice can result in the death of the calf and / or the cow. Being on site means that cows can be checked regularly when they are due to calf, including through the night, and also that a farm worker can hear when a cow gets into distress. In the last 12 months there have been 3 caesarean births, two of which were in the middle of the night and a further three night births with the vet in attendance.
- To attend calving generally – it is beneficial to have a worker in attendance when a cow calves, to that they can assist if necessary. Occasionally it two workers will be required when assistance is necessary, and it can be physically demanding to extract the calf from its mother.
- To ensure livestock is always where it should be, minimise loss or straying livestock.
- To notice and attend to cows, cattle and sheep who may be sick or injured.
- To immediately attend to breakdown in automated equipment, failure to do so could result in injury to livestock, failure to adequately dispose of waste, loss of produce.
- To ensure trespass, theft or vandalism does not occur, particularly important when footpaths are close-by. Equipment and machinery at the farm is highly valuable, and livestock and storage areas vulnerable to deliberate or unintended damage (e.g. fire) from intruders. While security will not usually be sufficient to justify a dwelling on a farm, in this instance it will be a material consideration of some weight, as the implications could be grave.
- Lambing (all day and night, March and April)

6.1.19 To conclude, the farm is capable of supporting more than three full time workers, and it is essential for the future survival and development of the business for two workers to be on site at all times. This necessitates a further dwelling on the farm holding, within sight and sound of the livestock.



Financial viability

- 6.1.20 The farming enterprise at Low Pasture Villa Farm has been well established for three generations. It is a highly profitable enterprise, due to the hard work, dedication and expertise of its partners. Over the years, much of this profit has been reinvested in the business, enabling it to withstand fluctuating milk, beef and cereal prices, as well as volatile input costs.
- 6.1.21 The financial 'test' set out in the former Annex A of PPS7 was not repeated in NPPF paragraph 55, although it can still be shown that the business has been established for the last 3 years, and profitable for at least one of those years. In fact it has been profitable for the three years preceding this application. A copy of summarised accounts can be made available on request.

6.2 Landscape and visual impact / design & access statement

- 6.2.1 The application is made in outline, with all matters reserved. A plan showing the indicative siting of the dwelling is included for information only. The accommodation would be over two storeys, containing around 150-200 sq metres floorspace. The dwelling would have a traditional appearance, utilising traditional materials as appropriate to the setting of the site.
- 6.2.2 The dwelling would be well related to the farm steading and close to existing buildings and the existing farm house on the site. Accordingly the development would not introduce a discordant, built feature in the landscape and would be read against the existing developments on the farm. The applicant is happy to consider a suitable landscaping plan, although given the relationship with the remainder of the farm buildings it is not considered necessary.
- 6.2.3 The land on which the dwelling would be located is situated on a relatively low level, away from public vantage points. The character of the landscape in this national park location would not be adversely affected by the development proposed.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 There is a need on site for a further agricultural worker to reside, to enable the proper management and operation of the farm business and to ensure the health and safety of staff and welfare of livestock. The farm business is capable, both in terms of labour requirements and financially, of supporting these workers. The house can be constructed without threatening the viability of the business.
- 7.2 The dwelling can be sited and constructed without harm to the special scenic qualities of the National Park landscape, or peoples' enjoyment of it.
- 7.3 The development proposed complies with the requirements of the Development Plan and is consistent with advice contained in NPPF. Accordingly, it is hoped that the application can be supported without delay.