

Retrospective application for a temporary, 5 year consent, for an agricultural worker's dwelling

Application Site:

Trevigo Farm, St Minver, Wadebridge, Cornwall,
PL27 6RB

Date:

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Submitted by:

Mr J T Vernon

1. Introduction

1.1 A full agricultural appraisal was prepared for the farm business by Lodge & Thomas in 2017, in relation to an application for an agricultural worker's dwelling. The farm business has not materially changed since then in terms of land holding, stock levels or labour requirement. The dairy enterprise which commenced in 2017 has consolidated over the last four years to a profitable and efficient business.

1.2 At the time of that appraisal, the farm was assessed to have a labour requirement of 5.33 full time workers. Stocking levels have increased since that date, increasing the labour requirement. The applicant at present has two dwellings related to the holding, the main farmhouse and a recently completed dwelling built pursuant to the above application.

1.3 The labour need of the farm is such that permission for an additional, temporary unit of accommodation is sought.

1.4 The clear functional need for the accommodation is set out below. The application is made retrospectively as whilst the need for the additional worker to be on-site is pre-existing, as the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020, the applicant rapidly acquired a static caravan for an existing employee who lived offsite in order to expedite his moving to the farm site. This allowed the farm to operate in a more 'COVID secure' manner whilst providing a solution to the farming need set out in this statement. An application is now made in order to seek formalisation of this arrangement.

1.5 This statement proceeds by providing an agricultural appraisal, a discussion of design and access considerations, discussion of applicable planning policy and concludes with a summary.

2. Agricultural Appraisal

2.1 Business

2.1.1 The applicant provided a detailed agricultural appraisal in support of an application for a permanent rural worker's dwelling made in 2017 (PA17/08672). That dwelling has recently been completed, is now occupied and is housing a worker for the farm. The 2017 appraisal is included with this application for reference.

2.1.2 At the time of that application, the County Land Agent visited the farm and supported the application. He informally indicated that given the size of the holding, there was justification for a further dwelling beyond the application being assessed in 2017.

2.1.3 The applicant's business transitioned from beef to dairy in 2016/2017. Milking commenced in summer 2017 and the business has continued with materially similar stocking levels, labour requirement and land holding since that date.

2.1.4 The dairy business in 2017 was centred on approximately 330 milking cows, 5 bulls and 65 replacement heifers. Since then, cow and bull numbers have remained the same with an increase in heifers to 150, plus substantial seasonal increases in numbers associated with calving.

2.1.5 At the time of the 2017 application, the business was assessed by Lodge & Thomas to have a labour requirement of 5.33 workers, an assessment which was accepted by the County Land Agent. The additional heifers take the labour requirement up to approximately 6 full time workers, plus labour required during calving.

2.2 Land Holding

2.2.1 Trevigo Farm extends to approximately 320 acres of grass and approximately 45 acres of whole crop barley which is part of the combined Entry Level/Higher Level Environmental Stewardship Scheme as under-sown cereals.

2.2.2 The breakdown of tenure on that land is of approximately 167 acres (67.6 hectares) of owner occupied land that includes the application site and the principal farm buildings including the milking parlour. There are an additional approximately 53 acres (21.4 hectares) of coastal grazing land which are rented by way of a long-term Farm Business Tenancy from the National Trust. The applicant also has an agreement with another family member for approximately 143 acres (57.9 hectares) which is farmed via a Contract Agreement.

2.2.3 The holding is set out in the plans created for the 2017 agricultural appraisal, which is provided with this application. It is not changed since that date.

2.3 Labour requirement and arrangements

2.3.1 The farm had a labour requirement of 5.33 workers, as assessed in 2017. That need has increased slightly due to the increase in replacement heifer numbers (65 to 150), a stocking level which has been consistent over the last three years and will continue as such. The applicant works full-time on the farm, with the part-time support of his wife. The applicant has, until recently, had the full-time assistance of his father, who is now transitioning into retirement and lives in a dwelling unrelated to the farm ownership/business. A further worker is housed in the recently completed dwelling which was the subject of the 2017 application. The farm therefore has access to two dwellings, a significant shortfall in available accommodation relative to the labour needs of the farm which is approximately 6 workers.

2.3.2 The applicant has a full-time employee who, until the purchase of the caravan which is the subject of this application, had been commuting. Living off-site was not a practical solution given the hours associated with a dairy enterprise and the need for on-site staffing year round, but particularly during the calving season which is critical to the success of the business. A further part-time worker is employed by the business who lives locally.

2.4 Dwellings

2.4.1 The applicant occupies the farmhouse and a second dwelling, recently completed, is occupied by [REDACTED] who works on the farm. No other dwellings are available to the applicant.

2.4.2 This application seeks consent for the occupancy of a temporary dwelling on the holding. The application is retrospective in nature, as the applicant's labour need was well established at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic and a static caravan was rapidly acquired to house an existing member of staff. The intention would otherwise have been to make an application in the normal way.

2.5 Alternative Accommodation

2.5.1 Locally, house prices are significantly inflated by the second home/holiday market and few properties are close enough to the farm to fulfil the functional needs of the farm. Within the parish of St Minver, where the farm is located, second home ownership is approximately 60% of all dwellings. Increased demand for property as a result of COVID-19 has further increased prices in the area. The only house to recently come to market near to the farm was a 3-bedroom house where the asking price was £699,950.

3. Design and Access

3.1 This application seeks to gain a temporary consent for a unit of accommodation for a full time agricultural worker at Trevigo Farm, St Minver. The application seeks to formalise the position with respect to a static caravan which is on site and is therefore retrospective in nature.

3.2. The needs of the farm are set out above and were specified in greater detail in the agricultural appraisal produced in 2017, which is provided with this application. The accommodation is needed to ensure the security, safety and welfare needs of the dairy enterprise undertaken on the site are satisfied, such that the essential need to have a worker on site is demonstrated. The size of the business and labour requirement are such that an additional unit of accommodation meets the functional test.

3.3 Application Location and Site

3.3.1 The application site is located approximately 1 mile to north of St. Minver on a farm with an existing and established dairy business.

3.3.2 The application site is located on what was agricultural land and is directly adjacent to existing buildings.

3.3.3 The siting of the caravan enables an additional agricultural worker to be on the holding 24 hours per day to provide essential care to the livestock on the farm. This need exists year round, but is particularly acute during the principal calving season from mid-summer to late-autumn.

3.3.4 The caravan is located adjacent to an existing shed to the south and benefits from screening provided by an existing and mature Cornish hedge to the west and a recently constructed bank to the north. The immediate access to the caravan/parking is to the east of the caravan. The nearest public road is to the west and it is therefore well screened from this direction.

3.4 Access

3.4.1 Access from the public road is via the existing farm lane. The site itself, within the farm, is accessed via existing concrete/hard standing areas.

3.4.2 The proposal reduces vehicle movements in the local area since it removes the need for the occupant of the caravan to commute to the site.

3.5 Services

3.5.1 Mains electric and water have been connected to the site and a septic tank has been installed.

4. Planning Policy

4.1 Local Policy - Cornwall Local Plan

4.1.1 The key provision within the Cornwall Local Plan (LP) with respect to this application is Policy 7 which, *inter alia*, supports new dwellings in the countryside where the use is for (at Policy 7.4):

Temporary accommodation for workers (including seasonal migrant workers), to support established and viable rural businesses where there is an essential need for a presence on the holding, but no other suitable accommodation is available and it would be of a construction suitable for its purpose and duration.

Or (Policy 7.5)

Full time agricultural and forestry and other rural occupation workers where there is up to date evidence of an essential need of the business for the occupier to live in that specific location.

4.1.2 The application site and the entire contiguous farm holding at Trevigo Farm is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), such that Policy 23.2a is relevant to this application:

Great weight will be given to conserving the landscape and scenic beauty within or affecting the setting of the AONB. Proposals must conserve and enhance the landscape character and natural beauty of the AONB and provide only for an identified local need and be appropriately located to address the AONB's sensitivity and capacity. Proposals should be informed by and assist the delivery of the objectives of the Cornwall and Tamar Valley AONB Management Plans including the interests of those who live and / or work in them.

4.1.3 Further policies which are relevant to this application include:

Policy 1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development

Policy 2 - Spatial Strategy

Policy 2a – Key Targets

Policy 3 – Role and function of places

Policy 12 – Design

Policy 27 – Transport and Accessibility

4.2 National Policy - National Planning Policy Framework (2018)

4.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework 2018 (NPPF) stresses the importance of having a planning system that is genuinely plan-led (Paragraph 15). Where a proposal accords with an up-to-date development plan it should be approved without delay (Paragraph 11c).

4.2.2 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF 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

4.2.3 Given the site is in an AONB, Paragraph 172 is relevant:

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. ... The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;

the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and

any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.

4.2.4 Further paragraphs which are relevant to the development:

Paragraph 8 – Sustainable development

Paragraphs 59 and 61 – Availability of suitable homes

Paragraphs 77 and 78 – Rural housing

Paragraphs 80–82 – Building a strong, competitive economy

Paragraphs 83–84 – Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Paragraph 109 – Highways

4.3 St. Minver Neighbourhood Development Plan

4.3.1 The St. Minver Parishes joint NDP was adopted in June 2017 and provides guidance on development in the Highlands (where the farm is located) and Lowlands Parishes up to 2030. The NDP notes in detail the absence of affordable accommodation in the parishes (paragraph 3.1) and acknowledges (paragraph 5.3.1) the difficulty of providing an adequate supply of affordable and

moderately priced homes in the coming years. This is reflected in the lack of available alternative accommodation adjacent to the farm holding.

4.3.2 Within the NDP area, development is restricted to designated areas except in a series of specified circumstances (NDP Policy 1.1). Two such examples are to provide local needs accommodation (NDP Policy 3.3) and to support the expansion of existing businesses (NDP Policy 4.5). Policy 1.1 further states that development is acceptable '*where there is substantial benefit of the development to the local people that cannot be achieved in another way*'. NDP Policy 1.2 notes the need to avoid '*isolated homes in the countryside unless there are special circumstances*' – a reference to NPPF Paragraph 79, discussed above, which provides direct support to this application.

4.4 The policy context of the proposal

4.4.1 Most clearly, this application satisfies a well established essential and functional need for a worker to be present on the holding. No alternative accommodation is available on or near to the farm site that could satisfy this need. It is therefore consistent with Policy 7.4 (LP) and Paragraph 79 (NPPF).

4.4.2 The entire farm holding is situated within the AONB and therefore any new dwelling on the farm would be within the AONB. The '*local need*' (Policy 23.2a, LP) and the need for the development and inability to satisfy it in another way (Paragraph 172, NPPF) has been demonstrated. In terms of the location within the holding, the site is directly adjacent to existing buildings and represents the most appropriate location where the caravan could be located in order to serve the needs of the farm, whilst protecting the environment of the AONB. We note that this site was discussed with the County Land Agent and Planning Officer as an alternative build site in connection with the 2017 application and both provided a favourable assessment of the site in an AONB context. Given the immediate topography and surrounding buildings/Cornish hedge/banking, the site is well screened from any public vantage points such that it is well within the capacity of the landscape to absorb it without any detrimental effect.

4.4.3 From the perspective of the St Minver NDP, the accommodation would provide for a local need, be restricted in occupation to a rural worker, would support an existing business, and is a need which cannot be achieved in another way. In particular, it fulfils the '*special circumstances*' of Paragraph 79 NPPF and Policy 1.2 of the NDP.

4.4.4 In the context of sustainability and the overall planning balance (LP Policy 1 and NPPF Paragraph 8), the proposal supports the efficient operation and expansion of an existing rural business and supports the social and economic vitality of the community by providing accommodation for a worker and, as a result of living on the holding, resident in the community. It will result in a small reduction in traffic on local highways. As a unit of temporary accommodation for a rural worker, it is directly supported by Policy 7.4 LP and Paragraph 79 NPPF. It is situated and screened in such a location that it preserves the AONB environment whilst providing for a well established local need. It is therefore sustainable, consistent with the applicable development plan and should be approved without delay.

5. Conclusion

5.1 This statement and the prior, detailed assessment of the farm business in 2017 has shown that there is an essential need for a rural worker to live at Trevigo Farm. The temporary rural worker's dwelling that is the subject of this application is therefore supported in principle by the Cornwall Local Plan and National Planning Policy Framework.

5.2 The farm's operation and functional need was formally appraised as part of an application in 2017 and the business is materially the same as at that date, with a slight increase in stocking numbers and four years of successful operation as a dairy business since that appraisal. The functional test is therefore satisfied given the size of the holding, number of animals and current accommodation on the holding.

5.3 The caravan which is the subject of this application is situated directly adjacent to existing buildings and benefits from natural screening due to the mature Cornish hedge lying to the west of the plot. This location provides the worker with direct access to the yard and livestock at all times. The proposed development clearly responds to a well evidenced local need. It has no negative impact on the AONB and due to the both the scale and location of the caravan, it is not intrusive and will have no negative impact on the landscape character of the AONB. We note that the location of the caravan was discussed in relation to a prior application at Trevigo Farm and was informally assessed as appropriate by the County Land Agent and Planning Officer.

5.4 The proposal supports the efficient operation of an existing rural business, is clearly sustainable and consistent with the development plan. We therefore request it is approved without delay.