

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

ERECTION OF A REPLACEMENT FREE RANGE EGG LAYING UNIT & CONSTRUCTION OF GROUND MOUNTED SOLAR PANELS

Walcott Farm, Digby Road, Walcott, Lincoln, LN4 3TD

Wot-An-Egg Ltd

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1. INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Wot-An-Egg Ltd of Quarry House, Cattle Hill, Warter, York, YO42 1XG.

Section 42 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a Design and Access Statement to be submitted with the majority of planning applications. The purpose of this report is to satisfy the requirements of Section 42 of the aforementioned Act.

This report has been prepared to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way.

This report has been prepared by Ian Pick. Ian Pick is a specialist agricultural and rural planning consultant. He holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours Degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management and is a Professional Member of Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, being qualified in the Rural Practice Division of the Institution.

Ian Pick has 23 years experience in rural planning whilst employed by MAFF, ADAS, Acorus and most recently Ian Pick Associates Limited.

2. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The applicants, Wot-An-Egg Ltd, own and operate an existing free range egg laying unit from Walcott Farm, Digby Road, Walcott, Lincoln, LN4 3TD. Walcott Farms extends to 112 acres, housing laying hens across 4 separate buildings.

One of the units at Walcott Farm was subject to fire damage in late 2020 and is beyond the state of repair. The applicants are therefore seeking full planning consent for the

erection of a replacement unit, which will be of an upgraded design and specification. The scheme also seeks to move the siting of the proposed replacement unit closer to that of the existing units and the approved egg store (ref: 21/0571/PNAGR) which will increase the wider efficiency of the farm.

The proposal also includes the installation of a ground mounted solar array with an associated metering kiosk. The proposed solar panels will provide the development with a renewable source of energy.

The proposal represents sustainable development within an existing rural and agricultural enterprise.

3. SCALE

The proposed replacement free range egg unit will consist of a single purpose-built poultry building extending to 120000mm x 20000mm, with an eaves height of 3000mm and a ridge height of 5973mm. The proposed unit would have an overall footprint of 2,400m². By comparison, the existing unit which was subject to fire damage measured approximately 92000mm x 19000mm, with an overall footprint of 1748m². The proposed replacement unit suggests a modest increase in footprint of 652m².

The fire damaged unit housed 15,000 hens, utilising a predominantly outdated 'flat-deck' system; by contrast the proposed unit will house 28,000 hens using a 'multi-tier' system, offering increased bird welfare and substantially reduced environmental impact.

The size of the building is linked to the size of the enterprise. Large buildings are necessary for modern-day free range egg production units, rather than a number of smaller buildings due to the substantial set up costs of the enterprise and the equipment that it necessary for the units to operate.

In poultry terms, a building designed to house 28,000 birds is not considered a large unit. For example, Environmental Impact Assessment regulations have a minimum bird threshold of 60,000 birds and Environmental Permitting regulations have a threshold of 40,000 birds.

Walcott Farm currently houses 68,000 hens (including the 15,000 hens within the fire damaged unit). This proposal will increase the total number of hens on site to 81,000, an increase of 13,000 hens.

The proposed ground mounted solar array will produce a 192kWp, with an overall height of 2537mm. Elevations of the panels can be seen attached.

4. ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT & PERMITTING

In order to operate, Walcott Farm is required by law to hold an Environmental permit which is administered by the Environment Agency. The permit must take into account the whole environmental performance of the plant, covering e.g. emissions to air, water and land, generation of waste, use of raw materials, energy efficiency, noise, prevention of accidents, and restoration of the site upon closure.

The purpose of the Directive is to ensure a high level of protection of the environment taken as a whole. As the proposed development will be controlled under the Environmental permitting regime, the likelihood of significant impact on the environment from the proposed development is negligible due to the strict regime of control.

In the light of the requirement for the Environmental Permit, paragraph 183 of the NPPF (July 2019) is relevant.

183. The focus of planning policies and decisions should be on whether proposed development is an acceptable use of land, rather than the control of processes or emissions (where these are subject to separate pollution control regimes). Planning decisions should assume that these regimes will operate effectively. Equally, where a planning decision has been made on a particular development, the planning issues should not be revisited through the permitting regimes operated by pollution control authorities.

Paragraph 183 refers to developments where a separate Environmental Permit is required in terms of the operation of the site. Essentially, paragraph 183 confirms that if an Environmental Permit is required, the planning system should not focus on issues which are controlled by the permitting process.

The Scope of controls for intensive livestock installations within the remit of the Environment Agency are detailed below.

In making an assessment for any permit or variation application, the Environment Agency would include the following key areas of potential harm:

- Management - including general management, accident management, energy efficiency, efficient use of raw materials and waste recovery.
- Operations - including permitted activities and operating techniques (including the use of feed, housing design and management, slurry spreading and manure management planning).
- Emissions - to water, air and land including to groundwater and diffuse emissions, transfers off site, odour, noise and vibration, monitoring.
- Information - records, reporting and notifications.

The applicants have revised their EP in order to facilitate for the proposed development. Details of their permit can be seen below:

Permit MP3639UJ – Wot-An-Egg

Permission number	MP3639UJ
Name	Wot-An-Egg
Site address	Walcott Farm, Digby Road, Walcott, Lincolnshire, LN4 3TD
Site postcode	LN4 3TD
Activity Type Description	INTENSIVE FARMING; > 40,000 POULTRY
Site grid reference	TF1190056000
Easting	511900
Northing	356000
Local Authority	North Kesteven
Permission date	10/05/2021

5. USE

The use of the proposed building is for the housing of free range laying hens.

A free range egg production system is an extensive and welfare friendly form of egg production. The proposed building includes accommodation for 28,000 laying hens. The bird area includes a scratch area and a perchery, together with nest boxes.

The bird housing area within the building includes a scratch area together with a series of tiered perches which overlay manure belts.

Nest boxes are accessible from the perches and are adjacent to an egg collection conveyor. The nest boxes are angled towards the conveyor and the hens lay their eggs in

the nest boxes. The eggs then roll onto the conveyor and are brought to the packing area at the centre of the building.

The feeding system within the building is based on an automated chain feeding system which operates 3 times per day between the hours of 9.00am and 8.00pm. Water supply is provided by bell drinkers.

The lighting within the building is on a time switch, providing the birds with 14 hours of daylight per day.

Ventilation within the buildings is automatic thermostat controlled.

Pop holes are situated in southern elevation. These pop holes provide the birds with direct access to the range area (16 hectares). Pop holes are opened at 8.00am daily and closed at 9.00pm (or dusk).

Odour

The free range unit is designed, and proven in practice, to produce negligible environmental consequences.

The design of the unit incorporates slatted perches, which are located over manure belts. The manure belts are emptied on a twice weekly basis to prevent any build-up of manure within the building. The frequent removal of manure ensures that there is never any volume of manure on the site which could create an odour nuisance. This offers a significant improvement over the existing scenario, which operates on a 'deep litter' system, whereby chicken manure is only removed following each flock (approx. once every 60 weeks). This continuous build-up of manure is now considered an outdated method of operation. This is known as a 'flat-deck' system.

Any responsible farmer is fully aware of the Government Regulations and advice with respect agricultural land management (e.g. *Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations 2015*, *Water resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and agricultural Fuel oil) (England) Regulations 2010 (SSAFO)*, *Cross Compliance (The Guide to Cross Compliance 2017)*, *The Government's Statutory Code of Good Agricultural Practice Protecting our Water, Soil and air*, *The industry good practice guidance entitled 'Think manures' and 'Tried & Tested Nutrient Management Plan'*).

Bird Welfare

All concrete flooring and drains will be regularly inspected, and any damage repaired to prevent ponding within the building.

The livestock area (and perches) will be inspected on a daily basis to maintain a clean and healthy environment for the livestock.

All drinkers will be inspected daily to prevent water leakage. Spares will be kept in stock for any repairs needed.

The building will be inspected on a daily basis, and any dead hens will be removed from the building. Carcasses will be stored in a specialist sealed carcass bin, which will be emptied by a licensed fallen stock collection agent.

Any complaints will be entered into the complaints book. The nature of the complaint will be logged with the time and date. The problem will be investigated, and corrective action taken, if required.

Dust

The nature of a free range unit precludes the emission of any significant amount of dust particles in the atmosphere. A dust laden atmosphere within the Unit must be avoided to protect the welfare interests of both birds and stockpersons.

Flies

Within the egg collection area of the unit any flies that are present normally come from outside the unit. They are controlled using fly tape, which is replaced regularly.

Where manure belts are used, and the manure removed from the site on a frequent basis there is no potential for the unit to be a breeding ground for flies. Flies can breed in poultry litter, and the frequent removal of the litter removes this potential. No pest control contract is required. The potential for flies breeding within the unit is more associated with the older and substantially outdated method of free range egg farming, which used a deep litter system, removing manure once per flock.

Heating

The system does not have any requirement for additional heating systems such as a biomass boiler.

Rodents

The unit will be professionally baited and regularly inspected for rodents under a formal control contract.

Problems are not allowed to occur on these units as any droppings or taint found on the eggs will lead to the whole batch of production being rejected at the packing station, at considerable financial loss to the producer.

Feral

The birds are secure in the houses at night, which prevents problems from foxes, feral cats, etc.

Lighting

The building does not have any requirement for 24 hour lighting. A single down-light is proposed to the western elevation of the unit, which will operate on a 2 minute motion sensor, with an additional light to each end of the unit which would only be used at the end of each flock for stock removal.

Washout Water

Foul water is to be appropriately contained and drained via a sealed underground dirty water tank during washout periods (when dirty water runoff is most likely). This process is controlled and must fully comply with the terms of The Water Resources (Control of Pollution) (Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) (SSAFO) Regulations 2010 and as amended 2013. Environmental good practice is also followed and is available in The Code of Good Agricultural Practice (COGAP) for the protection of water, soil and air (produced by DEFRA).

The applicant must inform the Environment Agency of a new, reconstructed or enlarged slurry store, dirty water tank, silage clamp or fuel stores at least 14 days before starting any construction work. The notification must include the type of structure, the proposed

design and construction, and once an agreed proposal has been constructed the applicant is required to send the Environment Agency a completed WQE3 notification form before the commencement of use the facility.

The legislative controls placed on the proposed development by the Environment Agency are such that the potential for impact to any adjacent watercourse is mitigated.

The dirty water storage tank will be emptied via a vacuum tanker following washout after each flock.

Noise

Noise sources associated with a livestock unit are identified as the following:

- Feed, Fuel and Other Deliveries;
- Feeding Equipment;
- Vehicles and Machinery on site;
- Manure Handling;
- Mechanical Extraction

Noise Mitigation Measures

Deliveries

Feed bins have been located immediately adjacent to the building and are accessible from the proposed hardstanding turning area. This location ensures maximum efficiency of feed deliveries.

Deliveries / collection of feed, fuel, eggs and manure will be undertaken at during the normal working day as far as is practicable. Drivers will avoid leaving engines running and avoid driving empty vehicles over rough ground. Normal working hours at defined as 8.00 – 1800 Monday to Friday and 8.00 – 13.00 on Saturdays.

For animal welfare purposes, birds are removed during the night to avoid panicking and smothering.

Feeding Equipment

The auger system proposed is the quietest and most energy efficient method of transporting feed.

Augers will not normally be operated when empty. Feeding equipment will be maintained to ensure optimum operation standards. Pneumatic transfer and feed mills are not proposed on site.

Vehicles & Machinery On Site

Cleaning out and removal of manure will be undertaken during the normal working day (0800 – 1800).

The access road and turning area will be maintained is a good state of repair to reduce any noise from the passage of vehicles.

Loaders and tractors will be well maintained, especially exhaust systems and silencers.

Manure Handling

Manure loading and removal to be undertaken during the normal working day, using a tractor and trailer. As stated above, all equipment will be well maintained.

Mechanical Extraction

The proposed building will utilise high velocity ridge mounted fans, as this is considered the most available techniques. The proposed building is remote from the nearest neighbours.

Poultry Manure

Poultry manure is exported from site and sold to neighbouring landowners for use as a sustainable organic fertiliser.

Ammonia Deposition

Ammonia, Nitrogen and Acid Deposition impacts of the proposed development have been assessed using SCAIL (Simple Calculation of Ammonia Impact Limits).

A search of SSSI's within 5km and SAC's / SPA's within 10km has been conducted.

The receptor search revealed 0 SSSI's / SAC's / SPA's within the screening distances. The receptor search can be seen below.

Designated Site details:

Search Radius [?] km RUN RECEPTOR SEARCH [?]

No. of Designated Sites [?] 3 found VERIFY RECEPTOR LOCATIONS [?]

Site No.	Name	Distance(km)	Designation	Country	Easting	Northing
1	Metheringham Heath Quarry	8.192	SSSI	England	505655	361496
2	Tattershall Old Gravel Pits	8.423	SSSI	England	519313	359567
3	Tattershall Carrs	9.863	SSSI	England	521146	358800

No receptors have been identified within the search area, therefore, no further assessment is required.

6. LAYOUT

The proposal relates to replacing an existing fire damaged building with a modern, purpose built, free range egg unit. The layout has been devised for ease of vehicle movements and efficient operation of the site. The overall site layout can be seen on the attached site plan (drawing No. IP/JT/02).

7. LANDSCAPE

The proposed unit has been sited in order to minimise its impact on the landscape and to provide for the operational requirements of the unit.

The proposed free range hen house is of an agricultural appearance, with polyester coated profile sheet walls and roof (juniper green BS12B29). The eaves and ridge height of the proposed building are relatively low which helps to mitigate any potential landscape impact. The proposed building will be seen within the context of the existing adjacent livestock units and will be seen as a replacement for the existing fire damaged unit which is to be removed.

Buildings of a similar design and nature are not uncommon within the surrounding agricultural landscape and can therefore not be construed as unusual or alien. Large agricultural buildings such as this often form part of the general public's perception of the 'the countryside'. The function and purpose of the building is clearly linked to an agricultural use of the surrounding land.

The applicant will also be providing range enhancement planting as part of this scheme. This is a requirement of the RSPCA, Freedom Food, Lion Code etc.

8. APPEARANCE

The proposed building is a purpose built poultry unit; the design is purely functional for the production of free range eggs.

The building is of steel frame construction with the external cladding being polyester coated profile sheeting (juniper green), materials which would help assimilate the buildings with the adjacent buildings at Walcott Farm, including the recently approved egg store / general purpose building (ref: 21/0571/PNAGR).

This design and appearance are typical of an agricultural building such as this and as such is deemed to be suitable to its rural and agricultural locality.

Photographs of the existing fire damaged building which is to be removed can be seen below.



Picture 1 - Building before fire damage



Picture 2 - Building after fire damage



Picture 3 - Building after fire damage

9. ACCESS

Access to the proposed unit is required by HGV and other commercial non-HGV traffic. The site will be serviced via the existing farm access. The existing farm operations see several large vehicles servicing the farmstead on a daily basis.

The proposal represents a modest increase in livestock which would only result a necessity for 1 extra feed delivery lorry per week

The proposal will have a negligible impact on the local highway network.

10. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018). The NPPF provides support for economic growth and development of agricultural businesses in paragraph 83.

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.*

The National Planning Policy Framework provides clear support for the proposals within paragraph 83.

The proposed development represents the sustainable growth and expansion of an existing rural business. The proposed development is compliant with the aims of national policy with the National Planning Policy Framework.