



Robert H Hicks & Co

Chartered Surveyors | Valuers | Rural Property Advisors

Agricultural Appraisal

For and on behalf of

Andrew and Bridget Heard of Harracott Farm Ltd

Taken and made this

29th September 2021

In respect of

Proposed Permanent Agricultural Worker's Supervisory Dwelling

At

**Harracott Farm
Frithestock Stone
Torrington
Devon**

By

Sarah Richardson MProf FAAV

Of

Robert H Hicks & Co

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1. Instructions

We received verbal instructions from Mr Andrew Heard, they were to assess the potential of gaining planning permission for a second agricultural worker's dwelling at Harracott Farm. The instructions included the preparation of an Agricultural Appraisal as a factual statement on an independent basis in accordance with both National and Local Planning Policy and in particular Paragraph 79 of the National Planning Policy Framework and DM28 of the North Devon and Torridge Local Plan.

2. Inspection

An inspection of the Holding took place by appointment on Wednesday 29th September 2021 in the company of Mr and Mrs Heard. The weather at the time of inspection was dry and sunny.

3. Background

Mr and Mrs Heard currently reside at Harracott Farm, Frithelstock Stone. The farm has been owned by the Heard family since 1960, originally consisting of 22.6 hectares (56 acres). Since this time Mr and Mrs Heard have continued to grow the business and have bought further land as it has become available. The land at Harracott now extends to 40.5 hectares (100 acres) and is farmed organically. Approximately 12 hectares (30 acres) of wholecrop cereals are grown each year to feed the suckler herd, along with 24 hectares (70 acres) of grassland, utilised as grazing for the sucklers and free-range chickens and to make silage for winter fodder. Mr Heard runs a livestock business consisting of a 35 head suckler herd alongside 108,000 chickens bred for meat per annum.

4. Proposal

It is proposed that an agricultural worker's dwelling in relation to this business is constructed on the land at Harracott to serve the farm business and provide suitable supervision.

5. Description

5.1. Location

Harracott Farm is located 4.5 miles west of the town of Torrington and approximately 6.5 miles south of the large market town of Bideford.

The land is scheduled as Grade 3 on the Natural England Agricultural Land Classification Map. It is within a SSSI impact risk zone and within a biosphere reserve. Attached at Appendix 1 is a Land Ownership Plan of the wider holding.

5.2. Dwelling Houses

There is currently one farmhouse located at Harracott Farm, Frithelstock Stone. Mr and Mrs Heard reside in this property and the proposed supervisory dwelling will house an agricultural worker employed by the business.

5.3. Agricultural Buildings

There are a number of agricultural buildings located at Harracott Farm, details of which are below:

Building	Size (feet approx.)
Loose house	45 x 22
Dutch barn	45 x 22
Handling area/crush	60 x 22
Cubicle shed	60 x 22
Cubicle shed	75 x 22
Cubicle shed	60 x 25
Machinery/bedding store	80 x 60
Brood shed 1	23 x 33
Brood shed 2	20 x 45
Brood shed 3	50 x 28

There are no buildings available or suitable for conversion to a residential dwelling as this is discussed further in paragraph 13.

6. Land Holding

The land at Harracott extends to 40.5 hectares (100 acres) owned by Mr and Mrs Heard. A plan is attached at Appendix 1 to show the location of the land owned by Mr and Mrs Heard.

7. Livestock on the Holding

Livestock on the holding comprises a flock of organic free-range chicken bred for meat. There are usually three batches of 8030 chickens on the farm at any one time. The chickens come in as day old chicks and are housed in the brood sheds at Harracott for the first three weeks of life, where they are provided with heat and light, which is gradually reduced in preparation for them to be moved to the free-range houses on the farm at three weeks of age. The chickens remain in the free-range houses until they are moved off the holding to the 2Sisters processing plant at 10 weeks of age.

In addition to the poultry enterprise, Mr and Mrs Heard run a herd of 35 suckler cows plus followers, predominantly Hereford crosses, which are calved between February and May. All the cows are housed between October and April. After calving they are turned out on the land, weather permitting. The calves remain with the mother until weaning, when they are then reared and sold at 14-16 months as store cattle.

Replacement heifers are bred and reared on the holding.

The Standard Man Day calculations for labour generated as a result of livestock on the holding are attached at Appendix 2.

8. Labour Employed on the Holding

Labour on the holding comprises Mr Andrew Heard on a full-time basis. He also employs two full time members of staff, who work on a rota of 4 days on, 4 days off. This ensures there is always at least two members of staff working at any one time. Seasonal part time help is employed at busy times of year to help with harvest and field operations. Mrs Heard works part time on the holding carrying out all the admin and farm office tasks.

All of the farming operations at Harracott are undertaken by Mr Heard and his staff, including all stock husbandry and field operations such as ploughing, drilling, mowing, turning silage, baling, wrapping, dung spreading and hedge trimming.

The farm business has a substantial range of machinery and keeps this up-to-date and in good condition.

9. Investment on the Holding

Mr and Mrs Heard have, within the last 5 years, purchased 12.9 hectares (32 acres) of land adjoining Harracott which shows the progression for the business.

Timber roadways were purchased last year as investment in the poultry business, to enable vehicle movements to and from the free-range poultry houses whilst reducing soil compaction and erosion. This will mitigate diffuse water pollution on the holding which is a concern as the farm is situated in the high priority water quality catchment.

Concreting of yards and roofing of the slurry pit has also been undertaken to improve the holding and reduce diffuse water pollution. This was funded in part by Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship and the Catchment Sensitive Farming Initiative.

10. Future Plans

If an agricultural workers' dwelling were permitted at Harracott, it is Mr and Mrs Heard's intention to be able to provide accommodation for a full-time worker to allow Mr Heard to share the responsibility of being on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Due to the nature of the job, and the requirement to be on hand to help with loading and unloading of chickens and general care of the livestock at unsociable times of night a dwelling on site is necessary.

If permission for a supervisory dwelling is permitted, Mr and Mrs Heard are considering expanding the organic free-range chicken enterprise, as current consumer demand is very high. If a dwelling were permitted, it is Mr and Mrs Heard's intention to continue to expand and to purchase or rent further land as and when it becomes available.

11. National Planning Policy

11.1. National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework is the principal guidance document regarding planning policy and is used for assessing the merit for planning applications. There are a number of paragraphs that are relevant to this application.

11.1.1. Paragraph 11

Paragraph 11 sets out a "presumption in favour of sustainable development" and when making decisions, planning should be granted unless "the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits".

The most widely used definition of sustainability is the Brundtland Commission definition, which was set by the United Nations in 1987 (Resolution 42 /187) and is as follow:

“Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. This is the definition of sustainable development that is included in the National Planning Policy Framework at Paragraph 7.

In line with the principle of sustainable development, there are no adverse impacts in this case which would outweigh the benefits of having another dwelling on site, in terms of the improvements to animal care and the contribution to the local economy. The proposal accords with the development plan, and therefore should be approved.

11.1.2. Paragraph 79

Paragraph 79 is the key area of policy in relation to agricultural workers dwellings. As with previous policy guidance, it is generally against new and isolated homes in the countryside but allows that there might be “special circumstances” such as “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”.

This application clearly falls within the parameters of Paragraph 79 as there is an essential need for a further dwelling in connection with the farming business. This dwelling is required in order to provide an adequate supervisory presence at Harracott.

In general, essential need is comprised of two factors; the first being that there is sufficient work generated on the holding, and the second being that those workers are required to be living in the locality/near the site in order to meet the essential needs of the business.

The labour requirement for the holding is assessed by the Standard Man Day calculations for the activities undertaken on the holding, a copy of which is included at Appendix 2. This demonstrates that there is a Standard Man Day requirement of 568.27 standard man days. This equates to 2.07 full time workers at 275 days per worker. This labour requirement would be expected for an organic holding of this size with a free-range poultry rearing enterprise, which is more labour intensive than is reflected in these figures. There is a high level of management involved to ensure the smooth rotation of the poultry to enable the high standard of hygiene and disease control to be maintained.

The second element of the essential need is that there must be a requirement for a 24-hour supervisory presence for each of the workers for whom a dwelling is required, in this case being 2 workers.

On-site supervision is necessary to ensure the business can function properly and safeguard the health and welfare of the stock accommodated at the holding. To function properly there needs to be always at least one person available at the holding. Poultry enterprises can require essential care at very short notice, as emergencies can quickly escalate to the loss of multiple birds.

On site supervision is necessary to ensure the business is compliant with the Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994, particularly the requirements for domestic fowl published by DEFRA. The current Welfare Code encourages all those who care for animals to follow the highest standards of husbandry. Good stockmanship is essential for protecting animal welfare, and is particularly important in organic systems as medicine and antibiotic use is restricted.

Animals which are badly managed or unhealthy will not thrive, and as such it is essential the stockman looks for signs of distress, disease, or aggression towards an animal by others in the group. For this

reason, it is essential the stockman has sufficient time to inspect the stock, check all the equipment and deal with any problems arising swiftly. Problems may arise at any time of the day or night due to welfare problems of the flock or herd, power failures, or breakdown of automated equipment such as heaters, ventilation, drinkers etc.

A significant risk to the free-range poultry is predators. It is particularly important during the day when the birds are ranging outside. Deer and foxes pose a serious risk to the flock. Any breach in the fencing of the paddock areas may allow the birds to escape, which may also cause them to panic.

The poultry on the holding are prone to problems such as variations in temperature or ventilation, as they are extremely sensitive to cold when they are young birds. They are also very susceptible to loud noises such as thunder and lightning storms, and this may cause them to smother, whereby they huddle on top of each other and can be suffocated. It is known for hundreds of birds to be lost in one incident. A fright from a fox or other predator or even low flying aircraft can also cause this, so constant supervision is essential to keep these risks to a minimum. If a smother does occur it is necessary to manually move the birds and separate the huddle to prevent the suffocation of the birds..

The chicks arrive as day old birds, that have been vaccinated with aviguard, hispracox, respen and vaxxitek to protect against a variety of diseases. Daily tasks to ensure the poultry remain high welfare include a minimum of twice daily checks on the brood sheds where the youngest chicks are housed. The temperature and ventilation are monitored to maintain the correct levels for the age of the chicks, starting at 30 degrees for the day-old chicks and reducing to ambient temperature by three weeks of age in preparation for the birds being moved to the free-range mobile sheds located in the fields surrounding the farmyard. Artificial light is provided in the brood sheds, which is reduced gradually from one hour of darkness at day one, to standard daylight hours by week three.

The brood sheds are fed manually twice a day and bedded daily. Water drinkers are automated but must be checked twice daily to ensure all are working correctly and clean of bedding/debris.

At three weeks of age, Mr Heard and two members of staff spend approximately six hours catching the chicks and transferring them into crates, which are then transported by tractor and trailer to the free-range mobile chicken houses in the fields. At this point the brood houses are thoroughly cleaned out, pressure washed and disinfected, ready for the next crop of day-old chicks to be delivered. The turnaround period between batches is approximately 8 days.

On arrival in the free-range houses, the chickens are kept in for the first week to enable them to adjust to their new surroundings, before being allowed to roam within a pen surrounding the houses. In order to maintain the free-range status, the birds have access to outside during daylight hours. The birds are released every morning, and in the evening it must be ensured that all birds have returned to the mobile houses. This involves work outside of the normal working hours particularly during the summer, for the birds to have maximum time outdoors.

There are two blocks of free-range houses, one with 11 and one with 12 houses, each housing different aged batches of chickens. These houses are equipped with automatic drinkers which must be monitored daily. The chickens are bedded with straw daily, fed and checked for signs of ill health which must be treated promptly to reduce spread, which can be rapid if not detected early due to the number and proximity of the birds. The poultry are weighed on a weekly basis, and weights are communicated to 2Sisters, the processors.

The chickens remain in the free-range sheds until they are 71 days of age. The feeders, drinkers, perches and pecking blocks are removed on the day of collection, prior to the team of catchers arriving. The catching of the finished chicken is usually carried out overnight between 11pm and 3am. Two articulated lorries arrive containing modules of crates that Mr Heard transports with a forklift to the free-range houses, for the catchers to fill with birds. Mr Heard then transports the filled crates back to load the articulated lorries.

When the finished chickens leave the farm for the processing plant, the free-range houses are pressure washed and disinfected, and moved position to another field. The location is continually rotated between batches to ensure the land is returned to the cropping rotation, used to grow wholecrop cereals and temporary grass to feed the stock on the farm. This prevents the risk of disease spread between batches and protects the fertility of the land.

There is a turnaround period of 10 days between batches to ensure the clean houses are moved to their new position. The portable timber roadways are moved to the new position, and all associated water pipes, header tanks and drinkers are moved with the houses and installed in the new position.

The 24-hour supervision required for the chicken enterprise in particular but also the seasonal requirement for assistance at calving time, has always been provided by Mr Heard. This has meant he is not able to leave the farm for any period of time as, if the alarm goes to indicate a problem with the brood houses, the consequences could be fatal for the young chicks if not attended to immediately. This is not only a welfare issue but would prove financially devastating for the business if chicks are lost.

When the suckler cows are calving they require constant attention to ensure that they do not lose their calves or fall into difficulty during calving. If careful attention is given to the cows and calves before and after calving the risk of loss is minimised.

It is important to ensure that the cows spend the first few hours of life isolated with their calves to bond and to ensure the calf receive colostrum within the first hours of life. This provides the calf with antibodies from the mother which provides immunity against disease, assuring them of their future healthy development.

It is essential to give the calves immediate attention when they are born but it is impossible that the time of birth can be programmed, therefore it is essential to be able to offer 24-hour care in case of emergency. In this instance an essential need for a second resident worker is demonstrated for the holding.

Suckler cows are known to be notoriously temperamental, and at calving time it is essential to have a second person on hand to help with difficult calvings from a health and safety perspective.

Naturally, an animal which is housed is more likely to become trapped in some way or to injure themselves and therefore sufficient levels of supervisory staff on site increases the chance of early detection, therefore greatly reducing the time that an animal must wait for attention.

Fire risk is a serious concern if there is not someone on hand at all times to evacuate stock, tackle the fire and raise the alarm. The provision of alarms and security lighting is of limited use if there is no one on site to deal with the problems as and when they arise.

The farm is currently in a Mid-Tier Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreement which promotes farming in an environmentally sustainable manner, whilst preserving and enhancing the biodiversity present on the holding. Steps have been taken on the farm to mitigate diffuse water pollution in the local catchment by covering livestock gathering areas and renewing concrete yards.

The brood sheds are heated via a biomass boiler, which is run on wood pellets. A 4-kW solar power system is in use on the farm, with the electricity produced being sold back to the National Grid.

There is a 100,000-litre rainwater harvesting tank, from which water goes through a filtration plant before being used to provide water to all the stock on the farm. These measures show Mr and Mrs Heard are dedicated to operating a sustainable business.

All of these issues, in addition to the many general farming tasks undertaken in connection with a farm must be taken into consideration along with others such as welfare, quality of stockmanship and animal husbandry and the necessity to provide essential attention to stock as required under the Agricultural (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1968 and the Cross Compliance Guidance and Legislation associated with current agricultural policy. In light of this, it is considered that the business has an essential need for a worker to be present on site within sight and sound of the land and buildings at Harracott Farm 24 hours a day to provide essential care at short notice and deal with any emergencies in a quick and efficient manner to avoid or reduce pain, suffering and loss of animals.

11.1.3. Paragraph 83

Paragraph 83 refers to policy support for rural economies and the allowance of growth in the countryside. Local plans should “support sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed buildings” and enable “the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses”.

This is a rural farming business that has expanded over the years through the hard work of the Heard family and now comprises a highly productive organic livestock farm. The needs of the farm and the financial performance of the business are more than able to support such a dwelling.

There are no existing buildings on site that are available or suitable for conversion. This is discussed in further detail in Paragraph 13.

12. Local Planning Policy

12.1. North Devon and Torridge Local Plan

Under the adopted Local Plan, Policy DM28, Rural Worker Accommodation is the relevant policy to consider.

Reflecting the National Planning Policy Framework, this policy requires that it be demonstrated that there is an essential operational need for a full-time worker to be resident at or near the place of work. We consider that the information provided under Paragraph 11.1.2 clearly shows this need has been met.

This is a full planning application, the design details including the size and nature of the dwelling are provided within the application documents and comply with Part 1b of Policy DM28. The dwelling that is proposed will indeed be commensurate to the needs of the business.

It is also necessary under this policy to demonstrate that the required worker cannot be housed in a nearby settlement, an existing dwelling at or near the site or through converting a suitable redundant or disused building. The availability of suitable alternative accommodation within the locality is dealt with below at Paragraph 13. As already discussed, there are no suitable redundant or disused buildings to convert.

The access to the site will be via an existing access and therefore we do not consider that there are any particular access issues and therefore the proposal satisfies part 1d of Policy DM28.

As accounts are provided as a separate supporting document to this application, part 2 of Policy DM28 is fully complied with. The financial statements show the business is generating a profit from its farming enterprises and the proposed dwelling is affordable to this business.

It is not considered that parts 3 and 5 are particularly relevant to this application and in line with part 4 as already stated, it would be fully expected that an Agricultural Occupancy condition be imposed.

13. Suitability of Alternative Accommodation

There are a no suitable properties for sale or rent within the local area as no properties would be within sight and sound of the buildings at Harracott. The only properties sold within 1 mile of Harracott in the last 2 years have sold for over £300,000 and would be in excess of Mr and Mrs Heard's budget. The properties also would not be within sight and sound of the agricultural buildings therefore would not be appropriate.

Even with some form of CCTV or the current alarm system in place or regular trips back and forth to the land at Harracott Farm, this would involve vehicle movements at irregular hours at regular intervals through the night which while impractical for the worker, would also have adverse impact on neighbours and their quiet enjoyment of their own homes.

14. Siting and Access

The site has been selected in order to be within sight and sound of the agricultural buildings in order for the occupant to be able to quickly respond to any issues and to be on immediate hand to carry out necessary management tasks.

Trespass and vandalism can have a serious effect on any livestock unit. Biosecurity breaches and damage to equipment or buildings can have a serious effect on the welfare of stock, as well as the risk of theft. Without there being someone on site at all times 24-hours a day the risks are greatly increased.

The proposed site of the supervisory dwelling would be to the north of the agricultural buildings. The siting would ensure the occupant is within sight and sound of the livestock buildings, to enable them to hear any animal in distress and help quickly. The site will also provide security as access to the farmyard will be past the supervisory dwelling.

A Design and Access Statement has been submitted as a supporting document to the application for a new agricultural worker's dwelling and more details in respect of siting, design and access can be found in that document.

15. Flood Risk

The site lies within Flood Zone 1 as designated on the Environment Agency Flood Risk map, and therefore as the site is less than a hectare in size it is not considered to be at risk of flooding or to generate a flood risk elsewhere. In accordance with Environment Agency guidance, a full Flood Risk Assessment has not therefore been produced.

16. General Comments

The Heard family started with 56 acres some 61 years ago and have built up a successful organic livestock enterprise with a strong emphasis on the environment and sustainability. They are a genuine farming family that have built up a profitable farm through hard work and determination. The granting of this application would allow them to further build and strengthen their business into the future.

17. Provenance

This appraisal has been prepared on in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (2019 revision) and is based on the information provided by the applicant and produced by the undersigned. The undersigned has worked in Devon and Cornwall for the past 4 years having gained her Masters' degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management at Harper Adams University. She is a fellow of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers (CAAV). The undersigned has prepared numerous appraisals for applicants in various district Council areas in the region.

Signed:
Sarah Richardson MProf FAAV

Dated: 1st October 2021

Appendix 1 Land ownership plan.



Appendix 2 Standard Man Day Calculations

Number	Livestock/Crop	SMDs per head/ha	Total
<i>Livestock (head)</i>			
108,000	Broilers	0.002	216
2	Bulls	3.5	7
35	Sucklers	1.35	47.25
50	Store Cattle	1.9	95
6	Alpacas	0.5	3
Total Livestock			368.25
<i>Land (hectares)</i>			
16.2	3 cuts of silage	4.0	64.8
12.1	1 cut of silage	1.6	19.36
12.1	Wholecrop	1.15	13.9
12.1	Re seeding	0.6	7.26
Total Land			105.32
			473.57
5% for organic management			23.67
15% for maintenance (-5% organic)			71.03
TOTAL			568.27

As the above table shows, there is a considerable labour requirement in connection with this farming business, as would be expected with an intensive organic free-range poultry and beef farm.

Overall, 568.27 Standard Man Days generated results in a labour requirement for 2.07 full time workers in connection with this business.

Of this labour requirement, 368.25 SMDs are generated in relation to the care of the livestock alone, which amounts to 1.35 workers.