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Brooks Hill Farm, Calmore Relocation of Farm Buildings

Agricultural Needs Report

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1 Introduction

1.1 Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd is instructed by the Street family to assess and justify the need for replacement farm buildings at Brooks Hill Farm, Calmore.

1.2 The need for the replacement farm buildings follows the resolution by New Forest District Council to grant outline planning consent (20/10997) for 280 dwellings north of the A36 Salisbury Road, Calmore for Bloor Homes Ltd and Barker Mill Estates as part of the Local Plan North Totton Strategic allocation. The application site includes the existing farm complex at Brooks Hill Farm and some of the associated agricultural land, with the development described as follows:

“Outline planning application with all matters reserved, except means of access to the highway network (junction arrangements) and associated highway improvements, for the demolition of existing buildings and the residential (C3) development of the site with up to 280 dwellings, Alternative Natural Recreational Greenspace, informal and formal open space, together with associated drainage, utilities and all other associated and necessary infrastructure.”

1.3 The potential implications of demolishing and not replacing the existing farm buildings are not considered in the Officer’s Report to Committee, which makes only one reference to the existing buildings in the Site Description:

“The only existing buildings on the application site are a small group of agricultural buildings (of mainly modern construction) that are set close to Salisbury Road. There are areas of hardstanding around these buildings, but otherwise the site is comprised of a number of individual fields laid to permanent pasture and grazed by livestock.”

1.4 Although described as being of modern construction in the Report to Committee, the existing buildings are in a poor condition and generally unsuitable for modern agriculture. The proposal is to replace them with a purpose-built set of farm buildings within the retained land at Brooks Hill Farm, approximately 370m to the north-west of their current location.

1.5 This report provides a description of the existing farm holding and the agricultural enterprise undertaken. It then describes the existing farm buildings and the proposed replacement buildings, and provides a detailed explanation and justification for the proposed replacement buildings.

2 Brooks Hill Farm

- 2.1 Brooks Hill Farm has been in the ownership of the Street family for three generations, initially as a dairy and poultry farm, with small areas of market gardening. It has been rented out to family members and relatives for the last two generations for dairy and beef cattle farming, and is now mostly let to Jamie Alford, who runs a cattle rearing and agricultural contracting business.
- 2.2 The farm is in three parts, having been severed by the construction of the A326 in the mid-1980s. Most of the farm lies to the east of the A326 and north of Salisbury Road, and currently comprises 18.51 ha (46 acres) of pasture and the farmyard which has been let to Mr Alford since 2006. The two areas to the west of the A326 amount to 4.09 ha (10 acres) and are let separately to two other occupiers.
- 2.3 Once the planning consent for the land north of Salisbury Road is implemented, the main (eastern) part of the land holding will reduce in size to approximately 11.4 ha (28 acres), with the two areas to the west of the A326 remaining the same as at present. An access road will be constructed from the Salisbury Road through the new development and will continue along the eastern boundary of the land holding to serve the new farm buildings which will be located in the north-western part of the new holding.
- 2.4 The main enterprise at Brooks Hill Farm is cattle rearing, with batches of 15-20 young calves purchased at Salisbury or Frome markets or from dairy farms in the locality and reared to strong stores at approximately 24 months of age, when they are sold to specialist finishing units.

Figure 1: Young cattle grazing at Brooks Hill Farm



2.5 There are currently 108 cattle grazing but total numbers are commonly around 160 which need to be housed over winter, usually from the end of October to April as the ground is too wet to support them without destroying soil structures. Most of the cattle are housed for two winters before being sold, with straw bedding bought in and stored in the yard, and wrapped forage made and also stored in the yard.

2.6 Brooks Hill Farm is farmed in association with 152 ha (377 acres) of pasture in the locality at the following locations:

Table 1: Land farmed in association with Brooks Hill Farm

Location	Hectares	Number of years farmed
Wade Park Farm	24	21
Land at Ower (1)	13	11
Land at Ower (2)	23	8
Netley Marsh	17	11
Meadow Mead	16	23
Home Farm	15	13
Hunts Farm	19	4
Timsbury Meadows	25	6

2.7 Whilst the area occupied is extensive and has generally been occupied for many years, the land is bare pasture which is used for forage production and grazing. Forage which is surplus to the requirements of the cattle enterprise is stored at Brooks Hill Farm before being sold.

2.8 Mr Alford also runs an agricultural contracting business, concentrating on harvesting, baling and wrapping forage, cultivations, seed drilling, muck spreading and hedge cutting which services a large area of agricultural land in the locality. The agricultural machinery for this operation is also stored outside on the yard at Brooks Hill Farm, with examples of the equipment shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Agricultural equipment stored on the outdoor yard



2.9 The agricultural contracting business is a significant rural employer in the locality, with seven full-time workers and an additional eight seasonal workers at peak harvesting times.

2.10 Aside from the buildings at Brooks Hill Farm, Mr Alford only has use of one other building that is rented and used to store machinery but this will soon no longer be available to him. The buildings and yard at Brooks Hill Farm are therefore central and critical to farming a substantial area of land (170 ha) in the locality; for over-wintering up to 160 cattle; for storing substantial volumes of wrapped forage and straw for both the cattle enterprise and for wider sale; and storing a number of items of machinery that are required to service a large area of agricultural land in the locality.

3 Farm Buildings

3.1 The layout of the existing farm buildings is shown in the Google Earth image at Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Farm buildings at Brooks Hill Farm



Building	Description
1	Cattle sheds, 420m ² and 260m ²
2	Open cattle yard
3	Cattle race/handling facilities
4	Wrapped bale storage
5	Farm office
6	Farm workshop
7	Outside machinery and equipment storage

- 3.2 The overall yard extends to approximately 7,630m², of which the cattle sheds, open cattle yard and cattle handling facilities amount to slightly more than 1,000m².
- 3.3 A record of condition survey of the buildings was carried out by Mr J Farquhar in the mid-2000s. This described the western cattle shed as:

“Lean-to pole barn with corrugated iron roof. North elevation brick and south elevation open with gates. West end open with gate and east end open with 2 gates overlapping. Floor could not be inspected as covering of dung over.

Structure - Timbered poles of some age.

Roof - Corrugated iron rusting and of some age with some holes and some sheets loose.

Brick wall - Brick and blockwork opening blocked up, not that sound, of some age.

Generally - Building of poor construction, gates rusting serviceable but not fixed. Electrics believed not working.”

- 3.4 The current condition of this shed is shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4: Existing cattle shed to west



3.5 The cattle shed to the east of the open yard was described as follows:

“Monopitch pole barn for hay and straw storage. The barn constructed of timber poles with asbestos/cement roof sheeting with roof lights, blockwork wall to approximately 5 ft and corrugated iron above. Floor covered with dung and debris and could not be inspected.

Structure - Pole barn with timber supports. Southern gable end post damaged. All posts old and of some age, but serviceable.

Roof - Asbestos/cement fibre sheeting all satisfactory, but of some age. Roof lights complete.

Walls - North east corner block walling damaged and collapsed and block work elsewhere moved and out of true. C.1. tin rusting and some loose but serviceable. Slatted ventilation on back wall all in poor order and damaged.

Guttering and downpipes loose and requiring refixing. Water trough in sound order.

Building generally serviceable for storage purposes but is old.”

3.6 This building is shown below in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Existing cattle shed to east



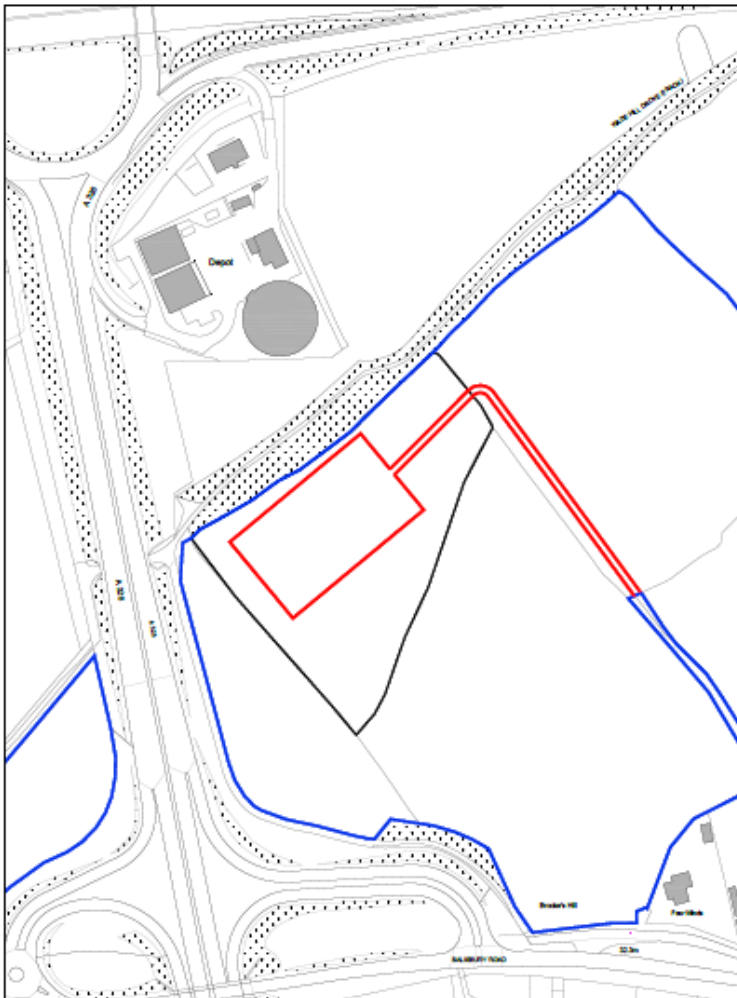
3.7 The Record of Condition survey also described the old milking parlour (which has since been demolished as the roof collapsed) as being in very poor order, and the workshop and machinery store as being of some age but serviceable.

3.8 The condition of the buildings has worsened in the last twenty years, given that reinvestment in the site would have been wasted in the light of its potential development for housing. The brick buildings adjacent to Salisbury Road have also deteriorated badly to the point where they are not safe to use, and a number of wooden huts have collapsed. Instead, the hardstanding areas have been used for the open storage of wrapped fodder and machinery, with some containers also used for feed, farm chemicals and secure storage.

4 Description of the Proposed Buildings

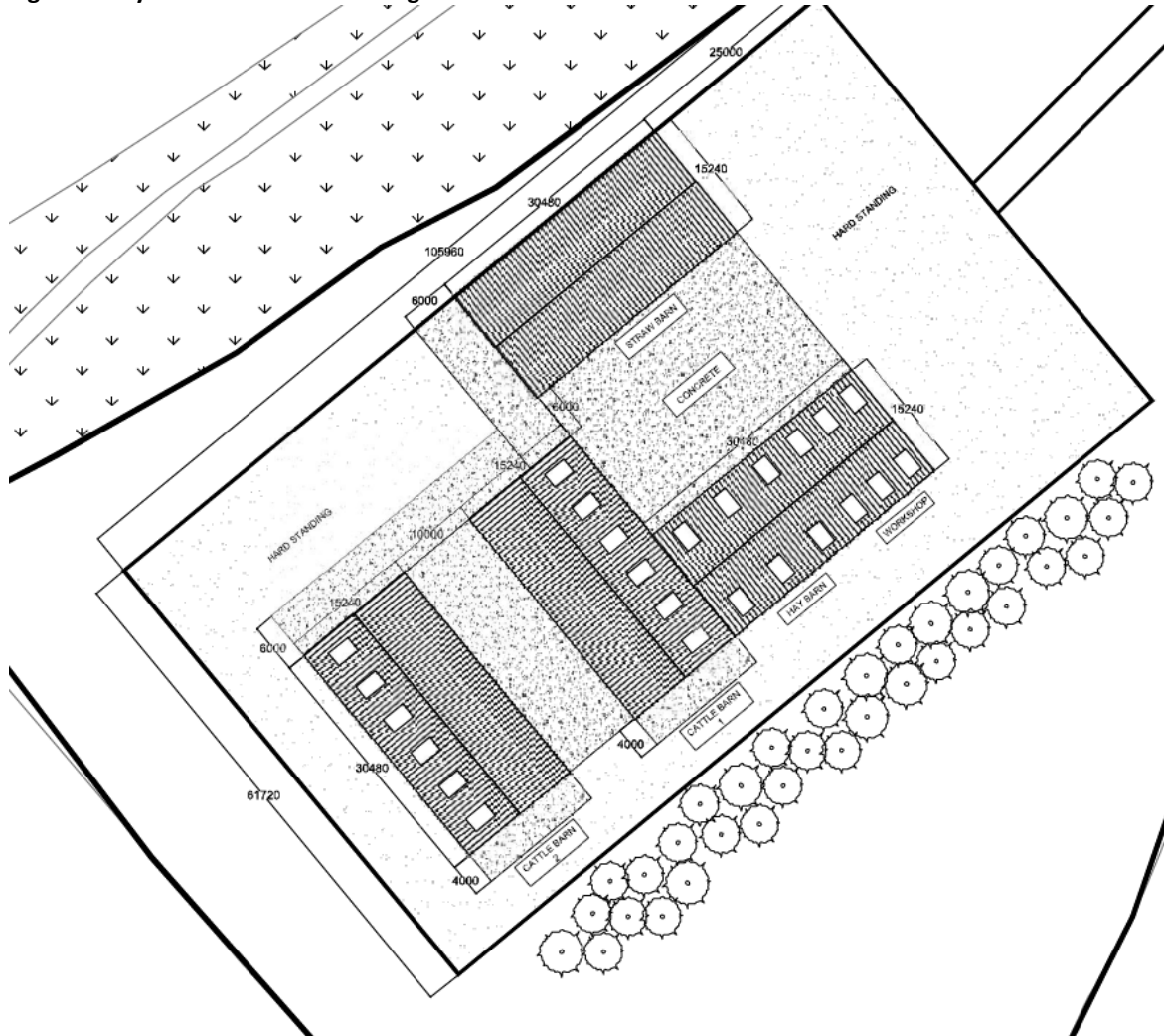
4.1 The proposed new yard will be located in the north-western corner of the retained land at Brooks Hill Farm, on low-lying land adjacent to the A326 and Ower Depot, as shown in the extract from the Site Location Plan at Figure 6. The existing farm buildings are to the immediate east of the buildings shown in the bottom right hand corner of the image, and the proposed access to the new yard is shown to the east of the new yard, following and upgrading an existing track.

Figure 6: Location of new farm buildings at Brooks Hill Farm



4.2 The new farm buildings will comprise two cattle barns, a hay barn, a straw barn and a workshop in two adjoining yards, which extend to a total of 6,539m², as shown in the extract from the Block Plan at Figure 7:

Figure 7: Layout of new farm buildings at Brooks Hill Farm



4.3 The cattle barns in the western yard would each measure 465m² (15.24m x 30.48m), with 6m to the eaves. They would have reinforced concrete panels to 4m at the rear elevations and for two-thirds of the end elevations, with metal profiled cladding above and for the roof (with six rooflights in each building). The front third of the building would be covered but open sided. This roof overhang is necessary to ensure that feed can be distributed from the central passageway and kept dry.

4.4 The eastern yard would contain a straw barn and a hay barn/workshop, which would also be two 465m² buildings facing each other but across a wider yard which is necessary to manoeuvre the tractors and trailers loading and unloading the straw and hay.

5 Rationale for the Proposal

- 5.1 Local planning policy encourages agricultural enterprises and a prosperous rural economy. The New Forest (outside the National Park) Core Strategy (2009) – Policy CS21 sets out the strategy for the rural economy which includes encouraging agricultural enterprises where this is consistent with maintaining and enhancing the environment; keeping existing employment sites; and encouraging improvements and redevelopments that will help maintain and enhance the environment.
- 5.2 The New Forest District Local Plan 2016-2036 Part 1: Planning Strategy – Policy SO8 seeks to promote a positive future for rural areas and help secure their economic prosperity and social well-being by supporting farming, traditional commoning practices, agricultural and rural enterprises, tourism and the diversification of the rural economy.
- 5.3 The rationale for the relocation and replacement of the buildings is very clear. With the realisation of Strategic Site SS1 and implementation of the development under application 20/10997, the existing buildings will need replacement to support an enterprise that:
- rears and needs to house approximately 160 cattle over winter;
 - makes forage over wide area in the locality for the cattle enterprise and for sale to others;
 - provides agricultural contracting services to a large area of agricultural land in the locality;
 - provides local agricultural employment for seven full-time workers and up to eight seasonal workers.
- 5.4 Without the buildings and yard, the enterprises will not be able to function, with a very clear subsequent loss to the rural economy and rural employment.
- 5.5 The replacement of the buildings also enables the farm to modernise its facilities, which are deficient in a number of respects. Apart from the generally poor condition of the existing buildings, the design of the new cattle buildings will ensure that the cattle bedding is entirely under cover which will minimise any run-off from the buildings, with any run-off collected separately from solid manure in order to comply with Nitrate Vulnerable Zone regulations. .
- 5.6 The new cattle buildings will also allow the cattle handling facilities to be located under cover, so that any cattle requiring attention and/or veterinary assistance can be separated and treated under cover to the benefit of both the animal and the handler.

- 5.7 The cattle buildings are appropriately designed for their use, with open fronts to ensure adequate ventilation and a dry feeding area; reinforced walling to take the force from large animals; and adequate head room to mechanically clean out the buildings.
- 5.8 The proposed buildings are appropriately sized – the two buildings would have a total footprint of 930m² which is less than the area currently occupied by the two buildings and the open yard (1,000m²) but which is arranged in a much more efficient layout. Standard farm management data¹ shows that straw bedded yards with all internal equipment and feed passages need up to 6m² per head which for 160 cattle is 960m². Given that some cattle will be younger and require less space, the buildings are appropriately sized.
- 5.9 The second yard enables the undercover storage of the substantial volumes of hay and straw that are produced and used on the farm or sold. The two areas shown on Figure 1 as storing wrapped forage amount to about 600m² on their own, irrespective of other areas within the yard also used for wrapped forage. The proposal will result in a very substantial reduction in the volume of plastic film used for wrapping forage, as well as visually containing the bulky material within a building.
- 5.10 There are also a number of key items of machinery that should be stored under cover whenever possible but which are currently stored outside, as shown by the examples in Figure 2. These include tractors, a telehandler, a square baler, a wrapper, a mower, a topper and a tedder. Storing these items under cover when space is available within the hay and straw barns and workshop will prolong their lives.

¹ Agro Business Consultants (2022). The Agricultural Budgeting & Costing Book, 94th edition.

6 Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1 Brooks Hill Farm has been in the ownership of the Street family for three generations, and has been let to its current tenant since 2006. It is the base of a substantial enterprise farming a total of 170 ha of land in the locality, rearing 160 cattle from young calves to strong stores, and providing agricultural contracting services to local landowners over a substantial area. The business employs seven full-time workers, with an additional eight workers employed seasonally at peak times.
- 6.2 Once the planning consent (20/10997) for 280 dwellings north of Salisbury Road is implemented, the existing farm buildings will be lost and the land holding will reduce in size. There will still be a requirement however to provide a base to continue a substantial and successful agricultural and rural enterprise, and the redevelopment of the farm yard provides an opportunity to overcome a number of the shortcomings of the current yard. These shortcomings particularly relate to overwintering cattle in an open yard; having to use large volumes of plastic film to wrap forage due to a lack of storage facilities; having to store expensive equipment outside; and as well as having to upgrade the poor condition of the buildings.
- 6.3 Without the buildings and yard, the enterprises will not be able to function, with a very clear subsequent loss to the rural economy and rural employment.
- 6.4 The proposal is therefore to replace the existing farm buildings with a purpose-built set of farm buildings within the retained land at Brooks Hill Farm, approximately 370m to the north-west of their current location on low-lying land adjacent to the A326 and Ower Depot.
- 6.5 The new farm buildings will comprise two cattle barns, a hay barn, a straw barn and a workshop in two adjoining yards, which extend to a total of 6,539m². This is smaller than the existing yard of 7,630m², described in the Officer's Report as *"a small group of agricultural buildings"*.
- 6.6 The buildings are appropriately designed for their use, and of an appropriate size replicating the existing internal and external footprints but arranged in a much more operationally efficient manner.
- 6.7 The proposal is therefore compliant with Policy CS21 of the Core Strategy and Policy SO8 of the Local Plan 2016-2036 in supporting agricultural enterprises, rural employment and a prosperous rural economy.