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**MR AND MRS M MERCHANT
COULNACRAIG FARM, OLD MILITARY ROAD, POTARCH, BANCHORY AB314BJ
PROPOSED HOUSE AND ANNEX FOR THE AGRICULTURAL HOLDING**

INTRODUCTION

Coulnacraig Farm is a registered farm situated 9 miles from Banchory on the "Old Military Road" which runs between Potarch and Feughside. The RPID reference number is 290177 and location code is 66/039/0109. It extends to 7.53 hectares.

Owners of Coulnacraig and applicants for this proposal are Matthew and Kate Merchant. They are local to the area having been born and brought up in Banchory, Torphins and Braemar, schooled in Torphins, Banchory and Aberdeen and have lived in Banchory since 1986. Coulnacraig was viewed by them as their opportunity to have their own "wee rural enterprise" within their local area and they could not resist the temptation to acquire the farm when the opportunity arose in 2018.

At purchase it was obvious the farm needed improving. Previous owners had utilised the farm mainly as coarse grazing but allowed the land to fall into a state of disrepair. Remnants of previous fences were visible but beyond repair and the existing shared access had its own difficulties in terms of visibility and safety.

The first improvements undertaken by Matthew and Kate was to provide new fencing and gates around the land to make the farm stock proof. An application for a new access was submitted to and approved by the Aberdeenshire Council. This was formed and installed in 2019 and gave independent and safe access to the farm direct off the adjacent public road.

The new fencing, gates and access were seen as providing the foundation for the future but over the last six years of ownership it became clear that the aims and aspirations to develop the rural enterprise needed permanent on-site presence.

Hence this application is to provide an on-site house and annex for owner and worker accommodation. Permanent accommodation on site will aid and assist them to develop the farm as a small scale rural enterprise providing small scale employment in the locality and through land improvements and enterprise make a positive contribution to the rural environment and culture.

LAND FARMED

The land farmed extends to 7.53 hectares and is in three parcels.

Parcel 1 consists of 3.490 grazing.

Parcel 2 consists of 2.840 mixed open woodland and grazing.

Parcel 3 consists of 1.20 hectares woodland, yard and farm access.

Parcel 1 and 2 are fully fenced with three strand wire and rylock mesh stockproof fencing for

cattle and sheep.

Parcel 2 contains 3.0 hectares of commercial woodland and parcel 3 has 0.5 hectares of mainly birch trees with some softwoods. Both areas have continual management and maintenance requirement.

When the property was acquired the gates and fences on site had fallen into a complete state of disrepair. New fencing was erected four years ago at considerable expense by the current owners. Grazing areas are now fully fenced and gated with two parcels being created with new stock proof fencing. The fencing created the opportunity for the farm to be used to provide grazing for breeding cows and followers and for ewes and lambs on separate occasions.

Parcel 3 lies adjacent to the public road and has a stream running through it. When the current owners acquired the farm, access was across and through the adjacent commercial land. This was not a suitable arrangement and a new access was formed giving direct and safer access to the public road.

All goods into and out of the farm are transferred via parcel 3.

The farm has capacity to reasonably accommodate up to 10 cows and followers, or 70 ewes and lambs or a mixture of breeding pigs and Alpacas. These could be reared for slaughter or directly marketed to customers. There is also capacity to erect enclosures within the yard areas to accommodate poultry, ducks and turkeys and other smaller livestock animals.

STAFF

The farm will be family run as a small scale agricultural enterprise. The owners will reside in the house and provide the staff level needed to develop and run the business and their input will be supplemented if and when required by the further assistance of part time labour.

LAND TYPE

The land quality is mixed and ranges from grazing to rough grazing to woodland. Parcel 1 slopes south to north and is mainly coarse grass with some fern, parcel 2 slopes south to north and has three sub sections consisting of fern on the south sub section and open woodland to the north sub section which supports strong natural grass growth and the remainder area is wet underfoot with strong natural grass growth.

FARMING SYSTEM

Livestock such as cattle, sheep, pigs and alpacas can all be supported in parcels 1 and 2 where substantial grazing exists although supplementary feeding in winter may be necessary depending on the animals. Given the proximity to the public roadway and the areas of land suitable for buildings on-site storage and deliveries can easily be accommodated.

Parcel 3 is undulating and is taken up mainly for access and agricultural buildings and yard although there is space to accommodate smaller farm animals such as chickens and ducks

ACCESS

The farm is located adjacent to public road known as the Old Military Road. Access to the farm is via a tarred junction with the main road and then into the farm via on-site tracks and roadways.

ANTICIPATED LABOUR REQUIREMENTS FOR ENTERPRISE

Labour required to operate the enterprise is not full time but depending on how the business develops the following may be expected.

Animal	number	allocation per head	total allocation
Pigs	10	28	280
Grazing	6.3	3.1	20
Sheep	50	5.2	260
Alpacas	10	5.2	52
Small animals			200
Tree husbandry			200
Total			1412
Hours per labour unit per annum			1900
No of labour units			0.74

Data Source farm Management Handbook 2020/21

The figures show a requirement for approx 0.75 labour units which will be provided by the owners living on site supplementing their time in their full time occupations.

FINANCIAL VIABILITY

The enterprise is shown above relates to incorporating core activities. Further developing the enterprise will expand the financial viability. The house for the enterprise will be built from existing funds. Having the house on site will allow labour to be on site and that in turn will allow the enterprise to expand and develop, expand the financial viability and help reduce the need to supplement income from full time occupations. The owners already have already invested in the main stay equipment needed to run and maintain the enterprise. If additional plant and machinery are needed that will be provided by agricultural contractors on an ad hoc basis.

LOCATION OF NEW DWELLING AND ANNEX

IMPACT

The proposed location for the house is shown on the attached location plan and is screened from view from the public road by the existing tree cover and that will not be eroded by the proposal. The site is already served by public utilities.

PLANNING POLICY FOR DEVELOPMENT IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

LAYOUT SITING AND DESIGN

Layout, siting and design is a primary consideration and design must reflect local character and contribute to the sense of place. The location for the house has been carefully selected within the site to achieve good all round vision for security and supervision and yet well screened from the public road with existing trees being retained with scope for additional planting as required. There are no existing buildings on the farm which could permit conversion and therefore it requires to be new build. The detail of the design will be given greater attention at full planning stage but it is fair to say the site creates the opportunity for innovative and forward looking design to reflect traditional rural form.

A NEED FOR CONTINUOUS ON SITE RESOURCE

ANIMAL WELFARE

Animals need to be inspected regularly and any problems dealt with timeously. This can only be achieved with a permanent residence on site.

BIOSECURITY

It is important to be able to deal with infectious disease in a manner which minimises possible spread of infection. This is best achieved where problems can be resolved without the need for farm staff to go off site.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Farms are attractive places and there is always the possibility that visitors (welcome or not) arrive unannounced. A permanent presence will ensure access are well monitored.

OPERATIONAL EFFICIENCY

Livestock may require attention at all or any time of day or night. A permanent presence ensures effective and speedy response to agricultural needs whatever they are.

SECURITY AND THEFT

Rural crime is an ongoing concern in countryside areas. A permanent presence ensures that security and theft can be discouraged.

SUPPORTING DRAWINGS

1709-001-Site Location Plan

1709-002-Farm Plan

1709-003-Site layout Plan

1709-010-Indicative Floor Plan and Elevation the House and Annex

CONCLUSION/

Over/

CONCLUSION:

There is a strong functional need for on-site accommodation to allow Coulnacraig Farm to develop as a productive farm and realise its potential to provide small scale employment in the area and make a positive contribution to the rural environment and culture. The reasons for on-site accommodation are clear and concise and the supporting information shows compliance with the policies of Aberdeenshire Council as set out in their Planning Advice Note 13/2012, Housing and Business Development in the Countryside and Greenbelt.

In light of that and in full consideration of the foregoing it is therefore respectfully submitted that the council should support the proposal.