

4271 FRANCE LANE FARM SELF STORAGE UNIT

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

25th March 2024

INTRODUCTION

This document has been prepared in support of an application for the conversion of an agricultural shed into a self-storage unit.

The proposals have been developed with the intention of minimising alterations to the existing building, maintaining the agricultural character of the original building and setting.

The face of farming is changing meaning British farms are having to find supplementary revenue streams outside the traditional sphere of the traditional working farm. With farming having to adapt to environmental demands, its resilience to cope will rely on diversified income streams. The volatility in the agricultural sector as well as climate change means a greater reliance on more commercially oriented activities if farms are to stay productive, progressive and profitable.

This is such an example with an opportunity to bring a building which is no longer required to support the day-to-day farming operations into a viable use to support the farming business through diversification. Securing alternative income streams through diversification is essential if agriculture is to remain at the heart of the countryside and driver of the rural economy.

EXISTING

France Lane Farm is located near the village of Hawkesbury Upton, South Gloucestershire, to the west of the A46.

The farm lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

A dedicated private access track from France Lane, leads past the farmhouse to a former farm shop which has the benefit of planning permission for conversion to a dwelling (Ref: P23/01228/F). Beyond that are some larger agricultural barns that are used irregularly as part of the farming operation associated with the wider landholding. These barns also have separate access from the north east through the farm land.

The western-most barn is a large, open-sided agricultural shed, used intermittently for agricultural storage.

The building is steel framed, with a corrugated metal sheet roof. The central section has a dual pitch, with a lean-to section to the north and a narrower lean-to to the south.

The west elevation is partially clad with corrugated metal cladding, with a precast concrete panel plinth.

The building is of robust construction and in good repair and structural condition.



Photos of existing barn and location on site

PROPOSALS

The aim of the proposed conversion works would be to provide a viable use for the barn as a self-storage unit, providing an income to support the agricultural operation of the wider farm business.

The proposed alterations would be strictly minimal, with the building and its structure retained in its current form.

The existing profiled metal cladding on the western elevation would be replicated throughout, with insulated cladding panels installed across all elevations.

Two roller shutter doors would be installed within the existing steel frame to provide access to the storage units. Internally, approximately 13 individual container sized units would be provided for rental.

A small and discrete parking and loading/unloading area would be introduced on the existing hardstanding between the barn and the adjacent large barn to the east.

BACKGROUND

The self-storage industry has its origins in the United States in the 1960s but has grown in the UK since the 1980s.

Since the pandemic the UK self-storage sector has seen considerable growth with more and more people needing surplus storage space in part due to home/hybrid working, house moves and renovations, as well as the perpetual life-changing events – the so called ‘four D’s’ driving demand: death, divorce, dislocation and downsizing.

Emerging trends such as the millennial generation being more inclined to urban living and lack of space in apartments, lifestyle changes/decluttering/home clear outs, AirBnB and the need to remove personal belongings as well as e-commerce are also driving demand for self-storage.

The confined nature of the site, the low activity from a small number of storage units and light frequency of comings/goings is compatible with farming operations and so can sit alongside background agricultural activities and neighbouring properties.

USE

The following management strategy is proposed to show how the site would function.

The site is proposed to be run as a self-storage facility, operated and managed by Dyson Farming Ltd. Each storage unit would be individually let and independently operated to give patrons flexible access to their units.

Longer term unit lets would be encouraged through financial incentives and shorter terms discouraged in principle.

Access will be controlled by fob access via the shed doors. The site will operate working hours of 7:00 till 19:00 Monday to Friday, 8:00 to 13:00 Saturdays with no entry possible on Sundays or Bank/Public Holidays to restrict unsociable access to the site.

PLANNING POLICY

In line with previous incarnations of national planning policy, there is a continuation of strong support in the latest National Planning Policy Framework (2023) for farm diversification, rural tourism and leisure:

Supporting a prosperous rural economy-

88. 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, beautiful 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;*

This is further supported in local policy; the South Gloucestershire Core Strategy supports farm diversification and development for tourism with Policy CS34 .7 acknowledging that; “the viability of the rural economy also needs to be ensured by providing and protecting sufficient land and premises for a range of employment opportunities of a scale appropriate to the settlement/locality, supporting farm diversification and development for tourism where the scale and environmental impact is consistent with the rural location and by protecting existing services and facilities. (16.10)”

Policy PSP28 – Rural Economy of the South Gloucestershire Policy, Sites and Places Plan also supports the conversion of existing rural buildings to enable farm diversification, stating that; ““7.33 Farm diversification can assist farmers to stay in business and provide facilities for the local community and visitors to rural areas. Rural enterprises such as these, may provide opportunities to re-use traditional farm buildings, where parking can be contained to the farmyard...”
“7.35 If developments are to be acceptable in the countryside, the conversion or re-use of existing buildings is preferred....”

The proposals have been carefully tailored to the requirements of this policy, which states that the conversion and reuse of existing buildings will be acceptable where:

- The building is of permanent construction; and
- The buildings are in keeping with their surroundings in terms of character, form, bulk and overall design; and
- The proposal(s) is of a scale which is consistent with its function, use and rural location.

The proposals have been developed in accordance with both national and local policy, reusing existing agricultural buildings to support farm diversification, whilst enhancing the immediate setting, and with no harmful impact on the character of the local countryside and surrounding amenities.

ACCESS

The existing access to France Lane Farm would remain the primary point of entry from the public highway, which affords good visibility in either direction.



View to north-west from access



View to south-east from access

The existing access track (pictured below), separate from the residential access to the farm house, will be used to access the proposed unit.



The relatively modest number of units and the encouragement towards longer term lets would minimise the number of vehicles using this access. A compact parking yard with space for up to four vehicles would be located on existing hard standing adjacent to the barn. This would provide space for vehicles to unload adjacent to the entrance doors

CONCLUSION

The farm needs to diversify against challenging economic and environmental conditions and this proposal will strengthen its business base with the reuse of an existing agricultural building which is no longer required into a compact self-storage unit; so providing an income which would support and sustain the working farm, as well as the wider rural economy.

The conversion works would repurpose the existing building, with minimal alterations, maintaining the form and agricultural character of the existing building.

The modifications are minor and appropriate to the farming context without impinging on the countryside setting or the wider landscape character of the AONB.