



# 2024

## Design and Access Statement

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TO SUPPORT A PLANNING APPLICATION TO  
ERECT A PURPOSE-BUILT LIVESTOCK  
HOUSING FACILITY AT BLACKBIRDS FARM,  
BLACKBIRDS LANE, HIGH CROSS,  
ALDENHAM. WD25 8BS

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## **DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT**

The following design and access statement has been prepared in explanation of, and support for, a request for full planning permission for the erection of a purpose-built livestock housing facility that is deemed suitable for the welfare standards to rear healthy and sustainable livestock.

This request is based on constructing suitable accommodation to house the offspring from the existing breeding herd of 160 adult cattle, selected thinner/younger cows, the breeding bulls and to provide a calving area. The main breeding herd of cows will continue to be kept during the winter months in outdoor corals. The building will allow the offspring to be soft weaned, as opposed to being abruptly removed from cows and sold at market, and remain on the farm to be either replacements for the suckler herd or sold in the spring time as good, strong store cattle.

The ability to house thinner/younger cows that would benefit from better rations and protection from the weather will greatly improve the overall performance of the herd by enabling these cows to remain in the herd successfully rearing calves. The ability to house the bulls in safe conditions during the winter months when they are removed from the breeding cows will benefit both the bulls and the staff who look after them by improving welfare and safety. Finally, the provision of dedicated calving pens will enable the calving period to be better supervised and safer for the staff.

To support this request, I lay out below the context of Blackbirds Farm and the reasons for requiring an investment into their livestock housing.

### **Physical Context of Blackbirds Farm**

Blackbirds Farm is accessed via Blackbirds Lane which runs north north west from Kemprow/Oakridge Lane in the settlement of High Cross near Aldenham. Both Blackbirds Lane and Kemprow/Oakridge Lane are unclassified roads. Blackbirds Lane continues beyond the gate through the farm yard in a north easterly direction toward a sewage works which lies immediately to the north/north east of the farm. Just before the boundary of the sewage works, the lane turns sharply to continue in a north westerly direction until it links up with Crab Lane. This stretch of the lane has Restricted Byway Status (Aldenham 082). The lane also continues in a south westerly direction through the farm yard, passing to the south of the application site, before turning southwards to link into Church Lane in Aldenham or joining up with FP12 to reach the B462 Radlett Road. This section of Blackbirds Lane is a public footpath (PRoW Aldenham FP010).

Blackbirds Lane was the traditional access to the farm until a new farm track was constructed in 2004 pursuant to TP/2004/0113. In May 2007 permission (TP/06/0796) was granted to realign the farm track to take the junction further away from Blackbirds Lane.

The farm has grown up either side of Blackbirds Lane at the point where it turns sharply to the north east. At the bend in the lane, there is a concrete driveway leading into the original farm yard, under a narrow archway formed by traditional timber framed farm buildings and up to the farmhouse, a grade II listed building. The barns within the immediate setting of the farmhouse are also of considerable age and of traditional timber boarded appearance.

The original farm yard understandably proved totally inadequate for modern farming practises and hence a new yard with modern, larger scale buildings has been progressively developed to the north, west and east of the original farm complex.

## **Planning History**

Various planning permissions have been granted by Hertsmere Borough Council over the last 20 or more years for the re-use of former, old style agricultural buildings primarily for a variety of B8 storage uses. Additionally, planning permissions have been granted for modern farm buildings around the periphery of the original farm yard. Of most relevance is a new hay and straw barn approved in July 2008 (ref TP/08/1078) sited to the immediate east of the proposed suckler housing.

## **Agricultural context for a new livestock unit.**

The farm's history has always been tightly linked with livestock, until Mr Pinkerton was forced to dispose of the dairy herd in 2004 due to heavy losses and intolerable volatility within the liquid milk market. This situation forced Mr Pinkerton to explore other revenue streams and opportunities for the existing infrastructure; hence the submission of a range of applications for re-use of older style buildings and other forms of diversification.

Throughout the subsequent 20 years the land has been used mainly for cereal production with the balance used for hay production and horse grazing. However, the political and economic landscape has significantly changed since Brexit and war in Ukraine. As a consequence, the profitability of Blackbirds Farm's cereal crop enterprise has become very risky due to the dramatic rise in costs, the volatility of prices, the lack of support from government and extreme weather patterns. This has triggered a review of the business and a move back to a more mixed farming approach with the introduction of a single suckled suckler cow herd. This represents a shift towards more extensive and sustainable farming, minimising the impact of climate change, protecting the business from external price fluctuations and helping to reduce the farm's carbon footprint.

These extensively reared suckler systems enable livestock producers to 'close the loop' on farming and facilitate an economically viable enterprise whilst also endorsing a sustainable method of rearing livestock. This is achieved by Blackbirds Farm making use of its home produce by milling the cereal grown on its arable land into animal feed and utilising the straw from cereal crops for animal bedding. Also, by using in-house grown forage, Blackbirds Farm dramatically cuts the need for importation of concentrate feed which is still so common across the United Kingdom farming industry; thereby saving on transport costs and other environmental impacts felt elsewhere.

Yet the challenge faced by Blackbirds Farm to realise this sustainable way of rearing livestock is that to maintain the business long-term, the existing livestock herd requires a suitable building that can house primarily the 150 weaned calves (yearlings), the breeding bulls, and for good farming practise, some of the thinner younger cows. Although some farmers operate a fully extensive system with no housing throughout the winter, this style of farming brings its own type of problems and does not easily suit Blackbirds Farm.

As highlighted earlier, Blackbirds Farm aims to have:

- the ability to house the weaned calves each year and rear the cattle in a building with the highest welfare standards;
- the best building design to dramatically improve livestock health resulting in less need to use antibiotics;
- a vast reduction in straw use; and
- control of the impact of the housed cattle on the local environment and the safety and indeed the greater ability to attract staff.

All of the above confirm the requirement for a suitable livestock housing unit to accommodate livestock over the winter months.

The existing farm buildings are totally unsuitable for modern livestock rearing. At 60+ years old they were designed to accommodate different farming techniques and are unsuited to the scale of modern machinery. Moreover, they were designed to house dairy cattle rather than suckler cattle which have entirely different needs for housing and farm operations.

Additionally, these buildings fall well below current welfare requirements. Given the change in climate, we now experience greater extremes in weather patterns which include greater fluctuations in temperature and rainfall throughout the winter period. Unless livestock are kept in appropriately designed housing, these conditions have an adverse effect on the health and welfare of the animals. For example, one adult cow can emit approx. 70L+ of moisture a day. Without adequate ventilation this creates a significant increase in the moisture content of the air surrounding the cattle resulting in a build-up of noxious gases. This can lead to disease outbreaks necessitating the increased use of antibiotics, something of considerable concern in terms of both animal and human health. Inevitably, this could also result in the loss of livestock leading to a less viable business.

Additionally, weaned calves have different needs from adult cattle and have much more fragile immune systems / susceptibility to dramatic temperature changes. Calves have a poor ability to thermoregulate and unless housed properly throughout the winter, their inability to thermoregulate can lead to a worse immune response and, commonly, death.

Therefore, it is paramount that if the livestock rearing business at Blackbirds Farm is to flourish, a purpose-built livestock unit must be erected to accommodate enough space per head of animal, facilitate sufficient air exchange for correct ventilation, be operationally designed to reduce labour requirements for handling yet maintain a high regard for operator safety and ultimately enable Blackbirds Farm to continue its livestock rearing business for the long term.

### **The Proposed Development.**

The development needs to provide purpose-built housing for cattle.

The building is shown to be erected on the west side of the farm yard to the rear of the hay and straw barn with its associated concrete hard standing which was approved in July 2008 and erected shortly thereafter. Hence, this will extend the existing farm yard in a direction previously found acceptable.

The yard at Blackbirds Farm is effectively built on a gentle south facing slope. This has led to the yard being developed with buildings sitting at different levels, often involving cut and fill taking place at each level to create suitable bases for the barns. The proposal represents a

continuation of this process with the cattle housing proposed to be sited on lower ground to the immediate west of the current yard with cut and fill being used to provide a suitable base. See drawing BF-AP-002 Rev B. At the proposed base level (82m AOD) the cattle housing will be accessible by machinery etc direct from the existing track which passes to the south east with the least impact on the surrounding area. Additionally, in this location the cattle housing will be well placed to allow the cattle to be walked to neighbouring grass fields avoiding public footpaths.

The building will be 23m wide plus 1.5m overhang either side x 42m long since buildings that are too wide do not naturally ventilate as well due to loss of wind speeds and creation of turbulent air inside the unit. It will have an eaves height of 4m finishing with a ridge height of 8.56m. The housing has a 17.5 degree pitch. The pitch and consequential height play a critical part in working with the natural ventilation to increase the air exchange via thermal buoyancy. A steeper ridge facilitates a quicker exchange which therefore enhances the environment, creating better welfare standards. Additionally, the orientation of the building is designed to best utilise the prevailing winds to aid natural ventilation. By rotating the building to point northeast, the prevailing winds along the central ridge, to be constructed as an open protected ridge with a cover, can be utilised to help force a negative pressure. This will help to exchange air within the housing on a more frequent basis. This is part of the principle of good livestock housing design.

The new building will be rectangular in shape to ensure that every animal has adequate space at the feed passage (0.6m per head) and good visibility of other animals. It will be constructed from a typical steel portal framed farm building to match the profile of the existing buildings. Roofing will be from anthracite coloured corrugated sheets. The gable ends of the building will have concrete precast panels which are easy to clean to 2.0m in height, with the area above the panels comprised of tanalised timber Yorkshire boarding. The long sides will be left open to eaves level to improve natural ventilation in the building. Solar panels will be provided along the southwest facing slope to allow the farm to benefit from green electricity. Tanks to harvest rain water, to be sited at each end of the building, will have a green finish, all as generally shown on drawings BF-AF-001 Rev A. Blackbirds Farm proposes to utilise all rainwater that is captured for livestock drinking and washdown as required. Any remaining surface water run-off will be channelled to a soakaway. Calculations for the amount of rainwater to be contained are based on the average wettest month's rainfall of 66mm which equates to approximately 60,000L of water in one month (working to a 90% catch and reuse of all rainwater).

Effluent from the cattle housing will be taken via the existing foul drainage system to drain into two existing dirty water lagoons which lie to the immediate north, as illustrated on BF-AP-006 Rev A. Access to these existing features is another important factor behind the chosen siting for the building. The manure will be used in-house on the farm to reduce the need for purchased fertiliser with all spreading operations carried out within the current guidelines.

Another principle of a good design for this cattle housing is to ensure that all the cattle have visibility of other livestock. It must also be safe to operate with limited resources; that is, it must be possible for livestock to be handled and moved, and pens mucked out with limited labour whilst maintaining the highest standard of safety.

## **New Building Works**

The proposed works will begin with the preparation of the site following the grant of planning permission. The site will be graded to the levels shown on plan BF-AP-005 Rev A. To ensure the new building fits into the current yard layout, the land nearest to the yard will be cut to enable the building to be sited closer and lower than the existing yard. The subsequent fill will enable the base level of the building to be high enough to allow surplus dirty water to drain to the existing dirty water lagoons. The suckler housing will then be constructed on the western edge of the farmyard. This building will be constructed to current standards to ensure that the livestock are housed in the best possible environment over the winter months, representing a significant improvement over the current situation where cattle have to remain outside through all weathers.

The livestock unit will have limited external floodlights in areas for operator and animal safety. The internal lighting will be adjustable to suit different requirements from feeding and bedding to quiet times with greatly reduced lighting.

## **Transport and Parking**

There is ample space for staff parking in the farmyard and there are parking spaces for the farm equipment around the farm and in designated farm buildings. There will be no additional machinery required as the farm already has everything required.

The farm is already home to a cattle herd of the size which the proposed building will accommodate and hence, construction work aside, there will be no additional traffic generated as a consequence of the proposed building

## **Environment Impact Assessment**

The possible environment effects of the development have been assessed with reference to the EIA Regulations 2017. As this unit is not an intensive livestock operation, it does not come under Schedule 1 of the Regulations. An EIA is therefore unnecessary.

## **Landscape and Visual Impact**

Care has been taken in siting the building, both to minimise its visual impact on the local landscape and to ensure that it is largely hidden from view from housing unrelated to Blackbirds Farm. The location means that the building will not be seen from the development at Wall Hall or any other residential properties to the north or south. Having regard to the local relief, there may be slight glimpses of the ridge line from the public right of way along Blackbirds Lane and areas of Kemprow/High Cross, but from that distance the ridge line will look exactly the same as existing more prominent ridge lines. The ridge of the proposed cattle housing will sit below the roofs of the taller of the existing buildings and from many areas the building will be completely hidden behind existing buildings.

A line of new planting will be undertaken to the rear along the southwest elevation in the form of a native hedgerow, more than compensating for the hedgerow which needs to be removed to accommodate the building. This will allow the building to blend into its agricultural setting.

## **Conclusion**

The proposed development is necessary to provide the facilities required in the interests of animal welfare to meet the needs and standards of modern-day farming and for the number of livestock to be accommodated.

The cattle housing has been designed to adhere to current standards pertaining to animal welfare and livestock handling.

It has been sited on the western edge of the farm yard in the area where modest expansion of the farm yard has previously been deemed acceptable (the 2008 planning permission for a new hay and straw barn) and in an area where its visual impact will be minimised. New hedge planting along the western site boundary will provide a new boundary to the operational area whilst also creating biodiversity net gain. Additionally, there are no residential dwellings sufficiently proximate to be affected by the proposal.

As the farm is a standalone unit the expansion will not affect any other local features or services, and the modernising of the facilities will only improve the working environment of the farm.

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