



**FOX RURAL**

**PLANNING & LAND MANAGEMENT**

**HEREFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**  
**RURAL PLANNING APPRAISAL**

**PROPOSED RURAL WORKER'S DWELLING**

**AT**

**GRENDON MANOR  
BREDENBURY**

**PLANNING REFERENCE – 243059**

## **REFERENCE**

FOX RURAL has been commissioned to provide an appraisal of the justification of a new farm worker's dwelling at Grendon Manor, Bredenbury, further to an outline planning application.

Previously I had met the applicant (Massie Piggott) and family members, together with their agent, plus Amber Morris and Ollie Jones in attendance, on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2024, in relation to an application for pre-application advice on the proposal for a new dwelling. As a result, it was agreed that a desktop appraisal was appropriate on this occasion.

## **1.0 OVERVIEW**

### **1.01 Location**

The farmstead is situated to the south of the A44 just to the west of Bredenbury.

OS Grid Reference - SO595567.

### **1.02 Background and History**

There are currently two dwellings on the farm, and an outline application was submitted in 2023 (P223950/O) for a further rural worker's dwelling. I was then commissioned to undertake an essential need appraisal which I submitted to the authority on the 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023. I concluded that there was no essential need for a further dwelling at Grendon Manor. The application was withdrawn in July 2023.

The situation then changed with one of the dwellings, previously not available to the farming business becoming available, since the recent death of the applicant's father. In addition, the applicant had made the decision to retire as from August 2024, with the intention to hand over the management of the farm to his son ■■■.

It was in light of these changes/proposals that the applicant wanted to explore the possibility of applying again for a worker's dwelling, which would be a residence for ■■■, whilst the applicant would continue to reside in the farmhouse.

An application for pre-application advice was submitted (241281), and despite the change in circumstances, the conclusion was that there was no essential need for a further dwelling.

The applicant has now applied for the dwelling based on an opinion that there is an essential need, whilst raising issues with regard the Fox Rural pre-application appraisal.

This appraisal will look afresh at the case taking into account the latest submitted documents.

## **2.0 CURRENT SITUATION**

### **2.01 Ownership and Occupation**

Grendon Manor consists of dwellings, modern farm buildings and c250 acres.

A further 150 acres nearby is farmed on a Share Farming Agreement.

All is farmed by the farming partnership 'MG, SJ & JJ Piggott' which consists of Massie Piggott, his wife ■■■ and son ■■■.

### **2.02 Enterprises**

#### ***Arable***

Around 350 acres of arable crops are grown each year, which include Winter Wheat, Winter Barley, Oil Seed Rape, and Oats.

### ***Sheep***

There is c50 acres of grass leys and pasture on which the family run a flock of c300 ewes which include North Country Mules and other commercial breeds. Charolais and Texel tups are used. The flock is lambled in two batches spanning February to April.

The lambs are finished and sold either direct to [REDACTED] or through Hereford Market.

### ***Poultry***

The family had reared Turkeys for nearly 30 years but have now changed over to Broilers through converting the existing sheds. These sheds now produce 168,000 broilers per flock and c7.5 flocks each year i.e. 1.26 million birds per annum with the partnership still contracted to [REDACTED].

[REDACTED] supplies the day-old chicks. There would then would typically be a thinning of approximately 30% of the flock at around 30 days with the remainder killed at 36 to 40 days. The removal of smaller birds, maintains the stocking density in accordance with regulations and also satisfies markets for smaller birds.

The sheds are automated with regard feed and water. They are insulated and equipped with automated ventilation and heating systems to maintain house temperatures on or close to the optimum temperature appropriate for the age of the birds, regardless of outside temperature.

There is a wood chip biomass boiler that provides the heat with gas back up in case of blockages or issues with electricity supply.

As the birds grow and the live mass increases, the heat given off from the birds increases and the houses require less heat input. This will of course depend on the time of year, and the system relies on constant automated adjustment.

Prior to slaughter, broilers are “caught” before being transported to the works. This work is carried out at night, so as to minimise stress to livestock. Catching staff and transport is provided by [REDACTED], whilst the family would be responsible for overseeing the process in order to ensure bird welfare.

Following the transport of birds off farm, extensive cleaning and maintenance is required before the next crop arrives. These works include removal of litter, cleaning the sheds and putting down fresh bedding. Automated systems including feeders, heating and water supply are maintained and primed during this period. This work is organised by the family, and typically, there would be c7 days between crops.

To combat the issue of automated system failure, the sheds are connected to an alarm system as installed by [REDACTED]. The system monitors the temperature in the sheds and triggers alarms for unintended climate changes, and also production equipment failures eg feed and water lines. In the event of a power cut there is an automated generators that kicks in.

Whenever there is a 'breakdown' there is an audible alarm for each of the sheds. In addition, the alarm system is monitored by [REDACTED] Ltd who via a tumbledown system dial in turn the Poultry Manager then [REDACTED], and continue dialling until a response is received that a member of staff is aware of the alarm. If the audible alarms are

heard first then the person responsible has to ring Custodian and submit a code to stop/prevent the dialling.

Once aware, then the person responsible would have to get to the sheds as soon as possible to identify and rectify the situation. It should be noted that temperature response levels are set within parameters to allow sufficient notice and time to take appropriate action.

### **Animal Feed**

The family produce a variety of animal feed mixes for sale utilising home grown arable crops and their own mill and mix unit.

I understand that they have been providing this service for local livestock farmers since the mid 90's. The buyers have to collect the feed from Grendon Manor.

### ***Bed & Breakfast***

The family has built up a successful B&B business, annexing the southern wing of the house and creating 5 ensuite bedrooms. This enterprise has been boosted by the nearby and recently created wedding venue of Bredenbury Court Barns.

### **2.03 Labour**

Massie Piggott [REDACTED] was full time on the farm, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED] he has now retired from physical farm work. A full-time farm labourer is being sourced to fill this gap.

■■■ Piggott ■■■ is now managing the day to day running of the farm, especially in respect of the Arable, Sheep and Feed enterprises, and helps out with the broiler unit, which was one of the roles his father undertook.

■■■ Piggott, will I understand continue to manage the B&B business and oversee the farm accounts.

The partnership also employs a Poultry Manager and a General Farm Worker, with contractors used for round baling and hedge cutting.

## **2.04 Buildings and Equipment**

There is a range of modern buildings at Upper House Farm yard including:

- 6 poultry sheds
- Grain storage
- Straw storage/ Livestock Shed
- Machinery Store and workshop
- Fertiliser and Chemical storage
- Wood Chip Biomass boiler.

## **2.05 Dwellings**

Mr & Mrs Piggott and their son ■■■ live in the main part of the farmhouse.

There is a 3-bedroom bungalow called 'Sticking Field' which is owned by ■■■ Piggott and was occupied by Massie's father until he recently passed away. It is understood that the applicant's daughter has temporarily moved in.

The family also own a house in Bromyard namely [REDACTED] Winslow Road, Bromyard, [REDACTED] which is occupied by the Poultry Manager. The general farm worker lives in Bartestree.

The plan is for the poultry manager to move into 'Sticking Field' and the proposal as per the application would be to develop a new dwelling at the farm for [REDACTED].

## **4.0 ESSENTIAL NEED APPRAISAL – RURAL WORKER'S DWELLING**

### **4.01 Approach**

As way of background, Clause 88 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that local planning policies and decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

In accordance with Clause 84 of the NPPF, planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more circumstances apply including where:

***a) “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”***

The reference to the “essential need for a rural worker..... to live permanently at or near their place of work”, originated from clause 10 of PPS7, which went on to recommend that planning authorities should follow the guidance in Annex A to PPS7.

Despite the NPPF having superseded Annex A of PPS7, Annex A did provide clear criteria to assessing the 'essential need' for a rural worker's dwelling. This guidance is tried and



trusted, and it is sometimes used as further reference by professionals and planning inspectors.

In July 2019, further guidance was added to the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) under the *Rural Housing* section of *Housing Needs of Different Groups*, with regard to considerations that might be relevant to take into account, when applying paragraph 79(a) of the NPPF 2018, (which is the same wording as paragraph 84(a) of the NPPF 2021).

These are:

- “• evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work to ensure the effective operation of an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products;*
- the degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site, providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*
- in the case of new enterprises, whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.*

Importantly *Policy RA4* of the Core Strategy – *Agricultural, forestry and rural enterprise dwellings*, clearly reflects similar criteria of justification.

In summary, paragraph 84(a) of the NPPF, now read in conjunction with the recent PPG guidance, plus CS Policy RA4, all reflect similar areas of requirement in making a case for there being an essential need, all of which I shall cover.

#### **4.02 Functional Need**

The most frequent reason for a functional need for a rural worker to be permanently based on a site, is so that there is somebody experienced to be able to deal quickly with emergency issues, most frequently revolving around the welfare of livestock, and which are likely to arise throughout the majority of the year, and during the middle of the night.

There would not normally be a functional requirement for there to be somebody on site with respect to an arable enterprise. The main issue here would be the matter of security.

#### ***Security***

Security and rural crime is always an issue for farms and of course it is going to be a factor when considering functional need.

There are already two dwellings at the farm, which would be a significant deterrent to intruders, and in any case, although security is a factor, it can never be an overriding.

Security can be a contributing factor and every situation must be judged individually. This farm for instance would not be considered as vulnerable as one on an urban fringe or in a particularly remote location. In addition, if farms are considered particularly vulnerable to intrusion, there are always steps that can be taken to make a yard, buildings and equipment more secure.

## ***Sheep***

For the majority of the year the sheep will be out grazing and brought back to the yard for dipping, treatment, shearing, and lambing.

The important point to make here is that whether there is a dwelling available on site, does not affect the welfare of the ewes and lambs during the lambing period, since lambing is something that is planned for, and the duties to be actually in and around the lambing ewes can be likened to shift work. In other words, a dwelling nearby is superfluous when comes to the practicalities of lambing, since the person responsible will be in and around the ewes as and when required.

Many sheep businesses station a touring caravan on the farm to house a student (typically veterinary or agricultural) during seasonal lambing. Not because there is a functional need for onsite accommodation, but to provide “off shift” accommodation for that person who might have come far, and the business not being in a position to source short term accommodation, plus of course provision of basic facilities where they are not already on site.

## ***Poultry***

The day-to-day management of a broiler unit has to be meticulously planned for, with routines varying with each stage of flock development. When birds are ‘in’, this will involve checking the birds a few times a day and sometimes late, depending at what stage, plus monitoring the automated systems and the bio-mass boiler.

During normal working hours, and during the periods when birds are in, there would be a worker in and around the poultry buildings. The need for a worker to be based nearby therefore arises mainly during the night time hours when there could conceivably be an

electricity supply and/or breakdown in the automated system or issues with the biomass boiler.

Issues relating to temperature and ventilation cause particular issues particularly during hot weather with large birds or conversely during cold weather with young birds. Failure of ventilation/heating can certainly affect the feed conversion ratio and loss of birds if left too long.

In the case of a feed line stopping then the birds can start to drink more to compensate which has the effect of flushing the food out of their system which can lead to mortalities.

In terms of adequate heating, which is particularly important with young chicks, a worker would need to be available to deal with issues relating to the biomass boiler, such as a blocked augur. Other typical issues may be a power-cut in which case a worker would be needed to ensure the back-up generator was functional.

However unlikely it might be that a system failure actually results in a welfare emergency, there is always the potential every time the alarm is raised, and therefore there is considered to be a functional need for somebody to be based close enough to be able to get to the site sufficiently quickly during those periods the houses are occupied to assess the situation, which is a scenario that could occur anytime in the year.

Bio-security is an increasing consideration when looking at the location of key workers for the prevention of diseases such as Avian Flu, and generally more stringent requirements of supermarkets. Bio security measures are still also expected to be adhered to for accessing the sheds in case of emergencies which has to be factored in.

It is difficult to assess what the maximum response time required from being aware of the alarm activation to presence at the site for welfare of the birds, since the

circumstances will vary. One comes across so many figures but I am aware of 20 minutes timescale within which to attend broiler housing the housing having been used/accepted in the past when considering rural worker's dwellings.

However, since my last report I am now aware of a Red Tractor Assurance maximum response time of 15 minutes, as referred to in the supporting letter from [REDACTED].

Although I failed to locate this figure within the Red Tractor Assurance Scheme Manual for Broilers & Poussin 1<sup>st</sup> October 2017 (Updated 1<sup>st</sup> October 2019), I am happy to accept this as the required response time for the purposes of this application.

Overall, there would be a functional requirement for a broiler unit of this scale to have an experienced employee based on site, or within a few minutes' drive of the farm.

There will be required back up labour to the poultry manager for the day-to-day management of the unit, however given the automated nature of broiler farming, we do not consider there to be a functional requirement for more than the primary worker to be based within easy access overnight. With a properly functioning alarm and custodian system, one person is considered sufficient to respond to automatic system failure within a 15-minute timeframe.

Having a second worker based within easy access, might be convenient and potentially financially advantageous, however there is not considered to be a functional need for more than one person living close to the housing.

If for some reason during a crop cycle, the farm manager had to stay away, it would be possible for somebody, to stay on site as temporary short-term cover if that second person

was not based close enough. This scenario could be house sitting, staying in a touring caravan, or in this case in one of the B&B rooms.

#### **4.03 Full Time Labour**

The proposed dwelling is destined for ■■■ Piggott who is already fully employed on the farm.

#### **4.04 Establishment and Viability**

I have previously seen the partnership accounts and consider the business to be viable and likely to remain as such for the foreseeable future.

#### **4.05 Alternative Dwellings**

The approach is to firstly investigate the availability of existing dwellings and ensure that, to quote Paragraph 3 (iv) of Annex A, “the functional need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned”.

Taking this into account, one would normally look at the potential availability of any other relevant dwelling(s), in the light of the need of the enterprise. To quote Paragraph 1 of Annex A to PPS7, “Whether this is essential in any particular case will depend on the needs of the enterprise concerned and not on the personal preferences or circumstances of any of the individuals involved”.

However, it is clear from cases such as Keen and Cussons, that personal circumstances of individuals with regard their homes, can be considered. In this particular case I do not feel that one can attach any weight to the farmhouse, if the intention is for the applicant to shortly retire and continue to reside here.

In essence, one is looking at whether there are any dwellings available or potentially available to the farming business, that would render the proposal of a new worker's dwelling non-essential.

The main functional requirement would be to have somebody readily available to deal with issues arising out of hours in respect of the broilers.

However, since the Poultry Manager will be moving onto the farm, then a case has not been established that he could not undertake the primary responsibility of attending in the case of an alarm.

We have also to consider the potential role of the dwelling in Winslow Road. This dwelling is on the eastern fringes of Bromyard and c3.6 miles from the farm yard and the question to be asked is whether this property could also fulfil the functional requirement, or to be more specific whether it is close enough and sufficiently accessible to Grendon Manor to enable quick enough response to alarms in connection with the broiler housing or the Bio Mass boiler.

It is accepted that the demands of both the broilers and the Bio-Mass boiler might require regular attendance and monitoring during unsociable hours, and that it would be much more convenient, if that person was within easy walking distance as opposed to relying on motorised transport.

However, it would seem inconceivable that somebody living in Winslow Road could not get to the broiler unit or AD Plant well within 10 minutes and at the very least, and provide support to the primary person based at Grendon Manor.

There is at the start a few metres of 30mph limit after which the journey would mean travelling within the national speed limit of 60mph on the A44. If one takes the distance

to be 4 miles then the journey at an average of 50 miles per hour the time taken would be under 5 minutes. It would be inconceivable that somebody based at Winslow Road could not get to the broiler unit within 15 minutes.

There are also properties for sale within and close to Winslow Road which could equally cover the functional need.

Another consideration would be to create a further dwelling out of the main farmhouse. This would inevitably have serious consequences for the B&B enterprise which is an important diversification enterprise. However, it is an option that could be explored further in the event of there being an essential need to provide further independent accommodation for a worker at the farm in the future.

In summary there is considered enough housing options to cover the welfare of the broiler flock. To have a further dwelling at Grendon Manor might be considered convenient and ideal for the family, however the requirement is to assess whether the proposal is **essential** not whether it is reasonable.

## **5.0 OTHER PLANNING MATTERS**

### **5.01 Succession**

Paragraph 80 of the NPPF introduces a new element to the exception circumstance of essential need for a rural worker to live on site, where it refers to “**those taking majority control of a farm business**”.



The PPG refers to the consideration of “ **whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process**”.

This is taken to mean that the requirement for the dwelling(s) might also be linked to business succession, and thereby enabling the continuing essential need for a permanent presence to be fulfilled by a suitable and eligible person, (say a son or daughter), whilst the retiring relative(s) can continue to reside in the original dwelling.

■ is ■ with a good number of years of farming experience under his belt, and would no doubt be considered suitable and eligible to take over the management of the farm.

With the applicant basically retired and his intention to remain in the farmhouse, it is clear that ■ will need a dwelling of his own on or within a quick commute of the farm. What is also clear, is that there are options to achieving this, aside creating a new dwelling at Grendon Manor, without affecting “continued viability” of the farm.

## **6.00 Conclusion**

In accordance with planning policy and guidance, there is no essential need for a new dwelling at Grendon Manor.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

**Robert Fox BSc (Hons) FAAV**

**Date: 7<sup>th</sup> February 2025**