

Our Ref: SD/J100525

The Head of Planning
Folkestone & Hythe District Council
Civic Centre
Castle Hill Avenue
Folkestone
Kent
CT20 2QY

20th March 2024

Dear Mr Lloyd

**Change of use of part of agricultural building to Micropub. The Old Milking Parlour
Blandred Farm Reece Lane Acrise CT18 8LW**

On behalf of the applicant O & P Gower Ltd proprietors of Blandred Farm please find accompanying this letter a planning application submitted via the Planning Portal (Portal Ref: PP-12902666).

The application comprises this covering letter together with the following drawings and documents.

Forms

- Completed Application Form and Certification,
- CIL Form 1.

Drawings

- Drawing No.240308-L-001 Site Location Plan
- Drawing No.240308-SE-001 Existing Block Plan
- Drawing No.240308-SP-001 Proposed Block Plan
- Drawing No.240308-E-001 Existing Floor Plans Roof Plan & Elevations
- Drawing No.240308-P-001 Proposed Floor Plans Roof Plan & Elevations
- Photographs of the building and the Farmstead

The Proposal

The application seeks planning permission to use part of an existing agricultural building at the farmstead to provide a Micropub. The facility will support a proposed campsite on the farmstead, which is subject to a separate application to the council. The proposal is a farm diversification scheme and seeks to provide refreshments to the holiday makers attracted to the campsite as well as walkers and cyclists enjoying the surrounding countryside. The micropub would also be open for wider public use. It is envisaged that the micropub would operate between May and September on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays between 11 am and 11pm. It is expected that the use would provide for at least 3 or 4 part time jobs for the duration of the opening season.

Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework seeks to support a prosperous rural economy. It identifies the need for policies and decisions to enable this through the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of businesses in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and the development and diversification of agricultural businesses. In addition, the NPPF supports sustainable rural tourism which respect the character of the countryside and recognises that such sites will often have to be found beyond existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport. For these reasons it is necessary to ensure that the development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make the location more sustainable by example improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport.

The development plan accords with the NPPF, reference to policy E3 (6) of the Places and Policies Local Plan 2020, seeks to promote tourist attractions within the countryside subject to four criteria, that a countryside location is required, there is a preference for the conversion of existing buildings, the development is viable and will have significant economic and other benefits to the locality to outweigh any harm and when located within the National Landscape (AONB) does not constitute major development. In addition, policy E6 supports farm diversification on the basis that the proposal is compatible with surrounding buildings and the location in terms of scale and design. That there would be no detrimental impact on local amenity, or the character and appearance or nature conservation value of the rural landscape, with particular weight to the protection of the AONB. It requires provision is made for access, servicing and parking, would not prejudice the agricultural working of the farm unit and where practicable the proposals re-use an existing farm building. In addition, it is considered that the proposal has no conflict with policy E7 relating to the reuse of rural buildings.

Overall, it is considered that the proposal is compliant with the NPPF and with the policies contained within the development plan. It is important to farmers to diversify their businesses and to widen their sources of income to supplement the nationally important agricultural activities they undertake. Farming as a business is facing some serious economic challenges and farm diversification is specifically encouraged at both a national and local level. Being in an attractive area of countryside, there is a significant opportunity for the applicant to develop a tourist related business, that will allow recreational opportunities for the public in the countryside, whilst also benefit both the landowner and the economy of the local area from the tourist related spend. In this instance the applicant is seeking to develop a campsite that will provide an opportunity for people to visit and stay in the area. The proposal seeks to support this campsite proposal but also to provide a facility which will serve other visitors walking and cycling within

the local area. It is the kind of rural diversification that the NPPF and policy E3(6) specifically seek to encourage. Making use of an existing building within the area and which can be utilised without any unacceptable impact on local roads, or to the detriment of the character and setting of the protected landscape within which it is sited nor to the wider amenity of the area. In these respects, the following aspects of the proposal are particularly noteworthy and should generally be considered to authenticate the acceptability of the scheme against the planning considerations defined by these policies.

Planning Considerations

Site Location and Surroundings

The application site is located on Reece Lane, a Class C public highway, approximately ½ mile to the west of Swingfield Minnis and the A260. Blandred Farm is a long-established agricultural enterprise, centred around the existing farmstead. It is located within the Kent Downs National Landscape. The applicant owns and farms approximately 110 hectares of surrounding farmland. The farmstead itself comprises an extensive range of modern agricultural buildings as well as a farmhouse and bungalow together. Only the properties known as Candlespur and Hawthorn Cottage are outside of the applicant's ownership. The roadway through the farmyard is a bridleway HE116A this together with the surrounding public footpath network into which it is linked connect the Blandred Farm site into the wider countryside in all directions. The site therefore has good access for those walking or cycling in the countryside and for anyone arriving by car or bus along the A260. The nearest bus stop being on the A260 in Swingfield Minnis, which is regularly served by the Stagecoach 16 service between Canterbury and Hythe via Folkestone.

Design And Access

The farm accommodation proposed for the micro pub is part of a modern concrete framed Atcost agricultural building with block work sides and a fibre cement roof. It was previously used as a milking parlour and is now used for general storage. The internal floorspace given over to the micropub is approximately 120m². The remainder of the barn is used for storing straw and hay. The micropub use would be integrated into the building with limited changes to the external appearance of the building. Access would be provided from the level concrete threshold that surrounds the building, with access utilising the existing large width sliding door within the side elevation. A further two personnel doors provide access from the gable end of the building. A single window in the side elevation together with roof lights within the fibre cement roof provide internal lighting.

Internally the space will be laid out with a bar, and a seating area as well as a store and cloakroom. Toilets are to be provided and will be connected to the existing cess pit that serves the wider farmstead and which is emptied by private contractor. Externally seating is to be provided on the concrete apron adjacent to the main access and on the adjoining grass verge to the immediate west.

Parking is proposed within the adjoining paddock, access from the concrete apron to the front of the building. A total of 11 parking spaces are to be provided, 10 within the paddock and a disabled parking space is available immediately adjacent to the building. In addition, 10 bicycle stands will be provided to the side of the micropub for the benefit of visitors arriving by bicycle. Details of these and their siting is expected to be secured by condition. Any vehicles delivering to the unit will be readily accommodated

within the forecourt area, the farmstead being wholly accessible for large vehicles typically associated with farming activities.

Ecology

The proposals are not considered to have any impact on protected species or their habitats. The building to be used for the micropub is a modern concrete framed building with blockwork sides and fibre cement roofs. It is understood that such buildings are generally unattractive to bats and it is therefore considered that the use of the building has a low potential for the presence of protected species. The area to be used for car parking is within a grazed paddock and would also have a low potential for protected species. A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has not therefore been prepared, but the applicant is willing to do so should the council's ecological advisor consider it necessary. Photographs of the site, including the interior of the building to be used are included for reference.

Hours of Use

The use is proposed to operate during the camping season to support the campsite (May to September), and when most people would be expected to be out and about enjoying the local countryside. Although campers and recreational walkers and cyclists will inevitably be enjoying the countryside on most days during this period, it is anticipated that demand will be most apparent on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, it is therefore the intention to limit opening to these days to ensure that the business is a viable operation. If demand is there then the day the premises are open will be expanded, however it is not anticipated that this would be other than over bank holiday weekends and potentially during the month of August. Opening times are to be further refined, however it is not anticipated that these would exceed 11am to 11pm. Once planning permission has been secured it is intended to apply to the council for the premises licence for the establishment.

Landscape Considerations

The provision of the micropub would have no unacceptable impact on the character and setting of the surrounding countryside. The use would be contained within an existing building resulting in no material change to its external appearance. Outside seating areas are contained within the farmstead and enclosed from view by the surrounding farm buildings. The parking area to serve it is to be provided alongside the existing farm buildings, the cars would be seen against the backdrop of the farm building and from wider view would also be enclosed by the established hedge that surrounds the paddock within which it is to be provided. The visual impact on the National Landscape would therefore be limited and its character and appearance unharmed.

Impact on Local Amenity

The two properties nearby that are not connected to the farm, would not be unduly impacted by the proposed use. The farm is the multi-generational family home and none of the family members that live here have any wish to have their own amenity unduly impacted by the use and it is intended to ensure that

the premises are run in a manner that would result in no harm to their own amenity let alone their two neighbours. The premises will be effectively managed by the licensee, and it is intended to operate them on the basis of a small friendly venue for the benefit of the people camping nearby and people enjoying a day out in the countryside. No food will be prepared on the premises, only heated pre-packaged food will be consumed and sold, although occasionally mobile food caterers may offer food at set times in conjunction with the micropub. It is intended that only low level background music will be played and be only audible indoors.

Conclusion

The proposed use of the barn will benefit people enjoying a day out or stay within the local area, and also contribute towards the essential diversification of the farm business. The impact of the use will be limited, with no detrimental impact on the character or appearance of the National Landscape or to the amenity of the local area. It is expected that the council would wish to limit aspects of the operation of the use through conditions attached to the planning permission, and the applicant would seek to work with the council to agree these.

The social and economic benefits of the scheme significantly outweigh any potential harm that may result from the use. The proposal accords with National Planning and Local Development plan Policies and should therefore be considered favourably with planning permission be issued without undue delay.

I trust that you have everything you require to favourably determine the application. However, should the council still harbour concerns about the proposal it is expected that they will seek a response to their concerns and work with the applicant in a positive and proactive manner to resolve the issues. Therefore, if you do require further clarification on any aspect of the proposals please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Steve Davies BA (Hons) Dip UP MRTPI

For and on behalf of
Hobbs Parker Property Consultants LLP

[Redacted]

e: steve.davies@hobbsparker.co.uk