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NC 07 / 3950 / F

**CHANGE OF USE TO ALLOW THE SITING OF A MOBILE  
HOME IN CONNECTION WITH AN ORGANIC FREE RANGE  
EGG ENTERPRISE  
AT  
LAND SOUTH EAST OF THE LODGE, HATFIELD,  
LEOMINSTER**

**APPLICANT:  
MR ANDREW BISHOP**

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

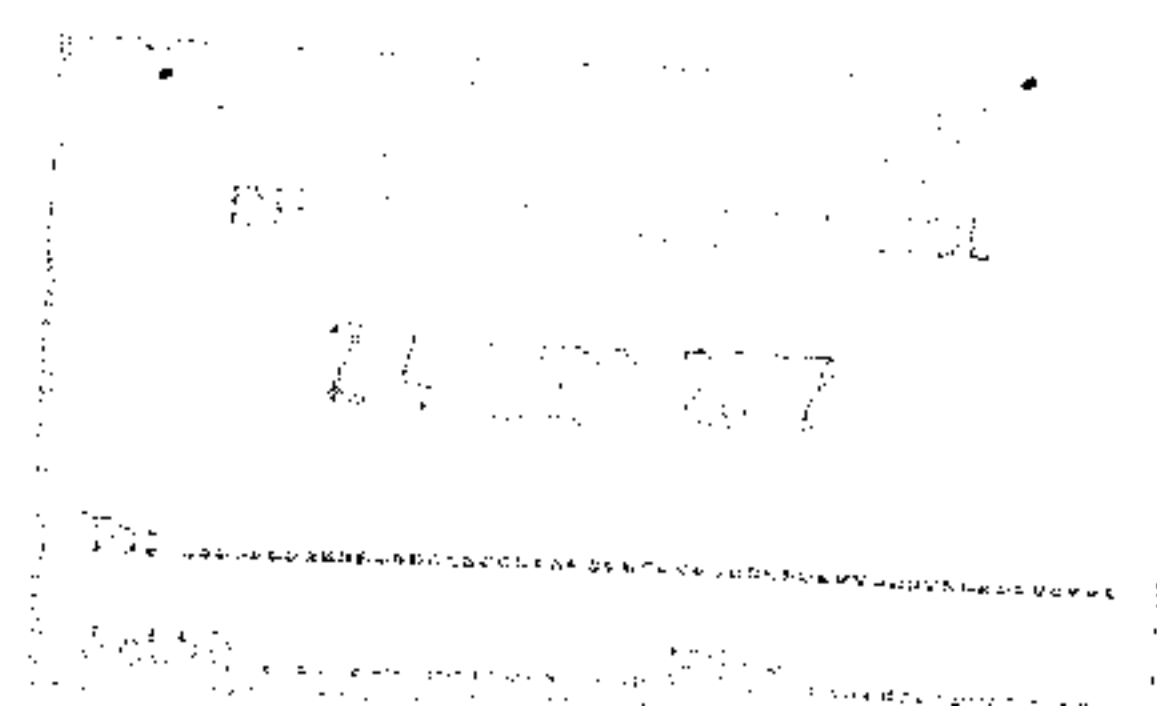
- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by Mr Andrew Bishop of Court Farm, Hafield, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0SE.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide an objective appraisal of the proposed agricultural business to be operated by Mr Andrew Bishop at the land South East of The Lodge, in connection with a planning application for the siting of a temporary agricultural dwelling on the holding.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared having regard to Planning Policy Statement 7 – *Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* dated August 2004. Particular reference has been made to Annex A which outlines the criteria for agricultural workers dwellings.
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Ian Pick. Ian Pick is a specialist agricultural and rural planning consultant. He holds a Bachelor of Science with Honours Degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management and is a Professional Member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, being qualified in the Rural Practice Division of the Institution.

## **2. SITE VISIT AND INTERVIEW**

- 2.1 A site visit was carried out on Friday 31<sup>st</sup> September 2007, by appointment in the company of the applicant.
- 2.2 This report is based on the information provided by the applicants at the site meeting, together with professional observations where appropriate.

## **3. AGRICULTURAL BUSINESS DESCRIPTION**

- 3.1 The agricultural business proposed by Mr Andrew Bishop is purely based on Free Range Egg Production. The applicant proposes to erect a 12,000 bird free range organic egg laying unit. The proposed unit will be operated under a franchise arrangement with John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd. The John Bowler (Agriculture) Limited franchise agreement provides the applicants with birds and feed, and a guaranteed market for the eggs produced. The agreement with the John Bowler Group also provides training for the applicants in free range egg production, technical advice and field support. The applicants have agreed a 5 year rolling contract with John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd.
- 3.2 A planning application has been approved by Herefordshire Council for the free range egg laying unit. The temporary dwelling proposed under this application is essential for occupation by the applicants as managers of the proposed free range egg laying unit.



**Free Range Egg Laying Enterprise**

- 3.3 The applicant proposes to develop the free range egg laying enterprise over the next 12 months.
- 3.4 The unit will comprise one purpose built poultry building of the dimensions 134.188m x 18.288m. The building is of a timber frame construction and external cladding is dark stained timber weatherboard. The roof covering is a polyester coated profile sheeting.
- 3.5 The unit will operate on a 60 week cycle. Birds are purchased at 'Point of Lay' aged 16 weeks and housed within the specialist free range poultry unit on the holding. The birds are kept within the laying flock for 60 weeks and are then sold and replacements purchased.
- 3.6 The inside of the building includes nest boxes, which are situated adjacent to a conveyor. The floor of the building is divided into a plastic slatted 'dunging' area and a scratch area. Manual opening 'pop holes' area situated on one side of the building to give the birds access to the outside ranging area.
- 3.7 In order to comply with 'Freedom Foods Welfare Standard' the ranging area must equate to 1 hectare (2.471 acres) per 1,000 birds. Therefore, the ranging area for this unit equates to 12 hectares (30 acres) of range area.
- 3.8 The 'pop holes' are opened at 8.00am every morning to allow the birds access to the ranging area and at 9.00pm (or dusk) the 'pop holes' closed.
- 3.9 The rows of nest boxes within the building are situated along one side, adjacent to an egg collection conveyor. The nest boxes are angled toward the conveyor and the birds lay their eggs in the nest boxes and the eggs roll onto the central conveyor. The conveyor then takes the eggs to the service area for packing and storage. Following packing, the eggs are placed on trolleys within the refrigerated egg store and will be collected by John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd two to three times a week. The eggs produced on the holding are to be sold under contract to John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd, which the applicant has already secured.
- 3.10 Ventilation within the building will be fully automated and controlled by a thermostat. The system comprises roof fans and side inlet vents. The thermostatic controlled system opens and closes vent and operates the ridge fans to maintain a constant temperature within the building. The building will be alarmed for high and low temperature and power failure.
- 3.11 Lighting within the buildings is to be controlled by a timeswitch to give the birds 14 hours of light per day. The lights within the building come on at 7.00am and go off at 9.00pm. Lighting control within the building is critically important as any failure can affect the laying cycle.

- 3.12 The feeding system to be operated is an electric chain feeder system which is on a time switch and is activated every two hours between 6am and 9pm.
- 3.13 The water supply is provided by nipple drinkers.

### ***Labour***

- 3.14 Labour for the proposed free range egg unit will include the following workers:

Position	Responsibilities
Mr Andrew Bishop	Overall manager – specific responsibilities include management of the business and stockmanship including all out of hours supervision.
Part-Time Egg Collector / packing	The applicant proposes employing a worker for egg collection and packing

- 3.15 Based on standard published data within the Farm Management Pocketbook by John Nix, 37<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2007, the standard labour requirement for the Free Range Poultry Enterprise is 720 standard man days (2.4 full-time workers), working on 0.06 man days per bird per annum.
- 3.16 The amount of labour proposed to be employed within the Free Range Poultry Enterprise is considered appropriate when the level of mechanisation and overtime is taken into account.

### ***Dwellings***

- 3.17 There are no dwellings on the site. The applicants dwelling is located at Orchard Cottage, Buckland. This dwelling is 4 miles from the application site.

### **Financial Data**

- 3.18 The total cost of the development equates to an investment £500,000 in the proposed building, infrastructure and equipment.
- 3.19 Based on gross margin data produced by John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd, organic free range egg production units produce gross margins of £13.50 per bird, after feed and birds. This would equate to a gross margin of £162,000 for the unit. From the gross margin, various fixed costs need to be deducted, as shown below:

Enterprise Gross Margin	£162,000
<b><u>Fixed Costs</u></b>	
Electricity	£5,000
Water	£5,000
Clean out .	£5,000
Unit Depreciation (500,000 over 20 years)	£25,000
Finance Charges (500,000 @ 6%)	£30,000



Labour (employed part time egg packer)	£7,000
General Overheads	£5,000
<b>Total Fixed Costs</b>	<b>£82,000</b>
<b>Projected Profit</b>	<b>£80,000</b>

#### 4. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The free range poultry unit will have a substantial requirement for labour which is outside normal working hours. This involves opening 'pop holes' at 8.00am every morning of the year, rounding up birds and closing 'pop holes' at 9.00pm (or dusk) every night of the year, monitoring of ventilation and temperatures, monitoring of feeding and water systems and monitoring of the lighting system, and monitoring of bird welfare. Failure of any of the systems has an adverse effect on bird welfare and production.
- 4.2 The applicant is therefore proposing to site a temporary agricultural dwelling on the holding. It is proposed that this dwelling will be occupied by the applicant as his family as unit managers.

#### 5. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY GUIDANCE

##### 5.1 PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT 7 (PPS7), SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL AREAS, 2004

- 5.2 This document provides national Government guidance concerning rural areas. It was issued in August 2004 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and is therefore very up to date.

##### *Sustainable Development*

- 5.3 PPS7 states that the core principal underpinning land use planning is sustainable development.
- 5.4 Paragraph 2 of PPS7 provides guidance for policies in development plans *"to sustain and enhance and; where appropriate revitalise country towns and villages...and for strong, diverse, economic activity whilst maintaining the local character and a high quality environment"*.

##### *Housing*

- 5.5 In paragraph 8, PPS7 discusses rural housing need, and states that *"the needs of all in the community should be recognised, including those in need of affordable and accessible, special needs housing in rural areas"*.
- 5.6 Paragraph 10 states that:  
*"Isolated new houses in the Countryside will require special justification for planning permission to be granted. Where the special justification for an isolated house relates to the essential need for a worker to live permanently at*

*or near their place of work in the countryside, planning authorities should follow the advice in Annex A to this PPS”.*

***The Importance of the Countryside***

- 5.7 Paragraphs 15 and 16 of PPS7 set out the importance of the countryside, and provide guidance for local authorities in the preparation of new Local Development Documents. Paragraph 16 emphasises the significance of the rural economy, and agriculture in particular, and states that the planning system should *“support development that delivers diverse and sustainable farming enterprises”*.

***Agriculture***

- 5.8 In paragraph 27, the Government acknowledges the importance of agriculture in manages and maintaining the landscape. The aim for planning policy to assist farming and farmers in their managing of agricultural land is also set out here.

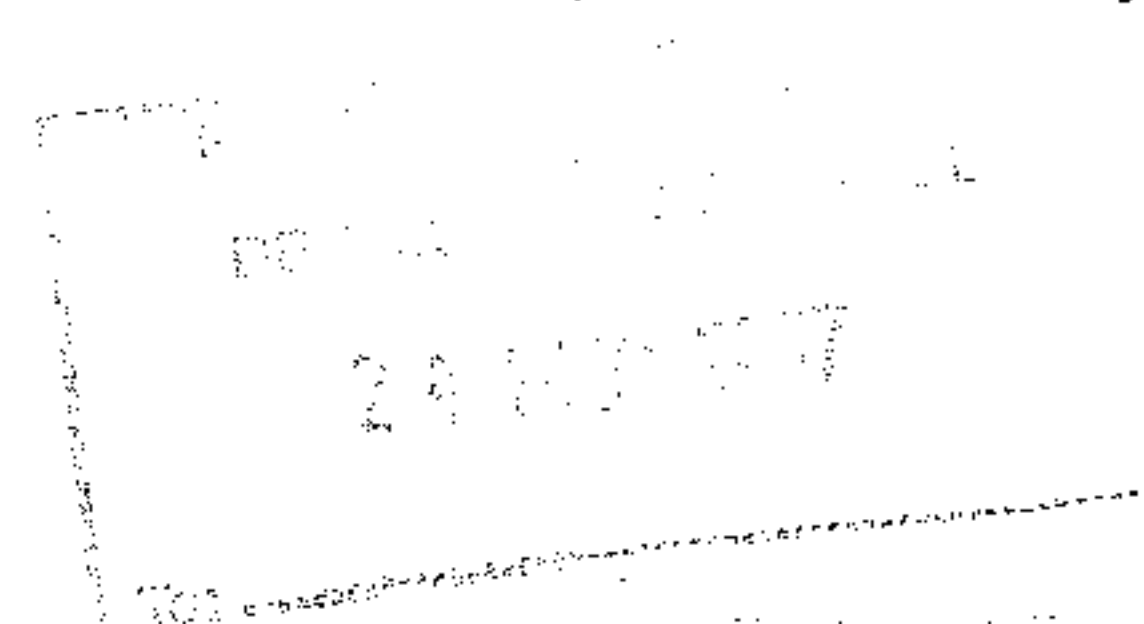
***Annex A: Agricultural, Forestry and Other Occupational Dwellings***

- 5.9 Paragraph 1 of this annex makes it clear that *“one of the few circumstances in which isolated residential development in the countryside may be justified is when accommodation is required to enable agricultural forestry and certain other full-time workers to live at, or in the immediate vicinity of, there place of work”*.
- 5.10 This paragraph also states that *“there will be some cases where the nature and demands of the work concerned make it essential for one or more people engaged in the enterprise to live at, or very close to, the site of their work”*.
- 5.11 Paragraph 12 of Annex A states *“If a new dwelling is essential to support a new farming activity, whether on a newly created agricultural unit or an established one, it should normally, for the first three years, be provided by a caravan, a wooden structure which can be easily dismantled, or other temporary accommodation. It should satisfy the following criteria:*
- i) clear evidence of a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise concerned (significant investment in new farm buildings is often a good indication of intentions);*
  - ii) functional need (see paragraph 4 of this annex)*

***Paragraph 4***

*A functional test is necessary to establish whether it is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available at most times. Such a requirement might arise for example if workers are needed to be on hand, day and night:*

- i) in case animals or agricultural processes require essential care at short notice*



- ii) to deal quickly with emergencies that could otherwise cause serious loss of crops or products, for example, by frost damage or the failure or automatic systems*
- iii) clear evidence that the proposed enterprise has been planned on a sound financial basis*
- iv) the functional need could not be fulfilled by another dwelling on the unit, or any other existing accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for occupation by the workers concerned; and*
- v) other normal planning requirements, e.g on siting and access, are satisfied*

## 6. POLICY ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 Functional need is principally determined by the nature and scale of the enterprises operated and the agricultural systems employed. This agricultural business proposes to operate an organic free range poultry enterprise on the holding extending to 12,000 birds.
- 6.2 On a typical organic free range poultry unit of this size, it would be considered essential that a full time skilled worker should live within very close proximity to the poultry buildings.
- 6.3 The free range enterprise has a labour requirement of 2.4 full-time workers based on standard data. Therefore the need relates to a full-time requirement.
- 6.4 The agricultural business has been planned on a sound financial basis. The project cost is £500,000. The accounting projections predicts profits of £80,000 per annum.
- 6.5 There are no other dwellings on the holding or in the locality which are available to the business or would meet the functional requirements of the business.
- 6.6 In order to satisfy the functional needs of the business, the temporary dwelling must be located in close proximity to the buildings which are used to accommodate the poultry. The proposed siting for the dwelling would satisfy this criteria.
- 6.7 A high standard of animal husbandry is essential if the business is to be successful.
- 6.8 The proposed enterprise will total 12,000 free range organic hens and it is considered there is an essential need for a full-time worker to reside on the holding to provide for the vast supervision and monitoring requirements.
- 6.9 The availability of supervision is necessary to ensure that the business complies with or exceeds the requirements of The Welfare of Livestock Regulations 1994 and in the case of poultry enterprises, the Codes of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock - Domestic Fowls (MAFF,



DAFS & WOAD, 1990). More specifically, poultry welfare issues relating to the need for on site supervision include:

*Failure of Power Supply*

- 6.10 Laying birds are nervous by nature. Quick, decisive action by an experienced stock person is essential in the event of failure of power supply resulting in the disruption of lighting system. Disruption of lighting can lead to panic and smothering. A smothering incident cannot be alarmed against, but is audible from outside the unit.
- 6.11 Other equipment on this farm is also automatic (i.e. ventilation, feeders and drinkers). Failure of the ventilation can cause the temperatures to rise very rapidly, which if not rectified immediate can cause heat stress to the birds. To avoid distress the birds need a constant supply of feed and water, hence prompt action is required in the event of failure of this equipment.

*Disturbance by Wildlife / Other*

- 6.12 Birds housed on the floor, as distinct from laying cages, are prone to panic resulting in smothering e.g. if disturbed by vermin or in the event of a wild bird entering the house, or by thunder and lightning or low flying aircraft. In the event of a smothering incident, this is audible outside the unit.

*Other Planning Issues*

- 6.14 Protection of livestock from theft or injury by intruders is of particular relevance in this case having regard to the secluded location of the farmstead. Whilst not in itself sufficient to justify a dwelling, this a contributing factor to be considered in relation to the need for a dwelling.
- 6.15 The nature of the enterprise is such that, the availability of supervision is required 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.
- 6.16 In order to meet the functional requirements of the business and the requirements of PPS7, the proposed temporary dwelling should be in close proximity to the buildings used to accommodate the poultry. The proposed site for the temporary dwelling would meet this criteria.



## 7. CONCLUSIONS

NC 07 / 3950 / F

- 7.1 On the basis of the information provided by the applicant, it is considered that there is a functional need for a full-time skilled worker to reside on the holding to provide the supervision requirements of the poultry.
- 7.2 It is considered that the proposed on site dwelling is required in order to provide constant and adequate supervision of the livestock enterprise and related mechanical systems and to carry out essential emergency repairs at short notice both within and outside normal working hours.
- 7.3 The applicants have shown serious commitment to this venture through the application for planning permission for the free range egg laying unit, which will represent an investment approximately £500,000 in buildings and equipment. The applicants have also secured a contract with John Bowler (Agriculture) Ltd. This contract provides a guaranteed market for the eggs and also provides the applicants with the required training, technical advice and field support in order to operate the unit.
- 7.4 The applicants business has been planned on a sound financial basis and there is significant confidence that the business will develop into a financially sound and profitable agricultural business.

**Ian Pick BSc (Hons) MRICS**  
**December 2007**