

PLANNING AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

7th February 2020

ADDITIONAL PAGES

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Additional Representations on Schedule Items

Pages 1 - 15

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7th February 2020

ADDITIONAL PAGES ON SCHEDULE ITEMS

Item	Ref. No	Content
03	18/03618/FUL	<p>Case Officer Update:</p> <p>At the request of the Ward Councillor, please see attached Business Plan for information</p> <p>Additional third party objection comment:</p> <p>"This application is out of sorts with an area of outstanding natural beauty, let alone the increase in traffic etc., and on NO account be considered"</p> <p>Upper Slaughter Parish Council additional comment:</p> <p>Following the submission of new reports for this application, Upper Slaughter Parish Council reconsidered this application at its meeting held on the 28th January 2020.</p> <p>The Council's previous objections made in December 2019 remain. However, it is noted that a Highways Report has now been submitted by Gloucestershire County Council Highways Department. Upper Slaughter Parish Council fully supports all the conditions and details made in this Report.</p> <p>It is obvious that this site is already being used. How, therefore, will the Planning Department enforce these conditions?</p> <p>Upper Slaughter Parish Council again wishes to state they support the comments and concerns made by Swell Parish Council.</p> <p>The Parish Council are in full agreement of the conditions stated by the Landscape Officer, in particular that "No external lighting is permitted on the buildings or within the site." This condition would then be working in line with Policy CE4 of the AONB Management Plan, which states:</p> <p>"Measures should be taken to enhance the tranquillity of the Cotswolds AONB by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">(i) removing and(ii) reducing existing sources of noise pollution and other aural and visual disturbance. <p>However, concern is again raised how these conditions will be enforced.</p>

BUSINESS PLAN

IN ASSOCIATION WITH PROPOSALS FOR CONVERSION OF REDUNDANT AGRICULTURAL BUILDINGS TO FUNCTION FACILITY

AT HILL BARN, LOWER SWELL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

ON BEHALF OF SIR ALAN AND LADY PARKER OF FIR FARM

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DESIGN | ENVIRONMENT | PLANNING | ECONOMICS | HERITAGE

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This revised Business Plan has been prepared by Pegasus Group to accompany a planning application which is submitted by Fir Farm (the Applicant). The application relates to the retrospective change of use and extension of 2 agricultural barns to a conference hall and function suite (D2) at Hill Barn, Lower Swell (the Application Site).
- 1.2 The planning application was submitted to Cotswold District Council, as the Local Planning Authority (LPA) on 19th September 2018. The application was validated under application reference number: 18/03618/FUL.
- 1.3 Pegasus Group were instructed by Fir Farm in relation to the proposals in July 2019.
- 1.4 This Business Plan sets out the background to the business of Fir Farm and explains how the two converted agricultural buildings would be used and how this would financially support the farming operation at Fir Farm.
- 1.5 Section 2 provides a description of the application site. Section 3 sets out the background to Fir Farm and the application site. Section 4 sets out the application proposals. Section 5 explains how the application proposals would support the farming operation at Fir Farm and Section 6 provides a summary of the key points.

2. THE APPLICATION SITE

- 2.1 The application site is located approximately 1km south west of the village of Lower Swell to the west of the B4068.
- 2.2 The site comprises a Dutch Barn and Stone Barn together with associated hardstanding. The site also previously comprised three modern portal framed buildings which were demolished as part of the works to convert the Dutch Barn and Stone Barn. The former farm yard lies to the north of the buildings and is laid to crushed stone providing car parking.
- 2.3 The site is accessed directly off of the B4068 which lies to the east, via a stone driveway which includes a number of passing bays.
- 2.4 The application site forms part of the wider Fir Farm which extends to 690 acres in and around Lower Swell. Fir Farm focuses on the raising of native and rare breed animals using sustainable, high welfare practices.

3. BACKGROUND TO FIR FARM

- 3.1 The application site forms part of the wider agricultural land holding known as Fir Farm which principally comprises Rectory Farm located on the southern edge of the village of Lower Swell.
- 3.2 Fir Farm (including the application site) was purchased by Sir Alan and Lady (Jane) Parker in 2010 at which time it was an intensive dairy farm.
- 3.3 Sir Alan and Lady Parker subsequently developed the farm to an organic mixed livestock farm, fully integrated with 100% grass fed beef herd, chickens, sheep, pigs and some arable cropping. The farm aims to be fully renewable, focussing on regenerative farming practices to produce a range of sustainably farmed and highly nutritious food which is sold directly to local customers.
- 3.4 Sir Alan and Lady Parker subsequently developed the farm to an organic mixed livestock farm, fully integrated with 100% grass fed herd, chickens, sheep, pigs and some arable cropping. The farm aims to be fully renewable, focussing on regenerative farming practices to produce a range of sustainably farmed and highly nutritious food which is sold directly to local customers. The Farm currently operates at a loss but is projected to break even in 2021.
- 3.5 A transition to a fully integrated mixed farm is economically more challenging in a number of ways, including that the Parkers have had to largely move away from more profitable contract arable farming. The Parkers have however invested heavily and are continuing to do so to help this take place. At this stage in its development it is loss making. There are however, a number of initiatives underway to reduce inputs and other costs but other farming enterprises where such diversification has worked also typically have diversified income streams as a critical part of their economic model. This would be a key economic benefit of re-using the Dutch and Stone barns, whose income streams could significantly affect the profitability of the business, particularly at a time of uncertainty regarding EU subsidies. The anticipated income generation from the barns (as set out below) would in itself exceed subsidies that could be lost by the Farm in the near future.
- 3.6 Many farms are now looking at different approaches to changes in agriculture and the need to maintain profitability. These include ceasing having livestock at all, cutting employment levels and thereby effectively limiting their farming and just retaining a subsidy income from their grassland. The Parkers are keen to

demonstrate that sustainable, high welfare, livestock farming can produce good economic outcomes together with associated local benefits, including employment of staff in farming. While many of these benefits are local, Fir Farm want to continue to produce high quality and high welfare meat not only for health reasons but also to counteract the possible increasing number of international imports.

- 3.7 The farm breeds and sells bulls and heifers as well as selling beef directly to pubs, restaurants and the local community in meat boxes. Pigs are also provided for hog roasts. Fir Farm is looking to increase its sale of meat and produce to the local community (both residential and commercial). This continuing diversification and development of more sustainable farming practices and the retention of active breeding would further increase income generation which will be reinvested into the Farm.
- 3.8 Fir Farm aspires to be an exemplar farm which can lead the way in not only reducing its carbon footprint to zero but show that grazing livestock in rotational farming systems can sequester carbon and make a significant contribution to building carbon sinks. As part of its aim to demonstrate the potential of sustainable farming practices Fir Farm has made the economic case, most recently to the Government's Head of Food Strategy, for a low input method of farming which has close to zero carbon emissions and the potential for farms to capture carbon.
- 3.9 In July 2019 Fir Farms' total carbon dioxide equivalent emissions were calculated at 544 tonnes a year, with emissions coming from electricity use, manure management, methane from enteric fermentation of livestock and fuel use. However, due to woodland creation (circa 90,000 trees planted), implementing a grazing regime which encourages soil biology and increases in soil organic carbon and by investing in renewable energy, 472 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent are sequestered on the farm annually. With conversion to a fully organic system nearly complete Fir Farm will be able to reduce those emissions even further. Should business plans allow, Fir Farm intend to invest in an agro forestry scheme that will sequester an additional 1063 tonnes of CO₂.
- 3.10 Fir Farm would also like to invest in strategies to reduce carbon emissions: in particular in on farm solutions exploring alternatives to diesel vehicles such as the use of anaerobic digesters to potentially run the tractors and other farm vehicles. Fir Farm would also like to increase use of renewable energy such as ground

source heat pumps, solar PV and biomass heating wherever possible. These have all been installed at Fir Farm but could be expanded further to further reduce the farm's carbon footprint.

- 3.11 Fir Farm has also studied the potential for a more developed composting system which would allow them to build more organic matter and sequester more carbon at a faster rate but this will take significant investment.
- 3.12 A key strategic priority for Fir Farm is to set up a mobile abattoir service which would travel around farms in the local area as well as serving Fir Farm, allowing animals to be slaughtered where they were born and raised. Fir Farm's animals are raised to the highest welfare standards, but currently there is no facility for on farm slaughter, with all of its associated welfare and traceability benefits. Fir Farm are in advanced discussions with the Food Standards Agency but will need additional farm revenue in order to financially justify the investment required.
- 3.13 At present Fir Farm directly employs 4 full time and 3 part time workers as well indirectly supporting the employment of various local maintenance contractors.

4. APPLICATION PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The application seeks retrospective planning permission for the change of use and extension of 2 x agricultural barns to a conference hall and function suite.
- 4.2 The Stone Barn has been converted into a small bespoke venue that could be used for small scale meetings / functions / lunches, with its own kitchen and toilet facilities. It could also be used as an ancillary venue to supplement the Dutch Barn. The Dutch Barn has been converted to provide a large open plan area which could be used for larger conferences and events. At present the building does not benefit from its own kitchen facilities and it is proposed that a new kitchen is installed within the existing building footprint as part of the application proposals.
- 4.3 To date, the buildings have been used to hold a number of events. In particular, the buildings have been used to hold conferences, meetings and educational events promoting sustainable agriculture together with organisations such as the Sustainable Food Trust (SFT), Pasture for Life Association (PFLA) and the National Farmers Union (NFU). For example, the buildings were used in April 2018 to host a conference on the Future of UK Farming, attended by the Rt. Hon. Michael Gove MP (then the Secretary of State for the Environment) and the NFU President Minette Batters. More recently, in July 2019 the buildings were used to host a conference on Farming and Climate Change, looking at ways for farms to reduce their carbon footprint and build their natural capital. A number of local farmers, estate managers and landowners attended the meetings. Because the venue is on the farm all attendees were able to have tours and practical demonstrations of the farm systems.
- 4.4 In 2018 the buildings were also used for other local and community events supporting charitable or fundraising purposes, such as a bridge party, Scottish dancing event, a Pony Club lunch and was also commercially let for events including a wedding, a tea party and a drinks party.
- 4.5 As part of this retrospective planning application it is proposed to limit the number of events that will take place. Whilst it is proposed to use the buildings commercially, this use is to be balanced with the level of activity which Fir Farm believe is required to help support the farming enterprise; with the level of commitment they wish to make to managing the facility; as well as seeking to address local concerns regarding the scale of the use.

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- 4.6 It is therefore proposed to limit use of the Dutch Barn to a **maximum of 15 events** (including a maximum of 5 evening events) per annum, over a maximum period of 20 days per annum to allow for 2 day events such as an annual agricultural conference as referred to below.
- 4.7 Day time events would cease by 7pm.
- 4.8 Evening events would cease by 12.30am (the following day).
- 4.9 It is anticipated that the Dutch Barn will be used to host a two day agricultural conference once every 12-18 months, similar to that which has now been hosted on three separate occasions at the application site. It is also anticipated that there will be a minimum of one family event per annum with the remaining events being charitable or fundraising events or parties. The Stone Barn will be used in association with the Dutch Barn or for separate lunches and small conferences/training events. In accordance with Fir Farm's sustainable farming objectives and ethos their target market will be providing a venue for agricultural events.
- 4.10 Car parking would be provided within the existing hardstanding area to the north of the buildings as detailed in the separate Transport Statement. A separate area of overflow car parking would be provided (details of which are to be agreed with the LPA) in association with the agricultural conference proposed to be held on an annual basis.

5. THE BUSINESS CASE FOR THE PROPOSALS

- 5.1 In 2010 when Sir Alan and Lady Parker purchased Fir Farm the Dutch Barn and Stone Barn were dilapidated and in need of repair. The dominant buildings were 2 large, modern, concrete structures in front of the Stone Barn which were subsequently removed. The Dutch Barn was used to store straw and the Stone Barn was used for farm storage. The previous owner had used the livestock barns (now demolished) for over wintering his dairy cattle.
- 5.2 On buying Fir Farm all farming operations were moved to Rectory Farm as part of the move to beef farming and to stop daily trips with big agricultural machinery through Lower Swell to the application site. There was an attempt to keep pigs in the barns but it was felt that it was too isolated a spot for livestock and they also needed checking 2 or 3 times a day from Rectory Farm, especially in cold weather.
- 5.3 The buildings therefore became surplus to requirements and Sir Alan and Lady Parker converted them as part of their wider aspirations to focus on sustainable farming practices by providing a facility that could host agricultural events. Use of the building has subsequently evolved and it has since hosted three agricultural conferences, various community lunches and other events and two weddings (once commercial and one family).
- 5.4 Continued use of the buildings for conferences and functions will provide a regular additional income stream for Fir Farm supporting the business itself as well as its diversification into sustainable farming practices, particularly at a time where subsidies for British Farmers is due to significantly reduce with the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union.
- 5.5 As an EU Member State British Farmers can apply for grants under the Pillar 1 and Pillar 2 payment schemes. The Government have proposed that final payments will be made to British Farmers in 2020 (subject to the UK leaving the EU). From 2021 to 2027 there is likely to be a transitional period while an Environmental Land Management Scheme is put in place. Farm income from subsidies will be allocated on a different basis and it is anticipated that this will entail a significant reduction in farm income of at least 25% - 50% depending on the nature of subsidies and farming enterprises.
- 5.6 As set out in paragraph 4.6 above use of the Dutch Barn is proposed to be limited to 10 day time events and a maximum of 5 evening events per annum. On the

basis of events already held at the buildings and a review of prices for other facilities that provide meeting facilities the following average hire costs are anticipated for the Dutch Barn:

- Day time or evening only use - £6,000
- Day and evening use - £10,000

- 5.7 Based on an assumption that all evening use will be in association with day time use this would generate an anticipated income of **£50,000** and a further 10 day time events could generate a further **£60,000** per annum.
- 5.8 All Dutch Barn bookings would include use of the Stone Barn at no extra cost.
- 5.9 When hired separately it is anticipated that the Stone Barn will be hired for between £1,000 - £1,500 per day (i.e. an average of £1,250). It is anticipated that the Stone Barn would receive approximately 2 additional bookings per month on a per annum average basis which could generate a further **£32,500** per annum.
- 5.10 In terms of catering, Fir Farm has used a local catering supplier for events that have already taken place and this arrangement is proposed to continue but with greater emphasis on using meat from Fir Farm.
- 5.11 As well as meat, Fir Farm intend to use their own produce, in liaison with catering suppliers, as far as possible which could include salad, eggs and potatoes further increasing the income generated through the conversion proposals.
- 5.12 The use of meat from Fir Farm at events will also help to market the farm's meat to a wider customer base and increase the sale of meat boxes and pigs for hog roasts.
- 5.13 In terms of employment, Fir Farm works with a local catering supplier who shares Fir Farm's values of supporting rural communities and hires all of its staff from the local area. To date the chefs used at Hill Barn live locally.
- 5.14 The number of staff who would be employed at each event would depend upon the nature of the event and the number of guests attending. Waiting staff ratios are likely to range between 1 per 15 – 20 guests depending upon the event. Kitchen staff would be employed in addition to waiting staff. The cost of waiting staff is factored into any additional cost per head for catering and as such will not affect the revenue taken from the overall building hire cost.

5.15 As set out in the Transport Statement up to 3 members of staff would be employed to direct people from the B4068 and manage parking within the site.

6. SUMMARY

- 6.1 In summary, it is proposed to use the Dutch Barn and Stone Barn for the hosting of events with a focus on agricultural and local community events.
- 6.2 The number of events are proposed to be controlled through the use of planning conditions with an aim of balancing the level of activity which Fir Farm believe is required to help support the existing and diversifying farming enterprise together with the level of commitment they wish to make to managing the facility as well as seeking to address local concerns regarding the scale of the use.
- 6.3 It is proposed to limit use of the Dutch Barn to a **maximum of 15 events** (including a maximum of 5 evening events) per annum, over a maximum of 20 days. This number of days would allow for 2 day events such as an annual agricultural conference.
- 6.4 It is anticipated that this will generate in the region of **£83,000** per annum. Further income is anticipated to be generated through the use of Fir Farm meat and produce as part of catering packages and through the associated marketing of Fir Farm's meat and subsequent sales of its meat boxes to the local residential and business community.
- 6.5 This additional income will be used to reinvest into the business to support the farming enterprise at Fir Farm together with its aim of becoming fully renewable. It will also help to fund projects such as exploring alternatives to diesel; use of anaerobic digesters to recycle certain food and farm waste; switching from red diesel to alternative fuels; use of anaerobic digesters to run farm vehicles; installation of renewable energy and carbon sequestration projects including an agroforestry scheme; and the establishment of a mobile abattoir to enable the most humane animal slaughter possible.
- 6.6 Fir Farm would like to continue to build their reputation as a flagship farm practicing regenerative land management. Having the ability to host agricultural meetings to inspire fellow farmers as part of their farm tours is a critical part of that core ambition.
- 6.7 A key part of establishing a credible reputation includes being able to show the business of farming sustainably can be profitable. Using previously redundant farm buildings to generate revenue is an essential part of the path to profitability.