

PLANNING STATEMENT

**Higher Woodhill Farm, Woodhill Road,
Bury, Lancashire. BL8 1BS**

Planning Application for The Temporary Siting of Three Containers to Be Used for The Manufacturing and Retail Sales of Farm Produced Ice Cream.

This statement is presented in support of a Planning Application, submitted by Jason Entwistle, of Mrs M Entwistle and Sons, of Higher Woodhill Farm, Woodhill Road, Bury, Lancashire. BL8 1BS, who is seeking Planning Consent for the temporary siting and use of three containers for the manufacturing and retailing of farm produced ice cream at the premises.

The application seeks to maximise the opportunities presented by the location of the farm, and to alleviate some of the business pressures that have arisen due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and the disruption to markets for agricultural produce.

Proposal

The application seeks consent for the siting of three former containers, to be used for ice cream manufacture and retailing.

This is an application for a Temporary facility, for a period of three years, to allow the development of a proposal to create a “Woodhill Farm Centre”, to be the subject of a future Planning Application, and to obtain the short-term benefits of increasing the farm business profit margins by carrying out direct sales of farm manufactured products.

The intention is to use one of the proposed containers for retail sales, the second container to house the ice cream making machinery and to accommodate the manufacturing activity, and the third container to be used as a store for the raw materials, such as fruit flavourings and cones/wafers and packaging.

The containers are low profile and are to be timber clad in natural materials which reduce their visual impact, and which are intended to blend into the farm setting and semi-rural location.

The Farm and Farming Activities

The premises at Higher Woodhill Farm, Bury, has been occupied by the Entwistle family for many years.

Historically, it has been operated as a poultry farm, rearing broiler chickens for sale to wholesalers within the North West region but, due to the advancement and upgrading of Farm and Animal welfare standards, the former poultry rearing buildings became unviable and uncompliant with current standards of food production without being improved through major capital expenditure on modernisation, so the poultry rearing business activities have been located to a

newly constructed farm complex within the North West, whilst still being operated by the Entwistle family.

The proximity of residential dwellings at the Higher Woodhill site also acted as a limiting factor for poultry production, as any new poultry buildings would have needed to be larger, to render them economically viable and therefore, by virtue of their size, they would be incompatible with the small and condensed nature of the site at Higher Woodhill.

The associated emissions from the poultry units could have presented the potential for conflict with the amenity of local residents.

To replace the former poultry rearing business, the family developed a dairy farming enterprise, initially utilising a herd of Holstein Friesian cattle, but more latterly, rearing a herd of pedigree Jersey cattle, producing high quality Channel Island milk for the wholesale markets.

The Entwistle's business is a primary supplier under contract of high cream milk to the well-known and nationally recognised Longley Farm Dairy product manufacturers from Holmfirth.

Current Market Pressures and Business Circumstances

The traditional markets for agricultural commodities and products have been subject to extreme volatility in recent times, due to the pressures exerted by the dominance of the supermarket retailers within British food production, the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Community, and the unexpected and wide-ranging disruption to the food markets because of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

The pressure from the Supermarkets has driven a downward trend in the price of agricultural produce, as the retailers seek to gain competitive price advantages, resulting in a reduction in farm gate prices, with the ongoing negative results upon the profit margins of farm businesses.

Returns received by dairy farmers have, at sometimes, been below the cost of production, endangering long term farm viability.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Community, and the Common Agricultural Policy, has equally had an initially negative effect upon farm incomes. The Government have noted within adopted legislation and policy, their intention to amend the basis of farm support payments, which currently sustains farm incomes, and to move away from the current structure, which is based upon area farmed, and to move to a new support system based upon environmental measures and outcomes. It is anticipated that the financial returns to farmers will be lower than that which they currently receive.

Given the limited acreage attached to Higher Woodhill Farm, this inevitably means that there will be an impact upon the income at the far and could indeed render the site unviable for farming purposes.

The milk processor who currently buys the Jersey Channel Island milk produced at the farm, is also having to contend with reducing product sales, due to the inability to export some of their product range, and the loss of some supply contracts through fierce competition.

The closure of the Catering, Hospitality and Restaurant/Café sector due to Coronavirus restrictions has resulted in a substantial reduction in the market for milk and cream, again limiting the processors ability to achieve high levels of sales, which has driven the reduction in demand, and prices, for dairy farms.

This has resulted in a reduced requirement for milk at the processor and drives the ambition of Wood Hill Farm to maximise the value of their milk by on farm processing into specialist ice cream, which can return higher profit margins.

Should the farm become unproductive, that may lead to subsequent intentions to develop the farmland at Higher Woodhill, given its setting as a notional “Infill Site”, being surrounded by residential development.

The Entwistle family wish to avoid this, as they see their long-term future at Higher Woodhill, so are seeking to maximise the returns for their milk product by manufacturing and retailing high quality farm made ice cream.

Location

The farm is sited at a position which is adjacent to established residential areas and it has roadside frontage along Woodhill Road.

The farming business currently utilises the farmland along both sides of the road, owning the area immediately around the farmhouse and farm buildings, and holding the land across the road as Secure Agricultural Tenants under an Agricultural Tenancy with the Landlords, Bury MBC.

The farm also has the use of additional local farmland in the Brandlesholme area.

The semi-urban setting generates both pressures and opportunities.

The farm is, as previously noted, constrained in its ambitions to modernise, which inevitably requires larger buildings, by the proximity to housing and the needs to manage the potential conflicts with associated noise and emissions.

But it also has the benefits of a large and local customer catchment, and the footfall and visitor numbers generated by visitors to the nearby Burrs Country Park

Burrs Country Park and Retail Opportunities

Higher Woodhill Farm is located at the access point, along Woodhill Road, to the Burrs Country Park, a 36-hectare parkland site owned by Bury MBC.

Since its establishment in the 1980's, the Burrs Country Park has become one of the principal tourist attractions in the Bury area, attracting visitors from the Bury area and from a wider catchment in the North West Region.

The site is a popular location with residents from the Greater Manchester area, and is visited for the purposes of outdoor recreation and countryside activities.

The Burrs site offering is also enhanced by the siting of a Caravan park, operated by the Caravan and Camping Club, and the Bury Showground which hosts outdoor events.

The East Lancashire Railway have also constructed and commissioned a station halt at the Burrs site, bringing in additional visitors.

In 2015, Bury MBC developed, after public consultation, a Burrs Country Park Strategy 2015 – 2029, which was published in June 2015.

This strategy document anticipates the expansion of the Burrs Country Park and extends the park boundary to include land adjacent to Higher Woodhill.

The Strategy seeks to expand the offering of the Burrs as a tourist destination, by enhancing the offer to visitors.

The Entwistle family engaged with Bury MBC in the development of the Strategy, attending meetings of the Burrs Strategic Development Group, and discussed with the Strategy Group, the potential to establish a Woodhill Farm Centre, as an attraction and diversified rural business, which was well received and considered to be an asset to the overall intentions of the Strategy.

This involves the development of the Higher Woodhill site to include a farm shop and café, with viewing areas for the farming activities, to offer the public the opportunity to interact with farm animals and the proposal also intends the establishment of an educational facility, where groups and visitors can learn about agriculture and food production.

The strategy anticipates circular footpath routes and cycleways, extending along the River Irwell banks, and subsequently passing immediately past Higher Woodhill Farm.

This represents a huge opportunity to retail to the visitors and recreational users the farm produced ice cream.

The local population have also increased the potential for passing trade at Higher Woodhill, as the residents take their outdoor recreational exercise. A retail ice cream outlet has the potential to become a “destination” for casual walkers.

The proposal for the design and construction of the Woodhill Farm Centre is currently being developed, and initial plans have been indicated to the Strategic Development Group.

Progress has been hindered by the expenditure and logistics required to relocate the poultry enterprise, and the imposition by Government of the current Coronavirus restrictions but, in the short term, the proposed location of the temporary retailing and manufacturing facility applied for will allow the farm to develop the retail offering, and to strengthen the overall income generated by the dairy business.

Planning Context.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF notes, at “*Supporting a prosperous rural economy*” Paragraph 83 (b) and (c), that Planning policies and decisions should enable;

(b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses, and*

(c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside*

“*Making effective use of land*” Paragraph 118 (a) notes that planning policies and decisions should; *encourage multiple benefits from both urban and rural land, including through mixed use schemes.....*

“*Proposals affecting the Green Belt*” Paragraph 145 (a) and (b) note that exceptions to the considerations of inappropriate development in the Green Belt include;

(a) *Buildings for agriculture and forestry, and*

(b) *The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use)*

The containers are intended to provide for a manufacturing and marketing facility that is directly connected with an existing and established use. The ice cream will be manufactured using milk and eggs produced upon the premises at Higher Woodhill Farm and retailed directly from the premises.

The ice cream is, therefore, a product wholly sourced, made and sold as an ancillary process to the main farm activity.

Paragraph 146 also indicates that “*Certain other forms of development are also not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided that they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it*”

The temporary siting of the containers does not, by virtue of their intended location and portability, prejudice the openness or purposes of the Green Belt. They can be considered as according with the intentions of the policy by assisting to maintain the ongoing viability of the farm, thereby securing the continuing profitability of the rural business operating from the premises.

The site at Higher Woodhill Farm is identified within the Adopted Local Development Plan as being located within the Green Belt, and subject to the appropriate policies.

Objective 4 notes the intention; “*To protect good quality agricultural land and maintain a viable rural economy*” and states a commitment to “*The support of farm diversification, where there are overriding economic reasons to allow alternatives which will not be detrimental to the use of land*”

Policy OL4/4 expresses an intention to *“encourage a viable rural economy by supporting farm diversification enterprises which respect the quality of the built and natural environment”*.

The policy further notes that *“To help sustain the rural economy there may be a need to continue and expand the process of diversification on and off farms, and to do so whilst still conserving that which is of value in the countryside.”*

The proposal as submitted will not be detrimental to the use of land, as the containers are to be sited within the cluster of existing farm buildings, are to be located upon an existing concrete hard standing within an existing yard area and are lower in height than the surrounding buildings. They will not interfere with ongoing farming operations.

The cladding with wooden fasciae will ensure that they do not look incongruous when viewed alongside the existing farm buildings.

Customer Access

Higher Woodhill Farm is situated upon the route of Woodhill Road, and the premises has roadside frontage.

Woodhill Road is the principal access route to the Burrs Country Park, a facility noted by Bury MBC as a *“Destination Park”* and a key element of the town’s tourism portfolio. It is said to be *“the Borough’s flagship park”* (Burrs Country Park Strategy 2015)

The Burrs is intended to be a *“destination”* and the Burrs strategy anticipates *“joined up events between partners”* and the provision of *“an increased range of enhanced recreational facilities”*. The extension of the Park’s defined boundaries brings a substantial proportion of the farm at Higher Woodhill within its overview.

The footfall currently passing the farm whilst accessing and leaving the Burrs Park is substantial and increases hugely during periods of good weather conditions. The Coronavirus restrictions, and the allowances for short local recreational walks as exercise has significantly increased the number of walkers passing the farm. The creation of the circular walkways and cycle paths will only increase this footfall and passing trade.

It is anticipated that the largest proportion of the customers for the ice cream produced at the farm will arrive on foot and buy an ice cream as a part of their visit to the Burrs and surrounding neighbourhood.

This will be a transitory clientele, as the retail proposal does not offer any internal accommodation whilst ice cream is consumed.

The existing farmyard has entrances which allow access and egress directly onto Woodhill Road, which will allow customers in vehicles to make short visits to purchase ice cream, without the requirement to park upon Woodhill Road. There will be no opportunity to stay upon site once a purchase is made.

The proximity of the children's playground and "kick pitch" at a point further along Woodhill Road represents a further "customer source" and additional sales opportunities.

This application for consent anticipates a three-year placement of the containers to establish the manufacturing and retail business.

It is the intention of the Entwistle family to submit a further Planning Application to Bury MBC, seeking consent for a larger diversified facility at Higher Woodhill, which, it is anticipated, will include a Farm Shop, an Educational and Exhibition Centre and a Café and Restaurant.

Upon the eventual submission of the anticipated Planning Application, it is intended that the issue of Vehicle Parking on site will be addressed, including the removal of existing farm buildings to provide adequate parking areas.

Summary

The temporary siting of the containers will allow the establishment of the ice cream making business and facilitate the heightening of awareness of the diversified direct retailing business at Higher Woodhill Farm.

It will permit the farm, in the short term, to benefit from a much-needed increase in income through the higher profit margins gained from direct sales, and therefore assist in maintaining the ongoing viability of the farming enterprise.

It will provide an outlet for the milk produced at the farm which the current markets and the dairy processors cannot absorb and help to secure the farm profitability.

The resulting ice cream manufacturing and retailing business will provide an additional and complementary attraction for the Burrs Country Park and raise awareness of the farm and its proposals for a future larger development.

The development will not prejudice the overall aims of the Green Belt, and will not be imposing, nor represent intrusive development.

We feel that the Ice Cream enterprise will be welcomed by the visitors to the area, and the Park, and we therefore request that the Authority grant the temporary consent application.