

Application No: 11/2681N

Location: LAND ADJ, LONG LANE, ALPRAHAM

Proposal: Proposed Agricultural Workers Dwelling to Serve a Working Farm to be Relocated

Applicant: Mr & Mrs Crank

Expiry Date: 08-Sep-2011

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION

Refuse

MAIN ISSUES

- Principle of Development - Whether there is a functional and financial need for an agricultural workers dwelling
- Impact on Character and Appearance of Open Countryside
- Impact on the Amenity of Neighbouring properties
- Impact on Highway Safety
- Impact on Protected Species

REASON FOR REFERRAL

This application was to be dealt with under the Council's scheme of delegation. However, the application has been called in by Cllr Jones to consider the credibility of the business case and to check design and siting.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE AND CONTEXT

The application site forms a newly established (re-located) agricultural unit located with the Open Countryside as defined by the Local Plan Proposals Map. The site includes three large agricultural buildings (all connected) with a large area of hardstanding to its east. The site is located on the northern side of Long Lane from which it is accessed. There are ponds within close proximity to the site.

DETAILS OF PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for 1 detached agricultural workers dwelling which would serve a new agricultural holding at Long Lane, Alpraham. The proposed agricultural workers dwelling would be 2 storeys with a height to eaves to 5.5m and 8.5m to ridge. The dwelling

would have a width of 12.3m and maximum depth (including two storey out rigger) of 13.1m. Accommodation would comprise 4 bedrooms (two en-suite), a bathroom, living room, dining room/kitchen, snug, utility room, shower room and tack room. Floor space would comprise 250sqm (measured externally). The scheme also proposes the construction of a double garage, with office which would have a height to eaves of 2.7m, height to ridge 4.995m. The garage would have a maximum width of 6.5m and maximum depth of 8.7m.

The scheme will also include the creation of a residential curtilage which would have a length of 66.5m and width of 35m and would comprise an area of 2327sqm.

RELEVANT HISTORY

10/3403N – Planning permission was approved for the Erection of a General Purpose Agricultural Storage Building on 26th October 2011.

09/3284N – Planning permission was approved for Erection of Agricultural Cattle Shed on 25th November 2009.

P08/1254 – GDO Determined that Planning permission was not required for General Purpose Agricultural Storage Shed on 5th December 2008.

POLICIES

National policy

PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development

PPS3: Housing

PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

Local Plan policy

NE.2 (Open Countryside)

NE.5 (Nature Conservation and Habitats)

NE.9 (Protected Species)

RES.5 (Housing in the Open Countryside)

RES.6 (Agricultural and Forestry Occupancy Conditions)

BE.1 (Amenity)

BE.2 (Design Standards)

BE.3 (Access and Parking)

BE.4 (Drainage, Utilities and Resources)

BE.5 (Infrastructure)

CONSULTATIONS (External to Planning)

Strategic Highways Manager - There won't be any significant impact on the surround highways infrastructure as a direct result of this proposal. No highways objections.

VIEWS OF THE PARISH COUNCIL

No objection subject to agricultural tie restriction

OTHER REPRESENTATIONS

None received

APPLICANT'S SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Design and Access Statement

Proposed Business Review – Agricultural Assessment

OFFICER APPRAISAL

Principle of development

The creation of a new dwelling within the Open Countryside is unacceptable in principle. However, Policy RES.5 states that Housing in the Open Countryside is acceptable where it is required for a person engaged full time in agriculture. The proposal therefore needs to be assessed against the functional and financial tests outlined in PPS7 with regard to the provision of an agricultural worker's dwelling on the site.

PPS7 states that new residential development may be justifiable in the open countryside on the basis that it would enable a full time agricultural worker to live at or in the immediate vicinity of their place of work. Agricultural workers will be expected to live in nearby defined settlements unless there is an essential need to have a worker readily available on site to secure the viability of the enterprise. Whether it is essential to have a worker available on site is based on the needs of the enterprise and not the preference of the individual.

The proposals contained in this scheme are for a new permanent agricultural dwelling to support a relocated farming enterprise. The farm has been relocated from its existing site at Grove Farm to the application site, and has received a series of consents for agricultural buildings since 2008. These buildings have been erected, however at the time of the officers site visit, did not appear to be operational as a dairy farm. The farming enterprise has 219 acres of land and is at the start of a 15 year Farm Business Tenancy. The applicants have been given notice that their existing house and buildings at Grove Farm, plus 26 acres of land, are to be returned to the land owner. It is considered that this is an established farming unit and a permanent dwelling could be considered to be acceptable.

For permanent agricultural dwellings in the open countryside PPS7 requires that 5 tests are met. The assessment of this application against these tests is shown below;

i) *'There is a clearly established **existing** functional need'*

The application proposals relate to the relocation of an existing, and established farming enterprise. The stocking of the farm consists of a dairy herd of 100 cows, 164 dairy heifers and 59 store beef cattle. The farm also has 60 acres of wheat and barley.

The agricultural justification states that there is a total labour requirement of 7,991 hours per year. The standard man year comprises 2,200 hours and as such this equates to a labour unit requirement of 3.63. These calculations have been taken from nationally accepted data (Nix 2011).

The nature of the enterprise which is predominantly dairy is one which would require the 24 hour supervision of livestock and it is therefore considered that there would be a need for a single skilled worker to reside within site and sound of the enterprise.

ii) *'The need relates to a **full-time** worker, or one who is primary employed in agriculture and does not relate to a part-time requirement'*

The labour unit requirement for the unit is for approximately 3.5 employees and therefore relates to a full time worker. As there is currently no employee residing within site and sound of the buildings this requirement is satisfied.

iii) *'The unit and agricultural activity concerned have been established for at least 3 years, have been profitable for at least one of them, are currently financially sound and have a clear prospect of remaining so' –*

The application has been supported by two years of accounts, it is normally expected that any application for permanent dwellings is supported by three years worth of accounts and it is therefore considered that insufficient information has been submitted to consider the financial basis of the enterprise.

Furthermore, from the figures submitted it is considered that the enterprise could not support the construction of a dwelling and remain financially sound. Guidance issued by MAFF to Local Planning Authorities states that *"for a holding to be considered financially sound and to assess whether it can be sustained for a reasonable period of time it is necessary to ensure that it can be shown to provide a reasonable return on the land, labour and capital used in the business"*. This is a conventional economic assessment that a sound business should be able to provide a reasonable return on all the inputs used (land, labour and capital). The minimum agricultural wage would provide a reasonable return to labour (at 2008 this was £13,455), a reasonable return on capital employed would be 2.5%, and land would be a notional rent. For a business to be considered financially sound both now and in the future the net profit achieved would have to cover these deductions. No details have been submitted on the amount of land owned. However with a cost of £300,000 for existing capital (buildings), £200,000 for the cost of the dwelling (total of £500,000), 2.5% on this would be £12,500. Three and a half agricultural workers on the site would equate to £47,250 wages. Therefore based on the capital and labour alone the net profit of £16,908 would fail to provide a reasonable return on the inputs of £59,750. On this basis it is considered that the enterprise is not financially sound and does not have the prospect of remaining so.

iv) *'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'*

In terms of other existing accommodation in the area the supporting information provided by the applicant states that there is a functional need for a worker to live within sight and sound of the livestock. As the functional test has been met it is considered an exploration of alternative dwellings would not be a viable alternative to satisfy the functional need.

v) *'Other planning requirements, e.g. in relation to access or impact upon the countryside are satisfied'* – This issue will be addressed separately below.

It is important that agricultural workers dwellings are of a size that could be justified by the functional requirement to ensure the continued viability of maintaining a property for its intended use. In this instance it is considered that the proposed dwelling is of excessive size. The proposed dwelling has a total floorspace of 250sq.m (when measured externally) and consists of 4 bedrooms (two en-suite), a bathroom, living room, dining room/kitchen, snug, utility room, shower room and tack room. The scheme also includes a large double garage. The justification to Policy RES.5 states that the proposed dwelling should not be unusually large or expensive to construct, the maximum size for which permission would be granted would be 140sqm (measured externally). Such a dwelling would be expensive to construct. PPS7 states that *'Agricultural dwellings should be of a size commensurate with the established functional requirement. Dwellings that are unusually large in relation to the agricultural needs of the unit or unusually expensive to construct in relation to the income it can sustain in the long-term, should not be permitted'*. Furthermore, such a large dwelling would prejudice any restrictive occupancy condition as the dwelling would be outside the range of property affordable to the local workforce should the dwelling be sold on in the future.

Impact on the character and appearance of the Open Countryside

As detailed above the size of the dwelling and detached double garage is considered to be unduly large, therefore the proposed dwelling would cause demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of the Open Countryside.

The proposals include the creation of a large domestic curtilage which would comprise an area of 2327sqm. This is excessively large and such a change of use would also significant alter the character and appearance of the open countryside.

The siting of the proposed dwelling, which is adjacent to existing agricultural buildings, and set back from the edge of the public highway, is considered to be acceptable.

Impact on the Amenity of Nearby Properties

There are no nearby properties which would be significantly affected by the proposed development.

Impact on Highway Safety

The site would be accessed via the existing approved farm access. The increase in vehicular movements resulting from a single residential unit would be insignificant and would not cause

any demonstrable harm on highway safety. No objections have been received from the Strategic Highways Manager.

Impact on Protected Species

The site is within very close proximity to a pond. As the proposed development would change the nature of land (i.e. developing on farm land) within such close proximity to this pond it is necessary to consider the impact of the proposals on Great Crested Newts. No Protected Species survey has been submitted with the application and it is therefore unclear of the impact that this proposed development would have on any GCN population or habitat.

CONCLUSIONS AND REASON(S) FOR THE DECISION

Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the existing enterprise is financially sound and has a clear prospect of remaining so. The proposed dwelling and garage are of unacceptable size and scale which would cause significant harm to the character and appearance of the Open Countryside. In addition the size of the domestic curtilage is unduly large and would alter to character of the local landscape to the detriment of the character and appearance of the Open Countryside. Furthermore, insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that there would be no adverse harm caused to protected species. It is therefore recommended that the proposed development should be refused.

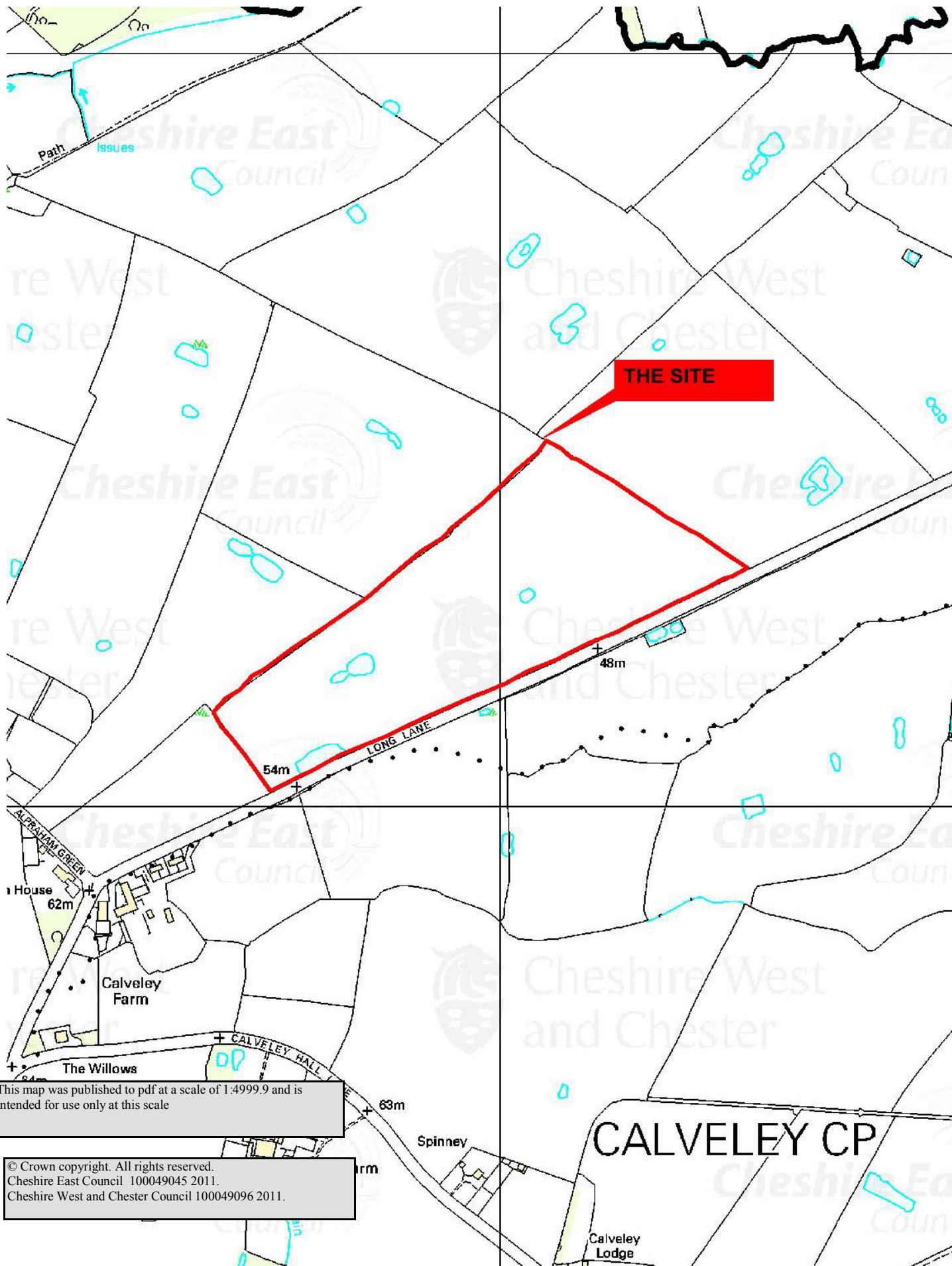
RECOMMENDATIONS

REFUSE for the following reasons:

- 1) The submission fails to demonstrate that there is clear evidence that the proposed enterprise has a clear prospect of remaining financially sound as specified within Annex A of PPS7. As a result the special justification for allowing a new dwelling in the open countryside has not been met and the proposed development is contrary to the provisions of PPS 7 (Sustainable Development in Rural Areas) and Policies RES.5 (Housing in the Open Countryside) of the Borough of Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011.**
- 2) In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the proposed dwellinghouse is excessively large with a floor area of 250sq metres. A property of this size would be more expensive to construct and would prejudice the effectiveness of the agricultural workers occupancy condition, creating a dwelling which would not be affordable to the local agricultural workforce. Furthermore, the scale of the dwelling and detached garage is of such a scale that it would cause demonstrable harm on the character and appearance of the Open Countryside. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies NE.2 (Open Countryside), RES.5 (Housing in the Open Countryside) of the Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 and the provisions of Planning Policy Statement 7.**
- 3) The proposed development includes the creation of a domestic curtilage which would be approximately 2300sqm in area. Such an area for domestic curtilage is unduly large and would cause demonstrable harm to the character and appearance**

of the Open Countryside. As such the proposed development would be contrary to Policies NE.2 (Open Countryside), RES.5 (Housing in the Open Countryside) of the Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 and the provisions of Planning Policy Statement 7.

- 4) The proposed development would be in close proximity to a pond. Insufficient information has been submitted to demonstrate that the proposed development would have no adverse effect on the population or habitat of Protected Species, particularly Great Crested Newts. In the absence of this information, to allow this development would be contrary to Policy NE.9 (Protected Species) of the Crewe and Nantwich Replacement Local Plan 2011 and PPS9.



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