



## Committee Report

**Planning Committee North** - 12 September 2023

**Application no** DC/22/4995/FUL

**Location**

Beetlebank Farm  
Darsham Road  
Bramfield  
Halesworth  
Suffolk  
IP19 9AG

**Expiry date** 17 February 2023

**Application type** Full Application

**Applicant** Mr Geoff Wakeling

**Parish** Bramfield

**Proposal** Siting of a temporary static caravan to accommodate a rural worker

**Case Officer** Jamie Behling

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## **1. Summary**

- 1.1. The proposed development seeks permission to site a static caravan on agricultural land to accommodate a rural worker at Beetlebank Farm.
- 1.2. The application accords with planning policy. In terms of consultation responses received, the Parish/Town Council does not object, the former ward member requested the application be presented before the referral panel (before the elections) and there have been no objections from statutory consultees.
- 1.3. The application is presented to the Planning Committee due to the applicant being an elected member of the Council. The applicant became an elected member in May during the course of consideration of the application.

## **2. Site Description**

- 2.1. Beetlebank Farm extends to 37 acres and comprises mixed pasture and woodland, a large agricultural barn and a small office building. The farm is accessed via a shared dirt track leading to the barn with the only adjacent neighbour being Grove Farm which appears to be used as holiday lets approved under previous planning applications. Grove Farm is outside of the ownership of the applicant with no planning history of them being connected.
- 2.2. An application (DC/20/4473/PN3) was submitted in 2020 for the conversion of the barn on the site into a dwelling under permitted development rights, however this application was withdrawn as the barn was not considered suitable for conversion.
- 2.3. The applicant inherited Beetlebank Farm in 2020 after decades of disuse. They subsequently started running the farm again in order to 'create a business emphasising self-sufficiency, conservation and community'. The farm is being run using traditional conservation-based farming methods, including rotational grazing, no-dig gardening, pasture-based livestock, agroforestry and regenerative agriculture. The farm currently contains nearly 50 sheep, up to 25 pigs, 100 birds including rare breed pheasants, chickens, ducks and geese, as well as birds of prey, ferrets and 7 dairy goats.

## **3. Proposal**

- 3.1. The proposal seeks to site a static caravan adjacent to the barn at Beetlebank Farm for a temporary time period of three years in order for the owner to live on the site and have access to the livestock at all times of the day.

#### 4. Consultees

##### Parish/Town Council

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Bramfield Parish Council	12 January 2023	31 January 2023
Summary of comments: Bramfield Parish Council "The Parish Council has no objection to this planning application and support the applicant's rural enterprise. However, the Parish Council has concerns over any future development of the site over and above the temporary accommodation proposed in this planning application."		

##### Statutory consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
SCC Highways Department	12 January 2023	13 January 2023
Summary of comments: No objections.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Environmental Protection	12 January 2023	16 January 2023
Summary of comments: No objections.		

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
Ward Councillor	N/A	8 March 2023
Summary of comments: Requests application to be called into Referral Panel.		

##### Non statutory consultees

Consultee	Date consulted	Date reply received
East Suffolk Ecology	12 January 2023	30 January 2023
Summary of comments: Comments included within officers considerations.		

### **Third Party Representations**

No third-party representations received.

### **5. Publicity**

None

### **Site notices**

General Site Notice

Reason for site notice: General Site Notice

Date posted: 20 January 2023

Expiry date: 10 February 2023

### **6. Planning policy**

National Planning Policy Framework 2021

SCLP3.2 - Settlement Hierarchy (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP3.3 - Settlement Boundaries (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP5.3 - Housing Development in the Countryside (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP5.6 - Rural Workers Dwellings (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP7.2 - Parking Proposals and Standards (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP10.1 - Biodiversity and Geodiversity (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP10.4 - Landscape Character (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.1 - Design Quality (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

SCLP11.2 - Residential Amenity (East Suffolk Council - Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, Adopted September 2020)

### **7. Planning Considerations**

#### Principle

7.1 The application site lies outside of the defined settlement boundary of Bramfield, and is therefore considered to be the Countryside, where, as indicated in policy SCLP3.2 of the

Suffolk Coastal Local Plan, new residential development will not be permitted unless it meets other planning policies identified in the local plan and NPPF.

7.2 One such policy is Local Plan Policy SCLP5.3 which sets out a number of circumstances where new residential dwellings in the Countryside might be acceptable. One of these examples is where a proposal is otherwise in compliance with SCLP5.6 which relates to Rural Workers Dwellings. This policy states that proposals for permanent dwellings in the Countryside for rural workers where they are to support an existing and viable rural business will only be permitted where:

"a) There is a clearly established existing functional need for a worker to be accommodated;

b) The need could not be fulfilled by another existing dwelling or accommodation in the area which is suitable and available for the occupied workers or, could be converted to do so;

c) The need relates to a full time worker, or one who is primarily employed in the rural sector, and does not relate to a part time requirement;

d) The unit and the rural activity concerned has been established for at least three years, has been profitable for at least one of them, is financially sound and has a clear prospect of remaining so;

and

e) The proposed dwelling is sensitively designed, landscaped and located to fit in with its surroundings and of a scale that reflects its functional role to support the agricultural activity."

7.3 The policy recognises that such accommodation can usually be met in existing properties either on site or in nearby settlements, but that in some instances it is essential for a worker to be in close proximity to the business, this is usually related to livestock or crops.

7.4 The NPPF indicates that new isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless there are special circumstances, which includes an essential need for a rural worker to live at their place of work in the countryside.

7.5 The Planning Statement has described the current number of livestock on the farm, which includes 25 sheep, 3 pigs, 100 birds including rare breed pheasants, chickens, ducks and geese, as well as birds of prey, ferrets and 7 dairy goats. However, since the application was submitted it is now claimed that there are now nearly 50 sheep and up to 25 pigs at the peak of numbers. The current flock of sheep are forecast to grow following lambing to up to 75 sheep and 25 ewe. The pigs farrow twice a year and numbers are predicted to grow to around 40 producing around 100 piglets per year. The birds hatch 200-300 chicks each year, and the dairy goats kid all year.

7.6 It is claimed that the functional need of the business is primarily concerned with the lambing and farrowing of the livestock. The business plan is to significantly increase the number of livestock on the farm which along with other farming activities, require 24/7 care. The chances of animals surviving birth is argued to be much greater if the applicant lived on site due to the short time scales the animals have from birth in which to be cared for. The applicant has supplied an accompanying letter of support from Three Rivers and Chapelfield Farm Vets in Beccles emphasises the importance of living close to livestock in order to maintain welfare standards.

- 7.7 The applicant is currently living in Halesworth in rented accommodation however it is felt that this is not sustainable due to the cost of rented properties increasing and the distance needing to be travelled, to and from the farm at varying times of the day.
- 7.8 The reference to protection of pests, specifically foxes, is noted. Noise from the poultry could indicate a predator attack which the applicant could then prevent by living on site, but pest protection can exist without a resident farmer and does not rely solely on an on-site agricultural worker to monitor and maintain them.
- 7.9 The applicant has also claimed other functional needs to be on site which includes covering crops due to temperature changes, harvesting flowers and vegetables, fence moving, biosecurity from unexpected visitors and possible dog attacks from walkers. It is acknowledged by the applicant that the farm is a fledgling business however in order to give it the best chance of success they feel that living on the site would significantly improve its viability, reducing financial and emotional costs.
- 7.10 In terms of the livestock need to be within 'sight and sound' of livestock, this cannot be fulfilled by other homes in the area. Nearby there is one large occupied home and some associated holiday let barns which are not available for this purpose. It is therefore reasonable, on livestock grounds only, to seek a temporary static caravan.
- 7.11 The applicant inherited the farm in 2020 and it appears to have been up and running sometime in 2021 as this is when the financial information begins. The local planning policy refers to a need of three years of running the business with at least one year being profitable, which currently has not fully been demonstrated. It is recognised however that living on site would be beneficial to the applicant and their business and its expansion to a viable level of activity. It is within the three years of this consent that the applicant would need to grow their business to a sustainable and profitable level. Therefore in this instance it is felt that that the predicted level of livestock, represents a valid functional need for a rural workers dwelling in order to help the business grow.
- 7.12 The application states: *"The business has been established for 18 months. Confidentially submitted accounts show that the business made a small loss in its first year (2021-22), which is not unusual for a new farming enterprise. However, it is running in profit for the current financial year, and projections show that the business will grow in profitability in the coming years, reaching a significant profit by 2025-26"*
- 7.13 At present the profit doesn't reach a level which also covers a minimum wage salary for the applicant. The viability of both the business and living wage for the farmer are essential in proving a long-term residential prospect here. The forecast for this financial year suggests that might be achieved and that will aid any future application. There will also need to be significant investment in the site to grow the business over the 3 years.
- 7.14 It has been concluded that there is now a functional requirement for someone to be on site to deal with matters arising at irregular working hours and intervals throughout the day and night, on site. With significant numbers of livestock being on site at any one point combined with the need during the calving period, the functional requirement for someone to be on site to attend to urgent matters has become crucial and apparent.

- 7.15 This is a fairly small agricultural holding and it is usually questionable as to whether such a scale of holding is capable of supporting a profitable venture to justify long term residential occupancy. The approval of this temporary consent does not establish that permanent dwelling should be allowed. Also, repeated temporary consents for static caravans should not be granted if the applicant is unable to demonstrate suitable profit and viability. It is therefore considered the proposal complies with Policy SCLP5.6 and consequently to SCLP3.3 and the NPPF because there is a functional need that would make it essential for a worker to live on the site. As the farm business is still at an early stage of life, a three-year temporary time limit on the caravan will allow the applicant time to grow the business and give the Local Planning Authority reassurance that the business is sustainable and financially viable in the long term. In approximately 2.5 years from the first occupation of the static caravan, through any further application, officers will re-assess the growth of the business and consider whether the applicant has made meaningful strides in growing the business to a sustainable level. If no further application is received in that three year period then the static caravan would have to be removed upon the consent expiring.
- 7.16 Given the need for the applicant to purchase and mobilise the static caravan prior to occupation, it is reasonable that 6 months is allowed for that process and the three years of consented occupation should run from first occupation. Therefore in effect, the applicant should be allowed 3.5 years of consent. This will ensure that for any future application, close to 3 years of running accounts could be provided.

#### Visual Amenity, Street Scene and Landscape

- 7.17 The site is located along a private track a significant distance from the highway or any other public rights of way. The proposed static caravan would be positioned close to the existing barn with substantial amounts of vegetation between it and the highway. Due to its position and size it would be unlikely to lead to any significant harm to the visual amenity of the area or the landscape.

#### Residential Amenity

- 7.18 The siting of static caravan in this location is far enough from neighbours that it would not lead to any loss of privacy, loss of light or oppression to neighbouring properties. The scheme would therefore not harm the residential amenity of neighbours.

#### Landscaping/trees

- 7.19 The proposal does not include any significant landscaping or the removal of trees.

#### Parking and Highway Safety

- 7.20 The site is accessed up an existing track used by the farm and its neighbour. There have been no objections raised by SCC Highways as the connection to the road has good visibility splays and is already in use.

#### Contamination

- 7.21 Environmental Protection have assessed the environmental search information and are content the proposal would not pose a risk to the health of the inhabitants of the caravan.

#### Ecology

RAMS/Ecology;

- 7.22 The application has not provided an ecological appraisal but it has been concluded that there are unlikely to be any protected species directly affected by this proposed scheme and therefore further information is not necessary.
- 7.23 The applicant/agent has paid the RAMS habitat mitigation payment, which has been received by the local planning authority.

## **8. Conclusion**

- 8.1 Overall, the principle of development is considered to be acceptable in this instance. There is a marginal justification for the need for an agricultural rural workers dwelling, given the very modest agricultural holding and the livestock focussed farm business. The caravan would not harm the visual amenity of the area or the landscape, nor would it have a negative impact on the residential amenity of neighbours and therefore the proposal is considered compliant with the policies listed above. It is essential that the applicant uses this three years effectively to prove the financial viability of this farm in order to have any longer term residential prospects on the site. If that process fails there would be no long term effects of this three year presence of a static caravan.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 Approval of planning permission subject to the following conditions.

### **Conditions:**

1. The applicant shall notify the Local Planning Authority of the date of first occupation of the static caravan and this must be within 6 months of the date of this consent. This permission shall expire three and a half years (42 months) from the date of this consent, by which date 'The temporary rural workers dwelling' hereby permitted shall have been removed from the site and the land reinstated to its former condition within a further 28 days, unless prior to that date planning permission is renewed.

Reason: The structures are unsuitable for permanent consent by virtue of its character/impact upon the locality

2. The development hereby permitted shall be completed in all respects strictly in accordance with 30-001, 30-002 and 30-003 received 23/12/2022, for which permission is hereby granted or which are subsequently submitted to and approved by the Local Planning Authority and in compliance with any conditions imposed by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt as to what has been considered and approved.

3. There shall only be one caravan (mobile home) sited on the application site, and that mobile home shall be the unit detailed on Drawing No. 30-003 received 23 December 2022.

Reason: to ensure the development is limited to only that which is required to meet the functional need for on site accommodation.



4. The static caravan shall only be occupied by Mr Geoff Wakeling and any spouse and dependents.

Reason: Because of the personal circumstances of the business case and agricultural need in the application.

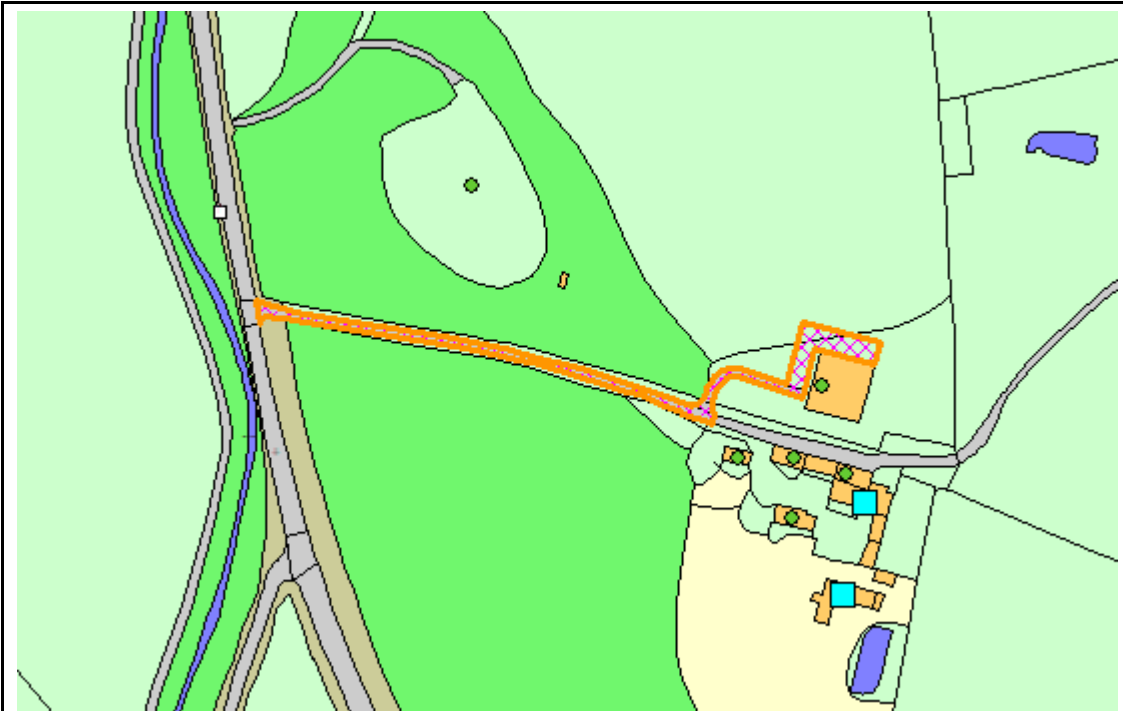
**Informatives:**

1. The Local Planning Authority has assessed the proposal against all material considerations including planning policies and any comments that may have been received. The planning application has been approved in accordance with the objectives of the National Planning Policy Framework and local plan to promote the delivery of sustainable development and to approach decision taking in a positive way.

**Background information**

See application reference DC/22/4995/FUL on [Public Access](#)

## Map



**DO NOT SCALE** AC0000814647

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## Key



Notified, no comments received



Objection



Representation



Support