

Planning Committee

03 December 2021

Agenda item number 7.2

BA/2021/0372/FUL - Somerton Holmes Farm, Horsey Road, West Somerton

Report by Planning Officer

Proposal

Lean-to extension to both sides of existing grain store. Cattle yard cover.

Applicant

Mr Agnew

Recommendation

Approve subject to conditions

Reason for referral to committee

Major application (site area over 1,000 sqm)

Application target date

07 January 2022

Contents

1.	Description of site and proposals	2
2.	Site history	3
3.	Consultations received	3
4.	Representations	4
5.	Policies	4
6.	Assessment	4
7.	Conclusion	8
8.	Recommendation	8
9.	Reason for recommendation	9
	Appendix 1 – Location map	10

1. Description of site and proposals

- 1.1. The application site is a farmstead known as Somerton Holmes Farm. The farmstead is 2.7 hectares and contains several agricultural buildings which serve the land adjacent. The buildings on the site include a large grain store, a twin cattle building with accompanying yard, a straw barn, a farm equipment store, offices and several silos varying in scale. A farmhouse known as Somerton Holmes Farm House lies adjacent to the west of the farmstead and this dwelling is well screened on all sides by trees and hedges; Somerton Holmes Farm House is outside of the application boundary.
- 1.2. Access to the site is from Horsey Road; the road extends north from the village of West Somerton. The farm access road is just shy of 1km away from the Staithe at the northern edge of West Somerton. The farm access road runs perpendicular to Horsey Road along a drainage channel and it is half a kilometre from Horsey Road to the farmstead.
- 1.3. Somerton Holmes Farm is a farmstead completely surrounded by agricultural land and is isolated from any other form of development. To the east of the site, 1.5km away, lie the sand dunes at Winterton beach.
- 1.4. The application site is within the Norfolk Coast, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Flood Risk Zone 3a and dark skies Zone 1. It is also within the Norfolk Recreational impact Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) zone of influence.
- 1.5. This application seeks consent to erect a lean-to extension on both sides of the main grain store located to the south east of the site and a lean-to extension on both internal sides of the cattle yard located to the north west of the site.
- 1.6. The existing grain store is 18.3 metres wide by 24 metres long with an eaves height of 8 metres and a ridge height of 10.7 metres; the building is symmetrical in design. It has concrete sectional and profiled steel walls set in a steel frame, with a fibre cement sheet roof, and metal roller shutter doors. The lean-to extensions would increase the width of the building by a total of 24 metres, each lean-to would run the full length of the building and would extend off the side walls by 12 metres. The lean-to extensions would retain the symmetrical appearance of the building and would be set just below the existing eaves height at 5.6 metres. Both extensions would feature a large roller shutter door and a single personnel door, whilst the east facing elevation would feature two additional grain store opening doors. The side elevations would match the existing grain store.
- 1.7. The existing cattle yard is a symmetrical structure measuring 61 metres long and 38 metres wide. It has a central raised feed passage running the full length measuring 4 metres wide. On both sides of the central feed passage is an 8 metre open section with a concrete base, and this is what the proposed development would cover. Next to the open sections are two covered areas for cattle with the two 8 metre open sections and the central feed passage in-between. They are both of the same design and sit 20 metres apart. The proposed covered sections are both 9 metres wide and 61 metres

long, with an eaves height of 4 metres and a ridge height of 5.1 metres. At all four end elevations of the covered section is a 5 bar gate to allow for cattle to move in and out. Two inverse lean-to extensions would extend 8 metres off the covered section and would cover the open sections. The proposed cover would extend off the existing eaves of the covered section (4 metres) and would meet at the central feed passage with a ridge of 5.4 metres. The proposed cattle yard cover would cover the full length of the cattle yard.

2. Site history

- 2.1. BA/2019/0139/PN - Relocate barn approved under BA/2019/0078/PN south by 12m - Prior Approval not Required
- 2.2. BA/2019/0078/PN - Erection of straw barn - Prior Approval not Required
- 2.3. BA/2014/0082/FUL - Installation of 396 Roof Mounted Photovoltaic Panels on to an existing cow shed - Approved with conditions
- 2.4. BA/2011/0299/FUL - To install 86No Tenesol Solar panels on the Southern facing roof to a barn adjacent to Somerton Holmes Farm Dwelling - Approved with conditions
- 2.5. BA/2011/0160/FUL - To install 74 No Yingli (YL235 P-29b) photovoltaic solar panels to the Southern facing roof of one of the barns - Approved with conditions
- 2.6. BA/2010/0333/AGR - Proposed agricultural building with lean-to at rear - Prior Approval not Required
- 2.7. BA/1998/0486/HISTAP - Twin, single storey, steel frame, single span cattle building with accompanying yard area - Approved with conditions
- 2.8. BA/1996/0390/HISTAP - Additional cattle building and yard - single-storey, steel frame, single span, open sided to south - Approved with conditions

3. Consultations received

Parish Council

- 3.1. No objection - lighting should be kept to a minimum.

Environment Agency

- 3.2. Consultation response not received.

Internal Drainage Board

- 3.3. No objection - The site is within the Internal Drainage District (IDD) of the Broads (2006) Internal Drainage Board (IDB) and therefore the Board's Byelaws apply.

BA Ecology Officer

- 3.4. No objection - general wildlife and biodiversity enhancement conditions recommended.

BA Landscape Architect

- 3.5. I am unable to support this application due to the likely adverse cumulative visual effects and the lack of any landscape mitigation. However, proposals may be acceptable subject to provision of an adequate landscaping scheme.

4. Representations

- 4.1. No representations have been received.

5. Policies

- 5.1. The adopted development plan policies for the area are set out in the [Local Plan for the Broads](#) (adopted 2019).
- 5.2. The following policies were used in the determination of the application:
- SP1 – Sustainable Development
 - DM5 – Development and Flood Risk
 - DM6 – Surface water run-off
 - SP6 – Biodiversity
 - DM13 – Natural Environment
 - SP7 – Landscape Character
 - DM16 – Development and Landscape
 - DM21 – Amenity
 - DM22 – Light pollution and dark skies
 - SP10 – A prosperous local economy
 - DM26 – Protecting General Employment
 - DM43 – Design
 - SSUT – Upper Thurne
- 5.3. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a material consideration in the determination of this application.

6. Assessment

- 6.1. The existing farmyard buildings are used for maintenance of farm machinery, for the drying and storage of combinable crops and for housing cattle. The buildings serve the surrounding agricultural land. This application seeks consent to extend the existing grain store on both south and north elevations, and cover the existing cattle yard by infilling the central section of the yard. In terms of the assessment of this application, the main issues that need to be taken into consideration relate to the principle of the development, flood risk and surface water run-off, the design of the proposed structures, the impact on landscape and dark skies, and the impacts on residential amenity and the natural environment.

Principle of development

- 6.2. The purpose of the proposed development is to increase the size of the existing grain store farm to increase storage capacity and to cover a half open cattle yard where the cattle are reared.
- 6.3. Adopted planning policies support the continued use of agricultural land and buildings, recognising that this is a traditional land use in the Broads. The continued use of land and proposed extensions to existing buildings associated with this proposal are considered in accordance with Policy SP1 (Sustainable Development in the Broads) and SP10 (A prosperous local economy). This is because the scheme does not propose a change of use of land from the existing agricultural use and allowing the improvement of facilities will support the existing farming business.
- 6.4. The farm itself rears cattle and processes arable crop grown locally by drying and storing. The extensions to the existing buildings on site would continue to support the functioning of the farm operation and would protect the existing use of the site. Overall, it is concluded that the application is in accordance with Policies SP1 and SP10 and it would protect the existing employment at the site in accordance with development management policy DM26 (protecting general employment) of the Local Plan for the Broads. The principle of the development is therefore considered acceptable.

Flood Risk and surface water run-off

- 6.5. The application site lies within Flood Risk Zone 3a, indicating the site has a high probability of flooding. The proposed development is classified as 'less vulnerable' development and is subject to the Sequential and Exception Test.
- 6.6. The nearby sources of flooding include an event in the local drainage network that exceeds the standard of protection, overtopping and/or breaching of the defences alongside the River Thurne and overtopping and/or breaching of the coastal defences. Considering the probability of flooding, the site has a low 'actual risk' of flooding associated with an event in the local drainage network due to the elevation of the site above the agricultural land to the south. The River Thurne has flood defences and the site is elevated above these, and the Winterton Ness coastal defences approximately 1500m to the east of the site consist of timber groynes, walls, and dunes. The site has a low 'actual risk' of flooding from the nearby sources of flooding.
- 6.7. The proposed development would extend existing buildings on the site; however, no specific mitigation measures have been included within the proposed design of the buildings. The Flood Risk Assessment did not recommend specific mitigation measures, the development does not increase any off-site risk and any impacts will be on the farm only. The increase in the built form would increase the impermeable area so there would be an increased volume of surface water which has the potential to increase flood risk, so soakaways are proposed to address this.

- 6.8. As the site is within Flood Risk Zone 3a, consideration of alternative locations for building is required through the Sequential Test to see if a suitable site is available for development which would be of a lower risk of flooding. In approaching the Sequential Test, there is an acknowledgement that the application site is within an existing area of hardstanding on an existing farm unit and that the benefits of this include that this location will minimise impact on the closest residential properties and the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape. The Flood Risk Assessment also states that it is not practical to undertake the development off site in a location with a lower level of risk. On balance, it is considered that these arguments are sound and the extensions to the existing buildings on the site are considered to pass the Sequential Test.
- 6.9. In terms of the Exceptions Test, the proposed development would support the farm operation, increase the economic viability of the farm and retain employment for local people resulting in wider sustainable benefits for the community. The proposal is therefore considered to meet the Sequential and Exceptions Tests, set out in the NPPF for development within an area of flood risk. The use of soakaways would mitigate the increase of surface water run-off that would result from having a larger built surface area. The proposal is therefore considered to meet the criteria of Policy DM5 and is in accordance with Policy DM6.

Impact upon the landscape and dark skies

- 6.10. The application site is located in the Upper Thurne Open Marsh, Broads and Fen Landscape Character Area. The landscape here is characterised by large areas of open and exposed marsh, fen and broads and includes a length of coastline with sand dunes. It is a level low-lying area of floodplain and a landscape of mainly undeveloped skylines, with an open, exposed and often remote, tranquil character. On this coastal plain a number of farmsteads can be found which can be significant features in the landscape.
- 6.11. Whilst the site is remote, there are a number of important viewpoints and receptors locally including the Norfolk Coast Path National Trail (1.5 km to the east), Grade 2 listed Horsey windpump (1.5km to the north-west), Martham Broad and public footpath (1.2 km west) and a further public footpath 500m to the south east. These receptors are sensitive and significant due to the number of Broads users/visitors which they attract.
- 6.12. The proposed cattle yard cover would be sited over an existing cattle yard within the central part of the group of buildings and would not have any landscape impacts.
- 6.13. The two lean-to extensions to the grain store, however, would be more visible and concerns have been raised, particularly as the existing building is already prominent and does not benefit from much screening. The Authority's Landscape Officer advises that the proposals would add significantly to the scale and massing of this structure, thereby increasing its visibility from surrounding receptors; it is likely that the site would become a more noticeable feature in the open landscape.

- 6.14. It is considered that this impact needs to be addressed in order for the proposal to be acceptable, and a condition requiring the submission and implementation of a planting scheme is recommended. The scheme should comprise a native tree planting belt along the entire eastern and southern edges of the farm complex, which would provide effective mitigation for the additional development as well as creating a green natural wall more congruent to the landscape than the existing concrete and steel buildings. It is noted that a previous permission for a straw barn (BA/2019/0078/PN) included a planting scheme in the north-east of the site, and this would complement that.
- 6.15. Given the location of the proposed development within a built-up farm complex and subject to a landscaping scheme to mitigate and screen the development, the proposed development is not considered to be unacceptable in terms of Policy DM16.
- 6.16. The application site lies within Dark Skies Zone 1, which is the darkest area within the Broads Authority Executive Area. In this zone, permanent illumination should not be allowed in order to protect the darkness of the sky. The agent has confirmed that it is not their intention to install any external lighting. However, given the importance of the sky here, it is considered reasonable to impose a condition restricting this. As there would be no external lighting installed, the proposed development is in accordance with Policy DM22.

Amenity of residential properties

- 6.17. There is one residential property adjacent to the application site; this is known as Somerton Holmes Farm House. It is an attractive unlisted period property, with a clearly defined curtilage bounded on all sides by a mix of trees and hedges. On the eastern side of the property lies a farm track and then the farm holding where the proposed development would be located. The closest farm buildings to the property are the cattle yard covers, at 25 metres from the boundary, with the grain store on the other side of the farmyard over 100 metres from the property's boundary.
- 6.18. The grain store is a large building (and the proposed extensions would increase this), however, due to the distance from the residential property, the proposed development would not result in any increase of overlooking or overshadowing and it is not considered that there would be a detrimental impact on amenity.
- 6.19. The cattle yard cover would have a greater impact on neighbouring property, by virtue of the structure being closer to the residential property. The purpose of the structure is to cover the central area where the cattle feed in order to reduce spoilage due to rain, rather than in order to increase the amount of cattle reared. The existing outlook (looking east) from the residential property is predominantly occupied by farm buildings and structures; the proposed cattle yard cover is not considered to have a significant impact on the existing outlook as it is expected to see farm buildings.
- 6.6. The proposed development is in a remote location where there is only one residential property; the impacts the development would have on this property are not considered to be significant. The proposed development is considered to be acceptable in terms of

the impacts it would have on neighbouring amenity and therefore in accordance with Policy DM21.

Design

- 6.20. The design of the buildings is functional and not incongruent with the existing farm buildings on the site. They would utilise matching materials to the existing, including concrete walls and steel vertical cladding, fibre-cement roof sheets, and galvanised roller shutter doors. The structures are typical of agricultural farm buildings and they do not raise any concerns with regards to Policy DM43.

Natural Environment

- 6.21. The application site is surrounded by arable agricultural land and is not close to designated sites for wildlife or biodiversity. The Authority's Ecologist raised no objections to the proposed development and does not consider the extensions would have any adverse impacts on local ecology. A general wildlife protection condition and two biodiversity enhancement conditions have been recommended in the Ecologist's response. The proposed conditions are considered reasonable and would provide biodiversity gain at the application site. The proposed development is considered to be in accordance with Policy DM13 of the Local Plan for the Broads.

7. Conclusion

- 7.1. The proposed development would cover the existing open area of the cattle yard, thus improving the quality of the area and well-being for the cattle as well as reducing feed spoilage and, therefore, cost.
- 7.2. The extensions to the grain store would provide additional storage capacity. The development would support the farm operation and protect the existing levels of employment at the farm. The principle of the development is supported and the development would not have a detrimental impact on flood risk and surface water run-off, amenity, or the natural environment. There is concern regarding the cumulative adverse impact the development would have on the landscape character, however it is considered the planting of a tree belt would effectively mitigate the adverse cumulative impacts from the proposed development and this can be secured by planning condition.
- 7.3. Other than the lack of support received to the scheme from the Authority's Landscape Officer, no objection to the scheme has been received from neighbours or consultees, and subject to conditions it is considered that this development is acceptable. Therefore, it is recommended that planning permission is approved subject to conditions.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1. That planning permission be granted subject to the following conditions:
- i. Standard time limit

- ii. In accordance with approved plans
- iii. Landscaping scheme
- iv. No additional external lighting
- v. General wildlife protection
- vi. Biodiversity enhancement

9. Reason for recommendation

- 9.1. The application is a major application due to the size of the proposed development area exceeding 1000m². The application is considered acceptable as a major form of development as the proposed development is in accordance with Policies DM5, DM6, DM13, DM21, DM22, DM26, and DM46 of the Local Plan for the Broads. The development would be acceptable in terms of Policy DM16 subject to the submission of a landscaping scheme to provide screening of the development and this can be secured by a planning condition.

Author: Calum Pollock

Date of report: 24 November 2021

Appendix 1 – Location map

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BA/2021/0372/FUL - Somerton Holmes Farm, Horsey Road, West Somerton



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