

Design and Access Statement

for

Proposed use of land and farm building as a
Farm Education and Leisure Activity Centre,
Cae Bach, Ellesmere Road, Bronington,
Whitchurch, SY13 3HD



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Introduction

This proposal is for the use of approximately 7 acres of agricultural land together with a modern farm building, as a, "*Farm Education and Activity Centre*", together with the erection of a toilet block, and provision of ancillary parking.

The applicants are a farming couple who presently farm in the Yorkshire Dales; and have already set up an Education and Activity Centre on their home farm.

Their current operation covers Yorkshire and the North; however they wish to expand their business, using their current business model to serve North Wales, the North West and the Midlands.

The Centre will provide both educational and leisure activities with a farming theme, for small groups of children or adults.

School groups will be invited to attend the farm as part of an alternative education package. This would typically include either regular weekly sessions or a short intensive program at the farm for each school group. Students in key stage 4 of secondary school will work towards a City & Guilds level one NVQ in Land Based Studies. This offering has proved to be particularly popular amongst students with a wide range of learning difficulties at the Yorkshire Centre.

The types of activities included in a typical day would include gathering sheep, assisting with sheep husbandry tasks, learning about the reproductive cycle, sheep diseases, sheering, lambing, lamb weighing, foot care etc. Similar units would also be offered working with a small number of pigs and calves. In addition, students will learn how to drive a tractor and assist with the maintenance of farm structures such as field boundary fences.

Team building days will be available to groups wishing to participate in fun / educational activity days with a farming theme. On these days, participants will learn how to gather sheep, herd pigs and drive a tractor. They will also participate in traditional village sports type games such as tug of war and welly throwing.

This business model is integrated with normal agricultural use of the site. At all times the farm will retain its agricultural features. Sheep will graze the fields and there will be a small number of outdoor Pigs.

Appearance (character)

The farm building is a modern agricultural building with Yorkshire board cladding. The only change to the external appearance will be the “filling in” of the gables and installation of a timber sliding door at each end. The hit and miss boarding will also have the gaps filled in using matching timber battens, although this won’t noticeably alter the external appearance.

The proposed toilet block will be a mobile ‘portacabin’ type unit, sited at the south end of the existing building, so that it won’t be visible from any public viewpoint as shown on the site plan. It will also be clad in timber to match the farm building.

Approximately half of the barn will be used to accommodate a small number of calves and other animals during periods of poor weather and for animal husbandry tasks. The remaining half of the barn will be set up with simple picnic benches which can be used by visitors to take shelter, eat a packed lunch, complete written work and listen to instruction. During periods of warm weather, a small number of picnic benches can be moved onto the outdoor area immediately in front of the toilet block. These will not be visible from any public viewpoint as shown on the site plan.

The existing farm yard to the north of the building will be retained and used as car parking for 10 cars. This area is screened by a semi-mature copse which was planted approximately 9 years ago.

An overflow parking area will be provided alongside the road side boundary. Again, this will be well screened, (by the thick road-side hedge). This area will be surfaced using grass reinforcement mesh, which is specially designed for heavy duty car parking See: <https://www.matsgrids.co.uk/29-grass-protection-meshes>

The use of this material will ensure that the field retains its agricultural appearance and it can even remain in use for sheep grazing when not used for car parking.

Planning considerations

The prevailing Development Plan is the Wrexham UDP (1996 – 2011).

Chapter 9 of the UDP addresses Community and Leisure facilities and Tourism, however there are no policies within this chapter relevant to this

type of planning application. It therefore follows that the application should be considered against the general development policies (listed in Chapter 1).

However, whilst the Wrexham UDP is presently in force, it is considerably out of date and the replacement Wrexham Local Development Plan is still some way off adoption; under these circumstances, the Welsh Government planning policies should be the principal guide for the development decision.

In particular, Planning Policy Wales and TAN 6 (Planning for sustainable rural communities) is supportive of rural diversification. Paragraph 3.12 states that,

Planning authorities should support the diversification of the rural economy as a way to provide local employment opportunities (and) increase local economic prosperity.....

also paragraph 3.7.2 states that

*Many economic activities can be sustainably located on farms. Small on-farm operations such as food and timber processing and food packing, together with services (e.g. offices, workshop facilities, equipment hire and maintenance), **sports and recreation services**, and the production of non-food crops and renewable energy, are likely to be appropriate uses.*

In general development management terms, the proposal is

- sited close to an existing settlement (Bronington) where there are a range of services and facilities;
- it is located well away from residential properties, so any noise generated on site will not adversely affect the amenity of neighbours. There will be no material change in the visual appearance of the site and the site will maintain a predominantly agricultural character – as at present;
- The development will provide local employment opportunities in the agriculture, education and leisure sectors
- The proposal will have economic benefits to the local community by providing business opportunities for local hotels, public houses, B&Bs', shops, caterers and suppliers etc.
- The proposal has a safe access and adequate car parking provision (see also below)

All of the above bullet points demonstrate compliance with the general development policies of the current Wrexham UDP policy GDP1.

Landscaping (character)

The site is well screened from public view by dense road-side and perimeter hedges. A new mixed native copse was planted in front of the farm building in approximately 2007 and this has matured considerably. As a result, it is not necessary to provide additional planting, however the existing hedges and trees will be maintained.

Layout

The site layout will remain unchanged apart from the minimal additions to the access and coach turning area as stipulated by the Highways Authority.

Access (movement to, from and within the site)

The existing access is directly off the A495. The site entrance is set back 5m off the highway edge and there is clear visibility in each direction – 160m to the west and 250m to the east at a point 4.5m back from the highway edge. (It should be noted that vehicles from the west are travelling slower after emerging from the 40 MPH limit and navigating a left-hand bend.)

The access has been constructed with 5m width for the first 10 metres, thereafter the access track is a minimum of 3m wide.

The attached plan shows proposed access improvements as recommended by Phil Palmer, Wrexham Highways Development Control Engineer. These will allow for a maximum 12.6m long coach visiting the site. Improvements include:

- re-positioning the main gate 15m back from the highway boundary. In any case – the gate will be kept open on activity days when pre-booked traffic is expected.
- The access will be surfaced with hard bound materials for a minimum distance of 15m behind the highway boundary.
- The track leading to the site will be provided with a passing place 16m long x 5m wide.
- Coach turning area in front of the barn.

The existing yard will provide 10 car spaces and additional overflow parking for 20 cars will be provided within the applicant's front field, alongside the roadside hedge. This will be surfaced with Matsgrids reinforced grass mesh, to provide a natural looking, firm, well drained vehicle surface.

Only pre-booked visitors will be arriving on site at any time. A larger group arriving by coach will have exclusive use of the site and on such days, there will not be a significant number of cars and the yard will be clear for a larger vehicle to easily park and turn around.

The number of persons on site at any given time is not expected to exceed 50 persons including staff. 30 persons would be a more typical average. To this end the groups would typically arrive via one of the following methods:

- Up to 20 cars
- One full sized coach
- Up to two minibuses
- A combination of one minibus and up to 10 cars

Notwithstanding the parking provision shown, the application use does not have a recommended parking provision within the Council's adopted car parking standards. It is therefore provided on the basis of the applicant's best working practice through their knowledge of the business.

Vehicle numbers can be carefully controlled as the venue is available only on a pre-booking basis. At point of contact, customers are advised to car share, to reduce traffic.

The additional parking area / grass mesh will run parallel to the roadside parking area as indicated on the 1:500 site plan and provide parking for an additional 20 cars. (see <https://www.matsgrids.co.uk/29-grass-protection-meshes>)

The proposed activities will take place within the hours of 9am to 6pm. The flexibility to be able to offer any day of the week to potential clients is important. It should however be noted that the proposed activities will never take place every day of the year and will always be more popular in the summer months. It was agreed (as a compromise) with residents of Bronington that the site will not operate activities on Sundays.

Ecology

The proposal is not proposing any development which may harm or be detrimental to protected species. The land is improved grassland of no special ecological interest and the farm building is a modern building, approximately 9 years old. The proposed toilet block will be a portacabin type building on jacks, with no permanent footings. Disabled access to the WC will be by way of a gently ramped boardwalk, again with no permanent excavation.

Accessibility

Disabled parking spaces will be provided adjacent to the farm building and a disabled wc with ramped access. The main farm building will have a smooth clear floor area suitable for disabled access.

Community Safety

The site is relatively isolated from any dwellings and there is limited natural surveillance. As a result the applicant will need to ensure his own security measures are put in place...such as quality locks on gates and buildings and enrolling on the "farmwatch" scheme.

Environmental sustainability

There are no new buildings proposed for the development. The proposed toilet block will be a 'recycled' (second hand – refurbished) unit so will be sustainable in this respect. This will also be clad in local timber.

Roof water is to be diverted to water holding tanks for use by stock and also for washing.

The site hedges and trees are to be carefully maintained and managed for wildlife enhancement. It will be in the applicant's interest to have a well-managed site of interest to visitors.

There will be no requirement for artificial lighting.

The site is within walking/cycling distance from Bronington so will be accessible to local people/employees by methods other than a private motor car.

Conclusion

The proposed use will bring about an extremely subtle and low key diversification of an agricultural unit to provide local employment opportunities and local economic benefits in the rural area of Bronington....in accordance with Planning Policy Wales and TAN 6.

The proposed use will comply with the requirements of the current Wrexham UDP policy GDP1

Safe access and sufficient car parking can be provided on site

Photos

The existing shed sits within a well-screened site. The WC block will be at the rear, out of site.



Parking will be in the yard, directly at the front of the building (behind the copse)

... also running parallel with the densely planted road-side hedge



Visibility from the access is clear and unobstructed in each direction. At a point 4.5m back from the highway edge, 160m to the west and 250m to the east.



The point of access (below) is currently 5m wide for the first 10m. Alterations can easily be made to accommodate the requirements of the Highways Department.

