

Animal Aid
The Old Chapel
Bradford Street
Tonbridge, Kent
TN9 1AW

3rd May 2022

Sent via email to north1@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Appeal Reference: APP/ P1045/W/21/3289734

Dear Planning Appeals Inspector,

Please accept this submission against the granting of permission, at Appeal stage, for a rabbit meat and fur farm.

Proposed development: Erection of rural worker's dwelling and agricultural/food production building.

Address: Land East Of Turlowfields Lane, Turlowfields Lane, Hognaston, DE6 1PZ

We understand that the appellant has since submitted an application for Appeal following the refusal of Planning Application Number: 21/00130/FUL

Here is Animal Aid's written representation to The Planning Inspectorate with regard to the referenced Appeal against the refusal of the appellant's planning application.

We kindly request for it to be noted that we, along with many members of the public, would welcome animal welfare being made a material consideration during review process of planning applications, including appeals. This is especially relevant in this instance, as regrettably, there is no species-specific legislation protecting the welfare of rabbits in the UK.

Animal Aid would like to draw your attention to a number of areas of concern.

Unsustainable, unsuitable scale and unproven need

- The application involves the construction of a brick worker's dwelling in the open Countryside. There is very little other development around, and the site is detached from any definable settlement containing the necessary facilities to support day-to-day occupation. This would encourage the use of a private motor vehicle for access, which is not in the interests of sustainable development, going against local Policy HC19.
- Why is a three-bedroomed house is required for a single worker to live on site? The size of the dwelling does not appear to be commensurate with the needs of the enterprise and does not appear sustainable, in terms of the viability of the activity, not appearing to meet the criteria of Local Plan Policy HC13 e).

- This site was a wildlife haven and rich pasture – it is becoming more and more challenging for it to be returned to its original state and purpose. An application solely to establish a bricks and mortar house, on prime open countryside would, rightly, not be granted by the more conventional planning permission process. A wildlife haven and rich pasture. A land registry check for the site has established that the site is owned by BCH UK Ltd, listed at Companies House as a development and real estate business.
- Without a clear case for the need for an agricultural worker’s dwelling and questionable financial sustainability of the rabbit farming business, such a proposal would constitute an unwarranted and inherently unsustainable form of development in the open countryside, contrary to the aims of Policies S1, S4 and HC13 of the Adopted Derbyshire Dales Local Plan (2017), and the guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2021).
- Planning permission has been breached previously and we question why permission should be granted at this stage. Derbyshire Dales District Council issued a formal Breach of Condition Notice ENF/21/00175 in response to a ‘Breach of Condition 1 of Planning Permission 17/00489/FUL – Removal of temporary dwelling and land restored to original condition by 17th January 2021’, as the time had passed for the presence of the structures.

Searchable:

<https://planning.derbyshiredales.gov.uk/online-applications/advancedSearchResults.do?action=firstPage>

- This site and others can be seen for sale here on ‘Spectacular Land: Rural Land Ownership Scheme’ (as accessed 26th April 2022):
<http://davski.bpweb.net/spectacularland/atlow.html>
We question why the sites would be put up for sale, if there is a functioning business in place?

No obvious economic benefit to the local area

- The extremely modest associated economic benefits of this proposal do not outweigh the unsustainable location and harm to the natural qualities of the setting. The Local Plan states: *‘The tourism industry offers major economic benefits to the area with over 10 million visits a year to the Peak District National Park. The settlements in the Plan area play an important role in supporting Peak District tourism by providing a range of tourist facilities and services, while the main market towns in particular provide a gateway to the National Park for people travelling by train from the surrounding cities.’*
Far from adding any positive attributes to the local area, the development, if granted, can only detract from the area.

Public safety

- The use of a rifle as 'pest control' may present a significant safety issue to the public. The consultancy document 'T & S Nurseries, Atlow Planning Application for a rural worker's dwelling. Appraisal by Reading Agricultural Consultants.', shows foxes who have been shot with rifles, which is not humane deterrence. The document also states that 'they remain a constant threat', which could indicate plans to have firearms present on the site.

2.8 Permanent fencing around the rabbit enclosure has been installed with weldmesh fencing buried 0.5m into the ground with electric fencing running around it at 0.5m and along the top (Figure 5). This has proved very effective at keeping foxes out of the enclosure although they remain a constant threat. Figure 6 shows four foxes that were shot one night using rifles and night-sights.

Figure 5: permanent fencing



Figure 6: fox kills



Visual harm

- The scale, density, design and elevation of the buildings would not be compatible with the character, appearance and amenity of the local open countryside, which is largely undeveloped. If the development were to proceed, this would result in visual harm and intrusion to the local scenery and landscape. This would be in conflict with Local Policy S3.

Noise and disturbance

- Many people flock to the Carsington Water for walking excursions and there is a caravan park close to the site. Visitor experience could be marred by the presence of a rabbit fur and meat farm nearby.
- The killing and processing of animals and associated machinery will likely generate significant noise. The sound of forklift trucks, fans, ventilation systems, fridges, freezers, etc. would mar the tranquillity of the nearby open countryside.

Storage, handling and disposal of waste materials

- We have concerns about the safe storage and disposal of waste products associated with a high intensity livestock unit and slaughtering facility. This is not satisfactorily addressed in the application. How will animal waste and bodily remains produced during slaughtering be stored, treated and disposed of, and how will it be ensured that none of this waste will contaminate the surrounding area, both land and water courses?

Smell and flies

- Rabbits create a lot of waste and ammonia during their lives. Additionally, the proposed slaughtering/ processing building would generate all manner of unpleasant noises, foul smell and increased waste.

Concern for wild rabbits and disease spread

- According to a recent New Scientist article titled '**Rabbits face a fresh onslaught akin to myxomatosis -can they survive?**' by Graham Lawton, rabbits are both a keystone species and ecosystem engineer crucial to maintaining sensitive food webs and habitat. The article explains that rabbits' relentless grazing and burrowing helps to maintain habitat for other wild living animals. A spokesperson for Natural England is quoted as saying, "*Rabbits are in a lot of trouble. They need our help.*"
- The presence of a rabbit farm in proximity to wild living rabbits poses a threat to the latter from potential disease spread. There have reportedly been outbreaks of VHD2 on the applicant's other farms.
- A report by Reading Agricultural Consultants titled 'T&S Nurseries T&S Rabbit Farms Lyndon Top Rural Worker's Temporary Dwelling Appraisal', and dated December 2020, states that '*Over the past year, or so, on two of the holdings (Granby and East Bridgford) there have been outbreaks of Rabbit haemorrhagic disease 1 and 2 (RHD) which causes sudden death to growers at 8-12 weeks of age, and adult stock. It is understood there is no treatment only vaccination.*'

Rabbits as potential SARS-CoV-2 reservoirs

- '*A recent study by scientists in the Netherlands and published on the preprint server bioRxiv* in August 2020 shows that the severe acute respiratory coronavirus-2 (SARSCoV-2) can infect rabbits, which opens the door for possible circulation in rabbit farms and another potential source of animal-to-human SARS-CoV-2 infection.*'
<https://www.news-medical.net/news/20200830/Rabbits-susceptible-to-SARS-CoV-2-Red-flag-for-potential-virus-reservoir.aspx>

Disease management

- There are no specific drugs licensed for use in 'meat' rabbits in the UK, due in large part to the lack of commercial rabbit farming here. As a result, the animals, intended for meat, may not be vaccinated, only the 'breeding animals' as they are not intended for meat production. It is of concern that disease could pass between wild rabbits and unvaccinated 'captive' rabbits in the vicinity. These diseases are lethal and easily spread between rabbit populations.

Public attitudes to rabbit meat and real fur

- We understand that, as a result of the planned business, fur would be produced as a 'by-product' which is highly distasteful and would be 'fur farming by the back door'. Fur farming has, rightly, been banned in the UK since 2000.

- There is huge public sentiment against real fur in the UK. A recent YouGov poll by the Humane Society International revealed that the vast majority (93%) of people in Britain don't wear real animal fur and do support a #FurFreeBritain.
- There is little demand for rabbit meat in the UK, and most people are repulsed at the thought of consuming these creatures. Rabbits are mostly viewed culturally as companion animals or wild animals in the UK. They are the third most frequently kept pet in the UK.

The threat of disruption

- As rabbit farming, for meat and fur, is something which is frowned upon by many members of the public, the farm could attract protests and unwanted attention, disrupting local life. There have historically been protests at the site and there will invariably be more, should permission be granted.

Animal welfare

- Animal Aid believe that no animal should be farmed for their fur or flesh. Additionally, it is known that rabbits are particularly unsuited to being farmed. The EFSA Journal (2005) 267, 1-31, "The Impact of the current housing and husbandry systems on the health and welfare of farmed domestic rabbits" states: *'Farmed rabbits are genetically not far removed from other rabbits used in laboratories or those in the wild and so their needs, the causes of poor welfare, and their susceptibility to disease is very similar. In particular, **the Panel notes with some concern, that the mortality and morbidity of farmed rabbits seems considerably higher than in other farmed animal species due to enteric and respiratory infections, and reproductive problems. The breeding life of does is very short with more than 100% often being replaced each year.'*** <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2005.267> (our emphasis added)

Disruption to local ecology

- There is a concern that rabbits may escape into the local environment. Rabbits are exceptional diggers and could escape by tunnelling out.
- We are not aware of there being an ecological impact report conducted for the proposed site. Given the rural location, the site is likely to be habitat for countless animal and plant species, some of which may be endangered or otherwise protected. It remains doubtful that there will be a Biodiversity Net Gain, and potentially even a loss.

Special protections as confirmed by Defra Magic.Map

- The area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Priority Species including Lapwing, Willow Tit, Tree Sparrow have been found in the area
- The whole area is listed as a 'Farm Wildlife Package Area'

- Higher Level Stewardship Themes, Land-based scheme

Traffic

- It is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in traffic with movements of feed, bedding, waste and live and dead animals.
- Residents report Turlow Fields Lane to be narrow with poor visibility.

Breaching Defra code and investigation findings of concern.

Animal Aid would like to draw your attention to some issues that our previous investigation into the operational Atlow/Hognaston site identified. We discovered:

- Rabbits confined for hours on end in tiny barren hutches, unable to freely access grass, no access ramps. This remained an issue when our investigators returned to the site on multiple occasions.
- Many large breed New Zealand White (NZW) rabbits at the site were barely able to stretch out or stand or rear up with ears upright. This appears to run contrary to Defra's **Rabbits: Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock (PB0080)** *'Accommodation for rabbits over 12 weeks of age should be not less than 45 cm high, or of sufficient height to allow rabbits to sit upright with ears fully erect.'*
- Commenting on our findings, Vicky Bond, director of the Humane League and veterinary surgeon, said: "I wouldn't say it was free-range. I think [the proprietor] can say free-range and people wouldn't know what it means and just assume [the rabbits] have lots of space. They don't have lots of space" - Vicky Bond, in a piece by journalist Claire Hamlett: <https://www.surgeactivism.org/articles/why-the-public-is-right-to-object-to-proposed-free-range-rabbit-farms>

Evidence from our investigation can be accessed here:

<https://www.animalaid.org.uk/stoprabbitfarms/> (we can also furnish you with printed copies upon request)

Potential for breaking of regulatory rules and lack of official oversight

- The production cap of 10,000 rabbits per year, for 'small-scale suppliers' means the applicant is exempt from Food Standards Agency (FSA) rules for monitoring and reporting. Without FSA oversight with the presence of an Official Vet (OV), meat hygiene inspector and CCTV monitoring in all areas where animals are present, there would be no day-to-day oversight of animal welfare, meat hygiene, food safety or safe waste disposal unlike a conventional slaughterhouse. Even in conventional slaughterhouses, with these additional measures, terrible abuse and violence towards animals has been recorded countless times.
- We understand that the business would be required to register with the Local Authority (LA), who would be responsible for ensuring that the producer complies with applicable labelling, record keeping, food safety and hygiene requirements.

According to the Defra 'Guidance on Slaughtering poultry, rabbits and hares on farms for small-scale suppliers':

A business can be classified as a small-scale supplier if **all** of these apply:

1. you slaughter less than 10,000 birds, rabbits or hares per year on your farm
2. you supply the birds, rabbits or hares directly to the final consumer or to local shops
3. **you supply meat within your own county and the adjoining counties (or no further than 50 kilometres from your county's border).**

The proposal, however, suggests that the operation of this business would run contrary to this, failing to meet the above criteria: *'The progeny would be reared outdoors, mainly for meat, and marketed to local butchers and restaurateurs, **and also to national suppliers**, either as fresh meat or frozen, with some stock sold live. Breeding stock would also be marketed to breeders and smallholders, and a small number sold as **pets**. The projected sales of meat rabbits after three years would be approximately, but no more than, 10,000 packs of meat per year.'* (our emphasis added)

Due to the multitude of issues that we raise, we would urge you to refuse permission for this planning application.

Yours faithfully,
Tor Bailey
Campaign Manager
(on behalf of)
Animal Aid