

Planning application 23-0158-PP – APPEAL

Planning application 23-0158-PP was refused for the following reasons:

The proposed development does not comply with Policies 8, 16 and 17 of National Planning Framework 4 or Policy ENV1 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan 2022 and the New Development Supplementary Guidance on Housing in the Green Belt as the business owner already resides at the site, and a site-specific operational need for the dwelling has not been demonstrated.

Rebuttal to these reasons for refusal will be given under the following headings;

- 1. Business owner already living on site**
- 2. Site specific operational need for dwelling**
- 3. New development in the countryside 2022**
- 4. LDP new development supplementary guidance 2022**

Whilst addressing the reasons above for refusal, the following policies will be addressed;

- Policy 8
- Policy 16
- Policy 17
- Policy ENV1 of the Adopted Renfrewshire Local Development Plan 2022
- New Development Supplementary Guidance on Housing in the Green Belt

1. Business owner already living on site

The Business owner and applicant, Linsay de Freitas, has lived at Undercraig Farm her entire life. In 2019 Linsay decided to start her own business on the family farm and has since reinvested and grown it into the success it is today. Currently, Linsay finds herself having built her business on the family holding, diversifying to directly connect with tourism, healthy living and providing opportunity for access to the countryside. Over this time Linsay has gotten married and started a family. Along with the challenges of farming, being a female in agriculture and balancing a work life balance in this challenging industry, she has had to move her husband into her family home to allow them to bring up a family as well as run a successful business. Living on the farm is the only option to continue to run Larch Green Alpacas due to the nature of the business; day to day activities, responsibilities, welfare and security of the livestock. With an established breeding program up and running and a view to expanding the herd to allow more visitors, it is vital to be present throughout the year.

Although the current living situation is not ideal for raising a newborn and beginning a new family, the proposal is business focused, merely complementing the current family situation. The applicant is currently residing in a 3 bedroom family home alongside her parents and her sister whilst trying to raise a family with her husband and newborn daughter. Linsay, regardless of this has continued since creating her business to scale it with a view to increasing its exposure and integration with the community. The business often engages with local universities, colleges, primary schools, additional needs educational establishments as well as care homes and running kids' clubs on the farm.

SAC report - An agricultural labour requirement report completed by SAC was presented to planning. SAC is an internationally recognised body who advises businesses, individuals, and governments alike on all subjects agricultural. Their report was completed on the conclusion of an in person, on site lengthy assessment of all aspects of the business. It is acknowledged there is no recognised standard for alpacas and the assessment for goats has been used instead. This is because Alpacas have not been as popular as other livestock until recently. This is changing and can be demonstrated in the changes in the law; Dogs (Protection of Livestock) (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2021. This amendment in 2021 came to recognise Camelids (alpacas) as Livestock affording them the same protection as other more commonly farmed livestock such as cattle, sheep, swine etc. This should be treated as an indicator of where this industry is going, and the significance of the SAC report should not be underestimated. In the SAC report this is addressed and confirms that although 1.7 labour units have been assessed on goats, it is highly likely should alpacas be recognised within the labour report in the future the labour unit would be much higher due to the nature of their care and the business activities. Although recognised not to solely be justification for a dwelling house, the scale of the business, ongoing growth and its requirement for commitment and continued presence on the farm is clearly demonstrated. SAC indicates in their report that to run the business in its current state it would take almost two people employed full time. The established breeding program along with other ongoing business commitments requires that a presence is kept on the farm at all times, there is no mention in planning policy that stipulates a trigger for the consideration of how much time is required to be spent on a farm when ongoing breeding is taking place therefore I would defer to the SAC report and the applicants own experience which indicates an all year round presence is needed. Put simply breeding livestock is not a part time activity.

Alternative accommodation - The refusal mentions other accommodation nearby should be considered. This is not supported by planning policy. To consider other accommodation nearby would substantially increase the applicant and her families carbon footprint due to resulting in constant trips by car to and from the farm. Policy fourteen states consideration should be given to reducing car dependency, policy one and policy five also refer to considering the global climate crisis, the suggestion that the solution is to increase carbon emissions to avoid building a new dwelling goes against planning policy in these circumstances. Policy sixteen and seventeen refer to considerations regarding affordable homes and local living and keeping people in the countryside, the refusal suggests buying a home in the village nearest to the proposed location however this would require a substantially larger financial investment than the proposed construction of a new dwelling as well as the already mentioned increase in carbon footprint. Lindsay has lived and worked on the farm and in the countryside her entire life and the suggestion of moving away from the farm and countryside because she already lives nearby to the proposed site is not supported by planning policy. Lindsay's business is thriving and this is because of her continued efforts and commitment and the amount of time she is required on the farm.

2. Site specific operational need for dwelling

The proposed location has been selected for very specific reasons which benefit the environment, community, business, and welfare of the valuable livestock. The location is specifically located near to the current operation. The proposed location has been selected as the location of the planned intensified breeding program; the continued success of the business relies on increasing the herd. The tourism aspect of the business entirely relies on Macho (male) Alpacas used for trekking due to their nature. In the absence of Hembras (female) Alpacas, Machos are placid and easy to train, curious around people and gentle by nature. Hembras are known to be standoff alpacas, they would prefer little interaction and are not easily trained. For this reason, all aspects of the tourism business make use of exclusively Machos. Hembras are only used for producing and their presence nearby to Machos can have extremely detrimental consequences to the business. Machos who sense the presence of Hembras or have frequent interactions with them can become violent, boisterous, and impossible to handle. This would pose a substantial amount of risk to the business allowing visitors to handle Machos in this state. The location of any increased breeding program must be located away from any current Macho herd to continue involving tourists handling of them safely. The proposed location is the furthest away location from the current Macho heard, who are located conveniently near to established parking for visitors and the main carriageway for maximum exposure to passers-by. The proposed location is out of sight of any Macho herd and would allow for any weaning Cria (baby alpaca) to take place without incident. The proposed dwelling is situated beside the livestock barn for the reason it will be treated as a maternity unit, allowing for instant support pre and post-partum to the Hembras as well as constant monitoring and additional support of any Hembras and Crias.

The location is the only relatively flat part of this parcel of land, this is beneficial as any construction would require minimal groundwork and disruption. The location has also been proposed due to its proximity to an existing road network, this is beneficial as it would require very little scarring to the land for access, it is noted there were no objections reported by the road's development officer. The location is secluded, utilising existing tree lines to mask it. The proposed location is situated near to an established power source and private water supply reducing the need to implement this moving forward. The location in the past has been the scene of multiple crimes, youth disorder and suspicious activity. The creation of a dwelling and continued presence at this location would greatly increase the safety of the nearby national infrastructure; radio masts, decrease the continued degrading of a historic monument nearby; world war two gunning establishment, discourage unauthorised dumping of waste and illegal use of the roads by persons driving under the influence and using illegal motorcycles and quad bikes.

The proposed location is also on land owned specifically by Lindsay, not her family.

3. New development in the countryside 2022

New developments will only be supported where they demonstrate diversification within green belt and rural areas and promote new employment, tourism opportunities or community benefits, which are compatible with and do not have an adverse impact on the character of the green belt. The development plan framework noted within policy ENV 1 with the weight of any test put on the quality and rural character of the area.

This new development which is proposed seeks to continue to diversify the farm, promote new employment and tourism opportunities all while supporting local economic growth allowing visitors to the area to have more to do and see and will have no adverse impact on the character of the greenbelt. With all consideration to the above the development fits within the criteria for consideration ensuring there is no detracting from any quality of the area the development seeks to increase its quality.

Lindsay currently employs and has a volunteer programme including volunteers working towards their 'Duke of Edinburgh' levels, and retired people who enjoy being in the countryside. She is looking to take on more as the business progresses.

4. LDP new development supplementary guidance 2022

Tourism - is an important element of the economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being. This proposal seeks to provide an opportunity for an existing business to continue to grow and offer more to any visitors to the area, contributing to local economy, complementing existing facilities with no detrimental impacts. The proposal seeks to bring the people of Scotland and further afield into the countryside to celebrate the heritage of the Scottish countryside. With the increase in breeding there is an opportunity to further link in with schools, universities, and other educational establishments as well as visitors with a view of increasing exposure to the husbandry side of the business. The location benefits from a nearby train station given visitors the opportunity to commute by train as well as on-site parking for cars/buses. It is demonstrated by the lack of concerns reported by the roads department that the location and road network is suitable for the proposal and as mentioned above the on-site already implemented water/electricity facilities compliment the proposed location.

Greenbelt development - It is demonstrated by way of the breeding program that the proposal is required in the location it is proposed. Supporting an established activity out with the nearby settlement. The proposal seeks to complement the surroundings and enhance the proposed location.