

<b>Item</b>	<b>06/00892/COUMAJ</b>	<b>Refuse Full Planning Permission</b>
<b>Case Officer</b>	<b>Caron Taylor</b>	
<b>Ward</b>	<b>Lostock</b>	
<b>Proposal</b>	<b>Change of use of agricultural land to a taxiway for Microlights (below 450kg) and Very Light Aircraft (below 600kg), access from North Road, Bretherton, retention of a portacabin for office/toilet facilities and carparking (the rest of the development is within South Ribble Borough).</b>	
<b>Location</b>	<b>Long Fold Farm North Road Bretherton Lancashire PR26 9AY</b>	
<b>Applicant</b>	<b>Mr A Pope</b>	
<b>Background:</b>	<p>Long Fold Farm is a 162ha arable and grassland unit forming part of the Tarleton Estate Ltd. The Pope family has held the farm under an Agricultural Holdings Act Tenancy since 1954. It is situated to the north of North Road, Bretherton and is accessed down a track off North Road (B5428).</p> <p>The site at Long Fold Farm is unusual in that it is bisected by the boundary between Chorley Borough and South Ribble Borough. This application is part of a an overall proposal for two intersecting grass airstrips for microlights (below 450kg) and very light aircraft (below 600kg), accessed from North Road, Bretherton, retention of a portacabin for office/toilet facilities and carparking.</p> <p>The intersecting grass airstrips themselves are within South Ribble Borough and an application for planning permission has been submitted to South Ribble Borough Council for this element, although it has not been determined to date.</p> <p>This application therefore covers the parts of the proposal within Chorley Borough only. This includes the access from North Road into the site, the taxiway from the farmstead to the proposed airstrips, retention of a portacabin for office/toilet facilities and carparking.</p> <p>A 2ha parcel of land for the taxiway (providing access to the airstrips from the farmstead) has been taken out of arable production, and is managed as permanent grassland, with car and trailer parking for visiting pilots within the farmstead. The portacabin on the site houses a toilet and will also be used as a small office to log flights and activity. The access to the farmstead from North Road will be via the existing farm access track.</p> <p>With the exception of taking the taxiway (and airstrips in South Ribble) out of arable production, the applicant states that farm management will remain virtually unchanged.</p>	
<b>Planning History:</b>	There is no planning history at the site, relevant to this application.	
<b>Planning Policy:</b>	PPG2: Green Belts PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas	

PPG17: Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation  
Policy 6 adopted Joint Lancashire Structure Plan  
DC1: Development in the Green Belt  
LT10: Public Rights of Way  
LT12: Golf, Outdoor Sport and Related Development  
EM3: Farm Diversification  
TR4: Highway Development Control Criteria

### **Consultations and Representations:**

As the site straddles the Borough boundary with South Ribble, the consultations and representations received that specifically relate to the part of development within Chorley Borough (that is the subject of this application) are detailed in the relevant sections below.

Due to the nature of the proposals many of the consultations and representations received refer to the airstrips themselves within South Ribble Borough, and these have been forwarded to South Ribble Borough Council. However, for completeness the total number of representations received for the development as a whole is noted.

### **Consultations:**

#### Lancashire County Council Highways

Whilst having no over-riding objections to a microlight and very light aircraft field in this location, the Development Engineer has a number of concerns relating to the access for the site.

Firstly, visibility currently available at North Road is substantially below the recommended standard in the critical lead direction with approximately 2m x 30m achievable past the existing hedgerows. There is also a wooden power set pylon creating an intermittent obstruction in this direction. To the left, current visibility is approximately 2m x 50m. While an appropriate level of visibility to the left can be achieved by appropriate hedgerow trimming or setting back, the best achievable major road distance in the lead direction, over land under the applicant's control, is only approximately 130m. The records show a combined 85%ile speed of 58 mph in the immediate vicinity of the access. The Development Engineer asks emphatically that the full major road visibility distance is provided at the access to give splays of 4.5m x 215m in both directions.

In addition, to facilitate entry to and exit from the highway would require that the access be widened to 5m for a distance of 15m from the edge of the carriageway of North Road and provided with 6m radii. The access is 250m long and approximately 3.2m wide with no passing places. There appears to be light but regular use of the access track by vans and other vehicles. Although it is accepted that the flying field is likely to be a relatively low traffic generator, there will be an increased likelihood of opposing vehicle conflict. At least one passing place, approximately half way along the access would be desirable to avoid the risk of opposing vehicles needing to reverse. If the application is to be approved the Development Engineer requests conditions be applied to ensure the above measures are implemented.

#### Bretherton Parish Council

Object to the application on the grounds that there will be an adverse impact on traffic generation and road safety. The access

from Longfold Farm onto North Road is potentially extremely hazardous. The proposed development would compound and accentuate the health and safety of all road users and pedestrians on this junction. The combination of a public footpath, slow moving vehicles with trailers and a national speed limit road with a long history of accidents would present an unacceptable risk.

Two public footpaths are in close proximity to the proposed application site. The applicant's suggestion to put signage on footpaths to warn walkers of low flying aircraft is not in keeping with rural ramblers health and safety.

It is considered that the development would detract from the character and appearance of the Green Belt and that the proposed development would be to the detriment of the character, setting and quality of the village of Bretherton and surrounding rural area.

The application states that it is 'not' for other commercial use. Is the intended farm diversification not a commercial venture? The Parish Council is concerned that this initial development would be the 'thin end of the wedge' and the potential for growth could be huge.

#### Croston Parish Council

Object to the application on the grounds of increased traffic, particularly with trailers, on minor roads may lead to problems

#### Ulnes Walton Parish Council

The proposals will result in an increase in traffic on already congested roads and the trailers used as transportation will create a nuisance.

#### Much Hoole Parish Council

Object to the application. There are public footpaths that cross the site and aircraft will be a significant hazard to the public. North Road is a busy link between the A59 and Leyland and an increase in traffic with trailers will cause safety hazards, not just from the trailers but the effect on other motorists, particularly as trailers approach or leave the landing site.

#### Ramblers' Association

Concerned that an increase in the amount of traffic along the access road will produce a hazard to walkers between the farm and North Road. The footpath through the farmyard and out to the northeast should be preserved. There is likely to be some loss of amenity due to the sound coming from the aircraft.

#### Country Land and Business Association (CLA)

The supporting documentation is dismissive of the impact on local communities both in terms of increase in traffic (with trailers), visual intrusion from parked cars and other equipment and general amenity. The CLA would suggest that the proposal is not in the spirit of the Green Belt legislation.

#### Campaign for the Protection of Rural England (Chorley District)

CPRE welcome sympathetic diversification of existing farmland in Chorley Borough. Such developments should have minimal visual intrusion into the traditional landscape of the area. Any noise and light pollution from such developments should also be minimised

by appropriate location, screening etc. At the lower limit of movements suggested in the proposal the impact on the local community should be minimal if conditions are set and adhered to. Higher levels of activity would be unacceptable and were unlikely to be achieved unless a regional or national event took place on the site. Any building associated with an approved permanent development should be of in keeping with the local farm buildings. CPRE welcome the environmental stewardship proposed for the farm.

Consultations with reference to the airstrips themselves have been received from NATS (National Air Traffic Services), Croston Parish Council, Much Hoole Parish Council, Bretherton Parish Council, Ulnes Walton Parish Council, Blackpool International Airport, Lancashire County Council Ecologist, Chorley Borough Council Environmental Services, HM Prison Service, English Nature, RSPB, West Lancashire District Council, The Ramblers' Association, Bretherton Endowed C of E School, Country Land and Business Association, the Campaign for the Protection of Rural England and Tarleton Parish Council. These have been forwarded to South Ribble Borough Council.

**Representations:** In total, 293 representations have been received at the time of writing the report. A copy of all representations has been forwarded to South Ribble Borough Council. Of this total, 126 letters refer solely to the airstrips themselves, the South Ribble part of the application. In addition a report has been received from a planning consultant who have been instructed by CABLA (Campaign Against Bretherton Light Aircraft), a group of residents in Chorley and South Ribble to object to the applications on their behalf.

167 letters of the objection received made reference to a part of the development within Chorley Borough as well as the airstrips. These can be summarised as:

- There will be an increase in traffic on North Road creating more noise;
- North Road already suffers from speeding traffic and is used by heavy goods vehicles and other traffic taking a route from the very busy A49 to the M6 and M61;
- Villagers are already trying to get the speed of the road reduced - more traffic won't help the road safety situation;
- The proposals will result in more accidents on North Road;
- The proposals will be detrimental to cyclists and horse riders on North Road;
- The proposals will increase the number of long/towing/turning vehicles on North Road, which are slower than normal traffic;
- The access to Long Fold Farm is poor and any changes to it will impact on the Green Belt being visually detrimental;
- The loss of hedgerows will impact on wildlife;
- North Road has very little footpath, and any increase in traffic will therefore be a danger for pedestrians;
- The site is in the Green Belt – the paraphernalia associated with the operation will impact on its openness;
- The proposals are incompatible with the farmhouse scene;
- The peace on the public footpaths would be shattered spoiling people's enjoyment of the countryside;

- The proposals would be a danger to walkers on the public footpaths, including on the access track and therefore discourage their use as there will be a conflict between walkers and towing vehicles;
- The storage of aviation spirit and flammable substances is dangerous;
- Loss of agricultural land;
- The movement of aircraft will be over land drains;
- Inadequate and misleading information has been supplied with the application;
- The harm caused by farm diversification outweighs the benefits to Longfold Farm;
- The contribution of the proposals to the rural economy would be small;
- It would be difficult to reject subsequent applications to expand;
- It would be detrimental to the welfare of nearby animals.

30 letters of support have been received. Again many of these refer to the airstrip generally, however, the issues raised relevant to this application can be summarised as:

- The proposed airstrips are in quite an isolated spot away from properties and the flights will go away from the village rather than over it;
- There will be no change to the landscape and therefore no wildlife disturbed;
- Having witnessed some of the crafts landing they were not intrusive and any noise was minimal;
- It is important we support one of the only working farms in the area. It is a difficult time for the agricultural industry. The proposals show great vision to help the local farmer carry on farming his land and bring in trade for the local businesses;
- The countryside is about enjoying the great outdoors and this will give more people the opportunity to do that;
- The portacabin is situated alongside existing buildings and the carpark is by the farm, therefore the proposals will hardly change the outlook at all;
- Tarleton already has lots of traffic and heavy vehicles passing through every day, a few light aircraft won't cause much of a problem;
- The taxiway can be returned to agricultural use if necessary;
- The open aspect of the countryside would not be compromised;
- The people objecting probably use air travel themselves from Manchester Airport in massive aircraft, which causes noise to residents in the area. It seems a case of 'not in my back yard'.

A letter has also been received from Lindsey Hoyle MP, which states there is strong opposition in the village and he shares residents concerns and asks that their views are given careful consideration when a decision is made.

**Applicants Case:** The applicant, Mr Pope, recognises the need to adjust his farming system in response to the present economics of agriculture. The downturn in agriculture has placed economic pressures on the business and alternative sources of income must be generated to

allow the business to remain viable, as returns from farm incomes have steadily declined since 1995.

Recent changes to the support system for UK farmers have seen the introduction of payments no longer based on production, but based on a flat rate per hectare. This has allowed a more extensive, but low input approach at the farm with more benign environmental impacts. Applications for both the Entry Level and Higher Tier of the Environmental Stewardship Scheme have been successful and annual payments are enabling Mr Pope to adjust his farming operations, enhancing the wildlife asset of the farm through the creation of habitats and food sources for a number of species.

Whilst the environmental incentives are designed to compensate for income foregone, due to the lower intensity of agricultural activity additional revenue is required to generate a sustainable income. To provide additional revenue, and maintain a viable business, diversification into non-agricultural activity is required, and Mr Pope has been approached to develop an airstrip for microlight aircraft. South Ribble Sport Aircraft Club has been operating from the site under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order) 1995, which allows for the temporary use of land for up to 28 days a year, to establish the suitability of the strip. This application and the one currently being dealt with by South Ribble Borough Council have therefore been submitted to allow the activity to operate beyond 28 days a year.

**Assessment:**

Green Belt

Policy DC1 of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review reflects Government guidance in PPG2: Green Belts. It states that planning permission will not be granted except in very special circumstances for development other than agriculture, forestry, essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation and other uses of land that preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with its purposes, including limited extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings in accordance with the relevant other policies within the Local Plan.

PPG2 states five purposes of including land in Green Belts and it is therefore appropriate to assess if the application conflicts with these purposes. The proposals will not result in unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas, the merging of neighbouring towns into one another or affect the setting and special character of an historic town. Regarding the purpose of assisting in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land, the proposal requires an open area to allow the activities to take place. Therefore the proposal does not conflict with this aim.

The final aim of Green Belt policy is to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Assessing the proposals against his criteria it is considered that they do not conflict with it. The carparking is to be within the existing farmstead and although a portacabin is to be used to provide a toilet and small office, no other buildings are proposed. PPG2 states that essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation are appropriate in the Green Belt and gives examples of small changing rooms or small stables. Although the portacabin is considered similar to these in size, in

terms of Green Belt policy its form and design is incongruous with the rural area and therefore unacceptable to be sited in the Green Belt on a longterm basis. It is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt assessed against PPG2 and Policy DC1 of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review. It should be noted that the aircraft run on petrol, so no fuel storage is proposed.

The application does not propose any storage facilities for aircraft and if they were proposed in the future would require planning permission. The taxiway itself will be grassland and therefore would not conflict with Green Belt policy. It is proposed that the aircraft would be tailored into the site, and the storage of trailers or aircraft could be avoided by an appropriate condition.

However, although it is considered that the elements above within Chorley Borough do not conflict with Green Belt policy (apart from the portacabin/office), the access causes more concern. The Highways Authority (LCC) have stated the requirements that the access from North Road should meet as the existing visibility is substantially below the recommended standard. This includes the addition of extensive visibility splays, 4.5m back from the edge of the carriageway and 215m in both directions, as well as requiring the access be widened to 5m (from 3.2m) for a distance of 15m from the edge of the carriageway off North Road, and the provision of a passing place halfway down the track to the farmhouse.

The section of North Road where the access from Long Fold Farm joins the main road is characterised by a small pavement next to the road on the north side with hedges on both sides. Even if the required visibility splays could be achieved by the applicants (as part of the land required is not under their control to the east), it is considered that the necessary works would have a detrimental impact on the rural nature of North Road and the visual amenities of the Green Belt. It would be necessary to set the hedgerows back significantly and the Highways Authority would require a condition be applied to the permission that no fencing, wall, hedge, tree or shrub be erected within the splay area. It is considered that this would almost create a visual 'lay-by'. PPG2 states that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt, which although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts, might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design. It is considered that the necessary upgrading of the access would alter the character of North Road and therefore have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the Green Belt contrary to PPG2.

It is also considered that the proposals are contrary to policy EM3 of the Local Plan - Diversification of the Rural Economy. One of the criteria of this policy is that sites should have adequate road access and developments should not reduce road safety or give rise to unsatisfactory traffic, parking or environmental conditions. As stated above, the current access is unsuitable and bringing it up to a suitable level would have a detrimental impact on the character of the area.

#### Public Footpaths

Public footpath number 6 (Bretherton) runs along the access track from North Road to the farmstead. As it approaches the

farmhouse it runs through the farmyard towards the agricultural buildings before heading northeast away from the farm buildings. In terms of the application it would share the access track with the traffic for the airstrip up to the farmhouse, and then cross the access track once more before heading into a field. It would not cross the taxiway. Farm vehicles already use this access track and although the proposals would result in an increase in traffic to the farm, the airstrip is likely to be a relatively low traffic generator and it is therefore considered that the impact on public footpath number 6 is not sufficient to warrant refusal on these grounds.

#### Neighbour Amenity

Due to the distance of the nearest properties from Long Fold Farm and the land forming part of this application, it is not considered that the access, parking, small office or taxiway would have a detrimental impact on the amenities of neighbouring properties.

#### Agricultural Land

The land is registered as Grade 3 of the Agricultural Land Classification (although the applicants have been unable to identify if it is in subcategory 3A or 3B).

PPS7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas and policy EP6: Agricultural Land, of the Chorley Borough Local Plan seek to avoid development of the best and most versatile agricultural land, defined as grade 1, 2 and 3A. However, as stated previously the land the subject of this application is already being used under the 28 day rule. Therefore, it would be difficult for the Local Planning Authority to argue that the proposals would result in the loss of the best and more versatile agricultural land, as the fall back position of an unsuccessful application, is that it could still be used under the 28 day rule.

Further investigations will be undertaken into other activities taking place at Longfold Farm (although outside the red edge of this application), which may be subject of a future enforcement to this committee if it is considered expedient to take action.

#### **Conclusion:**

Therefore, although it is not considered that a change of use of the land to a taxiway and parking at the farmstead would have an adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt or prejudice the purposes of including the land within the Green Belt, it is considered that the proposed access to the site is substandard and the necessary works to make it acceptable would have an adverse impact on the rural character of the area and the visual amenities of the Green Belt. In addition, the retention of a portacabin/office at the site on a longterm basis is considered inappropriate in the Green Belt due to its form and design being out of keeping with the rural area. The proposals are therefore considered contrary to PPG2, Policy 6 of the adopted Joint Lancashire Structure Plan and Policy DC1 of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review.

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## **Recommendation: Refuse Full Planning Permission**

### **Reasons**

1. The proposed development would be located in the Green Belt as defined by Policy 6 and Map 4 of the adopted Joint Lancashire Structure Plan and by the Proposals Map of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review. It is considered that the necessary upgrading of the access would alter the character of North Road and therefore have a detrimental impact on the visual amenity of the Green Belt. The proposals are therefore contrary to PPG2: Green Belts, Policy 6 of the adopted Joint Lancashire Structure Plan and Policy DC1 of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review.

2. Due to its form and design the portacabin is incongruous within the rural area and therefore it is unacceptable to be sited on a longterm basis at the site. It is therefore inappropriate development in the Green Belt and contrary to PPG2: Green Belts and Policy DC1 of the adopted Chorley Borough Local Plan Review.

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