



DESIGN, ACCESS & PLANNING STATEMENT

ERECTION OF A FREE-RANGE EGG LAYING UNIT & ASSOCIATED
INFRASTRUCTURE

LAND AT DELGATE BANK, WESTON, SPALDING, LINCOLNSHIRE

W Dring and Sons Ltd

Harrison Pick Ltd
Station Farm Offices
Wansford Road
Nafferton
East Yorkshire

Ian Pick: 07702 814950
ian@harrisonpick.co.uk

Sam Harrison: 07837 558724
sam@harrisonpick.co.uk

 **Harrison Pick**^{Ltd}
PLANNING CONSULTANTS

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

2. BACKGROUND & PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3. AMOUNT / SCALE

4. USE

5. LAYOUT

6. LANDSCAPE

7. APPEARANCE

8. ACCESS

9. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

10. PLANNING POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been commissioned by Mr Chris Dring of W Dring and Sons Ltd, Woad Farm, 670 Broadgate, Weston, Spalding, PE12 6JA.
- 1.2 Section 42 of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires a Design and Access Statement to be submitted with the majority of planning applications. The purpose of this report is to satisfy the requirements of Section 42 of the aforementioned Act.
- 1.3 This report has been prepared to illustrate the process that has led to the development proposal and to explain and justify the proposal in a structured way.
- 1.4 This report has been prepared by Jack Thompson of Harrison Pick Ltd. Jack holds an undergraduate degree in Planning and has two years of experience in professional practice. He is currently working towards his Master's degree and progressing towards membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (MRTPI).

2. BACKGROUND & PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 2.1 The applicant, W Dring and Sons Ltd, operates an established agricultural business extending to approximately 600 acres. The holding is wholly arable in nature, with the principal crops comprising wheat, vining peas and sugar beet. In addition, areas of land are contracted out for the production of vegetables and potatoes, reflecting the flexible and commercially responsive nature of the business. Given the nature and extent of the agricultural enterprise, the business has an essential need to diversify to remain sustainable and economically viable. To that end, the applicants

are proposing to diversify into free-range egg production with a unit being proposed on land at Delgate Bank, Weston, per the suite of drawings attached.

- 2.2 The need for diversification within the wider farming industry is now more essential than ever. The agricultural sector is set to face prolonged and intensifying economic pressures over the coming years, driven by a complex combination of global and domestic challenges. The phased withdrawal of the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS), which previously accounted for over 50% of net farm income on many family farms, is leaving holdings increasingly vulnerable. Replacement schemes, such as the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS), while well-intentioned, offer reduced and less predictable financial support, creating greater income volatility. At the same time, operating costs have risen sharply: fertiliser prices for ammonium nitrate and urea surged by more than 250% between 2020 and 2022, diesel and compound feed costs have increased in parallel, and these rises have not been matched by corresponding increases in farmgate prices.
- 2.3 Labour shortages have also reached critical levels since the UK's departure from the European Union, leaving many farms struggling to recruit both seasonal and permanent workers. This has been particularly damaging for labour-intensive sectors such as horticulture and dairy, with industry data showing that millions of pounds' worth of produce has gone unharvested due to worker shortages. Coupled with an ageing workforce - the average UK farmer is now over 59 - and significant challenges around succession planning and the 'family farm tax', the sustainability of traditional agricultural models is under significant threat.
- 2.4 Against this backdrop, diversification is no longer a choice but a necessity for farm businesses seeking to secure financial resilience and long-term viability. Enterprises are increasingly turning to complementary income streams such as rural tourism, niche livestock ventures, and the production of free-range eggs. In particular, free-

range egg production represents a practical and scalable diversification strategy, generating reliable year-round income that can offset volatile commodity markets. It makes effective use of existing land and infrastructure, integrates well with mixed farming systems, and helps to safeguard the economic future of family farms.

- 2.5 Without such diversification, many farms risk becoming asset-rich but cash-poor, unable to reinvest in essential infrastructure or weather ongoing economic shocks. By contrast, well-planned ventures such as free-range egg production not only provide direct financial returns but also contribute to the wider rural economy through job creation, local supply chains, and the retention of younger generations in the farming sector. In this context, diversification is critical not just for the survival of individual holdings, but for the resilience and sustainability of the agricultural industry as a whole.
- 2.6 The applicants have received support from their egg production contractor and have a preliminary contract agreement in place for the expansion, subject to planning approval.
- 2.7 The recent increased demand for free-range eggs necessitates a significant expansion within the industry to meet consumer expectations and sustain market growth. With an increasing focus on animal welfare and sustainable farming practices, more consumers are opting for free-range eggs over conventionally produced 'colony' eggs. To keep pace with this demand, producers and contractors alike must scale up their operations. The urgent necessity for this expansion has resulted in increasingly more lucrative contracts being offered to producers. All major supermarkets in the UK committed to cease selling colony produced eggs by the end of 2025 and replace all these eggs with the higher welfare free-range eggs.

- 2.8 The introduction of the free-range egg production unit represents an investment by the applicants of approximately **£2.1m** in groundworks, buildings and equipment and will create an additional **2No. full-time employment positions** on the farm, whilst securing existing employment associated with the wider holding.
- 2.9 The proposal seeks full planning permission for the erection of 1 No. free-range egg unit to house 32,000 free-range laying hens, together with an egg packing and storage facility, feed silos, hardstanding areas for parking and turning of vehicles, and an upgraded highway access.
- 2.10 The free-range egg unit measures approximately 110.5m x 24.5m, with an eaves height of 3.5m and a ridge height of 6.86m with a linked egg packing and storage building measuring approximately 24.0m x 12.0m, with an eaves height of 4.5m and a ridge height of 6.14m
- 2.11 The proposed development cannot be accommodated at, or in close proximity to, the applicant's main farmstead at Woad Farm. The land surrounding the farmstead is affected by the Grimsby to Walpole project, a major National Grid electricity transmission scheme. The scheme comprises a new high-voltage (400kV) overhead line of approximately 140 kilometres between North East Lincolnshire and Walpole in Norfolk, together with new pylons and substations, and is required to reinforce the transmission network and connect new sources of low-carbon generation. The route corridor and its associated infrastructure and easements affect the land in the vicinity of Woad Farm, which severely restricts the ability to erect large-scale agricultural buildings and associated infrastructure at the main farmstead.
- 2.12 As a consequence of these constraints, an alternative site within the applicant's control has been identified at Delgate Bank. The site has been selected because it is already in active agricultural use, is of sufficient size to accommodate both the

poultry building and the extensive free-range ranging area required, and lies at an appropriate distance from residential properties so as to minimise potential amenity impacts. Notwithstanding its separation from the main farmstead, the site enables the development to remain functionally linked to the wider farming enterprise. The selection of this site is therefore directly informed by, and necessitated by, the locational constraints imposed by the Grimsby to Walpole scheme.

3. AMOUNT

- 3.1 The proposal seeks full planning consent for the erection of a single free-range egg-laying unit designed to house 32,000 free-range laying hens. The size of the proposed building is intrinsically linked to the scale and operational needs of the enterprise. In the context of modern free-range production, a single larger building is more practical and economically viable than several smaller ones, primarily due to the significant set-up costs and specialist equipment required for efficient operation, management, and animal welfare compliance.
- 3.2 In poultry industry terms, a building with a capacity for 32,000 hens is not generally considered a large-scale unit. Rather, it reflects a typical 'standard' entry point for a commercial free-range enterprise. Contracts with major packers and distributors often require this capacity to ensure consistent supply, while the balance of investment and projected returns typically aligns most efficiently at this scale.
- 3.3 For context, the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations set a minimum threshold of 60,000 birds before triggering an EIA requirement, and the Environmental Permitting Regulations apply only to enterprises with 40,000 birds or more. This demonstrates that, at 32,000 birds, the proposed enterprise falls

comfortably below the regulatory thresholds typically associated with larger-scale poultry developments, underlining its moderate scale within the industry.

4. USE

- 4.1 The use of the building is for the housing of free-range laying hens, together with a linked control room and associated feed silos.
- 4.2 A free-range egg production system is an extensive and welfare-friendly form of egg production. The building includes a control room, together with accommodation for 32,000 laying hens. The bird area includes a scratch area and a perchery, together with nest boxes.
- 4.3 The bird housing area within the building includes a scratch area together with a series of tiered perches which overlay manure belts.
- 4.4 Nest boxes are accessible from the perches and are adjacent to an egg collection conveyor. The nest boxes are angled towards the conveyor and the hens lay their eggs in the nest boxes. The eggs then roll onto the conveyor and are brought to the packing area.
- 4.5 The feeding system within the building is based on an automated chain feeding system which operates every 2 hours between the hours of 6.00am and 9.00pm. Water supply is provided by bell drinkers.
- 4.6 The lighting within the building is on a timeswitch, providing the birds with 14 hours of daylight per day. Ventilation within the buildings is automatic thermostat controlled.

- 4.7 Pop holes are situated in both sides of the building. These pop holes provide the birds with direct access to the range area, which is shown on the Range Plan (drawing IP/26/FD/04). Pop holes are opened at 8.00am daily and closed at 9.00pm (or dusk).
- 4.8 The free-range unit is designed, and proven in practice, to produce negligible environmental consequences. The design of the unit incorporates slatted perches, which are located over manure belts. The manure belts are emptied on a twice weekly basis to prevent any build-up of manure within the building. The manure will be used as a sustainable fertiliser on arable land within the wider farming business, reducing the need for manufactured fertilisers. The frequent removal of manure prevents significant accumulation, reducing the potential for odour nuisance.
- 4.10 It should be noted that the spreading of poultry manure from this unit does not represent an addition of nutrients to the land beyond what would otherwise be applied. Each of the applicant's fields will receive nutrient inputs regardless of whether this application is approved. The use of poultry manure as an organic fertiliser will simply displace an equivalent quantity of alternative fertiliser whether synthetic chemical fertilisers, imported composts, sewage sludge, digestate, or other organic manures. The net nutrient loading to the land is not increased by this development.
- 4.11 Odour issues associated with poultry units are generally related to intensive production cycles on deep litter systems where the manure from the entire production cycle is retained within the building and cleaned out at the end of the flock cycle. An Odour Dispersion Modelling Study has been prepared by AS Modelling & Data Ltd and accompanies this application.

5. LAYOUT

- 5.1 The site has been selected due to the availability of a large ranging area for the hens and due to its separation distance from neighbouring residences.
- 5.2 The proposed development is sited within a flat, open arable landscape characteristic of the Lincolnshire Fens, bounded by drainage features. The scheme has been designed to limit views of the development through the retention of existing boundary vegetation and the introduction of new native woodland planting belts and a mixed tree and shrub landscaping scheme, as recommended in the accompanying Landscape and Visual Appraisal.
- 5.3 Operationally, the development will be served by a new vehicular access taken directly from Delgate Bank, in the form of a simple priority T-junction to the west of the site. The suitability of this access has been assessed in the accompanying Transport Statement prepared by Local Transport Projects Ltd, which includes swept path analysis confirming that the largest vehicles expected to serve the site (a 16.5m articulated HGV) can safely enter and egress. Vehicle parking and turning for all stages of construction and operation will be accommodated within the site, with no vehicles requiring to park or wait on the adjoining road network.
- 5.4 The overall site layout can be seen on the Proposed Site Plan (drawing IP/26/FD/02).

6. LANDSCAPING

- 6.1 The unit has been sited in order to minimise its impact on the landscape and to provide for the operational requirements of the unit.

- 6.2 The free-range hen house is of an agricultural appearance, with polyester coated profile sheet walls and roof (olive green BS12B29). The eaves and ridge height of the proposed building are relatively low, which further assists in mitigating any potential landscape impact.
- 6.3 The application site lies within National Character Area 46 (The Fens), an expansive, flat and open arable landscape characterised by large rectilinear fields bounded by drainage ditches and dykes, with dispersed farmsteads and occasional roadside dwellings. The site itself comprises a flat arable field bounded by drainage features, and is not subject to any national landscape designations. These matters are considered in detail in the accompanying Landscape and Visual Appraisal.
- 6.4 Large agricultural buildings are a modern feature of actively farmed areas and often form part of the public perception of the countryside. In that sense, given its generally agricultural appearance, it is not considered that the egg production unit would be out of character or an intrusion in the landscape. The function and purpose of the building is clearly linked to an agricultural use of the surrounding land. The Landscape and Visual Appraisal concludes that, with the recommended mitigation in place, the residual landscape effect would be minor and the residual visual effect moderate, and would not represent a material change.

Planning Constraints

- 6.5 The agricultural sector, particularly the livestock industry, is a cornerstone of the UK's rural economy and food security strategy. However, recent years have seen an intensification of planning constraints, particularly in terms of site selection for intensive livestock units. It has become increasingly imperative for Local Planning Authorities to adopt a supportive approach in this context, recognising the

intensification of these matters and balancing landscape considerations with national priorities for food sustainability and rural economic resilience.

6.6 The past decade has witnessed a significant tightening of air quality regulations, driven primarily by updated guidance from public bodies such as Natural England. In 2018, Natural England reduced their air quality thresholds from a 20% process contribution (PC) allowance to 4% PC for ammonia and nitrogen deposition on protected habitats. This was followed by a further reduction in 2022 to an effective threshold of 1% PC—a level 20 times stricter than that adopted in 2017. In layman's terms, and whilst the matter isn't entirely linear, one could argue that this has resulted in a requirement for any given site to be significantly further away from any protected habitat. These changes have dramatically reduced the availability of viable sites for livestock units. Prior to the imposition of these threshold changes in 2018, typically 90% of schemes initially screened for air quality compliance were deemed acceptable, whereas today, 90% fail to meet the necessary criteria. Compounding this challenge, Natural England's latest guidance (October 2025) has now introduced yet a further screening stage, requiring a rigorous review of the surrounding area in accordance with the JNCC thresholds and a far more exhaustive in-combination screening process. This has added a further layer of technical complication and uncertainty, making it increasingly difficult to identify sites that can progress through the planning process without triggering complex and costly modelling requirements.

6.7 In addition to air quality constraints, the site selection process for free-range egg units faces further limitations due to the specific requirements for ranging areas. Livestock regulations (such as RSPCA assured) stipulate that birds must have immediate access to 1 hectare of range per 2,000 hens, with all ranging areas located within 350 metres of the unit itself. This necessitates the placement of free-range egg units at the centre of a block of greenfield land, ensuring that sufficient

land is available for ranging in all directions. Consequently, this requirement typically prohibits the grouping of such units, which is otherwise a common planning practice aimed at minimising landscape and environmental impacts. These constraints further narrow the pool of potential sites and exacerbate the challenges faced by the agricultural sector.

- 6.8 From a landscape perspective, the siting of intensive livestock units often intersects with the need to conserve visual amenity and rural character. However, it is crucial to contextualise such developments within their agricultural settings. When designed with sensitivity, we would contend that these units can integrate seamlessly into existing agricultural landscapes.
- 6.9 Mitigation measures, including tree planting and sympathetic material choices, can further reduce visual impacts. For instance, proposals that include screening belts (such as this one) or align structures with existing topographical features demonstrate how adverse effects can be minimised while maintaining the functional integrity of the site.
- 6.10 The increasing scarcity of viable sites for livestock units underscores the importance of supporting those that meet current environmental and planning thresholds. The UK's push for food self-sufficiency and reduced reliance on imports aligns with national policy objectives, such as those outlined in the National Planning Policy Framework, which emphasises economic and environmental sustainability.
- 6.11 Moreover, the economic resilience of rural areas depends heavily on the agricultural sector's ability to adapt and expand. Intensive livestock units contribute to this resilience by enabling farms to meet market demands for high quality, sustainable products like free-range and organic meat or eggs. The financial

benefits of such developments extend beyond individual farms, supporting local supply chains and employment.

6.12 We would respectfully suggest that LPAs must recognise the pressing need to balance environmental concerns with agricultural viability. When a site is identified that complies with stringent air quality and ecological thresholds (as just one example of such constraints) it is vital to afford weight to the public benefits these developments bring, including food security, rural economic stability, and alignment with government sustainability goals.

6.13 The siting and design of the building have been developed to respond to this context. The proposed external materials and relatively low built form reflect the agricultural vernacular of the area, and the proposed woodland belts will soften views of the development over time. On this basis, and as set out in the accompanying Landscape and Visual Appraisal, it is considered that the proposal can be satisfactorily assimilated into its surroundings without giving rise to material harm to landscape character or visual amenity.

7. APPEARANCE

7.1 The building is a purpose-built poultry unit, the design of which is purely functional for the proposed use as a free-range egg laying unit.

7.2 The building is of a steel frame construction with the external cladding being polyester coated profile sheeting in olive green (or other colours to be agreed with the local planning authority).

- 7.3 This design and appearance are typical of an agricultural building such as this, and as such is deemed to be suitable to its rural and agricultural locality. Buildings of this design and scale are not uncommon in the surrounding landscape.

8. ACCESS

- 8.1 Access to the free-range egg laying unit is required by HGV and other commercial non-HGV traffic. A free-range egg production unit is a low traffic generating use. The table below shows the volumes, pattern and type of vehicles required to access the site.

Activity	Vehicle Size	Frequency
Hen Delivery	16.5m Articulated HGV	4 lorries per flock
Feed	16.5m Articulated HGV	1 per week
Egg Collection	16.5m Articulated HGV	2 per week
Manure Removal	Tractor and Trailer	2 per week
Carcass Collection	7.5 tonne lorry	1 per week
Hen Removal	16.5m Articulated HGV	4 lorries per flock
Dirty Water Removal	Tanker	2 per flock

- 8.2 During the normal operation of the site, there will be 6 commercial vehicles accessing the site per week (12 movements), resulting in an average of slightly below 1 commercial vehicle per day.
- 8.3 Peak traffic movements are generated at the beginning and end of each flock cycle when the hens are delivered (4 lorries / 8 movements), and then again at the end of the flock cycle, 60 weeks later for spent hen removal amounting to (4 lorries / 8 movements). These movements are experienced less than once per annum.

- 8.4 Visitors to the unit will include vets and farm assurance inspectors, and these visits are likely to be every 3 months, generating limited additional private cars.
- 8.5 The development will be served by a new vehicular access from Delgate Bank, in the form of a simple priority T-junction to the west of the site, as shown on the Proposed Site Plan (IP/26/FD/02). A Transport Statement prepared by Local Transport Projects Ltd accompanies this application. It confirms that adequate visibility splays are achievable, that the largest vehicles expected to serve the site can safely access and egress (demonstrated by swept path analysis of a 16.5m articulated HGV), and that vehicle parking and turning for all stages of construction and operation will be accommodated within the site.

9. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 A Noise Impact Assessment has been prepared by Matrix Acoustic Design Consultants. Following a background noise survey and an assessment undertaken in accordance with BS4142:2014+A1:2019, the assessment concludes that, during the day and evening periods, the ventilation fans and transport activities would result in a very low noise impact at the nearest dwellings, and that during the night period the noise impact would be negligible. On this basis it is concluded that, on noise grounds, the proposal is acceptable.
- 9.2 A Flood Risk and Drainage Assessment has been prepared by George Shuttleworth Ltd. Although the site lies within Flood Zone 3, the proposed development is classified as 'less vulnerable', for which development in Flood Zone 3 is considered appropriate, and the Sequential Test is demonstrated to be passed. The assessment concludes that the site is at a low residual risk of flooding, that floor

levels can be set above the surrounding ground, and that a practical sustainable drainage system can be provided which attenuates surface water and discharges at a controlled rate to the adjacent Internal Drainage Board watercourse, so that the development would not increase flood risk elsewhere in the catchment. Foul drainage would be served by a packaged treatment plant. The assessment concludes that no specific flood mitigation measures are required and that the development is appropriate in this location.

- 9.3 A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment has been prepared by Brown & Co. The site baseline comprises arable cropland with no hedgerows or watercourses. Following development, the scheme delivers a biodiversity net gain of 10.40%, exceeding the statutory minimum of 10% required under the Environment Act 2021, principally through the creation of modified grassland and a new native broadleaved woodland planting.
- 9.4 A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal has been prepared by Brown & Co. Informed by a desk study and a habitat survey of the site, the appraisal confirms that the site comprises an actively managed arable cropland field of limited intrinsic ecological value, with no statutory designated sites identified within 5 kilometres and only one non-statutory Local Wildlife Site within 2 kilometres. It identifies nesting birds, brown hare, and watercourse species (notably water vole associated with the adjacent drains) as the principal ecological features warranting further consideration. The appraisal recommends that any clearance of vegetation be undertaken outside the core nesting bird season (or, failing that, be subject to a pre-works check by a suitably qualified ecologist), that a Non-licensed Method Statement be prepared in respect of water vole, and that general protective measures be adopted for brown hare and other fauna. Subject to these measures being secured, the appraisal concludes that the proposal would not give rise to adverse impacts on protected or notable species and that no further ecological

surveys are required. The report also identifies opportunities for biodiversity enhancement, including the provision of bird and bat boxes and habitat features, which would complement the biodiversity net gain proposals referred to above.

10. PLANNING POLICY

10.1 National Planning Policy is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024). The NPPF provides support for economic growth and development of agricultural businesses in paragraph 88.

Supporting a prosperous rural economy

88. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;

b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

- 10.2 The National Planning Policy Framework provides clear support for the proposals within paragraph 88; the proposal pertains to the diversification of an existing rural agricultural business.

Jack Thompson BA(Hons)

Planning Consultant | Harrison Pick Ltd