

**REPORT ACCOMPANYING
A PLANNING APPLICATION FOR
A TEMPORARY STORAGE CONTAINER
TO SITE AN ON FARM MILK STATION AND VENDING MACHINE**

AT

**ST ANDREWS FARM
ANDREWS HILL
BILLINGSHURST
WEST SUSSEX
RH14 9JS**

Applicant: MA PJ Blanch

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1. Introduction

This report accompanies a planning application to position a timber clad container in the top farmyard area at St Andrews Farm. See plans attached to the application. The purpose of the container is to locate a milk station and vending machine to sell milk and milkshakes produced from the cows at St Andrews Farm, along with other associated products. St Andrews Farm is a mixed farm. The dairy herd is the main focus of the business, and this comprises predominantly Guernsey, Jersey and Ayrshire cows, notorious for producing high quality milk. A smaller area of arable land is also farmed, and this helps provide cereals and forage for the cows overwinter. This application is submitted in line with advice received from a pre-application request (reference PE/25/0226). The project has the support of the Rural England Prosperity Fund.

2. The Applicant

MA & PJ Blanch
St Andrews Farm
Andrews Hill
Billingshurst
West Sussex
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The Blanch Family have farmed at St Andrews Farm since 1956, and Matthew and Alistair Blanch, who currently run the farm, are third generation farmers. Matthew and Alistair both have young families, and it is hoped that the addition of the milk vending machine will help secure the future of the farm. As with all small family farms, it is essential that the farm business diversifies its' income stream. With the looming inheritance tax changes, particularly to agricultural property relief, this is now more important than ever. It is hoped the vending machine will help develop a more sustainable business, fit for the future.

Furthermore, the vending machine will allow the business to engage and interact with the public and local community. Connection between producers and consumers is essential if the rural economy is to survive and thrive and the approval of this application will enable this.

3. The Farm

3.1 The Holding

3.1.1 St Andrews Farm

St Andrews Farm is located to the south of Billingshurst and circa 4 miles north east of Pulborough. The farm is owner occupied and totals approximately 60 acres of agricultural land. St Andrews is the primary Holding, that operates alongside:

- Land at High Copse that is an additional area of 60 acres owner occupied land.
- Land at Adversane offers 70 acres, let under a Farm Business Tenancy.
- Land at Lordings provides an additional 95 acres, let under a Farm Business Tenancy.

The land is divided to provide grazing, silage and circa 40 acres of arable ground. The grazing platform is situated closest to the farm buildings to minimise the movement of cows for milking. The remaining land is utilised for silage and the arable rotation. On average 50 acres of grass silage is grown each year, and 10T of maize, in order to sustain milk production levels and meet the dietary requirements of the cattle throughout the winter months. The arable rotation generally comprises, winter wheat and spring barley, with a number of break crops adopted into the rotation, as seen fit, and as part of the farms increasing environmental efforts.

The farm demonstrates its commitment to farming in an environmentally aware manner in a number of ways. This includes the Sustainable Farming Incentive agreement in place; an environmental scheme that comprises options focussed on maintaining and improving soil health, water quality and supporting wildlife. Collaboration with our local Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer, to seek advice and support to improve the farm infrastructure to help us achieve best sustainable farming practices; plus, our Farm Assured (Red Tractor) status ensures we continue to perform and produce in line with the industry set, certified standards, that also encompass environmental requirements.

The Holding has always operated as a dairy farm, at peak, milking 150 cows. However, the decision has been made to reduce the herd size, down to a micro dairy. This decision has been driven by a number of factors, but the opportunity along with the support of the Rural England Prosperity Fund, that the vending machine and milk station will offer, allowing milk to be sold directly to the public, will allow the farm to add value to their product, and in turn ensure the business can continue to support the family, without the need for such a high stocking density. This will offer a plethora of benefits, a few of which include enabling engagement between producer and consumer, which in turn facilitates education and an increased connection within the local community. It also provides a platform for the local community to source a fresh, healthy, ethically produced local product. Through reducing stock numbers, it will allow the grazing rotation to be adapted, towards a more regenerative, extensive, approach, which in turn will have further environmental benefits, to include improving the diversity of grassland swards and reducing environmental pressures.

In terms of full-time employment, for day-to-day purposes, Matthew and Alistair Blanch are both full time employees, and manage the Holding; while additional ad-hoc labour and contractors are utilised at peak times of the year.

The main Holding at St Andrews Farm has a range of agricultural buildings, plus the farmhouse. All the farm buildings are all fully used for agricultural purposes, to house livestock, for milking, and to store grain, straw and machinery. Furthermore, their layout also makes them unsuitable. The building complex is relatively compact, meaning that the mixed use of public access and farm activities would cause a conflict in use. This has determined the location proposed within this application.

4. The Application

4.1 General

The clad container will be situated to the east of the Holding, close to the farm entrance. The container will measure 6.096m x 2.62m, with a total area of 15.97m², and 2.59m in height. There will be an additional open sided, undercover, 'porch type' area, with a width of 1.50m to the front of the container, to provide customers with shelter as they access the container, and to also provide a space to add a ramp, if necessary, to ensure optimum accessibility. Consideration has been made towards opening times, and it has been decided that opening hours will be restricted to minimise any potential disturbance. It has been a conscious decision that the facility will not be open 24 hours, and opening hours will continue to be closely monitored as part of the ongoing management of the venture. This will be controlled by gated access.

4.2 Design and Location

4.2.1 Location

Selection of the proposed location has been considered thoroughly. The container will be sited where it adjoins the existing concrete panel wall, on the outer edge of the existing farmyard. This location is well shielded from the tree line and bank that borders the boundary of the Holding. This location will satisfy two purposes:

- 1) It will minimise any visual impact from neighbouring properties.
- 2) It will help create a natural separation, between the farm activities and area where the public park up, while still being on farm, which helps strengthen the 'farm to fork' link.

The location is close to the farm entrance. This has been a conscious decision, to limit on farm traffic movements and to provide the most

accessible location. It will mean that no customers will need to drive, or walk, through the farmyard, and the container will also be immediately visible, as customers enter the Holding.

The decision to integrate the container within the curtilage of the farmyard has been intentional. This will mean that there will be no agricultural land lost, as a result, and that the area is already hardstand and concrete, minimising the impact of the proposal. From an environmental standpoint, this will cause no habitat loss or soil damage. While on an operational level, this location will be best suited, causing minimum impact to the day-to-day farm unit.

4.2.2 Design

The plans accompanying this report provide the detail of design and layout, to include dimensions of the proposed container. Three sides of the container will be fully enclosed, while the front of the container will be open fronted, ensuring, during opening hours, the milk station and vending machine are accessible to all. There will be a roller shutter door on the front that can be locked, ensuring the container can be closed up and secured at night. The external elevations will be clad, ensuring the container remains in keeping with the existing agricultural buildings.

There will be a concrete area in front of the container that will be reserved for customers to park. This area will be enclosed either end, to ensure there is a physical barrier between the parking area, and both the road and the rest of the farm.

Careful consideration has been given to the design and location of the container, to ensure that, visually, it integrates in with the location and layout of the existing buildings; while equally factoring in the mixed use of farm activities and the public, and ensuring there is suitable separation to help best manage this.

4.3 Access and Vehicle Movements

The proposed location of the container will be accessed off the existing farm entrance, off Stane Street. The access is already used for vehicle access and farm traffic. It is considered this will be adequate and no additional access will be necessary.

Due to the nature of the vending machine, there are no specific peak times of day, meaning traffic movements should be spread across the day. Naturally,

there will be an overall increase in traffic movements, but only car movements; movements generated by farm machinery will remain the same.

4.4 Landscaping

The location selected is within the curtilage of the farmyard and on the periphery of the existing farm building complex. This will ensure the container is easily accessible for the public, while creating enough distance between the public and the main farming activities.

Furthermore, the container will be shielded from the highway and neighbouring properties. There is a tree line and bank, behind where the container will be sited, and it is proposed that a hedgerow will also be planted along the bank, to aid year-round screening.

The northern, western and southern elevations are all facing the farm itself. Cumulatively, it is therefore considered any potential visual impact will be negligible.

4.5 Conclusion

Careful consideration has been given to this application. The design and location have been selected, to ensure the container has minimum visual impact, offers maximum accessibility to the public, while not conflicting with farm activities. The container and siting of the milk station and vending machine will entail significant investment, but with the current, and ongoing uncertainty across the agricultural industry, this is deemed essential, in order to secure and safeguard the future of the farm business.

Approval of the container will enable the family farm to add value to their product, through diversification. The milk station and vending machine will help the business generate an income stream that connects directly with the public, which in turn will provide the community with a local, sustainably sourced product. Approval of this application will also support the downsizing of the herd, which will allow the business to continue efforts towards farming in a more environmentally conscious manner. With the support and approval of the Rural England Prosperity Fund already in place, this is a business venture that the family is ready to embrace and is willing to work with Horsham District Council in order to ensure the project is a success. We would be pleased to discuss this application in greater detail.

Dated ...02-12-2025.....

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MA & PJ Blanch', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

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APPENDIX I
Photographs

St Andrews Farm, St Andrews Hill, Billingshurst, West Sussex RH14 9JS

Appendix I

Photo Schedule



First calves of Autumn 2025



First calves of Autumn 2025



Dairy cows out in the field for summer grazing



Dairy cows out in the field for summer grazing



Heifers grazing pasture that is part of the SFI scheme the farm is entered into, showing species variety and mixed sward length



Arable field showing overwinter bird feed mix, providing feed and shelter for wildlife

	
Proposed project site area	Area showing the project location and proposed collection area