Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority Item 6

Planning Committee

19 May 2026

Planning Application reference: C/33/184R

Full planning permission for installation of geotextile slurry storage bag at Town Head Farm, Highcroft, Grassington, Skipton, BD23 5BL

Purpose of the report

1. To provide further advice to Members on the validity and soundness of the reasons given for determining the above application in accordance with section 10 (b)(3) and (d)(ii) of the Planning Good Practice Guide.

Background

2. The Planning Good Practice Guide guidance applies to all Members when they are involved in the planning process. The aim of the guidance is to provide practical advice to Members when dealing with planning matters to ensure high standards of decision-making and reduce the risk of possible challenge.

3. The guidance includes the following procedure in cases where the Committee is minded to make a decision contrary to officer recommendation:

   "b) Where a recorded vote shows an intention to determine an application contrary to policy or/and advice, the matter will stand deferred until the next meeting of the Committee unless there are no substantial doubts about the validity or soundness of the reasons (such to be advised by the Head of Development Management).

   d) Where an application has been deferred under para b) above:

   ii. the officers will provide further advice to the Committee as to whether it is possible to strengthen the validity and soundness of the reasons put forward, and setting out appropriate conditions/planning obligations if the proposed decision was to approve the application."

4. At the meeting held on the 14 April 2026 Members were minded to approve the application contrary to Officer recommendation. A copy of the report from that meeting is **attached** for information.

5 . The reasons given by Members for that decision were:

- The environmental benefits of a secure slurry store
- The proposal would support the viability of the enterprise which had a benefit to the local economy
- Issues of food security

Analysis of reasons

6. The law (Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004) requires that decisions are taken in accordance with the adopted Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The Good Practice Guide includes the following:

> "Officers will advise in their report which of the arguments put forward by an applicant, objector or supporter are considered capable of constituting material considerations. Often arguments of a personal kind relating to the circumstances of the applicant are put forward to support an application. Whilst these can be moving and persuasive, personal circumstances cannot outweigh other planning considerations except in the most exceptional circumstances.
>
> Nonetheless, there will be occasions where you may be minded to vote to approve an application contrary to your policies. In this case you must identify clear and substantiated reasons that are capable of constituting material planning considerations.
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> The decision is ultimately the Committee's. However, it is imperative that the decision that is made identifies relevant planning considerations, and with detailed reasons set out to explain what might otherwise appear to the public to be inconsistency."

Reason 1: Environmental benefits of a secure slurry store

7. Within the supporting Planning Statement, the applicant advised that the application was submitted as a result of the introduction of The Reduction and Prevention of Agricultural Diffuse Pollution (England) Regulations 2018 and that the farm needs to provide both covered and additional slurry storage.

8. The Applicant advised that they require the slurry bag to comply with recent Environment Agency regulations requiring slurry storage systems to have a 6-month spare capacity for storage. This has been confirmed by the Environment Agency within correspondence which states that the existing slurry storage facilities at Town Head Farm have been found to be significantly undersized, providing only a matter of

weeks storage capacity. Inadequate storage capacity forces farmers to spread slurry during inappropriate conditions which greatly increases pollution risks and minimises any benefits to the receiving land. Conversely, additional capacity allows slurry to be safely stored until the nutrients it contains can be used on growing crops whilst significantly reducing pollution risks.

9. The correspondence from the Environment Agency in support of the proposed slurry bag goes on to state that covered slurry stores are particularly desirable as the exclusion of rainfall maximises available capacity whilst the presence of a cover minimises atmospheric losses of both ammonia and odour.

10. In this case, it is accepted that a new slurry storage solution is necessary to meet the needs of the farming element of the business based at Town Head Farm as the existing slurry storage is not adequate to meet the necessary regulations. The environmental benefits of covered storage (not just slurry bags but all forms of covered storage) are also acknowledged.

11. Attempts have been made to engage with the applicant's agent throughout the course of the application to discuss the potential of more appropriate sites. It is acknowledged that the applicant did submit their sequential test which discounted a number of sites around the application site. However, this sequential test was limited, and ruled out all tenanted land, although it is not clear why this land was discounted and the potential to use this land was not investigated further. However, it is understood to be common practice, where a farm enterprise is made up of a large proportion of tenanted land, to provide some of the farm infrastructure on that land. This sequential test also did not include any land immediately in or around the existing farmyard which hosts both the farm operation and the dairy business.

12. During the previous meeting, Members queried why the planning officer had not suggested other potentially appropriate sites. The onus is on the applicant to suggest and investigate appropriate sites rather than locations being recommended by planning officers. However, the planning officer has identified parcels of land to the east and north of the farmyard which could potentially accommodate some or all of the necessary infrastructure in landscape terms and have queried why other land, including tenanted land and land near to the farm group cannot be considered.

13. The redevelopment of the existing slurry tank site for a larger unit or the use of another site within the farmyard has also not been discussed or discounted. The applicant has provided additional information in relation to this following the previous Committee meeting, simply stating that "there is not sufficient room in the yard to allow us to operate our farming operation at all, we would literally be left with no room to operate at all." In effect the farmyard site is not large enough to accommodate both the dairy business and the farm operation such that the farm cannot satisfy its legal obligations to prevent pollution without expanding further into the surrounding fields. If a business, or indeed any other use, needs to expand beyond the physical capacity of the site such that the expansion has harmful environmental consequences generally means that the use has outgrown the site. The farmyard has also accommodated the expansion of the separate dairy business.

14. Officers have also questioned the need for a significantly larger storage capacity than the slurry storage proposed within a previously refused application ref: C/33/184P. This

refused application proposed a capacity of 1.4 million gallons, whereas the current application proposes a capacity of 1.85 million gallons. The applicant stated within his letter to Members ahead of the previous Planning Committee meeting that the need for the slurry bag was not due to any changes in the business or intensification of the farming. Therefore, it is not clear why additional capacity is needed over and above that required in 2022 when the previous application was submitted. However, the applicant has subsequently provided clarification on this matter and stated that since the submission of the previous application in 2022, the Environment Agency has become heavily involved in the operations at the site, and have advised them that additional areas of 'dirty water' from the yard need to be collected, which results in the increased storage requirements. The applicant has confirmed that the store is for slurry and dirty water from the farming operations at Town Head Farm only.

15. Following the previous Committee meeting, a revised landscaping scheme has been requested. Whilst a landscaping plan has since been submitted, Officers are seeking changes to it, to ensure it respects the character of the landscape, where trees are largely limited to the field edges. The applicant has confirmed they are happy to amend the landscaping further and therefore Members will be updated on this matter at or before the Committee meeting.

16. Information relating to odour management has also been requested, however the applicant advised that they have not had time to prepare this information. This information could however be secured by a suitably worded planning condition.

17. In respect of the existing slurry store, clarification has been sought in respect of the de-commissioning of this site to improve its appearance as it is a prominent feature next to a well used public footpath on the edge of Grassington. The applicant has stated that once the slurry bag is installed, the existing store will not be used for storage of slurry, but may be used for 'integration between existing pipe network and the new store'. Therefore, they have not provided any proposals for the removal of the existing slurry store or remediation of the site, but have advised that they would be prepared to relandscape the area around the existing store. Whilst this could help to improve the current appearance of the site it seems to amount to little more than planting around derelict concrete and metal structures rather than their removal. Officers consider that further works should be required to improve the appearance of the site once the existing slurry store has become redundant rather than the site be left in its current state.

18. As set out above, it is acknowledged that the proposed slurry bag would result in environmental benefits, and this is a material consideration. However, it is considered that moderate weight can be given to reason 1 as the proposals would also lead to environmental harm. Whilst improvements have been made to the scheme in respect of revisions to the access track to propose twin wheeling, which will help reduce its visual impact, and the applicant is willing to improve the proposed landscaping scheme, the development would still cause significant harm to the characteristic landscape within which the site is located, and it is considered that this would outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

Reason 2: The proposal would support the viability of the enterprise which had a benefit to the local economy

19. It is considered that the refusal of the proposals for the slurry bag in its current location would not directly impact upon the viability of the farm enterprise, although it is assumed that there would be sanctions if the regulations for an increase in slurry storage were not adhered to.

20. During the previous Committee meeting, Members made reference to the fact that a number of people are employed at Town Head Farm. However, much of the employment at Town Head Farm relates to the dairy processing enterprise which is a separate business rather those working at the site being employed by the farming enterprise. As the proposed slurry storage would serve only the farming processes at the site, the employment directly linked to the proposals would be limited.

21. As set out above, there is an acceptance of the need for a larger and improved slurry storage than that which exists. Officers have always been committed to find a better solution in terms of location for the slurry storage which would have a lesser impact upon the landscape and amenity of the surrounding residents.

22. In this instance, it is not considered that the proposal to increase the slurry storage capacity at Town Head Farm would directly support the viability of the farming enterprise or support employment at the site, and as such this reason to approve the application is non-specific to the application proposals under consideration. Therefore, Officers are of the opinion that minor weight could be given to this reason.

Reason 3: Issues of food security

23. It is unclear what was meant by Members in stating the proposed slurry bag would support food security. However, it is acknowledged that there is a need to protect and support farming within the National Park, which the policies contained within both the adopted and draft Yorkshire Dales Local Plan seek to do.

24. As addressed within the assessment of Reason 1 above, Officers are supportive of the applicant's need for appropriate slurry storage, however this should be in an appropriate location. Furthermore, it is considered that the proposal for additional slurry storage at Town Head Farm would not be directly linked to food security, and therefore this is not considered to form a material consideration and very limited weight could be given to this reason

Conclusion

25. It is acknowledged that there is a need for the farm enterprise to increase its capacity for slurry storage to meet the needs of the existing operations at Town Head Farm. The slurry bag would therefore result in environmental benefits, and this is a material consideration. However, in Officer's opinion moderate weight should be given to reason 1 as the proposals would also lead to environmental harm in that the development would cause significant harm to the characteristic landscape within which the site is located, and this would outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

26. In respect of reason 2, the reason is considered to be non-specific to this application as it is not considered that the proposal to increase the slurry storage capacity at Town Head Farm would directly support the viability of the farming enterprise or support employment at the site. Therefore, Officers are of the opinion that minor weight could be given to this reason.

27. In respect of reason 3, it is considered that this does not directly relate to the application proposals, and therefore very limited, if any, weight could be given to this reason.

28. Overall therefore, whilst the need for the development is understood, it is not considered that this need outweighs the clear environmental harms identified above. Therefore, the recommendation to refuse the application remains.

Recommendation

29. The recommendation to refuse planning permission remains as set out in the report to the April Planning Committee.

30. However, if Members are minded to approve planning permission, it is recommended that the following conditions should be imposed to enable Officers to achieve the mitigation needed to reduce landscape, biodiversity and residential amenity impacts:

- Standard time limits for submission of reserved matters
- Accordance with approved plans
- Submission of odour management plan
- Provision of biodiversity enhancement
- Implementation of landscaping scheme
- Use of existing slurry store to cease once slurry bag is brought into use
- Submission, approval and completion of decommissioning, landscaping and restoration scheme for existing slurry store site
- Archaeological monitoring and recording
- No lighting
- Access track to have twin wheelings
- Submission of details/plans of pump house building

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Background documents
Planning application file reference C/33/184R