

## **PLANNING STATEMENT**

### **Retention of agricultural access, associated agricultural track and extension to agricultural building for livestock housing, fodder storage and agricultural operations**

#### **1. Introduction**

This Planning Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application for the retention of an agricultural access, associated track and extension to an agricultural building at land east of Leek Road, Wetley Rocks.

The development follows the start of the implementation of a prior approval scheme under Schedule 2, Part 6 of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) Order 2015 (as amended), under application reference DET/2025/0011, where prior approval was not required for the erection of an agricultural building.

The development as constructed represents a proportionate and logical evolution of that fallback position, responding to the operational requirements of an active and expanding agricultural enterprise. This application seeks to regularise the development and demonstrate that it is appropriate, justified and compliant with national and local planning policy.

#### **2. Site and Surroundings**

The application site comprises approximately 6 hectares of agricultural grassland located to the east of Leek Road (A522). The land is enclosed by established hedgerows, supplemented by mature trees and an internal hedgerow set away from the highway boundary.

The site falls gently away from the road, with the building positioned beyond the inner hedgerow at a lower level. This relationship provides natural containment and limits visibility from the public highway.

The surrounding area is characterised by open countryside and agricultural land, with sporadic development typical of rural Staffordshire Moorlands. A non-designated heritage asset, the historic Consall Plateway, lies in proximity but is not directly affected by the development.

### **3. Planning History and Fallback Position**

The site has been subject to previous applications in 2019 and 2022, which were refused primarily on the basis of landscape concerns relating to access and track arrangements, rather than any objection to the principle of agricultural development.

Under application reference DET/2025/0011, the Local Planning Authority confirmed that prior approval was not required for the erection of an agricultural building. In doing so, the Authority accepted the siting, scale, design and external appearance of an agricultural building on this site.

This establishes a clear and robust fallback position, whereby a building of comparable scale and appearance could be lawfully implemented and used for agricultural purposes.

The current proposal does not depart from that accepted position but instead represents a proportionate evolution of it, maintaining the same siting, design approach and agricultural function.

### **4. The Development**

This application seeks retrospective planning permission for:

- the retention of an agricultural access
- the retention of an associated track
- the retention of an extension to the approved agricultural building

The building will be constructed using box profile steel sheeting in a Juniper Green finish, consistent with the previously approved structure, and the extension will read as a continuation of a single cohesive agricultural building.

Internally, the building provides flexible open-plan space for fodder storage, machinery storage and livestock accommodation, including lambing and shelter during periods of inclement weather.

The access incorporates recessed gates set back from the highway, allowing vehicles to enter and exit safely without obstructing the carriageway, with the track providing a defined and practical route into the site.

## **5. Agricultural Need and Functional Justification**

The holding is evolving from a low-intensity grazing parcel into an active and growing agricultural enterprise.

The applicant currently maintains approximately 20 breeding ewes plus followers and is in the process of expanding the enterprise to approximately 100–150 ewes plus followers. This growth is directly dependent on the availability of appropriate infrastructure, including livestock housing for lambing and shelter during adverse weather conditions.

The holding operates in conjunction with additional rented land extending to approximately 35–40 acres, currently used for silage production. This land typically produces between 6–8 large bales per acre per cut, with up to two cuts annually, forming a substantial fodder resource requiring appropriate storage.

The application site functions as the operational hub of the enterprise, accommodating fodder, livestock and machinery. The applicant utilises machinery including tractors, a baler, harrows, roller and hedge cutting equipment, which is currently stored off-site due to a lack of suitable facilities at the holding. This arrangement is inefficient and results in unnecessary vehicle movements.

The development enables the proper and efficient functioning of the holding by providing integrated on-site storage and livestock accommodation, consistent with modern agricultural practice.

The provision of covered livestock accommodation aligns with established good practice and recognised welfare standards, including DEFRA guidance, particularly in relation to lambing and protection during periods of adverse weather. The scale of the building, including the extension, is proportionate to these operational and welfare requirements.

Further detail is provided within Appendix A: Agricultural Land Management and Operational Justification Note

## **6. Access and Highway Safety**

The access arrangements have been informed by a detailed transport assessment prepared by a specialist consultancy.

The submitted Transport Technical Note includes swept path analysis, visibility splays and justification for the positioning of the southern access, demonstrating that the access can operate safely and effectively.

The access incorporates recessed gates and improved visibility, with vegetation management undertaken to optimise sightlines. The track provides a defined route for vehicles, ensuring that movements are controlled and predictable.

Traffic associated with the site is low in volume and typical of an agricultural holding, comprising primarily pickup vehicle movements, occasional livestock transport and seasonal machinery use. The development does not give rise to any material intensification that would adversely affect highway safety.

Importantly, the provision of a formalised access and track represents a significant betterment over previous informal access arrangements, improving safety for both site users and the wider highway network.

## **7. Landscape and Visual Impact**

The development is well contained within the landscape and benefits from a combination of landform and established vegetation.

The building is positioned behind an existing hedgerow and at a lower level relative to the highway, substantially reducing its visibility. The extension does not alter this relationship and reads as part of a single agricultural structure.

The track follows the field boundary and is agricultural in character. Its construction using crushed concrete and planings results in a subdued appearance appropriate to its function, avoiding any urbanising effect.

A proportionate landscaping scheme is proposed, including native hedgerow infill and additional planting of Alder, Silver Birch and Oak, reinforcing existing landscape features and providing further integration over time.

The development, as implemented, demonstrates that its visual impact is limited and materially less harmful than previously anticipated in earlier proposals.

## **8. Response to Previous Refusal Reasons**

The concerns raised in previous refusals have been comprehensively addressed.

Earlier decisions focused on the perceived landscape impact of the proposed track and access, together with uncertainty regarding their construction and visual effect. Those concerns are no longer applicable, as the development has been implemented and its actual impact can be clearly assessed.

The track is now an established feature, aligned with the field boundary and appropriate in its construction and appearance. It does not appear intrusive or urbanising and reduces the need for vehicle movements across open grassland.

The agricultural use of the site has also evolved significantly, with clear evidence of an active and growing enterprise requiring the infrastructure now in place.

Highway concerns have been addressed through detailed technical assessment, demonstrating that the access is safe and appropriate.

The basis upon which earlier refusals were made has therefore been fundamentally overcome.

## **9. Betterment and Sustainability**

The development represents a clear betterment over the previous situation.

It provides a safe and defined access in place of informal arrangements, reduces the need for vehicle movements across the field, consolidates agricultural operations into a single location and removes reliance on off-site storage.

This results in more efficient farm management, reduced vehicle mileage and improved environmental outcomes.

## **10. Planning Policy**

The proposal accords with the National Planning Policy Framework, which supports the sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses and requires that planning decisions recognise the operational needs of agriculture.

At a local level, the proposal aligns with policies supporting rural enterprise, appropriate development in the countryside and the protection of landscape character, where development is well-related, proportionate and appropriately mitigated.

The development satisfies these requirements, representing an appropriate form of agricultural development with limited and acceptable impacts.

## **11. Planning Balance and Conclusion**

The Local Planning Authority has already accepted, through the prior approval process, the principle, siting and design of an agricultural building on this site. That fallback position remains capable of implementation and carries substantial weight.

The current proposal represents a proportionate and logical evolution of that fallback, driven by the operational needs of an established and expanding agricultural enterprise.

The development delivers clear benefits, including improved highway safety, efficient farm operation, enhanced animal welfare and reduced environmental impact through the consolidation of activities.

Any limited visual impact is appropriately mitigated through siting, landform and landscaping and does not give rise to unacceptable harm.

In the context of the fallback position and the clear functional need, there are no adverse impacts that would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the development.

Accordingly, planning permission should be granted.

## **Appendix A**

# **AGRICULTURAL LAND MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONAL JUSTIFICATION NOTE**

**Land East of Leek Road, Wetley Rocks (ST9 0AX)**

## **1. Overview of the Holding**

The application site forms the core of a developing agricultural enterprise operated by the applicant. The holding currently comprises approximately 6 hectares of owned land, supplemented by additional rented land extending to approximately 35–40 acres.

The enterprise is centred on sheep farming, with a current flock of approximately 20 breeding ewes plus followers. The applicant is in the process of expanding the enterprise to approximately 100–150 ewes plus followers, with lambing undertaken during the spring period.

The holding is transitioning from a low-intensity grazing parcel into an active and productive agricultural unit, requiring appropriate infrastructure to support its continued growth.

## **2. Land Management Strategy**

The applicant is actively undertaking a programme of land management to improve the quality and productivity of the grassland within the ownership.

The land has historically been underutilised and is currently in need of improvement to restore its condition to a level suitable for reliable fodder production. This includes measures such as reseeding, rolling, harrowing and general pasture management.

The intention is for the application site to function as the principal fodder-producing area of the holding. Once established, the land will be capable of producing silage to support the livestock enterprise, with typical yields anticipated at approximately 6–8 large bales per acre per cut, with up to two cuts annually subject to weather conditions.

Following harvesting, the land will also be used for winter grazing, ensuring efficient use of the holding throughout the agricultural cycle.

The rented land will support the enterprise through grazing, particularly where ground conditions and grass quality are sufficient to provide appropriate nutritional value for livestock.

## **3. Functional Role of the Application Site**

The application site is intended to operate as the primary operational hub of the agricultural enterprise.

This includes:

- fodder production and storage
- livestock management, including lambing and shelter during inclement weather
- storage and use of agricultural machinery and implements

The consolidation of these functions within a single site reflects standard agricultural practice and ensures efficient and sustainable farm management.

The location of machinery and implements at the application site is essential to facilitate the ongoing improvement and maintenance of the land. Equipment including tractors, harrows, rollers, baling equipment and hedge cutting machinery are required to undertake the necessary agricultural operations associated with fodder production and land management.

At present, the absence of appropriate on-site facilities has resulted in machinery being stored off-site, creating inefficiencies and unnecessary travel. The development allows these operations to be based where they are required, reducing vehicle movements and improving operational efficiency.

#### **4. Livestock Welfare and Infrastructure Requirements**

The expansion of the flock necessitates the provision of appropriate infrastructure to ensure the welfare of the animals and the effective management of the enterprise.

The proposed building, including the extension, provides accommodation for livestock during lambing and periods of adverse weather. This aligns with recognised good agricultural practice and animal welfare guidance, including that published by DEFRA, which emphasises the importance of providing shelter and appropriate conditions for livestock.

The scale of the building is proportionate to the intended flock size and reflects the functional requirements of modern sheep farming.

#### **5. Summary**

The development at the application site is directly linked to the active management and improvement of the holding and the planned expansion of the agricultural enterprise.

The site is not a passive storage location but a functioning and evolving agricultural unit, with a clear role in fodder production, livestock management and land stewardship.

The provision of appropriate infrastructure, including the building, access and track, is essential to support this activity and represents a logical and necessary component of the agricultural use of the land.