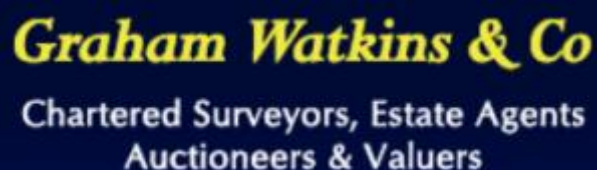


**Agricultural Justification for a Rural Workers dwelling at
Lower Haddon Farm
Gun Hill Road
Meerbrook, Leek
Staffordshire
ST13 8SL**

On behalf of
A W Wilshaw
**Lower Haddon Farm
Gun Hill Road
Meerbrook, Leek
ST13 8SL**

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INTRODUCTION

Mr Alan Wilshaw has requested a farm business appraisal to support an application for a rural worker dwelling at the heart of his farming operation at Lower Haddon Farm, Gun Hill Road, Meerbrook, Leek, ST13 8SL. Mr Wilshaw has a wealth of farming experience, having farmed at Meerbrook for over 50 years. Mr Wilshaw's current farm business comprises of a sheep enterprise, consisting of 650 ewes, together with followers, with all lambs being finished on the farm.

The need for the dwelling on site is a result of a number of factors but principally the fact that Mr Alan Wilshaw is now 76 years old and is unable to continue to do the same amount of farm work unaided and therefore, his grandson Ryan, who is 21 years old is now looking to join the business and work fulltime as part of the farming business, and ensure its future success. Over the coming months and years, Ryan will become the key farm worker, responsible for livestock health and welfare, and the running of the farm business.

To improve the farm business' financial viability and sustainability Mr Wilshaw is within the process of introducing cattle, through rearing calves. The introduction of cattle to the business will improve the fertility of the land in a sustainable and carbon neutral way. It is noted that cattle, and the manure they produce gives the land more nitrogen 'power' to grow a better crop of grass with a higher protein content. This would otherwise only be achieved by artificial fertilisers, which is a significant financial expense, together with an environmental cost.

The reared calves will also give a more reliable cash flow for the business throughout the year, opposed to the past heavy reliance upon selling lambs which are only seasonal. The calves are bucket fed milk to 10-12 weeks of age and then put on a 'rearing ration' until 6 months of age.

INCREASE IN STOCK NUMBERS

The proposed increase in stock numbers is to ensure the farm business is financially viable and sustainable for the future. Operating a mixed livestock enterprise provides a healthy cash flow, the calves and store cattle provide a year-round income, and the lambs command a strong seasonal income.

FARMING ENTERPRISE

Buildings

Mr Wilshaw has a set of buildings at Lower Haddon Farm, Meerbrook. The buildings are all utilised for storing fodder, machinery and as lambing pens during the lambing period, and for indoor finishing of prime lambs during the winter months. The buildings briefly comprise:

- 2x Lambing sheds also used for fattening lambs indoors
- Hay Shed
- Machinery Shed
- Workshop

Equipment

Mr Wilshaw's farming machinery and equipment is briefly outlined below:

Sheep Turnover Crate

Sheep Handling System & Hurdles

Post Knocker and associated fencing equipment

14ft Ifor Williams flatbed trailer

12ft Ifor Williams livestock trailer

Isuzu Rodeo Pickup – 2004 year 192,000 miles 4WD

Ford 6410 Tractor together with:

- Mower
- Tedder
- Chain Harrows
- Conventional Baler
- Pasture Topper
- 10ft Roller

LAND

The land is primarily based around the Meerbrook area. All land is down to grassland.

Schedule of Land:

Land at Lower Haddon Farm	49.74 acres	20.12 hectares
Land at Rudyard	79.71 acres	32.25 hectares
Land at Swythamley	<u>16.00 acres</u>	6.47 <u>hectares</u>
	145.45 acres	58.84 hectares

CURRENT LIVESTOCK NUMBERS

Sheep

Ewes - 650

Mr Wilshaw currently farms 650 ewes; these ewes are outdoor lambing and aim to lamb at 190%. The lambs produced from the ewes are sold as when ready as fat lambs.

Followers - 100

The breeding followers are attributed from the previous year's ewe lambs; Mr Wilshaw aims to have 100 breeding followers to introduce to his breeding flock each year to account for losses and culls.

FUTURE FARMING LIVESTOCK NUMBERS

The proposed farming system seeks to add calf rearing and the keeping of young store cattle to the current system.

Cattle

Calves – 50 per year

50 calves per year intend to be purchased across four batches. Calves will be weaned after approximately 12 weeks and then be retained as young store cattle, as outlined below.

Store Cattle – 50 per year

The calves reared will be kept for a further 12 months following weaning, being sold as store cattle at approximately 15 months of age for further growing/finishing.

STANDARD MAN DAYS

The Standard Man days calculation is performed using the data from the 52nd edition John Nix Farm Business Pocket Handbook 2022.

Current Enterprise

Enterprise – Current	Livestock Numbers/Hectares	Standard Man Days per head of stock (or per ha)	SMD
Sheep	650	0.5	325
Followers	100	0.4	40
Finishing Lambs/Hoggetts	1200	0.25	300
Land – Grazing	38.84	0.4	15.54
Land – Mowing and Grazing	20	1.4	28
Addition of general farm maintenance ¹	15%		100.28
TOTAL Standard Man Days		768.82	

¹ An additional 15% is added on the basis of completing general farm maintenance.

It is usual for a farm worker to work around 275, eight-hour days per year (after allowing for overtime). This assumes a 5-day working week along with 3 weeks holiday per year and public holidays off work as well.

Based on this, the farm has an established labour demand equivalent to **2.79 workers at this current time.**

Future Enterprise

Enterprise – future	Livestock Numbers/Hectares	Standard Man Days per head of stock	SMD
Sheep	650	0.5	325
Followers	100	0.4	40
Finishing Lambs/Hoggetts	1200	0.25	300
Increase Mowing and Grazing to	32.25	0.4	12.9
Decrease Grazing Land to	26.59	0.4	10.64
Calves	50	1.2	60
Store Cattle	50	1.9	95
			843.54
Addition of general farm maintenance ¹	15%		126.53
TOTAL Standard Man Days		970.07	

¹ An additional 15% is added on the basis of completing general farm maintenance.

It is usual for a farm worker to work around 275, eight-hour days per year (after allowing for overtime). This assumes a 5-day working week along with 3 weeks holiday per year and public holidays off work as well.

Based on this, the farm will have an established labour demand equivalent to **3.52 workers.**

FARMING ENTERPRISE LABOUR DEMAND

The current labour demand is 2.79 full time staff. Mr Wilshaw works full time in the farming enterprise, undertaking livestock duties and tends to the land himself. As demonstrated by the numbers he is working beyond full time, with some help from family. The proposed increased stocking numbers of bucket calves and store cattle established a new required labour demand of 3.52 full time workers. This increase in stock aims to provide a more regular cashflow for the farm business, promoting a financially viable and sustainable future for the farm business.

The labour demand figures are not an accurate representation of the required work. Farming is a time-consuming livelihood which operates 365 days per year, 24 hours per day, 7 days per week. It is not a business which you can 'lock the door on' at the end of a working day. Even when not actively working, it is important to be on-call and on site to deal with any issues which may arise.

DEFRA WELFARE REGULATIONS AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Under the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 Schedule 1 Paragraph 2, animals kept in husbandry systems, should be checked regularly to ensure that optimal animal health and welfare standards are achieved. Mr Wilshaw has 1000+ head of stock in his care each year (including lambs), which all require the highest degree of care and stockman-ship in order to ensure the best possible health and welfare of the livestock is maintained.

Sheep

At all times of the year, it is essential for the ewes to be checked at least twice daily. The health and welfare necessities for each period of lambing are summarised below;

Pre-lambing Period (February – April) - Prior to the lambing period (between 6-10 weeks prior), the in-lamb ewes require daily health checks. In particular those with twins and triplets require strict and stringent health checks to help ensure the ewe is in peak physical health prior to lambing.

It can be necessary to give supplementary feed during this time, however this needs to be monitored carefully, as too much feed can lead to difficult lambing, and too little can mean the lambs are not well enough grown and developed and the ewe is not able to mother them after birth. Managing this period is only possible with close monitoring and regular checks.

Lambing Period (April) - Mr Wilshaw's has a predominantly indoor lambing system and the ewes lamb throughout the day and night during the lambing period.

As illustrated by DEFRA's publication into sheep welfare, it is essential for young lambs to receive colostrum milk. If the ewe rejects the lambs or the ewe dies or is unwell, then the lamb is at risk of receiving no colostrum which means the death of the lamb is ultimately inevitable. Therefore, Mr Wilshaw's routine checks of his flock allows him to assess the health and welfare of the ewes and lambs, ensuring casualty, lame or ill sheep can be dealt with immediately, promoting the best possible health and welfare of his sheep, along with financial viability of the business.

Summer Period (May-September) – During this period the ewes are suckling their lambs, and it is essential they are carefully monitored. A ewe can sometimes turn on her lambs and not want to feed or care for them. If this occurs and is not identified the lambs are young and vulnerable and not likely to survive. Regular checks are able to ensure that ewes are being suckled and lambs are full and thriving.

Whilst suckling, ewes are susceptible to mastitis, or ‘bad bags’. If identified early this is treatable with anti-biotics, and the ewe can continue to suckle and rear her lambs. If not caught early (within 24 hours or less), it can result in the ewe being unable to suckle and therefore the lambs are orphaned, and the ewe becomes a cull. In some cases, it can result in the death of the ewe as the infection gets into the blood stream.

Weaning (September – November) – This is a labour-intensive time for the enterprise, as all sheep need to be processed, with lambs taken from their mothers, allowing them to improve prior to tugging. The ewes need to be monitored closely to ensure that they do not get an excess build-up of milk causing mastitis, and lambs also need to be checked regularly to ensure they are having adequate feed intake and continuing to thrive. It is also a time of year where stray stock is more likely and this increases to need for regular checks and monitoring.

Tugging and Winter Months – (November – February) – Prior to tugging (which takes place in November) ewes need to be carefully checked to ensure they are able to breed again and any culls removed from the breeding flock. During the tugging period the stock require regular checks to ensure the Rams are working and if the ewes are coming back into season or ‘holding’.

Cattle

The calf rearing and cattle enterprise will be all year round, but intake of new batches of calves will be managed to coincide with when there is less pressure from the sheep enterprise.

With specific reference to calves, the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 state that, under Schedule 6 paragraph 2 that calves (Calves being animals under 6 months of age) that are housed must be inspected by the owner or another responsible person at least twice a day to ensure their well being. This will require an inspection, ideally at either end of the day thus requiring responsible people to be on the site outside of normal working hours to ensure that the calves will be inspected at appropriate times. Schedule 6 Paragraph 12 states that calves must be fed twice a day and this again proves that workers are required on site outside of normal working hours. For younger calves (under 6 weeks of age) this requirement is greater both for inspections and feeding intervals.

Away from the legal obligations, there is obviously moral obligations to ensure animals are as well cared for as possible which can only be assured where the farmer is on site. From a business point of view the survival of all calves and stock is essential to the viability of the business which can be improved by increased frequency of checks and time on site.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Health and Safety Executive's Agricultural Information Sheet 35 which refers to handling and housing stock. It highlights the need for two workers to be on site when handling stock and it should not be undertaken unless at least two capable people are on site. Unfortunately, the nature of farming does not allow for this to be planned for daytime hours as handling/husbandry requirements are often required at nighttime and weekends as result of emergencies

The health and safety executive website states that Agriculture is the most dangerous industry to work in. In 2021/2022, 25 people were killed whilst farming, which is 21 times higher than the all industries average, and equates to 8.65 fatalities per 100,000 workers. The magnitude of danger involved in agriculture is clearly evident, most commonly through the use of heavy machinery, handling livestock, drowning, falling from heights and many more dangers which are a daily challenge that farmers have to contend with.

Having a dwelling on site reduces the risk somewhat, as Mr Wilshaw's grandson would be easily on hand to assist with any particularly difficult tasks, and furthermore would be closer should any accident on hand and would be identified much quicker.

LACK OF ALTERNATIVE DWELLINGS IN THE AREA

A Rightmove search detailed in Appendix 3 highlights a severe lack of properties for sale in the Meerbrook and surrounding areas which would be suitable and affordable for a farm worker. Notwithstanding this, the farm is away from the village and other nearby towns and villages, and dwelling in those locations would not meet the need to be on site, and would not be suitable in any event. It is essential for the farm worker, to be on site and within sight and sound of the livestock.

FINANCIAL POSITION OF THE BUSINESS

The farm business has been trading for a number of years and has a well-established farm business that has generated profit year on year.

The business is a successful business enterprise and over the last three years has generated a net profit of

£177,277 in 2025

£120,602 in 2024

£141,419 in 2023

£124,882 in 2022

£93,112 in 2021

The business has been increasing profits year on year apart from in 2024 where an investment in a new machine reduced the profit. This clearly demonstrates the financial strength of the farm business.

BUILDING COST

The proposed dwelling is a stone and tile farmhouse style dwelling which is in keeping with buildings locally while still providing a functional dwelling for the applicants to reside in onsite, the cost of the build is set out below.

The proposed dwelling will be approximately 144.80m² internally.

The building will cost in the region of £2750m² to build in total £398,200.

BUILDING FINANCE

It is worth noting that the applicants have private funds available for the new dwelling, however this report demonstrates that even if this is not the case the business can sustain the full finance cost of the build. The calculations are set out below:

Build Cost	£398,200
Finance at 4.5% Over 25 Years (fixed Rate)	£25,349 Per Annum

From this it is clear that the farm business can afford the repayments with the average profit over the last three years £146,432, this would leave a surplus of £121,000 for the applicants to live on and invest into the farm business each year.

HOUSING AVAILABILITY

A basic Rightmove search highlighted the lack of affordable housing within one mile of the applicant's farm. There were two properties highlighted both well out of the applicants' budget and affordability.

From a day to practical view and the health and welfare of the livestock point of view the applicant require to live onsite. This allows the applicant to tend to the livestock especially during the busy lambing periods and twice daily feeding for bucket calves as well as daily stock checks of other livestock.

The screenshot shows the Rightmove website interface. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like 'Buy', 'Rent', 'House Prices', 'Find Agent', 'Commercial', 'Inspire', 'Overseas', and a 'Sign in' button. Below this is a search bar with 'ST13 8SL' entered, and a dropdown menu showing 'Within 1 mile'. To the right of the search bar are filters for 'Min Price', 'Max Price', 'Min Beds', 'Max Beds', 'Property Type', and 'Filters'. Below the search bar, it says 'Properties For Sale in ST13 8SL, within 1 miles' and '2 results'. The results are sorted by 'Lowest Price'. The first result is 'Meerbrook, Leek' for £900,000, described as a four-bedroom property with a swimming pool. The second result is 'South Hillswood, Meerbrook, Leek' for £1,500,000, described as a two-bedroom property. Both results include a 'Contact' button and a 'Save' button. On the right side, there's a map showing the location of the properties. Below the map, there's a button that says 'See properties to rent near ST13 8SL'.

JUSTIFICATION FOR NEED OF DWELLING

As summarised in this report there is an overwhelming need for the key farm worker to reside on site at Lower Haddon Farm. The introduction of the cattle enterprise promotes future financial viability and sustainability of the farm business enterprise but is only feasible with the proposed dwelling. The bucket calves provide a much-needed source of reliable cash flow throughout the year, whereas the farming enterprise has previously relied on a more seasonal cash flow provided by the lambs.

The Rightmove search identified a severe lack of suitable dwellings that are affordable for a farm worker. Notwithstanding the value of these properties, none would provide the required proximity to the holding which is equally essential. The rural workers dwelling removes the financial implications and detrimental environmental impacts of travelling multiple times per day to and from the farm. The practicality of being able to have sight and sound of stock provides benefits which are not available elsewhere. Weather conditions can change very fast in the area, and not being able to make the journey to the farm if living off-site is a realistic prospect which could have consequences for both animal welfare and the financial performance of the business.

The DEFRA welfare regulations clearly demonstrate the requirements and obligations of farmers towards their stock, and this can only realistically be achieved by the key worker living on site.

SUMMARY

There is an overwhelming need for the key farm worker to reside onsite as has been clearly illustrated in this report, the key points are summarised below:

- To provide swift action for animals in distress or suffering with illness which may occur at any time day or night by the nature of farming livestock.
- There is clearly a large labour demand (in excess of the staff levels based on standard working hours) which can be better met if the need for travelling to and from site is negated.
- A dwelling on site will prevent the need for Ryan to commute, meaning a reduction in the carbon footprint of the farm business enterprise, aiming to meet the government's Net Zero by 2050.
- There is no other building onsite suitable for conversion, the site is well located for the land farmed and the buildings utilised, allowing him to be close to the stock within his care.
- The business has a strong financial base, with consistent turnover and profit within the business over the previous years, which makes it sustainable into the future.