

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2026/0265
Valid 01/06/2026

LOWER HADDON FARM
GUN HILL ROAD
MEERBROOK

ERECTION OF SELF-BUILD
AGRICULTURAL WORKERS
DWELLING

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Rural Area
- Are there other considerations and circumstances that outweigh the harms that would result from the development and exceptionally justify the provision of a dwelling in an isolated rural location.

The main issues relate to whether the proposal would comply with the development plan strategy for the provision of housing in the countryside; the impact that it would impose on the character and appearance of the area, with consideration for historic environment; and whether contribution to housing land supply and the applicant's needs, specifically as an agricultural worker, would be outweighed by any harm.

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The application site is located within an 'other rural' area of countryside 3.5km to the north of Leek and 200m to the south of the Peak District National Park.

The site is situated on an agricultural holding, of which 20.12 hectares include and surround Lower Haddon Farm, a small farmstead that is developed around and originates from the 19th century historic farmhouse.

Lower Haddon Farm is at the end of a 350m farm driveway that connects the farm to Gun Hill Road at an access point on higher ground to the north and coincides with public footpath Leekfrith 7 that, with other paths, links the walker from Leek, to the south, and a network of Peak District paths and walks to the north.

From Gun Hill Road, the driveway passes a roadside dwelling (Upper Haddon Farm) before dropping steeply in a southerly direction and turning to the east to follow a tree lined ravine to Lower Haddon.

The application site is to the edge of the driveway, on higher sloping ground, above and some 90m from the Lower Haddon farmstead. The site is to the inside of the driveway's curve on a slim strip of grassland between the edge of the drive to the south and the tree canopy that lines the ravine to the north. The land to the south is open and provides long distance panoramic views across the valley.

200m to the south of Lower Haddon Farmstead, accessed from a fork in the shared farm driveway, lies the dwelling Lockgate. Lockgate is a surviving, stone built, historic farmstead dating from the 19th century.

Gritstone Highland Fringe, landscape type of the highest of sensitivities. Large scale, steeply sloping, smooth rolling upland landscape with plateaus and steep slopes and valleys; Skyline ridges with long distance panoramic views; Large rectangular fields enclosed in the main with gritstone walls, with some hedgerows; Heathland areas encroached by sparse scrubby woodland; Conifer plantations and broadleaf woodland following narrow valleys; and Tittesworth Reservoir.

PROPOSAL

Application for a full planning permission to erect a 'self-build' agricultural worker dwelling.

As a self-build project the application claims exemption from BNG regulations. A proposal to plant hedgerow enclosure is advanced as a means of compensating for loss of improved grassland.

The dwelling is to be located on the north side of the existing access track that serves the farm, on a parcel of modified grassland, some 90 metres to the west of the existing farmhouse and associated farm buildings on the site.

The dwelling will have a gross floor area of 142.5m² and stand to a ridge height of 7.9 metres.

The accommodation of the dwelling will comprise of an open plan kitchen / dining room, living room, utility, shower room, store and hallway at ground floor, with stairs leading up to 3 bedrooms, family bathroom at office at first floor.

The dwelling would be of traditional design and front the driveway – stone built double fronted with chimneys to each gable. The application details coursed natural stone as the external facing material and Staffordshire Blue Tiles.

The dwelling would be provided with two parking spaces to the front of the dwelling. Vehicular access to the site is to be taken off the existing track that serves the farm and which connects with the carriageway of Gunhill to the north / northwest. The site plan shows the proposed provision of 2no. off-street parking spaces to serve the dwellinghouse.

The proposed site plan shows that the dwelling would have an irregularly shaped rear garden with a maximum depth of 10m to the top edge of the steep sided ravine and the canopy of the tree line. The site plan shows that the canopy of the largest tree to the northwest would be 7m from the rear of the dwelling and the largest tree to the northeast has a canopy that would overhang the garden area and come within 3m of the rear elevation.

The site slopes down from west to east across the width of the plot, the proposed site plan details how excavations would be necessary to level the site with an embankment

formed on the western, high side of the plot. The plot would be enclosed with a newly planted traditional hedgerow.

The application is accompanied by an Agricultural Appraisal prepared by Graham Watkins & Co. The appraisal can be summarised in the following manner:

The applicant is the farmer, resident and owner of Lower Haddon Farm. He has farmed at Meerbrook for over 50 years. The current farm business comprises sheep farming with a stock of 650 ewes, with followers and all lambs being finished on the farm. The farmstead provides 2 lambing sheds, a hay shed, a machinery shed, and a workshop. The appraisal details the various equipment that is stored. The holding includes the 20 ha of land at Lower Haddon and a larger area of land, 32 ha, at Rudyard with an additional 6ha at Swythamley. The business is currently said to be profitable, generating substantial net profit annually. To diversify and enhance the viability of the business the applicant intends to add calf rearing to the enterprise. The submitted appraisal calculates that the farm currently has a labour demand of 2.79 workers and that would rise to 3.5 workers with the introduction of cattle rearing. The applicant is now 76 years old and requires the assistance of an additional worker that is resident on the farm. That resident worker would be the applicant's 21-year-old grandson who is looking to join the business and, over time, become the key worker.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Local Plan (adopted 9th September 2020)

SS1 Development Principles
SS2 Settlement Hierarchy
SS10 Other Rural Areas Area Strategy
DC1 Design Considerations
DC3 Landscape and Settlement Setting
H1 New Housing Development
NE1 Biodiversity and Geological Resources
NE2 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
T1 Development and Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

79/06388/OLDDC Extension to form bedroom and kitchen. APPROVED.

83/12396/OLDDC Proposed change of use to compound for storage of agricultural equipment and materials. REFUSED.

05/01389/NOT_AG Agricultural building. APPROVED.

05/00063/FUL Extension to agricultural building. APPROVED.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 6th July 2026

Neighbour consultation period ends: 6th July 2026

Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

None

Town / Parish Comments

No response in consultation period

SMDC Tree Officer

Due to the presence of trees within/adjacent to the site it is necessary for the applicant to provide an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement to support their application.

An Arboricultural Impact Assessment should be submitted to demonstrate how the proposed development will affect existing trees and identify if any tree removal is required to facilitate the development.

For retained trees at the site, an Arboricultural Method Statement should also be provided to detail the measures and working methods required to protect and preserve retained trees on site.

Without these it is not possible to adequately assess the impact of the proposal on existing trees or determine whether appropriate mitigation against the harm of trees on site can be secured. Given the presence of protected trees both on and adjacent to the site, an Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Arboricultural Method Statement in accordance with BS:5837:2012 - trees in relation to design, demolition and construction, should be submitted to support the application.

Staffordshire County Council Highways

Conditional

Access off Gun Hill Road is existing and in current use. There are no proposals to alter the access. Access is surfaced in a bound material. Visibility is reasonable in both directions. Parking spaces are shown on the submitted drawings. It is highly unlikely that vehicles would park on the highway, but parking bays should be provided and retained. It is not a particularly sustainable location but dwelling will be part of an existing agricultural operation and there are other dwellings nearby. Siting of an agricultural workers dwelling on the site may reduce trips of a worker travelling to the site to work.

Current records show that there were no Personal Injury Collisions on Gun Hill Road within 215m either side of the property access in the previous five years.

Ramblers Association/Peak and Northern Society

Leekbrook 7 will be affected because the path runs through where the proposed development will take place. This must be taken into account and to keep this path open at all times. Use of the PROW, and the safety of users must not be affected by the development, nor during the work taking place.

OFFICER COMMENTS**Principle of Development**

For the purposes of the Local Plan and the NPPF Lower Haddon Farm and application site have a relatively isolated and remote location in an 'other rural' area of countryside that lies to the north of Leek.

Here Local Plan policy SS10 and paragraph 84 of the NPPF apply. There is a strong presumption against housing development in a location such as this. The location has limited, car dependent, access to facilities and services and, with intrinsic environmental and landscape qualities, is particularly sensitive to the impacts of development.

The strategy policy for the 'other rural' areas of countryside at SS10 of the SMDC Local Plan states that these areas will provide only for development which has an essential need to be in the countryside.

To support local population and rural employment needs in these areas, the Local Plan (Policy SS10 and H1) and the NPPF provide for development in certain exceptional circumstances.

One such exception is where there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside; and those needs cannot be met elsewhere.

In all circumstances, to enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside the policy SS10 requires priority to be given to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requires all development to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

However, notwithstanding, the authority cannot demonstrate a 5-year supply of housing land, the development plan policies most important for determining the application shall be considered out of date, and it is paragraph 11 of the NPPF that applies. The application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance do not provide a strong reason for refusing the development proposed and, therefore, planning permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

Design and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area

All strands and elements of Local Plan policy converge to provide protection for the character and appearance of the locality and countryside.

To enhance and conserve the quality of the countryside the policy SS10 requires priority to be given to the need to protect the quality and character of the area and requires all development to respect and respond sensitively to the distinctive qualities of the surrounding landscape.

Local Plan Policy DC1 requires that all development shall be well designed and reinforce local distinctiveness by positively contributing to and complementing the special character and heritage of the area in line with the Council's Design Guide SPD.

In particular, new development should incorporate creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area; and, be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, height, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

Local Plan policy DC3 states that development which leads to a prominent intrusion

into the countryside should be resisted.

Generally, these Local Plan policies reflect the national policy set out in the NPPF. Paragraph 135 of the NPPF (Chapter 12 'Achieving well-designed places') requires that decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area; are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting; and establish or maintain a strong sense of place. Paragraph 187 of the NPPF (Chapter 15 'Conserving and enhancing the natural Environment') requires that decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by protecting and enhancing valued landscapes or sites of biodiversity; and recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

The development of the site and the provision of a dwelling would result in a prominent intrusion in the countryside with the provision of a non-agrarian building in an exposed and isolated location. The dwelling would appear oddly positioned on a slim strip of sloping ground set against a steep tree lined ravine and water issue. The dwelling would be remote from and not have any visual connection or association with any of the other buildings or infrastructure at Lower Haddon, in those respects it would be bereft of coherent context.

Other dwellings in the locality, sparsely located across the landscape, largely, have a more direct roadside connection or appear within established arrangement of a working farmstead. They all have historic 19th century origins. The proposed dwelling would appear as an oddity in that context and would not share or possess any of those characteristics.

The dwelling would be built over the definitive route of footpath Leekfrith 7, requiring minor diversion, and from the south would be very exposed to the public vantage of the footpaths and from distance and on approach it would appear prominent and intrusive in wide open panoramic views of the landscape.

Moreover, there are design elements advanced with the proposal such as the necessary excavations to sloping ground and the formation of an embankment, and the cramped arrangement of parking spaces to the front elevation, that would exacerbate the intrusion and result in awkward or poorly assimilated and located development.

It is assumed that the dwelling could be built clear of root protection areas and tree canopy. However, the dwelling would be provided with a relatively short north facing back garden onto tall and overhanging tree canopy that would flank the garden to the northwest and northeast. The rear outlook and garden would be dark and shadowed by trees that would limit morning and evening sun. There would be likely pressure and desire to cut some of this canopy away to open rear aspect. That would be harmful and damaging to key and intrinsic features to the character of the landscape.

Furthermore, the Gritstone Highland Fringe landscape character type is identified in the Staffordshire Moorlands Landscape Character Assessment as very sensitive to the impacts of development and land use change. Consequently, due to the scale and overly prominent location of the proposed building, it would harmfully reduce existing

wide-open views across the sloping landscape, discordant with the landscape planning guidelines for this character area type.

In all of these regards the development would be harmful to the character and quality of the rural area and the landscape. The harm would be significant and long-lasting. There would be conflict with policies SS10, H1, DC1 and DC3 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

Other Considerations

The harm to the countryside and the character and appearance of the rural area would significantly and demonstrably outweigh any benefits that might result from the small and poorly located contribution that would be delivered generally to the authority's housing supply.

However, while the Council's rural exception policy, along with the other Local Plan housing policies, might be considered 'out of date', taking the policies of the NPPF as a whole, there still remains, at paragraph 84 (NPPF 2024), a specific exception or provision for dwellings in isolated rural location where there is an essential need for a rural worker to live at or near the site.

Essentially therefore, where an essential need for the development demonstrably outweighs the harm that would occur to the countryside, planning permission could be granted.

In this case, the applicant is a successful sheep farmer he has farmed sheep for many years and turns a considerable annual profit. While he is of advancing years the application does not discuss any retirement plan, he intends to continue farming with the assistance of an additional worker, namely his grandson.

Inherently sheep can graze and roam on wide areas of land that is remote and some distance from the farmer's residence. Indeed, the submitted appraisal suggests that the largest of the holding's land areas is in Rudyard. The labour demands of sheep farming are seasonal with lambing in the Spring. Labour support can traditionally be accommodated temporarily to assist with these short demanding periods.

The existing farmhouse has proximity and arrangement with the existing farmyard and farm sheds. The proposed dwelling would be physically and functionally separate, some distance, from the infrastructure and facilities of the farm it would not be quick or easy to access the sheds. The submission discounts the possibility of providing a barn conversion on the site, all the sheds are accounted for and in use. However, it does not explore the possibility of providing workers accommodation, temporarily or otherwise, on or to the edge of the existing farmyard – in those respects functional performance would be improved and impact on the countryside could be reduced.

The application does not map or detail the full extent of the holding. It is not clear whether the Lower Haddon holding includes the existing dwelling at Lockgate, 200m to the south. The drawn blue edge on the location plan is incomplete but appears to extend toward the property and there is some indication in the planning history that it might be occupied by family members.

The area and location of the land at Rudyard is not detailed or mapped either. The land at Rudyard is said to be the largest part of the holding, it is not clear how, locationally, farming activity on that land would benefit from the proposed development at Lower Haddon.

The application does not explain the situation of the 21-year-old grandson, the intended occupant and farm worker. It is not said that he is currently employed on the site or explain his current line of work, education or experience in farming. It is not said where the grandson currently resides.

Despite the applicant's advancing years and his apparent success and experience as a sheep farmer, there is an expressed intention to begin cattle rearing. Cattle rearing is more labour intensive and less seasonal. However, this is not an existing part of the enterprise and there are no current labour demands in respect of that venture. The applicant does not demonstrate any experience in this area of farming or an ability, given existing housing and shed provision, to introduce the venture. Little weight is attributed to this element of the applicant's supporting circumstances.

Overall, the application does not demonstrate an essential need to provide the development to accommodate a rural worker. The circumstances and considerations advanced, do not outweigh the harm that has been identified above that would be significant and lasting. There would be conflict with policies SS10 and H1 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

CONCLUSION / PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed development would provide an isolated dwelling in the countryside, and an essential need for such a dwelling to accommodate a rural worker has not been demonstrated. The proposed dwelling would be a prominent intrusion in the countryside that would be harmful to the character and quality of the countryside and character of the landscape. There would be conflict with policies SS10, H1, DC1, and DC3 of the SMDC Local Plan and the terms of the NPPF.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : REFUSE

Case Officer: Ben Hurst

Recommendation Date: 27th July 2026

X 

Signed by: Ben Haywood

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council