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**AGRICULTURAL JUSTIFICATION STATEMENT**

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For

An extension of an existing agricultural building for the storage of hay, straw, animal feed  
and machinery

at

Land east of building to rear of Jutland Cottage, South View, Fir Tree, Crook, DL15 8BN

On behalf of Mr Neil Armstrong

Report prepared by Alan Falshaw PgD FAAV ABIAC

In connection with the support of the above planning application.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been produced to support Mr Neil Armstrong in a planning application for extension of an existing agricultural building for the storage of hay, straw, animal feed and machinery to serve the agricultural needs of the farming enterprises.
- 1.2 The principal reason for an extension to the existing agricultural building is to provide additional storage for agricultural produce and machinery used in the day-to-day management of the enterprise.
- 1.3 This appraisal has been produced by Vickers & Barrass Chartered Surveyors upon written instructions from Mr Neil Armstrong and looks at the functional need and is based upon evidence seen and given by the applicant and our own professional judgement.
- 1.4 For the purpose of this report the agricultural justification will refer to “Hillcrest Farm” as the base for all activities.

## 2.0 SITE HISTORY

- 2.1 Hillcrest Farm consists of approximately 8.34 hectares (20.60) acres of permanent grassland and buildings. The majority of the land was purchased by Mr Neil Armstrong approx. 15 years ago with a further purchase 5 years ago. In addition, a further 4.20 hectares (10.37) acres) of permanent grassland is rented from local landowners. The arrangement of farm buildings has evolved over the years to accommodate the growing number of livestock and machinery within the business.

## 3.0 OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Rural Payments Agency and Magic Maps
- 3.2 The Agricultural Budgeting & Costings Book (91<sup>st</sup> Edition November 2020).
- 3.3 DEFRA Code of Recommendation Welfare of Sheep (2002). See **Appendix 1**.
- 3.4 County Durham Plan Adopted 2020 – Durham County Council
- 3.5 NPPF- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

## 4.0 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

- 4.1 Agricultural Building (General Purpose) Ref 3/2007/0795- 20.12.2007
- 4.2 Retention of Agricultural Building Ref DM/17/191/FPA -12.04.2017

## 5.0 THE EXISTING FARMING SITUATION

- 5.1 The business of Hillcrest Farm is operated by Mr Neil Armstrong.
- 5.2 The land falls within the National Character Area (NCA): Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe; is a transitional landscape between the North Pennine (NCA) to the west and the Tyne and Wear

Lowlands (NCA) to the east. The land is designated as lowland for agricultural support schemes.

The main type of agriculture in the area is sheep and beef production with some arable production. Typical holdings produce stock which are taken from birth to slaughter with additional store stock purchased for further finishing

- 5.3 The total area farmed by the business is approx. 12.54 hectares (30.9 acres) of grassland.
- 5.4 A map showing the parcels of owned land and rented land is contained in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.5 Mr Neil Armstrong has full time employment outside of the farm business. It is considered that this size of enterprise is not viable as a standalone business and numerous agricultural businesses of this size are operated on a part-time basis and contribute significantly to the rural economy.

## 6.0 **LIVESTOCK**

- 6.1 The main enterprise is a flock of 60-70 Mule x Texel ewes producing prime lambs for the home and export markets.
- 6.2 The flock of breeding sheep are housed at Hillcrest Farm in December in preparation for the coming lambing season between February and April. The housing over the most severe winter months helps with management and welfare of the animals and allows the land to recover in readiness for the coming grazing season. Once lambed and ground conditions allow, they are then moved to the different areas of grazing land.
- 6.3 The majority of lambs are grazed along with the ewes throughout the summer period, then once weaned they are brought into the buildings for further feeding and finishing for sale.
- 6.4 The proposal is to increase the number of breeding sheep from the current 70 to 112 to maximise the output from the grazing land and increase business viability.
- 6.5 Current stocking levels of 5.58 ewes and lambs/ha (2.25/acre)-proposed stocking level of 9.00 ewes and lambs/ha (3.68/acre)

## 7.0 **GOVERNMENT SUBSIDY**

- 7.1 Basic Payment Scheme is only claimed over the owned land at Hillcrest Farm.
- 7.2 There are currently no Environmental Schemes on the farmland.

## 8.0 FARM BUILDINGS

8.1 The buildings at Hillcrest Farm which are outlined on the plan below and described as follows:



- Machinery store -Steel portal frame with cement fibre roof and Yorkshire board cladding – 147m<sup>2</sup> - below.



- Livestock Housing – Steel portal frame with box profile roof and Yorkshire board cladding– 253m<sup>2</sup>-below.



- Proposed site of extension to Livestock Housing of 123m<sup>2</sup> – below.



- 8.3 All buildings have been designed for their current purpose and ensure the highest level of animal welfare is maintained by having plenty natural shelter and natural ventilation to aid animal health with suitable handling facilities also incorporated to assist with the daily handling of livestock.
- 8.4 Farm Animals are protected by the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007 See **Appendix 3**. The buildings allow for these requirements to be met.
- 8.5 The proposed extension would cover an area of approx. 123m<sup>2</sup>. This would increase the total area for livestock, fodder and concentrate feed to 376m<sup>2</sup>.

## 9.0 THE FUNCTIONAL NEED

- 9.1 The main functional need will relate to the increase in the number of breeding sheep and the resulting increase in storage for fodder, concentrate feed and extra space at lambing time.

The breeding sheep are housed mainly for lambing from December to April and will require 24-hour supervision over the lambing period.

The estimated 50% of the year's lamb crop will be housed late autumn-early winter for further feeding in readiness for sale over the coming months.

The need to store fodder and concentrate feed undercover is essential to prevent loss and deterioration. Small bales of hay cannot be stored outside, round bales can but it is advised not to. A more competitive price can be negotiated if buying concentrate feed in larger quantities and in bulk.

The livestock housing building at Hillcrest Farm is adequate for current numbers of livestock and storage requirement for fodder and concentrate feed. This is demonstrated in **Table 1** below using industry recognised space requirements.

**Table 1.**

**Space Requirements- Hillcrest Farm-Current**

Industry recognised requirements for housing of livestock and the storage of farm produce.

**Livestock**

**Sheep Enterprise**

*Lowland ewes*

*50% pregnant*

*50% with lambs*

*Previous years lambs 50% housed*

*Rams*

	<b>Head</b>	<b>M<sup>2</sup> /head</b>	<b>Total M<sup>2</sup> Requirement</b>
			0.00
	35	1.40	49.00
	35	2.20	77.00
	35	0.90	31.50
	6	1.40	8.40
	<b>Tonne</b>	<b>M<sup>3</sup>/tonne</b>	<b>Total M<sup>2</sup> Requirement</b>
	4.1	2.00	8.20
	6.25	6.00	37.50
	4.4	6.00	26.40
<i>Total area requirement for livestock and crop</i>	<b>M<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>238.00 M<sup>2</sup></b>
<i>Area available at Hillcrest Farm for livestock</i>	<b>M<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>253.00 M<sup>2</sup></b>

(Source: *The Agricultural Budgeting & Costings Book 91st Edition*). DEFRA Code of Recommendation Welfare of Sheep (2002).

The following **Table 2** again uses industry recognised standards to demonstrate the space requirements for the proposed increase in the numbers of breeding sheep and because of this increase the number of lambs and the storage requirement of fodder and concentrate feed will increase.

**Table 2**

**Space Requirements- Hillcrest Farm-Proposal**

Industry recognised requirements for housing of livestock and the storage of farm produce.

<b>Livestock</b>	<b>Head</b>	<b>M<sup>2</sup> /head</b>	<b>Total M<sup>2</sup> Requirement</b>
<b>Sheep Enterprise</b>			
<i>Lowland ewes</i>			0.00
<i>50% pregnant</i>	56	1.40	78.40
<i>50% with lambs</i>	56	2.20	123.20
<i>Previous years lambs 50% housed</i>	95	0.90	85.50
<i>Rams</i>	6	1.40	8.40
<b>Forage and Concentrate Storage requirements</b>			
	<b>Tonne</b>	<b>M<sup>3</sup>/tonne</b>	<b>Total M<sup>2</sup> Requirement</b>
Concentrate Feed	6.56	2.00	13.12
Small Bales of Hay	9.96	6.00	59.76
Round Bales of Straw	6.94	6.00	41.64
<i>Total area requirement for livestock and crop</i>	<b>M<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>410.02 M<sup>2</sup></b>
<i>Area available at Hillcrest Farm for livestock</i>	<b>M<sup>2</sup></b>		<b>376.00 M<sup>2</sup></b>

(Source: *The Agricultural Budgeting & Costings Book 91st Edition*). DEFRA Code of Recommendation Welfare of Sheep (2002).

**9.0 JUSTIFICATION**

- 9.1 The information above demonstrates the need to increase the area required for livestock, fodder and concentrate feed storage from the current 253m<sup>2</sup> to the proposed 376m<sup>2</sup> following the addition of the new building. It is thought that to increase the area of the proposed new building by a further 36m<sup>2</sup> to facilitate the whole requirement of additional area of storage would not be practical or financially prudent. Therefore, some flexibility will be required regarding the layout for storage of the fodder and concentrate feed.
- 9.2 Any original proposal for the storage of machinery in the new building will now be reversed and current machinery storage will be better utilised.



- 9.3 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2019, gives support to agricultural buildings in the countryside where there is a genuine need and are of a commensurate scale for the intended purpose. (Para 83/page 23)

The NPPF gives further support to encouraging vitality and viability of the rural economy including through agriculture.

- 9.4 The County Durham Plan Adopted 2020, gives support to a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings; and b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Also, where there is a genuine need and are of a commensurate scale for the intended purpose. (Section 5.75/5.76 Page 85)

## 10.0 **WIDER BUSINESS OBJECTIVES**

This farming business is a typical of the area, small part-time and efficient. The provision of the building extension is seen to make the business more sustainable. Over the last 25 years British agriculture has received payments from the European Union as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). These payments have evolved from payments based on production to payments for setting land aside from production to payments for creating wildlife habitats and enhancing the landscape. With the transition period surrounding Brexit now in progress, the landscape for British Agriculture is about to change yet again. The new Agriculture Bill will put the environment front and centre in the post CAP world. It is with this background that farming businesses such as Hillcrest Farm will need to become more resilient and adapt to change.

## 11.0 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 11.1 It is considered there is a justified need for the extension of the existing agricultural building to provide an additional storage area for fodder and concentrate animal feed along with extra space for the increased flock of breeding sheep.
- 11.2 The changing economic climate for agricultural businesses in the post Brexit era will require all businesses to be sustainable. Being efficient and adapting to change will become more important as the transition period continues. Businesses which are maximising their assets and carrying the optimum numbers of livestock will be more able to survive.
- 11.3 Vickers & Barrass have formulated the opinion that there is justified need for an extension to the existing agricultural building based on the evidence presented in this report.

12.0 **AUTHOR**



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Date: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021

For and on behalf of Vickers & Barrass