

# Agricultural Justification for a General Purpose Agricultural Building and Sheep Handling Pens

On behalf of

Graham Whitwell and Sarah Bolton

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The assessment has been prepared to support a full planning application for a general purpose agricultural building and sheep handling pens at Bonny Barn Pasture on behalf of Graham Whitwell and Sarah Bolton. The assessment deals with the operational need for the building and animal welfare considerations. Design details and planning policy is dealt with in supporting information elsewhere.

## **Background**

Graham Whitwell and Sarah Bolton operate a mixed cattle and sheep livestock farming business on land centred around Waddington. The couple live with their two young children at Carter Fold Farm where Graham is the second generation of his family to hold the Agricultural Holding Act tenancy. Formerly a dairy unit, the herd was dispersed after Foot and Mouth disease. The farm infrastructure and buildings are now utilised for overwintering cattle on a contract basis. The local milk round has been retained.

In addition to Carter Fold the couple also manage additional land under farm business tenancies, annual grazing licences and owned land.

The main farming enterprise is a flock of 500 breeding ewes producing up to 650 finished lambs for a Tesco contract and a further 200 Texel cross gimmers for home flock replacements with surplus numbers sold as breeding females.

The farming system is focused on a strong commitment to the environment. The land is entered into the Mid Tier Countryside Stewardship Scheme which includes over 500 metres of hedgerow restoration comprising of coppicing, laying and planting new native species hedgerow. A further 500 metres will be undertaken in during the 20/21 winter months. All hedges are double fenced to protect from livestock and vermin.

Additionally 1000 metres of watercourse fencing has been carried out in conjunction with the Ribble Rivers Trust and 350 native broadleaved trees planted.

Another Mid Tier agreement is in place for additional hedgerow management with a Higher Tier agreement agreed for woodland fencing, control of invasive species, thinning out around veteran trees and installing wildlife boxes.

Planning is also taking place in respect of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMs) which is planned to begin in 2024. The scheme is an environmental scheme predicated on public funding for public goods and will replace the current support payment system.

The business is certified with LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), an organisation that works with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers to deliver more sustainable food production, enriches the environment and engages with local communities.

Graham and Sarah are engaged with the Princes Farm Resilience Programme which delivers a series of workshops focusing on business skills to maximise profit and resilience. Topics include business planning, understanding accounts and budgeting and planning for the forthcoming ELMs.

### **Farm Business**

**Holding Number:** 21/681/0019

**Single Business Identifier:** 107155914

Current Land Holding:

<b>Location</b>	<b>Area Ha (acres)</b>	<b>Tenancy/ownership</b>
Carter Fold Farm	34.00 (84.00)	AHA Tenancy
Bare land	23.00 (57.00)	Farm Business Tenancy
Bare land	3.23 (8.00)	Grazing Licence
Bare Land	9.70 (24.00)	Owned
<b>Total</b>	<b>69.93 (173.00)</b>	

All land is registered on the Rural Land Register . BPS maps attached as Appendix A.

### **Need for the building.**

Carter Fold Farm is located within the village boundaries. Buildings and infrastructure at the farm are used for housing cattle during winter months. The system is a cubicle arrangement with self feed silage which meets welfare standards and has adequate storage for organic manures.

The remaining buildings within the farm curtilage are traditional barns and shippens which are unsuitable for access with modern machinery. The buildings are used as emergency accommodation in lambing time when weather conditions are harsh, but will not meet the required welfare standards.

Access to Carter Fold for sheep from the land requires crossing the highway (Newton Road) which presents a health and safety issue.

Sheep handling operations are located in farm buildings at Twitter Bridge Farm which lies to the west of the farmed land. The buildings also provide a small amount of storage for hay and straw and limited housing for lambing sheep and finishing lambs. The system is labour intensive with limited access for modern machinery and equipment and again will not meet the appropriate welfare standards.

These buildings are directly accessible with sheep from the majority of the farmed land. However, the location means that animals often require transportation by livestock trailer between Carter Fold and Twitter Bridge Farm if animals need to be transferred for emergency care etc.

Planning permission has been granted for the conversion of the Twitter Bridge buildings for residential use (Planning reference 3/2018/0750). A replacement building will not be provided by the landlord.

During the gestation period pregnant sheep are provided with supplementary feeding. Where this takes place trampling occurs and poaching of soils occurs. Phosphates are tightly bound to soil particles and runoff to watercourses can cause pollution. Housing sheep for critical periods prevents this problem and reduces the damage to soil and the risk of diffuse pollution.

Modern farm machinery and large items such as Heston straw bales require accessible buildings. Traditional farm buildings are unsuitable and increase labour costs reducing efficiency and overall business viability.

The government recognises the need for farm businesses to improve efficiency and Provides grant funding through the Countryside Productivity Small Grants Scheme (CPSG). An application has been accepted for a modular sheep handling system which will reduce labour and allow improved husbandry of animals for a wide range of routine tasks such as dosing, vaccinations, foot trimming, dagging and sorting.

### **Animal Welfare**

As committed livestock farmers the overriding concern for Graham and Sarah is the welfare of their animals. Lambing time is a particularly vulnerable time for breeding ewes. During inclement weather losses can be catastrophic and animal welfare is put at risk. Housing animals to allow lambs sufficient time to gain enough strength to cope with wet conditions is essential.

Furthermore, strict rules relating to animal welfare are laid down in the Animal Welfare Act 2006 which makes it an offense to cause or allow unnecessary suffering. General welfare requirements are outlined in the Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) Regulations 2007. Farmers must treat all farmed livestock so that their health and welfare meets the minimum requirements for care and husbandry. The consequences for a farmer who fails to meet animal welfare requirements are severe. Support payments can be lost if cross compliance is not met and fines can be imposed through the courts.

As a Tesco producer the farm is subject to a strict auditing process by the company to ensure the highest animal welfare and environmental standards are met. Where a business falls short of this requirement the supply contract would be lost with catastrophic consequences for the economic viability of the business.

Guidance is provided through the Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock: Sheep; and include the following guidance for space requirements for housed sheep.

<b>Best practice space allowances for sheep</b>	
<b>Category of sheep</b>	<b>Space (square metres)</b>
Lowland ewes - 60-90 kilograms live weight	1.2-1.4 floor space per ewe during pregnancy
Lowland ewes after lambing, with lambs at foot up to six weeks of age	2.0-2.2 floor space per ewe and lambs
Hill ewes - 45-65 kilograms live weight	1.0-1.2 floor space per ewe during pregnancy
Hill ewes after lambing, with lambs at foot up to six weeks of age	1.8-2.0 floor space per ewe and lambs
Lambs up to 12 weeks old	0.5-0.6 floor space per lamb
Lambs and sheep 12 weeks to 12 months old	0.75-0.9 floor space per lamb/sheep
Rams	1.5-2.0 per ram

**Taken from Codes of recommendations for the welfare of livestock: Sheep.**

### **Proposed building**

Consideration has been given to the location, size, design and layout of the required building and associated sheep pens to meet the functional requirements whilst accepting the structure will sit within the Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (FoBAONB).

After exploring various options a location has been chosen which allows convenient access from the land west of Newton Road and access with farm machinery. The position is directly north of the access track to Bonny Barn Pasture.

A standard six bay steel frame building measuring 27.50m x 12.20m (336m<sup>2</sup>) is proposed which would allow the sheep handling system to be located adjacent to the eastern side of the structure alongside the boundary wall.

A wire fence would be erected to create an enclosed compound which allows convenient access with livestock, machinery, fodder and feed.

The internal layout would be flexible to allow a mix of larger sheep pens which could be fed mechanically and smaller individual pens when required in lambing time. Approximately 4 bays of the building (224m<sup>2</sup>) would be used for sheep housing with the remainder used for hay, straw and animal feeds.

Based on the space requirements above this would allow between 160-186 ewes to be housed at the most vulnerable time of the year. This is adequate for the flock numbers and staggered lambing pattern which Graham and Sarah operate.

The building would be constructed as a steel frame with precast concrete panels which are clad above with Yorkshire boarding to allow good ventilation.

Landscaping is proposed and dealt with in the design and access statement.

### **SAFFO Regulations**

Where agricultural buildings for livestock involve a slurry based system the scheme will fall under The Water Resources (Control of Pollution) Silage, Slurry and Agricultural Fuel Oil) (England) Regulations 2010 – The SAFFO Regulations.

The proposed building will house sheep which will be bedded on straw. As such the scheme falls outside SAFFO regulations.

### **Conclusion.**

To allow the agricultural business to operate efficiently and meet the required standards of animal welfare additional housing is required. An efficient sheep handling system underpins the delivery of good animal husbandry. Functional buildings which allow access with modern farm machinery are essential.

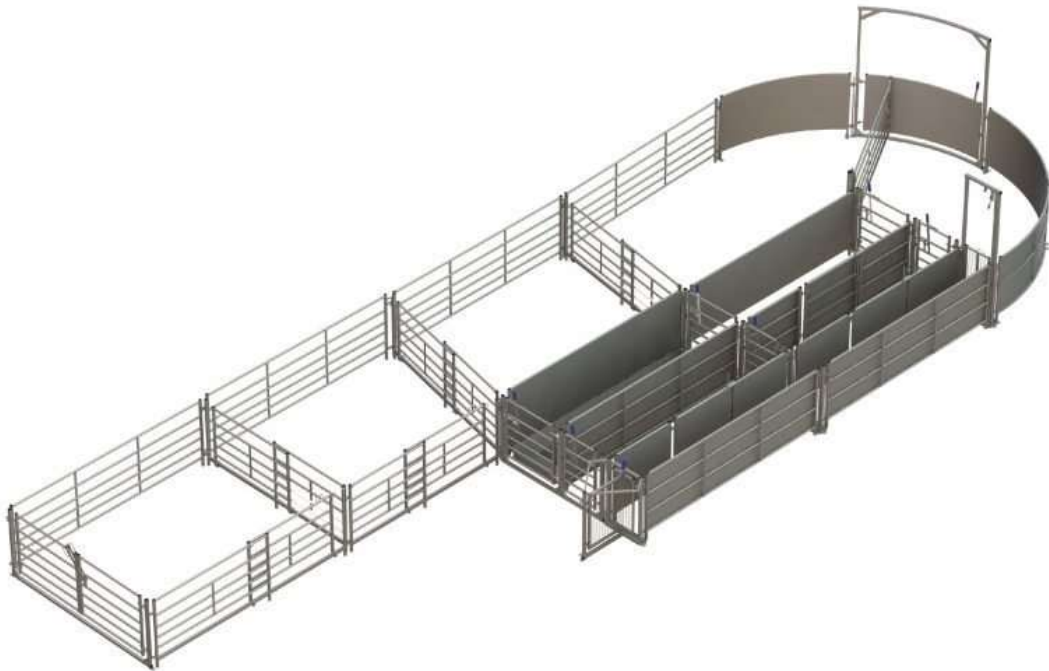
The proposed building will allow a young farming family that are embedded in the local community to farm efficiently, remain viable and produce food with a sound environmental footprint.

Appendix A RLR Maps attached separately.

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## Overview

- Sheep System D is the cornerstone of a most versatile system utilising a 4880mm approx semi-circular forcing pen. Sheep System D Plus builds on this to provide additional holding for 100 head.
- Approximately 15000mm long x 5100mm wide
- Options to put sheep through a narrow sorting race, footbath race or 915mm approx wide treatment race
- Swing and slide gate allows the forcing pen to be full all of the time
- Sheeted race can be tapered if required when working on lambs



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