

Agricultural Justification for a General Purpose Agricultural Building

On behalf of

Thomas and Sarah Whitwell

Rural Futures
78a Main Street
Warton
Carnforth
LA5 9PG
01524 736845
07791 488410



The assessment has been prepared to support a full planning application for a general purpose agricultural building at Lower Monubent Farm on behalf of Thomas and Sarah Whitwell. 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

Thomas and Sarah Whitwell operate a low input cattle and sheep farming business extending to 96 acres of permanent meadow and pasture at Lower Monubent Farm. The farm is a “bare land” unit with no buildings. The only infrastructure on the holding is cattle and sheep handling pens. The couple live with their young family at Tewitt Hall Farm where Thomas works with his parents.

Thomas and Sarah have a strong commitment to an environmentally sustainable farming system and have entered the land into a Mid Tier Environmental Stewardship Scheme. A number of management options have been chosen including low input grassland management, managing meadows for hay and restricted grazing for ground nesting birds. Capital works have included fencing livestock from Monubent Beck to enhance the riparian habitat and improve flood management. A boundary management plan includes hedgerow planting, laying and protective fencing.

Stocking is with beef cattle, including native breeds and breeding sheep for finished lamb production. A number of cattle are agisted to graze Southport marshes in the summer months.

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.

Farm Business

Holding Number: 21/681/0019
Single Business Identifier: 107155914
Land Designation: Severely Disadvantaged (SD)

Current Land Holding:

Location	Area Ha (acres)	Tenancy/ownership
Lower Monubent Farm	38.85 (96.00)	Owned
Southport marshes		Agisted grazing
Total	38.85 (96.00)	

All land is registered on the Rural Land Register. A map showing the holding is attached below.

Need for the building.

Lower Monubent Farm comprises 38.85ha of permanent grassland within a ring fence approximately 1.5 miles north of Bolton-by-Bowland. The land runs contiguous with Monubent Beck which forms the eastern boundary. The land is classed as Severely Disadvantaged and lies within the Ribble Catchment Sensitive Area.

With no built infrastructure other than livestock handling pens cattle are prone to poach the land in winter months. Soils are damaged and the risk of diffuse pollution to Monubent Beck is increased.

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.

Hay and fodder storage is presently restricted to large bales or sheeted stacks which result in spoilage and supplementary feedstuffs must be transported to the land daily.

Animal Welfare

Like all committed livestock farmers the overriding concern for Thomas 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.

The farm is a member of the Red Tractor Farm accreditation scheme which ensures the highest animal welfare and environmental standards are met

https://assurance.redtractor.org.uk/contentfiles/Farmers-6800.pdf?_id=637420690041554931.

These standards are also a requirement for the Morrisons supplier contract which would be lost with serious consequences for the economic viability of the business if compliance is not met.

Proposed building

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

The building location is adjacent to the access point utilising the existing track. A boundary line to the north provides screening with mature trees and shrubs.

A standard seven bay steel frame building measuring 32.00m x 12.20m (391m²) is proposed which will provide cattle and sheep housing together with storage for fodder, feedstuffs, machinery, equipment and a covered manure store.

Anticipated changes to the priority catchment sensitive boundaries will make the building eligible for funding the roof area of the manure store.

A wire fence will be erected to create an enclosed boundary around the building.

The internal layout will allow cattle or sheep housing depending on the time of year and need.

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

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 be a straw based system. As such the scheme falls outside SAFFO regulations. Nevertheless, the design and specification of the building meets the specifications within Ciria Report C759B Livestock Manures and Silage Storage for Agriculture Part 2 Design and Construction.

Conclusion.

To ensure the environmental goals of the Mid Tier Stewardship Scheme are realised and to meet the required animal welfare standards, livestock housing is required. The proposed building is functional in design and essential to the efficient management of the farming unit.

The proposed building will enable a young farming family to pursue a sustainable farming system predicated on sound management practices and in line with government guidance.

