

**Assessment of Essential Need for a
Permanent Rural Worker's Dwelling**

relating to

Proposed Rural Worker's Dwelling

On behalf of

Mr T and Mrs P Blanchard

at

**Land North of Forest Road, Wootton
Rivers, Marlborough**

DOLMAN
Tel: 01380 729456
Email: info@dolmansurveyors.co.uk
May 2026

Executive Summary

This Assessment Report has been prepared by Dolman on behalf of Tom and Pippa Blanchard to support a planning application for the development of a permanent rural worker's dwelling on land north of Forest Road, Wootton Rivers, Marlborough. This report accompanies, and should be read alongside, the suite of technical reports and drawings that have been submitted with the planning application.

Paragraphs 82 – 84 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024) deal with Rural Housing. Paragraph 84(a) states that the development of isolated homes in the countryside is permissible 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”*. Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) goes on to set out some relevant considerations including evidence of necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work and the degree of confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future (ID: 67-010-20190722).

The site comprises land currently occupied by existing agricultural barns that are used for cattle housing and storage. The applicant's current farm business occupies 1,600 acres comprising the principal farm at Wolfhall Farm, together with New Barn Farm and the site.

The main farm falls within a high risk area for bovine tuberculosis (TB) and has suffered with regular TB outbreaks for the past 15 years. This means that the farm is nearly always shut down requiring cattle to be housed for longer as well as impacting negatively upon the value of the stock. The barns at the Forest Road site are therefore set up as a TB isolation unit, proposed to house calves until they are ready to be sold. Without this arrangement, the calves have to be sold at a loss under TB restrictions, which impacts the viability of the farm business. There is therefore an essential need for a rural worker's dwelling on site for the following functional and financial reasons:

- The calves need to be reared away from the main herd at the Forest Road site from a very young age. This will require constant care and monitoring to ensure suitable standards of animal welfare and to attend to emergencies at short notice;
- There is a lack of suitable accommodation in the area to house a farm worker within sight and sound of the barns;
- The farm business is viable, however, TB restrictions impact upon the financial returns of the main herd. The isolation unit means that calves can be reared and sold at market value, supporting the viability of the business.

Background and Farm Business

Site Location and Context

The site sits within a parcel of agricultural land comprising approximately 109 acres (44ha) and forms part of the wider farm business that is operated by the applicants, Tom and Pippa Blanchard. Tom and Pippa took over the farm business from Tom's father, Mr P Blanchard, in 2014. Mr Blanchard continues to be involved in the farm business and lives in the farmhouse at the principal farm, Wolfhall Farm. Tom and Pippa currently live in the farmhouse at New Barn Farm. The farmhouses at Wolfhall Farm and New Barn Farm are ~4.5 miles and ~3.3 miles from the buildings on site respectively (by road).



The site is located to the north of Wootton Rivers, c. 220 metres from dwellings at the northernmost edge of the village. The surrounding land includes an arable field and three agricultural buildings as shown in the image above.

The agricultural buildings are permitted as follows:

Barn 1:

- 16/05166/APD - Proposed Steel Portal Framed Building – Prior approval not required

Barn 2:

- 20/03798/APD - Prior notification for an agricultural steel framed building for storage of straw – Prior approval not required
- PL/2022/05565 - Change of use of existing buildings on site, from restricted agricultural use, which includes cattle housing to full agricultural use, including cattle housing - Approved with conditions

Barn 3:

- PL/2023/05141 - Full planning permission for construction of an additional cattle building – Approved with conditions

Farm Business

The total farmed area comprises 1,600 acres (647.5ha) consisting of approximately 1,350 acres (546.3 ha) rented on various tenancies and the remainder owned by the applicants. The areas are broken down as follows:

- a) Manor Farm
- b) Wolfhall Farm
- c) New Barn Farm
- d) Cullys & Levetts Farm

The farm business is comprised of a dairy, beef and arable enterprises.

Dairy Enterprise

The dairy enterprise comprises a herd of:

- 550 milking cows;
- 300 dairy replacement heifers; and
- 300 beef animals from calves through to large stores.

The buildings at Wootton Rivers are currently in agricultural use for straw storage and cattle housing in line with the permissions set out above. The cattle housed at the site are primarily youngstock reared for beef. Young calves are not able to be housed onsite due to the need for 24hr monitoring. More recently, the site has been set up as an Isolation Unit for bovine tuberculosis (TB). The main herd is based at Wolfhall Farm where it has suffered with regular TB outbreaks for the past 15 years. This means that the farm is nearly always shut down requiring cattle to be housed for longer as well as impacting negatively upon the value of the stock.

A TB Isolation Unit enables a group of cattle to be isolated from the main herd in a dedicated unit. This group is then enrolled in its own testing regime. Should they go clear after two short interval tests, they receive officially TB free (OTF) status and can be sold to any outlet, regardless of the status of the herd of origin. These TB-free animals could command a stronger price than those sold under TB restrictions. It also broadens market options.

The calves will therefore be housed on site in batches of approximately 200 animals (aged from 1 week old). The unit is 'filled' over the course of 6 weeks, and it then takes around 5 months for each batch of calves to clear through the system and go on to be sold. All cattle on site will therefore be between 0-6 months old.

The dairy unit operates a split block calving system, calving in spring and autumn with an output of 2 batches per year into the isolation unit. Therefore, the throughput of calves is constant. Once a batch of calves is cleared as OTF, the Isolation Unit can be re-established, and it is then filled again with a new batch.

Arable Enterprise

- 750 acres managed to grow crops as feed for livestock and cash crops including wheat, barley, oats, maize, fodder beat and lucerne.
- The arable enterprise is managed from New Barn Farm where a drier and grain storage facilities are located.

Labour

Current staff and their accommodation are set out below.

Responsibility	Number	Accommodation
Mr and Mrs Blanchard	2 x FTE	Farmhouse at Wolfhall Farm
Farm Leads	2 x FTE	Farmhouse at New Barn Farm
Herd Manager	1 x FTE	Wolfhall Farm Cottage (rented with Wolfhall Farm tenancy)
Assistant Herd Manager	1 x FTE	Wolfhall Farm Cottage (as above)
Assistant Herdsperson	4 x FTE	2 x properties at High Street, Burbage (rented as part of Manor Farm tenancy) 2 x accommodated at Wolfhall Farm and New Barn Farm
Tractor Driver/General	2 x FTE; 1 x PTE	1 x property at Cadley rented from Ramsbury Estate 2 x living with parents locally
Total	12 FTE; 1 PTE	

Relevant Planning Policy

This section considers policies that are relevant to this Assessment of Essential Need for a Rural Worker's Dwelling. A wider review of planning policies relevant to the application is contained within the accompanying Planning Statement.

The Development Plan for the application site comprises:

- Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015
- Wootton Rivers Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017 – 2026
- Saved policies from the Kennet District Local Plan 2011

Material considerations also include the National Planning Policy Framework 2024 and relevant Supplementary Planning Documents and Guidance.

We have reviewed saved policies within the Kennet District Local Plan, and these are not relevant to the proposed development. The Kennet District Local Plan is not therefore considered further within this report.

Wiltshire Council submitted the Wiltshire Local Plan to the Secretary of State for independent examination in November 2024. Policies within the emerging Local Plan will gain weight the closer the plan is to adoption. The Examination in Public is underway and the Inspectors have agreed that the Examination can proceed to Stage 2 with further hearings to take place in the autumn. Limited weight is therefore applied to emerging policies at this stage however, where relevant, policies within the emerging Local Plan have been considered and limited weight applied accordingly.

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was updated in December 2024 and provides the Government's overarching policy framework for decision making. It states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, including the provision of homes, commercial development and supporting infrastructure in a sustainable manner. Planning law requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Paragraphs 82 – 84 deal with the provision of rural housing. Paragraph 82 states that *"in rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs"*. Paragraph 83 goes on to

state that housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities.

Paragraph 84 states that planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless certain circumstances apply, including where:

a) 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

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) is an online resource that provides guidance to support the interpretation of policies in the NPPF. In relation to rural housing, PPG sets out considerations that may be relevant to the assessment of need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers as follows:

- *evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at, or in close proximity to, their place of work to ensure the effective operation of an agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance, where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attention 24-hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- *the degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- *whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*
- *whether the need could be met through improvements to existing accommodation on the site, providing such improvements are appropriate taking into account their scale, appearance and the local context; and*
- *in the case of new enterprises, whether it is appropriate to consider granting permission for a temporary dwelling for a trial period.*

It goes on to states that: *“Employment on an assembly or food packing line, or the need to accommodate seasonal workers, will generally not be sufficient to justify building isolated rural dwellings”.*

Local Planning Policy

Wiltshire Core Strategy

The Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015 sets out policies to guide development across Wiltshire. Core Policy 48 (CP48) relates to ‘supporting rural life’ and sets out that outside of defined limits of settlements and built areas (i.e. in the countryside), proposals for residential development will be supported where these *“meet the accommodation needs required*

to enable workers to live at or in the immediate vicinity of their place of work in the interests of agriculture or forestry or other employment essential to the countryside". It states that such proposals should be supported by functional and financial evidence.

The supporting text to CP48 states that applications will be scrutinised thoroughly and opportunities for accommodation within nearby settlements must be considered initially (paragraph 6.67).

Wootton Rivers Neighbourhood Development Plan 2017 – 2026

The Wootton Rivers Neighbourhood Development Plan was made in January 2018. It sets out policies for managing the development of the Plan area (including the application site) until the end of 2026.

Policy H1 states that any new development will be limited to in-fill and will only be acceptable if it is within the built-up area of Wootton Rivers.

Policy NRD1 supports development that provides employment, services and facilities within the settlement boundary. It also supports the change of use of buildings provided the proposal conforms with policies in the Wiltshire Core Strategy.

Emerging Policy

The Wiltshire Local Plan Review is afforded no weight as it has now been withdrawn from examination. However, it does indicate a desired direction of travel for the assessment of applications for housing in the countryside. Local Plan Review Policy 82 'housing in the countryside' sets out a presumption against housing development outside of defined settlement boundaries or built areas, unless it meets certain criteria. The criteria include:

1. The proposal would deliver onsite housing to accommodate employees that are essential for the viable operation of a rural business. In such circumstances, applicants will be expected to submit clear evidence to show:

- i. the functional need for permanent onsite accommodation, including an assessment of alternative options at nearby settlements and/or as part of existing onsite accommodation; and*
- ii. that the enterprise will remain financially viable for the foreseeable future, to justify the development of permanent accommodation.*

Assessment of Need

It is proposed to construct a 4-bed dwelling immediately to the north of the existing agricultural buildings to provide accommodation for a rural worker and their family. The siting, design and proposed layout of the dwelling are detailed within the accompanying Design and Access Statement.

Functional Need for Rural Workers Dwelling

Proper Functioning

The buildings on site can house approximately 200 youngstock cattle. The dairy enterprise operates a year-round calving system and therefore the throughput of calves is fairly constant. As set out in preceding sections, due to TB restrictions and regular shutdowns at the main farm, the site at Forest Road has been set up as a TB isolation unit. This means that the barns on site will be used to house youngstock cattle from the age of 1 week old to be reared at the site, away from the principal farm. Calves will then be moved on from the site and sold once the required TB testing has been carried out.

The functional need for a rural worker's dwelling on site therefore arises due to the young and vulnerable age of the animals to be housed on site and the need for this site to be separated from the principal farm as a TB isolation unit. In addition to the essential need for a worker on site as assessed below, there is an acute lack of adequate accommodation nearby which emphasises the need for a suitable dwelling to be provided on-site. The lack of suitable accommodation is considered further in a later section of this Assessment.

The barns will be occupied by very young calves throughout the year, which will require constant monitoring and attention from a worker close to the barns to:

- Be able to attend to emergencies at short notice which, if not dealt with quickly by a skilled stock attendant, could result in the loss of young stock;
- Tend to young stock on a regular basis to ensure that statutory animal health and welfare requirements are met;
- Be available on a 24-hour basis to supervise all aspects of calve rearing over the course of the 'filling' period and subsequent months;
- Maintain separation from the principal farm and ensure compliance as a TB Isolation Unit with strict biosecurity to be implemented.

The DEFRA *Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Cattle* sets out animal welfare standards for those who care for farm animals. It notes that without good stockmanship, animal welfare can never be properly protected. The Code emphasises the importance of having close supervision of cattle by suitably trained people to maintain the "five freedoms" for the welfare of cattle:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst- by ready access to fresh water and a diet to maintain full health and vigour;
2. Freedom from discomfort- by providing an appropriate environment including shelter and a comfortable resting area;
3. Freedom from pain, injury or disease- by prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour- by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animals' own kind;
5. Freedom from fear and distress- by ensuring conditions and treatment which avoid mental suffering.

The Code states *"It is particularly important that you watch calves carefully for signs of diarrhoea or respiratory disease, such as coughing or rapid or laboured breathing, both of which could spread rapidly"*. In addition, it highlights that *"If you rear calves in a system where milk is provided by artificial means, you should closely monitor their feed intake"*. Regular inspections and constant monitoring are therefore essential alongside the other aspects of calve-rearing including feeding and water and maintaining suitable accommodation.

Labour Requirements

The Standard Work Days (SWD) system can be used to provide a general estimate of the farm labour requirement. A labour unit of one person is assumed to work 2,200 hours per year or 275 notional 'Standard Man Days' of eight hours per year. Figures have been obtained from the Agricultural Budgeting C Costing Book, 96th Edition (May 2023) to estimate the labour requirement for the whole dairy enterprise.

The labour requirements for the dairy enterprise as well as the site itself are set out in the tables below. For clarity, the identified labour requirements for the Forest Road site will be **in addition to** the requirements of the dairy enterprise.

Dairy Enterprise

<u>Description</u>	<u>Numbers</u>	<u>Standard Man-Days Required (per animal)</u>	<u>Enterprise Total</u>
Dairy Cows	550	3.75	2062.5
Dairy Replacement Heifers (12-24 months)	150	1.75	262.5
Dairy Replacement Heifers (over 24 months)	150	2	300
Beef Animals (12- 24 months)	300	1.75	350

		Total SMD	2,975
		Total Labour Units (based on 275 days/annum)	10.8

Forest Road site

Description	Numbers	Standard Man-Days Required (per animal)	Enterprise Total
Weaned Calves 0-6 months	200	1.63	326
		Total SMD	326
		Total Labour Units (based on 275 days/annum)	1.2

There is therefore a theoretical need for 10.8 full-time workers for the dairy enterprise element of the farm business. This excludes the arable enterprise, which requires additional workers. In addition, there is a need for at least 1.2 full-time workers at the Forest Road site alone.

Availability of Nearby Accommodation

Current staff live on and around the principal farm or in Burbage. There is no other unused accommodation currently rented or owned by the farm business.

As identified above, the proposed young cattle housed on site require 24-hour care and therefore any rural worker would need to always be within sight and sound of the barns and livestock. The only buildings on site are agricultural buildings to house cattle and there are no buildings on site that are suitable for conversion to residential accommodation.

The nearest dwellings to the barns are approximately 220m to the south and would not be within sight and sound of the barns, even if available. Furthermore, regardless of the distance to the barns, a search on Rightmove and Zoopla has revealed no suitable properties for rent or purchase at an affordable price that would be within sight or sound of the barns.

A review of nearby planning applications has revealed that planning permission has been granted for the development of 7 no. new dwellings at Church Farm in Wootton Rivers (ref.

19/04526/FUL and 19/11140/FUL). This site is not appropriate to provide a rural worker's dwelling for the following reasons:

- The dwellings would be over 1km from the Forest Road agricultural buildings and not within sight or sound of the young calves.
- The site is currently being marketed but the applicant does not have control over when the dwellings will be built. The TB isolation unit is ready for operation so a worker is needed on site as soon as possible to maintain the viability of the farm business.
- The purchase price of any of the proposed dwellings is not clear and whether any would be available for purchase. There is therefore too much uncertainty as to whether these dwellings would be affordable or available for the farm business to buy.

Financial Evidence

The Blanchard family has been farming in and around the Burbage area since 1910. Tom Blanchard, the applicant, has followed his father's and grandfather's footsteps in taking on the business since 2014. He operates as a partnership.

The farm's financial accounts show that the farm has been successfully managed and built up to a sustainable agricultural business since Tom took over. It is, however, important to note that the impact of TB does affect viability. It is therefore important to establish a permanent location for a TB isolation unit, and the associated farm worker's dwelling to maintain the viability of the business going forward. The financial accounts are available at the request of the Planning Officer.

Conclusion

This Assessment Report has been prepared by Dolman on behalf of Tom and Pippa Blanchard to support a planning application for the development of a permanent rural worker's dwelling on land north of Forest Road, Wootton Rivers, Marlborough.

This report demonstrates that there is an essential need for a rural worker's dwelling at the site for the following reasons:

- The calves need to be reared away from the main herd at the Forest Road site from a very young age. This requires constant care and monitoring to:
 - Be able to attend to emergencies at short notice which, if not dealt with quickly by a skilled stock attendant, could result in the loss of young stock;
 - Tend to young stock on a regular basis to ensure that statutory animal health and welfare requirements are met;
 - Be available on a 24-hour basis to supervise all aspects of calf rearing over the course of the 'filling' period and subsequent months;
 - Maintain separation from the principal farm and ensure compliance as a TB Isolation Unit with strict biosecurity to be implemented.
- There is a lack of suitable accommodation in the area to house a farm worker within sight and sound of the barns;
- The farm business is viable, however, TB restrictions impact upon the financial returns of the main herd. The isolation unit means that calves can be reared and sold at market value, supporting the viability of the business.

The proposed dwelling therefore complies with Paragraphs 82-84 of the NPPF as there is an essential need for a worker to live close to the barns at Forest Road. It also complies with Core Policy 48 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy which supports residential proposals to *"meet the accommodation needs required to enable workers to live at or in the immediate vicinity of their place of work in the interests of agriculture..."*.

Whilst only limited weight is applied to emerging Policy 83 of the Wiltshire Local Plan, this Assessment demonstrates that there is a functional need for permanent onsite accommodation that cannot be provided in nearby settlements or as part of existing buildings on site. Financial evidence is also outlined to demonstrate that the farm business will remain viable into the future and that the construction of permanent on-site accommodation at Forest Road will support the viability of the business.