



**READING
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Your Ref: DC/25/0403
Our Ref: 10724-aw

17 June 2025

For the attention of Amanda Wilkes

Horsham District Council
Albery House
Springfield Road
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 2GB

Dear Ms Wilkes,

Site: Stonehouse Farm, Handcross Road, Plummers Plain, West Sussex.
Application: DC/25/0403
Proposal: Full Planning Application to form a comprehensive masterplan including:
1. Rationalisation and enhancement of existing commercial facilities (Use Classes E(g) B2 and B8 at Stonehouse Business Park including demolition of two buildings and their replacement with new Class E(g), B2 and B8 facilities. Extension of existing building to form a new office and wardens' accommodation. Existing mobile home removed. 2. Decommissioning of the Anaerobic Digester and re-use of the existing 2no buildings for storage and office uses (Class E (g) and B8) and the diversion of a public footpath. 3. Residential redevelopment of the Jacksons Farm site including the demolition of existing barns to provide 3no. dwellings with access, parking, and landscaping.

Thank you for your instruction dated and email dated 16 June 2025 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) provide a brief overview of the application and whether there are any agricultural concerns.

In preparing this response I have had regard to:

- a comprehensive and fully detailed Planning Statement (PS) dated March 2025 produced by ECE Planning on behalf of the applicant, Lake Investments.

RAC is familiar with the application site comprising Stonehouse Farm and its associated agricultural land and range of buildings, anaerobic digester, fishing lakes and the Jackson Farm site having visited the site on a number of occasions following instructions from the



Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd

Registered Office as above

Company No. 3282982

Registered in England



Council with reference to a significant number of previous planning applications at the application site.

The PS has provided a comprehensive list of these planning applications.

Background

1. RAC understands that the applicant, Lake Investments, purchased Stonehouse Farm and its land holding, including Jacksons Farm in 2022.
2. The site at Stonehouse Farm extends to a total of 41 hectares (101 acres) and was historically a dairy farm with a range of agricultural buildings. RAC is aware that over time the previous owner developed cattle and sheep breeding enterprises and an anaerobic digester along with fishing lakes and with some of the redundant agricultural buildings a change of use to commercial uses. Some of these redundant agricultural buildings had received planning permission for change of use (temporary or permanent) but there were others within the land holding where their use was unlawful.
3. There is an existing mobile home on site located at the Stonehouse Farm buildings which RAC understands was previously used to house a rural worker employed in the previous owner's agricultural enterprise.
4. There is a public footpath (FP1708) which crosses the farm between Handcross Road and Hammerpond Road north to south, close to the eastern boundary of the site.
5. The applicant sought and received pre-application advice on its proposal from the Council.
6. The PS provides a comprehensive masterplan of the proposed redevelopment of Stonehouse Farm.

Proposal

7. The applicant seeks planning permission for the following:
 - i. Rationalisation and enhancement of existing commercial facilities (Use Classes E(g) B2 and B8) at Stonehouse Business Park including demolition of two buildings and their replacement with new Class E(g), B2 and B8 facilities. Extension of existing building to form a new office and wardens' accommodation. Existing mobile home removed.
 - ii. Decommissioning of the Anaerobic Digester and re-use of the existing 2no buildings for storage and office uses (Class E(g) and B8) and the diversion of a public footpath.
 - iii. Residential redevelopment of the Jacksons Farm site including the demolition of existing barns to provide 3no. dwellings with access, parking, and landscaping.

Relevant Planning Policies

8. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in December 2024.

9. Paragraph 11 of the NPPF sets out the core land-use planning principles that should be adopted and these expressly include:

- A presumption in favour of sustainable development;
- Positively seek opportunities to meet the development needs of the area and be sufficiently flexible to adapt to rapid change;
- Provide for objectively assessed needs for housing and other uses;
- Approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; and,
- Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission.

10. Section 4 requires that decision makers:

- should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way; work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic; social and environmental conditions of the area;
- seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

11. Section 6 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Building a strong, competitive economy' and at paragraph 85 it notes:

"planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt..."

12. At paragraph 88 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' it notes:

"Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- 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;*
- b) The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses;*
- c) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and*
- d) The retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open spaces, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship".*

13. Policy 10 of the Horsham District Planning Framework looks at rural economic development and states:

"Sustainable rural economic development and enterprise within the district will be encouraged in order to generate local employment opportunities and economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities.

In the countryside, development which maintains the quality and character of the area, whilst sustaining its varied and productive social and economic activity will be supported in principle. Any development should be appropriate to the countryside location and must:

- 1. contribute to the diverse and sustainable farming enterprises within the district or, in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, contribute to the wider rural economy and/or promote recreation in, and the enjoyment of the countryside; and either*

- a. *be contained wherever possible within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion or, in the case of an established rural industrial estate, within the existing boundaries of the estate; or*
 - b. *result in substantial environmental improvement and reduce the impact on the countryside particularly if there are exceptional cases where new or replacement buildings are involved. New buildings or development in the rural area will be acceptable provided that it supports sustainable economic growth towards balanced living and working communities and criteria a) has been considered first."*
2. *demonstrate that car parking requirements can be accommodated satisfactorily within the immediate surrounds of the buildings, or an alternative, logical solution is proposed".*

14. Policy 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (excluding South Downs National Park) deals with countryside protection and enhancement and states:

"Outside built-up area boundaries, the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside will be protected against inappropriate development. Any proposal must be essential to its countryside location, and in addition meet one of the following criteria:

1. *support the needs of agriculture or forestry;*
2. *enable the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste;*
3. *provide for quiet informal recreational use; or,*
4. *enable the sustainable development of rural areas.*

In addition, proposals must be of a scale appropriate to its countryside character and location. Development will be considered acceptable where it does not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside, and protects, and/or conserves, and/or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located, including:

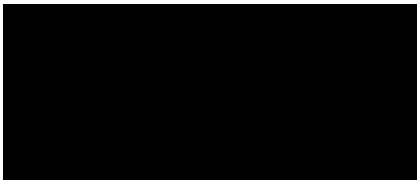
1. *the development pattern of the area, its historical and ecological qualities, tranquillity and sensitivity to change;*
2. *the pattern of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, trees, waterbodies and other features; and*
3. *the landform of the area."*

Appraisal

15. RAC would note that applicant's aims are designed to rationalise and enhance the existing commercial facilities and repurpose redundant agricultural buildings for viable commercial use at Stonehouse Farm and introduce a sensitively designed residential development at Jacksons Farm.
16. It is evident from the PS document that new woodland areas will be created across the Stonehouse Farm and its land holding which will be managed in time. RAC would note that no woodland management plan is provided. Similarly, the PS notes that areas of wildflower and pasture will be created as an extension to Jacksons Ridge, and there will be areas of habitat mosaic which includes rough grassland, scrub and thicket planting throughout the land holding.
17. Whilst RAC accepts that these proposals will provide important habitats for wildlife, there will inevitably be some periodic requirement for some form of management in these locations to ensure they do not become too overgrown in their rural location.

18. RAC understands that the applicant intends to keep the fishing lakes, but it is unclear who will manage the fish stocks and regularly monitor their health and ensure the safety of anglers.
19. RAC is not aware of any livestock to be kept as grazing animals on any part of the application site. The Council may wish to have this confirmed by the applicant.
20. Overall, RAC is of the view that the applicant's proposal for the redevelopment of the former agricultural unit at Stonehouse Farm and the land holding is acceptable and will make an efficient use of a redundant agricultural unit.
21. The applicant's proposals are likely to enhance the landscape in this rural location.
22. RAC is supportive of the applicant's proposals which is considered to be compliant with the NPPF and Local Planning Policy.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.



Alan Bloor