



# READING AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANTS

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Your Ref: DC/25/0033  
Our Ref: 10687-jb

Date: 25 March 2025

## For the attention of Jacques Burrowes

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

Dear Mr Burrowes,

**Site:** New Barn Nursery, Broadford Bridge Road, West Chiltington, Pulborough, West Sussex, RH20 2LF.  
**Application:** DC/25/0033  
**Proposal:** Erection of 1no detached self-build rural workers dwelling, creation of new vehicular access and closing up of existing access

Thank you for your instruction dated 6 March 2025 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) comments on the above planning application.

In preparing this response I have had regard to:

- the application form and associated plans; and
- a Planning Statement (dated January 2025) produced by MME Planning Services (the applicant's agent).

I have not visited the site or discussed the application with the applicant or the agent.

## Background

1. The applicant, Mr Paul a'Barrow, operates an agricultural/forestry business from the application site. The Planning Statement details that the applicant produces logs as part of an existing forestry business and is also a tree surgeon, providing 24/7 call out services, alongside producing hay.



Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd

Registered Office as above

Company No. 3282982

Registered in England



2. The applicant trades as Paul a'Barrow Tree Surgery. A search for this company shows the applicant's website <https://www.storringtonsawmills.co.uk> which details the services as including landscaping and tree surgery.
3. It is unknown from the submission documents whether the logs and hay produced by the applicant are all produced from the application holding or from land off-site and not owned by the applicant.
4. The application site has planning permission for three biomass boilers and drying containers for the production of logs which are sold on to customers. These were approved under DC/18/0851 and DC/19/2273. The Planning Statement details that the boilers are generally working 24 hours a day and are refuelled throughout the day, and at around 10pm each night. It is unknown if the boilers are operating every day, 365 days a year.
5. The Planning Statement details that the applicant travels to site throughout the days to ensure the equipment is operational and working properly. It is unknown if any alarm and monitoring systems are fitted which notify the applicant of any issues or emergencies requiring prompt attention.
6. It is unknown how many incidents or emergencies have required the applicant to respond promptly to since the biomass boilers and drying containers were installed on site.
7. It is unknown where the hay produced by the applicant is stored or what storage facilities are available or whether the biomass boilers are involved in drying the hay.

## **Proposal**

8. The application proposes the erection of a permanent rural worker's dwelling which will be occupied by the applicant.
9. The two storey dwelling comprises an open plan kitchen/living/dining area, woodyard and farm office, w.c, three bedrooms family bathroom and en-suite bathroom.
10. The Planning Statement details that the proposed dwelling has a gross internal area of 156m<sup>2</sup> across the two floors.
11. It will be occupied by the applicant, Paul a'Barrow.

## **Relevant Planning Policies**

12. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in December 2024.
13. 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.

14. 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.

15. Paragraph 82 et seq deals with housing in the countryside and notes;

*“In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs...”*

*To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services...”*

16. However, paragraph 84 maintains the presumption against isolated new dwellings in the countryside unless they are essential, noting:

*“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:*

- 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...”*

17. 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...”*

18. 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;...”*

19. Planning Practice Guidance titled ‘Housing Needs of Different Groups’ (July 2019) provides some guidance relevant to paragraph 80 of the NPPF in the section ‘How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed’?

20. These include:

- *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 agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attendance 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;*

21. 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.”*

22. Policy 20 considers rural workers’ accommodation and states that:

*“Outside the defined built-up area new housing for rural workers will be supported provided that:*

- 1. there is a functional need for the dwelling and the occupation of the dwelling is to support the established business use.*
- 2. evidence is submitted to demonstrate the viability of the rural business for which the housing is required.”*

23. 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**

### Essential Need

24. In order to demonstrate that there is an essential need for a rural worker to live on site, it is necessary to consider whether it is essential for the proper functioning of the enterprise for one or more workers to be readily available most of the time.
25. An assessment of the essential need for a rural worker to live at or near their place of work requires:
  - an evaluation of the risks involved;
  - the frequency and type of out-of-hours emergency that might arise;
  - the scale and loss that could be incurred should that emergency situation occur;
  - the potential for an on-site worker to identify the problem; and
  - the ability of that resident worker to promptly rectify the problem.
26. The Planning Statement and additional submission documents do not detail the instances which have required the applicant to respond to, or the potential scale and loss that could be incurred through any emergencies.
27. RAC considers that the applicant has been operating the biomass boilers and drying containers and his business from a wider site whilst living away from site as noted in the Planning Statement for a number of years. Without further supportive and detailed information it is not possible for RAC to conclude that there is an essential and justified need for a full-time rural worker to reside on site.

### Financial Viability and Sustainability

28. The NPPF deals with the concept of sustainable development at a strategic rather than an individual enterprise level. In terms of economic development, it is concerned with contributing to and building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation.
29. RAC considers that in order for any business to demonstrate viability, it should be generating profits sufficient to provide a return on the capital invested – in agriculture/equestrian a figure of 2.5% is usually cited; reward the owner for any

unpaid labour – equivalent to the national minimum wage; a notional return on land and, provide for the build cost of the proposed dwelling.

30. Confidential copies of the financial accounts for the applicant, trading as Paul a'Barrow Tree Surgery, for the years ending 31 March 2022 to 31 March 2024 have been provided, alongside projected log and hay sales for the three year period 2024 to 2027.
31. RAC considers that the financial accounts demonstrate the applicant to be operating a well-established and profitable and viable business, however it is considered that a large proportion of the sales income relates to off-site activities including the tree surgery and landscaping business advertised on the applicant's website.
32. Whilst the business can support the notional figures referred to above, it is not detailed in the accounts or submission documents how much turnover is generated from the land holding as opposed to off-site activities.

### Other Dwellings

33. The Planning Statement details a search of available properties on Rightmove (unknown date).
34. A search of Rightmove at the time of writing this appraisal shows 2 properties for sale within 0.5 miles of the application site.

The screenshot displays two property listings from the Rightmove website. The first listing is for a detached house in West Chilton nr Billingshurst, listed by Mapp & Weston. It features a large detached house with a driveway and a modern interior with a red dining table. The price is £1,150,000. The second listing is for a detached house on Harbolets Road, West Chilton, RH20, listed by Hamptons. It features a detached house with a large garden and a modern interior. The price is £995,000, labeled as the Guide Price. Both listings include contact information and a 'Save' button.

35. They are considered beyond the affordability of a rural worker.

### **Conclusion**

36. RAC would conclude that the applicant's submission documents do not clearly demonstrate the need for a rural worker to reside at the application site and therefore the applicant's business does not meet the essential need test.
37. The applicant has been living off-site and running the business for a number of years.

38. Whist the applicant's business is considered profitable, it is unknown how much of the turnover and sales relates to off-site work such as tree surgery and landscaping, along with hay production.
39. Overall, RAC considers that the applicant's proposal is not compliant with national or local planning policy.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Olivia Wojniak

