

MME PLANNING SERVICES

Change of Use of Agricultural Barn to Gym and Farm
Office and Change of Use of Gym to Agricultural
Storage Barn.

at

Spring Gardens Nursery, Spring Gardens, Washington,
West Sussex, RH20 3BS

Planning and Statement

Ref: P-035e

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Version 1



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Figure 1: Site Location

Contents

Contents	
1. Introduction	1
2. Site, Surroundings and Background	1
3. Planning History	3
4. Proposals	4
5. Planning Policy	5
6. Planning Considerations	7
7. Summary and Conclusion	11

1. Introduction

- 1.1 We are instructed to prepare and submit this full planning application for the change of use of an agricultural barn to a gym and farm office (Building 1) and change of use of a gym to an agricultural storage barn (Building 2) at Spring Gardens Nursery, Spring Gardens, Washington, West Sussex, RH20 3BS. This application is submitted following a number of applications and extensive recent history in relation to both buildings which are the subject of this current submission.
- 1.2 This statement sets out the proposed scheme in detail with regard to the following aspects: the planning history of the site, the development proposals, the relevant planning policy, the planning merits of the scheme and how the proposals comply with the Council's policies.

2. Site, Surroundings, Background

- 2.1 The application relates to 2no barns sited within the wider holding of Spring Garden Nursery, Washington, outside of any defined built-up area boundary. The site is therefore located within the countryside in policy terms. The existing buildings which are the subject of this application were erected in 2002 and 2021 respectively. Building 1 is currently used for agricultural purposes and Building 2 is used as a gym.
- 2.2 The site is located to the west of the A24 and a number of buildings in, residential, agricultural and commercial use. The surrounding area is predominantly rural in character, with more open fields located to the north which the applicant owns / has use of for agricultural activities. Given the dense mature vegetation surrounding Building 1, distances to surrounding development, and the backdrop of the wider holding and associated buildings, the application buildings are not visible from any public vantage points and do not appear prominently within this context.
- 2.3 As detailed above, the application site / buildings has a long and detailed recent history. 2no planning applications were initially submitted in relation to Building 1: firstly under planning reference DC/21/2349 in January 2022 for 'Erection of an agricultural barn for the mixed use of agricultural storage of plant and machinery and use as a personal training gym (Retrospective)' and secondly under planning reference DC/22/0780 in June 2022 for 'Part-Retrospective application for the retention of an agricultural barn for the mixed use of agricultural storage of plant and machinery and use as a personal training gym for a temporary period of two years'.

- 2.4 Following the refusal of these applications, an Enforcement Notice, under reference EN/22/0043 was served in August 2022 in relation to the building / use. In addition to the breach of planning control for the unauthorised development and material change of use of the land, the Enforcement Notice also included a reason in relation to the principle of a gym use in this location and that the development would have an adverse effect upon the integrity of the internationally designated Arun Valley Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and Ramsar sites by way of increased water abstraction.
- 2.5 The applicant subsequently appealed the Enforcement Notice, which was dismissed (with amendments) by the Planning Inspectorate in May 2024. The use as a gym of Building 1 ceased in October 2024. Prior to this, an application was submitted under planning reference DC/24/1100 in July 2024 for the retention of Building 1 as an agricultural barn. This application was refused by the Council in October 2024, but a subsequent appeal was allowed by the Planning Inspectorate in July 2025.
- 2.6 In addition to the submissions in relation to Building 1, a Lawful Development Certificate Existing (LDCE) application was submitted in relation to Building 2 in August 2024 under planning reference DC/24/1194. A split decision was issued for this application in February 2025, however the LDCE established the agricultural use of the relevant section of Building 2. Following this decision, a notification under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class R of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) (2015), as amended was submitted to the Council in February 2025 notifying the Council of the applicant's intention to convert less than 150sqm of the established agricultural barn into a gym. Acknowledgement of this notification was received from the Council in June 2025. Further to this decision, a Habitats Regulation Assessment Application was submitted in September 2025 and was subsequently permitted in November 2025 following changes to water neutrality in October 2025.
- 2.7 The steps taken above established the principle of a gym use in this rural location. The gym use was created within Building 2 in accordance with the requirements of the GPDO in December 2025 and has been in use as such to the present day.
- 2.8 In addition to the above, the wider holding consists of a farm shop and café which is operated by the applicant and their immediate family. The shop and café building consists of a very small ancillary office which is used for administrative and operational activities in relation to the agricultural / business activities.

3. Planning History

- Prior notification for the erection of a building for agricultural use

Ref. No: DC/21/0318 | Status: Refuse Prior Approval, March 2021

- Erection of an agricultural barn for the mixed use of agricultural storage of plant and machinery and use as a personal training gym (Retrospective).

Ref. No: DC/21/2349 | Status: Application Refused, January 2022

- Part-Retrospective application for the retention of an agricultural barn for the mixed use of agricultural storage of plant and machinery and use as a personal training gym for a temporary period of two years.

Ref. No: DC/22/0780 | Status: Application Refused, June 2022

- Use of building as agricultural barn (Retrospective)

Ref. No: DC/24/1100 | Status: Application Refused, October 2024. Appeal Allowed, July 2025

- Application to confirm the continuous use of existing building used as agricultural storage, car repair, mechanics, agricultural maintenance garage and general B8 storage purposes for a period in excess of ten years. An extension to the building was completed more than 4 years prior to the date of the application (Lawful Development Certificate - Existing).

Ref. No: DC/24/1194 | Status: Split Decision, February 2025

- Notification of Change of Use of an Agricultural Building, not exceeding 150sqm in floor area, to flexible commercial use under Schedule 2, Part 3, Class R of the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) (2015), as amended.

Ref. No: DC/25/0264 | Status: No Objection to Notification, June 2025

- Application under Regulation 77 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 relating to Prior Approval consent DC/25/0264

Ref. No: HRA/25/0023 | Status: Application Permitted, November 2025

4. Proposals

- 4.1 The proposals relate to the change of use of the existing agricultural barn to a gym and farm office (Building 1) and the change of use of the existing gym to an agricultural storage barn (Building 2).
- 4.2 As set out above under sections 2 and 3 of this statement, the principle of the uses sought under this application, namely a gym use (within Building 2) and agricultural storage (within Building 1), have been established within this location. This application merely seeks to swap the uses between the buildings, with the addition of an ancillary farm office located within the mezzanine of Building 1.
- 4.3 No external alterations are proposed to the buildings. The buildings are located approximately 130m away from each other within the same countryside context. Given the existing permitted uses in this location, the proposal would not result in any additional activities or harm beyond that of the existing situation on site.
- 4.4 The use of the mezzanine within Building 1 as a farm office and storage would essentially be an ancillary use in connection with the farm shop and café and wider agricultural activities taking place within the holding.

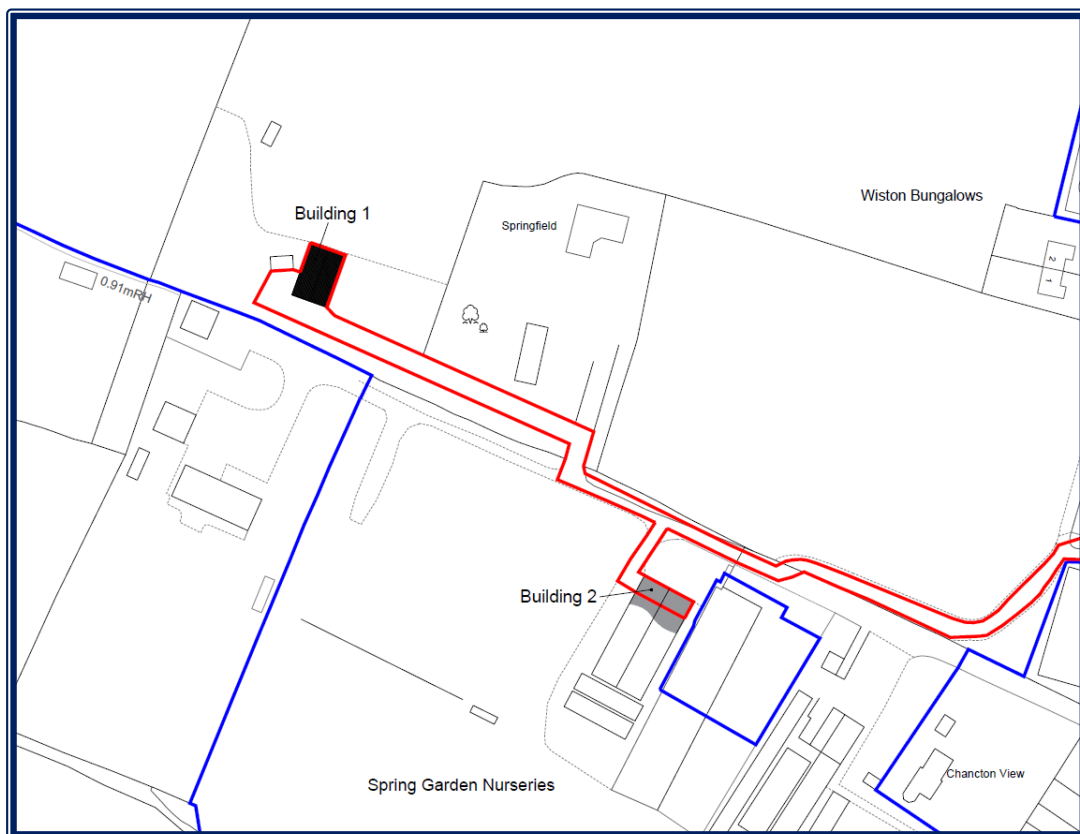


Figure 2: Block Plan showing the distance and relationship between Building 1 and Building 2

5. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024) and National Guidance

- 5.1 The NPPF sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. It provides a framework for the preparation of local plans for housing and other development. The NPPF should be read as a whole.
- 5.2 Running throughout the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Sustainable development is achieved through three main objectives which are – economic, social and environmental.
- 5.3 Paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that for decision-taking, this means approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay. Where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out of date, planning permission should be granted unless the policies of the Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provide a clear reason for refusing the development proposed, or, any adverse impact of doing so would 'significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits' when assessed against the policies of the NPPF when taken as a whole (NPPF paragraph 11 (d)).

Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) (2015)

- 5.4 Paragraph 34 of the NPPF requires that all development plans complete their reviews no later than 5 years from their adoption. Horsham District Council has submitted its new local plan for examination, however at this stage, the emerging policies carry little to no weight in decision-making.
- 5.5 A Local Development Scheme (LDS) was published in February 2025 by the Council. The LDS sets out the production timetable for the New Local Plan anticipated to be adopted in April 2026. Notwithstanding the above, as the HDPF is now over 5 years old, the most important policies for determining this application are now considered to be 'out-of-date'. This position is further highlighted given that the Horsham District Local Plan examination hearing meetings scheduled for January 2025 were cancelled by the appointed Inspector, and in April 2025 advised that the Plan is withdrawn due to concerns about its legal compliance, with no further progress made on the new local plan to date.

5.6 While considered to be out of date, the main HDPF policies relevant to this application are as follows:

- Policy 1 - Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development
- Policy 7 - Strategic Policy: Economic Growth
- Policy 9 - Employment Development
- Policy 10 - Rural Economic Development
- Policy 25 - Strategic Policy: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
- Policy 26 - Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection
- Policy 31 - Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
- Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
- Policy 33 - Development Principles
- Policy 40 - Sustainable Transport
- Policy 41 - Parking
- Policy 43 - Community Facilities, Leisure and Recreation

Ashington Neighbourhood Plan (ANP) (2021)

5.7 Neighbourhood Plan policies relevant to this application are as follows:

- ASH1 – Overall Spatial Strategy for Ashington
- ASH5 – Landscaping and Countryside Access
- ASH8 – Ashington Community Cluster

Planning Advice Note(s) (PAN)

5.8 Relevant PANs to this application are as follows:

- Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

6. Planning Considerations

Principle / Need

6.1 Policy 10 states that –

“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 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 be contained wherever possible within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion, or in the case of an established industrial estate, within the existing boundaries of the estate; or result in substantial environmental improvement and reduce the impact on the countryside, particularly if there are exceptional circumstances where new or replacement buildings are involved”.

6.2 Policy 26 states that –

“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: support the needs of agriculture or forestry; enable the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste; provide for quiet informal recreational use; or 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 level of overall 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.”

- 6.3 As detailed above, the existing uses of the buildings have been established under planning reference DC/24/1100 (Building 1) and DC/25/0264 and HRA/25/0023 (Building 2). These uses are active and established and represent realistic fall-back positions when assessing the principle.
- 6.4 It is considered that the proposals would comply with the requirements of Policy 10, as they would be contained within existing buildings and would continue to support the economic development within this rural area. The proposals would not result in marked intensification of activity given the existing uses in operation.
- 6.5 While it is noted that there are currently no restrictions attached to the existing gym within Building 2, the gym use currently operates by appointment only between the hours of 06.30 and 19.30 Monday to Friday, and would continue to operate in this manner. The gym has a total of 2no staff members who operate the business and run the classes. There is usually one member of staff present at any one time and the gym operates predominantly as a personal 1 on 1 training as well as some group classes, with class sizes ranging from 5 to 10. All classes last for approximately 45 minutes with 15 minutes allowed for arrivals and departures. As per the opening hours, no changes are proposed to these arrangements as part of the proposals to re-locate the gym from Building 2 to Building 1. The proposals would merely allow additional space for the gym activities to function more appropriately and effectively. While the use of a gym in this location has already been established, it is noted that this use complies with Policy 26 of the HDPF, in that it provides a recreational use.
- 6.6 The provision of the farm office to the mezzanine of Building 1 is considered to be low-key in nature and in line with the current use of the building. This would allow the farm shop, café and operations of the wider holding to function more effectively.
- 6.7 With regard to Building 2, given that this was previously used as agricultural storage, the re-introduction of this use would not raise any principle concerns, providing storage space for plant and machinery used in association with the wider holding. Details of the applicant's machinery and appropriate access around the holding have previously been detailed and established under planning reference DC/24/1100.
- 6.8 Taking the above into account, it is considered that in this instance, the proposed uses would be acceptable in principle and in accordance with Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF.

Design, Appearance, and Impact on the Setting

- 6.9 Policy 25 of the HDPF seeks to protect the natural environment and landscape character of the District, including the landform, development pattern, together with protected landscapes and habitats. Development will be required to protect, conserve, and enhance landscape and townscape character, taking account of areas or features identified as being of landscape importance, individual settlement characteristics and settlement separation. In addition, development will be supported where it maintains and enhances the Green Infrastructure Network.
- 6.10 Policies 32 and 33 of the HDPF require development to be of a high standard of design and layout. Development proposals must be locally distinctive in character and respect the character of their surroundings. Where relevant, the scale, massing and appearance of development will be required to relate sympathetically with its built-surroundings, landscape, open spaces and to consider any impact on the skyline and important views.
- 6.11 As detailed above, no external alterations are proposed to the subject buildings. While it is noted that some concerns have previously been raised in relation to the external appearance of Building 1, this was primarily linked to its previous unauthorised use as a gym. As the principle of a gym use has been established in this rural location, on balance, it is contended that the appearance of Building 1 would not be harmful to a degree which would warrant refusal of this application. Notwithstanding the above, the applicant would be happy to accept any conditions which the Council may deem appropriate such as blinds or amended glazing to limit light spillage for example, to ensure that any perceived impact can be mitigated against.
- 6.12 The overall form of Building 1 and materials used in its construction are agricultural in nature, and would be appropriate in this location, having previously been deemed to be acceptable.
- 6.13 Building 2 has a utilitarian appearance which has been previously approved and regularised. As such, no concerns would be raised in relation to this building.
- 6.14 Overall, the proposals would represent appropriate development within this setting and would be in accordance with Policies 25, 32 and 33 of the HDPF.

Neighbouring Amenity and Parking and Highways

- 6.15 As detailed within the officer reports for the previously refused applications and enforcement appeal, matters in relation to impact on amenity and highway impacts and parking were not considered to be areas of concern. Given the current fall-back positions and nature of the proposals, it is not considered that this current application would alter this position with regard to these material matters.
- 6.16 Notwithstanding the above, the details provided at paragraph 6.5 with regard to opening hours, staff numbers and class sizes show that the operation is modest in nature and would not result in any harmful impact on neighbouring amenity or any highway safety or capacity issues.

Ecological and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- 6.16 Policy 31 of the HDPF states that –
- “Development will be supported where it can demonstrate that it maintains or enhances the existing network of green infrastructure. Development proposals will be required to contribute to the enhancement of existing biodiversity and should create and manage new habitats where appropriate. The Council will support new development which retains and/or enhances significant features of nature conservation on development sites. The Council will also support development which makes a positive contribution to biodiversity through the creation of green spaces, and linkages between habitats to create local and regional ecological networks”.
- 6.17 As set out above, the proposed development relates to the use of existing buildings with no alterations proposed. Existing ecological features around the buildings would be unaffected by the development. In addition, this application would be exempt from the requirement to achieve a minimum 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), as it qualifies as ‘de minimis’ development under Regulation 4 of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024.

7. Summary and Conclusion

- 7.1 Overall, given the fall-back positions and the nature of the proposals, the development represents an appropriate form of development within this countryside setting and would be acceptable in principle. The proposals would be acceptable in terms of design and impact on the surroundings and with regard to neighbouring amenity and transport.
- 7.2 The proposal would be in accordance with Policies 10, 25, 26, 32 and 33 of the HDPF and therefore, the Local Planning Authority is respectfully asked to grant planning permission accordingly.