



READING AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANTS

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Your Ref: DC/26/0905
Our Ref: 11198-sn

30 September 2026

For the attention of Sam Nye

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

Dear Mr Nye,

Site: Hundred Steddle Barn, Brighton Road, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9RT.
Application: DC/26/0905
Proposal: Outline Application for redevelopment of the site to provide up to 1 no dwelling with all matters reserved except access.

Thank you for your instruction dated 13 August 2026 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) comments on the above planning application.

In preparing this desk-top response I have had regard to the Design and Access Statement (dated June 2026) and the Rural Housing Policy – Supporting Evidence (undated) prepared by an unknown author, the associated plans and application form.

I have also been provided with further information in emails dated 16 September 2026 and 28 September 2026 following requests via yourself for cashflow projections and clarity regarding the existing dwelling on site.

I have not visited the application site nor had any contact with the applicant in preparing this response.

Background

1. The applicant, Mr Alexander Walters is a Director of Woodmancote Vineyard Limited along with Mrs Beverley Savioz. Woodmancote Vineyard Ltd is a newly established company with Companies House showing it was incorporated on 20 March 2026 but it is understood that the vineyard has been cultivating vines since 2013 when the applicant's father, Dr Melvyn Walters, was operating on the site prior to his death in November 2023.
2. It is detailed that Dr Walters died 3 months prior to the proposed launch of the Woodmancote Vineyard vintages and the "Rusty Goose" brand.



Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd

Registered Office as above

Company No. 3282982

Registered in England



3. The application site extends to 2.38 hectares and comprises over 12,000 vines and Alexander and Beverley of Woodmancote Vineyard Ltd are continuing to run their late father's enterprise, albeit under a new limited company.
4. The vines include Bacchus, Chardonnay, Meunier and Pinot Noir Precoce varieties and the production of English sparkling wines takes place on site with yields of 6-10 tonnes of grapes per hectare.
5. The business is able to sell grapes off the field at harvest and as bulk wines from the tank or in labelled or unlabelled bottles.
6. The Supporting Evidence Document details the impact of the winter 2025/26 frosts on the vines at Woodmancote which saw temperatures drop below a typical winter period which resulted in bud and shoot destruction leading to reduced yields in the harvest.
7. It is detailed that the applicant considers a resident on site worker is essential to allow the business to react promptly to temperature drops and frosts, particularly during the extended risk period of February to May when nightly monitoring of temperatures takes place.
8. It is also detailed that HMRC requires duty-suspended alcohol to be stored in secure and approved locations like excise warehouses or authorised producer premises which provide strict physical security and comply with supply chain due diligence rules.
9. It is detailed that since 2017 there is a wine stock of approximately 12,000 bottles stored on site and the winery is capable of storing and processing up to 40,000 litres of wine in the tanks which can produce up to 50,000 bottles per annum.
10. It is detailed that there was an attempted theft at the application site in March 2026 at 3am which was disturbed by on site staff.
11. Alexander is a Director of Fairview Veterinary Trading Ltd and Fairview Veterinary Retail Ltd and works as a full time emergency farm animal veterinary surgeon and Beverley currently works as a Palliative Care Specialist Nurse. It is unknown if either will take on any of the three roles detailed for employment – vineyard manager, vineyard worker/assistant or winery receptionist/assistant which will be new roles developed as part of the expansion of the existing business.
12. This application proposes the erection of a permanent rural worker dwelling which is be occupied by the vineyard manager.
13. It is understood from the Design and Access Statement that a worker (being a member of the family – assumed to be either Mr Walters or Mrs Savioz) is currently residing on site in the existing buildings on the western boundary of the holding however it is considered by the applicant that this is limiting further tourism and retail uses of the site.
14. It has been confirmed by the applicant in the email dated 28 September 2026 that the existing barn is a residential dwelling with permission granted for the conversion from agricultural to residential over 30 years ago. It is understood that this dwelling is not subject to an agricultural occupancy condition.

Proposal

15. The outline application before the Council proposes the erection of a rural worker dwelling accessed via an existing entrance, sited in the south-eastern corner of the application site.
16. It will provide accommodation for the vineyard manager, and as such it will be occupied by a rural worker.

Relevant Planning Policies

17. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in August 2026.
18. The National Planning Policy Framework places a presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. Policy S3 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development provides that decisions on development proposals should apply this presumption. This means that:
 - development proposals within settlements should be considered against Policy S4;
 - development proposals outside settlements should be considered against Policy S5; and
 - in all locations, proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan and the national decision-making policies in the Framework should be approved without delay.
19. Policy DM3 - Determining Development Proposals requires local planning authorities to work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner, seeking solutions to problems arising from initial proposals where necessary, taking a proportionate approach to the planning matters raised, considering whether otherwise unacceptable proposals can be made acceptable through planning conditions or obligations, and not refusing applications which should clearly be approved having regard to the development plan, the Framework and other material considerations.
20. The objective of Chapter 4 of the Framework is to promote sustainable patterns of development, including enabling development which supports the rural economy and rural communities while safeguarding the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.
21. Within this context, Policy S5 - Principle of Development Outside Settlements recognises that certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements where the benefits are not substantially outweighed by adverse effects. These include development for rural businesses and services where a countryside location is necessary, the reuse, extension or replacement of existing buildings, the redevelopment of previously developed land, and limited infilling within groups of houses.
22. Policy HO11 - Isolated Homes in the Countryside continues the long-established approach of resisting isolated new homes in the countryside unless specified exceptions apply. One such exception is where there is an essential need for a rural worker, including someone taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.
23. Chapter 7 - Building a Strong, Effective Economy seeks to ensure that planning decisions support economic growth.
24. Policy E1 - Supporting Economic Growth requires planning policies and decisions to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt, and confirms that significant weight should be given to supporting economic growth and productivity, taking account of local business needs and wider opportunities for development.
25. Policy E2 - Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy states that planning policies and decisions should enable:
 - a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, including through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
 - b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses; and
 - c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside and contribute to local prosperity.

26. Planning Practice Guidance titled 'Housing Needs of Different Groups' (July 2019) provides some guidance relevant to HO11 of the NPPF in the section '*How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed?*'
27. 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;*
28. It further notes 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*".
29. 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."*
30. 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."*
31. Policy 26 deals with countryside protection and enhancement and 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:*
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

32. The primary test set out in the NPPF and Local Plan Policy 20 is an assessment as to whether it is essential for a rural worker to live at, or near, their place of work. In this case, the applicant has taken over his late father's vineyard and wine production enterprise.
33. The applicant considers that a rural worker dwelling on site is essential in order to maintain the appropriate level of management and supervision of the vines and wine production and storage bottles.
34. The primary test set out in the NPPF is an assessment as to whether it is essential for a rural worker to live at, or near, their place of work.
35. 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 at most times.
36. 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 any problem; and
 - the ability of that resident worker to rectify the problem effectively and expeditiously.
37. The July 2019 updated NPPG details the assessment of isolated homes in the countryside as *including "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);"*.
38. In the case of the applicant's vineyard and wine production enterprise at the application site, the essential needs could arise from the following:
 - Frost protection and overnight monitoring;
 - Checking for ripeness, harvesting, and overnight processing;
 - Fermentation monitoring and temperature checking;
 - Collection of vineyard data; and
 - On-site security.
39. RAC would consider in this case that the essential need for a rural worker to be on-site, relates to the management and production of the vines and is concerned with the growing and caring of the vines and harvesting the grapes. Changing weather conditions can require the vines to be covered or uncovered manually by staff for frost protection.

40. It is detailed that the site uses infrared heaters, frost barriers and burning braziers/candles/bougies to protect the vines from frost damage and these are monitored throughout the dusk to dawn period when temperatures drop.
41. RAC accepts that there needs to be a quick and immediate response once the temperature sensors are triggered and that this temperature drop will mostly occur overnight and early morning.
42. RAC considers there is an essential need for a rural worker to reside on site to meet the general management and protect the growth of vines throughout the year under various environmental conditions and to deal promptly with any unforeseen emergencies which could lead to severe financial losses.
43. It is understood that a full-time rural worker, being Mr Walters or Mrs Savioz, is already residing on site in the existing accommodation meeting this accepted essential need.

Financial Sustainability

44. 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.
45. In this context RAC considers any assessment of economic sustainability as the ability of the business/enterprise to utilise its resources which allows it to function properly; it has to have the ability and necessary funds available to stay in business.
46. RAC considers that in order for any business to demonstrate viability, it should be generating profits sufficient to cover all costs, provide a return on the capital invested, realistically reward any unpaid labour (usually at least equivalent to the national minimum wage); and provide for the build cost of the proposed dwelling.
47. The Evidence Document details that there is currently wine stock in the tanks with an approximate revenue of £300,000 and stock of £210,000 in 10,370 bottles with wine vintages dating back to 2017.
48. It details that the 2.38 hectares vineyard can produce up to 20,600 bottles per annum with a gross annual revenue of £515,000 and a net profit margin of £4.48 per bottle leading to a profit of up to £45,000 based on current stock levels.
49. The email dated 28 September 2026 has provided sales forecasts and profit and loss projections with expenditure relating to production and packaging, contracted labour, marketing and sales, insurance/utilities/admin, and maintenance/other.
50. It is noted that the contracted labour charge is in addition to that of the full-time worker.
51. The projections also include the potential for income through tours and events however no income is projected from these over the three year period.
52. The sales forecast detail that the following 3 years will comprise the sale of the following wine stocks:
 - Year 1 – 2019 English Sparkling Wine
 - Year 2 – 2019, 2020 and 2021 English Sparkling Wine and 2023 Bacchus
 - Year 3 - 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2023 English Sparkling Wine and 2023 Bacchus
53. This application is for the erection of a permanent dwelling for a rural worker where there is an existing dwelling on site and it is considered that as the business has not yet been trading and selling wine that a temporary period may be more appropriate to test the business plan.

54. RAC considers that the Business Plan demonstrates the enterprise will be able to meet all notional costs, including minimum wage for a full-time worker in Year 2.
55. RAC would note that minimum wage for a full-time worker is currently £27,960 per annum.
56. RAC would note that if the Council were minded to approve the planning application for a temporary rural worker's dwelling then the applicant's business plan and developing viticulture and wine enterprise would be thoroughly tested over the next three years.
57. However, the applicant need to be aware that if approval were to be granted for a temporary dwelling, then full financial information and detailed business accounts would be required at the end of the three year period if an application for a permanent dwelling for a rural worker is submitted.
58. This information would be fully scrutinised and the applicant's agricultural business will have to have demonstrated that it is profitable, financially viable and sustainable.
59. In the event that at the end of the three year time period the applicant's viticultural business was not proven to be viable, the Council would have the authority to have the temporary dwelling removed and the land restored to its original condition.

Other Dwellings

60. It is understood that a rural worker is already residing on site meeting the essential need of the vineyard in the existing dwelling which is not subject to an agricultural occupancy condition.
61. The submitted documents detail that the applicant would prefer this building is utilised for the purposes of the vineyard and the customer base and a purpose built dwelling is instead provided.
62. A search of Rightmove on 30 September 2026 displays 2 properties for sale within ½ mile of the application site postcode (BN5 9RT) which RAC would consider beyond the affordability of a rural worker and beyond sight and sound of the vines and stored wines kept on site.

BN5 9RT X Within 1/2 mile Min Price to Max Price Filters

Properties For Sale in BN5 9RT, within 0.5 miles > Save Search Create Alert

2 results Sort: Highest Price Map view

Prioritise properties with... Add keyword

Brighton Road, Henfield, West Sussex
 Detached 5 4
 0.13 miles
 A substantial four bedroom property with a detached two-storey annexe, set in 4.2 acre grounds
 Reduced on 29/04/2026
 £1,800,000 Guide Price PREMIUM LISTING
 Strutt & Parker 01403 912671 Local call rate Contact Save

Brighton Road, Henfield
 House 4 3
 0.21 miles
 Positioned on Brighton Road in the charming village of Henfield, this impressive detached house offers a remarkable blend of space, comfort, and stunning views. Spanning an expansive 4,032 square feet, the property boasts four generously sized bedrooms and three well-appointed...
 Reduced on 07/08/2026
 £1,450,000 PREMIUM LISTING
 01273 495333 Local call rate Contact Save

Conclusion

63. The applicant proposes the erection of a permanent rural worker dwelling to allow the existing barn conversion dwelling to be used for visitor and tour purposes.
64. The proposed dwelling would be occupied by a full-time rural worker, being Mr Walters or Mrs Savioz, who currently reside on site in the existing dwelling and meet the accepted essential need of the vineyard.
65. RAC considers there is the requirement for one dwelling on site only.
66. RAC considers that the business requires a temporary period to demonstrate that the wine sales and expenditure will be able to support the notional costs including the labour costs associated with a full-time worker.
67. RAC considers that if the Council are minded to approve a new rural worker dwelling; the existing dwelling should be converted to agricultural retail and tourism uses (subject to planning permission) at the point the proposed dwelling is habitable.
68. RAC considers that the proposal for the erection of a permanent rural worker's dwelling at the application site is not compliant with national and local planning policy.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

Olivia Wojniak