

DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Planning Application for Mixed Use Development

Use Classes B8 and E

at

BIRCHFIELD NURSERY

London Road, Henfield
West Sussex, BN5 9AB

Prepared: March 2026

BIRCHFIELD NURSERY

London Road, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9AB

Mixed Use Development: Use Classes B8 and E

THREE INTEGRATED OPERATIONAL AREAS

This application comprises three operational areas that are intrinsically linked and work seamlessly together to support the existing nursery and garden centre business:

AREA 1: EXISTING NURSERY AND GARDEN CENTRE

The core horticultural business selling plants, trees, landscaping materials and garden products to retail and wholesale customers. This established use is supported by the two operational areas below.

AREA 2: CLASS B8 STORAGE AND DISTRIBUTION

Essential logistics supporting the nursery and garden centre:

- Delivery and haulage of construction materials, aggregates and landscaping supplies
- Transportation of plant stock and horticultural products
- Delivery of large specimen trees requiring HGV access and specialist handling
- Storage and distribution of plant machinery and equipment
- **Parking and operating lorries from the location (essential for day-to-day operations)**

The site's A281 access is absolutely adequate for HGV movements and distribution operations. This principal road frontage makes the site ideally suited for B8 operations.

AREA 3: CLASS E COMMERCIAL, BUSINESS AND SERVICE

Retail, wholesale and supporting services:

- Retail and wholesale of garden-related items (plants, tools, equipment, landscaping materials, paving slabs, construction materials, landscape supplies)
- Coffee shop (approved) attracting additional visitors to the garden centre
- Garden centre shop selling plants, seeds and garden essentials
- Complementary commercial activities (garden design, landscaping services, professional offices) generating rental income to subsidise nursery operations

HOW THE THREE AREAS WORK TOGETHER

These three operational areas are intrinsically linked and mutually supportive:

B8 provides the logistics backbone: HGV access and distribution operations enable delivery of construction materials, large specimen trees, and bulk horticultural supplies sold through Class E retail and wholesale operations. Without B8, the garden centre cannot receive or distribute the products it sells.

Class E generates income and footfall: Commercial activities create the customer base and financial stability that sustain the nursery. The coffee shop attracts visitors who then shop at the garden centre. Rental income from offices and complementary businesses subsidises nursery operations during quiet periods.

The nursery underpins both B8 and Class E: The horticultural operation provides the products distributed via B8 and sold through Class E. It creates the countryside setting and authentic business context that makes the site attractive to visitors and commercial tenants.

CRITICAL POINT

Together, these three areas create a viable, integrated rural business that cannot function effectively if artificially separated. Removing any one of these areas would undermine the entire operation and threaten the nursery's long-term viability.

All three areas link closely to and directly support the existing nursery and garden centre business

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Design and Access Statement supports a planning application for the change of use of Birchfield Nursery, London Road, Henfield to accommodate a mixed-use development comprising Use Classes B8 (Storage and Distribution) and E (Commercial, Business and Service). The application seeks to establish a sustainable rural business hub that supports the continued operation of the existing nursery & garden centre whilst enabling complementary businesses to thrive in the countryside location.

This application directly addresses the concerns raised in the previous appeal decision (APP/Z3825/W/21/3279450, dated 28 February 2022) and presents a revised proposal that fully aligns with local and national planning policy, whilst delivering significant economic, environmental and community benefits.

Key aspects of this application include:

- Recognition and integration of existing lawful uses on site, including the approved coffee shop, B8 storage and distribution areas, and agricultural buildings converted under Class R to flexible commercial use
- A business model that supports the garden centre through symbiotic relationships with complementary businesses, creating a viable rural employment cluster
- Contribution to rural economic development through job creation and support for rural businesses
- Enhancement of biodiversity and ecological value through habitat creation and native planting
- Improved site management and reduction of visual clutter compared to the current situation

2. SITE CONTEXT AND HISTORY

2.1 Site Description and Location

Birchfield Nursery is located on London Road (A281) in Henfield, West Sussex. The site comprises approximately 1.2 hectares of land that historically operated as a commercial plant nursery. The site lies within the countryside, outside any defined settlement boundary, but benefits from excellent accessibility via the A281, a principal road connecting Brighton to the north.

The site contains a number of buildings and structures associated with its historic nursery use, including glasshouses, polytunnels, storage buildings, and ancillary structures. The topography is relatively flat, and the site is bounded by agricultural land to the north, east and west, with the A281 forming the southern boundary.

2.2 Planning History and Previous Appeal

The Inspector's decision of 28 February 2022 (APP/Z3825/W/21/3279450) dismissed an appeal for mixed-use purposes including B8, E and garden design/landscaping business use. The Inspector identified two main issues that led to the dismissal:

1. **Whether the site is in an appropriate location for the proposed use**
2. **The effects on the character and appearance of the area**

The Inspector concluded that the proposed uses would not comply with Policies 2, 10, 25 and 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) and Policy 3.2 of the Henfield Neighbourhood Plan, primarily because:

- The uses were considered inappropriate for a countryside location
- The proposal failed to demonstrate it was essential to the countryside location
- The landscaping proposed would not adequately screen inappropriate uses
- Insufficient evidence was provided regarding employment benefits

2.3 Approved Planning Permissions and Lawful Uses

The site has a substantial planning history demonstrating that diverse commercial uses have long been accepted at this location. Most significantly:

DC/11/1250 - The Glasshouse 'Centre of Excellence' (Approved 5 July 2011)

This landmark approval established the principle of diverse commercial uses at Birchfield Nursery. The approved development included:

- Offices (30.6 sq metres with 8 workstations)
- Coffee shop and restaurant
- Garden essentials shop and retail space
- Meeting room and reception facilities
- Kitchen facilities
- Viewing gallery
- Educational facilities for schools and gardening clubs

Critically, the 2011 Design and Access Statement explicitly stated that **"Diversification is the only means to ensure an all-year-round income"** and that the development would create 23

full-time staff initially, expanding to 47 full-time staff. The approval recognised that diversification was essential to help the nursery flourish and explicitly approved offices, restaurant facilities and community uses alongside the horticultural operations.

This 2011 approval is of fundamental importance because:

- **Established principle:** It demonstrates that Horsham District Council has previously accepted that diverse commercial uses (offices, restaurant, retail, community facilities) are appropriate at this countryside location
- **Diversification necessity:** The Council explicitly accepted the argument that diversification was essential for the nursery's survival – the same argument underpinning this application
- **Employment generation:** The Council approved a scheme creating up to 47 jobs – similar to the 27-40 jobs proposed in this application
- **Policy consistency:** The approval demonstrates policy support for rural economic development and business diversification at this specific site

In addition to this landmark approval, several more recent planning permissions have been granted:

Coffee Shop (Class E)

- Planning permission granted for coffee shop facility serving garden centre customers and the local community
- Creates an established Class E use on site
- Generates additional footfall and supports the viability of the garden centre

B8 Storage and Distribution

- Approved B8 storage and distribution areas on the site.
- Supports the operational requirements of the garden centre and complementary businesses
- Demonstrates the acceptability of B8 uses on site

Agricultural Buildings - Class R Permitted Development

- Agricultural buildings on site have been converted to flexible commercial use under Class R of the General Permitted Development Order
- These conversions allow for Class E and B8 uses without requiring specific planning permission
- Establishes a clear precedent for commercial activity at the site

These approved uses create a material planning consideration and establish that the principle of B8 and Class E uses at this location has already been accepted by the Local Planning Authority. This application seeks to formalise and optimise these uses within a comprehensive management framework.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) recognises the importance of supporting sustainable rural businesses and economic growth in rural areas. Paragraph 84 states that planning decisions should enable:

- The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas
- The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses
- Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that respect the character of the countryside

The proposal aligns with these objectives by supporting the continued operation of an existing rural business (the garden centre) whilst enabling complementary commercial activities that contribute to the local rural economy.

3.2 Horsham District Planning Framework (2015)

Policy 2: Strategic Development

This application recognises that the site lies outside designated development areas. However, Policy 2 acknowledges that rural areas require appropriate development to meet community needs and maintain economic vitality. The proposal supports this through:

- Enabling an existing rural business to remain viable
- Creating local employment opportunities
- Utilising previously developed land and existing buildings

Policy 10: Rural Economic Development

Policy 10 is particularly relevant as it establishes criteria for assessing rural economic development. The proposal satisfies these criteria by:

- Contributing directly to the wider rural economy through job creation and business support
- Re-using existing buildings and previously developed land, thereby avoiding development on greenfield sites
- Supporting the diversification of the rural economy through a mix of complementary uses
- Demonstrating clear economic benefits that outweigh any landscape impacts

Policies 25 and 26: Landscape Character and Countryside Protection

The previous appeal highlighted concerns about landscape impact and inappropriate development in the countryside. This application addresses these concerns through:

- Comprehensive landscaping designed specifically to screen views from the A281
- Use of existing buildings rather than new construction
- Controlled height limits for any external storage areas
- Enhancement of biodiversity and ecological value
- Integration with the rural landscape character through appropriate materials and design

3.3 Henfield Neighbourhood Plan

Policy 3.2 of the Henfield Neighbourhood Plan seeks to protect the landscape and ensure development is appropriate to its rural setting. This application responds to this policy through careful design, comprehensive landscaping and the re-use of existing structures, ensuring that the development respects and enhances the local landscape character.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Development Description

The application seeks planning permission for the mixed use of Birchfield Nursery for Use Classes B8 (Storage and Distribution) and E (Commercial, Business and Service). The proposal is designed to create a sustainable rural business hub that supports the continued operation of the garden centre whilst enabling complementary businesses to operate from the site.

4.2 The Business Model: Supporting the Garden Centre

The core rationale for this application is the economic reality facing the garden centre. Like many rural retail businesses, the garden centre faces significant challenges:

- Seasonal fluctuations in trade that create cash flow challenges
- Competition from larger garden centres and online retailers
- High overhead costs associated with maintaining the site and infrastructure
- Underutilised buildings and spaces that represent a financial burden

The proposed mixed-use development addresses these challenges through a symbiotic business model where:

- Multiple businesses provide rental income that subsidises the garden centre operation
- Shared overheads (utilities, maintenance, security) reduce costs for all businesses
- Diverse businesses create year-round activity and footfall, benefiting the garden centre
- Both directly related businesses (landscaping, horticultural suppliers) and complementary businesses work together to create a viable business ecosystem
- The coffee shop and other Class E uses attract additional visitors who may become garden centre customers

Without this additional support, the garden centre faces an uncertain future. The proposal therefore represents not just business diversification, but business survival – ensuring this rural employer and community asset remains viable for years to come.

4.2.1 The Importance of Business Diversity

A critical element of this application is the recognition that successful rural business hubs require **diversity of uses** – not just businesses directly linked to horticulture. This diversity is essential for several reasons:

Financial Resilience Through Diversification

Relying solely on horticultural-related businesses would expose the site to sector-specific risks. A diverse tenant mix ensures that if one sector faces challenges, others can maintain stability. This creates a more robust and sustainable rural employment site.

Year-Round Activity and Viability

Different business types operate on different seasonal patterns and daily rhythms. This diversity ensures constant activity on site, which provides:

- Security and deterrence of anti-social behaviour through regular presence
- Efficient use of infrastructure and facilities throughout the year
- Footfall for the garden centre and coffee shop even during traditionally quiet periods

- Shared costs distributed across more businesses, reducing the burden on the garden centre

Cross-Support Between Businesses

Whilst not all businesses need direct links to horticulture, they naturally support each other through:

- Trades using the site may require garden centre products for projects (timber, aggregates, plants)
- Architects and designers working on site may specify garden centre products for client projects
- Haulage businesses can provide logistics support for garden centre deliveries
- Makers and craftspeople selling in the garden centre attract additional customers
- All businesses benefit from and contribute to the coffee shop's viability

Rural Business Needs and Site Suitability

Many rural businesses struggle to find appropriate premises. This site offers:

- Affordable workspace in a rural setting with good road access
- Flexibility for businesses requiring both indoor and outdoor space
- Secure storage facilities for valuable equipment and materials
- A business community providing networking and mutual support
- Location away from residential areas appropriate for trades and light industrial activities

The diversity of uses ensures the site operates as a **genuine rural business hub** rather than a mono-use facility vulnerable to market changes. This approach aligns with national and local policy objectives to support diverse rural economic activity and create sustainable rural employment opportunities.

4.3 Proposed Uses

Class E: Commercial, Business and Service

Class E uses will include a diverse range of businesses that work together to create a viable rural business hub:

Horticultural and Directly Related Uses:

- Garden centre retail operations (ongoing core use)
- Coffee shop (approved and operational)
- Garden design consultancy and landscape planning services
- Horticultural supply and wholesale operations
- Plant and garden equipment sales

Complementary Professional and Creative Uses:

- Office space for architects and design professionals who may specify garden and landscape products
- Workshop spaces for skilled trades including carpentry, metalwork, and craft trades
- Maker spaces where artisans can create handcrafted goods
- Shop floor space within the garden centre for local makers and craftspeople to display and sell their products, creating an additional attraction for visitors
- Small office units for rural professionals and consultants

These diverse Class E uses create a vibrant business community that supports the garden centre financially whilst generating employment and serving the rural economy. The inclusion of makers and craftspeople selling within the garden centre adds unique appeal, attracting visitors who might not otherwise visit a traditional garden centre, thereby supporting both the retail operation and the individual businesses.

Class B8: Storage and Distribution

Class B8 uses will accommodate a range of storage and distribution needs essential to rural businesses:

Horticultural and Site-Related Storage:

- Storage of garden centre stock, plant supplies and equipment
- Storage for landscaping businesses and contractors (materials, equipment, vehicles)
- Distribution operations supporting horticultural businesses
- Self-storage facilities for trades and small businesses requiring secure, accessible storage
- Storage for construction and building trades (materials, tools, equipment)
- Haulage and logistics operations serving rural businesses and the agricultural sector as well as supporting the nursery & garden centre through deliveries of materials plants and machinery.
- Distribution hub for rural businesses requiring good road access

The B8 uses address a significant gap in rural business infrastructure. Many trades and small businesses struggle to find affordable, secure storage with good access. By providing these facilities, the site supports the broader rural economy whilst generating income that subsidises the garden centre. Haulage operations are particularly appropriate given the site's A281 frontage, avoiding the need for HGVs to navigate narrow rural lanes.

B8 uses will be contained within existing buildings wherever possible, with controlled external storage areas limited in height and screened by landscaping. This approach minimises visual impact whilst providing essential facilities that rural businesses desperately need but struggle to find.

4.4 Integration with Existing Approved Uses

The proposed uses will be fully integrated with the existing approved facilities on site:

- The approved coffee shop will continue to serve garden centre customers and site users, creating a natural hub for the various businesses
- Existing B8 storage areas will be incorporated into the overall site management plan
- Agricultural buildings converted under Class R will accommodate appropriate Class E and B8 uses, maximising use of existing structures
- Shared parking, access and service areas will be efficiently managed to reduce the overall site footprint

5. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

5.1 Landscape Integration and Visual Screening

Learning from the previous appeal decision, this application places landscape integration at its core. The Inspector noted that proposed landscaping would not adequately screen inappropriate uses. We have therefore developed a comprehensive landscaping strategy that addresses this concern:

Roadside Screening (A281 Frontage) (approved with Site Access)

- Dense native hedgerow planting along the entire A281 frontage, using species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and field maple
- Hedgerow will be maintained at minimum 2.5m height to provide year-round screening
- Planting design to filter and screen views whilst maintaining visual permeability appropriate to the rural setting.

Storage Area Management

- External storage areas will be limited to designated zones
- Maximum storage height of 2.5 metres to prevent visual intrusion
- Storage areas will be screened by hedging and trees on all sides visible from public vantage points
- Tidy site management enforced through operational management plan

5.2 Built Form and Materials

The proposal prioritises the use of existing buildings, avoiding the need for significant new construction:

- Existing glasshouses, storage buildings and converted agricultural buildings will accommodate the proposed uses
- Any necessary repairs or improvements will use materials sympathetic to the rural setting, including timber cladding, agricultural-style metal sheeting and brick
- Building colours will be muted and recessive (greens, browns, greys) to blend with the landscape
- No external illumination except for essential security lighting with downward directionality

5.3 Access and Parking

The site benefits from an established vehicular access from the A281. This access is suitable for the proposed uses and no modifications are required. On-site parking provision will be formalised and clearly marked, with sufficient spaces for staff, visitors and operational vehicles.

6. ADDRESSING PREVIOUS APPEAL CONCERNS

This application has been carefully prepared to address each concern raised in the previous appeal decision (APP/Z3825/W/21/3279450). The following section demonstrates how this proposal overcomes the previous reasons for refusal.

6.1 Appropriate Location for Proposed Use

Previous Concern:

The Inspector concluded that the proposed uses would not comply with Policy 10 requirements and would amount to inappropriate development in the countryside.

How This Application Addresses the Concern:

This application demonstrates that the proposed uses are both appropriate and essential to this countryside location through the following arguments:

3. **Contribution to Rural Economy:** The proposal directly supports the continued operation of an established rural business (the garden centre) which employs local people and serves the rural community. Without the additional income and operational synergies created by the complementary businesses, the garden centre's viability is threatened. This satisfies Policy 10's requirement to contribute to the wider rural economy.
4. **Countryside Dependence:** Garden centres and horticultural businesses are inherently countryside-dependent operations. They require access to suppliers, outdoor space for plant displays and storage, and proximity to the customer base they serve (rural residents and visitors). The landscaping and garden design businesses proposed are similarly dependent on a rural location, with direct connections to the horticultural sector.
5. **Historic Planning Approval for Diverse Uses:** The 2011 approval (DC/11/1250) for 'The Glasshouse' Centre of Excellence explicitly approved offices, restaurant, retail and community facilities at this site. Horsham District Council has already determined that diverse commercial uses are appropriate at this location and accepted that diversification is essential for the nursery's survival.
6. **Existing Lawful Uses:** The site already benefits from approved B8 and Class E uses (coffee shop, storage areas, converted agricultural buildings). This application seeks to consolidate and optimise these existing permissions, rather than introducing entirely new inappropriate uses.
7. **Re-use of Previously Developed Land:** Policy 10 encourages the re-use of existing buildings and previously developed land. This proposal makes efficient use of existing structures and infrastructure, avoiding development on greenfield sites.
8. **Economic Necessity:** The garden centre cannot survive on retail sales alone in today's competitive market. The mixed-use model is economically essential – without it, the site faces closure or abandonment, resulting in loss of rural employment and a derelict eyesore in the countryside.

6.2 Character and Appearance of the Area

Previous Concern:

The Inspector concluded that whilst landscaping may reduce visibility, the uses and features would still be seen and would be at significant odds with Policies 25 and 26, failing to protect the landform and development pattern.

How This Application Addresses the Concern:

9. **Controlled Storage Heights:** External storage will be limited to a maximum height of 2.5 metres and located only in designated areas that are screened by landscaping. This prevents visual intrusion and maintains the rural character.
10. **Use of Existing Buildings:** The proposal prioritises indoor storage and operations within existing buildings, minimising external visual impact. The buildings themselves are already part of the established site character.
11. **Improved Site Management:** The proposal includes an operational management plan requiring tidy site practices, designated storage areas and regular maintenance. This will improve the current visual appearance compared to the existing somewhat cluttered situation.
12. **Rural Character:** Many rural areas contain working agricultural and horticultural businesses with associated buildings, equipment and storage. The proposed uses are consistent with the working rural landscape and are more sympathetic than many alternative countryside uses such as intensive agriculture or industrial farming operations.

6.3 Employment Benefits

Previous Concern:

The Inspector noted there was no detailed evidence allowing a reasoned comparison between the former nursery use and proposed use regarding employment.

How This Application Addresses the Concern:

This application provides clear evidence of employment benefits:

Employment Type	Estimated FTE	Notes
Garden centre staff	8-10	Mix of full-time and seasonal
Coffee shop	3-4	Approved facility
Landscaping businesses	4-6	Multiple small businesses
Trades & workshops	5-8	Carpenters, makers, craftspeople
Office-based businesses	3-5	Architects, designers, consultants
Haulage & logistics	2-4	Drivers and logistics staff
Storage & other B8/E	2-3	Site management, distribution
TOTAL	27-40	Substantial rural employment

The proposal will create and sustain 27-40 full-time equivalent jobs in this rural location. This represents a substantial economic benefit and demonstrates clear compliance with Policy 10's objectives for rural economic development. The diversity of employment types ensures

resilience and year-round job security, with a mix of horticultural, professional, creative and logistics roles.

7. JUSTIFICATION FOR DIVERSE BUSINESS TYPES

A key aspect of this application is the inclusion of diverse business types that may not have a direct horticultural link. This section demonstrates why this diversity is not only appropriate but essential to the proposal's success and policy compliance.

7.1 Compatibility with Rural Character

The proposed diverse business mix is entirely compatible with rural character because:

- **Rural businesses need rural locations:** Trades, haulage, workshops and storage operations are traditional components of the rural economy. These businesses have always existed in countryside locations where land is available, rents are affordable, and they can operate without conflicting with residential amenity.
- **Working countryside:** The countryside is not a museum – it is a working environment supporting farming, forestry, horticulture and associated trades. The proposed uses reflect this reality and contribute to a living, working rural economy.
- **Road infrastructure suitability:** The site's A281 frontage makes it particularly appropriate for businesses requiring vehicle access, including haulage and distribution. Locating such businesses here prevents HGVs navigating narrow rural lanes serving villages and farms.
- **Existing site character:** The site has an established commercial character from its nursery history. The proposed uses maintain this character rather than introducing something alien to the landscape.

7.2 Policy Compliance: Rural Economic Development

HDPF Policy 10 requires that development contributes to the wider rural economy. The diverse business model achieves this more effectively than a narrow horticultural focus would:

- **Greater employment generation:** A diverse business hub creates more jobs (27-40 FTE) than a single-sector operation could sustain. This directly supports rural residents and reduces out-commuting.
- **Economic resilience:** Different business sectors provide economic stability. When one sector faces challenges, others maintain employment and economic activity.
- **Supporting multiple sectors:** The proposal supports construction trades, professional services, logistics, creative industries and retail – all important components of the rural economy.
- **Addressing market failure:** There is a documented shortage of affordable workspace, storage and workshop facilities in rural areas. This proposal fills a genuine market gap, enabling rural businesses to thrive.

7.3 The Maker Economy and Local Retail

The inclusion of workshop space for makers and craftspeople, with shop floor space in the garden centre, creates a unique rural business model with significant benefits:

- **Supporting rural crafts and skills:** Provides affordable workspace for traditional and contemporary makers, preserving rural skills and creating apprenticeship opportunities.
- **Enhanced visitor attraction:** A garden centre that also showcases and sells locally made crafts becomes a destination, attracting visitors who might not otherwise visit a traditional nursery.

- **Community benefit:** Creates a venue where local people can buy locally made products, supporting the circular rural economy.
- **Diversification aligned with policy:** The NPPF actively encourages rural tourism and leisure developments. A garden centre with artisan makers creates exactly this type of sustainable rural visitor attraction.

7.4 Storage, Haulage and Distribution

The inclusion of self-storage, haulage and distribution operations requires specific justification:

- **Essential rural infrastructure:** Rural businesses including farms, estates, contractors and trades all require storage and logistics support. Providing this infrastructure in an accessible countryside location serves the rural economy directly.
- **Appropriate location:** The A281 frontage makes this site ideal for haulage operations. It prevents large vehicles using inappropriate rural lanes and provides efficient access to the strategic road network.
- **Supporting the garden centre:** On-site haulage businesses can provide cost-effective distribution services for the garden centre, reducing operational costs. They also contribute substantial rental income.
- **Rural employment:** Haulage and logistics provide good-quality employment for local people, particularly important in rural areas with limited job opportunities.
- **Existing permission precedent:** B8 storage and distribution uses have already been approved on site, establishing that such operations are acceptable in principle at this location.

7.5 Professional Services: Architects and Consultants

Office space for architects, designers and rural professionals contributes to the business ecosystem:

- **Rural professional workspace shortage:** There is limited affordable office space in rural areas. Professionals often work from home due to lack of alternatives, missing the benefits of professional workspace and business networking.
- **Natural synergies:** Architects and designers working alongside a garden centre, landscaping businesses and makers create natural collaboration opportunities and cross-referrals.
- **Low-impact use:** Office uses generate minimal traffic and no external storage, making them highly appropriate for a rural location.
- **Supporting garden centre viability:** Professional tenants provide reliable, year-round rental income with long lease terms, creating financial stability for the garden centre operation.

7.6 The Alternative to Business Diversity

It is important to consider what would happen without permission for diverse business types:

- **Garden centre closure:** Without diversification, the garden centre faces closure within the next few years. This would result in complete loss of employment and an abandoned site.
- **Derelict eyesore:** An abandoned former nursery site would quickly become overgrown and derelict, creating a significant negative visual impact far worse than well-managed business uses.

- **Pressure for housing development:** A closed commercial site in the countryside inevitably attracts residential development pressure, which would represent far greater landscape impact than the current proposal.
- **Lost economic opportunity:** Refusing diverse business uses means losing 27-40 rural jobs and rejecting an opportunity to support multiple sectors of the rural economy.

The planning system should enable sustainable rural businesses, not constrain them to the point of unviability through overly restrictive interpretations of countryside policy. This proposal represents pragmatic, sustainable rural economic development that deserves support.

8. PLANNING BENEFITS

The proposed development delivers a range of significant planning benefits that weigh strongly in favour of granting permission:

8.1 Economic Benefits

- Creation and retention of 27-40 full-time equivalent jobs in a rural location across diverse sectors
- Support for multiple small and medium-sized rural businesses from different sectors, creating economic resilience
- Preservation of an established rural employer (the garden centre) that would otherwise face closure
- Generation of business rates and economic activity supporting the local economy
- Provision of flexible workspace for rural businesses including trades, professionals, makers and haulage operators
- Support for the horticultural, construction, creative and logistics sectors, all important to the rural economy
- Addressing market failure in rural workspace, storage and distribution facilities
- Creation of a rural business hub that fosters collaboration and mutual support between businesses

8.2 Environmental Benefits

- Substantial biodiversity enhancement through native planting and habitat creation
- Landscape integration and visual screening improving the site's appearance
- Re-use of existing buildings and previously developed land, avoiding greenfield development
- Carbon sequestration from extensive tree and hedgerow planting
- Sustainable drainage improvements and water management
- Prevention of site dereliction and abandonment

8.3 Social and Community Benefits

- Retention of a valued community facility (garden centre and coffee shop) serving local residents
- Diverse employment opportunities for local people across multiple sectors, reducing the need to commute
- Support for small businesses, makers, craftspeople and entrepreneurs in the rural area
- Creation of a venue where local artisans can showcase and sell their work, supporting the local creative economy
- Enhanced visitor attraction through the combination of garden centre, coffee shop and locally made crafts
- Enhanced woodland walk available for informal recreation
- Contribution to rural vitality through year-round economic activity and prevention of site dereliction
- Workspace and networking opportunities for rural professionals who would otherwise be isolated working from home

8.4 Planning Policy Compliance

- Direct contribution to rural economic development (HDPF Policy 10)
- Support for sustainable rural businesses (NPPF paragraph 84)
- Efficient use of previously developed land and buildings
- Landscape protection and enhancement (HDPF Policies 25 and 26)
- Integration with existing approved uses on site

9. CONCLUSION

This Design and Access Statement demonstrates that the proposed mixed-use development at Birchfield Nursery represents sustainable rural economic development that fully complies with local and national planning policy. Crucially, it establishes that **business diversity** is not a weakness of the proposal but rather its fundamental strength – creating resilience, maximising employment and ensuring the garden centre's long-term survival.

The application has been carefully prepared to address all concerns raised in the previous appeal decision. It presents a compelling case for approval based on:

- **Established Planning Precedent:** The 2011 approval of The Glasshouse (DC/11/1250) demonstrates that Horsham District Council has previously accepted diverse commercial uses including offices, restaurants and community facilities at this specific site, with diversification recognised as essential for business survival.
- **Business Diversity is Essential:** The mix of horticultural, professional, creative, trade and logistics businesses creates a financially viable and economically resilient rural employment hub. No single sector could achieve this alone. The diversity ensures year-round activity, shared costs and mutual business support.
- **Changed Circumstances:** The approval of B8 storage, a coffee shop and the conversion of agricultural buildings under Class R has established that commercial uses are appropriate at this location. This application consolidates and optimises these existing permissions.
- **Economic Necessity:** The garden centre requires support from diverse businesses to remain viable. The mixed-use model is not just preferable – it is essential for business survival and the retention of rural employment.
- **Countryside Appropriateness:** All proposed uses – from garden centre and landscaping to workshops, professional offices and haulage – are appropriate for and dependent upon a rural location with good road access. They contribute directly to the working rural economy.
- **Enhanced Landscape Integration:** Comprehensive landscaping, controlled storage heights and tidy site management will substantially improve visual amenity. The proposal includes significant biodiversity enhancements that will actively enhance landscape character.
- **Substantial Employment Benefits:** The proposal will create and sustain 27-40 jobs across diverse sectors, representing major economic benefit for this rural area and clear contribution to rural economic development.
- **Addressing Rural Business Needs:** The proposal fills a documented gap in rural infrastructure by providing workspace, storage and distribution facilities that rural businesses desperately need but struggle to find.
- **Policy Compliance:** The proposal aligns with NPPF objectives for sustainable rural business growth, satisfies HDPF Policy 10 requirements for rural economic development, and addresses landscape concerns through appropriate design and mitigation.

The alternative to approval is the gradual decline and eventual closure of the garden centre, with the loss of all associated employment and the likelihood that the site becomes derelict or is redeveloped for less appropriate uses. Planning permission would secure the site's future as a productive rural business hub that contributes positively to the local economy, provides valued community facilities and enhances the rural landscape.

The planning balance strongly favours approval. Any residual landscape concerns are comprehensively addressed through the proposed landscaping scheme, whilst the substantial economic and social benefits far outweigh any limited impacts. The proposal represents sustainable development and should be supported in accordance with the presumption in favour of sustainable development set out in the NPPF.

For the reasons set out in this statement, planning permission is respectfully sought for the proposed mixed-use development at Birchfield Nursery.

Contact Information

Applicant:

Mr Jack Dunckley
Birchfield Nursery
London Road
Henfield
West Sussex BN5 9AB

For further information or site visits, please contact the applicant at the above address.