READING AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANTS
Gate House
Beechwood Court
Long Toll
Woodcote
Reading RG8 0RR
Tel: 01491 684 233
rac@reading-ag.com
www.reading-ag.com

Your Ref: DC/25/0566
Our Ref: 10726-hd

2 May 2025

For the attention of Hannah Darley
Horsham District Council
Albery House
Springfield Road
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 2GB

Dear Ms Darley,

Site: Wood Reeves, Mill Lane, Lower Beeding, West Sussex, RH13 6PX.
Application: DC/25/0566
Proposal: Extensions and alterations to existing building to provide 'Fishery Managers' dwellinghouse

Thank you for your instruction dated 17 April 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;
- a Planning, Design and Statement (PDAS) (undated) produced by PROwe Planning Solutions (the applicant's agent); and
- Needs Appraisal (dated April 2025) produced by Kernon Countryside Consultants Ltd.

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

Background

1. Wood Reeves extends to an unknown area as the Site Location Plan does not indicate the full extent of ownership.

2. The submission documents detail that the main lake, known as Furnace Pond, extends to 2.7 hectares and is used by a private fishing club. The lake is open to members 24 hours a day.

3. The lake comprises 15 pegs, but it is unknown if any are suitable for use by disabled anglers.

4. The Needs Appraisal details that the lake is well stocked with carp, however an approximate number of fish stocks is unknown.

5. It is detailed that the club has an aerator to increase oxygen levels when they are low, however no further details of the aerator are provided.

6. The site comprises two buildings which are used for storage and the member's hut.

7. It is detailed that the club managers the site, ground, fish and facilities. The applicant's role in the management of the site and welfare of the fish stock is unknown.

8. There are no details of any incidents or emergencies which have resulted in loss of fish stock on site contained in the submission documents.

9. It is understood that the applicant and fishing club have operated the fishery whilst living off site.

Proposal

10. The application proposes the conversion and extension of the existing storage building and member's hut to provide accommodation for a fishery manager.

11. The proposed conversion comprises an open plan kitchen/living/dining area, two bedrooms and shower rooms with a small storage area.

12. It is unknown where the member's hut provision will be within the conversion or if this facility is no longer required.

Relevant Planning Policies

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

14. 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.

15. 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.

16. 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…"

17. 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;…"

18. 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

19. The Needs Appraisal comments that the building is compliant with Local Plan Policy 10 for the conversion of rural buildings and KCC consider that there is no need to consider whether there is a functional need for a resident worker.

20. The Needs Appraisal then continues that there is a need for a resident worker. It is understood that the applicant, who lives nearby, has owned the application site for the last 30 years and RAC would note that no details of why there is now a need for a rural worker to reside on site have been provided.

21. 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. Policy 20 of the Local Plan also requires a firm intention and ability to develop the enterprise concerned. In this case, an angling enterprise, and in order to provide the necessary and appropriate management and supervision for the enterprise, the applicant considers it is essential that a rural worker is required to live on site in order to ensure that the welfare needs of all the fish stocks in the ponds at the application site are not compromised.

22. There is a legal responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ensure that animals are kept in a manner which accords them freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition; appropriate comfort and shelter, the prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment or injury, disease or infestation; freedom from fear; and freedom to display most normal patterns of behaviour. The issue of security is also acknowledged to be an increasing problem especially where the holding is at risk from fire, trespass, and vandalism – and such risks can only adequately be managed with on-site supervision.

23. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. The Act also contains a Duty to Care to animals which means that anyone responsible for an animal must take reasonable steps to make sure the animal's needs and its welfare are met.

24. The health and welfare of fish is covered by the 'Aquatic Animal Health (England and Wales) Regulations 2009'. This requires the fishery owner/manager to record the health of fish stocks and monitor mortality, to record any movement of fish stocks on to or out of the premises.

25. The overall responsibility for Duty of Care for the welfare for the fish on the application site is unknown and it is unknown who the applicant or fishing club intend to employ as the fishery manager to take on this Duty of Care.

26. 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 rectify the problem.

27. In this application it is considered by RAC that the essential needs for an angling enterprise such as this could arise from:

    - monitoring and feeding the growing fish with some of the older fish stocks requiring supplementary feed during periods of cold weather, which can occur outside normal working hours;
    - close monitoring and recording the health of the fish and taking prompt action if any health concerns are identified. There are a number of fish diseases which if not spotted quickly can lead to major losses of fish stocks in the ponds;
    - close monitoring of water quality with regular daily checks on the ponds to ensure it meets with the correct levels of oxygen and there are no contaminants which may impact on the fish health;
    - thinning out of fish stock from the ponds; and

- preventing predation by cormorants and herons.

28. It is unknown if the fishing lake is aerated by manual or automatic pumps and if there are any alarm systems installed which notify the applicant or fishing club of any oxygen crashes or temperature drops which would affect the fish.

29. No details of the frequency of out of hours emergencies have been provided. In addition, it is unknown how many times a day the applicant or fishing club visit the site or how many hours are spent carrying out tasks on the site relating to the fish welfare.

30. There are no standard labour calculations for fish related enterprises, and the number of fish stock on site is unknown.

31. Overall, RAC is unable to conclude that there is a justified and essential need for a full-time rural worker to reside on site.

Financial Sustainability

32. 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.

33. 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.

34. In terms of demonstrating viability, any viable business should be generating profits sufficient to provide a return on investment – in agriculture a figure of 2.5% is usually cited, reward the owner for unpaid labour – equivalent to the minimum wage; and provide for the build cost of the dwelling.

35. The Needs Appraisal considers that as this is an application to be assessed under Policy 10 for the re-use of rural buildings there is no requirement for a financial assessment. RAC consider that as the application relates to a rural worker residing on site and comments are made in terms of Policy 20 essential need it is appropriate to appraise the application in its entirety against the policy and therefore the financial viability of the enterprise.

36. The Needs Appraisal refers to application DC/18/2733 for the conversion of a stable to a dwelling for a fishery worker. RAC appraised this site (RAC ref 8298-td) against the requirements of Policy 20 and had sight of the financial accounts for a three year period to assess the financial viability of the enterprise.

37. Overall, without copies of financial accounts for the rural enterprise operating from the application site, RAC is unable to conclude that the business is financially viable and sustainable now and in the long term.

Other Dwellings

38. A search of Rightmove displays four properties within 1/2 mile of the application site ranging from £585,00 for a three-bedroom house to £1.2million for a four-bedroom dwelling, both of which RAC would consider beyond the affordability of a rural worker.

39. It is unknown where the applicant or which member of the angling club has the responsibility and overall Duty of Care for the fish on site resides.

Conclusion

40. The proposal before the Council is for the conversion and extension of the existing storage building and member's hut to provide a fishery manager dwelling.

41. It is unknown who has overall Duty of Care for the fish stocks on site and it is unknown who is proposed to reside in the converted building.

42. RAC is unable to conclude that there is an essential need for a rural worker to reside on site. No evidence of incidents or emergencies which have required a prompt response to minimise any potential losses have been submitted.

43. No financial accounts for an established fishery enterprise have been provided and therefore RAC is unable to comment on the financial viability and sustainability of the business.

44. No consideration has been provided to the availability of any alternative dwellings within the local area has been made within the submission documents.

45. Overall, RAC considers that the applicant's proposal for the conversion of the existing buildings on site to provide a rural worker dwelling is not compliant with national or local planning policy.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Olivia Wojniak