

# DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

## Birchfield Nursery, London Road, Henfield, BN5 9AB

**Proposal:** Replacement of existing agricultural barn (Class R) and offices with a new commercial building with flexible use including workshop/office space (Use Classes B2, B8, E and Class F)

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose of this Statement

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the replacement of an existing agricultural barn (Class R) and offices with a new commercial building providing flexible workshop and office space at Birchfield Nursery, London Road, Henfield, BN5 9AB.

#### 1.2 Site Location and Context

Birchfield Nursery is located on London Road (A281), Henfield, West Sussex. The site benefits from excellent vehicular access directly from the A281, a principal road providing good connectivity to the surrounding area. The site operates as an established mixed-use commercial facility. While anchored by the nursery & garden centre operation with its retail plant sales and coffee shop (which has operated on site in temporary form for a number of years), the site accommodates multiple businesses including haulage, storage, and construction-related enterprises, in addition to the nursery activities. This diverse business cluster reflects the site's established role as a rural employment hub.

#### 1.3 Planning History

In 2025, the Council was notified about the change of use of the agricultural building to Class R through a Prior Notification for Change of Use to flexible commercial use, covering the following usages: B2 (General Industrial), B8 (Storage or Distribution), E (Commercial, Business and Service), and Class F (Local Community and Learning), as well as the provision of agricultural training. This Prior Notification was approved by the Council with no objections, establishing the principle of flexible commercial use on this part of the site.

#### 1.4 The Proposal

The application seeks permission to replace the existing agricultural barn (which benefits from the approved flexible use) and outdated office space with a purpose-designed commercial building. The new building will continue the flexible use established under the Prior Notification approval, namely Use Classes B2, B8, E and Class F. This will provide modern workshop and office facilities that will benefit all the existing businesses operating on site, including the nursery, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises. The improved

facilities will also enable the site to accommodate additional complementary businesses, expanding the range of services and offerings available from the premises and supporting wider rural economic development.

The design will complement the permanent coffee shop application currently awaiting approval on site, featuring eternit roof slates and timber cladding to create a cohesive architectural character across the site.

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## **2. SITE ANALYSIS**

### **2.1 Existing Site Uses**

The site currently comprises a diverse range of commercial activities:

- Nursery & Garden centre with retail plant sales
- Coffee shop (operating in temporary form for a number of years, with permanent replacement awaiting planning approval)
- B8 storage facilities.
- Office accommodation
- Haulage operations
- Construction-related business activities
- Agricultural barn with approved flexible commercial use (B2, B8, E and Class F) – in poor condition
- Associated commercial infrastructure

This mix of complementary businesses demonstrates the site's established role as a rural commercial hub supporting local employment and economic activity.

### **2.2 Buildings to be Replaced**

The existing agricultural barn and office space are no longer fit for purpose. The barn is in poor structural condition and, despite benefiting from planning approval for flexible commercial use, cannot adequately accommodate modern business requirements for any of the site's existing enterprises. The office accommodation similarly does not meet current standards. Their replacement presents an opportunity to provide high-quality, energy-efficient facilities that will support the long-term viability of all businesses operating on site and enable further diversification of on-site activities while maintaining the same flexible use parameters already approved by the Council.

### **2.3 Site Boundaries and Neighbouring Properties**

The site adjoins Birchfield House to the west. Early consultation has been undertaken with the occupiers of Birchfield House, who have confirmed their support for the proposal subject to design considerations that protect their residential amenity. These considerations have been incorporated into the scheme design as detailed in Section 3 below.

### **2.4 Access and Highways**

The site benefits from established access onto the A281, a well-maintained principal road. The existing access arrangements are suitable for the range of commercial activities on site, including haulage operations, and are well-suited to accommodate the proposed development and the approved flexible commercial uses. The replacement building will enhance the site's potential to accommodate the range of activities permitted under Use Classes B2, B8, E and Class F while maintaining appropriate access and parking provision.

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## 3. DESIGN PRINCIPLES

### 3.1 Amount and Use

The proposed building will provide flexible commercial space in accordance with the uses already approved by the Council under the 2025 Prior Notification, namely:

- **Use Class B2 (General Industrial):** Light industrial processes appropriate to the site's mixed commercial character, including equipment maintenance, light manufacturing related to construction activities, and horticultural operations
- **Use Class B8 (Storage or Distribution):** Storage of goods, equipment, materials and products associated with the nursery business, haulage operations, construction enterprises, and complementary activities
- **Use Class E (Commercial, Business and Service):** Office space, retail services, and other commercial activities that support the multiple businesses operating on site
- **Use Class F (Local Community and Learning):** Provision of agricultural training and educational activities related to horticulture and land-based skills

This flexibility is essential to accommodate the evolving needs of all the existing businesses on site. The nursery, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises will all benefit from improved workshop and office facilities that meet modern standards. The provision of flexible space will also enable the site to attract additional complementary businesses, further strengthening the site's role as a rural employment hub.

### 3.2 Layout and Siting

The building will be positioned on the footprint on the existing structures, minimising impact on the wider site and maintaining established operational patterns. Following consultation with the neighbouring occupiers at Birchfield House, the building has been designed to be set back a minimum of 1 metre from the western boundary fence. This setback provides several benefits:

- Allows for the higher proposed ridge height while maintaining appropriate separation from the boundary
- Facilitates future erection and maintenance of boundary fencing and vegetation
- Provides additional buffer space between the commercial building and the adjacent residential property
- Demonstrates responsive design that takes account of neighbour concerns

The layout will be efficient and functional, designed to support modern business practices while respecting the site's established commercial character. Internal spaces will be designed with flexibility to accommodate subdivision or shared use by the multiple businesses operating on site and any future tenants working within the approved use classes.

### 3.3 Scale and Massing

The scale of the proposed building has been carefully considered to replace the existing structures without introducing an incongruous element into the site or causing unacceptable impact on neighbouring properties. The building will be single-storey with a ridge height not exceeding approximately 6.9 metres above ground level. This height has been determined following consultation with Birchfield House to ensure the new structure does not block sunlight from the east direction any more than the existing structure currently does. The modest profile is consistent with agricultural and commercial buildings in rural settings while providing the internal height necessary for the full range of approved uses, including workshop activities, storage of equipment and materials for the various businesses, and vehicle maintenance associated with haulage operations.

### 3.4 Appearance and Materials

To ensure visual consistency across the site, the proposed building will adopt a design approach similar to the permanent coffee shop application currently awaiting approval, utilising:

- **Roof:** Eternit slates providing a durable, long-lasting finish with an appropriate rural character
- **Walls:** Timber cladding offering a natural, contextually sensitive appearance that weathers gracefully and complements the garden centre setting
- **West Elevation (Boundary with Birchfield House):** Timber cladding externally and internally with insulation between to create an enhanced acoustic barrier, minimizing noise transmission to the neighbouring residential property
- **Windows and Doors:** Appropriately proportioned openings to provide natural light and functional access, with roller shutter or sectional doors where required for B2 and B8 uses serving the various businesses

This material palette will create a unified architectural identity for the commercial buildings at Birchfield Nursery while ensuring the development sits comfortably within its context. The consistent use of eternit slates and timber cladding across the site's newer buildings will replace the current mix of disparate structures with a cohesive, high-quality aesthetic appropriate to the rural location.

### 3.5 Acoustic Considerations

Following consultation with Birchfield House, particular attention has been paid to the acoustic performance of the western elevation facing the residential boundary. The wall structure will comprise timber cladding both internally and externally with a degree of insulation between, creating an enhanced build-up that will minimize noise travel from workshop and industrial activities permitted under the approved B2 use. This design approach demonstrates consideration for residential amenity while maintaining the attractive timber aesthetic consistent with the site's architectural character.

### 3.6 Hours of Operation

In response to concerns raised by the neighbouring property regarding potential disturbance, considerate operating hours will be communicated to tenants and other users of the building. Use will be limited to general business hours with no antisocial late-night work or excessive noise on weekends. This operational management approach ensures the building functions as intended to support daytime commercial activities within the approved use classes while respecting the amenity of nearby residents.

### 3.7 Sustainability

The new building will incorporate modern construction standards delivering significant improvements in energy efficiency compared to the structures being replaced. Features will include enhanced insulation, efficient heating systems, and maximized natural daylight to reduce energy consumption.

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## 4. NEIGHBOUR CONSULTATION

### 4.1 Pre-Application Engagement

Prior to submission of this application, consultation was undertaken with the direct neighbours at Birchfield House. This proactive engagement has allowed their concerns to be addressed at the design stage, resulting in a scheme that balances the operational needs of the multiple businesses on site with the residential amenity of adjacent properties.

### 4.2 Neighbour Response

The occupiers of Birchfield House have provided the following statement of support:

*"We fully support your application for the replacement barn on the basis of the following considerations:*

- New structure is set back a minimum of 1m from the boundary fence – to allow for higher proposed ridge height and to allow erection/maintenance of boundary fence/vegetation*
- Overall ridge height does not exceed ~6.9m AGL - so as not to block sunlight from east direction any more than existing structure*
- Wall structure build up on the west elevation is timber clad internally and externally with a degree of insulation - to minimise noise travel*
- Communication of considerate operating hours to the tenants or other users limiting its use to general business hours i.e no antisocial late night work and excessive noise on weekends.*

*Thanks again for your time and considering us in promoting your project. We wish you the best of luck with the application."*

### 4.3 Design Response

All of the considerations raised by Birchfield House have been incorporated into the design of the proposed building as detailed in Section 3 above. This collaborative approach has resulted in a scheme that:

- Maintains appropriate separation from the boundary through the 1m setback
- Limits ridge height to approximately 6.9m to avoid additional overshadowing
- Incorporates enhanced acoustic performance in the west elevation
- Commits to considerate hours of operation

The support of the immediate neighbour, following meaningful consultation and design refinement, demonstrates that the proposal has been developed with sensitivity to its context and will not result in unacceptable impacts on residential amenity, notwithstanding the flexible commercial uses already approved for the existing building.

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## **5. ACCESS**

### **5.1 Vehicular Access**

Vehicular access to the site is via the established entrance from the A281. No changes to access arrangements are proposed. The site's excellent road connections make it well-suited to accommodate the approved flexible commercial uses including B2, B8, E and Class F activities. The existing access already serves the multiple businesses on site, including haulage operations, and is suitable for commercial vehicle movements. The replacement building will not generate traffic movements beyond those already associated with the approved uses of the existing structure and the established commercial activities on site. The Council's approval of the Prior Notification in 2025 without objection confirms the acceptability of these uses at this location.

### **5.2 Pedestrian Access**

Pedestrian circulation within the site will be maintained and improved. The new building will be designed to ensure safe pedestrian movement between different areas of the commercial site, with clear separation from vehicle routes where appropriate, particularly important given the mix of businesses including haulage operations.

### **5.3 Accessibility and Inclusive Design**

The building will be designed in accordance with Building Regulations Part M, ensuring accessibility for all users including those with mobility impairments. Level thresholds, appropriate door widths, and accessible WC facilities will be incorporated where required. This is particularly important given the approved Class F use which may include agricultural training and educational activities for diverse groups.

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## **6. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

## 6.1 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The proposal accords with the NPPF's objectives, particularly:

**Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy (Chapter 6):** The NPPF supports sustainable growth and expansion of business in rural areas, recognizing that sites to meet local business needs may need to be found in or near rural settlements. Paragraph 84 specifically encourages the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. The proposal enables multiple established rural businesses to modernize their shared facilities while maintaining the flexible commercial uses already approved by the Council, supporting local employment, economic vitality, and rural diversification. The site demonstrates the successful clustering of complementary rural businesses including nursery operations, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises. The inclusion of Class F use for agricultural training directly supports rural skills development.

**Achieving Well-Designed Places (Chapter 12):** The proposed design demonstrates good design principles through appropriate materials, scale, and relationship to existing site development. The building will be functional, visually appropriate, and sympathetic to its context. Importantly, the design has been refined through consultation with neighbours, demonstrating the collaborative and responsive approach to design encouraged by the NPPF.

**Meeting the Challenge of Climate Change (Chapter 14):** Replacement of inefficient existing buildings with modern, energy-efficient construction represents a sustainability benefit supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy.

## 6.2 Horsham District Planning Framework (or applicable local plan)

Subject to confirmation of the specific local planning authority policies, the proposal is likely to accord with policies supporting:

**Economic Development:** Policies that support the retention and enhancement of existing employment sites and rural businesses. The proposal secures the future viability of multiple established local employers operating on a shared site while maintaining flexibility to accommodate a range of commercial activities already deemed acceptable by the Council through the 2025 Prior Notification approval. The site represents an important rural employment location supporting jobs in nursery operations, haulage, storage, and construction sectors.

**Rural Diversification:** Many local plans include specific policies encouraging farm and rural business diversification. The proposal enables the commercial site to maintain its approved range of flexible activities in fit-for-purpose accommodation, directly supporting rural economic resilience. The clustering of complementary businesses on this site represents efficient use of rural employment land. The provision for agricultural training (Class F) specifically supports skills development in the rural economy.

**Design Quality:** Local design policies emphasizing appropriate materials, scale, and integration with site context. The proposed timber and slate palette reflects rural vernacular traditions while providing contemporary functionality suitable for modern commercial operations.

**Residential Amenity:** The design responds positively to residential amenity considerations through appropriate setback, height control, acoustic design, and operational management. The support of the adjacent neighbour demonstrates that the proposal will not result in unacceptable harm to living conditions.

**Re-use of Previously Developed Land:** The proposal represents efficient use of an established commercial site, replacing buildings that have reached the end of their useful life rather than developing greenfield land. The site's role as a multi-business employment location makes particularly efficient use of previously developed land and existing infrastructure.

### **6.3 Replacement Buildings and the Principle of Development**

The principle of flexible commercial use (B2, B8, E and Class F) on this part of the site has been firmly established through the Council's approval of the Prior Notification in 2025 without objection. This application does not seek to intensify or expand the approved uses but rather to replace an inadequate structure with a purpose-designed building capable of accommodating the same range of activities in a safe, efficient, and environmentally superior manner, serving the multiple businesses already operating on site.

Where local policy addresses replacement of existing buildings, the proposal benefits from support for replacing structures that are no longer fit for purpose with appropriately scaled modern equivalents, particularly where:

- The existing building is in poor condition
- The replacement maintains the approved uses without intensification
- The replacement supports viable rural business uses and existing employment
- The scale and appearance are sympathetic to the setting
- Neighbouring amenity is protected

This application satisfies all these tests.

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## **7. JUSTIFICATION**

### **7.1 Business Need and Established Uses**

The existing agricultural barn, despite benefiting from approved flexible commercial use (B2, B8, E and Class F) since 2025, is in poor structural condition and no longer provides adequate accommodation for these approved activities. Similarly, the existing office space does not meet modern business requirements. Multiple businesses currently operate on site, including the nursery, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises. All of these businesses would benefit from improved facilities providing flexible workshop, industrial, storage, office, and training space to support:

- Light industrial processes related to horticultural operations and construction activities (B2)

- Storage of equipment, materials, goods, and vehicles for the nursery, haulage, and construction businesses (B8)
- Office and commercial functions supporting the multiple businesses operating on site (Class E)
- Agricultural training and educational activities (Class F)
- Accommodation of additional complementary businesses operating within these approved use classes

Without appropriate facilities, the multiple businesses on site cannot fully utilise the commercial uses already approved by the Council, and the long-term viability of this established rural employment location would be compromised. The site has successfully operated a temporary coffee shop for a number of years and accommodates diverse commercial activities, demonstrating its suitability as a mixed-use commercial destination. The provision of improved facilities will enable the full potential of the approved uses to be realized, supporting all existing businesses and enabling additional enterprises to locate on site.

## **7.2 Economic Benefits and Diversification**

The improved facilities will enable the site to effectively accommodate the existing businesses and additional enterprises operating within the approved use classes (B2, B8, E and Class F). The multiple existing businesses—nursery operations, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises—will all benefit from modern, fit-for-purpose workspace. The flexible design will also allow for additional businesses such as:

- Light manufacturing and processing related to horticulture or construction (B2)
- Additional equipment suppliers and distributors (B8)
- Landscape designers, horticultural consultants, construction-related professional services (E)
- Agricultural training providers and educational organizations (Class F)
- Garden-related craftspeople and artisan makers

This diversification within the already-approved use parameters brings multiple benefits:

- Secures existing local employment across multiple sectors
- Creates additional local employment opportunities
- Enhances the site's attraction as a rural business destination
- Makes efficient use of an established commercial site with excellent transport links and existing infrastructure
- Supports rural economic resilience through business clustering and complementary activities
- Provides flexible workspace suitable for small and growing rural enterprises across various sectors
- Supports rural skills development through agricultural training provision
- Demonstrates the viability of mixed-use rural employment sites

The ability to accommodate multiple businesses on site within the approved use classes represents sustainable rural economic development, consistent with national and local planning policies encouraging rural business growth and diversification. The existing

successful clustering of nursery, haulage, storage, and construction businesses demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach.

### **7.3 Principle of Development Already Established**

It is important to emphasise that the Council has already approved the principle of flexible commercial use (B2, B8, E and Class F) on this part of the site through the Prior Notification process in 2025. The approval was granted without objection, confirming that:

- The uses are acceptable in this location
- The impact on highways, amenity, and other material considerations is acceptable
- The flexible use approach supports the viability of rural businesses
- The site is suitable for accommodating diverse commercial activities

This application does not seek to introduce new or more intensive uses but rather to provide a fit-for-purpose building to accommodate the same approved range of activities. The replacement of a deteriorating structure with a well-designed, energy-efficient building represents an improvement that will enable the approved uses to be carried out more effectively and sustainably, benefiting all the existing businesses on site.

### **7.4 Site-Specific Considerations**

Birchfield Nursery is an established multi-business commercial site with planning permission for various uses including retail, food and beverage, storage, and (as of 2025) flexible commercial use encompassing B2, B8, E and Class F. The site successfully accommodates multiple businesses including the nursery, haulage operations, storage facilities, and construction-related enterprises, demonstrating the effective clustering of complementary rural businesses. The site has also operated a temporary coffee shop for a number of years, and a permanent replacement is currently awaiting planning approval.

The replacement building will serve the approved flexible commercial uses without intensification or adverse impact on the surrounding area. The excellent A281 access means the site is particularly well-located to accommodate these commercial operations, including haulage activities, without generating unacceptable traffic impacts on minor rural roads. The site's existing commercial character, established use approvals, mix of existing businesses, and good infrastructure make it an ideal location for accommodating multiple compatible businesses, demonstrating the efficient use of rural employment land.

### **7.5 Residential Amenity**

Through proactive consultation with the neighbouring occupiers at Birchfield House, the design has been refined to ensure protection of residential amenity. The commitment to a 1m setback, controlled ridge height, enhanced acoustic performance, and considerate operating hours demonstrates that the development can proceed without causing unacceptable harm to neighbouring living conditions. The positive support received from the immediate neighbour provides strong evidence that the proposal represents a sensitive and acceptable form of development in this location, notwithstanding the flexible commercial uses already approved and the multiple businesses already operating on site. The enhanced acoustic design of the western elevation will provide superior noise attenuation compared to the existing structure,

representing an improvement in amenity protection for activities associated with all the existing businesses.

## **7.6 Design Quality**

By adopting a consistent design approach across the site—matching the permanent coffee shop application with eternit slates and timber cladding—the proposal will enhance the overall visual quality of the commercial site. This represents an improvement over the disparate collection of aging structures currently on site and creates a professional, cohesive business environment suitable for the multiple existing businesses and for attracting quality tenants and business partners operating within the approved use classes. The unified architectural language will transform the site's appearance, replacing ad-hoc temporary and deteriorating buildings with a well-considered, high-quality development appropriate to the rural setting and befitting a successful rural employment hub.

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## **8. CONCLUSION**

This application proposes the replacement of an agricultural barn (which benefits from approved flexible commercial use for B2, B8, E and Class F) in poor condition and outdated office space with a fit-for-purpose commercial building to accommodate the same approved uses. The proposal:

- Enables the continued operation of flexible commercial uses (B2, B8, E and Class F) already approved by the Council in 2025 through Prior Notification
- Supports the continued viability of multiple established rural businesses operating on site, including nursery operations, haulage, storage, and construction enterprises
- Provides modern facilities that will benefit all existing businesses on site
- Replaces buildings that are no longer fit for purpose with modern, efficient accommodation
- Secures existing employment and creates opportunities for additional local employment within the approved use classes
- Adopts high-quality, contextually appropriate design and materials that will create architectural cohesion across the site alongside the permanent coffee shop application
- Makes efficient use of previously developed land with excellent transport links and established commercial infrastructure
- Demonstrates the effective clustering of complementary rural businesses on a shared site
- Protects the amenity of neighbouring residential properties through sensitive design and operational management
- Has been developed through meaningful consultation with immediate neighbours, who have confirmed their support for the scheme
- Aligns with national and local planning policies supporting rural economic development, business diversification, and the efficient use of rural employment sites
- Generates no intensification beyond the uses already approved by the Council without objection

The development represents sustainable rural economic growth through the modernization of an existing multi-business commercial site with established use approvals, delivered through well-considered design that respects local character and neighbouring amenity. The flexible workspace will enable the site to fully realize the potential of the approved uses, supporting the existing businesses and creating a more resilient rural business hub that benefits the local economy across multiple sectors. The positive support of the adjacent neighbour, following design refinement in response to their concerns, demonstrates that the proposal achieves an appropriate balance between business needs and residential amenity. Approval is respectfully recommended.

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**Prepared:** January 2026

**Site:** Birchfield Nursery, London Road, Henfield, BN5 9AB