



TO: Planning Committee

BY: Head of Development and Building Control

DATE: 21 July 2026

DEVELOPMENT: Change of Use of Equestrian Stables to Offices (Class E), including the enclosure of the existing stable roof overhang.

SITE: Beckley Stud Reeds Lane Southwater West Sussex RH13 9DQ

WARD: Southwater North

APPLICATION: DC/25/1444

APPLICANT: **Name:** Mr Lee Middleton **Address:** Beckley Stud Reeds Lane Southwater West Sussex RH13 9DQ

REASON FOR INCLUSION ON THE AGENDA: At the request of Councillor Vickers

RECOMMENDATION: To refuse planning permission

1 THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

To consider the planning application.

DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICATION

- 1.1 Permission is sought for the change of use of the equestrian stables to offices (Class E) and the enclosure of the existing overhang. Parking is proposed to the south of the existing stable block, on existing hardstanding. No changes are proposed to the existing site access.
- 1.2 The submitted Planning Statement confirms the proposed office accommodation would be used in association with the established existing occupant of the site to facilitate the administrative elements of the business.
- 1.3 At the time of an earlier site visit the stables were in partial use as a dwelling, with the detached dwelling in use as an office. The uses taking place on the site are subject of an ongoing compliance investigation. This application has been assessed on the basis of the last lawful use of the stable block.

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

- 1.4 Beckley Stud is located on the corner of Colstaple Lane and Reeds Lane, the site is accessed via Reeds Lane. The site is stated as being a mixed-use equestrian and commercial enterprise, with a rural workers dwelling also present. The wider site contains storage buildings, stables and other equestrian related development. Beyond the site

dwellinghouses are set sporadically along Coltstaple Lane and Reeds Lane. To the southeast of the site, across the A24 lies Southwater.

2 INTRODUCTION

STATUTORY BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

- 2.2 The following Policies are considered to be relevant to the assessment of this application:

National Planning Policy Framework:

Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF 2015):

Policy 1 - Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development
Policy 3 - Strategic Policy: Development Hierarchy
Policy 7 - Strategic Policy: Economic Growth
Policy 9 - Employment Development
Policy 10 - Rural Economic Development
Policy 24 - Strategic Policy: Environmental Protection
Policy 25 - Strategic Policy: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
Policy 26 - Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection
Policy 31 - Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
Policy 33 - Development Principles
Policy 34 - Cultural and Heritage Assets
Policy 38 - Strategic Policy: Flooding
Policy 40 - Sustainable Transport
Policy 41 - Parking

Southwater Neighbourhood Plan (2021):

Policy SNP 1 Core Principles
Policy SNP 15 Driving in the 21st Century
Policy SNP 16 Design

Horsham District Local Plan (2023-40) (Regulation 19):

Policy 1: Sustainable Development
Policy 2: Development Hierarchy
Policy 9: Water Neutrality
Policy 10: Flooding
Policy 11: Environmental Protection
Policy 13: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
Policy 14: Countryside Protection
Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Policy 19: Development Quality
Policy 20: Development Principles
Policy 21: Heritage Assets and Managing Change within the Historic Environment
Policy 24: Sustainable Transport
Policy 25: Parking
Policy 29: New Employment
Policy 30: Enhancing Existing Employment
Policy 31: Rural Economic Development

Supplementary Planning Guidance:

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule (2017)

2.3 PLANNING HISTORY AND RELEVANT APPLICATIONS

DC/18/1622	Removal of existing mobile home and positioning of new mobile home (retrospective). Construction of 1.8m fencing along eastern/southern boundaries along with brick pillars and gates to entrance (retrospective). Proposed construction of 1.5m high fence along eastern/northern boundaries.	Application Permitted on 17.02.2020
DC/18/1826	Erection of a 60m x 30m sand school.	Application Permitted on 09.11.2018
DC/19/0278	Demolition of existing stable and erection of stables	Application Permitted on 06.08.2019
DC/20/0613	Retention and completion of horse walker with barn shelter and adjacent turnout pen	Application Permitted on 05.08.2020
DC/20/0615	Retention of bund	Application Permitted on 05.08.2020
DC/22/0388	Retention of existing green steel clad building and mono-pitch lean-to for storage and distribution use by Equine America UK and resulting mixed use of Beckley Stud as a whole for equestrian, residential and commercial purposes	Allowed on Appeal 07.05.2025.
DC/22/0565	Temporary retention of storage containers at Beckley Stud for a two year period	Application Refused on 15.03.2023
DC/25/1494	Retention of an outbuilding for incidental domestic storage (Retrospective).	Application Permitted on 04.12.2025
DC/25/2133	Erection of a new storage building and associated hardstanding and the retention of existing installed hardstanding.	Application Refused on 20.03.2026

3 OUTCOME OF CONSULTATIONS

- 3.1 Where consultation responses have been summarised, it should be noted that Officers have had consideration of the full comments received, which are available to view on the public file at www.horsham.gov.uk.

INTERNAL CONSULTATIONS

- 3.2 **HDC Conservation:** No Objection. The proposal would be understood within the context of the site and is not considered to result in additional harm to the wider setting of the listed buildings (Kings Farm, and Newfoundout East).
- 3.3 **Environmental Health:** No Objection.

OUTSIDE AGENCIES

- 3.4 **Ecology Consultant:** No objection, conditions recommended.
- 3.5 **WSSC Highways:** The LHA does not consider that this proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or result in 'severe' cumulative impacts on the operation of the highway network, therefore is not contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 116), and that there are no transport grounds to resist the proposal.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS

3.6 Representations:
None received

3.7 **Southwater Parish Council:** No Objection.

4 HOW THE PROPOSED COURSE OF ACTION WILL PROMOTE HUMAN RIGHTS

4.1 The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the same Act, which sets out their rights in respect to private and family life and for the home. Officers consider that the proposal would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles.

4.2 The application has also been considered in accordance with Horsham District Council's public sector equality duty, which seeks to prevent unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people in a diverse community, in accordance with Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. In this case, the proposal is not anticipated to have any potential impact from an equality perspective.

5 HOW THE PROPOSAL WILL HELP TO REDUCE CRIME AND DISORDER

5.1 It is not considered that the development would be likely to have any significant impact on crime and disorder.

6 PLANNING ASSESSMENTS

Principle

6.1 Policy 10 of the HDPF states that *"sustainable rural economic development and enterprise within the district will be encouraged in order to generate local employment opportunities and economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities. In the countryside, development which maintains the quality and character of the area, whilst sustaining its varied and productive social and economic activity will be supported in principle. Any development should be appropriate to the countryside location and must:*

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."*

6.2 Policy 26 of the HDPF relates to countryside protection, stating 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 meet a specified criterion, which includes enabling the sustainable development of rural areas.

- 6.3 As part of an earlier appeal on the site for a storage building (in the north-eastern corner of the site) the Inspector stated: -

“The Appellant owns a number of horses and at Beckley Stud has focused on the breeding and training of exceptional racehorses along with box rest and racehorse recuperation. Beckley Stud was first established to develop a successful breeding program to produce elite homebred British sports horses. It has a longstanding working relationship with The Billy Stud, a local stud farm. Alongside the breeding, training and rearing of horses at Beckley Stud, the Appellant runs EA. Since EA has taken ownership of the appeal site, these primary functions remain unchanged, and Beckley Stud continues to operate as a breeding facility working in partnership with The Billy Stud.

Beckley Stud provides EA with a bespoke research and development facility to test and improve products. Beckley Stud continues to be a working equestrian facility complete with stables, sand school, and fields. It is home to a variety of horses, ponies and foals which compete and train across multiple disciplines, which makes it ideally situated to trial new supplements and optimises existing products to ensure that EA supplies high quality equine products to the industry”.

- 6.4 This appeal decision considered that Beckley Stud represented a ‘*working equestrian facility complete with stables, sand school, and fields*’. As part of other submissions on the site it has been set out that Beckley Stud functions as a live, working research and development facility, enabling the applicant to test and refine nutritional products using horses that are bred, trained, and kept on site. The previous planning history of the site has stated that Beckley Stud is in mixed use, as a whole, for equestrian, residential and commercial purposes.
- 6.5 The submission sets out that there are currently 12 employees at the site, two staff work across Equine America and Beckley Stud with the rest being divided equally between the two enterprises. The agent also confirms the stud would still be in use with up to 8 horses / foals being kept at the site for rearing, isolation and horse management. It is understood that stabling at the site (following the change of use) would be provided in mobile field shelters. It is not clear whether the field shelters would have a degree of permanence which would require planning permission, but given the nature of equestrian activities stated as taking place on the site it is reasonable to consider the presence of stabling elsewhere on the site would be necessary.
- 6.6 The proposal seeks the change of use of an existing stable building to office accommodation, including staff facilities and a canteen. The submitted plans indicate in excess of 20 desk spaces together with associated ancillary facilities. It is stated that the accommodation would be occupied by employees of Beckley Stud involved in the development, production and sale of equestrian supplements, together with workspace for visiting veterinarians.
- 6.7 Policy 10 of the HDPF supports rural economic development and the conversion of existing rural buildings for business use where such development is appropriate to its countryside location and maintains the quality and character of the area. The scale of office accommodation proposed, together with the associated level of staffing and ancillary facilities, would introduce a substantial commercial operation within this countryside location.
- 6.8 It has been established through previous decisions on the site, most notably the appeal decision associated with DC/22/0388, that Beckley Stud (as a whole) entails a mixed use for

equestrian, residential and commercial purposes. It is though noted that the rural workers dwelling provides modest accommodation, and its need was originally derived from the equestrian use of the site. The primary activities taking place on the site will therefore derive from the relationship between equestrian and commercial activities.

- 6.9 On the basis of the available information, it has not been demonstrated that the scale of the proposed office accommodation would be reasonably necessary for, or proportionate to, the existing mixed use enterprise taking place on the site. The level of accommodation being sought has potential to move away from a mixed use of the site, with any equestrian element subsumed by commercial activities within both the proposed office accommodation and elsewhere on the site.
- 6.10 The planning history for the site sets out an incremental shift away from rural based equestrian activity toward the mixed use referenced above. While equestrian activity is referenced within the submission it is not clear that the level of such use is on a par with other commercial activities, which include existing storage and the proposed office accommodation. In this regard it is noted that a separate application for the erection of a storage building (providing approximately 1,575 sq m of floorspace) was refused under ref: DC/25/2133, with this refusal raising concerns relating to the lack of essential need and landscape and neighbouring amenity impacts.
- 6.11 The scale of the proposed office accommodation would facilitate a significant intensification of commercial activity at the site. In the absence of evidence demonstrating that this level of accommodation is reasonably necessary for, or proportionate to, the established mixed use of the site, the Local Planning Authority is not satisfied that the proposal would remain appropriate to its countryside location. The proposal would therefore fail to represent a form of development appropriate to its countryside location and would conflict with the aims of Policy 26, which seeks to protect the character of the countryside and resist development that results in a significant increase in countryside activity.
- 6.12 The preceding Inspector in allowing an appeal considered a storage building to be an acceptable form of '*diversification*' which related to the wider equestrian activities taking place on the site, ref: DC/22/0388. In respect of this appeal decision, it is considered to be highly relevant that the activity levels associated with this storage building were proven to be modest and controlled.
- 6.13 In contrast, the current proposal would facilitate a substantial concentration of office-based employment activity within the countryside. The submitted plans demonstrate provision for more than 20 workstations together with ancillary staff accommodation and facilities for visiting veterinarians. It has not been demonstrate that the scale of office accommodation is reasonably necessary or would retain a mixed use of the site which would be appropriate in this countryside location, or that the resulting employment activity would remain ancillary to that use. In the absence of such justification, the Local Planning Authority is not satisfied that the development would remain appropriate to its countryside location or that it would avoid a significant increase in countryside activity, contrary to Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF.
- 6.14 This conclusion reflects concerns raised as part of the consideration of a refused application for a storage building on the site (in the location of the existing sand school), where it was considered that the scale and nature of the development would lead to a change in the character of the use taking place on the site, which would no longer be equestrian led (ref: DC/25/2133). This decision is currently subject of an ongoing (written representations) appeal.

Design and Appearance:

- 6.15 Policies 32 and 33 of the HDPF seek to ensure that development promotes a high standard and quality of design in order to enhance and protect locally distinctive characters. The policies also seek to ensure that the scale, massing and appearance of development relates sympathetically with the built surroundings, landscape, open spaces and routes within and adjoining the site, including any impact on the skyline and important views.
- 6.16 Policy SNP16 (Design) of the Southwater Neighbourhood Plan states that *“All development must be of high-quality design. In Southwater this means: Facing buildings with locally sourced materials, or materials equivalent to those that would historically have been sourced locally wherever possible.”*
- 6.17 The proposal would result in minimal external changes to the stable block. The infill of the roof overhang and changes in fenestration is of little consequence, and the main structure and form of the building would remain. The external alterations would therefore accord with the above policies.

Heritage:

- 6.18 Policy 34 of the HDPF states that development should reinforce the special character of the historic environment through appropriate siting, scale, form and design; and should make a positive contribution to the character and distinctiveness of the area.
- 6.19 Newfoundout East, located on the opposite side of Reeds Lane, and Kings Farmhouse on the opposite side of Coltstaple Lane are Grade II listed buildings. It is considered that the separation distances between the converted office building and these heritage assets is such that there would be no adverse impact on their setting or significance. As such no conflict with Policy 34 of the HDPF has been identified.

Residential Amenity:

- 6.20 Policy 33(2) of the HDPF states that permission will be granted for development that does not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of the occupiers/users of nearby properties and land.
- 6.21 A preceding appeal decision for an existing storage building on the site, ref: DC/22/0388, considered that, *“that this rural area is reasonably quiet. There are also residential properties located close to the site on Coltstaple Lane and Reeds Lane, and therefore the area remains a noise sensitive environment in which the potential for and effect of any additional noise and disturbance must be carefully considered”*.
- 6.22 The scale of the proposed development and the related level of activity on the site has significant potential to result in a unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity. It is though considered that an office would not be expected to result in a level of noise or general disturbance which would lead to unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity. Similarly, while the office accommodation is of a scale which would be expected to result in additional vehicular movements to and from the site, these would not be of the same impact as HGV movements associated with other uses taking place on the site. If necessary, a condition could control hours of use of the office and this would be sufficient to minimise the potential for unacceptable harm, in accordance with the above policy.

Highways Impacts:

- 6.23 Policy 40 of the HDPF emphasizes the importance of transport access and ease of movement for the local economy, with a focus on sustainable transport and safe access. Policy 41 of the HDPF further specifies that developments must ensure adequate parking provision.

- 6.24 The application has been accompanied by a plan to demonstrate the proposed parking. The Local Highway Authority confirmed in their comments this parking provision is suitable and that the proposal would not result in an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the highway network. There are considered to be no reasons to take a different view, and no conflict with the above policies has been identified.

Ecology:

- 6.25 Policy 31 of the HDPF states that development proposals will be required to contribute to the enhancement of existing biodiversity, and should create and manage new habitats where appropriate. The Council will support new development which retains and /or enhances significant features of nature conservation on development sites. The Council will also support development which makes a positive contribution to biodiversity through the creation of green spaces, and linkages between habitats to create local and regional ecological networks.
- 6.26 There is no evidence to suggest the existing stable building is used by protected species, and subject to details of external lighting, which could be secured through condition, no adverse impacts would result from the development.

Water Neutrality:

- 6.27 A 2021 Position Statement from Natural England identified that it could not be concluded with the required degree of certainty that new development in the Sussex North Water Supply Zone would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites. As a consequence, and to comply with the legal duties set out in the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (known as the Habitat Regulations), all new development since has been required to demonstrate water neutrality.
- 6.28 On 31st October 2025 Natural England formally withdrew the 2021 Position Statement, citing a package of measures that they were satisfied would safeguard the Arun Valley sites. Principal amongst these measures is a reduction in the Southern Water abstraction licence 'by March 2026'. However, given the licence change has not yet taken place Horsham District Council, as competent authority under the Habitats Regulations, cannot yet be certain that new development will not result in adverse impacts on the Arun Valley sites.
- 6.29 To ensure development can come forward as water neutral in the meantime, the Council has agreed with Natural England to use the significant water savings made by Southern Water in 2024/25 through their programme of leakage reduction (amongst other measures). This has generated some 3,240,000 litres per day of water savings that can now be attributed to new development without increasing water abstraction in the Arun Valley beyond baseline. These savings were previously to be used to launch the Sussex North Water Certification Scheme (SNWCS), however following the withdrawal statement SNWCS will no longer be launching. Natural England standing advice dated 10 November 2025 raises no objection to using these savings to enable development to come forward. The standing advice clarifies that it functions as Natural England's formal response pursuant to Regulation 63(3) of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 to all relevant planning applications which seek to achieve water neutrality using the above Southern Water savings.
- 6.30 Officers have undertaken an Appropriate Assessment which demonstrates that the anticipated increase in mains water consumption from this development, alongside all other development granted since the 31st October 2025, will not exceed 3,240,000 litres per day.
- 6.31 Accordingly, Officers consider that the proposed development will not have an Adverse Effect on the Integrity of the Arun Valley Site, either alone or in combination with other plan and projects, thereby complying with Regulations 63 and 70 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, HDPF Policy 31, and paragraph 193 of the NPPF.

Drainage and Flood Risk:

- 6.32 The proposal does not result in the addition of any hard surfacing and would convert an existing building. A pre-commencement condition has been recommended securing the foul and surface water drainage at the site.

6.33 Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) mandates that every development must achieve at least a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), unless the development qualifies as exempt under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, and that every planning permission granted for the development of land in England shall be deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that development may not be begun unless a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority and the planning authority has approved the Plan.

- 6.34 The Biodiversity Gain Plan must show how the development will achieve the required minimum 10% BNG using the statutory biodiversity metric tool and must demonstrate how the habitats will be managed and maintained for 30 years, starting from the date the development is completed. Off-site gains and significant on-site enhancements will be secured over this period by way of a Legal Agreement.
- 6.35 The development qualifies as 'de minimis' under Regulation 4 of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024.

Conclusions and Planning Balance:

- 6.36 The proposal would enable the re-use of an existing building and would provide accommodation for business activities associated with the established enterprise operating from Beckley Stud. The development would therefore support economic activity and employment in a rural location and would be consistent with the general objectives of Policy 10 of the HDPF.
- 6.37 However, there are concerns regarding the scale and nature of the office accommodation proposed. The submitted plans indicate provision for in excess of 20 workstations, together with associated staff facilities and workspace for visiting veterinarians. Insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this level of office accommodation is reasonably necessary for, or proportionate to, the operation of the equestrian enterprise at the site, or that it would remain a genuinely mixed use, i.e. including an active equestrian element, as previously accepted.
- 6.38 The Local Planning Authority is therefore not satisfied that the proposal represents a form of rural economic development that is appropriate to its countryside location. By reason of its scale and intensity, the proposal would facilitate a substantial office-based employment use in the countryside and has not been demonstrated to avoid a significant increase in countryside activity. As such, the proposal conflicts with the requirements of Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF, which seek to ensure that rural economic development remains appropriate to its countryside setting and that the rural character of the countryside is protected from inappropriate forms of development.
- 6.39 On balance therefore, while the proposal would deliver economic benefits, these are not considered sufficient to outweigh the identified policy conflict and resulting harm. The application is therefore recommended for refusal.

7 RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 That planning permission be refused for the following reason: -

1. The scale of the proposed office accommodation has not been demonstrated to be reasonably necessary for, or proportionate to the established mixed use of the site. Consequently, the Local Planning Authority is not satisfied that the proposed office use would be appropriate to this countryside location or that it would avoid a significant intensification of commercial activity within the countryside. The proposal therefore conflicts with Policies 10 and 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015), which seek to ensure that rural economic development is appropriate to its countryside setting and that the rural character of the countryside is protected from inappropriate development.

Background Papers: DC/25/1444
DC/25/2133
DC/22/0388