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Your Ref: DC/26/0149
Our Ref: 11044-hd

6 March 2026

For the attention of Hannah Darley

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

Dear Ms Darley,

Site: Oakwood Farm, Storrington Road, Thakeham, West Sussex RH20 3QT.
Application: DC/26/0149
Proposal: Erection of a chalet style (self-build) dwelling.

Thank you for your instruction dated 24 February 2026 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) comments on the above planning application.

In preparing this desk-top response I have had regard to the Design and Access Statement (dated January 2026) prepared by the applicants' agent, NJA Town Planning Ltd, the applicant's Farming Statement (undated), and the associated plans and application form.

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

The Council have confirmed the instruction is for an assessment against Policy 20 of the Horsham District Planning Framework as reference is made to the need for a resident rural worker in the Design and Access Statement and the Farming Statement.

Background

1. The applicants, Mr and Mrs Vaughan-Spencer, own 7.68 hectares (19 acres) of grassland which is currently used for grazing by mixed livestock and poultry. The Farming Statement details that the applicants purchased the land in 2015 and have registered as an organic smallholding with the Soil Association.
2. The applicants keep the following livestock and poultry on the land:
 - 114 laying hens;
 - Cattle (unknown number);
 - Pigs (unknown number); and
 - Sheep (unknown number)



Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd

Registered Office as above

Company No. 3282982

Registered in England



3. It is understood from the Farming Statement that the applicants produce grain and hay on site for feeding to the livestock and poultry on site.
4. No details of the applicants CPH number or farming enterprise details have been provided.
5. The applicants currently live off site and travel to site each day to carry out checks on the livestock and collect and prepare eggs for sale within the kiosk on site (approved under DC/24/1698). It is unknown where the applicants currently live, the time they spend on site and any emergencies which have required them to be on site outside of any normal or regular hours.

Proposal

6. The application before the Council proposes the erection of a self-build dwelling.
7. The proposed dwelling measures 13m x 8.5m and comprises living room, kitchen/dining area, laundry and shower room, boot room, pantry, three bedrooms and a bathroom.
8. It will provide accommodation for the applicants, Mr and Mrs Vaughan-Spencer, and their family.

Relevant Planning Policies

9. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in December 2024.
10. 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.
11. 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.
12. Paragraph 82 et seq deals with housing in the countryside and notes;

“In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs...”

To promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services...”
13. However, paragraph 84 maintains the presumption against isolated new dwellings in the countryside unless they are essential, noting:

“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

- a) *there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside...*

14. 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..."

15. 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;..."*

16. Planning Practice Guidance titled 'Housing Needs of Different Groups' (July 2019) provides some guidance relevant to paragraph 80 of the NPPF in the section 'How can the need for isolated homes in the countryside for essential rural workers be assessed'?

17. These include:

- *Evidence of the necessity for a rural worker to live at or in close proximity to their place of work to ensure the effective operation of agricultural, forestry or similar land-based rural enterprise (for instance where farm animals or agricultural processes require on-site attendance 24 hours a day and where otherwise there would be a risk to human or animal health or from crime, or to deal quickly with emergencies that could cause serious loss of crops or products);*
- *The degree to which there is confidence that the enterprise will remain viable for the foreseeable future;*
- *Whether the provision of an additional dwelling on site is essential for the continued viability of a farming business through the farm succession process;*

18. Policy 10 of the Horsham District Planning Framework looks at rural economic development and states:

"Sustainable rural economic development and enterprise within the district will be encouraged in order to generate local employment opportunities and economic, social and environmental benefits for local communities.

In the countryside, development which maintains the quality and character of the area, whilst sustaining its varied and productive social and economic activity will be supported in principle. Any development should be appropriate to the countryside location and must:

1. *contribute to the diverse and sustainable farming enterprises within the district or, in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, contribute to the wider rural economy and/or promote recreation in, and the enjoyment of the countryside; and either*
 - a. *be contained wherever possible within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion or, in the case of an established rural industrial estate, within the existing boundaries of the estate; or*
 - b. *result in substantial environmental improvement and reduce the impact on the countryside particularly if there are exceptional cases where new or replacement buildings are involved. New buildings or development in the rural area will be acceptable provided that it supports sustainable economic growth towards balanced living and working communities and criteria a) has been considered first."*

19. Policy 20 considers rural workers' accommodation and states that:

"Outside the defined built-up area new housing for rural workers will be supported provided that:

1. *there is a functional need for the dwelling and the occupation of the dwelling is to support the established business use.*
2. *evidence is submitted to demonstrate the viability of the rural business for which the housing is required."*

20. Policy 26 deals with countryside protection and enhancement and states that:

"Outside built-up area boundaries, the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside will be protected against inappropriate development. Any proposal must be essential to its countryside location, and in addition meet one of the following criteria:

1. *support the needs of agriculture or forestry;*
2. *enable the extraction of minerals or the disposal of waste;*
3. *provide for quiet informal recreational use; or,*
4. *enable the sustainable development of rural areas.*

In addition, proposals must be of a scale appropriate to its countryside character and location. Development will be considered acceptable where it does not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside, and protects, and/or conserves, and/or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located, including:

1. *the development pattern of the area, its historical and ecological qualities, tranquillity and sensitivity to change;*
2. *the pattern of woodlands, fields, hedgerows, trees, waterbodies and other features; and*
3. *the landform of the area."*

Appraisal

21. The primary test set out in the NPPF and Local Plan Policy 20 is an assessment as to whether it is essential for a rural worker to live at, or near, their place of work. In this case, the applicants operate an organic mixed livestock and poultry enterprise however the scale of the enterprise is unknown.
22. The applicants consider that a rural dwelling on site is beneficial in order to maintain the appropriate level of management and supervision of the livestock and to ensure that animal welfare obligations are met.
23. There is a legal responsibility under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 to ensure that all 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 of 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.
24. The Code of Practice for the Welfare of Laying Hens and Pullets (2018) notes that:
"Animals must be cared for by a sufficient number of staff who possess the appropriate ability, knowledge and professional competence" and
"Stockmanship is one of the most important influences on the welfare of laying hens. A good keeper will have a compassionate and humane attitude, will be able to anticipate and avoid many potential welfare problems and have the ability to identify those that do occur and respond promptly..."
25. Under the Animal Welfare Act 2006 it is an offence to cause unnecessary suffering to any animal. The Act also contains a Duty of 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. The overall responsibility for Duty of Care for animal welfare will lie with the applicants.
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 the case of the applicants' poultry and livestock enterprises at the application site, the essential needs could arise from:

- the general welfare and care of all livestock on the farm;
- the management of free-range egg producing poultry and housing accommodation;
- the general welfare and management of breeding stock where assistance may be required at birthing;
- the general care and attention of the new born animal ensuring they have received adequate colostrum, again assistance may be required;
- the regular inspection of livestock whether housed or at grass for signs of disease or distress and to rectify the problem promptly;
- the provision of security for animals from theft or malicious attack; and
- dealing promptly with unforeseen emergencies.

28. RAC are unable to comment on the labour requirement as the numbers of sheep, pigs and cattle on site are unknown.

29. RAC are unable to conclude on whether the proposal meets the essential needs test or Local Plan Policy 20.

Financial Sustainability

30. 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.

31. 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.

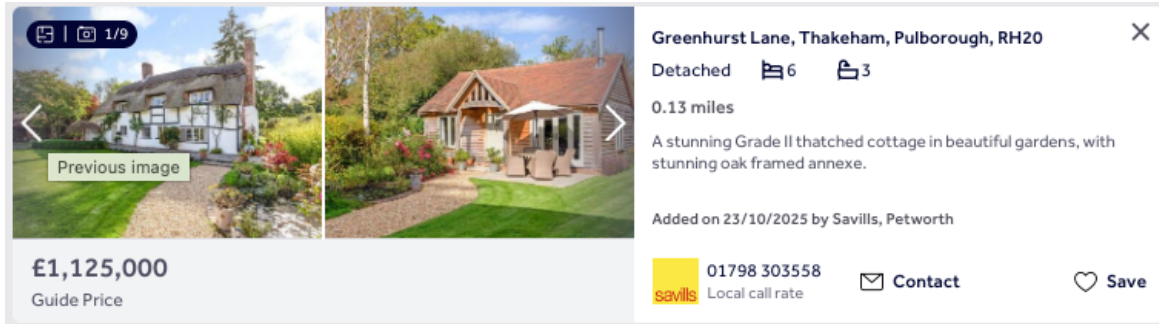
32. RAC considers that in order for any business to demonstrate viability, it should be generating profits sufficient to cover all costs, provide a return on the capital invested, realistically reward any unpaid labour (usually at least equivalent to the national minimum wage); and provide for the build cost of the proposed dwelling.

33. No details of the applicants' agricultural activities or farm business accounts have been provided and therefore it is not possible for RAC to comment on the financial viability or sustainability of the agricultural enterprise.

Other Dwellings

34. It is understood that the applicants currently live off site however the distance to site is unknown from this Planning Application.

35. RAC has viewed the earlier application for the retention of the sales kiosk which shows an address for the applicants which is 0.6 miles from the application site.
36. A search of Rightmove on 6 March 2026 displays 25 properties for sale within 1 mile of the application site postcode (RH20 3QT) however RAC would note this postcode area is 0.8 miles from the application site. A closer postcode to the site is RH20 3EE.
37. The closest property advertised for sale is located on Greenhurst Lane, 0.2 miles from the application site, which RAC would consider beyond the affordability of a rural worker.



Conclusion

38. The applicants propose the erection of a self-build dwelling.
39. The proposed dwelling would be occupied by the applicants who provide the daily management, supervision and care for all poultry and livestock on site.
40. No confirmed details of livestock numbers have been provided, however based on the information submitted regarding the poultry on site RAC considers there is not a justified essential need for a full-time worker to reside on site to meet the needs of the poultry and livestock.
41. No details of the applicants' agricultural business or business accounts have been provided and therefore it is not possible for RAC to comment on the financial viability and sustainability of the rural business.
42. RAC is not aware of any other residential dwellings in the immediate locality that are suitable and available.
43. RAC considers that the proposal for the self-build siting of a rural worker's dwelling at the application site is not compliant with national and local planning policy, in particular Local Plan Policy 20.

I hope these comments are helpful.

Yours sincerely

Olivia Wojniak