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/24/1404
Our Ref: 10555.SP1

18 October 2024

For the attention of Shazia Penne
Horsham District Council
Parkside
Chart Way
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 1RL

Dear Ms Penne,

Site: **Merryhill Mushrooms, Storrington Road, Thakeham, West Sussex, RH20 3ED.**
Application: **DC/24/1404**
Proposal: **Demolition of existing outbuildings and erection of a barn.**

Thank you for your instruction dated 10 October 2024 requesting Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) comments on the above planning application.

The appraisal has been produced by Alan Bloor an Associate of RAC and fellow of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants.

In preparing this desktop response I have had regard to:

- the application form and associated plans;
- a Planning, Design and Statement (PDS) dated September 2024 produced by N J A Town Planning Ltd, the applicant's agent; and
- an Arboricultural Report dated July 2024 produced by Duckworths Arboriculture Ltd.

I have not visited the application site in the preparation of this report or discussed this application with the agent or applicant.

Background

1. From the supporting information provided in the PDS, Merryhill Mushrooms is a family run business operating from the site since 2006. The business is run by Mr Rucklidge, the applicant.

2. The supporting documents note that that the business has evolved over this period and has developed further mushroom products for direct sales and more recently online sales. These

products include mushroom growing kits and other mushroom food products, as well as the sale of loose mushrooms.

3. The PDS notes that as the applicant's business has continued to evolve, with the development of more seasonal products and a range of mushroom growing kits, there is a requirement for the construction of a larger, dry, hygienic fully insulated building.

4. Currently the business and production of mushrooms products operates from five separate wooden sheds at the application site. The wooden sheds are said to be in a poor state of repair and lack insulation.

5. The applicant's proposal for a new single larger building is stated as being a requirement to improve and consolidate floor space into one functional unit to meet the need for product testing, continued development and production of a wide selection of mushroom growing kits, seasonal dry food products, improvements to packaging and storage of goods awaiting dispatch, and improved office space.

Proposal

6. The application proposes the demolition of five small wooden sheds on site and the erection of a new two-storey wooden barn over the same footprint as five small wooden sheds.

7. The five small wooden sheds have an overall floor area of 56.3m². The proposed new wooden barn measures 20m in length x 5m in width – total area 100m² but with an internal floor area of 87.7m² (19.5m x 4.5m).

8. The proposed new barn has a ground floor accessed by a set of double doors on the front and a set on the side elevations. The first floor is accessed by a set of internal steps.

9. The proposed barn has a low-profile mono-pitch corrugated tin roof with a height of 5.9m on the front elevation and height of 4.65m on the rear elevation.

10. The siting of the proposed barn is contained within the existing curtilage.

11. The existing concrete bases are to be removed, and the new barn erected using ground screws to keep ground disturbance to a minimum.

Relevant Planning Policies

12. National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated December 2023.

13. 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.

14. Paragraph 38 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.

15. Section 6 of the NPPF is concerned with 'Building a strong, competitive economy' and at paragraph 81 it notes:

"Planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt. Significant weight should be placed on the need to support econmic growth and productivity.. …"

16. At paragraph 84 '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;…"

17. Policy 10 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (excluding South Downs National Park) (adopted November 2015) deals with 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 balance living and working communities and criteria (a) has been considered first.*
2. *demonstrate that car parking requirements can be accommodated satisfactorily within the immediate surrounds of the buildings, or an alternative, logical solution is proposed.*

Proposals for the conversion of rural buildings to business and commercial uses will be considered favourably over residential in the first instance."

18. Policy 26 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

19. The applicant's proposal is erect a two-storey new timber barn as a replacement for five existing wooden sheds. The proposal will provide a floor area in the proposed barn (ground and first floor) of 175.4m² (19.5m x 4.5m x 2 storey). The original five wooden sheds have a total floor area of 56.3m². The new proposed barn will increase the available floor area for the mushroom enterprise by 119m².

20. RAC would note that in the plans submitted for the construction of the proposed new wooden barn, there is no floor plan provided in the documentation or the PDS of how the mushroom business proposes to utilise this increase in floor area within the new two-storey wooden barn. It would have been of assistance if the applicant or his agent had submitted a simple floor plan or simple detailed areas within the building of where the business activities were to be located. This would have confirmed that the proposed increase in floor area is genuinely required for the mushroom enterprise.

21. RAC does accept that in this rural business and from an operational perspective having all the of the mushroom business activities and working regimes under one roof and in a well-insulated building will be beneficial to the work regimes and efficiency of the applicant's business.

22. RAC would accept that the applicant's proposal for the erection of a larger wooden building to be used as a replacement for five existing small separate wooden sheds, may be reasonably required and necessary for the purposes of the continued development of this well-established mushroom enterprise on the holding.

23. In summary provided the Council is satisfied that the additional floor area as proposed in the new wooden building is genuinely required, RAC would accept that the applicant's proposal is compliant with national and local plan policy.

I trust these comments are helpful in your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



Alan Bloor