PLANNING STATEMENT

SITE:
SNAKES HARBOUR FARM, KENT STREET, COWFOLD
WEST SUSSEX RH13 8BG

PROPOSAL:
RETENTION OF FORMER BUNGALOW AND CHANGE OF USE AND CONVERSION TO AGRICULTURAL BUILDING COMPRISING FARM WORKSHOP, INCUBATION/HATCHERY ROOM, HONEY PRODUCTION AREA AND FARM OFFICE

APPLICANT:
MR H HUTCHINGS

BACKGROUND

Snakes Harbour Farm is a small agricultural holding comprising 70 acres of owned land with a further 25 acres of land rented locally. It is run primarily as a beef cattle holding. Additionally, honey is produced from 40 hives. There is a small free range chicken and guinea fowl operation focused on egg production. At present replacement birds are bred and reared on site but this application offers the opportunity to establish an incubation/hatchery room

Under application ref. DC/17/2030 planning consent was granted to replace the existing agricultural worker's dwelling at the holding. The new dwelling was re-sited and constructed in the southeast corner of the existing farmyard complex. This replacement dwelling is now occupied. Condition No. 7 on this consent stated as follows:

'Post Occupation Condition: Upon the occupation of the building hereby permitted the existing building(s) indicated on plan 1389/17/P/14 shall cease to be used for any purpose whatsoever and within a period of 3 months thereafter such existing building(s) shall be demolished (including the removal of foundations) all materials arising from such demolition removed from the site and the site of the demolished building restored in accordance with details of landscaping which have been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority.'

Condition No. 7 effectively requires the demolition of the original farmworker's bungalow within 3 months of occupation of the replacement dwelling.

PROPOSAL

The original bungalow building remains a solid structure which sits comfortably within its immediate environs, given its limited massing and bulk. It is a single storey structure having a shallow pitched roof and gross internal floor area of 120m2.

This building can be easily adapted to provide for a multi-faceted agricultural use. By removing certain internal walls and existing domestic fittings (bathrooms and kitchen) and changing some external fenestration, a good quality, general purpose agricultural building can be achieved. Such a building would be a significant asset to the operational efficiency of this agricultural holding.

The existing unit lacks a farm office, farm workshop, honey production area and incubation/hatchery room. All these essential agricultural uses can be accommodated within the existing building at minimal expense.

The proposed mixed agricultural uses of the building are considered essential to the efficient running of the farm and would circumvent the need for additional new buildings.

Changes to the external appearance of the building include removing existing glazed doors and French windows and replacing these with solid timber doors. This has the effect of reducing the domestic appearance of the building.

There is considered a persuasive case to re-use this building for agricultural purposes. It is essential to the operational efficiency of the farm holding.

A condition on any consent could restrict the use of the building to agricultural purposes only. This would protect the position of the Planning Authority in the future.

Further changes to the external appearance of the building would be considered, including blocking existing windows, if this was thought desirable, in terms of producing a building having a more agrarian character.

It is considered more sustainable to re-purpose this building for agricultural use than potentially having to construct a new building or buildings at some point in the future. On agricultural grounds, therefore, there is considered to be justification for the conversion of this former bungalow to agricultural uses essential to the efficient functioning of the holding.

The removal of the existing kitchen and bathrooms result in the building having no water consumption implications and therefore a Water Neutrality Report is not required.

The change of use would not increase employee numbers on the site and no intensification in water usage is therefore implied.

As a simple change of use, where no external works within the curtilage are proposed, this development falls to be considered as de minimis under current Biodiversity Net Gain regulations.

No additional hard surfacing or increase in building footprint is proposed and therefore less than 25m2 of habitat is affected.

To conclude, there is considered a persuasive case for re-purposing the existing building for a variety of agricultural uses associated with production on the holding.

This is a good quality building that sits comfortably in the landscape. Its re-use, for the purposes outlined, would significantly improve the agricultural efficiency of the holding.

As a building essential for agricultural need, its retention would be supported by Policies 10 (Rural Economic Development and 26 (Countryside Protection) of the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015. These are reproduced overleaf.

Policy 10

Rural Economic Development

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.**

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.

Policy 26

Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection

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.**

Both these Policies support agricultural development. They recognise it is important to meet the needs of agriculture in order to support the rural economy.