



WESTCOTT VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

Mr James Leaver



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Planning Department  
Mole Valley District Council  
Pippbrook  
Dorking  
Surrey, RH4 1SJ

20 March 2024

Dear Sirs

**MO/2024/0300 Home Farm, Coldharbour Lane, Westcott, RH4 3JG**

**Conversion of one redundant agricultural barn to 2 No. semi-detached residential dwellings (Use Class C3) and one studio/workshop (Use Class B1) to a single residential unit (Use Class C3).**

I refer to the application above and write in my capacity as the lead for planning matters for Westcott Village Association (WVA). We wish to express concern in relation to the application which falls in green belt, AONB and AGLV.

WVA wrote a letter of objection in July 2023 in relation to MO/2023/0806/PLA which was for an almost identical application from the same applicant. This was refused and is now the subject of an appeal.

Despite the provision of additional assessment work, our position remains unchanged with this application. In the context of the reduction in size of the farm by c.6 hectares in December 2022 to c.32 hectares and the proposal to change the use of the majority of the farm buildings to residential use, we are most concerned about fragmentation and the threat to the future viability of the agricultural holding.

Notwithstanding the stated current emphasis on sheep grazing, lavender growing and the production of free-range eggs we believe insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the studio/ workshop building and steel framed barn are surplus or redundant to the holding. We are concerned that the loss of farm buildings to residential use could lead to further fragmentation of the agricultural holding and it then ceases to be a sustainable entity. This could lead to a subsequent attempt to apply for replacement agricultural buildings in the future in accordance with RUD14.

Application MO/2023/0731 for “Erection of an agricultural building for the storage of hay, machinery and housing sheep with associated hardstanding and access track” from the owner of the c.6 hectares of “fragmented” land which had been acquired from the applicant a few months earlier bears this point out. The application was refused on points 2, 3 and 6 of RUD14 as well as policies CS13, CS14, ENV22 and ENV23.

#### POLICY RUD14 - AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT REQUIRING PLANNING PERMISSION

**New agricultural, horticultural or forestry buildings will be permitted where it can be demonstrated that the proposed development:**

- 1. is to be sited on agricultural land which is in use for agriculture for the purposes of a trade or business;**
- 2. is reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the holding;**
- 3. would not detract significantly from the appearance and openness of the countryside;**
- 4. would not cause unacceptable levels of noise, effluent discharge or damage to Sites of Nature Conservation Importance identified in Policies ENV9, ENV10, ENV11, ENV12 and ENV13;**
- 5. would not adversely affect the amenities of any nearby residential properties;**
- 6. does not replace buildings converted to non-agricultural uses which could reasonably have continued in agricultural use;**
- 7. would not generate volumes of traffic that would prejudice highway safety or cause significant harm to the environmental character of country roads.**

In relation to the subject application we refer to Policies RUD12 and RUD19 (points 1,2,3,6 and 7 in particular).

#### **POLICY RUD12 - DEVELOPMENT ON FRAGMENTED AGRICULTURAL LAND**

**The Council will not permit development that would result in the fragmentation of agricultural or horticultural holdings so as to seriously undermine the economic viability of the remaining holdings.**

**In considering proposals for new agricultural buildings on parcels of land which were formerly part of a larger agricultural holding, the Council will require clear cut evidence to demonstrate that they are reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit and are otherwise acceptable in terms of Policy RUD13 and RUD14.**

#### **POLICY RUD19 - RE-USE AND ADAPTATION OF RURAL BUILDINGS**

**The re-use and adaptation of buildings in the countryside will be permitted provided:**

- 1. the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction;**
- 2. on land within the Green Belt, the proposal does not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it;**
- 3. the associated uses of land surrounding the building(s) would not materially harm the character and amenities of the area and, in the case of sites within the Green Belt, conflict with the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it;**
- 4. the proposed use and the form, bulk and general design of the building(s) are in keeping with their surroundings;**
- 5. the conversion does not lead to dispersal of activity on such a scale as to prejudice town and village vitality;**
- 6. the use can be contained within the building(s) without extension, or external storage, other than such provisions which can be made without any adverse effect on the building, its surroundings or, in the case of sites in the Green Belt, the openness of the Green Belt;**
- 7. any conversion works will be carried out in a manner appropriate to the character of the building(s) and have no adverse impact on its surroundings;**
- 8. the amount of traffic likely to be generated by the proposal would not prejudice highway safety or cause significant harm to the environmental character of country roads.**

**Where the Council has reasonable cause to believe that an applicant has attempted to abuse the system by constructing a new farm building with the benefit of permitted development rights, with the intention of early conversion to another use, it will investigate the history of the building to establish whether it was ever used for the purpose for which it was claimed to have been built.**

**Subsequent rebuilding of re-used buildings will not be permitted, and permitted development rights for extensions will be removed by condition.**

Of course policies CS13, CS14, ENC22 and ENV23 are still relevant as well.

The “precedent” cases provided in the Planning Statement and within Westcott Ward are well known to WVA. The decisions made in respect of Bury Hill Fisheries, The Stables at Rookery Hill Farm and Old Bury Lodge are based on very different circumstances and we fail to see the relevance in drawing reference to these planning decisions.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Leaver', written in a cursive style.

James Leaver

Planning Lead, Westcott Village Association