

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

Policy DM23

Housing Related to Rural Workers

New dwellings in the countryside related to, and located at or near, a rural business will be supported where the following criteria are satisfied:

- a. It is proven as essential to the continuing use of land and buildings for agriculture, forestry or a similar land based rural business;
- b. Detailed evidence is submitted showing the relationship between the proposed housing and the existing or proposed rural business and demonstrating why the housing is required for a full time worker in that location;
- c. It is demonstrated that there are no suitable alternative dwellings available or that could be made available in that location to meet the need. This includes those being used as tourist or temporary accommodation or existing buildings suitable for residential conversion;
- d. It is shown why the housing need cannot be met by existing or proposed provision within existing settlement boundaries;
- e. The financial viability of the business is demonstrated to justify temporary or permanent accommodation;
- f. The size, location and nature of the proposed dwelling is commensurate with the needs of the business; and well related to existing farm buildings or associated dwellings;
- g. The development has no adverse impact on the rural character and heritage assets of the area and its setting within the wider landscape, and in accordance with policies SP2 and SP7; and
- h. No dwelling serving or associated with the rural business has been either sold or converted from a residential use or otherwise separated from the holding within the last 10 years. The act of severance may override the evidence of need.

Where a new dwelling is essential to support a new rural business, temporary accommodation will be sought for the first 3 years. Any permission will be subject to a condition restricting the use of the property to persons employed within the rural business.

Agricultural Occupancy conditions will be retained unless demonstrated through robust evidence that there is no current or possible renewed need for the foreseeable future, that appropriate marketing has been undertaken and that it cannot meet an existing local housing need.

Supporting Text

11.39 The rural economy plays an important role in the District, in providing employment and in managing the rural landscape. The Council encourages viable agricultural, forestry and other land based rural businesses that support the delivery of a wide range of public benefits and sees them as essential to the maintenance of a thriving rural economy.

11.40 Many people work in rural areas in offices, workshops, garages and garden centres but it is unlikely that they will have an essential need to live permanently at or near their place of work. Being employed in a rural location is not sufficient to qualify as a rural worker with an essential housing need, neither is the need to accommodate seasonal workers.

11.41 The Council's preference is for rural workers accommodation to be located in nearby towns or villages or in existing properties near to their place of work, which would avoid the need for new dwellings in the countryside. The Council accepts however, that there may be cases where the nature and demands of the worker's role require them to live at or very close to the work place. Such instances will be judged on the needs of the workplace and not the personal preferences of the specific individuals.

11.42 Where new businesses are being set up, there is a need for the financial viability of the business to be demonstrated before a permanent dwelling is considered. A period of three years allows time for a business to establish and justify the development of a permanent dwelling to meet an essential need. A temporary dwelling to meet an essential need can be sought in this initial period which will usually be restricted via a condition.

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11.43 The District is known for its links with the equestrian and horseracing industry, with Newbury Racecourse located on the edge of Newbury. The racehorse breeding and training industry is a particularly important part of the local rural economy, with the Lambourn area a nationally important location. This type of development is covered in policy DM37. The Council wishes to retain and support the expansion of this industry and so through this policy and also in accordance with policy DM37 will support the provision of new residential accommodation in the countryside where it is shown to be essential. Where new stabling or breeding facilities are proposed, together with residential accommodation, financial viability will need to be demonstrated together with supporting evidence to show the new facility has sufficient need to require a worker to be permanently living on the site in the long term. It should be noted that a restricted occupancy condition may be applied.

11.44 The Council is mindful of the impact that proposed rural workers dwellings can have on the landscape and the potential impacts on biodiversity, particularly where the provision of housing involves the conversion of an existing building. The requirements within policies SP8 and SP11 will therefore apply.

11.45 Suitable alternative buildings that should be considered before creating a new dwelling unit, are existing vacant residential buildings or buildings suitable for conversion to residential use. Applicants should detail in their planning submission whether it is possible for the retired rural worker/their dependents/their widow or widower to be housed in alternative existing accommodation, thus allowing the existing residence to be used for the incoming rural worker.

11.46 The creation of new curtilages associated with new dwellings and their boundary treatment can also impact on the rural character of the area. Details will be required of the way the boundaries are to be established.

11.47 Where an agricultural occupancy condition has been applied this will not be relaxed unless it is clear that there is no longer a continuing need for the accommodation in the local area by the persons employed or last employed in the agricultural sector. Proposals for the removal of existing conditions will need to be supported by robust evidence. To establish the current market interest in a particular property it should be widely marketed, through advertisements in the local press, internet and other publications including at least one agricultural publication, on terms reflecting its occupancy condition. This should normally be for at least 12 months or an appropriate period as agreed with the Council. After this time, if no interest in occupation has been indicated then the accommodation should be made available as an affordable dwelling. Only if it can be robustly demonstrated that such use would be unviable, unsuitable or unnecessary at the location, will release on to the open market be deemed acceptable.