

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

Policy DM36

Farm Diversification

Proposals relating to the diversification of existing farms in the countryside will be supported where the proposal complies with the following criteria:

- a. The use/development is suitable for a rural location;
- b. It does not cause severance or disruption to the existing business and it is demonstrated that the development can make a long-term contribution to sustaining the farm business as a whole;
- c. Diversification activities remain subsidiary to the agricultural operation, in terms of physical scale and environmental impact;
- d. It re-uses or replaces existing buildings wherever possible. Where this is not feasible, new development should be related physically and functionally to existing buildings;
- e. When new buildings are proposed, the business has not disposed of a building or converted one to a residential use in the previous 3 years which could have met the need of the development proposed;
- f. It is of a high quality design, appropriate in scale, bulk, form, impact and siting to the character and local distinctiveness of the surrounding rural area and its setting in the wider rural landscape;
- g. The use of materials is appropriate within the local architectural context;
- h. Any internal and external changes do not harm the significance of a heritage asset in accordance with policies SP9 and DM11;
- i. It would not cause unacceptable levels of disturbance, nuisance or environmental harm to nearby properties or other adjacent land uses by noise, smell, dust, pollution, lighting or operations at unreasonable hours; and
- j. It does not generate traffic of a type or amount inappropriate for the rural roads affected by the proposal or require improvements to these roads which could be detrimental to their rural character.

Supporting Text

12.32 The countryside of West Berkshire includes significant areas of privately owned and farmed landscapes with rural estates and farms, both large and small, playing a vital role in both the development of a sustainable rural economy and the conservation and enhancement of the diversity and local distinctiveness of the landscape character across the District as a whole. Within this context, the purpose of this policy is to continue to support the long term viability of agricultural businesses.

12.33 The objective of diversification is to allow the primary agricultural unit to be retained whilst being supported by other forms of income such as:

- Farm shops selling local produce;
- Educational facilities directly related to the farm/countryside location;
- Leisure facilities promoting the quiet enjoyment and understanding of the countryside, including increased access to the countryside;
- Tourist accommodation;
- Small-scale generation of electricity or heat from local renewable sources of energy, primarily for use on site or in the local area;
- Appropriately scaled processing facilities for the outputs of the unit or of other agriculture businesses in the local area.

12.34 For larger businesses, 'whole farm or estate plans' can be particularly helpful in identifying potential opportunities in a holistic way. In order to encourage partnership working and to aid decision making, when considering proposals for development within rural estates and large farms, positive regard will be had to proposals which are part of a 'whole farm or estate plan' that has been endorsed by the Council.

12.35 The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, are encouraged where suitable opportunities exist. What is considered suitable will depend very much on the individual characteristics of a proposal and its context and the impact of cumulative development. Consideration will therefore include the site itself, and the amount and type of existing development; the type and nature of development proposed; where the development is located; whether the proposal responds positively to its rural context; and the intensity of

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the proposed use compared to the existing use (e.g. looking at the visitor movements associated with the proposed use). A more restrictive approach is taken to new residential development and this is set out in policy DM1. Policy DM36 is therefore not relevant to schemes which seek the redevelopment of previously developed land in the countryside for residential uses.

12.36 Re-use and adaptation of existing farm buildings should normally take priority over redevelopment unless it can be demonstrated that redevelopment would be a better option given the extent of environmental improvement that would occur.

12.37 In applying the policy the Council considers it essential that both the integrity and setting of historic farm buildings are conserved and enhanced. Successful proposals depend on having a clear understanding of their existing significance, their setting in the wider landscape and their sensitivity to and capacity for change. Their appropriate conservation and re-use will also ensure that the historical investment that has been made in their materials and energy will be sustained.

12.38 Proposals for visitor/tourist accommodation should be economically viable in the longer term and applicants will be expected to clearly demonstrate this as part of a planning application submission. Planning conditions may be applied or the Council may require applicants to enter into a legal agreement to ensure that such accommodation remains ancillary to the main use of the site and to ensure that such buildings are not sold off separately to be followed by applications for further housing or residential accommodation.

12.39 Assessment of the highway implications will be made on the basis of the proposal and what would be considered necessary in terms of improvements by the Highway Authority. The reference to 'rural roads' is a generic term and the Council would be concerned as to the effects of the proposed development on rural tracks, footpaths and bridleways. Relevant considerations would include past and existing levels of traffic generated from the site; the level, type and frequency of traffic likely to be generated by the proposed development; and traffic levels accepted under any existing planning permission attached to the land.