

4 Housing in the Countryside

Policy C 5

Housing related to Rural Workers

New dwellings in the countryside related to, and located at or near, a rural enterprise will be permitted where:

- i. It is proven as essential to the continuing use of land and buildings for agriculture, forestry or a rural enterprise;
- ii. Detailed evidence is submitted showing the relationship between the proposed housing and the existing or proposed rural enterprise and demonstrating why the housing is required for a full time worker in that location;
- iii. 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.
- iv. It must be shown why the housing need cannot be met by existing or proposed provision within existing settlement boundaries;
- v. The financial viability of the business is demonstrated to justify temporary or permanent accommodation;
- vi. The size, location and nature of the proposed dwelling is commensurate with the needs of the enterprise; and well related to existing farm buildings or associated dwellings;
- vii. The development has no adverse impact on the rural character and heritage assets of the area and its setting within the wider landscape. Where it affects the AONB the impact on its special qualities and natural beauty of the landscape will be the overriding consideration;
- viii. No dwelling serving or associated with the rural enterprise 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 enterprise, temporary accommodation will normally 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 enterprise.

Agricultural occupancy conditions will be retained unless demonstrated there is no continuing need, that appropriate marketing has been undertaken and that it cannot meet an existing local housing need.

Supporting Text

4.37 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 rural enterprises that support the delivery of a wide range of public benefits and sees them as essential to the maintenance of a thriving rural economy.

4.38 There are a number of existing educational and institutional establishments within the rural area of West Berkshire. Policy C5 does not apply to these uses. The policy provision for new development associated with these establishments is set out in saved policy ENV.27 of the West Berkshire District Local Plan.

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4.39 The Council's preference for rural workers' accommodation is for such provision 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.

4.40 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.

4.41 The District is known for its links with the equestrian and racehorse 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 Core Strategy Policy CS12. The Council wishes to retain and support the expansion of this industry and its related specialist breeding and veterinary facilities and in accordance with Policy CS12 will support the provision of new residential accommodation where it is shown to be essential.

4.42 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.

4.43 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.

4.44 The Council is mindful of the impact that proposed rural workers houses 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 Core Strategy policies CS17 and CS19 will therefore apply.

4.45 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. 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. Appropriate marketing will need to have been undertaken and it will need to be shown that the property cannot meet another local housing need.

4.46 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.