

STATEMENT OF CASE

APPEAL SITE: Warrenwood Manor (Equestrian area), Hornbeam Lane, Brookmans Park, Hatfield, AL9 6JF

APPELLANTS: Mr & Mrs Nigel Brunt

APPEAL PROPOSAL: Erection of single-storey equestrian building to form a covered manege and indoor riding facility (outline application).

LPA REFERENCE: 6/2018/3188/OUTLINE

DATE OF REFUSAL: 29 March 2019

1. APPEAL SITE DESCRIPTION

The appeal site lies on the eastern side of Hornbeam Lane and is set within 13 hectares of land approved for equestrian use and facilities, with the centrepiece being a substantial 20 horse stable building, granted at a planning appeal in 2001, and associated equestrian facilities which include an open and floodlit manege used for riding and dressage, and substantial paddocks.

The equestrian land is well defined having its own gated entrance from Hornbeam Lane, and forms part of the wider Warrenwood estate, extending to 24 hectares, which also extends on the western side of Hornbeam Lane and contains the dwelling 'Warrenwood Manor'.

The applicant lives in the dwelling and utilises the stables and equestrian activities

The manager of the equestrian area and stables lives in a flat above the stables.

The various planning permissions granted by the council for the equestrian use and the stables were conditioned that they were to be used solely in connection with the host dwelling 'Warrenwood Manor', for ancillary residential (non-commercial) use.

The site is approached off the main road, Kentish Lane, via Hornbeam Lane, a bridleway and made up road which runs past a group of dwellings, formerly estate staff cottages, near the main road to lead into the appeal site through a gated entrance after some 400 metres.

Once inside the equestrian area there is a hardstanding for visitors vehicles and horse box parking, with a hay and storage barn and the main stables building.

Adjacent to the south side of the hardstanding is the current open manege measuring 80m x 40m, with floodlighting, the site of the proposed indoor riding arena building the subject of the appeal application.

Beyond this and abutting the south side of the manege is land within the approved equestrian area which was originally granted and earmarked for a manege on which work has been commenced but not completed.

An overhead telegraph wire runs on poles immediately in front of the barn over the stable yard hardstanding and traverses the site.

The site is within the Green Belt.

The surrounding area is undulating and rolling in form with generally small fields and large banks of trees and hedges and is part of the council's Brickendon Woods landscape character area which describes the area as predominantly wooded farmland and parkland with most land uses being well screened by dense woodlands and tall hedgerows, making views within the area generally short and that the farmland consists mainly of pastoral fields, often in equine occupation.

The appeal site lies close to a bridleway running through the woods close to the western border of the appeal site. This is separated from the appeal site by mature trees and landscaping.

2. RELEVANT HISTORY

The relevant history of the 13 hectare equestrian area and stables building is set out in full below in chronological order, along with other consents relating to the dwelling.

EQUESTRIAN USE (land on east side of Hornbeam Lane)

1999: Planning permission granted by the LPA on land east of Hornbeam Lane for change of use of 13 hectare of land to equestrian use with associated manege, rides and landscaping (S6/1999/0372/FP).

2010: Planning permission granted on land east of Hornbeam Lane for change of use of land to equestrian use, with associated manege, rides and landscaping (S6/2009/2556/MA). This consent effectively renewed the earlier consent which had not been implemented.

2013: Planning permission granted on land east of Hornbeam Lane for change of use of land to equestrian use with associated manege, rides and landscaping. (S6/2012/2655/S73B). This consent renewed the earlier consents.

It should be noted that the manege approved by this consent occupies a position just to the south of the existing manege which was commenced but not yet completed.

The consent contained a condition linking the use to that of the dwelling by condition 9 in the consent as follows,

"The use hereby permitted and associated manege and rides shall only be in conjunction with the residential development and stable block approved under planning permission S6/2009/2574/FP and shall not at any time be used for commercial livery or riding school purposes."

2018: Outline application refused for the erection of a single storey building to form an indoor manege and riding facility. This was to be sited on land to the south side of the current manege.

STABLES (land on east side of Hornbeam Lane)

2001: Appeal allowed and planning permission granted (S6/2000/1492/FP) for the construction of a 20 box stable building for equestrian use at Hornbeam Lane subject to a condition as follows,

'The stable building hereby permitted shall be occupied only in conjunction with the equestrian use permitted on the adjoining land and shall not at any time be used for any commercial livery or riding school'

2010: Planning permission granted for the retention and alteration of a 20 box stable building in connection with the equestrian use of land east of Hornbeam Lane (S6/2009/2574/FP).

2013 Planning permission granted for the retention and alteration of a 20 box stable building in connection with the equestrian use of land east of Hornbeam Lane (S6/2012/2656/S73B).

Condition 16, linked the stables with the dwelling, as follows,

"The stable building hereby permitted shall only be occupied in conjunction with the residential development hereby approved on the adjoin land and shall not at any time be used for commercial livery or riding school purposes."

BARN (land on the east side of Hornbeam Lane)

1998: Planning permission granted for erection of a barn (375m²) for storage of hay, feed and machinery purposes in connection with the use of the land (S6/1998/129/AG). This was demolished to make way for the current manege.

2016: Planning permission granted for single-storey storage and hay barn adjacent to the stables.

HOUSE (land on the west side of Hornbeam Lane)

1990: Appeal allowed and planning permission granted for demolition of the existing house (known as Meadow Cottage, and known locally as Spike Island) and construction of a replacement dwelling on land west of Hornbeam Lane (S6/1989/652/OP)

1993: Planning permission granted for renewal of the above 1990 consent (S6/1993/350/OP).

1996: Planning permission granted for renewal of the above 1993 consent (S6//1996/189/OP)

1998: Planning permission for a revised siting of the dwelling (S6/1998/1132/FP)

2010: Planning permission for erection of new dwelling and garage to replace existing part built dwelling on the west side of Hornbeam Lane (S6/2009/2574/FP)

2013: Time extension of above 2010 replacement dwelling consent (S6/2012/2656/S73B) and also including the stables.

2013: Planning permission for adaption and completion of the part built dwelling to provide a single dwellinghouse and garage (S6/2013/0919/FP)

For the sake of completeness, and in order to understand fully the history and the applicant's involvement with the site, the following additional facts are put forward.

- ✓ In 1998, the site was purchased by Andrew Perryment (Rose Ltd) and this is when the development of a new replacement dwelling and the development of an equestrian area and stables essentially began.
- ✓ Mr Perryment ran a string of polo horses and in 1999 was granted planning permission by the LPA to develop a 13 hectare site on land on the east side of Hornbeam Lane for change of use to equestrian land and associated manege, rides and landscaping.
- ✓ Following several refusals by the LPA, planning permission was eventually granted at appeal following a Public Inquiry for a 20 horse stable block close to the entrance to the site off Hornbeam Lane.
- ✓ In developing the new dwelling, stables and equestrian areas Mr Perryment ran out of funds and the developments stalled, with the dwelling, barn and stables buildings started but not finished.
- ✓ There then followed a series of renewals and time extensions and design changes etc to each element which were all granted by the LPA. However, the various developments were not physically progressed much further for a number of years.
- ✓ Eventually, in late 2012, the estate was sold to the appellants Mr & Mrs Nigel Brunt. At that time it comprised a derelict building site. Mr Brunt set about completing the dwelling, stables and equestrian areas and now lives in the dwelling with his wife and 5 children, all of whom are loving of horses and one of whom is an aspiring Olympic dressage competitor.
- ✓ The stables and equestrian areas are linked to the dwelling (through a planning condition of the consents) so that they are for personal use only (non-commercial).

3. THE APPEAL APPLICATION

The application subject to this appeal proposes the erection of a single storey equestrian building to create an all weather indoor manege and riding arena for dressage training and practise.

It is an outline application with the only matter reserved being landscaping

The building would measure 66.5m x 32m x 5m to eaves (8m to ridge). This would be located on the site of the outdoor floodlit manege which itself measures 80m x 40m.

The principal appearance of the building would be traditional Yorkshire boarding over a brick plinth to match the existing stable block.

Following the recent refusal of application ref: 6/2018/2149/OUTLINE for the same development but positioned on land adjacent to the south side of the existing manege, the location within the equestrian area is now to be built over the current outdoor manege.

This would be essentially for the same purpose as now but allow more regular use as the facility would be protected from the weather which even with rain on the sand etc can affect the ability to use the area for dressage training and jumping.

It is positioned on a part of the approved equestrian area earmarked and allocated for 'development' as distinct from the open greener paddocks and grazing land of the equestrian area.

The building would provide an all weather riding arena at this equestrian complex.

A supporting letter is attached from Millie Brunt, the applicants daughter, explaining the circumstances surrounding the application and the need for this facility.

4. THE REFUSAL

Planning permission was refused for the following single reason (and the refusal notice and officers written report are both attached to this appeal),

"The proposed building, by reason of its scale and location, would represent inappropriate development in the Green Belt as a result of harm to Green belt openness. Very special circumstances necessary to justify the development do not exist. Consequently, this proposal is contrary to policy GBSP1 of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan, policy SADM 34 of the Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council Draft Local Plan proposed submission August 2016 and the national Planning Policy Framework 2019."

To summarise from the officers delegated report, it is clear that he accepts the category of the building as *Outdoor sport and recreation* to be appropriate within the Green Belt subject to further conditional issues regarding openness and purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Of these, as the building would be built wholly within the footprint of an existing floodlit manege in the equestrian area, and would not extend operational development onto undeveloped land he considers there to be no encroachment on the countryside nor conflict therefore with any of the 5 purposes for including land within the Green Belt.

He considered that the design ensured that, *the proposed building would have a form and appearance indicative of a rural building* and that, *whilst very large in scale views of the building from the wider area would not be unduly dominant.*

He also considered that, *the proposed building is well separated from the nearest residential property.*

His sole issue, reflected in the reason for refusal relates to openness impact. He makes a *spatial* and *visual* assessment of openness impact, and whilst he considers that views from Cucumber Lane to the east, *'would be very limited given both the separation distance and presence of landscaping'* views from Hornbeam Lane on approach and from the bridleway affected openness.

He also considered that there were no very special circumstances which were overriding.

A full response to these views will be given in the assessment section below.

5. NATIONAL POLICY

National Planning Policy Framework (July 2019) (Protecting Green Belt land).

First published in 2012, the NPPF is the primary expression of Government planning policy and is a material consideration in planning decisions.

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICIES

Policy SADM 34 (Development within the Green Belt) referred to in the reason for refusal, states as follows,

Within the Green Belt as defined on the Policies Map planning permission will be granted for development in accordance with national policy and other policies in this plan subject to the following criteria.

Openness and purposes of the Green Belt

Proposals for the re-use of buildings, appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and development on previously developed sites will need to demonstrate that they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In assessing the impact of the proposal the Council will take into account:

- (i) Whether the site lies within a parcel of land which makes a significant or partial contribution to one or more purposes of the Green Belt;
- (ii) Whether the scale of development or activity would compromise that purpose;
- (iii) The level of impact on both the physical and visual openness of the Green Belt.

Policy D2 Character and Context (Supplementary Design Guidance)

Supplementary Design Guidance (para 2.7) states that in the Green Belt,

“New development should be located adjacent to or in proximity to existing buildings to lessen the impact on the rural character of the area.”

SDG Policy D2 *Character and context* states as follows,

“The council will require all new development to respect and relate to the character and context of the area in which it is proposed. Development proposals should as a minimum maintain and where possible should enhance or improve the character of the existing area.”

Policy D1 (Quality of design) (paras 10.36 – 10.39)

Local plan Policy D1 (Quality of design) aims to ensure a high quality of design. This policy is expanded upon in the councils Supplementary Design Guidance (SDG) which requires the impact of a development to be assessed giving regard to the bulk, scale and design of the proposal. Furthermore, criterion (v) of policy RA21 refers to new buildings reflecting the local rural character in terms of design, massing and materials. In addition chapter 7 of the NPPF emphasises the importance of good design in context.

7. ASSESSMENT

Green Belt

The application site is situated within the Metropolitan Green Belt where national and local Green Belt policies apply.

These are as referred to in the reason for refusal principally the *National Planning Policy Framework (2019 NPPF and local policy SADM34 (Development within the Green Belt)*.

There are 2 main issues to consider associated with established national Green Belt policies contained in the NPPF (*13 Protecting Green Belt Land*).

- Firstly, whether the building would be not inappropriate development in the Green Belt having regard to the NPPF and taking into account the effect on openness and the purpose of including land within the Green Belt.
- Secondly, if the proposal is inappropriate development whether the harm by reason of inappropriateness is clearly outweighed by other considerations which amount to very special circumstances.

As stated above, the planning officer in his delegated report assessing the proposal has narrowed the issues down considerably. I will refer to this common ground under the headings below.

Appropriate or inappropriate development

There are 3 strands to this section, as follows,

- (i) Is the nature or category of the facilities provided within the list stated in the NPPF
- (ii) If so is there any conflict with the purpose of including land within the Green Belt
- (iii) If so is openness preserved.

It seems from the officers written delegated report that he considers the answer to (i) to be in the affirmative, with a no to strand (ii) with his sole concern in relation to (iii) and the issue of openness.

Outdoor sport and recreation category

The NPPF states that a local planning authority should regard the construction of new buildings as inappropriate in the Green Belt, apart from certain exceptions.

Exception b) includes,

“The provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation..... as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.”

The council report accepts that the proposed building falls within this category being in connection with the existing use of land for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation (equestrian use).

The proposal would be on the site of the approved current outdoor floodlit manege and within the curtilage of land approved and well established for equestrian uses which includes a substantial stable for 20 horses and an open manege and associated riding facilities. Its purpose is clearly in connection with and linked to the adjacent stable and approved equestrian use which provides facilities for outdoor sport and recreation.

Purposes of including land within the Green Belt

The planning officers report states as follows on this point,

“The proposal would be built wholly within the footprint of an existing manege in the equestrian area. As operational development would not extend out onto undeveloped land it is considered that there would be no encroachment into the countryside, nor would there be any conflict with any of the other purposes of including land within the Green Belt.”

The NPPF makes it clear that the fundamental purpose of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl and the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and permanence. The 5 purposes served by Green Belts are set out in the NPPF, paragraph 134. Of these the only relevant purpose on the list would be *c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*

However, the application site is well-established as an approved equestrian complex and already contains a large stable block and equestrian activities and the proposal would not encroach on more open countryside but be contained within the approved ‘developed’ equestrian area, rather than a more open greener field location, and specifically on land currently used as an open floodlit manege of larger dimensions.

Openness

Openness is the key issue as far as the council is concerned.

The taller and much larger adjacent stable block on the equestrian area, was granted at appeal and a similar assessment made as to whether it was (a) inappropriate development in the green belt and (b) the effect it would have on its surroundings. The appeal report concluded that the stable was appropriate development in the green belt as it was associated with the councils consent for equestrian use which is one of the categories (facilities for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation) allowed by Green Belt policy. On the second matter regarding the impact on openness, it was concluded as follows,

“The council do not raise any objection to the materials or design of the stable building or its position on the East Field and I see no reason to take a different view. It would be in a relatively isolated position in attractive countryside but its remoteness also means that it would hardly be visible from any dwellings or, except at long distance, from any well used road. Additionally the tall hedges and areas of woodland which proliferate in this area further restrict views of the site. The main views from public vantage points would be from Hornbeam Lane and, at a greater

distance, from Cucumber Lane. However, a condition of the permission for equestrian use was the carrying out of a scheme of planting and landscaping and.....I am satisfied that a combination of new planting and existing trees and hedges would be sufficient to reduce the visual impact of the stable to negligible proportions”

Similar considerations apply in the case of the appeal proposal which development is located in proximity to existing buildings to lessen any impact on the rural character of the area.”

The planning officers report accepts that *‘views from Cucumber lane would be very limited given both the separation distance and presence of landscaping’* and as with the stables a combination of existing, and new planting and landscaping would be sufficient to reduce the visual impact of the building to negligible proportions.

The stable building consented at appeal was arguably in a more open location than the current appeal location.

The councils sole concern on openness appears to be the view from Hornbeam lane, when it states as follows,

‘Views of much of the north-western facing gable of the proposed building would be visible when approaching the site from Hornbeam Lane (ie. the paved track portion). The height, width and scale of the building would be therefore clearly apparent from this public vantage point.’

‘The narrower track of the bridleway immediately to the west of the site is well enclosed on both sides by established trees. These trees would inevitably reduce views of the proposed building, however the presence of this building would still be obvious by users of the bridleway particularly as a result of its sheer length- proposed at 66.5m and close proximity to the bridleway. Views of the building would be heightened when the trees are not in leaf.’

Firstly, in response, the planning officer also states that,

‘The proposed building would have a form and appearance indicative of a rural building. Whilst very large in scale, views of the building from the wider area would not be unduly prominent.’

The *Essendon Parish Council* commented on the application as follows,

‘After careful consideration we do not consider that the proposal would have any harmful impact on the amenity of the area or of local residents. We consider the structure, while large, to be of suitable design, taking as it does the form, design and materials of a typical agricultural rural structure. As such we have no objection to the proposal.’

Similarly, the *Ramblers Paths and Ways Officer (Ian hardy)* for the Welwyn Hatfield Borough supported the application by saying,

‘I can see no reason why we should raise any objection to the proposal to erect a structure in place of the manege as described in the application...’

Secondly, in terms of positioning the proposed building is clustered with existing equestrian buildings and lies adjacent to a mature belt of trees and landscaping along its western boundary which separate it visually from the bridleway so that its impact on openness is mitigated.

Hornbeam lane is not heavily utilised. The made up portion leads only to Warrenwood Manor and is a private road. It is also a bridleway but is not heavily used. The appeal report for the stables building referred to this location as follows,

“It would be in a relatively isolated position in attractive countryside but its remoteness also means that it would hardly be visible from any dwellings or, except at long distance, from any well used road. Additionally the tall hedges and areas of woodland which proliferate in this area further restrict views of the site.

The section through the woods runs alongside the equestrian area for a short distance but similarly is not heavily used. Any views towards the appeal site are mitigated by the mature tree screen and can be described as intermittent, and at the moment the same views are of a floodlit manege and overhead telephone wires (permission has been granted to put the overhead cables and wires underground if the appeal project goes ahead).

Whilst the planning officer suggests that the gable end of the proposed building would be visible from the paved part of Hornbeam lane on approach from the north, this view is significantly mitigated by mature tree and boundary landscaping which allow glimpses only, and these would be not dissimilar to the view of the approved stables building (appeal consent) and hay barn (council consent) which are seen in the foreground to any views of the appeal building. The impression on approach would not be one of harm to openness but of a building appropriately part of an equestrian facility and group of buildings.

The view from the bridleway through the woods would be intermittent due to the natural landscaped dividing barrier with the equestrian area. The house Warrenwood manor would be visible to the west and to the east is the floodlit manege and overhead cables all of which are proposed to be removed.

It would not encroach onto the countryside and is positioned on a part of the approved equestrian area earmarked and allocated for ‘development’ as distinct from the open greener paddocks and grazing land of the equestrian area.

As with the approved stable building appeal assessment above, although located in attractive countryside, the building would be on a substantial established equestrian area, and hardly be visible from any dwelling or well used road, except at long distance and then any view would be only partial, distant, oblique and intermittent. Similarly, the tall hedges and areas of woodland which proliferate in this area further restrict views of the site. The main views from public vantage points, as with the stable building, would only be from Hornbeam lane and, at a greater distance from Cucumber lane.

Similarly the case officers report on the recent refused application (6/2018/2149/OUTLINE) for a siting adjacent the south side of the current manege, refers to, *“The absence of obvious views of the building..”* That, *views from cucumber lane would be very limited given both the separation distance and presence of landscaping”* and regarding the only other public views from Hornbeam

lane, states that, *“The bridleway is well enclosed on both sides by established trees which would restrict views of the application building.”* It also states, that, *“The proposed building would have a form and appearance of a rural building. Whilst very large in scale views of the building from the wider area would not be obvious and, as such, the building would not appear overly prominent in its setting.”*

The officers report recognizes that there should be a dual test on openness , both spatial and visual. The issues are illustrated by a couple of recent decisions.

In the case of Goodman Logistics Developments (UK) Ltd v Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and another [2017] EWHC 947 the Planning Inspector, on appeal, had found that the development, simply by its physical impact, would have a significant adverse impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Having reached that conclusion, the Inspector said that an assessment of the visual impact of the development was not relevant to the assessment of the impact on openness.

The developer appealed, and the question for the court was whether the visual effect of development could be taken into account as reducing the harm that development would cause to the openness of the Green Belt. The judge decided that visual harm and/or perception was an “obviously material” consideration and that the perceived effect upon openness could be less than might be expected because, for example, the development would have a limited effect upon people’s perception of openness from beyond the boundary of the site.

Whilst the decision may seem obvious; it leaves open the possibility that even though a site may be developed completely, provided the visibility from outside site is limited, it may be acceptable as having no or a limited impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

The previous appeal decision granting consent for the larger stable block took such thinking into account as quoted above.

The siting of the proposed building is also now ‘clustered ‘ with the stables and developed part of the equestrian area. This siting has also been recommended by Mr and Mrs Ingram who objected to the previous siting further south and who suggested in a letter to the council that there should be no reason if the applicants wish to ride under cover that they should cover over the existing outdoor manege. This would also mitigate any impact caused by the outdoor lighting at the same time.

The council in its officers report confirm the view that, *“The proposed building is well separated from the nearest residential property so as to ensure that the living conditions of its occupiers and all other residential occupiers in the area would be maintained.”*

The proposed building being constructed of Yorkshire boarding over a brick plinth wall would reflect the local rural character in terms of design scale and materials and harmonise with the existing stable building. The officers report states,

“The proposed building would have a form and appearance indicative of a rural building. Whilst very large in scale, views of the building from the wider area would not be obvious and as such the

building would not appear overly prominent in its setting. It is therefore considered that the proposal is acceptable in this respect."

The landscape Character assessment of the West End to Brickendon Wooded Slopes describes the areas character as, amongst other things,

steeply undulating wooded slopes

tall dense hedges

densely wooded and treed with tall treed boundaries

strongly undulating landform

small fields

most land uses are well screened from view

woodland cover is extensive

it is not possible to discern details within the area

Views are short and limited by vegetation

There is little evidence that the area is valued for its distinctiveness

Development proposals that would result in permanent change to the historic landscape of the area will not be permitted

The final section entitled '*Strategy and Guidelines for managing change*' recommends as follows in relation to equine uses and sites,

"Ensure, via SPG if necessary, that developments in equine recreation respect the character of the area, especially in the detail of boundary treatments and buildings"

Such a building is not untypical within this rural area where many equine activities predominate. It would also be located in proximity to an existing stables building as recommended by council policies so as to lessen any impact on the rural character of the area, which states,

"New development should be located adjacent to or in proximity to existing buildings to lessen the impact on the rural character of the area."

My conclusion is that the proposal meets the 'appropriate development' test of the NPPF on all counts, in that,

- ✓ This building provides appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation associated with an outdoor sport and recreation activity on an established equestrian site of significant scale.
- ✓ The building is not isolated but on an existing equestrian site. Its siting on the site of an outdoor manege with floodlights is well screened by existing mature trees and hedging from Hornbeam Lane and further landscaping would mitigate its impact on openness, as

was similarly accepted on the approved stable building which was arguably in a more isolated location.

- ✓ Any public views of the building would generally be partial, oblique intermittent and often distant.
- ✓ Of the 5 purposes of including land within the Green Belt, the only relevant one relates to any encroachment of the countryside. The building does not encroach onto the countryside, but is located in a discreet position within an approved established equestrian area.
- ✓ The proposal would obviate the need for the outdoor lighting to the existing manege.
- ✓ The new building would reflect the local rural character in terms of design, massing and materials.

Very special circumstances.

Should it not be accepted that the development is appropriate and compliant with national policy in that regard, I would rely on very special circumstances.

The NPPF states (para 143) that, *'Very special circumstances ' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

Level of harm

In terms of the level of harm through any inappropriateness and any other harm this is considered to be relatively small.

I say this as the planning officer has already confirmed that the category of facilities provided is not inappropriate within a Green Belt designation and the building being on the site of an existing floodlit manege with surrounding fencing within an approved established equestrian area does not conflict with any of the 5 purposes of including land within the Green Belt. He also maintains that views from Cucumber lane do not harm openness due to distance and landscaping and the views from the wider area would not be obvious and the building would not be overly prominent in its setting. That the proposed building being constructed of Yorkshire boarding over a brick plinth wall would reflect the local rural character in terms of design scale and materials and harmonise with the existing stable building. No neighbours are affected and the parish council and the ramblers and footways officer of the council see no reason to object to these facilities on this established equestrian location.

The sole issue the officer raises relates to views from Hornbeam lane but these are clearly not open or direct views but partial and intermittent and which are significantly mitigated already by mature trees and landscaping, which, as with the stables consent could be further mitigated by a landscaping condition. The location is discreet and not apparent from any well used roads

Indeed if one compares the appeal decision for the stables consent which refers to the site being away from any well used road and screened by woodland which could be supplemented by

additional landscaping, the officer suggested as follows which would reduce any visual impact to negligible proportions.

“It would be in a relatively isolated position in attractive countryside but its remoteness also means that it would hardly be visible from any dwellings or, except at long distance, from any well used road. Additionally the tall hedges and areas of woodland which proliferate in this area further restrict views of the site. The main views from public vantage points would be from Hornbeam Lane and, at a greater distance, from Cucumber Lane. However, a condition of the permission for equestrian use was the carrying out of a scheme of planting and landscaping and.....I am satisfied that a combination of new planting and existing trees and hedges would be sufficient to reduce the visual impact of the stable to negligible proportions”

Any harm therefore could similarly be reduced by further planting in accordance with a submitted scheme if need be to negligible proportion Taking account of both short and long distance views the proposed building is discreetly located against existing landscaping rather than being isolated, and thus preserves openness.

Essential need

The stables are relatively large and can accommodate 20 horses, all of which need to be exercised but many of which also need to be trained. Some are Olympic prospects. The building would be essentially required as the horses cannot go out to paddock in the winter due to the soft and muddy state of the ground and when the manege sand gets wet or frozen cannot exercise there either. This is therefore a quite reasonably essential facility for a large stable such as this accommodating so many horses.

A supporting letter from Amanda Petts the stables manager explains the need for this facility in greater detail

A letter has also been submitted in support of the proposal by Millie Brunt, the eldest daughter of the applicants to explain the need for an all weather equestrian manege and riding area to support the intensive training needed for her horses to compete.

This facility cannot be provided on another site and is intrinsically related to this equestrian complex where Millie trains.

She has explained the need for an indoor manege where she can train and exercise the horses in all weathers and in the dark winter months, and the inability to do this on an outdoor manege which is severely limited by the winter weather and even dry summer weather which affects the safety of the horses.

External floodlights removed

There was initially some controversy over the floodlighting of the manege but the council have agreed a switch off time of 8pm. However, the equestrian building would enable the lighting facility to be reduced as the lighting of the indoor manege would be under cover.

Screening

The appeal building would also help provide a “*book end*” at the southern end of the equestrian built zone thus screening away activities within the stables yard including the horse box and other parking which is readily open to view, and the appellants would accept a condition that a scheme of landscaping extends all the way along the eastern boundary next to open land in front of the horse box parking as well as appeal building thus offering an added benefit to the proposal screening off the activities.

Conditions

The submission of a landscaping scheme to extend around the perimeter of the site could further mitigate any perceived harm. This was the approach of a previous appeal Inspector when the stables was granted consent at appeal which was said could reduce any impact to negligible proportions.

The submission of a landscaping scheme is required in any event as this is a reserved matter, the application being in outline form.

The submission of samples of the materials of construction can also be a condition of consent.