

PLANNING REF : 251143
PROPERTY ADDRESS : Seaforth Cottage
: Upper Culham Lane
: RG10 8NR
SUBMITTED BY : George & Annie Harper
DATE SUBMITTED : 15/06/2025

COMMENTS:

Please see following a summary of objections in relation to this planning proposal on the basis that this is excessive development in the green belt and the plans should not be approved or at a minimum be scaled back.

Excessive development in green belt:

- Stabling for 156 ponies is excessive (i) compared with other local elite teams per below (ii) for an individual who currently owns 22 ponies and (iii) for what is supposedly a private polo facility
- For example, the nearby Park Place polo team in Remenham Hill have planning permission in place for 76 stables, the Black Bears polo club at Lower Shiplake (which is a more commercial facility) has 98 stables and the King Power polo team at Billingbear Park, Wokingham (again a more commercial facility) has 88 stables
- The application form states that the number of full time employees is going to increase from 2 currently to 45 which appears excessive for a single polo team and there is no explanation as to what role these 45 employees will be undertaking
- On the site plan, there is parking/a yard indicated in the north east of the site with no context provided in the application as to the purpose of this parking/yard. It is a considerable distance from the rest of the main buildings and warrants further explanation. Similarly, there is an estate track to the east of the site that supposedly leads nowhere, again with no explanation within the application. There is no obvious relevance for these developments

Lack of community engagement:

- The community involvement statement indicates that there was no community engagement due to "sensitivities around purchasing the farm" with the expectation that traffic and biodiversity are the main concerns
- While Mr. Sarkelian's planning agent Mr. Spragg did notify the residents of Upper Culham and hold a meeting with us on 24th May 2025, this was after the planning application had been submitted - Furthermore, Mr. Sarkelian has made no attempt himself to engage with the community despite suggestions to Mr. Spragg that this would be well received and in his interest, particularly so that we could better understand the intended plans
- The application also states that the existing commercial tenants will not be impacted by the development, also supported by Mr. Spragg 's comments in the residents' meeting on 24th May 2025 that leases had been recently reagreed. However, we have been led to believe from at least one of the commercial tenants that notice has been served and they have to vacate the premises by October 2025 so there is certainly a concern with regards to trust within this application and communication between the applicant and his planning agent

Traffic concerns:

- While the attempts to resolve anticipated traffic issues by creating a new access are welcome, it remains unclear what will deter those working at and/or visiting Upper Culham Farm from using the entrance on Culham Lane in addition to the new proposed access
- Having been witness to a very serious accident outside our property in September 2023 resulting in serious injury as well as damage to our property, the fact that cars regularly travel at great speed along Culham Lane (National Speed Limit), together with young children and a dog, we are greatly concerned about additional potential traffic on Culham Lane
- Regarding the new proposed access, this is a fast stretch of the A4130 which is corroborated by the Transport Statement, which indicated the 85th percentile speeds East and West were 51.2mph and 54.6mph respectively. With slowmoving horse lorries and additional traffic using this new site access, there is inevitably an increased risk of accidents on this stretch of road. This is particularly relevant in the summer months (corresponding with the polo season) when events in Henley-on-Thames attract high levels of visitors such as Henley Regatta, Rewind Festival, Thames Traditional Boat Festival (among many others) and therefore means that traffic levels are considerably higher than those in January when the traffic data was collected
- The Transport Statement also fails to recognise the fatal accident near this stretch of road in November 2023 (<https://www.henleystandard.co.uk/news/henley-on-thames/184852/two-people-hospitalised-following-five-car-crash-near-hurley.html>); there was also another accident in June 2021 which closed the road (<https://www.getreading.co.uk/news/reading-berkshire-news/henley-road-accident-live-traffic-20807399>)
- This stretch of road often sees drivers overtake slow moving vehicles or cyclists in the face of oncoming traffic travelling at speed and there is no due regard provided for this within the application

Impact to views over countryside:

- The Landscape and Visual Assessment Impact ("LVIA") document notes that the visual amenity of Seaforth Cottage (and other nearby properties) "would be partially altered but this is not considered to be adverse in nature"
- Currently Seaforth Cottage enjoys views from the 1st floor across open farmland towards the Thames Valley and the Chilterns National Landscape in the distance, one of the deciding factors in our decision to purchase the property
- Not only are there inconsistencies within the various application documents as to what planting there will be within this view (see further below), we are concerned that trees and vegetation will be allowed to grow to a height and density that materially alters the view across the Thames Valley to the Chilterns National Landscape from our property
- 4.19 of the LVIA further reinforces this concern: "As part of the landscape design and mitigation strategy the character of the site has been deliberately changed from open arable to a well treed landscape where the sense of enclosure is higher, and the proposed trees form the dominant landscape feature in character terms"

Light and noise pollution

- The proposed sizeable yard and stabling is inevitably going to

generate considerably more light and noise pollution than the existing livery facilities and there are no mitigating measures for this within the application

- It is well known (and experienced by local residents near the Park Place polo facilities) that these types of facilities generate considerable noise and light pollution early in the morning and late at night which, particularly given the excessive proposed number of ponies to be accommodated, will undoubtedly have impact to neighbouring residents

Inconsistencies and concerns relating to the detail of the application itself:

- The Community Involvement Statement references that "the proposed Exercise Track would only be used twice a day for the quiet exercise of horses and only during the polo season - between early March to the end of September. Therefore, any activities in this part of the site would be very infrequent and temporary". We would contest that such activity taking place twice a day is in fact very frequent and given this would be an annual occurrence, stating that this is temporary is indeed false and designed to mislead

- There are inconsistencies within the application documents with regards to the planting on the western edge of the Stick and Ball field within sight of Seaforth Cottage. In the LVIA, it states that it will be enclosed by "a new hedgerow and hedgerow trees" whereas in the Landscape Plan Initial document/map, there is no indication of any hedgerow, only woodland. Please see related concerns above

- The application form states that there will be 45 full time employees, however, Table 2 in the Transport Statement indicates that there will be 18 members of staff plus 12 players totalling 30 individuals making twice-daily vehicle trips out of the new proposed access. Assuming that the players are counted as full time employees (which is unclear in the proposals), at a minimum, there are 15 full time employees who are either not accounted for or who would be using the existing entrance onto Culham Lane

Significant concerns about future development on the site as a commercial facility:

- While not addressed within this planning proposal, we have serious concerns as to Mr. Sarkelian's ultimate ambitions for this site, namely for it to become a more commercial venture than solely a private polo facility (as Mr. Spragg led us to believe in the residents meeting on 24th May 2025)

- A company has been registered to Upper Culham Farm on Companies House under the name of "Spitfire Polo Club Ltd" (company number: 16194868) with the Nature of Business listed as (i) 01430 - Raising of horses and other equines (ii) 93120 - Activities of sport clubs and (iii) 93191 - Activities of racehorse owners

- Furthermore, a website was in place at <https://polo.london/index.html> referring to Upper Culham Farm as "the Spitfire Polo Club" which "regularly hosts tournaments" and where you will "find a premium hotel" where "guests can choose from a variety of room categories with panoramic windows offering magnificent views of the polo fields and the picturesque surroundings". The website also referenced that "the SPITFIRE Club regularly hosts exciting events and unforgettable holidays. We are pleased to offer unique events, from sports tournaments to themed parties"

- Concerningly, as Mr. Sarkelian's planning agent, when the website

was brought to his attention at the residents meeting, Mr. Spragg was seemingly unaware of Mr. Sarkelian's future intentions for the site and unsurprisingly the website was removed the following morning (25th May 2025)

- Residents however have full documentary evidence of the website which can be provided to the necessary authorities on request
- There is also a live instagram page under @spitfirepoloclub which references the now defunct website
- All of the above can only lead us to conclude that Mr. Sarkelian has significantly greater ambitions for this site than that set out in the planning proposal, seeking to establish a commercial Polo Club hosting events and leisure facilities including a hotel
- Therefore we would strongly urge that, should planning be granted for the development of the site, strict covenants are put in place to prohibit future commercial endeavours and protect the green belt from further excessive development or compromise