

PLANNING REF : 251143
PROPERTY ADDRESS : White Cottages
: Upper Culham
: RG10 8NP
SUBMITTED BY : Ms CME James
DATE SUBMITTED : 16/06/2025

COMMENTS:

- My objection to planning application 251143 is based on several concerns:

- Noise and disturbance
- Traffic
- Loss of privacy
- Loss of Outlook
- Planning Policies
- Loss of light
- Impact on local amenities
- Environmental impact
- Appearance of the area

- Overshadowing and loss of daylight
- Impact on area of special character and green belt
- Design and layout:

- .

- Upper Culham Farm's historical and current uses reflect its agricultural roots, with policies emphasizing the need to preserve its special character and surrounding landscape.

- I note that there are numerous references to this already being an equine property. However, this is similar to the property known as Youngs Farm where planning was only granted on the basis that this was agricultural land with incidental equine use. From the plans themselves, it is clear that this is exactly what this land has been used for - there is a small area that has been used for equine use but the majority is agricultural and has been used as such for centuries. I have lived here for 15 years and I do not recall horses have ever been grazed on the areas which are currently agricultural use only, and the majority of riding took place in the indoor school or on the surrounding bridleways not on the agricultural land and the horses were kept and grazed in the fields behind the house. To try and assert that this is already land of an equine nature is not correct. - The land itself is in the area currently designated as the Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau. It is deemed to be both Green Belt and an Area of Special Character and is proposed to become part of the Remenham Chalk Valued Landscape incorporating other important landscapes in this area and potentially be included in the Chilterns AONB.

- Any change, particularly a change that is so sweeping that it will override the natural features and introduce vertical elements (both natural and manmade) that are at odds with the plateau will take away this small area of rarity and will affect the access and enjoyment of the majority of people who live or visit here.

- I also note that while there is the description of only the hamlet of Upper Culham being in the stated special protected area, my understanding is that the whole of the land is in the Remenham Arable Chalk Plateau and the overriding policy objectives of landscape and property being inextricably entwined.

- A polo estate would impact on the picturesque and long views, remove the sense of remoteness, allow modern development and infrastructure and impact on the dark skies and the recreational

enjoyment from those using the Chiltern Way as well as the residents and the wider community. A polo estate would go against every part of the Landscape Strategy and would leave the landscape uglier and less liveable in.

- Currently, the plateau is well maintained thanks to the current landowner of the land on the opposite side to this application from Kentons Lane to the edge of Crazies Hill, and the land in this application has been farmed well by the farmer maintaining the landscape quality. The scenic quality is rare, (I believe it is the only such plateau in Wokingham) and therefore not just rare but unique to the area: it represents the natural formation and is not built upon or been subjected to much manmade additions (save for additions to the property and curtilage) and removing this would create a loss of outlook for walkers and riders who use the footpath and restricted byway and single track roads giving a sense of escape from urbanity to be replaced by something oppressive and overbearing in this context. It is a small part of land that has not fallen victim to development but continued to help feed the nation through the agricultural usage which in turn has preserved wildlife.

- However, it is hard to see how a manicured polo estate will protect the area of special character or enhance it or integrate with it - this is a large scale manmade and commercial activity that changes the use of the land and puts in manmade urbanised features such as tarmac roads and field divisions through planting where none were there

before and is the antithesis of what is currently there and what is on the other side of Culham Road. The development does not benefit the flora, fauna or the local residents or those who escape to this area to enjoy its rural nature. It changes the features of the Plateau and removes its status as a special area and its rarity will be lost through this change.

- In regard to the 'rurality being preserved' there is a big difference between living right by the rurality of equine land use being horses grazing and hacking compared to living right by a full on polo establishment where mallet and ball work is practiced six days a week, matches are played on a regular basis, horses run at full speed and, being a team sport, there will inevitably be shouted instructions and discussions and the attendance of spectators. This is like saying that living next to the local rec ground with some goalposts for a kickabout is the same as living next to the Madjeski (Select Car Leasing) stadium. It is for good reason that many polo grounds on a similar scale as this are assimilated into estates of much larger landholdings where they can be placed in areas away from residential properties and create less impact rather than this one which takes up the whole of a landholding and is surrounded by residential properties.

- In regard to the visibility for 1-4 White Cottages, there seems to be a discrepancy - in 5.30 it is stated (my bold): visual amenity would be partially altered yet in 5.31 they are clearly aware that 'their first floor windows are visible across much of the central and southern part of the site, at variable distance and varied degree of visibility. It is accepted that views from their upper windows, likely to be bedroom windows, would include the facilities and activities . . . It is difficult to reconcile how on one hand there is the belief that the visual amenity would only be partially altered when they are also aware that the upper windows look over the central and southern part of the site ie the exercise ground,

the practice grounds, the polo field, the irrigation lake and pump house and the roads throughout the land. This is clearly more than a partial alteration - it is the complete loss of outlook.

- Furthermore, it is clear that the applicant and agents do not have an understanding of the visibility of the land and have underestimated the extent of 1-4 White Cottages outlook on this visual amenity. The reality is that the White Cottages see the whole of the area from the upper floors and can see all the way to the A4130 and does not just take in the exercise track and polo field but the whole site. Given the owner's stated aim of running a high goal polo team and the proposed stabling for 52 horses plus staff accommodation, the addition of estate roads, car and truck parking and an additional building in the form of a pump house that is the same size as a studio flat (the overview states it will have a footprint of 15sqm but on the plans it is stated as 8000 x 4000 ie 32 sqm)- all of which are visible from these properties (and others such as those in Ashley Hill Place),- it will be like looking on to a commercial development.
- I believe there are around 11 houses in Upper Culham on Upper Culham Lane which are not part of the applicant's ownership, 2 of which are Grade II listed and of which 1-4 White cottages make up over 30% of the total. Adding in the other properties highlighted in the planning documents, this means that between 50%-60% of the residential properties in the hamlet will be visually impacted by this development to some degree. This in a hamlet that is currently protected. In addition, properties in Middle Culham, Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill could also be affected. Their conclusion is incorrect the loss of outlook and visual amenity will affect at least half the residents, if not more, to some degree. Any loss will be adverse in nature.
- The destruction of the visual amenity and the loss of outlook is far greater than that which is being put forward and for a far greater number of residents than has been stated.
- All my bedrooms and bathroom face on to the land within the application. The land is currently one large area with hedgerows limited to the periphery and the farm tracks lying invisibly among the crops. Therefore, not only will the whole openness of the plateau be changed but far from having no/limited impact, all the White Cottages will see all of the polo pitches as well as the accompanying buildings and practice areas, the car and truck parks, the vehicle movements and the players and horses. At night, we already get leakage from the current stables and school, but given the scale of the new stabling and the siting of them even closer to our properties, and the placement of the new entrance where cars and lorries will enter with their full beams on, this will increase the light nuisance and shine straight through into all of our bedroom windows.
- The White Cottages will be the most impacted and to allow permission that would affect over 30% of the residents at best and at worst, 60% is too high a percentage. Far from this being 'visually self-contained and discreet', the area is highly visible and the plans are overbearing and commercialised and urbanised. It will impact over half of the current residents' ability to enjoy the visual and rural area where we live and work.
- Such a proposal also leads to a loss of privacy as we will be overlooked throughout the site. I note that their proposed solution

is:

o To protect the privacy of these residents it is proposed to introduce various tree planting along the south western edge of the site. At Year 10, the residual effects are expected to diminish to negligible effects with views from the residential properties largely screened or substantially filtered.

- Therefore, not only will residents have a loss of outlook and privacy immediately, but for 9 years the residents at the White Cottages have to look on to an urbanised, busy noisy development out of keeping with the landscape that has existed for centuries but by year 10 they swap that for something no better.

- A 1m sapling is likely to grow 50cm per year meaning that by year 10, the cottages will be shaded by 6m trees blocking our sunlight, significantly reducing daylight to habitable rooms particularly on the ground floor and overshadowing first floor rooms and front gardens. Therefore we will suffer the following losses over the next

decade:

- Loss of Privacy
- Loss of Outlook
- Loss of light

- More than that, it is changing the whole area of natural openness.

- this is an area of horizontals not verticals and of openness that highlight the plateau not discrete parcels that hide it, and this is what makes it so rare. Being surrounded by 6m trees not only takes away our visual amenity and outlook it is also completely changing the open nature of the plateau with its low hedging and turning it into a darker, wetter area out of keeping with its special features.

- The proposed planting against the boundary of Culham Lane leads to additional concerns that affect both residents and visitors. With leaf fall in autumn and reduced light from the tree foliage in summer this will create additional safety issues for drivers, the many cyclists who use this part of the Berkshire loop cycling route, walkers, horse riders going to the bridleways etc who already have to contend with a twisty, single track road. Reducing the light and visibility and increasing the slipperiness of the surface, will lead to more accidents, plus the leaf drop will lead to the road drains blocking more readily leading to flooding and, again, risk of accidents plus put a financial drain on the Borough Council who will have to repair the road more often due to water damage leading to potholes.

- I understand that there is a duty to look at biodiversity issues for planning applications and I hope my first-hand knowledge of the area assists in understanding the importance of this for the species that live here.

- The land provides food and sanctuary both to humans but also to a variety of species particularly those that use the grasslands on the opposite side of Culham Lane and the more intensively farmed land at Upper Culham Farm.

- Both sides are frequented by deer, badgers, foxes, hedgehogs, partridges, pheasants, warblers, seed-eating birds, Barn Owls, little Owls, stoats, weasels, Red Kites, Buzzards, sparrow hawks, kestrels, swifts, housemartins, wagtails, jackdaws and the occasional hare, as well as more common birds and a whole host of insects and butterflies, moths and bees and a plethora of flora. We are fortunate that the trees in the plateau are few and far between and so there is less

impact from more predatory birds and creatures such as magpies and squirrels on the smaller birds, who then thrive. In winter, the stubble fields are home to migrating birds including several different species of geese and other migrant species who stop off here on their way to winter climes. They live here because urbanisation and humanity has not encroached entirely and they are either specific species that only thrive in open pasture and farmed land or because they have migrated to these specific fields for generations and it is part of their inbuilt navigation system to roost here for a while before continuing their migratory journeys.

- The change from arable land with its seasonal planting and crop growth to the harvesting and farrowing of the soil with the addition of the buffer zones on the outer edges of the fields that supports the wildlife (both full time and those temporary visitors) to a manicured parkland setting with manmade roads, increased human activity, and loss of natural habitat will lead to changes in available breeding, feeding, nesting and protective environs for all of these flora and fauna and their habitat, food and shelter will be destroyed.

- While the proposal talks about woodland in regard to the lack of semi natural habitats in order to justify the planting of trees that would screen and maintain the owners privacy, it fails to recognise that not only are those vertical elements completely out of keeping with the open plateau but that currently the agricultural nature of the majority of the acreage works as a semi natural habitat (often in conjunction with the dense woodland at Bowsey Hill and the open grassland on the opposite side of the plateau) and the planting of trees is the antithesis of what is needed for the resident fauna who need open fields both grassland and agricultural or a mix of dense large scale woodland and open fields both grassland and agricultural, which they currently have and which would be removed if the planning is granted. The migratory birds who have relied on these fields for probably over 700 years as a place of safety, food and a place to roost for a brief interlude on their long journeys will now find none of this here and it will take generations for them to recompute where to stop and a loss of lives from not being able to rest and feed before travelling during that time.

- This is a 'Tranquil and remote rural area, with a strong experience of dark skies, due to its relative inaccessibility'.

- By increasing the accessibility and creating proper roads (rather than the current farm tracks) within the estate and by running a professional polo outfit from here then this will no longer be tranquil and remote and there is likely to be strong light pollution obliterating the current dark skies as well as increased groundwater where tarmac would lie over the permeable tracks and grass.

- The plateau itself is unique in its character but also in the way that noise carries both from it and to it.

- The game of polo is by its very nature noisy - horses galloping, crowds of spectators, mallets hitting the ball, team mates calling out to each other and dust being kicked up in summer. The siting of the polo establishment on the plateau means that sound carries and this will change the whole character of the area not just for residents but for the multitude of cyclists and walkers who escape to this area to be in the countryside surrounded by peace and quiet.

- o Typically, 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. - Looking at how noisy a polo establishment is, I found the following information and also include my own notes to this:

o The average decibel level at a polo match is estimated to be in the mid-90-decibel range.

o This level is similar to that of power tools and can be potentially harmful to hearing over time if sustained exposure occurs.

o Polo practice can reach noise levels exceeding 85dB. This can be potentially harmful to hearing if sustained or where that noise is in conjunction with other everyday noises at a higher, lower or similar decibel level and will increase intensity, and time spent within this decibel range must be reduced or ear protective equipment provided.

o The noise level of a cantering horse is within the range of 60-80 decibels. (NB: there are stalls available for up to 52 horses and in the event that all of them were being exercised at one time then each would produce 60-80 decibels ie 52 x 70db average. In the event that 25 horses were each exercised for an hour by 5 grooms, this would mean that for 5 hours each day for 6 days a week that the local

residents could be exposed to 5 x 70db average per hour for 5 hours every day. on a track metres away from the White Cottages.)

o NB: the application states that the ponies will be exercised twice a day but fails to say how many will be exercised at each time or how long each exercise session will be. The noise of exercise will also include the noise of shouted instructions, conversations etc bringing the total decibels to a level more akin to 130 decibels per hour on the basis of one horse and two people. and higher than that if more horses and people and the intensity will also be increased thus leading to potential hearing damage

- In effect, in the summer, the local residents will be subjected to noise at a minimum that is of the same level as a train horn, power tools or being at a childrens party and similar to levels found at rock concerts or even higher. The exposure to this will not be a brief interlude but will be for hours at a time for at least 6 or maybe even 7 days a week for 7 months of the year. This is without taking into consideration the noises that already exist in the area such as the traffic noise or the noise that each of us will generate simply going about our daily lives.

- I also have concerns about the forms of transport that will be used. I understand that helicopter travel to polo is popular and given that you do not need to have planning permission to land helicopters on your own land (subject to certain conditions) there would be no need to draw attention to it in the planning application. As they will be coming in to land/taking off, they will be low and the noise will be indescribable (in excess of 100 decibels per take off and landing and then between 85-100 decibels in flight), this is in addition to the noise being generated on the establishment during the same period and it could well see highs in excess of safe levels at peak times. This is an intolerable level for anyone yet the local residents will be subjected to this from March to the end of September on a regular basis. And this is on top of the noise being generated from the polo establishment in other areas, the traffic noise and our own noise. - As well as being a

noise concern, there is also the loss of privacy for everyone in Upper Culham and Cockpole Green who will be fully visible in their gardens from the low flying helicopters.

Additionally, there have been several helicopter accidents in the news, and this means that the local residents not only have to contend with the noise and privacy issues but also the risk of injury or death if there were a helicopter accident. It is a known fact that take off and landing are the most dangerous times, and the residents of Upper Culham, Aston, Remenham, Cockpole Green, Crazies Hill and Warren Row could all be affected - as well as anyone travelling on Culham Lane or on the A4130. This again is a risk that may potentially be created where one was not before.

- In addition, there is a likelihood of increased criminal activity given the high value enterprise. Not only will this have an impact on local residents who may find themselves victims of crime from opportunists but in order to combat this, soon there will be CCTV, additional flood lights, barrier fencing etc. The beautiful and protected plateau will soon look like a prison and the people who will suffer most from this will be the people who live, work and visit the protected area of Upper Culham and its associated landscape and the landscape that has been minimally changed since the 13th Century will be lost forever.

- I note that there is a proposed lake which has capacity for 67298m³ of water. To put that into context, that is the equivalent of roughly 27 Olympic size pools.

- In terms of size, the irrigation lake is in size akin to a publicly owned reservoir .

- I also note that in the flooding document with this application there are mention of ponds on several occasions. I also note that in the drawings the pump house does not correlate to the size put forward in the written application (and which may reflect that it was to be used for a smaller lake and thus could be half the size of the one now included in the plans), and it seems a logical conclusion that these reports have been made using erroneous assumptions. This is borne out in the flooding report where it seems the information provided was based on their understanding at point 3.1.2 in the report : they were working off the premise that there would be 3 ponds. This makes the whole report unsafe to be relied on as it does not correlate to what will actually be on the land and what has been put forward in the application plans. I also note that while they discuss soakaways and drainage in depth, there seems to be no discussion about the safety, the size, the risks etc of this lake and its placement and capacity but only deals with its maintenance schedule - probably because they were not instructed to deal with this mega lake/reservoir.

- You will be aware that the area relies on the reservoir at Bowsey Hill which often leaks and leads to low water pressure. The demand on that to fill up an irrigation lake is immense if that is what is proposed.

- Flooding from all types of water activity in this area is currently almost zero from tidal, river, and groundwater flooding risk (as confirmed in the application). Placing such a large lake here metres from White Cottages and the public road increases the flood risk for those areas exponentially in regard to ground water flooding. In effect, the proposal is not only changing the whole landscape character but it is again introducing a risk that is not currently there.

- You will see on the plans that the irrigation lake is, at its closest, only metres away from the public highway and from the White Cottages. You will also note from the contour lines that this area

of land slopes down towards the road and the cottages and therefore if water were to flood, it would follow gravity and flood downhill not back into the applicants property but into mine, my neighbours and on to the public highway and down into Cockpole Green.

- If the irrigation lake breaches or is damaged, there is the potential for an amount of water akin to a small public reservoir flooding out and there is no doubt this would inundate all of the White Cottages and our grounds as well as potentially the houses in Cockpole Green.

- I attach the following article which, while concentrating on small reservoirs, clearly states the dangers of storing this amount of water.

<https://britishdams.org/assets/archive/documents/Small%20Raised%20Reservoirs%20Rev1.pdf>

- The inclusion, the size and the placement of this lake given the positioning near residential properties and the public highway and on soil known for its porosity and in a place where the natural fall is on to properties and the public highway would unlikely be acceptable for a proposed above ground reservoir and although it may not be

caught by this legislation, I hope the planners can see this is poor planning, high risk and dangerous as well as changing the character of the open plateau.

- The applicant has put forward various economic reasons why a polo facility would be beneficial.

- As background, I specialise in advisory work for farmers and landowners and I can categorically state that the acreage of agricultural land at Upper Culham Farm is perfectly viable and is often run by one family.

- For specific industry insight, please also see

<https://www.savills.co.uk/blog/article/326621/rural-property/changing-the-perception-of-farm-scales-and-sales.aspx>

- The landholding in acres at Upper Culham Farm is the size that is in the most popular farm size bracket, and is what is deemed to be a suitable landholding for around 80% of the farming community and is one that is often family owned and run and is of a size to be profitable whether it is arable or livestock. While it is true that some farms are run by contractors, there are many farms this size farmed in hand or by tenant farmer families which are profitable and which will employ between 3-50 workers. Polo estate jobs also may well go to non-locals - for example, Mr Young in his polo field application used testimony from his grooms who were in the main South American (which I understand is common as they are often good polo players and can both keep and exercise the ponies correctly). I note that the applicant states that there have been no accidents in the immediate vicinity of the new entrance. However, please see <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-berkshire-67852177>. While this is stated to be at Rosehill, I could see cars involved in the accident at the entrance to the restricted byway and further back towards the layby close to the proposed entrance and emergency vehicles were also parked there. Please note the layby is well utilised and close to the proposed entrance and vehicles exiting this are likely checking traffic behind and accelerating when exiting and would not expect traffic to suddenly stop ahead. I note also that the proposed entrance is just after a small bend in the road where people are accelerating from the 30mph section leaving Remenham in the Maidenhead-bound

direction. This is the direction where the large lorries will be coming from and turning against the traffic flow. The visibility is

not good here both due to the curve in the road, the fact it is going uphill and due to the side hedging plus that most vehicles are accelerating. This is likely to create an accident blackspot. This isn't just about what happens now. The landowner has set out his plans for having a first class polo team and with that aim, it is likely that additional urbanisation of this rural area will abound. From this initial application, there will be applications for tannoy, for night games and floodlighting, there will be applications for increased lighting, fencing and alarm systems around the whole site for the safety of the horses and staff, there will be licence applications for matches and tournaments, there will be applications for a clubhouse and associated activities, there may be applications for a bar and licensing requirements and full time helicopter landing facilities. If planning permission is granted now, it will be increasingly difficult to turn down these other applications, and this small untouched protected area that acts as buffer between the major conurbations of Maidenhead and Reading and the smaller towns of Twyford and Henley will be lost forever both to the residents and to the many cyclists and walkers that use it and to the wildlife that calls this home. The whole proposal (including the suggested solutions) will have an overbearing impact on the surrounding area and the properties in terms of size, scale, and proximity. It will result in the loss of privacy, outlook, amenity, light and the visual appeal of the area. The proposal creates a sense of being overlooked or overshadowed, and will significantly impact the character of the area and the quality of life for residents of all the properties in Upper Culham, particularly White Cottages, as well as in the neighbouring settlements of Cockpole Green and Crazies Hill.