

Planning Statement

**Lower Rivermead Farm
Willow Lane
Wargrave
RG10 8LH**

Construction of an equestrian arena

Supporting statement ref: RG108LH/ER/NB – October 2025

Introduction and Site Background

This Statement is submitted in support of a full planning application made to Wokingham Borough Council on behalf of Mr K Rixon (the Applicant) for construction of an equestrian arena (the proposal) on land at Lower Rivermead Farm, Willow Lane, Wargrave, RG10 8LH (the application site).

The application site is accessed from Willow Lane and forms part of a land holding , within the ownership of the applicant, extending to in the region of 53.26 acres (21.55 hectares). The general site context is shown, below, in figures 1 and 2 (red dot for ease of reference only). The application site relates to an area of land which is situated in a countryside location to the east (on the other side of the river from) Lower Shiplake.

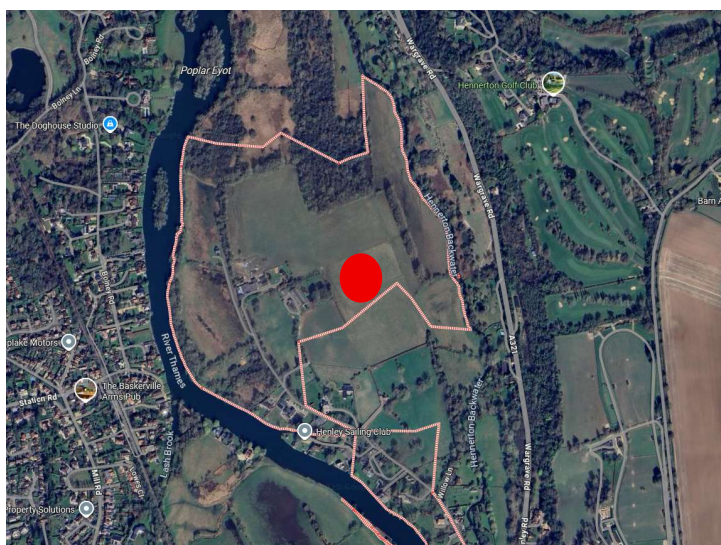


Figure 1: General Site Context



Figure 2: Immediate Site Context

A search of the Council's online planning register via "Lower Rivermead Farm" and postcode "RG10 8LH" shows the following planning history for the general site:

162303 – Application for agricultural prior determination for agricultural storage facility for the storage of baled straw. Prior approval refusal – 8 September 2016

062616 – Application for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use for the storage of HGVs and plant machinery. Refused – 12 February 2007 (Appeal determined)

026815 – Application for a Certificate of Lawful Existing Use for a Waste Transfer Site Recycling of Building Site Materials – Refused – 9 February 2007

161711 – Application not proceeded with

072446 – Application for a Certificate of Lawful Existing use for HGV, plant storage and waste transfer operation. Approved 1 August 2007

07276 – Application for an agricultural determination for the erection of a steel framed building. Permitted development – 13 August 2007

016101 – Proposed erection of 1 dwelling. Refused – 23 January 2007

The Government's Flood Map information indicates that the site, the location of the arena, stands within Flood Zone 2/3 with the access to the site and surrounding area being within Flood Zone 3. Consideration has been given as to Flood Risk Assessment within the statement and accompanying supporting information below.

The access, via Willow Lane is noted to stand within the Wargrave Conservation Area, however, the siting of the arena itself is substantially away from the Conservation Area demonstrated on the interactive policy maps. The site is not therefore within a conservation area, nor does it contain any listed buildings/structures nor contain any scheduled ancient monuments or similar. The nearest listed buildings are a significant distance away off Wargrave Lane itself or notably to the north and in no way connected visually or otherwise to the proposals.

There are no public footpaths across the site where the arena is proposed, however, there are footpaths in the vicinity of the access route (along Willow Lane itself), but these are not to be impacted upon as a result of the proposals. The site is within the Green Belt.

Statement of Community Involvement

The land use planning process is more effective when the people that might be affected by change are an integral part of the engagement process. In this case, however, given that the proposal is for a private equestrian proposal which is located away from neighbouring properties it is not considered that anyone might be affected by the development and, therefore, there is no reasonable basis for extensive engagement with the community pre-application.

The applicant's agent has served notice on landowners who own the access, from the highway to the application site at the point of submission and in accordance with the Council's own Statement of Community Involvement – letters are sufficient means of engagement for what is, by definition, minor development. Furthermore, with proposals of this nature, there is for example limited input which could be taken into account with what is a standardised structure (unlike for example an extension where feedback could be utilised to inform design or impact upon neighbours) located as a below ground structure (aside from fencing) in a field.

Finally, and again in accordance the Council's own Statement of Community Involvement once the application is validated details of all submitted planning applications can be viewed on the

Council's website by entering the site, address, the reference number or via an interactive map. The law requires that for most types of planning application that the Council consult for a 21-day period (unless a longer period applies) before a decision can be made. Furthermore, the Council will/can (depending on the nature and scale of the proposed development), post letters to properties beyond those adjoining the application site which may be affected by the proposed development, notify nearby town or parish councils of relevant planning applications in proximity to their area, inviting comments, publish a press notice, consult with other organisations where applicable and publicise a weekly list of planning applications on the Council's website.

For the minor scale of the proposal this approach, combined with letters to landowners across which the red line boundary crosses (for access), with one of these being on behalf of a resident's group who are responsible for maintenance of the access route, is sufficient and proportionate in terms of community involvement.

Planning Policy

The starting point for determination of all applications is the Local Development Plan as set out in Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The relevant Local Plan in this case is the Adopted Core Strategy Development Plan document 2010 (CS) and The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 2014 (MDD). The National Planning Policy Framework 2024 (The Framework) is also a material consideration.

We are aware that the Council is working on a new Local Plan – the Local Plan Update – which will put in place a new planning strategy for the period 2040, however, at the point of submission the policy is emerging but not yet adopted. It is understood that the local plan update proposed submission plan was submitted to the secretary of State for examination by an independent planning inspector in February 2025 (with hearings due to commence in November 2025), however, it is not considered that due to the early stage of examination that the emerging policy carries any significant weight. The proposal will, therefore, focus upon the acceptability of the proposals in the context of the currently Adopted Development Plan.

The Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. MDD Policy CC01 states that planning applications that accord with the policies in the Development Plan for Wokingham Borough will be approved without delay, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

In light of the above the main issues considered within this planning statement are:

- The principle of development
- Design and impact upon the character of the area
- Ecological impacts and biodiversity net gain
- Flood risk/drainage
- Highways and access
- Residential amenity

Principle of Development

The site stands within the Metropolitan Green Belt (inside Borough) with relevant policy including that of CS policy CP12 and MDD Policy TB01 respectively. CS Policy CP12 effectively

reverts to national policy with regard to preventing inappropriate development (by reference to PPG2 – superseded by the Framework from 2012 onwards). MDD Policy TB01 also reverts back to the Framework (albeit the paragraph numbers relate to earlier versions of the Framework) with regard to allowed exceptions, maintenance of openness and the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

Paragraph 154 b), of the Framework, outlines that the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, are appropriate development in the Green Belt providing the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. The proposed arena is generally appropriate development within the Green Belt subject to preserving the openness of the Green Belt.

CS Policy CP11 (Proposals Outside Development Limits (including countryside)) outlines that in order to protect the separate identity of settlements and maintain the quality of the environment proposals outside of development limits will not normally be permitted unless in defined exceptions listed within that policy. CS Policy CP11 includes where proposals, in the case of other countryside-based enterprises and activities, it contributes and/or promotes recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside. It is reasonably considered that a proposal for an equestrian arena as part of exercising horses kept on the land can fall within the category of countryside-based activities promoting recreation in, and enjoyment of, the countryside.

The proposed arena is to be located close to existing buildings and would be viewed (albeit there are limited views from the public domain) in the context of general built form around Lower Rivermead Farm. The proposal is, predominantly a below ground structure with the area, which is currently laid to grass, resulting in an all-weather surface (sand and rubber) replacing the current grass finish. Such a surface, with associated drainage provision, cannot be considered to be harmful to the character of the area nor the openness of the Green Belt.

The fencing around the arena is of modest height and is well below what would usually be able to be constructed under permitted development as well as being designed to be of an open character as a result of the proposed post and rails. The use of post and rail fencing is considered to provide the necessary enclosure of the arena whilst at the same time retaining the general openness and rural feel of the site.

Overall, the proposal would contribute to recreation and leisure in the countryside which, in principle, is in accordance with CS Policy CP1 and would not result in an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the countryside. In a similar manner, the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation, of which equestrian use is, is acceptable and due to being a ground level engineering operation/construction, combined with post and rail fencing, it is not considered that the proposal would negatively impact upon the openness of the Green Belt nor conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt as set out within paragraph 143 of The Framework.

Design and impact upon the character of the area

The site stands within Landscape Type A (River Valleys) – Landscape Character Area A1 (Thames River Valley) according to the Council's Landscape Character Assessment 2019. Thames River

Valley defines much of Wokingham's northern boundary sweeping in a corridor some 13 km long between the village of Sonning, through Wargrave and Henley-on-Thames to Remenham and Aston at the district's northernmost point. Characterised by a flat floodplain landscape dominated by the river.

The floodplain landscape is characterised by large pastoral and arable fields, divided by paths, ditches and post and wire fences, creating a sense of openness on the floodplain. The LCA notes medium size horse pastures bounded by fences and drainage ditches which is consistent with the application site in question.

Overall, the impact on the landscape would be limited. The field pattern would remain intact as the open land would be maintained for grazing purposes only and falls outside the scope of this application. No hedgerows or trees would be removed as a result of the proposal. The proposal has been designed to be a safe, all year round, riding facility on site. At 20m x 40m it is the smallest, standardised, size for such facilities based upon a small dressage arena size.

The proposal would be a ground level structure (aside from the fencing), which assists with visual containment. The proposed post and rail fencing is appropriate for a rural location and is, in any case, of a height which could be constructed within the scope of the General Permitted Development Order without the requirement for planning permission. The proposal would not be visually intrusive within the landscape.

Ecological Impacts and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

According to the Wokingham Borough Council Planning Policies and constraints map (interactive) the site stands within an area which is a Great Crested Newt Impact Risk Zone (moderate habitat suitability), however, NatureSpace should only be consulted for major developments which the proposal is not by definition. The proposal is also within a SSSI Impact Risk Zone, and the application is, evidently, submitted along with appropriate ecological documentation prepared by Arbtech Consulting.

The proposal is submitted with a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) which, in turn, has been utilised to prepare a BNG report along with the required BNG Metric. The PEA does not identify any constraints or protected species and proposals for any lighting, in the future, can be controlled via condition to ensure that any lighting is appropriate for the area as well as the parameters found within the Bat Conservation Trust guidance. Precautionary Working Methods relating to newts are noted and can be conditioned as required.

The BNG calculations show that the current landscaping proposal (tree planting to the north of the arena as shown on the submitted plans) would result in a 11.34% uplift in BNG – which is consistent with the legally required 10%. A habitat management and monitoring plan (HMMP) can be secured by condition as required.

Flood Risk/Drainage

The land to the West of Wargrave is located within the flood plains of the River Loddon and Thames with the areas on the other sides within the Green Belt. MDD Policy CC09 requires that all sources of flood risk, including historic flooding, must be taken into account at all stages and *to the appropriate degree* (my emphasis) at all levels in the planning application process to

avoid inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding. Development proposals in Flood Zones 2 or 3 must take into account the vulnerability of proposed development.

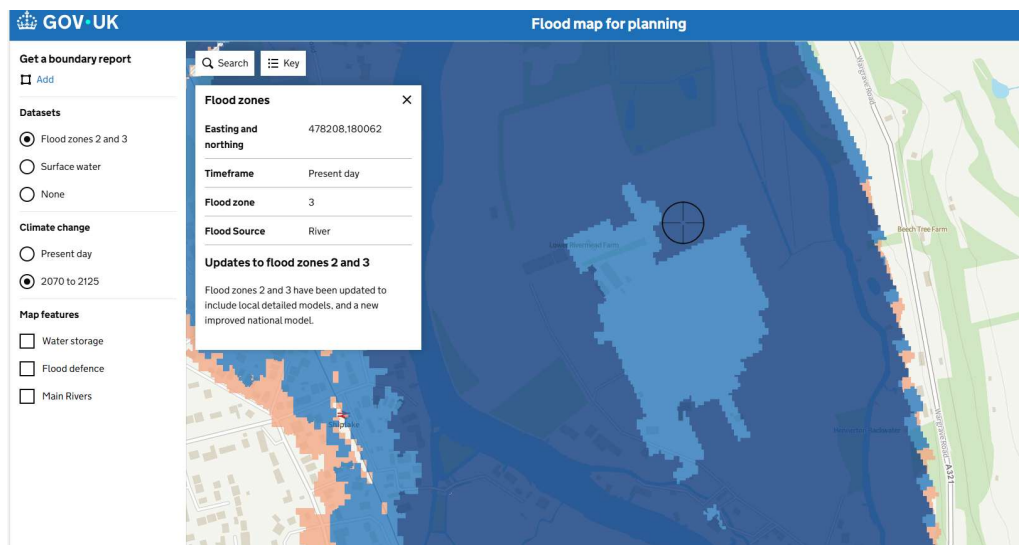


Figure 3: Flood Risk Mapping (flood zone unchanged for present day versus 2070 – 2125) (orange)

The proposal would be located within a flood risk zone. Equestrian arenas can be classified as "water compatible" development, meaning they are considered less vulnerable to flooding than residential or commercial buildings (or in this case, any building due to the nature of construction). In terms of alternative location/a sequential test – the applicant's entire landholding is within flood zone 2/3 meaning that, reasonably, there is nowhere else facilities could be located and there are no other sites within a lower flood risk zone. The applicant outlines that the proposed location is one which has been selected because it is not one which has been subject to flooding in the centre of the field.

As noted within the PPG (table 2) in flood zone 3b (functional flood plain) since equestrian facilities are classified as "water compatible," they can be built in Flood Zone 3. As outlined there is no other plausible location within the locality and the proposal has been designed and would be constructed to remain operational and safe for users in times of flood (albeit if flooded it would simply not be used), result in no net loss of floodplain storage and not impede water flows and not increase flood risk elsewhere. CS Policy CC10 also requires all development proposals must ensure surface water arising from the proposed development including taking into account climate change is managed in a sustainable manner.

The proposal would be constructed on a stone subbase, with non-woven geotextile membranes, and topped with sand fibre/sand/rubber mix with drainage pipes at 5m intervals (perforated) with bottom collector pipes as shown in the submitted drainage plan. The outlets would be north and east, respectively, connecting to a shallow pond and existing ditch which drain to Hennerton Backwater. The proposal is, ultimately, permeable and designed to create a top surface that will remain dry and not "chop up" as would be the case if horses were ridden in the same space in the field all year round. The proposal is capable of accommodating flood water, should water levels rise, and would drain as water levels fall without any issue or vulnerability or increase to flood risk.

Residential Amenity

The proposal would be sited a sufficient distance away from the nearest residential properties so as to not have a harmful impact on neighbouring residential properties. The proposal is submitted on the basis of personal use and would not, therefore, lead to additional traffic generation on Willow Lane and there can be no demonstrable impact to residential amenity in terms of loss of light, overbearing or noise and disturbance and there is not considered to be an impact.

No lighting proposals are included, or required, as a result of the construction of the proposed arena, however, should lighting be required at some point during the future, a condition can be applied to any permission granted to ensure that the submission of lighting is approved prior to installation on site to protect the amenities of the area.

Highways and Access

The proposal makes no change to the existing access arrangements on site. The proposed arena is submitted to be for personal use only (i.e. not as a livery yard or event facility which would generate comings and goings of a commercial nature), and can be conditioned as such, and therefore will not intensify the use of the access road nor have any impact upon highway safety. There is an existing access to the site and there would be no additional movements from vets, farriers and general supplies as a result of the proposal which seeks to provide an exercising facility for horses already on site. The would not impact highway safety.

Conclusion

The proposal, overall, is considered to have an acceptable impact on the rural character of the area, preserves the openness of the Green Belt as a source of outdoor sport and recreation, is appropriate to neighbouring amenity, flood risk and highway safety and the proposal should therefore be approved subject to conditions without delay.