

DELEGATED OFFICER REPORT



WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Application Number:	201458
Site Address:	Newlands, Mole Road, Sindlesham, RG2 9JQ
Expiry Date:	26 October 2020
Site Visit Date:	
Proposal: Full application for the proposed erection of an equestrian facility for training and livery purposes including fifty horseboxes, foaling yard, indoor and outdoor riding arenas, lunge ring and horse walker, reception, office, members clubhouse with bar, parking for 25 cars, three parking areas for HGV horse lorries, and three units of residential accommodation comprising manager's three-bedroomed house, staff two-bedroomed flat and staff five-bedroomed flat, with access via Gravelpithill Lane and Ellis's Hill.	

PLANNING CONSTRAINTS/STATUS

Badger Setts Consultation Zones
Listed Building
Ancient Woodlands
Contaminated Land Consultation Zone
Affordable Housing Thresholds
Bat Roost Habitat Suitability
Scale and Location of Development Proposals
Local Wildlife Site
Minerals Site Consultation Area
National Historic Parks and Gardens
Replacement Mineral Local Plan
Tree Preservation Orders
Landscape Character Assessment Area
PRoW
SSSI Impact Risk Zones
Thames Basin Heaths SPA Mitigation Zones
PRoW Within WB Consultation Zone
Ordinary Watercourses Consultation Zone
Historic Flooding Points Consultation Zone
Ancient Woodland Consultation Zone
Local Wildlife Sites Consultation Zone
National Historic Parks and Gardens Consultation Zone
Ordinary Watercourse
Article 4

PLANNING POLICY

National Policy	National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG)
Core Strategy	CP1 – Sustainable Development CP2 – Inclusive Communities

(CS)	CP3 – General Principles for Development CP4 – Infrastructure Requirements CP5 – Housing Mix, Density and Affordability CP6 – Managing Travel Demand CP7 – Biodiversity CP8 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area CP9 – Scale and Location of Development Proposals CP11 – Proposals Outside Development Limits
MDD Local Plan (MDDLDP)	CC01 – Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development CC02 – Development Limits CC03 – Green Infrastructure, Trees and Landscaping CC04 – Sustainable Design and Construction CC05 – Renewable Energy and Decentralised Energy Networks CC06 – Noise CC07 – Parking CC09 – Development and Flood Risk CC10 – Sustainable Drainage TB12 – Employment Skills Plan TB21 – Landscape Character TB23 – Biodiversity and Development TB24 – Designated Heritage Assets TB25 – Archaeology
Other	Borough Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document CIL Guidance + 123 List Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

PLANNING HISTORY

Application No.	Description	Decision & Date
F/2008/1241	Proposed erection of one dwelling with garages and staff accommodation. Proposal was within land edged blue. Reasons for refusal related to impact on countryside; unacceptable urbanisation; impact on Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area; impact on surface water run-off rates; unsatisfactory provision of services, amenities and infrastructure needs.	Refused 07.08.2008

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Internal

WBC Landscape and Trees

Recommend refusal.

WBC Highways

Recommend refusal.

WBC Ecology

Further information required. I am not convinced that the submitted Ecological Assessment (Derek Finnie Associates, ref: DFA19095, December 2019) has adequately assessed the ecological impacts of this assessment. There are a number of areas which I think require clarification or more information.

WBC Growth & Delivery (Planning Policy)

1) In accordance with CP11, development proposals will not normally be permitted except where one or more of the specified exceptions apply. In principle the equestrian aspect of the development is supported by CP11.1. An assessment will need to be made by the case officer for CP11.2 and CP11.3.

2) The case officer will need to be satisfied that there is a genuine essential need for workers to live permanently on the site.

3) The Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (which was made in April 2020) is a relevant development plan document for determining the application.

4) Overall, the principle of the proposed development broadly accords with current development plan and national policy subject to localised impacts and appropriate justification of the need for the proposed rural worker dwellings. Furthermore, the proposals appear consistent with the NPPF's support for the expansion of all types of business in rural areas. On that basis, there would be no objection to the current application provided there are no unacceptable impacts on the character of the countryside and sufficient evidence is provided to justify the quantity of dwellings proposed.

WBC Public Rights Of Way

1) There is a risk that the lane will be more predominantly used by vehicles than other types of use: this would impact on its status, turning it into a minor road than a byway. I am on the fence here as to whether this would be a reason for refusal of permission but it would be a considerable change and the application does seem to minimise this as an issue.

2) I am alarmed by the reference to 68 traffic movements in one hour: In the context of the lane it does appear that the scheme is more than simply "small scale" as purported by the designer. It may also mean that the 16 movements mentioned for staff accommodation is in addition to this.

WBC Economic Prosperity & Place (Community Infrastructure)

No objection, subject to the delivery of affordable housing through a commuted sum.

WBC Employment Skills Plan

Contribution required via S106.

WBC Environmental Health

1) HMO – the shared accommodation within the unit may be classed as an HMO if those that are living there are not related. An application for an HMO should be made to PPP by the owner of the premises.

2) Licence – it was noted that a bar was to be in the club house, if this is to serve alcohol, a licence would be needed, please inform the applicant to contact PPP to arrange this.

3) Noise - Noise from the build of the development should be managed by conditions. Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) and contamination conditions proposed.

WBC Conservation Area Officer

No objection to the proposal on heritage grounds. The impact of the proposal on the nearest listed building would be very much at the lowest level of less than substantial harm to the designated heritage asset.

WBC Drainage

No objection subject to conditions.

No response received:

WBC Cleaner and Greener

WBC Green Infrastructure

WBC Sports Development (Places and Neighbourhoods)

External**British Horse Society Access and Bridleways Officer**

I fully support the creation of a new equestrian centre but do have real concerns about the access shown on this application. For this reason alone I am objecting to the application. Increasing the traffic along the byways should be discouraged. It would not be safe or desirable for non-motorised users to share the Byways with increased motorised traffic. Greenways are intended to be off road routes where greener methods of travel / active travel are encouraged, in particular walking, cycling and horse riding. Further consideration needs to be given to the access for this equestrian centre and in particular with the Greenways in mind. Viability studies should be carried on both Byways 6 and 8 to determine if and how motorised and non-motorised traffic can be segregated so that these can be used for business access as well as the proposed Greenways. I believe this application should be withdrawn until a better solution for access has been agreed.

Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum

- 1) It is well documented that we consider the crossing of the B3030 to be unsafe for byways users and that the LAF has championed the introduction of a Pegasus type crossing for some years, both to protect vulnerable users and support the many local rural enterprises which rely on the byways for access to the countryside.
- 2) Needs of ALL byways users must be protected.
- 3) It should also be noted that Mole Road has been referred by the M&WBLAF to the current Consultation 'Stay Healthy, Stay Safe, Slow Down' by WBC on speeding.
- 4) The Greenways Survey carried out at the Arborfield Fete in June 2015 indicated that there is great enthusiasm for walking, primarily for leisure and exercise. Dog walking was popular and organised rambling groups were also well supported.
- 5) Horse riding is popular in the parishes with a relatively large number of livery stables and riding schools. However there is a general feeling that the bridleways have two serious shortcomings: the lack of circular routes and the difficulty of crossing main roads.
- 6) Cycling in the parishes is limited. This is partly because the road network is considered too dangerous, while the off-road routes do not have suitable surfaces.

Police Crime Prevention Design Advisor

- 1) I have liaised with Police colleagues, analysed crime data, reviewed the submitted documents and visited the site. Unfortunately, we have concerns regarding Access to the proposed site. I consider some aspects the design and layout to be problematic in design terms and therefore feel that the development does not meet the requirements of the NPPF 2019, Section 12 'Achieving well-designed places', point 127 (part f), which states that; 'Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments... create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible... and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience'.
- 2) The opinion of Thames Valley Police Traffic Management Officer is that Gravelpithill Lane is not a suitable access point for goods vehicles required to build the development, or the horseboxes that will be accessing the development on a daily

basis. A safety issue is created by slow moving goods vehicles and horseboxes entering Mole Road (50mph limit).

3) Mole Road at its junction with Gravelpithill Lane is a rural single carriageway road with one lane in each direction, subject to a 50mph speed limit. There are no street lights or footpaths in the vicinity of this junction. There are a number of private dwellings and businesses set along the road, mainly further north in Sindlesham village. Approximately 125 metres south of the junction is a sharp bend for which advisory 40mph warning signs are located on the verge prior to the bend. Gravelpithill Lane is an unmade road that is severely rutted along its length, the worst of the rutting is at the junction Mole Road.

4) The five year collision history shows there is only one injury collision along this part of Mole Road, a serious injury collision that happened on 04/04/2019 on then sharp bend to the south of Gravelpithill Lane. Having reviewed the transport statement supplied to me it is clear that the visibility splay south from the junction towards the bend is not sufficient for a 50mph road.

The points above are fundamental issues which must be addressed if police objections are to be retracted.

Environment Agency

Due to workload, we are unable to make a detailed assessment of this application. We have checked the environmental constraints for the location and have the following guidance.

The environmental risks in this area relate to :

- ☐ Groundwater Protection – the site lies in a secondary aquifer
- ☐ Pollution prevention
- ☐ Foul drainage/wastewater
- ☐ Other consents

The Gardens Trust

We have studied the online documentation and were surprised that the Design and Access statement, (Paras 5.20 & 5.2) made no mention whatsoever of the Grade II* Bearwood College registered park and garden (RPG) which lies in very close proximity to the application site. Despite this crucial omission, fortunately both the GT/Berkshire GT do not believe that the setting or features of the RPG are adversely affected.

Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue

Full assessment of the proposed development in respect of 'Building Control' matters will be undertaken during the formal statutory Building Regulations consultation.

Berkshire Archaeology

The application area has an archaeological potential and the proposed development, if permitted, will have an impact on any archaeological remains that might survive within the site. This impact can be mitigated by a programme of archaeological investigation, secured by an appropriately worded condition.

Forestry Commission

As a Non Ministerial Government Department, we provide no opinion supporting or objecting to an application. Rather we are including information on the potential impact that the proposed development would have on the ancient woodland.

Historic England

Do not wish to offer any comments.

Natural England

No comment. Refer to Standing Advice and our own services for protected species,

ancient woodland and veteran trees.

No adverse comments:

Gigaclear Network

SGN Gas

SSEN Electricity

No response received:

Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust

Open Spaces Society

Ramblers Association

South East Water

Thames Water Utilities Ltd

Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association

Woodland Trust

REPRESENTATIONS

Parish/Town Council	Arborfield and Newland PC – Split Opinion In recognition of the split opinions in the Parish, the Parish Council requests the WBC planning officers to give specific consideration to submitted questions which are not adequately addressed in the planning application submission and to ensure that answers are given by the applicants before a decision is taken. Barkham PC – Cannot Support Barkham Parish Council regrets it cannot support this proposal as presented at this location. Based on discussions with the applicants, it appears that the Planning, Design, Heritage and Access Statement (PDHAS) does not reflect the way the applicants intend to run the operation, the aspirations of local horse owners need to be correctly managed and much has to be done to mitigate the adverse impact of this proposal on the site and surrounding area. Winnersh PC – Serious Concerns The Parish Council have serious concerns about the impact that this proposal will have on its residents through increased traffic generation and on the Byway itself.
Ward Member(s)	Cllr Cowan There are a series of issues the Planning Authority needs to take into consideration. There are many residents comments which I assume the Planning Officers will give due consideration to and these comments will be reflected in the Officers report.
Neighbours	33 responses of objection or concern 12 responses of support Neighbour comments are detailed and extensive and a very significant proportion are relevant to the development proposed. They run to nearly 18,000 words. The agent's response to these comments is approximately 2,000 words. These have been summarised and are available to view on the public website via the header 'Neighbour Responses to

	Consultation – Summary’. The issues raised, both for and against the scheme, are addressed within the body of the report. They cover the following: ○ Accuracy of the application site ○ Principle of Development ○ Neighbourhood Plan ○ Scale of the Development ○ Impact on the Character of the Area ○ Impact on Trees and Landscape ○ Impact on Wildlife ○ The Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area ○ Impact on Public Rights of Way ○ Highway Issues ○ Impact on Heritage Assets ○ Noise, Light and Air Pollution ○ Impact on Tranquillity ○ Drainage Issues ○ The Business Case for a New Livery Facility ○ Onsite Accommodation for Staff ○ Clubhouse and Bar ○ Equine Issues ○ Loss of Agricultural Land ○ Letters of Support
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APPRAISAL

Site Description:

The application site edged red comprises about 1.8ha (4.5 acres), including about 0.5 / 1.4 acres of woodland. The site is edged on two sides by Gravelpithill Lane and Ellis Hill, both unmade tracks, which both lead off Mole Road, the B3030, to the south of Sindlesham. It is outside of development limits.

Mole Road provides the current access to the land edged blue. Land edged blue measures approximately 22.6ha (56 acres) but this includes woodland and existing dwellings and their curtilages, shown on OS mapping as being of approximately 3.6ha (9 acres). The overall site includes the former site of a dwelling, a gatehouse style of dwelling at Newlands Lodge and an access road directly off Mole Road, leading to the centre of the land edged blue, which is not proposed for use as an access to the land edged red. The land is currently used in part for horse grazing and part is grassland which doesn't appear to be in use for grazing.

The Tree and Landscape Officer has described the area as follows:

The site is located in the countryside and in Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment Area (WDLCA) L1 'Bearwood Wooded Sand and Gravel Hills' a landscape of high quality.

Key characteristics include:

- Heavily wooded 'forested' character comprising large blocks of distinctive coniferous planting interconnected with swathes of mixed and deciduous

woodlands.

- Very sparsely settled with small stretches of roadside ribbon development, some new executive style houses and isolated farm buildings
- Recreational use including golf courses, horse riding establishments and network of public footpaths.
- Few roads creating a relatively secretive landscape.
- Parkland landscape
- Recreational value
- Peaceful secluded character

The elevated landscape with its dense interconnected woodland and pattern of small coombe pasturelands are in good condition. This is a distinctive landscape with a strong sense of place; however, there are opportunities for improving the biodiversity of the woodland.

The site lies within the Barkham and Bearwood Valued Landscape. It borders Gravelpithill Lane and Ellis's Hill to the east and south, and slopes from east to west. The eastern and southern boundaries are populated with woodland and hedge and are protected by TPO1684/2019. A small wooded copse is located to the west of the site boundary, and the Coombes, an area of ancient and semi-natural woodland beyond Ellis's Hill and Coombe Lane to the south, protected by the same TPO. The site appears to be a smaller field within a much larger area of pasture that funnels to the north with existing woodland creating an uneven edge to the east and Gravelpithill Lane. In fact it appears that the corner rectangle was once a field with four boundaries (see 1938 OS). Most of the built part of the development is proposed in this rectangle, with the outdoor school beyond this to the north. The site is proposed to have its main access from Gravelpithill Lane with the secondary access from Ellis's Hill in the south – this is stated as being for those who will live at the site, although that, in times when the ford floods, Gravelpithill Lane will take all traffic.

The application site is located in deep countryside illustrated by the both of the proposed site entrances being accessed along an unmade track / byways:

- Gravelpithill Lane to the north of the site (a BOAT – byway open to all traffic) also known as PROW ARBO BW 9111 and Greenway Route E that leads from Mole Road up into the wooded ridges above Bearwood,
- Ellis's Hill to the south of the site also known as PROW Ref. ARBO BW 9111 and Greenway Route B (also a BOAT).

The site is located at the south-eastern corner of a triangular area of landscape where Mole Road forms the left side and cuts across the lower slopes at 50 AOD. Gravelpithill Lane forms the right side and Ellis's Hill the lower or southern part of the triangle. The distance between the lanes along Mole Road is about 780m. Within this almost equilateral triangle of land are contained many of the valued features of the character area. A tributary of the River Loddon cuts across the south-west corner of the triangle which crosses Ellis's Hill where it is bridged by a ford, but this floods in periods of sustained rainfall.

The site is located within Wood-Pasture and Parkland (A BAP Priority habitat) and is partially covered by a woodland TPO Ref. 1684/2019 which extends along the southern and eastern site boundaries adjacent to the lanes, and beyond the site

extensively to the east. In addition, the TPO includes Hazeltons Copse to the SW which is Ancient Woodland, and to the south of the site is The Coombes also Ancient and semi-natural woodland (also protected by TPO371/1988). Opposite the site to the east is Local Wildlife Site 'Bearwood Estate Woods and Lakes' comprising open water, woodland and heathland, which is also a BTO site of county importance.

The area is sparsely populated with just a few scattered dwellings along the west side of Mole Road such as Mole Bridge Farmhouse (Grade 2 listed) almost in line with the development, and to the north Argyll Cottage The Mole and Mole Park bungalow. Halfway along the stretch of Mole Road from Gravelpithill Lane to Ellis's Hill (285m) is Newlands Lodge on the east side, and further up the hill toward the site is Newlands house itself. Not far from the junction of Mole Road and Ellis's Hill is Hunters Point and Brook Cottage. Further along the lane over the ford (which floods in winter) is Ellis Cottages and Farmhouse.

Description of Proposal:

The proposed use is defined as an Olympic-standard equestrian facility for training and livery purposes. The type of equestrian or Olympic discipline is not specified. There are three Olympic equestrian disciplines: show jumping, dressage and three day eventing (also including cross-country). A considerable number of alternative variations of horse uses may be proposed. The type of equestrian use impacts on detailed aspects of the proposal. Without this information, assumptions have to be made.

Buildings and other facilities total a net additional floorspace of approximately 15,000sq.m. and comprise:

- Stabling for 50 horses, with 11 being shown adjoining a foaling yard.
- An indoor arena measuring 50m x 30m
- An outdoor ménage measuring 60m x 40m
- A clubhouse above the main stables, showing seating, bar, viewing lounge with access to an undercover outdoor balcony, also accessed from an external spiral staircase direct to the ground floor, and ancillary facilities
- A detached, single-storey, three-bedroomed Manager's house, described on the plans as a cabin, with private rear garden
- A residential flat above the main stables, including five bedrooms and communal sitting room, kitchen / dining area and bathrooms
- A residential flat above the second stable block, including two bedrooms, an office and communal sitting / kitchen / dining areas and bathroom
- Parking for 25 cars is shown in four locations around the yard
- Parking for approximately 11 lorries is shown in three locations around the yard
- Lunge ring
- Horse walker
- A reception and office, integral to the main stable complex

Ancillary facilities include:

- 4 x wash-down areas
- 4 x solariums
- 4 x tack rooms
- 3 x feed stores

- 3 x WCs
- 1 x hay / bedding store
- 1 x laundry / vet store
- 1 x vet room
- 5 x storage areas for muck

Engineering and hard landscaping works include:

- Attenuation pond
- Earth works to the proposed ménage, to enable the ground to be level
- Retaining walls totalling approximately 188m in length
- Other, undefined boundary treatment
- Access road, via Gravelpithill Lane and Ellis's Hill, showing an access also leading onwards, into the site edged blue, and internal circulation for all vehicles on all sides of the main complex

Soft landscaping works:

- The proposed loss of two groups of trees to facilitate the provision of the entrance from Gravelpithill Lane
- The proposed loss of six single trees, most of which are oak trees.
- All proposed removals are within the existing TPO
- Enhancement planting

Uses of the site are specified in the Business Plan:

- Livery yard
- Professional coaching
- Horse sourcing and consultancy
- Horse training and management
- Showjumping Academy Programme for Independent School Pupils (contracted out)
- Saddlery
- Equine transportation business
- Bespoke equestrian concierge services
- National and International competition support, including all admin and coaching

For clarity, the applicants submitted a pre-submission proposal in 2017 under reference number 172203, as identified in the current Planning, Design, Access and Heritage Statement. That proposal was for 31 stables.

Assessment of the Scheme

Principle of Development:

The National Planning Policy Framework has an underlying presumption in favour of sustainable development which is carried through to the local Development Plan. The Managing Development Delivery Local Plan 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.

This area is located to the south of Sindlesham, outside of development limits as

defined by Core Strategy policy CP9 and updated by MDD policy CC02. The site is therefore located in the countryside in policy terms and Core Strategy policy CP11 applies. In accordance with CP11, development proposals will not normally be permitted except where one or more of the specified exceptions apply.

The equestrian element of the proposal

The exception set out in part 1) of CP11, is where development contributes to “diverse and sustainable rural enterprises within the Borough”. Any exceptions must also then comply with part 2), that the development should not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion beyond the original buildings, and also part 3), that the development is contained within suitably located buildings that are appropriate for conversion.

It is considered, by nature of being an equestrian facility which is more appropriately located in a countryside location rather than a built up area, that development would constitute a rural enterprise. In principle the equestrian aspect of the development is supported by CP11.1. That element of CP11 relating to whether the proposal is diverse and sustainable is considered later in this report, within the Business Viability section. There are no original buildings and, as such, the proposal fails to comply in principle with CP11.2 and CP11.3.

Paragraph 83 of the NPPF states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;
- b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
- c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside'

This is assessed in detail throughout this report.

The residential element of the proposal

Paragraph 4.58 in the supporting text to Policy CP11 of the Core Strategy states that “Proposals for agricultural workers dwellings will need to demonstrate that they comply with this policy and PPS7”. PPS7 has since been superseded by the NPPF, which states that isolated homes in the countryside should be avoided unless one of more of the subsequent circumstances apply, including where “there is an essential need for a rural worker, including those taking majority control of a farm business, to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside” (Paragraph 79). This is assessed later in the report, following on from the assumptions to be made about the equine elements of the proposal.

Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan

The application site is located within the parish of Arborfield and therefore the Arborfield & Barkham Neighbourhood Plan (made April 2020) is a relevant development plan document for determining the application. The Neighbourhood Plan is broadly consistent with the strategic policies in the Core Strategy and MDD and with the NPPF.

Relevant policies relating to the current application include:

Policy 'IRS1: Preservation of separation of settlements', which relates to development within countryside areas and seeks to preserve the character and appearance of the countryside. This policy is consistent with CP11 and introduces a new emphasis on character and visual separation and perceived coalescence of existing settlements.

Policy IRS2 states that proposals should: 'Recognise, respect and preserve the identity and rural setting of settlements'. This also reflects Core Strategy and MDD policy in requiring the scale and density of the development to respect the distinctive character and biodiversity of the area. A requirement of IRS2 is that developments respect and preserve any 'outstanding views', which are defined at paragraph 4.16 as views that present "an exceptional panorama of the landscape and including middle and distant features". This is a high test that will not be applicable to most views. IRS2 also elevates consideration of the Village Design Statements (VDS's) for Arborfield and Barkham in the decision making process, though these are already material considerations, and referenced in CP1 supporting text. Arborfield and Newland VDS includes the application site and refers to farmland, trees and boundaries in Section 5, referring specifically to their maintenance, replanting, retention and care. Compliance with this policy is considered in further detail in the Trees and Landscape part of this report.

Policy IRS3 of the Neighbourhood Plan: 'Protection and enhancement of the natural environment and green spaces' is consistent with the requirements of the NPPF in seeking biodiversity net gain and measures that mitigate and adapt to climate change, inter alia.

Policy TC3 gives conditional support for businesses in the countryside and agriculture. Point 3) requires that 'new or expanding activities do not cause excessive encroachment away from the original buildings'. This broadly mirrors the wording of CP11.

Policy GA1 seeks to 'Minimise additional traffic on unsuitable roads' which is consistent with CP4 and CP6 and any improvements to public transport will be supported in accordance with GA3: 'Public transport improvements with long term viability'.

Local Plan Update

The Draft Local Plan Update was subject to consultation in Spring 2020. At the time of writing, the LPU has limited weight in the decision making process.

Policy ER4 of the Draft Plan relates to 'Supporting the rural economy'. ER4 states that:

"The rural economy will be supported by small scale development within the countryside, where it is demonstrated that the proposal:

a) Is genuinely required to support an existing or new rural business or enterprise;

Criterion 2 of draft policy ER4 further requires that all development be contained within appropriately converted existing buildings or in well-designed new buildings which are proportionate to the use and respect the character of the rural setting.

Representations submitted as part of the Draft Plan consultation are currently being reviewed and analysed. It is therefore not clear to what extent there are unresolved objections to relevant policies.

Detailed Considerations

The details of the scheme are to be considered within the following headers:

- Equine Matters, including the residential elements of the scheme
- Trees and Landscape
- Ecology Issues
- The Tranquillity of the Area
- Highway Access and Parking Provision
- S106 Payments
- Heritage Assets
- Environmental Health and Drainage Issues
- Business Viability

Equine Matters

Paragraph 8 of the NPPF seeks to achieve sustainable development and subsection c), the environmental objective, aims to contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, including: making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that, inter alia, maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment.

Policy CP3 states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that, inter alia, are of an appropriate scale of activity.

Policy CP11 seeks to ensure that development in the countryside contributes to sustainable rural enterprises.

Capability of the site to accommodate 50+ horses:

DEFRA's Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids is dated December 2017. It provides guidance regarding the amount of land required per horse for both grazing and behavioural needs.

Grazing needs:

Paragraph 1.2 states: The area of pasture required per horse will depend on the type of grass, ground conditions, time of year, type of horse and degree of pasture management employed. As a general rule, each horse requires approximately 0.5 – 1.0 hectares (or 1.25 to 2.5 acres) of grazing of a suitable quality if no supplementary feeding is being provided. The grass is defined in Paragraph 4.2.7 of the submitted ecological assessment as species-poor, semi-improved grassland.

The application seeks permission for 50 stables including the stables adjoining the foaling yard, which would imply that the eleven adjoining stables would house a mare and foal. As such, a minimum of 50 horses would be stabled, possibly extending to

61 horses. The grazing area available within the land edged blue (ie, excluding woodland) is approximately 19 hectares (47 acres). This would not provide adequate grazing for the stabling capacity of the site at the lower threshold of 50 horses.

Land needs for a horse are not solely for grazing requirements; they are also for behavioural needs.

Behavioural needs:

Whilst a lack of grazing can be compensated for, in part, by hay or similar feed, horses also require adequate quantities of land for exercise and for opportunities to socialise, as detailed in Section 3 of the DEFRA Guide. Paragraph 3.1 outlines well-known consequences of horses that are stabled for too long: windsucking, weaving, crib-biting, box-walking and wood-chewing. The proposed ménage would not be a substitute for the freedom to exercise and, as such, does not add to the total land available for grazing, exercise and socialising.

Staffing needs:

It is recognised that this quantity of horses require on-site grooms or a yard manager, for reasons including the ability to monitor the health of the horses, for the security of both the horses and their tack, and in case of fire. The case made within planning applications for grooms' accommodation to be located in close proximity to stables is well-rehearsed. However, whether all of the required staff need to be on site is not certain.

The industry-recognised Equine Business Guide (2019), produced by Agro Business Consultants in association with Warwickshire College, contains an acknowledged method for specifying the amount of man hours required for horses at livery. The type of livery proposed has not been stated in the submitted Business Plan. However, the detail within that submission implies that full livery would be provided. Therefore, for the purposes of this calculation, and due to the inability of the Local Planning Authority to control the split between DIY, part or full livery, a 100% full livery use of the site is assumed.

The standard man days (SMD) required for full livery are 660 hours per horse per year. When multiplied by 50 horses, this results in a need for just under 15 staff. The Guide has a suggested 50% reduction in scale of required provision when there are 21+ horses. As such, just over 7 staff are required for 50 horses at full livery.

It is not possible to be any more precise because the Guide also provides SMD calculations for a breeding facility, for showjumping, dressage, eventing or hunting, all of which differ. The range includes 660 hours per horse per annum at full livery to 1120 hours per horse pa for eventers. At the bottom end of the range is 280 hours per horse for foals, which have not been included in this equation. In the same way as it is not possible to restrict, by condition, the type of livery, it is not considered possible within planning regulations to restrict and enforce against different types of equestrian use at a site.

The submitted plans show a total of ten bedrooms across three separate dwellings. Four of those bedrooms are shown to be doubles but the size of the other six rooms appears to have capacity for more than one person per room. As such, the provision

is for a minimum of 14 people (it is acknowledged that some of these may be family of the yard manager, unconnected with the business). In the absence of additional information and for the purposes of this assessment in bedspace terms, it is clear that the proposed provision exceeds the SMD requirement by 50%. In addition, the need for all staff to live on site is not stated and it is not proven to be necessary. The Borough Council's Strategic Development Location of Arborfield, for example, is delivering 3,500 dwellings at a distance of approximately 2.3 miles from the application site, when measured via Gravelpithill Lane.

The pre-application submissions of 2017 stated that the residential flats for the grooms were a necessity in order to attract and retain good quality yard staff. They were not stated as a necessity for reasons of proximity to the horses. The proposed free-standing cabin would serve that purpose.

As such, and notwithstanding the objection in principle to the provision of new residential accommodation in the countryside, the proposed provision exceeds the requirement as given in the Equine Business Guide. No other special circumstances have been provided to justify such provision, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority.

Equipment needs:

The proposal does not show housing for additional equipment which would be needed on site, for example, to maintain the land, or for varying exercise needs of the horses and riding disciplines undertaken. Such provision is likely to result in additional paraphernalia over and above that which has been formally plotted, for both residential and commercial needs, to the detriment of the natural environment. It is also noted that the Energy and Sustainability Statement (JAW Sustainability 4th November 2019) includes the suggested provision of wind turbines and solar panels to meet the needs of the site and the requirements of Policies CC04 and CC05 of the MDD Local Plan, adding to essential paraphernalia which hasn't been plotted on the submitted drawings.

Equine Matters Conclusion:

The proposal would result in an unsustainable intensification of use of the site for equine purposes, which would not maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment. The proposal would therefore conflict with the provisions of Paragraph 8c) of the NPPF, whose environmental objective seeks to protect and enhance our natural environment, Paragraph 79 of the NPPF, due to the absence of a recognised essential need for the implied quantity of rural workers on the site, Paragraph 170 of the NPPF, which recognises the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, Core Strategy Policy CP1, which seeks to ensure that development is sustainable, Policy CP3, which outlines the general principles for development and Policy CP11, relating to sustainable development in the countryside. It conflicts with Policy TB21 (Landscape Character) of the MDD Local Plan and also with Policies IRS1, IRS2, IRS3 and TC3 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan. Finally, the proposal conflicts with the DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their Hybrids (December 2017).

Objection is therefore raised to the proposed use of the site for equine purposes as proposed.

Trees and Landscape (Summary):

The WBC Tree and Landscape Officer has defined the key features of the land as being topography, trees & hedgerows, pasture, public rights of way and recreation routes.

She objects to the scheme and has made detailed comments relating to:

- The removal of TPO'd trees
- The location of the proposed access and the retaining wall and their impact on the root protection areas (RPAs) of trees which are to remain, conflicting with Policy CC03 of the MDD Local Plan and with BS5837:2012
- The lack of information relating to surfacing of the access road and vehicular circulation space, to the proposed utility service runs and to changes in levels, which may result in conflict with Policy CC10 of the MDDL
- The substantial impact of the proposed main complex on the southern view because it is proposed to be 78m wide and 7-10m above the surface (dependent on ground levels)
- The inability of the wider existing tree cover to screen the buildings from all views of the site
- The lack of integration with the surroundings, in conflict with Policy CP3 of the Core Strategy
- The overall impact of the scale of the development in the view and on the character of the area
- The harmful impact of increased traffic on recreational routes
- The designation of the topography of the site's value in the submitted Landscape and Visual Assessment as medium and the impact of the development as low. The T&L Officer disagrees and considers the site's value to be high and the impact of the development as high
- Enhancement planting which would result in a net increase in trees and hedgerows on the site, with a magnitude of change on the existing tree resource in Year 1 as medium / beneficial
- High sensitivity of the existing landscape to development of this nature
- The total change of the application site from pasture to built form, resulting in a high magnitude of change
- The highly sensitive public rights of way, with the proposal resulting in a medium / high magnitude of change
- Disagreement with the assessment of no substantial loss of topography
- Disagreement with the LVA assessment of magnitude of change being medium. The T&L Officer considers the valued landscape to be highly susceptible and highly sensitive to change
- Disagreement on the baseline for the landscape. The LVA considers it to be medium. The T&L Officer considers it to be a locally valued landscape, as per the WBC Topic Paper
- Disagreement on the impact of the proposal on views. Where the LVA classes them as negligible or moderate, the T&L Officer considers them to be major

She concludes with the following:

The proposals would not conserve the unsettled character of the area or enhance the existing wooded and pasture setting but would instead have a detrimental impact on the following features:

- The intact view of the elevated wooded hills that form a backdrop to the wider site and the ridge adjacent to Bearwood Park, a Grade II* Registered Park and Garden.
- The typical varied and intricate topography e.g. the valley side where the site is located and range of landscape spaces created by the interplay of woodland, mature single trees, copses of younger trees and managed and overgrown hedgerows with intervening pasture and wetland at valley floor associated with the tributary of River Loddon.
- Large expanses of mature mixed woodland in close proximity to the site which are designated as Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and a sense of place.
- The distinctive mosaic of interconnecting mixed woodland interspersed with small scale pastoral fields in the south of the immediate area of the site which provide scenic qualities and visual diversity.
- Recreational value through the presence of byways, footpaths and bridleways, which allow enjoyment of the landscape, will be compromised by the development.
- Peaceful secluded character with naturalistic qualities and experience of dark skies, largely unsettled and with limited access, from the increased activity to and from the site, 24 hr. lighting and increased activity on the tranquillity.
- Impact of development on views - both enclosed views within woodland and long views across the Loddon Valley towards Reading, and south towards Barkham and beyond.

Key issues identified under the Landscape Character Assessment 2019 include: 'Pressure for alternative land uses within the woodlands leading to the erosion, clearance or inappropriate management of woodland areas', the lack of recruitment of young trees of local provenance, decline in livestock grazing and replacement with pony paddocks. The pressure for built development on the wooded skyline is leading to visual intrusion in elevated landscapes.

The landscape guidelines are: To conserve the distinctive wooded skylines, particularly where there is potential for it to be highly visible in the view such as large or vertical elements. To conserve and protect the landscape pattern of mixed woodland and pasture and conserve and enhance the open and rural qualities of the pastureland. Most noticeable is the management of integration of equine activities with the landscape through maintenance of existing boundaries and control of built elements, and to conserve the unsettled rural and undeveloped character. Pertinent to this application is to maintain and enhance the character of the tree-lined byways and tracks and to resist highways improvements, infrastructure and signage.

The development proposals clearly fail to meet the key issues contained within the landscape guidelines of the L1 LCA, and are therefore contrary not only to local plan policy but also national policy.

The development is contrary to Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy as it would not maintain or enhance the high quality of the landscape. The development is also contrary to Policy CP3 as it is not of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height. The proposals will have a detrimental impact on the landscape, and fail to contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and spaces themselves and

the way they integrate with their surroundings.

The proposals are contrary to Policy CC03 of the Local Plan as the proposals fail to promote the integration of the scheme with the countryside due to the scale and height of the development proposed. Although a Tree Protection Plan has been submitted, there are some issues that are still to be resolved to meet with the policy: 'to protect and retain existing trees, hedges and other landscape features'.

The proposals are contrary to Chap. 8 RD2 and RD3 of the Borough Design Guide – 'New development in the countryside must respond to the unique character and setting of the site.' and 'The location and design of new development must respond to and should not harm the setting of the landscape'.

The development conflicts with Paragraph 170b of the NPPF which states that:

170. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland.

In addition, the Borough Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP) identifies that conserving our current trees is very significant, as mature trees sequester a much higher amount of carbon than new trees, which take years to reach the same level of maturity, depending on the tree type. The July 2020 CEAP Progress Report has, as a target, the support of the long-term retention of woodland and trees.

Tree and Landscape Conclusion:

The site is located within a "valued landscape" for the purposes of paragraph 170(a) of the NPPF. The Valued Landscape Topic Paper (WBC) builds on NPPF 170 at a local level, although it is at Draft Plan stage.

Features which raise this landscape above what Mr Justice Ouseley calls, (in *Stroud DC v SSCLG* [2015] EWHC 488 (Admin)), 'mere countryside', are present in the landscape even before the Topic Paper is adopted. Full weight should be given to the features which raise the landscape above 'mere countryside' such as: wholly rural site, levels of enclosure, tree and hedgerow cover, undulating topography, bucolic appearance, retention of historic hedgerows, lack of traffic noise pollution, views in from public rights of way, no sense of any urban area nearby, profoundly rural landscape, presence of woodland trees and hedgerows.

Perception, enjoyment and appreciation of the key features would be undermined by the proposal with views across the landscape, into and through the woodland being undermined by the development.

The proposed development would result in a high magnitude of change to the existing landscape which would have a negative impact on the trees and the land which forms the application site and the surrounding area. An objection is therefore raised to the proposed scheme due to the conflict with Paragraph 170b of the NPPF, Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy, Policies CC03 and TB21 of the MDD Local Plan, RD2

and RD3 of the Borough Design Guide and Policies IRS1, IRS2 and IRS3 of the Neighbourhood Plan. In addition, it conflicts with the provisions of the Borough Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan, which seeks the conservation and long-term retention of woodland and trees. Objection is therefore raised to the proposal.

Ecology issues (Summary):

The WBC Ecologist's response to consultation includes the following:

I am not convinced that the submitted Ecological Assessment (Derek Finnie Associates, ref: DFA19095, December 2019) has adequately assessed the ecological impacts of this assessment. There are a number of areas which I think require clarification or more information.

Zone of Influence:

The Ecological Assessment has not explicitly defined a zone of influence for the proposed development. From the sub-heading 'Site Evaluation', it could be inferred from the discussion that this assessment has considered the zone of influence to extend only to the red line boundary but this isn't clear. The only mention of a zone of influence in the whole report is to rule out Longmoor Bog SSSI from being scoped in for further consideration.

The Phase 1 Habitat Map supplied in the assessment includes a partial mapping of the area within the blue line. It isn't clear why there is only a partial mapping of the habitats within the blue line. The submitted Business Case sets out that the application includes a stable barn to accommodate 40+ horses and that the facilities will be set in 'acres of pasture land'. I interpret this to mean that the horses stabled at this facility will introduce a grazing pressure to the fields within the blue line that may need to be considered as part of the ecological zone of influence.

Only one map has been supplied within the Ecological Assessment. The Phase 1 Habitat Map does not give the landscape context or show the proximity of local wildlife sites and/or habitat of principal importance. Nearby local wildlife sites are listed in table 1 of the assessment but their relationship to the application site is not shown or discussed. The scoping in or out of these sites for further evaluation needs to be explicitly made.

The site has been recognised as part of a larger area in Natural England's Woodpasture and Parkland BAP Priority Habitat inventory. This is not shown in any map context in the assessment. The discussion of the site's value as this habitat of principal importance has been taken out of the surrounding landscape context.

Woodpasture and Parkland Habitat of Principal Importance:

I am not persuaded by any of the reasoning put forward in paragraph 5.2.2 at this stage. I advise that we follow the precautionary principle and consider the site to be habitat of principal importance until a much more robust case demonstrates otherwise. Should such a case not be made then, under CP7, the loss of habitat of principal importance will only be acceptable if the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance and appropriate compensation measures are provided. No compensation measures are yet proposed.

Paragraph 5.2.2 asserts that there are no ancient or veteran trees within the site or

blue line. The methodology by which this assessment is made is not given in section 3. The government standing advice recommends the use of the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory as part of a desktop survey. This does show within the blue line a number of veteran trees and many notable trees (that might be classified as veteran on further investigation).

The Wokingham District Veteran Tree Association database also shows a number of trees within the blue line. It is not clear how the applicant's ecologist has ruled these out.

Phase 1 Habitat Map:

I am concerned that scale chosen does not allow for accurate mapping of Gravelpithill Lane. In the Phase 1 Habitat Map this is shown entirely as hardstanding but the submitted Topographical Survey (Survey Solutions, May 2018) clearly show it as being tree or woodland lined. This gives uncertainty as to whether the ecological impact assessment has adequately considered the proposals for the access road.

I am somewhat surprised that the Phase 1 Habitat Map contains no target notes nor any photographic evidence from the survey. This is unusual. Three basic habitat types are described in the field survey results. Was there really no variation on these types worth noting at the margins or across topographical changes? Were there really no point features of ecological value?

Access Roads:

I note that the submitted Transport Statement (Motion, ref: 1802065/entewl, June 2020) identifies four places along Gravelpithill Lane for proposed widening and passing place creation. As the Transport Statement was written several months after the Ecological Assessment, I am concerned that this part of the proposal has not been included in the assessment. Please can the applicant's ecologist provide an updated assessment to include consideration of the proposed widening.

The Ecological Assessment and Arboricultural Assessment mapping do not match in the location of the proposed access point on to Ellis's Hill. It is not clear what vegetation clearance is required and how the ecological impact has been considered for this part of the design.

Flood Risk Assessment:

It is good to see that the Flood Risk Assessment proposes at surface attenuation for surface water flows as this has the potential for also providing an ecological benefit.

There is no detail to the drainage strategy to show how the attenuation basin will be connected to the development. I am concerned that the location and scale of the attenuation basin has not been included in the ecological impact assessment. I am concerned that the lack of detail of how water will conveyed means that the impact on ecologically valuable habitat of these connections has not been assessed.

Biodiversity Net Gain:

Paragraph 170 (d) of the National Planning Policy Framework makes it clear that development should provide a net gain for biodiversity. Paragraph 175 of the same framework makes it clear that applications that continue to cause significant harm to

biodiversity after the mitigation hierarchy has been applied should be refused.

Within the brief discussion (section 6) in the Ecological Assessment unquantified mitigation and enhancement measures are proposed. Paragraph 6.2.5 concludes that this will result in a net biodiversity gain. On the information presented, I am not convinced that this is the case. Looking at the landscaping plan, the majority of the site will be converted from semi-improved grassland to buildings and hardstanding and there is very little space devoted to the compensation/enhancement measures proposed.

I would want to be confident that enhancements within the blue line are well defined and achievable. This is particularly important when intensive grazing of the stabled horses in the fields within the blue line is part of the business strategy for this project.

Bats:

The Ecological Assessment does not include a ground level tree assessment for bat roost potential for all the trees identified to be removed or recommended for other work to make safe in the Arboricultural Assessment.

The Bat Conservation Trust's Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition) are within the references of the Ecological Assessment but are not mentioned anywhere else within the document. This is peculiar.

Based on the information so far presented, I am currently of the opinion that the site represents moderate commuting and foraging potential for bats. On this basis monthly surveys would be expected to be undertaken.

Within the revised assessment of impact on bats, I think it also relevant to define the key locations that that should remain unlit as they are thought to provide key habitat for light sensitive biodiversity. This could form part of a more detailed mitigation strategy for lighting, in line with the Institute for Lighting Professionals guidance note 08/18 that provides greater certainty than the vague proposal in paragraph 6.1.3 of the current Ecological Assessment.

Reptiles:

The lack of target notes and photographs in the Ecological Assessment do not give me confidence that the potential for the site to support reptiles has been adequately considered.

I do not give the current justification for not conducting a reptile survey much credence.

Thames Basin Heaths SPA:

The application site straddles the boundary between the 400m-5km linear mitigation zone and the 5-7km linear mitigation zone for the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

It appears as if the primary point of access for the new dwellings is within the 400m-5km linear mitigation zone and therefore this development is required to provide mitigation for recreational pressure on the SPA.

As the Ellis's Hill access is being included specifically for the residential users, this application requires an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations.

Ecology Conclusion:

Two reasons for refusal are therefore proposed, relating to the impact on biodiversity and on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.

The Tranquillity of the Area:

A number of objectors and the Tree and Landscape Officer refer to the existing tranquillity of the area. They consider that it would be negatively impacted. It is therefore necessary to establish the baseline for the tranquillity status of the area.

The CPRE has been producing a map of tranquillity for England since 2006 and their mapping data goes down to 500 x 500 sq.m. areas. The application site is clearly on the positive end of the tranquillity spectrum and part of a larger block of tranquillity, contrasting notably to much lower levels in the surrounding area. This therefore indicates its particular value locally. The woodland cover would enhance the tranquillity score for the area.

Paragraph 180 of the NPPF, which falls within their section on Ground Conditions and Pollution, seeks to ensure that new development is appropriate for its location, taking into account the likely effects (including cumulative effects) of pollution on health, living conditions and the natural environment, as well as the potential sensitivity of the site or the wider area to impacts that could arise from the development. In doing so, they should identify and protect tranquil areas which have remained relatively undisturbed by noise and are prized for their recreational and amenity value for this reason.

The same paragraph seeks to limit the impact of light pollution from artificial light on local amenity, intrinsically dark landscapes and nature conservation.

This is echoed in the Core Strategy which seeks, in Policy CP1, to maintain or enhance the high quality of the environment, minimise the emission of pollutants into the wider environment and avoid areas for development where pollution, including noise, may impact upon the amenity of future occupiers. It is considered that future occupiers can include, in this instance, the continuing and future users of the adjoining rights of way. Policy CP3 seeks to secure development which does not result in detriment to the amenities of adjoining land users, including open spaces. Policy IRS1 of the Arborfield and Barkham Neighbourhood Plan also seeks to preserve the character and appearance of the countryside.

Tranquillity Conclusion:

It is concluded that the objections raised on this basis have foundation and that the proposal would result in harm to the tranquillity of the locality, in conflict with Policies CP1 and CP3 of the Core Strategy, Policy IRS1 of the Neighbourhood Plan and Paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

Highway Access and Parking Provision:

The keeping of 50+ horses on a site would result in additional vehicular traffic

movements even in the absence of attendance by riders. This would occur through typical needs of the horses for both hard feed and hay, for visits from vets, farriers and equine dentists and of staff. A livery use adds traffic from riders attending the site. The horses would also, typically, go off site for any range of leisure activities, from hacking to lessons in indoor arenas, to competition and social events. This would result in a significant intensification of use of the adjoining lanes by vehicular traffic.

Additional potential for significant traffic generation exists with the following proposals for the site over and above those listed above, as stated in the Business Plan:

Point 2.1:

- The business has expanded into 'an increasingly popular equine transportation, saddlery service and as a distributor'. This is undefined but is assumed to mean as a wholesale distribution business. The precise location for this within the site is not clear from the submitted plans.

Point 2.2:

- The provision of an on-site sports therapist. That business use isn't stated as being exclusive to users of the yard
- Hospitality events hosted around the country, to be taken into Europe
- Showjumpers residing with them
- Hosting open days where they offer a viewing day open to all members of the public and local communities, encouraging them to take an interest in the sport and raise awareness of interaction with the horses.
- This would also be available to clients as an opportunity to come and see their horse in training, and provide an opportunity for some schools and community groups to enjoy some time with the horses and staff.
- A breeding service
- Provision of the veterinary work in-house with excellent labs, vets, staff and stud facilities. We have seen an increase in our clients wanting to do Embryo Transfers this year and currently we have to transport the mares for the facilities - with the expansion we require we would be able to do this at Newlands and further take on new business.

And as stated in the Transport Statement:

Paragraph 1.3:

- E-commerce
- Riding School

The Borough Council's Highways Officer recommends refusal. The response includes comments on General Matters, Parking, Trip Rates, Cycle Parking, Access, Gravelpithill Lane, Swept Path Analysis, Visibility Splays, Road Safety Audit, Sustainability Assessment, Framework Construction Method Statement and Travel Plan. The response addresses comments made by neighbours, the British Horse Society, the Public Rights of Way Officer and Thames Valley Police, all of which have been brought to his attention.

It is clear from the summary of neighbour responses received that a significant proportion share a concern about the impact of the proposal on their future use of Gravelpithill Lane and Ellis's Hill. Their concerns tie in with the impact on tranquillity, as detailed in the section above. The Highways Officer recognises the potential

impact on other users of the lane and includes reference to Greenways Route E, which is planned to run along Gravelpithill Lane, which will have its own space requirements due to the desire to provide segregated routes.

The agent for the application responded to comments received from neighbours, via their transport consultants, Motion. They state that the proposals are likely to generate an absolute maximum of 68 traffic movements in any one hour, although they consider that traffic volumes will typically be much lower. It is clear that the existing vehicular use of both gravel tracks is substantially lower than this per hour and that the resultant traffic could potentially result in the reluctance of pedestrians and other non-motorised users to use the tracks in the future, due to a concern for their own safety and comfort.

Whilst some of the highway issues are potentially capable of being addressed at a technical level, such as with an upgrade to the surface, provision of passing places, segregation for non-vehicle users, visibility splays at the exit and sufficient width for two large vehicles to pass, they would result in conflict with other policies and provisions, particularly regarding tree and landscape and ecology policies and they would result in a harmful impact on the both the character of the area and on tranquillity. As such, the incompatibility cannot readily be seen to be capable of resolution through the submission of amended drawings showing technical changes to the access.

The Public Rights of Way Officer has responded on more than one occasion, taking into account comments made by neighbours, the British Horse Society and the Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum. Some of his solutions replicate those of the Highways Officer, insofar as they suggest alternative locations for the bridleway, as a means of separating out vehicular traffic from horses and pedestrians. However, this would again impact the character of the area. One of his proposed solutions is to impose a condition which seeks to ensure that any damage to the lane is repaired. However, this may not meet with the guidance given in Paragraph 55 of the NPPF for the imposition of conditions: in particular whether the proposed condition could be enforceable, precise and reasonable.

The Case Officer for the application conducted site visits in July, August and September including via Ellis's Hill, where the ford made access impossible, despite following significant periods of dry weather. This conflicts with the statement in Paragraph 1.4 of the submitted Transport Statement, which suggests that safe and suitable access can be achieved via Ellis's Hill.

Highway Access and Parking Provision Conclusion:

Two reasons for refusal are therefore proposed, relating to the absence of supporting information and the lack of parking on the site.

Section 106 payments:

Both the Housing Policy Officer and the Policy Officer for Economic Prosperity and Place require contributions or a commuted sum in lieu of the provision of affordable housing and an Employment Skills Plan. In the absence of such provision or a S106 agreement securing such provision, a holding objection is raised to the scheme.

Heritage Assets:

Neighbours have objected to the scheme's potential impact on the nearest Grade II listed building at Mole Bridge Farm. The Conservation Officer has reviewed these objections but maintains a position of no objection, due to the distance between the two sites and the potential for intervening clusters of trees and vegetation to screen much of the site. He considers that any harmful impact to the setting of the listed building would be at the lowest level of less than substantial harm.

Turning to the adjoining Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Bearwood College and the response of the Gardens Trust, it is noted that they express surprise that the Design and Access Statement made no mention of the RPG. However, they do not believe that the setting or features of the RPG are adversely affected.

As such, it is considered that the grounds raised by neighbours relating to impact on heritage assets cannot be sustained through to reasons for refusal.

Environmental Health and Drainage Issues:

Concerns raised by neighbours, particularly relating to the amount of effluent that could result from the proposed development, has been raised with the Environmental Health and Drainage Officers and prompted an additional consultation with the Environment Agency (EA). The EA were unable to make a detailed assessment of the application due to workload prioritisation. The EA's response seeks to ensure that there is no risk to groundwater quality, that no pollution is caused or allowed and that there are foul drainage connections where possible. Both the Environmental Health and Drainage Officers are satisfied that proposed conditions could address those concerns.

Business Viability:***Sustainability of the business:***

The submissions for the business have included:

June 2017-May 2018:	Cash Flow Forecasts
June 2018-May 2019:	Cash Flow Forecasts
January 2020-December 2020:	Cash Flow Forecasts
April 2019-March 2020:	Management Accounts
April 2017-March 2018:	Unaudited Financial Statements for Kelly Hart Equestrian
April 2018-March 2019:	Unaudited Financial Statements for Sillett Equestrian
Undated:	Business Plan

Most of these have been excluded from the public website at this stage, for reasons of commercial sensitivity. They have not been subjected to independent assessment through assessors appointed by the Borough Council, due to the weight of objections received on other grounds.

Two companies are shown as having been incorporated separately by each of the applicants at Companies House:

May 2018:	Sillett Equestrian Ltd. Dormant.
May 2018:	Sillett Equestrian Newlands Ltd. Dormant.

They state the SIC code as 01430: 'Raising of Horses and Other Equines', which does not wholly align with the submissions received for this planning application.

The lack of consistency in the dates for each of the submitted accounting figures and for the two separate businesses is noted. The absence of figures showing long-term viability is also noted and this impacts on the ability of the business to display that it is sustainable, with long-term potential.

Support received for the proposal as a result of neighbour notification refers to the limited available options for livery in the area, the potential to enter competitions at the site, the potential for job creation and the addition of community facilities that the proposal would provide. One letter of support refers to the failure of other livery businesses due to their lack of critical mass to survive and the status of the applicants as being highly regarded for coaching, horse care and management in the showjumping world.

The submissions received as part of the application do not point towards livery being available on a local, DIY or part-livery basis and it is not clear that the site will be open to local riders for competition purposes. As such, the basis for local support has not been adequately substantiated within the submitted documents.

Neighbours have pointed to the closure of other livery yards in the locality (stated as being Bearwood Stables and Cloud Stables). In the absence of such accounting figures, the potential for a substantial complex of buildings and three dwellings to remain, should the business not be viable, is therefore a relevant concern of the neighbouring community.

Diversity of the business:

The breadth of business proposed to be undertaken points towards a diverse operation within the equine industry. This diversity is not fully reflected in the submitted accounts. The following are examples of those parts of the business excluded from or not clearly shown within any projections or statements:

- Luxury lifestyle management service 'Quintessentially'
- Equine transportation
- In-house veterinary practice
- Sports therapist
- Off-site hosting services
- Distribution business
- E-commerce
- Residential facilities for show jumpers
- Saddlery service
- Embryo transfer and breeding service

The consequences of this diversity on a range of factors, from the financial accounts to the character of the area cannot, therefore, be fully understood.

In the absence of establishing, through rigorous analysis of the submitted financial statements, whether the business is viable and whether it is operationally achievable within the space and buildings proposed, a holding objection is therefore raised to the proposal.

As such, the proposal conflicts with the overarching economic and environmental objectives of the NPPF, which seeks to provide a strong and competitive economy whilst protecting and enhancing our natural environment, Paragraph 83 of the NPPF, which seeks to support a prosperous rural economy, Policy CP1 of the Core Strategy, which seeks to secure development which is sustainable and Policy CP11, which seeks to ensure that proposals contribute to a diverse and sustainable rural enterprise.

Other Matters:

All other consultees have stated that planning conditions would be able to control any issues raised by the development.

The Public Sector Equality Duty (Equality Act 2010):

In determining this application the Council is required to have due regard to its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. The key equalities protected characteristics include age, disability, gender, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief. There is no indication or evidence (including from consultation on the application) that persons with protected characteristics as identified by the Act have or will have different needs, experiences, issues and priorities in relation to this particular planning application and there would be no significant adverse impacts as a result of the development.

RECOMMENDATION

Conditions agreed:	Not required
Recommendation:	Refuse
Date:	29 September 2020
Earliest date for decision:	16 September 2020

Recommendation agreed by: (Authorised Officer)	
Date:	07/10/2020