



Head of Development Control,
Planning Dept
Wokingham Borough Council

10th October 2025

(by email only)

AM2P Ref: J.146

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Application 251143 – Equestrian Use and associated development at Upper Culham Farm

I write on behalf of Remenham Parish Council to object to the above proposed development. The Parish Council raised initial objections in their letter dated 25th June 2025. Following amendments made by the Applicant, the Parish Council wish to maintain the initial objections raised and expand on a number of points as referred to below.

Impact upon the Green Belt

The Applicant has submitted a LVIA as part of the revised scheme. The only reference made to Green Belt matters within the LVIA is confirmation that the site lies within the Green Belt. The submitted Planning Statement on behalf of the Applicant only makes three references to the Green Belt, primarily referring to paragraph 154 of the NPPF.

It is therefore considered helpful to take a more detailed look at the relevance of the Green Belt designation in this location, and the appropriateness or otherwise of the development in light of this.

The NPPF advises that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless it falls within one of the exceptions listed at paragraph 154. The Applicants suggest that the proposed development falls within category (b) as follows;

'(b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it'

There are two elements to consider as part of this criteria; firstly whether the facilities proposed are 'appropriate', and secondly whether they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the Green Belt purposes. If it is found that the proposal does not adhere to either of those requirements then it must be considered to be inappropriate development in Green Belt terms.

With regards to whether the proposed facilities are 'appropriate', it is recognised that if used as proposed, the facilities are connected with the proposed equestrian use of the site. But it is considered that in itself can't be justification that the facilities are appropriate, otherwise a disproportionate scale of 'connected' facilities could be justified. There are a number of polo facilities in the locality that operate without the requirement for buildings of such a scale as proposed in this instance. It is clearly appropriate to accommodate a limited number of horses on site, but the provision of 3 substantial American Barns is not considered to be an appropriate scale of facility in a rural location on a largely undeveloped site. Such a scale of development is definitely not necessary in order to undertake a Polo operation and provide for outdoor sport at the site.

Whilst recognizing that there will be grey areas in defining what is or is not 'appropriate' in terms of paragraph 154, it is indisputable that the proposed development cannot preserve the openness of the Green Belt. Taking the proposed 3 American Barns alone, each one will introduce a built structure that is considerably larger than the vast majority of buildings in the area. And there are three of them, side by side! When combined they will introduce development across an area of approximately 60m x 100m. And this will be introduced to an area of land without any buildings at present, part of which is used for a menage. It is inevitable that this will have a detrimental impact upon the openness of the Green Belt.

The Application is supported by a LVIA, which makes the case for the proposed development being largely screened in the wider area, and hence not detracting from the landscape character. It is noted that the LVIA was undertaken in July 2024, with trees and hedgerows in full leaf. It is surprising that no efforts have been taken to view the site in winter conditions since then, when screening is notably less effective. Even when trees and hedges are in leaf, views across the site are apparent from the adjacent footpaths/bridleways. The below photos are taken from public views and if developed as proposed, the appearance of the three American Barns will be very apparent within such views. The findings of the LVIA are therefore challenged, due to the adverse impact that the scheme will have upon the landscape character.



Photo A – taken from the bridleway on the eastern boundary looking across the site, from which views will be easily apparent of the proposed American Barns



Phot B – taken from the PROW looking across the site in a southerly direction, from which the proposed American Barns will be visible.

However, when assessing openness in Green Belt terms, it is established that whether or not a development is visible from beyond the site, is not overly relevant. Due to the significant scale of development proposed in this instance, the openness of the area will be harmed whether or not the buildings and other development are visible from beyond the site. The openness will not be preserved, as paragraph 154(b) of the NPPF requires. This is further illustrated by cross reference to a relevant and nearby combined Appeal decision under references APP/X0360/W/19/3224323 and 3224329, at Malmesbury Estate, Remenham Hill, less than 1km away from the current application site, and also within Wokingham Borough.

The Malmesbury Estate appeals involved the proposed introduction of Grooms Accommodation and a new American Barn and outdoor arena to serve an existing Equestrian site. The Inspector's decision letter is attached as Appendix A to this letter for ease of reference. The Inspector dismissed both appeals, and their comments with regards Green Belt openness are particularly relevant to the current proposal. The Grooms accommodation included a single storey building with a footprint of 17m x 21m, and was intended to replace an existing building. So, a sizable proposed building, but notably smaller than the proposed American Barns in the current application, which are not replacing existing buildings. The Inspector concluded at paragraph 53 of the appeal decision that the siting, size and mass of the Grooms Accommodation would have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and represent inappropriate development accordingly.

The American Barn proposed at the Malmesbury Estate was 60m x 12.6m x 5.5m high and the Inspector noted at paragraph 56 that the siting, size and height would not preserve the openness of the Green Belt and represent inappropriate development within it accordingly. For clarification, the American Barns proposed at Upper Culham Farm are of a greater footprint and a higher height than that considered at the Malmesbury Estate – and there are three of them proposed, side by side!

It follows that the proposed development at Upper Culham Farm will inevitably detract from the openness of the Green Belt and that the scheme has to be classed as an inappropriate form of development in the context of the NPPF comments on the Green

Belt. The NPPF advises at paragraph 153 that inappropriate development should not be approved except in very special circumstances, and that such circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt (and any other harm) is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

The Applicants submission does not make any reference to 'very special circumstances' (VSC). It is not clear whether this is because they are aware that there are not any VSC in this instance, or that they are not aware of the significance of them when assessing Green Belt proposals. The supporting Planning Statement does make reference to the proposal generating local jobs and providing money for the local economy. It is not disputed that an operation of such scale would generate some employment, but equestrian operations are commonplace in the locality, with employment opportunities already present for those choosing to work in such a field. It is noted that in assessing the appeal at Malmesbury Estate, the Inspector at paragraph 45 advised that there would be some benefits in terms of employment and increased spending in the local area, but this would carry limited weight. The same assumption should be made in this instance, and it is very apparent that such benefits will not 'clearly outweigh' the harm to the Green Belt and other harm, as required by the NPPF.

With regards the Development Plan's reference to the Green Belt, Policy CP12 of the Core Strategy states that planning permission will not be granted for inappropriate development in the Green Belt. For reasons explained above, the proposed scheme is therefore quite clearly in conflict with Policy CP12.

Policy TB01 of the MDD Document advises at Policy TB01 that appropriate development will only be permitted if it maintains the openness of the Green Belt. As explained above, the proposed development will not maintain the openness of the Green Belt.

Other Issues

The adverse impact upon the openness of the Green Belt is reason alone to refuse the application. However, the Parish Council also supports other concerns raised by local residents when objecting to the scheme.

With regards the proposed access into the site, whilst the submitted plans indicate that sufficient visibility splays can be achieved, it is requested that the Highway Officer visits the site and examines the proposals very carefully. Due to the topography of the highway, even though it might appear on plan that splays can be achieved, this is potentially not the case in reality due to vehicles not being apparent when approaching up the hill from the Henley direction. When combined with an existing mature tree within the roadside verge affecting visibility to the East, very high traffic speeds on the road, and very slow vehicles entering and leaving the site, the new site access has the potential to raise major highway safety concerns.

Concerns have also been raised with regards the proposed introduction of a reservoir to the site, directly opposite a number of residential dwellings. It is requested that the Council's Drainage Officers have a proper understanding of the implications of what is proposed in this respect on the surrounding environment and properties.

Reference has already been made above to the visual impact of the scheme in the surrounding landscape, including the Public Rights of Way Network. There will also be an impact upon the outlook from a number of nearby properties, and the close proximity of some houses to the site does mean that the proposed intense operation of the site

could have a detrimental impact upon amenity levels in terms of noise and pollution, as has been experienced at some local equestrian facilities.

Realistic Impact

Much of the Application submission refers to the intended introduction of a top-class equestrian facility. The Planning Statement refers to the intention to develop a 'world class polo facility' and pages are dedicated to the achievements and future intentions of the Applicant in the sport of Polo around the world. The substantial scale of development proposed, with three large American Barns, two polo fields and many other associated facilities, would indeed suggest that a serious facility is being put forward.

It is therefore surprising that no mention is made within the submissions of whether any Polo matches will actually be played at the site. The submitted Transport Statement implies none whatsoever, given that all of the traffic assumptions within it refer to the staff using the facility and make no reference to any matchday implications. Is that realistically going to be the case?

The relevance of the question is that the impact of matches being played at the site would have a significant detrimental impact upon the rural character and Green Belt nature of the site, local highway network and amenity of nearby residents.

For reasons set out above, even if no matches are to be played at the site, there are fundamental reasons why the proposals are unacceptable, but such reasons extend further if there is any possibility of matches being played at the site.

Conclusion

To conclude, the proposed application has been shown to be in conflict with relevant development plan policies, most notably CS Policy CP12 and MDD Policy TB01 relating to Green Belt matters, CS Policy CP11 and MDD Policy 21 relating to countryside and landscape character and CP3 of the CS relating to impact upon amenity. Subject to more detailed consideration by relevant experts at the Council there may also be conflict with policies relating to Highways and Drainage matters.

Given that there is conflict with relevant development plan policies the application should be refused unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the primary material consideration is the NPPF and for reasons set out above, this provides clear guidance as to why the scheme represents an inappropriate form of development in the Green Belt and that there are no very special circumstances to warrant approving the scheme. It is therefore respectfully considered that the application should be refused.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Andy Meader.

Andy Meader BSc Hons Dip TP MRTPI

Director

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Appeal Decisions

Hearing Held on 11 February 2020

Site visits made on 18 February 2020

by Neil Pope BA (Hons) MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 11 March 2020

Appeal A Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3224323

Malmesbury Estate, Remenham Hill, Henley-on-Thames, Berks, RG9 3HN.

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Rilex International against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council (the LPA).
 - The application Ref. 182327, dated 3/9/18, was refused by notice dated 16/11/18.
 - The development proposed is the demolition of an existing outbuilding and replacement with grooms accommodation with a players gym.
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Appeal B Ref: APP/X0360/W/19/3224329

Park Place Stables, Remenham Hill, Henley-on-Thames, Berks, RG9 3HN.

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 against a refusal to grant planning permission.
 - The appeal is made by Durio Ltd against the decision of Wokingham Borough Council.
 - The application Ref. 182524, dated 15/8/18, was refused by notice dated 19/12/18.
 - The development proposed is a new American barn and permanent outdoor arena.
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Decisions

1. Both appeals are dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The appeal sites lie within the Metropolitan Green Belt (GB) and form part of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden (RPG) at Park Place, and Temple Combe. They also lie within the settings of various Grade II listed buildings¹. There is a lengthy and rather complex planning history² to this part of the RPG.
3. Although the appeal sites are in separate ownership they are managed jointly by Rilex International Ltd³ and are used by the residents of Park Place house (the Borodin family) for equine purposes. This includes training facilities and stabling to support a high goal polo team.

¹ Including the late 17th century obelisk within the RPG and Remenham House (listed as Remenham Cottage) on the opposite side of the A4130. The provisions of section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 are engaged. The LPA has not identified harm to the significance of any listed building.

² This includes a 2008 permission that was subject to a legal agreement and an Integrated Estate Management Plan (IEMP) to restore part of the parkland (ref. O/2008/1353), as well as a 2016 permission for the creation of a polo facility for private use, comprising a polo field, exercise track, stable block, all weather practice area, summer pavilion and widening of an access onto the A4130 on part of a former golf course (ref. 162288). Areas of parkland has subsequently been restored and other polo-related developments have been undertaken. Some do not have planning permission (e.g. temporary stables, viewing mounds, storage sheds/areas) or have not been built in accordance with the approvals (pavilion) or remain after permission has expired (a show jumping arena).

³ On behalf of the appellants, I was informed that Rilex International is the same as Rilex International Ltd.

4. Appeal site A includes a hardsurfaced area that is used for the parking of articulated (horse transport) lorries, as well as pony tethering lines. The 'red line' plans for this part of the site show a smaller hardsurfaced area than has been provided and do not include the pony lines facility⁴. I have determined appeal A on the basis of the details shown on the submitted plans.
5. At the Hearing, I identified five main issues for discussion. One of these⁵ was the effect upon the significance of the RPG. Following my site visits, I asked the appellant to explain why it considered that the proposed American barn (appeal B) would not harm the significance of Remenham House or the obelisk within the RPG. I have included this matter as part of the main issue.
6. The main parties agreed that if, having closed the Hearing, I was to find less than substantial harm to the significance of the RPG and that harm would not be outweighed by public benefits, it would not be necessary to consider the other issues that I had identified at the Hearing.
7. Applications for costs have been made by both appellants against the LPA and by the LPA against both appellants. These applications are the subject of separate Decisions.
8. I closed in Hearing in writing on 26 February 2020.

Main Issue (both appeals)

9. The main issue is the effect upon the significance of the RPG and various listed buildings and whether any harm would be outweighed by any public benefits.

Reasons

10. The appeal sites lie within the countryside towards the top of Remenham Hill and to the east of Henley-on-Thames. They are located to the south of the A4130 and close to the northern boundary of the 240 ha RPG. Both sites form part of an extensive range of polo facilities that operate from within the RPG.
11. Appeal site A includes a blockwork wall and asbestos roof storage building⁶ that is set immediately alongside a belt of trees and to the south of Hurley Lodge. To the west, there is a riding arena (approximately 100m x 80m) with the hard surfaced lorry parking area alongside. To the south east of the storage building there is a taller, newer, metal clad storage building. The LPA has informed me that this neighbouring storage building does not have permission.
12. Appeal site B includes an existing American barn⁷ (approx. 50m x 15m), an outdoor show jumping arena (approx. 60m x 30m), horse walker, paddock and fencing. The LPA has informed me that this barn is being used to stable more horses than have been authorised and permission for the temporary arena has expired. This site also includes 24 loose boxes⁸, 15 of which are on the site of the proposed American barn. Beyond appeal site B and to the north west are

⁴ I also understand that the pony lines are unauthorised.

⁵ The other issues related to the GB and the effect upon the character and appearance of the area.

⁶ On behalf of the appellant, it has been calculated that this building has a 'footprint of 221m²'. There is dispute between the main parties as to whether or not this building should have been demolished. Whilst the LPA may be correct, for simplicity, I have included it as part of the 'baseline' for appeal A.

⁷ On behalf of the appellant, I have been informed that this is different to the approved plans and not in the approved position.

⁸ The main parties agree that these do not have planning permission.

Horseshoe Cottages. A large quadrangle stable block, including an administration building and car park lie to the east of this appeal site.

13. Remenham House is situated to the north east of appeal site B. The Grade II listed obelisk lies much further to the south west and off Dairy Lane⁹. This no through road serves a small number of dwellings. It also provides a means of access to the French Renaissance style, Park Place country house¹⁰.

Planning Policy

14. The development plan includes the Wokingham Borough Council Core Strategy (CS) 2010 and the Wokingham Borough Council Managing Development Delivery Document (MDD) 2014. Given the main issue that I have identified above, the most relevant development plan policy to the determination of these appeals is MDD policy TB24 (designated heritage assets).
15. The National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) is an important material consideration that carries substantial weight in these appeals. MDD policy TB24 does not include the 'public benefits' balance contained within section 16 of the Framework. This would reduce the weight to be given to any conflict with MDD policy TB24.

The Main Issue - The RPG, the obelisk and Remenham House

The RPG

16. Registered parks and gardens are key components of the historic environment. These irreplaceable, distinctive and much cherished parts of our inheritance are a fragile resource that can be easily damaged beyond repair. Grade II* parks and gardens are particularly important sites and of more than special interest. The Berkshire Gardens Trust (BGT) has informed me that Park Place is one of the very few Grade II* Registered Parks and Gardens in Berkshire.
17. The significance of the RPG at Park Place is derived mainly from the 18th and 19th century gardens and pleasure grounds that surround the listed country house, as well as the extensive landscaped park that was laid out during the later 18th century by General Conway and the tree planting by Robert Marnock in the late 19th century. The open parkland and trees, including belts of trees, boundary trees and woodland, as well as its largely tranquil character, are integral to an appreciation and understanding of this designed landscape and the intentions of the designers and those who employed them. These features make an important contribution to the historic interest of this RPG.
18. Over time, there have been numerous changes to this RPG. These include the erection of a number of buildings and the construction of two golf courses. (The golf course in the north eastern part of the park has since been replaced by polo/equine facilities.) Some of these changes, such as the removal of golf course bunkers and other inappropriate works, have assisted in restoring parts of the parkland. However, in all likelihood, most of the buildings that have been constructed in the north eastern part of the RPG since the latter part of the 20th century would have had some adverse effects upon its open parkland character. Whilst some golf course activity would have disturbed the

⁹ I understand that this is not a public highway but those living along this lane, their visitors and some residents of Remenham Hill regularly walk along it for purposes such as dog-walking.

¹⁰ This Grade II listed building is not visible from the appeal sites.

tranquillity of the parkland the same is likely to be true of some of the polo activities, especially during the summer when practice matches take place.

19. Both appeal sites are close to the northern edge of the RPG. The belt of trees growing alongside appeal site A contributes to the sense of boundary planting to this designated heritage asset and the space around the blockwork and asbestos roof building is part of the open parkland. Although the stables, equine facilities and the boundary fencing on appeal site B could be considered to convey a sense of partition from the parkland, the spaces around the buildings (including the areas where the 24 loose boxes have been erected) assist in retaining a semblance of the open attributes of this part of the RPG. Both appeal sites contribute to the significance (historic interest) of the RPG.

The Obelisk

20. The significance of the obelisk in the grounds of Park Place (erected in 1837) is derived primarily from its architectural interest as part of the spire of St. Bride's in Fleet Street that was designed by Sir Christopher Wren, as well as its historic interest as a commemoration to Queen Victoria's accession and as a prominent surviving feature within a designed landscape.
21. The obelisk appears in various views across the parkland, including those south along Dairy Lane. There are wide views from the obelisk, including those to the north across the open parkland and towards appeal site B. Whilst appeal site B does not form part of the formal area of the pleasure grounds or garden, it is an integral part of the wider parkland setting and makes a very small contribution to an appreciation of the heritage interest of this listed building.

Remenham House

22. The significance of early 19th century Remenham House is derived primarily from its architectural qualities. These include its painted stucco walls, wide bracketed eaves, hipped slate roof, chimneys, sash windows and entrance porch. Its historic interest includes much of the fabric of the building and its positioning along a former turnpike road. The countryside to the south, including appeal site B, maintains the rural setting of this listed building.
23. As I noted during my visit, the principal (roadside) elevation of Remenham House can be seen from the footway along the A4130. The upper section can also be seen across appeal site B from Dairy Lane. These views assist in affording an appreciation and understanding of the heritage interest of this listed building. Appeal site B makes a small, but positive, contribution to the significance of this listed building.

Impact of Appeal A Scheme

24. The proposed replacement building on part of appeal site A would be single storey in height. However, measuring approximately 17m x 21m it would be a sizeable new building and have a larger 'footprint' than the existing single storey storage shed. Notwithstanding the proposed half-hip roof, the mass of new building would also be greater. Whilst the existing storage shed is not a thing of beauty, it has an overtly agricultural form and appearance and sits rather discretely against the immediate backdrop of the belt of trees.
25. In contrast, the proposal with its numerous windows (some of which would be full height), personnel doors and considerable activity that would be associated

- with 10 grooms bedrooms and a gymnasium, as well as the likelihood of cars being parked nearby, would be a conspicuous addition to this part of the RPG.
26. This new building would erode the historic open character of the parkland and the increase in activity would further diminish the tranquillity of this designed landscape. The proposed removal of several trees¹¹ from the tree belt and the crown lifting of some others¹² to provide for roof clearance would weaken the sense of boundary planting and the important contribution that trees make to the heritage interest of the RPG. The proposal would harm the significance of the RPG and conflict with the provisions of MDD policy TB24.
27. In the context of the Framework, the proposed development would result in less than substantial harm to the significance of this designated heritage asset. I also share the concerns of the LPA and the BGT that the proposal, together with the existing riding arena to the west, the polo pitch to the south west and the pavilion, would have a cumulative adverse impact upon an appreciation and understanding of the significance of this part of the RPG.
28. If there is a sliding scale of harm within the category of 'less than substantial' the development would be towards the middle to lower end. However, less than substantial harm does not amount to a less than substantial planning objection in the planning balance. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. The more important the asset, the greater the weight. I afford great weight to the harm to the significance of a RPG that is of more than special interest.
29. The proposed replacement building would be sited and designed so as not to intrude into any important views to or from listed buildings within or around the RPG. This proposal would not harm the significance of any listed building and would preserve their settings.

Impact of Appeal B Scheme

30. The proposed outdoor show jumping arena would be the same size and largely occupy the site of the existing arena but would be repositioned about 10m to the north. As noted above, temporary permission for the existing arena has expired. It is a matter of dispute between the main parties as to whether this should be treated as unlawful development or whether the situation could be addressed by way of the LPA serving a breach of condition notice. Whilst this is a matter for the parties to resolve, as this existing facility should have been removed by the end of March 2015, it would be inappropriate for me to include it as part of a 'baseline'. However, the LPA has been aware of its existence for many months and to date, has not commenced any enforcement proceedings.
31. The proposed arena would be used by the Borodin family for show jumping. It would be adjacent to the A4130 and the existing American barn and horse walker. It would be unlikely to result in any significant increase in activity within this part of the RPG. The proposed surface covering (possibly wood chip and fibre chip or rubber chip) and jumps that could reasonably be expected would have little in common with the green, landscaped parkland to the south. Moreover, the new fencing and proposed tree planting *"upon the southern*

¹¹ The 6 Leyland Cypress trees that is intended to remove are not specimen trees but are an integral part of this belt of trees that has conservation/cultural value as part of this RPG.

¹² 1 Norway Maple and 2 holly trees.

*boundary*¹³ would reinforce the sense of partition from the rest of the RPG. This element of the proposal would result in a very minor adverse impact upon the significance of the RPG.

32. The proposed American barn would measure about 60m x 12.6m x 5.5m (ridge height). This would be finished using larch cladding on the walls and a slate tiled roof to match the appearance of the existing barn alongside. However, this sizeable new building, which would provide 24 loose boxes, a tack room, feed room and secure storage would be at odds with the open parkland character of the RPG. Whilst it would have the potential to reduce vehicle movements with polo ponies not having to be transported off site for training purposes, there would be some additional noise and activity arising from the use of the proposed building. On balance, given the proximity to the main road and the existing equine facilities alongside, there would be no loss of tranquillity. Nevertheless, the conflict with the open parkland character would amount to less than substantial harm to the significance of the RPG. This would be somewhere towards the lower end of a sliding scale of harm. The proposal would conflict with the provisions of MDD policy TB24.
33. The proposed development would be seen in views of Remenham House when looking north east from along Dairy Lane. Seeing a development does not by itself amount to a harmful impact and the proposed show jumping arena would not distract from an appreciation or understanding of the significance of this neighbouring listed building.
34. However, the siting, height and mass of the proposed American barn would interrupt, if not obscure, a view of the upper part of the principal elevation of Remenham House. Whilst other (roadside) views of the principal elevation would remain, when viewed from Dairy Lane the proposed new building would diminish the ability to appreciate some of the special architectural qualities of this listed building from within the RPG. This would amount to less than substantial harm to the significance of this listed building, with harm at the lower end of any sliding scale. The proposed building could also interrupt some views of the RPG from the upper floor windows in this listed house and diminish an appreciation of its rural surrounds. This would also conflict with the provisions of MDD policy TB24.
35. The proposed development would entail a minor change to the setting of the listed obelisk without interrupting or intruding into any important views of this designated heritage asset. Whilst the proposed American barn could be seen from this designated heritage asset, it would be a considerable distance from the obelisk and would form a very minor element in the extensive views from this remnant of the church spire. The proposal would not harm the ability to appreciate or understand the significance of this listed building and would preserve its setting.

Other Listed Buildings

36. There is nothing before me to demonstrate that the appeal sites contribute to the significance of any other listed building or that the proposed developments would harm their heritage interest. The proposals would preserve the settings of all other listed buildings that have been identified to me.

¹³ As set out in the Design and Access Statement.

Public benefits

37. In undertaking the 'heritage balance' I must take into account any public benefits of the proposals. The appellants have argued that these comprise: furthering the development of a high goal polo team, its ability to compete at sporting events and the spectacle of the sport of polo; enhancing the Borodin family's enjoyment of equestrian activities, including competing at show jumping events; maintaining equestrian use and allowing this part of the RPG to be managed as a single unit; the removal of an unsightly storage building; better supervision and care of horses that are kept on the site and; a reduction in vehicular traffic. I shall also consider any likely economic benefits.
38. Whilst not planning policy, the Government's Planning Practice Guidance, amongst other things, states that public benefits should be of a nature or scale to be of benefit to the public at large and not just be a private benefit. However, benefits do not always have to be visible or accessible to the public in order to be genuine public benefits.
39. Within the terms of the planning permission for polo activities within the RPG, the public are precluded from attending practice matches etc., Nevertheless, some members of the public are interested in playing/watching/following polo, including attending polo matches elsewhere. Additional serious competition within this sport, through the involvement of more/competitive teams, could enhance public enjoyment. There has been very considerable investment in developing polo facilities at Park Place and I note that the polo team which is based at Park Place is achieving much sporting success. The proposed polo facilities could deliver some public benefit. I afford this some limited weight.
40. Horse/show jumping is another sport enjoyed by some members of the public. Whilst the proposed outdoor arena would be of much benefit to the Borodin family and would enhance their enjoyment of the sport, it is very far from certain that this would lead to any public benefit. I afford this no weight.
41. It may be preferable, for land management purposes, for the appeal sites to be managed as one entity. Some equestrian use of the land may also be preferable to some other land uses in limiting the impact upon the significance of the RPG. However, there is no suggestion that if these appeals were to fail that the sites would no longer be managed together or that a different, harmful land use would take place. I afford this no weight in the planning balance.
42. The removal of the existing storage building (appeal A) would help restore the open character of this part of the parkland and, in so doing, be of public benefit. However, I have found above that this is a rather discrete building and the proposed replacement would harm the significance of the RPG. This proposal would not amount to a public benefit.
43. The proposed grooms accommodation (appeal A) would allow more staff to reside on site and supervise and care for the increasing number of horses that would be stabled. Ensuring the safety and welfare of animals is capable of being a public benefit. However, notwithstanding the appellants' equestrian / essential need argument, the grooms accommodation would be a considerable distance¹⁴ from the stables and I am unconvinced that 10 additional staff residing on site would be necessary. In this regard, the LPA has informed me

¹⁴ The LPA has calculated that it would be about 600m from the stables.

that there is an existing administration and accommodation block much closer to the stables. The grooms accommodation would not deliver any meaningful public benefit arising from animal safety or welfare or essential functional need.

44. The proposed developments could result in reduced traffic flows from ponies not having to be taken off site for training and staff no longer having to commute to the sites. However, with more people living on site and more horses being kept, there could be additional traffic movements arising from an increase visitors, deliveries, vets, farriers and any contractors/maintenance workers. Any overall reduction in traffic numbers/flows are likely to be very small and any benefit to users of the public highway very limited.
45. The proposed development would, for a temporary period, help support the construction industry. There could also be benefits in terms of additional staff employed on the sites and some increased spending in local shops and services. This would comprise a public benefit which carries limited weight.

The Planning / Heritage Balance and Conclusion on the Main Issue

46. When the less than substantial harm to the significance of the RPG that I have found in appeal A is weighed with the public benefits the balance tips against granting planning permission. When the less than substantial harm to the significance of the RPG that I have found in appeal B and the less than substantial harm to the significance of Remenham House is weighed with the public benefits the balance tips more heavily against granting permission.
47. I conclude on the main issue that the proposals (appeals A and B) would harm the significance of the RPG and the significance of Remenham House (appeal B only) and this harm would not be outweighed by the public benefits.

Other Matters

48. Given my findings above regarding the main issue, my decisions do not turn on the outcome of the other issues that I identified at the Hearing. Whilst my decisions could therefore be 'silent' on these matters, the main parties have made detailed representations regarding the impact upon the GB and the character and appearance of the area. For completeness, I set out below a summary of my findings in respect of these other matters.
49. CS policy CP12 and MDD policy TB01, which relate to the GB, were based on the now cancelled PPG2 and an earlier version of the Framework. In the context of these appeals, this would reduce (to a limited extent) the weight to be given to any conflict with these policies.
50. The construction of a new building/provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport within the GB is one of the specified exceptions to inappropriate development within the GB, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the GB and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This could include a building for grooms accommodation with a polo players gym.
51. However, I struggle to understand how a new building (appeal A) with space for 10 grooms bedrooms, to be occupied by staff working on a seasonal basis and 'remote' from the stables, would be appropriate facilities for the permitted polo use. In this regard, I have not been aided by the decision¹⁵ to pursue

¹⁵ The appellants have been professionally advised throughout the planning and appeal processes.

- appeals whilst much uncertainty exists concerning the lawfulness of various developments which have been undertaken in and around the appeal sites.
52. Even if the appeal A building was a suitable facility for the permitted polo use, I share the concerns of the LPA over the appropriateness of a building to accommodate so many grooms, especially when some already appear to be living alongside the existing stables. I note the findings in the appeal decisions relied upon by the appellants. However, none are directly comparable to the situation before me with significantly smaller grooms facilities allowed elsewhere on land within the GB and seemingly, in locations closer to stables.
 53. Notwithstanding the above, if the proposed building was an appropriate facility, its siting, size and mass together with the likely activity in and around this new building, including vehicle parking, would not preserve the openness of the GB. Furthermore, this new building would be materially larger than the one it is intended to replace, it would not amount to infilling¹⁶ or the redevelopment of previously developed land and would have a greater impact on the openness of the GB than the existing development on the site. I agree with the LPA that the building proposed under appeal A would be inappropriate development within the GB.
 54. The proposed riding/show jumping arena (appeal B) would comprise an engineering operation and/or the change of use of land for outdoor sport or recreation. On balance, and in the context of GB policy, it would preserve the openness of the GB and would not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This would not be inappropriate development within the GB.
 55. The proposed American barn (appeal B) would considerably increase the number of horses that could be stabled in connection with the polo activities operating from within the RPG. I note the LPA's argument that such an increase would be at odds with the terms of the 2016 permission for a polo facility. Whilst it could ultimately fall to the courts to interpret the bounds of that permission, it does not appear to restrict the number of horses that could be stabled or kept on the land.
 56. I agree with the appellant that the proposed American barn would, in the context of GB policy, comprise an appropriate facility for outdoor sport. However, its siting, size and height would not preserve the openness of the GB. It would comprise inappropriate development within the GB.
 57. The proposed building for the grooms accommodation and gym (appeal A) would, by virtue of its size and siting, be at odds with the open qualities and wooded parkland character of this part of the 'Arable Chalk Plateau' landscape character type¹⁷. Whilst there would be limited views of this building, it would appear as a discordant addition to the landscape and at odds with the LPA's published landscape strategy, which carries moderate weight. It would detract from the quality of the local environment and conflict with CS policy CP11 (countryside) and MDD policy 21 (landscape character).
 58. The proposed outdoor arena (appeal B) would not entail the erection of any buildings or structures and would retain the space to the east of the paddock. Although the perimeter fence and jumps would be unsympathetic paraphernalia

¹⁶ Although not defined within the Framework, it would not be unreasonable to consider this to be the filling of a small gap in an otherwise built-up frontage or a small gap between buildings.

¹⁷ As defined in the Wokingham District Landscape Character Assessment.

within the countryside, this element of the proposal would not have any significant adverse effect upon the character or appearance of the landscape.

59. In contrast, the proposed American barn would be more prominent in the landscape and would diminish the sense of openness between the western flank wall of the existing barn and the paddock beyond. It would detract from the character and appearance of the local landscape and conflict with CS policy CP11 and MDD policy 21.
60. The above noted harm to the character and appearance of the landscape weighs against an approval but would not, by itself, be sufficient to justify withholding permission. Moreover, there is nothing to demonstrate that the proposals would harm the special qualities of the candidate extension to the Chiltern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or its scenic attributes.
61. If the harm to the character and appearance of the area were to be placed into the GB balance along with the other 'harms' that I have identified (GB and designated heritage assets), the other considerations advanced in support of the proposals, including the public benefits and the equine/sporting needs, would not clearly outweigh the totality of the harm so as to amount to the very special circumstances required to justify the proposals. The proposed developments (both appeals) conflict with the provision of the Framework for safeguarding the GB, as well as CS policy CP12 and MDD policy TB01.
62. I note the concerns of some neighbouring residents regarding the impact of the proposed development upon road safety and the free flow of traffic along the A4130. However, both the LPA and the Highway Authority (HA) were satisfied that the proposals would not compromise road safety interests or increase the risk of congestion. Whilst mindful of the evidence of residents who are very familiar with local highway conditions, including the traffic flows along Remenham Hill during the Henley Royal Regatta, there is no cogent evidence to justify taking a different stance to the LPA and HA on highway matters.
63. The proposed arena and stables (appeal B) would result in an increase in activity to the south east of Horseshoe Cottages. This would have the potential to result in some adverse impact (noise disturbance and possible increase in odours) to the residents of these neighbouring cottages. However, I note that the LPA, having consulted its Environmental Health Officers, did not refuse permission on the basis of any adverse impact upon those living alongside. Any adverse impacts upon neighbouring residents would be unlikely to be so great as to justify withholding permission. However, this does not overcome or outweigh the harmful impact that I have found in respect of the main issue.

Overall Conclusion

64. Given all of the above, I conclude that neither appeal should succeed.

Neil Pope

Inspector

APPEARANCES

FOR THE APPELLANTS

Mr I Ellis BA, MRTPI	Associate Director, Southern Planning Practice Ltd
Mr J Burton of Counsel	
Mr A Burn BA, MCIfA	Principal Heritage Consultant, Cotswold Archaeology
Mr J Cooper BSc, DipLD, FLI, AILA	Director of Landscape Architecture, SLR Consulting
Mrs J Scrivener FBIAC	Bourne Rural Planning Consultants Limited

FOR THE LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY

Mrs J Davey BSc (Hons), MRTPI	Senior Specialist Planner, WBC
Mrs S Blackmore of Counsel	
Mr S Ryder BA (Hons), CMLI	Director, Ryder Landscape Consultants Ltd

INTERESTED PARTIES

Mrs H Handley BA (Hons), MSc, MRTPI	Associate Planner, Pegasus Group, on behalf of Remenham Parish Council
Mrs B Kirkham DipTP, BLD, CMLI	Chair and Planning Advisor, Berkshire Gardens Trust
Cllr J Halsall	Remenham Parish Council
Cllr J Merkel	Remenham Parish Council
Mr M Phillips QC	Local resident
Mr N Williams	Local resident
Mr Burletson	Local resident

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED AT THE HEARING

Document 1	Note from Mr Phillips and two letters from local residents
Document 2	Mrs Davey's equine experience
Document 3	Annotated aerial photographs from Mrs Davey
Document 4	Extract from CS Proposals Map from Cllr Merkel
Document 5	Extract from the 2019 Landscape Character Assessment

DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED DURING THE ADJOURNMENT

Document 6	LPA's response to the appellants' reply to its costs applications
Document 7	LPA's response to the appellants' costs applications
Document 8	Letter dated from Mr Burn in response to the Inspector's request for comments in respect of two listed buildings
Document 9	Agreed Supplementary Note to Landscape Statements
Document 10	Appellants' response to LPA's schedule and annotated photographs of authorised and unauthorised

	developments
Document 11	List of final draft suggested planning conditions
Document 12	Letter on behalf of Remenham Parish Council in respect of Dairy Lane
Document 13	Appellants' comments in respect of Dairy Lane
Document 14	Appellants' response to the LPA's reply to its costs applications