

**PLANNING, DESIGN & SUSTAINABILITY
STATEMENT IN RESPECT OF A HORSE
EXERCISER**

AT

**JAC, FOREST ROAD, WOKINGHAM
RG40 5QY**

MLP REF: FR/12/188

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1.0 Introduction, the nature of the use and development

- 1.1. The applicant is a Registered Charity (1127691) organisation, known as Just Around the Corner (JAC) Ltd. It is based in the Borough and has operated for the last 26 years as a youth work charity. It supports vulnerable young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. In July 2008, JAC was granted the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service and this is a measure of the excellent work it continues to carry out in the Community.
- 1.2. It operates through its activities in the community and in liaison with schools, the police and social services, churches, the Borough, Town and Parish Council's, as well as the families of those for which it cares. It is a safe, non-statutory, organisation with a specific emphasis on the use of animals (mainly horses) for animal assisted learning. It is not a counselling service and neither is it a riding school or similar establishment.
- 1.3. JAC offers a learning-based approach to help children, young people and families. It offers NVQ qualifications in stable management and horse care. It has always been involved in the local community, with secondary schools in the Borough and more recently in liaison with primary schools. It offers a discipline of working and the link to the widely acknowledged benefits of equine assisted learning.
- 1.4. Students work at the Centre, where horses and other livestock are kept along with the central administration and learning activities buildings.
- 1.5. This Statement details the specific nature of the land use; planning history: planning policies and the application of those policies. In applying these and the other material considerations, the following conclusions are reached:

- The aspirations and operations of the applicant are an important material consideration, in the determination of this application. It is a charity located within the Borough, which specifically deals with youth work and assisted learning programmes. It is an important and a wholly sustainable approach to this provision and includes staff and administration, as well as providing facilities for the animals (primarily horses); alternative curriculum activities (crafts); and horticultural activity. These are an essential part of the learning environment and community work. It is, in planning policy terms, a co-ordination of an existing community-based organisation.
- The relevant planning policies at both national and local level, allow for the development, as an inclusive community facility, with horse related and horticultural activity, where the administration and therapy functions are ancillary to these uses. The determination of previous applications made by the Charity, reflects this approach as being the starting point for determination, having regard to relevant planning policies.
- It is shown that the visual impact of the structures is acceptable and this has regard to the design in terms of the materials specification, mass, bulk and height: as well as the way in which it relates to other cluster of buildings and the landscape framework.
- There is no material effect in terms of highways, flood risk or any other material considerations. In light of all of these matters, the development is acceptable, having regard to prevailing planning policies and on its individual merits.

2.0 Planning history

- 2.1. In 2011 planning permission was granted for a building complex for the Charity. Regrettably, this could not be implemented and a subsequent permission under reference F/2012/0651 was proceeded and now forms the main complex.
- 2.2. In April 2015 under reference F/2014/2781 retrospective permission was granted for a Hay barn; and in November 2015 (152882) solar panels were granted permission.

- 2.3. In December 2016 a variation of the conditions on the 2012 permission was approved. 162793 refers.
- 2.4. Under reference 170733 permission was granted for an ancillary building to provide a workshop and stores for the Charity.
- 2.5. In September 2023 under reference 231595 planning permission was refused for the retention of buildings to the north of the site. This was then granted permission under reference 232961 with the buildings being relocated to the complex of built development further to the south.

3.0 Relevant planning policy

- 3.1. National planning policy relating to the countryside is set out in the Framework and considers that various land uses are appropriate. This includes the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities (88 d) whilst acknowledging that not all will be accessible by public transport (89).
- 3.2. Where there are local landscape designations, these should be afforded less weight than statutory/national designations. In this case, there are no such landscape designations, in the saved Local Plan or Core Strategy and the land in question has the lowest level of designation - "countryside".
- 3.3. The relevant Core Strategy policies are as follows:
 - CP1** (1) The requirement to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment.
(7) Avoid areas of best and most versatile agricultural land.
(9) Avoid increasing (and where possible reduce) risks of or from all forms of flooding.
(11) Demonstrate how they support opportunities for reducing the need to travel, particularly by private car.
 - CP2** To ensure that new development contributes to the provision of sustainable and inclusive communities (including the provision of community facilities) to meet long term needs, planning permission will be granted for proposals that address the requirements of, inter alia, children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs (category b); The site is located either within or close to the development limits of a settlement in policy CP9 in order to maximise the possibilities for social inclusion and sustainable patterns of living (category D(i));
 - CP3** Planning permission will be granted for proposals that: are of an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout, built form, height, materials and character to the area together with a high

quality of design (category a); have no detrimental impact upon, inter alia, landscape or water courses (category c); use the full potential of the site and contribute to the support for suitable complementary facilities and uses (category e); contribute to a sense of place in the buildings and integrate with their surroundings including the use of appropriate landscaping (category f); contribute towards the provision of an appropriate sustainable network of community facilities (category h).

CP11 Proposals outside Development Limits (including countryside) will not normally be permitted except where, inter alia, it does not lead to excessive encroachment or expansion of development away from other buildings (2); it is for essential community facilities cannot be accommodated within development limits (6).

3.4. The relevant policies of the MDDDPD are as follows:

CC01 The presumption in favour of sustainable development that being the combination of social, economic and environmental considerations.

CC03 Trees and landscape and the objective of ensuring that development does not materially harm valued landscape features.

CC09 Flood Risk and the avoidance of development which would increase flood risk.

TB21 Ensuring that development does not materially harm the landscape character of the Borough.

4.0 The application of planning policy and visual impact considerations

4.1. In applying planning policy to the proposals, we suggest that the following considerations are relevant:

- (1) Is the proposed structure acceptable as a matter of principle?
- (2) Is the visual impact acceptable?
- (3) Are there any other material planning considerations?

The principle of development?

4.2. In applying the relevant planning policies, it is clear that the site lies within the countryside designation, where development is restricted, aside from a number of categories, as set out in CP11.

4.3. In terms of location, it is acknowledged that the function, if it is to be effective and co-ordinated, must be sited outside of the development limits. In short, this is because an essential part of the work involves equine assisted learning and horticulture.

- 4.4. Notwithstanding this, the charity has located all of its operations at this site and the reasonable expansion as a community facility is policy compliant with the Framework (88(d)).
- 4.5. This was the view expressed in 2017 where the expansion of the use and buildings was considered as follows:
.....the proposal accords with the relevant development plan policies in the DMM and the principle of development is acceptable.
- 4.6. CP11 pre-dates the 2021 Framework and the tests are:
 - That it contributes to a diverse and sustainable rural enterprise or as a countryside-based activity it allows for enjoyment of the countryside.
 - It does not lead to expansion away from the original buildings.
- 4.7. In this case it is accepted through various permissions that the site and land use is not remote from the development limits and indeed the subsequent development of the North Wokingham SDL has a positive effect on this judgement.
- 4.8. In this case and as set out above, JAC is an acknowledged and locally funded organisation, which performs a community function taking its clients from the whole of the Borough. Thus, it is transport sustainable in planning policy terms: and more importantly, it is practical for the work of JAC. It is clear that the functioning of the charity and the students work, benefit considerably from rationalisation at Forest Road, where the full range of learning assistance is provided, in one place.
- 4.9. In considering the application in 2011 the case Officer noted that the JAC facility might not be described as “essential” in the terms of Core Strategy policies. However, it was noted that the operation needed to have horses and rural activities, as part and parcel of its’ operation. In consideration of the nature of the work, the levels of support for the proposal and the considerable benefits of single site operation, a case for the rural location was acknowledged and accepted. As such, it was concluded, on the balance of these matters, that the proposal could reasonably be described as being “essential” in the terms of CP11(6).

- 4.10. Turning to the specific development which is the subject of this application the buildings and in guidance from Officers, the proposed structure is sited closer to the complex of buildings. This is compliant with CP11(2) and the dispersion is acceptable. This position is suited to the operation in so far as it is close to the stables.
- 4.11. Policy CP2 also lends support, in spatial planning terms, to the provision of development which is inclusive and sustainable. This includes development, which addresses the requirements of, inter alia, children, young people and families, including the co-ordination of services to meet their needs (category b). This is plainly the case with this proposal.
- 4.12. To this extent, we regard the development which is the subject of this application as part and parcel of an “essential” community facility in the terms of policy CP11 and CP2. In terms of transport sustainability, the objectives of CP1(11) and CP2D(i) are patently satisfied. It follows that, the proposal meets the objectives of the relevant planning policies and is acceptable, as a matter of principle.

Visual impact

- 4.13. The subject structure is proposed to be sited close to the complex of buildings where it would have limited, if any, impact in terms of public views. It is relatively small scale in terms of height and as is shown below are, in the terms of CP3(a) are of “an appropriate scale of activity, mass, layout and built form” so that they do not harm the character of the locality.
- 4.14. In the Officer report considering the buildings in 2017 it was noted that the land is on the outskirts of Wokingham and is “not identified as being of high sensitivity in the adopted Landscape Character Assessment SPG”. On this basis and whilst having regard to the principles of CP11 and related policy TB23 it was considered that no material harm would result. Plainly the more recent decision takes a different approach and this application is expedient as opposed to having planning merits in regard to visual effect.
- 4.15. The structure which are the subject of this application are very much smaller than the main complex and form a discrete group.

- 4.16. On the planning balance and given the small-scale nature of the buildings as well as their clustering with landscape, there is no prima face conflict with relevant planning policy. In making this assertion, we have regard to landscape designation and the Character Assessment.

Other material considerations

- 4.17. The other material considerations are that the development is wholly related to the ongoing progress of JAC and its work as a Charitable organisation. There would be no material increase in parking or traffic onto Forest Road and indeed this position has been acknowledged as acceptable.

5.0 Summary - the planning balance

- 5.1. By way of summary, the applicant sets out the following:

- The functioning of the JAC Charity is an important material planning consideration, in the determination of this application. It is long standing and acknowledged to be of importance in the Borough.
- The proposal is wholly policy compliant and is sited within the complex of built development as has been expressed as being desirable by the local planning authority. It is shown that the visual impact of the proposed structure is wholly acceptable.
- There is no material effect in terms of highways, flood risk or any other material considerations. In light of all of these matters, the development is acceptable, having regard to prevailing planning policies and on its individual merits.

- 5.2. Having regard to the foregoing, the land use and buildings remain as sustainable and planning permission should be granted.