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Swalcliffe Park Equestrian

**USE OF LAND AT GRANGE FARM FOR MIXED USE COMPRISING EQUESTRIAN
TRAINING/COMPETITIONS (USE CLASS D2) AND AGRICULTURE, TOGETHER
WITH EXTENSION OF EXISTING VEHICLE PARKING AREA**

Planning Statement

October 2014

Introduction

1. PWA Planning is retained by Swalcliffe Park Equestrian Ltd to progress a planning application for the change of use of land at Grange Farm for mixed use comprising equestrian training/competitions (Use Class D2) and agriculture, together with extension of existing vehicle parking area.
2. This statement provides a description of the proposed development together with an appraisal of the planning merits of the scheme in the context of relevant planning policies and guidance. The application is supported by the following documents :-
 - Completed 1APP form, relevant certificates and notices.
 - Planning Statement.
 - Transport Assessment.
 - Noise Assessment.
 - Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment.
 - Ecological Impact Assessment.
 - Application Site boundary (Drawing Reference 13_002_01 Rev B).
 - Parking Area Details (Drawing Reference 160_123)
3. For reasons identified in this statement it is considered that based on planning policy and material considerations the application proposals represent appropriate, sustainable development and that planning permission ought to be granted.

Background

4. Swalcliffe Park Equestrian (SPE) is a family run business offering cross country equestrian training facilities as well as hosting some competitions throughout the year. The business is managed by Barbara Taylor, Richard Taylor and Sarah Beveridge, and operates from Grange Farm; a large arable farm which is owned by the Taylor family.
5. Equestrian activities first began at Grange Farm in 1997 when the first cross-country course was built by Richard Taylor; Richard is now a highly successful equestrian course builder who is recognised by the British governing body of eventing 'British Eventing' as a gold level builder and has built cross country fences for National and International competitions up to 4 star level including European Championships, Luhmulen Horse Trials in Germany and the Beijing Olympics.
6. In its initial stages, SPE was seen as a diversification away from the more traditional agricultural activities at Grange Farm utilising Richard's talents in course building, the Taylor family's keen interest in equestrianism and the availability of good areas of relatively free draining land in close proximity to the Grange Farm complex. In its initial stages, the equestrian use of the site was relatively modest and co-existed with the on-going agricultural use of the farmland. Over time the business evolved, with the installation of semi-permanent, grass-based, training facilities such that by the early to mid-2000s, there were a number of recognisable areas of land which had been given over, almost exclusively to equestrian use, including permanent jumps and water features. The business continued to be successful and equestrian training, competitions and horse trials formed the core of the operations and since the early part of the last decade, these activities have been taking place on a more or less continuous basis, using fairly well established areas of former agricultural land.
7. Moving to the present day, the facility at SPE consists of the cross country course comprising of a number of portable jumps and two separate water complexes, an 80m x 80m grass 'arena' as well as a number of grass dressage arenas. The site is also able to provide a modest area of car parking on land immediately to the north of the Grange Farm complex and for any larger events / rallies, overspill temporary car parking is provided on the free draining grass. The grassland is able to host cross country courses up to 2,500m in length.
8. Whilst SPE have in the past and will continue to host larger events and horse trials involving up to 250 riders, these are relatively small in number and often necessitate the use of other parts of Grange Farm, when these are not being actively farmed at that point in time. In 2012, figures provided by the business show that there were only a total of 16 events where the total number of riders exceeded 50 per day.
9. It is therefore clear that the day to day business of training / schooling with smaller events, where the total number of riders per day is considerably less than 50 riders, often only less than 10 per day, represents the core of the business. By way of example in June 2012 (the busiest individual month) activities took place on 15 out of the 30 days, but on average this involved fewer than 20 riders per day.

Site Description

10. The extent of the application site is shown on the submitted location plan, drawing number 13_002_01 Rev B. The total area of land is 38.98 hectares and this encompasses the full extent of land for which a change of use application is made for day-to-day equestrian training purposes, additional land where vehicle parking will be provided for up to 20 horseboxes/trailers and now also includes other areas of land which may be used only transiently for equestrian purposes during large events which will be held on no more than 28 days per annum.
11. For the avoidance of doubt, the total site area is 38.98 hectares, this comprises all land associated with both the everyday use for training and schooling with a maximum of 50 riders per day together with additional land intended to be used for large events with a maximum of 250 riders per day. The submitted site plan illustrates within that an area of some 14.26 hectares with hatching in order to identify that land which will be used for the everyday use for training and schooling. In this respect, a large proportion of the site is intended for use solely for large events in order to achieve the required course distance.
12. The site comprises fields to the north of Grange Farm, an area of land which accommodates a cross country course with existing water feature, together with the existing grass area which has been established in equestrian use for a number of years. This area of land is the most elevated part of the site and is relatively free draining. It is bound to the south-east by Grange Lane from where vehicular access is currently provided via a gate in the south west corner.
13. All of the land lies to the north of the Grange Farm complex of buildings and is bound by Grange Lane to the south-east and Main Street to the north. The land is set at differing levels and slopes from the north-east to the south west of the application site. The nearest domestic properties to the site (aside from Grange Farm and Wykham on Park Lane – which are in the control of the applicants) lie to the north and east across Grange Lane and along Main Street.

Application Proposals

14. The application seeks planning permission for the change of use of land at Grange Farm for mixed use comprising equestrian training/competitions (Use Class D2) and agriculture, together with extension of existing vehicle parking area. This application is submitted to the Council following a previous planning application submitted in August 2013 for training and competition facilities at Grange Farm (13/01295/F refers) which was subsequently withdrawn.
15. A further application was then made (14/00081/F refers) for the change of use to comprise equestrian training and agriculture, however whilst the officer's report to committee recommended that the application be approved it also recommended conditions to that approval which would remove permitted development rights for the land and would leave the applicant unable to host any large events. As was made explicit in the submission documents to that application, Swalcliffe Park Equestrian is a business which is founded upon a reputation for excellent training and schooling facilities together with hosting larger events at various points throughout the year. In this respect the applicant withdrew application reference 14/00081/F due to the loss of large events which would have resulted in significant detriment to the viability of the business.
16. SPE initially commenced in 1997 when Mrs Taylor sought initial written advice from the planning authority about the need for planning permission and at that time it was agreed that permission was not required where the equestrian use remained at a low level. Further growth of the business in the late 1990s and early 2000s further expanded the areas of land which were then used almost exclusively for equestrian purposes. Since that time the business has fluctuated in intensity and in terms of the areas of land used for equestrian purposes. However it is clear that over the past 10 – 12 years, equestrian training has taken place at Grange Farm over various fields and has continued alongside the agricultural enterprise. Such uses do not benefit from express planning permission, as the operators were unaware of the necessity for such consent, assuming it to be legitimate as a diversification of the farm activities.
17. The planning application therefore seeks to regularise and hence bring some clear planning status to the use of the upper fields for equestrian use in order to ensure that this long established business may continue to operate successfully.
18. The planning application seeks approval to the material change in the use of the land from agriculture to mixed use equestrian training/competitions (Use Class D2) and agriculture. For the most part this change of use occurred many years ago, however there are elements which have not been used for a consecutive period of 10 or more years and the application therefore seeks consent for this change in use. Moreover the application provides an opportunity to regularise the use of the application site to ensure that there is no confusion or concern about the planning status of the whole development.
19. As referred to above, the planning application does not seek consent for the use of any land outside of the application boundary. Given that the typical daily usage is well below 50 riders per day, the applicants are content to propose that the development is operated in the following manner (subject to appropriate conditions) :-

- (i) Unrestricted equestrian activities up to a maximum of 50 (fifty) riders per day;
 - (ii) All rider numbers to be logged and records of events kept for inspection at any time by the local planning authority (something which is done for business purposes in any event).
 - (iii) Equestrian events on up to a maximum of 28 days per annum with up to a maximum of 250 (two hundred and fifty) riders per day.
20. With respect to the small number of larger events, where the number of riders may exceed 50 per day, the applicants had intended to rely upon the rights afforded by the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order Schedule 2 Part 4 Class B. For the reasons already set out, the previous application was made on this basis but subsequently withdrawn. The applicant now requests explicit planning permission for the larger events.
21. This level of usage, as proposed in the application will ensure that the impact of the development within the locality is limited and in fact though the changes now proposed, is reduced from the present. The applicants are prepared to accept appropriate conditions to control the use in the manner described.
22. An additional area of parking is proposed to the south of the application site, by way of an extension to the existing vehicle parking area and utilising the same entrance/exit to Park Lane. It is intended that this will better cater for the day to day usage of the facilities and will provide increased semi-permanent parking which can be utilised during the larger events, thereby limiting the need for overspill grass parking. The parking areas could be surfaced in blinded road planings, a common method of providing a permeable hard surface in countryside locations, however the applicants are prepared to agree the most appropriate method of surfacing with the planning authority. The proposed parking area is of a scale consistent with the anticipated maximum parking demand for the day to day activities and for the majority of needs associated with events up to 50 riders / day.
23. The applicants are prepared to provide specific supplementary planting and screening if required to mitigate any impact upon neighbouring users.

Planning Policy Compliance

24. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
25. This statement considers the application proposals against relevant saved development plan policies contained within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan 1996 as well as emerging policies of the Cherwell Local Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Development Plan : Cherwell Local Plan (1996)

26. The Cherwell Local Plan was adopted in November 1996 and remains the adopted development plan until the emerging local plan is completed.
27. The Secretary of State issued a Direction under paragraph 1(3) of Schedule 8 to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 in respect of policies in the 1996 Local Plan. Accordingly only some policies of the Local Plan were 'saved' until they are subsequently superseded by the relevant emerging framework documents.
28. The relevant saved policies from the Cherwell Local Plan are :-

Policy AG5 'Development Involving Horses

"Horse related development for recreational or commercial purposes is becoming increasingly popular. The Department of the Environment PPG7 contains advice on such development, which can provide new opportunities for employment in rural areas and an alternative use for agricultural land.

PROPOSALS FOR HORSE RELATED DEVELOPMENT WILL NORMALLY BE PERMITTED PROVIDED:-

- (i) THE PROPOSAL WOULD NOT HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE CHARACTER AND APPEARANCE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE;*
- (ii) THE PROPOSAL WOULD NOT BE DETRIMENTAL TO THE AMENITY OF NEIGHBOURING PROPERTIES;*
- (iii) THE PROPOSAL COMPLIES WITH THE OTHER POLICIES IN THE PLAN.*

29. Policy AG5 is a permissive policy and, subject to criteria aimed at protecting the local environment, it is clear that equestrian related developments will be supported. Although reference to PPG7 is now out of date, the general principles enshrined in this policy remain entirely relevant to the present time. In particular the reference in the policy text to the increasing popularity of equestrian uses, the potential for rural employment and the alternative use for agricultural land are all directly relevant to the current proposals and indeed the existing use is testament to these aspects.

30. Of the relevant criteria, and with regards the second of the criteria, it is worth noting that the substantive equestrian uses have been operating from the site for a considerable number of years having been initially established in 1997. In this respect there does not appear to be any past history of complaints from any third parties in respect of the impact of the equestrian activities, in particular from such matters as traffic and noise etc. Although recognising that the larger events do have the potential to introduce greater levels of activity and traffic, the planning application provides robust justification for the proposals in demonstrating that the noise and highways matters are acceptable. Indeed the planning application promotes a development which is intended to improve and rationalise the existing facilities and offer an opportunity to ensure that any impacts within the wider area are appropriately managed and where possible reduced.
31. Other relevant policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996 are addressed below and it is considered that the proposals are compliant and no material conflict with other development plan policies can be identified.
32. It is therefore considered that Policy AG5 is both directly relevant to, and would fully support, the development proposed.

Policy TR7 'Development attracting traffic on minor roads'

DEVELOPMENT THAT WOULD REGULARLY ATTRACT LARGE COMMERCIAL VEHICLES OR LARGE NUMBERS OF CARS ONTO UNSUITABLE MINOR ROADS WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED.

33. In order to protect the amenities of the plan area, and in the interests of highway safety, development likely to create significant traffic flows will normally, subject to consideration of the other policies in this Plan, be expected to have good access to the major through routes or County inter-town routes identified in the Structure Plan or other principal roads.
34. Policy TR7 is intended to safeguard against an adverse impact from excessive or inappropriate vehicles using minor country roads as a result of new development proposals. The application is supported by a transport assessment which considers the traffic impact of both the day to day activities of the development and the proposed larger events of fewer number. The transport assessment concludes that, given the safeguards related to the limit on daily numbers attending the site, there would be no such adverse impact resulting from the development. In this respect the transport statement confirms that controlling the daily maximum number of riders to a figure below 50 for day to day activities will produce an average maximum number of trips of fewer than 10 / hour, which is at such a low level that it will have no material adverse impact on the highway network.
35. The larger events (for over 50 riders per day) being limited in frequency by the restriction to 28 days per annum are the subject of appropriate event management by the operators; this includes signage and the use of overspill parking and alternative access points, so as to limit as far as possible the incidence of problems arising with traffic or noise. The submitted transport assessment includes figures gathered from a recent event held by Swalcliffe Park Equestrian and provides a detailed analysis of the traffic impact arising, concluding that it is acceptable.

Policy C7 ‘Landscape Conservation’

DEVELOPMENT WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED IF IT WOULD CAUSE DEMONSTRABLE HARM TO THE TOPOGRAPHY AND CHARACTER OF THE LANDSCAPE

Policy C13 ‘Areas of High Landscape Value’

THE IRONSTONE DOWNS, THE CHERWELL VALLEY, THE THAMES VALLEY, NORTH PLOUGHLEY, MUSWELL HILL AND OTMOOR ARE DESIGNATED AREAS OF HIGH LANDSCAPE VALUE WITHIN WHICH THE COUNCIL WILL SEEK TO CONSERVE AND ENHANCE THE ENVIRONMENT.

36. The proposed change of use does not comprise works which will impact upon the visual appearance of the land, indeed for a significant period of the year agricultural use will continue on the land alongside the equestrian purposes.
37. The proposed extension to the existing vehicle parking area close to Grange Farm is intended to be of a construction similar to that existing and it is expected that the full details of that will be a conditional requirement of any planning permission. In addition the applicant is willing to provide appropriate landscaping and planting buffers to this, or indeed any other areas of the application site, where this is deemed appropriate in order to mitigate visual or other impacts of the proposed development.
38. The proposed development is therefore considered to fully comply with relevant policies of the Cherwell Local Plan 1996.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

39. The National Planning Policy Framework was published on 27 March 2012. The NPPF is a key part of the Governments reforms to make the planning system less complex and more accessible, to protect the environment and to promote sustainable growth.
40. The NPPF states at paragraph 19, 'Delivering Sustainable Development' that, "The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system."
41. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states at paragraph 28 'Supporting a prosperous rural economy' that, "Planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. To promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:-
- (i) support the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business and enterprise in rural areas...
 - (ii) promote the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;
 - (iii) support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors and which respect the character of the countryside;
42. It is considered that the proposed developments at SPE can draw considerable support from NPPF. In this respect, the development will :-
- (a) support the continued success of a respected, long-standing, equestrian based business and one which has a legitimate reason to be located in the countryside and which continues to provide a considerable boost to the local economy;
 - (b) directly promote the development and diversification of a land-based rural business which itself has evolved from an agricultural base and which represents a positive example of farm diversification;
 - (c) will allow the business to continue its good work in the local community, and indirectly to promote the local area to the many visitors to the site, many of whom spend money within the local economy;
 - (d) respect the character of the countryside with little impact on the landscape setting;

Other Material Considerations

Community Benefits for Swalcliffe and the wider Cherwell District

43. SPE provides a valuable local resource, which helps to support the local equestrian community and more generally the wider local community. The business has co-existed with the local community for many years without any negative impact and indeed the positive economic and leisure benefits are readily apparent.
44. In advance of this application for planning permission the applicants have where appropriate sought to discuss their proposals with neighbours and indeed these consultations with close neighbours have resulted in amendments to the scheme in an effort to address some points of concern raised. The applicants are always keen to ensure that their activities and those of their customers do not negatively impact on the lives of other non-equestrian residents and they go to considerable lengths to address concerns that may be raised. In fact such issues are few and far between, largely due to the professional and responsible manner in which SPE operate.

Highways

45. The submitted transport statement reviews the highways and transport issues generated by the proposed development. It is clear that based on the level of day to day activity proposed in the application, the impact on the surrounding highway network will be limited and certainly would not give rise to highway issues that would justify refusal of the application.
46. In this respect it is informative that NPPF paragraph 32 indicates quite clearly that *“development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe”*. It is clear that the proposed development would not result in severe residual impacts.
47. It should be noted that the previous applications for equestrian training and competition facilities at Grange Farm have raised no objection from the Local Highways Authority, Oxfordshire County Council.

Ecology

48. An ecological impact assessment is provided in the supporting documents to this planning application. The submitted report indicates that, subject to appropriate precautions, there should be no impact on protected species as a result of the proposed development. All recommendations contained in the report will be implemented as part of the development process.

Flood Risk Assessment

49. A brief site specific flood risk assessment is provided in accordance with the requirements of NPPF paragraph 103.

Pre-Application Consultations

50. The proposed development has been subject to pre-application discussions with planning officers of Cherwell Council. A meeting was held with Emily Shaw at the Council's Offices on 1st April 2014 where the submission of this planning application was agreed and key matters discussed. Officers have identified the issues to be addressed as part of the application process and have indicated the level of information required to ensure a valid planning application. The points raised and the validation requirements have been addressed as part of the submissions.

51. In accordance with the requirements of paragraph 187 of NPPF, the applicants are committed to the development of the site in the manner proposed and are keen to work with the LPA to ensure a positive and successful outcome for all concerned.

Conclusion

52. Swalcliffe Park Equestrian is a successful and very well respected local equestrian business offering a range of equestrian facilities to the local and wider community of north Oxfordshire. It has operated from Grange Farm for a considerable number of years, having been established initially as a farm diversification project, building upon the skills of Richard Taylor, son of the current owners of Grange Farm. The business has succeeded in offering an equestrian training and competition facility on parts of the former agricultural land and balancing this with ensuring the development is sympathetic to its setting and the amenities of neighbours.
53. The proposed development seeks to regularise the planning status of the overall development which has evolved without express consent, though which has been in existence for a considerable number of years.
54. The proposals are supported by technical reports dealing with relevant matters, as agreed with Officers of the Council during pre-application consultation. To this end it is demonstrated that the development is in accordance with relevant adopted development plan policy. Moreover the proposed change of use is considered to represent sustainable development, which supports the rural economy and is for a land-based rural use, which accords with the advice in NPPF.
55. The application is therefore commended to the Council in the expectation that the application can be dealt with in a positive fashion in order to allow the equestrian business to maintain its position as one of the premier facilities in north Oxfordshire.