

APPLICATION NO.	P19/S4050/FUL
APPLICATION TYPE	FULL APPLICATION
REGISTERED	6.11.2019
PARISH	WOODCOTE
WARD MEMBERS	Jo Robb Lorraine Hillier
APPLICANT	Hildred Partnership
SITE	The Land North of Woodcote Oxford Road Woodcote
PROPOSAL	The Change of Use of an Agricultural Field to an Equestrian Cross-Country Track including the siting of a Porta Cabin and associated drainage. (revised plans received 18th December, amending site access and providing site section of proposed water jump)
OFFICER	Simon Kitson

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This application is referred to the Planning Committee as the officer's recommendation of approval conflicts with the views of Woodcote Parish Council.
- 1.2 The application site (**attached** at Appendix A) is comprised of an area of land measuring approximately 11.14ha in area and currently put to pasture. The surrounding land is mainly agricultural, with some residential properties separated by roads and farm tracks to the east and south. There are currently vehicular access points at the A4074 and the B471/ Goring Road.
- 1.3 The site falls wholly within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The land is within the Chilterns Escarpment, described under Character Area 8 of the South Oxfordshire Landscape Assessment (SOLA).

2.0 PROPOSAL

- 2.1 As detailed in the application submission, consent is sought for an equestrian, British Eventing Standard Cross-Country training course intended to provide facilities for a range of equestrian users.
- 2.2 The course will comprise 80-100 specialist moveable jumps which would include a water complex that will be formed in the ground permanently. There would also be an area of hard-standing formed and the siting of a temporary, timber clad cabin providing welfare facilities.
- 2.3 The following restrictions are proposed:
 - The site will be open between 8am-8pm (5pm on weekends) February to October inclusive.
 - There will be a maximum of 8 horses on the course at any one time
 - There will be two members of part-time staff dedicated to the enterprise, one will be managing the patrons and the other maintaining the obstacles and course. There will also be an office member of staff off-site who will manage the bookings and the general running of the business.
 - Vehicles will park on the hard-standing where the horses can be unloaded and prepared for the course. The land will also have holding paddocks

- There will only be security lighting on the site with no flood lighting being proposed

2.4 The current proposed site plans are **attached** as Appendix B. All other supporting documentation associated with the application can be viewed on the council's website, www.southoxon.gov.uk.

3.0 **SUMMARY OF CONSULTATIONS & REPRESENTATIONS**

3.1 Woodcote Parish Council – Objection. Response to amendment:

- Access proposed to the site although changed and moved 15 metres to provide a 51 metre vision splay as per OCC highways, a large section of the vision splay is covered with vegetation and mature hedging/trees, there is no reference to this being cut back therefore the vision is obscured making the access still unsuitable.
- It is worth noting from the traffic survey taken by Woodcote Parish Council that this section of highway carries 4000 vehicles per day, in peak periods 250-300 vehicles in one direction and 100-150 vehicles in the other direction making visibility from the site very important.
- Woodcote Parish Council also support the Chiltern Conservation Boards proposal for landscaping to shield the porta cabin and car park.
- Should a solution to the access be found Woodcote Parish Council recommend that a 5 year temporary planning be granted, this gives time to access the commercial impact on the site within the AONB.

3.2 Chilterns Conservation Board - No strong views

- The Chilterns AONB is nationally protected as one of the finest areas of countryside in the UK. Public bodies and statutory undertakers have a statutory duty of regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB. This is reinforced within the WNDP and the Chilterns AONB Management Plan policies.
- The use, providing it maintains a low-key status, would conserve the landscape character of the site. To enhance the site will require further consideration as to landscaping and the submission of details. Conditions as to landscaping and periodic use during the year are appropriate and within the tests as set out in Planning Practice Guidance.
- The splays must not result in erosion of the tree screen to the northern boundary. Further, any parking layout matters the subject of a planning condition must be consistent with the rural setting here. The standard condition implies an urban car parking layout/drainage.
- The use can be controlled to the February – October period. The temporary nature of the eventing structures would permit their removal from the landscape and their storage during this period. No illumination / lighting can be permitted at the car park.

3.3 CPRE Oxfordshire – comments made:

- Concerns expressed over the potential impact upon the AONB and whether it would satisfy the relevant management plan guidance
- No details are supplied in relation to hardstanding or the security lighting. These should be minimal and must conform to guidance
- CPRE support the Parish Council's stance on a 5 year temporary permission

3.4 Oxfordshire County Council Single Response - No strong views

- The splays proposed within the revised access plan are considered acceptable.

3.5 Forestry Officer (South Oxfordshire District Council) - No strong views

- No objections to the proposal, subject to replacement trees being planted to mitigate the loss of trees and hedgerow in order to facilitate the access. A landscaping condition should be attached to ensure that replacement trees and hedges are planted. The general tree protection condition should also be attached to ensure the RPA of trees and hedges to the north of the proposed parking area and either side of the proposed access are protected throughout construction
- 3.6 Countryside Officer(South Oxfordshire & Vale of White Horse) - No strong views
- the section of hedgerow to be removed to facilitate the amended western access is an ecologically important hedgerow under The Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
 - Alternative access locations of lesser impact have been considered and ruled out.
 - To ensure compliance with the development plan, compensatory planting should be provided.
- 3.7 Drainage - (South & Vale) - No strong views
- Surface water and foul drainage details are required as a condition of consent
- 3.8 Neighbour Objections (9) Key issues raised:
- Insufficient information provided in relation to hours of use, waste treatment, landscaping, staffing and security system to prevent unauthorised occupation.
 - The site is within a very prominent location and would be seen from a great distance. The visual impact would be exacerbated by floodlighting, leading to an erosion of the dark skies and harm to native wildlife
 - The proposal would fail the statutory test in that it would neither "conserve" nor "enhance" the Chilterns AONB. Much of the natural beauty of this part of the AONB is derived from pasture and agriculture
 - The proposed access would be very dangerous, with a blind bend and high-speed traffic exiting from the A4074. Further, the proposed scheme would increase traffic through Woodcote, specifically the junctions between South Stoke Road and Reading Road, and Beech Lane and Reading Road. These have known issues, recognised within the Village Statement
 - The proposal could be a means of achieving "brownfield" status as a precursor to housing development
 - There are opportunities to significantly enhance the land with large-scale landscaping and conservation
 - There are two statutory listed building to the south west, Toggs and Weevil Cottages, whose settings would be impacted by the proposed equestrian use. This would be both in terms of neighbouring amenity and heritage.
 - This development requires a harmful change of use from agricultural production.

Comments in support (13) Key points:

- The revised access plan provides sufficient visibility levels of oncoming traffic
- The proposal would benefit the equestrian community. There is a clear demand for this type of facility and the proposal would significantly reduce current travelling distances
- The issues raised by members of the local community are not as severe as suggested. Cross country training is undertaken in daylight hours without the need for artificial lighting, the jumps have a natural appearance and the scale of the activity is appropriate within a rural setting.

4.0 **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

4.1 There is no planning history for the site.

5.0 **POLICY & GUIDANCE**

5.1 Woodcote Neighbourhood Development Plan (WNDP) Policies;

D1 – Good Design
D2 – Light Pollution
T1 – Traffic Congestion
E1 – Green Space and Landscaping

5.2 South Oxfordshire Core Strategy (SOCS) Policies;

CS1 - Presumption in favour of sustainable development
CSB1 - Conservation and improvement of biodiversity
CSEN1 - Landscape protection
CSEN3 - Heritage
CSM1 - Transport
CSQ3 - Design
CSR2 - Employment in rural areas

5.3 South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2011 (SOLP) Policies;

C4 - Landscape setting of settlements
C6 - Maintain & enhance biodiversity
C8 - Adverse affect on protected species
C9 - Loss of landscape features
CON5 – Setting of listed buildings
D1 - Principles of good design
D2 - Safe and secure parking for vehicles and cycles
G2 - Protect district from adverse development
G4 - Protection of Countryside
R10 - Proposals involving the keeping of horses
T1 - Safe, convenient and adequate highway network for all users
T2 - Unloading, turning and parking for all highway users

5.4 Emerging Local Plan 2034

On 10 October 2019 the Secretary of State for Housing Communities and Local Government issued a Holding Direction on the Council in relation to the emerging Local Plan 2034. The holding direction has been made under the provisions of Section 21A of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This means that the emerging plan has 'no effect whilst the direction is in force', this is set out in section 21A(2) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The emerging Local Plan holds no weight at present.

5.5 Supplementary Planning Guidance/Documents

South Oxfordshire Design Guide 2016 (SODG 2016)

5.6 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

National Planning Policy Framework Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG)

Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024

6.0 **PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS**

6.1 The main areas for consideration are as follows:

- The principle of the proposed change of use
- The impact of the design, height, scale and materials upon the character of the site and the wider AONB;
- The impact upon the highway network, in terms of highway safety, access and parking provision.
- The environmental and ecological impact
- The impact upon residential amenity

Principle

6.2 Policy R10 of the SOLP is broadly supportive of proposals involving equestrian uses, recognising that horse riding for recreational purposes, horse breeding and training are common activities within rural parts of this district. The policy does nonetheless require the proposed use to be weighed against the landscape, traffic and amenity impacts and it does state that very careful consideration will be given to new commercial riding establishments where the scale of operations may be particularly detrimental to the character of the countryside. Where development relating to the keeping of horses is acceptable in principle, every effort should be made to ensure that any new buildings and structures are sited and designed to harmonise with their surroundings, that the development is to a high standard and will be adequately maintained.

6.3 Officers note the applicant's point that the proposal is part of an agricultural diversification scheme intended to support their wider farming business, in accordance with SOCS Policy CSR2 and that there may be some modest economic benefits arising from the seasonal staffing requirements. In response to some of the views expressed during the formal consultation, there are no reasonable grounds to consider the proposal as a precursor to a housing development. Furthermore, land in equestrian use would not normally be considered as 'Brownfield'. The majority of structures proposed are temporary in nature and officers have no evidence that the land could not be readily restored to agricultural use if the equestrian facility were to cease operating from the site.

Scale, design and landscape

6.4 In terms of the landscape impact, officers are mindful of Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Paragraph 172 of the NPPF. These set out the District Council's duty to have regard to the 'purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty.' and afford AONBs the highest status of protection. Several consultees, including the Chiltern Conservation Board (CCB) and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) make reference to these parts of the legislation and specific sections of the Chilterns AONB Management Plan 2019-2024. SOCS Policy CSEN1 reinforces the need to protect the district's distinct landscape character and key features from inappropriate development.

6.5 Notwithstanding the scale of the proposal, officers are inclined to agree with the CCB, that the proposed use is not incompatible with the requirement to conserve the landscape character of the site, particularly in view of the limited number of horses occupying the course at any one time, the seasonal nature of the facilities and the limited degree of permanence to the new structures. As set out in Policy R10, the

grazing of any number of horses would not require planning permission and recreational riding activities are a relatively common pastime in rural areas.

- 6.6 It is accepted that the site is within a relatively prominent location at the edge of the settlement. However, aside from the water jump feature, which would resemble a natural water body, there would be no significant engineering operations towards the south of the site and the series of timber moveable jumps would be relatively low-key features within filtered public views. To the northern parts of the site, the areas of operational development would be concentrated towards the western corner. Whilst gravel hardstanding is proposed, officers do recognise that the parking area and timber-clad portable cabin might detract from the rural character of the site without additional screening.
- 6.7 Parts of the boundary along the A4074 are deciduous, meaning that aspects of the development would be more prominent outside the summer months and it is apparent that there would be some tree and hedgerow removal required in order for the access and visibility splays to be provided and maintained to the standard expected by the Local Highways Authority (LHA). It is therefore particularly important that the boundary treatments within these areas are reinforced, reducing any visual prominence of the development within public views. The applicant is agreeable to these areas being agreed by condition, an approach supported by the CCB and the council's Forestry and Countryside Team.
- 6.8 Provided that the landscaping measures provided in mitigation are suitably robust, officers consider that the proposal would conserve the landscape character of the site and there would not be a harmful impact upon the rural setting within this part of Woodcote. There would be no conflict with SOCS Policy CSEN1. Officers do not consider that there are reasonable grounds to impose a 5-year temporary permission in this instance, given the lack of objection by the LHA to the amendment and the long-term landscaping plan proposed in order to address visual impacts.
- 6.9 Whilst a number of objectors raise issues in relation to floodlighting, none is proposed within the application. The agent has advised that the security lighting would be on a timer and could be motion sensitive. Further details on this should be obtained as a condition.

Highway safety

- 6.10 The site is currently served by two access points onto dual-lane highways, one to the north at the A4074 and one to the west at the B471. Whilst there is evidence that a pedestrian access has existed in the latter location, it has been widened for vehicular use without consent from the council. Even if it were a longstanding vehicular access point, officers are in no doubt that the current proposal would result in more vehicular movements than a standard agricultural use. The LHA initial objection was confined to the substandard visibility of oncoming traffic. Resultant congestion on other aspects of the road network was not raised as an issue.
- 6.11 The northern access point was not deemed to be safe by the applicant's highways consultant due to the road conditions along this stretch of the A4704, which is subject to the national speed limit. There were potential issues arising from slow-moving horse lorries and vehicles with horse trailers leaving the site, in conjunction with poor site lines. It is understood that the Local Highways Authority (LHA) concur with this assessment.

- 6.12 Following the LHA's objection to the initial submission, the applicant accepted that greater levels of visibility would be required at a new access point to the west. This revised access provision was informed by discussion with the LHA and it would achieve greater visibility splays of 2.4m x 51.8m minimum. The LHA no longer object to the application on highway safety grounds and officers have no basis to challenge the expert advice provided. It is recommended that conditions are attached requiring the blocking off of the substandard access points prior to the commencement of the equestrian use and for the visibility splays shown on plan to be retained free from obstruction.

Ecology

- 6.13 The council's Forestry and Countryside Team have commented on the scheme. No objections are expressed, subject to conditions. Provided that compensatory planting is undertaken in mitigation for the loss of the section of hedgerow following the creation of the new access, the development can achieve compliance with Policy CSB1 of the SOCS.

Drainage

- 6.14 The site is not within an area known to be at high risk of flooding and there are few engineering operations proposed. Following dialogue with the council's drainage team, it is agreed that foul and surface water drainage requirements can be addressed by condition.

Environment and amenity

- 6.15 The application was discussed with the Environmental Health team and no concerns were expressed in relation to waste. They would normally envisage manure to be removed by a contractor.
- 6.16 With regard to the impact upon the nearest residential properties, officers note the significant intervening distance between the water jump and the nearest dwellings at Weevil Cottage and the Red Lane bungalow housing development, more than 70m. These properties are also separated from the application site by the main highway. Having regard to the intensity of the proposed use, up to 8 horses simultaneously using an approximately 10ha area, the lack of artificial lighting or any visible built structures, officers do not consider that there would a harmful impact upon neighbouring amenity in terms of loss of privacy, noise or other disturbances.
- 6.17 Whilst a neighbour also objects to the heritage impact upon the listed buildings at Weevil/ Toggs cottages, officers consider that the views from these properties would be largely unaltered. The relatively low-key activities proposed within the sizeable parcel of land would not compromise their historic rural setting.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The proposal broadly complies with the relevant Development Plan policies and national planning guidance. Strictly subject to the attached conditions, officers are satisfied that the proposed change to equestrian use would not harm the rural setting of the site or the special landscape character and scenic beauty of this part of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Following advice from the Local Highways Authority, officers are also satisfied that the proposed access arrangements are acceptable in terms of their impact upon highway safety. Officers are also satisfied that there would not be material harm to the amenity of the nearest residents.

8.0 **RECOMMENDATION**

Grant Planning Permission, subject to the following conditions:

1. Commencement within 3 years - Full Planning Permission
2. Development to be implemented in accordance with the approved plans unless varied by other conditions of consent.
3. Prior to the commencement of the development hereby permitted, a scheme for the landscaping of the site, including the planting of trees and hedging, and the treatment of the access road and hard standings, shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The scheme shall include details on the extent and location of hedgerow planting on site, with specifications for the species, best practice techniques to establish and maintain any planting, and a scheme of replacement should planting fail in the first 5 years. The agreed planting shall be delivered within 1 year of the first use of the development and retained as such.
4. Prior to the commencement of the approved scheme, surface water and foul water drainage details must be submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.
5. The vision splays shown on the approved plan (2054-001 A) shall not be obstructed by any object, structure, planting or other material with a height exceeding or growing above 0.6m metres as measured from carriageway level.
6. Prior to first use of the approved development, the existing access points onto the A4074 and B417 shall be closed and not used by any vehicular traffic associated with the development.
7. Details of the proposed security lighting must be agreed prior to first use of the proposed development. No other external lighting shall be installed without the prior grant of planning permission from the Local Planning Authority.
8. Unless otherwise agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority, the equestrian facilities shall only be used for the purposes and operating times specified within the supporting planning statement (Ref: 1524-7907).

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