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Staffordshire Moorlands District Council
Moorlands House
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Dear Sir

PROPOSED RELOCATION OF EXISTING STABLES, THE ERECTION OF A NEW STABLE BARN, AND THE CHANGE OF USE OF LAND TO FACILITATE THE STABLING AND SCHOOLING OF A MAXIMUM OF 8 HORSES ON A COMPETITION LIVERY BASIS AT ROCK HOUSE FARM, HEATH HOUSE LANE, HORTON, ST13 8RX.

This statement is submitted on behalf of Mrs Tara Vernon in support of a full planning application for a proposed development at Rock House Farm, Heath House Lane, Horton. Mrs Vernon's daughter, Katie, is rapidly becoming a very accomplished show jumper rider and he is now seeking to establish a business at Rock House Farm where she would ride and train horses on behalf of their owners (competition livery). The land and buildings at Rock House Farm have been used for equestrian purposes for a considerable number of years. The family currently own 4 horses and a pony which are all stabled within the existing buildings.

The documents submitted with the application include:-

- Completed Application Forms.
- 01 Proposed stable building – plans and elevations – 1:50@A1.
- 02 Existing stables – plans and elevations – 1:100@A3.
- Location plan – 1:2500@A4.
- Existing block plan – 1:100@A3
- Existing site plan – 1:500@A4.
- Proposed block plan – 1:100@A3.
- Proposed site plan – 1:500@A4.
- £1155.00 in respect of the planning fee. This has been calculated on the basis of the floor space of the proposed stables which is 177.3m²

The Proposed Development

The application seeks full planning permission for the relocation of the existing stables, the erection of a new stable barn, and the change of use of land to facilitate the stabling and schooling of a maximum of 8 horses on a competition livery basis. The site forms part of a registered agricultural holding which covers an area of some 15 acres. The proposed stable barn would be constructed from timber with a profile sheet roof and accommodate 4 stables, a tack room and a wash room. The existing timber building, which is to be re-positioned, contains 3 stables. There is also 1 existing stable within the stone barn.

The development is required in connection with the proposed equestrian use (competition livery) of the site by Mrs Tara Vernon and her daughter, Miss Katie Vernon. Miss Katie Vernon is an accomplished rider who competes in show jumping at both national and international level. Katie from the age of 16 has worked and trained with Olympic dressage rider Richard Davison, Olympic Dressage rider from Uttoxeter. In 2013 she was selected for an Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence and more recently she has been awarded 2 sporting grants from Staffordshire Moorlands Council. Katie has also been selected for the 2015-17 British Equestrian Federation Excel Talent program. Supported by Sport England, the BEF England Excel Talent Programme seeks to identify, support and develop riders and horses that demonstrate talent and potential in the Olympic (dressage, eventing and Showjumping) and Paralympic (para-equestrian dressage) disciplines. The programme has been developed to extend the rider talent pathway below the UK Sport funded World Class Programme and to help support riders to go on to achieve their potential. The two year programme provides selected riders with the opportunity to have access to top equestrian specialists including: International coaches, physiotherapists, psychologists, farriers, saddlers, vets and nutritionists via a series of rider performance camps. Riders are expected to attend up to three 2 day training camps each year plus other one day events. The link below will help you to understand the level Katie is now achieving and her future in show jumping.

<http://www.bef.co.uk/Detail.aspx?page=Excel-Talent-Programme>

In association with the above Katie is now also studying for the UKCC level 2 show jump coaching certificate to enable her to pass on the valued training she has received. To this end the equestrian use at the site has already taken on an Apprentice from Reaseheath College in Cheshire.

The existing position at Rock House Farm is that the site benefits from 4 stables and 15 acres of land. The current "set up" was adequate prior to Katie becoming accepted on the BEF England Excel Talent Programme. The existing stables are really only suitable for horses up to 15.2-16 hands in height. Now that larger horses would be present (17.2 hands) it is essential that new stables are built at the site in the interests of animal welfare. All the horses are just turned out for an hour in the morning and the same later in the day so most of the time they would be stabled.

The proposed stable barn would enable Katie to accommodate and train young horses owned by other professionals. This form of livery is known as "competition livery" and there would be no DIY livery at the site. Essentially the horses are trained and ridden by Katie but returned to their owners once they have achieved a certain level.

At present the current lack of stables is a huge issue. One of the reasons Katie was selected for the Excel Talent Program is due to her ability to build her own 'string' of horses and compete with them

at a high level. There is currently an Olympic rider from Ireland who wishes to provide Katie with horses but this offer cannot be taken up due to the inadequacy of the existing stables.

The purpose of wanting to build the barn rather than normal stables is due to the size and highly strung nature of the horses which would be present at the site. Young horses must be handled carefully, particularly when they are out of their stables for visits by blacksmiths and physiotherapists.

National Planning Policy Framework

The NPPF sets out the Government's commitment to a planning system that does everything it can do to support sustainable economic and housing growth. LPA's are expected to plan positively for new development.

The NPPF builds upon the Government's 'Plan for Growth' which was published in March 2011. The overall theme of this document is to support long term sustainable economic growth and job creation.

The NPPF at paragraph 17 sets down a number of over-arching roles that the planning system ought to play; it provides a set of core land-use planning principles that should underpin both plan-making and decision-taking. In relation to the consideration of this planning application, the key roles are:-

- to proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs.
- always seek to secure high quality design and a good standard of amenity for all existing and future occupants of land and buildings.
- contribute to conserving and enhancing the natural environment and reducing pollution.

In relation to the Green Belt the Framework says that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to retain and enhance landscapes and visual amenity. As with previous Green Belt policy, inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.

The NPPF says that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 89 states that the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation are not inappropriate development, as long as they preserve the openness of the Green Belt.

Development Plan

The Staffordshire Moorlands Core Spatial Strategy provides the overall planning framework which is used to assess development proposals. Relevant policies within the Core Strategy (CS) include:-

Policy SS6c indicates that the open countryside and Green Belt will only provide for development which meets an essential local need, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. The Council will seek to retain the rural economy by enabling the limited expansion or redevelopment of an existing authorised business for employment uses and seek to support the diversification of existing farm enterprises (in accordance with policy R1). Policy SS6c seeks to protect the character of the countryside. Strict control will continue to be exercised over inappropriate development within the Green Belt allowing only for exceptions as defined by Government policy.

Policy R1 requires that all development in the rural areas outside the development boundaries of the towns and villages will be assessed according to the extent to which it enhances the character, appearance and biodiversity of the countryside, promotes the sustainable diversification of the rural economy, facilitates economic activity, meets a rural community need and sustains the historic environment. Appropriate development should not harm the rural character and environmental quality of the area or any sites designated for their nature conservation, or historical interest by virtue of the scale, nature and level of activity involved and the type and amount of traffic generated or by other effects such as noise and pollution. Within the Green Belt, inappropriate development which is otherwise acceptable within the terms of this policy will still need to be justified by very special circumstances.

Policy DC1 seeks to ensure that all development compliments the character and heritage of an area. In particular, new development should protect existing amenity and, where appropriate, promote the maintenance, enhancement, restoration and re-creation of the biodiversity of the site. All development should provide a safe access.

Policy DC3 seeks to protect and enhance the local landscape.

Policy SS1 requires all development and use of land to contribute positively to the social, economic and environmental improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands. Reference is made to the desire to increase economic prosperity whilst retaining the character of an area.

Planning Considerations

The principle of development in the Green Belt

The application site is a developed parcel of land located to the front of an existing stable block which lies adjacent to the existing stone barns and dwelling at Rock House Farm. There is also a large ménage located to the west of the concrete hardstanding. The proposed stable barn would be positioned on this existing area of concrete hardstanding. Trees and hedges reinforce the site's boundaries and prevent long distance views into the site which is not readily visible from public vantage points.

The site lies within the Green Belt. The National Planning Policy Framework establishes national Green Belt policy. Policy SS6c of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy (CS) also deals with the Green Belt.

The Framework identifies the protection of the Green Belt as a core planning principle. It says one of the fundamental aims of the Green Belt is to keep land permanently open, and openness and permanence are its essential characteristics. Inappropriate development is by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Substantial weight must be given to any harm to the Green Belt, and very special circumstances will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Paragraph 89 of the Framework sets out those categories of development which may be regarded as not inappropriate. The provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation is one such use, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. CS Policy SS6c is consistent with paragraph 89 of the Framework. The application proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt in the context of paragraph 89 of the NPPF.

The very nature of providing buildings for outdoor sport and recreation in line with paragraph 89 of the Framework has the potential to result in some harm to the openness of the Green Belt. There will always be some impact as a result of the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt, but the Government's clear intention is that building can take place on open sites without an adverse impact on overall openness. The Framework specifically excludes this type of development from being inappropriate in the Green Belt and it is my view that the assessment of the impact on openness should be in the context of the wider area and the objectives of Green Belt policy.

In this instance, the proposed development is well related to the existing buildings and equestrian use at the site and would not result in any significant incursion into an area of Green Belt. The site is already developed with stables, an area of concrete hardstanding and a ménage. Since the proposal does not cause any significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt it would not result in inappropriate development.

Character and appearance

The Core Strategy does not contain any policies in relation to equestrian development. CS Policies R1 and DC1 seek to protect the character and appearance of an area and minimise its impact on the character of the countryside. Design and appearance should, therefore, be in keeping with the character and appearance of the area. The proposed stable barn has been positioned to minimise its visual impact. It is well related to the existing buildings and would be set against the backdrop of the rising land and tall boundary trees behind. The use of timber and the overall design and agricultural appearance of the building are appropriate for the area. The proposed stable barn has an eaves height of 2.4m and a ridge height of 4.5m. The scale of the building sits comfortably within its wider context and would not undermine the visual character of the area. The existing stables would be re-located to the rear of the site and the stable barn. If necessary, additional landscaping could be provided at the site by means of a planning condition.

Other material considerations

The proposed development is required for the stabling of horses which are required to further the equestrian career of Miss Katie Vernon. Should the Council consider the proposal to be inappropriate development within the Green Belt then I would suggest that this factor could represent a material consideration in support of the proposal. Katie is obviously a very talented show jumper whose future career deserves the support of the Council. The proposed equestrian use would be a family run business organised on a competition livery basis. There would be no DIY livery at the site which would assist in minimising vehicle movements. The larger stables proposed within the barn are required due to the size of the horses which would be accommodated at the site. The site has been chosen since it is the family home and is already used for equestrian purposes. It is also of sufficient size to cater for the grazing and care of up to 8 horses.

Conclusion

The National Planning Policy Framework indicates that there are three dimensions to sustainable development; environmental, social and economic. The proposal satisfies the relevant core planning principles within the Framework and the requirements of CS Policies SS1, SS6c, R1, DC1 and DC3 for the following reasons: -

- In environmental terms the proposal is an appropriate form of development which would not cause any significant harm to the openness of the Green Belt or the character of the area.
- In social terms the proposal would not cause any harm to the amenity of nearby residents or highway safety.
- In economic terms the proposal would create employment and support the diversification and sustainability of this rural area.

In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework significant weight should be given to the need to secure economic growth and planning permission granted for the proposed development.

Yours sincerely

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