Rob Duncan
Planning
Consultancy

PLANNING STATEMENT

SPRINGS COTTAGE FARM, BAGNALL

MARCH 2016

Site Address:
Springs Cottage Farm, Thorney Edge Road, Bagnall, ST9 9LE

Applicant:
Dr. L. Pearson

Proposal:
Proposed Equestrian Centre

Planning Statement:
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1 Introduction

1.1 Rob Duncan Planning Consultancy Ltd. has been instructed by Dr. Lee Pearson to prepare a planning application for the creation of an Olympic standard equestrian centre on land at Springs Cottage Farm, Thorney Edge Road, Bagnall. Planning permission has previously been granted on the site for the erection of four stables and tack room, along with the change of use of the land to equestrian (SMD/2011/0923).

1.2 The applicant is a ten times Paralympic Gold Medallist, and has amassed some 35 Gold medals at European, World and Olympic level throughout his career. His vision is to create a Midlands venue for the training of horse riders in both dressage and show jumping, and thereby contribute to providing a tangible legacy to the London 2012 Olympic Games.

1.3 The proposed equestrian centre will encompass an Olympic standard manege (20m x 60m), enclosed on three sides by a horseshoe shaped stable block that will occupy a total footprint of 576m^2 and stand to a maximum height of 3.75 metres. The stable block will comprise of 17 stables for the keeping of horses trained by the applicant, 5 further stables for use by visitors, a tack room, feed and equipment stall, grooming stall, office, farrier/vets box and two small storage areas. To the rear (west) of the building there will be four turnout paddocks, and a 16.5m diameter horse walker. A new vehicular access and parking area will be located to the south of the building complex.

1.4 Pre-application advice has been entered into with the Local Authority who have advised that the proposal would constitute an inappropriate form of development within the Green Belt, and that a case of very special circumstances would need to be demonstrated. This Planning Statement

duly seeks to demonstrate that the proposed development is acceptable in planning terms, and is accompanied by the following documentation:

- Arboricultural Report (Tree Heritage)
- Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Middlemarch Environmental)

2 Site & Surroundings

2.1 The application site comprises a parcel of land extending to some 0.8 hectares, and forms part of a wider holding owned by the applicant that extends to some 5.7 hectares. The site is broadly flat in nature, before rising up in a westerly direction. The applicant's existing dwelling lies to the north of the site along with a cluster of existing agricultural buildings. The site as a whole lies to the south-east of the village of Bagnall, on the western side of Thorney Edge Road. The site is bordered to the south by open fields, beyond which lies a detached dwelling, whilst to the west there are open fields, raised up at an elevated level. The eastern boundary comprises Thorney Edge Road itself, beyond which lies further fields as well as a farm complex and the Jackson's Nursery site.

3 Planning Policy

3.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires proposals to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan taking into consideration any material considerations relevant to the determination of the application. Following its recent adoption the Development Plan for this area comprises the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy Development Plan Document (2014) of which the following policies are considered to be of relevance:

3.2 Strategic Objective 7 of the Core Strategy seeks to support and enhance the tourism, cultural, recreation and leisure opportunities for the District's residents and visitors.

3.3 Policy SS6c of the Core Strategy states that these areas will provide only 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. It goes on to state that the Local Authority will enhance tourist opportunities by supporting small-scale tourism developments in areas outside the Churnet Valley Master Plan area (in accordance with policies E3 and R1), and that development within the Green Belt will be assessed in the context of national planning policy.

3.4 Policy E3 of the Core Strategy states that new tourism and cultural development will be assessed according to the extent to which it supports the local economy and promotes the distinctive character and quality of the District and enhances the role of Staffordshire Moorlands as a tourism and leisure destination having regard to the Area Strategies in Policies SS5, SS6 and SS7. The policy furthermore states that new tourist and visitor accommodation, attractions and facilities should be developed in locations that offer, or are capable of offering, good connectivity with other tourist destinations and amenities, particularly by public transport, walking and cycling. They should normally be located in or close to settlements where local services, facilities and public transport are available or in areas specifically allocated for tourism development.

3.5 Policy R1 of the Core Strategy states 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. It goes on to state that wherever possible development should be within suitably located buildings which are appropriate for conversion. Where new or replacement buildings are involved, development should have minimal impact on the countryside and be in close proximity to an existing settlement. 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.

3.6 Policy C2 of the Core Strategy states that the Council will promote the provision of high quality recreational open space by implementing and supporting schemes that will protect and improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space and outdoor sports, leisure and children's play facilities throughout the district, in accordance with the adopted minimum standards set out in the Open Space, Sport and Recreation SPD. New sport, recreation and open space facilities should be located in accessible locations and supported by the local transport infrastructure, protect the residential amenity of the area, be of an appropriate quality, scale and form compatible with the local area, especially if the site is located outside the settlement boundary in the open countryside; and not harm interests of acknowledged importance; and be designed so that they are fit for purpose. The policy goes on to state that applications to improve the use and availability of existing outdoor sports and recreation provision such as the introduction of ancillary facilities such as changing rooms, artificial surfaces or floodlighting will be permitted provided that they are directly related to the needs of the facility,

can be satisfactorily and economically serviced, and meet the above criteria for new sport, recreation and open space facilities.

3.7 Policy DC1 of the Core Strategy states that new development should be of a high quality and add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. Proposals should be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance.

3.8 Policy DC3 states that the Council will protect and, where possible, enhance local landscape and the setting of settlements in the Staffordshire Moorlands by resisting development which would harm or be detrimental to the character of the local and wider landscape. The Council will also support development which respects and enhances local landscape character, and will support opportunities to use sustainable building techniques and materials which are sympathetic to the landscape.

3.9 Policy NE1 of the Core Strategy states that the biodiversity and geological resources of the District and neighbouring areas will be conserved and enhanced by positive management and strict control of development by (amongst others):

- *Resisting any proposed development that could have an adverse effect on the integrity of a European site alone or in combination with other plans or projects unless it can be demonstrated that the legislative provisions to protect such sites can be fully met.*

- *Ensuring development where appropriate produces a net gain in biodiversity, and ensuring that any unavoidable impacts are appropriately*

mitigated for.

- *Ensuring development promotes the appropriate maintenance, enhancement, restoration and/or re-creation of biodiversity through its proposed nature, scale, location and design.*

- *Protecting and enhancing habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity as identified in legislation, and recognising and implementing appropriate measures, including landscape-scale conservation management, to take account of the fact that the distribution of habitats and species will be affected by climate change.*

3.10 Policy T1 of the Core Strategy states that the Council will promote and support development which reduces reliance on the private car for travel journeys, reduces the need to travel generally and helps deliver the priorities of the Staffordshire Local Transport Plans, where this is consistent with other policies. This will be achieved by:

- *Ensuring that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development.*

- *Ensuring that major development is located in areas that are accessible by sustainable travel modes or can be made accessible as part of the proposal.*

- *Referring to appropriate parking standards as laid out in national guidance, or any parking standards that may be produced locally.*

- *Where appropriate all new development shall facilitate walking and cycling within neighbourhoods and town centres, and link with or extend identified walking or cycling routes.*

4 Other Material Considerations

National Planning Policy Framework

4.1 The National Planning Policy Framework places a strong emphasis on promoting sustainable development including promoting the sustainable growth an expansion of all types of business in rural areas, including through well designed new building and supporting sustainable rural tourism. It also sets out the Government's approach to development within the Green Belt. The content of this document is explored in more detail, where relevant, in the Planning Assessment below.

5 Planning Assessment

Impact on the Green Belt

5.1 This application seek consent to create an equestrian centre on a parcel of land located within the North Staffordshire Green Belt and within the rural area. Policy SS6c of the Core Strategy relates to the Rural Area and states that these areas will provide only 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, and goes on to state that development within the Green Belt will be assessed in the context of national planning policy.

5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out within paragraph 89 a list of developments that will be considered appropriate within Green Belts. The list includes:

> *"provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport, recreation and for cemeteries, as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it".*

5.3 Whilst this proposal entails elements that would normally be regarded as appropriate development (e.g. the proposed manege) the Local Authority have advised at pre-application stage that the size of the stable development as a whole is likely to impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and would conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. As a consequence it is recognised that this proposal, taken as a whole, is likely to be deemed to constitute inappropriate development within the Green Belt.

5.4 Paragraph 87 of the NPPF confirms that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraph 88 of the NPPF goes on to advise that when considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm 00to the Green Belt, adding that 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.

5.5 In terms of other impacts to the Green Belt, it is noted that this site benefits from a reasonably good screen of mature trees that run along the eastern boundary with Thorney Edge Road. This screen is more substantial at the northernmost end of the site, and this feature has the effect of limiting views

into the site from this direction. The rising nature of the landscape to the west furthermore means that the development will sit at a lower level and thus will not result in any longer-distance impacts to the landscape. The development will also be closely associated with the existing complex of buildings to the north of the site, and there is further built development on the opposite side of Thorney Edge Road associated with the nearby farm and Jackson's Nursery which benefits from a large number of existing structures. As a consequence, this development will not appear unduly intrusive or isolated within the surrounding area, and coupled with the appropriate materials of construction and low ridge height of the building, I submit that it will not result in substantial 'other harm' to the Green Belt.

Very Special Circumstances

5.6 It is submitted that in this particular instance there are a number of material considerations that collectively serve to clearly outweigh the total harm to the Green Belt.

5.7 Following the success of the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Government introduced a commitment to provide a tangible legacy to the Olympic Games, backed up by a £1billion investment programme funded through Sport England. Equestrian is one of the sports eligible for funding through this programme, and the applicant's vision for this site is to provide an Olympic Standard venue for the training of horse riders with and without disabilities in both dressage and show jumping.

5.8 The applicant is a highly skilled and successful athlete who over the years has amassed some 35 European, World and Paralympic gold medals. 10 of these medals were achieved during the Paralympic Games held in Sydney, Athens, Beijing and London. He was appointed as an MBE in 2001 for his services to disabled sports, and was subsequently promoted to OBE in 2005 in

recognition of his services to equestrianism and disabled sport. Further recognition was then given in 2009 when he was made a CBE for the same reasons.

5.9 The success, experience and knowledge that the applicant holds is very unique, and the development of this equestrian centre will not only serve to help further the applicant's success to the benefit of British Sport, but it will also afford an opportunity for him to train other riders and thus contribute positively to the social improvement of the Staffordshire Moorlands and the wider region.

5.10 There are 21 Riding for the Disabled Groups within a one-hour drive of Bagnall, and these groups are the most likely to encourage riders to use the site. Whilst many of these groups operate from existing equestrian centres, none offer the opportunity for riders to experience suitably trained, elite level horses. Disabled riders will be offered one-to-one or small group training sessions on appropriately experienced, specialist horses (referred to in equestrian circles as schoolmaster horses) and thus the proposal will make a valuable contribution towards achieving more inclusive participation in sport, whilst also offering opportunities for disabled riders to benefit from the applicant's skills and experience to help them achieve more success in equestrianism. In addition to the above, the site will be available to help train other riders, up to and including international level from both the UK and abroad.

5.11 Paragraph 9 of the NPPF confirms that pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in people's quality of life including improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure. The provisions are reflected within Strategic Objective 7 of the Core Strategy

which seeks to support and enhance the tourism, cultural, recreation and leisure opportunities for the District's residents and visitors.

5.12 The provision of this Olympic standard facility, coupled with the applicant's extensive experience and knowledge to provide training and education for these riders, will result in very significant beneficial enhancements to achievement and participation in sport by both disabled and able bodied people, and will improve the conditions in which they take leisure. I submit that the considerations weigh heavily in favour of the proposed development.

5.13 These comments are reinforced by the letter of support provided by the British Equestrian Federation which is enclosed as Appendix A. The letter notes that the centre will not only allow the applicant to continue to train, compete and remain competitive at elite level, but it will also give him the opportunity to train and coach riders and horses from grassroots upwards and thus hopefully inspire the next generation of Olympians and Paralympians. I therefore submit that the support of the British Equestrian Federation serves to reinforce the view that the benefits this proposal will bring to sporting participation should be afforded substantial weight in the determination of this application.

5.14 The facility will also help to encourage further participation in sport by offering opportunities for people to train in eventing and dressage on the site. Policy C2 of the Core Strategy states that the Council will support schemes that will protect and improve the quantity, quality and accessibility of open space and outdoor sports, leisure and children's play facilities throughout the district. The proposal is consistent with these objectives and will improve both the quantity and quality of outdoor sports and recreation facilities within the District. Sporting activity plays an important role in

helping to tackle various health problems by engaging in physical activity. Such benefits are well documented, and I therefore submit that the potential to encourage further participation in sport also weighs heavily in favour of the proposed development.

5.15 The facility also has the potential to attract equestrian tourism to the area. As part of wider development proposals for the site, the applicant intends to seek permission to convert the existing outbuildings to the north of the site into dwellinghouses in order to provide accommodation for those wishing to use the facility, including the British Paralympic Squad and their associated carers and grooms. Planning submissions for these conversions will be lodged in the very near future, and have also been subject to positive pre-application discussions with the Local Authority. Riding venues are increasing in popularity and there is a market for residential training courses, which are typically 3-5 days long. The proposed equestrian centre, even without accommodation, and the high level training it offers will encourage visitors from the local region and further afield to visit the local area, and this in turn will have knock on benefits for the local economy in terms of visitors using local services and facilities. In the event of consent being granted for the residential conversions, the benefits to local tourism will be even greater. These benefits to local tourism lend further substantial weight in support of the proposed development.

5.16 The proposal will also contribute positively to the rural economy through the creation of new jobs. It is anticipated that the proposal will generate a requirement for 3 full time jobs, as well as a number of casual positions. The full time posts would entail care of the horses, supporting the running of the facility, and undertaken the administration and operation of the business including the training sessions. I submit that these benefits to local employment lend further weight in favour of the proposed development.

5.17 In addition to the above I submit that the provisions of paragraph 81 of the NPPF also weigh in favour of the development. The guidance in this paragraph states that:

> *"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 provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land".*

5.18 This proposal will serve to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt by offering opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation, and owing to the sloping nature of the land to the west and the existing vegetation on the eastern boundary, will not have a significant adverse impact on the landscape, visual amenity of local biodiversity (as discussed below). As such the aforementioned provisions of the NPPF are considered to lend further weight in favour of the proposed development.

5.19 Further weight is also lent by paragraph 28 of the NPPF which states 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, adding that planning should support land based rural businesses, and sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, communities and visitors, and which respect the character of the countryside. This proposal constitutes a land based rural business that will benefit the local economy, and derive enhancements to local tourism and leisure opportunities. As such it accords with the aims of paragraph 28 of the NPPF and accordingly this lends further weight in favour of the development.

5.20 I consider that the aforementioned considerations carry a significant degree of weight in favour of the proposal, and collectively amount to a demonstration of very special circumstances sufficient to clearly outweigh the harm to the green Belt that will ensue as a consequence of this development. The principle of development is therefore considered to be acceptable in planning terms.

Design & Appearance

5.21 In terms of design and appearance considerations, policy DC1 of the Core Strategy states that proposals should add value to the local area, incorporating creativity, detailing and materials appropriate to the character of the area. Proposals should furthermore be designed to respect the site and its surroundings and promote a positive sense of place and identity through its scale, density, layout, siting, landscaping, character and appearance. These provisions are reinforced by paragraphs 56 and 58 of the NPPF.

5.22 The equestrian buildings proposed in this application adopt a standard stable style of construction and will be constructed from materials (timber) that are appropriate to the rural area, and I submit that their appearance is therefore acceptable for this location. The proposed horse walker would be used to warm up and cool down the horses and would help to rehabilitate injured horses without them being ridden. This would prevent injury during exercising and help develop muscle strength. The horse walker will also provide a controlled training environment for young or boisterous horses which might be a danger on the roads. It is a bespoke structure and will be located to the rear of the stable block away from public views. It materials of construction are appropriate for its intended function and will not give rise to demonstrable harm to the character and appearance of the area. As a

consequence I submit that the proposal accords with the provisions of policy DC1 of the Core Strategy.

Ecological Impacts

5.23 In terms of ecological considerations, policy NE1 of the Core Strategy sets out the Council's policies for the protection of important habitats and local biodiversity. This site currently comprises a field that is used for the grazing of horses and is enclosed to the east by a number of trees. Accordingly this application is accompanied by a preliminary ecological appraisal, as well as a tree survey.

5.24 The preliminary ecological appraisal does not identify any significant constraints to the development of this land in terms of protected species, but sets out a number of recommendations. These include the provision of biodiversity enhancement measures, the safeguarding of existing trees, a precautionary approach during construction to avoid adverse impacts on reptiles, careful consideration of any external illumination to avoid impacts on bat foraging routes, covering of excavations overnight, clearance of any vegetation outside the bird nesting season and the development of a method statement to deal with Himalayan Balsam on the site. The applicant is agreeable to implementing these recommendations, and these can be secured via an appropriately worded planning condition.

5.25 The tree survey has assessed the quality of the existing trees along the eastern site boundary, and makes recommendations in respect of ensuring that these trees are safeguarded. The applicant is agreeable to the recommendations contained within the Arboricultural Report and these can also be secured by way of an appropriately worded planning condition. Having regard to the above, the proposal is considered to accord with the provisions of policy NE1 of the Core Strategy.

Highway Safety

5.26 Policy T1 of the Core Strategy sets out the Council's approach to highway safety considerations, and seeks to ensure that all new development is located where the highway network can satisfactorily accommodate traffic generated by the development or can be improved as part of the development. In addition to the above, paragraph 32 of the NPPF states that planning decisions should take account of opportunities for sustainable modes of transport, and should ensure that a safe and suitable access can be achieved for all people. Paragraph 32 of the NPPF goes on to state that:

> *"Development should only be prevented or refused on transport grounds where the residual cumulative impacts of development are severe". (my emphasis)*

5.27 The application site is located adjacent to Thorney Edge Road which in this locality is straight in its alignment. The proposed vehicular access will afford good visibility in both directions on egress and will be of sufficient width to enable vehicles, including horse boxes, to pass one another. The Local Highway Network, particularly to the south is also considered to have sufficient capacity and geometry to accommodate the traffic that would be generated by this proposal. This is furthermore an appropriate location for equestrian facilities, which cannot otherwise be located within existing settlements. I therefore submit that the proposal accords with the provisions of policy T1 of the Core Strategy.

6 Conclusion

6.1 Paragraph 186 of the NPPF states that local planning authorities should approach decision-taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development. It goes on to state in paragraph 187 that local

planning authorities should look for solutions rather than problems, and decision-takers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.

6.2 Having regard to the provisions of the Core Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework it is acknowledged that the stable block and horse walker components of this proposal will render the scheme as a whole as inappropriate development within the Green Belt. It is nevertheless considered that there is a clear case of very special circumstances to justify a departure from policy as discussed above. The proposal is of an appropriate design, will have a limited impact on the landscape owing to the slope to the west of the site and the mature vegetation to the east, and will furthermore not result in adverse impacts to ecological interests or highway safety.

6.3 The proposed development is therefore considered to accord with the provisions of Strategic Objection 7 and policies SS6c, E3, R1, C2, DC1, DC3, NR1 and T1 of the Staffordshire Moorlands Core Strategy DPD, and guidance contained within the National Planning Policy Framework.

6.4 The Local Authority is therefore respectfully requested to support the proposal and grant planning permission accordingly.