Bank House

Red Lane

Light Oaks

Stoke on Trent

ST2 7LT

22ND January 2023

Personal statement in support of proposed enclosed dog walking business.

My name is Laura Robinson, I am the applicant for a proposed enclosed dog walking field at Kerry Hill farm Eaves Lane, Bucknall ST2 8NA.

My parents have owned and farmed Kerry Hill farm up until retirement due to the business no longer being financially viable. The field and an adjacent field have since been passed onto myself and my Brother. Nationally farmers are having to diversify or sell up completely due to the financial difficulties placed upon smaller farms. I have been approached by several renewable energy companies who have offered to buy/rent out both my own and my brothers' fields which amount to 30 acres, for solar/wind power energy. Having seen such use of the countryside I would not wish for the family farm to be used in such away as I believe it would be an eyesore in the area I live.

Despite the field being hedged around the full field there have been occasions where the horses have been spooked by thunder storms and have broken free through the hedges and have had to be retrieved from the roadway, this has obvious safety issues for road users and pedestrians. No amount of fencing and hedges are sufficient to restrain horses when spooked. A change of use to an enclosed dog exercising field where there will be little chance of any dogs escaping the field would obviously reduce the risk of harm to road users, pedestrians and local residents.

I have been a registered Veterinary Nurse for over 30 years practicing in small animals. Often, dogs are brought into the vets for treatment that have sustained significant injuries from other dog attacks whilst being walked in public areas, in the worse cases some pets have had to euthanized causing obvious stress and upset to the owners and families.

During the Covid Pandemic, it is estimated that dog ownership increased by 25% this has also seen a significant increase in dog attacks which not only cause injuries to the animal but quite often the owner is injured, a recent event as reported in the national news resulted in the death of a dog walker potentially due to dogs being on leads due to no secure area to allow them to run free. The potential implications of owners being attacked are stress and anxiety and time off work. Under the Dangerous Dogs Act, a member of the public only must feel in fear of a dog bite to bring forth a prosecution. There are many dogs that have fear of humans

or other dogs due to cruelty or mistreatment and often become rescue dogs, these animals still require exercising and may come into conflict due to lack of private areas to exercise.

Taking into account the above facts I believe there is a need for secure, safe and private walking areas where owners can exercise their dogs without fear of harm or prosecution and a safe haven for female and family dog owners. This proposal is not unique and such ventures are becoming more and more popular and the fact that most are fully booked up shows there is a demand.

Examples of enclosed exercise fields within a 25 mile radius are as below:

- Paddocks for Paws, Bradnop, Staffordshire Moorlands.
- Winnies Wagtails, Keele, Newcastle under Lyme.
- Outdoor hounds Halmerend, Newcastle.
- Country hounds Congleton
- Dogs Allowed, Macclesfield (there are several in the Macclesfield area)
- Muddy Paws Paddock, Macclesfield
- Ashbourne Canine Exercise Field.
- The Field, Uttoxeter
- Newlands Uttoxeter

The list highlights that there are currently no safe walking areas within the urban conurbation of Stoke-on-Trent, although the application falls within the remit of Staffordshire Moorlands I feel the majority of users will be from with the Stoke-on-Trent area who currently wishing to use such facilities need to travel significant distances which may not fit in with daily life. My proposal is close to urban areas of the city which would reduce the need for users to travel out of the area and in turn reduce lengthy car journeys, pollution and address planning sustainability issues.

Having consulted with potential users on where they currently exercise their dogs it is evident that a lot use Wetley Moor Common nature reserve an area found to have ground nesting birds. Any decrease in the number of dogs walked in this area would have a positive impact for such nesting birds and other wildlife.

Although this is a resubmission of my previous application I would like to take this opportunity to address issues previously raised during the consultation.

Concerns previously raised of increased noise and cars using the local roads may in my opinion due to the misconception of the proposed venture with anticipation of numerous dogs and vehicles using the field at any one time similar to a dog training centres. The purpose of the business is that users can use the field privately and therefore the number of vehicles using the local road network will be not significantly increase, even at 100% usage during the summer months this will only result in an additional 13 return journeys throughout a 13 hour period. Regarding dogs barking they are naturally peaceful creatures who generally only bark when over excited or stressed such as being restricted to confined spaces such as small gardens. It is unlikely that being exercised in 1.5 acres of land will cause stress and anxiety, in fact it should only provide the opposite.

During discussions with the planning department regarding my previous application there was areas of concern regarding the erection of fencing on the site being both visible and intrusive to the area, The new application has no requirement for any additional fencing as the existing perimeter fencing and hedges are to be retained along with the existing post and rail fencing which already divides the field.

The concern of dangers to surrounding livestock is unfounded as the adjacent field is owned by my brother and has no livestock on it, the other adjacent field has only a few horses on it which will not be affected as the field is secured by a large established hedge with sheep fencing within it.

A condition applied to usage of the field is that owners should clean up after their pets using dog poop bags and take the waste home just like they would if walking in private areas. This condition is unlikely to violated as the users are paying to use the site and therefore likely to be responsible dog owners. Conditions of usage will be that users will collect any dog faeces in dog waste bags and placed in a bin, a waste disposal contract will be in place once the site begins to operate. Like Humans a dogs constitutional habits are normally during certain times of the day and it is unlikely that every dog walked throughout the day will have the need to defecate therefore it is expected that there will be limited waste disposal needs. This has been supported by discussions with operators of other such developments.

As part of my application and my support of environmental and climate issues I propose to increase the ecosystem of the field by rewilding areas of the field to include wild flowers and natural grasses which would provide much needed areas for insects and birds which have sadly been on the decline for decades. Such improvements have been supported by local authorities with areas being converted into wild flower meadows. Managed grass pathways will be formed to provide a calm and stimulating experience for the wellbeing of both the dog and owner.

Previously there has been concerns raised for potential anti-social activities on the car park. I have lived in the area all my life and there is no evidence to support that any anti-social behaviour occurs on the existing parking area due to the gates being secured and this will remain the case with provision made for the gates to be closed outside of business hours.

It is recognised that the field is in green belt and under paragraph 145 in the National Planning Policy Framework new development is considered to be inappropriate subject to a few exceptions. One such exception is to use the land for the provision of outdoor recreation as long as it preserves the openness of the greenbelt. This proposal in my opinion meets both criteria as aforementioned.

To conclude I feel that the proposal will have no impact on the rural setting and will only have a positive impact on both the locality and the ecosystem. There is demand for such provision as highlighted by other identical businesses further afield, but there is currently no such provision locally for residents of Stoke on Trent who have to travel significant distances which in a time of trying to tackle climate control is not good for the environment.

As already stated traditional farming on a small scale is declining and the need to diversify is increasing, this proposal makes sympathetic use of the rural setting with no impact on the surrounding area.

The proposal increases the welfare and safety of both the owner and dog and allows the animal to be exercised whilst not on a lead, but doesn't propose a danger to others who may come into contact during exercise in public areas.

In my opinion there are significant positives to the provision of a dog exercising field which the benefits have been accepted and approved by neighbouring authorities, please also see attached letters of support for the application and I hope this goes towards planning permission if required being granted.

Kind regards

Laura Robinson