D & A Statement To Support Application For
Change Of Use Of Agricultural Land To
Dog Walking & Exercise Field
Bird Grove Farm, Creswell Road, Hilderstone ST15 8SL

Introduction :

The application is for the change of use of 0.72 acres of agricultural land at Bird Grove Farm, Creswell Road, Hilderstone, ST15 8SL for use as a dog walking and exercise field, and associated fencing and vehicle parking.

Drawing No. 591/01 and location plan denotes the red edge boundary of the proposed site, which forms part of the larger site owned by the applicants totalling 5.7 acres.

The land will be securely enclosed with a 1.8m high post and wire fence, enabling owners to walk their dogs off the lead in a safe and secure environment.

This facility will be of particular benefit to those who own dogs displaying nervous or antisocial behaviour, with poor recall, a disability or an area for early puppy training.

All dog walking sessions will be pre-booked for hourly slots and possibly longer via an online booking system. Only customers who have made a prior booking will be able to use the field, dog walkers will not be able to arrive speculatively. The booking system will restrict customers to a maximum of 4 dogs per owner at any one time.

The Site :

The red edge site contained in this application totals approximately 0.72 acres of agricultural grassed field located on Creswell Road approximately 190m north of the junction with Moss Lane. The land abuts Creswell Road along the western boundary, neighbouring agricultural fields to the north, and land forming Bird Grove Farm to the south and east which is also owned by the applicant. The occupants of Bird Grove Farm House will own and operate the proposed dog walking field.

Entry to the site is via the existing vehicular access off Creswell Road serving Bird Grove Farm, which will be retained.

There is currently a timber post and rail fence to the western road boundary, with hedge planting, and a post and wire stock fence to the northern field boundary. Entrance gates and fences to the southern and eastern boundaries have been removed for future replacement.

There are no residential properties [other than the applicants] to the north, east or west of the site, the nearest being approximately 160m to the south – Swallows Rest, The Coach House, Courtyard Cottage, Rose Cottage and Draymans Cottage.
The site does not fall within the Green Belt but is in open countryside.

Character & Appearance :

The character and appearance of the current agricultural parcel of land will remain unchanged as it will continue to be an open field surfaced with cut grass.
There will be no permanent structures on the site as a consequence of this proposal, other than the introduction of agricultural fencing, and so the visual agricultural appearance of the site will remain unchanged.
The only engineering work required is the formation of a small parking area to accommodate a maximum of 2No cars, turning of which can take place within the tarmac drive allowing vehicles to exit the site in a forward gear.
It is confirmed that no commercial puppy or dog training / agility classes will be carried out, and there will be no agility equipment in the field.
This service provides a facility promoting health and wellbeing for dogs and their owners from the local and wider community. The character of the use remains unchanged to what would be expected from a public footpath network, other than the enclosed and secured nature of the site.

Social Conditions :

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, there has been a sharp increase in dog ownership which sadly in some cases has resulted in dogs which were not socialised or trained correctly due to the lockdown. It is widely reported in the national news that dog attacks are now more frequent than ever before and so the provision of secure dog walking fields are becoming ever more important. They improve the quality of life for the recent and increasing movement of the home-based work force who now own dogs and provides a social distancing facility whilst exercising both themselves and their dogs should future lockdowns occur.

Business Operation :

The facility will operate on a pre-booking system only for one owner at a time to walk and exercise their own dogs, up to a maximum of four, for a 1 hour period. The owner will be sent electronically a gate lock code which will allow them access into the field.

The facility will operate from 08.00hrs to 20.00hrs during summer time, and 08.00hrs to 16.00hrs during winter time, for seven days a week. There will be no external lighting anywhere at the facility.

The field will only be used by private individual dog owners and their pets. It will not provide facilities for commercial dog training classes, agility or competitions.

A specialist dog waste bin such as the “Gladiator 50ltr Bin With Chute” as shown below will be provided within the secure field which will be emptied twice weekly or as demand requires, and all waste will be removed from site via a formal contract with a licensed waste carrier such as Biffa.

It will be agreed in the terms and conditions that anyone using the facility will be responsible for collecting their dogs waste and depositing it in the bin provided. The owners will also regularly inspected the site to ensure it remains clean and healthy.

Gladiator 50 ltr Bin With Chute



Parking & Vehicle Movements :

Vehicular access will be via the current dropped kerb access off Creswell Road serving Bird Grove Farm. The access is very well positioned and benefits from good visibility of the highway in both directions due to the wide grassed verge with no obstructions.

A parking area for 2 cars will be formed off the current private drive to allow for the cross-over period when dog owners arrive and leave. The parking bays are slightly larger than the national standard to allow for owners who often use vans to transport large or multiple dogs. Vehicles will be able to manoeuvre with the private drive allowing them to enter and egress the site in a forward gear.

The private drive and parking bays will be surfaced with tarmac to provide a clean all weather hardstanding and ensure no mud is carried back out onto the highway.

During summer months, the maximum number of vehicle movements generated by the facility will be 1 per hour for 12 hours throughout the day, and so it is not considered that this will have any adverse impact on the highway network.

Employment :

The management and operation of the online booking system, marketing and compliance with all necessary legislation will be carried out by the site owner. In addition, grass mowing and general site maintenance will provide employment for 1 part time employee.

This will provide an additional source of income for the owner and a part time local employee in support of a rural business.

Landscaping & Ecology :

The site currently consists of grassed field 0.72 acres in size with no trees, landscaping or water features, and very little prospect for wildlife and ecology. It is recognised the proposed change of use should preserve and not detract from the openness of the countryside and so the field shall remain as grass. However, the owner would like to take the opportunity to improve the site in order to achieve a biodiversity net gain and so would plant approximately 150m of additional native hedgerow and 6No new trees. Also the grass would have areas that are less frequently cut and allowed to grow with the introduction of wild flowers to encourage pollinator insects.

Tree and hedgerow locations and specifications are shown on the Site Layout drawing.

Access :

The site can be approached from the north and south via Creswell Road which is a metalled public highway with an established vehicular access currently serving Bird Grove Farm.
Entry in to the dog walking field will be via a locked steel mesh gate set within the boundary fence adjacent the car parking area off the private drive, which will be DDA Compliant. The gate will be operated with a coded lock to prevent unauthorised access.
The terms and conditions for the use of the field will be provided to the dog owner when booking, which must be agreed and adhered to.
The sessions are to be booked for 55 minutes in any one hour with a 5 minute window between sessions to avoid cross over. This is also to ensure social distancing and the exclusivity of the use of the dog walking field.

Planning Policies :

The National Planning Policy Framework [NPPF] sets out core planning policies which should underpin the planning decision making process. There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and is central to the policy approach in the framework. It emphasises the need to plan positively for appropriate new development. The core principles that are pertinent to this case is that planning should :

- contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. At a very high level, the objective of sustainable development can be summarised as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs

- Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives) :

a) **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) **an environmental objective** – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

It is considered this proposal satisfies each of the above objectives as it provides an additional income stream and employment in a rural business, and improves mental health and well-being to people and their dogs through the provision of a safe space for exercise in the outdoors. Enhancements to the grass field and additional hedge/tree planting will also improve the natural ecology and biodiversity together with a carbon neutral use for the site.

Section 6 of the NPPF provides policy on 'supporting a prosperous rural economy'. Paragraph 83 sets out that planning policies and decisions should enable:

a) The sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas

b) The development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses

c) Sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

d) The retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

It is considered this proposal satisfies each of the above objectives as it provides sustainable growth for the applicants, allows for diversification of redundant agricultural land, aids leisure and provides open space for the community whilst respecting the rural countryside setting.

Impact :

Although the site is located in the open countryside, the retention of the grassed field without any permanent structures will preserve the openness and rural character setting.

The nearest dwellings are approximately 160m to the south and so it is considered will not suffer any loss of residential amenity, noise nuisance or privacy issues.

The low number of vehicle movements will not adversely affect the highways network or cause disturbance to neighbours.

The proposed use will enhance the biodiversity and ecology of the site whilst providing a safe and secure facility for an outdoor activity which is naturally associated with the open countryside.