

DELEGATED DECISION REPORT

SMD/2025/0451
Valid 30/10/2025

ROUND MEADOWS FARM
ROWNALL ROAD
WETLEY ROCKS

PROPOSED CHANGE OF USE
FROM EQUESTRIAN
TRAINING FACILITY TO
SPORTS AND LEISURE
FACILITY (PADEL)

(FULL - MINOR)

MAIN ISSUES

- Whether or not the proposal amounts to inappropriate development in the Green Belt
- The principle of the proposal
- The impact on the character and appearance of the area
- The impact on residential amenity
- The impact on highway safety

DESCRIPTION OF SITE

The site is in the countryside about half a kilometre to the north of the built-up part of Cellarhead and is also in the Green Belt. It comprises a large part of a large metal - sheeted portal-frame former agricultural storage building which has been in use for many years as a commercial equestrian training centre. It is on the west side of Rownall Road which provides the access to the site. The rear part of the building, to the east, is within the same ownership and is in use as a children's play barn also accessed via the same entrance of the road. There is a large yard area to the front of the building (to the east of it) used for car parking but no marked spaces. There is open land to the south and west of the building. There is a smaller similar portal-framed agricultural storage building attached to the north side of the building. Directly to the north of this are horse stables and other buildings in equestrian use. About 40m to the north-east of the building on site are a number of dwellings, some of which appear to be converted barns. There is also a dwelling to the other side of the road to the east, opposite the site entrance.

PROPOSAL

This is a full planning application for the change of use of the equestrian centre part of the building into a padel tennis/racquet sport centre with two padel courts. The only external change to the building would be the insertion of a glazed entrance into the south side elevation of the building. An amended site plan was received on 19th November 2025 which shows eight parking spaces for the padel centre placed next to the north-east corner of the building. The current yard area in front of the building that the road entrance leads to currently is segregated via post and wire fencing. The applicant would be removing this resulting in a large yard area to improve parking availability for the children's play centre visitors.

A Design and Access Statement has been submitted which gives more information as follows:

The building had been owned and run by the applicants for 10 years and previously formed part of a wider farming complex and successful horse-riding stables. The building was constructed and installed by previous owners of the site, and it is considered that the building was erected circa 1984.

The building has served as a space to exercise and train horse at least since 2008, the client believes that was in place as early as 2004. An application to regularise the use was submitted in 2008 under application ref SMD/2008/0441, later withdrawn. A formal certificate of lawful development application for the equestrian use was submitted in 2016 and approved in 2017 under reference SMD/2016/0819. This application is therefore submitted based on the fact that the building has an extant use for equestrian exercise and training.

The linked part of the building has been subject to a formal change of use from a redundant agricultural building to a Children's Soft play area and the external works including the erection of an extension to provide an entrance. Approved under application reference SMD/2019/0144. The approval has been implemented and operational since 2019.

The application is for two padel tennis courts within the existing sports facility. The proposal seeks to locate the new courts within a building that is current use for Equestrian exercise and training.

Padel is commonly described as the fastest growing sport in the world and increasingly being called the fastest growing sport in the UK. Padel is a discipline of tennis and was recently recognised by Sport England. The sport is governed by the LTA and is developing rapidly and growing in popularity across the UK. Padel is easy to learn and popular with women and men and played by people of all ages and abilities. It contributes to a healthy lifestyle and is very sociable being played as doubles. The padel courts will be available to members and non-members. Local schools and other groups will be offered regular opportunities for children to come and try this new sport.

It is anticipated that the operation will accommodate 1 hour sessions staggered at half hourly intervals, the facilities will accommodate a maximum of 8 padel users at any one time, it is anticipated that a maximum of 2 staff on any one time opening hours of Monday-Sunday 7am till 10pm.

RELEVANT LOCAL AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICIES

Staffordshire Moorlands Local Plan (Adopted Sept 2020)

- SS10 Other Rural Areas Strategy
- C2 Sport, Recreation and Open Space
- DC1 Design Considerations

- T1 Sustainable Transport

National Planning Policy Framework (Dec 2024)

Sections 6 (Economy), 8 (Communities), 12 (Design) and 13 (Green Belts).

SITE HISTORY / RELEVANT PREVIOUS APPLICATIONS

SMD 2016 0819: Certificate of Lawfulness for the use of the site as an equestrian exercise and training use. Granted.

CONSULTATIONS

Publicity

Site Notice expiry date: 16.12.25.
Neighbour consultation period ends: 16.12.25
Press Advert: N/A

Public Comments

An objection letter has been received from a local resident stating the proposal would have substantial negative effect on residential properties in very close proximity.

Town/Parish Council Comments

Any increase in traffic and noise nuisance to neighbours should be considered however they may not be any different than those that exist under the current use of this premises.

Local Highways Authority

No objection subject to a condition requiring the proposed parking area for the padel tennis centre be provided before the change of use commences.

Environmental Health

No objection subject to conditions to restrict noise and disturbance during the works phase, details of lighting to be submitted for approval, adaptation of the building to provide sound insulation in accordance with details to be submitted for approval, restrictions on the hours of operation and restrictions on sound levels of any machinery such as air conditioning.

Further comments were provided as follows:

Noise: There is no predicted adverse impact to amenity according to the planning statement – “The proposed development should not result in any significant increase in the local noise climate. The application building comprises of a portal framed building and whilst it is located within close proximity to the village it is positioned far

enough from other noise sensitive receptors to avoid any issues being raised.” This advice is not supported with objective evidence e.g sound insulation details or a noise impact assessment.

This is a relatively new sport and potential noise impacts are not yet clear but the proposed development is indoors and the nearest non-involved property is approx. 50m away according to our mapping system. If the timings are restricted to daytime as proposed and noise breakout is controlled then neighbourhood amenity should be adequately protected. We would advise the timings proposed are made a condition of development.

But the current construction of the building is unclear and does not appear to contain any obvious sound insulation to prevent breakout noise. We recommend a condition is imposed requiring the building is adapted to prevent noise breakout through the walls and roof. This activity is reported as causing high impact noise levels which if not attenuated could cause complaint to the local authority and compromise the future operation. If the building has been previously upgraded to address noise breakout then these details should be provided.

The use of opened doors or windows for ventilation is not ideal and it maybe appropriate to install air conditioning, any air conditioning units installed should be attenuated so as not increase pre-existing background sound levels.

Statutory nuisance: The granting of this planning permission does not in any way indemnify against statutory nuisance action being taken should substantiated complaints within the remit of part III of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 be received.

OFFICER COMMENTS

The site is in the Green Belt and Policy SS10 of the Local Plan, the strategy for the countryside in the District, requires strict control over inappropriate development in the Green Belt. Inappropriate development is by definition in the NPPF, harmful to the Green Belt. Paras 154 and 155 lists the exceptional forms of development which are not inappropriate development. The change of use of buildings is listed, where such buildings are permanent and substantial. The building on site is clearly permanent and substantial. It may have been built for agricultural purposes which is a use which is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt but the use has been changed to an equestrian training centre with a Certificate of Lawfulness which legally confirms the use and authorises the use of the building as such. It is no longer an agricultural building. The further change of use of the building is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and this respect complies with Green Belt policy in the NPPF (Section 13) and Policy SS10 of the Local Plan.

Policy SS10 states the countryside will provide only for development which has an essential need to be located in the countryside, supports the rural diversification and sustainability of the rural areas, promotes sustainable tourism or enhances the countryside. Whilst a padel tennis courts use is not regarded as essentially needing to be the countryside, the proposal involves the change of use of an existing building which is also used for sport and recreational purposes. Although equestrian uses in general are regarded as requiring a countryside location, it could also be argued

that the current use in an indoor commercial horse training facility also does not essentially require a rural location. It is an indoor use, not outdoor recreation demanding open land and fields and as a commercial use is not linked to the surrounding fields.

Furthermore, Policy SS10 supports the diversification of existing farm enterprises. The surrounding area was home to a farm enterprise that has diversified significantly and there is still some agricultural use present (such as in the adjoining building).

Policy SS10 also seeks to limit uses which generate a substantial number of regular trips in areas that are not well served by public transport. The nearest bus stops are 1km walk from the site on Ash Bank Road, Werrington/Cellarhead and walking along Rownall Road to reach the site from the bus stops appears to be safe enough and easily possible. However, it is anticipated that most visitors will arrive by car. But the current use of the site also needs to be considered. The current equestrian training facility would also generate a similar amount of traffic, especially as customers would require a horse box towed by car to visit the site. It is not considered a proposed padel tennis use of the building would be any less sustainable than the current horse training facility use.

Overall, the proposal would not amount to any significant conflict with Policy SS10, the strategy for the countryside, as a whole.

Policy C2 is the policy directly relating to sport and recreation. In the case of proposals for new sport, recreation and open space, facilities should:

- a) be located in accessible locations and supported by the local transport infrastructure;
- b) protect the residential amenity of the area;
- c) 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;
- d) not harm interests of acknowledged importance; and
- e) be designed so that they are fit for purpose.

With regard to a), as argued above, accessibility is restricted but the site is not in a remote location and is 500m from the built-up residential areas of the large villages of Werrington and Cellarhead and reached via good quality road which appears suitable for cycling and to some extent appears safe for walking despite the absence of a footway.

With regard to b), Environmental Health does not object to the proposal on the grounds of noise affecting the nearby dwellings, especially in relation to the current use of the site. This is an indoor use and not outdoor which helps with noise abatement and the building can be further noise insulated via conditions.

With regard to c), two padel tennis courts are proposed and when used to full capacity, the building will be occupied by eight players and two staff. There is nothing to suggest the current horse training use would have much less persons present when in use. The site also adjoins a children's play barn which I consider is a more intensive use when at full capacity. There are equestrian uses and large

industrial warehouses on neighbouring land to the north. Given the neighbouring land uses, it is not considered the change of use of the horse training facility, another recreational use, into two padel tennis courts would be incompatible with the area or lead to significantly greater environmental impacts.

With regard to d), the proposal would not harm any interests of acknowledged importance. For example, it is not close to listed buildings, Conservation Areas or biodiversity sites.

With regard to e), there is nothing to suggest that due to the design, it would not be “fit for purpose”.

Overall, the proposed use would generally comply with policies SS10 and C2 of the Local Plan and therefore is acceptable in principle.

With regard to the impact on the character and appearance of the area, the only external changes would be the insertion of a glazed entrance onto the south-facing wall. This would not harm the appearance of the building and in any case, would be well screened from the road by a group of trees immediately to the south. The proposal would not lead to any significant impact on the visual amenities of the area in compliance with Policy DC1.

With further regard to the impact on residential amenity, there are a number of dwellings close to the site (at least 40m to the east and north-east). There is potential for such sport and leisure uses to lead to noise from both the activity and players. The Environmental Health Officer has assessed the potential noise impacts and considers there would be no significant problems but would require further details of the building in the event that noise level exceeded 35db. A condition can be imposed which will secure this level and in the event that noise levels exceeded this, a scheme of adaptation to control noise break-out would need to be applied to the building. I consider that such a condition is necessary to ensure local residents would not be significantly affected by noise and that a further condition be added, as recommended by Environmental Health requiring any details of machinery that would need to be installed e.g. air conditioning, for prior approval before installation. This is along with standard conditions which restrict the hours of operation specified. With the safeguard of conditions, I do not consider the proposal would significantly affect residential amenity, in compliance with Policy DC1.

Finally, with regard to highway safety, there is no objection from the local highways authority. Eight parking spaces, equal to the number of players when at full capacity, can easily be provided and marked out in the existing yard. This would not affect the area of yard which can be used for the parking for the play barn, made easier by the removal of a dividing post and wire fence which the applicant agrees to and can be required via a planning condition. There is ample space in the yard for any additional parking which might be required along with turning space. The road leading up to the site (which is straight and of adequate width to allow two large vehicles to pass easily) and the existing entrance are of sufficient quality with good visibility sufficient to ensure highway safety would not be affected, in compliance with policies DC1 and T1 of the Local Plan.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is not required for the development as it is a conversion scheme with no loss of any external habitat area.

CONCLUSION/PLANNING BALANCE

The proposed change of use would not amount to inappropriate development, is acceptable in principle and would not lead to any harms to the visual or residential amenities of the area, would not lead to significant additional traffic or be detrimental to highway safety, with the safeguard of conditions. It would comply with the Local Plan and the government planning guidance contained in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

OFFICER RECOMMENDATION : APPROVE

Case Officer: Chris Johnston

Recommendation Date: 6.1.26

X 

Signed by: Jane Colley Signature

On behalf of Staffordshire Moorlands District Council