



The countryside charity
Hertfordshire

31a Church Street
Welwyn
HERTS AL6 9LW
www.cpreherts.org.uk
office@cpreherts.org.uk
01438 717587

Standing up for Hertfordshire's countryside

Elizabeth Burnham
Planning and Building Control
St. Albans City and District Council
St. Peter's Street
St. Albans
Herts AL1 3JE

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

11th December 2020 (by email)

Dear Ms. Burnham,

Application No. 5/2020/2327

Change of use of land from fallow (3b) agricultural to equestrian (sui generis) and erection of an equestrian stable building with ancillary equestrian storage and internal access track application (access sought)

Land At Mackerye End, Harpenden, Hertfordshire

CPRE Hertfordshire have concerns regarding this proposal for development in the Green Belt contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework and the St Albans Local Plan.

This is the third application for equine development on this site, applications 5/2020/0267 and 5/2019/2196 having previously been refused.

We recognise that the current application further reduces the size of the stable building and relocates it into the north east corner of the site, but that does not change the fundamental objection that it introduces a built form into what is currently an open field in the Green Belt, with consequent impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the Landscape Conservation Area in which the site lies.

We do not dispute that the land has been used for grazing and other equine purposes for a number of years, albeit without change of use from agricultural to equestrian, but that use has been carried out without stabling on the site. Previously the applicant has referred to the intent to breed horses at the site and the need for mechanical equipment such as a tractor in order to maintain the land. Though these are not specifically mentioned in this application, it is reasonable to assume that they are still intended, and, in our view, take the proposal beyond normal domestic equine use or outdoor recreation.

The applicant rightly states in the Planning, Design and Access Statement that equestrian use falls within the exceptions outlined in paragraph 145(b) of the National Planning Policy Framework in as much as they are outdoor recreation and hence the proposal is not

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inappropriate development in the Green Belt. However NPPF 145(b) requires the facilities to preserve the openness of the Green Belt. *R (Lee Valley Regional Park Authority) v Epping Forest DC* [EWCA Civ 404] held that the concept of “openness” means the state of being free from built development, i.e. the absence of buildings. Despite the reduction of one bay, this is not a small structure. It will impact on the openness of the Green Belt both spatially and visually. It would also be contrary to Local Plan Policy 104 as it would adversely affect the landscape quality of the Landscape Conservation Area.

As very special circumstances put forward to outweigh the resulting harm to the openness of the Green Belt, the applicant puts forward the fact that the building has been located closer to the north east boundary and hence will be less apparent in the landscape. However, the site is completely open to the south and south-west where the land slopes up to the site and the building will be clearly visible on the top of the hill.

It is also stated that the availability of livery stables is reducing in the area and hence the applicant needs to construct these stables to meet their own need. We do not believe that has been sufficiently demonstrated in the documentation accompanying the application, or that it amounts to sufficient weight to offset the harm. The Council will have to satisfy itself on this need before determining the application.

Finally, it is also claimed that the proposal will support the local economy through the purchase of feed, etc. Given that the proposal is for domestic equine use, this is likely to be small when compared to commercial liveries and can only be awarded limited weight.

We do not consider that the planning balance supports this development and urge the Council to reject it.

Yours sincerely,

David Irving
Senior Planning Volunteer
CPRE Hertfordshire