

Planning Application: 23/02221/FP – Change of Use from agricultural land to a dog walking field including access, fencing and a visitor parking area – Land to the west of High Street, Graveley.

The purpose of this document is to respond on behalf of the applicants to the comments received from the Area Highway Development Control Manager.

Highways are recommending refusal on two grounds:

1. That the access road is not wide enough to allow two vehicles to pass each other or for non-motorised users to access the site safely.
2. They have concerns of conflicts between pedestrians on footpath 017 and the vehicular access.

Whilst we understand Highways' concerns, we believe that given the extremely low volume of proposed daily usage there are solutions that can address these concerns.

I will address each issue in the same order as detailed above.

1. The proposed highways access is approx. 3.8 metres at the entrance to the site, it remains at this width until 15 metres into the site where it widens to form a passing bay.

The original design of the access and the passing bay has been slightly amended on the attached drawing, which is labelled revision B, please replace the original drawing with this latest version. We have identified an area on the latest revision, which is shown hatched, this broadens the previous passing bay and is designed to provide an area for vehicles to safely pass if required.

In order to ensure that two vehicles do not meet on the 15 metre section of access where it is not possible for vehicles to pass, the applicants propose to operate a management system through their booking scheme that is designed to ensure that vehicles from an earlier booking are not leaving at the same time as vehicles from a later booking arrive.

The applicants already operate similar facilities elsewhere in the region, they report that operating figures from existing sites show an average of 60% occupancy and these bookings are primarily between 8am and 6pm. The average booking is for one hour.

The operators are able to control bookings through an automated system that opens and closes the gates into the dog walking area automatically thus restricting times when users can enter and leave.

When users book using the online booking system, they will also be issued with a set of instructions that must be followed, failure to do so could result in them being barred from the site in future.

All users will be asked to arrive at least five minutes before their session starts. All users finishing their session will be asked to vacate the site within 5 minutes after their session finishes.

This will mean that there is a very low probability that a car leaving the site will meet a car coming in.

If, however in the unlikely event that this does happen users will also be instructed when leaving the site to give way to vehicles entering.

Thus, if a car leaving the site is progressing towards the entrance on the 15-metre section between the wide passing bay and the entrance and meets a car coming in the car leaving will immediately reverse to the passing bay thus allowing unrestricted access to the car entering.

This system will ensure there is a very low probability of any vehicles entering the site being prevented from progressing down the access track towards the parking.

We have also noted that the Council has received comments from a few local residents. They have highlighted the fact that some parents walk their children to the local school along FP 017. To ensure there are no vehicles associated with the dog walking entering or leaving the site whilst parents are taking or collecting their children from school, the booking system will not allow bookings between 8.30-09.10 in the morning and 3.00-3.30pm in the afternoon on weekdays during the school terms. The operators use a sophisticated online booking system that can easily control bookings during these periods. This will ensure there will be no vehicle interaction with parents and children. However, we also note that parents are allowed to park in the adjacent pub car park. There is no dedicated footpath into the car park, so parents and children do already interact with vehicles entering and leaving the pub car park.

To prevent interaction between motor vehicles and pedestrians on the access road all users must arrive in a vehicle, not on foot.

In reality this is exactly what happens as users of the site are not comfortable with walking their dogs on leads in public places which is why they choose to use the secure dog walking facility provided.

We believe that a very simple management system will ensure that the access can be safely used at all times without causing any issues at the entrance to the site.

2. In order to ensure there is no interaction between users of footpath 017 and the access the applicants are proposing to erect a post and wire agricultural fence along the northern boundary of the access road thus segregating the footpath from the access road.

This would provide an improvement over the current situation whereby agricultural vehicles can come and go over the agricultural access immediately adjacent to the public footpath with no segregation.

We believe that Highways' concerns are unfounded. Vehicles entering and leaving the site will be doing so at extremely low speeds and the management system proposed will ensure that there is a very low probability of any vehicle entering the site meeting a vehicle attempting to leave. There will be no interaction between motor vehicles and pedestrians as there is no access to the site permitted on foot. The access will be segregated from footpath 017 by an agricultural post and wire fence.