

Grow Walkies Ltd

Land to the West of High Street, Graveley, Stevenage, Herts, SG4 7LE

**Section 73a Application for the Variation of Condition 1 Attached to Planning
Permission 23/02221/FP - Change of Use of Field to Dog Walking Field Including
Installation of Fencing. Retention and Completion of Existing Agricultural Track &
Visitor Parking Area (As Amended by Plan Received 15th November 2023)**

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- B:** Existing Site Plan– GrowWS-1-1-003B-SitePlan
- C:** 23/02221/FP – Decision Notice
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- E:** Noise Management Plan
- F:** Noise Assessment – LFAcoustics Ltd July 2025

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Planning permission 23/02221/FP was granted on 8 January 2024 for the Change of use of field to dog walking field, including installation of fencing. Retention and completion of existing agricultural track and visitor parking area (as amended by plan received 15th November 2023) on land to the west of High Street, Graveley, Hertfordshire.

1.2 This s73a application seeks the removal of Condition 1 of permission 23/02221/FP which states *“The use of agricultural land for the siting of a Dog Walking Facility hereby permitted shall be discontinued and the land restored to its former condition on or before 2 years from the date of this approval, unless planning permission is sought to formalise the development in perpetuity.*

Reason: Permission has been granted for a temporary period solely to monitor the use and the appropriateness of the development in regards to amenity.

1.3 A further planning permission (24/02118/FP) was granted on 4 December 2024 for the temporary erection of a weather shelter and dog play frame within the dog walking field at Graveley. The permanent siting of this equipment will be dealt with under a separate application.

1.4 This report is accompanied by

- Application form;
- Site plan;
- Decision Notice
- Officer’s report
- Noise Assessment
- Noise Management Plan

2.0 BACKGROUND

2.1 Grow Walkies Ltd was established in May 2021 in response to growing demand for safe secure dog walking areas in light of the increase in dog thefts during the Covid pandemic. During the

pandemic, dog ownership soared when people found themselves isolated at home due to ill health or for work.

- 2.2 Using their farming contacts, the team at Grow Walkies decided that they could provide safe secure areas where dog owners could give their dogs freedom without fear of losing them.
- 2.3 The demand for secure dog walking sites has continued and Grow Walkies now operate 19 fields on 15 sites
- 2.4 The Graveley site opened on 12 April 2024 and is nearly averaging 12 bookings per day.
- 2.5 The site is open between 0700 hours and 2100 hours Monday to Friday, 0800 hours and 1800 hours on Saturdays, Sundays, Bank or Public holidays.

3.0 **ASSESSMENT**

- 3.1 This application seeks the removal of Condition 1 which restricts the granted planning permission (23/02221/FP) for a period of two years. The reason given for this condition states *“Permission has been granted for a temporary period solely to monitor the use and the appropriateness of the development in regards to amenity.”*
- 3.2 Within the Officer’s Report, “amenity” is described on all bar one occasion as relating to noise. The single other mention of amenity was from the Parish Council consultee response and was in relation to loss of privacy.
- 3.3 The site has now been in operation for over 17 months and is close to achieving an average of 12 bookings a day, which is in line with other fully established Grow Walkies sites. As the site is now fully established and has been in operation for two full summer periods with longer daylight hours, there has been sufficient time to monitor the use and the appropriateness of the site in regards to amenity.
- 3.4 **Location**
- 3.5 The site lies to the west of Graveley High Street, 966m to the north east of Junction 8 of the A1(M) Motorway, 5km to the south of Letchworth and 3.7km to the north of Stevenage.

3.6 The site comprises of part of a former agricultural field which is laid to grass. The site totals 0.86Ha comprising 0.8Ha of dog walking field. 0.024Ha of parking/turning area and 0.04Ha of access track.

3.7 The grid reference for the parking area which lies within the site is TL 23082 27702 and the centre of the dog walking field is TL 23050 27602.

3.8 The Location Plan has been submitted as Appendix A and the Existing Site Plan as Appendix B

3.9 **Assessment of key considerations**

3.10 **The Principle of Development in the Green Belt**

3.11 The Planning Officer in his report concluded that the development was not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and that very special circumstances do not need to be demonstrated.

3.12 **Design /Impact on the Character of the Area**

3.13 The proposed design and use was assessed in detail by the Planning Officer and was considered to be acceptable in design terms and in accordance with Policies SP9 and D1 of the Local Plan as well as Section 12 of the NPPF.

3.14 **Impact on Designated Heritage Assets**

3.15 The Council's Conservation Officer was consulted on the original application and stated that *"The proposals would preserve the architectural and/or historic interest of nearby listed buildings and therefore complies with sections 16/66 of the Act.*

The proposals would preserve the architectural and/or historic interest of the conservation area and therefore complies with section 72 (1) of the Act".

3.16 It was therefore concluded that the development would not result in any harm to the character of the Conservation Area or the setting and appearance of the 3 No. adjacent listed buildings.

3.17 **Flood Risk**

3.18 The site lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3 and a Flood Risk Assessment was submitted as part of the

original application.

- 3.19 The FRA concluded that the development would have a NPPF flood risk classification of 'Water Compatible'. NPPG identifies that 'Water Compatible' uses of land are appropriate within Flood Zone 3a and 3b without the need for an Exception Test.
- 3.20 An indicative drainage strategy was prepared which demonstrated that the development could be effectively drained while providing sufficient storage to accommodate surface water runoff for all storm events up to and including the 1 in 100-year event, plus an allowance for climate change.
- 3.21 The Environment Agency were consulted on the use of a swale as drainage for the site and had no objection to the proposals. The development was therefore considered to be acceptable in terms of flood risk in accordance with Section 14 of the NPPF
- 3.22 **Transport and Highways Impacts**
- 3.23 An improvement to the access track to allow for a passing/waiting place where vehicles can pass, along with a fence between the access track and the adjacent footpath, were submitted for consideration to the Highways Officer.
- 3.24 This approach was deemed acceptable by Highways and the design of the fence was submitted and approved prior to installation.
- 3.25 In conclusion, the Planning Officer considered that the access track and parking area, subject to the incorporation of more hardstanding for a passing place, was acceptable in planning terms.
- 3.26 **Impact on the Amenities of Neighbouring Properties**
- 3.27 The Planning Officer considered the proposed use of the site and its location in relation to the nearest residential properties and to the George and Dragon Pub.
- 3.28 The car park for the development is adjacent to the car park for the George and Dragon pub where noise from the coming and going of cars and the opening and closing of car doors is prevalent.
- 3.29 The Planning officer acknowledged that the proposed use as a dog walking field would give rise to some impact upon the neighbouring properties compared to the existing use of the site which was

as an agricultural field at that time. The consultation responses were noted in respect of noise and disturbance but he went on to say that in his view, the perceived impacts of the proposal were being somewhat overstated. It is clear that amenity is assessed in the Officer's Report in relation to noise and the potential noise impact on the closest residential properties.

- 3.30 He considered other planning applications in the district that had the potential to cause noise from dogs and those decisions both included a 2-year condition which allowed the proposed use to commence and due time given to assess the full impact of the proposals on the amenities of neighbours. The other applications were:
- 3.31 21/02190/FP – Farrowby Farm, Hinxworth: Continued use of agricultural land for the siting of a therapy pool for dogs and retention of existing therapy pool structure.
- 3.32 19/02939/FP – Land West of Chantry Lane, Little Wymondley: Change of use of land, shed, part of barn from agriculture to dog exercise park (sui generis), erection of compost toilet and 2-metre-high fence (as amended and supported by information received 9th March and 21st April 2020)
- 3.33 21/02190/FP – Farrowby Farm, Hinxworth has gone on to secure a permanent permission (23/02232/FP).
- 3.34 19/02939/FP – Land West of Chantry Lane, Little Wymondley – Further built development has progressed on this site and it is unclear if the dog exercise park was ever implemented, even on a temporary basis.
- 3.35 The Council's EHO endorsed the inclusion of a 2-year temporary condition and advised on the inclusion of a Noise Management Plan (NMP) however, the Planning Officer considered the imposition of an NMP to be unreasonable on the back of the already proposed temporary condition.
- 3.36 The Planning Officer went on to say that he didn't consider there were any materially adverse reasons to refuse permission on the grounds of neighbour amenity impacts but agreed that the temporary (two-year application permission) condition would enable the proposed use to commence whilst also allowing the site to be monitored on the impact it may have on the immediate neighbours.

4.0 RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

- 4.1 It is clear that residential amenity refers to noise impacts as being the major concern following responses from residents and the Parish Council.
- 4.2 Grow Walkies Ltd are a professional company and are keen to work with neighbours to ensure that residential amenity is maintained.
- 4.3 A Noise Assessment was therefore carried out on the site between Thursday 10 to Monday 14 July 2025 by LFAcoustics Consulting Engineers. The Noise Assessment Report is included as Appendix E.
- 4.4 Noise monitoring equipment was located within the dog walking field where a worst case scenario with regards to any noise from dog walkers could be recorded. The monitoring was carried out during term time and included the busiest weekdays and a full weekend period.
- 4.5 The noise results indicated that the use of the field resulted in a negligible change in the noise levels which, it was noted, are mainly influenced by road traffic. Where the use of the field was identified during the survey, the increase in noise was noted to be very low, less than 1dB(A) at the site boundary.
- 4.6 Assessing this result against the IEMA Guidelines indicates that the noise associated with the use of the site would result in a “None or Not Significant” impact with the overall change in noise levels unlikely to be perceptible beyond the field boundary.
- 4.7 The clients are aware however that there will be exceptions and that there will be rare cases where the noise levels from the use of the field will breach those recorded during the Noise Assessment.
- 4.8 As a result, the clients have implemented a Noise Management Plan (NMP) for the Graveley site. This NMP is based on other Noise Management Plans that have been in successful operation on their other sites.
- 4.9 The Noise Management Plan formalises the company’s response to any noise incidents that may occur so that they can be resolved quickly and effectively.

- 4.10 There have been three recorded noise complaints during the 17 months since the site has been opened.
- 4.11 The first complaint was received whilst the dog walker was still on site. The Grow Walkies member of staff acted quickly and spoke to the dog owner. During the phone call they could hear the dog barking in the background. The dog owner was asked to leave site immediately, which they did.
- 4.12 The other two complaints have been within the last six weeks. Both complaints were from the same neighbour and both related to the same dog walker.
- 4.13 After the first complaint, the dog walker was contacted. They were very apologetic and said that it was a new dog and that they would keep it on a lead or restrict it from group walks if the barking could not be controlled.
- 4.14 After the second complaint, the dog walker was asked to stop using the Graveley site and to use other Grow Walkies sites that are in more rural locations.
- 4.15 In all three events, the company acted swiftly to rectify the situation and to stop any future occurrence from the customers in question.
- 4.16 The company recognises the importance of maintaining a good working relationship with neighbours and the implementation of the Noise Management Plan for the Graveley site sets out the standards and processes that they will adhere to.

5.0 SUMMARY

- 5.1 This s73a application seeks the removal of Condition 1 of permission 23/02221/FP which states *“The use of agricultural land for the siting of a Dog Walking Facility hereby permitted shall be discontinued and the land restored to its former condition on or before 2 years from the date of this approval, unless planning permission is sought to formalise the development in perpetuity.*

Reason: Permission has been granted for a temporary period solely to monitor the use and the appropriateness of the development in regards to amenity”.

- 5.2 Amenity has generally been defined in terms of noise impact within the Officer’s Report and in all

responses apart from one mention in the PC response which refers to privacy.

- 5.3 In determining Planning Permission 23/02221/FP, the Planning Officer assessed the Change of Use to a dog walking field as acceptable in planning terms in relation to the Principle of development in the Green Belt, the Design /Impact on the Character of the Area, the Impact on Designated Heritage Assets, Flood Risk and. Transport and Highways impacts. The site and use of the field will remain unchanged and will continue to comply with Local and National Planning Policies.
- 5.4 Whilst the Planning Officer also considered the Impact on the Amenities of Neighbouring Properties to be acceptable in Planning Terms, they considered that Condition 1 would allow the use to commence and for the use to be monitored to assess the development in regards to amenity during the two-year temporary permission period.
- 5.5 The applicants commissioned a Noise Assessment (Appendix F) and have implemented a Noise Management Plan (Appendix E) for the Graveley site.
- 5.6 The noise assessment concluded that assessing the recorded results against the IEMA Guidelines indicated that the noise associated with the use of the site would result in a “None or Not Significant” impact.
- 5.7 There has been sufficient time to assess the site in relation to residential amenity. During the 17 months of operation, the Applicants have demonstrated that they take a proactive and effective approach to ensuring that residential amenity is maintained for the neighbouring properties.
- 5.8 This application seeks to remove Condition 1 that limits the use of the field to two years.
- 5.9 We dutifully request the removal of Condition 1 of planning permission 23/02221/FP for the Change of use of field to dog walking field, including installation of fencing. Retention and completion of existing agricultural track and visitor parking area (as amended by plan received 15th November 2023) on land to the west of High Street, Graveley, Hertfordshire so that the development can continue in perpetuity.