



WARNER

29th December 2025

FAO Sara Burke
The Planning Inspectorate
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Bristol
BS1 6PN

Sent by email to: East3@planninginspectorate.gov.uk

Dear Sara,

**RE: APP/X1925/W/25/3375383 – Land at Church Wood, Three Houses Lane,
Codicote, Hertfordshire**

Warner Planning Ltd writes on behalf of the Appellant following the submission of third-party representations in respect of the above appeal. This rebuttal responds to comments submitted by local residents and Knebworth Parish Council, including those from Ms Katharine Gillings, Mrs Jenni Thompson, and Mr Tim Wise (hereafter collectively referred to as “the Representors”).

The representations raise a number of recurring themes, which are addressed in turn below:

- ☼ Nature and scale of the proposed equestrian use
- ☼ Access, parking, and operational matters
- ☼ Landscape, Green Belt, and visual impact
- ☼ Impact on ancient woodland, trees, and ecology
- ☼ Procedural matters and alleged lack of information
- ☼ Nature and Scale of the Proposed Use

Several representations question whether the proposed development is intended for private or commercial equestrian use and suggest that the scale of the operation is unclear. In response, we reiterate that the appeal proposal is for a private equestrian facility ancillary to the lawful use of

the land, and not for a commercial riding school or livery enterprise. There is no proposal for public access, events, or commercial hire, and no intensification of use beyond that which is typically associated with private equestrian activity.

The Statement of Case explains the context of equestrian provision in the wider area to demonstrate that the proposal reflects established patterns of rural land use, rather than to imply a commercial operation. The absence of visitor facilities, car parking for third parties, or commercial signage further reinforces the private nature of the proposal.

The appeal proposals seek to formalise and improve equestrian infrastructure on the site through a planned and policy-compliant scheme, replacing ad-hoc or unauthorised arrangements with a controlled development subject to appropriate planning conditions.

The appeal precedents cited have been included to demonstrate that equestrian and recreational facilities of this nature are regularly found to be acceptable in the Green Belt, where they preserve openness and accord with the relevant provisions of national and local planning policy.

Access, Parking, and Operational Matters

Concerns have been raised regarding vehicle movements, horse boxes, deliveries, and the absence of formal parking or hardstanding. It is important to clarify that the appeal scheme does not propose a change of access arrangements or an intensification of vehicular activity beyond that already associated with the lawful use of the site.

The absence of visitor parking is deliberate and reflects the private nature of the facility. Any limited vehicle movements associated with animal welfare or maintenance would be intermittent and comparable to those typically associated with rural land management. As such, there would be no material impact on Three Houses Lane or the surrounding highway network.

It is noted that Hertfordshire County Council as Highway Authority raised no objection to the proposal, confirming that the development would not result in any unacceptable impact on the local highway network or highway safety.

With regard to hardstanding, drainage, lighting, and ancillary infrastructure, these matters are either addressed within the submitted plans or are capable of being appropriately controlled by condition. It is not uncommon for detailed operational matters to be secured at this stage, particularly where they relate to environmental protection and amenity safeguards.

Landscape, Green Belt, and Visual Impact

The Representors raise concerns regarding the visual impact of the buildings and allege that the proposals conflict with Green Belt policy and landscape character. In response, we note that the appeal scheme has been expressly designed to be low-profile, rural in appearance, and visually recessive, making use of existing landform, woodland backdrop, and natural screening.

The buildings are not prominent when viewed from public vantage points and are read within the context of established woodland and rural land uses. The scale and form of development do not result in encroachment into the countryside beyond what is already established and do not undermine the openness of the Green Belt when assessed against relevant policy tests.

National policy does not seek to keep the countryside free from development, but rather to protect it for its intrinsic character, which includes appropriate rural and land-based uses such as equestrian facilities.

Comparisons drawn with other equestrian facilities are illustrative only and do not form the basis of the planning case. Each proposal must be considered on its own merits, having regard to its specific context and design response.

Trees, Ancient Woodland, and Ecology

Concerns have been expressed regarding potential impacts on Church Wood, veteran trees, and Tree Preservation Orders. These matters have been fully considered as part of the application and appeal submission. The proposals have been deliberately set back from woodland boundaries, and no works are proposed within Root Protection Areas.

Where technical matters such as tree protection measures, drainage safeguards, or ecological mitigation require refinement, these are matters that are routinely addressed by planning condition. There is no evidence to suggest that the proposal would result in harm to ancient woodland or protected trees, either directly or indirectly.

Assertions that the scheme poses a “continued threat” to woodland are not supported by the technical evidence submitted with the appeal.

It is noted that matters relating to ecology and trees did not form part of the Local Planning Authority’s reasons for refusal. Furthermore, the Council’s Ecology Officer raised no objection to the proposal, subject only to the imposition of a standard precautionary condition. The Appellant

is content to accept this condition in full, and accordingly there is no evidential basis to conclude that the development would result in harm to ecological interests or protected trees.

Procedural Matters and Validation

Several Representors suggest that the appeal is premature or that the application was incomplete. The Appellant strongly disagrees. The proposal was properly validated by the Local Planning Authority, assessed by officers, and determined by Committee. The appeal seeks to challenge the planning judgement reached, not to bypass due process.

The suggestion that the application should be withdrawn and resubmitted is not a planning consideration for the Inspector. The appeal is appropriately before you and should be determined on its planning merits, based on the evidence provided.

Matters relating to external materials and lighting are capable of being appropriately controlled through the imposition of planning conditions, and there is no requirement for these details to be fixed at this stage in order for the acceptability of the development to be assessed.

It is noted that the Local Planning Authority has chosen not to submit a further Statement of Case in support of its position or in response to the matters raised within our Appeal submission. In the absence of any additional evidence or clarification, it is unclear how the Authority intends to substantiate or defend its position as the Appeal progresses. The lack of further submissions may reasonably be interpreted as an acceptance that there is no additional evidence available to address the points raised or to rebut the case put forward by the Appellant.

Parish Council Representation

Knebworth Parish Council has confirmed that its objection remains unchanged following the original refusal. While the Parish Council's position is noted, it does not introduce any new matters beyond those already addressed by the Appellant within the Statement of Case and supporting evidence.

Conclusion

In summary, the third-party representations do not identify any substantive new matters that have not already been fully considered within the Council's decision-making process or addressed comprehensively within the submitted Appeal Statement.

The appeal proposals represent a modest, rural, land-based equestrian development of a type commonly found within Hertfordshire's countryside. The proposal is for private use only by the appellant. The scheme has been carefully designed and sited to ensure it preserves both the

spatial and visual openness of the Green Belt, in accordance with Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In particular, the development falls squarely within the exemption set out at NPPF paragraph 154(b), being the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation which preserve openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt.

The limited scale, low-profile design, agricultural vernacular, and sensitive siting against existing landscape features ensure that the proposal does not result in harm to the character or appearance of the countryside. As such, the scheme accords with Policies SP5 (Countryside and Green Belt), SP9 (Design and Sustainability), D1 (Sustainable Design), and NE2 (Landscape) of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011–2031, when read as a whole.

The proposal also aligns with the objectives of the NPPF Chapters 6 and 12, which support sustainable rural enterprise, diversification of land-based activities, and the delivery of well-designed development that responds positively to its context. The equestrian use is inherently rural in nature and supports the continued vitality of the countryside economy, consistent with NPPF paragraphs 84 and 85.

From a highways perspective, the development will not give rise to material additional vehicular movements when compared with the lawful agricultural use of the land. This position is supported by the Highway Authority, and the proposal therefore complies with NPPF paragraph 115 and Local Plan Policy T1, which confirm that development should only be resisted on transport grounds where severe impacts would arise.

Environmental matters, including ecology and drainage, have been appropriately assessed and are capable of being satisfactorily addressed through condition. The proposal will deliver biodiversity enhancements and sustainable drainage measures in accordance with Policies SP12, NE4, NE7 and NE8, and the relevant provisions of the NPPF relating to climate resilience and environmental protection.

Taken together, the appeal proposals deliver a range of planning merits, including:

- ✿ The provision of appropriate equestrian facilities within the Green Belt that preserve openness and rural character;
- ✿ A low-intensity, private use compatible with surrounding land uses and the setting of Three Houses Lane;
- ✿ High-quality, proportionate design that reflects local precedent and countryside character;
- ✿ No unacceptable impacts on highways safety, amenity, landscape, ecology, or drainage; and
- ✿ Support for rural diversification and the sustainable management of countryside land.

When assessed against the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal delivers clear benefits, including the formalisation and regulation of equestrian use, improved animal welfare, better land management, and support for rural activity. Any alleged harms identified by third parties are either unsupported by evidence or are capable of being satisfactorily mitigated through condition, and do not significantly or demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the scheme. It is clear that the planning balance weighs firmly in favour of the proposal. The limited and carefully controlled nature of the development ensures compliance with national and local planning policy, and there is no policy-based justification for dismissing the appeal.

The Appellant therefore respectfully requests that the appeal be allowed.

Yours sincerely



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Director

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