

Weston Parish Council response to Planning Application: 26/01981/FP

Erection of equine storage building, relocation of existing field shelter and installation of concrete hardstanding. Warrens Green Lane, Weston.

The Parish Council recognises that facilities genuinely required in connection with equestrian recreation may, in principle, constitute an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt. However, Policy GB7(1)(f) of the National Planning Policy Framework requires such development to constitute an appropriate facility, to minimise its impact upon the openness of the Green Belt and not significantly conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt.

Weston Parish Council considers that the proposal has not demonstrated that it meets these requirements and therefore OBJECTS to application 26/01981/FP.

More specifically, our reasons are as follows:

1. Lawful status of the existing field shelter

The application describes the field/horse shelter shown on drawing 1217-ARC-DR-02 as an “existing” structure which is to be relocated. However, the Parish Council has been unable to identify from the published planning history the planning permission under which this structure was originally erected or its present lawful planning status.

The Parish Council therefore requests that, before determination, the Planning Authority confirms the planning permission or other lawful basis under which the existing field shelter was erected.

This is material because this existing building forms part of the baseline against which the proposed additional development and its impact upon Green Belt openness are to be assessed.

2. Location and cumulative impact

The area between Friends Green Farm and Anchor House has already been subject to considerable development. The Parish Council considers that the scale and proposed location of this development would further extend the built form into the presently more open area between Paddock View Barn and Anchor House.

The application proposes the relocation of the existing field shelter from its present position to the proposed new development area. The Parish Council questions why relocation to this more exposed position is necessary and why the equestrian requirements could not instead be accommodated at, or close to, the existing location of the field shelter.

Retaining the equestrian buildings within the established cluster of development would, in the Parish Council's view, materially reduce their prominence from Damask Green Road and reduce the extension of built development into more open land.

Similarly, the Parish Council considers that a location within or closer to the existing cluster of buildings would reduce the visual impact of the development when viewed from Footpaths 22 and 23.

No justification appears to have been provided to explain why the proposed location represents the option that best minimises the impact upon Green Belt openness.

3. Extent of proposed concrete hardstanding

Drawing 1217-ARC-DR-03 shows a substantial area of new concrete hardstanding encompassing the proposed buildings and the surrounding area. Assuming that this document is accurately drawn, our measurements suggest that the area to be concreted will extend to approximately 550m² if bounded by the red lines to the south and east, and by the dotted lines to the west and north. This represents approximately 70% of the stated 791m² application site.

The Parish Council has not identified any substantive justification within the submitted documents for the extent of this hardstanding or an explanation of why an area of this size is reasonably necessary for the stated equestrian use.

The additional hard surfacing would increase the physical and visual impact of the development upon this presently open site. In the absence of justification for its extent, the Parish Council is not satisfied that the proposal demonstrates that its impact upon the openness and rural character of the Green Belt has been minimised.

The Parish Council therefore asks the Local Planning Authority to consider whether the amount of hardstanding could be materially reduced and whether a less visually intrusive surface treatment would be appropriate.

4. Scale of the development

The application comprises the relocation of the existing field/horse shelter together with the erection of a separate and significantly larger building described as an Equine Store.

Drawing 1217-ARC-DR-01 shows the proposed Equine Store measuring 16 metres by 8 metres, providing 128m² of floorspace, with a ridge height of approximately 4.7 metres.

The Parish Council's concern is not simply that additional storage is proposed, but that the submitted information provides no substantive explanation of the functional requirement for a storage building of this scale.

In particular, there is no information identifying:

- the number of horses the proposed building is intended to serve;
- why the existing shelter and its storage provision cannot meet the reasonable requirements of the equestrian use; or
- why a separate 128m² storage building is necessary.

In the absence of such evidence, the Parish Council is not satisfied that an Equine Store of the scale proposed has been demonstrated and further encroachment into open land within the Green Belt justified. We therefore believe that the proposal conflicts with NPPF Policies GB6 and GB7 and North Hertfordshire Local Plan Policies SP5, D1 and NE2.

The Parish Council also asks the Local Planning Authority to resolve an apparent inconsistency in the submitted drawings before determination. Drawing 1217-ARC-DR-03 identifies the relocated field shelter as 9m × 5m, whereas detailed drawing 1217-ARC-DR-02 shows dimensions of approximately 9.17m × 3.6m, broadly consistent with the 32.4m² existing floorspace stated on the application form.