

## **Grow Walkies Ltd**

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

**Design and Access incorporating Planning Statement**

**Application For a Weather Shelter and Dog Play Frame on Dog Walking Field  
Permitted under Application 23/02221/FP.**

Prepared by:

**SBRice Ltd**

**September 2024**

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 SBRice Limited are instructed by Grow Walkies Ltd (“the applicants”) to submit an application in full for a wooden weather shelter and play frame on land to the west of High Street, Graveley, Stevenage, SG4 7LE that has a two-year permission (23/02221/FP) for Change of use to a dog walking field (“the site”).
- 1.2 This report is accompanied by
- Application form;
  - Site plans;
  - Weather Shelter and playframe specification drawings.
  - Heritage Assessment

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Planning Permission 23/02221/FP was granted on 8 January 2024 for a 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 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023).
- 2.2 Condition 1 of the permission 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 regard to amenity.*
- 2.3 Condition 6 of the permission states: *There shall be no buildings, structures, hard surfaces, artificial grass, fences or other permanent means of enclosure on the application site in association with the approved dog walking use, other than those approved as part of this application, unless first agreed in writing by the local planning authority. Reason: In the interests of the appearance of the locality and openness of the Green Belt.*
- 2.4 The Grow Walkies Ltd dog walking field at Graveley opened on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

### 3.0 ASSESSMENT

3.1 This is an application in full for a wooden weather shelter and wooden playframe to be located within the dog walking field permitted under 23/0221/FP in compliance with Condition 6 of that application.

#### 3.2 Location

3.3 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.

3.4 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.

3.5 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.

3.6 The Location Plan is included as **Appendix A** and the Existing Site Plan is in **Appendix B**.

#### 3.7 Assessment of Potential Flood Risk

3.8 In accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) all forms of flood risk need to be considered in relation to any development.

3.9 The site is predominantly within Flood Zone 3.

3.10 A Flood Risk Assessment was carried as part of the original application and the surface water drainage strategy has been implemented.

3.11 The wooden weather shelter will be located on the area of hardstanding just inside the gate to the dog walking field that has already been permitted, assessed and installed.

3.12 The playframe will sit on a small area of woodchip to protect the surrounding grass. The woodchip is a fully permeable natural product that will not affect the drainage on or off of the site therefore no further assessment of flood risk is required as part of this application.

3.13 **Design and Access**

3.14 There are no proposed changes to the access, the site, the fencing, the parking, the operating hours or any other features permitted under the original application.

3.15 The Proposed Site Plan is included as **Appendix C**.

3.16 The proposed wooden weather shelter measures 2.4m wide x 1.6m deep x 2.2m high at the front and 2.1m high at the back. Apart from the small wooden bench, it is essentially a smaller version of an animal field shelter that is seen frequently in a rural setting.

3.17 The shelter would be sited on the existing hardstanding area just inside the gate to the dog walking field and no engineering works are required for its installation.

3.18 The specification drawing can be found in **Appendix D** and a photo of a newly installed weather shelter taken during the winter months at another site is shown below in Fig 3.17



3.19

3.20 The shelter is three sided and just large enough to provide shelter from the wind and rain. During

the summer months it also provides a shaded area for dogs and owners to get out of the heat, should they need to.

- 3.21 Being made of wood, the shelter will weather and blend into the landscape
- 3.22 The playframe is an irregular structure of open form that measures approx. 6.16m x 4.33m x 3.17m tall at its highest point.
- 3.23 The proposed playframe is also made of wood and a specification drawing can be found in **Appendix E**.
- 3.24 The playframe would be located on a small area of woodchip to protect the surrounding grass. No engineering works are required for its installation.
- 3.25 The photo below in 3.26 shows a weather shelter and playframe in situ on another Grow Walkies site. The photo also shows other infrastructure that is not proposed for the site at Graveley.



3.26

3.27 The site is in the Green Belt and there are no other statutory designated sites in close proximity.

#### 4.0 THE PROPOSAL

4.1 This application is for a wooden weather shelter and wooden playframe to be located within an existing permitted dog walking field.

4.2 The dog walking field opened in April 2024, it is well screened by existing vegetation and contained within an existing agricultural grass field.

4.3 Grow Walkies are a professional company offering secure dog walking facilities over a number of sites. Their sites are well-maintained, professionally run with strict guidelines for users. The reviews and support for the sites are over-whelmingly positive and demonstrate the need for well-run enclosed dog walking areas.

4.4 Feedback from customers has been very positive but the lack of shelter has proved an issue. Some comments from customers are included below.

CW [Redacted] 3:05 PM  
To: Grow Walkies >

**Re: Walkies booked! 1-2 Dog 60 mins  
|| Graveley**

Hello.

I've been using the Graveley field quite a few times now and intend to keep booking it every week. I just wanted to know if there are plans in place to have some form of shelter at all, or something to provide a shaded area?

I went today and it was full sun and 26 degrees in my car by the time I left. The field is a wonderful size and has everything you could want for our canine friends including water but the issue of no shade/shelter did worry me a bit today.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards.

Clare

On 13 Jun 2024, at 17:44, Grow Walkies  
<[info@grow-walkies.com](mailto:info@grow-walkies.com)> wrote:

< 2 3 Messages

GW Grow Walkies 3:32 PM  
Thank you for your recent Walkies enquiry. We...

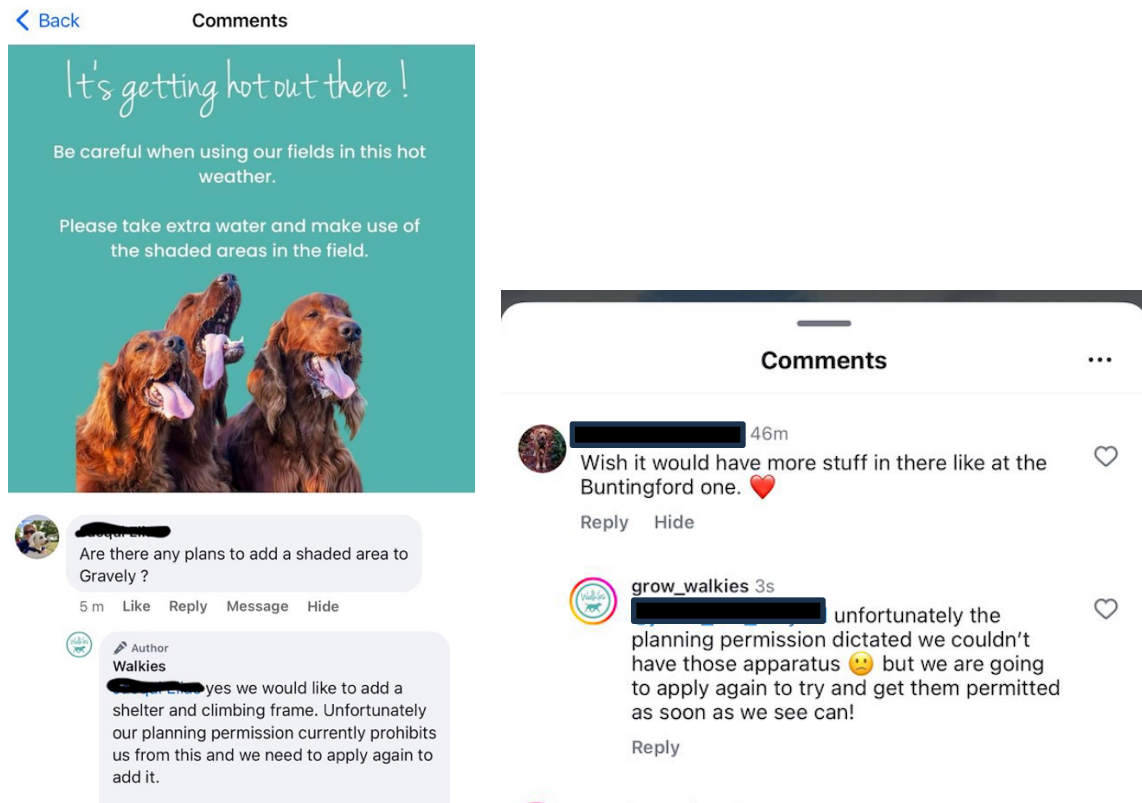
MD [Redacted] 3:32 PM  
To: Grow Walkies >

**Re: Walkies booked! 1-2 Dog 30 mins  
|| Graveley**

Any chance of getting some sort of shaded area built ? I have a breathing condition and find it hard to be stuck in the sun for too long  
Just a thought 🙌  
Thanks Martin

Sent from [Outlook for iOS](#)  
[See More](#)

4.5



4.6

4.7 The weather shelter would clearly benefit the users of the site all year round with little to no impact on the openness of the Green Belt.

4.8 The playframe will add interest for the dogs and will encourage engagement with the owners promoting training and obedience.

4.9 Both are modest in size and the inclusion of these structures will not generate any additional bookings or noise but will dramatically enhance the experience of users of the site.

4.10 Weather shelters and play frames have been permitted on other Grow Walkies sites within the Green Belt including a recent permission within Hertfordshire (East Herts).

## 5.0 PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications for planning permission be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The National Planning Policy Framework (2023) must be taken

into account in preparing the Development Plan and is a material consideration in planning decisions. Planning policies and decisions must also reflect relevant statutory requirements.

5.2 The North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 was adopted on 8 November 2022 and replaced the saved policies of the District Plan Second Review with Alterations.

5.3 The application site is located within the Green Belt.

5.4 **National Planning Policy Framework (2021)**

5.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (2023) otherwise referred to as ‘the Framework’ in this report sets out the Government’s policies that should be applied to the preparation of development plans and determination of planning applications.

5.6 It encourages Local Planning Authorities to approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way which involves proactively working with applicants to secure developments that would improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. The planning system at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible. In rural areas planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances. Rural development is to be encouraged in order to create new jobs and prosperity and the Framework encourages the planning system to take a positive approach to sustainable new development in rural areas. It recognises that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements and in locations that are not well served by public transport. Rural development must be sensitive to its surroundings and must ensure that it does not have unacceptable impacts on road networks by promoting other possible sustainable forms of transport such as walking or cycling.

5.7 Section 6 of the Framework confirms that when considering proposals for commercial development significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity taking into account both local business needs and the wider opportunities for development.

5.8 Paragraph 84(b) in Section 6 advises that:

- Planning policies and decisions should enable

(b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses

(c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

5.9 The site is located within the Green Belt and as such Section 13 of the Framework is relevant, in particular paragraph 154(b) which confirms that the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation are not inappropriate developments in the Green Belt as long as they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

5.10 Paragraph 200 requires applicants to consider the significance of any heritage asset affected by proposed development, the level of detail should be proportionate to the asset's importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.

5.11 **The North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031**

5.12 The site is located outside of the North Stevenage NS1 Policy Map area but within the Metropolitan Green Belt. The following Local Plan Policies are relevant:

- Policy SP5 – Countryside and Green Belt
- Policy SP13 – Historic Environment
- Policy HE1 - Designated Heritage Assets

## 6.0 **KEY ISSUES**

6.1 The key planning issues are:

1. Principle of development in the Green Belt.
2. Potential impact on heritage assets.

## 7.0 ASSESSMENT OF COMPLIANCE WITH PLANNING POLICY

### 7.1 Principle of Development

- 7.2 The Framework sets out in paragraph 143 that the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.
- 7.3 Paragraph 152 states that inappropriate development is by definition harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances.
- 7.4 Paragraph 154 confirms that the construction of new buildings in the Green Belt should be considered inappropriate unless the development is included under the list of exceptions, these include under (b) the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.
- 7.5 Openness can be considered as meaning an absence of built or urbanising development.
- 7.6 The existing site comprises of part of a grass field enclosed by a post and wire fence that is used as a dog walking field and a small hardstanding area for visitor car parking. This application is for a small weather shelter and dog play frame within the existing dog walking field.
- 7.7 The use for recreational development falls within exception 154(b) of the Framework.
- 7.8 Both East Herts and Harlow have recently permitted applications for Grow Walkies Ltd that have included a weather shelter and dog play frame as part of the application. The permission for East Herts was located in the Green Belt and the Harlow application was within a Green Wedge which is a classification that has similar requirements in planning terms.
- 7.9 They concluded that the development accorded with Chapter 13 of the Framework, that the proposal would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt and furthermore would preserve the openness.
- 7.10 Policy SP5 of the Local Plan confirms that planning applications within the Green Belt will be considered in line with the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

- 7.11 We therefore conclude that the proposed development accords with the requirements of policy SP5 and Chapter 13 of the Framework and that the principle of development is acceptable.
- 7.12 **Flood Risk**
- 7.13 The site lies within Flood Zones 2 and 3 as defined by the Environment Agency's flood mapping. Chapter 14 of the NPPF provides guidance on dealing with development where all or part of the application site falls within Flood Zones 2 and 3. Policy NE7 of the Adopted Local Plan relates to development and flood risk and provides very similar guidance to that found in the NPPF.
- 7.14 Both adopt a sequential approach to flood risk, advising that development should first be directed to less vulnerable sites within Flood Zone 1. Where this is not possible certain types of development will be required to demonstrate that they pass the exception test.
- 7.15 Under paragraph 167 of the NPPF applicants are required to submit a site-specific flood risk assessment for all developments in Flood Zones 2 and 3 and if the development is greater than 1 Ha in Flood Zone 1.
- 7.16 Where development is permitted in the higher flood risk zones it should demonstrate that it is flood resistant and resilient meaning that it could be brought back into use without significant refurbishment, it incorporates sustainable drainage systems, any residual risk can be safely managed, and safe access and escape routes are included where appropriate.
- 7.17 The original application included a Flood Risk Assessment that concluded that the development would have a NPPF Flood Risk Vulnerability classification of 'Water Compatible' and provided an indicative drainage strategy that demonstrated that the site can be effectively drained for all storm events up to & including a 1 in 100-year event plus an allowance for climate change
- 7.18 The drainage scheme within the FRA has been installed.
- 7.19 The weather shelter is to be located on a hardstanding area that has already been assessed and mitigated for in the calculation.
- 7.20 The play frame is to be located on a small patch of woodchips to protect the ground during wet weather. The woodchip is fully permeable and will not affect the drainage of the ground beneath

so will have no impact in terms of flood risk either on or off site.

7.21 The proposed development has been considered in the context of its compliance with the relevant policies in the NPPF and the adopted Local Plan and we believe that the inclusion of these two pieces of equipment would not increase flood risk to third parties or put future site users at any additional flood risk and is therefore compliant with the relevant policies in the NPPF and Adopted Local Plan.

7.22 **Impact on Heritage Assets**

7.23 The Heritage Assessment for the original application can be found in **Appendix F**.

7.24 The Conservation Officer concluded that the dog walking field was compliant with Sections 16/66 and 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and the aims of Section 16 of the NPPF and Policy HE1 of the North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031.

7.25 The proposed new weather shelter and play frame are a significant distance from the setting of the Conservation Area and Grade II Listed buildings and given the nature and position of the proposed structures, the original assessment is considered to still be relevant and they are considered to preserve the setting of the Listed buildings and Conservation Area in accordance with the requirements of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, Policies SP13 & HE1 of the North Hertfordshire District Local Plan 2011-2031 and Chapter 16 of the NPPF.

7.26 **Transport and Highways**

7.27 Policy SP6 of the Local Plan requires development to ensure that a safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users from the highway.

7.28 The proposed development would not generate any additional vehicle movements and no changes are proposed to the existing permitted highways access.

7.29 The proposal therefore complies with the relevant Local Plan policies.

7.30 **Other Matters**

7.31 **BNG**

7.32 The Government have now fully implemented the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements brought in under the Environment Act 2021. As from 2 April 2024 all development is obliged to meet the BNG requirements.

7.33 Exemptions to the mandatory requirements were set out by the Government in their response to the BNG regulations and policy consultation, legislation clarifying these exemptions has now been adopted.

7.34 We have considered the proposed development in the context of the regulations and believe that the development qualifies under the 'below a de minimus threshold' exemption.

7.35 This exemption applies to development that does not impact a priority habitat and impacts less than 25 m<sup>2</sup> of non-priority onsite habitat or 5 m for non-priority onsite linear habitat.

7.36 All sealed surfaces such as buildings and concrete are assigned a zero score in the statutory biodiversity metric meaning that these surfaces are effectively exempt from the 10% net gain requirement.

7.37 As the proposed weather shelter is located on existing hardstanding it is eligible under the exemption rules and is not obliged to demonstrate a minimum of 10% BNG.

7.38 The footprint of the playframe is less than 25 m<sup>2</sup> and is also eligible under the exemption rules and is not obliged to demonstrate a minimum of 10% BNG.

7.39 Paragraph 84 of the Framework provides strong support for the sustainable growth of all types of businesses and enterprises in rural areas. Decisions should **enable** sustainable leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside.

7.40 The applicants have considered whether the development could give rise to potential adverse impact on residential amenity.

7.41 The inclusion of a weather shelter and play frame is highly unlikely to generate additional noise or

disturbance to neighbouring properties but will enhance the experience of users to the site providing much needed shelter during the extremes of weather that our country is prone to.

- 7.42 For the reasons given above we consider that the development does not constitute inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as such it is not necessary to demonstrate very special circumstances.

## 8.0 SUMMARY

- 8.1 This is an application for a wooden weather shelter and wooden play frame to be located in a dog walking field permitted in application number 23/02221/FP in January 2024.
- 8.2 The weather shelter and playframe are modest portable wooden structures that will weather and blend into the landscape.
- 8.3 The inclusion of the structures will not require any changes to the existing permitted field or access track and will not generate any additional vehicle movements.
- 8.4 Feedback from users of the site demonstrates the need for shelter from the weather during hot and wet days and will be beneficial for users that have medical conditions or need to sit down whilst exercising their dogs.
- 8.5 The site is located away from the main village residential area and is in a location that it well screened from view.
- 8.6 The proposal when considered in the context of Chapter 13 of the Framework and Policy SP5 of the Local Plan is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt and applications for the same pieces of equipment have recently been permitted by East Herts and Harlow Council.
- 8.7 The proposed development has been considered in the context of its compliance with the relevant policies in the NPPF and the adopted Local Plan and we believe that the inclusion of these structures would not increase flood risk to third parties or put future site users at any additional flood risk and is therefore compliant with the relevant policies in the NPPF and Adopted Local Plan.
- 8.8 The development has been considered in the context of its location to 3No. Grade II Listed properties. The limited amount of development will not have any impact on the heritage assets. It

is therefore compliant with Chapter 16 of the Framework and Policies SP13 & HE1 of the Local Plan.

- 8.9 The development is compliant with national and local planning policies. We dutifully request planning permission is granted.