

PLANNING STATEMENT

on behalf of Mr A & Mrs L McKenna

Change of Use from Equestrian Land to Dog Walking
Facility and Glamping Site, with associated access
and parking

Land at Lower Green Farm, Ickleford, Hitchin, SG5 3TW

Prepared by: Erin Harcombe and Heidi Surfleet, Graduate Planners

Reviewed by: Tom Kilvert, Senior Associate Planner

For and on behalf of Brown&Co.

Brown & Co is a leading provider of agency, professional and consultancy services across the whole range of rural, commercial, residential, and agricultural markets.

Date: February 2026

Reference: 064610

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by Brown&Co to accompany a planning application submitted on behalf of Mr and Mrs McKenna Ltd. The proposal seeks consent for the change of use of part of an existing equestrian field to create an enclosed dog walking/exercising facility and a glamping site, with associated access and parking. The application relates to land at Lower Green Farm, Ickleford, Hitchin (SG5 3TW).
- 1.2 Since acquiring the site in 2024, the Applicants have sought to diversify the use of their landholding. The proposed development would utilise an area of the existing equestrian field to provide a secure dog-walking paddock and to site up to five shepherd huts to form a low-impact glamping facility.
- 1.3 The purpose of this statement is to set out the background to the applicant's proposals and the key planning issues raised by them. The statement is structured as follows:
- **Section 2:** describes the physical characteristics of the **site and its surroundings**;
 - **Section 3:** outlines the **proposed development**;
 - **Section 4:** summarises the national and local **planning policy context**;
 - **Section 5:** provides a **planning assessment** of the key considerations raised by the proposal; and
 - **Section 6:** sets out in brief our overall **conclusions** on the proposal.
- 1.4 This statement should be read in conjunction with the following:

2. Site and surroundings

- 2.1 The application site extends to approximately 0.67 hectares and lies within the Parish of Ickleford, positioned on the northern edge of the settlement of Lower Green. The land forms part of an established equestrian paddock associated with Lower Green Farmhouse, located immediately to the south and within the Applicant's ownership. This includes part of a wider equestrian facility, which accommodates an extensive range of stables, a manège, and associated equestrian infrastructure.

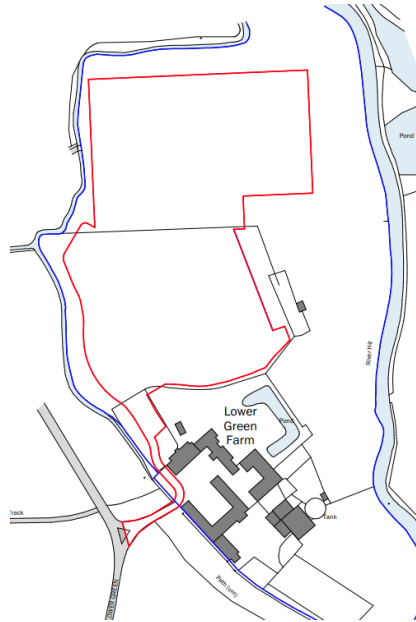


Figure 1: Location Plan

- 2.2 The site is accessed via an existing road (Lower Green) and the existing access into the Lower Green Farm complex to the southwest.



Figure 2: Photograph showing the existing access track

- 2.3 The site is well enclosed by established natural boundary features. Mature hedgerows and trees define the northern, eastern, and western edges, providing strong landscape containment and effective visual screening.



Figure 3: Photograph showing the existing tree and hedgerow coverage on-site and beyond

- 2.4 The nearest residential property, 'Lower Green Farmhouse' is located within the Applicant's site ownership, circa 100m to the south of the centre of the application site.
- 2.5 A public right of way/bridleway (Ref: Ickleford 004) bounds the site to the west, as shown in Figure 4 below.

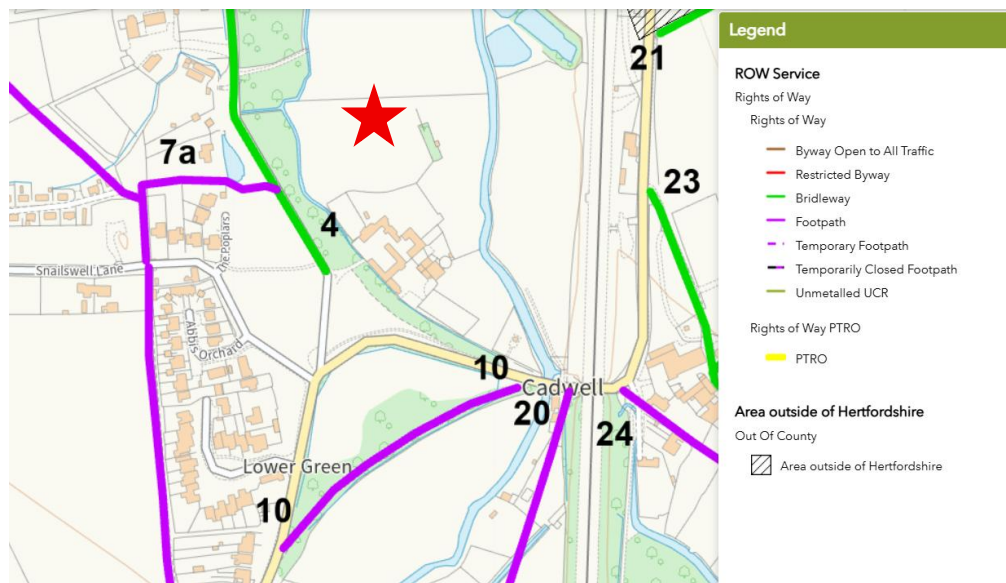


Figure 4: Map showing Public Rights of Way (Hertfordshire County Council) with the site starred

- 2.6 There are two listed buildings within close proximity to the application site, including the Grade II listed "North Barn Range at Lower Green Farm" and the Grade II listed "Lower Green Farmhouse", as indicated in the map extract below. A Heritage Statement supports this planning application.



Figure 5: Listed Building Map (Historic England)

- 2.7 Much of the site is located within Flood Zone 2, as shown in the map extract contained in Figure 6. The site is also at a low risk of surface water flooding, with only a small localised area having an annual surface water flood probability of approximately 3.3%, as shown in Figure 7.

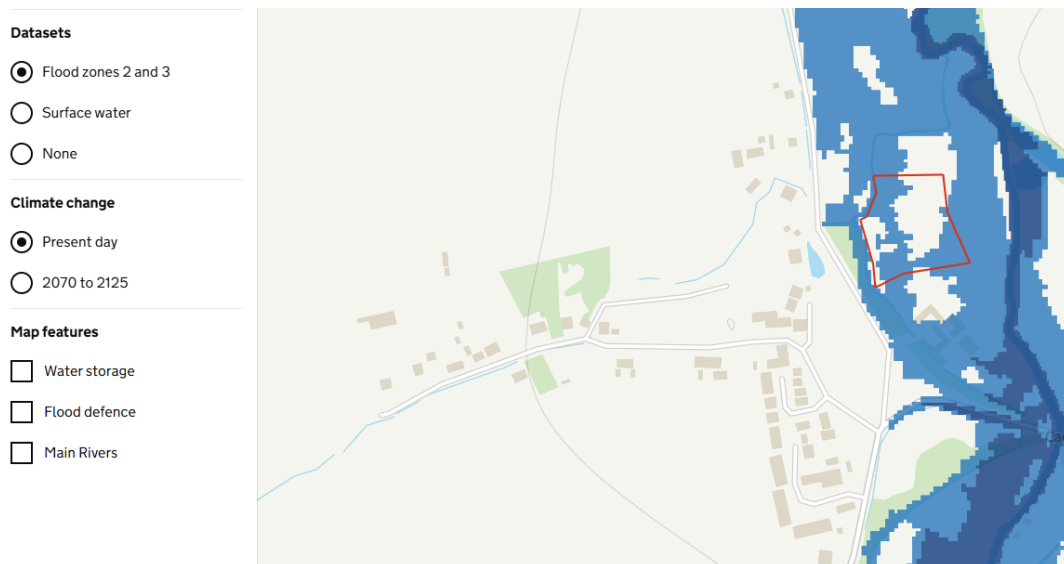


Figure 6: Flood Risk Extract Map (Gov.uk)

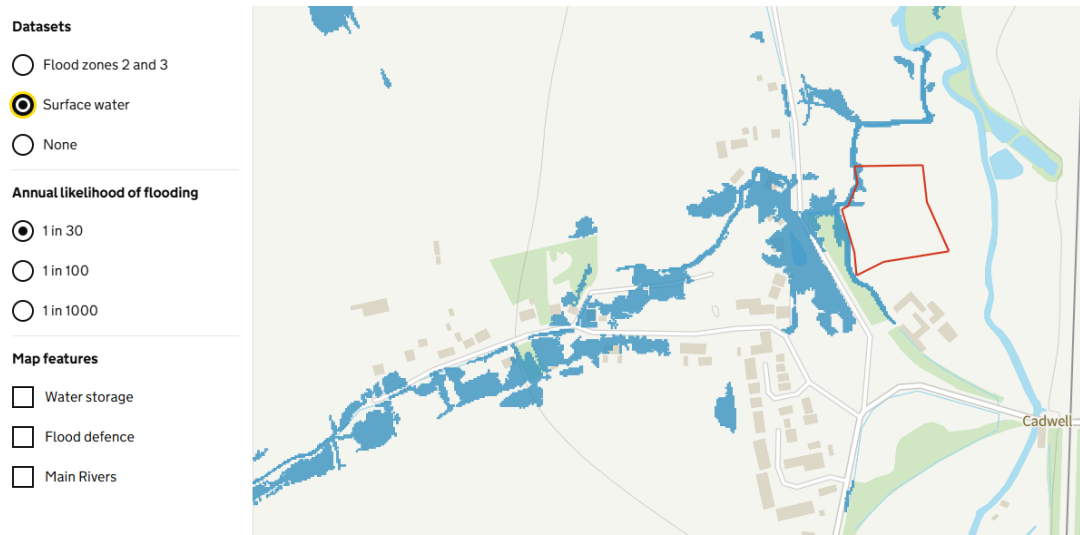


Figure 7: Surface Water Flood Map (Gov.uk)

3. Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal seeks a change of use to provide a secure dog-walking and exercising facility within the northern section of the field, together with a glamping site comprising five shepherd huts within the southern field. This diversification would provide the Applicants with an additional income stream to support the ongoing upkeep and operation of the existing equestrian facility. The concept of linking glamping with equestrian activities (including the potential for visitors to “bring your horse on holiday”) enhances the suitability of this location and supports the rural economy.
- 3.2 To enclose the dog walking paddock, a 1.8-metre-high deer-style mesh fence is proposed around the perimeter of the northern field.
- 3.3 The proposed glamping area, located within the southern section of the field, would accommodate up to five shepherd huts, each lightweight and movable as they will be mounted on wheels. Photographs illustrating the type of shepherd hut the Applicant intends to install are provided at **Appendix 1**. The shepherd hut example meets the definitions set out within Section 29(1) of the Caravan Sites & Control of Development Act 1960 and Section 13(1) of the Caravan Sites Act 1968. Given that the proposal relates solely to a change of use and the units fall within the statutory definition of a caravan, there is no requirement to provide elevation drawings.
- 3.4 The shepherd's huts are temporary in nature, being sited and used between March and October, after which they are moved off-site for the remainder of the year. The huts would also be finished in muted natural colours, using traditional materials to ensure the structures are sympathetic to the surrounding rural landscape.
- 3.5 The proposed dog-walking facility will be enclosed by a new hedgerow, which will screen and soften the appearance of the 1.8-metre-high deer-style fencing positioned within it. In addition, the glamping area will include a comprehensive planting scheme, incorporating new trees, shrubs, and hedgerow planting to create privacy around each hut while also providing effective screening of views into the site. These landscape enhancements will ensure both elements of the proposal are well integrated into their rural setting and maintain a low visual impact.

- 3.6 Vehicular access to serve both the glamping and dog-walking facilities would be taken from Lower Green, utilising the existing road network. From this point, a new internal access track is proposed along the western boundary of the site, providing an efficient route to each element of the development. The two facilities will be served by separate parking areas, ensuring safe and convenient access for users while maintaining a clear operational distinction between the glamping use and the dog-walking field. The dog-walking facility will include a dedicated turning head to allow vehicles to enter and exit the parking area safely, along with a lockable pedestrian gate to provide secure access to the enclosed dog-exercise field. The glamping facilities will include mown footways, enabling guests to walk safely from the parking area to each shepherd's hut.
- 3.7 The Applicants will manage both the proposed glamping and dog walking facilities. Each facility will be provided with access to fresh water and appropriate cleaning amenities. A designated website will be utilised to enable dog walkers to book exclusive access to the dog walking facility for a 1-hour slot. Therefore, the number of people on-site at any one time is minimised to the paying customer and their dog/dogs.
- 3.8 It is proposed that a dog waste bin be provided close to the car park. It must also be noted that no external lighting is proposed.

4. Planning policy context

- 4.1 Planning law requires that planning applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise¹. The development plan is, therefore, the starting point for the assessment of all planning proposals. Development plan policies of particular relevance to this application are summarised in paragraphs 4.3 – 4.10 below.
- 4.2 The Government's planning policies, as set out in the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG), are also a significant material consideration in deciding planning applications. National planning policies of particular relevance to this application are summarised in paragraphs 4.12 – 4.16 below.

North Hertfordshire Local Plan 2011-2031

- 4.3 The North Hertfordshire Local Plan to 2031 was adopted in November 2022. The plan outlines the location and scale of development across the district and sets out the strategies for achieving the plan aims through to 2031. The following Local Plan policies are particularly relevant to the determination of this application:

Policy SP1: Sustainable development states that the Council will grant permission for proposals that create high-quality developments that respect and improve their surroundings and provide opportunities for healthy lifestyle choices.

Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt permits development proposals in the Green Belt where they would not result in inappropriate development.

The NPPF defines inappropriate development as being harmful and should not be permitted unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF sets out a number of exceptions whereby development in the Green Belt would not

¹ Section 38(6) of the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town & Country Planning Act 1990.

be considered inappropriate. These instances include buildings for agriculture or forestry and the provision of appropriate facilities, including buildings for outdoor sport and recreation.

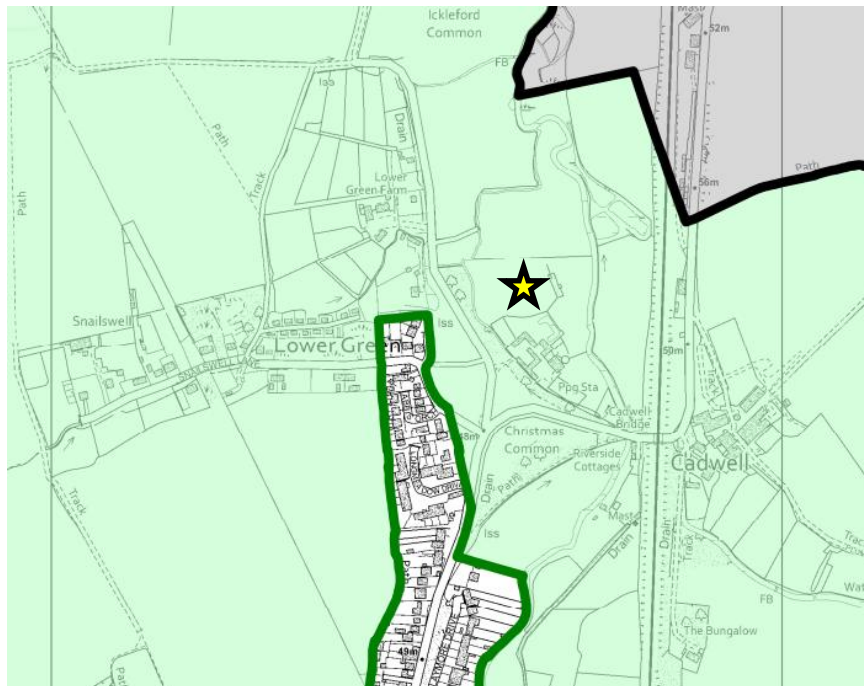


Figure 8: Adopted Policies Map, with green shading representing green belt with the site starred (North Herts Council)

Policy SP6: Sustainable Transport requires development to ensure that a safe and suitable access can be achieved for all users from the highway and that they can provide sufficient car parking provision.

Policy SP9: Design and Sustainability supports development where it is well designed and located and responds positively to its local context.

Policy ETC8: Tourism states that planning permission for tourism-related development will be granted, subject to a sequential approach, where it:

- a) Increases the attractiveness of the District as a tourist destination;
- b) Improves visitor accommodation; or
- c) Delivers sustainable tourist and visitor attractions in appropriate locations.

Policy T1: Assessment of transport matters sets out that planning permission will be granted provided that development would not lead to highway safety problems or cause unacceptable impacts upon the highways network.

Policy T2: Parking confirms that planning permission will be granted provided that proposals have regard to relevant Supplementary Planning Documents.

Policy D1: Sustainable design states that planning permission will be granted provided that development proposals respond positively to the site's local context.

Policy NE2: Landscape states that planning permission will be granted for proposals that respect the sensitivities of the relevant landscape character area, do not cause

unacceptable harm to the character and appearance of the area and have considered long-term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping.

Policy NE4: Biodiversity and geological sites sets out that development should deliver measurable net gains for biodiversity.

Policy NE7: Reducing flood risk states that an FRA should be prepared in accordance with national guidance that considers the lifetime of the development, climate change impacts and safe access and egress.

Policy HE1: Designated heritage assets outlines that planning permission for proposals affecting the setting of a Designated Heritage Asset will be granted where they:

- a) Enable the heritage asset to be used in a manner that secures its conservation and preserves its significance;
- b) Incorporate a palette of materials that make a positive contribution to local character or distinctiveness; and
- c) Will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset, and this harm is outweighed by the public benefits of the development.

Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan

- 4.4 The Ickleford Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in March 2024, now forming part of the district's Development Plan.

Policy E2: Protecting the Landscape states that development proposals should protect and enhance the historic and natural landscape and local character of the Parish.

Policy E3: Rural Character sets out the criteria for development proposals to respect the rural character of the village by ensuring that they respond positively to the local topography, the scale and character of new buildings is in keeping with the rural setting, the variable sense of space around buildings is retained, boundary treatments and landscaping are carefully designed, and views of importance are protected.

Policy E4: Biodiversity confirms that development should provide at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.

Policy SD3: High Quality Design states that proposals for good quality new development will be supported where they are in accordance with the design principles set out in the Ickleford Design Codes.

Policy C2: Recreation and Green Spaces states that development proposals for the improvement of existing recreation areas and open spaces and the provision of additional facilities will be supported.

Policy C4: Supporting Local Employment and Agriculture states that proposals for the development of new small businesses and for the expansion or diversification of existing businesses, including farm based operations, will be supported, providing it can be demonstrated that there will be no unacceptable impact from increased traffic, lighting, noise or other emissions or activities arising from the proposed development and it would have an acceptable impact on the character and scale of the village and its landscape.

Ickleford Design Codes

- 4.5 The Ickleford Design Codes support the Neighbourhood Plan policies that guide the assessment of future development proposals and encourage high-quality design. The site is located within Area type D 'Green Belt'. The following codes are relevant to the proposal.

MO.01: Connectivity is centred around developing a well-connected network allowing for efficient movement. These routes should be safe and attractive to both pedestrians and cyclists.

MO.06: Car parking outlines that parking should be well-integrated and not 'visually dominate the local environment'. In addition to this, as guidance, the design code emphasises that development should be located where the need to travel is minimised, thus presenting those in, or within proximity to, built up areas as very viable options.

NA.01: Green Belt explains that development on Green Belt land will be resisted to retain and 'safeguard sufficient land for agriculture, forestry and outdoor leisure'. The guidance here stresses that only certain forms of development are permitted within the Green Belt, with these including outdoor sport and recreation.

NA.02: Green Networks recognises the wide ranging social and environmental benefits of green spaces, with these implementable in various forms too, including green roofs and street trees. As such, the objective should be to establish a connected network of green space, bridging both the public and private.

NA.03: Design with water highlights the important of water management in reducing flood risk and benefitting local biodiversity.

NA.04: SuDS sets out the importance and role of sustainable urban drainage systems, with a hierarchy for schemes to follow where water capture in this way is not possible, including suitable surface treatments, ponds, and green roofs and walls.

NA.06: Biodiversity outlines how new development should achieve biodiversity gains, with existing habitats protected and enhanced, with the opportunity to create new ones too realised.

ID.01: Local character recognises the uniqueness and various qualities of the built environment, and the impacts this has on individuals' sense of place. As such, the design code sets out guidance regarding design features, including materials and roof profile, so to ensure more recent additions to the local built environment make a positive contribution.

ID.03: Heritage assets highlights that new development should respect and enhance heritage assets and their setting.

PS.01: Access street outlines how these streets provide access for new developments, carrying local traffic.

North Hertfordshire and Stevenage Landscape Character Assessment (2011)

- 4.6 The application site is located within the Character Area of River Oughton and Purwell Valleys. Key characteristics of this Character Area include grazed water meadows, meandering watercourse and self-seeded mature hawthorn which makes for a mature landscape character. The study outlines that land adjacent to Ickleford is predominantly used for horse grazing and stabling, with boundaries defined by post and barbed wire

fencing. The Landscape Study places the overall landscape character area of River Oughton and Purwell Valleys as being of moderate low landscape value, with moderate sensitivity.

North Hertfordshire Design Supplementary Planning Document

- 4.7 This SPD expands on national policy, providing specific urban design guidance for the locality, forming part of the Local Development Framework. According to the OS Map accompanying the Design SPD, the application site is within an area characterised by employment.

The document sets out that design principles for the village of Ickleford, specifically, include:

- Protect the trees through the centre to the village
- Gateways into the village should be strengthened

In regard to development within the district's rural areas, guidelines are set out, outlining that development within the green belt area will continue to be controlled in line with PPG2.

Vehicle Parking at New Development Supplementary Planning Document

- 4.8 This SPD, alongside North Hertfordshire District Council's Parking Strategy 2019-2031, outlines policies and guidance in regard to parking provision on new developments specifically, setting out the council's role within this. As a principle, the SPD explains that 'car parking areas should make a positive contribution to the design and setting of a development', with these incorporating impermeable surfaces where possible so to allow for sustainable drainage. As outlined in the document, the norm is that minimum parking provision is met in all cases.

Policy 24 sets out guidance regarding new developments and controlled parking zones (CPZ), with the need to retain Listed Buildings, for example, potentially restricting parking provision. The policy also notes that the need for parking on new developments will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.9 A revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in December 2024 and sets out the purpose of the planning system with a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The paragraphs relevant to the proposed development are as follows:

Paragraph 7 states that the planning system is in favour of sustainable development.

Paragraphs 10 & 11 state that at the heart of the planning system lies a presumption in favour of sustainable development. Local Authorities should plan positively for new development and approve development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay.

Paragraph 88 explains that planning decision should enable the following:

- 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

Paragraph 89 highlights that ‘sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist’.

Paragraph 154 highlights that development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless the following exceptions apply, including the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including 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.

Paragraph 207 outlines the requirement for applicants to ‘describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting’, with the level of detail proportionate to the assets’ importance.

Paragraph 208 explains that local planning authorities should ‘identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal’ so to avoid and minimise the impact on it.

Paragraph 210 encourages local planning authorities to consider the desirability of the proposed new development on local character.

National Planning Practice Guidance

- 4.10 The Government’s Planning Practice Guidance provides a web-based resource of national planning guidance covering a wide range of topics. Of relevance to this application is the guidance relating to the Green Belt and flood risk.
- 4.11 In relation to the Green Belt, the PPG states that the court have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in assessing the impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt. These include but are not limited to:
- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume
 - the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness
 - the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation.
- 4.12 In regard to flood risk, the Annex 3 (flood risk vulnerability classification) of the PPG states that sites use for holiday or short-let caravans and camping are deemed to be ‘More vulnerable’ subject to a specific warning and evacuation plan. Amenity open space including outdoor recreation is deemed ‘Water-compatible’ development. More vulnerable development in Flood Zone 2 is appropriate.

5. Planning assessment

Principle of Development in the Green Belt

- 5.1 The site lies within the designated Green Belt. Policy SP5 of the Local Plan confirms that the Local Planning Authority (LPA) will only support development in the Green Belt where it

does not constitute inappropriate development, or where very special circumstances can be demonstrated. Section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that great importance should be attached to Green Belt protection, with its fundamental aim being to keep land permanently open. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF sets out a number of specific forms of development that are not considered inappropriate in the Green Belt, provided they meet certain criteria.

“154. Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies:

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

h) Other forms of development provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. These are:

v. material changes in the use of land (such as changes of use for outdoor sport or recreation, or for cemeteries and burial grounds)”

- 5.2 The proposed change of use for the dog-walking facility in the northern section and the glamping site accommodating shepherd huts in the southern section is assessed against the relevant national and local Green Belt policies to ensure the development complies with the established policy framework.

Dog Walking Facility

Appropriate Development in the Green Belt

- 5.3 The proposed dog-walking facility accords with NPPF paragraph 154(b), as the development can be characterised as the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation. The proposal introduces only minimal material changes to the site, limited to fencing, an access track, and a small parking area, features that are commonly found in rural settings and do not alter the fundamental character of the land. Moreover, the fencing could be erected under permitted development rights.
- 5.4 The proposed dog-walking field also falls within exception 154(h)(v), which stipulates that material changes in the use of land for instances such as outdoor recreation are permitted provided they preserve the Green Belt's openness and do not conflict with the purposes of the Green Belt.

Decisions supporting the Principle of Development in the Green Belt

- 5.5 A relevant example of a dog-walking facility being considered appropriate development within the Green Belt is found in appeal reference APP/K3415/W/20/3264866 at Goosemoor Green, Staffordshire, where the Inspector allowed the change of use of agricultural land to a secure dog-walking field (**see Appendix 2**). The Inspector concluded that the proposal constituted a material change of use of land for outdoor sport or recreation and therefore fell within the Green Belt exceptions, noting that such uses are not inappropriate provided they preserve openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. In this case, the limited physical works, primarily a 2 m deer-fence enclosure and parking on existing hardstanding, were found not to cause harm to openness, and the appeal was therefore granted. This decision supports the principle

that secure dog-walking facilities can fall within the outdoor recreation exceptions in the Green Belt when their physical impacts are minimal and the use maintains the open character of the land.

- 5.6 Interestingly, North Hertfordshire District Council recently approved a dog walking field (LPA ref: 23/02221/FP) in the green belt at Land to the West of High Street, Graveley (see **Appendix 3**). The Planning Officer reviewed and referenced numerous appeal decisions, before concluding that the proposed dog walking field represented a “*material change of use of land*” for the purposes of outdoor recreation, falling within the scope of appropriate development in the Green Belt under NPPF paragraph 154(h)(v). Furthermore, the Planning Officer noted that, similar to this change of use application, the proposal in Graveley did not comprise any built form, instead proposing fencing and some loose hardstanding, which was not considered to infringe upon the openness of the Green Belt. Given the limited intensity of the use, the Planning Office further concluded that the activity “*would not be over and above what could be expected from the existing agricultural use*”.
- 5.7 In this case, conditions were attached to the permission on the basis of concerns raised by consultees including the Parish Council and Environmental Health, centred around the site’s location within the Green Belt and impacts of residential amenity. As such, both consultees implored the Officer to impose conditions relating to opening hours, limits on the number of vehicles on site at any one time, and a prohibition on external lighting, should permission be granted. Similar conditions could appropriately be applied to this proposal.

Preserving the Openness of the Green Belt

- 5.8 Paragraph 187 of the NPPF indicates that planning decisions should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, as also recognised in Local Plan Policy SP5.
- 5.9 The proposed dog walking site forms a rectangular parcel of land within an equestrian facility that is well enclosed on three sides by existing hedgerow and mature trees. The proposal includes planting additional hedgerows to further enclose the site. Notably, the 1.8 metre deer-style mesh fence proposed to enclose the dog walking field, so as to ensure the security of the dogs, is the only engineered element of the proposal and could be erected under permitted development rights and therefore does not meaningfully reduce the openness of the Green Belt. The associated parking area is also minor in size, well-contained by existing vegetation, and does not represent an intrusive or harmful encroachment. The only substantive change proposed here, with the dog walking facility, therefore is its use. While the facility will generate some level of vehicular movements, the booking system will manage and limit this to one booking at a time. As a result, only two vehicles may pass each other as users of the site arrive and leave. Within the countryside, this level of vehicular activity is already typical for outdoor recreation sites of this kind, and the majority of the site would remain open grassland, retaining the existing sense of rural openness.
- 5.10 The proposed parking area would also be discreetly located and screened from Lower Green Road by existing mature vegetation, ensuring that it does not become a prominent feature in the streetscape. The creation of a designated dog-walking field introduces a more structured facility while reflecting patterns typical of rural areas, where dog walkers frequently use laybys and gateways to access open land. While the deer fencing and elements of the paddock may be partially visible from the bridleway (Ickleford 004), these features are characteristic of countryside management and would not appear out of place in this context.

- 5.11 We therefore submit that the development does not amount to inappropriate development in the Green Belt, insofar as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

Shepherd's huts

Appropriate Development in the Green Belt

- 5.12 Characterised as a material change of use for outdoor recreation, the proposed shepherd's huts would also fall within the scope of exceptions outlined in NPPF paragraphs 154(b) and (h)(v) and as such, can be considered as representing appropriate development in the Green Belt.

Decisions supporting the Principle of Development in the Green Belt

- 5.13 A relevant example of shepherd's-hut accommodation being regarded as appropriate development in the Green Belt is found in appeal reference APP/R1845/W/25/3368220 at The Coppins, Bewdley, where the Inspector accepted that the siting of four shepherds' huts and a small shower block fell within the exceptions set out in NPPF paragraph 154(b) and 154(h)(v) (see **Appendix 4**). The Inspector stated that *"No compelling evidence has been put to me to suggest that the use of shepherd's huts themselves would not comprise a form of outdoor recreation as far as national and local planning policies in respect of the Green Belt are concerned"*. The Inspector went on to say, *"I consider that the proposal would not harm the openness of the Green Belt, owing to the overall visual characteristics and size of the proposed structures, and the impermanence, moveable nature and the stated intention to move the huts"*. Therefore, the principle of shepherd's huts in this location was deemed to be acceptable.
- 5.14 Furthermore, with appeal reference APP/R0660/W/24/3346725 at Ivy Cottage Tree Farm, Wilmslow, the Inspector considered that the principle of development for a shepherd's hut and associated works, concluding that it constituted appropriate development within the Green Belt (see **Appendix 5**). In that case, the Inspector allowed the appeal subject to a condition restricting occupation of the shepherd's hut to holiday accommodation only, supported by an up-to-date register made available for inspection upon request. The Inspector also concluded that the temporary nature of the shepherd's hut, operated as a short-stay holiday let, did not amount to an inappropriate form of "outdoor recreation" and was therefore compliant with NPPF paragraphs 154(b) and 154(h)(v).
- 5.15 Another example of shepherd's-hut accommodation being considered as appropriate development in the Green Belt is found in appeal reference APP/H2265/W/21/3277002 at Chance Cottage, Tonbridge (see **Appendix 6**). The Inspector noted that the Council raised no objections to the proposal pertaining to its impact on the Green Belt, and found this to be a reasonable conclusion, agreeing with it. To note, in this case, the site was also located within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (referred to as National Landscapes since 2023), while the site concerned with this application is not.

Preserving the Openness of the Green Belt

- 5.16 The glamping element of the scheme is modest in scale, comprising five sensitively designed shepherd huts positioned within an enclosed field. **Appendix 1** contains photographs showing an example of the type of shepherd's huts that would be located on site. The huts would be finished in subdued, rural colours to ensure they blend with the surrounding agricultural buildings and landscape. Given the scale and limited number of

units, the absence of external lighting, and the additional hedging proposed, the development would sit comfortably within its setting.

- 5.17 The proposal does not involve operational development and instead represents a change of use of land only, with no new built form proposed. As such, it has a fundamentally lower impact on the Green Belt than built development. The proposed use is also seasonal, operating only during March to October which further limits any effect on the openness and character of the wider rural landscape. The huts are mounted on wheels rather than fixed foundations, and they are not permanently attached to the ground. They can therefore be moved during the off-season, defined as the period from November to February, which further reinforces their temporary nature. While the huts do result in some loss of openness by being positioned within an undeveloped part of the field, this impact would be very minor in nature, given their limited scale and their movable design, which allows the restoration of openness should there be a cessation of use. The shepherd huts will also be accessible via mown tracks, further limiting the visual impact of the proposal.
- 5.18 The site is well-screened by existing vegetation, and this will be further enhanced by proposed planting.
- 5.19 In addition, the potential effects associated with the use, such as increased vehicle movements, would not be out of place in a rural setting where agricultural, equestrian, and countryside-based activities routinely generate similar patterns of activity.
- 5.20 Furthermore, the land could be returned to equestrian use at any time, as no permanent or irreversible physical changes are proposed. The development respects the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and would not give rise to unacceptable noise, odour, lighting, or general disturbance. To preserve the rural character and dark-sky environment, no external lighting is proposed.
- 5.21 In this way, the proposed change of use to accommodate five shepherd huts should similarly be regarded as the provision of facilities appropriate to outdoor recreation, given the combination of landscape containment, restricted visibility, and the inherently low-intensity nature of such accommodation.
- 5.22 The appeal referenced above (APP/R0660/W/24/3346725) at Ivy Cottage Tree Farm, Wilmslow is of further relevance where the Inspector found that, due to the siting and limited scale of the hut, they considered that there would be no adverse impact on the openness of this part of the Green Belt (**see Appendix 5**). As such, openness was preserved in line with national policy. For reference, the shepherd's hut included within this appeal has a footprint of approximately 11sq.m and is raised above the ground on wheels and, as such, has a maximum height of around 3.3 metres. For reference and comparison, the indicative plan and layout for the shepherd huts proposed within this application show a footprint of 7.57 square metres, which is significantly smaller than that of the scheme allowed at appeal. The huts are also to be positioned above ground level on wheels, as illustrated in **Appendix 1**. While the details provided are for indicative purposes only and do not necessarily represent the final design, we expect a similar scale and design to be delivered.
- 5.23 Taking these factors into account, the proposal therefore does not constitute inappropriate development and complies with Local Plan Policy SP5 and Section 13 of the NPPF. The development is considered to preserve the openness of the Green Belt and not conflict with the purposes of its designation.

Tourism benefit

- 5.24 Local Plan Policy ETC8 (Tourism) is also relevant, as it sets out the circumstances in which tourism-related development will be granted planning permission, provided that proposals also align with Policy ETC3. This policy recognises the benefits tourism can bring to the district, both directly and indirectly, and the opportunities sustainable tourism can offer. The proposal outlined in this application represents a rural tourism use that is only feasible in a countryside setting. Accordingly, the proposal accords with Neighbourhood Plan Policies E3 and C2, Local Plan Policy SP5, and paragraph 154 of the NPPF, which encourages the diversification of rural land-based businesses and the sustainable growth of rural tourism.
- 5.25 The site is within walking distance of Ickleford village and is well placed for visitors accessing Hitchin, Hitchin Lavender, and the future Universal Studios attraction. Access to a public right of way adjacent to the western boundary also enables circular walking routes, strengthening the site's appeal for both dog walking and glamping visitors.
- 5.26 The site is considered to be in a sustainable location given its close relationship with Ickleford and Hitchin. The expected level of activity would be modest, with only five shepherd huts and an exclusive one-hour booking system for the dog walking paddock ensuring that visitor numbers remain low. The intensity of use is therefore limited and appropriate to the rural context. Vehicle movements associated with the proposal would be minimal, and the historic equestrian use would have generated higher levels of traffic than the scheme now proposed. There would be no adverse impact on the highway network.
- 5.27 The development would not harm the ecological or landscape qualities of the site, which remains largely open, with only a small area of hardstanding and a 1.8-metre fence required. The additional trees and hedging proposed along southern boundaries would provide further screening and biodiversity benefits, and the works themselves are comparable to what could be carried out under permitted development rights.
- 5.28 The proposal would re-purpose a small parcel of the applicants' wider landholding to generate additional revenue that would support the continued operation of the existing equestrian business. The scale of the development is appropriate, and it would not detract from the character or appearance of the site or its surrounding landscape. The scheme would also deliver social benefits by supporting outdoor recreation, healthy lifestyles and opportunities for local residents and visitors to enjoy the countryside, in line with Policy SP1. This line of argument is reinforced by the Inspector's decision for APP/R0660/W/24/3346725 where the Inspector acknowledged the supplementation of income shepherd's huts can provide, thereby making a positive contribution to the existing business by presenting an opportunity to diversify (**Appendix 5**).
- 5.29 The proposal is also expected to create local employment opportunities, including roles necessary for the upkeep, management and maintenance of the dog walking field and shepherd's huts.
- 5.30 It is therefore considered that the proposed development would support the growth and diversification of the applicant's business and its contribution to the local rural economy in accordance with Local Plan Policy ETC8 and is therefore acceptable in principle.



Figure 9: Photograph showing views of the proposed dog walking area



Figure 10: Photograph showing views of the glamping site

Residential Amenity

- 5.31 The nearest residential property is Lower Green Farmhouse, situated to the south of the application site. Existing mature trees and the intervening barn within the farm complex provide a substantial physical and visual buffer between the dwelling and the proposed

development. As a result, views towards the dog walking field and glamping area are already significantly screened.

- 5.32 The scale and nature of the proposed dog walking facility is not expected to generate significant noise or disturbance. Dog walking is a common countryside activity, particularly in this location where the adjoining Common is already heavily used by local dog walkers. While occasional barking may arise, this is typical of dog walking environments and is generally short-lived, often occurring only when dogs are first released into a space. Persistent barking is not characteristic of dogs engaged in active exercise and play, particularly within a managed, open field environment. The Applicants live on site and will oversee the operation of the facility, enabling direct management of any potential noise issues.
- 5.33 It is proposed that the field will operate during daylight hours, with a maximum operational period of 08:00 to 21:00 during the summer months and 08:00 to 17:00 in the winter. It is considered unlikely that the field would be fully booked throughout the day, every day, and that use during the earliest and latest sessions would be limited. However, the proposed hours are considered appropriate for those who work during the day.
- 5.34 The proposed use and hours of operation are therefore considered compatible with neighbouring uses and would be comparable to activities undertaken at the adjacent Common in terms of frequency and associated noise.
- 5.35 The glamping element comprises only five shepherd huts, a modest scale that limits levels of activity and associated activity. The huts are positioned within the southern field, which is well screened and visually separated from nearby dwellings. Given this scale and the quiet nature of glamping accommodation, it is not anticipated that the proposal would give rise to any unacceptable noise, light or privacy impacts. For these reasons, the development is considered to accord with the relevant Local Plan policy relating to residential amenity.
- 5.36 In terms of the impact of the proposed dog-walking facility on the residential amenity of guests staying in the shepherd's huts, it is important to emphasise that the shepherd's huts' occupation would be seasonal. In addition, as outlined above, the use of an online booking system will help to manage visitor numbers for the dog-walking field, with one-hour bookable slots allowing up to two people, one car, and their dogs at any one time, thereby limiting any adverse impacts on the surrounding uses.
- 5.37 The site layout has been designed with amenity impact in mind, with the dog-walking field positioned to the north of the site, while the shepherd's huts are proposed to the south of this, with over 100 metres between the two. A fenced paddock for horses lies between the two uses, providing both physical separation and a clear functional distinction. This arrangement helps ensure that the activities associated with dog walking are limited to the designated space and do not infringe upon other recreational uses.

Highways

- 5.38 The proposed development would utilise the existing access from Lower Green to the south of the site. A new access track will be laid within the western boundary of the site, providing access to the glamping site and dog walking car park facilities. A small parking area surfaced with hoggin would be created in the southern corner of the site for the glamping site, providing space for five vehicles. Further north, a small car parking and turning area will be created to service the dog walking facility, allowing for overlap between bookings.

From the parking area, a lockable gate would provide secure access to the enclosed dog walking field.

- 5.39 The nature of the proposals is such that they are unlikely to generate a significant amount of associated traffic, given the proposed booking system. Customers will be able to book the one-hour slots, which include 10 minutes at the end to tidy and vacate the premises. Therefore, the vehicle trip generation will be 2 two-way movements per hour which is considered to have a negligible impact on the local highway network. Indeed, dog walkers are generally considered to be present within the countryside in the first place as a preferable location for such activities.
- 5.40 The glamping facility will not intensify traffic movements as it is anticipated that users will drive to the site to park and then ultimately the use of their vehicle will be limited during their stay.
- 5.41 It is therefore considered that the proposed development would not result in significant adverse impacts upon local highway safety and would comply with Local Plan Policy T1 and Section 9 of the NPPF.



Figure 11: Photograph showing where the access track will be located

Flood Risk & Drainage

- 5.42 The application site partially falls within Flood Zone 3 as identified on the Environment Agency's flood maps and is therefore considered to be at high risk of fluvial flooding.
- 5.43 The NPPG outlines that developments located in Flood Zones 2 and 3 will typically need to be supported by a sequential test. The exceptions for not requiring a sequential test include

developments involving a change of use. The proposed development is for an equestrian to dog walking facility and glamping change of use, with the scheme proposing an area of hard surfacing for car parking, the installation of 1.8m deer fencing (which would normally be permitted development) and the siting of one shepherd's hut outside the area of flood risk. Therefore, a sequential test is not required to support this application.

- 5.44 A Flood Risk Assessment was undertaken by MAC Engineering and concluded that the proposed development's vulnerability classification is compatible with the Flood Zone and therefore the development is appropriate. The proposed development will not create any impermeable areas and will therefore have no surface water drainage. The huts will be connected to the existing foul drainage.
- 5.45 Regarding flood risk for the dog walkers, due to the nature of the use, it is such that should any significant flooding occur, then the field would not be available for use, and the booking system would be temporarily closed.
- 5.46 The proposed development would therefore comply with the provisions of Local Plan Policy NE7 and Section 14 of the NPPF.

Ecology

- 5.47 A Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (BNG) prepared by Brown&Co accompanies this planning application and sets out the results of a site survey and desk-based assessment, informing the BNG potential of the site in the context of the new dog walking paddock and glamping facility.
- 5.48 It is proposed to contribute to a baseline dominated by modified grassland field through a range of measures. These include planting 34 small individual trees and introducing a new native hedgerow, while enhancing the existing poor condition ditch to moderate condition, so as to deliver a net gain. More information on the proposed changes to habitats and associated biodiversity recommendations can be found in the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment accompanying this application.
- 5.49 The onsite habitat change is estimated to result in a habitat unit uplift of 10.08% and a watercourse uplift of 86.72%. Thus, the project is considered to meet the legal obligation to achieve a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in England.

Heritage

- 5.50 A Heritage Note has been prepared by Stone & Meadow which concludes that the proposal will have no adverse impact on the listed buildings to the south. On the contrary, the Heritage Note reasons that the construction of the proposed shepherd's huts and small area of car parking for the use of the huts will result in a modest increase in the awareness of the built form on the site. Design considerations have been integral from the outset, and proposal is intentionally small scale in nature and positioned in a way to limit visual impact on the heritage asset. The report also emphasises that the additional landscaping proposed will only soften this, providing screening and privacy.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use of part of the applicants' existing equestrian land to provide two complementary rural leisure uses: a secure dog-walking and exercising facility, and a small-scale glamping site comprising five

movable shepherd huts. The proposals represent an appropriate and proportionate diversification of the existing rural business at Lower Green Farm.

- 6.2 The site is located within the Green Belt. However, both elements of the scheme fall within the exceptions identified at paragraphs 154(b) and 154(h)(v) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), relating to appropriate facilities for outdoor recreation and material changes of use of land. The development preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with its purposes. The proposals involve no permanent built form, rely on lightweight, movable structures, and are supported by strong landscape containment. Comparable decisions referenced within this Statement demonstrate that similar schemes have consistently been found acceptable in Green Belt locations.
- 6.3 The proposals also amount to sustainable rural tourism and recreation development, directly supported by Local Plan Policy ETC8, Neighbourhood Plan Policies E3 and C2, and NPPF paragraphs 88 and 89, which encourage the diversification of rural businesses and the delivery of low-impact visitor accommodation in countryside locations. The glamping use is modest in scale, seasonal in operation, sensitively designed, and well related to the nearby settlement of Ickleford and the wider walking network, including the adjacent public right of way.
- 6.4 In addition the Planning Statement demonstrates that the proposed development would not result in unacceptable impacts in respect of:
- Residential Amenity
 - Highways
 - Flood Risk
 - Ecology (whilst delivering in excess of a 10% BNG net gain)
 - Heritage assets
- 6.5 Overall, the proposal represents a well-designed, low-impact form of rural diversification that aligns with the Development Plan when read as a whole and is further supported by national planning policy. The scheme preserves the openness of the Green Belt, enhances biodiversity, supports the rural economy, and delivers recreational and tourism benefits without generating unacceptable amenity, heritage, landscape or highway impacts.