

THE RURAL PLANNING PRACTICE



Equestrian Justification to Support Application 20/200957 for:

Retrospective Application to increase the number of horses on site from 19 to 21. Demolition of an existing field shelter and construction of ten new stables, with feed stores and tack room. Development of ancillary parking area with use of existing access.

ADDRESS Stables Cottage, Hermitage Road, Higham, Kent,
ME3 7NE

ON BEHALF OF Katie Roberts

PREPARED BY The Rural Planning Practice

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Stables Cottage Livery Site





1. Introduction

- 1.1. This application seeks retrospective planning permission for stables and ancillary storage erected to the rear of the garden at Stables Cottage as part of the livery business, RockOn Livery Services Ltd. The number of stables now matches the number of horses allowed to be kept, thus placing less pressure on the grazing.
- 1.2. The application also includes a better parking arrangement, improved manure processing and storage in containers using worms.
- 1.3. The applicant, Katie Roberts lives at Stables Cottage next door to the livery yard. She is on hand to deal with out of hours emergencies. Katie has been living at and running the stables the last 10 years. The yard provides assisted, full and DIY livery to many local people. The livery business currently employs one full time groom and two part time staff.
- 1.4. The facilities include a 20m x 60m sand school, with good off-road hacking.
- 1.5. It is a thriving, popular business in need of some investment which will in turn improve the yard's appearance and functionality.

2. The Value of Horses to The Rural Economy and to Health and Wellbeing

- 2.1. The British Equestrian Trade Association's (BETA) National Equestrian Survey 2019 highlights;

"The economic value of the equestrian sector stands at £4.7 billion of consumer spending across a wide range of goods and services each year. This has increased from £4.3 billion in 2015.

There are 27 million people in Britain with an interest in the equestrian industry.

There has been an increase in the number of people who have ridden at least once in the past 12 months, to 3 million from 2.7 million in 2015.

Lack of access to horses and riding facilities is a barrier for 22% of lapsed riders returning to the sport."

- 2.2. The Pandemic has well illustrated the value people place on being outside. Horses have provided a great diversion during lockdown, as well as being a source of exercise.



- 2.3. Riding is well recognised as good exercise especially when mixed in with stable chores such as mucking out or filling water buckets. Mental well-being is also enhanced by being around horses and spending time outside.
- 2.4. Riders have a great variety of aspirations. Many simply enjoy hacking round the countryside or going for a plod round the school, others are competitive and aspire to Badminton Horse Trails or the Olympics and some simply love just being round the animals and taking care of them.
- 2.5. This BETA Key Facts makes the point that access to horses is a barrier to people being able to ride. The whole of North Kent is under considerable pressure from all quarters and the applicant, Katie Roberts not only provides a much-valued livery service but has achieved a very high standard in competitive dressage riding at Prix St George level on a horse she has trained through the levels.

3. Relevant Planning History

- 2013 0186 - Application for variation of Condition 1 attached to Planning Permission 2001 0753 to allow the number of horses and foals kept on the land to increase from 14 to 19. Approved.
- 2014 1034 - Retention of two stables and concrete base and field shelter.
- 2014 1054 - Formation of a Sand School. Approved for the use of livery clients but not for events.

4. The Yard

- 4.1. The area is where many equines are kept, benefiting from the location close to accessible countryside in a relatively sustainable spot and in reach of a populous area.
- 4.2. There are 19 horses and two Shetland ponies.
- 4.3. The extended horse accommodation provides 19 loose boxes. There is also a horse feed, tack room and social / arena viewing area. The original yard had nine loose boxes with a kitchen and WC.
- 4.4. The ability to stable horses is essential for their wellbeing. A stable is not only shelter from extreme weather but provides a place where a horse may be more safely handled for veterinary care, attention to teeth, and more day to day routines such as tacking up or grooming.
- 4.5. Good hacking is available on farmland and rural lanes adjoining the yard. The land in the control of the applicant extends to 10 acres subdivided into 23 separate paddocks by post and rail fencing. The applicant provides good land management and the horses are grazed in pairs and the applicant provides regular rotation of grazing in order to provide good grazing in both winter and summer months.
- 4.6. The horses kept at the yard perform a variety of jobs. Some horses are happy hackers, while some compete nationally at a higher level in affiliated dressage competitions, show jumping and eventing.



- 4.7. The yard has been designed to provide sufficient storage for feed, bedding and rugs, as well as a wash down and solarium for drying wet horses or for use after clipping. The sand school is also much valued by the livery clients because it enables a shorter but more intensive period of exercise for the horses than hacking which is less intense.
- 4.8. The applicant has experienced some difficulties with the previous owner of the yard who, when the property was subdivided' made it difficult to access some parts of the site, and this application helps to resolve the legacy of this too.

5. The Proposal

- 5.1. The application provides the opportunity to improve the appearance and management of the yard. Access is retained in its existing position because the visibility is best at this point. The proposed access and parking improvements will result in a more effective situation for the larger vehicles such as lorries and horse transporters when accessing and manoeuvring on site.
- 5.2. The parking arrangement is much improved and takes part of the garden and paddock with angled parking for 11 cars plus parking space for the house at the front. The parking surface will be rolled hogging. The access track is concrete grass blocks. There is enough space for parking of cars for clients as well as parking for farriers, vets and emergency vehicles. Horse transporters are parked along the north east fence line of the outdoor school.
- 5.3. The stables are of timber construction with profiled sheeting roofs. The 10 new horse stables have been added on to the existing buildings to minimise the footprint and incorporate the stables and field shelter allowed by permission 2014/1034. Feed and bedding storage is shown with two feed rooms, and a tack room. There is also an existing kitchen and a chalet for livery clients use. The changes will result in an overall improvement to the yard arising from better storage of feed and bedding, parking and muck containment. These changes reduce the need for ad hoc external storage.
- 5.4. The applicant is proposing to install two storage (shipping) containers and introduce a natural, faster composting process using worms. The applicant has already started to do this which has received an enthusiastic response from local allotment keepers who regularly collect the manure which is also used by the applicant. The proposed positioning of the containers improves the appearance of the site. The existing manure piles are being removed.
- 5.5. The proposed hard standing will extend to around the sides and top of the arena allowing access for manure removal and general day to day management. A concrete apron is shown in front of stables 14-19 allowing for safe access for all horses and will eliminate slippery mud in the winter months. This area will also allow for any unexpected overflow parking.
- 5.6. Rainwater is harvested.



5.7. Foul drainage is a cesspit located beneath Stable 6.

5.8. Lighting is shown on drawing 51 1000 607.

6. Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF)

6.1. Paragraph 84 supports the *“sustainable growth and expansion of all types of rural business in rural areas both through conversion of existing building and well designed new buildings”*.

6.2. In this case the expansion of the yard responds to demand for the facilities. The yard is full with a waiting list.

6.3. In terms of Green Belt policy the NPPF at paragraph 149(b) accepts as appropriate development :

“the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use) for outdoor sport, 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”.

6.4. The yard at RockOn will improve visually as the result of this application. The buildings have been configured as tightly as possible. The provision of an equestrian yard is appropriate development.

6.5. The NPPF promotes healthy and safe communities and at paragraph 92 endorses the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community.

6.6. Paragraph 98 supports the access to *“high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity”* as important for the health and well-being of communities.

6.7. The 2014 **Gravesham Core Strategy** at policy CS12 and CS19 supports facilities for sports and recreation provided good design is considered and implemented.

Gravesham Local Plan First Review 2014

6.8. Policy for the Use of Land for Horse-riding and the Erection of Stables is set out below:

“9.44 These may be associated with land fragmentation. Whilst the use of land for the riding of horses is appropriate to the open recreation functions of the Green Belt, it can be detrimental to landscape and agricultural policies. The location of the Borough is such that there is considerable pressure for such activities. The erection of stables and horse shelters can, unless well designed and properly sited, be detrimental to the appearance of the countryside. The provision of jumps and other structures can look unsightly. Vehicles and trailers visiting the premises and inexperienced horse-riders on the public highway can be detrimental to road safety. The policy is designed to recognise the demand for such facilities but to carefully control their location and appearance.”



6.9. Policy C17 states:

“Proposals for the recreational use of land in the countryside for horse-riding, riding schools and the erection of stables will only be permitted if they are compatible with the agricultural, landscape and transport policies of this Plan. Where proposals are acceptable in principle, the Borough Council will expect stables and horse shelters to be properly designed and constructed of sound materials appropriate to the countryside and to be in an acceptable location within the site.”

6.10. The proposals serve to improve the functionality and appearance of a yard much valued by local people. The location close to good hacking is a very great advantage of the yard.

7. Conclusion

7.1. These proposals meet planning policy at national and local level. They improve facilities for the horses and livery owners and allow access to the countryside for recreation in this locality which has a large catchment of people with horses. The proposal benefits health and wellbeing.

7.2. The authority is respectfully asked to grant permission for these improvements.