



SUPPORTING STATEMENT

In respect of the use of land for the siting of 2 no. shepherds huts for use as holiday lets and relocation of existing menage at:

Beechwood Farm, Forward Green, Stowmarket,
Suffolk, IP14 5EQ

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This statement is prepared on behalf of Mr N Ward in respect of an application for the siting of 2 no. shepherds huts to provide additional holiday let accommodation at Beechwood Farm, Forward Green. The proposal also includes the relocation of the horse menage and associated ground works to facilitate this and the additional shepherd huts.
- 1.2 The 2 no. shepherd huts proposed would be in addition to the existing 3 shepherd huts already on site which were granted permission in January 2021 under planning reference DC/20/04670.
- 1.2 It will consider the planning policy position and provide an overview of the relevant material considerations relating to the proposed development.
- 1.3 The extract below shows the location of the site relative to nearby development.

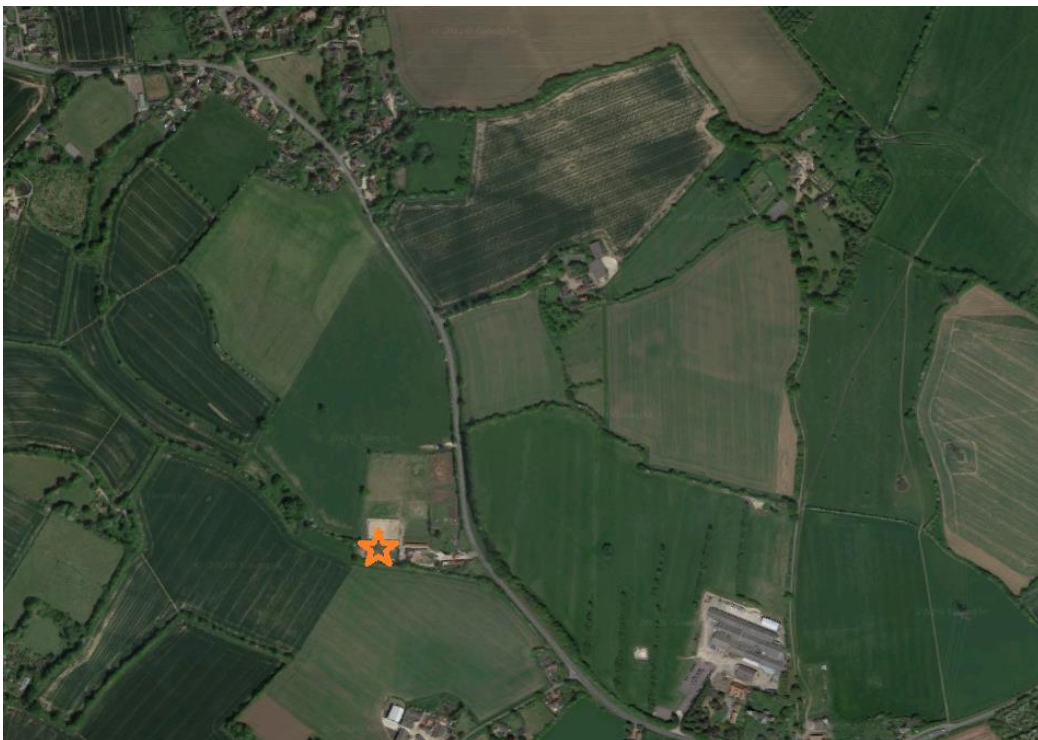


Image 1: Location Plan

- 1.4 Mr Ward builds his own shepherds huts and has in the last few years launched his business, Beechwood Shepherds Huts, which has now produced and sold its first few units. Details of the products produced can be found at <http://beechwoodshepherdshuts.co.uk/>.

2.0 The Site

2.1 The site benefits from a recent planning permission dated 5th January 2021 in respect of the “Change of use of land for the siting of 3 no. shepherd huts for use as holiday lets” under Council reference DC/20/04670. There have also been recent permissions in relation to the change of use of land for equestrian use together with both planning permission and listed building consent for works to the farmhouse itself.

2.2 The Planning Officer’s report on the 2021 planning permission identifies the site as;

“Beechwood is a detached two storey grade 2 listed cottage with various barns, outbuildings and stables within the plot. The dwelling is accessed off the A1120 and lies to the west of Earl Stonham. The site is surrounded by open countryside to the south and west, with a footpath along the southern boundary. To the north of the site lies a menage”.

2.3 As detailed, Beechwood Farmhouse is a listed building (listed as ‘Hawfield’). The listing describes the building as;

“House, probably late C16 or early C17, with mid C20 extension to left. 2 storeys. 3-cell cross-passage entrance plan. Timber-framed and plastered. Thatched roof with axial and gable chimneys of red brick. Mainly C20 casements (2 small C19 casements at 1st storey). C20 entrance door with open gabled porch of red brick”.

2.4 The image below shows the site from the A1120, which lies to the east of the property.



- 2.5 As can be seen, the site benefits from a generous access off the road and contains a range of buildings to the south of the dwelling.
- 2.6 The land and property sit some distance from neighbouring properties/premises, and the site is bounded to the south by a public footpath which turns through 90 degrees at the western end and runs north.
- 2.7 The land has been utilised for many years for adhoc storage associated with the equestrian use and for the keeping of animals on occasion. However, this has recently been altered through the creation of the existing shepherds huts on the site. The holiday let business here has been well received and is booked up throughout most of the forthcoming holiday period season.
- 2.8 There are no other constraints affecting the site.

3.0 The Proposal

- 3.1 The application seeks planning permission for the use of the site for tourism, consisting of the siting of 2 no. shepherd huts (additional to the 3 shepherd huts previously approved to the south of the site). The proposal would also see the relocation of the current menage which would then be to the northeast of the shepherd huts and situated behind the existing building and stables on site.
- 3.2 The application is supported by plans and documents including:
- Site Location Plan;
 - Proposed Block Plan;
 - Supporting Statement;
 - Land Contamination Questionnaire;
 - Groundsure Homebuyers Report;
 - Flood Map for Planning Extract;
 - Shepherds Huts images.

- 3.3 The proposed block plan shows how the shepherds huts would be set out on the site, making use of the existing access road and track within the site.
- 3.4 Parking would be provided immediately adjacent to each hut in an informal manner.
- 3.5 Details are also provided of the reorientated menage, which is to be sited in an area of paddock close to the existing ménage location.

4.0 Planning History

- 4.1 Planning permission was granted on 5th January 2021 for the *“Change of use of land for the siting of 3 no. shepherd huts for use as holiday lets”* under planning reference DC/20/04670. The Council determined that the application was in line with development plan policies and would not cause any demonstrable harm or adverse impacts on either the listed building or the character of the area.
- 4.2 The site also benefits from a number of permissions relating to change of use of land for equestrian purposes.
- 4.3 Planning permission was granted on 10th May 2016 in respect of the *“Change of use of land for the keeping of horses, menage and replacement of stables”* under Council reference 0675/16.
- 4.4 That permission was supplemented in 2019 when planning permission was granted on 2nd September 2019 for the *“Change use of site as commercial livery and training stables and the retention of two stable buildings and a horse walker”* under Council reference DC/19/03566.
- 4.5 There have also been recent permissions (planning permission and listed building consent) for works to the farmhouse itself.

5.0 Planning Policy Context

- 5.1 The revised National Planning Policy Framework was published in July 2021. It sets out the Government's planning policy and is a material consideration when determining planning applications.
- 5.2 The NPPF is supported by the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), which assists applicants and decision makers to interpret the NPPF.
- 5.3 The development plan for Mid Suffolk District Council consists of the saved policies of the Mid Suffolk Local Plan (1998), the Core Strategy (2008) and its Focussed Review (2012). The following policies within these documents are considered to be relevant to this proposal;

Mid Suffolk Local Plan 1998

- GP01 - Design and Layout of Development
- H16 - Protecting Existing Residential Amenity
- RT16 - Tourism Facilities and Visitor Attractions
- RT19 - Static Caravans and Holiday Chalets

Mid Suffolk Core Strategy (2008) and Focussed Review (2012)

- CS01 - Settlement Hierarchy
 - CS02 - Development in the Countryside & Countryside Villages
 - CS05 - Mid Suffolk's Environment
 - FC1 - Presumption In Favour Of Sustainable
 - FC1.1 - Mid Suffolk Approach To Delivering Sustainable Development
- 5.4 Where relevant to the consideration of this proposal, these policies will be referred to within the 'Planning Considerations' section of this report.

6.0 Planning Considerations

6.1 Paragraph 10 of the NPPF states *“So that sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the Framework is a presumption in favour of sustainable development”*.

6.2 The proposal seeks permission for the use of the site for tourism use, in the form of 2 well-designed shepherds huts. Planning permission has previously been granted for 3 no. shepherd huts to the south of this site and this proposal would therefore seek to extend and increase the amount of accommodation available, in a small scale and sustainable way.

6.3 Paragraph 84 of the NPPF states that;

“84. Planning policies and decisions should enable:

- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*
- 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; and*
- d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship”*.

6.4 This site is outside of any village settlement boundary and for planning purposes is therefore considered to be in the countryside. Policy CS2 of the Core Strategy confirms that tourism is one of the categories of development which is permitted in the countryside, and therefore the proposal can be seen to comply with policy CS2 as a matter of principle.

6.5 Saved policy RT18 of the Local concerns touring caravan and camping sites, stating that;

“Sites for touring caravans and tented camping should be located where there is no adverse impact on the character and appearance of the surrounding landscape. Proposals should not

adversely affect residential amenity, highway safety, agriculture, forestry and wildlife conservation. Sites must be well screened to minimise their visual impact on their surroundings, have good access to services, to the major road network and to a range of attractions of particular interest to tourists.

Touring caravan and camping sites will be permitted where they have good access to services, the major road network and a range of attractions of particular interest to tourists”.

- 6.6 Policy RT19 of the Local Plan concerns the proposals for static caravans and holiday chalets, it states;

“Static caravans and holiday chalets will only be permitted where there are no adverse effects on the character and appearance of the landscape, existing residential amenity, highway safety, agriculture, forestry, wildlife conservation and where essential services can be provided

In the countryside where permanent residential use would not be permitted but holiday use is acceptable, conditions will be imposed limiting the period of occupancy to ensure that the accommodation remains available for holiday use”.

- 6.7 As mentioned above, the proposal seeks to extend the existing number of shepherd huts within the wider site by the addition of two new units. In considering the previous proposal for shepherds huts on this site, it was found that the site is located close to the villages of Stonham Aspal, Stowupland and Creeting St Mary, and in a reasonable distance of both Stowmarket and Needham Market too. In responding to the provisions of the aforementioned policies, whilst their requirements are understood, the purpose of many tourism sites is to offer a ‘get away’ where they are slightly remote from towns and larger villages. However, in terms of the requirement to be located in an accessible location, this site scores well given its proximity to these villages and towns, which provide the main facilities that holiday makers require as evident by the need to increase the accommodation available.

- 6.8 The two shepherd huts would be located to the north of the existing huts and would therefore sit comfortably in this setting, being located well away from the road and visible in only very limited views from the public footpath.

- 6.9 The proposal would not affect residential amenity, and the existing access provides safe and convenient access to the land that can readily accommodate the proposed development, with excellent visibility in either direction. The level of traffic generated by this use would not be significant and there are no known highway capacity issues which would preclude this use in this location.
- 6.10 The land is currently being used for a menage as part of the wider equestrian use of the site. The menage would be relocated to sit behind the existing buildings and stable blocks. The shepherd huts would allow for this area of the site to be read as a whole with the existing shepherd huts and would offer a more efficient use of land in that regard. The proposal would effectively consolidate the two uses into their respective areas of the site. It would bring with it significant economic and social benefits, offering additional holiday accommodation in an accessible location and delivering additional income for rural facilities nearby. As such, the development will also provide local social benefits in terms of helping to sustain the viability of local services thereby helping to safeguard local jobs.
- 6.11 The provision of the 2 no. shepherds huts offer flexibility to the choice of accommodation provided locally, and enables the existing business to expand and grow by attracting custom from a variety of sources.
- 6.12 The application does not involve the loss of agricultural fields or land set aside for forestry and so will have no impact on those uses.
- 6.13 The effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the hospitality and travel industry has been significant and its knock-on effects are still being felt several years later. In 2020 a newspaper article (relating to the impact of Covid-19 on the hospitality industry), the author identified that:

A number of pub operators with sites at some of Britain's most popular tourist spots believe a recent spike in staycation bookings will prove 'critical' in their recovery from Covid-19.

Though outbound travel to destinations across Europe is expected to resume from 4 July – with the Government apparently poised to confirm travel corridors to up to 10 countries in the coming days – a recent surge in online activity demonstrates unprecedented demand for a British bolthole once lockdown restrictions are eased.

According to figures released by Rest Easy Group – the parent company of brands such as Snaptrip, DogFriendlyCottages.co.uk, Big-Cottages.com, LastMinute-Cottages.co.uk and LateRooms.com – web traffic increased by up to 381% at peak hours across its portfolio after Boris Johnson announced the easing of lockdown measures on Tuesday 23 June.

What's more, the group has also revealed an increase of 69% in traffic and 172% in bookings compared with this time last year - with more than 50% of staycation reservations made for July.

Two fifths of these bookings were made by couples or families, while 58% were from groups of three or more adults.

"It's no secret it's been a tough few months for the travel sector worldwide, so we welcomed the news from the Government that staycations will be allowed to go ahead from 4 July and it seems the public did too," Matt Fox, CEO and co-founder of Rest Easy Group, said.

"During the past three months, we have seen a steady increase in bookings for mid-to-late 2021, but the Prime Minister's announcement sent a flood of new traffic to all our brands as people get excited about travelling again in 2020."

6.15 The above is still relevant, particularly so when people are now looking to make more economical choices and savings, and UK holidays are likely to continue to surge. The applicant is conscious of an increasing need for such facilities and the demand for the existing shepherd huts has suggested that this type of holiday accommodation is increasingly popular, thus the need to increase the availability with the addition of two further huts.

6.16 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF sets out three objectives to achieving sustainable development;

"a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;

b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future

generations; and by fostering a well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy”.

6.17 This proposal is considered to encompass all three of these objectives.

6.18 Economically, there are clear and demonstrable benefits resulting from the delivery of much needed additional tourism accommodation, as expressed earlier in this statement. Those occupying the units would be highly likely to support other local communities and facilities through expenditure at facilities and services. There would be significant direct and indirect employment resulting from this facility, offering and supporting rural jobs. The proposal meets not only the provisions of the NPPF in this regard but is also wholly compliant with policy RT19.

6.19 From a social perspective, the use brings significant benefits from the opportunity for people to take holidays in the Suffolk countryside, to recreate and relax and to enjoy the local facilities at their leisure. The proposal would also generate additional/secure existing employment in this rural area, bringing social benefits through the support to local communities and the investment in the local area.

6.20 Environmentally, whilst it is clear that any holiday facilities such as this will require travel to and from them, the site is well located for walking, cycling and public transport. Significant facilities are available within a short distance of the site, including shops, nearby villages (linked by footpaths), tourist attractions, entertainment, recreation, public houses and the Stonham Barns complex. The provision of the 2 no. shepherd huts and the relocation of the existing menage will result in tidying up of this part of the site and ensuring that the diverse use of the whole site reads and flows better, providing environmental benefits that would weigh in support of this scheme.

- 6.21 The proposal would make effective and efficient use of land, and would be constructed to a good specification that would minimise waste and energy usage.
- 6.22 Overall, therefore, the proposal complies with all of the objectives of sustainable development and development plan policies aimed at securing increased tourism in the Mid Suffolk district.

7.0 Planning Balance

- 7.1 The application seeks planning permission for a change of use of land that will encourage tourism and offer a pleasant and quiet holiday accommodation with good access to nearby facilities and services. In order to facilitate this, the existing menage will be moved into an adjacent paddock.
- 7.2 In accordance with Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, applications for planning permission must be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. The consideration is, therefore, whether the development accords with the development plan and, if not, whether there are material considerations that would indicate a decision should be taken contrary to the development plan.
- 7.3 The development plan includes the Mid Suffolk Local Plan and the Core Strategy and its Focussed Review. Specific policy provision is made, through saved policies RT18 and RT19, for tourism accommodation such as this, subject to certain criteria being met.
- 7.4 The site is well located and would be able to accommodate the development without giving rise to impacts on amenity, highway safety issues or a detrimental impact on the landscape as per the previous application for three shepherd huts under DC/20/04670. The proposal delivers significant economic benefits through the addition of this type of varied accommodation that would give those looking to holiday in this area options in terms of the nature of their holiday. However, whilst the proposal seeks to increase the overall number of shepherd huts on site, the proposal would still be of a scale that would sit quietly in its surroundings and provide a low-key development in terms of its external impacts.

- 7.5 The proposal is economically and socially sustainable, demonstrating clear benefits to local services and facilities, and providing and securing employment. The relocated menage can be accommodated in a manner that does not give rise to any amenity or landscape issues and where the menage would be readily accessible from the adjacent stables.
- 7.6 For all of these reasons, the proposal is found to be in accordance with the development plan, demonstrating the objectives of sustainable development and should, thereby, be supported.