

RSPCA
Southridge Animal Centre
Packhorse Lane, Ridge, Potters Bar, EN6 3LZ

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**Supporting Statement for Planning Application
to Seek an Approval for Proposed Reception
Extension and Dog Training Marquees**

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1.00 INTRODUCTION

This Statement is prepared in support of the Planning Application by the RSPCA for the retention of temporary marquees at the Southridge Animal Centre, Packhorse Lane, Ridge, Potters Bar EN6 3LZ. The proposals consist of the retention of two temporary marquees used for café and dog exercise facilities/meetings at the RSPCA.

This Statement will seek to provide information in support of the Planning Application for the RSPCA in seeking to improve and maintain their current premises at Southridge Animal Centre. This is to be read in conjunction with the development proposal drawings and supporting documents.

2.00 THE RSPCA

The RSPCA exists under Acts of Parliament as a Charity, a National Organisation supporting local communities. The RSPCA Southridge Animal Centre is one of 15 animal rehoming centres operated by the RSPCA's National Head Quarters. The primary purpose of these centres is to find new homes for abandoned and unwanted companion animals, mainly dogs and cats but also small mammals and birds and, where appropriate, large animals such as horses. Reasonable numbers of British wildlife, exotic species and farm animals also pass through the Centre. Animals arrive from various sources, mostly the public and the RSPCA's Inspectors, but also outside agencies such as the Highways Agency and the Police. Reasons for admission include abandonment, abuse, neglect and unable to keep due to circumstances and strays. Wildlife admissions are generally orphans, injured or the subjects of wildlife protection prosecution cases. Southridge Animal Centre is often used for the storage of investigation cases from RSPCA Inspectors and animals removed from dwellings.

3.00 PLANNING HISTORY

Planning permission for the erection of two marquees to provide café facilities/reception extension and dog training was granted by Hertsmere Borough Council in accordance with Planning Approval TP/10/0992.

The Decision Notice was dated the 1st September 2010.

Since the receipt of Planning Approval for the temporary marquees, the RSPCA subsequently secured Planning Approval for the permanent construction of dog training building and various small animal buildings and extension to reception building under Planning Approval TP/11/0578 which was approved in the Decision Notice dated 22nd June 2011.

A subsequent Planning Approval was granted under Decision Reference No. TP/12/1767, dated 15th October 2012 (copy attached), for the retention of the two marquees. This maintained the marquees on site as a temporary solution during the continued difficulties faced by the RSPCA to secure funding for the permanent structures.

Works to implement permission Reference TP/11/0578 have since commenced with the erection of the aviary and various fencing operations and small paddocks.

A further Application Ref. 14/1012/MA was approved dated 24th July 2014 for the Non-material Amendment to Planning Permission TP/11/0578.

- The Applicant (The RSPCA) applied in October 2014 for a further extension of the temporary Planning Approval. Approval was granted under Decision Reference No 14/1616/FUL, dated 15th December 2014 for further retention of a period of two years for the two marquees.
- The Applicant (The RSPCA) applied in October 2016 for a further extension of the temporary Planning Approval. Approval was granted under Decision Reference No 16/2101/FUL, dated 21st December 2016 for further retention of a period of two years for the two marquees.
- The Applicant (The RSPCA) applied in December 2018 for a further extension of the temporary Planning Approval. Approval was granted under Decision Reference No 18/2281/FUL, dated 28th January 2019 for further retention of a period of two years for the two marquees.
- The Applicant (The RSPCA) applied in January 2021 for a further extension of the temporary Planning Approval. Approval was granted under Decision Reference No 21/0122/FUL, dated 16th March 2021 for further retention of a period of two years for the two marquees.

The RSPCA have continued to provide facilities and services from the site at Southridge but experience further continued financial shortfalls and have been unable to secure funding for the permanent new structures to replace the temporary marquees. The demand for the facilities continues and extends the RSPCA responsibilities from the current site.

A previous pre-application discussion was held with the Original Planning Officer, Sharon Richards in November 2018. It was discussed that whilst the proposals in September 2016 to implement the permanent works for the dog exercise building and café would be further delayed beyond the date of the expiry of permission for the temporary marquees, there remains a further need to extend the temporary uses to maintain facilities on site that are currently used and required. This situation has not changed in 2023, hence a new application is therefore required.

The RSPCA have recently undergone changes in leadership. The RSPCA are continuing to seek funding and regularly review their capital project commitments. Whilst Southridge remains a key site for the delivery of animal care and rehoming, funds have yet to be made available for their project for replacing the temporary facilities.

In the current financial climate the RSPCA remains focused on maintaining animal welfare and rehoming facilities and do not yet have surplus funds to develop additional capital projects, preferring to continue funding existing facilities instead.

During the Covid Pandemic of 2020-2021 the RSPCA have found the use of the marquee spaces invaluable. The provision of covered areas has allowed the RSPCA to maintain safe social distancing in ventilated areas allowing the safe registration and meeting with clients and key workers to the site.

Since 2021 when the current approval was granted, the RSPCA has not been able to secure any further funding but continue to provide service and facilities from Southridge. The Cost of Living is impacting on current fundraising potential whilst operational costs have largely increased.

This Application seeks consent for the approval for a further two years for the temporary Marquees to support provision of the dog training building by the RSPCA. This will also encompass the reception marquee extension for which it is anticipated can be maintained for a similar timescale. No drainage or below ground works are required as roof water will run off to soft ground only.

As a charity it will be appreciated that the RSPCA have to raise funds in order to implement these proposals and in the current economic climate this is proving exceptionally challenging.

It remains at the heart of the RSPCA to improve and enhance their facilities for animal welfare and Southridge is one of many schemes throughout the country where the RSPCA are striving to improve their facilities.

The original drawings, as approved, and the original Design and Access Statement is enclosed with the Planning Application by way of supporting information.

The Local Authority is encouraged to support this Application by the RSPCA in meeting its objectives in support for community and local employment initiatives.

4.00 BUSINESS CARE /VERY SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Southridge RSPCA Animal Centre is situated in the South Region of the RSPCA. It is the South region's 'flagship' animal centre, taking in an average of 1,000 animals a year - predominantly dogs, cats and small 'furrries' such as rabbits. The centre successfully rehomes an average of 650 - 700 animals a year.

Southridge is an innovative centre, with hard-working committed staff dedicated to taking in, caring for, and rehoming as many animals as possible. Southridge works hard to support the work of the RSPCA Inspectorate, whose job is to rescue the most cruelly treated, neglected and abused animals. The North London inspectorate group is based on site as Southridge.

The RSPCA's strategy, and in turn the South regional strategy is to support the Society's focus on 'core business' - supporting the work of the inspectorate, as they are the only animal welfare charity to have such a uniformed force. Southridge animal centre forms a key part of the regional strategy, as it is one of only 5 sites across the whole region (which stretches from Kent to Cornwall, and the Isle of Wight to North London/Potters Bar) identified to provide an integrated service delivery as part of this support.

Having identified the areas of greatest need across the region in terms of supporting the work of the inspectorate, greater London is the single biggest. As such, using key animal centres in/around the M25, and the two RSPCA London hospitals and satellite clinics in London are integral to our work moving forward. Southridge is the largest of the animal centres, and of all the centres in the South region, Southridge is the one that excels at taking the most 'difficult'

behavioural dogs, assessing them, and successfully working with them to make them rehomeable.

In order to achieve this, the centre desperately needs the infrastructure to meet requirements. The RSPCA is working in an increasingly challenging financial environment, with legacy income decreasing, and increased competition between charities. Since 2014 the Society has continued to experience significant financial challenges, and budgets for all cost centres have been decreased year on year - including the animal centres. This means the centres are expected to deliver the same (or more) animal welfare year on year as the need never decreases, but with decreasing budgets. In view of this, all centres have had to become far more adept at income generation locally.

Large Marquee/cafe marquee

The large marquee is invaluable to the centre, as it is used as a multi-purpose facility. It was donated to Southridge by the local branch of the RSPCA (Potters Bar * Barnet Branch) from voluntary donations.

Just some of those uses include:

Enhancing the care of dogs in the centre and promoting responsible/fun dog ownership in the community:

- It provides the centre with an "all weather" area in which to exercise and work the dogs in the care of the centre, both mentally and physically. During the extremes of weather the marquee is invaluable, as the outside compounds become almost fully submerged in the winter or are baking hot in summer. Kennelled dogs have to be provided with optimum exercise opportunities to facilitate their mental and physical well-being.
- An area in which dog behavioural assessments can be carried out in, both by staff and by the visiting dog behaviourist - promoting safe adoption and dog ownership of rescued dogs.
- Every Friday evening the centres' dogs are treated to mental agility sessions in the marquee.
- It provides a peaceful area for alternative therapies to be given to the dogs.
- Fortnightly dog training classes are held at the centre for dogs which have been adopted in the local community, in support of successful adoption. These can be held under cover, encouraging good attendance in poor weather. These classes promote responsible dog ownership and safe dog ownership.

- Training courses for the RSPCA Inspectorate and RSPCA Animal centre staff are held in the marquee. These training courses facilitate the work of these staff, including providing a positive effect on safe dog ownership in the community.
- Provides an area where prospective owners and the dog of their choice can be introduced, which increases the number of dogs adopted.
- Southridge is one of only 2 centres across the whole RSPCA to be trialling a new role, Behaviour and Welfare officer. This role has obtained a special qualification from Bristol University in dog behaviour and welfare, and is designed to provide a pro-active assessment and training service to the animal centre and surrounding community. Use of the marquee is vital for this role.
- Venue for our regular volunteer inductions. Volunteers from the local community work alongside the staff at the centre, exercising, socialising and caring for the animals.
- Southridge regularly works with various health trusts offering volunteer placements to their clients. The training or induction can be carried out in the marquee.
- Southridge have been approached by the local fire brigade for training to their officers in dog handling skills the marquee would provide the venue for this.

Southridge working with the community

- Southridge works with both the police and the probation service offering "placements" to teenagers and adults on various schemes. We are only able to do this because of the marquee which provides a working area in the poor weather. Attendees of these placements have found it very beneficial and have continued to volunteer at the Centre long after their placements have been worked.
- Southridge is expanding into offering work placements with local schools. The marquee is the only space big enough in the centre to provide undercover training and education classes.
- The Behaviour and Welfare officer (as above) will be holding "open behavioural clinics" in the marquee, available to all dog owners in the area on a very minimal or free cost basis, with the aim of preventing a number of negative behavioural issues in the local community.
- The Middlesex North West branch of the RSPCA is in discussion with Southridge for using the marquee as a venue for a regular educational youth group who will learn about all aspects of animal care.

- The centre regularly acts as a workplace environment for students from local colleges studying animal care. The marquee provides an all-weather environment for training for them.
- Southridge is a central part of the local dog owning community - promoting responsible and fun dog ownership. External flyball community and dog agility groups hold regular events based around this marquee.

Benefits of the Café Marquee

- Private area to introduce dogs to people.
- Private area to talk to adopters, or MOPs experiencing problems, initially purchased by friends as a fundraising initiative of the friends to bring in much needed funds and as an overflow for the reception area when needed to be.
- Social centre for the volunteers at the centre.
- Facility for visitors - only undercover area where it is possible for them to sit down.
- Used as the location for talks to smaller groups.
- Inspectorate hold meetings in there.
- PR initiative because it provides the cafe staff with the opportunity to discuss the work of the RSPCA and the Friends with the customer.
- Used by the chairman as a meeting place to meet with local companies and individuals to discuss fundraising.
- Cafe area used for foreign groups, talks, refreshments.
- In inclement weather it provides an area for visitors to warm up in, where they can sit with their new dogs.
- The monthly inductions for dog walking, cattery helpers are given in this building these allow us to cover all H & S issues surrounding dog walking.
- Provides an area where probationers and people on community service to discuss their daily work plan and consume their refreshments.
- Food prep area for all our fundraisers held at the centre.
- Worked really hard to obtain five star rating. It is now a really good little café.
- The cafe marquee is also very valuable to the centre, as it enhances the visitor experience of the centre, and affords the opportunity to raise much-needed additional income.

Donations /storage

The marquee is the only large space available for providing a holding and sorting area for large donations of animal food/hay/straw from companies, which are often last minute. For example, Southridge can be contacted in the morning offering a donation worth tens of hundreds of pounds but they must be able to accept it that afternoon. Working within the budgetary restrictions they have, these type of donations are absolutely invaluable to the centre. The marquee provides an area to "accept" these mass donations and where they can be held before being sorted and distributed to the correct areas in the centre and other RSPCA Establishments. Over the last four years Southridge has had donations over the value of £10,000 of food which without the marquee they would not have been able to accept (which in turn would send a very negative message to potential donors, and might cause the RSPCA reputational damage). The money they have saved by receiving these has been ploughed back into animal welfare work.

Fundraising

The marquee at Southridge provides a central point for fundraising. The money raised from events held in it is essential for the continued wellbeing of the animals at the centre and to maintain the principles behind the workings of the centre and schemes that it runs. Southridge holds numerous fundraising events each year, including an annual Christmas ball and a 'fun day' which are hugely popular in the local community and very loyally attended every year. Events held in the marquee generate £20,000 on average each year; without this income, the centre will be able to do far less animal welfare, would generate far less footfall, and would not be able to maintain its' profile in the local community.

The RSPCA are desperate to be able to replace the marquee structure with a permanent structure (primarily a dog training barn) in the next 3-5 years, but it could potentially take this period of time to raise the significant funds needed. We are approaching major donors to see if they would be prepared to support, and The Friends group will hopefully be able to raise some funds.

Much of the additional fundraising work is undertaken by the centre staff over and above their 'day' jobs. Southridge work incredibly hard within their local community, with the intention of being seen as a real asset to it.

The implications of not having this structure are too awful to contemplate. Southridge would be absolutely lost without the marquee and all of the above activities would be in the very least severely compromised, at worst totally prohibited from taking place.

There is no other major expenditure planned for the centre in the foreseeable future, as there is no funding for it, and raising funds for this permanent structure now needs to be the priority.

5.00 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Since the granting of the above Planning Permissions, the RSPCA has continued to maintain its presence and facilities at Southridge Animal Centre, Packhorse Lane and continues to provide rehoming facilities for animals to the Potters Bar area. In addition, the RSPCA has promoted and maintained support for the permanent facilities at Southridge Animal Centre but the development programme for the site continues to be delayed due to the ongoing economic climate and delays in securing funds to procure the works. This has in turn caused a delay to the timetable in submitting to the Local Planning Authority the proposals to remove the temporary marquees and reinstate the land in accordance with the conditions on the Planning Approval as stated in TP/16/2101.

6.00 CONCLUSION

The RSPCA have demonstrated the continued need and provision of services at Southridge which depend on the temporary Marquees at present. The RSPCA can demonstrate a commitment to the future development and enhancement of facilities at Southridge. Economic demands and lack of financial resources continue to limit the ability to deliver permanent structures, but the RSPCA remain focused and committed to consider fundraising and development investment. The RSPCA seek further comment for temporary retention of marquees to support their future plans. The Planning Authority are encouraged to support this Application.

During the Covid Pandemic of 2020-2021 and onwards the RSPCA have found the use of the marquee spaces invaluable. The provision of covered areas has allowed the RSPCA to maintain safe social distancing in ventilated areas allowing the safe registration and meeting with clients and key workers to the site.

RSPCA seek to continue and maintain the current facilities for the immediate future without detriment to the essential community service they provide.