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Monday, 14 August 2023

REF PRE28/23/01302

Dear Sirs

Planning Permission Application Supporting Statement

Proposed      Erection of Timber Stable Block (Retrospective)  
At              Field North of Torquilstone 9A HillCrest High Shincliffe Durham DH1 2PQ

Thank you for your letter dated 8 August with reference to my enquiry regarding planning permission for the above. As part of my application for retrospective planning permission, I have put together this supporting statement to address the aspects of the County Durham Plan that are relevant to the stable, with it being within open countryside and green belt. This letter will also set out the history and use of the site, as well as explaining the operation and use of the stable block.

I have enclosed a copy of my original letter dated 28 April 2023 which you may find useful, it includes a lot of information regarding the stable and our use of the land. It is important to note that the timber stable block is for private use only, and was constructed for the welfare and proper care of our four horses during the winter months.

The erection of the stable and our occupation of the land I believe have many positive impacts on the environment which I have documented in this statement.

Introduction - The Land

The Land itself extends to approximately 3.62 hectares of mainly hillside. The field has many bushes and trees which screen the stables from the main road and the housing estate behind. The field is accessible by gates at three points. There is a gate at Hillcrest, which is accessed at the end of a row of houses through a gate at a property named Torquilstone. There is a gate next to the stables which is accessed by a track round the outside of the arable field next door, also owned by Mr Charles Harle. Finally there is a gate at the bottom of the field which we also use, as we live in the village below.

For the last 30 years at least the land has been used for grazing purposes only. We grazed our horses on the land from 1992 until 2011, and then the land was vacant until we moved the same pony back in July 2022. The field needed some restoring in terms of making the fencing safe and topping the overgrown grasses and removal of rubbish that had been dumped. The land is now being managed with regular upkeep such as seeding and rolling and daily removal of manure which makes the fields much more aesthetically pleasing. The stable building was erected in May 2022 in a bit of a hurry as I was in hospital having a femoral osteotomy meaning I was going to be in a wheelchair for a number of months, and our elderly pony would not have survived a winter exposed to the elements. I was not aware that that time that the land was in fact green belt, for which I sincerely apologise.

## Policy 10 – Development in the Countryside

The timber stable block was placed in its location along the hedgerow for a number of reasons. The location allows it to be screened from view and provides shelter from the wind. We also chose this placing so that we did not alter the landscape, and to make sure the impact of the construction of the building was minimal. With this in mind, the stable block does not draw on local amenities at all and is entirely self-sufficient. The water we use for the horses is harvested rain water from the guttering on the roof into an IBC tank. We have solar powered low voltage (12V) lights which are used very little, but that we need in the dark months. Our lights are internal, therefore having a low impact on light pollution and can not be seen at all from neighbouring buildings.

## Policy 13 - Equestrian Development

I have four horses on the land at the moment, and have no plans to get any more. Two horses are retired field companions and two are in regular riding work. One of the elderly horses was rescued from a rather dire situation involving cruelty, and she does need extra care and attention. She needs to be kept warm and dry during the winter months and has some rather nasty physical and mental scars. Her welfare is especially important. I ride most days on local bridleways and private fields. The horses are a hobby and are cared for by myself and my parents. There is no commercial or monetary benefit whatsoever. There is no riding arena the land is for grazing purposes only.

The horses welfare is paramount and they do need individual stables during the winter months as two are mares and two are geldings. Fighting over food is a concern if the horses were to be confined in a communal 'shelter' rather than a stable, but also the wind in our location can be extremely strong and cold - an open front structure would definitely blow away which is incredibly dangerous with four animals inside.

For welfare, the stables needed to be an appropriate size, the building was designed to be as small as possible but with the stables being large enough for our horses to sleep without being cast (where they would get stuck upside down against a wall) Therefore each stable is 12ft x 12ft which is average. Our grazing land is ample for 4. Waste is removed from site by tractor through the access point into the field next door, and not along the residential street. Manure is used by the farmer next door on local farmland. I have recently started to use low impact, short chop rape seed straw which biodegrades faster than regular straw or wood shavings, thus reducing the waste output and as a result, fewer collections which means less disruption for everyone including the wildlife.

The horses are tended to daily by myself and my father who lives locally. Either or both of us are usually there at 8.30am and again at 6pm, my mum does last checks around 8pm on foot. I do not have regular visitors and the stable is a very private, quiet and peaceful space. We keep ourselves to ourselves but neighbours are welcome to come and see the animals should they want to. We tend to visit the stables on foot unless we are carrying feed or bedding, in which case we take a vehicle in one of the three access gates.

We have a fantastic relationship with our neighbours, many of whom we have known 30+ years from having horses on the land since I was a child. I have enclosed some copies of letters that they have given me when I made them aware of this application.

The timber stable is the only building that we need, and we have no plans for any further development at all. We are extremely invested in conservation of the local area and keeping it a beautiful space.

## Policy 20 – Green Belt

When the stable was built neither myself or Mr Harle, from whom we rent the land, were aware that the land is now Green Belt. I was in hospital at that time so I was not present but in hindsight, with more time, I would have made further enquires myself, for which I do apologise. It is my hope that with my enthusiasm for the conservation of the local area, and working with the local council as much as possible, that we can agree a resolution that would allow for me to continue to keep the horses safe and well cared for.

## Policy 26 – Green Infrastructure

The erection of our stable block does maintain and protect the county's green infrastructure network. The stable block has been placed as discreetly as possible and in return we have invested time and thought and money into identifying ways in which to nurture the area and encourage more wildlife trees and plants.

In early 2021 much of the grass was over 3ft high and the fence line had been littered with rubbish from the neighbouring houses. When we began to repair the fence line it was noted that a lot of work was needed to clear the rubbish away. N Y Agri Services was appointed to clear the whole area, cut the grass, clear the fence line, remove brambles and remove the rubbish. We then purposefully installed 'non-permanent' fencing – which is wooden fenceposts with electric rope line. We chose this fencing as it is non imposing and is wildlife friendly (no wildlife would be fenced in and free movement would be able to continue). We arranged for the whole field to be topped again six months later which is now a haven for wildlife.

Firstly, we have the return of swallows which have successfully nested and hatched in one of the stables, I am told they return to the same nest year on year. We have seen many bats on an evening at twilight, we were advised to provide a bat box for them which we have done. We have many birds of prey including buzzards which I believe scour the land now that the long grasses have been cleared. There is a large Heron, Owls, as well as many foxes, hedgehogs and of course rabbits. We have planted sections of ground next to the stable with wildflower seeds to encourage bees and insects. There are many different species of birds that we enjoy watching, including Thrushes which I am now aware they are protected in the UK under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

Although the horses are recreational, the conservation of the land and eco systems has also become a huge part of our lives. We are very much invested in looking after the area and keeping it as wild and unspoilt as possible.

## Policy 29 – Sustainable design

The timber stable block was constructed from wood was acquired from renewable sources. There is no pollution of or draw from local amenities such as electricity or water. We do not use any chemical or spray at all on the land, it has been left as it always has been and has always worked for us. The land is properly managed, in that it is rolled and seeded in the spring and manure is removed daily. It is for this reason that the field is aesthetically pleasure and is no longer overgrown with weeds and bramble. We Improved the drainage by replacing parts of a broken field drain that was causing flooding. Any land that was disturbed has been re seeded with grasses and wild flowers. Our impact on the local habitat has been positive, which can be seen by the arrival of endangered birds of prey which were not present before the land was cleared.

## Policy 31 – Amenity and Pollution

We do not use any sprays or chemicals on the land and it is managed properly. The field is now rolled and seeded in the spring, and any disturbed land for example, from the repair or broken drainage, is replanted with grasses and wild flowers. The stable block does not draw on local amenities. The water we use for the horses is harvested from the guttering into an IBC tank. We have solar powered low voltage (12V) lights which are used very little, but that we need in the dark months. The lights are indoors and low voltage to keep light pollution to a minimum. As previously mentioned, manure is removed regularly by the farmer and used on local farmland. . I have recently started to use low impact, short chop rape seed straw which biodegrades faster than regular straw or wood shavings, thus reducing the waste output and as a result, fewer collections which means less disruption.

## Policy 32 – Despoiled, Degraded, Derelict, Contaminated and Unstable Land

The field itself is suitable for the grazing of horses and historically has only been used for the grazing of livestock. There is no pollution pathway, and the impact the timber stable has on the environment is minimal. The land is not contaminated in any area and has been left wild with the exception of replacing rotten fencing. The stable is located

at the very top of the hill along the hedgerow away from any sloping land and all risks of the shape of the land were identified prior to the construction.

#### Policy 39 – Landscape

The erection of the timber stable does not harm the character, quality or distinctiveness of the landscape or important features or views, namely the view of the cathedral. We incorporated the importance of this when making decisions on the location of the stable itself. The hedgerow screens the building from view from the East, the view from that direction is unchanged. The view from the west is the view from the access gate and is only visible to one neighbour, Mr Tarn, who has written a supportive letter which I have attached. The Stables are not visible from the north due to the placement of the stable and the shape of the land, being on the very top of a hill. The stable is visible from arable fields to the east. Public rights of way are unchanged, there are none through the field.

#### Policy 44 – Historic Environment

The land has always been grazing land, which is still evident from the natural spring that runs into a clay trough that is located in the field. It has clearly been there for many decades. The introduction of the timber building does not alter the character heritage or nature conservation value of the land

The field itself has only ever been used for grazing animals, the land itself is steep and the ground is clay. We have grazed our horses here since 1992. Prior to that I am told cattle and sheep grazed the land.

Our four horses graze the pasture 24 hours per day in the summer months, in the winter months the horses graze during daylight hours, and then come indoors to the timber stable overnight for shelter from the cold weather, wind and rain. The field is very exposed to the weather and the older horses need somewhere warm and dry to sleep, and also for welfare. The stables are also occasionally used for vet visits, tacking up, or periods of rest.

#### Habitat

Since cutting the grass and clearing much of the rubbish away, we have noticed an abundance of wildlife returning to the field that we had not seen in a number of years

We are very much invested in looking after the area and keeping it as wild and unspoilt as possible.

As advised, we have made arrangements for the hardstanding to be reduced in the area north of the stable block. When Mark Sandford visited the site, this area was unseeded as we had a land drain repaired, and the ground had been disturbed. It will again be seeded with a mixture of grass and wildflower seeds. The single horse trailer is kept to the south of the stable, as advised to minimise intrusion onto the green belt.

#### Moving Forward

At present the stables are just visible from postcode DH1 2PQ due to the hedgerow being cut shorter in error by the farmer our landlord. I have asked that this hedge is left to grow to screen the very top of the stable building completely from view. By the end of the year I am assured that the view from DH1 2PQ would be unchanged from what it was before the erection of the stable.

We have spent many hours looking into alternatives for the stabling but due to the extremely strong winds we feel it would be too dangerous to have a classic 'field shelter' with an open front. A field shelter would also be communal and we can not confine four horses, two male and two female in a communal structure for welfare reasons. Therefore, if required by the council, I can make adjustments to the structure. For example, I would be prepared to split it in to two smaller structures if that was required, or change the location as required. However, I am assured by the neighbours of Hillcrest that they are happy with the location.

I propose further screening from view with allowing the hedge to grow or planting trees as requested. I am very much committed to making any alterations as deemed necessary by the Council.

I do hope that my circumstances in this statement are taken into consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly should you need any further information.

Yours Sincerely



Miss Kate Shepherd

Enc Letter of Support Mr and Mrs Tarn Torquilstone  
Email of Support Mrs Kate Jaifri  
Letter of Support Mrs Eileen Robinson  
Copy of Pre Application Letter  
Site Location Plan  
Existing Site Layout plan  
Elevation Drawing  
Floor Plan Drawing  
Supporting Statement