

Proposed new entrance to Clock House Farm, Penshurst Road, Bidborough, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, TN3 0LW, Planning Statement

## Background

Martine Weber has run the livery yard at Clock House Farm since 1996, a total of 27 years. There are currently 19 horses at the yard. The property was sub divided in 2016 when Stable Cottage became a separate property and the Studio, Clock House Farm was built (ref: 15/505178/ FULL) replacing a barn and small building which had been declared unfit for human occupation.

Planning permission was granted in 2013 (ref: 13/01343/FUL) for a new site access. The application was similar to the current application apart from the access to Stable Cottage which was to be closed off.

A subsequent application was refused in 2020 (ref:20/01337/FULL) for the following reasons:

- 1. The proposed development would adversely affect the rural landscape and cause unjustified harm to the character of the countryside and the Area Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proposal is thereby in conflict with the National Planning Policy Framework 2019, saved policies LBD1, EN1 and EN25 of the Tunbridge Wells Local Plan 2006, Core Policies 4, 5, 14 of the Tunbridge Wells Core Strategy 2010 and the Landscape Character Assessment.*
- 2. Insufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the proposal would provide safe, suitable and sustainable access for all. The proposal is thus contrary to Core Policy 3 of the Tunbridge Wells Core Strategy 2010, Policy TP4 of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Plan 2006, National Planning Policy Framework 2019 and the National Planning Practice Guidance.*
- 3. The proposed development fails to demonstrate adequate mitigation and management proposals for biodiversity, sufficient to ensure net gain or no net loss of biodiversity on the site. The development would be contrary to Paragraph 174 (b) of the NPPF, National Planning Policy Guidance and Core Policy 4 of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Core Strategy 2010.*

Pre-application advice was sought in April 2023 when a site visit was made by TWBC and a response given.

## Site Description & Local Context

Clock House Farm is located 1.6km to the west of Bidborough on the southern side of Penshurst Road, the B2176. It is a commercial livery stables and has been in operation for 27 years. It is located within the High Weald AONB and within the Metropolitan Greenbelt. It is sited on a ridgeline which extends from Bidborough Ridge to the east of Bidborough village to Swaylands, near Marlpit Corner where the land drops down to the Eden /Medway valley. The site falls south towards Barden Mill. There are no public rights of way across the site; Barden Road runs between the B2176 and Speldhurst to the east of the site; WT66 public bridleway runs from the B2176 to Ashour Farm to the north of the site.

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Nearby heritage listings include Grade II listed Ashour Farm Cottage and garden wall, Grade II listed barn at Barden Furnace Farm, Grade II listed Swaylands School, Stable Block, Lodge, Boundary Wall and Swaylands Park and Garden and the Grade II\* listed Old Swaylands.

There is Ancient Woodland following the western and southern site boundaries and across the B2176 to the north in Ashour Wood.

### **Need & Justification**

The sub-division of Clockhouse Farm in 2016 has resulted in an access for the livery business which has poor sightlines in both directions and an insufficient turning radius for farm vehicles or horse transport to enter or exit the farm when travelling from or to the west; this access is used on a daily basis by numerous vehicles including large and farm vehicles. The risk of a serious traffic incident is considerable.

There are currently 19 horses in the 'do it yourself' (DIY) livery yard with all owners visiting daily and some owners visiting twice daily; additionally, some owners have their own horse transport and travel regularly to competitions and clinics.

There are regular visits from farriers, vets, trainers, physiotherapists, with an estimated 1 to 2 visits/day from equine professionals; there are 2 members of staff, both travelling to work by car; deliveries of horse feed, hay and straw from local farms and businesses are made weekly by tractors or large vehicles; manure is removed regularly by tractor. Regular training clinics in the manege at Clock House Farm involve visits by 6-10 horseboxes.

Most of the horses at Clock House Farm are in regular work and are exercised in the manege on site or taken out for a hack; the closest bridlepath lies to the north of Clock House Farm directly across the B2176 Penshurst Road. The proposed new entrance would provide a connection directly opposite this bridlepath, reducing the need for horses to travel along a busy road.

Stable Cottage is not owned by Clock House Farm and has a single occupant with one vehicle.

The proposed new access for Clockhouse Farm would provide a safe entrance and exit with the necessary sightlines for the numerous vehicular movements required by this small successful rural business. The existing access to Clock House Farm would be closed off with a native hedge, hedgerow trees and boundary fence with the existing hard standing used for overflow parking.

### **Proposed new access**

The proposed new gated access is located as close to the stables as possible while achieving the necessary 90m sightlines to east and west. The gate is set back from the B2176 to allow horseboxes and other long vehicles a safe waiting area while the gate is opened. New native hedgerow is proposed behind the sightlines to the east with two small areas of new native woodland scrub immediately to the east of the new entrance. To the west the existing hedgerow will be trimmed back to provide the necessary sightlines. New native

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hedgerow flanks the gateway which will comprise a pair of lockable metal farm gates with post and rail stock fencing.

Compacted Type 1 surfacing is proposed for the new access track. The existing access to Clock House Farm will be closed off with new native hedgerow, hedgerow trees and post & rail stock fencing.

No additional external lighting is proposed.

## **Material Considerations**

### **Visual Impact**

The proposed development would be visible to moving motorists, passengers and cyclists using the B2176; as visual receptors these viewers would have a low sensitivity, their view of the development would generally be a glimpsed oblique view and the impact is considered to be **minor adverse**. Walkers and horse riders using the bridlepath from Ashour Farm towards Clockhouse Farm would be slow moving and have a high sensitivity. They would have an oblique view of the new entrance, but there would be no noticeable deterioration in the existing view from the bridlepath would still be dominated by the linear woodland lining the B2176. The visual impact on walkers and riders is considered to be **negligible**.

### **Residential Amenity**

The only residential property with potential views of the proposed new entrance to Clock House Farm is Ashour Lodge. See Heritage Impact below.

### **Highway Safety**

Sightlines have been created to the east and west of 2.4 x 90m, for the proposed new access. The sightlines would be improved for all traffic exiting Clock House Farm. The turning radius for traffic entering the farm from the west would be improved. The turning radius for traffic exiting the farm to the west would be improved. The safety and welfare of horses and their riders riding from Clock House Farm to the bridlepath at Ashour Farm would be improved, as it would riding from the bridlepath at Ashour Farm to Clock House Farm.

KCC Highways have undertaken traffic studies for the B2176 and the results of their studies are submitted with this application.

### **Impact on the Openness of the Green Belt**

The proposed development of a new access to Clock House Farm is a form of development which is not inappropriate within the Green Belt as long as the openness of the Green Belt is preserved. Openness is defined as the absence of development such as buildings, hard surfacing and residential use of the land. In the case of the proposed new access at Clock House Farm, it is considered that the development is modest in scale, in keeping with the existing use of the farm and in character with the local area. Although there will be an increased area of permeable hard standing, this **will not harm the openness** of the Green Belt which will remain free of buildings and rural in character.

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**Impact on the character and appearance of the High Weald AONB**

Located within the High Weald AONB, the landscape fabric of the site is considered to have a high sensitivity to change. The proposed development would require the replacement of a length of low-quality native hedgerow and the trimming back of a length of hedgerow to provide the necessary sight lines; this would result in a moderate change over a limited area, giving rise to a low to medium magnitude of landscape change. In terms of landscape impact, this is considered to be **negligible**: the proposals would fit with the scale and landform pattern of the local landscape character, and they incorporate mitigation measures to ensure they will sit well with the surrounding landscape features and elements, with minimal negative impact or conflict with national policies.

A 51-metre length of existing hedgerow will be removed; 91 metres of existing hedgerow will be trimmed back to permit the necessary sightlines. These will be replaced by 71m of new native hedgerow with hedgerow trees and 140 square metres of proposed native woodland scrub interplanted with native trees. The newly widened grass verges will be sown with meadow grass.

**Impact on Heritage Assets**

The only heritage asset which could be affected by the proposed new entrance to Clock House Farm is Ashour Lodge. This is a Grade II building which as a lodge faces the Ashour Farm entrance, away from the proposed new access to Clock House Farm. The garden is leafy with a thick boundary hedge and at the time of the survey there were no views from the rear of Ashour Lodge towards the proposed entrance; there may however be some filtered oblique views from a rear first floor window during the winter months. In terms of impact this is considered negligible. The setting of Ashour Lodge would not be adversely affected by the proposed new entrance.

Other nearby listed buildings and gardens at Swaylands and Barden Furnace Farm do not have views of the proposed development so there would be no impact on the listed features or their settings.

**Impact on Ecology**

The Preliminary Ecological Assessment undertaken by Martin Newcombe (November 2023) notes that the site boundary hedgerow along the B2176 is 'relatively thin and less diverse' (para 3.2 of Martin Newcombe PEA) at the eastern end (near the existing entrance) and improves in biodiversity and ecological value towards the western end of the site frontage (near the manege). By locating the new access as far east as is compatible with the required sightlines, any impact on the richest section of boundary hedgerow is kept to a minimum.

There would be no impact on nearby ancient woodland within the site or to the north on Ashour Farm.

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In his PEA Martin Newcombe notes that there is no suitable habitat on site for protected or notable species. However, he cites a slight risk of the presence of dormouse and great crested newt, the likelihood of breeding bird activity in the hedge, and the importance of avoiding the felling of any big trees in the western end of the hedgerow, otherwise bats could be affected. Bird breeding season will be avoided during site works as with best practice for all projects. Bird nest boxes and bat boxes will be erected as advised in the PEA.

### **Conclusion**

Clock House Farm is a successful rural business with a significant amount of regular traffic, including deliveries, slow moving farm vehicles and horse boxes. The existing access is dangerous; the risk of serious traffic accident is considerable.

The proposed new access to Clock House Farm will greatly improve sightlines for vehicles exiting the farm and will also improve the turning radius for vehicles entering the farm from the west or exiting the farm in a westerly direction. It will improve the safety and welfare of horses and riders riding from Clock House Farm to the bridlepath at Ashour Farm as it will on their return from Ashour Farm to Clock House Farm.

A new access can be achieved with the necessary sight lines by trimming back the existing hedgerow and replacing an existing hedge. The visual impact is considered to be minor adverse to traffic on the B2176, and negligible to highly sensitive visual walkers and riders using the bridlepath through Ashour Farm. With the proposed mitigation of new native hedgerow, hedgerow trees and scrub planting, the landscape impact is considered to be negligible. The impact on the High Weald AONB is also considered to be negligible.

There would be no adverse impact on residential amenity. There would be no impact on heritage assets. There would be no adverse impact on the ecology. The openness of the Green Belt would be retained.

We recommend that this proposal for a modest new access to Clock House Farm is supported.

23<sup>rd</sup> November 2023

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