**DESIGN AND ACCESS**

**STATEMENT**



R T DESIGN

Architectural and Surveying Services

25 Seymour Drive, Bradshaw, Bolton, BL2 3HB

**ALPACA WALKING CENTRE**

**AND REPLACEMENT BUILDING**

**AT POPPYWOOD ALPACAS,**

**WILDERSWOOD, HORWICH,**

**BOLTON, BL6 6SJ**

**DESIGN**

**1 AMOUNT**

This application is submitted following the refusal of the original application (Ref 13959/22) based on the decision that the use of the site as an Alpaca walking centre needed planning permission. This application seeks retrospective permission for the continued use of the business on the site together with the replacement building erected on the site of the original timber building, to be used in association with the walking centre to provide adequate facilities for those visiting the site.

The proposed development will consist of a detached timber building to be used as a centre in connection with the existing Alpaca walking business that was set up at Wilderswood in 2021. It is proposed to be used as a tearoom and classroom in association with the business, together with toilet facilities, including a disabled toilet.

The proposed building is very similar to the recently approved retrospective application for a building to provide shop, café, and toilet facilities in association with the existing fisheries (Ref 13445/22).

**2 USE**

Poppywood Alpacas was set up in May 2021. This has been developed on the site of the existing stables at Wilderswood, which has ceased to trade as a business following a serious riding accident for Mrs Pippa Berry in January 2020, in which she broke her neck and suffered a head injury. This resulted in the closure of Wilderswood Stud, a business that Mrs Berry had run at the site for over 17 years. This was a full-time career for her involving training and schooling horses for sale for her own and customers horses, teaching riding lessons and operating a horse breeding stud, for which she is a qualified AI technician, stallion handler and semen collector as well as being a qualified BHS riding instructor.

Since the accident she has been unable to ride and continue her career with horses, due to the injuries she sustained, with constant neck pain and limited movement in her neck, debilitating migraines, balance issues and PTSD. Subsequently the business was closed and her horses sold.

Following a visit to a friend’s open farm where alpacas were kept and spending time with these gentle animals, it seemed the perfect next stage for moving forward with her life. She and Mr Berry, who has severely scaled back his construction business to help her and their family, purchased some female alpacas to continue Mrs Berry’s love of breeding and to diversify the business from horse breeding to alpacas, as these animals are easier to keep and manage than the hard physical work involved with keeping and breeding horses. It was something she could be involved in, with her husband’s help and also contribute towards the huge impact the accident had upon her mental health.

The alpacas have been a saviour in aiding Mrs Berry’s recovery and their popular use as therapy animals is becoming widely used not just at Poppywood, but all over the world. They have researched the use of alpacas as therapy animals and also the popularity that alpaca walking has in other areas of the UK and saw that there was a gap in the market in their local area. Through the business they have become involved in the local and more widespread communities, visiting a range of establishments with the alpacas, but more so with a variety of groups visiting Poppywood, from children and adults with physical and learning difficulties to schools, community groups, children’s parties and many more.

They also run private one to one therapy sessions and private group sessions. These sessions are educational and informative and they have had tremendous responses from their customers on Google, Facebook and Instagram.

The business has been operating for 2 years now and they have enjoyed great success to date with many repeat visits from families and organisations. Since the inception of this business, which uses the existing riding school and stables facilities already on site, they had used an existing cabin on site as an office for the business, but decided to provide a more bespoke building that better suited the needs and expanding success of the business. The cabin was taken down in February 2022 with the intention of replacing this with the new building which began in March 2022. Having then realised that planning permission would be required for this building, work on site stopped and RT Design were contacted with a view to submitting the relevant information to enable planning approval to be secured.

As part of the business they process the alpaca wool to make products from. They are constantly being asked by customers about additional toilet facilities that are suitable for disabled users, as the current toilet in one of the existing stables was not accessible for disabled customers, and also availability of refreshments and to provide facilities for group parties as part as the alpaca walking sessions.

The proposed building would provide these facilities for the benefit of customers booking visits. The remote location of the site means there are no facilities nearby for customers to enable them to further enjoy their experience.

Having a building that provides a classroom and tea room, would help this popular business to grow whilst providing a greater wellbeing experience for the customers.

It is anticipated that the business will continue to grow and expect the additional facilities to increase the turnover by 50% over the next 12 months. This expansion would also require recruiting further staff to help run the business, with the growth of Poppywood Alpacas continuing to educate and share the positive experiences people enjoy when visiting the centre. The centre is already involved in providing training and education to students from local colleges. Without these places students would struggle to gain invaluable hands on experience and knowledge within an active working environment.

Prior to starting up this business Mrs Berry contacted Bolton planning department to enquire if planning permission was needed to run the business. She emailed the planning department on 29th July 2020 and asked the following :

Good morning,

 I would like some advice with regards to  Alpaca walking and what permission, if any we need.

 I believe we would need to apply for a licence as we would be offering the walking to the public.

We believe this exciting new venture would be very beneficial to the area as there doesn't seem to be anybody else offering this kind of service and we think it would help at this time encouraging people out into the countryside to spend time with these wonderful, calming animals whilst also gently exercising.

If someone could get in touch and point me the right direction we would appreciate it.

Many thanks

Mark & Pippa Berry

They received the following reply the same day :

Dear Mr and Mrs Berry,

 I am in the Planning Department. You will not require planning permission for walking the alpacas on the road. You would only need planning permission (potentially) if you are proposing to construct structures on land for the housing of the alpacas.

You may however wish to contact our Highways section, to see if there is anything they require. They can be emailed at highways@bolton.gov.uk.

 Kind regards,

 Helen Williams

Principal Development Officer

Mrs Berry then made contact with the highways department who said they had no further information to add to what they had been told.

Based on this information they commenced with the walking business and then further contacted the planning department in April 2022 with the following request :

Good afternoon

We are looking for some advice on whether we need to apply for change of use on a storage building to a classroom/gift shop and tea room for our business, Poppywood Alpacas.

We are licensed with Bolton Council and are a Defra registered farm where we run an alpaca walking, breeding and fiber producing farm and therapy and educational setting and we would like to now include a classroom, gift shop and tearoom for our customers due to a high interest in demand.

Not only do we offer our services to the general public but we also work alongside schools, special education units, care homes, rehabilitation centres, health care facilities and within many more community environments.

We are also looking to erect a couple of bell tents in one of our fields for seasonal use and would also like some advice on this.

Please could we get some advice and guidance on the best way to achieve growing our business.

Kindest regards

Mark & Pippa Berry

They again received a response the next day with the following information :

Dear Mark and Pippa,

Yes, you would need planning permission for the below.

I would advise that you seek advice from a private planning consultant before submitting an application to the Council. The Council is unable to offer you pre-application advice.

Kind regards,

Helen Williams

At this point RT Design were contacted to prepare an application for the replacement building. The application was submitted on 19th July 2022. Following a site visit on 4th August 2022 by the case officer and the conservation officer, further information was requested on 19th August 2022, which was sent on 23rd August 2022. From that date, despite several emailed requests for updates to the case officer and other members of the planning department no response was received.

The next contact we had was when a different planning officer turned up on site to take photographs on 24th August 2023. The information sent to the planning department on 23rd August 2022 was only added to the planning website on 5th September 2023. It was also discovered at this time that the comments from Highways saying that they had no objections to the proposal had been removed from the website.

The application was refused on 7th September 2023. The grounds given for refusal were :

1 The proposed development represents inappropriate development within the

Green Belt and the applicant has provided no very special circumstances to

clearly outweigh the harm that would be caused to the openness purposes of

the Green Belt in this location, contrary to Policy CG7AP of Bolton's

Allocations Plan and section 13 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

2 Insufficient information has been provided by the applicant to demonstrate

that the proposed development would not increase odours, light pollution,

noise and activity in and around the site to the detriment of the living

conditions of nearby residents and thus the development is contrary to Policy

CG4 of Bolton's Core Strategy.

3 Insufficient information has been provided by the applicant to demonstrate

that the proposed development would not prejudice highways safety on the

surrounding road network, thus failing to accord with Policies S1 and P5 of

Bolton's Core Strategy and the Supplementary Planning Document:

 "Accessibility, Transport and Road Safety".

None of the above reasons relate to any of the information requested and supplied within the application. Indeed, the grounds for refusal relating to highways is at odds with the highways comments, see below :

Consultee Details

Name: Highways Engineering

Address: Paderborn House, Bolton BL1 9TA

Email: Not Available

On Behalf Of: Highways and Engineering Development

Comments

13959/22 SB

Following highway consultation comments on the above planning application: -

Although there does not appear to be any transport work with the submission, the retrospective proposal appears small scale and will potentially generate negligible additional traffic/parking demand at that location which should be accommodated with little additional detriment/severity to road safety, amenity and operational capacity. On this basis, the Local Highway Authority cannot reasonably object to what is being proposed under this application.

HS05-5 spaces (as indicated on application form-to be indicated within the red-edge of the application site).

With regards to the second ground for refusal relating to insufficient information on odours and light pollution, the site was visited by Bolton Council Environmental Health department on 21st January 2023 and granted a food hygiene rating of 5 (copy of Food business intervention report attached to documents).

With reference to light and noise pollution, the use of the site as an alpaca walking experience uses no lighting over and above that which already existing in relation to the horse riding business. With regards to noise, alpacas are sensitive animals with very acute hearing. Prior to people taking part in the walking experience, they are instructed by the guide within the classroom that they must speak quietly so as not to alarm the animals. The walk is a quiet and calming experience.

Mrs. Berry then received a further letter from the enforcement officer on 14th September 2023 requesting that planning permission be sought for the business.

This statement together with the amended plans and a planning statement are therefore being submitted to address this alleged breach of permission and allow this successful business that provides an essential service to the mental health and wellbeing of the many repeat visitors who use the centre.

Further to this, based on comments from the officer’s report and the enforcement letter, the following information should address the points raised :

* The glamping tents have been removed from this application.
* The business was granted an Animal Exhibition License by Bolton Council in November 2021 to exhibit alpacas at Wilderswood (copy of License included in attached documents).
* The reference to the removal of trees on the site was addressed in the information sent on 23rd August 2022, in the form of a letter sent by Lucy Clarkson, development officer (Enforcement) stating that no further action would be taken (letter submitted in documents).
* The parking spaces provided are within the existing hardstanding to the rear of the building, with adequate space for parking of larger vehicles used for disabled visitors, such as mini buses used by various health providers and charities.
* The number of vehicles visiting the site are limited to the days within which the business operates and are no more intrusive than the vehicles that visited the site in association with the horse breeding and riding school. The maximum number of people per experience is limited to 14 persons, which based on families or groups would relate to a maximum of 4 vehicles per experience visiting the site.
* Highways raised no objection to the proposals.
* Comments raised relating to highways state that did not take into account the use of the site as an Alpaca walking business. These concerns, in relation to the policies quoted have been addressed in the Planning Statement.
* There exists through the site a Public Right of Way footpath (Horwich 161) which has been retained in its’ original location adjacent to the building and has been upgraded/repaired as required to ensure its’ continued suitability for those wishing to use it.
* The opening hours for the business are

Thursday - 10.30 till 15.30; Friday - 12.00 till 17.00;

Saturday - 10.30 till 17.00; Sunday - 10.30 till 17.00.

Wednesday (only during school holidays) - 10.30 till 17.00

Some weeks the business will have fewer bookings so would not open on the days listed. The times and dates listed represent a busy week. The business is seasonal, meaning the winter months are quiet, often not opening at the times stated, due to no bookings and adverse weather conditions.

**3 LAYOUT**

The proposed building will be a timber frame construction providing areas for teaching attending groups, provided adequate space for refreshments and toilets that are access externally directly off the patio area.

**4 SCALE**

The building structure is an L shaped building which is 12metres long and 8metres deep overall, with a ridge height of 3metres above floor level, with a maximum height above the sloping ground level being 3.5metres to eaves and 4metres to ridge level at its furthest point from the existing ground level.

**5 LANDSCAPING**

The building with have a decking patio area to the rear facing main entrance with the deck extending to give access to the toilet facilities.

 **6 APPEARANCE**

The building will have a Larch timber panel cladding finish to the walls with the roof to re-use the green Onduline bitumen corrugated sheet roofing panels from the cabin that was removed.

**ACCESS**

**Vehicle and transport links –**

The nearest bus station is Bolton, which is 9.6km away.

The nearest bus stop in both directions is 1200m away

The nearest railway station is Horwich, which is 5.4km away.

The nearest motorway junction is Junction 6 of the M61, which is 6.1km away.

**Inclusive access**

Access to and within the proposed unit will be required to comply with

Building Regulations Part M, covering all aspects of disabled access and use of facilities.

External lighting by all access routes and doorways will be provided by means of passive

detectors to afford better access for the visually impaired.

Ramped paved entrances will be incorporated into the design to allow for level approach

entrance to all ground floor door openings.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED**

The following information is based on a site visit and discussions then between Mr and Mrs Berry, RT Design and Jodie Turton and Mary Mee from Bolton Planning Department, during a visit to the site on Thursday 25TH January 2024.

**FLOOD RISK ASSESSMENT**

Information has been sent to confirm that the site is in a flood risk Zone 1, low risk. Following the site meeting with the planning officer it was agreed that the main areas of the site, which are to be retained as grazing land, should not be included within the application, taking the area of the site within the application under 1 Hectare.

**SUSTAINABLE DRAINAGE SYSTEM**

The details of the site drainage added to the site by the applicants over the past few years have significantly improved the drainage of the site, in particular from the fields running down towards the buildings, mainly added following the construction of the applicants dwelling some years ago. They have also put into place an Acco Drain system around the existing stables to discharge the surface water to the existing drainage system.

The issue of historic flooding at the neighbours property, as discussed on site were related to surface water issues connected with the United Utilities land to the north of the site.

**CRIME IMPACT STATEMENT**

Regarding crime and safety, the site is in a remote location, but was already well provided with security provisions from the previous use of the site as in horse riding school. The areas around the buildings are covered by a CCTV system.

There is also security lighting around the buildings and the site, together with existing lights to the riding arena. An additional security measure is that the applicants live on site and can monitor movements from their house.

The car parking area is tarmacked and kept in a clean and slip free condition. This is important to the business as many of the visitors vehicles are mini buses from schools which cater for disabled children in wheelchairs, so the areas from the car park to the stables and the centres building are regularly maintained.

The facilities are well sign posted and gates are secured as required. Fire safety equipment is provided on site which is maintained and checked as required.

**TRANSPORT SYSTEM**

Due to the remote location of the site there is no public transport available. Most of the visitors to the site arrive by private cars or in education facilities transport including special needs vehicles. The car park is sign posted with sufficient space for wheelchair access.

As discussed on site the riding arena and the land to the north of this are not used for car parking, which we understand where areas covered in relation to car parking in an objection received. As shown clearly on site the area to the north of the site which was the subject of this objection could not be accessed by vehicles due to the steep banking needed to be accessed to achieve this.

The number of vehicles visiting the site is limited to the days and times of the week that walking session take place. These session are all pre booked and numbers limited to a maximum group of 14 people per session, so that the applicants can control the numbers of people at the site at any one time.

**HERITAGE STATEMENT**

As discussed on site the majority of the site has been retained as it was in the previous use of the site as a riding school. No aspects of the proposal have any effect on the status of the site in relation to Heritage aspects.

**COAL MINING RISK ASSESSMENT**

The only activities involved within this application in relation to new buildings is the rebuilding of the old laboratory timber building into the new classroom/tearoom which has been built on the original base. Therefore there is no excavation works involved within the application.

**ECOLOGY ASSESSMENT**

The activities involved in this application have no detrimental effect upon the ecological activities that may occur around the site. The majority of the site will be untouched as it will be retained as grazing land and the buildings used to stable the Alpacas are within the original stables.

**LANDSCAPE PROPOSALS**

As shown on site, the areas of the site where the trees were removed some years ago is a considerable distance from the main areas of the centre. Whilst the walks do go into this area the site is obscured from the neighbours nearest to the walking path by tree planting that they have implemented on their side of the boundary fence between their house and the footpath.

As stated previously the enforcement action taken at the time concluded that no further action was required. The area where the trees were removed is on a steep bank and this has been seeded and maintained.