



**Bourne Rural**  
PLANNING CONSULTANCY LIMITED

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**Proposals for:**  
**The erection of an equestrian barn**

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**on land at**

**Harris Piece  
Priory Road  
Heythrop  
Chipping Norton  
OX7 5TA**

**Applicant: Mr J Benfield**

**Supporting Statement**

Bourne Rural Planning Consultancy Limited

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## 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Bourne Rural Planning Consultancy Limited ('BRPC') is instructed by Mr John Benfield ('the Applicant'), to submit an application to West Oxfordshire District Council ('WODC') for the erection of an equestrian barn on land to the east of the A3400, to the south of Harris Piece, Chipping Norton.
- 1.2 BRPC is an independent consultancy specialising in agricultural, equestrian and rural land use planning matters and provides advice to landowners and local authorities across England.
- 1.3 The appraisal has been undertaken by Mrs Jill Scrivener who is an independent consultant specialising in agricultural, equestrian and rural land use planning issues. Mrs Scrivener has more than 30 years of practical agricultural and equestrian experience and is a Fellow of the British Institute of Agricultural Consultants ('BIAC'), having previously held the position of Chairman of BIAC from 2014 to 2016.
- 1.4 The author is familiar with the application holding having undertaken a number of site visits since 2014. She has recently visited the site in order to secure up to date information in relation to the ongoing development of the equestrian activity in operation and the needs of the expanded enterprise. The information gathered forms the basis for this Statement.
- 1.5 This Statement should be read in conjunction with the following drawings submitted in support of the application:
  - Dwg. 2452/01C Location Plan;
  - Dwg. 2452/02B Existing Block Plan;
  - Dwg. 2452/03B Proposed Block Plan;
  - Dwg. 2452/04B Proposed Floor Plan;
  - Dwg. 2452/05B Proposed NW and SE Elevations; and
  - Dwg. 2452/06B Proposed NE and SW Elevations.

## 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Harris Piece is an equestrian holding, situated approximately 1km to the north-east of Chipping Norton, and has been owned by the Benfield family since 1998 and is now owned by Mr John Benfield, the Applicant.
- 2.2 The land holding now extends to 9.6ha (23.7 acres) of owned land plus 2.6ha (6.42 acres) of rented land which is immediately adjacent to the main yard area. Access to the yard is to the south of Priory Road. A further field access is provided to the north of Priory Road which provides access to the northern paddocks, with a further access to the east of the A3400 and which provides direct access to the southern paddocks (and which incorporates the application site). The site is situated outside of the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
- 2.3 A commercial equestrian activity operates from the holding which includes both a livery yard and horse breeding enterprise which are owned and operated by the Applicant and his wife, Jemma. In addition, Mr Benfield also runs his farrier business from the site. Over the years, WODC have been supportive of the establishment and expansion of the equestrian business at Harris Piece. Most recently, planning permission was granted in January 2017 (WODC application reference 16/03107/FUL) for the erection of a permanent worker's dwelling to support the equestrian business in operation on the holding. Mr Benfield and his family now live permanently on site.
- 2.4 The owned land at Harris Piece originally extended to 6.3ha (15.5 acres) with an additional 4.86ha (12 acres) of land rented under informal tenancy agreements to provide for grazing and hay making to support the ongoing equestrian business in operation. In response to the increasing demands of the business, additional of land was purchased in 2022 to ensure sufficient land availability to support this thriving and expanding rural business. The owned land now extends to 9.6ha (23.7 acres) of owned land with a further 2.6ha (6.42 acres) of adjacent land also rented. All owned land is as shown edged in white on the image below:



Above: Google Earth image of the land ownership (white lines) and additional grazing (shaded yellow)

- 2.5 Horse numbers on the holding have increased over recent years and currently comprise: one stallion, ten brood mares, ten foals, three yearlings and one 2yr old in training. There are also six horses at livery and three owned riding horses/ponies. The number of horses cared for as part of the remedial farriery service fluctuates, but it is usual for there to be at least one horse being cared for on site at any one time.
- 2.6 There has been a change in management of the breeding business recently and, rather than selling the majority of foals at weaning (as was originally the case), the decision has been made to retain and increased number of the foals produced and keeping them through to 3yrs old, when they are sold on.
- 2.7 It is this change in management which generated the requirement for additional land and also generates the need for the application barn on the grazing land to the south. At any one time, there would be up to 12 youngsters on the holding.

#### Existing Buildings and Facilities

- 2.8 There are number of buildings in the main yard area which provide for storage and stabling facilities, including:
- an open-fronted general store used for tractor and trailer storage;

- two wood-clad stable blocks (comprising six and three stables respectively) which also incorporate a tack room and stores for wheelbarrows etc. Only four of the stables are properly suitable for thoroughbred horses due to restricted access and size; and
- a further two buildings which provide for hay and machinery storage and which also incorporate four stables and a workshop area.

2.9 In addition to the permanent stabling on the holding, there are an additional four temporary stables/field shelters in the historically owned paddocks adjacent to the yard area.

### 3.0 Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal within this application is for the erection of a six bay open-fronted portal frame building which would be located on land to the south of the holding. The building would provide winter housing and hay and feed storage for the young stock which graze the southern land.
- 3.2 The barn would measure 12m x 30m with a ridge height of 5.9 and 4.6m to the eaves.
- 3.3 The building would be open-fronted to the north-east elevation with remaining external elevations clad in Yorkshire boarding above concrete block wall (to a height of 1.2m). The roof would be clad in cement fibre sheeting in grey and would incorporate twelve clear corrugated panels to provide natural daylight within the building.
- 3.4 The building would incorporate a concrete floor with a 4m concrete apron to the north-east to support year-round use and to provide the horses with an appropriate environment.
- 3.5 There is an existing access to the east of the A3400 as shown on the Google Street View image below:



Above: Google Street View image of the existing access

- 3.6 This existing access would support the siting of the barn at this location and enable it direct road access without the need for the Applicant to cross the grazing paddocks at times when the land is wet.
- 3.7 The photograph below (taken by the author) shows the existing access in the background with the application site in the foreground, to the right behind the post and rail fencing. Also visible is the tree and hedge line which separates the two southern paddocks.



Above: photograph of the existing access and application site

3.8 The application building would support the existing equestrian business and allow the youngsters to be kept separately from the mares, foals and stallions on the holding.



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## 4.0 Relevant Planning Policy

- 4.1 The Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 require that planning applications be determined in accordance with the policies set out in the Development Plan, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 The Development Plan is the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031, which was adopted in September 2018.
- 4.3 Government advice is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (revised in December 2023) with detailed guidance provided in the National Planning Practice Guidance (November 2023).

### West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031

- 4.4 The Development Plan for the district is the West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2031 ('the Local Plan') which was formally adopted on 27 September 2018 and sets out the overall planning framework for the district from 2011 to 2031.
- 4.5 Policy OS1 of the Local Plan addresses the presumption in favour of sustainable development and states that:

*Planning applications that accord with the policies in this Local Plan (and, where relevant, with policies in Neighbourhood Plans) will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.*

*Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise – taking into account whether:*

- Any adverse impacts of granting permission would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the National Planning Policy Framework taken as a whole; or*
- Specific policies in that Framework indicate that development should be restricted.*

- 4.6 Policy OS2 deals with locating development in the right places and provides the overall strategy for accommodating development in the most sustainable locations. A settlement hierarchy has been established which is based on main service centres, rural services centres, villages and then small villages, hamlets and open countryside.
- 4.7 The policy goes on to state that proposals for non-residential development within small villages, hamlets and open countryside are regarded as appropriate in certain circumstances, including, of relevance here:

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*Proposals to support the effectiveness of existing businesses and sustainable tourism.*

4.8 There are a number of general principles that apply to development within this policy. It is stated that all development should:

- *Be of a proportionate and appropriate scale to its context having regard to the potential cumulative impact of development in the locality;*
- *Form a logical complement to the existing scale and pattern of development and/or the character of the area;*
- *Be compatible with adjoining uses and not have a harmful impact on the amenity of existing occupants;*
- *As far as is reasonably possible protect or enhance the local landscape and the setting of the settlement/s;*
- *Not involve the loss of an area of open space or any other feature that makes an important contribution to the character or appearance of the area;*
- *Be provided with safe vehicular access and safe and convenient pedestrian access to supporting services and facilities;*
- *Not be at risk of flooding or likely to increase the risk of flooding elsewhere;*
- *Conserve and enhance the natural, historic and built environment.*

4.9 Policy E2 deals with supporting the rural economy. It confirms, *inter alia*, that proposals for new buildings in the countryside will be supported where required “*for diversification proposals or where they meet a specific business need which cannot otherwise be met in a more sustainable location*”. It also states that “*new building(s) must be suitably located for the scale and type of the proposed use..*”.

4.10 Supporting paragraph 6.33 identifies that horseriding is a significant leisure activity in West Oxfordshire rural district and is an important part of the rural economy.

4.11 The following policies are also of relevance:

Policy EH2: Landscape Character

Policy EH3: Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Policy T2: Highway Improvement Schemes

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### National Planning Policy Framework

- 4.12 The National Planning Policy Framework ('the NPPF') was revised on 19 December 2023 and sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- 4.13 Paragraph 8 of the NPPF identifies the need to achieve sustainable development and sets out three overarching and interdependent objectives.
- 4.14 The economic objective identifies the need to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy. The social objective identifies (of relevance here) the need to support health and well-being.
- 4.15 The environmental objective focuses on the need to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment. Importantly, it identifies the need to make effective use of land.
- 4.16 Paragraph 88 states that planning policies and decisions should enable (of relevance here):
- a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful 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;...*
- 4.17 Paragraph 89 identifies that "*Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport...*".

## 5.0 Assessment

### Principle of Development

- 5.1 These proposals allow for the erection of a new equestrian barn to support the existing and expanding equestrian enterprise in operation at Harris Piece.
- 5.2 Paragraph 88 of the NPPF supports the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, beautiful new buildings. There is support at a national level for proposals of this nature.
- 5.3 There is no specific policy in the Local Plan which deals with equestrian development. Policy OS1 states that planning applications that accord with policies in the Local Plan will be approved, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.4 It is highlighted in Policy OS2 of the Local Plan that in countryside locations, proposals for non-residential development will be regarded as appropriate if they, *inter alia*, support the effectiveness of existing businesses.
- 5.5 This application accords with this policy through the erection of a new building to support this thriving equestrian business. It would support and improve the effectiveness of the equestrian breeding activity, promote good land management and improve the welfare provision of the horses owned, reared and trained by the Applicant. These benefits will, in turn, improve the quality of the service on offer and, ultimately, improve the viability and sustainability of the business going forward.
- 5.6 Policy E2 confirms that proposals for new buildings in the countryside will be supported where required where they meet a specific business need which cannot otherwise be met in a more sustainable location.
- 5.7 It is evident that there is a need for this development to be located in a countryside setting, immediately adjacent to the land it serves and to the grazing paddocks of the horses that will be housed within. There is no scope to site the building closer to the existing yard as it is necessary to have a degree of physical separation between the youngsters and the breeding mares and stallions. The proposed building would meet a specific business need and cannot be sited in a more sustainable location.
- 5.8 There is in-principle support for this proposal which accords with Policy OS2 and Policy E2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 88 of the NPPF.

### Equestrian Need

- 5.9 Due to the expansion of the existing equestrian business, the Applicant has purchased additional land to support the increasing horse numbers. The grazing paddock within which

the proposed building would be located extends to approximately 2.5ha (6.2 acres) and is to become the satellite unit for the young horses which form part of the developing breeding and training activity. It is proposed to create a separate facility for the youngsters, away from the stallions and mares. This will allow the Applicant to optimise land use and grazing availability whilst also providing the best environment in which the youngsters can grow and develop.

- 5.10 The existing yard area is already fully utilised with mares and foals, the stallion, livery horses and riding horses and there is no capacity to accommodate the increasing number of youngsters which are kept as part of the ongoing, restructured, business. Initially the youngsters were sold at weaning or shortly thereafter. However, the demand for horses of 2-3 years of age has increased and the Applicant wishes to capitalise on this increasing demand, to further increase viability and sustainability of the equestrian business.
- 5.11 Even if there were available stables within the yard area, it is not appropriate to keep these young horses in close proximity to the mares, foals and stallions. Young horses have very specific requirements and are highly strung, so they need to be kept in a tranquil environment away from the high energy status of the stallions and mares (which is particularly high when mares are on heat). Stabling and grazing the youngsters alongside the core breeding and livery horses is not the calm environment needed to support healthy and safe development, both physical and mental.
- 5.12 The proposed building is needed to provide group housing for the young horses in addition to the storage of the hay and feed required as part of their day-to-day feeding regime, to promote healthy bone growth and physical robustness.
- 5.13 It is proposed to single sex group house the young horses within the proposed building. Group housing young horses is a well-established management for training youngsters as it has positive effects on horses' reactions towards humans, as well as many other advantages on the development of the young horses. It has been found to reduce aggression and improve initial training potential. Group housing also promotes for ease of handling of the horses.
- 5.14 The proposed building would incorporate six bays. It is anticipated that the two central bays would be used for the storage of hay and hard feed and for rug storage. This central storage section provides a natural barrier between the colts and fillies which reduces potential for conflict/excitement between the two sexes whilst they are housed.

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### Scale and Design of the Proposed Building

- 5.15 The barn would measure 12m x 30m (six internal bays of 5m each) with a ridge height of 5.9 and 4.6m to the eaves and would be open-fronted to the eastern elevation.
- 5.16 The walls would be concrete block below Yorkshire boarding. The concrete floor and the blockwork lower walls would provide for ease of cleaning and robustness of construction. The Yorkshire boarded upper walls would support good ventilation and air flow within the building which is essential to animal health and well-being and also provides suitable conditions for hay storage.
- 5.17 Of the six bays within the building, four would be used for the group housing of the horses, a total floor area of 240m<sup>2</sup>. It is assumed that there would be 12 youngsters kept in the southern paddocks at any one time, all of which would be housed in the building overnight. There would be sufficient room within the application building to allow for a number of hay feeding areas and to ensure a good freedom of movement for the youngsters, reducing any capacity for in-fighting.
- 5.18 The two central bays (120m<sup>2</sup> in total) would provide for storage of hay, hard feed, rugs and other small equipment/goods ancillary to the equestrian use. With up to 12 youngsters resident in the southern paddock, there would be an annual hay requirement of c.1,250 small bales at an assumed average of 2 bales/week/horse. In addition, concentrate feed would also need to be stored in the building in addition to horse rugs, grooming equipment, feed buckets etc
- 5.19 From the above, it is evident that the proposed building is no larger than necessary to support the proposed use. The size of the building is commensurate with the ongoing use and will support the effectiveness of this existing business.

### Landscape

- 5.20 Policy EH2 of the Local Plan identifies that new development should conserve and, where possible, enhance the intrinsic character, quality and distinctive natural and man-made features of the local landscape. Proposals should avoid light and noise pollution and should maintain or improve the existing level of tranquillity and dark-sky quality where possible.
- 5.21 The building is of typical utility design and is sited alongside the existing field boundary, in close proximity to a substantial and established hedgerow which provides excellent screening.
- 5.22 The site has been chosen to provide for the requirements of the horses whilst also ensuring the impact of the development in landscape terms is as limited as possible.

5.23 There is an essential need for the building as proposed. The scale of the building is no larger than reasonably necessary and the design is typical of a rural building and consistent with other buildings in the vicinity.

#### Biodiversity

5.24 Policy EH3 sets out that the biodiversity of West Oxfordshire should be protected and enhanced.

5.25 This proposal is for a utility rural building and the development does not lead to any loss of habitat as no trees or hedges are to be removed.

#### Highways

5.26 The siting of the new building at this location would benefit from an existing farm access. The existing access is of sufficient length to enable a horse lorry and/or tractor and trailer to access the site and stand clear of the carriageway.

5.27 The proposed development would not of itself generate additional traffic movements over and above existing. The youngsters are to be 'turned away' on the southern paddocks for a period of up to one year, during which time they would simply develop without the need for training and riding. There would, of course, be a requirement for twice daily visits to check on the welfare of the horses, rug up, check feed and water. But this requirement exists whether there is a building in situ, or not. It is the needs of the horses which require regular checks and not the provision of a new building. Group stabling the young horses will, of course, generate a need to muck out and turn out the youngsters. But this would be undertaken as part of the twice daily checks already undertaken. Daily welfare checks take place on foot, through the grazing paddocks, as part of the overall management.

5.28 Furthermore, the hay storage provision within the proposed building will enable the storage of hay and hard feed which will reduce the need for daily/weekly vehicular trips to the fields as is currently the case.

5.29 In terms of Policy T2 of the Local Plan, the existing access is suitable to support the proposed development and the new equestrian barn would not generate any additional impact on the local highway network.

#### Flooding

5.30 The application is within Flood Zone 1 and is at very low risk of flooding from surface water.

5.31 There are no constraints on the site in relation to flooding matters.

## 6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This Statement is submitted in support of a planning application for the erection of an equestrian barn that would be used for the group housing of young horses and the storage of their hay. The building would measure 12m x 30m (six internal bays of 5m each) with a ridge height of 5.9 and 4.6m to the eaves and would be open-fronted to the north-east elevation. Also proposed is a concrete apron to the north-east of the barn which would measure 4m x 30m.
- 6.2 The building would be used for the group housing of horses and storage of hay, hard feed, rugs etc. to support the existing equestrian business in operation on the land holding.
- 6.3 There is a need for a building to house the young horses away from the other horses on site to provide the calm environment needed to support their healthy and safe physical and mental development. Furthermore, there is a need for a building to be located on the additional grazing land to the south which is required to support the increased horse numbers. The building is also needed for the storage of hay and feed required as part of the youngsters' day-to-day feeding regime. The equestrian need for the building has therefore been demonstrated.
- 6.4 The erection of a new building would support this thriving equestrian business, through supporting and improving the effectiveness of the equestrian breeding activity, promoting good land management and improving the welfare provision of the horses owned, reared and trained by the Applicant. These benefits would, in turn, improve the quality of the service on offer and, ultimately, improve the viability and sustainability of the business going forward. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Policy OS2 of the Local Plan and paragraph 88 of the NPPF.
- 6.5 There is a clear need for this development to be located in a countryside setting, immediately adjacent to the land it serves and to the grazing paddocks of the horses that will be housed within. There is no scope to site the building closer to the existing yard. The proposed building would meet a specific business need and cannot be sited in a more sustainable location. The proposals therefore accord with Policy E2 of the Local Plan.
- 6.6 The building is of typical utility design and is sited alongside the existing field boundary, in close proximity to a substantial and established hedgerow which provides excellent screening. The scale of the building is no larger than reasonably necessary and the design is typical of a rural building and consistent with other buildings in the vicinity. The proposals therefore comply with Policy EH2 of the Local Plan.



- 6.7 The proposed development would not lead to any loss of habitat as no trees or hedges are to be removed and it is therefore in accordance with Policy EH3 of the Local Plan.
- 6.8 The new building would not generate any additional impact on the local highway network and the existing access offers suitable support. The proposals are therefore in accordance with Policy T2.
- 6.9 We submit this application to you for your favourable consideration.