Application Number: ADC/0394/08 Recommendation - REFUSE

Site: **Happy Valley Stables, Slonk Hill Farm, off New Barn Road, Shoreham-by-Sea BN43 6HN**

Proposal: **Replacement Stable block**

The Application

Permission is sought for the erection of a replacement stable block at the Happy Valley Riding Stables site, located within the Sussex Downs AONB, 200m north of the A27 Shoreham by-pass, near the Holmbush junction. The site consists of a mixture of low stable blocks, horse walkers, and sand schools sited within an open field at the base of a shallow coombe. The site has been utilised as a licensed riding school for many years with the recent addition of new stables, tackrooms, an enclosed walker and open sand school retrospectively approved under SU/33/04/TP. The site is limited to accommodation of 60 horses under condition 3 of this permission.

Following recent storms, a timber and asbestos clad stable block (constructed under SU/136/87/TP) has become severely damaged such that it is now uninhabitable by horses. A larger replacement block is sought in order to provide modern covered accommodation suitable for the rearing of a higher standard of horse. The accompanying Design and Access statement states that this will be of benefit to the owner's son, Henry Turrell, who is an England international showjumper hoping to compete in the 2012 Olympic Games.

The current stable block accommodates 13 stables within a 'U' shape building 17.8 metres in length, 13.3 metres in width (a floor area of 236 square metres) and 2.8 metres in height. Each stable is 2.7 metres by 3.3 metres.

The proposed new stable block is to be a large single span pitch-roofed structure. As originally submitted, it was shown 29.6 metres in length, 11.1 metres in width (a floor area of 329 square metres, 40% larger than current) and with a height of 4.8 metres to the ridge. The amended plans now received show it reduced to 25.9m long and 3.8m high, keeping it 11.1m wide (287sqm floor area). It will now accommodate 11 stables (3.5 metres by 3.5 metres), a wash room and a tack/rug/feed room.

Consultations and Representations

South Downs Joint Committee: Objection was raised to the proposals as originally-submitted on grounds that the introduction of an 'American Barn' design of stabling within a sensitive landscape, with its high ridge line and dominance against the existing low stable buildings, would result in additional visual impact within the AONB. Following amendment of the plans, considers the issues more finely balanced and, although still having concerns about the visual impact, taking account of the unattractive existing building being replaced and the reduction in number of buildings, no longer objects. This is on the basis that, if permission were to be granted, conditions are imposed requiring details of the roof colour and materials to be agreed, control over floodlighting, and restriction of use of the buildings to private use by the applicant (not livery-style use).

Environment Agency: No objections in principle but the site lies within a sensitive groundwater area. All precautions must therefore be taken to avoid discharges and spills both during and after construction. Site activities should be carried out in accordance with the Pollution Prevention Guidelines No.24 for Stables, Kennels and Catteries. Any manure stack should be sited in accordance with the 'Code of Good Agricultural Practice for the Prevention of Pollution of Water' in order that no risk of polluting run-off enters either ground or surface waters.

Adur District Council: The EHO has no objection.

Third Parties: No comments received.

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

Adopted West Sussex Structure Plan 2001-2016 (WSCC 2005) (saved policies): LOC2, NE8, CH1-2, DEV1
Adopted Adur District Local Plan 1993-2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies) AG1, AC1-3, AC15
Design Bulletin No.3 'Development involving Horses in the Countryside' (ADC 1996)
PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' (ODPM 2004)
'South Downs Planning Guidelines' (South Downs Joint Committee 2008): EQ1, EQ4, EQ9, EQ12-13

Planning Assessment

Policies

Structure Plan Policy NE8 states that development which needs to be located in the countryside in order to sustain the countryside as a place of varied and productive social and economic activity, in accordance with LOC2, should be permitted provided that the character and environment of the area is protected and, where possible, enhanced. Within the Sussex Downs AONB, policy CH2 requires that development should only be permitted if it meets proven local needs and there is no alternative site elsewhere and provided it maintains the natural beauty, distinctive character and remote and tranquil nature of the AONB. It also requires development to be compatible with or enhance the distinctive character and quality of the landscape, and to be designed and sited to enhance visual quality.

Local Plan policies AC2-3 state that permission for development in the AONB will only be permissible in compelling circumstances. In such cases, any development needs to be of a particularly high standard of design, to be in keeping with the locality and sited so as to minimize noise disturbance and visual intrusion. New development should be sympathetic to traditional forms, materials and detailing of buildings and enclosures.

With regard to development involving horses in the countryside, the Local Plan includes a specific policy AC15 which states that planning permission will be granted for uses in the countryside involving horses where existing buildings are utilized. Where a new building is proposed, permission will only be granted if the need is compelling, the building is located to cause minimal adverse impact on the landscape, it relates well to existing buildings, and is of a scale appropriate to the locality. Sporadic development or proposals of poor design and construction quality unsympathetic to the rural surroundings will be resisted.

The Council's Design Bulletin (No.3 'Development Involving Horses in the Countyside') provides supplement guidance to policy AC15. Paragraph 4.2 of the Design Bulletin states that rarely will the recreational benefit be likely to justify permission for new buildings. The interests of animal welfare is often a more compelling need but this argument will not necessarily be sufficient to constitute a compelling need in all circumstances; in some cases concerns about damage to the landscape and the cumulative effect of a proliferation of sporadic development may be over-riding. Paragraph 4.4 requires that a stable be sited to cause minimal harm to the landscape, by either being sited within or adjacent to existing groups of buildings. A minimum size of shelter is recommended as being 3m by 3.7m with a height of 2.7m for a typical stable, whilst the design should blend in with the rural character of the locality, usually brown-stained timber or timber-faced wall construction with a roof of dark mineral felt covering is usually most appropriate.

The South Downs Planning Guidelines 2008 state that redevelopment of existing equestrian buildings will normally be supported subject to the buildings being of a form, bulk and general design in keeping with their surroundings (EQ1). New buildings will generally be considered more favourably where they are within an existing group of buildings which provide an adequate context to assimilate the building into its surroundings (EQ4). The design of new buildings should reflect the agricultural vernacular and ideally use traditional materials; walls should be darker than side walls to reduce their perceived scale – buildings of poor design with inappropriate modern materials such as corrugated sheeting or concrete blocks will be opposed (EQ9). In areas of degraded landscape with existing poor quality buildings such as on the urban fringe, site specific guidelines should be developed in order to achieve a progressive improvement (EQ13). Where permission is granted, conditions or legal agreements will be sought removing permitted development rights for fencing, controlling external lighting, minimizing outside storage (including horseboxes and equipment) and requiring landscaping (EQ12).

Need for the development

The Happy Valley Stables are located within a shallow open coombe a short distance north of the by-pass (about half a mile north west of the Holmbush Centre). The use of the site as a riding school has long been established but planning permission SU/33/04/TP limits the number of horses to be kept on the property to 60. The premises currently consists of a variety of low-rise stables and barns, a walker, and two sand schools. There is a mix of building types with stable blocks of particularly low quality finished in combinations of blockwork, timber and asbestos. Given the location of the site within the shallow coombe, it is highly visible from the surrounding hills, the majority of which are open land devoid of heavy vegetation. As current, the stable block to be replaced is outworn in appearance with storm damage to its asbestos clad roof. It is a modest U-shaped building with a shallow-pitched roof not too dissimilar in scale to the secondary collection of stable buildings to the southwest. It is considered that, in this instance, in principle, the need to replace the storm damaged stable block is compelling both in terms of maintaining the upkeep and appearance of the site and the need to stable horses in conditions appropriate to their welfare needs.

Visual Impact

The proposed building will be significantly larger both in footprint (approximately 40% larger) and height (2 metres taller). It will have a single pitched roofline with gable ends and will be a very large barn-like structure within the context of the site. The surrounding buildings are all modest in both height and size (no greater than 4 metres in width and 23

metres in length) and form an intricate agglomeration around small yard areas. This pattern is replicated in the U-shape of the storm-damaged building. The large expanse of the new single structure is thus considered to be at odds with its modest surroundings and contrary to the requirements of Local Plan policies AC2-3 and AC15.

The applicant agreed to try to reduce the scale of the development and has submitted amended drawings reducing the length of the building to 25.9 metres (principally by reducing the number of stables to 11) and the pitch of the roofline to 10°, creating a revised ridge height of 3.8 metres. It is considered that the length is now more appropriate to the site. However, the roof will still be overly dominant and discordant within a highly visible site.

The applicants have stated that the single roof structure is required to provide absolute shelter for its resident horses, and to allow for the free flow of air above them. In the context of the site though, the size of the building, with its single roof structure and wide linear form, is considered excessive and it should be broken into more modest elements in order to reduce its impact and ensure a better relationship to the form and scale of the other more traditional stables on the site. Although the planning officer for the South Downs Joint Committee has conditionally withdrawn his objection following the submission of the amended plans, he still has some concern at the introduction of a wide barn-style roof into this sensitive open landscape.

It is recognized that the need to replace the stable block with a higher quality block suitable for keeping horses appropriate for the owner's needs is compelling. However, it is considered that its scale needs to be further revised in order for it to meet the above Structure and Local Plan policies requiring the outstanding character and visual quality of the AONB landscape to be protected. It is not considered that the amendments submitted are sufficient for permission to be granted.

Recommendation

REFUSE on ground that:-

The site lies within an area designated under the provisions of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 as the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the proposed building would conflict with the countryside policies of the West Sussex Structure Plan (CH2) and the Adur District Local Plan (AC2-3, AC15) in that its excessive scale and inappropriate design would be harmful to the visual quality and essential character of the Downland landscape.

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