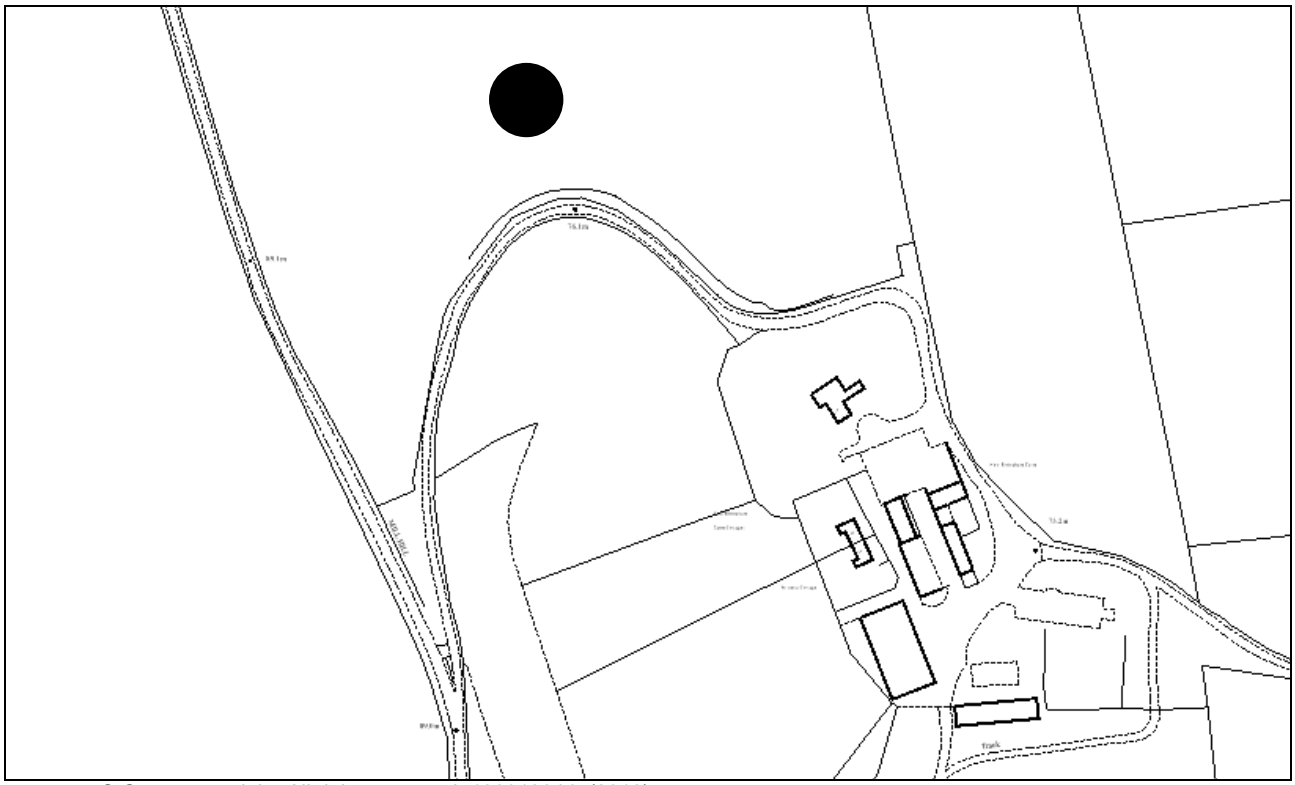
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Application Number: ADC/0259/10 Recommendation - APPROVE

Site: **New Erringham Farm, Mill Hill, Shoreham-by-Sea BN43 5FA**

Proposal: **Sand school for private equestrian use (60m by 30m surrounded by retaining boards and unfenced)**



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The Application

'New Erringham Farm' consists of 5 hectares of land within the South Downs National Park approximately 1.3km north of Shoreham-by-Sea, accessed from Mill Hill. It is separate from but adjoins the much larger 500-hectare Erringham Farm (which was the subject of recent applications for 2 new agricultural workers' houses). It includes the original farmhouse and several farmbuildings with sheep and horses kept in the adjoining paddocks. The application seeks permission to construct a sand school for exercising the applicant's horses. No commercial use is sought.

The sand school is proposed to be constructed 140m to the north west of the house and buildings, in a paddock currently used for training the applicant's 4 horses. There are a number of jumps on the site already. The sand school will measure 60m long by 30m wide and would be positioned north-south in a dry 'valley'. Some 'cut and fill' is proposed because of the natural sloping contours of the land. No fencing or illumination is proposed. The sand school would be surfaced with a sand/wax mix of materials known as 'Activ-track' which would have a natural sand colour. Hedge planting is proposed along the western field boundary to screen views of the sand school from Mill Hill.

The application is accompanied by a Design and Access Statement which sets out the background to the application and the reason for wishing to site the sand school in the location proposed. This is discussed in more detail below.

Consultations and Representations

South Downs National Park Authority: Object on grounds that the rectilinear form of the proposed sand school would be incongruous in this sensitive open downland location, the character of which has already been eroded in recent years by the introduction of equestrian paraphernalia, post and rail fencing and formal tree planting.
However, if the principle were considered acceptable and permission were to be granted notwithstanding the above objection, they would welcome conditions ensuring that the arena remains unfenced and unlit, as indicated in the Design & Access Statement. The light, mottled colour proposed for the surfacing would be suitable for this location.

Environment Agency: No comments.

Third Parties: The South Downs Society object, stating that the chosen location is unacceptably prominent and the proposal would be an intrusion in this otherwise entirely natural downland setting. They ask that the applicant considers an alternative location within the farm complex where it would not be so prominent.

Relevant Planning Policies and Guidance

Adopted Adur District Local Plan 1993–2006 (ADC 1996) (saved policies): AC1, AC2, AC3, AC15
Design Bulletin No.3 'Development involving horses in the Countryside' (ADC 1996)
PPS7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' (ODPM 2004)

Planning Assessment

Policies

The Local Plan shows that the site lies in the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This was re-designated (with boundary changes) as the South Downs National Park in April 2010. Local Plan policies (AG1, AC1) state that development will not normally be approved in the countryside. AC1 protects the countryside for its own sake from development which does not need a countryside location and resists development that is not required for quiet recreation or related to the essential needs of agriculture.

In the National Park (former AONB), where there is a particular objective to prevent harm to the landscape which is of national importance, the relevant policy (AC2) states that "*only in compelling circumstances will development be permitted.....any development that would be harmful to the visual quality and distinctive characteristics of the area, particularly the opportunity it offers for quiet outdoor enjoyment, will not be permitted"* and that *"essential need for development for agriculture.....or to take advantage of a valuable asset or opportunity to meet demand for recreation may exceptionally be regarded as compelling"*.

AC2 also states that, where circumstances are regarded as compelling, development will need to be of a particularly high design standard, must be in keeping with the locality and sited so as to minimise noise and visual intrusion. AC3 states that it

should conserve and enhance the landscape character having regard to landform and appearance and be sympathetic to traditional forms and materials; the removal of buildings and features which are detrimental will be encouraged.

AC15 refers specifically to development associated with horse riding and states that permission will only be granted for such development if the need is compelling, it is located to cause minimal adverse effect on the landscape and its siting is, where practicable, well-related to existing buildings and does not result in sporadic development that erodes the open character of the countryside. The scale of such development should be appropriate to the locality and its design and construction should be of a high standard and fit in sympathetically with the rural surroundings. It should not conflict materially with the guidelines in the Council's Design Bulletin No.3. The latter refers mainly to the erection of buildings such as horse shelters, stables and feed stores and does not refer specifically to sand schools. It states that animal welfare considerations may amount to compelling circumstances justifying equine development.

The above policies accord with PPS7 which states that new building in the open countryside or outside areas allocated for development in development plans should be strictly controlled; the Government's overall aim is to protect the countryside for the sake of its intrinsic character and beauty, the diversity of its landscapes, heritage and wildlife, so it may be enjoyed by all.
PPS7 states that nationally-designated areas such as National Parks and AONBs *have been confirmed by the Government as having the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.....The conservation of the natural beauty of the landscape and countryside should therefore be given great weight in planning policies and development control decisions in these areas.*
In relation to equine-related activities, PPS7 states:-
"Horse riding and other equestrian activities are popular forms of recreation in the countryside that can fit in well with farming activities and help to diversify rural economies. LPAs should set out in their LDDS their policies for supporting equine enterprises that maintain environmental quality and countryside character. These policies should provide for a range of suitably located recreational and leisure facilities....."

Need for the sand school

The applicant's Design & Access Statement states that:-

"The sand school is required by the applicants to exercise their horses. They currently use a wider area but including the same paddock that the school is to be sited within. The impact of horses' hooves on the hard ground during the drier months causes damage to their fetlocks and the surface suffers poaching during wetter times of the year. A sand school is required to prevent damage to the paddocks and indeed to the horses. The school will allow the surrounding areas to be used less intensively and will therefore help maintain the appearance of the downland. There is therefore a demonstrable need for the development."

It is considered that this justification, which is based partly on animal welfare considerations and partly on avoidance of damaging the natural grass surface, is capable of meeting the compelling circumstances requirement of policy AC2. The Council's Design Bulletin No.3 refers to horse welfare as a relevant consideration. Taking account of the proposal being associated with a form of quiet recreation appropriate in the countryside, it is considered that the principle of the proposal,

notwithstanding the objection of the South Downs National Park Authority, is difficult to resist.

Siting alternatives

The applicant has explored three areas for siting the sand school. The first area was to the south of the access road and to the west of the farmhouse, closer to the group of buildings. This area has steeply sloping ground which would involve a greater alteration of ground levels to create a level surface and it also suffers from poor drainage, with water run-off from the surrounding slopes collecting in the 'bowl' where the sand school could be sited.

The second area was on the eastern upper slope of the field to the north of the access road. However, this location would be very visible from Mill Hill road to the west.

The applicant therefore prefers to site the sand school within the valley in the field to the north of the access road where it would be less visible and would not suffer any drainage problems.

Appearance and impact on National Park landscape

The applicant's agent has submitted additional plans showing in more detail the extent of 'cut and fill' required to construct the sand school. These demonstrate that at the north-west corner of the proposed riding school the field contours will necessitate cutting in to form a slope up to 2.5m high, falling to 1.2m high in the north-east corner. The slope will be gradual at a gradient of 1:3 over a distance of 10m at its widest point around the north west corner, with a gradient of 1:6 over 6m at the north east corner.

At the southern end of the sand school, the land will be raised by 1.8m in the south-east corner only, with no cut or fill required in the south-west corner as the existing ground level is 79m AOD at that point, which is to be the overall level of the sand school.

The sand school will be located some distance from the farmhouse and farm buildings (140m or more away) and will be viewed as an isolated development to some extent. It will also have a rectilinear form which is at odds with the undulating Downs. However, the natural valley in which it is to be sited will help to significantly reduce its wider visual impact, only being visible for a distance of about 110m along Mill Hill to the west. The applicant is proposing to mitigate this impact by planting a hedge along the boundary with Mill Hill which will extend the existing hedgeline and which will not look out of place in the landscape where field boundaries are frequently marked by hedges.

The sand school will also be visible from the access road leading to New Erringham Farmhouse and other dwellings in the vicinity. This roadway is also a public right of way (byway) but it is not considered that its visibility from it would be significantly harmful to public appreciation of the wider landscape.

The sand school will not have fencing around its perimeter nor will it require floodlighting, which will further help avoid undue impact in the Downland landscape. The mottled colour of the proposed surface material is considered to be acceptable and this view concurs with that of the South Downs National Park Authority.

On balance, it is not considered that the development will result in material harm to the intrinsic visual qualities of the South Downs National Park.

Recommendation

APPROVE for the reason:-

The proposal is associated with a form of quiet recreation appropriate to the countryside and its justification in the interests of animal welfare and avoidance of damage to the natural ground is considered to be a compelling circumstance justifying its location within the South Downs National Park. Its siting and design would not cause unacceptable detraction from the landscape. It would consequently not conflict with the policies of the Adur District Local Plan (AG1, AC1, AC2, AC3, AC15) and PPS7.

Subject to:-

1. C1Ci (Standard time limit)
2. C14Gi (No external lighting or floodlighting without approval)
3. No means of enclosure of the sandschool hereby approved shall be erected or constructed without the prior approval of details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.
4. The sandschool hereby approved shall not be brought into use until a hedge has been planted along the western boundary of the field in which the sandschool is sited in accordance with details to be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. Any plants which within a period of five years from the time of planting die, are removed or become seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species unless the local planning authority gives written consent to any variation.
5. The sandschool shall be for the personal use of the owner of New Erringham Farm only and shall not be used in connection with any riding school or other commercial use.
6. This permission relates to the following approved plans:-
   1:1250 Scale Site Plan date stamped received 13 October 2010
   Drawing Nos. P201, P202, P203, P204, P205, date stamped received 13 October 2010
   Drawing No. 157494/01 date stamped received 19 July 2010
   1:500 Scale Block Plan date stamped received 19 July 2010
   Drawing No. SK1 date stamped received 20 August 2010

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