Planning Statement

Proposal:	Use of land as a dog exercise field
Site:	Land at The Bassetts, Whaddon Lane, Hilperton, Wiltshire, BA14 7RN.
Our Reference:	PS_2448.v2

Land Development and Planning Consultants Ltd. is a Rural Planning Practice based in Corsham, Wiltshire. The Practice was established in 1989 to provide advice and representation on the range of town and country planning issues relating primarily to the countryside, villages and the market towns of Wessex. Clients include individuals, developers, legal and land agencies, commercial and residential developers, local authorities and amenity groups.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Land Development and Planning Consultants Ltd. have been instructed by Mr Eric Horgan of The Bassetts, No.52 Whaddon Lane, Hilperton to prepare and present an application for the use of agricultural land as a dog exercise ground at Whaddon Lane, Hilperton.

2.0 Context

2.1 The land, subject of this application, lies 800.0m northwest of Hilperton with an existing access off Whaddon Lane. The site is 1.78 hectares (4.40acres) of grass pasture broadly square and bordered on the east side by Whaddon Lane. Mature hedges form the east, north and west boundaries, with a post and rail fence separating the site from the paddock to the south, used in association with a set of stables, also within the Applicant's ownership. Historically the land has been used for livestock grazing and the keeping of horses.

3.0 Proposed development

3.1 Planning consent is requested for the use of the land as an exercise space for dogs; to facilitate the proposed use the existing access will be improved to enable private vehicles to drive onto the land and park within a small area of hardstanding providing parking for no more than two vehicles. A meshed deer gate, secured using a coded entry system, will be erected at the access with a five-bar gate leading from the parking area into the field, providing pedestrian access for clients and their dogs, together with husbandry vehicles and equipment when necessary.

3.2 The existing boundaries will be bolstered with 1.80m high post and wire fencing to create a secure area where dog owners can confidently allow their pets to run free and enjoy the space.

3.3 The proposed fencing to the southern boundary will be temporarily screened with artificial hedging while the hedge planting establishes to limit intervisibility between the horses and the dog field.

3.4 Operational plan

3.5 The clients will book sessions through an online portal in one-hour blocks, separated by a 15minute cross-over period to ensure that the parking area is clear for the next client.

3.6 Hire of the field will be limited to private individuals (rather than commercial dog walkers) who will be restricted to access with a single car and no more than three persons per booking. Hours of operation will be from 7am to 5pm, with the last booking of the day commencing at 4pm. Additional evening hours will be offered in the months from April to September with the last booking of the day commencing at 6pm.

3.7 Emergency contact for the site will be through the Applicant who lives within eye and earshot of the field at 'The Bassetts', 200.0m southwest of the field.

4.0 Policy Context

4.1 The starting point for the determination of this application is the provisions of the Development Plan. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 states determination must be made in accordance with the Plan unless material consideration indicates otherwise. The relevant Development Plan for this form and scale of proposal comprises Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015 (WCS).

4.2 In addition, the pre-submission draft of the Wiltshire Council Local Plan 2023 is currently before Members prior to a final pre-submission consultation and provides an indication of the proposed policy direction for Wiltshire over the plan period 2020 to 2038.

4.3 There are no specific policies for the creation of dog exercise fields, or rural economic diversification within either the current, or emerging Development Plan.

4.4 Paragraph 84 'supporting a prosperous rural economy' of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021, directs local planning authorities to provide a supportive policy context for the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses. Further support for rural economic development is given at para.85 of the NPPF, which confirms that positive and pragmatic decisions for business development outside of existing settlements are acceptable, by taking a reasonable and sensitive approach to access in particular.

5.0 Planning Assessment

5.1 The proposed use of land for dog exercising is an activity that is necessarily located away from existing settlements on land that can be effectively enclosed to provide a safe and secure environment for dog owners to enjoy their pets and for the dogs to enjoy the space. The proposed use is a diversified use of a small plot of land that is not essential to agricultural production. As such the proposed use is considered acceptable in principle.

5.2 The main issues to be considered in relation to the proposed activity are;

5.2.1 The impact of the use on the amenity of the area for surrounding residents and recreational visitors;

5.2.2 The impact on the local highway network through the introduction of the activity onto Whaddon Lane;

Amenity

5.3 Section 3.0 of this statement sets out how the enterprise proposes to operate. Care has been taken to plan the operation of the business to ensure that the use of the land will not harm the enjoyment of the wider area by residents and visitors. Potentially harmful impacts of a dog exercise venue could arise through excessive noise from excited dogs barking, dog owners causing disturbance through inappropriate or insensitive use of the facility or dogs escaping and worrying livestock.

5.4 The approach to management of such issues is to limit visitor access to the site. By only permitting a single vehicle per booking the maximum number of dogs on the site at any one time will be self-limiting, and will be animals that are already known to each other and so reducing the potential for excited, or nervous barking which can arise when unfamiliar, less social dogs meet. For that reason, the facility will not be available to commercial dog minders/walkers who care for a number of different dogs from different owners.

5.5 Equally, the Applicant is eager to prevent the site being used as a venue for social events by dog owners. Therefore, conditions of booking will include the stipulation

that a maximum of three persons may attend per session, thus the primary focus of a visit will be between dog and owner.

5.6 As detailed in the supporting plans, the field will be fully enclosed by a contiguous 1.8m high stock proof perimeter fence with additional hedging to the south boundary and enclosing the hardstanding at the access. The fence will be dug in at the base to prevent dogs digging under the boundary (although the expectation is that owners will be actively monitoring their dogs throughout their visit). The access and parking area will have off-set gates to restrict visual contact between dogs within the site and users of the highway, including walkers, cyclists and horse-riders, thereby reducing the potential for barking by dogs unused to such activity.

5.7 The proposed boundary fence and treatment surrounding the access will provide the necessary separation and security to prevent dogs from escaping the site or worrying livestock or persons outside of the field. The proposed approach to management of the dog exercise venue demonstrates that all reasonable endeavours will be taken to maintain the amenity of the area for residents and visitors and can be subject of suitably worded conditions attached to a planning consent.

Highways

5.8 While the application site is conveniently located for residents of Hilperton to enable some clients to visit the field on foot, it is expected that the majority of visitors will drive to site in private cars.

5.9 As Whaddon Lane leaves Hilperton it becomes single-lane with passing places. While the lane is subject to the national speed limit, experience shows that the majority of road users travel significantly below 60mph in respect for the width of the highway and other road users, which includes a number of pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders accessing the local bridleway, footpath network and canal towpath.

5.10 The existing field entrance is located on a relatively straight section of lane, rising from the south to north. The proposals include improvements to the access to consolidate the first 5.0m and pipe a small ditch under. The hedge to either side of the access is

within the Applicant's ownership and will be sensitively managed to improve visibility at the access while retaining visual separation between the field and highway, further planting will be introduced within the site as discussed at para. 5.7 and detailed in drawings LDC.2448_03A & 04.

5.11 The operational limitations proposed by the Applicant will ensure that only a single car will access the site per booking and conflicting traffic movements associated with the proposed use will be prevented by a generous 15minute separation between bookings.

5.12 The proposed use of the field for private dog exercising, in the manner suggested will have no material impact on highway safety or highway capacity in this location, and will not represent a significant increase in traffic movements in consideration to the existing number of residential properties and businesses currently using the lane.

6.0 Concluding notes and planning balance

6.1 The proposed use of the field as a secure dog exercise venue is consistent with the **economic objective** of the NPPF by contribution of the business to a strong and diverse rural economy.

6.2 The **social objective** of the NPPF is met through the opportunity the business offers to clients to access the countryside with their dogs at a safe and secure venue contributing to the health and vitality of clients.

6.3 The **environmental objective** is met through the ongoing management of the land and the proposed additional hedge-planting by introducing an additional 156.0m of native species hedge in association with the proposed use of the land.

6.4 In conclusion, the proposed use of the field is considered to be acceptable in principle, and through the proposed operational limitations, that could be secured by condition, the business will function without unreasonable impacts on the surrounding area, local amenity or the local highway network. Indeed, the business will provide a facility to the increasing number of dog owners who wish to enjoy their dogs in a secure and peaceful environment to the benefit of the clients and their pets.

6.5 It is trusted that the local planning authority will be able to support the application in its submitted form. The Applicant would welcome the opportunity to discuss in detail the proposals and to provide further information as required to enable a comprehensive assessment to be undertaken. Please contact the Agent at the earliest opportunity should such details be necessary.