

ASSESSMENT OF EQUINE BUSINESS PLANNING APPLICATION.

1.0	REFERENCE	APA/001/0701
1.1	Proposed Development	“the siting of a temporary rural worker’s dwelling for the period of 3-years, in association with the breeding of horses”
1.2	Planning Authority	Wiltshire Council Development Control North
1.3	Planning Application No.	PL/2026/00857
1.4	Applicant	J. Regnard c/o agent.
1.5	Site Address	Soho Grange Stud, Ashley Lane, Box SN13 8AN

2.0 DESCRIPTION

Location

- 2.1 The application site forms part of the applicant’s freehold. The freehold lies immediately south of the Ashley Road, at the foot of Doctors Commons Hill and at the western edge of Box. The land rises up the hill away from the roadside. Surrounding land use is largely agricultural, with dwellings to the east.

Land Area and tenure

- 2.2 The applicant’s freehold comprises some 4ha (10 acres) in a ring fence and including the application site. In addition to the freehold land a further 10 acres is held leasehold.

Soil Type and Characteristics

- 2.3 The soil at the application site is classified in the Evesham 1 series, which is described as brashy soils over limestone

3.0 EQUINE BUSINESS PRACTICE

Existing

- 3.1 The applicant, Julie Regnard, purchased the freehold of the site in 2016 and has since established an equine business at the site over the last 10 years. Julie is assisted in the business by her partner, Zach Horn.
- 3.2 The focus of the business is the production of competition grade equines from brood mares. Three brood mares are kept. At present serving, pregnancy diagnosis and foaling all take place off site at Kington Langley Stud, near Chippenham.
- 3.3 Progeny from the brood mares are reared and sold according to the characteristics of the equine. Foals can be forward sold during pregnancy, alternatively they can be retained and schooled for sale as competition grade equines at five to seven years.

Proposed

- 3.4 The proposal is to consolidate all activities on site, dispensing with the need for Kington Langley Stud. In this way all breeding, foaling, rearing and schooling will take place on site. Alongside the consolidation of activities the number of brood mares will be increased to four. In appropriate circumstances suitable young equines may be purchased and schooled on site for onward sale as competition equines.

Comments

- 3.5 The applicant advises that both brood mares and their progeny are from either Warmblood or Thoroughbred lines and have correspondingly high values.
- 3.6 I understand that the applicant is a life-long equestrian breeder and trainer, with good connectivity in the wider equestrian community.

Buildings

- 3.7 There is a modern portal framed barn which includes six “American” stables. In addition there are two field stables.

4.0 EXISTING ACCOMMODATION

Dwellings owned by applicant

- 4.1 The applicant and her partner live away from the site, in Bristol.

5.0 LABOUR REQUIREMENTS

Existing

- 5.1 The business in its current form generates a part time labour requirement.

Anticipated if Proposals Undertaken

- 5.2 The proposed expansion of the business will generate a requirement for a full time labour unit. I understand the applicant intends to work in the business full time.

6.0 NPPF – ESSENTIAL REQUIREMENT

- 6.1 The planning application for the dwelling is associated with the proposed consolidation and expansion of the existing business. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised in 2024. In the context of the application for the proposed dwelling, paragraph 84 of the NPPF states:

“Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply

- a) there is an essential need for a rural worker.....to live permanently at or near their place of work in the countryside.”

- 6.2 Under the NPPF it is therefore relevant to consider the requirements of the enterprise and whether those requirements present an essential need for a worker to live at or near the enterprise.
- 6.3 The applicant’s argument is that the proposed consolidation of the business will present an essential need for a permanent presence on the holding at all times. The need stems from two key points:
- Supervision and security for high value equines.
 - Animal welfare, including foaling, sickness and injury.
- 6.4 It is my opinion that there is a clear need for close attention to the brood mare before, during and after foaling and a need for close supervision of the neo-natal foal. It is recognised that the timing of foaling is an uncertain business, with term dates notoriously variable.

- 6.5 Stabled horses can present a requirement for immediate attention as a result of colic or becoming cast or otherwise injuring themselves in the stable. This need becomes more acute as the value of the equine increases and in that respect it is recognised that the business focuses on high value competition equines.
- 6.6 It is my opinion the focus on competition grade equines, the requirement for supervision for animal welfare and the value of the equines will present an essential need for a presence on the holding at most times in the event the business is consolidated on site as proposed.

7.0 BUSINESS ASSESSMENT

- 7.1 There is no express reference in the NPPF to an assessment of either an existing or proposed business which will operate in association with the proposed rural dwelling. It is my opinion that such an assessment is critical to forming an opinion on the continuation of the “essential need”. In this case the essential need described and recognised above will only continue through the operation of the business. If the business does not operate on a profitable and viable basis then it will fail and the authority would be left with a dwelling but no “essential need” for its presence.
- 7.2 Following the Government’s update to Planning Practice Guidance (PPG), published in July 2019, financial viability is now referenced as a consideration when determining the need for a rural worker’s dwelling.
- 7.3 The applicant has provided a Business Plan and submitted profit and loss accounts for the last two trading periods. The Business Plan sets out the development of the business over a three year period including gross margins, fixed costs and projected profit and loss budgets.
- 7.4 The Business Plan indicates increased profitability in all years. The projected profit at year three is, in my opinion, sufficient to demonstrate viability. The Business Plan builds on the existing business. The applicant has provided profit and loss accounts for the business for the last three years. The accounts indicate that the business is profitable and that there has been a modest increase in profit year on year. The level of profit in all three years falls short of the prevailing minimum wage so it is my view that the business in its current form does not demonstrate viability.

8.0 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 8.1 In addition to the provision of the dwelling the application requests planning permission for an extension to the existing farm building and the construction of an outdoor manège. In my view the two structures would seem appropriate for the proposed expansion of the business.
- 8.2 The applicant advises that the capital cost of the proposed works (temporary dwelling, outdoor manège and lean-to) will be funded without recourse to external borrowing.

9.0 CONCLUSION AND OPINION

The consolidation of the business to the application site along with its expansion will in my view present an essential need. The proposed changes to the business appear to have been planned on a sound financial basis.

I trust the above provides you with the information required. If you require any further information, or clarification on the any aspect of the above, please do not hesitate to contact the writer.

A.M Coke BSc (Hons) MRICS

Note: This Report has been prepared on information provided by the Applicant and or the Applicant’s Agent.

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Date 31 March 2026

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