

THE RURAL PLANNING PRACTICE



Planning and Design & Access Statement

To support an application to develop replacement stables and storage with parking, manure trailer and a sand school at Highfield House, Chapel Hill, Wilton, Marlborough.

ADDRESS	Highfield House, Chapel Hill, Wilton, Marlborough SN8 3SR	
ON BEHALF OF	Rachel and Michael Baster	
PREPARED BY	The Rural Planning Practice	
DATE	August 2026	ISSUE PLANNING

Document formatted to print on A3 or be viewed on screen



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Aerial Image of Site & Surroundings

Highfield House

Grafton Road

- Site
- Access - from both Grafton Rd and Hollow Lane via Highfield House main drive
- Footpath
- ◇◇◇◇◇◇◇◇ Conservation Area (to north and east of boundary)

Not to scale

↑ North



1. Summary

1.1. This application seeks approval for a private equestrian facility comprising:

- A Barn Stables housing five loose boxes (3.7 m x 4 m each - with one larger foaling box), a wash/farrier area, feed and hay, rug and equipment storage, welfare facilities and a WC. Part of the building next to the foaling box will be used as a gym for rider fitness.
- A 20 m x 40 m sand school for year-round horse exercise, schooling and jumping.
- Associated hardstanding, circulation, and manure management facilities.
- Access is available from a track serving the house, or an existing access from Chapel Hill; no change is necessary or proposed. There will be no view of the building from the highway as the result of existing screening.

2. Introduction

- 2.1. This application is made on behalf of Mr and Mrs Baster who live at Highfield House on the outskirts of the village of Wilton, within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.
- 2.2. The family has recently moved to Wilton. Four members of the family ride, the fifth is a baby destined to join them, and there is a need to replace the existing rather poor run of two loose boxes and a hay store with a better insulated, small Barn Stables which allows for better storage and living environment for the horses. Timber loose boxes become very hot in summer, and cold and damp in winter.
- 2.3. The best site for the equestrian building is the paddock immediately adjoining the house which has an electricity and water supply.
- 2.4. The site is easily accessed on foot from the house which is very desirable for welfare of the equines, and vehicular access for farriers and other horse care professionals such as physiotherapists is available from the track.
- 2.5. The area provides good off-road hacking. The land is well drained resulting from the chalk/greensand subsoil that is helpful for horse keeping and riding. Riding is acknowledged to bring health and wellbeing benefits, while encouraging children to be active and to learn the responsibilities of animal care.
- 2.6. As well as being in the National Landscape, the constraints of the site are the proximity of the Wilton Conservation Area. The house is a non designated heritage asset, but the impact on its setting is negligible. A footpath runs to the south of the site but is the far side of an established hedge which affords limited, glimpsed views of the site.
- 2.7. The application is submitted with drawings, a Preliminary Ecology Appraisal, and a Tree Survey.



View of the site (North)



Existing building



The most Northerly part of the site

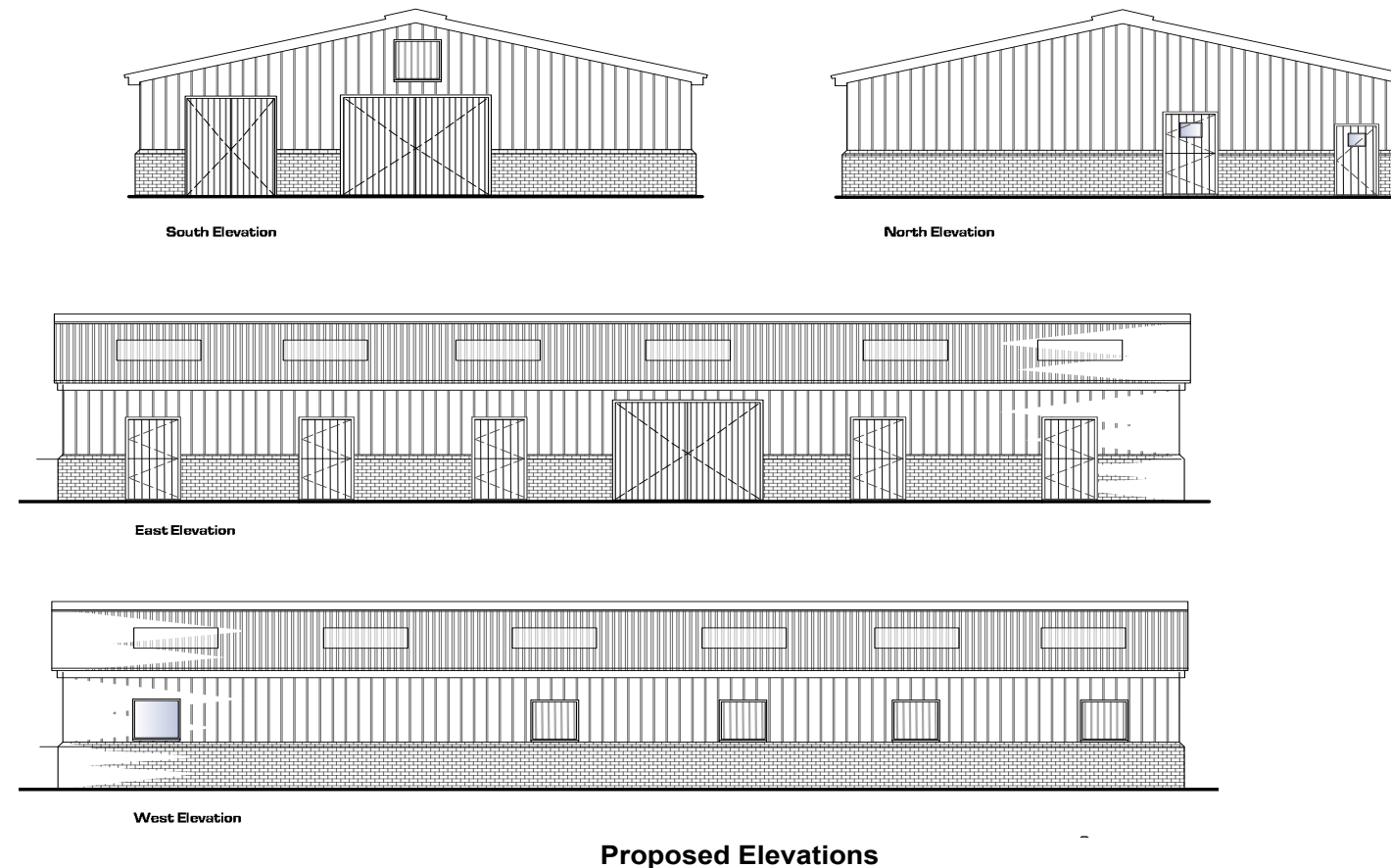


3. Planning History

3.1. There is no relevant planning history.

4. The Proposal

4.1. The proposal is for Barn Stables with dimensions of 26m x 13m. The building will be steel framed constructed of a brick wall, with timber 'hit and miss' boarding above to allow ventilation that is vital for the health of the horse. The roof will be corrugated fibre cement sheets. The materials and appearance as a simple agricultural building will fit comfortably in its setting close to the Conservation Area boundary. The ridge will be cranked to allow for air flow. The building will incorporate five loose boxes, up to 4m x 4m to allow for larger horses, a foaling box, a wash/clipping/farrier bay, a feed room with space to hang rugs. A WC and welfare facilities are incorporated since a groom may be employed to assist with the horses' care and a riding instructor. A small area next to the foaling box can be used as a gym for rider fitness.

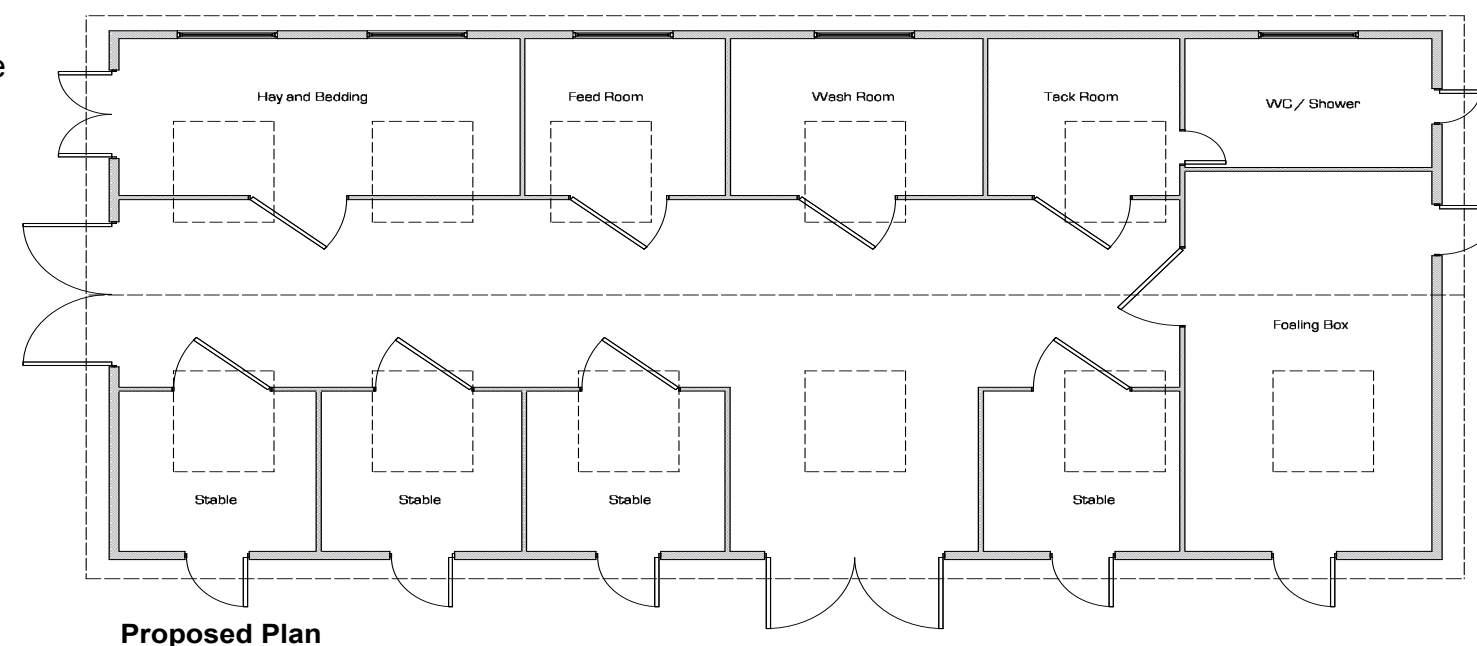


4.2. The compact layout and simple shape of the Barn Stables helps to preserve the character of the Conservation Area and National Landscape, while supporting horse welfare and management and sustainable land management.

4.3. Manure storage will be a trailer stationed on a concrete pad so that it can be taken off site to be used as manure on local arable fields. There is no run off.

4.4. The sand school is 20m x 40 m. The sand school will be fenced with post and rail. The surface will be equestrian sand mixed with fibre.

4.5. The site also provides parking for visiting dentists, physiotherapists, and allows a turning area for them and a horse transporter.





5. Why is the Sand School Necessary?

- 5.1. A contained school is a safer place to train young horses than an open field.
- 5.2. The sand school provides a consistent surface which helps to minimise soft tissue injuries and lameness in valuable competition horses.
- 5.3. Whilst a horse may not be schooled every day, it enables horses to be exercised off public roads which is desirable on safety grounds especially with low light levels in the winter.
- 5.4. For some horses a school allows space for training for more advanced dressage movements including lateral work and extension of paces.

6. The Equestrian Industry

- 6.1. The equestrian industry was shown by the British Horse Society in its evidence to the Government concerning the Agriculture Bill in 2018 to be of significant importance
- 6.2. The evidence stated:
 - The Horse Industry is of vital importance to Agriculture and land use. Whilst farming is the primary land use in the UK, the Society believes that the horse industry is the secondary land use accounting for approximately 1,000,000 hectares of grassland in the UK and catering for nearly one million horses.
 - The economic value of the equestrian sector, excluding racing, stands at £4.3 billion of consumer spending. There are 1.3 million regular riders in the UK.
 - It was estimated that in 2015 horse owners spent £3,600 on each horse per annum compared with £2,650 in 2011.
 - The British Horse Society welcomes the inclusion of funding for public access to and enjoyment of the countryside. We believe that this is entirely in keeping with the government's public statements on the importance of countryside access as a form of 'public good'.
 - The British Horse Society believes that responsible access to the countryside is inherently beneficial to society. The benefits of countryside access, not only to physical health but also to mental health and wellbeing are well proven. Increasing and enhancing access supports the Government's aim in its 25-year Environment Plan to connect people with the environment to improve health and wellbeing.



Highfield House view
from site



The existing building



- The British Horse Society commissioned the University of Brighton and Plumpton College to research the health benefits of recreational horse riding. A key finding of this research was that horse riding and activities associated with horse riding, such as mucking out, expend sufficient energy to be classed as moderate intensity exercise.
 - Additionally, with an increasingly urban society, an improved and enhanced rights of way system that encourages activities such as horse riding, and carriage driving provides vitally important opportunities to better connect the equestrian public with the natural environment and understand the critical work undertaken by farmers. However, in England horse riders have access to only 22% of public rights of way and horse-drawn carriage vehicle drivers to only 5%. Furthermore, many rights of way are now disconnected from each other because the roads that should connect them are no longer safe for equestrians to use because of the speed and volume of motorised traffic on them. This leaves many equestrians without a safe local route to use.
- 6.3. In the past six years the Society's records show that there have been 2914 reports of road incidents involving horses, 40 Rider deaths, 237 Horse deaths, 840 Horses injured; 85% of these incidents were because vehicles passed too fast or too close to the horse.
- 6.4. From this it can be seen that horses not only generate demand and income for the allied trades including vets, physios, horse dentists, feed merchants and so on, but horses are of considerable value to health and wellbeing. This meets the aspiration of paragraph 96 of the NPPF 'Promoting health and safe communities'.



View toward the proposed sand school location



7. Biodiversity and Ecology

- 7.1. This application comprises development below the 0.2ha threshold, which as of 6th August 2026 set out in the Governments Guideline Understanding Biodiversity Net Gain means that this development is exempt from providing biodiversity net gain.
- 7.2. The Preliminary Ecology Assessment (PEA) identified the paddock as modified grassland. The development was considered unlikely to have any impact on protected species due to the low ecological value of the habitats. The report advised care with regard to future light levels to protect bats, and precautionary measures to check the site before work starts, with wildlife fencing for the duration of the works.
- 7.3. The trees and hedges around the site form a part of the network linking habitats and wildlife across the wider area. These will all be retained and are not anticipated to be affected by the development.
- 7.4. It is proposed to increase the species diversity of the existing hedgerow by interplanting with native indigenous species, including those that form blossom and produce fruit and nuts to increase the opportunity for feeding and foraging.
- 7.5. No further surveys for protected species are considered necessary.
- 7.6. Paragraph 5.5 of the PEA set out Site Enhancements and these are included on drawing **5197 03** shown here. The methods include, a Bumblebee Box, and Bug Hotel, retention of brash piles, as well as hedgehog boxes, bat boxes, bird nesting boxes and an owl box.



Extract from proposed site plan (not to scale)



8. Policy

Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and Levelling up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA)

- 8.1. Section 85 of the act requires planning authorities to consider whether proposals 'conserve and enhance' Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. LURA now places a duty on authorities "to further the purposes" of the designated landscape. The landscape impact of the proposed sand school is not significant and does not affect any public viewpoints. There is an underlying and often forgotten part of the section at 87 (2) which refers to:

'A conservation board, while having regard to the purposes mentioned in subsection (1), shall seek to foster the economic and social well-being of local communities within the area of outstanding natural beauty and shall for that purpose co-operate with local authorities and public bodies whose functions include the promotion of economic or social development within the area of outstanding natural beauty'.

- 8.2. In this particular case the development supports the rural economy and those working within it, as well as biodiversity enhancement and social wellbeing.

Development Plan

- 8.3. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. For this proposal the Development Plan comprises the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and the Grafton Neighbourhood Development Plan. The North Wessex Downs National Landscape Management Plan is also an important material consideration because the site lies within the designated National Landscape.

National Planning Policy Framework August 2026

- 8.4. Sustainable Development

The proposal represents sustainable rural development. It balances economic, social and environmental objectives by supporting an existing rural facility, improving equine welfare and incorporating sustainable design measures whilst responding sensitively to its landscape setting.

- 8.5. Why the Proposal Represents Sustainable Rural Development

The proposal represents investment in the long-term future of an established rural facility. The arena will improve horse welfare through year-round exercise, support sustainable land management, incorporate sustainable drainage measures and sit comfortably within the landscape. Collectively these considerations demonstrate that the proposal achieves the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development.

- 8.6. Policy S5 - Principle of Development Outside Settlements recognises that certain types of development have an appropriate or necessary relationship with the countryside location, as in this case. It is not an unrelated built use in the countryside.

- 8.7. Achieving Well Designed Places

The building has been designed as an agricultural-style structure and to reduce its mass and visual prominence. The palette of materials demonstrate that functionality, sustainability and landscape integration have been considered together from the outset. The development also provides tangible equine welfare and optimised development for welfare reasons.



8.8. Conserving and Enhancing the Natural Environment

The site lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape where substantial weight under Policy N4 - Protected Landscapes should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty. The proposal has therefore been landscape-led. The new stables replace an existing older structure and this and the manège are similarly located in a discrete location surrounded by mature planting, the existing hedgerows and mature trees will all be retained.

The proposal does not represent major development in the National Landscape and will be read as an agricultural building.

Impact on the Setting of the Conservation Area (CA).

- 8.9. The 2005 Wilton Conservation Area Statement considers the historic maps. Highfield House is within the boundary of the CA, and is called Midden Hollow. It is specifically mentioned with its tree lined driveway. Allegedly the house was rebuilt by the Ailesbury Estate in 1908 in a group of existing older buildings around a yard deemed to be of little historic value. The agricultural use ceased in 1966.
- 8.10. The statement mentions the character of the roadsides to include grass verges, banks and hedges with overhanging trees. The village is set in a steep sided valley with the older houses on the steeper side to the East, and the flatter, more clay area being the siting for newer housing. Hedgerow and trees define the area. This development does not impact on these characteristics. The CA Statement identifies the use of weatherboard as characteristic, and this is used on the building. The parking areas will be rolled hoggin which is porous and in keeping.
- 8.11. The barn and arena are modest and sensitively sited, integrating with the existing field pattern. Timber/brickwork materials, low ridge height, and compact layout minimise visual impact. Post-and-rail fencing and natural surfacing further reduce prominence. No trees areas are affected, and no native hedges are removed.

Wiltshire Core Strategy 2015:

- 8.12. CP51 (landscape), the policy requires careful account to be taken of designated landscapes. This has been considered and taken into account as explained.
- 8.13. CP50/52 (biodiversity), the policy requires biodiversity to be enhanced as the result of development. The BNG calculations prove this is achieved.
- 8.14. CP57 (design), care has been taken with the design of the building and the materials to ensure they are appropriate to the site and its setting.
- 8.15. CP58 (heritage), the building has been designed to be compatible with buildings nearby. The location in the setting of the conservation area has been taken into account.
- 8.16. CP60/61 (transport). There should be no impact on the transport network as the result of this development.



Grafton Parish Neighbourhood Plan 2025-2040

- 8.17. The proposal aligns with the objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan by supporting an established rural facility while conserving landscape character and delivering appropriate design. It responds positively to the policies relating to landscape conservation, appropriate development and rural employment by reinforcing the existing pattern of development at Highfield House rather than extending built form into the wider countryside.
- 8.18. The lighting designed to be bat friendly will also respect the local Dark Skies Policy.

The North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan 2025

- 8.19. The plan is very supportive of recreational use of land within the National Landscape including riding. Like the Wiltshire Core Strategy it endorses good design with respect for heritage assets and sympathetic design to reflect vernacular buildings and materials.
- 8.20. This application has taken all of this into account.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1. The development grouped with other buildings, and carefully designed to fit within the setting of the conservation area meets local and national planning policy criteria. The site and equestrian use helps to support the rural economy and health and well being.
- 9.2. The authority is respectfully asked to grant planning permission for the development.