



Bourne Valley Associates Ltd

Planning Statement

for the

**Retrospective change of use of land and existing buildings
to a mixed agricultural and sui generis use comprising
educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted provision,
together with the retention and completion of hardstanding
for use as an associated car park, and the retention of a
Studio and Hay Barn**

at

**Land to the North of Dark Lane
Crofton, Marlborough, SN8 3DW**

for

Herd Thyme Ltd

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Project: Regularisation for Herd Thyme
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1. *Introduction*

This Planning Statement supports a retrospective full planning application for the mixed agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted use of land and existing buildings north of Dark Lane, Crofton, together with the retention and completion of the associated car park. The application is submitted by Bourne Valley Associates, acting as agent on behalf of Herd Thyme.

Herd Thyme is a tenant on the land and provides animal-assisted therapy, education and alternative provision for children and young people, including students with special educational needs and social, emotional and mental health needs. The operation makes use of the site's existing rural buildings, agricultural setting, animals and outdoor spaces to provide individually tailored educational and therapeutic activities.

The application follows the withdrawal of planning application reference PL/2025/09158, which related only to the creation of the hardstanding and car park. During the determination of that application, the Local Planning Authority identified that the underlying use of the land and buildings occupied by Herd Thyme had not previously been granted planning permission. The earlier application was therefore withdrawn to enable a comprehensive application to be prepared covering the entirety of Herd Thyme's operational site.

The present application responds directly to the Council's advice and provides a transparent means of assessing and regularising the established use of the land and buildings, together with the parking provision required to support that use.

2. *Site context, planning history and need for the regularisation of existing development*

2.1. *Site Context*

The site is approximately 2.5 km from Great Bedwyn and 3.5 km from Burbage.

The site is in a rural location and forms part of a wider established agricultural holding. The surrounding area is predominantly characterised by agricultural fields, woodland, hedgerows, dispersed farmsteads and other rural buildings.

The application site comprises the whole of the land and buildings within the red-line boundary, all of which are occupied and used by Herd Thyme. It includes the studio and adjoining store, hay barn, other animal accommodation, grazing and outdoor activity areas, internal access and circulation arrangements and the 418m² permeable stone car park. The site operates as a single mixed planning unit combining agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted activities.

The application boundary is shown on the Location Plan and Block Plan, Drawing 06150-00-A. The detailed arrangement of the buildings, access and 418m² car park is shown on the Site Plan, Drawing 06150-00-A, Sheet 03. Land and buildings forming part of the wider holding but remaining outside Herd Thyme's occupation and use are excluded from the application and continue to be used for agricultural purposes.



The site lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape. The landscape effects of the proposal must therefore be considered carefully, although the application predominantly concerns the continued use of existing buildings and an established operation rather than substantial new built development.

Access to the site is obtained from Dark Lane using the existing access shown on Drawing 06150-00-A, Sheet 03. The internal access leads to the buildings and the associated parking area.

The nearest residential properties, Railway Cottage immediately adjacent to the site and Nos. 157 and 158, are approximately 35 m away on the opposite side of Dark Lane. Crofton Cottage is also approximately 35 m from the site, on the opposite side of the Crofton Road junction. Mature hedgerows and trees provide substantial screening between the site, neighbouring properties and the wider countryside.

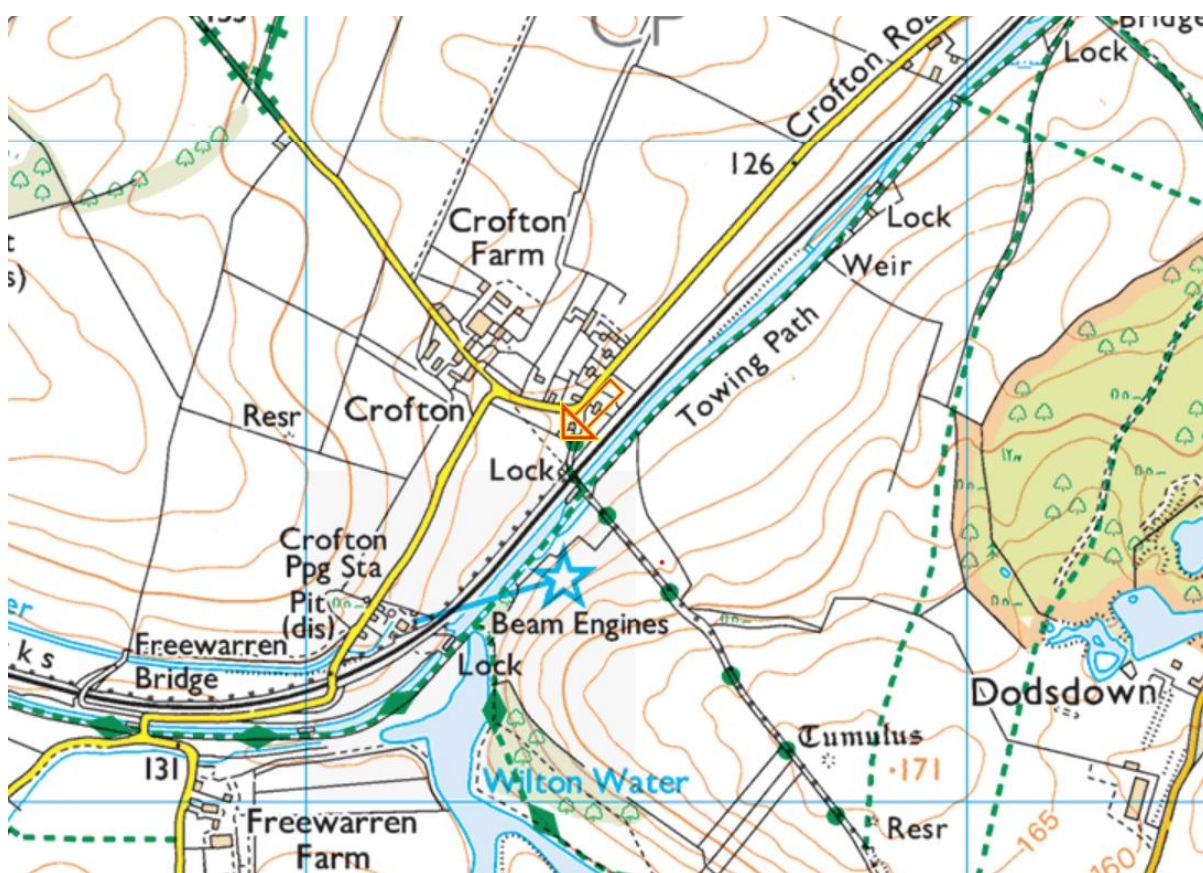


Figure 1 - Geographic context of Herd Thyme

2.2. Existing and previous uses

The land and buildings historically formed part of the wider agricultural holding. Information provided by the landowner indicates that some of the buildings were subsequently occupied by a builder for a period exceeding ten years before Herd Thyme took occupation.

Herd Thyme has operated for approximately 12 years and moved to the application site in April 2025. It previously occupied other buildings at Crofton Farm, but these were subsequently required for



agricultural purposes. Herd Thyme was therefore offered the buildings and associated land within the present site. Repairs to damage caused by the previous occupier, together with necessary internal adaptations, were completed by April 2025.

Herd Thyme principally occupies four buildings: two of which, a studio with an adjoining store and porch, and a separate hay barn are recent additions that require retrospective planning consent. The remaining two buildings are historic and have been used for agriculture and a builders yard. All of the buildings are now used by Herd Thyme.

The studio provides approximately 28m² of floorspace, with an adjoining 20m² store and 2m² entrance porch. The separate hay barn measures approximately 7.27m by 4.73m.

The studio is finished in olive-green steel cladding with white uPVC windows. The adjoining store and porch have natural timber-clad walls and olive-green profiled steel roofs. The hay barn is finished in olive-green profiled steel cladding. The buildings retain a simple, functional rural appearance.

The hay barn stores feed for the animals. These agricultural activities are closely integrated with Herd Thyme's educational and therapeutic provision, so the site operates as a single mixed agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted use.

Agricultural activity remains an integral part of the use of the application site. Animals are kept and cared for on the land, while the hay barn and other associated areas are used to store feed and support their husbandry. The animals and agricultural activities also form a fundamental part of Herd Thyme's educational and therapeutic provision. The site therefore operates as a mixed agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted use rather than as separate, independently functioning uses.

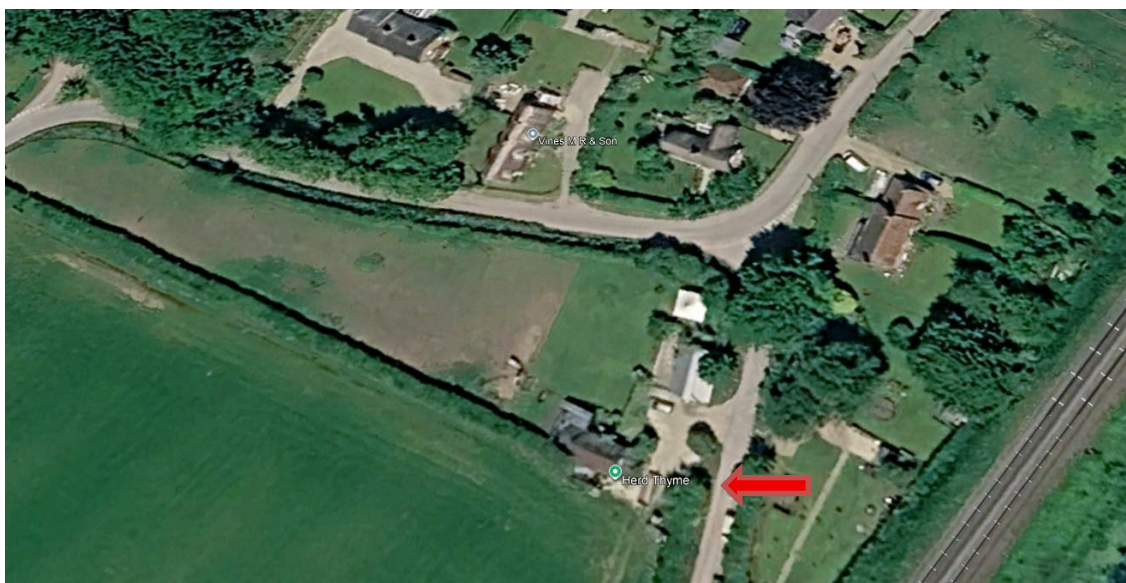


Figure 2 - Aerial photograph of Herd Thyme (prior to works)



2.3. The Herd Thyme service

Herd Thyme is registered with Wiltshire Council as an Alternative Provision provider. Students are referred by schools across a wider catchment which includes Wiltshire, Berkshire, Hampshire and Somerset, with the majority of placements funded by Wiltshire Council.

The service supports children and young people with special educational needs and social, emotional and mental health needs. Individual programmes are designed to develop confidence, communication, emotional resilience, self-regulation and practical skills within a calm and supportive rural environment.

Activities include equine-assisted learning, therapeutic bareback riding, animal care, horticulture, bushcraft, nature-based mindfulness, sensory regulation and academic tuition. Students can also work towards qualifications in animal care and receive support with functional skills and GCSE studies.

The service is supported by eight part-time members of staff with experience in education, therapy and animal care. A small number of volunteers also assist for a few hours each week.

The nature of the service means that a conventional urban classroom or commercial unit would not provide an equivalent environment. Access to suitable animals, outdoor land and a quiet rural setting is fundamental to the educational and therapeutic model. The proposal is therefore functionally dependent upon its countryside location.

2.4. Planning history

The directly relevant planning history is:

PL/2025/09158 – Change of use of part of field to create a hardstanding/car park. Application withdrawn on 14th July 2026.

Application PL/2025/09158 was made following an inspection of the works undertaken to form the parking area. The description was subsequently amended to identify that the works were retrospective.

During its consideration of that application, the Local Planning Authority reviewed the wider planning history and concluded that planning permission had not previously been granted for Herd Thyme's use of the land and buildings. The Council advised that the parking area could not be assessed separately as ancillary parking associated with an established lawful use.

The Council therefore requested a new application seeking permission for the change of use of the whole of Herd Thyme's operational site, including its buildings, associated land and parking area. PL/2025/09158 was withdrawn to allow that comprehensive application to be prepared.

The present application responds directly to that request. It allows the Council to consider the planning merits of Herd Thyme's operation as a whole and provides an opportunity to secure appropriate planning controls over matters such as the extent of the use, operating hours, staff and student numbers, parking and external activities.



3. Development Proposed

Retrospective planning permission is sought for the use of the land and buildings within the red-line boundary as a mixed agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted provision operated by Herd Thyme Ltd. The use includes the keeping and husbandry of animals, storage of their feed, supervised animal interaction, outdoor learning, therapeutic activities and education within the existing buildings and external areas.

The application also includes the retention and completion of the existing hardstanding for use as an associated car park. The car park provides safe, off-road parking for staff, students, parents, carers and other authorised visitors to the site. Dark Lane serves the site and is a dead end road adjacent to the Kennet and Avon Canal. There are always cars park along Dark Lane owned by users of the canal. The carpark offers a safe turning and dropoff area for visitors to the site. Avoiding congestion along Dark Lane from the site users.

A suggested description of development is:

Retrospective change of use of land and existing buildings to a mixed agricultural and sui generis use comprising educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted provision, together with the retention and completion of hardstanding for use as an associated car park.

The application does not seek permission for the unrestricted use of the site as a general school, commercial training centre, visitor attraction or events venue. The proposal relates specifically to Herd Thyme's established model of supervised alternative education, therapeutic intervention and animal-assisted learning.

The principal components of the use comprise:

- keeping and husbandry of animals, including associated feed storage;
- individual and small-group education and tutoring;
- animal-assisted learning and therapeutic activities;
- equine-assisted learning and therapeutic riding;
- animal care training and practical qualifications;
- horticulture and food-growing activities;
- bushcraft and supervised outdoor learning;
- nature-based mindfulness and sensory regulation;
- staff administration and welfare facilities;
- storage associated with the educational, therapeutic and animal-care activities; and
- associated access, circulation, drop-off and parking.

Herd Thyme principally uses the studio and adjoining store for its educational and therapeutic activities. The separate hay barn is used to store hay required to feed the animals kept on the site. The agricultural use of the hay barn is therefore functionally connected with both the keeping of animals and Herd Thyme's wider animal-assisted provision. No new buildings are proposed.



The physical works comprise the retention and completion of the 418m² car park. The existing Type 1 stone surface is permeable, although further stone is required to bring the finished surface up to the level of the existing gateway. Work has been paused pending the determination of this application.

Photographs of the site can be seen below.











3.1. Operational arrangements

Herd Thyme is open to students between 9.15 am and 3.15 pm during school term time. A small number of students also attend during school holidays, while some older students undertake volunteering or work-experience placements. Occasional evening or weekend activities take place, but these do not form part of the routine daily operation.

A maximum of 12 students is present at any one time, with a typical daily attendance of between five and eight. Most students work individually with a member of staff, although some small-group activities take place. The average staffing ratio is approximately one member of staff to three students.

All eight members of staff work part time, with a maximum of seven normally present at any one time. A small number of volunteers also attend for a few hours each week.

All student and visitor attendance is prearranged. Drop-in visits are not permitted because of the safeguarding requirements of the service, and the site has not hosted public or large-scale gatherings.

Deliveries are limited. Post is received on most days, while larger deliveries associated with the farm generally occur approximately once a week.

On a typical day, five to seven staff cars are present and remain parked for the working day. Student attendance comprises a mixture of full-day and half-day placements. There may therefore be approximately five morning drop-offs, five midday collections and five further midday drop-offs, followed by approximately five afternoon collections. One student currently arrives by minibus.

Teachers undertaking site visits and prospective parents or carers also visit by appointment, normally amounting to approximately four additional visits each week. The controlled and prearranged nature of attendance avoids unrestricted or concentrated visitor traffic.

The buildings are served by an existing toilet. There is no lighting within the car park, although an existing floodlight remains fitted to one of the buildings. General waste generation is limited and is accommodated within the Council's fortnightly collection service.

3.2. Parking and hardstanding

The 418m² parking area is accessed through the existing entrance from Dark Lane. It can accommodate approximately ten parked vehicles while retaining sufficient space for student drop-off, collection and turning.

The parking area was created to address practical and safety concerns arising from vehicles using an unsurfaced area. The provision enables vehicles to enter, park, turn and leave the site safely without obstructing Dark Lane or conflicting with the movement of students, animals and operational vehicles within the site.

The hardstanding comprises permeable Type 1 stone and retains an informal rural appearance. It does not include kerbing, road markings or car park lighting. No trees, hedgerows or other vegetation were removed, and all construction access was taken through the existing gateway.



Surface water infiltrates through the permeable stone surface. This has improved the previous condition by preventing water from pooling on the surface and does not result in additional runoff onto Dark Lane or neighbouring land.

4. Planning Policy Context

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.

The statutory development plan includes the Wiltshire Core Strategy, adopted in January 2015, together with any applicable saved policies and made neighbourhood plan policies.

The emerging Wiltshire Local Plan was withdrawn from examination in May 2026 and has not been adopted. The Wiltshire Core Strategy therefore remains the principal local development plan document.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework, published on 17 August 2026, is an important material consideration. It replaces the December 2024 Framework.

4.1. Wiltshire Core Strategy

Core Policy 14 sets out the spatial strategy for the Marlborough Community Area. The supporting text recognises the strength of the education sector within the area and seeks to maintain high standards of health, education and culture while protecting the North Wessex Downs National Landscape.

Core Policy 48 supports rural life and the sensitive reuse of existing rural buildings. It supports the conversion and reuse of rural buildings for employment, tourism, cultural and community uses where:

- the buildings are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding;
- the use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement;
- the use would not harm residential amenity;
- the buildings can be served by adequate access and infrastructure; and
- the site has reasonable access to local services, or the reuse would secure the long-term safeguarding of a heritage asset.

Core Policy 50 requires development to protect features of biodiversity and geological value, avoid or reduce disturbance to sensitive species and habitats and seek appropriate opportunities to enhance biodiversity.

Core Policy 51 requires development to protect, conserve and, where possible, enhance landscape character. Particular regard must be given to trees, hedgerows, field boundaries, important views, tranquillity and the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Core Policy 57 requires a high standard of design in changes of use as well as new operational development. Proposals must respond positively to the landscape setting, retain important natural features and have regard to neighbouring amenity.



Core Policies 60 and 61 seek to reduce unnecessary reliance on private cars while ensuring that development can be served by safe access, suitable parking, turning and loading arrangements.

4.2. National Planning Policy Framework

National Policy S5 addresses development outside settlements. It supports development for rural businesses and services where an outside-settlement location is necessary. It also supports the reuse of lawful buildings of permanent and substantial construction, unless the benefits would be substantially outweighed by adverse effects assessed against the Framework's other decision-making policies.

The application accords with this approach. Herd Thyme provides a rural service whose operation depends upon access to animals, agricultural land, outdoor activity areas and a quiet countryside environment. It also makes productive use of existing rural buildings without requiring substantial new built development.

National Policy HC4 requires substantial weight to be given to the benefits of proposals which provide new or improved public service infrastructure or community facilities and to development which demonstrably promotes good health, prevents ill-health, reduces health inequalities or supports social interaction.

Herd Thyme provides specialist education and therapeutic support for children and young people with additional needs. The service promotes mental health, emotional regulation, confidence, communication, practical learning and social interaction. These social and public health benefits should be afforded substantial weight.

National Policy N2 requires development to consider landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, conserve existing natural features and take opportunities to strengthen ecological networks and integrate development into its surroundings.

National Policy N4 requires development within a Protected Landscape to be limited in scale and extent and sensitively located and designed. Substantial weight must be placed on conserving and enhancing its natural beauty.



5. Planning Assessment

5.1. Principle of development

The application seeks to regularise an established educational and therapeutic service occupying existing rural buildings and associated land. It does not propose a substantial new building or a materially expanded complex of development within the countryside.

Core Policy 48 expressly supports the reuse of rural buildings for cultural and community uses where the buildings are suitable, the site can be adequately accessed and the use does not harm the landscape or residential amenity.

The existing buildings are of permanent construction and are already being used without substantial rebuilding. Their continued occupation secures a productive use for existing rural accommodation and avoids the environmental and landscape effects that would arise from constructing an equivalent purpose-built facility.

The operation has a genuine functional requirement for a rural location. Its activities depend upon direct and supervised interaction with animals, access to outdoor land and the therapeutic benefits of a quiet countryside setting. These requirements could not readily be replicated within a conventional urban classroom, office or commercial building.

The agricultural and non-agricultural elements are closely interrelated. The keeping and care of animals necessitate appropriate land, accommodation and feed storage, while those animals and associated husbandry activities provide the basis for much of Herd Thyme's education and therapeutic work. The combination of uses is therefore coherent and appropriate to the site's rural setting.

The proposal therefore delivers clear educational, therapeutic, community and public health benefits. National Policy HC4 requires substantial weight to be given to those benefits.

The principle of retaining Herd Thyme's operation is consequently supported by Core Policy 48 and National Policies S5 and HC4, subject to the detailed effects of the use being environmentally and operationally acceptable.

5.2. Relationship with the wider agricultural holding

Herd Thyme occupies and uses the whole of the land and buildings within the application boundary. The site forms part of a wider agricultural holding, but operates as a distinct mixed planning unit under Herd Thyme's control.

Agricultural activities take place within the application site through the keeping and husbandry of animals and the storage of hay and other feed. These activities are closely integrated with the educational and therapeutic provision, as interaction with animals and learning about their care form fundamental parts of the service.



The application therefore does not seek to replace all agricultural activity with a wholly non-agricultural use. It seeks permission for the mixed agricultural, educational, therapeutic and animal-assisted use that operates across the site. Agricultural activities elsewhere on the wider holding remain unaffected.

5.3. Landscape and visual effects

The application site lies within the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, and substantial weight must be given to the conservation and enhancement of its natural beauty.

The proposal principally retains the use of existing buildings and established areas of land. It does not introduce substantial additional built form or materially alter the established pattern of development within the wider holding.

The rural appearance and agricultural origins of the buildings remain readily apparent. Their reuse does not require substantial external alteration, extension or rebuilding. The buildings continue to be viewed in the context of the surrounding farmed landscape and the other buildings within the holding.

The 418m² car park is positioned immediately south of the existing buildings and is accessed through the established gateway. It is therefore read in association with the existing group of rural buildings rather than as an isolated feature in the open countryside. Its permeable Type 1 stone finish retains an informal rural appearance and avoids the suburbanising effect of tarmac, kerbing, road markings or lighting.

Existing trees and hedgerows provide visual containment. No trees, hedgerows or other established vegetation were removed when the parking area was formed, and the existing boundary vegetation remains intact.

The development is limited in scale, makes use of an established group of rural buildings and does not materially harm the special qualities, landscape character or scenic beauty of the National Landscape. It therefore accords with Core Policies 14, 51 and 57 and National Policy N4.

5.4. Highway safety parking and accessibility

The site's rural location is necessary because its educational and therapeutic functions depend upon access to animals, outdoor land and the countryside. Attendance is controlled through referrals and prearranged visits, and the site does not generate unrestricted public access or passing trade.

A maximum of 12 students and seven members of staff is present at any one time. The mixture of full-day and half-day placements distributes student arrivals and departures between the morning, midday and afternoon. One student currently arrives by minibus, while other occasional visits are limited to approximately four appointments each week.

The parking area accommodates approximately ten vehicles and provides space for drop-off, collection and turning within the site. It therefore avoids parking or manoeuvring on Dark Lane and provides a safer environment for students, including those with mobility, sensory or behavioural needs. The proposal would not have an unacceptable effect on highway safety or the operation of the local highway network and accords with Core Policies 60 and 61.



5.5. Residential amenity

The nearest residential properties are separated from the site by Dark Lane and established hedgerow and tree cover. The operation principally takes place between 9.15 am and 3.15 pm, with students attending in small, supervised groups. Occasional evening or weekend activities take place, but these are not part of the routine daily operation.

The use does not involve amplified music, unrestricted visitor access or large public events. Occasionally a student may become dysregulated and temporarily generate additional noise, but the applicant estimates that this occurs approximately once a month and it is managed by supervising staff.

No complaints have been received concerning noise, lighting, traffic or the general operation of Herd Thyme. One nearby resident has expressed concern about the car park itself; however, the parking area is unlit, uses a permeable stone surface and enables vehicles to park and turn within the site rather than on Dark Lane.

The use therefore does not cause unacceptable noise, disturbance, overlooking or other harm to neighbouring living conditions and accords with Core Policy 57.

5.6. Ecology

The application principally concerns the use of existing buildings and managed land. No trees, hedgerows or other established vegetation were removed when the car park was formed, and the existing boundary vegetation is retained. No material ecological effects have been identified.

As the application seeks retrospective planning permission under section 73A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the statutory biodiversity net gain requirement does not apply.

5.7. Flood risk / Drainage

The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is therefore at the lowest risk of flooding from rivers and the sea.

The Environment Agency's long-term flood-risk mapping identifies the site as having no identified risk of surface water flooding, both under the present-day scenario and when allowance is made for climate change.

The hardstanding is formed from permeable construction, allowing surface water to infiltrate within the site. The parking area does not increase flood risk elsewhere or result in uncontrolled runoff onto Dark Lane or neighbouring land.

The proposal is therefore appropriately located in flood-risk terms and would not increase flood risk on or off the site. No objection arises in relation to flood risk or surface-water drainage.



6. Conclusion

The application provides a comprehensive and transparent means of regularising Herd Thyme's established occupation and use of the land and buildings, together with the associated hardstanding and car park.

The proposal makes productive use of existing rural buildings and provides a specialist alternative education and therapeutic service for children and young people, including those with special educational needs and social, emotional and mental health needs.

The animals, land and quiet countryside environment are fundamental to the service provided. There is therefore a clear functional justification for the rural location that could not readily be replicated within a conventional urban building.

The proposal delivers substantial educational, therapeutic, community and public health benefits. Those benefits are supported by Core Policy 48 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and should be afforded substantial weight under National Policy HC4.

The proposal retains a meaningful agricultural use through the keeping and husbandry of animals and the storage of their feed, integrated with Herd Thyme's educational and therapeutic activities. It principally uses existing buildings and established operational land, without requiring substantial new built development. The development does not result in unacceptable harm to the North Wessex Downs National Landscape, highway safety, residential amenity, ecology or the continued agricultural use of the wider holding.

The proposal accords with Core Policies 14, 48, 50, 51, 57, 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and with National Policies S5, HC4, N2 and N4 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Retrospective planning permission should therefore be granted, subject only to conditions which are necessary, relevant and proportionate to the development.