

1. INTRODUCTION

The Planning & Design Statement has been prepared to accompany and support a planning application submitted to South Holland District Council, which proposes the change of use of part of an unproductive field of agricultural land to use as a dog exercise paddock with associated car parking, on land to the west of the main conurbation of Deeping St Nicholas.

The Planning & Design Statement has been prepared in accordance with the relevant Development Plan and National Planning Policies, and covers an assessment of the physical context, the social and economic impact of the proposal, as well as design, appearance and access.

2. OUTLINE OF PROPOSED SCHEME

The proposed scheme would see the change of use of part of a redundant agricultural field, to use as a dog exercise paddock facility. Research estimates that 10 million, or 34% of UK households own a dog, with approximately 13 million dogs owned in the UK.

Many houses have only small gardens, which limits the ability for dogs to get sufficient exercise during the day, and public open spaces are often unsuitable for people to allow off-lead exercise of dogs, as they compete with other public recreational uses, other dog walkers, and may be in close proximity to busy roads.

This is particularly problematic for large, boisterous, or naturally protective dogs. These factors can lead to dogs being under-exercised and developing behavioural difficulties. Facilities have therefore developed around the country, where dog owners can private-hire secure areas of open land for a set period of time, in which they can walk and exercise their dog(s) without encountering any of the aforementioned issues. Furthermore, these provide open spaces that professional dog walkers and trainers can use during the working day.

The applicants have identified the site as being suitable for such a use given its close proximity and ease of access from both Deeping St Nicholas and Market Deeping and the road network, its unsuitability for other uses, and its location set within the village boundary in open countryside, where disturbance would be negligible.

Within the village there are no public rights of way. This has led to local Dog walkers using field margins that are not designated public footpaths and furthermore causing upset to ground nesting birds which local surveys have found to include not only game birds but also sky larks, corn buntings, ducks and hares.

Additionally with the busy A1175 running through the centre of the main village causing further risk to dogs when being walked off the lead and the recent and planned expansion of Deeping St Nicholas has led to an additional 2000 residents to the locality and the busy main road means safe dog walking areas for residents are now severely limited.

The enterprise will utilise an online booking system, where users can hire the facility in one-hour segments, throughout the daylight hours of the day, for use of up to six dogs in any one session. A designated secure hard standing car parking area will be installed, with access strictly controlled, with no more than three vehicles in the car park at any one time

Dog owners will be free to bring their own toys and apparel during their session. Dog owners will be required to clear up after their dogs, and foul waste bins will be placed inside the gate to the paddock, emptied regularly, and disposed of in appropriate ways. Modest signage will be placed on

the wings either side of the entrance gateway, to indicate the location to first time, and prospective users, along with site rules.

3. SITE ASSESSMENT

i) Physical Context

The land is located within Deeping St Nicholas, immediately adjacent to the A1175 within the 40mph speed limit, to the west of the railway crossing. The field is a triangular shaped grass field of 3.17 hectares of which 1.21 hectares will be fenced to create the exercise paddock, together with an area of hard standing covering 300 sqm to the eastern apex, which will be gravelled. The land is classed as agricultural, but due to its location, size and shape, it is becoming increasingly unsuitable for cropping and is an unproductive and idle part of the applicant's farming business.

The site sits in "open countryside", with a small holding immediately to the northeast, the railway line to the south and a drainage ditch and the A1175 to the immediate north. There is currently a 7m wide double gateway from the A1175 onto an existing concrete farm track, to allow access onto adjoining areas of farmland to the east of the railway line. The south side is open, with an opening through to the applicant's adjoining farmland.

The proposed application seeks to re-utilise the land for use as an enclosed and safe place in which dog owners can exercise their dogs, off the lead. The area for the exercise paddock would remain as grass, maintained at a suitable level for exercising and training of dogs, and a small area of hard standing would be installed to form the designated car parking area, set out for three car parking spaces. There will also be an open sided wooden field shelter within the paddock for users to shelter during inclement weather.

The existing site entrance is in our opinion sufficient for safe access and egress to and from the site. We consider the site to be suitable for the proposed use.

ii) Social Context

The dog exercise paddock will provide safe and secure facilities in which dog owners from Deeping St Nicholas and the local area can allow their dogs to exercise and run around off the lead, without fear of escape. The enterprise will be available for private hire users, and those who undertake dog training and care professionally.

iii) Economic Context

The proposal is a diversification away from core farming activities and utilises an otherwise unproductive and unprofitable area of land to provide an alternative income stream to the applicant's business. This is particularly important under the current circumstances, with falling farm incomes, and a reduction in the subsidy support to farmers following withdrawal from the EU. Alternative income streams are therefore likely to play an important part in supporting farming businesses and safeguarding existing employment.

4. PLANNING POLICY

This planning application has considered the Development Plan of the recently adopted Local Plan for South Holland District Council, and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). In the section below, we consider whether the proposal constitutes sustainable development in line with the Development Plan and the NPPF.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines national policy guidance and was last updated in July 2021. The key principle of the NPPF, as stated in paragraph 11, is a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The Local Planning Authorities (LPA), are first directed to approve developments that fit with their Development Plan “without delay”, but where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission unless:

- i) the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed; or
- ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.

Paragraph 84 sets out the planning policies should support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity by taking a positive approach to sustainable new development. It goes on to say that to promote a strong rural economy, local and neighbourhood plans should:

“- the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses”

“- sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside;” and

“- the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.”

The proposed application relates to a diversification enterprise, utilising an otherwise unproductive field to provide a facility for local people to use for leisure activities with their dogs. The site can also be accessed from the village, along footpath adjacent to A1175.

Local Planning Authority Development Plan

South East Lincolnshire adopted a new Local Plan on 8th March 2019 for the planning period 2011 – 2036, and therefore the Development Plan to consider in relation to this application is the adopted South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011 - 2036.

Within the Local Plan, ‘Our Vision’ states;

“The delivery of new sustainably designed homes (both market and affordable), as well as additional employment opportunities, will meet the needs of all the population. This will be supported by the necessary facilities, services and infrastructure that create healthy, mixed and balanced communities. Through growth, health inequalities and community deprivation will have been reduced.”

Supporting this within its ‘Strategic Priorities’ section the Plan further states that;

“To provide the right conditions and sufficient land in appropriate locations to help diversify and strengthen the economic base of South East Lincolnshire to meet the needs of existing businesses, to attract new businesses and sources of employment, and to maximise the potential historic and environmental assets can have for sustainable tourism.”

Connected closely to the successful Vine House Farm Shop and Café, we believe that this additional local community facility and visitor attraction will not only provide additional part time employment to the village, but the development will have negligible impact on the surrounding area

Spatial Strategy within the plan promotes this further by stating;

“In the Countryside development will be permitted that is necessary to such a location and/or where it can be demonstrated that it meets the sustainable development needs of the area in terms of economic, community or environmental benefits.”

Policy 7 also promotes additional employment by stating;

“The South East Lincolnshire authorities will, in principle, support proposals which assist in the delivery of economic prosperity and some 17,600 jobs in the area, 3,800 in Boston Borough and 13,800 in South Holland District. Of these about 10,300 jobs fall into Class B.” and;

“New employment development/businesses or the extension of an existing business outside the above allocated employment sites will be supported provided that the proposal involves the re-use of previously developed land or the conversion/re-use of redundant buildings. Where it can be demonstrated that no suitable building capable of conversion/re-use is available or the re-use of previously developed land is not available or is unsuitable, proposals on non-allocated sites may be acceptable provided:

- a. the development does not conflict with neighbouring land uses;
- b. there is no significant adverse impact upon the character and appearance of the area;
- c. the design is responsive to the local context;
- d. there will be no significant adverse impact on the local highway network;
- e. there will be no significant adverse impact upon the viability of delivering any allocated employment site;
- f. proposals maximising opportunities for modal shift away from the private car are demonstrated;
- g. there is an identified need for the business location outside of identified employment areas on the Policies Map.

We are satisfied that these criteria, where applicable, are met within the application. In particular, the impact of the development will be minimal, but for the installation of 1.8 metre high wire mesh secure fencing and gates, along with a 3x5 metre open field shelter and a small area of gravelled hardstanding within the car park compound.

The success of the Vine House Farm Shop and Café will be further promoted with the development of this Dog Exercise paddock. With over 160,000 visitors in 2022, Policy 9: Promoting a Stronger Visitor Economy, supports this existing business by stating;

“Proposals for tourism and visitor development which utilise and enrich the natural and built environment and existing attractions of South East Lincolnshire to the benefit of the local economy, visitors and local communities will be supported within the boundaries of settlements identified in Policy 1. Outside these settlements, small-scale development to support the visitor economy, including farm diversification, equine development and fishing lakes, will be supported provided that the locality; and 3. demonstrate a functional link with an existing rural attraction or farm enterprise.”

Further to this, paragraph 3.2.15 states;

“The Countryside of South East Lincolnshire is a precious resource, mainly in its role for agriculture but also for recreation. There are types of development that require a Countryside location either because it is the location of an existing building or use South East Lincolnshire Local Plan 2011-36 of land. Where changes to such buildings or land uses require planning permission Policy 1 and other more detailed Local Plan policies will apply. Agriculture and forestry are clearly uses which must function in the Countryside but other uses which may diversify from agriculture and forestry, e.g. recreation and tourism, can meet the broad sustainable objectives of the Local Plan”

Again, we believe that the application is also within keeping with those criteria. The application is a diversification from the main farming enterprise, reutilising otherwise unproductive and unprofitable land, and will benefit the farming business.

5. DESIGN

i) Amount, Scale and Layout

Dog Exercise Paddock

In developing the scheme, high regard has been given towards the effect of the proposal on the character and appearance of the area. The nature of the use means that the land will remain open and grassed, as it is now, whilst the style of fencing is considered not overly obtrusive within the local landscape.

The dog exercise paddock will cover an area of 1.21 ha. Grass will be maintained at a sward length suitable for dogs to run around in. Access will be gained from a 4.6m x 1.2m high metal and mesh gate, dividing the car parking area from the exercise paddock (see gate “C” of gate elevations).

Secure “dog-proof” fencing would need to be constructed around the site. The intended “mesh fencing, which will measure at 1.9m (6ft), is designed to appear minimalist and retain a suitable degree of transparency, as not to negatively impact on the open character of the location. The fence will be supported by 1.9m high timber posts placed every 5m along the boundary, with strainer posts every 70m, or at a corner.

The photo below gives an indicative example:



There will also be a small 3m x 5m open sided wooden field shelter within the exercise paddock to provide some shelter to users. This will be a wooden construction and finished in a clear coat wood preservative.



Car Park

The existing concrete farm access track running from the A1175 towards the railway will be used to allow vehicular access to the site, the applicant intends to make repairs and improvements to this roadway in order for users to have hazard free and suitable access to the facility.

To the East of the entrance, a 300 sqm car parking area will be installed, accessed through a 4.6m x 1.8m gateway "B" on the attached plan. This will be gravelled surfaced with three car parking spaces, and also fenced with wire mesh so as not to obstruct views over the open countryside beyond.



A 4.6m x 1.2m gateway “D” will also be installed from the car park. This is wide enough to allow a mower to maintain the grass length. Users will be able to access the dog exercise paddock via a 1.2 x 1.2m metal gate.



ii) Landscaping

With regard to existing landscaping within the site, it is not proposed to alter or remove any existing trees or hedges as part of the proposal. In addition, a new mixed species hedgerow boundary will be planted running alongside the fence line to the south western boundary. This will provide shade and some natural shelter from cross winds from the south. An area of hedgerow to the east of the paddock will be retained for wildlife refuge.

iii) Appearance

The fence line to the car park and exercise paddock will be mesh fencing, so as to remain transparent. The open shelter will be of wooden construction using a clear coat preservative. The paddock will also have a number of enrichment features including a field shelter (seen in section 5), tunnel, natural log for climbing and balancing, recycled tyres for running through. Indicative images are shown below.





iv) Flood Risk

The site is within flood zone 3 for planning terms, and has a high probability of flooding. However, since the application will not change the vegetative surface of the land as a grass paddock, and with only a small area of porous gravel for car parking, we do not consider there is an increased risk of flooding as a result.

v) Historical Features

The site is not listed, nor within the immediate vicinity of a conservation area or ancient scheduled monument.

6. ACCESS

The site is accessed from A1175, via an existing gateway into the site. The existing access road is situated within the posted 40mph stretch of the public highway, with open and clear views of traffic travelling in either direction of the A1175 allowing vehicles to safely enter and leave the site.

Visibility lines are satisfactory in both directions for a road under the requirements of the national speed limit, with visibility of 270m to north-bound traffic when looking right out the entrance, and 425m to south-bound traffic to the left, when set 2.5m back from the kerb edge. The access is wide enough to allow a car to be exiting at the same time as one is entering the site, and therefore there should be no reason for traffic to be waiting on the road.

The usage of the site will not, however, create significant extra movement of traffic into and out of the location given that there are limitations on the number of users per booking.



8. Dog park operation

- i, the proposed hours of operation are 7am – 7pm 7 days a week. This will alter with the seasons, with closing time in the winter earlier due to natural day light.
- ii, all dog owners will be required to book a 50 minute time slot, on an online booking portal with a 10 minute change over period between sessions
- iii, the paddock will be limited to a maximum of 6 dogs at anyone time and 3 owners. It is however envisaged that for the majority of the bookings there will be just one owner with one or two dogs
- iv, the operation of booking slots will be limited to day light hours in the winter
- v, Dog waste bins will be available within the paddock and car park, these will be collected on a regular basis by an external company.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The application seeks the change of use of an otherwise unproductive grass field within the village of Deeping St Nicholas, for use as a dog exercise paddock, that local residents and professional dog trainers and carers can hire for up to an hour at a time. The change of use will involve only very minor alterations to the existing site, with the erection of secure mesh fencing and the reconfiguration of the existing access the only material changes. The aspect, street scene and landscape will not alter as a result of the scheme.

The change of use application accords with both National and Local planning policy pertinent to development in the countryside, the rural economy and diversification from agriculture, and we therefore respectfully believe that this application should be granted consent from the Local Planning Authority without delay.