

Equestrian/Racehorse Industry

Policy CS 12

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Equestrian/Racehorse Industry Development

Proposals for equestrian related development that provides diversification opportunities for farmers, helps to strengthen the rural economy, and increases opportunities for people to enjoy the countryside in a sustainable way, will be supported.

Development associated with equestrian activities will be encouraged where the reuse of existing buildings is considered before any new build; and the scale, form, impact, character, siting, and level of activity is in keeping with its location. Proposals for associated new residential accommodation in the countryside will be permitted where genuine need is suitably demonstrated through a business case and accommodation cannot be reasonably secured within existing settlements.

North Wessex Downs AONB Racehorse Industry

Whilst conserving environmental quality and countryside character, the racehorse breeding and training industry in the AONB will be maintained, and its sensitive growth will be allowed for. Within this context:

- suitable existing establishments or facilities are expected to be retained;
- permanent fragmentation will be resisted; and
- redevelopment away from uses essential to the horseracing industry will be subject to the tests of suitability and necessity outlined in the explanation of the policy.

Newbury Racecourse

Newbury Racecourse's viability as a major tourist attraction and economic driver will be maintained and future development proposals should have a positive impact upon the ability of the Racecourse to continue operations as normal and potentially expand in the future. Proposals within and adjacent to Newbury Racecourse will be design and community led to secure high quality sustainable development that is sensitive to the environmental quality and historic character of the area.

Explanation of the Policy

5.72 Equestrian activities and related development, and the racehorse breeding and training industry are characteristic features of West Berkshire, and are of particular importance to the rural economy. The North Wessex Downs AONB is home to around 10%⁽⁶⁸⁾ of Britain's racehorse trainers and the Lambourn area is a nationally important centre of activity for the horseracing industry second only to Newmarket. The policy recognises the important links between the various aspects of the equestrian industry and the shared facilities and infrastructure that supports it, such as farriers, veterinary practices, horse feed merchants and the important role riding schools and recreational uses play in providing the racehorse industry with people interested in equine matters.

68 A study of the key effects of the horseracing industry on the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Council of Partners, 2007) available to view at www.northwessexdowns.org.uk

5 Core Policies

5.73 Within an overall context of development restraint in the countryside, the policy aims to allow for the sensitive development and growth of the industry whilst conserving environmental quality and countryside character. This includes the built and natural form, and social and economic aspects such as the influence of the racehorse industry as part of the local economy which gives Lambourn its unique character. Development proposals will need to be in keeping with the character and appearance of the local area and prevent the spread of the built form in the countryside and AONB. Outside of settlements, preference will be given to proposals that seek to locate within valleys and avoid development on hilltops or ridgelines.

Racehorse Industry

5.74 In relation to the racehorse industry within the North Wessex Downs AONB, the policy aims to prevent pressure for redevelopment of existing facilities to other uses, and fragmentation of existing sites. These pressures could lead to the decline of the industry locally, threaten the character and form of settlements, and increase pressure for replacement facilities in environmentally sensitive areas. Protecting training yards from development for alternative uses is particularly important in difficult times for the Industry.

5.75 The variety in yard sizes is an important feature for the industry in this area and this can help support the start up of new trainers. Throughout a trainer's career they will require different sized yards at different times for a variety of reasons, and a range of yard sizes allows them to move within the same area, retaining access to local gallops, staff and owners. A small yard could range in size from 10 to 40 horses and could work with as few as six boxes. Given the Rules of Racing⁽⁶⁹⁾, it is difficult to sub-divide yards. As such, spare box capacity does not demonstrate an ability to go without certain individual yards which are important for new trainers and for those who are down-sizing their operations.

5.76 Access to gallops is important for yards and opportunities for improving access routes should be fully explored before a yard is considered for re-use or redevelopment. In considering access to gallops, a trainer would consider safety of the horses and the time taken to get to the gallops which will depend on the number of horses in training, how many riders are used, and how many outings to the gallops are needed. Some trainers will depend upon the gallops provided and maintained by the Jockey Club Estate.

Applying the policy

5.77 In terms of interpreting Policy CS12, existing establishments or facilities includes land and buildings relating to the racehorse industry, including residential development.

Suitability test: In considering the suitability of existing establishments, the key factors to consider will be:

1. the location of the site relating to the form and character of the settlement;
2. the existing range of facilities on the site and their adequacy for the purpose of training and/or breeding horses, or their capability for adaptation to meet such needs;
3. the availability of and access to (including the potential for improved access) suitable gallops and training areas;
4. the impact on local roads including the safety of horses and riders and traffic using the highway; and
5. the availability of sources of labour and the accommodation of personnel on site or in the locality.

5.78 It is not the intention of the policy to retain training and breeding establishments that are no longer appropriate. The Council accepts that it cannot control the closure of businesses where there is little or no support and which are not economically viable. However, it can ensure that racehorse industry facilities are not displaced by redevelopment or changes to other land uses without first considering the consequences and potential loss to the industry. It can also ensure that applications for re-use or redevelopment should conserve the character and amenities of the settlement, the landscape and rural quality of the surrounding countryside and not materially harm the availability of local employment opportunities.

Necessity test: Proposals for redevelopment or change of use will need to show that it is no longer necessary to retain the yard or facility in its current use. In order to show that there is no longer a demand for the yard or facility in that particular location, a robust marketing plan, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority, will be required as evidence from the applicant to show that all reasonable attempts have been made to sell or let the site at a realistic price. Any proposal for the loss of a training yard will need to demonstrate how it will not detrimentally alter the critical balance and/or range of yard sizes available in the area. It is important to retain a supply of yards which are of various sizes to allow for market churn.

5.79 Proposals for fragmentation of existing establishments and facilities should not adversely affect the operational use of the site or the industry as a whole.

5.80 It is acknowledged that there is a need in some circumstances to provide accommodation close to hand in order to provide 24 hour supervision as part of licensing requirements, or for the effective running of an establishment. It is the Council's preference for workers to be accommodated within existing nearby villages, so as to contribute to the overall sustainability of settlements and limit development in the countryside.

Newbury Racecourse

5.81 For Newbury Racecourse, the policy aims to ensure that the Racecourse maintains its status as a premier sporting and major events venue. The policy seeks to allow for sensitive development of the Racecourse and surrounding areas which do not have a negative impact upon the ability of the Racecourse to continue operations as normal or restrain expansion opportunities in the future.

Delivery and Monitoring

This policy will be implemented through the determination of planning applications relating to the equestrian industry and further guidance may be prepared through a Supplementary Planning Document.

The Newbury Racecourse whilst allocated as a strategic site within the Core Strategy gained planning consent in April 2010 and is likely to be implemented through the terms of that consent.

The policy will be monitored through development completed/permitted within the AONB and the monitoring of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan.