

9 DCNC2004/3698/F - PROPOSED THERAPEUTIC RIDING CENTRE COMPRISING INDOOR AND OUTDOOR ARENAS WITH ASSOCIATED FACILITIES, STABLE YARD AND HAY STORE AT WHARTON BANK FARM, WHARTON, LEOMINSTER, HEREFORDSHIRE, HR6 0NX

For: Herefordshire Riding for the Disabled per David Taylor Consultants, The Wheelwright's Shop, Pudleston, Leominster, Herefordshire, HR6 0RE

Date Received:
26th October 2004

Ward:
Leominster South

Grid Ref:
50619, 55511

Expiry Date:
21st December 2004

Local Member: Councillor Burke and Councillor Thomas

1. Site Description and Proposal

- 1.1 The site lies to the west of the B4361 in the small hamlet of Wharton/Ford Bridge, approximately 1.5 miles south of Leominster Town. The site forms part of the former agricultural holding known as Wharton Bank and was formerly used as a silage clamp. Immediately to the east are a range of additional agricultural buildings which are now being converted into private residences. Beyond these are a number of detached and semi-detached properties sited linearly between the road and the main Hereford-Shrewsbury railway line. Ground levels are relatively uneven both within and surrounding the proposed area to be developed with the site being elevated above the nearby main road.
- 1.2 The site lies within the open countryside with the landscape being designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value and also described as a Principal Wooded Hills landscape within the Landscape Character Assessment. To the north and running through the site is footpath/bridleway No. ZC82 and much of the land to the east is designated as falling within the flood plain and is an Environment Agency classification Flood Zone 1.
- 1.3 The application has been submitted by Herefordshire Riding for the Disabled who are a registered charity. It comprises the construction of a bespoke building to be used as an indoor riding arena measuring 75m in length x 45m in width x 9m in height to the ridge of the roof. The indoor arena building will also incorporate a terraced seating area, staff facilities including kitchen, toilets, conference room, teaching rooms, volunteers room and manager's office with a principal entrance and reception area in the form of an octagonal two-storey tower. Also attached to the arena building by way of the vehicle width link is a stable yard development comprising 19 loose boxes with ancillary facilities such as office, tack room, feed store and toilets. To the rear (west) of the main buildings is an outdoor manege measuring 40m in length x 30m in width along with a further open-sided agricultural building to be used for the storage of hay of

15.5m in length x 10m in width x 9m in height. An existing access off the B4361 is to be utilised with a new access track to be constructed along with various hard and soft landscaping and a reed/willow bed foul drainage system.

2. Policies

2.1 National Policies

PPS7 – Sustainable Development in Rural Areas

2.2 Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan

E6 – Commercial development in rural areas

CTC2 – Areas of Great Landscape Value

CTC6 – Landscape features

CTC9 – Development requirements

A1 – Development on agricultural land

A2 – Diverse agricultural diversification

A3 – Agricultural buildings

LR1 & LR2 – Leisure and recreational development

2.3 Leominster District Local Plan (Herefordshire)

A1 – Managing the district's assets and resources

A2 – Settlement hierarchy

A9 – Safeguarding the rural landscape

A12 – New development and landscape schemes

A15 – Development and watercourses

A16 – Foul drainage

A35 – Rural employment and economic development

A38 – Rural tourism and recreational activities

A41 – Protection of agricultural land

A42 – Agricultural buildings

A45 – Diversification on farms

A61 – Community, social and recreational facilities

A66 – Access for the disabled

A70 – Accommodating traffic from developments

A78 – Protection of Public Rights of Way

2.4 Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft)

S1 – Sustainable development

S2 – Development requirements

S7 – Natural and historic heritage

S8 – Recreation, sport and tourism

DR1 – Design

DR2 – Land use and activity

DR3 – Movements

DR4 – Environment

E11 – Employment in small settlements in open countryside

E13 – Agricultural and forestry development

E15 – Protection of green field land

LA2 – Landscape character and areas least resilient to change
LA6 – Landscaping schemes
RST1 – Criteria for recreational sport and tourism development
RST6 – Countryside access
S11 – Community facilities and services

3. Planning History

NC2003/3508/S - Re-stoning existing farm track. Prior approval not required 22.12.03.

4. Consultation Summary

Statutory Consultations

- 4.1 Environment Agency: 'The site lies within Flood Zone 1 where the primary risk to flooding is generated by surface water run off. The Agency therefore expects the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems and recommends a condition concerning prior agreement of surface and foul drainage systems.'

Internal Council Advice

- 4.2 Traffic Manager: No objection subject to conditions concerning improved visibility from the access and the provision of suitable parking and vehicle manoeuvring area.
- 4.3 Public Rights of Way Manager: The development is not acceptable as it will obstruct Public Bridleway ZC82. A Division Order is required to enable the development to be carried out, which must be confirmed and certified before the development is substantially complete.
- 4.4 Head of Forward Planning: The application fails to meet the criteria laid out in Policies A1, A2 and A9 of the Leominster District Local Plan. The scale and design of the proposal would be harmful to the AGLV and the location would generate car journeys. There may be exceptional circumstances under Policy A2 that could permit this development.
- 4.5 Head of Environmental Health and Trading Standards: No objection subject to conditions concerning restriction on operating hours during the construction phase and control over the disposal of stable waste.
- 4.6 Landscape Officer: Comments predominately included within officers appraisal but conclude with 'I recommend that permission be refused for this development because it would have a harmful effect on the AGLV and would thus be contrary to policy A9 of the Leominster District Local Plan (1999)'

5. Representations

- 5.1 Leominster Town Council: Recommend approval.
- 5.2 One letter of objection has been received from Ian and Linda Hamilton, Cook's Folly, Wharton. The main points raised are:

1) Wharton Bank Farm has been developed into a housing estate. We are continually plagued by the obnoxious smell from Wharton Court and we are now faced with the prospect of a riding school adjoining our land. Surely this small hamlet of Wharton has been developed enough.

2) There have been 3 accidents in the last 3 years within 100 yards of Cook's Folly. The proposed entrance to the development will be very close to a blind bend and the increase in traffic is likely to increase the number of accidents.

3) We are concerned with the noise generated by a complex of this size.

4) The visual impact of the development will be an eyesore on the beautiful natural landscape.

5) We are concerned the development will lead to increased risk of flooding by surface water run off.

5.3 29 letters of support have been received. These include letters from Herefordshire NHS Integrated Learning Disability Service, The Martha Trust, Hereford, SCOPE - for people with cerebral palsy, local specialist schools such as Barrs Court School, Stable Cottage Care Home, Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School, and Social Services and Housing Department of Herefordshire Council. Supporting information has been provided by the applicants and their agent, which will be referred to in the officer's appraisal.

The main points raised are:

1) Wharton has the advantage of good access to off-road riding to complement the proposed development as well as good road communications.

2) The plans are carefully considered in order to blend into the landscape.

3) The charity has sought other sites in other parts of the county.

4) The benefit of these facilities for children with severe, profound and multiple learning disabilities or autism and challenging behaviours is remarkable with pupils gaining in confidence and self-esteem and becoming more relaxed and developing concentration and listening skills as well as developing language and communication skills. This proposal will allow the number of sessions for the children to be increased both during and outside of school times, especially after school, weekends and holidays.

5) Herefordshire Riding for the Disabled is an admirable charity dependent upon voluntary contributions from many ordinary people who have been touched by the distress of the disabled whether from illness or accident.

6) The site is the most conveniently located area central to the county with good access roads. The design of the development is sensitive to the surrounding landscape.

7) The existing facility at Holme Lacy does not provide enough staff, horses or facilities to allow more people to benefit from working with horses.

The full text of these letters can be inspected at Central Planning Services, Blueschool House, Blueschool Street, Hereford and prior to the Sub-Committee meeting.

6. Officers Appraisal

- 6.1 Before considering the planning issues, it will be useful for members to understand the nature of the applicants business and what has led to the submission of this application. Herefordshire Riding for the Disabled (HRDA) is a charity, which provides therapeutic riding for adults and children with all levels and types of disabilities, both mental and physical. Disabled people are referred to RDA by medical, educational and social services from across the West Midlands including Shropshire and Worcestershire, Herefordshire and mid-Wales. RDA also treat road traffic accident and stroke victims directly from hospital.
- 6.2 HRDA is one of only a few centres nationwide who offer hippo therapy (physiotherapy on horseback). HRDA currently rent a premises at Holme Lacy College but have been given notice to quit within the next 2 to 3 years due to the College's future redevelopment plans. There is presently a client waiting list with the need to expand the existing premises to cater for future expansion plans including offering NVQ training for special needs students along with other specialist courses.
- 6.3 HRDA have been actively looking for a new site for a number of years. Six sites in particular have been given serious thought, which are Westhide, OS585442, Mill Farm, Credenhill, OS446430, Hampton Bishop, OS545386, St Mary's School, Lugwardine, OS548408, Lady Bank Farm, Credenhill, OS446439, and New Court Farm, Lugwardine, OS544414. All these sites have proved unsuitable for various reasons including negative planning reaction, poor access, unacceptable landscape impact, flood risks and restrictions on the purchase of the land.
- 6.4 In considering the determination of this application there are two principal planning issues, which must be assessed.
- 1) The principle of development,
 - 2) Landscape impact.
- 1) The principle of development
- 6.5 It is estimated that the proposal will create 8 full-time and 11 part-time staff, in addition to NVQ students employed with base training. The existing premises at Holme Lacy also has around 92 regular volunteers and it is likely that this figure will increase given the scale of the development proposed. In view of this, the proposal must be assessed against employment as well as community and recreational policies within the Development Plans. Policy A35 of the Leominster District Local Plan and Policy E11 of the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan (Revised Deposit Draft) both state that large-scale development for employment uses in the open countryside should not be permitted. The floor area of the main building alone is around 2650 square metres (28,525 square feet) therefore the development is unquestionably large scale.
- 6.6 Policy A61 of the Leominster District Local Plan concerning community, social and recreational facilities states that:
- 6.7 'Proposals for new community, social and recreational facilities and services which aim to satisfy health, general welfare, recreational and social needs will be permitted where

they accord with criteria listed within Policy A1 of the Local Plan, are appropriate in scale to the need of the local community and reflect the character of the area and are located within or around the settlement within the area they serve.'

Again, the proposal does not accord with the criteria contained within this policy or Policy A1.

- 6.8 However, the proposal serves an extremely wide catchment area with the majority of its staff and volunteers emanating from rural areas (reflecting horse ownership). All of the users of the facilities are transported by bus. The Hereford-Leominster bus route passes the site entrance with a bus stop being in close proximity. In view of this, the opportunity exists for staff and volunteers to commute to the site by non-car based modes of transport. Whilst the proposal does not accord with the employment, community, and general sustainability principles outlined in the Development Plans, the nature of the proposal and the people that it serves is such that it is unlikely the development could ever be fully sustainable and therefore the principle of the development in the location proposed is accepted.

2) Landscape Impact

- 6.9 A pre-application proposal for the site in question was submitted in April of last year, with the applicants being advised that the proposal could not be supported due to the harmful impact that the development would have on the character and appearance of the landscape. This view has not changed. The site lies within an Area of Great Landscape Value.
- 6.10 Policy A9 of the Leominster District Local Plan states:
'The beauty and amenity of the rural landscape will be conserved and enhanced by paying particular regard to the design, scale, character and location of development proposals to ensure that they do not detract from the quality and visual appearance of the landscape within which they sit.'
- 6.11 The proposal is for a large development (much larger than most agricultural buildings) in an elevated position. The site is also prominent being readily visible from the A49, the B4361, the railway line, footpaths in the locality, and from slopes above Marlbrook on the opposite side of the Lugg valley. The visual impact is compounded by the overall scale of the development and particularly the large expanse of roof to the indoor riding arena, which will be visually intrusive in this planned position.
- 6.12 The applicants have recognised the prominent and elevated position of the site and have tried to mitigate the visual impact of the main riding arena building by excavating it some 3m into the rising ground levels. Landscaping is also proposed on the most visible elevations. However, the Landscape Officer also raises concerns regarding the extent of excavation and the large-scale embankments that would result, which would look artificial and further detract from the landscape. The site is also classified as Principal Wooded Hills within the Supplementary Planning Guidance Landscape Character Assessment. The definition of such a landscape is described as 'highly visible landscapes framing long-distance views and therefore their visual integrity is of paramount importance in the rural landscape.' The proposal is also considered to be contrary to guidance contained within this Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- 6.13 Members should, however, be aware that landscape policy A9 of the Leominster District Local Plan, criteria 2, states that

‘Proposals should only be permitted which would not adversely affect the landscape quality of the Area of Great Landscape Value unless the exceptional need for the development is sufficient to outweigh the need for protection.’

This policy does therefore allow for developments to be permitted in exceptional cases even where the impact on the landscape is considered to be harmful.

6.14 Having carefully considered and balanced out the planning issues including the social benefits of the proposal, it is felt that as the proposed development is not site specific, a more appropriate location could be found which is acceptable in landscape terms.

RECOMMENDATION

That planning permission be refused for the following reason:

- 1 The proposal is for a large-scale development in an elevated and prominent position within the landscape which is designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value. It is considered that the development by virtue of its siting and design would have a harmful impact on the Area of Great Landscape Value contrary to Policies CTC2, CTC6 and CTC9 of the Hereford and Worcester County Structure Plan, Policy A9 of the Leominster District Local Plan (Herefordshire) and advice contained within the Council's adopted Supplementary Planning Guidance entitled Landscape Character Assessment and Planning Policy Statement 7:Sustainable Development In Rural Areas.**

Decision:

Notes:

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Background Papers

Internal departmental consultation replies.