

**Mereworth
(Mereworth)**

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TM/15/01576/FL

Downs And Mereworth

Proposal: Conversion of equestrian buildings to form 1no. residential dwelling and associated works
Location: Land Opposite Highlands Farmhouse Horns Lane Mereworth Maidstone Kent
Applicant: Mrs Claire Trevill

1. Description:

- 1.1 Planning permission is sought to convert equestrian buildings on this site to a one bedroom live/work unit. The extension to the building has been limited to a 4 sqm link between the two equestrian buildings on the site; this link would be timber boarding to one side and glazed to the other. The link would allow the kitchen/diner and bathroom proposed in one of the buildings to give access to the bedroom and office proposed in the second building.
- 1.2 All existing window and door openings are to be reused with only one new window being proposed in the gable end of the existing hay barn which would allow the owner to monitor the horses out at grass. Existing stable doors would remain visually the same as the exterior; the bottom section would become part of the fixed part of the external wall while the top section would form a window shutter.
- 1.3 The external walls of the existing building would remain as existing, with conversion works limited to internal modifications and new roof lights. The existing felt roof covering would be replaced with an insulated composite panel system. There would be no visible roof to the link extension as it would be formed under the existing roof overhang. Internally, it would be necessary to construct new insulated skin within the confines of the existing building envelope. This would include works to the existing concrete floor slab, external walls and underside of the existing roof structure.
- 1.4 The residential curtilage of the converted building would be limited to 65 sqm, which is proposed to be situated on what was previously part of the concrete stable yard. The remainder of the existing stable yard (approx. 190 sqm) would be returned to paddock and the manure bunker removed. The existing tack room would be retained for storage.
- 1.5 The applicant has indicated that in recent years they have been repeatedly targeted by thieves who have stolen property and caused damage to property. The applicant now feels that she can no longer stable the horses, preferring to leave them permanently turned out. The converted building would allow the applicant to permanently monitor the site and protect the horses. The applicant has a mobile

field shelter for the horses to use during extreme weather conditions and hay is grown by the applicant so only a minimal amount of storage is required.

- 1.6 The application has been accompanied by a Planning Statement and a Design and Access Statement. Additionally the application includes a structural report of the buildings which concludes that the building is capable of conversion without any significant structural alterations or rebuilding, and a biodiversity assessment which recommends that lighting should be sensitive, new planting should encourage biological diversity, watching brief regarding bats and alternative nesting should be provided for birds, especially swallows.

2. Reason for reporting to Committee:

- 2.1 Called in by Ward Councillors due to local concerns and MGB policies.

3. The Site:

- 3.1 This site is located in the Green Belt and in the countryside. It is directly to the east of Horns Lane. The existing building consists of three loose boxes, a tack room and a hay barn, which was granted planning permission in 1993. The timber buildings are single storey with a pitched felted roof in an L-shaped configuration. The stables are accessed via a gravel vehicular track off Horns Lane. Wooden security gates, with a metal barrier in front, are located at the site entrance. The site is obscured from Horns Lane by mature hedgerows.
- 3.2 The existing stables provide stabling for the 12 acres that are used for grazing by the applicant's horses. The applicant has indicated that of the 12 acres they have, 8 acres are used for the growing of hay and the remaining 4 acres are used for rotational grazing. The applicant has 2 horses.
- 3.3 The site has been visited and it is noted that there is a field shelter (on skids) in one of the fields and a block of two stables (on skids) in another field. There is also a large wooden shed in the existing stable courtyard (that is not shown on the plans) which has been erected and is used as a hay store. Tack and other equipment is currently stored in the secure storage area at the end of the main stable block and it is proposed to be maintained for this use if the conversion takes place.
- 3.4 To the west of the site, on the opposite side of Horns Lane, is Old Highlands Farmhouse. To the south of the site is Highlands Farm.

4. Planning History (relevant):

TM/93/00844/FL grant with conditions 16 July 1993

Provision of stable block, tack room and free standing hay store together with parking and turning area

TM/93/00845/RM grant with conditions 7 June 1994

Details of materials, part details of landscaping, and means of disposal of manure submitted pursuant to conditions 2, 5 and 3 of permission TM/93/0430FL

5. Consultees:

5.1 Private Reps (and Art 13 site notice) (2/4R/0S/OX) (including CPRE Tonbridge and Malling district) centred on the following concerns:-

- Main reason for requiring conversion is to monitor security of the site, yet there have been no reported thefts on the police website in the last 12 months; moreover people who live opposite and local policeman at PC meeting are not aware of any problems at the site. Also not aware of any harm to the horses on the site. No evidence put forward as to how they have combatted the security problem at the site. Site is already secure with the high wooden gate promoting CCTV cameras in operation and a heavy duty metal barrier in front;
- There has been little equine activity at the site in recent months, few horses and horses are not ridden;
- The quality of the residence is low and contrary to Policy CP24;
- Consider that the application is a precursor of additional more extensive development at a later stage for financial gain;
- Not considered a live – work unit, more like a residence with a space for a home computer;
- Consider in future will require more buildings to be erected at the site for the horses;
- Proposal will result in residential paraphernalia external to the built development;
- New field of horses recently set up at junction of Horns Lane with Beech Road – very popular area for horse grazing and demonstrates that the owners must feel safe with this green field zone;
- If allowed in future planning application maybe made for a more substantial styled residential property.

5.2 PC: Strongly object to the application – comment that the dwelling appears to be needed to monitor the horses given past (unspecified) history of vandalism. There are no records of break-ins in the recent past and the Police have no knowledge of any issues of vandalism on this site. Have alternative solutions been considered

such as CCTV? This application is in the Green Belt where development should only be allowed in exceptional circumstances.

6. Determining Issues:

- 6.1 Policy CP3 of the TMBCS reflects national Green Belt policy in the NPPF. Paragraphs 87-88 stated that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in “very special circumstances”. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. ‘Very special circumstances’ will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.
- 6.2 Paragraph 90 of the NPPF states that certain forms of development are not inappropriate in the Green Belt provided they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. This includes the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of a permanent and substantial construction.
- 6.3 Policy CP14 of the TMBCS allows for the appropriate conversion of an existing building to residential use.
- 6.4 Policy DC1 of the MDE DPD (adopted April 2010) relates to the re-use of rural buildings. This policy states that proposals for the reuse of existing rural buildings that are of permanent and sound construction and capable of conversion without major or complete reconstruction will be permitted subject to meeting the following criteria:
- The building and any alterations proposed are of a form, bulk and general design and of materials which are in keeping with the character of the area;
 - The proposed use is acceptable in terms of residential and rural amenity, highway impacts and the use of land surrounding the buildings, and can be accommodated without requiring the erection of extensions or ancillary buildings;
 - The proposed use does not result in the fragmentation and/or severance of an agricultural holding;
 - Any landscaping scheme is appropriate to its rural location;
- 6.5 An independent structural survey has been undertaken by the applicant and submitted as part of the application. This report stated that the buildings could be converted without substantial alterations; the work proposed to the buildings is set out in the report.

- 6.6 The proposed package of alterations to the exterior of buildings and the partly glazed link would, in my opinion, harm the intrinsic character of this rural building.
- 6.7 These 2 buildings are extremely typical of lightweight timber buildings often expressly permitted in constrained MGB and countryside locations throughout the Borough as appropriate, i.e. being small scale essential facilities to serve a rural leisure use. Notwithstanding the submitted independent structural survey, Members may agree that the proposed works to the building including adding of internal insulation together with the new roof covering and the addition of a link (this is essential to the creation of the dwelling) is effectively a substantial reconstruction of the building, as opposed to a genuine conversion. I am of the view that the proposal is inappropriate in Green Belt terms.
- 6.8 In addition, whilst the domestic garden area is small, it will still introduce domestic paraphernalia into the locality. The introduction of domestic comings and goings will harm the rural and Green Belt amenities.
- 6.9 Existing trees, hedges and fencing are to be retained on the site, and there will also be additional planting. Moreover a large area of hard surfacing on the site is to be returned to paddock. However in order to facilitate the conversion, the applicant has had to erect a detached building (which does not have the benefit of planning permission) to be used as a hay store and further buildings (on skids) have been erected in the fields (these buildings are often chattels due to being moveable and in such circumstances would not require planning permission). The addition of these further building/chattels has encroached onto the openness of the MGB. They duplicate the functions provided by the buildings subject of this planning application and appear to effectively prejudge the determination of this application.
- 6.10 The applicants have commented that the reason for the conversion is to improve security on the site. However, local residents and the PC have raised concerns regarding this, in so far as there is no evidence to support this claim, and I would tend to agree with their concerns. Whilst I can sympathise with the applicant that the site needs to be more secure, I do not consider that the building should be allowed to be converted for this reason alone and that it is not a “very special circumstance” as it could be repeated at numerous other similar sites. There is no national or local policy support for the principle of on-site dwellings needed in these sorts of locations to deal with security concerns for horses at pasture or in field shelters.
- 6.11 The proposed dwelling would be sufficiently separated from the nearest dwellings – Old Highlands Farmhouse and Highlands Farm, to ensure that there will be no impact on the residential amenities of the occupants of these dwellings.
- 6.12 The PC and local residents have commented that this development may be a precursor for future development on the site. Whilst I do acknowledge that this maybe the case in the future, all such developments will require planning

permission and will be considered on their merits if they are put forward. Having said that, the hay store is a duplicate of a building already on site and needs planning permission in its own right. This can be the subject of an informative.

6.13 In light of the above assessment, I consider that the proposal does not meet the requirements of the NPPF and the LDF by reason of being inappropriate development in the countryside which is Green Belt. It introduces a domestic garden and activity which would harm rural and Green Belt amenities. As such the following recommendation is put forward:

7. Recommendation:

7.1 Refuse Planning Permission for the following:

Reasons

1. The site lies within the countryside and Metropolitan Green Belt. These buildings cannot be converted to a single dwelling use without major reconstruction and extension and hence the proposal is inappropriate in the Green Belt and countryside. It is thus contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (para 89) and Policies CP3 and CP14 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Core Strategy 2007 and Policy DC1 of the Managing Development and the Environment DPD. No very special circumstances or material considerations are considered to outweigh the harm.
2. The site lies within the countryside and Metropolitan Green Belt. The use will necessitate replacement equestrian facilities and also the introduction of a residential garden curtilage which, together with new domestic comings and goings, would harm the amenities of the Green Belt and countryside. It is thus contrary to the NPPF (para 89) and Policies CP3 and CP14 of the Tonbridge and Malling Borough Core Strategy 2007 and Policy DC1 of the Managing Development and the Environment DPD.

Informatives

1. The applicant is advised that the exiting hay store that has been erected in the stable courtyard requires planning permission.

Contact: Rebecca Jarman