

Development at Common Farm Stables Upper Helmsley

Design and Access Statement

16/00238/MFL
RYEDALE DM

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DEVELOPMENT
MANAGEMENT

1. The Applicant

David O'Meara is a racehorse trainer originally operating from stables in Nawton in Ryedale. Commencing training in 2009 with only 12 horses Mr O'Meara has risen swiftly through the training ranks to be one of the most successful trainers in the country. In 2015 122 winners were amassed realising a total prize money of £1,580,569 from 110 horses and since 2009 5 Group 1 races have been won. In addition, Mr O'Meara has been the top trainer at York for the past 2 seasons and had runners in Dubai, France, Canada, Ireland, America and Hong Kong.

22 full and part time staff were employed at Nawton when the yard was in full summer operational mode.

Whilst successful at Nawton Mr O'Meara wishes to upgrade his operation both in terms of facilities and location and sees Common Farm as the basis to achieve this.

Mr O'Meara is not seeking to establish a new venture in the countryside but to enhance and extend the existing yard at Common Farm previously operated by Mr Mel Brittain and others. The upgraded yard would be in a position to continue to take advantage of and utilise the expertise, trained staff, and ancillary providers that the Ryedale racing community rely on whilst having good transport links to tracks nationwide.

2. Site

Common Farm is an existing racehorse training yard and stud situated approximately 650 m west of the village of Upper Helmsley. The existing unit consists of 1 purpose built horse barn capable of accommodating 44 horses, and a former converted and extended fold yard which has been used for stabling but has fallen into disrepair. A further barn previously capable of accommodating 35 horses was demolished late in 2015.

In addition, there is a range of outbuildings, a group of 5 isolation looseboxes, a horse walker and a dwelling all set within a large gallops area, turnout paddocks and grazing areas. Part of the gallops will continue to be used in association with the Northgate Lodge racing yard.

Access to the site is via an existing track/drive which joins the County Highway 500 m south of the village of Upper Helmsley.

3. History

The stables have operated since the 1990s and formed part of the racing complex associated with Northgate Lodge situated to the south of the site. Originally the whole complex including Common Farm and Northgate Lodge was owned and operated by trainer Mr Mel Brittain. Latterly Common Farm was subdivided and let to other trainers.

The only relevant planning history is in 1996, permission was granted for the erection of a block of 6 residential units and staff accommodation to be wholly and only used in connection with training racehorses at Common Farm. At this time Mr Brittain was intent on splitting the yard and offering to let a set number of boxes with a residential unit thus enabling the yard and associated facilities including the gallops to be used by a number of trainers.

At that time the number of loose boxes available, as stated in the 1996 application, was 142.

4. Design and Access Statement/ Proposals

Retrospective permission is sought for the erection of a replacement horse barn, 24 loose boxes, 3 horse walkers, roof over 1 existing horse walker, the provision of a horse wash down area, resurfacing of tracks and yard area, provision of an all weather gallop, horse walks, access track, and gallops access/layby, and siting of temporary office/rest room building.

Due to a misinterpretation and misinformation work has commenced on the above works which is essentially an upgrading of the complex to make it fit for modern racehorse training.

A. Stables barn

The stables barn is a purpose built unit capable of accommodating 50 horses. Built on the site of a previous barn used for stabling the proposed building measures 32 m x 29.9 m, with an eaves height of 4.57m on its north elevation and 3.55m on its southern elevation and a double ridge height of 6.31m. The building has been specifically designed to accommodate racehorses in a modern, clean, easily maintained environment. Externally the building appears as a modern agricultural barn, similar to countless others in the area, steel framed with block walling and Yorkshire Boarding to the sides and eaves under a dark grey fibre cement roof. The roof has a double ridge which keeps the height down. Closely reflecting the local "modern" vernacular in terms of design and situated between 2 other large barns the existing appearance of Common Farm as a group of rural buildings is maintained. The building is viewed from public areas to the north east and south west. Both views, from public highways, are long range and the proposed building and the complex as a whole are viewed against a back drop of trees.

The proposed barn is a larger replacement of, and on the site of, a concrete block and corrugated iron former grain store, and parking and circulation area. Unfortunately, no visual information is available regarding this building although it is clearly shown on the submitted ariel photo (CF9) and had a footprint with a maximum length of 26 m and a maximum width of 17 m. Although used in the past for the stabling of horses it was not built for this purpose and had seen better days.

B. Loose boxes

The proposed loose boxes are intended to provide additional stabling in close proximity to the existing buildings and horse walkers. They in effect replace the boxes in the fold yard barn which have fallen into disrepair and are no longer fit for purpose. Proposed in a "U" shaped block the building is proposed wholly in timber under a dark green fibre cement roof and would measure 3 m x 36 m in 2 blocks connected by 3m x 20 m link with an eaves height of 2.22m and a ridge height of 3.1 m. The units are of a traditional loose

box design and form a small quadrangle with doors, windows, and eaves overhang facing inwards. The buildings are partially on the site of the 1996 permission for residential accommodation. In addition to the traditional loose box appearance the buildings are to be located within 11m of the proposed barn and will continue to maintain the group appearance of Common Farm and are not apparent from public areas.

C. Horse walkers

Horse walkers are an essential piece of kit associated with modern racehorse training and are used to exercise horses, warm up horses prior to using the gallops and to warm down after. At present Common Farm has 1 existing walker. It is proposed to erect 3 others and roof over that existing. The structure is essentially a steel framed carousel with a diameter of 12.2 m and a maximum height including the roof of 3.4 m situated on a circular concrete pad. The walls of the walker are clad with a rubber type material and the roofs are clad in a grey sheet steel.

The existing walker is situated at the southwest end of an existing barn and the 3 others are to be located adjacent forming a block of 4. Whilst mechanical in appearance the walkers continue to form part of the Common Farm group and are not visible from public areas.

D. Wash down area

The wash down area is used to wash horses after exercise. The proposal is to erect 1.8 m high block walls and a hardstanding attached to the southwest end of the existing barn to form 5 No bays. This part of the proposal is functional, not obtrusive and is not visible from public areas.

E. Resurfacing existing tracks and yard area and provision of horse walks.

The existing complex suffers, to an extent, from a lack of serviceable access roads around the buildings and between essential elements of the training complex. It is proposed to improve this situation by overlaying existing tracks with 150 mm of road planings and to overlay the existing yard area with 150 mm of road planings. A new access track to the north of the existing horse barn is also proposed using the same material. This material is durable, permeable and substantially improves access around the unit for horses, vehicles, staff, and visitors.

In addition to surfacing existing track and hardstanding areas it is proposed to surface the storage parking area to the north east of the fold yard barn. This area has previously been used for storage of hay, straw, equipment and parking and can be seen on the submitted arial photographs (CF9 CF10). The area had previously been partially enclosed by a dilapidated post and rail fence. Part of the proposal is to fence the northeast boundary of the complex with a new post and rail fence and to plant the boundary with a hawthorn hedge and hedgerow trees. This area is viewed intermittently from the Upper Helmsley to Sand Hutton road although it would be seen as part of, and against, the back drop of the existing buildings and trees and through the proposed planting.

It is also proposed to create horse walks consisting of 150 mm of sifted road planings between the existing track leading to the gallops and the start of the 5.5 furlong all weather gallop (see below) and from the top of the gallop, following the access road and hedge line, back to the stables.

In addition, a stoned passing bay is proposed adjacent to the access track 60m from the junction with the county highway. As well as allowing vehicles to pass close to the junction with the county highway the stoned area will provide a serviceable access to the top of the gallop.

Visually the surfaced tracks and yard areas will not be apparent from public areas, but will allow the complex to be more functional in all weathers.

F. All weather gallop

Common Farm is an existing racehorse training establishment. Part of this complex are the gallops. The gallops sit between Common Farm and the racehorse training complex of Northgate Lodge. The gallops will continue to be shared by both establishments. In respect of Common Farm, it is proposed to create an all-weather 5.5-furlong gallop with a straight shoot. The gallop would be created by placing a plastic grid 4.2 m wide on top of the existing ground surface and then covering it with a mix of sand and fibres to a depth of 150 mm and contained at its edges by 150 mm boarding. A running rail is then provided at either side.

This type of facility is a common feature at racing stables and is essential for the safe conditioning and training of horses in all weathers and seasons. Often grass gallops can become waterlogged in the winter or dry out too much in the summer thus making them unusable.

As a physical feature the all-weather gallop will not be visible from public areas.

Whilst the need for planning permission for the all-weather gallop could be questioned on balance this element of the proposal is included within the application. However, the running rail that runs alongside the gallop is considered to be permitted development being a means of enclosure less than 2 m in height and not adjacent to a highway. Its inclusion in the drawings is for illustrative purposes.

G. Temporary office/rest room building

The proposal as a whole is part of a phased upgrading of the facilities on site. Currently there is no proper office or welfare facilities on site. Eventually it is intended to incorporate such facilities into the adjacent former fold yard barn situated to the rear of the dwelling. Until this happens there is a need for an office on site to administer the business, including making race entries, contacting owners, general admin, storing racing colours, and ordering equipment, etc. and a rest room for staff.

5. Access

Access to the site is via an existing drive/track which joins the public highway 400 m south of Upper Helmsley. Visibility is good and the access has served the complex well. Prior to the demolition of the previously mentioned barn in late 2015, the complex was in theory capable of accommodating 142 horses. This figure is based on the 3 large barns on site which were referred to in the 1996 application to erect stable staff accommodation and the subdivision of the yard. Whilst this development has never been completed the 1996 permission clearly acknowledges the level of use and consequently vehicle movements, that Common Farm could have been put to. The proposed level of accommodation at 123 horses is less than the previous maximum level.

4. Landscaping

The site is not within a nationally designated landscape area. However, the appearance of the site and place within the wider landscape are important to the applicant. The buildings associated with Common Farm are not easily seen in the landscape being on the north side of Helmsley Hill and protected on its south side by Swincarr Plantation. Long range views of Common Farm are available from the Warhill to Stockton on Forest road although the site is seen as a farm group set against a backdrop of trees. The site is also viewed from the Upper Helmsley to Sand Hutton Road. Whilst this view of the main complex is clearer it is seen as a farm group in the landscape and against a back drop of trees. Common Farm is concealed from other areas by landform and woodland.

The proposals do not fundamentally change the landscape that Common Farm is set within. A small length of hawthorn hedge has been removed in the area where the loose boxes will be erected. Their loss will be supplemented by a planting of a hawthorn hedge with hedgerow trees along the north east side of the resurfaced areas on the north east side of the complex.

It is not intended to remove any other features in the landscape and the complex will remain viewed as a farm type complex set within managed grassland and agricultural land.

5.Flooding/Drainage

The site is not subjected to flooding and is not shown as being within a flood zone on the Environment Agency flood map for the area.

Surface water from new roofs will be disposed of via the existing surface water system, used to drain the existing buildings on site, that flows to the beck to the north and partially via soakaway. The trackways and horse walks will be self draining.

6.Conclusion

The proposal seeks to upgrade, enhance, and extend an existing horse racing stables. As can be seen above in the description of the proposals care has been taken to achieve both modern functional additions to the existing racing yard whilst retaining the existing group of buildings within the landscape. The main barn essentially replaces a previous barn used for stabling, the loose boxes replace the dilapidated boxes contained within the old fold yard, the old fold yard will in the future be refurbished to provide offices and welfare accommodation that will replace the temporary office, the horse walkers represent an essential piece of kit at a racing stables, the all-weather gallop is a common feature situated on an existing grass gallop, and the upgraded trackways and hard standings make the whole complex much more functional.

The proposals will enhance the quality of facilities on the site and coupled with Mr O'Meara's standing in the racehorse training fraternity will result in one of the premier training yards in the north of England. To this end there is a need for a quality appearance to the yard and facilities which Mr O'Meara is keen to promote whilst keeping its impact on the surrounding area to a minimum.

6.Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The site is within the City of York Green Belt. Section 9 of the NPPF places great importance on keeping the Green Belt open. Para 89 states that the construction of new buildings within the Green Belt is considered to be inappropriate development. However, exceptions to this stance include amongst others the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport and recreation as long as it preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict with the purposes of including land within it. Paragraph 89 further indicates that the limited infilling or partial redevelopment of previously developed sites, whether redundant or in continuing use, which would not have a greater impact on the openness of the Green Belt and the purpose of including land within it than the existing development, is not considered inappropriate development.

In addition, para 90 of the NPPF states that engineering operations are also not inappropriate development in Green Belt provided they preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in Green Belt.

The proposals are considered to meet Green Belt Policy and as such are considered to be appropriate development as set out in para 89 and 90 of the NPPF.

1. The proposed development is for the training of horses for racing which is clearly an outdoor sport and the proposed facilities are appropriate for this type of use. The proposed barn, loose boxes and horse walkers are purpose built and specifically designed for the accommodation and exercising of racehorses. By definition the "provision of appropriate facilities" that meet Green Belt criteria at para 89 i.e. "construction of new buildings" will lead to some loss of openness. In this case that loss of openness is limited by both the redevelopment of land previously used for buildings and ancillary facilities associated with the training of racehorses and therefore could not be described as open, and essential additional stabling and horse walkers which para 89 of the NPPF does not consider to be inappropriate.
2. In addition, the proposal is a partial redevelopment of a previously developed site. The site has been used for the training of racehorses since the early 1990s. The existing barn is clearly designed to accommodate horses and the fold yard has clearly been converted and used for stabling. Isolation boxes, the horse walker, circulation and storage areas, and gallops also clearly indicate the use of the site. This use was confirmed during the submission and approval of ancillary residential accommodation associated with the training of racehorses in 1996 and has continued. The proposed development of the new barn on the site of the former converted grain store, and parking and circulation area is clearly a redevelopment of a previously developed site.
3. The resurfacing of the circulation areas in the yard, horse walks, and all weather gallop are considered to be engineering operations. By their very nature being development that has little or no impact on openness and represent in essence the simple change to the surface of the land.

The development, due to the design and location of the proposed buildings and structures is not considered to conflict with the purpose of including land within it.

Special circumstances

In addition to the proposed development meeting the requirements of the NPPF in terms of Green Belt policy there are special circumstances that should, if necessary, also be weighed in the balance. The Government, in para 28 of the NPPF, place great emphasis on the economic benefits of appropriate development in the countryside. In addition, the Planning Authority accepts that the horseracing industry is an important economic element within the District and one of its major employers. Objective 10 of the Ryedale Plan seeks to support the land base economy by promoting sustainable rural enterprise and activity that helps to retain traditional land uses such as food production and horse racing.

In this case we have a site that is substantially under used but with the potential to meet the aspirations of the Planning Authority by bringing about the economic benefits of a successful horseracing yard and creating/preserving jobs in the District. The complex as a whole has been underused and the facilities on site do not meet the requirements of modern stabling, care, and conditioning of racehorses. Only substantial

investment will arrest that situation and allow the yard to flourish and be successful. This is important not just from a local perspective in terms of bringing an underused, economically beneficial site back to its full potential, but the size, location, and standard of the yard has national ramifications. It is important for Ryedale's racing industry that it has success. Ryedale is one of the top 4 horse racing centres in the country along with Newmarket, Lambourn and Middleham. Ryedale is effectively in competition with these other areas for patronage. Good facilities and successful trainers will attract owners to Ryedale which in itself an investment in the area.

Mr O'Meara wishes to remain in Ryedale but his options in terms of establishing a yard in his own right have been limited due to lack of suitable premises. Common Farm, an existing racing yard in Ryedale, forms that basis of a well-equipped modern training establishment including its own gallops. This can only be achieved by a substantial investment in Common Farm. This would apply to anyone wishing to realise the potential of the existing yard. If the fact that the site is within Green Belt is to stifle considerable development the yard may continue to deteriorate and remain an underused asset in the District.

The proposed development is not considered to be excessive and specifically seeks to upgrade the yard to high standard whilst retaining a level of horse accommodation commensurate with a trainer of his standing. Again this is important. Mr O'Meara is one of the most successful trainers in Ryedale and in order to maintain that success, and to continue to attract and maintain owners, good facilities including stabling and gallops and a certain level of horses are essential. One factor relating to success, in addition to the skill of the trainer and his staff, and the facilities available, are the number of horses trained in the yard. The most successful trainers in the country and also in Ryedale will usually accommodate in excess of 100 horses. In this case the current site was capable of accommodating in excess of a 100 horses but not all in an acceptable modern standard. The proposal will allow facilities to be provided, that realise the potential of the site, to a level that would result in a yard capable of accommodating a trainer with a high profile in terms of success and horse numbers. Again this would be an asset both locally and District wide.

The development is sustainable (NPPF para 7 – 16) making use of an existing complex and improving its appearance within the countryside by replacing a poorly designed former agricultural building and limiting any material expansion resulting in the continued grouping of buildings.

Furthermore, the NPPF para 28 places importance on supporting and promoting the growth and expansion of rural based business. In this case when fully operational in summer mode the site will provide for 25 full time and 10 part time staff in addition to local ancillary business which will benefit such as farriers, local farmers, feed merchants etc.

The Development Plan

In terms of Green Belt Policy, the Ryedale Plan relies on those relevant policies in the NPPF.

However, there are several relevant policies in the Ryedale Plan and the importance of the horse racing industry is clearly acknowledged.

In particular Objective 10 seeks to support the land base economy by promoting sustainable rural enterprise and activity that helps to retain traditional land uses such as food production and horse racing.

Section 3 Aspirations and Strategy supports development that is necessary to support a sustainable and healthy rural economy.

In terms of specific policies, the following are considered relevant.

SP6 Delivering and Distribution of Employment Land and Premises

"New land and Buildings for employment will be supported from the following locations: -

Wider Open Countryside

Expansion land for existing major employers/established business; small scale conversions of existing buildings or provision of new buildings to support appropriate rural economic activity in line with the provisions of Policy SP9."

SP9 The Land Based and Rural Economy

"Ryedale's Land Based Economy will be sustained and diversified with support for: -

.....

New buildings that are necessary to support land based activity and a working countryside including for farming, forestry and equine purposes.

It is clear that the principle of the development is supported by both Policy SP6 and SP9.

SP13 Landscape

Care has been taken to ensure the development does not have an adverse impact on the landscape character of the area and is referred to in the Proposals section above.

SP16 Design

Care has been taken to ensure the design of the development is compatible with its surroundings and is referred to in the Proposals section above.

SP19 Presumption in favour of Sustainable Development

It is considered that the upgrading and continued use of this economically beneficial facility is sustainable and in accordance with the NPPF.

SP20 Generic Development Management Issues

As demonstrated above in the proposals section the proposed development is considered to meet the requirements of Policy SP20 in terms of Character, Design, Amenity and Safety, and Access and Parking.

• **6.Overall Conclusion**

The proposed development is a well-planned upgrade, and limited expansion of an existing racehorse training stables. The development will result in one of the country's leading training centres thereby enhancing Ryedale's standing in the racing world which is a vital element of Ryedale's economy. The re-developed site will provide employment for 25 full time and 10-part time staff when fully operational and will be an asset to the area and the wider District with minimal impact beyond that existing.

The proposals are supported by policies contained within both the NPPF and the Ryedale Plan.