

SUMMARY PROOF OF EVIDENCE

OF

ALINE HYDE

BA(Hons) MA MRTPI

APPEAL BY: Jockey Club Racecourses Limited

SITE: Land at Sandown Park Racecourse, Portsmouth Road, Esher, Surrey, KT10 9AJ

LPA reference: 2019/0551

PINS reference: APP/K3605/W/20/3249790

October 2020

1. My name is Aline Hyde, and I am a Chartered Town Planner. I hold a Bachelor's degree in Politics and a Master's degree in Planning Policy and Practice. I am currently employed by Elmbridge Borough Council as a Senior Planning Policy Officer, though most of my experience has been gained within development management.
2. The evidence I provide is true and has been prepared in accordance with the guidance of my professional institution, the Royal Town Planning Institute. Where opinions are expressed, these are my own professional and sincerely-held opinions.
3. The site is located within the Green Belt, and it has been established within the evidence of Mr David Webster that the proposal would be inappropriate development within the Green Belt and that there would be additional harm to the openness of the Green Belt and to the purposes of designating land as Green Belt.
4. The evidence of Mr Ian Mitchell demonstrates that there would be further harm arising from the proposal's impact on local transport networks, and the evidence of Dr Anthony Lee details the failure to make sufficient provision of affordable housing. In view of these harms, my evidence is presented on the basis that very special circumstances which clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and any other harm, would be necessary in order for the proposal to be granted planning permission.
5. Whilst the Appellant disagrees that the proposal is inappropriate and has therefore not advanced a case for very special circumstances, they have set out what they consider to be the benefits of the proposal. I have considered these individually and cumulatively to see whether these benefits are very special, and whether they would clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other harms identified by the other expert witnesses for the Council.
6. The Appellant claims that there is a need to improve the racecourse facilities. I accept that it is necessary to ensure animal welfare and human safety. That said, I do not accept that all of the works proposed by the Appellant are essential: much of the work proposed is for enhancements to the visitor experience sought in order to increase revenue. I acknowledge the contribution of the racecourse to the health of the local economy. I attach moderate weight to the need to carry out improvements to the facilities.
7. The Appellant also claims that there is a need to construct a hotel at the site. I do not dispute that there is a paucity of hotel rooms available for visitors to the site, and to the area more generally. The Appellant relies on a previous grant of permission for a hotel on another area of the site, but I do not consider the two proposals to be comparable. I attach limited weight to the benefits of the delivery of a hotel on the site.
8. Elmbridge has an unmet need for housing, and specifically for smaller residential units with 1, 2 or 3 bedrooms. The Borough is highly constrained, but has produced an Action Plan to address the shortfall in housing delivery, and is producing a new Local Plan. Development opportunities on such a scale do not often come forward in Elmbridge, and I therefore afford significant weight to the delivery of up to 318 homes.

9. I consider that a policy-compliant provision of affordable housing in this case would be 45%. The Appellant is proposing to provide just 20%, and without satisfactory justification. Even if the explanation proffered was accepted, the contribution towards the Borough's need for affordable housing is modest. At best, the affordable housing could be given moderate weight in the planning balance but I consider that the weight given should be less.
10. The site is not in a sustainable location, but is relatively sustainably-located compared to conditions across the Borough taken as a whole. I give limited weight to the location of the proposal in relation to public transport, active travel options and community facilities.
11. The Appellant has included a community zone within the proposal. Whilst the recreational spaces incorporated within this element may promote physical activity, I consider that the weight to be attributed to it should be limited.
12. The existing childrens' day nursery on the site would be demolished and replaced as part of the proposal. There is an unmet need for childcare provision in the area, but the Appellant has provided insufficient information to allow me to determine whether the proposed nursery would do much to address this need. I therefore give the provision of the nursery limited weight.
13. The Appellant intends to provide an ecological management plan for the site, though the details are vague. There may be a benefit to biodiversity arising from the installation of bird and bat boxes and the planting of hedgerows, but I do not consider that the grant of permission would be necessary to allow these measures to be implemented. I give limited weight to this benefit.
14. The Appellant suggests that the proposal would better integrate the railway station with the district centre. There would be works to pedestrian connectivity, though these were requested by the County Highways Authority and considered to be necessary to render the proposal acceptable. The crossing to be installed on Station Road would, however, provide a wider benefit to residents of and visitors to Esher, and I give it limited weight in the balance.
15. The interpretation boards proposed by the Appellant appear to me to have no relationship to the proposal, and are therefore given no weight.
16. The Appellant argues that the new residents accommodated by the development would have a beneficial impact on the local economy. Whilst I agree that there would be increased spending, I consider it to be much less than has been suggested by the Appellant and I therefore give it only limited weight.
17. A legal agreement remains under discussion. If agreement is reached regarding the payment of a financial contribution to secure a management plan for Littleworth Common, the fourth reason for the refusal of permission by the Council will be overcome.

18. If agreement is reached regarding the payment of a financial contribution towards improvements to accessibility at Esher Railway Station and for monitoring of the travel plans, the fifth reason for refusal will be resolved.
19. Without prejudice to my opinion that permission should be refused, I consider it necessary to ensure that the funds generated by the sale of the residential land are used to carry out the racecourse improvement works. It is also necessary to ensure that the extant permission for a hotel is set aside, and that the proposed day nursery is delivered.
20. Having identified and assessed the benefits arising from the proposal, I give substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt as directed by the NPPF. I give significant weight to the harm to the character and appearance of the area, and significant weight to the failure to provide a satisfactory contribution towards affordable housing. I give moderate weight to the harm to local transport networks.
21. I conclude that the benefits of the scheme do not clearly outweigh the harm to the Green Belt and the other harms identified by the expert witnesses. Accordingly, I find that very special circumstances do not exist and permission must therefore be refused.
22. Even if the Inspector were to conclude that the proposal would not be inappropriate development within the Green Belt, I still consider that the harm to the character and appearance of the area, taken with the failure to provide a policy-compliant level of affordable housing and the impact on the local transport network, would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of granting permission.