

Application No:	2008/0729	Application Type:	FULL Esher
Case Officer:	Graham Speller	Ward:	
Expiry Date:	13/06/2008		
Location:	Sandown Park Portsmouth Road Esher Surrey KT10 9AJ		
Proposal:	Detached hotel with associated parking, medical facilities, canteen, changing rooms and saddling enclosures (4,684sqm) following demolition of existing hotel and associated facilities (1,593sqm)		
Applicant:	Racecourse Investments Limited Miss Marie Jasper Barton Willmore 11-13 High Street		
Agent:	Theale Court Reading RG7 5AH		
Decision Level:	If Permit: Council If Refuse: Council		
Recommendation:	Permit		

Representations:

Reported on Agenda for Planning Committee

8 objections, 7 Objections from separate households, including the Esher Residents Association, with concerns over reduction in openness of Green Belt caused by mass and bulk of the proposed replacement building, increase in footprint, loss of public parking spaces, eyesore of lorry parking, building would be dominant, height excessive, exceptional case has not been made, racecourse is not a conference venue, proposal not leisure related, out of character, no need for hotel, proposed canteen would create noise and smells near houses, hotel will be noisy at night, no evidence that Sandown Park requires such a large hotel complex, financial viability of Sandown Park is not dependent on this hotel development as there is a proposal adjacent to Hampton Court Station, increase in traffic, excessive size, noise and air pollution, inconsistent with the needs, role and character of a small residential town, loss of trees, increase in guests in evenings and weekends has potential for bringing public disorder and increasing criminal behaviour .

14 letters of support from separate households with following comments: Sandown Park Racecourse is of great significance to Esher, existing hotel accommodation is not adequate, would bring more visitors to Esher, Sandown now dependent on conferences and exhibitions in order to remain viable, a larger hotel would ensure that racecourse continues to be ongoing, financially viable, if Sandown were to close would result in other development, hosts prestigious top class racing, not detrimental to green belt, no noticeable disturbance or change in traffic levels, will be built on same site as Park Lodge so no reduction of green belt, increase business to Esher High Street, more accommodation likely to lead to extension of exhibition and conferences, more jobs would be created, Sandown Park Racecourse is an important part of the wider community outside racing, financial viability of sporting activities is a special case, reduction in overall footprint, would not create a precedent, would add to vitality of High Street, more trees and landscaping, would underpin financial future of racecourse, will be a prominent feature and have visual appeal.

Reported as 'Late Letters' to Planning Committee

Letter from Jockey Club sent to all members highlighting:

- The very special circumstances
- The financial position at the racecourse

- Consistency with other 'very special' cases at other racecourses
- Need for additional hotel facilities in the locality
- No practical better ways of generating income
- Appropriateness of the size of the hotel.

Letter from agent sent to all Members in relation to the conditions - main point is a suggested variation to condition 23.

7 further letters of objection - points raised previously plus:

- Insufficient consultation with most affected residents in Warren Close
- Significant increase in traffic
- Severe impact on surrounding countryside, wildlife and local residents
- Uncertain whether it is necessary
- Unlikely to be viable at all in present circumstances
- Canteen should be relocated away from boundary to minimise air and noise pollution as well as fire risk and vermin
- What guarantees are there Sandown will not seek future Green Belt releases?

Letter and Email from Chairman of Warren Close RA:

- Members did not visit Warren Close to determine how much residents privacy will be affected by the tall hotel
- Lack of a scale model
- Infrastructure contribution is insufficient to cove the harm that will result
- Early food preparation will lead to early noise and air pollution
- Future alcohol license should be prevented by a planning condition
- Precedent of accepting the special circumstances cited in support

Would consider withdrawing objections if:

- Canteen is relocated away from their boundary
- The entire perimeter is screened with new tree planting, and off-limits to the public.

Letter from agent responding to objections:

- 2 days of public consultation and exhibition were held in January 2008 and all residents in Warren Close were invited.
- Some have made individual representations.
- The specific concerns have already been debated by the Sub Committee
- Consultees have not raised these objections
- The infrastructure contribution follows the Elmbridge SPD
- A condition will be placed on the canteen to ensure no odours or fumes will be generated and it will only be used on race days.

R e p o r t

Description

1. Sandown Park Racecourse is one of fourteen racecourses owned by Racecourse Investments Limited. The Racecourse was laid out in 1875 and was the first in Britain to be enclosed. Sandown Park extends to approximately 66 hectares and, in addition to the racecourse and associated buildings, includes other recreational activities where there is a dry ski slope, go-kart circuit and a golf course located within the centre. Sandown Park also has established conference and banqueting facilities.
2. The planning application site itself, which forms part of the wider Sandown Park Racecourse complex, currently comprises Sandown Park Lodge Hotel, two stable blocks, saddling enclosures, the pre parade ring and a hard standing area for horsebox unloading and car parking. Sandown Park Lodge Hotel is a converted jockey's hostel/hospital built in the early 1990's. The building is a two storey brick and tile building and offers 21-bedded rooms with en-suite facilities. The hotel also contains a stable lad's canteen.

3. The application site is located within the Green Belt and extends to 0.95 hectares. It is situated in the southwest corner of Sandown Park Racecourse fronting onto Portsmouth Road (A307) to the immediate north of Esher town centre.

History

4. In the late 1950's there were five successive applications made to erect housing fronting Portsmouth Road, all of which were refused planning permission. In 1962, application 62/361 was for a change of use of the entire racecourse to residential, including shops, offices and ancillary developments. The application was refused and a subsequent appeal dismissed on the basis that it was considered that it should remain as a racecourse, although it was acknowledged that other ancillary outdoor recreation facilities would need to be considered.
5. In 1965 permission 65/316 was granted for use of land for golf driving range.
6. In 1966 permission 66/202 was granted for a replacement grandstand and associated facilities.
7. In 1967 permission 67/545 was granted for retention of buildings and continued use of land for golf driving range and pitch and putt course.
8. In 1970 permission 70/96 was granted for a new grandstand and associated facilities. A further application 71/860 was granted permission to erect a new grandstand.
9. The existing two storey hotel building was built under 89/0206 to replace sub standard facilities and was originally intended as the jockeys hostel and hospital. A condition was attached restricting use in connection with horse racing and other open air recreation and not to be used separately.
10. Permission was sought under 91/0946 to lift the restrictions imposed by that condition. Following refusal of that application an appeal was lodged. The Inspector, considering the merits of the appeal was satisfied that, given the then current policies, the reason for the condition (protection of the green belt) was equally applicable at that time as when originally imposed and dismissed the appeal.
11. Application 95/1317 for a detached two storey building for use as betting bar, club room, toilets, children's play area and nursery facilities and construction of silenced go kart circuit following demolition of existing buildings was granted planning permission.
12. Application 96/0560 for construction of car parks and internal access roads together with landscaping and drainage following demolition of two toilet blocks and storage building was granted planning permission.
13. Application 99/2041 for extension and alterations to grandstand with ancillary buildings; new stand to replace town suite and alterations to access and car park was granted planning permission.
14. Application 2001/0979 for single storey side extension to administrative building, refurbishment and extension of grandstand was granted planning permission.
15. Application 2003/1852 for continuation of use of jockeys hostel without compliance with Condition 8 of EL89/0206 – restricting use in connection with horse racing and other open air recreation facilities at Sandown Park was granted planning permission. The rationale behind such a decision was that since the grant of the original permission and subsequent refusal and dismissed appeal; policies on the Green Belt had changed. The revised Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts stated, inter alia, that the re-use of buildings within a Green Belt is not inappropriate development provided certain criteria are met. It was considered at the time that the policies would allow for the re-use of existing buildings so long as there were no significant harmful impacts, particularly on the

openness of the Green Belt. However, a condition was attached that stated that on those days when racing took place the accommodation should first be made available to those persons connected with horse racing and only when such demand had been satisfied shall the rooms be made available to the general public.

16. Application 2006/1334 for a detached single storey building for storage of race equipment was granted planning permission.
17. Application 2008/0316 sought a screening opinion as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment was required for a hotel proposal. A decision was issued that an EIA was not required for such a development having considered it against the relevant criteria.

Proposal

18. The proposals are for improvements to the use of the site for Racecourse operational purposes, and to provide hotel accommodation (109 beds). Specifically, the proposals include:
 - Redevelopment and replacement of an existing hotel (35 beds) to provide a new 109 bed hotel (Class C1);
 - Replacement, relocation and upgrading of the race day jockey's medical facility and stable lads/lasses canteen and changing facilities;
 - Replacement and upgrading of the pre-parade ring and saddling enclosure;
 - Improvements to the public realm and landscaping of the racecourse; and
 - New horsebox unloading area, horse walk and footpath.

Hotel

1. The hotel will be a part three storey part four storey building and occupying 1,188 m² footprint providing 4,264m² gross floor area. The hotel will provide 109 guestrooms, reception and back of house space, public areas including a breakfast room, public support space and kitchen accommodation. It is stated that conferencing and restaurants are not included in the proposal. The hotel scheme comprises of an 'L' shaped plan form with the main hotel configured along the south east side of the pre parade ring and return extending towards Portsmouth Road to the south west adjacent to built form along the High Street. The building mass at top floor level is reduced on the wing towards Portsmouth Road, due to the change in levels on the site. The public guest space is orientated so as to maximise views to the saddling enclosure and open space beyond. The hotel building would have maximum overall width of 69.347m and overall depth (including wing) of 32.952m with a maximum height of 13.65m. The building would be sited 26 metres from Portsmouth Road at its closest point and 23 metres from the western boundary of the application site. Materials would be a mix of facing brick, clay tiles, render, lead/zinc and cedar or oak timber cladding.
2. In terms of parking, 100 of the existing parking spaces would be allocated for the hotel use in addition to cycle storage spaces. There will be no increase in the overall number of parking spaces within the racecourse. The existing main entrance would give vehicular access to the hotel and pedestrian access would be both via the main entrance and also an improved DDA compliant step and ramp.

Jockey's medical facility

3. There will be a small stand alone addition to the existing administration building to provide a modern replacement race day jockey's medical facility to replace the outdated facility currently provided in Sandown Park Lodge. A space of 60 m² is required to comply with Horse Racing Association regulations. The building would be single storey with a pitched

roof with overall dimensions of 8m wide and 7.5m deep with an overall height of 5.536m. A covered access link to the administration building would be provided and external access for emergency use. The style of the building will reflect existing architectural style of the administration block with red multi stock facing brick and tiled roof.

Stable lads/lasses canteen and changing facilities

4. A single storey structure is proposed to occupy the area previously forming part of the stable block located immediately adjacent to the west boundary of the site. The accommodation would provide canteen facilities for 50 persons; male and female staff locker and toilet/shower/changing facilities. Additionally a relax/TV room is provided for the use of staff at break times. The building would have overall dimensions of 34.714m wide and 7.619m deep with an overall height of 3.2m to a flat roof. Materials are shown to be facing brick finish.

Saddling Boxes

5. The proposals also involves the replacement and realignment of the saddling boxes and pre parade ring approximately within the existing pre parade area to make room for a horse walk which is to be located between the new hotel and pre parade ring, connecting the horse unloading area and stable complex. There are currently 12 saddling boxes located to the north of the existing hotel. The existing saddling boxes are in need of replacement due to their age and poor condition.
6. The application is accompanied by the following statements and reports:
 - Supporting Planning Statement (February 2008) which includes a Needs Analysis for Hotel Accommodation and a Sequential Sites Assessment;
 - Design and Access Statement (February 2008);
 - Transport Statement – Final (February 2008);
 - Transport Statement - Final Revision 1 (July 2008);
 - Travel Plan Statement – Final (February 2008);
 - Landscape and Visual Appraisal (February 2008);
 - Tree Survey and Tree Constraints Plan (October 2006);
 - Drainage Assessment (February 2008);
 - Services Assessment (February 2008);
 - Statement of Community Engagement (February 2008);
 - Evaluation of Financial Case for Very Special Circumstances (August 2008). (This is confidential information that is circulated separately, however, a non confidential summary has also been provided and is attached as **Appendix A**).

Consultations

7. Surrey County Council (Transportation) - Following a site inspection and receipt of revised Transport Statement, the Highway Authority has assessed the impact of the proposal on highway safety and capacity and raised no objections subject to conditions/informatives. The development is considered to be in accordance with saved policies MOV4 and MOV6 of the Local Plan and DN2 and DN3 of the Surrey Structure Plan.

8. Surrey County Council (Environment and Regulation Service – Planning Implementation Team) (strategic) – advises that the paramount emphasis of the spatial strategy of the Surrey Structure Plan is the achievement of sustainable development. Policies therefore seek to direct new development to existing urban areas in order to promote more sustainable patterns of development, the efficient use of urban land, and to protect the Green Belt and countryside. Schemes are to promote housing or mixed uses, or support the local economy, and provide necessary infrastructure. Access by a range of alternative modes of transport should be possible. All development schemes should exhibit high quality design, respect local character and respond to infrastructure and environmental requirements. The County considers that the site is accessible and the proposals are likely to enhance a substantial and important national and local leisure and conference facility adjacent to the urban area. No objection is raised under saved Policies LO1 and LO2 concerning the spatial strategy of the Structure Plan.

No objection is also raised under saved Policy DN13 concerning leisure and recreational facilities. The proposals are also considered to comply reasonably with Government best practice guidance on the location of sustainable tourist facilities. It is also the County's view that, in common with proposals for other racecourse in Green Belt in Surrey, provided an exceptional case is proven for replacement development of the scale intended, no objection is raised under Policy LO4 concerning the protection of the Green Belt. The proposals are likely to ensure improvements to the public realm and the connectivity of the site. Further comments are made with regards to energy conservation measures, archaeology, drainage and transportation. A number of other detailed comments are made which are discussed elsewhere in this report under planning considerations.

9. Surrey Police – no specific concerns about the actual build but make comments regarding designing out crime within the built environment.
10. Elmbridge Access Group – comment that the consideration to the needs of those with disabilities needs to be made.
11. Elmbridge Borough Council - Head of Environmental Health and Licensing – recommend informative regarding premises licence.
12. Thames Water – advise that with regard to sewerage and water infrastructure no objections are raised.
13. Environment Agency – confirmed with the applicant that no Flood Risk Assessment will be required in association with the proposed hotel development.
14. Elmbridge Borough Council – Heritage, Landscape and Tree Preservation Manager – advises that pre application discussions took place with the landscape architects, which informs the landscape approach. No objections are raised to the landscape proposals subject to conditions. A number of other comments are made which are discussed elsewhere in this report under planning considerations. In terms of conservation it is advised there is no adverse affect on the Listed Sandown House opposite and potential benefit to the adjacent Listed Travellers Rest
15. Elmbridge Borough Council – Senior Tree Officer – Notes that the proposal involves the removal of various trees, however, only three are of particular concern. T82 horse chestnut is located to the footpath and is a small tree of some significance by nature of its location and the proposed removal of the cypress hedge screen. It is recommended that this tree be retained. T19 and T209 – oak and beech are located adjacent to the north corner of the new building. Both trees are significant and mature and form part of the local and wider landscape. It is recommended that both these trees be retained and the siting of the proposed hotel changed to accommodate this in the same way that T42 poplar has been.

16. Elmbridge Borough Council – Urban Design Consultant – considers that the siting and footprint now put forward is the best choice of previous proposals put forward in pre application discussions. Considers that the proposed hotel building forms a suitable ‘stop end’ to the commercial High Street and links satisfactorily to the main Sandown complex. Comments that the upper storey is set far enough back from Portsmouth Road viewing point and is also set back from the frontage such that its impact will be minimal. The design of the splayed ended wing with the use of glass and at the entrance corner is considered good design. However, it is recommended that the design of the façade be amended to break up the horizontal feel of the long wing. Concludes that the lowering of the block and the amendments achieved so far have brought the scheme up to an acceptable level. Subsequent to these comments, the applicant has revised some of the detailing of the proposal, which is considered more fully elsewhere in this report under planning considerations.

Pre-application discussions

17. There have been extensive pre application discussions regarding the proposals prior to the submission of this application. Advice was given that with the exception of the proposed hotel, essential facilities for outdoor sport and recreation was considered ‘appropriate development’ in the Green Belt, provided that it preserved openness and would not conflict with its purpose. Advice regarding the hotel proposal was that it was considered to represent ‘inappropriate development’ in the Green Belt, which, by definition was harmful to the Green Belt. Accordingly the Council would need to be satisfied that there were ‘very special circumstances’ which outweighed the harm to the Green Belt.
18. Further advice was given in respect of the other planning issues. Concern was raised regarding the scale, bulk and volume of the proposal and the increase in footprint and impact in the street scene. In addition, advice was given that due to the site location outside of the defined Town Centre, the applicant would need to show that a sequential approach to site location had been undertaken. The implications for parking, access and additional traffic that may be generated would also need to be assessed and the applicant was advised to contact Surrey County Council (Transportation) in this regard.
19. Pre application discussions also took place with the landscape architect and the Council’s Heritage, Landscape and Tree Preservation Manager. Advice was given on the importance of preserving the openness of the site and the Green Belt location, taking account of significant views in and out of the site, the visual and physical relationship of the site with its surroundings (including the Racecourse, Portsmouth Road and Esher High Street, the historic context including the adjacent Listed Buildings of Sandown House and the Travellers Rest).
20. In addition to pre application discussions, the applicant undertook a public consultation programme with local residents with a specialist company promoting community involvement with planning proposals. The conclusions of the consultation programme are submitted with this application in the statement of community engagement.

Planning Considerations

21. There are a number of national, regional and local policies which are listed below that are relevant to the consideration of the current proposals:

Government Guidance

PPS1	Delivering Sustainable Development – By Design
PPS6	Planning for Town Centres
PPG2	Green Belts
PPG13	Transport
PPG17	Planning for Open Space, Sport and Recreation
Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG9)	
DCLG	Good Practice Guide on Planning for Tourism

The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005
By Design
Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice
Safer Places: The Planning System and Crime Prevention
Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide
Planning for Town Centres: Guidance on Design and Implementation tools

Surrey Structure Plan 2004

LO1	The Location of Development
LO4	The Countryside and Green Belt
SE2	Renewable Energy and Energy Conservation
SE4	Design and the Quality of Development
SE8	Landscape
SE9	Trees and Woodland
DN1	Infrastructure Provision
DN2	Movement Implications of Development
DN3	Parking Provision
DN4	Public Transport
DN13	Leisure and Recreation Facilities
DN14	Tourism Development

Replacement Elmbridge Borough Local Plan 2000

GEN4	New Development and Infrastructure and Services
GRB1	Definition of the Green Belt Boundary
GRB14	Woodlands and Forestry
GRB17	Built Development Associated with Outdoor Sport in the Green Belt
ENV1	Development and the Environment
ENV2	Standard of Design
ENV6	Provision of Environmental Art through Development
ENV11	Landscape Considerations in the Development Process
ENV12	Retention of Trees on Development Sites
LER14	Hotels, Guest Houses, Bed and Breakfast Accommodation
MOV2	The Movement Implications of Development
MOV4	Traffic Impact of Development Proposals
MOV6	Off Street Parking
MOV7	Servicing Facilities
ELE2	Employment Development
ELE3	The Location of Employment Development
ELE5	Employment Development and Residential Amenity

22. The principal issues to be considered in determining this application are:

- Appropriateness within the Metropolitan Green Belt/Very Special Circumstances
- Sequential approach to site selection
- Design and siting
- Impact in Landscape, Heritage and trees
- Transportation and access and parking

Appropriateness within the Metropolitan Green Belt/Very Special Circumstances

23. Sandown Park Racecourse lies in the Metropolitan Green Belt. PPG2 provides guidance on Green Belt policy and confirms a general presumption against 'inappropriate' development in the Green Belt. PPG2 states that such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances. PPG2 also confirms that 'inappropriate' development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and that it is for the applicant to show why permission should be granted. The guidance states:

“Very special circumstances to justify inappropriate development will not exist unless the harm by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations. In view of the presumption against inappropriate development, the Secretary of State will attach substantial weight to the harm to the Green Belt when considering any planning application or appeal concerning such development.”

24. PPG2 states that the construction of new buildings inside a Green Belt is inappropriate development unless, amongst other things, is essential facilities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation, and for other uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and which do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. PPG2 comments that essential facilities should be genuinely required and examples of such facilities include small changing rooms or unobtrusive spectator accommodation for outdoor sport, or for small stables for outdoor sport and recreation.
25. The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005 reiterates advice contained in PPG2 and comments that “The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. The most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness.”
26. Surrey County Council (Strategic) have commented that the impact of built development on the purposes of Green Belt is a major concern. The Racecourse site is not identified within the Borough Local Plan as a major existing developed site in Green Belt and therefore available for infilling or redevelopment. It is the County’s view that some redevelopment for Racecourse purposes and the other established activities as replacement facilities at Sandown, may be satisfactory, provided the proposals take due regard of the purposes of Green Belt, including a reduction in encroachment and a consequent improvement to the openness of Green Belt. Such a view is qualified by the need for the Borough Council to be satisfied that detailed regard is paid to the impact of development on the openness and appearance of the Green Belt and the propensity, if any, for causing further harm to the character and amenities of the area.
27. However, whilst the site is not a ‘major developed site’ the approach advocated in Annex C of PPG2 is helpful as it provides useful guidance as to how redevelopment should be approached. It states that redevelopment should:
 - a) have no greater impact than the existing development on the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land in it, and where possible have less;
 - b) contribute to the achievement of the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts;
 - c) not exceed the height of the existing buildings; and
 - d) not occupy a larger area of the site than the existing buildings.
28. Annex C of PPG2 also comments that the location of new buildings should be decided having regard to the openness of the Green Belt and the purposes of including land within it, the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts, the main features of the landscape, and the need to integrate the new development with its surroundings. It suggests that it may be more appropriate to site new development closer to existing buildings. It also states that proposals should be considered in the light of all material considerations, including for example visual amenity and the traffic and travel implications of redevelopment.
29. Within the supporting planning statement, the applicant has set out an explanation of what JCR considers to be the effect of the planning application on the openness of the Green Belt. Comparisons of footprint between what exists and proposed is set out in a table. The planning application proposals include the removal of various buildings within the racecourse. The applicant considers that this would assist in minimising the impact of the new larger hotel on the amount of footprint and floorspace within the Green Belt and to improve the openness and reduce impact on the Green Belt. However, whilst the

proposal involves the replacement of a number of existing buildings and in terms of footprint there is a reduction, the scale and volume of the hotel element is greater than the scale of buildings to be removed.

Race day jockey's medical facility, stable lad's/lasses canteen and changing facilities and saddling boxes

30. The replacement race day jockey's medical facility, stable lad's/lasses canteen and changing facilities and saddling boxes and their use for horseracing related activities is considered an essential need for the racecourse outdoor sports role. The scale of these elements of the proposals is also considered proportionate to their proposed relevant functions and the siting of the buildings takes account of existing built form on the site. As such, these elements are considered appropriate development in the Green Belt in accordance with saved policy GRB17 and PPG2.

Hotel

31. As set out in the design and access statement, the design evolution sought to minimise footprint and therefore impact on the Green Belt.
32. The applicant acknowledges that the replacement of the existing hotel with a larger hotel is not considered to be 'appropriate' development in the Green Belt. Therefore, in accordance with Green Belt policy, the applicant has put forward two very special circumstances in support of the hotel element of the proposals. These two very special circumstances are:
- Meeting the need for hotel accommodation in accordance with PPS6; and
 - Facilitating the long term financial viability of the racecourse.
33. Whilst the applicant has demonstrated that there is a need for hotel accommodation, as required by PPS6, it is not considered that this, in itself or cumulatively, represents the very special circumstances envisaged in PPG2 as similar arguments could be made for any sort of development. Nonetheless, it is acknowledged that there is a paucity of such accommodation in the area and that demand would be satisfied to some extent by the proposed hotel. In addition, in the companion document to the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the South East Plan, it states, inter alia, that the presence of hotels can generate expenditure in an area and increase linkages to other tourism opportunities. It also states that limited service provision is particularly suited to town centre locations as it can complement other town centre uses by providing a larger market for their services (e.g. bars and restaurants). The applicant has stated that the hotel will be of a premium brand limited service facility, assisting in providing for the needs of visitors to the area requiring overnight accommodation and that restaurants are not included in the proposals. The applicant confirms that it is not the intention for the hotel to compete with the racecourse facilities or the High Street where many restaurants exist.
34. The applicant states that the hotel proposal is also a vital part of the racecourse's strategy to maintain a viable business into the longer term. Sandown Park Racecourse is owned by the Jockey Club Racecourses, a non dividend paying organisation which reinvests all its profits back into racing. Although acknowledged as one of the UK's premier racecourses, at the time of the purchase by JCR in 1994, the existing facilities were tired and dilapidated. Therefore, in 2001 JCR spent £30.5 million on a refurbishment designed to improve facilities and enhance financial performance. The applicant advises that the business plan for this modernisation was based on a combination of racing and non racing activity. Whilst the diversification of the business has been a success, current trading will not allow for any significant future investment and if Sandown Park Racecourse were not part of a large group, it would be unviable and fail as a business. The applicant comments that the current financial position of Sandown Park Racecourse is unsustainable as it has suffered a serious decline in its major income streams and faces increased competition. In that respect, the applicant considers that building a new hotel will enable Sandown Park

to gain an essential additional revenue stream as well as reducing risk by diversifying its existing business and will help to secure the long term future of Sandown Park Racecourse. As such, the applicant considers that this represents a very special circumstance to allow for such development.

35. The County Council (strategic) comments that it would not demur from the economic case for improved accommodation to serve the racecourse facility. Such a case has been made successfully in the recent past in connection with similar hotel facilities at both Epsom and Lingfield Park Racecourses. It is the County's view that the importance of maintaining and redeveloping the Sandown Park Racecourse to maintain the status of the facility as a national and local asset can be given particular weight. Provided an exceptional case is proven, the County Council under Policy LO4 raises no objection in respect of the hotel proposals
36. In support of the above statements, the applicant has also submitted a (confidential) evaluation of the financial case put forward. However, a non confidential summary has also been provided and is attached as **Appendix A**. Independent analysis of the financial case has been undertaken, details of which are set out below.
37. Following recent financial events and the potential economic slowdown currently being experienced by the UK economy, the applicant has submitted additional comments. It contains some confidential information that is circulated separately, however, a non confidential version has also been provided and is attached as **Appendix B**). The applicant refers to the Kernon report (Appendix A) and acknowledges that it reflects the situation that in the short term, without the hotel proposal the racecourse would continue to survive. However, the applicant also comments that the Kernon report was produced before the economic slowdown and a drop of 10% of turnover would lead to a reduction in profit. It is stated that this shows the uncertainty over when the new income from the hotel would be critically needed. The applicants comments that in their view they need to secure planning permission immediately to ensure that they can reduce the impact of reduction in turnover. In addition, it is stated that if the revenue decline materialises then in the short term essential maintenance will have to be deferred, the timing of such a measure is particularly poor for Sandown Park, where a structural survey of stables has revealed the need for up to £1.5 million of rebuilding work as well as £0.5 million of repairs to a leaking grandstand roof.
38. Whilst the proposal involves the replacement of a number of existing buildings, including the existing Lodge hotel, and in terms of footprint there is a reduction, the scale and volume of the hotel element is greater than the scale of buildings to be removed. This would have a greater perceived impact on the openness of the Green Belt.
39. Whilst a financial case has been put forward by the applicant who considers that it shows that the necessary very special circumstances have been demonstrated and will allow Sandown Park Racecourse to make the necessary future investment to sustain the future of racing at Esher, it is also acknowledged that Sandown Park Racecourse will survive in the short-term without the hotel proposal. The Kernon report does accept that the analysis by Sandown Park Racecourse and the forward projections all appear to be soundly based. The very special circumstances that the applicant is thus putting forward are future investment in Sandown Park Racecourse. The Kernon report concludes that Sandown Park Racecourse will continue as a racecourse without a hotel, trading at broadly break even level. But it also recognises that existing facilities do not provide the surplus to permit for future capital repairs, improvements and replacements at a level anticipated by the applicant. Without exceptional funding from other sources or subsidy from the wider parent organisations, it concludes that the position for Sandown Park will be one of gradual decline.
40. Whilst the financial case that has been put forward is significant and unique to Sandown Park Racecourse, in the short term a hotel is not required for its financial viability. It is therefore considered that the proposed hotel represents inappropriate development

having regard to the tests set out in PPG2 and that the harm by reason of inappropriateness is, in this case, not outweighed by other material considerations.

Sequential approach to site selection

41. PPS6 Planning for Town Centres confirms the Government's key objective for town centres is to promote their vitality and viability and focussing development in existing centres. The proposed development includes the provision of a new hotel to replace an existing smaller hotel facility, which is one of the town centre uses listed in PPS6. A sequential approach should be applied in selecting appropriate sites for allocation within the centres where identified need is to be met. All options in the centre should be thoroughly assessed before less central sites are considered for development for main town centre uses. The sequential approach requires that first locations in appropriate existing centres are considered and then edge of centre locations, with preference given to sites that are or will be well connected to the centre and then out of centre sites. PPS6 defines edge of centre as likely to be within 300 metres of the town centre boundary. The applicant is also required to demonstrate the need for the development, that the development is of an appropriate scale, that there are no more central sites for the development, that there are no unacceptable impacts on existing centres and that locations are accessible.
42. The application site is just outside the town centre boundary but well within the 300m distance outlined in PPS6.
43. The applicants submit that there is a need for additional hotel accommodation in Esher. An independent hotel analysis has been undertaken by the applicant, which confirms there is a need for additional hotel accommodation in Esher to meet frustrated demand, particularly during the week. The applicant also states that a lack of local accommodation means that 2 day conferences are impossible and that this will have difficulties in Sandown Park retaining its current business level and profitability. The report confirms that the scale of overnight accommodation needed to meet demand to serve Esher catchment area is consistent with the proposed 109 bed hotel proposed at the racecourse. In terms of the sequential approach to site selection, some 14 potential Town Centre sites and 6 edge of centre sites have been identified and assessed which are outlined in the accompanying sequential approach assessment document. The conclusion is that there are no available, suitable or viable town centre sites to meet the hotel need identified. The report also comments that the hotel proposal will promote the vitality and viability of services in the town centre by increasing the potential number of visitors to the centre.
44. The applicants also assessed Moore Place as part of the PPS6 sequential approach, however, now that a planning application has been made, additional comments have been submitted to take account of this. The applicant states that the offer and potential client market is different and complementary to the mainstream conference related hotel proposed for the racecourse. In this respect, the two hotels would meet need in different sectors of the hotel market place in that Moore Place is proposing a boutique hotel (Hotel Du Vin) with 50 bedrooms and fine dining restaurant. The applicant considers, therefore, that the two proposed hotels are complimentary and will serve different markets.
45. PPS6 also requires that developments should be accessible by a choice of means of transport. This is re-enforced by PPG13: Transport. The accompanying transport statement confirms that the site is accessible by car and by other modes. The site is located adjoining the town centre boundary and the proposed hotel is located an easy walk from Esher railway station and nearby bus services.
46. It is considered that the applicant has undertaken an appropriate sequential approach methodology and therefore the application accords with PPS6 requirements.

Design and siting

47. Government guidance contained in Planning for Town Centres specifically refers to guidance on design and implementation tools. It refers to Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development which sets out the Government's overarching policy on design matters. PPS1 is clear that good design is indivisible from good planning. It states that design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.
48. Within the overarching design policy provided by PPS1 and the policy in PPS6, the guidance states that the following design principles should be taken into account and development should:
- normally be orientated so that it fronts the street;
 - respect building lines of the existing urban environment;
 - maximise the amount of active street frontage;
 - avoid designs which are inward looking and present blank frontages;
 - provide level access from the public realm; and in the case of development in edge of centre locations, provide good pedestrian access to the centre
49. The guidance also states that developments with innovative layouts which maximise the use of a site and, where appropriate, make use of multiple levels should be encouraged, having due regard to local context.

Saddling Boxes

50. In terms of the replacement and realignment of the saddling boxes and pre parade ring, the applicant advises that the redevelopment and rationalisation of operations will enable the relocation of the horse box unloading area to a much more appropriate and convenient location, from which the horses will be escorted along a new horse walk to be provided between the hotel and pre parade ring, This arrangement overcomes the inadequacies of the present unloading arrangement whereby for safety reasons the entrance has to be closed to the public while horses are unloaded into this public area. It is considered that there would be no adverse affect on the character of the area or on any adjoining amenity as a result of this element of the proposals which accord with saved policies GRB17, ENV1 and ENV2.

Stable lads/lasses canteen and changing facilities

51. Whilst the proposed building would be somewhat utilitarian in design, the single storey flat roof nature would result in less impact on existing residential properties in Warren Close than a conventional pitched roof building. The proposal would replace some existing single storey stable buildings and, in addition, a number of existing stable buildings along the current boundary would be removed and additional landscaping planted behind a new parking area. It is considered that at a maximum height of 3.2m there would be no adverse affect on the character of the area or on any adjoining amenity as a result of this element of the proposals. Any smells from the proposed canteen would have to be properly dealt with and it is considered that any noise disturbance would be minimal as there would only be doors and windows to the front of the building facing the pre parade ring and new saddling boxes. It is considered that these elements of the proposals accord with saved policies GRB17, ENV1 and ENV2.

Jockey's medical facility

52. The proposed jockey's medical facility would be located adjacent to the administration building and its design would respect the existing architectural style of the existing building. It is considered that there would be no adverse affect on the character of the area as a result of this element of the proposals which accords with saved policies GRB17, ENV1 and ENV2.

Hotel

53. Within the design evolution of the proposed hotel, the applicant considered a number of options. The current submission is the result of the culmination of considering various options that are contained within the design and access statement. The design evolution sought to minimise footprint and therefore impact on the Green Belt, while providing a hotel in line with operator requirements. During design evolution, efforts were also made to minimise the mass of the proposals and define height relationships back to the existing lodge, which is 9.11m in height.
54. The design and access statement comments that the overall building concept for the hotel is that of a clean, articulated modern building to be seen as two distinct interconnecting elements that are visually separated by a glazed see through element. The building concept is conceived to act as a transition between the High Street vernacular and that of the racecourse and grandstand providing an end to the linearity of the High Street frontage and gateway to the racecourse. It is considered that the siting and footprint now put forward is the best choice of previous proposals put forward in pre application discussions and that the proposed hotel building would form a suitable 'stop end' to the commercial High Street and links satisfactorily to the main Sandown complex.
55. The design statement comments that the building will be predominantly 3 storey with a dormered pitched roof on the element parallel to Portsmouth Road, reflecting the dominant heights and style of buildings in the High Street. A 2/3 storey element projecting towards Portsmouth Road on the buildings west end is intended to provide a visual link with the High Street. The applicant states that the eaves of the main façade are 970mm higher than the existing lodge. The applicant also states that because the roof curves upwards from front to back, the height of the hotel when viewed from the immediate vicinity will be perceived as the eaves height.
56. It is considered that because the upper storey is set far enough back from Portsmouth Road viewing point and is also set back from the frontage its impact will be minimal.
57. The detailing of the proposal has been amended during the process of the application. The amendments are a simplification of the three glazing features on the front elevation, addition of glass fins to emphasise the verticality of the building to balance the horizontal mass and addition of rendered finish to the northern end of the front elevation facing Portsmouth Road to break up the horizontal mass of the building.
58. The County Council (strategic) accepts that the current setting is visually poor with poor connectivity with either the Racecourse or the town. On the basis of the submitted Design and Access Statement and Landscape and Visual Assessment report, it is the County's view that it is likely that the scale/footprint of development would be acceptable visually, given the general setting. The County Council also comment that although the new hotel proposal is a significant increase in scale and footprint over the existing hotel, on the positive side, the development would introduce an acceptable element in the transition between the racecourse and the town.
59. Notwithstanding the Green Belt issue considered above, it is considered that the hotel proposal represents good design and would not have an adverse impact in the street scene. In addition, it is considered that the design approach conforms with both national planning policy and guidance and development plan policy contained in saved policies SE4, ENV1 and ENV2.

Impact in Landscape, Heritage and trees

60. Government guidance contained in Planning for Town Centres states that the treatment of hard and soft landscaping within a development is of considerable importance and should be considered from the outset of the design process to ensure that it complements the architecture of proposals and improves the overall quality of the existing townscape. The guidance also comments that townscape views into and out of larger sites should be carefully considered from the start of the design process.

61. There is no doubt that such an approach has been taken in this case. The applicant has provided a landscape and visual appraisal document. This outlines that, in terms of the landscape strategy, the landscape proposals have been carefully formulated in response to the existing features of the application site and the proposed development. The design statement comments that the primary greening will be achieved by establishing a hierarchy of structured tree and hedgerow planting to integrate the hotel and racecourse improvements into the existing landscape setting. In addition, additional tree planting will be used to reinforce the view corridor to The Warren to the north, and to provide some screening of the hotel from the rear of properties in Warren Close.
62. The observation and conclusions for the assessed 'Zones for Visual Impact Analysis' and the identification of the view corridor from the south west corner of the racecourse to the wider landscape setting to the north east and its retention within the proposed layout are accepted. The landscape strategy is considered acceptable and there are a number of opportunities identified, which may provide further benefits. The proposed loss of trees is considered acceptable when taken in the context of the overall landscape scheme and replacement planting. The proposals have been amended to include additional tree planting between the car parking bays 35 to 66 and additional trees and shrub planting proposed between bays 87 and 96 and also trees are proposed to plug the visual gap from the Portsmouth Road. These additions to the landscape proposals will have the primary benefit of softening the façade of the proposed hotel but will also provide a link to the rest of the Sandown Racecourse landscape and a link between the backdrop of the vegetated Mound to the rear of the site and the mature trees along Portsmouth Road. The proposals are considered to take account of saved policies ENV11 and ENV12.
63. It is noted that the application contains two different proposals for the Portsmouth Road frontage. Landscape Master plan Option 1 with retention of the existing conifer hedge and Option 2 with the conifer hedge removed. When the main racecourse buildings and landscaping of the car park were proposed, one of the positive outcomes was the opening up of views across the site and creating character for the racecourse landscape. This was achieved with a hierarchy of tree planting, shrub planting in blocks similar to jumps to break up the car parking areas and replacing the previous close boarded boundary fence with a hornbeam hedge and white post and rail fencing. With this in mind, it is important to integrate the new development into the racecourse and as part of Esher so it is considered that it would be beneficial to remove the conifers. It is also noted that the proposal to consider phased removal of the conifer hedge after construction works are complete which would have a number of landscape benefits. These include allowing screening during construction and in the longer term retention of any suitable existing trees, the potential for new planting and opening up the site and its views from Portsmouth Road with similar boundary treatment to the rest of the racecourse.
64. In terms of loss of trees and the comments of the Council's tree officer, the applicant has responded. The applicant notes that the tree officer agrees with the decision to retain tree T42 and that it is recommended that trees T82, T19 and T20 should be retained in the same way. The applicant has advised that this is not possible because T82 is located within the proposed non vehicular access area, which is in this location in order to comply with DDA regulations. Alternative locations were considered but were impracticable or also involved removal of other trees. In terms of T19 and T20, the applicant advises that these are located obstructing the route between the horsebox unloading area and stables, and in close proximity to the proposed hotel. The applicant considers it is not practicable to retain these specific trees. The applicant has submitted an indicative landscaping scheme, which demonstrates that additional planting can be incorporated into the scheme to off set the removal of these trees. Whilst the tree officer remains concerned regarding the loss of these trees, the proposed loss of trees is considered acceptable when taken in the context of the overall landscape scheme and replacement planting which can be dealt with by an appropriate planning condition.

65. In terms of conservation, it is considered that there would be no adverse affect on the Listed Sandown House opposite the site, now converted into residential units, and could result in potential benefit to the adjacent Listed Travellers Rest by improving its setting.
66. The County Council (strategic) comments that the proposals have the potential to improve landscaping and built form. Provided the submitted Landscape Strategy is subject of a management and planting plan to ensure long term improvements, no objection is raised under saved Policies SE8 and SE9 concerning landscape and trees and woodlands.

Transportation and access and parking

67. The County Highway Authority has assessed the application and consider there to be no objections to make on safety, capacity or policy grounds. The Highway Authority advise that the applicant's Transport Consultants, Peter Brett's Associates have reassessed the traffic analysis. The revised analysis has not included an assessment for future years, as traffic count data for the last 3 years show no growth of traffic on Portsmouth Road. The methodology and conclusions of the revised transport assessment are considered acceptable and the County Highway Authority is now satisfied the junction will operate safely, within capacity. The Highway Authority is also satisfied that the traffic generated by the hotel can be safely accommodated within the existing highway network. In terms of parking, the Highway Authority is satisfied that no additional car parking is to be provided within the site and also consider it acceptable to allocate 100 of the existing parking spaces for the hotel use.
68. The development is considered to be in accordance with saved policies MOV4 and MOV6 of the Local Plan and DN2 and DN3 of the Surrey Structure Plan.

Matters raised in Representations

69. Matters raised in representations, both objectors and supporters of the proposals, have been fully addressed in this report under planning considerations.

Other matters

70. The Town and Country Planning (Green Belt) Direction 2005 clarifies the arrangements and criteria for referring applications for planning permission for inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as identified in PPG2, to the Secretary of State for a decision on whether to call in the application for determination. The effect of the Direction is to require local planning authorities to refer any application for planning permission which falls within paragraph 3 of the Direction, and in respect of which the authority does not propose to refuse planning permission, to the Secretary of State at the appropriate regional Government Office, in accordance with the provisions in paragraphs 4 and 5 of the Direction.
71. This Direction is relevant if the Sub Committee and Planning Committee were minded to permit the proposals as the grant of permission would involve a 'departure' from the development plan and exceeds 1000 m² and a decision to grant planning permission cannot be issued before the expiry of a period of 21 days beginning with the date advised in writing by the First Secretary of State to the authority as the date of receiving the necessary information. The proposals would also have to be advertised as such.
72. A suitable unilateral undertaking has been submitted in respect of the necessary infrastructure contribution.
73. The County Council (Strategic) comment that the proposals have the potential of incorporating the principles of sustainable design and build, so as to comply with saved policy SE4. The County advise that a commitment to the appropriate BREEAM standards for buildings should be sought, as well as a commitment to energy conservation measures and to the use of renewable energy sources to achieve the 10% target indicated in saved policy SE2. The applicant has confirmed that the future building contract specification will

include a requirement for the achievement of a very good BREEAM rating. As such, these matters can be dealt with by appropriate planning conditions.

74. With regards to archaeology, the County Council (Strategic) comment that a significant proportion of the site affected by the proposed development will have been destroyed in archaeology terms both by building works involved in the construction of existing and previous buildings, and as a result of previous landscaping. However, in order to comply with the requirements of saved policy SE5 concerning the protection of the heritage, it is suggested that the details of any proposed ground works are submitted which can be dealt with by a suitable condition. The applicant has confirmed that the ground works involved in the replacement and upgrading of the pre parade ring will be limited to the provision of footings for the saddling boxes but would accept a suitable condition requiring further details.

Conclusion

75. The replacement race day jockey's medical facility, stable lad's/lasses canteen and changing facilities and saddling boxes and their use for horseracing related activities is considered an essential need for the racecourse outdoor sports role and, as such, appropriate development in the Green Belt. In addition, the design and location of these buildings are considered acceptable and relate well to the existing racecourse facilities. It is considered that there would be no adverse affect on the character of the area or the visual amenities of the street scene or amenities of nearby residential properties as a result of these proposals.
76. The applicants maintain that the hotel proposal, in addition to specifically addressing the shortfall of hotel provision in Esher, is a vital part of the racecourses strategy to maintain a viable business into the longer term. It is considered that the racecourse and its facilities are an important component of Esher town centres character and its continued success within the local community and economy is very important. The racecourse has been established since 1875 and it forms an intrinsic part in the economy of both the local and wider area and that the proposals could ensure improvements to the public realm and the connectivity of the site to Esher town centre.
77. It is concluded that the development proposed is inappropriate and, by definition, harmful to and compromising the openness of the Green Belt in terms of the hotel element. Whilst the financial case that has been put forward is significant and unique to Sandown Park Racecourse, in the short term a hotel is not required for its financial viability. The very special circumstances advanced by the applicant are not considered to be of sufficient weight to justify an exception being made. As such, the aims to protect the Green Belt as set out in Government Guidance PPG2 would not be met and that the harm by reason of inappropriateness is, in this case, not outweighed by other material considerations.

SD-S's Recommendation: Refuse Planning Permission

The Sub-Committee, following a site visit and having reviewed the relevant material considerations, considered that the very special circumstances advanced by the applicant in terms of facilitating the long term financial viability of the racecourse had been proven and clearly outweighed the harm by reason of inappropriateness to justify an exception being made in the Green Belt.

Sub-Committee's Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission subject to referral to the Secretary of State as a Departure from Green Belt Policy and subject to the conditions and informatives set out below.

The Planning Committee, also following a site visit, agreed with the conclusions of the Sub Committee.

Planning Committee's Recommendation: Grant Planning Permission subject to referral to the Secretary of State as a Departure from Green Belt Policy and subject to the conditions and informatives set out below.