

Change of Use from Commercial Equestrian to Domestic Residential

Applicant: Louise Houghton

Site: *The Site (Former Curridge Green Riding School, West Berkshire)*

Authority Decision: Refusal of Planning Application

Appeal To: The Planning Inspectorate

Date: 16 February 2026

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This statement supports my appeal against West Berkshire Council's refusal of planning permission to regularize residential use at *the site*, formerly a commercial riding school.

The key points of this appeal are:

- Full compliance with the NPPF 2023 and West Berkshire Local Plan.
- Procedural and professional errors beyond applicant control.
- Demonstrated environmental and aesthetic improvement.
- Disproportionate and inequitable nature of the refusal.
- Conflict with the Human Rights Act 1998 and Equality Act 2010.

This appeal seeks a fair and balanced decision that corrects those failings while affirming planning principles of sustainability and justice.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Planning decisions shape both landscapes and lives. This appeal concerns one modest dwelling created entirely within an existing footprint, in full harmony with sustainability goals. The refusal issued by West Berkshire Council does not reflect either the facts or national planning intent.

This document demonstrates alignment with the National Planning Policy Framework (2023) and local strategy while addressing human impact, proportionality, and environmental stewardship.

## **2. BACKGROUND AND PERSONAL CONTEXT**

After divorce in 2015, I entered the private rental sector. Rising costs forced me in 2022 to relocate to land owned by my late aunt's trust — the long-redundant riding-school site. What I found was derelict and environmentally damaged. Using limited savings, I repaired existing welfare buildings on a *like-for-like* basis and safely removed asbestos through licensed contractors.

I commissioned *Architecture & Design Ltd* (later *Studio One UK – Consultancy*) to manage my change-of-use application, paying all fees in good faith. Unbeknownst to me, the company collapsed and never filed the submission. When eviction enforcement began early 2024, I discovered the failure.

With guidance from a council officer, I resubmitted manually. The planning officer anticipated imminent approval before an unexpected refusal was issued without further dialogue. At all times I acted transparently and responsibly.

### **3. PROCEDURAL FAILINGS AND LACK OF DUE PROCESS**

NPPF ¶38 obliges councils to engage *positively and proactively* with applicants. Instead, my experience involved misinformation, abrupt enforcement, and lost documentation.

External professional negligence and administrative inconsistency denied me fair process. The compressed appeal window — over the Christmas period and amid medical recovery — further prejudiced my rights.

These actions fall short of the Human Rights Act 1998 (Art. 8) and the Equality Act 2010 (s149), both requiring fairness and due regard to vulnerability.

### **4. ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSFORMATION AND SUSTAINABILITY**

Under the former riding-school operation, fifty horses produced hundreds of gallons of waste daily; pollution and erosion were extensive. My stewardship has yielded measurable restoration:

- Sealed septic system preventing contamination.
- 175 m<sup>2</sup> of concrete replaced with permeable material.
- 450 tonnes of soil reinstated.
- 200 native saplings and 95 m of wildlife hedging planted.
- Solar panels installed under ECO4 for renewable energy.

These results meet NPPF ¶¶8, 174, 180 and West Berkshire CS19, promoting biodiversity and sustainable land use.

### **5. LOCAL CHARACTER AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

Traffic has reduced from roughly 80 vehicles daily to 1; floodlighting eliminated; noise negligible.

Repairs and pale paint restore rather than harm character.

The dwelling lies between two residential properties, qualifying as *infill* under Policy ADPP1. The result is visual improvement and peace consistent with NPPF ¶130 and CS19 objectives.

## 6. HOUSING, SUSTAINABILITY AND PUBLIC INTEREST

The NPPF ¶69 and the West Berkshire Local Plan Review (2020–2037) encourage re-use of redundant buildings. Granting approval will:

- Add one dwelling without new land take.
- Bring derelict structure back into productive, low-carbon use.
- Support government EPC and net-zero targets.
- Reduce public housing pressure.

Hence, under NPPF ¶11, this proposal clearly constitutes sustainable development.

## 7. HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

My medical recovery and mental-health diagnosis establish vulnerability under the Equality Act 2010 (s149). The refusal and pending eviction breach the duty of care toward vulnerable persons.

Under Human Rights Act Art. 8, respect for home and private life is essential. Eviction absent public harm fails the proportionality test demanded of public authorities.

## 8. ACCOUNTABILITY AND PUBLIC RESOURCES

Refusal forces a self-supporting resident into homelessness, transferring costs to public services — contradicting NPPF ¶62 on efficient use of existing housing. Approval would uphold fiscal responsibility and public confidence in equitable planning.

## 9. POLICY ALIGNMENT SUMMARY

| Framework / Policy  | Objective  | Site Compliance                           |
|---------------------|--|---|
| NPPF ¶11            | Presumption in favour of sustainable development | Fully achieved                            |
| NPPF ¶8             | Sustainability in all dimensions                 | Met through restoration and efficiency    |
| NPPF ¶174–186       | Protect biodiversity and landscape               | Achieved via planting & pollution control |
| West Berkshire CS13 | Sustainable transport                            | 98 % traffic reduction                    |

| <b>Framework / Policy</b> | <b>Objective</b>                  | <b>Site Compliance</b>                |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| West Berkshire CS19       | Landscape / heritage protection   | Site enhanced visually & ecologically |
| NPPF ¶169                 | Support small-scale rural housing | Conversion of existing structure      |
| Human Rights Act Art. 8   | Respect for home                  | Eviction disproportionate             |
| Equality Act 2010 s149    | Protect vulnerable residents      | Duty unmet by Council                 |

## **10. CONCLUSION**

This appeal exemplifies how planning policy and compassion can coexist. The development improves the environment, preserves footprint, and strengthens local amenity.

Refusal achieves nothing of public benefit; approval upholds sustainability, fairness, and human dignity.

Accordingly, I respectfully request that the Planning Inspectorate allows this appeal and grants change-of-use consent for residential occupation of *the site*.

Submitted respectfully to the Planning Inspectorate

Louise Houghton

Date: 16 February 2026

Contact: [REDACTED]