

Statement of Common Ground

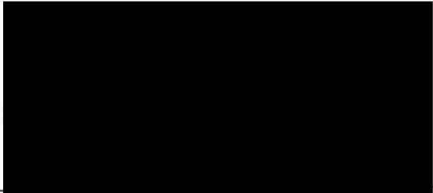

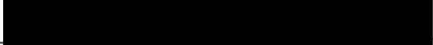
Between

West Berkshire Council

And

Louise Houghton

Appeal:	6005140 (WBC Ref: 25/00534/FUL)
Site:	Curridge Green Riding School ("Thambury Gate") Curridge Green Curridge Thatcham RG18 9EA
Proposal:	Retrospective: Change of use from riding school to dwelling.
Date:	16.04.2026

Signed: 	Signed: 
Date: 	Date: 
Name: Lauren Hill MRTPI On behalf of West Berkshire Council	Name: Louise Houghton
Position: Senior Planning Officer	Position: Applicant and Appellant

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1. Introduction:

1.1. This Statement of Common Ground (SoCG) has been prepared in relation to the above planning appeal and has been agreed between West Berkshire Council and the Appellant. It sets out factual information about the appeal site and proposal, as well as matters of agreement and dispute.

1.2. For the reasons set out in the delegated report, the submitted plans differ substantially from what has been built on the site, where demolitions and substantial rebuilding have taken place.

1.3. West Berkshire Council can only process what has been submitted and has determined the application accordingly. Should this appeal be upheld, a further retrospective application will be required to permit the additional building works undertaken.

1.4. Appeal description: *Retrospective: Change of use from riding school to dwelling.*

1.5. Reasons for refusal as per the Decision Notice:

1.5.1 *Evidence has not been provided by the applicant demonstrating that the north-western building was structurally sound and capable of conversion without substantial rebuilding, extension or alteration. The applicant has not proven that the north-western building was genuinely redundant or disused prior to converting the building to residential use. Lastly, the conversion has not resulted in the retention of the equestrian building's character, its fabric and distinctive features. The development therefore fails to comply with Policy DM24 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 and the NPPF.*

1.5.2 *The rural character and visual quality of the National Landscape has not been preserved or enhanced due to the nature of the changes made to the northwestern building. The original building comprised basic materials including unpainted block work and stable openings, with a small area used for ancillary uses to the Curridge Riding School. In contrast, the new development, incorporates the use of modern domestic materials and features, including new blue UPVC windows and doors, additional glazing, replacement roofing and new flu, light pink painted walls, solar PV panels and an air source heat pump. These modern domestic materials/features have*

cumulatively altered the original building's rural equestrian character to a structure of a more domestic appearance.

Furthermore, the light emitted from the building due to the level and scale of glazing would harmfully erode the intrinsically dark skies of the surrounding landscape contrary to Policy SP2 which seeks to preserve the dark night skies in the NWD National Landscape (AONB). The development does not comply with the Quality Design SPD, Policies DM24, SP2 and SP7 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041, the National Design Guide, nor the NPPF.

2. The Appeal Site

2.1. The appeal site is as per the submitted plans.

2.2. Address: Curridge Green Riding School ("Thambury Gate"), Curridge Green, Curridge, Thatcham, RG18 9EA

2.3. Uses of the site:

2.3.1. Previous use: Riding School (Use class: "Sui Generis")

2.3.2. Current use: Dwelling (Use class: C3)

2.4. Existing structures on site:

2.4.1. The site has been subject to various demolitions and alterations since the application was validated. A history of the works is described in the West Berkshire Council's Statement of Case.

2.4.2. At time of writing (April 2026), the following structures are present:

- 1no. dwelling (portion of former northwestern L-shaped building)
- Sliding entrance gate in excess of 1m in height.
- Screen wall once comprising southwestern elevation of L-shaped building. Screening material inserted into openings.
- Timber panel fencing along portions of the northern and northwestern boundaries in excess of 1m in height.

2.5. Dimensions (as per submitted plans):

Appeal site extent	0.27ha
Northwestern L-shaped building	Original area: Approx. 225sqm Demolished area (prior to determination): Approx. 100sqm.
Southern stable block	Approx. 80sqm (demolished following refusal)
Extent of dwelling at validation	Approx. 58sqm
Current extent of dwelling (incl. unfinished extension)	Approx. 125sqm.

2.6. Physical features:

- 2.6.1. Slope: Gradual downward slope towards the southeast.
- 2.6.2. Vegetation: lining the northern and northwestern boundaries
- 2.6.3. Saplings planted at northeastern corner of the site.

2.7. Site constraints:

- 2.7.1. North Wessex Downs National Landscape
- 2.7.2. Outside Curridge settlement boundary (in the countryside)
- 2.7.3. Flood Zone 1
- 2.7.4. Unallocated site

3. The Local Area

- 3.1. The site is located on the southern outer edge of the settlement boundary of the village of Curridge. The area contains scattered detached dwellings and farm buildings surrounded by large areas of agricultural land and open fields. There is a collection of dwellings approximately 80m to the east, 1no. detached dwelling to the north ("The Old Parsonage") to the north of the highway / by-way intersection, and 1no. adjacent dwelling to the west ("Solo Chase").

3.2. There is a by-way (CHIE/41/2) that runs along the site's northwestern boundary from which the site takes access via a tall impermeable sliding gate at the intersection. A Public Right of Way (CHI/29/2) runs along the northeastern boundary of the site.

3.3. The site forms part of the Lowland Mosaic Character Area (8A: Hermitage Wooded Commons) of the North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2025). The Hermitage Woodlands Commons form part of an undulating lowland plateau, comprising an intricate mosaic of woodland, pasture, and small areas of remnant heathland. Settlements are largely dispersed across the landscape, with scattered farmsteads, small collections of dwellings and isolated dwellings. The area has a quiet and tranquil rural character with dark night skies. The site also forms part of the "Farmed Chalk Mosaic", as described within the West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019).

4. Planning History

4.1 The most recent history is set out in the Officer's Report. For completeness, a full history is set out below:

Planning History (Previous owner(s))

- 75/03476/ADD – Erection of stables and office (Refused 26.11.1975)
- 75/03997/ADD - Relocation of stables and offices (Approved 03.03.1976)
- 17/03377/FULD - Full application for the development of a 3 bedroom rural workers dwelling associated with Curridge Green Riding School (Invalid, closed 03.01.2018)
- 17/03553/FULD - Full application for the development of a 3 bedroom rural workers dwelling associated with Curridge Green Riding School (Refused 23.05.2018)

Planning History (Appellant)

- 24/00732/FUL - Retrospective: Change of use from riding school to dwelling. (Not valid, closed 01.08.2024)
- 24/01625/FUL - Retrospective: Change of use from riding school to dwelling (Returned to applicant, closed 13.03.2025)

Application under Appeal

- 25/00534/FUL - Retrospective: Change of use from riding school to dwelling
Received 12.03.2025.
Refused 07.05.2025.

Details of Previous Use

- 4.1. Curridge Riding School opened in 1972 at Orchard End, Curridge Green (approx. 150m southeast of the site between no. 2 Curridge Green and "Orchard End Bungalow"). The stables at the appeal site were built in 1975 and 1976. The Riding School moved into the stables on the site in 1976.
- 4.2. The previous owner rented approx. 43ha of surrounding land. Lessons were given to all ages (mostly children) during the week, but mainly at weekends. At the weekend, there were 4 ride-outs per day (approx. 15 riders at the weekend plus front and back staff riders) and annual gymkhanas were held.
- 4.3. Up to 55 horses and ponies were kept. A maximum of 20 horses were kept in the stables. The rest grazed the fields and were brought in each day and held in the stalls until needed. Approximately 100 people would pass through the site between 6am for first feed and 10pm. Horses were kept at livery, which moved to "Solo Chase" (southwestern neighbour) as its base.
- 4.4. The Riding School closed on 23rd March 2020, but the site was used as a livery until 10th July 2022. The Appellant subsequently purchased the property and developed the site.

5. Appeal Proposal

Description

- 5.1. The application description reads as follows: Retrospective change of use of a riding school to dwelling.
- 5.2. The development relates to the conversion of an equestrian building into a market house (C3 dwelling).

Plans

5.3. The following plans have been submitted. These were considered when the application was refused:

- "Map A: Sole Ownership" by Requestaplan, drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
- "Map B: Land for Proposed Change of Use" by Requestaplan, drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
- "Map C: 3 Entry / Exit Routes as per Existing Permissions", drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
- Revised Parking Plan reference no. TQRQM24094085506702 (received 20.05.2025)
- Car Parking Provision Plan by Matmap Survey Limited, drawing no. MMS-24-001/01, dated 28.04.2024.
- Floorplan Drawing (existing) by Mapmap Survey, drawing no. MMS-24-001/03, dated 28.04.2024.
- Floorplan Drawing (proposed) by Mapmap Survey, drawing no. MMS-24-001/02, dated 28.04.2024.

5.4. No elevations were submitted. Appellant indicated that the elevations were not changing.

5.5. The Officer's Report and West Berkshire Council's statement of case provide a detailed description of the proposal.

5.6. Subsequent building works and demolitions have been undertaken on site. The Inspector may wish to take this into consideration when determining the appeal.

6. Development Plan and Supplementary Planning Guidance

Agreed planning policies and documents

6.1. The statutory development plan for West Berkshire is made up of a number of different documents. It is agreed that the following development plan policies and material considerations are relevant to the appeal proposal:

West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041 (adopted June 2025)

6.1.1. Strategic Policies:

- Policy SP1 The Spatial Strategy
- Policy SP2 North Wessex Downs AONB
- Policy SP3 Settlement Hierarchy
- Policy SP5 Responding to Climate Change
- Policy SP6 Flood Risk
- Policy SP7 Design Quality
- Policy SP8 Landscape Character
- Policy SP9 Historic Environment
- Policy SP10 Green Infrastructure
- Policy SP11 Biodiversity & Geodiversity
- Policy SP12 Approach to Housing Delivery
- Policy SP15 Housing Type & Mix
- Policy SP16 Affordable Housing
- Policy SP19 Transport
- Policy SP20 Infrastructure Requirements & Delivery

6.1.2. Development Management Policies

- Policy DM1 Residential Development in the Countryside
- Policy DM3 Health & Wellbeing
- Policy DM4 Building Sustainable Homes & Businesses
- Policy DM5 Environmental Nuisance & Pollution Control
- Policy DM6 Water Quality
- Policy DM7 Water Resources & Waste Water
- Policy DM8 Air Quality
- Policy DM10 Listed Buildings
- Policy DM11 Non-designated Heritage Assets
- Policy DM14 Assets of Archaeological Importance
- Policy DM15 Trees, Woodland & Hedgerows
- Policy DM24 Conversion of Existing Redundant or Disused Buildings in the Countryside to Residential Use
- Policy DM28 Residential Extensions
- Policy DM30 Residential Amenity
- Policy DM35 Sustaining a Prosperous Rural Economy
- Policy DM37 Equestrian and Horseracing Industry
- Policy DM41 Digital Infrastructure
- Policy DM42 Transport Infrastructure
- Policy DM44 Parking

Material considerations relevant to the development:

- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2024, as amended in 2025)
- The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- Quality Design SPD (2006)
- Planning Obligations SPD (2014)
- Sustainable Drainage Systems SPD (2018)
- National Design Guide (2021)
- North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2025)
- West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019)

7. National Policy and Other Guidance

Relevant sections and paragraphs in the NPPF

7.1. The NPPF 2023 has been superseded. At the time of writing, the relevant paragraphs of the NPPF 2024 (as amended in 2025) are as follows:

7.1.1. Paragraph 84 (c)

Planning policies and decisions should avoid the development of isolated homes in the countryside unless one or more of the following circumstances apply:

(c) the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting

7.1.2. Paragraph 131:

The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.

7.1.3. Paragraph 135 (a, b, c, d and e only):

Planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments:

- a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;*
- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*

7.1.4. Paragraph 139:

Development that is not well designed should be refused, especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes. Conversely, significant weight should be given to:

- a) development which reflects local design policies and government guidance on design, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents such as design guides and codes; and/or*
- b) outstanding or innovative designs which promote high levels of sustainability, or help raise the standard of design more generally in an area, so long as they fit in with the overall form and layout of their surroundings.*

7.1.5. Paragraph 164 (b):

New development should be planning for in ways that:

- (b) help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, such as through its location, orientation and design. Any local requirements for the sustainability of buildings in plans should reflect the Government's policy for national technical standards.*

7.1.6. Paragraph 167:

Local planning authorities should also give significant weight to the need to support energy efficiency and low carbon heating improvements to existing buildings, both domestic and non-domestic (including through installation of heat pumps and solar panels where these do not already benefit from permitted development rights). Where

the proposals would affect conservation areas, listed buildings or other relevant designated heritage assets, local planning authorities should also apply the policies set out in chapter 16 of this Framework.

7.1.7. Paragraph 187:

Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);

b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;

c) Not applicable to this development.

d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs;

e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and

e) Not applicable to this development.

7.1.8. Paragraph 189:

Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads. The scale and extent of development within all these designated areas should be limited, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

Other national-level guidance:

7.2. The following guidance at regional and national level are as follows:

- 7.2.1. The Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)
- 7.2.2. North Wessex Downs Landscape Character Assessment (2025)
- 7.2.3. West Berkshire Landscape Character Assessment (2019)
- 7.2.4. National Design Guide (2021)

8. Planning Matters in Agreement:

The following matters are agreed between the Appellant and West Berkshire Council:

- 8.1. The site address.
- 8.2. Site area and dimensions as set out in the Officer's Report and Section 2 above.
- 8.3. Site constraints as set out in the Officer's report and Section 2 above.
- 8.4. List of plans as set out in Section 5 above.
- 8.5. Ecological impact (see also Statement of Cases and Officer's Report under "Ecology")
 - 8.5.1. The development is unlikely to result in any negative ecological impacts.
 - 8.5.2. Additional landscaping has been planted.
- 8.6. There are no drainage concerns (see Officer's report under "Flooding and Drainage")
- 8.6. There are no concerns regarding highways impact.
- 8.7. Housing contribution:
 - 8.7.1. The proposal adds 1 dwelling to the West Berkshire local housing supply.

9. Planning Matters in Dispute:

In summary, the following matters are in dispute between the parties:

- 9.1. The development's visual impact (See also Officer's Report under "Design, Character and Appearance and Heritage")
- 9.2. Whether the development constitutes sustainable development (see Statement of Cases).
- 9.3. Whether the development constitutes infill development. (See Statement of Cases)
- 9.4. Whether the original building was redundant (See Statement of Cases, the Officer's report under "Principle of Development" and the Decision Notice)
- 9.5. Whether substantial building has taken place or if the development was undertaken on a "like for like" basis.in accordance with Policy DM24 (see Statement of Cases and Officer's Report under "Principle of Development")

- 9.6. Whether the neighbouring amenity has been strengthened (See Statement of Cases)
- 9.7. Whether the development supports the government's net-zero targets (See Statement of Cases).

10. Schedule of Conditions

Note to Inspector

- 10.1. The following conditions have been put forward by West Berkshire Council. They are designed to ensure compliance with the submitted application that was assessed and refused. These conditions disregard the additional development that has taken place on site following validation, for which an additional application will be required.
- 10.2. The Appellant accepts that the below conditions may be changed by the Inspector if seen fit.

Proposed Conditions

The proposed conditions are as follows:

Compliance with Submitted Plans and Documents

- 10.3. The site shall be redeveloped in accordance with the following submitted plans within 1 year of decision. Thereafter, the development shall remain in perpetuity:
 - a. "Map A: Sole Ownership" by Requestaplan, drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
 - b. "Map B: Land for Proposed Change of Use" by Requestaplan, drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
 - c. "Map C: 3 Entry / Exit Routes as per Existing Permissions", drawing no. TQRQM24094085506702, received 12.03.2025.
 - d. Revised Parking Plan reference no. TQRQM24094085506702 (received 20.05.2025)
 - e. Car Parking Provision Plan by Matmap Survey Limited, drawing no. MMS-24-001/01, dated 28.04.2024.
 - f. Floorplan Drawing (proposed) by Mapmap Survey, drawing no. MMS-24-001/02, dated 28.04.2024.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of proper planning in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy SP7 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041, and Supplementary Planning Document Quality Design (June 2006).

Elevations

10.3.1. Within 3 months of the decision, elevations of all sides of the building shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority. The elevations shall correspond with the approved floor plans and include the materials and colours used for the external surfaces. The development shall be redeveloped in accordance with the approved elevations and remain in perpetuity.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and in the interest of proper planning in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy SP7 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041, and Supplementary Planning Document Quality Design (June 2006).

Schedule of materials

10.3.2. Within 3 months of the application hereby approved, a schedule of the materials used in the construction of the external surfaces of the development shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter the development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved details in perpetuity.

Reason: To ensure the appropriate use of external materials. This condition is applied in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Policy SP7 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041, and Supplementary Planning Document Quality Design (June 2006).

Landscaping

10.3.3. Within 6 months of the date of decision, a detailed soft landscaping scheme shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The soft landscaping scheme shall include detailed plans, boundary treatments, planting and retention schedule, programme of works, and any other supporting information. All soft landscaping works shall be completed in accordance with the approved soft landscaping scheme within the first subsequent planting season. Any trees, shrubs,

plants or hedges planted in accordance with the approved scheme which are removed, die, or become diseased or become seriously damaged within five years of completion of this completion of the approved soft landscaping scheme shall be replaced within the next planting season by trees, shrubs or hedges of a similar size and species to that originally approved.

Reason: Landscaping is an integral element of achieving high quality design. This condition is applied in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework, Policies SP7, SP8 and SP10 of the West Berkshire Local Plan Review 2023-2041, and the Quality Design SPD.