

**Environment Department
Planning Control
Policy Notes**



28. Equestrian Developments

January 2004

Bolton Metro

Environment Department

Planning Control Policy Notes

In December 1995 Bolton Council adopted its Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as the sole statutory land use plan for the whole Borough. This plan has since been reviewed. The latest plan is the Second Deposit UDP which was published in January 2001 and subject to Public Inquiry between November 2001 and December 2002. On adoption this plan will replace the 1995 UDP as the statutory plan for the Borough.

The Council has a number of Planning Control Policy Notes, of which this is one, providing detailed policy advice to supplement UDP policies and help those who wish to understand the Council's detailed planning requirements and advice. These notes will have been subject to public consultation before being finalised.

The interpretation of this advice will relate to the circumstances and particulars of a planning application which will be determined on its own merits.

In the context of changing local, regional and national planning policies it may be necessary for the Council to revise its Planning Control Policy Notes to take these changes into account.

Prospective applicants requiring clarification of the Note's contents should contact the Council's Planning Control Section.

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Introduction.

- 1.1 The keeping of horses for recreation purposes has become increasingly popular in recent years leading to a consequent increase in planning applications for stables, riding arenas, storage buildings, and other facilities associated with equestrian activities.
- 1.2 The information contained in this note supplements policies CE11/1 and CE12/1 of the adopted Unitary Development Plan, provides an overview of national and local planning policy relevant to equestrian developments, and guidance for applicants on the Council's approach to determining proposals for a number of types of development.
- 1.3 The majority of proposals will involve land in the countryside, which is designated either as Green Belt or protected open land. In principle, such locations are appropriate for the keeping of horses. However, in all cases the Council will seek to ensure that the environmental quality, amenity, wildlife interest and character of the countryside are not harmed by inappropriate developments.
- 1.4 Compliance with the guidelines contained in this note does not guarantee that planning permission will be forthcoming, other material considerations will be taken into account and each case determined on its merits.
- 1.5 ***Throughout the text the word 'horse' is used as a generic term. This note therefore applies to developments relating to all sizes, types and breeds of equines.***

National Government Policy.

2.0 Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 – Green Belts (1995).

2.1 “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” (paragraph 1.4 PPG2).

2.2 **“Essential facilities”** for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation are appropriate in Green Belts provided they are **“genuinely required”** for uses of land which preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in it. Examples of such facilities include **“small”** stables which are unobtrusive in the landscape and by virtue of their limited size and scale would not adversely affect the openness of the Green Belt (see paragraphs 3.4 and 3.5 PPG2).

2.3 “With suitable safeguards, the re-use of buildings should not prejudice the openness of Green Belts, since the buildings are already there. It can help to secure the continuing stewardship of land especially by assisting farmers in diversifying their enterprises, and may contribute to the objectives for the use of land in Green Belts. The alternative to re-use may be a building that is left vacant and prone to vandalism and dereliction” (paragraph 3.7 PPG2).

2.4 “The visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which, although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts, might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design (paragraph 3.15 PPG2).

2.5 Planning Policy Guidance Note 7 – The Countryside – Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development (1997).

2.6 “Rural areas can accommodate many forms of development without detriment, if the location and design of development is handled with sensitivity. New development should be sensitively related to existing settlement patterns and to historic, wildlife and landscape resources. Building in the open countryside, away from existing settlements or from areas allocated for development in development plans, should be strictly controlled” (paragraph 2.3 PPG7).

2.7 The re-use and adaptation of existing rural buildings has an important role in meeting the needs of recreation. It can reduce demands for new building in the countryside and avoid leaving an existing building vacant, and prone to vandalism and dereliction (see paragraph 3.14 PPG7).

- 2.8 "High standards of design, construction and maintenance of buildings, and care of land are necessary to ensure that equestrian activities do not have an adverse effect on the countryside and that the horses are well housed and cared for" (Annex F, paragraph F1 PPG7).
- 2.9 "As for all development in the countryside, applicants for planning permission for development involving horses should take particular care to minimise the effect their proposals will have on the appearance of the countryside. Buildings should be sited and designed to blend with their surroundings" (Annex F, paragraph F2 PPG7).

Local Planning Policy.

- 3.0 This section sets out policies contained in Bolton's Adopted Unitary Development Plan (December 1995) and Bolton's Second Deposit Unitary Development Plan (January 2001) that may be of particular relevance in the determination of proposals for equestrian development.

Planning the Way Ahead - Bolton's Adopted Unitary Development Plan (December 1995)

- 3.1 The following policies are contained in the adopted UDP. Policies CE11/1 and CE12/1, dealing with development in areas of Green Belt and Protected Open Land are set out in full.
- 3.2 **Policy CE1/2** seeks to ensure that the design of new buildings respects the character of the area in which they are situated and the amenities of adjoining properties.
- 3.3 **Policy CE3** protects listed buildings and their setting, ancient monuments and sites of archaeological interest from harmful development and operations.
- 3.4 **Policy CE6** seeks to minimise conflicts between adjoining land uses.
- 3.5 **Policy CE7** considers the potential effects of development in relation to air, water, land or noise pollution.
- 3.6 **Policies CE10, CE11, and CE11/1** are concerned with control of development in the Green Belt.

CE11/1. The Council will not allow development within the Green Belt unless it falls within one or more of the following categories:

- a) development in connection with an outdoor recreation facility, together with ancillary buildings required in connection with that facility;
- b) development in connection with cemeteries or institutions requiring large grounds;
- c) development for mineral extraction in accordance with the policies for minerals;
- d) small scale business, industrial or warehouse development in existing industrial estates;
- e) changes of use of existing redundant buildings which possess architectural or historical merits;
- f) limited infilling in settlements or ribbon developments that are within the Green Belt where it is in scale with the area and will not adversely affect its character or surroundings.

Development in any of the above categories will be acceptable only if it does not prejudice the purposes and the visual amenities of the Green Belt by reason of its scale, design and siting.

3.7 **Policy CE12/1** is concerned with the control of development in areas of protected open land.

CE12/1. The Council will not normally allow development on defined areas of open land, as shown on the Proposals Map, unless it falls within one or more of the following categories:

- a) limited infilling within an established housing or industrial area where this is in scale with the area and will not adversely affect its character or surroundings;
- b) the development forms part of, and is required for, the maintenance of an existing source of employment;
- c) the development requires a location outside the urban area, but is not acceptable in the Green Belt, provided that it does not substantially change the open character of the land;
- d) the development would be acceptable in a Green Belt location.

3.8 **Policy CE13** seeks to protect and enhance the quality and diversity of the landscape in the Borough.

3.9 **Policies CE16 to CE16/4** deal with nature conservation.

3.10 **Policy CE17** seeks to conserve and enhance the open character and recreation value of the valleys of the Croal, the Irwell, the Douglas, Middle Brook, Eagley and Bradshaw.

3.11 **Policy CE18/1** controls development in those parts of the Borough that are designated as part of the West Pennine Moors.

Bolton's Second Deposit Unitary Development Plan (January 2001).

3.12 This is the emerging review plan for the Borough which although not yet adopted is being used for planning control purposes.

3.13 **Policy R2 – Protected Open Land:** aims to restrict development in open countryside and protect these areas from impacts on nature conservation interest, landscape character, and visual intrusion.

3.14 **Policy R3 – Farm diversification:** supports the re-use of farm buildings in the countryside.

3.15 **Policy R5 – Landscape Character:** aims to protect the defined Landscape Character Areas from development, which would adversely affect the landscape and its distinctiveness.

3.16 **Policies G1 and G2 – Green Belt:** these policies seek to maintain the openness of the Green Belt and support the purposes for which it was designated, by protecting the land from inappropriate development.

3.17 **Policy G3 – Re-use of buildings in the Green Belt:** supports the continuing stewardship of land in the Green Belt through the re-use of buildings.

3.18 **Policies N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N7 and N9 – Nature Conservation:** these policies protect designated nature conservation sites or areas (Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Biological Importance and Green Corridors), other sensitive habitat and landscape features, and sites known to be important for protected or rare species.

3.19 **Policy EM2 – Environmental Management:** this policy protects existing land uses from unacceptable impacts, such as pollution, arising from incompatible new development.

3.20 **Policies D1, D3, D14 – Design and The Built Environment:** these policies promote good design and aim to protect and preserve the built environment from unacceptable and inappropriate developments.

GUIDANCE ON THE DETERMINATION OF APPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The use of land for the grazing of horses where they are considered to be livestock (the animals being bred or kept for agricultural purposes) does not normally require planning permission. A planning application for the change of use of land may be required where horses are to be kept for recreation, leisure, competitive, breeding or commercial purposes. Where any form of development is proposed planning permission will be required in all cases.
- 4.2 The Council will require high standards of design, construction and maintenance of buildings and the care of land to ensure that equestrian facilities do not have an adverse effect on the countryside and that the horses are well housed and cared for. Most of the countryside around Bolton lies within the Green Belt wherein applicants must demonstrate that the proposed development is **essential** for the keeping of horses, **genuinely required** and **small** in scale.
- 4.3 Where replacement or additional facilities are required for existing stock, applicants will be expected to provide details of the horses kept in terms of size (how many hands), number (how many horses), and ownership. The Council may require sight of the horses' passports in order to verify this information¹ and ensure that new facilities are genuinely required. Where an applicant is seeking to establish new facilities at a site on which horses are not kept at the time of application this must be fully justified in terms of the personal requirements of the applicant or, for example, in the context of a farm diversification scheme or the continued stewardship of land.

Grazing land.

- 4.4 The British Horse Society and Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals recommend that a minimum of 1 acre, or 0.4 of a hectare, of well managed grazing land is required per horse. If the pasture is of poor quality a larger area of land may be required. This standard is applied by the Council to guard against over-grazing and consequent detriment to animal welfare, and the character and appearance of the landscape.
- 4.5 Where planning permission for the change of use of land for the keeping of horses is granted conditions may be imposed in relation to,

¹ In February 2002 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs announced that in order to comply with European Commission Decision 92/353/EEC it would require all horses to have a passport. This is necessary to trace and identify horses to prevent them entering the food chain if they have been administered in the previous six months with any medicines that are not intended for use on food producing animals. The Horse Passports (England) Regulations 2003 come into force on the 30th November 2003. All horses must have a passport by 30th June 2004.

for example, fencing and boundary treatments, and the storage of show jumps and other paraphernalia.

Field Shelters.

- 4.6 Field shelters can vary in terms of type, size, construction and permanence. In certain cases planning permission for a shelter may not be required. However, prospective applicants are advised to contact the Council at an early stage to discuss planning requirements.
- 4.7 Shelters are intended to provide protection from extreme weather conditions and will be used on an intermittent basis. A structure which provides a maximum of 13 square metres of space (the size of a standard stable) will be adequate in most cases. However, the size and number of horses to be accommodated and the area of land available for grazing will be considered in reaching a decision on acceptable dimensions. A shelter which would provide space for more horses than the land can support (1 acre per horse) will not be acceptable.
- 4.8 Shelters should not be intrusive in the landscape and preferably should be sited in a well screened location. In some cases conditions may be imposed to require landscaping to overcome the impact of a shelter on visual amenity and landscape quality (see paragraph 4.26). Applicants should give careful consideration to the orientation and aspect of the new building so as to maximise protection for the horses from the elements.
- 4.9 It is expected that shelters will be of non-permanent construction, usually timber, in order that they may be easily removed when no longer required (conditions may be imposed to require the removal of redundant structures so as to avoid clutter and dereliction in the landscape). Details of materials to be used and the colour of paint or stain finishes to be applied to the structure must be submitted with all applications.

Stables and storage buildings.

- 4.10 Proposed stables and storage buildings must be essential and genuinely required by the applicant. Where existing buildings within the application site or in the applicant's ownership are suitable for equestrian use, but are vacant or not being used for this purpose, the applicant will be required to fully justify the creation of a new facility. Consideration must be given to the adaptation or conversion of existing buildings before new build.
- 4.11 Proposals for extensions to existing buildings should be small scale and harmonise with the scale, height, form and design of the original building. Applications to replace existing buildings will be acceptable in principle where this is essential because of the condition of the building. Proposals involving listed buildings and those in Conservation Areas will be subject to specific policies dealing with these. Where the

alteration or demolition of buildings is proposed a bat survey may be required.

- 4.12 It is expected that stables and storage buildings will occupy the smallest amount of space possible consistent with clearly stated essential requirements (see paragraph 4.3). The construction of barns or other large storage facilities may be acceptable in connection with an existing and continuing agricultural use of the site of which evidence will be required. As already indicated, the keeping of horses for recreation or commercial purposes does not constitute agriculture. Therefore, applications for large scale equestrian related developments should demonstrate very special circumstances to justify approval.

Siting

- 4.13 Where possible stables should be sited at least 30 metres from dwellings to avoid impacts on residential amenity from smells, noise and nuisance. However, dwellings directly related to, or part of, the application site, for example a farmhouse, may be excluded from this standard.
- 4.14 The proposed building(s) must not be intrusive in the landscape and should, wherever possible, be positioned in a well screened or unobtrusive location. Developments should be located a minimum of 10m from existing watercourses or wetlands². The maintenance of such buffer strips may be secured by condition and should remain free from, for example, external storage and waste.

Design

- 4.15 It is expected that buildings will have a compact form and make the best use of space.
- 4.16 Stables should generally be no more than 13 square metres in size (a loose box 3.6m x 3.6m is considered an appropriate standard).
- 4.17 Tack rooms should be no more than 9 square metres in size (a room 2.5m x 3.6m is considered an appropriate standard).
- 4.18 Storage for hay, feed, and bedding materials should be accommodated in one unit whose size will relate to the number of horses kept. A room 13 square metres in size (3.6m x 3.6m) is considered adequate in most cases, but consistent with justified requirements a store up to 20 square metres in size may be acceptable (5.5m x 3.6m).

² This is a requirement of the Environment Agency to ensure minimal: disturbance to river wildlife corridors; siltation; and pollution.

- 4.19 The dimensions referred to in paragraphs 4.16 to 4.18 above are standards used by designers and manufacturers of equestrian buildings. It is expected that in applications for stables the dimensions proposed will reflect the size of horses to be kept. For example, ponies could be accommodated in stables smaller than the standard. Therefore, permission may be refused where it is clear that the size of building is excessive in relation to requirements.
- 4.20 Applications for buildings larger than those referred to in paragraphs 4.16 to 4.18 will require full and detailed justification³.
- 4.21 Full details and samples of all materials to be used in construction will be required as part of an application. The use of materials acceptable to the Council will be secured by condition.
- 4.22 It is expected that external walls will be brick, stone, render or timber (unrendered blockwork will not be acceptable). The roof will usually be tile, slate or timber. Roof pitch should be shallow to minimise the height of buildings and reduce their visual impact. Details of paint or stain finishes to be used on external surfaces must be provided.
- 4.23 Where buildings are to be located on sloping sites full details of existing and proposed ground levels, slab level of the new buildings and any hard-standings will be supplied by way of spot heights, contours and cross sections.
- 4.24 In all cases new buildings should be designed to be in keeping with their surroundings and must not adversely affect landscape character and the visual amenity of the countryside.
- 4.25 Hard-standings and parking areas must be kept to a minimum.

Landscaping and fencing.

- 4.26 In many cases some form of landscaping will be required in order to help minimise the visual impact of new development. New planting should use native species and be of a form consistent with a rural setting. Any new planting or existing vegetation relied upon for screening new development should be protected from potential damage by livestock and machinery. Boundary treatments and fencing should also be consistent with a rural setting, for example hedging or post and rail, and not urban in appearance. Details of planting schemes and fencing (including materials and finishes) must be submitted to the Council for approval prior to the commencement of the development.

³ The RSPCA advises that for larger horses, e.g. draught horses, a stable up to 4.3m x 4.3m may be required.

All-weather outdoor riding arenas or menages.

- 4.27 Outdoor arenas that are well designed, sited and landscaped need not have a significant impact on the landscape. Siting should be a minimum of 10m from watercourses or wetlands⁴, take advantage of natural topography and screening, and be close to existing buildings wherever possible. Details of surface materials, boundary treatments and landscaping will be required in order to assess the visual impact of the proposal. In addition, show jumps and paraphernalia associated with arenas can also be visually intrusive and therefore conditions may be imposed to require the storage of this equipment in a building or enclosure when not in use. The existing levels, and proposed level of the arena should be supplied by way of spot heights, contours and cross sections. Details of engineering operations such as excavation and drainage, and the importation of construction materials will also be required.
- 4.28 An arena should generally be no more than 20m x 40m in size as this is considered the upper limit for an **essential** facility⁵. It is acknowledged that applicants competing at a high level in equestrian sport, and some commercial premises may require a larger arena. However, all proposals involving an arena larger than 20m x 40m will need to demonstrate very special circumstances.

Floodlighting.

- 4.29 The location and position of all external light sources should be submitted as part of a planning application. Lighting mounted on poles or columns will not normally be acceptable as this creates visual intrusion in the countryside. The Council may impose conditions to control hours of operation and illumination (lux) levels of approved light sources.

Livery stables, indoor riding arenas, riding schools, studs and other commercial equestrian establishments.

- 4.30 Large scale new buildings to accommodate livery stables, indoor riding arenas, riding schools, studs and other commercial equestrian establishments will not be permitted in the Green Belt unless very special circumstances can be demonstrated. However, limited additional development, or the replacement of buildings, at existing establishments may be acceptable where this has no greater impact on the landscape than the existing buildings and it can be clearly demonstrated that the new development is essential. In other areas of

⁴ This is a requirement of the Environment Agency to ensure minimal: disturbance to river wildlife corridors; siltation; and pollution.

⁵ This is a standard applied by 'British Dressage' and is used for dressage competitions.

open land, not designated Green Belt, building away from existing settlements or from areas allocated for development in development plans, will be strictly controlled. Proposals involving listed buildings and those in conservation areas will be subject to specific policies dealing with these, and where the alteration or demolition of buildings is proposed a bat survey may be required.

- 4.31 Redundant or under-used farm buildings may present opportunities for re-use in connection with both private and commercial equestrian activities. Such development is encouraged as a means of avoiding dereliction in the countryside, promoting the continued stewardship of land, and achieving farm diversification.
- 4.32 Details of access arrangements, traffic generation and car parking provision will be required as part of any proposal for a commercial equestrian facility.

Access.

- 4.33 Suitable access arrangements must be made for proposed sites so that no hazard is caused to users of the highway.
- 4.34 Vehicles and horses must be able to enter and leave the site safely without the need to stop on the highway, for example in order to close a gate. Planning permission will not be forthcoming if the development is likely to lead to unacceptable risks to road safety. Consideration will also be given to the availability of opportunities for applicants to exercise horses using unclassified roads, tracks and bridleways. In circumstances where there are severely limited opportunities to use routes avoiding the main road network, planning permission may be refused.

Waste Disposal.

- 4.35 Planning applications for stables must include details of drainage, and methods of storage and disposal of manure (see paragraph 4.14).

External storage.

- 4.36 Conditions may be imposed to control the outdoor storage of vehicles, equipment and any other material associated with the keeping of horses. It may be appropriate to designate storage areas and prescribe what can be stored there. This is necessary to avoid clutter in the landscape, unacceptable visual intrusion and environmental impacts (see paragraph 4.14). However, notwithstanding the need to control outdoor storage, planning permission is unlikely to be forthcoming for the erection of new buildings to house vehicles and machinery in connection with the equestrian use of land.

The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995.

- 4.37 Stables erected within the curtilage of a dwelling house (i.e. in a large garden but not a separate paddock) for horses kept as "pet animals... for the domestic needs or personal enjoyment of the dwelling house" enjoy permitted development rights under Part I of the order. However, the keeping of a horse or horses within the garden of a dwelling will usually be impractical due to the small size of most residential gardens. In a garden of less than an acre, where there are other houses adjoining it may be considered unneighbourly to residents and detrimental to the welfare of the animal to maintain a horse in that situation.

Security and supervision.

4.38 It should be noted by applicants that concern about security and supervision at equestrian facilities will not be considered justification for a new dwelling in the countryside whether permanent or temporary.

**** As new Government guidance emerges, or changes are made to the Unitary Development Plan, it may be necessary to revise this document in order to take such changes into account.***