READING AGRICULTURAL CONSULTANTS

September 2026

Proposed Relocation of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre including Erection of Stable Block, Creation of Outdoor Arena and Siting of Two Round Pens.

Land Rear And East of No.7 Blackpool Hill Cottages

Straight Drove

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1 Introduction

1.1 Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC) is instructed by Pamela Spencer and Rebecca Hardy, trading as Folly Farm Equestrian Centre, (the applicants) to provide a supporting equestrian justification statement for the Relocation of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre including Erection of Stable Block, Creation of Outdoor Arena and Siting of Two Round Pens from Folly Farm Equestrian Centre, 25 London Road, Yaxley Peterborough PE7 3NQ to Land Rear And East of No.7 Blackpool Hill Cottages, Straight Drove, Farcet, Peterborough, PE7 3DL.

1.2 In response to the instruction, RAC has visited the site in September 2026 and discussed with the applicants:

- the equestrian activities carried out on the site;
- the number of horses involved in the equestrian enterprise; and
- sources of published information and correspondence relevant to the equestrian activities being undertaken by the applicants.

1.3 The report has been prepared by Olivia Wojniak. I am an independent consultant in agriculture and rural land use and an Associate of Reading Agricultural Consultants Ltd (RAC), an Associate Member of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (AssocRICS) and a Member of the Society of Agriculture (MSAg). I hold an Honours Degree in Rural Land Management from the Royal Agricultural University.

2 Reason for Relocation

2.1 The current Folly Farm Equestrian Centre site located at Yaxley forms part of the approved Great Haddon housing development allowed at appeal on 29 August 2025 under 24/00378/OUT for Outline permission for up to 115 dwellings, public open space, landscaping, access from London Road, and demolition of existing buildings.

2.2 In a Statement posted online at the time of the application, the applicants stated:

“While the final decision is still pending, the reality is that the ongoing construction work from the Great Haddon development has already changed our environment.

"Sadly, our current site is no longer the safe, peaceful home it once was for our horses.

"Increased foot traffic on the public path through Folly Farm, constant construction noise, and the changing surroundings all bring extra risks and stress for them.

"Our horses' welfare has always been – and will always be – our number one priority.

"With the area now set to become a fully built-up development, it's clear this is not a sustainable site for a riding school going forward."

2.3 This approval utilises the whole site of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre and therefore the equestrian business has to relocate.

Google Earth Extract Showing Current Location of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre



Approved Site Layout Plan of 24/00378/OUT



2.4 In order to continue operating Folly Farm Equestrian Centre with its current client base, the applicants began a search up to 15 miles from the Yaxley site but ideally finding a site within 5 miles which would allow many existing riders and families to continue attending the centre.

2.5 The Business would be severely impacted if there was a requirement to relocate beyond a 5 mile distance as it could have resulted in the loss of the well-established customer base and potentially lead to the closure of the riding school.

2.6 The applicants were able to find a site in Farcet, the application site, which is located 3.9 miles from the Yaxley site which meets the needs of the existing equestrian business and customer base.

3 Background

3.1 Folly Farm Equestrian Centre is a riding school and livery yard operated by Rebecca Hardy (of the applicants) which extends to 11 acres and comprises 20 stables, 3 tack rooms, rug rooms, feed stores, wash bay, hay barn, two round pens, outdoor arena and classroom with office.

3.2 Photographs taken at my site visit on 3 September 2026 show the current stabling and equestrian facilities on site:









3.3 The site began operating as a livery yard approximately 30 years ago and started as a riding school 15 years ago. Since establishing the riding school the applicants have operated as a 5 star riding school (meaning the operator is exceeding the statutory guidance standards having been in business for more than 1 year) with a licence to operate with up to 21 horses and ponies.

3.4 On site there are 5 riding school horses/ponies owned by Rebecca Hardy, 6 working liveries and the remaining horses are on full livery.

3.5 The working livery horses are typically a child's first pony which allows the owners to reduce the livery costs as the horse/pony will work a number of agreed hours in the riding school.

3.6 The business currently employs 9 staff members (not including Rebecca Hardy) comprising:

- 3 x 30+ hour per week;
- 5 x part-time/casual staff; and

- 1 x maintenance worker 20 hours per week.

3.7 The Centre offers private or semi-private lessons only with lessons beginning at 10am on weekdays and 9am on weekends and provides lessons to 108 clients per week.

3.8 The Centre is not a Riding for the Disabled Association (RDA) Centre but due to the nature of the private/semi-private lessons the applicants find that they have a number of SEN (Special Educational Needs) clients.

3.9 The applicants' business has a long waiting list for new riders wishing to take lessons, particularly following the closure of several riding schools within the local area which have closed due to increasing costs and regulatory requirements. Currently the nearest riding schools are in Eye Green – 8.8 miles from the application site or Thorney – 10.7 miles from the application site.

3.10 In addition to the riding lessons, the applicants are a Pony Club Approved Centre with club meetings taking place on a Wednesday night each week and offers pony days and camps during school holidays. These lessons do operate as a group session.

3.11 The applicants have also identified an opportunity in the market to provide "stay and play" sessions with parents bringing children aged 2-4 years old to the site with this operating twice a week depending on the season.

3.12 Within the Farcet area there are no riding schools or full livery yards and therefore the relocation of the business will not impact on any other equestrian yards in the local area.

3.13 The application site extends to 28 acres and has previously been in arable use however the applicants are seeding it to re-establish a long-term grass ley for horse grazing.

4 Qualifications, Experience and Training

<u>Rebecca Hardy – Proprietor</u>

- NEBOSH National Diploma in Occupational Health and Safety (DipNEBOSH)
- City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Work-based Horse Care and Management – Coaching
- UKCC Level 2 Equestrian Coaching Qualification – completed through The Pony Club under the former UK Coaching Certificate framework
- City & Guilds A1 Assessor Award – Assessing Candidates Using a Range of Methods
- PTLLS – Preparing to Teach in the Lifelong Learning Sector
- CIPD Employment Law Programme

- Level 3 Safeguarding
- BHS Two-Day Initial First Aid Course
- ACCPH Certificate in Equine Facilitated Learning
- Level 3 Forest School Leader qualification – currently studying

Experience

- 15+ years' experience owning and running a riding school and equestrian centre
- Extensive experience in equestrian coaching, horse care and management, equine welfare and rider development
- 25+ years' professional experience in Human Resources and Health & Safety, progressing through senior management to Director level
- Extensive professional experience in safeguarding, risk management, health & safety, training and assessment, employment matters, people management and organisational governance

Georgia – Yard Manager

- City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma in Work-based Horse Care and Management
- Level 2 Safeguarding
- BHS Two-Day Initial First Aid Course

Experience

- 12+ years' equestrian industry experience
- Extensive practical experience across riding-school coaching, horse care and yard management
- Experienced in the day-to-day management of horses and ponies, equine welfare, rider support and the operation of a busy riding-school yard

Coaching & Yard Team

4.1 The wider coaching and yard team brings a broad range of equestrian qualifications and practical experience, including qualifications and training at various levels in:

- Equestrian coaching and instruction;
- Horse care and management;

- Equine welfare;
- Yard management and practical horse care;
- Safeguarding; and
- First aid.

4.2 The team combines formal training with extensive practical experience working with horses, riders, children and young people, with staff undertaking the necessary training and development appropriate to their individual roles.

5 National Planning Policy

5.1 National planning policy guidance for development in the countryside is set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) updated in August 2026.

5.2 The National Planning Policy Framework places a presumption in favour of sustainable development at the heart of the planning system. Policy S3 - Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development provides that decisions on development proposals should apply this presumption. This means that:

- development proposals within settlements should be considered against Policy S4;
- development proposals outside settlements should be considered against Policy S5; and
- in all locations, proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan and the national decision-making policies in the Framework should be approved without delay.

5.3 Policy DM3 - Determining Development Proposals requires local planning authorities to work with applicants in a positive and proactive manner, seeking solutions to problems arising from initial proposals where necessary, taking a proportionate approach to the planning matters raised, considering whether otherwise unacceptable proposals can be made acceptable through planning conditions or obligations, and not refusing applications which should clearly be approved having regard to the development plan, the Framework and other material considerations.

5.4 The objective of Chapter 4 of the Framework is to promote sustainable patterns of development, including enabling development which supports the rural economy and rural communities while safeguarding the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.

5.5 Within this context, Policy S5 - Principle of Development Outside Settlements recognises that certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements where the benefits are

not substantially outweighed by adverse effects. These include development for rural businesses and services where a countryside location is necessary, the reuse, extension or replacement of existing buildings, the redevelopment of previously developed land, and limited infilling within groups of houses.

5.6 Chapter 7 - Building a Strong, Effective Economy seeks to ensure that planning decisions support economic growth.

5.7 Policy E1 - Supporting Economic Growth requires planning policies and decisions to create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand and adapt, and confirms that significant weight should be given to supporting economic growth and productivity, taking account of local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

5.8 Policy E2 - Supporting a Prosperous Rural Economy states that planning policies and decisions should enable:

a) *the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, including through the conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;*

b) *the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses; and*

c) *sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside and contribute to local prosperity.*

6 Local Planning Policy

6.1 The adopted Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (May 2019) does not contain a standalone equestrian policy. Instead, equestrian proposals are determined primarily against Policy LP10 (The Countryside) and Policy LP23 (Tourism and Recreation).

6.2 Policy LP10 The Countryside states:

"Development in the countryside will be restricted to the limited and specific opportunities as provided for in other policies of this plan.

All development in the countryside must:

a. *seek to use land of lower agricultural value in preference to land of higher agricultural value:*

   i. *avoiding the irreversible loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land (Grade 1 to 3a) where possible; and*

ii. *avoiding Grade 1 agricultural land unless there are exceptional circumstances where the benefits of the proposal significantly outweigh the loss of land;*

b. *recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside; and*

c. *not give rise to noise, odour, obtrusive light or other impacts that would adversely affect the use and enjoyment of the countryside by others."*

6.3 Policy LP23 Tourism and Recreation states:

"A proposal for a new or expanded tourism, sport or leisure use in the countryside will be supported where it can be demonstrated that:

a. *it is well-related to a defined settlement unless there are robust operational or sustainability reasons why it needs to be located elsewhere;*

b. *it does not cause harm to, and where appropriate, enhances the ecological, landscape and heritage significance of the proposed location;*

c. *the impact of the scale, character and location of the development on both its immediate surroundings and the wider landscape are minimised as far as possible;*

d. *adequate servicing can be provided, including water supply, electricity and for sewage and waste disposal; and*

e. *it will not have an adverse impact on any internationally or nationally designated wildlife site through increased visitor pressure.*

Where tourist accommodation is approved appropriate planning conditions will be used to prevent occupation as a person's permanent sole or main residential use.

A proposal for tourist accommodation, including touring caravan and camping sites, should be supported by a robust business plan demonstrating that it is viable in the long term."

7 Proposal

7.1 This application proposes the erection of a stable block with associated equestrian facilities, creation of a 30m x 80m outdoor school and siting of two round pens.

8 Appraisal

Stable Building

8.1 The proposed stable building is formed of a courtyard area and U Shaped stabling which will provide for the relocated riding school and livery operations of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre.

8.2 The proposed stable building has been designed so that the horses when stabled in their boxes can see other horses. As horses are social animals this is an important welfare and design feature of the stable building. The proposed courtyard and U shape design provides for the efficient day to day labour usage and management of stabled horses.

8.3 The proposed building comprises the following:

- 20 loose boxes (16 standard size and 4 larger);
- Two wash bays;
- Two tack rooms;
- Two rug rooms;
- Two feed rooms;
- Two storage areas;
- Office;
- Kitchen;
- Classroom; and
- Toilets (one male, one female and one disabled).

8.4 The courtyard block of the proposed building comprising 9 stables is formed around turnout pens which will be used to limit grazing for any laminitic horses or ponies and can provide a teaching area for the Pony Club nights or camps.

8.5 The U Shaped block comprising 11 stables will be utilised by horses and ponies on full livery and it is the intention of the business that this area will not be accessed by riding school clients.

8.6 The British Horse Society and the DEFRA Code of Practice for the Welfare of Horses, Ponies, Donkeys and their hybrids (2009), which sets a minimum stable size for large horses of 3.65m x 4.25m (15.5m2), a minimum size of 3.6m x 3.6m (12.96m2) for horses; a minimum size of 3.05m x 3.05m (9.3m2) for ponies and a minimum size of 4.25m x 4.25m (18m2) for foaling boxes.

8.7 The stables are designed with 16 loose boxes each measuring 3.6m x 3.6m which will be suitable for stabling of horses and 4 loose boxes each measuring 3.6m x 5.4m which will provide stabling for larger horses in the riding school or full livery. The larger stable boxes provide additional flexibility within the establishment and ensure that the accommodation is capable of meeting the differing requirements of the horses on site. The proposal therefore represents a purpose-designed solution to the operational requirements of the equestrian use.

8.8 The supporting equine facilities are integral to the operation of the stables rather than being ancillary facilities included for convenience. The wash bays are required for routine horse care and hygiene and allowing areas external to the looseboxes for veterinary/dentist/farrier/physio visits; the tack rooms and rug rooms provide secure and appropriate storage for saddlery, riding equipment and horse rugs; and the feed rooms and storage areas provide suitable accommodation for feed, bedding, equipment and other materials required in the daily management of the horses. These equine facilities are commonly seen on equestrian yards.

8.9 Muck from the stables at Yaxley is currently stored and collected by a local farmer monthly. It is proposed that this arrangement will continue at the Farcet application site.

Riding School and Educational Facilities

8.10 The provision of a classroom is particularly important to the operation of a modern riding school, particularly when the applicants are a Pony Club Centre which requires theoretical as well as practical teaching in order for Club Members to achieve awards and badges. Equestrian activities involve an important educational component extending beyond practical riding instruction. A suitable indoor teaching space enables tuition to be provided in areas such as horse care, stable management, tack and equipment maintenance, animal welfare, riding theory and safe working practices.

8.11 The classroom would also provide an appropriate space for briefings and instruction before or after practical activities.

8.12 The proposed kitchen and toilet facilities, including a dedicated accessible toilet provide appropriate welfare facilities for staff, pupils, instructors and visitors. Their inclusion ensures that the development can operate as a properly managed and accessible equestrian facility, rather than relying upon inadequate or dispersed facilities elsewhere on the site.

8.13 The office provides an appropriate administrative base from which the applicants' business can be managed, including bookings, staff and customer management, horse records, health and safety matters and general administration.

Welfare and Safety of Horses and Riders

8.14 The layout has been designed around the welfare of the horses and the safe operation of the equestrian business. Separating horse accommodation, equipment storage, administration and teaching facilities allows the various activities associated with the riding school and livery yard to be managed safely and efficiently.

8.15 The provision of dedicated storage and welfare facilities would also assist in maintaining a tidy and well-managed site.

Purpose Designed Facility

8.16 The existing footprint at the current Folly Farm Equestrian Centre in Yaxley totals 465m^2 across four stable blocks/buildings.

8.17 The proposed stable block at the Farcet application site measures 560m^2.

8.18 This proposal combines the requirements of the Equestrian Centre into a single building which will enable staff to manage the horses efficiently, provides appropriate facilities for clients and pupils, and ensures that equipment, feed and other materials can be securely stored within dedicated spaces.

8.19 In RAC's professional opinion these individual equine facilities within the proposed building are of an acceptable size for their intended use and will meet the necessary management and welfare requirements for all the horses on site

8.20 RAC considers that the proposed design of the stable block is of an appropriate size and design for its intended use.

Creation of Outdoor Arena

8.21 This application proposes to create a 30m x 80m outdoor arena (manège) which will be used by the applicants and their riding school, pony club and livery clients.

8.22 The current manège at the Yaxley site measures 20m x 40m and provides space for the exercising of horses but only allowing space for one or two jumps and turning circles. The exercising space is limited for the scale of operation at the Equestrian Centre.

8.23 The proposed larger manège will enable the applicants to safely operate up to two lessons at once, potentially offering the opportunity to reduce the waitlist for riding lessons whilst maintaining the private or semi-private lessons or allow livery clients and riding school clients to ride at the same time.

8.24 The manège will involve laying suitable drainage, a permeable layer and rubber riding surface (utilising the current surface from the Yaxley site) and bordered by post and rail fencing. The environmental effects of the development will be minimal.

8.25 The perimeter post and rail fencing of the manège will be 1.3m high and is of a typical rural design for such a facility and provides suitable rider and horse safety in line with the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) guidelines for Health and safety in horse riding establishments and livery yards (2015).

8.26 The proposed manège is of dimensions suitable for providing the necessary horse and rider safety for the various riding disciplines and lessons – particularly noting the wider turning space for horses and impact it may have on their skeletal and muscular systems.

Siting of Two Round Pens

8.27 The proposed round pens are an essential ancillary equine facility to support the efficient operation of the riding school and livery yard and to provide a safe, controlled and weather-independent means of exercising horses or controlling access to grazing.

8.28 They are currently sited at the Yaxley site and will be relocated to the application site with one being a sand round pen and the other being a grass round pen.

8.29 Different horses have different exercise and training requirements, and the availability of both grass and sand surfaces would allow the applicants to select the facility and most appropriate environment according to the horse, activity and prevailing ground conditions.

8.30 The grass round pen would provide an enclosed surface, area for the controlled exercise, schooling and training of horses. Its enclosed form allows horses to be worked safely in a defined space without requiring use of the larger riding arena or taking horses onto public roads.

8.31 The sand round pen will provide a purpose-designed, all-weather enclosed surface for controlled exercise, schooling and horse training. The use of a suitable equestrian surface would provide greater consistency than grass, particularly during periods of wet weather when grass areas may become unsuitable for repeated use.

8.32 They will also provide a useful facility for introducing horses to a controlled schooling environment, undertaking basic exercises and allowing horses to become accustomed to being worked in an enclosed area.

8.33 For the riding school, the pens will provide instructors with an additional environment in which horses and riders can be assessed and trained. Its smaller scale would be particularly useful for individual instruction and exercises requiring close supervision.

8.34 For the livery yard, the pens will provide clients with an additional location for controlled exercise and schooling, thereby reducing pressure on the outdoor arena and allowing that equine facility to remain available for lessons and more intensive schooling activities.

8.35 The round pens are currently sited adjacent to the outdoor school at the Yaxley site, however this application proposes a degree of separation between the two as horses within the round pens can be a distraction to horses and riders having lessons or training within the outdoor arena.

8.36 RAC considers the round pens represent a necessary and proportionate ancillary equine facility that would support the applicants' operation of the riding school and livery yard.

9 Loss of Agricultural Land

9.1 The application site is denoted as Grade 2 Agricultural Land on DEFRA's Agricultural Land Classification.

9.2 Although the site is identified as Grade 2 agricultural land and therefore falls within the definition of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) agricultural land, the proposed equestrian use should not be characterised as the permanent loss of the agricultural resource.

9.3 Agricultural Land Classification is concerned with the inherent physical and chemical characteristics of land and does not classify land according to its current use. The proposed equestrian use would retain the land as predominantly open, permeable grassland, with the majority of the site remaining available for the grazing and management of horses. Indeed, land used for the grazing of horses can constitute agricultural land where it is genuinely used for grazing.

9.4 The proposal would therefore not result in the wholesale sealing, excavation or urbanisation of the Grade 2 resource; rather, it would represent a change in the land management and use of predominantly undeveloped grassland, with only the footprint of the stable building and any associated hardstanding representing a permanent physical change.

9.5 Consequently, the relevant consideration is the limited area of land physically lost to built development and the extent to which the soil resource is protected, rather than treating the

entire equestrian landholding as a loss of BMV agricultural land. The NPPF's current guidance similarly directs decision-makers to consider the economic and other benefits of BMV land and, where significant development is necessary, to prefer poorer-quality land, rather than establishing an absolute prohibition on development of BMV land.

10 Conclusion

10.1 The proposed relocation of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre from the current site in Yaxley to the application site in Farcet is considered compliant with National and Local Planning Policy.

10.2 The stables are suitably scaled and would be built of appropriate materials, including 20 loose boxes, associated storage and handling areas. Such structures are commonly seen in a countryside location.

10.3 The outdoor school and round pens are considered an appropriate equine facility for the exercise and training of the riding school and livery horses and ponies.

10.4 The applicants' business provides a well-established riding school and livery with over 100 weekly riding clients and the employment of 9 staff members along with wider benefits to the local economy through vets, farriers, dentists and feed and bedding merchants.