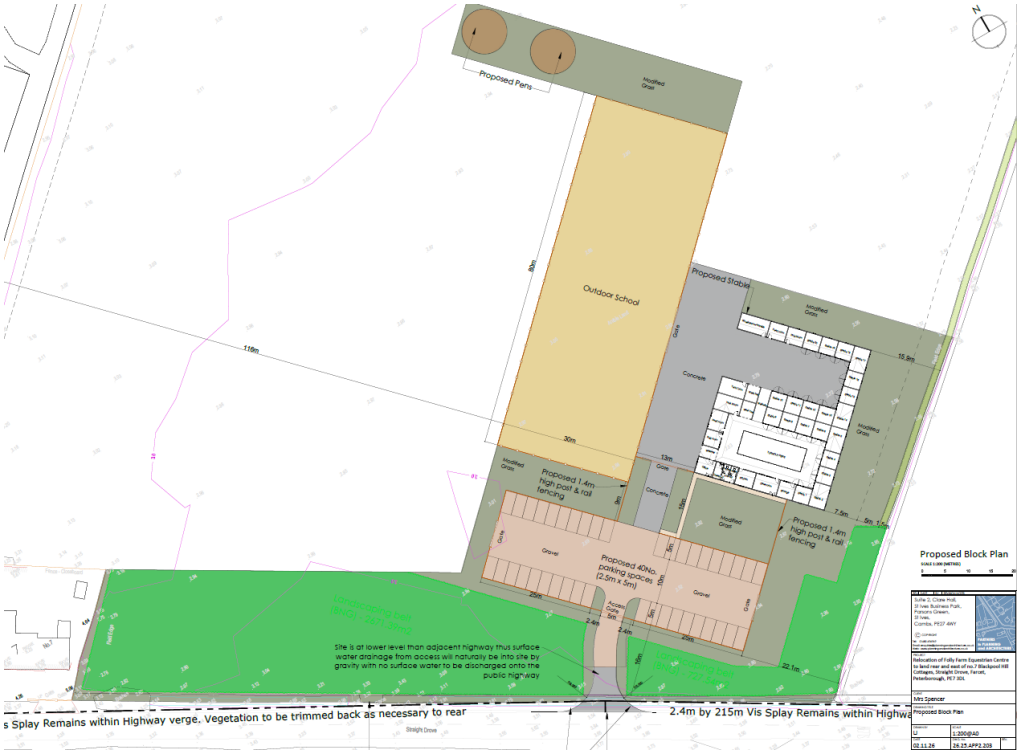
PLANNING, DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT



PROPOSAL: Relocation of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre, including a proposed stable building, outdoor riding arena, two round pens and associated access, parking and landscaping

SITE: Land rear and east of No. 7 Blackpool Hill Cottages, Straight Drove, Farcet, Peterborough PE7 3DL

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1 FOREWORD

1.1 This Planning, Design and Access Statement has been prepared by Partners in Planning and Architecture Ltd in support of a full planning application for the relocation of Folly Farm Equestrian Centre to land rear and east of No. 7 Blackpool Hill Cottages, Straight Drove, Farcet, Peterborough, PE7 3DL. The application seeks permission for a purpose-designed stable building, outdoor riding arena, two round pens and associated access, parking and landscaping.

1.2 Folly Farm Equestrian Centre is an established riding school and livery business operating from 25 London Road, Yaxley. It provides individual and small-group riding instruction, livery, Pony Club activities and educational programmes, including provision for children with special educational needs. Its relocation is supported by an independent Equestrian Justification Statement addressing the business's operational requirements.

1.3 The relocation is necessary because the existing Yaxley site forms part of the residential development site authorised under outline planning permission 24/00378/OUT for up to 115 dwellings, allowed on appeal on 29 August 2025. The permission encompasses the existing equestrian centre, such that the business must find alternative premises to continue operating.

1.4 The proposed Farcet site is approximately 3.9 miles from the existing premises, keeping the business within its established customer catchment and allowing its staff, riding-school pupils and livery customers to continue using the service.

1.5 The application is accompanied by the following drawings: Site Location Plan (26.25.APP2.200); Proposed Block Plan (26.25.APP2.203); Proposed Eastern and Western Visibility Splays (26.25.APP2.204); and Proposed Stable Plans and Elevations (26.25.APP2.205).

1.6 Supporting documents comprise the Equestrian Justification Statement (Reading Agricultural Consultants, September 2026); Highways Statement (MTC Engineering, October 2026); Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Sound Ecology, October 2026); and statutory Biodiversity Metric (4 November 2026). The flood-risk and drainage assessment is contained within this Statement.

2 SITE ANALYSIS

2.1 The application site lies on the north-eastern side of Straight Drove, approximately 1km south-east of the main built-up area of Farcet, to the rear and east of No. 7 Blackpool Hill Cottages. It is an open, predominantly arable field parcel in a flat, agricultural landscape, with dispersed dwellings and equestrian premises along Straight Drove.



Figure 1: *Image looking north through the application site from Straight Drove*

2.2 Drawing 26.25.APP2.200 defines the red-line application site as approximately 12,246m² (1.224 hectares) and identifies a further 84,026m² (8.402 hectares) as adjoining blue-edged land.

2.3 The site comprises Grade 2 agricultural land, which is best and most versatile agricultural land. It has been used for arable cropping and contains no substantial trees or hedgerows, with shallow drainage ditches at its boundaries.

2.4 The site is outside the settlement boundary and has no specific allocation or other site-based designation on the adopted Local Plan Policies Map. It lies immediately adjacent to, but outside, the mapped Great Fen Landscape and Visual Setting. It is not within a conservation

area, and no listed buildings are identified in its immediate surroundings.

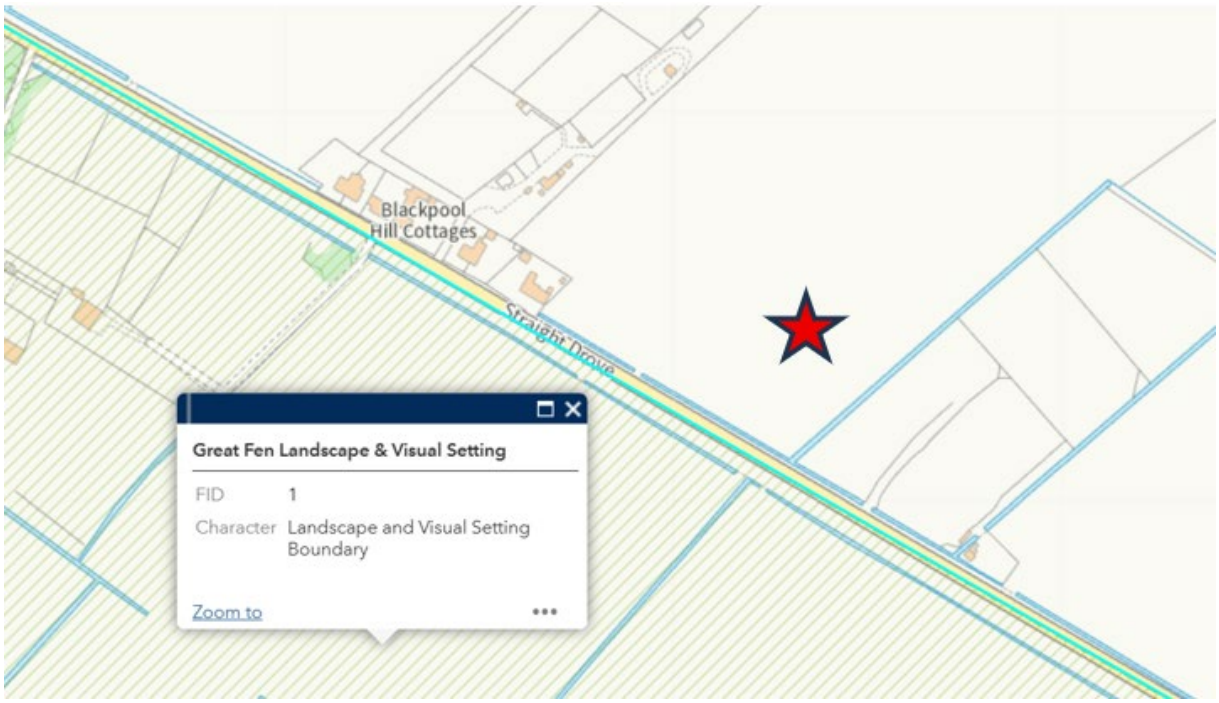


Figure 2: *Excerpt from HDC Adopted Local Plan Policies Map*

2.5 The site is in Flood Zone 1, with the Environment Agency mapping indicating no notable surface-water flood route across the main development area.

3 THE SURROUNDINGS

3.1 The surroundings are characterised by open fields, boundary ditches and scattered rural development along Straight Drove. Blackpool Hill Cottages form a small residential group immediately west of the site; land to the north and east remains predominantly agricultural.



Figure 3: *Image looking west along Straight Drove frontage towards No.7 Blackpool Hill Cottages*

3.2 Straight Drove is a rural, unlit two-way road, approximately 5.5–6m wide at the site frontage and subject to the national 60mph speed limit. Grass verges and drainage ditches run alongside much of the highway, with no continuous footway along the site frontage. The existing agricultural access crosses the frontage ditch; the proposed replacement access is assessed in the accompanying MTC Engineering Highways Statement.

3.3 The wider locality includes paddocks, agricultural buildings and established equestrian uses, including Springtythe Stables to the north-west. No public right of way crosses the application site, and there is no nearby connected public footpath or bridleway network serving the frontage. Public views of the site are therefore principally available from Straight Drove, while the closest sensitive receptors are the neighbouring cottages.

4 PLANNING HISTORY

4.1 At Folly Farm Livery Stable, London Road, Yaxley, outline application 24/00378/OUT sought permission for up to 115 dwellings, public open space, landscaping, access and associated works following demolition of the existing buildings. The application was refused on 10 October 2024, but the appeal (APP/H0520/W/25/3363835) was allowed on 29 August 2025, subject to conditions and a Section 106 agreement.

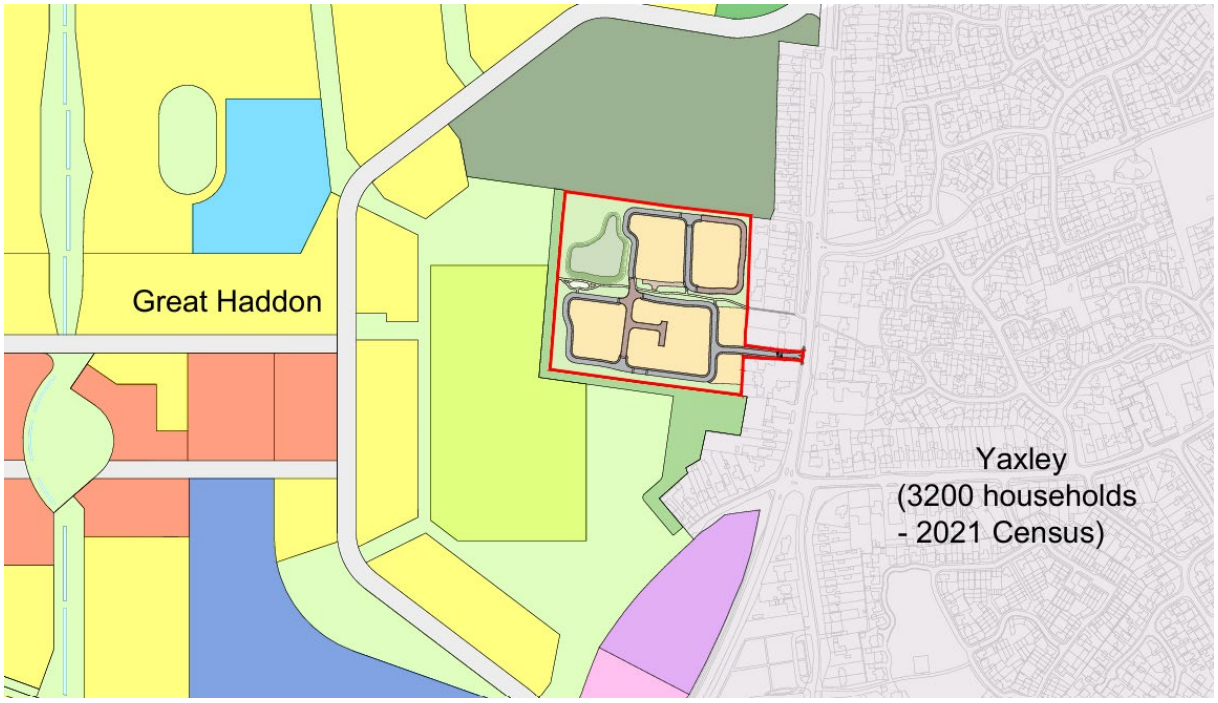


Figure 4: *Excerpt from Plan showing existing Folly Farm site subject to outline planning permission for 115 homes in the context of Yaxley and adjacent Great Haddon development*

4.2 The outline permission, with only access determined at this stage, encompasses the existing equestrian centre. Redevelopment of those premises necessitates relocation if the established riding school and livery operation is to continue. This is directly relevant to the justification for the proposal, without predetermining the acceptability of development at Farcet.

4.3 Within the wider Farcet landholding, an earlier notification (26/01694/AGDET) concerned a 360m² general-purpose agricultural storage building under Schedule 2, Part 6, Class A of the General Permitted Development Order 2015. On 8 October 2026, the Council determined that prior approval for siting, design and external appearance was not required.



Figure 5: *Excerpt from Block Plan submitted with approved agricultural determination application 26/01694/AGDET*

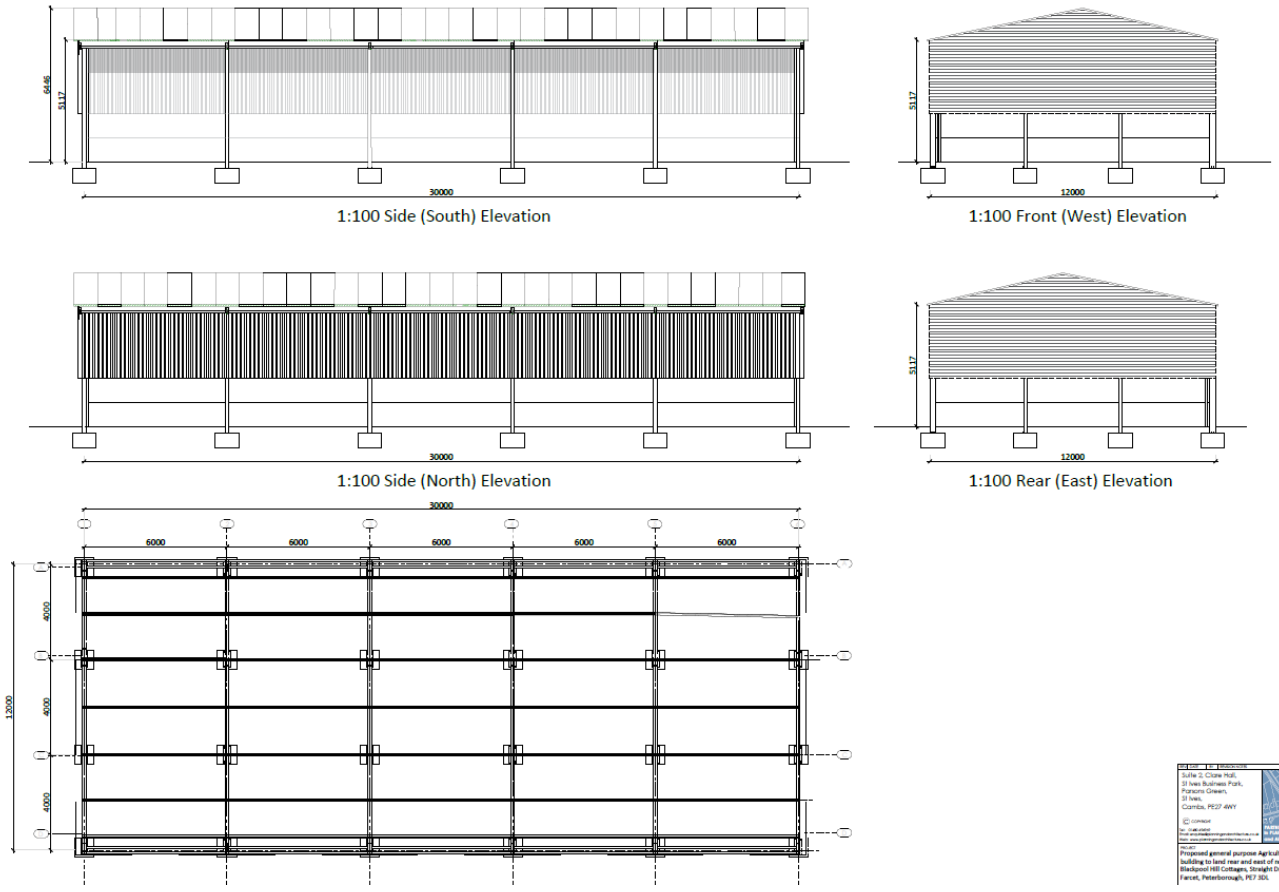


Figure 6: *Floor Plans and Elevations submitted with approved agricultural determination application 26/01694/AGDET*

5 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

5.1 The application seeks permission to relocate Folly Farm Equestrian Centre from Yaxley to Straight Drove, Farcet. The development comprises a purpose-built stable complex, a 30m by 80m outdoor riding arena, two round pens, access and parking, associated external areas and landscaping.



Figure 7: *Excerpt from Proposed Block Plan*

5.2 The stable building is arranged as a single complex around internal courtyard and turnout areas. It provides 20 loose boxes, comprising 16 standard and four larger boxes, together with two wash bays, two tack rooms, two rug rooms, two feed rooms and ancillary storage.

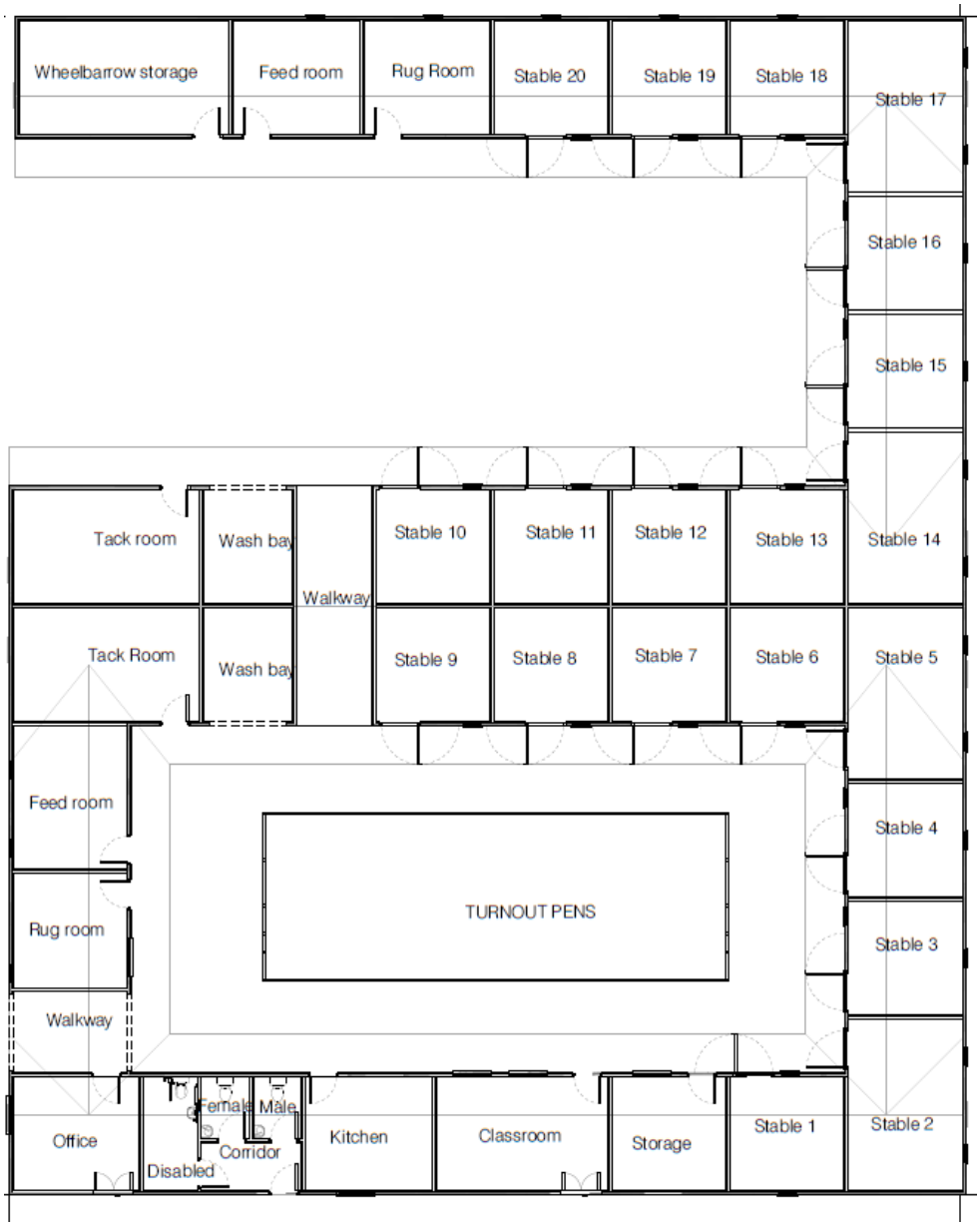


Figure 8: *Proposed Stables Floor Plan*

5.3 The building also provides a classroom, office, kitchen and male, female and accessible toilets. These facilities are integral to the riding-school and livery operations, providing suitable accommodation for teaching, administration, horse care, staff and customer welfare.

5.4 The 30m by 80m outdoor arena would accommodate riding instruction, exercising and training, providing greater flexibility for lessons and livery use than the current facility at Yaxley. The two round pens would provide dedicated space for controlled exercise and training.

5.5 The block plan provides 40 parking spaces served by a new access from Straight Drove. Visibility splays of 2.4m by 215m in each direction are shown on drawing 26.25.APP2.204 and are considered alongside vehicle tracking and forecast traffic movements in the highways assessment below.

5.6 The proposed layout includes frontage landscape planting and grassed areas within the application boundary. The location and extent of the facilities are shown on drawing 26.25.APP2.203, with the stable accommodation detailed on drawing 26.25.APP2.205.

5.7 Folly Farm is an existing five-star licensed riding school authorised for up to 21 horses and ponies. It employs nine staff in addition to the proprietor and provides lessons to around 108 clients each week. This application is intended to secure continuity of that established enterprise, rather than create an unrelated new destination.

6 PLANNING POLICY ANALYSIS AND JUSTIFICATION

LEGISLATION

6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 also requires regard to relevant development plan provisions and other material considerations.

RELEVANT NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

6.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in August 2026, is a material consideration. Of particular relevance are Policies S3 and S5, concerning sustainable development and development outside settlements, and Policies E2 and E4, concerning commercial development and rural businesses.

6.3 Policy S3 establishes the presumption in favour of sustainable development and directs proposals outside settlements to the approach in Policy S5. Policy S5 addresses development outside settlements, including circumstances in which a countryside location is necessary for a rural business or service.

6.4 Policies E2 and E4 support investment in businesses and suitable rural enterprises and leisure facilities. Their application to the proposed riding school, livery operation and associated buildings is considered in the assessment below.

RELEVANT LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

6.5 The adopted development plan is Huntingdonshire's Local Plan to 2036 (May 2019). The application site lies in the countryside, where the relevant development plan policies must be considered together.

6.6 Policy LP10 (The Countryside) is relevant, alongside Policy LP23 (Tourism and Recreation) and, insofar as applicable, Policy LP19 (Rural Economy).

6.7 The assessment also addresses Policies LP11 and LP12 (design), LP14 (amenity), LP16 and LP17 (transport and parking), LP5 and LP15 (flood risk and drainage), and LP30 (biodiversity).

Planning Justification

The Principle of the Proposed Development:

Relevant In-Principle Policy Context

6.8 The application seeks the relocation of an established commercial riding school and livery business to a new site in the countryside, rather than the expansion of an existing equestrian operation on the application land. The principle of development must therefore be considered principally against Policies LP10 (The Countryside) and LP23 (Tourism and Recreation) of the adopted Local Plan, together with Policy S5 of the NPPF 2026. Further relevant considerations include Policy LP19 (Rural Economy) of the Local Plan and Policies E2 and E4 of the NPPF, which seek to support economic growth and the development of rural businesses.

6.9 Policy S5 of the NPPF establishes the principle of development outside settlements for certain specified uses, which should be approved unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse effects, when assessed against the national decision-making policies in the Framework. In particular, Policy S5(1)(a) expressly identifies outdoor sport and recreation as a form of development supported in principle outside settlements.

6.10 The proposal would provide for the relocation of a comprehensive equestrian centre, offering riding lessons, Pony Club activities and associated tuition, alongside stabling and livery facilities. The outdoor arena and round pens would accommodate riding, training and exercise, while the stable block and teaching accommodation would provide the supporting facilities integral to the operation of the centre. Taken as a whole, the proposal clearly represents an established form of outdoor sport and recreation which is supported in principle under Policy S5(1)(a).

6.11 The national policy context is further reinforced by Policies E2 and E4 of the NPPF. Policy E2(1)(a) directs that substantial weight should be given to the economic benefits of commercial development allowing businesses to invest, expand or adapt. Policy E4(1) supports well-designed new buildings and facilities for rural leisure, whilst E4(2) recognises that rural business needs may require locations outside settlements, subject to taking available opportunities to use previously developed or well-related sites and ensuring appropriate siting and design. These provisions are directly relevant to the continuation of an established equestrian enterprise.

6.12 Turning to the adopted Local Plan, Policy LP10 (The Countryside) restricts development in the countryside to the limited and specific opportunities provided for by other policies of the Plan. It also requires development to seek to use land of lower agricultural value, recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and avoid adverse impacts upon its use and enjoyment. The policy does not impose a blanket restriction on countryside development, recognising that certain forms of development are appropriate in such locations.

6.13 In this regard, Policy LP23 (Tourism and Recreation) expressly supports new or expanded sport and leisure uses in the countryside, provided they are well-related to a defined settlement or there are robust operational or sustainability reasons for locating elsewhere, and subject to satisfying the policy's environmental, landscape and servicing requirements. The proposed equestrian centre falls within the type of recreational development envisaged by this policy, providing a specific development plan basis for supporting the principle of the proposed use in the countryside.

6.14 Further support is provided by Policy LP19 (Rural Economy), which expressly recognises businesses involving horses as a form of rural enterprise with a legitimate reason to be located in the countryside. Whilst the detailed provisions of LP19 principally address new Class B business development and the expansion of existing businesses, this recognition reinforces the established suitability of equestrian enterprises within rural locations.

The Rural Location and Operational Requirements

6.15 Equestrian centres are closely associated with countryside settings, requiring sufficient grazing and turnout land, stabling, secure exercise areas and separation between horses, riders and the wider public. Outdoor riding instruction and training require substantial open space and suitable ground conditions. Although some equestrian facilities can exist within settlements, the scale and operational characteristics of a riding school and livery yard can justify a countryside location. The existing Yaxley premises do not undermine that conclusion: they form part of a substantial equestrian landholding and are now being displaced by residential development.

6.16 The necessity for relocation is not simply an aspiration to secure improved or enlarged premises. The existing Folly Farm Equestrian Centre at Yaxley is included within land authorised for residential redevelopment under application 24/00378/OUT, allowed on appeal on 29 August 2025 for up to 115 dwellings. The approved development would occupy the present riding school site, creating a clear need to relocate if the existing business and its services are to continue.

6.17 The Equestrian Justification Statement prepared by Reading Agricultural Consultants (September 2026) provides independent evidence of the operational need for relocation. Folly Farm has operated as a livery yard for approximately 30 years and as a riding school for around 15 years. It employs nine staff, provides instruction to approximately 108 clients each week and offers Pony Club activities alongside livery services. A substantial waiting list indicates continuing local demand.

6.18 To protect the customer base, the operators searched for alternative premises within approximately 15 miles of Yaxley, prioritising sites within five miles. Farcet is approximately 3.9 miles from the existing centre, allowing established pupils and families to continue attending. A more distant relocation could materially weaken the customer base and place the viability of the business at risk.

6.19 The service extends beyond commercial livery and riding lessons. Folly Farm is a five-star licensed riding school and Pony Club Approved Centre, offering individual and small-group instruction, including for children with special educational needs. Its lesson waiting list, together with the limited availability of comparable facilities nearby, adds weight to the social and economic benefit of keeping the service within its established catchment.

6.20 These circumstances provide robust operational reasons for a countryside location under Policy LP23(a). The equestrian activities require substantial land, stabling and safe exercise facilities, while proximity to Yaxley is important to the continuing operation of the established business. Policy LP19 also recognises that businesses involving horses may have a legitimate need for a rural location. The proposed site is therefore justified by the nature of the use and the particular circumstances of the relocation.

6.21 Policy LP10(a) seeks to direct development towards land of lower agricultural value and to avoid the irreversible loss of best and most versatile agricultural land where possible. The application site comprises Grade 2 land and the loss of agricultural use and disturbance of soils must be weighed in the balance. The permanent buildings, yard, arena and parking are concentrated within the 1.224-hectare application site, while parts of that area would remain grassed or landscaped. The adverse effect on Grade 2 land is acknowledged, but is considered proportionate in light of the functional land requirements, the constrained relocation search and the benefits of retaining the established service.

6.22 Under Policy LP10(b), the development must respond to the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. The facilities would be concentrated towards Straight Drove, with the single-storey stable complex arranged around a courtyard and the arena and round pens forming an integrated equestrian layout. The stable's pitched roofs, gabled elements and boarded elevations are consistent with the appearance of rural equestrian buildings. Frontage landscaping would soften views of the parking and stable complex. Overall, the layout and design are considered compatible with the rural character of this part of Straight Drove.

6.23 Policy LP10(c) requires the effect of noise, odour, lighting and other activity on the use and enjoyment of the countryside to be considered. The proposal would generate routine horse care, riding lessons and associated vehicle arrivals, but these are established rural activities of a limited scale. The site layout separates the principal facilities from neighbouring dwellings, and external lighting and waste management can be controlled by condition. The use is not expected to cause unacceptable disturbance to the surrounding countryside.

Conclusion on Principle of Development

6.24 The principle of relocation is supported by Policy LP23, which provides a development plan route for appropriate countryside recreation when read with Policy LP10. The land requirements of the riding school, the approved displacement of the Yaxley premises and the need to remain within the existing customer catchment provide robust operational reasons for this location under LP23(a). Its other requirements are addressed in the detailed assessments below.

6.25 At national level, the proposal is a form of outdoor sport and recreation supported in principle by NPPF Policy S5(1)(a). The operational case for a rural location also engages Policy S5(1)(b), with further support from Policies E2 and E4 for rural business and leisure activity. The principle is therefore acceptable, subject to the proposal's effects being assessed against the remaining relevant policies.

Design and Impact on the Character and Appearance of the Area:

6.26 Policies LP11 (Design Context) and LP12 (Design Implementation) of the adopted Local Plan seek to ensure that development responds positively to its surroundings, having regard to the character of the built and natural environment, the scale and appearance of buildings and the integration of appropriate landscaping. Policies LP10 and LP23 similarly require development in the countryside to recognise its intrinsic character and beauty and minimise impacts upon the surrounding landscape. At the national level, Policy DP3 of the NPPF requires development to respond to its context and integrate with its surroundings, whilst Policy N2 seeks to conserve and enhance landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside.

6.27 The site occupies open agricultural land within a flat, low-lying landscape of substantial fields, drainage ditches and dispersed roadside development. Dwellings, agricultural premises and equestrian uses form part of the setting along Straight Drove, but the wider landscape remains predominantly open.

6.28 The site has limited established boundary vegetation and is readily visible from Straight Drove. The change to its currently open appearance is therefore acknowledged. It has no identified protected landscape designation, and no public right of way crosses or immediately adjoins the application site; views of the development will principally be available from Straight Drove.

6.29 The site adjoins, but lies outside, the mapped Great Fen Landscape and Visual Setting. That relationship is a relevant landscape consideration, notwithstanding the absence of a designation over the application land. The proposed buildings and facilities are concentrated close to Straight Drove, and their single-storey form and proposed screening limit the extent of change in wider views. The development is not considered to materially harm the landscape or visual setting of the Great Fen.

6.30 The proposal would introduce a substantial built element onto presently open agricultural land. Nevertheless, the stable complex, arena, round pens, parking and access are contained within a defined operational area rather than being dispersed across the adjoining holding.

6.31 The stable building comprises a single-storey complex with pitched roofs, gabled projections and boarded elevations arranged around internal courtyard and turnout areas. Although its footprint is substantial, its height, materials and coherent layout are appropriate to its equestrian function and rural setting. Consolidating the accommodation in one complex also avoids a scatter of smaller outbuildings.

6.32 The stable complex and car park would be visible from Straight Drove, particularly before the new planting establishes. The block plan therefore incorporates substantial landscape belts

along the road frontage on either side of the proposed access. This planting would soften views of the development and provide a greener transition between the highway and the operational equestrian area.

6.33 The outdoor arena and round pens would have a comparatively open form and sit alongside the stable complex. Although they would alter the appearance of the field, their effects would be localised. With no public rights of way crossing or immediately adjoining the application site, views would principally be from Straight Drove.

6.34 The proposal would change the character of the application land, but the effects would be localised and moderated by the low-rise equestrian design, consolidated layout and substantial landscape planting. It is therefore considered compatible with the countryside character in accordance with Local Plan Policies LP10, LP11, LP12 and LP23 and NPPF Policies DP3 and N2.

Sustainability Statement:

6.35 Policy LP12(j) of the adopted Local Plan requires development to make efficient use of energy, water and other resources, including the expectation of BREEAM 'Good' or an equivalent standard for non-residential uses. The site layout and orientation of the stable complex respond to its position alongside the outdoor arena, concentrating the stables, classroom, office and welfare accommodation in one low-rise building rather than a series of separately serviced structures. Its internal courtyards and openings, as illustrated on drawing 26.25.APP2.205, offer opportunities for natural daylight and ventilation, while grouping the occupied teaching and welfare rooms enables efficient provision of building services. Frontage planting and grassed areas will provide shelter and shade as the landscaping matures. The detailed specification will prioritise efficient lighting, appropriate insulation and heating of occupied rooms, together with water-saving sanitary fittings. These measures integrate resource efficiency into the building and site design, having regard to the specialist equestrian use.

Residential Amenity:

6.36 Policy LP14 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan requires development to safeguard the amenity of neighbouring occupiers, including in respect of noise, light, odour and other potential disturbance. NPPF Policy P3 similarly requires proposals to avoid or adequately mitigate unacceptable impacts on living conditions. The closest residential properties are the Blackpool Hill Cottages adjoining the western side of the site and other scattered dwellings along Straight Drove.

6.37 The proposed riding school facilities are concentrated to the east of those properties, with the stable building, outdoor arena and round pens set back from the highway and separated from neighbouring gardens by intervening land and landscaping. The use would generate ordinary equestrian activity, including riding instruction, horse movements and associated vehicle arrivals, rather than an intensive industrial or entertainment use. The accompanying Highways

Statement forecasts no more than 12 two-way vehicle movements in the busiest hour, limiting the potential for traffic-related disturbance.

6.38 There is no proposal for floodlit arena use or outdoor amplified events. A detailed external lighting scheme is anticipated at condition discharge stage to avoid glare and unnecessary light spill, consistent with the PEA recommendations. Having regard to the layout, separation from neighbouring dwellings and nature of the operation, the proposal is not expected to give rise to unacceptable noise, overlooking or other amenity impacts and is considered consistent with Policy LP14 and NPPF Policy P3.

Transport, Highway Safety and Parking:

6.39 Policies LP16 (Sustainable Travel) and LP17 (Parking Provision and Vehicle Movement) of the adopted Local Plan require the opportunities for sustainable travel, likely transport effects, safe access and parking to be addressed. NPPF Policies TR3, TR4 and TR6 similarly require the location and nature of a proposal to inform its assessment. Importantly, Policy E4(2) expressly recognises that rural business needs may require locations outside settlements which are not well served by public transport.

6.40 The proposed location is not one where regular walking, cycling or public transport access can realistically be relied upon. Straight Drove is an unlit 60mph rural road without a continuous footway or an immediately accessible public right of way network. Private vehicle journeys will consequently account for most staff and customer trips.

6.41 The application relocates an established riding school rather than creating an unrelated destination. The operators searched for suitable sites within approximately 15 miles of Yaxley, placing particular emphasis on locations within five miles to retain existing pupils and customers. The proposed site is approximately 3.9 miles from the present premises and around 1km from Farcet, serving the Yaxley, Great Haddon and wider Peterborough catchment without requiring a move to a more distant location.

6.42 The sustainability assessment must reflect the type of use proposed, not apply urban transport expectations mechanically to a land-intensive rural activity. Policy S5(1)(a) supports outdoor sport and recreation outside settlements; Policy S5(1)(b), Policy E4(2) and Local Plan Policy LP23 recognise the particular locational needs of rural enterprises. Policy TR3 requires regard to the nature and location of development when assessing opportunities for sustainable travel. Retaining an established riding school within its customer catchment is therefore relevant even though most journeys will be by car.

6.43 The MTC Engineering Highways Statement (October 2026) is based on traffic counts undertaken at the operational Yaxley centre on 25 and 26 September 2026. No cycling trips and few pedestrian arrivals were recorded. Its forecasts allow for those pedestrian journeys transferring to car travel and for the change from 17 to 20 occupied stables. The scheme is forecast to generate 24 two-way vehicle movements on a weekday and 70 on a Saturday, with maximum hourly movements of 11 and 12 respectively and lower movements in weekday

network peak periods.

6.44 The realistic alternative to this relocation is also material. Residential redevelopment will displace the existing centre, but the demand for riding instruction, livery and educational activities will remain. Without a suitable replacement within the established catchment, existing customers could face longer journeys to alternative facilities or lose access to the service altogether. The proposed location retains the business close to Yaxley, and much of the forecast traffic would transfer from the current operation rather than constitute wholly new recreational demand. This does not remove the site's car dependence, but it provides a proportionate justification for the chosen location when Policies LP16, LP23, S5, E4 and TR3 are considered together.

6.45 Importantly, the sustainability assessment must also consider the realistic alternative to the proposal. The approved redevelopment of the Yaxley premises will displace the riding school, but the established local demand for riding instruction, livery and associated educational activities will remain. In the absence of a suitable replacement within the existing catchment, customers may face longer journeys to alternative facilities, or the loss of a valued five-star licensed service, including provision for children and those with special educational needs. Relocation to Farcet, approximately 3.9 miles from the existing premises, would retain that service within its established catchment, with most forecast vehicle movements representing the transfer of existing journeys rather than wholly new demand. Whilst private car use will predominate, the limited scale of traffic generation and operational need for substantial open land provide a proportionate justification for this countryside location. Accordingly, the proposal is considered to strike an acceptable balance against the sustainable travel objectives of Policy LP16 and NPPF Policy TR3, having regard to the specific support for rural recreation and business development under Policies S5 and E4.

6.46 The proposed access would be 5m wide for its first 10m, with 8m entrance radii and 2.4m by 215m visibility splays in both directions, designed for the national speed limit and shown on drawing 26.25.APP2.204. The splays would remain within the highway verge, subject to vegetation clearance and maintenance. The access also requires a new culverted crossing of the frontage ditch and removal of the existing field-access culvert, with drainage details addressed separately.

6.47 Vehicle tracking demonstrates that cars can pass at the entrance and that the access can accommodate the larger vehicles anticipated, including 7.5-tonne deliveries and vehicles towing horse trailers. The 40-space car park would accommodate lesson changeovers and busier periods without reliance on roadside parking. Although the development will remain car-dependent, its evidenced trip generation, proximity to the established customer catchment and safe access arrangements support a conclusion that it would not cause unacceptable highway safety impacts or severe network effects. The proposal therefore accords with Local Plan Policies LP16 and LP17 and NPPF Policies TR3, TR4 and TR6.

Ecology and Biodiversity:

6.48 Policy LP30 of the adopted Local Plan requires biodiversity interests to be protected and opportunities for enhancement to be secured. The application is supported by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) prepared by Sound Ecology (October 2026), following surveys in August and October 2026. The 1.224-hectare application site comprises predominantly cultivated arable land with narrow, species-poor boundary vegetation. No priority habitats, significant trees or hedgerows were identified within the application boundary, and the PEA assigns the site low ecological value.

6.49 The PEA identifies no evidence of protected species using the application site and does not recommend further species surveys for the proposed development. The frontage and eastern ditches were found unsuitable for water voles, whilst the cropped land provides unsuitable terrestrial habitat for great crested newts despite the presence of ponds in the wider area. No badger evidence or bat roosting features were identified. Skylarks were recorded in the adjoining field to the north, outside the application boundary, which is not subject to any proposed works under this application.

6.50 The application site is not subject to any statutory nature conservation designation. The nearest internationally designated site is the Nene Washes SAC/SPA/Ramsar site, approximately 3.35km to the north. In considering the potential for functionally linked land used by wintering geese and swans, the PEA finds that the application land is unlikely to perform this role, having regard to its proximity to the highway and existing residential activity, together with the relevant impact risk zone mapping. Significant effects on designated sites or protected and priority species are not anticipated by the appraisal.

6.51 The ecological appraisal recommends precautionary construction methods, including appropriate checks for nesting birds and timing of vegetation clearance, together with external lighting that avoids unnecessary spill onto adjoining habitats. New native planting, hedgerow and grassland habitat, one bat box and two starling nest boxes are proposed. These measures can be secured through conditions and the associated landscape and ecological management arrangements.

6.52 Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is mandatory for this development under Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, inserted by Schedule 14 to the Environment Act 2021. The statutory objective is a minimum 10% increase in biodiversity value. This sits alongside Local Plan Policy LP30 and NPPF Policy N2, which seek to conserve and enhance biodiversity through the design and delivery of development.

6.53 The submitted statutory biodiversity metric assesses habitat creation and enhancement within the application boundary. It calculates an increase from 2.448 to 3.033 area habitat units, a net gain of 0.585 units (23.9%), and 0.017 new hedgerow units from a zero baseline. The metric indicates that the statutory biodiversity gain objective and applicable trading rules can be met on-site, through the proposed landscape planting and habitat creation, without off-site units or statutory credits. The final metric and layout will be reconciled through the Biodiversity

Gain Plan.

6.54 The detailed habitat specifications, establishment measures and management arrangements will be finalised through the Biodiversity Gain Plan required by the statutory pre-commencement biodiversity gain condition. Significant on-site habitat enhancements will be secured and managed for at least 30 years through an appropriate condition or other legal mechanism. The submitted metric therefore demonstrates a deliverable on-site route to satisfying the statutory BNG requirement, subject to approval of the final Biodiversity Gain Plan.

Flood Risk and Drainage

6.55 Policy LP5 of the Huntingdonshire Local Plan and NPPF Policy F4 require a site-specific flood risk assessment for proposals on sites of one hectare or more, including those within Flood Zone 1. The red-line application site measures approximately 1.224 hectares. Accordingly, the following assessment considers the available Environment Agency Flood Map for Planning information, the nature of the proposal and the local drainage context, proportionate to the apparent level of risk and with regard to the Planning Practice Guidance on flood risk and coastal change.

6.56 The application site lies within Flood Zone 1, the area of lowest probability of flooding from rivers and the sea. The Environment Agency's present-day mapping places the mapped Flood Zones 2 and 3 beyond the site, principally around drainage corridors to the north and southeast. A comparison of the application location plan with the Flood Zones plus Climate Change layer also indicates that the red-line area and proposed built facilities remain outside the mapped future river and sea flood extents. This should be confirmed against the final application boundary on the Environment Agency mapping.

6.57 The Environment Agency surface-water mapping indicates a generally low level of risk across the principal development area. The extreme 1 in 1,000 annual probability mapping, including the future climate-change scenario, shows some isolated shallow-risk areas in the surrounding locality and near drainage features, rather than a continuous flood route across the stable building, arena or parking area. The adjoining open drains and the relatively low-lying ground are nevertheless relevant to the detailed management of local runoff and potential ponding. The scheme does not propose to place vulnerable overnight residential accommodation on the site.

6.58 The existing land is predominantly agricultural and largely undeveloped, allowing rainfall to disperse across open ground. The development would introduce roof areas, a surfaced yard, a riding arena and parking, requiring appropriate control of runoff notwithstanding the low mapped flood risk. The proposed block plan includes extensive grassed and landscaped areas and a predominantly gravelled parking surface. Clean roof and surface water will need to be managed through a proportionate sustainable drainage scheme, with infiltration used only where supported by ground conditions, or otherwise suitable attenuation and controlled discharge. Runoff must not be directed onto Straight Drove or neighbouring land, and dirty

stable-yard water must be kept separate from clean surface-water drainage. A separate foul-drainage arrangement for the proposed welfare facilities will also need to be confirmed in accordance with Policy LP6.

6.59 The proposed new access requires a culverted crossing of the existing frontage ditch, with the existing field-access culvert to be removed. The crossing is necessary to provide a safe vehicular entrance for the relocated equestrian business; its detailed design should preserve the capacity and continuity of the watercourse. Any required ordinary watercourse consent or drainage-board agreement will be sought separately. Detailed drainage design and maintenance arrangements can be secured through an appropriately worded condition, having regard to Local Plan Policy LP15, NPPF Policy F8, the National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems and the Cambridgeshire Flood and Water SPD.

6.60 In summary, the proposed development is situated in an area of low mapped fluvial and surface-water flood risk, with no encroachment by the proposed buildings into the mapped climate-change flood extent. Subject to the detailed drainage and culvert arrangements maintaining existing water flows and avoiding increased off-site runoff, the development can be made safe without increasing flood risk elsewhere, consistent with Local Plan Policies LP5 and LP15 and NPPF Policies F4, F5, F7 and F8.

7 SUMMARY

7.1 The application would safeguard Folly Farm Equestrian Centre, an established five-star licensed riding school displaced by the appeal-approved redevelopment of its Yaxley premises. The business supports nine staff and provides instruction for around 108 clients each week, including Pony Club activities and provision for children with special educational needs.

7.2 Local Plan Policies LP23 and LP10, together with NPPF Policy S5(1)(a), support appropriate outdoor recreation in the countryside. The need for extensive equestrian facilities and the importance of retaining the existing customer catchment provide robust operational reasons for this location under LP23(a) and S5(1)(b).

7.3 Significant weight is attached to the retention of employment and a valued local service offering physical activity, education and social benefits, particularly to children and young people. These benefits engage NPPF Policies E2, E4 and HC4.

7.4 The development would affect Grade 2 agricultural land and change the open character of the application site. Those effects are acknowledged, but would be localised by the consolidated, low-rise layout and frontage landscaping. The site lies outside the Great Fen Landscape and Visual Setting, while the submitted metric demonstrates a potential 23.9% on-site biodiversity gain, subject to approval of the statutory Biodiversity Gain Plan.

7.5 Car travel will predominate, but the proposal retains an established rural service within its existing catchment rather than requiring a more distant relocation. Forecast traffic is modest, at no more than 12 two-way movements in the busiest hour, and the proposed access, visibility splays and parking adequately address highway impacts.

7.6 The application site lies within Flood Zone 1 and outside the mapped flood extents accounting for climate change, with a generally low risk of surface-water flooding. The proposed development can be accommodated without increasing flood risk elsewhere, subject to appropriate surface-water drainage measures and detailed design of the proposed culverted access. These matters can be satisfactorily addressed through planning conditions, consistent with Local Plan Policies LP5 and LP15 and NPPF Policies F4, F5, F7 and F8.

7.7 In the balance required by Policy S5, the economic, recreational and community benefits would not be substantially outweighed by the identified agricultural, landscape and transport effects when assessed against the national decision-making policies. The proposal is therefore considered consistent with the development plan as a whole, and planning permission is sought.