

**REPORT FOR EASTERN AREA PLANNING COMMITTEE****Report No.**

<b>Date of Meeting</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> October 2023
<b>Application Number</b>	PL/2023/05818
<b>Site Address</b>	Boomerang Stables, Crooked Soley, Chilton Foliat, RG17 0TL
<b>Proposal</b>	Re-use of former equestrian barn to create two dwellings, driveways, landscaping and related infrastructure.  Erect a stable block within one of the gardens comprising 10 stables, a tack room, store and hay room. Erect a barn and garage within the same curtilage. Erect a garage within the other curtilage (resubmission of PL/2022/08607)
<b>Applicant</b>	Addington Investments Ltd
<b>Town/Parish Council</b>	Chilton Foliat Parish Council
<b>Ward</b>	Aldbourn & Ramsbury (Cllr James Sheppard)
<b>Type of application</b>	Full Planning Permission
<b>Case Officer</b>	David Millinship

Reason for the application being considered by Committee:

This application was 'called-in' by Cllr Sheppard for the following reason:

- 'Grey area' over sustainability of design versus site location.

### **1. Purpose of Report**

The purpose of the report is to assess the merits of the proposal against the policies of the development plan and other material considerations and to consider the recommendation that the application be approved.

### **2. Report Summary**

The key issues for consideration are:

- Principle of development;
- Landscape and visual impact (including design) CP 51 & 57;
- Impact on neighbour amenity;
- Highways impact CP 61;
- Environmental and ecological impacts CP 50.

### **3. Site Description**

The application site is a roughly rectangular parcel of land which contains a cluster of buildings, an animal enclosure, and a dressage training area/outdoor arena. It abuts a much larger area of land to the north that accommodates the commercial enterprise known as Boomerang Stables (an equestrian centre with extensive facilities). The surrounding area is of a distinctively rural character, with narrow roads and large fields in an irregular pattern, with land predominantly in a mixture of equestrian and agricultural uses. The site is within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

The southern intervening boundary of the site (shared with the public highway at East Soley Lane) is bounded by a substantial conifer hedge with an earth bund and native hedge running along the western intervening boundary. There are currently three access points into the application site (all vehicular). One is within the western intervening boundary (onto Solely Road), one almost central on the south side and the other at the south-eastern end of the site (both accessing into East Soley Lane). No public rights of way (PROW) cross the application site but there are nearby PROWs, including footpaths numbered CFOL5, CFOL9 and CFOL11, which all connect into the public highway network that skirts the western and southern boundaries of the site.

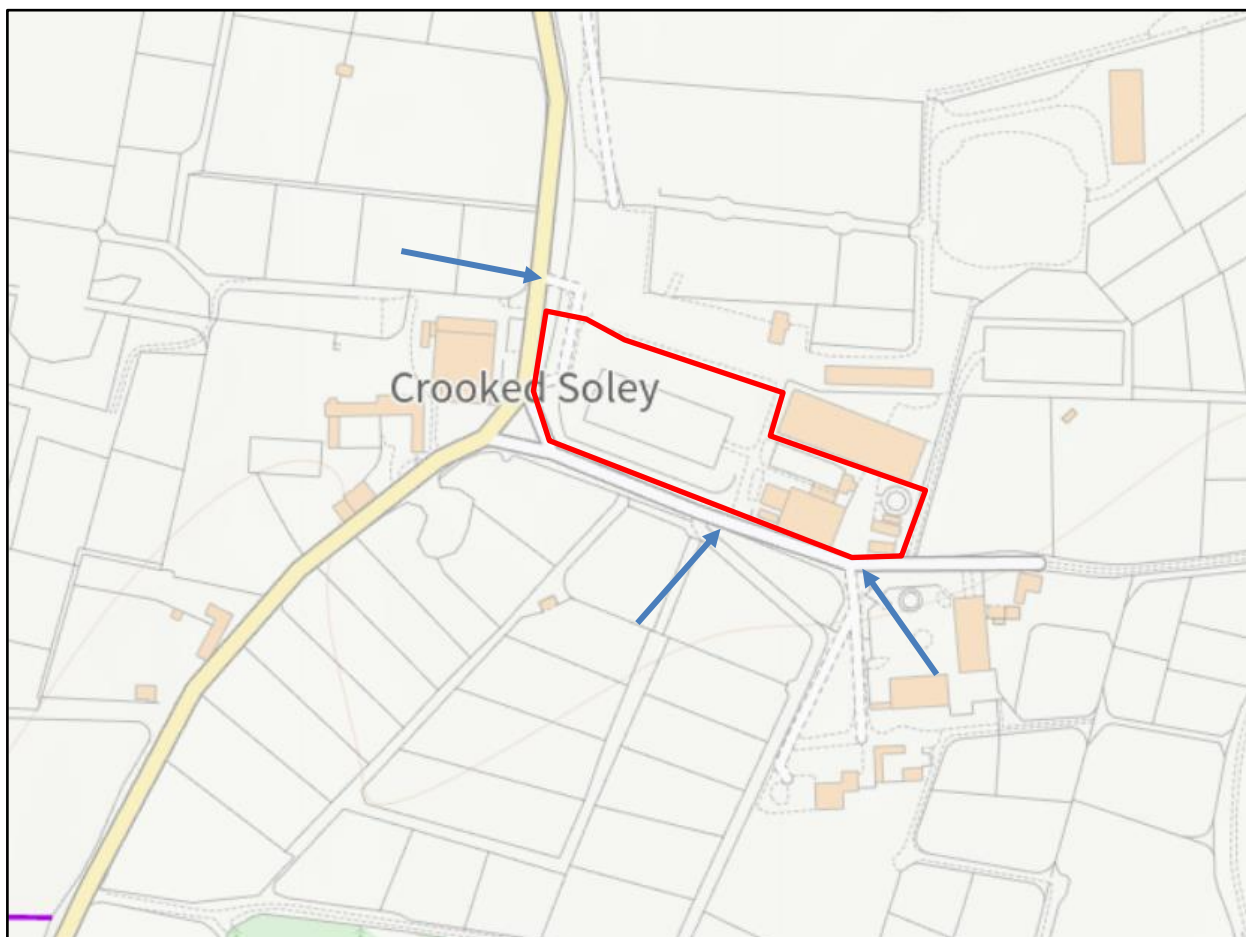


Figure 1: **Site Location** with marked **access points**



Figure 2: Proposed Site Block Plan

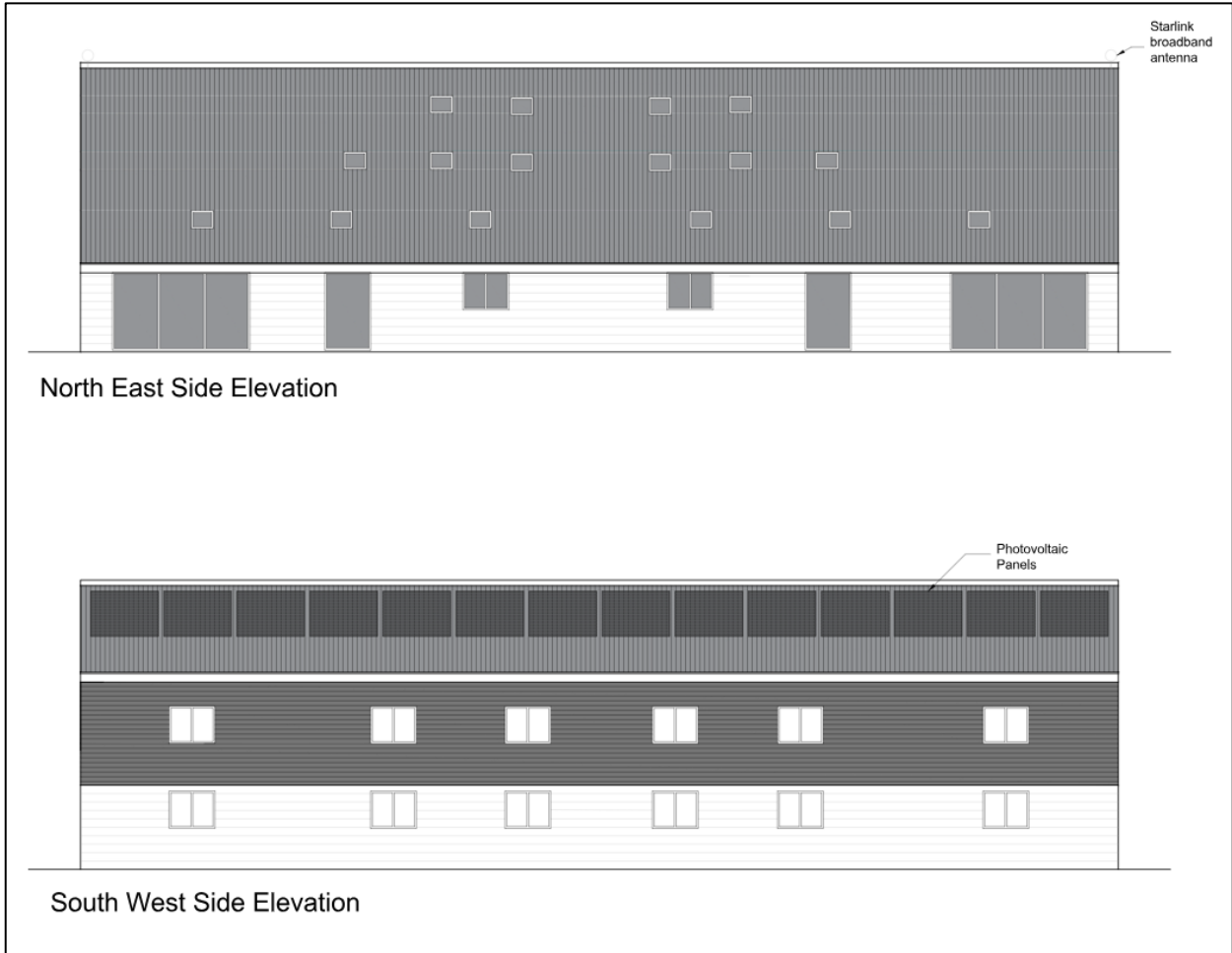


Figure 3: Elevations



South East Front Elevation



North West Rear Elevation

Figure 4: Elevations

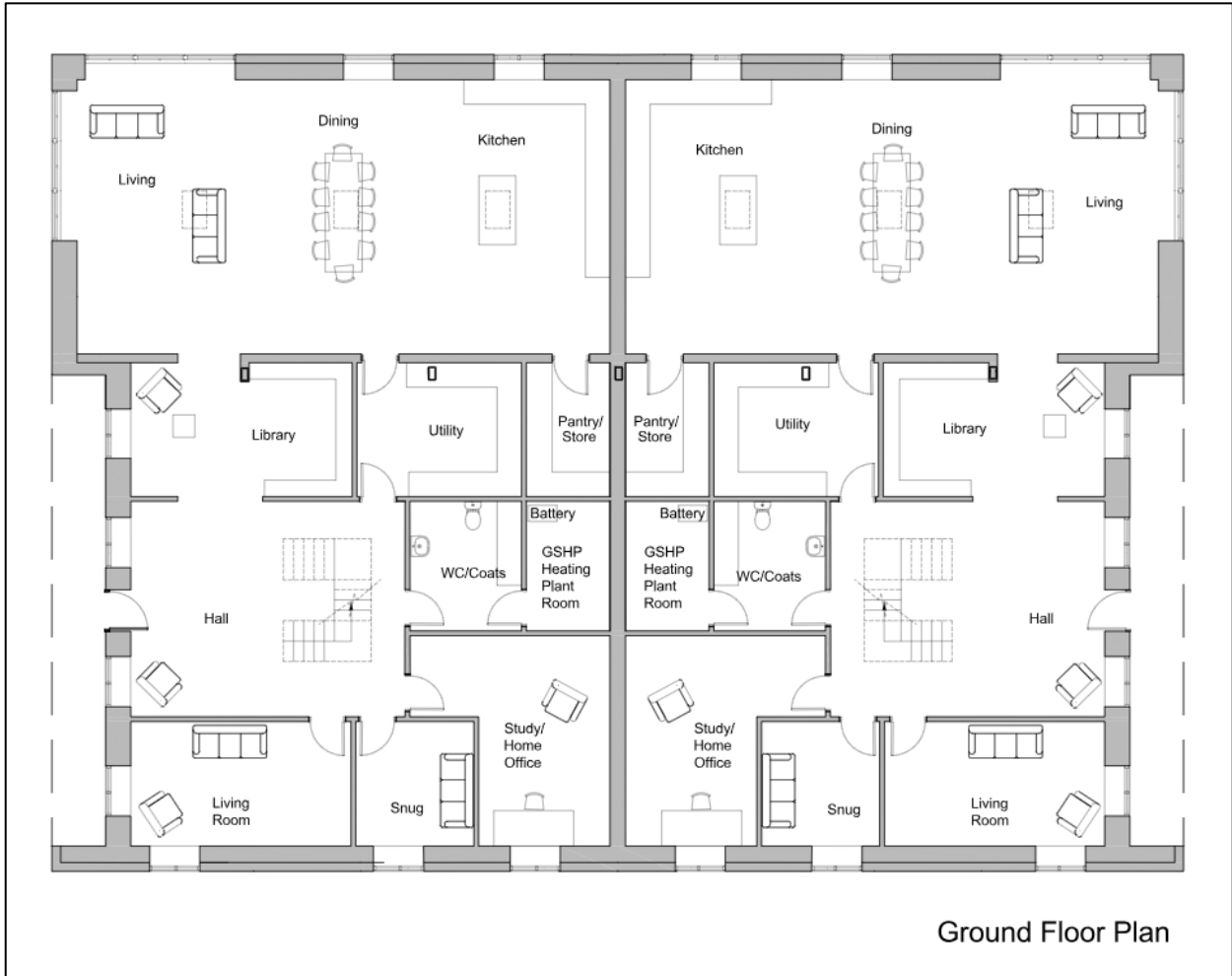


Figure 5: Ground Floor Plan

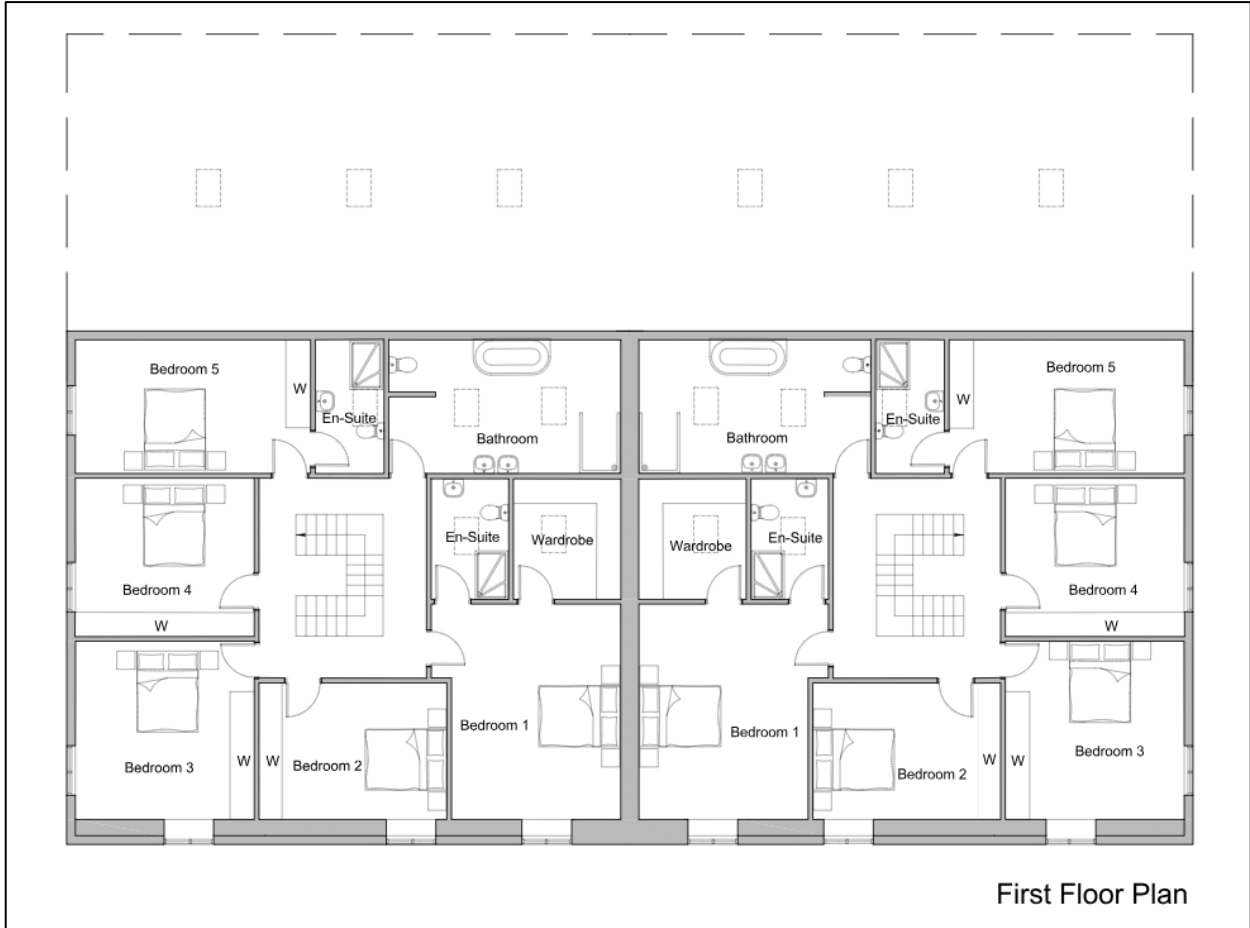


Figure 6: First-floor plan

#### 4. Planning History

The following planning history is specific to the application site:

PL/2022/08607	Re-use of former equestrian barn to create two dwellings, driveways, landscaping and related infrastructure. Erect a stable block within one of the gardens comprising 10 stables, a tack room, store and hay room. Erect a barn and garage within the same curtilage. Erect a garage within the other curtilage.	Withdrawn by the Applicant (27 <sup>th</sup> January 2023)
20/06839/FUL	Redevelopment of equestrian premises for the erection of a detached house, outbuildings, gardens and related infrastructure	Dismissed at Appeal (4 <sup>th</sup> November 2021)
E/09/1244/FUL	Retrospective application for erection of 34 stables.	Approved with Conditions (16 <sup>th</sup> September 2010)
E/09/0834/FUL	Retention of, and alterations to, hardstandings for parking vehicles and permanent cross country jumps. Formation of new vehicular access and driveway, and construction of lay-bys alongside public highway. Amendment of condition 2 of application K/15244 to delete reference to West Soley Farm and to allow use of the schooling facilities by day visitors for schooling as opposed to competition purposes only.	Approved with conditions (16 <sup>th</sup> September 2010)
E/09/0842/CLE	Certificate of lawful development for existing hard standing for parked vehicles and permanent cross country jumps and associated works. Use of land for general keeping/schooling of horses, not in connection with the buildings at West Soley Farm, to which members of the public are admitted.	Refused (30 <sup>th</sup> September 2009)
K/59477/F	Retention of a timber framed office.	Approved with conditions (11 <sup>th</sup> November 2008)
K/57891/F	Retention of permanent and semi-permanent schooling jumps and associated hardstanding.	Refused (23 <sup>rd</sup> June 2008)
K/15244	Change of use from agriculture and stud farm to agriculture and keeping and schooling of competition horses.	Approved with conditions (16 <sup>th</sup> January 1995).
K/81/1093	2 dwellings units, 23 loose boxes and livestock building.	Approved with conditions (21 <sup>st</sup> June 1982)

The following planning history is related to the adjacent land (the majority also under the ownership of the applicant):

14/02119/FUL	Temporary permission for staff dwelling to serve equestrian business.	Dismissed at Appeal (12 <sup>th</sup> January 2015)
E/2012/0977/FUL	Replacement of mobile home with temporary permission, with permanent log cabin.	Dismissed at Appeal (19 <sup>th</sup> July 2013)
E/09/0451/FUL	Use of land for stationing of mobile home.	Approved with conditions (19 <sup>th</sup> August 2009)
K/45499	The provision of single storey staff accommodation.	Refused (19 <sup>th</sup> June 2003)
K/59341/F	Erection of dwelling.	Refused (19 <sup>th</sup> October 2008)
K/54190/F	Stationing of temporary mobile home for groom.	Refused (13 <sup>th</sup> June 2006)
K/41548	The erection of a new two storey house for owner and staff, plus office and garage. New stable block.	Refused (23 <sup>rd</sup> August 2001)

K/33674	Renewal of K/18300 - Revision to siting and design of residential accommodation previously approved, and addition of garage extension & riders gymnasium extension.	Approved with conditions (7 <sup>th</sup> January 1997)
K/18300	Revision to siting and design of residential accommodation previously approved (K/16984) and addition of garage extension & riders gymnasium extension.	Approved with conditions (2 <sup>nd</sup> January 1992)
K/16984	Equestrian training facility with residential accommodation.	Approved with conditions (20 <sup>th</sup> June 1991)

## 5. The Proposal

The proposal seeks full planning permission for the conversion of an existing equestrian barn into 2 no. self-contained dwellings along with the construction of driveways, site landscaping and related infrastructure. The development would involve the change of use of the building into a residential use (planning use class C3) and a large area of the adjacent land into domestic garden curtilage. The dwellings would be identical in floorplan layout (albeit in mirrored layouts) with the existing building split in two equally sized units. Five bedrooms would be provided to both units at first-floor level with the potential for additional bedrooms at ground floor level (the submitted plans showing study/snug rooms sufficiently sized to accommodate bedrooms).

Whilst the building would be equally split into two units, the surrounding land proposed to be changed into domestic garden curtilage would not be equally divided. The eastern unit (referred to as Unit 1) would have access to a garden area of approximately 1,500 sq.m including a detached double garage within the south-eastern corner of the plot. Access to Unit A would be from the existing south-eastern access point (remodelled with new gates).

The domestic curtilage area proposed to serve Unit 2 (the western unit) would occupy an area of approximately 8,100 sq.m with access from the western edge of the plot. A stable block is proposed to be erected within the Unit 2 curtilage comprising 10 stables, a tack room, store and hay room. It is also proposed to erect a barn and garage within the same curtilage.

The details of the proposals are identical to previous planning application ref: PL/2022/08607. The submitted information has been expanded on by the architects (in the Design and Access Statement) to attempt to justify the sustainable nature of the development's design.

## 6. Planning Policy

National Context:

National Planning Policy Framework 2023 (NPPF)

Planning Practice Guidance (guidance on the policies contained within the NPPF)

Local Context:

Wiltshire Core Strategy (WCS)

- Core Policy 1 – Settlement strategy;
- Core Policy 2 – Delivery strategy;
- Core Policy 14 – Spatial strategy for the Marlborough community area;
- Core Policy 41 – Sustainable construction and low carbon energy;
- Core Policy 44 – Rural exception sites;
- Core Policy 45 – Meeting Wiltshire's housing needs;
- Core Policy 48 – Supporting rural life;
- Core Policy 50 – Biodiversity & Geodiversity;
- Core Policy 51 – Landscape;

- Core Policy 56 – Contaminated land;
- Core Policy 57 – Ensuring high quality design and place shaping;
- Core Policy 60 – Sustainable transport;
- Core Policy 61 - Transport and development;
- Core Policy 64 – Demand management.

## 7. Consultations

### **Archaeology (Wiltshire Council) – No objections.**

Due to modern development at the site, it would be unlikely for any groundworks associated with the development to expose any archaeological features and/or deposits.

*“The proposed building is required for the full implementation of the proposed farming practice at the unit.”*

### **Chilton Foliat Parish Council – No objections subject to conditions.**

The Parish Council has no objection to the principle of the proposed conversion. However, the following comments were made with regards to the need for planning conditions should the local planning authority support the development:

*...all the facilities (solar panels, battery storage, satellite broadband, independent water supply etc.) are vital. As a condition of any approval, all construction traffic MUST be required to approach and leave the site towards the north to avoid causing damage to Soley Lane towards the B4192 which is very narrow and has verges which have, in the past, suffered damage from excessive heavy traffic. This is the route the current Boomerang Stables traffic is required to take.*

### **Drainage (Wiltshire Council) – Objection.**

An objection was made due to lack of information relating to the surface water disposal system design and how this would impact upon the local network (including in the event of system exceedance).

### **Ecology (Wiltshire Council) – No objection subject to conditions.**

Conditions to secure provision of new bat roosts (in accordance with proposals) and implementation of the ecological mitigation measures and site planting scheme.

### **Highways (Wiltshire Council) – Objections.**

An ‘in principle’ objection has been lodged. It is advised that any residential unit on the site will be wholly reliant on the use of the private vehicle. The adjacent road network does not provide any pedestrian facilities to encourage non-motor vehicle use. Local services such as employment, schooling and shopping are remote, once again encouraging the use of the private vehicle.

Further advice is given with regards to access design and use of conditions should the LPA support the scheme.

## 8. Publicity

The application has been advertised by way of writing directly to adjoining landowners and relevant consultees.

One response to the public consultation was received. The full comment can be read on the council’s website. For ease of reference, the material considerations relating to the current proposal are bullet pointed below:

### Objections:

- The building is not redundant and remains in use for its intended purpose;



- Should the planning permission be granted there is concern a future planning application will seek a like-for-like replacement of the commercial building;
- Comments made in response to planning application PL/2022/08607 are also referenced.

## 9. Planning Considerations

Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 require that the determination of planning applications must be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

### Housing land supply and status of the development plan

Further to the above, paragraph 11 of the NPPF states that plans and decisions should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision taking this means:

*c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or*

*d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date<sup>1</sup>, granting permission unless:*

*i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed<sup>2</sup>; or*

*ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole.*

The NPPF advises that for applications involving the provision of housing, development plan policies can be considered to be out-of-date in situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply (5yrHLS). This excludes development proposals with certain impacts and/or sites within sensitive areas (including development within an AONB). As the site is within an AONB it must first be considered whether the proposed development would conflict with the NPPF policies relevant to the protection of the natural environment.

NPPF para. 174 states that:

*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues.*

The scheme remains broadly the same as that proposed in 2022 (ref: PL/2022/08607 - withdrawn by the applicant) which was submitted as a revised proposal following planning application 20/06839/FUL being dismissed at appeal in Nov'21. The 2020 application was broadly the same application site and was for the demolition of the existing equestrian building, erection of a six-bedroom detached dwelling, with an associated store/barn building and stables. The LPAs assessment and subsequent appeal established that no irreplaceable habitat would be affected and the impact of the development on the protected characteristics of the AONB would be

<sup>1</sup> The NPPF advises that this includes, for applications involving the provision of housing, situations where the local planning authority cannot demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites (with the appropriate buffer, as set out in NPPF para. 74); or where the Housing Delivery Test indicates that the delivery of housing was substantially below (less than 75% of) the housing requirement over the previous three years.

<sup>2</sup> The NPPF confirms that the policies referred to are those in the Framework (rather than those in development plans) relating to: habitats sites (and those sites listed in paragraph 181) and/or designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest; land designated as Green Belt, Local Green Space, an **Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty**, a National Park (or within the Broads Authority) or defined as Heritage Coast; irreplaceable habitats; designated heritage assets (and other heritage assets of archaeological interest referred to in NPPF footnote 68); and areas at risk of flooding or coastal change.

neutral, despite the establishment of a distinctively domestic visual appearance to the development.

The proposed conversion (rather than demolition and construction of a new building) would have a marginally lesser visual impact but would still involve the creation of a distinctively domestic character through alterations to the building and landscaping of the surrounding plot(s) and, the use of a high number of rooflights within the proposed design is a concern in terms of the ability for the tranquillity and darkness. However, the Inspector's conclusions are maintained since they remain valid, namely that the proposal would have a neutral impact upon the tranquillity and scenic beauty of the AONB (further detailed assessment is provided within the landscape and ecology sections of the report below). The principle of the proposal is not considered to conflict with the aims of NPPF para. 11(d)(i).

In this case, the LPA has a 5yrHLS of around 4.6yrs<sup>3</sup>, meaning that the housing delivery policies of the development plan (the WCS) may be out-of-date. Further consideration of the principle of the development is therefore required to be undertaken in line with the wider policies of the NPPF (with regard to the housing delivery policies of the development plan as a material consideration). The current planning policy situation, at both national and local level remains as it was in 2020 when the principle of the new dwelling was considered. At that time, the Inspector had considered that the spatial strategy of the WCS (particularly that relating to the Marlborough Community Area) was consistent with the approach taken by the NPPF (broadly, to ensure that new housing is provided in the most sustainable locations, balanced against the housing needs of a particular area). As such, the Inspector afforded significant weight to the policies of the WCS.

As no material changes to the planning policies (those most relevant to the proposal) have occurred since the 2020 appeal, the relevant policies of the WCS can be afforded significant weight in the assessment of the current planning application.

#### Principle of development

The existing building was erected to support operations associated with a commercial equestrian enterprise. Whilst a commercial equestrian use is considered to be a *sui generis* use<sup>4</sup> it can be accepted as being an employment-generating use within the wider rural area. As such, there are matters to consider with regard to the acceptability of the location for the proposed residential units as well as the impact of the proposal upon the wider rural economy and employment.

The proposal seeks to create two open-market dwellings (C3 use class) by converting an existing building. In broad terms, NPPF para. 78 seeks to support some development to provide new housing within rural areas as follows:

*In rural areas, planning policies and decisions should be responsive to local circumstances and support housing developments that reflect local needs. Local planning authorities should support opportunities to bring forward rural exception sites that will provide affordable housing to meet identified local needs.*

Core Policies 1 and 2 of the WCS together set out a spatial strategy (along with indicative numbers for housing delivery) to ensure that development within certain community areas is sustainable and meets the needs of those areas. Core policy 14 further sets out the development needs/aims for the Marlborough Community Area (which encompasses the application site) including recognising settlements in rural areas where new housing development may be appropriate. Outside of sustainable settlements Core Policy 44 allows for the allocation of, or granting of planning permission for, small sites comprising affordable housing only as an exception to normal policies. Core Policy 48 seeks to support rural life and sets out certain criteria relevant to the conversion of existing rural buildings. The combined policy approach of the WCS is consistent with the aims of the NPPF so can be afforded significant weight as a material planning consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> As reported within the council's most recent Housing Land Supply Statement (May 2023).

<sup>4</sup> Under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987 (as amended).

The proposal is not for affordable housing but would create two substantial open-market dwellings. Crooked Soley is a small cluster of only a few dwellings and commercial premises (mostly equestrian businesses). Under the WCS spatial strategy, it is not considered to be a 'settlement' capable of supporting new housing. Furthermore, there is no evidence of any housing need within this area, particularly for the type of large dwellings proposed by the scheme.

However, the WCS recognises that conversion of rural buildings into alternative commercial use(s) may sometimes be supported if they have become redundant. CP48 only supports conversion of rural buildings into residential uses where the residential use is needed for a rural worker or there is clear evidence that commercial reuse is not a practical proposition, and the below criteria is met:

- i. The building(s) is/are structurally sound and capable of conversion without major rebuilding, and with only necessary extension or modification which preserves the character of the original building.*
- ii. The use would not detract from the character or appearance of the landscape or settlement and would not be detrimental to the amenities of residential areas.*
- iii. The building can be served by adequate access and infrastructure.*
- iv. The site has reasonable access to local services.*
- v. The conversion or re-use of a heritage asset would lead to its viable long term safeguarding.*

In isolated locations, CP48 confirms that the re-use of redundant or disused buildings for residential purposes may be permitted where justified by special circumstances, in line with national policy. The site is considered to be in an unsustainable location, but is not isolated (i.e. it has other surrounding development, can be accessed by private motor vehicles and has connections to utilities such as running water, electricity etc.). Therefore, the exceptions provided for by the NPPF (para. 80) are less relevant than the main criteria of CP48. In any case, it is not considered that any of the exceptions set out within para. 80 are relevant to the proposal. Para. 80(c) provides the following exception:

*...the development would re-use redundant or disused buildings and enhance its immediate setting...*

The applicant's evidence has not conclusively demonstrated that the building is redundant or disused but, more crucially the proposal would not enhance the immediate setting and would give rise to a low-level of harm to the special characteristics of the AONB (not sufficient level of harm to warrant a reason for refusal but harmful nonetheless – see landscape section of the report below).

In terms of CP48 criteria i, no firm evidence has been submitted to confirm whether the building is structurally capable of conversion. However, the existing building is a common type of modern utilitarian steel frame barn with concrete block walls at lower level topped with timber clad walls and a steel profile sheet roof. It is proposed to maintain the general appearance of the barn with the black timber cladding and profiled roof sheeting used in the conversion. Internally, it is reasonable to expect that a mezzanine floor, utilities, and insulation (required to meet base-level building regulations) could be installed within the existing structure. Similarly, the new fenestration openings required (whilst relatively high in number) would appear capable of being created without the need for significant structural alterations and the character of the building would not be substantially changed (within public views). As such, whilst no structural survey report has been submitted, it is reasonable to expect that the modern building would be capable of conversion into the proposed units.

Criteria ii (similar to the brief AONB assessment above) is not considered to be substantially in conflict with the proposal. The character of the site would be changed to a much more domestic appearance but given the topography of the site, existing boundary enclosures and that the broadly rural/utilitarian character of the existing building would be preserved the visual impact would be neutral. The site has existing accesses to the public highway that can be repurposed, and utilities appear to be able to be secured/repurposed for a domestic use so no conflict with criteria iii would occur. The proposal does not involve the conversion/reuse of a heritage asset so

criteria v does not apply.

Criteria iv is of most relevance since it relates to the sustainability of the site location. WCS Core Policies 60 and 61 are also relevant to the sustainability of the site location (by a range of sustainable modes of transport) so have significant weight in addition to CP48. The site is not near shops, schools or other facilities required for the type of day-to-day living expected to be supported by these large residential units. The nearest school is approximately 3.5km from the site (approx. 45min walk) with shops providing convenience goods located around 6.5km away in Ramsbury (approx. 1hr 30mins walk).

Furthermore, local roads are often narrow, with high speed limits, no street lighting, footways or cycle lanes. It is noted that para. 105 of the NPPF recognises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas. However, this does not negate the need for new housing sites to be well-connected to a range of local services to support day-to-day living. In this case, future occupiers of the site would rely heavily on the use of private motor vehicles to access essential services and alternative modes of transport (such as walking or cycling) are highly likely to put residents at risk or would simply be impractical due to the routes/distances required to be travelled.

The previous appeal decision on the site (dated November 2021) for a new build dwelling stated that:

*...considering the very limited range of services and facilities near the appeal site, and the distance to the nearest village, it is highly likely that the intended future occupiers of the proposal would use private vehicles to access these. Indeed, the appellant has stated that it is a fact of life that the resident population uses motor vehicles to travel between Crooked Soley and nearby settlements. This would also be the case if modes of transport were split, by the future residents taking buses running from nearby villages, for example.*

The assessment of access to services and facilities does not change because the current proposal is a conversion rather than a new build. Furthermore, this is a proposal for two large dwellings as opposed to the single dwelling previously dismissed at appeal. As such, and in light of the Inspector's previous conclusions (which I consider remain of substantial relevance to the current assessment), it remains the case that the site does not have reasonable access to local services.

The applicant notes that there have been changes in societal trends e.g. home working, home deliveries and electric vehicles, the Inspector in the above-mentioned appeal decision also had regard to this aspect (as it was previously argued by the applicant) concluding the following:

*...the use of sustainable transport modes, such as ultra-low and zero emission vehicles, cannot be mandated, and the other factors mentioned will very much depend on personal choices. As such, considering the poor accessibility of the site to services and facilities, it is necessary to take a precautionary approach, meaning that the significant use of internal combustion engine-based private vehicles by future occupiers must be considered to be a real possibility.*

The LPA agrees with the above conclusions and therefore does not consider the commentary by the applicants on this matter overcomes the significant concerns over the location of the site. Whilst Building Regulations require new EV charging points, and planning permissions can include conditions requiring them to be installed, as mentioned above, the LPA cannot mandate that the occupants of the dwelling use an EV car. With regards to electric bikes, it is less an issue of the distance in this case, but more the road conditions that make cycling an unattractive proposition here (narrow 60mph, unlit and unpaved roads).

The applicant has noted that a current Government consultation (White Paper) is seeking comments on potential amendments to the change of use (Part 3) permitted development rights provided by the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO), to include equestrian buildings. The consultation currently has no weight in planning assessments and (at the time of writing) no

change of use permitted development rights are available for buildings in equestrian use. Furthermore, should the GPDO be amended in the future, it is highly likely that any permitted development rights awarded to equestrian buildings will be subject to certain provisions, limitations and conditions, likely including the need for a developer to apply to the LPA for prior approval. This assessment must be undertaken in line with the policy advice of the NPPF and relevant policies of the development plan (WCS).

Therefore, it is concluded that the proposed development would not provide a suitable location for new residential development, having regard to the accessibility of services and facilities. The proposal conflicts with Core Policies 1, 2 and 14 of the WCS which collectively establish the development strategy for the area, including with respect to proposals outside the defined limits of development. It would also conflict with Core Policies 60 and 61 which collectively provide that, amongst other things, new development should be located and designed to reduce the need to travel particularly by private car, and to encourage the use of sustainable transport alternatives. It would also fail to accord with the NPPF, which seeks to promote sustainable transport.

### Design and Visual Impact

The building to be converted would largely retain its utilitarian character and form with no additions or extensions proposed. External material will be retained with white render applied over the (currently painted) blockwork walls. Understandably, new windows and doors are proposed to provide sufficient levels of natural light to internal areas. In this regard, the proposal includes a significant amount of rooflights which are uncharacteristic and overtly domestic in form - albeit they are on the elevation facing away from the roadside.

Within each dwelling there would be more than sufficient space to enable reasonable standards of living to be attained (subject to the creation of new fenestration openings to provide light) and within the wider plots a generous amount of space would be provided for parking, turning and private amenity space. Conditions could be imposed to control external materials and the removal of permitted development (PD) rights for extensions and alterations.

The proposal would incorporate stables and a barn of a broadly agricultural character with appropriate materials (despite being proposed to be used as ancillary domestic buildings), thereby maintaining some of the equestrian/rural character of the site. On balance, the outbuildings (including the garages) are considered to be acceptable in terms of visual impact.

On balance, the scheme is considered to comply with the design standards expected by Core Policy 57 of the WCS.

Turning to visual matters, the Inspector stated the following on the previous appeal decision on the site:

*Due to the relatively small scale of the proposal in its wider context and considering that despite the site's elevated position the proposed buildings would not appear particularly prominent when viewed from further afield, the proposal would have a limited visual impact on the wider landscape.*

Although a different scheme (a new build), it did incorporate a tennis court, pool house, barn, garage and stables, with large curtilage, landscaped gardens and an orchard. This is a relatively comparable level of development to the current scheme but, the Appeal scheme did not include the extensive array of roof lights that the current scheme does. Whilst the LPA may be able to conclude that during light hours the proposal would have a neutral impact on the landscape character and scenic qualities of the AONB (and area in general), the same cannot be said at night. The site will maintain the existing boundary vegetation and bunding along with additional planting. So, it will have a very similar visual impact to the current set-up (within public views) where limited intervisibility is apparent during daylight hours. At night, however, the upward light spill from roof lights, in an area where there is little light spill from buildings and no street lighting, could have an adverse impact on the tranquillity of the AONB.

The need to protect against intrusion from light pollution is a key component of landscape considerations under Core Policy 51 (point vii.). Paragraph 7.15 of the North Wessex Downs AONB Management Plan states that

*The sense of remoteness and tranquillity is fundamental to the character of the North Wessex Downs AONB. It is central to the enjoyment and appreciation of the landscape. Dark night skies in the AONB contrast dramatically with surrounding urban areas. The absence of artificial light allows the full majesty of the night skies and stars to be appreciated unimpeded by the night time glow of our major urban areas.*

This is reinforced within the aims of point vii. of WCS Core Policy 51 and paragraphs 174, 176 and 185 of the NPPF which seek to limit the impact of light pollution on intrinsically dark landscapes and the scenic beauty of AONBs.

A key threat to the AONB landscape (see paragraph 7.37 of the Management Plan) is the impact on dark skies from lighting schemes that are poorly designed and directed where there is usually few planning controls to mitigate. The LPA would be unable to control the spill of lighting from the many roof lights that are proposed in the northeastern roof slope. However, the AONB Management Plan mainly references concerns over high-powered external lighting (types of which may not always require planning permission and may already be present within the wider Boomerang Stables commercial yard. Accordingly, it is considered the scheme would give rise to some harm due to the potential for increased light spill at night. However, given that the light would be from internal areas (not high-powered external lighting) it is considered the overall impact would not cause harm to the tranquillity of the AONB or its dark skies.

#### Heritage Impacts

On the previous appeal, it was common ground between both parties that the proposal would not affect the setting or significance of West Soley Farmhouse (a Grade II listed building). Given the relatively comparable nature of the current scheme, the same conclusions are drawn here.

#### Neighbour Amenity

Due to the separation distances involved, no neighbours stand to be adversely affected by the proposals by reason of loss of light, privacy or overbearing impacts.

With regard to the amenity of future occupants, it is considered that reasonable standards are achievable in line with the requirements of Core Policy 57. Although in reasonably close proximity to an existing equestrian enterprise, an element of buyer beware is attached here i.e. one should be aware of this use upon purchase of the property. It is also noted that there are restrictions on the operation of Boomerang Stables to protect the amenity of nearby residents which would apply to these new properties.

#### Highway Safety

The local highway authority (LHA) has concerns over the location of the site with regard to sustainability. This issue has already been addressed in the principle of development section above, but equally applies in this section. Core Policy 60 provides that the Council will use its planning powers to help reduce the need to travel particularly by private car. Core Policy 61 requires that new development should be located and designed to reduce the need to travel particularly by private car, and to encourage the use of sustainable transport alternatives.

Whilst accepting that the application of these policies needs to take into account paragraph 103 of the NPPF, which advises that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions will vary between urban and rural areas, in light of previous comments made and those of the Highways Officer, there is a clear conflict with the aims of Core Policy 60 & 61 in this case. There are very few facilities in proximity to the site and within the nearest village of Chilton Foliat (3km) and there are no reasonable alternatives to the use of the private car to cater for the day-to-day needs of future residents.

Aside from the principle issue, the LHA have no concerns with the accesses that would serve the two dwellings, subject to the conditions to ensure they are designed and maintained in a safe and

suitable manner.

### Ecology

During the 2022 application the Council's Ecologist requested submission of additional information that was subsequently submitted. Further comments confirmed the Ecologist had no objections subject to conditions to control external lighting, compliance with the recommendations/mitigation measures of the submitted surveys and to secure the installation of the proposed bat boxes. If the application were to be approved, such conditions would be considered reasonable and necessary and would, ensure no conflict with the aims of Core Policy 50 of the WCS.

### Drainage and Flood Risk

Records available to the council confirm the site is within an area at very low risk of river, surface and ground water flooding. Despite this, Core Policy 67 of the WCS seeks to ensure:

*All new development will include measures to reduce the rate of rainwater run-off and improve rainwater infiltration to soil and ground (sustainable urban drainage) unless site or environmental conditions make these measures unsuitable.*

The current application was accompanied by a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) and a drainage strategy (that is similar to that proposed previously for the appeal for the new dwelling). The initial details have been reviewed by the council's Drainage Engineer who has requested additional information and further assessment to ensure that surface water can be appropriately managed on a day-to-day basis and in the event of a 1 in 100-year flooding event (plus climate change variable). The applicant has provided additional details that are awaiting review by the Drainage Engineer (at the time of writing). However, it is not considered necessary (at this stage) to agree full system details as technical approval could take place in accordance with a suitably worded planning condition (should the principle of the development be supported by the LPA).

### Public Benefits & Planning Balance

The proposal would generate some public benefits in terms of the provision of two new housing units (towards the council's 5yrHLS). The latest Housing Land Supply Statement (base date May 2022) shows that the Marlborough Community Area (outside of Marlborough Town) to which this site lies has already met its indicative housing requirements by an excess of 10 dwellings. Whilst not a ceiling figure, it provides no support for further housing in the area. Furthermore, the proposal would deliver two large 5-bedroom dwellings where demand within the community area is at the more affordable end of the spectrum. Notably, 3-bedroom dwellings are in the highest demand - both affordable and open-market. In light of the above, limited weight is attached to this benefit.

Some short-term employment and economic benefits through the construction phase. In line with Para. 81 of the NPPF that significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, this benefit can be given some limited positive weight in the overall balance.

The design of the scheme would incorporate measures to ensure the dwellings were resilient to climate change (use of solar panels, modern insulation, new surface water drainage measures etc.) as well as ensuring that high-speed broadband was secured to enable modern, high-speed communication. Whilst these design measures could be secured by a planning condition, the benefits delivered are not considered to be substantially in excess of those that would be required to meet basic building regulations (the use of solar panels may go over B.Reg's requirements but other measures would be relatively basic requirements). The LPA would also have no control over the future use of the dwellings (i.e. whether residents worked from home or not) and, in any case, regular access to other essential services (not just employment) would be required. These design measures can only be afforded limited positive weight in the overall balance.

However, the above report has confirmed that the WCS spatial strategy the policies relating to the provision of new housing are consistent with the aims of the NPPF so can be given significant weight. The proposal has been found to conflict with the aims of the NPPF that aim to ensure that

new housing is provided in appropriate locations to meet local needs, where future occupiers would have access to a range of essential services. Further to this, the proposed development does not benefit from any of the rural exceptions set out within the WCS or NPPF.

The harm that would be caused by the development in this location is considered to substantially outweigh the public benefits expected to be generated. On balance, the development is considered to be unacceptable and contrary to Core Policies 1, 2, 14, 48, 60 and 61 and the planning policy advice of the NPPF.

#### S106 contributions/CIL

The development would be CIL liable. No s.106 contributions are considered necessary.

#### **10. Conclusion**

The proposed development conflicts with the aims of Core Policies 1, 2, 14, 48, 60 and 61 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy and, if approved would lead to a distortion of the spatial strategy of the development plan (that is consistent with the planning policy advice of the National Planning Policy Framework).

No policy or other material planning considerations to support the scheme have been identified and it is concluded the development would not provide any significant improvements to the economic, social or environmental conditions of the area. It would not, therefore, be sustainable development for which the NPPF para. 11(d) presumption in favour applies. The planning application should therefore be refused.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

That the application be **REFUSED** for the following reason:

1 – The proposed development would result in the creation of two large open-market five-bedroom dwellings, that are not considered to meet the circumstances of rural exception housing, would not meet any identified local need and would be located in an area that cannot provide reasonable access to essential services and facilities. The proposal conflicts with the development strategy for the area as set out within Core Policies 1, 2, 14 and 48 of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy. It would also fail to accord with the planning policy advice of paragraphs 79 and 80 of the National Planning Policy Framework, which seek to locate rural housing where it would respond to local circumstances and reflect local needs unless exception policies apply.

2 – The application site is in a location that cannot provide reasonable access to services and facilities, where the occupants of the development would have few options for sustainable transport alternatives and would be heavily reliant on the use of private motor vehicle transport contrary to Core Policies 60 and 61 of the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and the planning policy advice of the National Planning Policy Framework.

#### Informatives:

The application has been considered in line with paragraph 38 of the NPPF that:

*Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.*

The application is not considered to provide any improvements to the economic, social or environmental conditions of the area. The applicant has been kept up-to-date with the assessment and has been given opportunities to provide additional information and responses to the case officer's correspondence.



