



Planning Statement

Change of use from residential to veterinary practice

1 Woodcot, New Road, Billingshurst

prepared by

WPS Planning

Planning Statement
1 Woodcot



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Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION	1
2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA	2
3.0 PLANNING HISTORY OF THE SITE	4
4.0 THE PROPOSAL	5
5.0 PLANNING POLICY	7
6.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT	9
7.0 CONCLUSION	16

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for the change of use of 1 Woodcot, New Road, Billingshurst, West Sussex from a private dwelling (Use Class C3) to an equine veterinary practice (Use Class E).
- 1.2 The application relates to the reuse of an existing residential property located within the built-up area of Billingshurst. The proposal seeks to establish a small-scale, specialist veterinary business that will operate primarily as a base for professional staff, including veterinary surgeons and administrative personnel. The nature of the business is such that veterinary services will be delivered off-site, at client premises including farms, stables, and equestrian facilities, rather than from the application site itself.
- 1.3 This Planning Statement has been prepared to accompany the application and to assess the proposals against relevant national and local planning policy. It demonstrates that the development represents a sustainable and appropriate form of development, having regard to the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF).
- 1.4 Importantly, the proposal does not constitute a traditional veterinary practice with a high volume of visiting clients, animals, and associated activity. Instead, the use is more accurately characterised as a low-intensity, office-based professional service use, with staff attending the premises as a base before travelling to external appointments. As such, the anticipated impacts in terms of noise, disturbance, traffic generation, and general activity are significantly lower than might typically be associated with veterinary or other commercial uses.
- 1.5 The application has been carefully designed to ensure that the existing character of the property and its surroundings are preserved. No significant external alterations are proposed, and the building will retain its residential

appearance. The scale and nature of the use have been deliberately limited to ensure compatibility with neighbouring residential properties and to avoid any material harm to local amenity.

- 1.6 This statement sets out a clear justification for the proposed development, demonstrating that it accords with the development plan when read as a whole and that there are no material considerations that would indicate otherwise. It should be read alongside the submitted plans and supporting documentation.

2.0 SITE AND SURROUNDING AREA

- 2.1 The application site comprises 1 Woodcot, New Road, Billingshurst, West Sussex, RH14 9DS, an existing detached residential property located on the edge of Billingshurst. The property forms part of a small cluster of residential development along New Road, characterised by detached and semi-detached dwellings set within relatively spacious plots, with mature landscaping and a semi-rural edge-of-settlement character.
- 2.2 For planning policy purposes, the site lies outside the defined built-up area boundary of Billingshurst as identified within the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF). As such, the site is located within the countryside for policy purposes, where development is more strictly controlled. Notwithstanding this designation, the site is closely related in both visual and functional terms to the existing settlement and does not form part of an isolated or remote rural location.
- 2.3 New Road is a local route that provides connectivity between the site and the wider settlement, including access to Billingshurst village centre, which lies within a short distance. The surrounding area exhibits a transitional character, sitting between the defined settlement and the open countryside, with a mix of residential properties interspersed with areas of open land and equestrian or agricultural uses. This context is particularly relevant given the equine focus of the proposed veterinary practice.

Planning Statement

1 Woodcot

- 2.4 Despite being located outside the formal settlement boundary, the site benefits from good accessibility to a range of services and facilities within Billingshurst, including shops, schools, healthcare provision, and public transport connections. Billingshurst railway station is accessible within a short drive or cycle, providing links to the wider region. As such, the site can reasonably be described as sustainably located in functional terms, notwithstanding its policy designation.
- 2.5 The immediate context is residential in nature, with neighbouring properties positioned at a sufficient distance to avoid undue sensitivity. The site is not located within a Conservation Area, nor is it a listed building, and there are no designated heritage assets within the immediate vicinity that would be affected by the proposal. Similarly, there are no known environmental constraints that would preclude the proposed development.
- 2.6 The property benefits from an established vehicular access onto New Road and a generous curtilage capable of accommodating parking and manoeuvring associated with both its existing and proposed use. The size and layout of the plot provide a degree of separation from neighbouring dwellings, which is an important factor in ensuring that the proposed low-intensity use can be accommodated without adverse impact.
- 2.7 Overall, whilst the site lies outside the defined built-up area for planning policy purposes, it occupies a sustainable edge-of-settlement location with strong functional links to Billingshurst. Its relationship with both the village and the surrounding rural context makes it particularly well suited to a low-key, rural-based professional service such as an equine veterinary practice, especially one that operates primarily off-site with minimal on-site activity.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 The most relevant planning history for the site is as follows:

- DC/23/0541 – Erection of single storey rear extension – Permitted
- DC/23/0564 – Replacement detached garage building to the side of the property - Withdrawn
- DC/21/2852 – Demolition of existing garage and erection of replacement garage, car port and office, together with a single storey rear extension

3.2 The planning history demonstrates that the site has been subject to a series of domestic-scale extensions and outbuildings consistent with its use as a residential dwelling with associated ancillary structures. There is no record of any previous commercial or non-residential use being established at the site.

3.3 Importantly, the site is also associated with equestrian-related land and buildings, including stables and associated facilities, which reflects the rural and equine character of the surrounding area. This context is a material consideration in assessing the suitability of the proposed equine veterinary use.

3.4 Overall, the planning history indicates a pattern of incremental development typical of a residential property in a semi-rural location, with no constraints arising from previous decisions that would preclude the proposed change of use.

4.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 4.1 This application seeks full planning permission for the change of use of 1 Woodcot, New Road, Billingshurst from a private dwelling (Use Class C3) to an equine veterinary practice (Use Class E).
- 4.2 The proposal relates solely to the use of the existing building and does not involve substantial external alterations. The intention is to retain the established residential character and appearance of the property, ensuring that it continues to integrate appropriately within its surroundings. Any minor internal works required to facilitate the proposed use would be limited in scope and would not affect the external fabric or visual amenity of the building.
- 4.3 The proposed equine veterinary practice will operate in a manner that differs fundamentally from a traditional veterinary surgery. The premises will function primarily as a base for veterinary professionals and administrative staff, rather than as a customer-facing clinic. The key components of the use will include office and administrative space, workspace for veterinary surgeons to prepare for off-site visits, storage of medical supplies and equipment, and staff welfare facilities.
- 4.4 The operation of the business will be limited in scale, with a total of five staff based at the site, comprising two veterinary surgeons, one veterinary assistant, and two office staff. At any one time, not all staff are expected to be present on-site, as the veterinary surgeons will spend a significant proportion of the working day attending off-site visits.
- 4.5 The proposed hours of operation will be 08:00 to 18:00, Monday to Friday only, with no routine weekend or evening working. These hours reflect standard business operations and are compatible with the surrounding residential context. The limitation of hours further ensures that there will be no early morning or late evening disturbance to neighbouring occupiers.
- 4.6 Critically, the building will not operate as a drop-in or appointment-based clinic

for visiting clients, and there will be no routine attendance by members of the public with animals. Instead, veterinary services will be delivered directly at client premises, such as farms, livery yards, and equestrian facilities, with vets travelling to and from the site throughout the working day.

- 4.7 This operational model has been deliberately chosen to ensure that the use remains low intensity and compatible with the surrounding residential environment. The absence of visiting clients and animals significantly reduces activity levels at the site, particularly in terms of noise, disturbance, and traffic generation. Vehicle movements will primarily consist of staff arrivals and departures, together with veterinary vehicles leaving the site to attend off-site appointments, resulting in a modest and predictable pattern of activity.
- 4.8 No external areas of the site will be used for the treatment, holding, or exercise of animals, and there will be no external plant, structures, or equipment associated with the veterinary use. As such, the proposal avoids any of the characteristics commonly associated with higher-intensity veterinary or commercial operations.
- 4.9 Overall, the proposed development represents a modest and carefully controlled change of use, effectively akin to a small-scale professional office use. It has been specifically designed to ensure that it can operate without giving rise to material impacts on neighbouring properties or the character of the area, while providing an important specialist service that supports the rural and equestrian economy.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY

National Planning Policy

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out that there is a presumption in favour of sustainable development and that this should run through both plan making and decision taking. In terms of the determination of planning applications this should mean the approval of developments that accord with the development plan without delay, and that where the development plan is silent or relevant policies are out of date, that permission be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, or policies of the NPPF indicate otherwise.
- 5.2 Sustainable development is seen within the NPPF as having three roles, namely an economic, social and environmental role which should be a golden thread running through both plan making and decision taking.
- 5.3 The following sections within the NPPF (2024) are important factors in the assessment of the proposal:
- Section 6 – Building a strong, competitive economy
 - Section 9 – Promoting sustainable transport
 - Section 11 – Making effective use of land
 - Section 12 – Achieving well-designed and beautiful places

Local Plan

- 5.4 In terms of the local planning policy context for the Application Site, the adopted Development Plan for the Horsham District is composed of the following relevant documents:

- Horsham District Council Planning Framework (HDPF) – Adopted November 2015
 - Policy 1 - Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development
 - Policy 3 - Strategic Policy: Development Hierarchy
 - Policy 26 - Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection
 - Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
 - Policy 33 - Development Principles
 - Policy 40 – Sustainable Transport
 - Policy 41 – Parking

6.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

- 6.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that applications are determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. In this instance, the site lies outside but adjacent to the defined built-up area boundary of Billingshurst, and is therefore considered to be within the countryside for planning policy purposes. As such, the proposal must be assessed against the relevant policies of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF), including Policy 10 (Rural Economic Development), Policies 26 (Countryside Protection), 2 (Strategic Development) and 3 (Development Hierarchy).
- 6.2 Policy 26 seeks to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside by restricting development outside built-up area boundaries, unless it can be demonstrated that the proposal is appropriate in scale, maintains or enhances rural character, and is necessary to support the rural economy or local needs. In this case, the proposal represents a modest and contained change of use of an existing building, with no physical encroachment into undeveloped land and no urbanising effects.
- 6.3 Policy 10 supports sustainable rural economic development, including the growth and expansion of existing businesses and the establishment of new enterprises, particularly where these are located within or adjacent to existing settlements or involve the reuse of existing buildings. The policy recognises the importance of supporting rural businesses that contribute to the local economy, provided that proposals are of an appropriate scale, respect their surroundings, and do not result in unacceptable impacts.
- 6.4 The equine veterinary practice is inherently linked to the rural economy, providing essential services to farms, stables, and equestrian facilities across the wider area. The countryside location is therefore functionally appropriate, as it allows the business to operate efficiently in proximity to its client base. At

the same time, the site's close relationship with Billingshurst ensures that it remains accessible and sustainably located, striking an appropriate balance between rural function and sustainable access.

- 6.5 Policy 3 supports development within settlements but does not preclude appropriate uses on the edge of settlements where they are compatible with their surroundings and support local services or employment. In this regard, the proposal represents a sustainable form of rural enterprise that does not undermine the spatial strategy but rather complements it.
- 6.6 The NPPF (paragraphs 88 and 89) supports the sustainable growth and expansion of rural businesses, including through the reuse of existing buildings. The proposal aligns closely with these objectives, making effective use of an existing dwelling to support a specialist rural service. Importantly, the development does not introduce a use that would be harmful to the countryside, nor does it result in the loss of a dwelling that would significantly undermine housing supply objectives.
- 6.7 Overall, the principle of development is considered acceptable, as the proposal represents an appropriate and sustainable form of rural diversification that complies with both local and national policy.

Loss of Residential Use

- 6.8 The proposal involves the change of use of the property from a single residential dwelling (Use Class C3) to a commercial use within Class E. In considering this aspect, regard must be had to the relevant policies of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF), in particular Policy 16 (Housing Mix) and the overarching spatial strategy set out in Policies 2 and 3, alongside the guidance within the NPPF relating to housing supply.
- 6.9 The application relates to the loss of a single dwelling, and it is acknowledged that maintaining an adequate supply of housing is an important planning objective. However, the scale of the loss in this instance is extremely limited

Planning Statement

1 Woodcot

and would not materially affect the overall housing stock or the ability of the local planning authority to meet its housing requirements. The proposal does not form part of a wider pattern of residential loss, nor does it result in the erosion of a designated housing allocation or a location identified as critical to housing delivery.

- 6.10 Furthermore, the site's location outside the defined built-up area boundary is a material consideration. While residential use is established, the countryside designation means that new residential development would typically be restricted under Policy 26. As such, the retention of the property in residential use does not carry the same strategic weight as dwellings located within settlement boundaries, where housing delivery is more actively supported.
- 6.11 It is also relevant to consider that the proposed use makes effective and productive use of an existing building, supporting a rural-based business that is intrinsically linked to the countryside. The equine veterinary practice represents a form of employment-generating development that aligns with the objectives of supporting rural enterprise, as set out in both local and national policy.
- 6.12 Importantly, the building will remain in a form that could readily revert to residential use in the future, with no substantial physical alterations proposed. This reversibility further reduces the weight that should be attributed to the loss of the dwelling in planning terms.
- 6.13 In balancing these considerations, it is concluded that the loss of a single residential unit in this location is justified and is outweighed by the economic and functional benefits of the proposed use. The proposal therefore accords with the development plan when read as a whole.

Impact on Residential Amenity

- 6.14 Policy 33 of the HDPF requires development to provide a high standard of amenity and to avoid unacceptable harm to neighbouring occupiers. In

assessing the likely impacts of the proposed development, it is essential to consider the specific operational characteristics of the equine veterinary practice, which differ significantly from those of a typical veterinary clinic or more intensive commercial uses.

- 6.15 The proposed use is inherently low-intensity and largely internal in nature. The building will be used primarily as a base for administrative and professional staff, with activities limited to office-based functions, preparation for off-site visits, and the storage of equipment. There will be no treatment of animals on-site, no kenneling, and no external activity associated with veterinary operations. As such, the potential for noise generation is extremely limited.
- 6.16 The absence of visiting clients and animals is a critical factor in the assessment. Unlike a conventional veterinary surgery, there will be no regular flow of visitors arriving throughout the day, no waiting areas, and no associated noise from animals or customer activity. This significantly reduces the potential for disturbance and ensures that the level of activity remains comparable to, or even lower than, that associated with a typical residential use involving home working or small-scale business activity.
- 6.17 In terms of comings and goings, the presence of five staff (two vets, one veterinary assistant, and two office staff) will result in a modest number of daily movements, primarily associated with staff arrivals and departures within standard working hours of 08:00 to 18:00, Monday to Friday. The staggered nature of veterinary visits, with staff leaving the site to attend off-site appointments, further reduces the likelihood of concentrated activity at any one time.
- 6.18 The site layout and separation distances between neighbouring properties provide an additional buffer, ensuring that any activity associated with the use does not give rise to overlooking, loss of privacy, or an overbearing presence. There are no proposals for external lighting, plant, or equipment that might introduce additional disturbance.

- 6.19 Taking all factors into account, the proposal would not result in any material harm to residential amenity and is fully compliant with Policy 33.

Highways and Parking

- 6.20 Policy 40 of the HDPF requires that development is appropriately located in terms of accessibility and that it does not result in severe impacts on the highway network. Paragraph 115 of the NPPF reinforces that development should only be refused on highways grounds where impacts are severe.
- 6.21 The proposed development is characterised by a low level of traffic generation, particularly when compared to other potential uses within Class E. The operational model of the equine veterinary practice is such that there will be no client visits to the site, and therefore no associated short-stay parking demand or frequent turnover of vehicles.
- 6.22 Vehicle movements will primarily consist of staff travelling to and from the site, together with veterinary vehicles departing to attend off-site appointments. Given that veterinary surgeons will spend much of the day away from the premises, the number of vehicles present on-site at any one time will often be limited. This results in a dispersed and predictable pattern of movements, avoiding peak-time congestion or conflict.
- 6.23 The existing access onto New Road is considered suitable for the level of use proposed, with no requirement for alterations. The scale of traffic associated with the development is not materially different from that which could be generated by a residential use, particularly when taking into account multi-vehicle households and home-based working patterns.
- 6.24 Parking provision will be limited to staff vehicles, and the absence of visiting clients ensures that demand remains low. There will be no overspill parking pressures or adverse impacts on the surrounding highway network.
- 6.25 Overall, the proposal complies fully with Policy 40 and national guidance, with no evidence of severe or unacceptable highways impacts.

Design and Character

- 6.26 Policy 32 of the HDPF requires development to respect the character and appearance of the surrounding area and to be sympathetic to its context. The proposal is limited to a change of use and does not involve any significant external alterations to the building.
- 6.27 The retention of the existing residential form ensures that the visual character of the property remains unchanged. The building will continue to appear as a dwelling within the street scene, with no overt commercial features that would detract from the established character of the area. Any minor signage required would be discreet and proportionate, ensuring that it does not introduce visual clutter.
- 6.28 The absence of external activity associated with the use is also an important consideration. There will be no outdoor storage, no animal handling areas, and no visible intensification of use that might alter the perception of the site. The development will therefore preserve both the immediate residential character and the wider semi-rural setting.
- 6.29 Given the limited nature of the proposal, it is considered that there will be no adverse impact on landscape character, visual amenity, or the intrinsic qualities of the countryside. The development is therefore fully compliant with Policy 32 and Policy 26.

Sustainability

- 6.30 The NPPF sets out a presumption in favour of sustainable development, requiring proposals to deliver economic, social, and environmental benefits. The proposed development performs strongly across all three strands and represents a highly sustainable form of development in overall terms.
- 6.31 Economically, the proposal supports a specialist equine veterinary business that contributes to the rural and agricultural economy. The equestrian sector is a significant component of the local economy in West Sussex, and the

Planning Statement

1 Woodcot

provision of veterinary services is essential to its continued operation. The development will also support employment, with five staff associated with the business.

- 6.32 Socially, the proposal enhances the provision of veterinary services across the district, improving accessibility and response times for equine care. Although the site itself does not receive visiting clients, its role as an operational base supports a wider network of service delivery that benefits the community.
- 6.33 Environmentally, the reuse of an existing building avoids the need for new construction and minimises the consumption of resources. The location of the site, close to Billingshurst, allows for sustainable access by staff where possible, while the operational model, where vets travel directly between sites, reduces the need for multiple client journeys to a central facility.
- 6.34 Furthermore, the low-intensity nature of the use ensures minimal environmental impact in terms of noise, emissions, and energy use. The proposal therefore aligns with the core sustainability objectives of both the NPPF and the HDPF.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 This application seeks planning permission for the change of use from a residential dwelling (Use Class C3) to an equine veterinary practice (Use Class E). As set out within this Planning Statement, the proposal represents a carefully considered, low-intensity form of development that is both appropriate to its location and fully compliant with the development plan when read as a whole.
- 7.2 While the site lies outside the defined built-up area boundary and is therefore designated as countryside under the Horsham District Planning Framework, the proposal has been demonstrated to accord with the relevant provisions of Policy 26 (Countryside Protection). The development involves the reuse of an existing building, with no physical expansion, encroachment into open land, or urbanising impact. The proposal maintains the intrinsic character and appearance of the countryside and does not give rise to harm to landscape or visual amenity.
- 7.3 The principle of development is further supported by Policy 10 (Rural Economic Development), which actively encourages the growth and expansion of rural businesses, particularly where this involves the reuse of existing buildings and supports key rural industries. The proposed equine veterinary practice is directly linked to the rural and equestrian economy, providing an essential service to farms and equestrian establishments across the district. Its location is functionally appropriate and sustainable, being closely related to Billingshurst whilst serving a wider rural catchment.
- 7.4 A key material consideration is the specific operational nature of the proposed use. The development does not constitute a traditional veterinary practice with visiting clients and animals. Instead, it will operate primarily as a staff base, with veterinary surgeons travelling to off-site locations. This results in a form of development that is closely comparable to a small-scale office use, with very limited on-site activity, no customer footfall, and no external operations.

Planning Statement

1 Woodcot

- 7.5 As demonstrated within the assessment, the proposal will not give rise to any unacceptable impacts. In terms of residential amenity (Policy 33), the use is low-key and internal in nature, with no noise-generating activities, no external disturbance, and activity levels that are comparable to or lower than typical residential use. The absence of visiting clients and animals is a critical factor, ensuring that the proposal integrates comfortably within its residential context.
- 7.6 From a highways perspective (Policy 40), the development will generate minimal traffic, limited primarily to staff movements. The operational model results in fewer vehicle movements than many alternative commercial uses and avoids the frequent turnover associated with customer visits. There are no highway safety concerns or capacity issues arising.
- 7.7 The proposal also preserves the character and appearance of the area (Policy 32), with no material external alterations and no visual indicators of intensified commercial use. The building will retain its residential appearance and continue to contribute positively to the street scene and wider semi-rural setting.
- 7.8 In terms of housing considerations, the loss of a single dwelling must be weighed in the planning balance. However, this loss is limited in scale and does not materially affect housing supply. Furthermore, the site's countryside location reduces the strategic weight attached to its retention as housing, and the building remains capable of reverting to residential use in the future. This limited harm is clearly outweighed by the benefits of the proposal.
- 7.9 The development also aligns strongly with the sustainability objectives of the NPPF, delivering economic, social, and environmental benefits. It supports rural enterprise, contributes to local employment, enhances the provision of specialist veterinary services, and makes efficient use of an existing building in a sustainable location.
- 7.10 Overall, the proposal represents a highly sustainable and policy-compliant form of development, with no adverse impacts that would significantly and

demonstrably outweigh its benefits. The scheme has been carefully designed to ensure compatibility with its surroundings and to operate at a scale that is entirely appropriate to its context.

- 7.11 Accordingly, it is respectfully concluded that planning permission should be approved.