

# *A Guide to Horse Policy*

A full planning application is normally required for the use of land for keeping horses for non-agricultural purposes and for buildings to house them, unless these qualify as permitted development the General Permitted Development Order. Horse keeping for agricultural purposes must be part of a registered agricultural unit to qualify as not requiring planning approval.

Policy C3 and Appendix 16 in the Dartford Local Plan Review Second Deposit Draft set out the Council's planning policies relating to horse related activities. This guidance note explains the requirements for in more detail. If you are in any doubt as to the guidelines or the need for planning permission, staff are happy to provide advice and guidance – contact details are at the end of this note.

Throughout the text, the term horse(s) also includes ponies.

Further information on the planning process and the Council's policies are available in the Planning Section of the Council's website – [www.dartford.gov.uk](http://www.dartford.gov.uk)

The Dartford Local Plan Review Second Deposit Draft identifies the Metropolitan Green Belt in Dartford Borough. The majority of applications for stables involve sites within the Green Belt. Here, there is a strong presumption against permitting new development outside the existing built-up area unless it conforms with the open recreation functions of the Green Belt or other rural land uses.

In many cases, it can be argued that stables for riding horses are in keeping with the open recreation functions of the Green Belt. However, any development approved within the Metropolitan Green Belt is required to be sited and designed so as to maintain the open character of the area.

## ***HORSES AND GRAZING***

If horses are not part of a recognised agricultural unit or if within such a unit are not kept for agricultural purposes, the Council will require a full planning for their keeping. Land grazed exclusively by horses and improperly managed soon deteriorates into an unsightly wasteland. In such cases, the Council is in a position to take steps to remedy this situation by application of the Ragwort Act 2003. Through this, the Department of the Environment Food and Rural Affairs is able to bring proceedings against the occupiers of land on which certain injurious weeds grow.

The effect of poor management of land grazed by horses is particularly bad because of the selective manner in which horses graze, eating the shorter sweeter grass and leaving clumps of coarser vegetation. Land is said to be "horse sick" when droppings are allowed to accumulate on a restricted area encouraging the growth of coarse grasses unpalatable to horses. Land management techniques such as mixed grazing, resting the land and the removal or spreading of droppings helps to prevent land falling into this condition. Horse sick pasture is also likely to carry a high burden of worms which are parasitic on horses. A minimum of one acre per horse should be available for grazing and fenced off from the exercise area.

In recent years there has been a trend toward the sale of small or divided fields for horse keeping, especially in urban fringe areas. This can lead to deterioration of both the land and landscape if insufficient thought is given to either the size, shape, layout or management.

### **GUIDELINES**

Applications for horse grazing and stables generally fall into one of the following categories:

Private:

- a) isolated in a field
- b) in a domestic garden
- c) on land adjacent to the owner's home, e.g. paddock adjoining house

Commercial:

- a) riding school
- b) livery stables
- c) stud farm
- d) combination of above functions

The Council will expect planning applications to comply with the following guidelines where relevant.

### **Stables**

- a) *The stable should not exceed 13.4 sq. m with no more than 4 stables per site. [The British Horse Society recommends an area of between 3 x 3.7m and 3.7 x 3.7m and a height of between 2.7 and 3.4m according to the size of the horse].*
- b) *Any associated structures such as tack rooms, food/bedding stores and manure bays should be appropriate to the scale of the stable(s) and should not exceed 22 sq. m.*
- c) *The stable(s) and associated structures and vehicle parking areas should be sited to minimise visual intrusion and should be at least 30m from any unrelated residential building and the land set aside for horses should be at least 21m from any unrelated residential building.*
- d) *The buildings should be of a design and construction appropriate to their use as stables and should be sited so as to blend into the surroundings. Detailed consideration must be given to materials, landscaping and siting or grouping of buildings, that is, near to agricultural buildings.*

## **Horses and Grazing**

- a) A minimum of 0.4ha per horse should be available for grazing fenced off from a separate area for exercise. Management proposals that demonstrate measures to prevent the possible erosion and decline of good vegetation on the land will be required.
- b) There should be sufficient land available for the exercise of the horse(s) and there is safe convenient access to it from the site.

## **Sensitive Locations**

*Proposals in sensitive areas should make a positive contribution to the landscape.*

Sensitive areas are identified in the Local Plan Review as Landscape Character Areas and Special Landscape Areas.

## **Fencing and Hedges**

- a) *The proposed means of enclosure should be sympathetic to the character of the adjoining countryside. Whilst boundaries must be stock proof, the Local Planning Authority would not wish to see the introduction of harsh fencing and would expect suitable hedge boundary treatment (if necessary in addition to stock proofing). Attention should be paid to the design and siting of any supplementary fencing necessary to protect and maintain existing or newly planted hedgerow/tree boundaries from browsing.*
- b) *The stable(s) and related area(s) available to the horse(s) should be satisfactorily screened.*

Secure fences and gates are essential in keeping any animals enclosed. Very thick high hedges or posts and rail fencing are the best means of enclosure for horses and are also the most acceptable in visual terms. The effectiveness of any means of enclosure is, however, largely dependant upon good maintenance. In sensitive areas the existence or provision of hedges may be paramount importance.

Hedges and trees, whether existing or newly planted, will require protection from horse grazing by additional fencing.

## **Drainage**

- a) *Certain parts of the Borough are particularly sensitive to pollution of ground water, depending upon various factors such as the underlying geology and the proximity of boreholes supplying water. In any such sensitive area it is essential for stables to be connected to a main drainage system (subject to the agreement of Thames Water) or cesspool. The Council will be guided by the advice of the Environment Agency in this respect. The drainage system should be fitted with suitable screening devices that will prevent the drainage system from becoming blocked by hay and straw.*
- b) *The erection of stables without the provision for an effective system of foul drainage may be permitted when ALL of the following criteria apply:*
  - *The stable would be situated in a predominantly rural area and sited sufficiently remote*

*from other premises.*

- *The Environment Agency considers that there is no risk of pollution to ground water.*
- *The absence of a foul drainage system would not be prejudicial to health or likely to give rise to nuisance to persons occupying adjoining premises and land.*

*c) Erection of stables will only be permitted if provision for foul drainage meets the requirements of the Local Planning Authority as outlined above.*

### **Stable Management**

*a) The layout of the stables should include details of an area appropriately designed and sited for the reception of soiled bedding material.*

*b) Burning of waste will not normally be acceptable.*

*c) Planning permissions granted for the erection of stables in proximity to residential properties may be on a temporary basis in order to assess the effects of the development on the area. The renewal of such permissions will depend upon whether nuisances have been experienced by neighbours.*

Good stabling management can go a long way in either eliminating or substantially reducing problems caused to residents associated with keeping horses nearby. The area set aside for a manure heap should have a concrete base and be enclosed on three sides. Its siting should be carefully chosen so that it will cause the least offence, but at the same time must be accessible in order for manure to be removed regularly. The use of residual insecticides may be appropriate in certain circumstances. Local Bye-Laws in operation similarly require that a properly constructed receptacle for manure is provided.

In areas sensitive to water pollution or where an effective system of foul drainage is required for any other reason, it may be necessary to provide a drainage connection to the hard base on which the manure heap stands.

The burning of waste has proved to be a major source of irritation and in view of this, burning waste will not normally be acceptable. Incinerators of a design acceptable to the Council will be required if waste is to be burnt.

### **Access and Parking**

*a) The access to the stable(s) must allow for vehicular movements to and from the site without causing harm to the free flow of traffic or to road safety.*

*b) The provision of parking to the following minimum standards;*

- *Horse keeping without stables: one surfaced space off the highway.*
- *Non-commercial stables: one space per loose box.*
- *Commercial units will be assessed individually.*

Parking and access arrangements need to take account of the size of the facilities and the level of usage. Advice on these matters can be obtained from Kent County Council.

### **Riding Facilities**

*The keeping or stabling of horses will only be allowed where there is access to bridleways or suitable riding facilities within a reasonable distance off the highway, such as a large paddock.*

In the interests of highway safety an application for the keeping or stabling of riding horses is more likely to be favourably received if there is easy access to suitable facilities.

### **Stables in Domestic Gardens**

If planning permission is sought for the erection of stables, permission will only be granted if the garden is of sufficient size to enable the stable to be erected at a suitable distance from adjoining residential properties.

Planning Permission granted for the erection of stables in residential areas may only be granted on a temporary basis, with renewal of such permissions depending in part upon whether or not nuisance to neighbours has been caused by the development. It is advisable that a minimum area of half an acre should be made available for the sole use of the horse.

### **Commercial Stables**

Commercial stables are likely to be larger than private stables and usually have other buildings associated with them, such as an office, tack room, staff room, toilets and possibly an indoor school. Particular emphasis therefore must be placed upon the visual impact of such buildings on the environment.

Traffic generated by commercial stables and in particular by riding schools is usually far greater than in the case of private stables. Standards relating to the provision of access to the site, and to parking spaces and turning spaces within the site will therefore reflect the greater intensity of vehicular activity likely to be associated with a commercial undertaking.

### **Riding Schools**

Riding schools must be licensed by the Local Authority under the Riding Establishments Acts; the Licensing Section should be contacted in this respect. This requirement is additional to the need to obtain Planning Permission and Building Regulations approval.

In order to obtain a licence the riding school must satisfy the Local Authority that the animals are healthy and well cared for, and that the tuition offered is of an acceptable standard. The licence is renewable annually and in this way the performance of riding schools can be monitored. Before planning permission is granted the Council will have to be satisfied that suitable facilities/bridleways are available for riding.

### **DEVELOPMENT CONTROL**

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