RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2016-2017:

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE 7 JULY 2016 Agenda Item No. 6

APPLICATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR PLANNING

1. <u>PURPOSE OF THE REPORT</u>

Members are asked to determine the planning applications outlined in Appendix 1.

2. <u>RECOMMENDATION</u>

To refuse the applications subject to the reasons outlined in Appendix 1.

 Application No:15/1239 - Change of use from agricultural to agricultural and equestrian. Construction of an access track and ménage. (Amended red line boundary received 04/05/16), land at Coed Gwaenydd Bach, Cwmbach, Aberdare. This page intentionally blank

APPLICATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL

APPLICATION NO:	15/1239/10 (EL)
APPLICANT:	Mrs C Davies
DEVELOPMENT:	Change of use from agricultural to agricultural and equestrian. Construction of an access track and ménage. (Amended red line boundary received 04/05/16)
LOCATION:	LAND AT COED GWAENYDD BACH, CWMBACH, ABERDARE, CF44 0RS
DATE REGISTERED:	04/05/2016
ELECTORAL DIVISION:	Cwmbach

Recommendation: Refuse

REASONS: Whilst the continued use of the site for the purposes of agriculture combined with use of the site for the keeping of horses is considered to be acceptable in principle, the construction of the proposed ménage would result in an adverse impact upon the levels of amenity enjoyed by the occupiers of neighbouring residential properties. Further concerns are also raised with regard to the impacts of the development upon highway safety. As such, the proposal is contrary to the requirements of policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and National Policy.

Reason Application Reported To Committee

• A request has been received from Councillor Elliot for the matter to come to Committee for the reason that impacts upon residential amenity of neighbouring occupiers may be considered.

APPLICATION DETAILS

Full planning permission is sought for the change of use of a 29 acre parcel of land known as Coed Gwaenydd Bach, Cwmbach, Aberdare and the construction of associated works.

The application seeks to change the use of the land from agricultural to a mixed use of agricultural and equestrian (i.e. the keeping of horses).

Physical works proposed include:

The construction of access tracks within the site. The proposed tracks would connect with the access to the site (from Llys-y-Coed) and would cross the first field in a north east and south easterly direction, providing access to the second 'top' field

and woodland respectively. A small car parking area would also be provided. The tracks would extend to 103 metres in length (in total) and would measure 3.5 metres in width. A typical cross section for the track indicates that it would be constructed with aggregate cut to a depth of 75mm, with the ground then levelled.

The applicants state that the tracks are required as the ground in this area is very wet, with water rising in various locations within the site and a number of culverts being present. They state that the access tracks are required in order to transport materials within the site by use of quad bike and trailer.

The construction of a ménage on the site. This would provide a formal surfaced area that would be used to exercise the horses. This would be located close to the access to the site, with its north western line being parallel with the rear boundaries of numbers 3 – 5 Llys-y-Coed. A typical cross section for ménage accompanies the application. This indicates that it would be constructed with a clean stone sub-base, above which would sit a geotextile membrane, the arena surface (sand and rubberoid chippings mix) would be laid upon this. This would provide an all weather exercise facility. The cross section indicates the need to provide drainage systems beneath the ménage construction. A 1.5 metre high post and rail fence would define the riding arena. The applicant states the ménage is for personal use only and will not form part of a business enterprise.

Additional information is provided by the applicant in their supporting Design and Access Statement. This states that it is their intention to allow their horses to live outdoors 24/7 all year through, providing access to as much of the 29 acre site as possible. They state that at present they have 3 horses on site, but the maximum the site could support (allowing sufficient grazing for each horse) would be 5.

They also comment that no feed is kept on the site and that waste is removed from site on a daily basis. It is also commented that the ménage will be used on a daily basis, but there is no intention to use artificial lighting. In addition to the keeping of horses they state that they intend to grow crops on the site. They state that the land will be operated solely for private, personal use and do not intend to operate any commercial enterprises from the site.

SITE APPRAISAL

The application site consists of a parcel of land known as Coed Gwaenydd Bach, Cwmbach. The site extends to cover an area of 29 acres and comprises open fields (toward the west of the plot) and areas of woodland (to the east). Within the open fields the level of the land falls gradually from north east to south west (toward the A4059). To the north west a proportion of the application site is bounded by residential properties on Llys-y-Coed and Heol-y-Deri. An area of the site, adjacent to Llys-y-Coed, has been fenced off by post and rail fencing and is used for the keeping of horses. Further east of this a second area has been enclosed and is used for the keeping of chickens. Much of the woodland forms part of a Site of Important Nature Conservation (SINC) and also part of a Special Landscape Area (SLA). The woodland within the site is designated as Ancient Woodland (Glamorgan Ancient woodland inventory). Vehicular access to the site is gained through the neighbouring residential estate, via Llys-y-Coed.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no planning history on the site in question.

PUBLICITY

The application was advertised by direct neighbour notification and site notice. A total of 28 letters of representations have been received (it is noted that a number of these submissions are from the same authors). The letters are summarised as follows:

Highway safety

- Concerns are expressed that the development would increase traffic movements through the residential estate.
- Concerns are raised that the construction works associated with the development will cause additional construction traffic through the estate.
- Concerns are expressed that the ménage will be used as a commercial equestrian business. In turn concern is expressed that this would generate an increase in traffic to and from the site.
- Concerns are raised that the access roads leading to the site are un-suitable to cater for the type of traffic which may be generated by the proposal (e.g. horse boxes, trailers etc.) Furthermore, this presents safety concerns, particularly for children who live and play in the area.
- Questions are raised with regard to the suitability of the access track proposed, in terms of its ability to support heavy vehicles (e.g. horse transporters etc.)
- It is claimed that vehicles used on the site often drag mud and dirt onto the highway, presenting a visual nuisance and potential physical hazard to pedestrians.
- It is stated that the applicants ride the horses from the site through the residential area. Concern is expressed with regard to the potential damage to highway surfaces.
- It is noted that the application includes access over land that is not within the applicant's control or ownership (a strip of land between Llys-y-Coed and the access gates), this area of land is owned by Redrow Homes Ltd.

Environmental Health / Amenity

• Concerns are raised that the proposal presents increased potential for vermin infestations, unpleasant odours, flies and noise disturbance.

- It is commented that there is no reference to how the applicants will manage waste produced by chickens and horses on the site. It is stated the use already generates odour. Concerns are also raised that animal waste produced may contaminate watercourses on the site.
- Concerns are raised with regard to the proximity of the ménage to the rear of a number of residential properties and their gardens. As well as general noise and disturbance concern is expressed that any lighting associated with this would further adversely affect neighbouring residents in the evenings.
- With 29 acres available, it is suggested that alternative sites within the land might be available.
- Concerns are raised that the proposal would adversely affect existing 'views' from neighbouring residential properties.
- It is commented that the applicants use quad bikes on the site and these cause disturbance in terms of noise. It is claimed that the vehicles that the applicants use on site (quad bikes) are very noisy (and are often used for recreational purposes). It is claimed that having these vehicles 'racing' around the land early in the morning (before 07.00) and late into the evening (beyond 22.00) and at weekends has had a negative impact upon neighbours leisure time at homes.

Visual Impacts and Effect on Designations

- It is claimed that the construction of the ménage would be out of keeping with the character of the site and the management of the land to date has been harmful to the wider designation as a Special Landscape Area.
- It is stated that little regard has been had to the fact that a proportion of the site is identified as a Site of Important Nature Conservation.
- It is claimed that matters relating to ecology have not been fully considered, with the applicants removing hedgerow, tress and long grass, thereby affecting habitat.

<u>General</u>

- Concerns are raised with regard to the fact that the application does not adequately explain how the ménage would be constructed, i.e. whether material would need to be imported onto the site and/or removed from the site, how the topography of the land has been taken into account.
- Questions are raised with regard to the suitability of the site (in terms of ground conditions) for the construction of a ménage. It is stated that the land is on a steep incline and suffers poor drainage due to its soil composition. As such, much of the site is often waterlogged.
- It is claimed that the use of the site has resulted in a worsening in ground conditions to the rear of existing dwellings that bound the site.

- Concern is expressed that the approval in this scheme could set a precedent for further development on the site, e.g. an increase in the number of animals on site, the construction of stables.
- Matters of animal welfare are also raised. Questions are raised as to whether there is sufficient grazing land (of sufficient quality) available to support the horses, it is commented that the proposed construction would result in the loss of some of this grazing land.
- Concerns are expressed that a caravan has been on the site for some time and that the applicants may wish to live on the site.
- Matters of 'crime and disorder' are raised by residents, who state that they have already experienced anti-social behaviour on the land.
- It is commented that a number of residents have already experienced damage to their property, loss of privacy, noise disruption and personal insult.
- It is commented that efforts have been made to plan large 'social events' on the land, and there is a fear that these would increase in frequency if planning permission is approved.
- Loss of property value is also identified as a concern.

CONSULTATION

Transportation Section –objections raised for the following reasons:

- The proposed development will lead to additional vehicular movements by all types of vehicles along the sub-standard residential streets leading to unacceptable highway and pedestrian safety concerns to the detriment of safety of all highway users and free flow of traffic.
- In the absence of adequate off-street parking facilities, the development would generate additional on-street parking in the adjacent turning area, to the detriment of safety of all highway users and impacting on the free-flow of traffic.
- The proposed development would generate vehicular reversing movements to and from the highway, in close proximity to the turning area, to the detriment of highway and pedestrian safety.

Public Health & Protection – no objections raised.

Countryside, Landscape & Ecology - no objections raised.

The 29 acre land holding includes three largely improved fields with one supporting marshy grassland. The rest of the Site is Ancient Woodland (Glamorgan Ancient Woodland Inventory) and is an important woodland site which forms part of a Site of Important Nature Conservation (SINC 36). In order that the grazing impacts (upon the woodland) can be controlled and the ecological value of the site isn't diminished a condition is suggested which would require the applicants to prepare a

management plan for the site. This would include information such as: specifying the number of horses that would be permitted on the site, agreeing details of any tree works required, agreeing methods for the removal of Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam.

Land Reclamation and Drainage – it is noted that insufficient information has been provided in order to fully assess the suitability of the drainage systems proposed on site.

Dwr Cymru/Welsh Water – no objections raised.

POLICY CONTEXT

Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan

Indicates that the site is outside of the defined settlement limits, within a coal resources area, Special Landscape Area and partially within a Site of Important Nature Conservation.

Policy AW2 - promotes development in sustainable locations.

Policy AW5 - sets out criteria for new development in relation to amenity and accessibility.

Policy AW6 - sets out the criteria for new development in terms of design and placemaking.

Policy AW8 - sets out the criteria for the Protection and Enhancement of the Natural Environment.

Policy AW14 - seeks to safeguard primary and secondary coal resources from development.

Policy NSA12 - sets out the criteria for Development within and adjacent to Settlement Boundaries in the northern strategy area.

Policy NSA25 - identifies a number of Special Landscape Areas, including Cynon Valley Northern Slopes.

National Guidance

Planning Policy Wales

Chapter 3 (Making and Enforcing Planning Decisions), Chapter 5 (Conserving and Improving Natural Heritage and the Coast) and Chapter 8 (Transport), set out the Welsh Government's policy on planning issues relevant to the determination of the application.

REASONS FOR REACHING THE RECOMMENDATION

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that, if regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to

be made under the Planning Acts, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Furthermore, applications that are not in accordance with relevant policies in the plan should not be allowed, unless material considerations justify the grant of planning permission.

Main Issues

As set out above, this application comprises two elements, the first being the change of use of the land from agricultural land to a mix of agricultural and equine use and the second being the physical construction works of access tracks and a ménage.

With respect to the change of use of the land, the key consideration in determining this element of the application is the compatibility of the proposed activity with surrounding land uses. With respect to the construction of the tracks and ménage, the key considerations are the impact of the development on the character and appearance of the immediate area and the impact of the development on the amenity and privacy of the occupiers of adjacent residential properties. The potential impacts of the resulting scheme upon highway safety are a further consideration.

Change of use

The land, which is the subject of this planning application, extends to 29 acres and consists of three largely improved fields, with one supporting marshy grassland, and the rest of the site being woodland (defined as Ancient Woodland by Glamorgan Ancient Woodland Inventory). The land also forms part of a Site of Important Nature Conservation and Special Landscape Area. The current application seeks (in retrospect) to utilise the land for equestrian purposes, i.e. the keeping of horses. As set out above, the key consideration in determining this element of the application is the compatibility of the proposed activity with surrounding land uses.

The land in question sits outside of settlement limits, with part of its north western boundary defining the line of the settlement. It is noted that the land would have previously formed part of a larger agricultural holding, however much of the land to the north west has been developed by the construction of a neighbouring residential estate (by Redrow Homes). It is acknowledged that the north western extent of the site adjoins the above-mentioned residential development; however to the east and north the site is bounded by open countryside and woodland. As such, the site clearly occupies a semi-rural location.

Having considered the history of the site, it has been established that the lawful of use of the land in question is agricultural. This view is further substantiated by an affidavit completed by the previous land owner who states that her father farmed the land and furthermore, *'after her father's death (in 2007) the land was leased to a local farmer and used for grazing horses and cattle'.*

Whilst the applicants seek to retain an element of agricultural activity on the site (including the keeping of chickens and growing of crops) they also wish to 'keep' their horses on the site. Since feed would be brought onto the site to sustain the horses, in addition to their grazing, this constitutes a partial change of use in the land from agricultural to equine.

However, in many respects it is considered that the activity of keeping horses is comparable to the keeping of livestock, which as stated above, represents a lawful use. It is acknowledged that feed would have to be transported to the site; however this would also be the case if, for example, cattle or other livestock were being kept. Therefore, in light of the similarities in function between the lawful and proposed use, in principle, it is not considered that the keeping of horses on the land would significantly affect the character of the site or appear out of keeping with its semirural setting.

It is also noted that consultation has been undertaken with the Council's Public Health and Protection Section, to aid in the assessment of this aspect of the scheme. Their response comments that officers have visited the site on a number of occasions, as a result of complaints from neighbouring occupiers; however, officers have not witnessed odour or noise at a level that would be regarded as a Statutory Nuisance. As such, their response concludes by raising no objections to the application.

Physical Works

In addition to the change of use of the land, various other physical works are proposed as part of the application. These include, the construction of a series of access tracks and the construction of a ménage.

Access tracks

It is understood that a combination of ground conditions and general soil composition means that areas of the site are particularly wet. As such, when vehicles are taken onto the site the ground is often 'churned up' causing damage to the ground and also affecting the visual appearance of the site. In order to deal with this issue the application proposes the construction of an internal access track. This would run through the first field, providing an access to the second 'top field' (to the north) and woodland (to the east). Whilst the plans indicate that the total length of track would extend to 103 metres, its length is dictated by its purpose and the need to connect various areas within the site. It is also considered that its construction would not be overly engineered. The track would typically measure 3.5 metres in width, with a cross section indicating that it would be constructed with aggregate cut to a depth of just 75mm. Whilst it is accepted that the track would obviously be visible within the site, given its design and proposed construction methods, it is not considered that it would appear overly prominent, or harmful to the visual amenity of the area, being

consistent with the sort of accesses that are often constructed on farms and small holdings.

Ménage

In addition to the access tracks, the applicant also wishes to construct a ménage on the land. As set out above, ground conditions and general soil composition means that areas of the site are particularly wet, this is exacerbated during periods of heavy rainfall. As such, the applicants wish to construct a ménage in order that a level, all weather surface is available throughout the year, upon which the horses may be exercised. In principle, the construction of a ménage on land, which is also used for the keeping of horses, may be acceptable; however some concerns are raised with regard to the scheme that is currently presented.

The major area of concern relates to the proposed siting of the ménage. The layout plan indicates that it would be located toward the north west of the site, immediately to the rear of numbers 3-5 Llys-y-Coed. The applicants have indicated that the ménage is likely to be used on a daily basis, although they note the times (i.e. morning, afternoon, evening) are likely to change depending on the season and personal circumstances. They also confirm that theoretically, all three horses (which are currently kept on site) could use the ménage at the same time. Since during periods of bad weather, ground conditions on the fields are often poor (often being very wet) inevitably, it will be preferential to use the ménage to exercise the horses. As such, this will inevitably lead to a concentration in activity around the ménage. Concern is therefore expressed that in turn this would have the potential to cause disturbance to the occupiers of neighbouring residential properties. The site layout plan illustrates that the ménage would be constructed in very close proximity to neighbouring dwellings on Llys-y-Coed. At its closest point, a distance of just 0.3 metres would separate the ménage from the boundary with number 5, increasing to a maximum of 3.0 metres to the rear of number 3. Similarly, the property itself (number 5) would be off-set from the ménage by just 7.0 metres. With the development being in such close proximity concerns are expressed that the activity of exercising horses would adversely affect the levels of amenity that neighbouring residents may expect to enjoy, both in terms of disturbance and to a degree, a loss of privacy, particularly during months when natural screening (from hedgerows and trees) is lessened.

During a meeting with the applicant it was suggested that an alternative location for the ménage be considered. However, they indicated that given the topography of the land and other constraints relating to the location of culverts and watercourses, they did not feel that there were any other more suitable locations.

Following on from this point, further concern is expressed with regard to the level of detail in relation to the construction of this aspect of the scheme. During a visit to the site, it was observed that the area of land upon which the ménage is proposed is not formed by level ground, with a fall in land from north east to south west. However,

the plans that accompany the submission are not reflective of this, with the 'typical ménage cross section' illustrating a level surface. In order to achieve this it would be necessary to undertake a series of ground works on the site. During the site meeting the applicant indicated that they would partially cut into the land to achieve a level surface for the north eastern half of the ménage, and then use the excavated material to fill the ground beneath the south western half of the ménage. Whilst in principle, this approach is understood, the plans that accompany the application do not reflect these works and therefore insufficient information has been provided to fully assess the impacts resulting from these works. It is worthwhile noting however, that by raising the land levels on the south western half of the ménage, this would inevitably, further increase the potential impacts upon the closest neighbouring occupier (number 5 Llys-y-Coed).

It is also noted that the council's Land Drainage Section have expressed some concern that limited information has been provided in relation to how surface water run-off from the construction would be managed.

Overall, it is considered that the siting and construction of the ménage, would result in a form of development that would adversely affect the levels of amenity and privacy of neighbouring residents, to an unacceptable degree. As such, this aspect of the scheme is considered to be contrary to the requirements of policy AW5 of the Local Development Plan.

Access (rights of access)

Following the publicity of the planning application, representations were received from Redrow Homes Ltd. in relation to the means of access to the site. They stated that they control a strip of land which sits between the highway and the access gates to the application site. Furthermore, they stated that they had not granted the applicants a right of access over this land.

In response to this, the application was updated; the applicants formally served notice on Redrow Homes Ltd. and completed the relevant land ownership certificates to accompany the application. In addition to this, the applicant has also sought legal advice on the matter of whether a lawful right of access to their site exists. A letter (dated 22nd June 2016) confirms that having explored the matter, they do benefit from a right of access to the site. In support of this claim various documentation has been submitted, this includes historical maps, and ariel photography that illustrates an access to the field from the (now) residential estate. However, most relevant is a copy of a sworn affidavit, completed by the previous land owner, who inherited the site from her father. The declaration states that when farming the land her father accessed the site over a roadway which ran through what is now Llys-y-Coed. It also states that *'in or around 2004-2005 the land adjoining the Property was subject to development by Redrow Homes Ltd.'* and that during this period her father continued to have access across the Redrow site, whilst it was being developed. In 2010 it is stated that (she) the owner was contacted by the then site manager

(Gareth Evans) for Redrow, who wished to move the access point to its current position. Finally, they state that since its re-location in 2010 they have continued to use this as a means of access to the site. Furthermore, they state that *'they have not received any complaint or objection from any party in this respect.'*

As such, on the basis of the evidence presented it is considered reasonable to assume that the applicants benefit from a right of access to the land in question. Nevertheless, it is noted that matters relating to land ownership are private civil matters to be resolved between the relevant parties. As such, this issue would not in itself constitute a reason for the refusal of the planning application.

Highway safety

In order to aid in the assessment of the impacts of the scheme upon highway safety, consultation has been undertaken with the Council's Transportation Section.

Their observations comment that the site is accessed via a network of private residential streets, which measure 5.5m in width with 2.0m footways, this in itself presents a concern.

Their observations express major concern that the development would generate a number of vehicular trips through a residential estate, which would be to the detriment of safety of all highway users. It is commented that the residential streets that lead to the site are not designed and built to cater for the type of vehicles that would be generated by the proposed development, for example, large horse boxes, 4x4 vehicles pulling horse boxes and feed deliveries.

Being designed for residential traffic only, it is commented that the residential streets are sub-standard in terms of structural integrity, geometry, junction radii and lack of width due to on-street car parking pressure, to cater for the type of vehicles that may be generated by the proposal.

Further concern is expressed with regard to the fact that the additional heavy traffic would pass by a children's playing park, which is located in an area where there is already a substantial amount of on-street car parking. Concerns are expressed that in turn, this could result in vehicles being forced to mount the footway in order to pass or increase reversing movements, which may be problematic for vehicles towing trailers. Overall, their observations comment that this would be to the detriment of highway and pedestrian safety and may increase maintenance costs to the Council.

Overall, the Transportation Section express major concern that the residential streets that lead to the site are not designed and built to cater for the type of traffic generated by the proposed development. In turn this would lead to unacceptable highway and pedestrian safety concerns. Furthermore, concern is expressed that the site layout plan does not provide a sufficient level of off-street car parking provision

or turning area to cater for the vehicles that may be generated by the proposed activities. Overall, formal objections are raised in terms of highway safety and the scheme is considered to be contrary to the requirement of policy AW5 of the Local Development Plan.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Liability

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) was introduced in Rhondda Cynon Taf from 31 December 2014.

The application is for development of a kind that is not CIL liable under the CIL Regulations 2010 (as amended).

Conclusion

Having taken account of all of the issues outlined above, it is considered that the current submission represents a use that it compatible with its semi-rural setting. However, concerns remain with regard to the proposed construction of the ménage, most notably, its siting. It is considered that in the position proposed, the development of a ménage would result in an unacceptable loss of amenity to the closet neighbouring residents. Furthermore, the Transportation Section have expressed concerns with regard to the impacts of the development upon the highway safety and the network of residential streets that lead to the site.

Therefore the proposal is recommended for refusal for the reasons specified below.

RECOMMENDATION: Refuse

- 1. The proposed ménage by reason of its proximity to the neighbouring residential properties and gardens to the north west (no. 3-5 Llys-y-Coed), would result in an adverse impact upon the levels of amenity and privacy currently enjoyed by those occupiers. As such, the proposal is considered to be contrary to policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan and Planning Policy Wales.
- 2. The proposed development is considered to be contrary to policy AW5 of the Rhondda Cynon Taf Local Development Plan as it would result in an adverse impact upon highway safety in the vicinity of the application site for the following reasons:

(i) The proposed development would lead to additional vehicular movements by all types of vehicles along the sub-standard residential streets leading to unacceptable highway and pedestrian safety concerns to the detriment of safety of all highway users and free flow of traffic. (ii) In the absence of adequate off-street parking facilities, the development would generate additional on-street parking in the adjacent turning area, to the detriment of safety of all highway users and impacting on the free flow of traffic.

(iii) The proposed development would generate vehicular reversing movements to and from the highway, in close proximity to the turning area to the detriment of highway and pedestrian safety.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

as amended by

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE

7 JULY 2016

REPORT OF: SERVICE DIRECTOR PLANNING

<u>REPORT</u>

OFFICER TO CONTACT

APPLICATIONS RECOMMENDED FOR REFUSAL MR. J. BAILEY (Tel: 01443 425004)

See Relevant Application File