Planning Statement

Retention of Horse Walker Hoad Farm, Hoad Road, Swingfield, Folkestone CT18 8LP



1. Introduction

This Planning Statement supports a retrospective planning application for the retention of a covered horse walker at Hoad Farm, Swingfield. The application is submitted on behalf of T Williams Sporthorses Ltd, a long-established professional equestrian business operating from the site. The horse walker has been installed within the core operational area of the equestrian yard and is used solely in connection with the existing lawful equestrian use of the land. This statement assesses the development against the adopted Development Plan and demonstrates that the horse walker can be retained without harm to the Kent Downs National Landscape, residential amenity, or any other matter of public interest.

2. Planning History

Hoad Farm has a long and well-documented planning history confirming its established equestrian use. Historic consents include the continued use of agricultural buildings as stables, the erection of a stable block, and later consents for holiday accommodation and further equestrian buildings. The Council's recent officer report for application 24/1539/FH, relating to the retention of a menage, confirms that the land has an established equestrian use for the sale, training and keeping of horses and that equestrian development on this land does not constitute a change of use. The horse walker sits within the same planning unit and forms part of the same established equestrian operation.

3. Location and Planning Policy Context

The Development Plan comprises the Core Strategy Review 2022 and the Places and Policies Local Plan 2020. Relevant policies include SS1, CSD4, NE3, NE4, NE5, HB1 and HE2. The site lies within the Kent Downs National Landscape, an Area of Archaeological Potential, and affects the setting of a Listed Building. Policy NE4, which relates specifically to equestrian development, is the primary policy for assessing the acceptability of the horse walker. The structure is approximately 50 metres from the nearest dwelling and fully enclosed within the

existing equestrian yard. It cannot be seen from Hoad Road or any public vantage point and is visually absorbed into the cluster of barns, stables and training facilities already present on the site.

4. The Proposal

The proposal seeks retrospective planning permission for the retention of a 15-metre covered horse walker. The structure comprises a black steel frame, black corrugated roof plates, black wood-look lower panels and black windbreak mesh above. The overall height is approximately 3.5 metres to the roof apex. The horse walker is positioned within the operational equestrian yard and sits on land already in equestrian use. It is used solely for the established equestrian business and does not introduce any new activity, public access, or intensification of use.

5. Compliance with Policy NE4 – Equestrian Development

Policy NE4 sets out nine criteria for equestrian development, all of which are satisfied by the horse walker. The structure has no detrimental impact on the rural landscape or the Kent Downs National Landscape because it is located within the existing cluster of equestrian buildings and cannot be seen from public roads or footpaths. Its dark, recessive materials ensure it blends into the established equestrian yard. The development is visually and functionally related to existing buildings, consistent with the policy requirement for equestrian development to be well-related to existing built form.

The existing farm access and hardstanding remain sufficient, and no additional traffic is generated. The horse walker provides controlled, low-impact exercise for horses already kept on the site, reducing pressure on paddocks and preventing excessive erosion of soil and vegetation. It does not generate any unacceptable impact on amenity, as it does not increase horse numbers or activity levels and produces no additional noise beyond the established equestrian use. No external lighting is proposed. The development does not result in the loss of best and most versatile agricultural land because the land was already in equestrian use and not in productive agriculture. The horse walker does not affect the bridleway network and sits on a concrete ring foundation with surrounding permeable surfaces, ensuring appropriate drainage.

6. Use, Operation and Welfare Need (Updated)

The horse walker is used solely in connection with the existing lawful equestrian business at Hoad Farm. It does not introduce any new activity, public access, or commercial diversification.

Modern equestrian practice requires structured, low-impact exercise to maintain joint health, fitness and mobility. This is particularly important for horses with respiratory conditions, where controlled exercise in a sheltered, dust-managed environment is essential to prevent flare-ups. The applicant has provided veterinary confirmation of this welfare need, including evidence of a recent nosebleed episode in one of the horses, demonstrating the importance of safe, consistent exercise away from adverse weather and airborne irritants.

The applicant’s daughter competes at England pony team level, and the yard operates to the professional welfare standards expected of high-performance equestrian sport. Controlled mechanical walkers are standard welfare infrastructure for professional yards, ensuring safe warm-up, cool-down, rehabilitation and conditioning. The facility does not increase horse numbers on site; it simply improves welfare provision for horses already lawfully stabled and

trained at Hoad Farm. The development is therefore ancillary to the established equestrian planning unit and does not constitute a material change of use.

7. Landscape and Visual Impact

The horse walker is fully contained within the equestrian yard and screened by existing buildings, fencing and hedgerows. Its dark materials ensure it blends into the surrounding built form. The structure is not visible from public roads or footpaths and has no impact on the wider Kent Downs National Landscape. The development therefore complies with Policies NE3 and NE4 in respect of landscape protection.

8. Residential Amenity

The nearest dwelling is approximately 50 metres from the horse walker. The structure is located within the established equestrian yard and does not generate additional noise, odour or activity beyond the existing equestrian use. No external lighting is proposed. The development therefore complies with HB1 and NE4 in respect of amenity protection.

9. Highways and Access

No additional traffic is generated by the development. The existing access and hardstanding remain sufficient for the established equestrian use. The development complies with Policy T5 and NE4.

10. Archaeology

The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Potential. As confirmed in the officer report for the menage, any investigation would require removal of the structure and is not justified given the uncertainty of archaeological potential. The same reasoning applies to the horse walker.

11. Flood Risk and Drainage

The site lies within Flood Zone 1. No change of use occurs, and drainage arrangements remain appropriate for the established equestrian use. The surrounding permeable surfaces and the construction of the horse walker ensure that surface water is appropriately managed.

12. Conclusion

The horse walker is a modest, well-sited equestrian structure that is fully ancillary to the established lawful equestrian use at Hoad Farm. It is visually contained, appropriately designed, and has no impact on the Kent Downs National Landscape, residential amenity, highways, archaeology or drainage. The development complies with all criteria of Policy NE4 and relevant policies of the Core Strategy Review and Places and Policies Local Plan. The additional welfare evidence provided by the applicant further demonstrates the necessity and proportionality of the facility. There are no matters of public interest that weigh against the retention of the horse walker, and it is respectfully requested that planning permission be granted.