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| <b>APPLICATION NO:</b> 13/00661/FUL     | <b>OFFICER:</b> Mr Martin Chandler   |
| <b>DATE REGISTERED:</b> 27th April 2013 | <b>DATE OF EXPIRY:</b> 27th July 2013  |
| <b>WARD:</b> Prestbury                  | <b>PARISH:</b> Prestbury   |
| <b>APPLICANT:</b>                       | Jockey Club Racecourses Ltd  |
| <b>AGENT:</b>                           | Mr N J Surtees   |
| <b>LOCATION:</b>                        | Cheltenham Racecourse, Evesham Road, Cheltenham  |
| <b>PROPOSAL:</b>                        | Erection of a new Grandstand, extension of raised walkway deck viewing area, and realigned horse walkway and raised pedestrian walkway/bridge (over realigned horse walkway). Extension to North Entrance building, extension to and refurbishment of Weighing Room, construction of a garden terrace with a new betting shop beneath, extension of the un-saddling lawn and hard landscaping to north of Weighing Room. New steps and adjustments to landscaping strip between tented village and end of Parade Ring, adjustments to levels and resurfacing within the built complex and resurfacing to the course side in front of the new Grandstand up to the running rail. Other associated infrastructure work (including underground ducts and services), landscaping works, and relocation of spoil material to a remodelled site. |

## Update to Officer Report

### 1. OFFICER COMMENTS

1.1.1. Members will note that the initial officer report identified what the determining issues are with this application and proceeded to comment on the green belt considerations and wider policy context. This update will focus on the remaining issues.

#### 1.2. Design and layout

1.2.1. Local Plan Policy CP7 requires development to be of a high standard of architectural design and to complement and respect neighbouring development.

1.2.2. As identified in the main body of the report, this application comprises a number of different components albeit that the most obvious aspect is the proposed new grandstand. The proposal is supplemented by a number of drawings but also detailed photo-montages which provide a very clear understanding of the proposal. Within the applicant's design and access statement is suggested that:

1.2.3. *The drawings and images clearly demonstrate how the proposals will create an integrated arrangement of built structures linked by the new Level 2 deck. Viewing balconies and steppings are integrated within the building plans to provide hugely improved circulation and exceptional views of the Parade Ring and the Racecourse.*

1.2.4. *The massing of the proposals effectively completes the architectural composition at the northern end of the Racecourse and maintains the focus upon the Parade Ring through the radial linking decks.*

1.2.5. The statement goes on to suggest:

1.2.6. *The new grandstand is a respectful, statement building and an elegant stop end to the main run of Grandstand development fronting onto the Racecourse, starting at the Tattersalls Grandstand at the southern end of the development.*

- 1.2.7. *In order to articulate the north western corner of the new Grandstand, the building takes on a rotunda-like form. This glazed rotunda rises out of the solid base from Level 2. The over-sailing roof edge also takes on a circular format to cap the rotunda at this important visual corner. On the other corner to the northern end of the building, there are curved balconies at the upper levels, further creating interest and drama.*
- 1.2.8. It is proposed that the materials for the new grandstand will tie in with those used for the Centaur development, thereby *'reinforcing the language of materials that connect the more developments at the Racecourse'*.
- 1.2.9. Members will note that the Civic Society are supportive of the scheme but the comments received from the Architects Panel are slightly reticent, asking for a better understanding of the scheme before submitting more formal comments. In light of this, the applicant has tried to arrange a meeting with the Architects Panel but at the time of writing this report, this had not been achieved. Should such a meeting take place, and further feedback is given to officers, members will of course be updated.
- 1.2.10. It is the view of officers that the proposed development, and particularly the grandstand, is a well conceived scheme that will enhance this section of the racecourse. It is apparent that the applicant has identified a need to improve circulation within the racecourse and also the facilities that it has to offer; the proposed development responds to these needs in a successful way.
- 1.2.11. Members will note that the consultation responses provided from the parish council and the landscape architect both comment on the visual impact of the proposed development; the report will now consider this aspect of the scheme.

### 1.3. Landscape and Visual Impact

- 1.3.1. The nature of the racecourse site is such that there are many public vantage points of it, both over short and long distances. With this in mind, the application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) which has identified, in discussion with officers, five important view points of the racecourse. These are:
- a) Racecourse station;
  - b) Footpath adjacent Park Lane (to the east boundary of the site);
  - c) The Paddocks (accessed from Swindon Lane);
  - d) Footpath adjacent Southam Lane;
  - e) Distant view from Cleeve Hill;
- 1.3.2. The applicant has provided photographs of these viewpoints, and has also provided 'before and after' scenarios for views 'a', 'b' and 'e'. These photographs are available for inspection both in the Council Offices and on the Council's website. They will also be available at the committee meeting.
- 1.3.3. The applicant's LVIA provides the following summary of the impact that the proposed development will have:
- 1.3.4. *The site has been assessed in terms of its landscape character and visibility within the landscape, with reference to national, county and local level character assessments, to identify the key landscape elements within the site, and the visual impact of the site on the surrounding landscape.*

- 1.3.5. *Cheltenham Racecourse sits between an area of undulating and open farmland and the edge of Cheltenham. The site has its own specific character arising from its use as a racecourse, but by its nature is not incompatible with the greater landscape beyond, and is an important buffer restricted outward development of the town. The adjacent land uses, topography and existing vegetation mean that views of the site as a whole are restricted to specific viewpoints immediately adjacent to the site, or are from a distance where the buildings and course form part of a much wider panorama. Despite the scale of the buildings proposed, the visual impact of this on the Green Belt, AONB and local view points have generally been assessed as being minor. Therefore as a whole, it is considered that the proposal should be considered acceptable within the parameters set both nationally and by the local plan.*
- 1.3.6. The LVIA has been assessed by the Council's Landscape Architect who advises that; *Assessment of the visual effects of the proposed new grandstand varies between moderate adverse and minor neutral. As the landscape setting of Cheltenham Racecourse is one of its notable features, any proposed redevelopment should seek to enhance the relationship of built form to landscape. A building design of less height and mass should be considered in order for it to relate better to its surrounding landscape.*
- 1.3.7. Having reflected on this response from the Landscape Architect, officers consider that it is an overly cautious approach. The initial officer report has already identified that the racecourse is acknowledged as a special case to Cheltenham and the relevant local plan policy promotes a positive approach to the consideration of development in this location. The applicant has also responded to this comments will the following thoughts:
- 1.3.8. *To significantly reduce the impact of the building you would have to significantly reduce the size of the building which would make the building economically unviable. The new building is a large building set in a large landscape with large existing buildings surrounding it and we feel that slightly reducing the height and mass from that assessed would not alter the impact currently stated.*
- 1.3.9. Officers consider that the viability argument is an important consideration here. Members are well aware why the application has come about and therefore the application has to be judged on its merits; it is either acceptable or it is not.
- 1.3.10. Given the approach advocated within the local plan and emphasis on sustainable development promoted within the NPPF, officers do consider that the proposal is an acceptable form of development within the green belt that will not overly compromise the wider landscape. The racecourse does represent a significant incursion in to the green belt but this proposal, particularly from the more sensitive long views will form part of this wider complex of buildings and therefore the impact on these views will be negligible. When viewed in close proximity, the new grandstand will be viewed in the context of a number of large buildings; whilst these views will change, it is difficult to argue that these changes will be unacceptably harmful and it is certainly very difficult to argue that any harm brought about by these changes would outweigh the benefits that the proposal brings with it.
- 1.3.11. Members will note that the Landscape Architect has also made a number of detailed comments relating to the landscaping proposals and has also made reference to utilising a green roof for the grandstand. In response to this the applicant has stated that:
- 1.3.12. *The JCR resists the suggestion that a green roof should be included in the design on the new grandstand. A green roof would add significantly to the weight of*

1.3.13. Again, officers are sympathetic to the views of the applicant here. The nature of the roof is such it is only visible from long distance views where the impact on these views is already very minor. A green roof would not bring any significant benefits to these long views, but would come at considerable expense and, in light of the positive approach advocated by the NPPF, officers have not asked the applicant to pursue this matter.

1.3.14. In summary, it is accepted that the proposed grandstand will have a visual impact on the landscape but that this is not so significant as to warrant the refusal of planning permission. The level of impact has been thoroughly assessed and the 'before and after' submissions have helped officers make an informed judgement; the Council's Landscape Architect also considers that the level of impact is not significant (suggesting instead that it varies between 'moderate adverse' and 'minor neutral'). Given that the level of harm has not been judged to be significant, when weighed against the benefits that the development will bring to the town, and in light of the approach advocated by local plan policy CO9, officers are satisfied that the proposal represents an acceptable form of development in this location. It is an architecturally well-considered proposal that has been thoroughly analysed and will represent an improvement to the built form of the racecourse.

#### 1.4. Impact on neighbouring property

1.4.1. Local Plan Policy CP4 requires development to protect the existing amenity of neighbouring land users and the locality. The application has generated just three letters of representation with noise and parking provision being the two main issues.

1.4.2. In relation to noise, the proposal does not seek a more intensive use of the racecourse, but instead to improve race day facilities; in this respect the proposal is principally horse racing related as required by policy CO9. Members will be well aware that the racecourse currently hosts festivals and does generate noise, but given the nature of the proposals, it would be very difficult to argue that this application will make the existing situation any worse. The limited response to the application would appear to be a reasonable barometer of this situation as well.

1.4.3. Turning to parking provision, again the proposal does not seek to significantly exceed the existing capacity. The applicant envisages that should this project proceed, the attendance on Gold Cup day could return to the level experienced in 2012 (70,000). All Cheltenham residents are aware of the congestion associated with Festival week but this is managed by the racecourse; to judge this application against the unique circumstances of race week would be doing the application a disservice.

1.4.4. Loss of views has also been cited as an objection to this application but members will be aware that this is not a material planning consideration.

1.4.5. Officers consider that the proposal is fully compliant with the provisions of local plan policy CP4.

### 1.5. Access and highway issues

- 1.5.1. The applicant has been in direct discussions with the County Council regarding the impact the proposed development may have on highways safety. At the time of writing this report, the County's final comments had not been received by the case officer but it is understood that no major issues have been raised.
- 1.5.2. It is understood that the County are discussing the following matters with the applicant, all of which would form part of a legal agreement between the applicant and the County Council as highways authority:
- a) Proposed widening of footways at the A435 Evesham Road / B4075 New Barn Lane / B4075 Swindon Lane roundabout; and a footway link into the Racecourse from the roundabout.
  - b) New signage (including flashing warning lights) and road markings (i.e. colour contrasting crossing points) on the A435 Evesham Road. All works described above are to be undertaken by the Applicants contractor at the Applicants expense (Total cost: £40,000 approx.) with all works being carried out in accordance with the said Agreement.
  - c) Travel Plan costs
- 1.5.3. The applicant understands the rationale and need for these items and discussions are progressing smoothly. Upon receipt of the County Council's final comments, members will be updated.

## 2. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1. It is apparent that this application represents a significant investment into Cheltenham Racecourse and this should be welcomed. The proposals seek to improve the facilities currently provided by the course and in some instances, introduce new facilities to appeal to race-goers. The Cheltenham Borough Local Plan recognises the importance of the racecourse to the town, socially in terms of reputation, but also economically. It is for this reason that policy CO9 promotes a positive approach to the consideration of development at the racecourse.
- 2.2. Notwithstanding the above, the site is prominently located within the green belt and therefore development still has to be appropriate to this context, despite the positive approach identified within the local plan. With this in mind, this report has identified that the proposal is a well-considered scheme that will represent an enhancement to the built form of the racecourse. The report does however also acknowledge that the proposals will have a visual impact on the wider locality. Importantly though, from the more sensitive long distance views, this impact will be minor.
- 2.3. In light of this less than significant impact to the landscape character, when considered against the benefits that the proposal will bring to the town, officers are of the view that the proposal is one that should be supported. The importance of the racecourse to the town and the economic benefits that it brings does represent 'very special circumstances' (as acknowledged by the approach taken by the local plan) and therefore it is considered that the scheme does comply with the provisions of the NPPF.
- 2.4. It is a sustainable form of development and it is therefore recommended that members resolve to grant planning permission for the proposals subject to the satisfactory resolution of the highway matters, including the necessary legal agreement.
- 2.5. A full list of conditions will follow by way of an update.

