

GERRARDS LANE DOG PADDOCK

T & O HARRISON

RETROSPECTIVE PLANNING STATEMENT

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1	INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND.....	1
2	RELEVANT POLICY.....	5
3	APPRAISAL	6
4	COMPARABLE APPLICATION.....	14
5	CONCLUSION	15

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 This retrospective application has been submitted on behalf of T & O Harrison, an agricultural enterprise operating out of Water Lane Farm, Tarbock Green. This application represents a diversification scheme by the farming family, as they seek to maintain viability in a period of growing economic uncertainty and agrarian reform.

1.2 The dog paddock at Gerrards Lane has been operating for a number of years without complaint from any nearby residents or highways issues. The paddock forms part of a wider offering by My Dog Paddock, a self-service dog paddock business set up and run by Charlotte, partner to Olly who owns and runs T & O Harrison. The fields on offer are all situated on T & O Harrison land, and are sited carefully in order to maintain the viability and agricultural quality of the fields they occupy.

1.3 The application site remains open and mostly undeveloped to maintain this purpose, and allows the farm team, if ever necessary, to return the site to agricultural use. The only structure on the site is the fence and gate, erected for the safety of the dogs, and to allow the paddock to function as a private, bookable amenity.

1.4 Within the site there is a gravelled area for parking and turning. The website makes clear a maximum of two cars are allowed on site per session, but it is rare more than one occupies the site at any one time.

1.5 The site contains provision to dispose of dog poo, including a closed bin, and scoop. This is serviced by the team regularly to ensure no waste builds up.

1.6 The following pages include pictures taken in December 2024.





Figures 1 to 5: Images of Gerrards Lane dog paddock (December 2024)

1.7 As demonstrated by the photos, the surrounding landscape is rural, with the paddock tucked into the corner of a field and backed by a tall line of trees. The front of the site is bordered by a hedge, and opposite the site are more open fields (also owned by T & O Harrison).

1.8 The site is maintained by T & O Harrison regularly, and the site is mowed by the team's agricultural machinery seasonally. This is done by booking a session on the website and mowing within that session, to ensure customers and agricultural vehicles do not clash in their use of the paddock.

1.9 This Statement assesses the use of this paddock against local and national policy and finds it supported as a farm diversification scheme, and a rural business.

2 RELEVANT POLICY

2.1 Listed below are the most relevant local and national policies to this development.

KNOWSLEY LOCAL PLAN: CORE STRATEGY JANUARY 2016

Policy CS1 Spatial Strategy for Knowsley

Policy CS4 Economy and Employment

Policy CS5 Green Belt

Policy CS8 Green Infrastructure

KNOWSLEY REPLACEMENT UNITARY DEVELOPMENT PLAN (SAVED POLICIES)

G3 Agricultural Land

G4 Rural Diversification

ENV2 – Noise and Vibration

NPPF (2024)

Paragraph 84 - Building a strong, competitive economy

Paragraph 88 to 89 - Supporting a prosperous rural economy

Paragraph 143 – The five purposes of Green Belt

Paragraph 154 - Green Belt exceptions

3 APPRAISAL

PRINCIPLE

3.1 The principle of this development is supported by Policy CS4 of the local Core Strategy, and G4 of the UDP. CS4 sets out the overall Employment Development Strategy and states:

Planning, site assembly and other available interventions will be used to:

- a) **Support sustainable economic growth** and meet the development needs of established and emerging employment sectors, including the Liverpool City Region key economic sectors;*
- g) **Support new start up businesses** including social enterprise;*
- i) **Support the diversification** of the rural economy;*

3.2 The proposal as both a farm diversification scheme, and a start-up business, is supported by this policy. The number of paddocks on offer is a direct result of the demand the business facilitates. The rural location of the site has not diminished demand and instead facilitates outdoor dog walking demand from the surrounding settlements of Halewood, Woolton, Belle Vale, and Tarbock Green.

3.3 As such, this proposal is support by CS4 as the diversification of the rural economy, and a start-up business witnessing organic, sustainable economic growth.

3.4 G4 is more specific to rural diversification development but is nevertheless supportive. The policy states:

Proposals for the diversification of rural enterprises will be permitted provided that they would:

- a) Preserve the openness and purposes of the Green Belt;*
- b) Not harm the visual amenity or character of the area; and*
- c) Otherwise be in accordance with the policies of this Plan.*

3.5 Here, subject to tests regarding the Green Belt, diversification is supported. The explanatory notes within in the UDP expand on this support and states:

*The Council recognises that **diversification into non-agricultural activities can be vital to the continuing viability of many farm enterprises. Rural diversification shall be encouraged** where it contributes to sustainable development objectives and preserves the openness of the Green Belt and does not conflict the purpose of including land within it*

3.6 The proposal as a diversification scheme by T & O Harrison directly contributes to the overall viability of the farm. Foreign grain imports have saturated the market increasingly in the past few years, and the wider enterprise was impacted by the poor weather throughout 2024. As such, the unit is experiencing a growing reliance on other streams of income in the face of increasingly unpredictable poor weather, agrarian reform, and a difficult market.

3.7 Within this context, this business should be considered vital to the wider agricultural holding, and the staff it supports. By using land they already own, the applicants have converted an existing resource (small areas of agricultural land) into a use which provides a more steady stream of income and is less reliant on seasons, weather, and markets.

3.8 Further support for this business can be found in the current NPPF, which was revised in December 2024 in part to strengthen its policy support for economic growth. Paragraph 86 asks that planning policies be *“flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, and allow for new and flexible working practices and spaces to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances”*.

3.9 Paragraph 88 is specific to a prosperous rural economy and states that decisions should enable:

- a) the **sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas**, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed, new buildings;
- b) the development and **diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses**;

3.10 Both of these paragraphs make clear that farm diversification schemes should be supported, and that a flexible approach is required by Council’s to maximise economic growth. This is in line with the Council’s own policy CS4.

3.11 UDP Policy G3 Agricultural Land is also relevant to this proposal, as the use of agricultural fields does result in some small loss of agricultural land. However, due to the lack of permanent development (such as a building) on the site, the land is easily convertible back into agricultural land if the applicants felt it necessary.

3.12 It is important to note that Policy G3 is not wholly against the loss of agricultural land, and does set out in the wider text:

*"Non-agricultural developments (such as new recreational or tourism uses) can themselves have a **valuable role to play in diversifying the rural economy** and can also provide an opportunity for enhancing the landscape. Policy G3 therefore does not seek to prevent such uses being permitted in principle."*

3.13 Here, the policy notes make clear that not all development is considered equally harmful. The policy discourages new buildings or uses, such as golf courses, which 'sterilise' the land, rendering its quality as agricultural land destroyed. This is not what this proposal represents, and it is not considered that the use of the land for the exercising of dogs has irreversibly damaged this land as agricultural land. The policy notes quoted above make clear this distinction.

3.14 Policy G3 supports diversification uses such as recreational use. The proposal is a diversification scheme and is considered necessary by the applicant to maintain the viability of their wider agricultural operations. The income from the dog paddock business is relatively efficient in terms of income produced for such a small space, and the applicants are happy to convert the plot for the sake of steady less-seasonal income.

3.15 Consequently, this section finds that this development meets the tests within local policies G3, G4, and CS4, and is supported by Paragraphs within the NPPF. As such, the principle of this change of use is policy compliant and supported.

GREEN BELT

3.16 Policy G4 references Green Belt tests within the policy wording and supports diversification schemes subject to their preservation of the openness of the Green Belt and that they do not harm the visual amenity or character of the area. This test is in keeping with national Green Belt policy and local plan policies such as Policy CS5 Green Belt.

3.17 Policy CS5 references 'inappropriate development' but does not expand on this, so the NPPF is considered the determining authority in what is 'inappropriate' in this case. Paragraph 154 of the NPPF identifies exceptions to inappropriate development and includes the following:

*b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, **for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation**, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;*

3.18 Openness is not defined in the Framework. It is, therefore, a matter of planning judgment. However, in determining the nature and extent of any impact on Green Belt openness it is necessary

to assess both spatial and visual impacts. In the case of this application, no buildings are proposed, only a fence and gate.

3.19 Neither the fence or the gate are solid, and both can be seen through. When looking at the paddock, the extent of the site and the trees to the rear can be seen. Additionally, there is no permanent infrastructure within the site which could further impact perceptions of the openness of the site.

3.20 The paddock is sited to the side of a large field (also in the ownership of T & O Harrison). As such, it is enclosed on two sides by extant natural screening (the trees to the rear of the site, and the hedge to the front). As such, the character of the wider field is preserved, and the sense of openness is not noticeably impacted.

3.21 Recent amends to Paragraph 154 of the NPPF (December 2024) included the phrase ‘*including building*’ in this Green Belt exception. This is significant, as this suggests even buildings can be considered to preserve the openness of the Green Belt if proposed for a use in connection with the existing use of the land.

3.22 Within this context, it is proposed that the hedge, fence and gate are appropriate, and do not impact the openness of the Green Belt in a harmful way.

3.23 Furthermore, the proposal as a farm diversification scheme can be considered in connection with the existing use of the land. As such, the NPPF identifies this proposal as keeping with exception b) and, therefore, appropriate in the Green Belt.

SURROUNDING DEVELOPMENTS

3.24 Despite the Green Belt designation of the site, the paddock cannot be considered in a wholly pastoral area. The closest settlement, Halewood, is within walking distance and has been identified in the Core Strategy as in need of green space. Within the Area Priorities section, “*Localised shortages of good quality greenspace*” are identified, and addressed in the Halewood-specific strategy:

To improve the quantity, quality and/or accessibility of existing local greenspace and to maintain and enhance the Green Infrastructure network

3.25 This identified shortage, suggests there is lack of open green space suitable for walking dogs, or letting them off the lead. Therefore, the provision of this dog paddock is crucial for dog health in this particular area.

3.26 The below snip from the applicant's website outlines the wide customer-base the paddocks serve, which is significant in the context of the aforementioned shortage of green space.

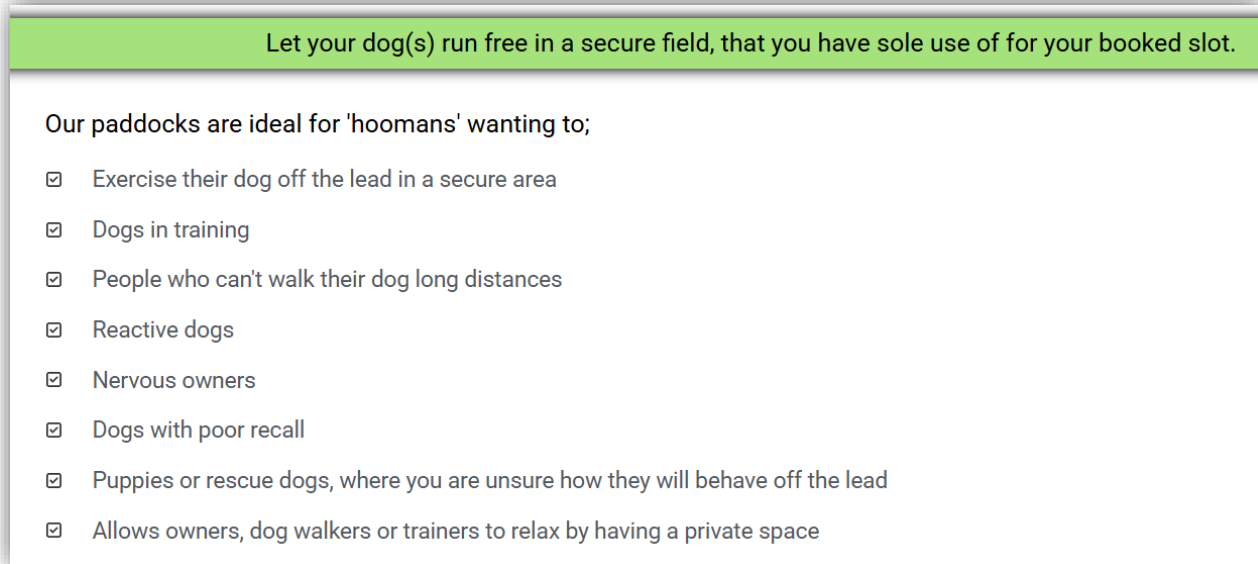


Figure 2: Snip from website (My Dog Paddock – Private dog field for hire)

3.27 A broader look at the needs of Knowsley in general reveals a focus on Green Infrastructure (as identified in Strategic Objectives 5 and 8, and Policies CS1 Spatial Strategy and CS8 Green Infrastructure). Additionally, Strategic Objective 9 provides an intersectional intention to promote health and well-being, including “*maintaining existing and creating new opportunities for physical activity associated with sport and recreation, and supporting community involvement, cohesion, cultural activities and self-improvement*”.

3.28 Cumulatively, these policies and Local Plan objectives reveal a lack of green space throughout the borough, particularly in Halewood, and a shortfall in Green Infrastructure, which is having knock-on effects on well-being and health inequality.

3.29 This dog paddock addresses an identified need in this area, and provides space for dogs to be exercised off lead. It is asserted here that exercising a dog is outdoor recreation, and exercise for both the human and the dog.

3.30 Paragraph 89 is relevant here and states:

Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads

3.31 Here, the NPPF emphasises that development in a rural area is acceptable when it meets an identified need, even if it's in an area not well-served by public transport.

3.32 It is not considered reasonable that this use and site could be provided within a settlement boundary, as it requires a large amount of open green space. Available greenfield sites are rare within settlement boundaries, and almost always priced for housing development. The applicants are using land they already own to supplement their agricultural viability as they cannot expend the cost of a plot priced for residential development.

3.33 The site meets the identified need within Halewood. The above iterates policy support for the site despite it's out of settlement position, and lack of public transport connectivity. It is within walking distance of settlements, and provides off-road parking, so as not to impact the local road. As such, it can be considered appropriate in this area and supported by local objectives and policies and NPPF paragraphs, specifically Paragraph 89.

HIGHWAYS

3.34 Bookings are a minimum of one hour and are limited to two cars per booking. The applicant reports it is rare for a booking to see more than one car at a time. As such, the total traffic count caused is less than the agricultural field adjacent to the paddock, which can be visited by multiple large agricultural vehicles per day.

3.35 The sessions are 55 minutes long to account for a 5-minute changeover period, which ensures sessions do not immediately adjoin and gives customers time to leave before the next customer arrives. As such, there is no doubling up of vehicles as bookings do not cross over.¹

3.36 There have been no reports of accidents as a result of the use of the site by clients, or the continuing agricultural use of the field (adjacent) by agricultural vehicles. Additionally, the submitted site plans identify the required visibility splay lengths and the applicant maintains the hedges in both directions to ensure safe access.

¹ Terms & Conditions – My Dog Paddock

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

3.37 The site has been operating for a number of years with the operating hours 4am to 11pm, with the last slot being bookable at 10pm. The sign on the gates (shown in Figure 1) has been there since the paddock first opened for business. The sign includes a contact name and number and references the website, which also has contact details. The applicant reports that since the opening of the paddock, no one has been in touch to complain or comment on the noise or traffic generated by this use.

NOISE

3.38 The residents of the nearest dwelling (approximately 80m away) are bordered on one side by agricultural fields in active use, and on the other side by Gerrards Lane. As such, the residents are acclimatised to constant road noise, or agricultural vehicle noise.

3.39 A Noise Impact Assessment is submitted with this application and confirms the noise generated by the use of the paddock is less than the current level of background noise the nearest receptor (the dwelling on Gerrards Lane) hears constantly as a result of being situated next to a road.

HOURS OF OPERATION

3.40 The applicant is requesting to maintain the current hours of operation for the field. These are: 4am to 11pm, with the last slot being bookable at 10pm.

3.41 Research undertaken by the applicant indicates that nearly 80% of the existent customer base works full-time, as per the below:

Time Slots Booked	Employment Status							Grand Total
	Full Time	Full Time Shift (S)	Full Time Self Employed (SE)	Part Time	Part Time Shift (S)	Part Time Self Employed (SE)	Retired	
Mid-week and Weekends	36	6	9	10		1	7	69
Mid-week	4	1	1		1		1	8
Weekends	13	3	5	1			1	23
Grand Total	53	10	15	11	1	1	9	100

Figure 3: Employment Status of Extant Customer-base

3.42 Additionally, the research identified that these employment statuses had a direct impact on when people felt they could book. A questionnaire sent to the entire customer base establishes that 91% of people can only book set times, due to other family commitments, such as helping out with

childcare during working hours for family members or waiting for a family member who drives, to return from work.

3.43 The questionnaire also establish that even people who have little or no work ties (retired / part-time) are limited to set hours.

3.44 Further research by the applicant confirms that the customers using the field did not feel that using another free open public space was possible. Reasons cited included poor recall, or having a reactive dog.

3.45 Critically, the applicants wish to maintain long opening hours to serve shift workers (over 10% of their customer base), and provide ample sessions in summer, to allow their customers to exercise their dog outside of peak temperatures. This is especially relevant to the application site as it's rural location, and minimal hardstanding ensures that it will remain cooler than more urban spaces such as pavements.²

3.46 It is therefore crucial to the viability of the business, and by proxy, the agricultural unit, that non-standard working hour sessions are available.

3.47 At present, the applicant could use the paddock or land for the exercising of their dogs at any time. Additionally, any person could walk or exercise their dog on any public land e.g. pavements or parks. Consequently, it is asserted that more restrictive hours of operation are unenforceable, as a result of people's current freedoms.

3.48 Within this context, the applicant is requesting to continue their current working hours of 4am to 11pm Monday to Sunday.

² The danger of hot pavements | The Kennel Club

4 COMPARABLE APPLICATION

23/02640/FUL - ZOOMIES

4.1 Another dog paddock, operating under the name Zoomies, is located next to the application site and is accessible from North End Lane. This use was permitted under application 23/02640/FUL and establishes the principle of a dog paddock in this area, in the Green Belt, as acceptable:

the change of use from part agricultural land to a dog exercise area would be considered acceptable in principle, as it would be considered to fall within recreation. The above would also demonstrate that the proposed development would comply with Policy CS5, given that the nature of the proposal would be exempt from being classified as 'inappropriate development'. Moreover, the proposal would not be considered to cause any detrimental adverse harm on openness of the Green Belt, its purposes or on visual and recreational amenities

4.2 This is in part substantiated by the number of public comments on the application (91), 87 of which were letters in support.

4.3 Under this application, the hours of opening were conditioned to be (all year) 7am-8pm (Monday-Sunday). These hours were agreed upon following concerns raised by Environmental Health about the noise generated by the use of the site. The maximum allowances decided on in the course of this application were eight dogs and three vehicles on-site at any one time (Highways did not object to this use despite the access from North End Lane being much narrower and of poorer quality than Gerrards Lane).

4.4 It is important to note that the Zoomies site is located much closer to dwellings (directly opposite) than the Gerrards Lane site is, and has larger allowances on dogs and vehicles on site per booking. Consequently, it is asserted that the hours of opening applied to Zoomies should be more restrictive than what is applied to this dog paddock.

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 This application can easily be supported as a farm diversification scheme, a green space which meets an identified local need, and as a sustainable rural business with minimal Green Belt impact and sustainable economic growth.

5.2 T & O Harrison have successfully operated this dog paddock without any complaints or issues, providing a valuable service to a broad customer base. The current hours of operation cater to shift workers and summer sessions, ensuring dogs can be exercised safely and comfortably regardless of weather or occupation status. Research by the applicant confirms this flexibility is a prized asset of the business.

5.3 The site is ideally located and safely designed, and supports numerous settlements in the area. This statement finds it is supported by national and local policy and respectfully requests that this application be approved without delay.