



Very Special Circumstances Assessment Proposed Extension to Existing Sand Arena

Ham Polo Club, Petersham Road, Petersham, Richmond, TW10 7AH

The site for the extended sand arena falls within the Richmond's MOL area, and as such the NPPF states that the Council will not approve applications that are considered inappropriate development. However, if the very special circumstance and need exception are met, then permission should be granted. Whilst we maintain our strong opinion that the extension to the sand arena is not considered inappropriate development and has been carefully designed not to affect the openness of the MOL, it is submitted that there are clear benefits which will outweigh any perceived harm caused.

The proposed extension to the sand arena will provide an ideal facility for all year round riding lessons and schooling, and will facilitate other equestrian disciplines such as show jumping and dressage, thus providing benefit to the local community by enhancing provision of sport facilities in the area. The current arena is too small to facilitate this.

The proposed extension to the sand arena will provide the opportunity for Winter polo, which will enable the club to operate polo matches all year around, rather than just within the summer months as is currently the case. This will provide opportunity for club members and the public alike, by making polo more accessible throughout the entire year.

Arena Polo offers a range of advantages to horses and players alike. It keeps the horses in playing shape throughout the winter. It improves riding skills for both players and horses due to smaller size of the arena compared to a full size pitch. It provides a safe environment to teach young riders and young horses to play the game. It provides an excellent facility for the strategy and tactics of the game to be explored throughout the year.

Currently, horses at the club are turned out on the grassed area to the north of the existing sand arena. This is problematic as trespassers are free to wander on to the land and come into contact with the horses, which poses a health and safety risk to the public and horses alike. There have been numerous issues in the past with dogs running onto the area and the public feeding the horses. The proposed enlarged sand arena would also provide a safer, more practical area for turning out the horses, as well as the other uses described above.

In the early planning stages of the project, other areas of the site were considered for the sand arena. However, the chosen site is the only feasible location for the sand arena. Firstly,

the use is already established in that area with the existing sand arena being located to the north west of the site. The polo field to the south of the site is not large enough to accommodate both the polo pitch and sand arena, and needs to remain as the polo pitch as it is the only area of the site large enough to facilitate this. The equestrian track to the north of the site forms the second polo pitch and again is intrinsic to the use and is too large to be accommodated elsewhere on the site. This really only leaves the location to which the sand arena is proposed.

The proposed extended sand arena is bound by a strip of hedgerow to the east, which, as it exists, restricts views across the site. Having said this, the proposed fence to the extended sand arena has been kept as low as possible so as not to obstruct views across the site. Further to this, it is proposed that the fence will be visually buffered by strategic planting to the outside of the arena to reduce the visual impact of the extended arena.

The arena fence is specifically designed for Winter Polo to be safely played. It provides a solid barrier for the ball to bounce off, as well as providing a visual barrier for the horse to allow orientate themselves around. A post and rail fence would not provide the visual barrier for the horses and would potentially lead to many injuries.

It is for the reasons set out above, that the chosen location for the sand arena extension is the only feasible location on the site for it.

There are a number of Polo Clubs in the UK with similar sand arenas, including Royal County of Berkshire, Hickstead, Emsworth, Dallas Burston and Black Bears. All of these clubs host tournaments throughout the winter months which have become intrinsic to the running of the club, allowing them to offer year round polo and a host of other community uses.