

COMMITTEE REPORT

Committee: Planning Committee **Ward:** Micklegate
Date: 30 August 2007 **Parish:** Micklegate Planning Panel

Reference: 07/01311/FULM
Application at: Racecourse Racecourse Road Knavesmire York YO23 1EJ
For: Widening of South Bend of race course, surfacing of service track and associated works including drainage works
By: York Race Committee
Application Type: Major Full Application (13 weeks)
Target Date: 3 September 2007

1.0 PROPOSAL

1.1 The application relates to the upgrading of the York Racecourse and consists of the following elements:

- (i) the widening of the south bend by a maximum of 10 metres.
- (ii) the surfacing of the service track along the inside of the racetrack.
- (iii) the installation of an improved drainage system.

1.2 The applicant states that the improvements are required to ensure that York Racecourse can continue to compete with new racecourses and ever improving existing venues. Although the Royal Ascot at York event in 2005 was deemed to be a huge success, the condition of the racetrack itself was the subject of some criticism by the Racing Press, and it is widely known that the track suffers from severe waterlogging after heavy rain, resulting in the abandonment of an event earlier this year. In submitting this application, the applicant seeks to address the following issues:

- (i) to improve the performance and consistency of the racing surface;
- (ii) to minimise the risk of abandonment;
- (iii) to improve the quality of live televised transmissions to national and international audiences
- (iv) to minimise the health and safety risk to horses, jockeys and other racecourse operatives;
- (v) to improve the clarity/division of racecourse activity from more informal recreational use of the Knavesmire during race days in the interests of wider public safety;
- (vi) to improve the surface quality of the racecourse.

1.3 The proposal will address these shortcomings in the following ways:

- (i) the quality and consistency of the racing surface will be improved by the widening of the south bend (which at present is overly narrow) to provide appropriate spacing for competing horses and jockeys, and by the extension of the existing drainage system to all parts of the racing surface;
- (ii) minimise the risk of abandonment by the proposed extension of the drainage works;

- (iii) improve the quality of televised transmissions by providing a properly levelled and surfaced service track, thereby eliminating jerky camera reception resulting from the uneven topography and poor quality of the existing service track;
- (iv) minimise health and safety risks by providing an even and properly surfaced service track. This will enable injured horses and jockeys to be transported from the racecourse speedily and safely, avoiding the risk of further injury resulting from the uneven nature of the existing service track. It will also provide a safer environment for other racecourse staff and other operatives (e.g. paramedics, vets, TV crews etc);
- (v) improve the clarity/subdivision of racecourse activity and more informal recreational use by minimising conflict arising from public use of the Knavesmire and by providing safer and shorter braking distances for vehicles using the surface track;
- (vi) improve the surface quality of the Knavesmire by avoiding unnecessary damage/erosion of the grass surface by vehicles, through the provision of a proper and level service track.

There is no indication in the application of whether it is intended to increase the number of race days at the course; the present number of race days (15 per year) is controlled by the terms of the lease and is not relevant to the consideration of this application.

1.4 Part of the site is within the Racecourse/Terry`s Factory conservation area and the application has been appropriately advertised. A number of buildings within the racecourse are listed, namely the County Stand and Press Stand (Grade II), the Indicator Board and Clock Tower (Grade II), and the Guinness Bar (Grade II "star").

2.0 POLICY CONTEXT

2.1 Development Plan Allocation:

Conservation Area Racecourse 0035

City Boundary York City Boundary 0001

DC Area Teams Central Area 0002

Floodzone 2 Flood Zone 2 CONF

Floodzone 3 Flood Zone 3

Listed Buildings Grade 2; Indicator Board And Clock Tower York Racecourse 0161

2.2 Policies:

CYGB1

Development within the Green Belt

CYHE2

Development in historic locations

3.0 CONSULTATIONS

3.1 INTERNAL

HIGHWAYS(NETWORK MANAGEMENT) - There are no highway objections to these proposals but, and whilst of no direct concern to the highway authority, it is recommended that the service track profile be laid to a cross fall or, preferably, a camber of a nominal 1:40. It is considered that the proposed flat surface with simple edge tapers could result in areas of ponding. It is also recommended that the overall width be increased to a minimum of 3.5 metres to cater for broadcasting and emergency vehicles travelling at speed.

LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE - Support the application. In addition to the benefits to racing events, the proposed works would:

- create an all-weather walking and cycling track which will have year round recreational benefits for local residents
- create an improved access route for vehicles connected with Council booked or managed events on the Knavesmire so reducing wear and tear to the wider grassed area
- provide a safety route for emergency vehicles attending any of the above, attending to any injured footballers or other general users of the Knavesmire.

DESIGN, CONSERVATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Archaeology

This site lies in an area where complex earthworks have been observed when the Knavesmire has been covered with a light dusting of snow. These will relate to previous use and occupation on the Knavesmire and could date from the Roman period to the present day

It will be necessary to have an archaeological watching brief on all groundworks for the track widening and service track. Please place condition ARCH2 on any consent which is granted.

In addition, the applicants must submit a method statement relating to how the level reduction will take place. It is important that the level reduction is carried out using a methodology which allows maximum access and visibility for the archaeologist carrying out the watching brief. A tracked 360 degree excavator using a toothless ditching bucket is my preferred machine.

CITY DEVELOPMENT - No comments

3.2 EXTERNAL

MICKLEGATE PLANNING PANEL - No objections

DRINGHOUSES LOCAL HISTORY GROUP - We request that the southern part of the Knavesmire, including the area which would be affected by the widening of the

south bend and creation of the tarmac surface road, be the subject of aerial and/or contour survey, in order to record the remnants of the early 20th century golf course.

We would like arrangements to be made to ensure that during the works all evidence uncovered of the history of the Knavesmire can be recorded. This would include the area adjacent to the Second World War prisoner of war transit camp near the Indicator Board.

We would like it to be noted that, if any of the works impinge on the slope between the present racing surface and Tadcaster Road, there are important parcels of medieval ridge and furrow which should be respected.

LOCAL RESIDENTS - Two letters have been received, making the following points:

- the Knavesmire is part of one of York`s ancient strays (Micklegate Stray), and the hard surfaced road will undermine its integrity as a substantial area of undeveloped land
- the new road will be a significant eyesore in an area of open natural beauty
- the track will only be used for 15 days a year (4% of the year)
- how often do injuries occur where saving a few seconds would have any significant impact
- do people really get in the way of service vehicles. How can they fail to notice them.
- the surfaced track will attract joy riders on motorbikes, scooters and mini-bikes
- the hard surface may adversely affect drainage and counteract the drainage improvements being carried out elsewhere
- surface water should not be encouraged to run off towards adjacent residential properties in Hunters Way and Bracken Road

N.B. one of the letters (relating to the final point) was withdrawn, recognising that the planned drainage scheme will potentially be of considerable benefit to properties in Bracken Road and Hunters Way as it will take water off the adjacent area to the centre of the racecourse. Notwithstanding this comment, City of York Council must ensure that existing watercourses on their land are properly maintained.

4.0 APPRAISAL

4.1 Key Issues

- impact on the openness of the Green Belt
- visual impact of service road

4.2 The application relates to the upgrading of the racecourse by the widening of the south bend, the carrying out of additional drainage works and the surfacing of the existing service track. The site is within an area of Green Belt and is partially within the Racecourse/Terry`s conservation area. Central Government advice in relation to development within Green Belts is contained within Planning Policy Guidance Note 2 "Green Belts" (PPG2). This states that there is a general presumption against inappropriate development within the Green Belt, and that such development should not be approved, except in very special circumstances (para 3.1). It points out that the statutory definition of development includes engineering and other operations

(e.g. drainage works, roads), and the making of any material change in the use of land. The carrying out of such operations is inappropriate development unless they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt (para 3.12). It also advises that the visual amenities of the Green Belt should not be injured by proposals for development within or conspicuous from the Green Belt which, although they would not prejudice the purposes of including land in Green Belts, might be visually detrimental by reason of their siting, materials or design (para 3.15).

4.3 Policy GB1 of the City of York Draft Local Plan states that within the Green Belt, planning permission will only be granted where the scale, location and design of such development would not detract from the open character of the Green Belt, it would not conflict with the purposes of including land within the Green Belt, and it would not prejudice the setting and special character of the City of York, in addition to being for one of a number of specific purposes listed in the policy. All other forms of development within the Green Belt are considered inappropriate. Although not specifically listed in Policy GB1, the advice in PPG2 makes it clear that the carrying out of engineering or other operations within the Green Belt need not be inappropriate provided they maintain openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

4.4 Part of the site is identified within the Draft Local Plan as a "Major Developed Site Within the Green Belt", where racecourse related uses may be acceptable subject to a number of criteria being satisfied. However, this area only includes the racecourse buildings and spectator accommodation and thus does not have a significant bearing on this application. Part of the site is within the Racecourse/Terry's conservation area, although so far as the racecourse is concerned, this is again restricted to the racecourse buildings and spectator accommodation. However, when determining applications within conservation areas, the Council is under a statutory duty to consider the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character and appearance of the area.

4.3 Policy E4 of the Approved North Yorkshire Structure Plan states that buildings and areas of special townscape, architectural or historic interest will be afforded the strictest protection. Policy HE2 of the Draft Local Plan states that within conservation areas, and in locations which affect the setting of listed buildings, development proposals must respect adjacent buildings, open spaces, landmarks and settings and have regard to local scale, proportion, detail and materials. Proposals will be required to maintain or enhance existing urban spaces, views, landmarks, and to other townscape elements, which contribute to the character or appearance of the area.

4.4 It is considered that the nature of the proposal (i.e. widening of the south bend, drainage works, surfacing of the service track) would not impact on the openness of the Green Belt. Although the widening of the south bend would require the racecourse railings to be relocated, this would not have any greater visual impact than the existing situation. Although the tarmac surface of the service road would differ in appearance from the grassed surface of the remainder of the Knavesmire, given the overall size of the area, it is considered that it would be absorbed into the landscape and would not cause significant harm to the visual amenity of the Green

Belt or wider conservation area. There are very few public vantage points from which the service road would be readily visible, the bridge carrying Bishopthorpe Road over the A64 being the most elevated viewpoint. There is also a precedent for a similar form of surfacing within the racecourse in the form of the cycleway linking Green Lane with Bishopthorpe Road.

4.5 Although it has been contended that the service road would only be used on race days (approx 15 days a year), this is not strictly the case. The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has pointed out that the service road would have all year round recreational benefits by providing an all weather walking and cycling track, in addition to reducing wear and tear to a (potentially) much wider grassed area, and providing a safe route for emergency vehicles attending any casualties arising from recreational activities or other managed events taking place on the Knavesmire. In conclusion, it is considered that the service road would not impact on the openness of the Green Belt, and that the potential benefits both to the racecourse and in more general recreational terms would outweigh the limited impact on visual amenity.

4.6 The racing surface will be drained by lateral drains at 5m centres to a 160mm drain located between the inner rail and the proposed service road. The works will include the maintenance and repair of the existing racecourse drains, including any necessary improvements to address the shortcomings of the existing drainage system. At the present time, rainwater from the racecourse and the rest of the Knavesmire flows into the City carrier drains and then into a culvert. Discussions with the Council's drainage Engineers have concluded that the most appropriate arrangement for the City and the racecourse would be to transfer surface water through the new carrier drains directly into the culvert. The racecourse will regularly maintain and clean the new carrier drains, and the system will have the added benefit of reducing the load on the City's drainage system.

4.7 A suggestion has been made that the works could include the provision of suitable connections between the existing pedestrian links around the racecourse and the surfaced service road on the inside of the track. However, the applicant has pointed out that the relevant governing body (The British Horseracing Authority) will not sanction or approve the introduction of a crossing (particularly on the home bend where racehorses are accelerating and can reach speeds in excess of 40 m.p.h.), as this would create an interruption to the consistency of the track surface, possibly affecting traction or balance and causing a fall and consequent injuries to the horse and/or its rider.

4.8 Highways officers raise no objections to the proposal, but have recommended an increase in the width of the service track by 0.5m to 3.5 m in order to cater for broadcasting and emergency vehicles travelling at speed. They have also recommended that the "fall" or camber of the track be increased from 1:60 to 1:40 in order to reduce the possibility of ponding. The applicant has indicated that whilst they are prepared to increase the width of the track as recommended, the proposed 1:60 fall has been found to be effective at other racecourses.

4.9 This site lies in an area where complex earthworks have been observed when the Knavesmire has been covered with a light dusting of snow. These will relate to previous use and occupation on the Knavesmire and could date from the Roman

period to the present day. The Council's Archaeologist has requested that a standard archaeological watching brief condition be attached to any planning permission, in addition to the submission of a method statement indicating how any excavations for the drainage works and service track will take place. It is considered that a condition requiring an aerial survey to be undertaken to record remnants of an earlier 20th century golf course (as suggested by the Dringhouses Local history Group) would be unduly onerous, and that an archaeological watching brief would be an adequate method of uncovering and recording any remaining features.

5.0 CONCLUSION

5.1 It is considered that the proposal would not be harmful to the openness of the Green Belt, and would not be unduly harmful to the visual amenity of the area. The benefits that would arise both in terms of the operation of the racecourse and the wider recreational use of the Knavesmire have been taken into account in reaching this conclusion.

6.0 RECOMMENDATION: Approve

1 TIME2 Development start within three years

2 The development hereby permitted shall be carried out only in accordance with the following plans:-

Plan ref: 10416 - contextual overview

Drawing no. 587/006 Rev PL1 - technical detail of south bend

Drawing no. 587/002 Rev PL1- drainage details

Drawing no. 587/005 Rev PL1 - typical cross section of service road

Standard rail detail

all received on 31 May 2007

or any plans or details subsequently agreed in writing by the Local Planning Authority as amendment to the approved plans.

Reason: For the avoidance of doubt and to ensure that the development is carried out only as approved by the Local Planning Authority.

3 Unless otherwise agreed in writing with the Local Planning Authority, the width of the service track hereby approved shall not exceed 3.5 metres at any point.

Reason: In the interests of visual amenity.

4 ARCH2 Watching brief required

5 Prior to the commencement of the development, a method statement shall be submitted to and approved by the Assistant Director (Planning and Sustainable Development) indicating how any reduction in levels on the site will take place.

Reason: The site lies within an Area of Archaeological Importance and the development will affect important archaeological deposits which must be recorded during the construction programme.

INFORMATIVE: It is important that the level reduction is carried out using a methodology which allows maximum access and visibility for the archaeologist carrying out the watching brief. A tracked 360 degree excavator using a toothless ditching bucket is the preferred machine.

7.0 INFORMATIVES: Notes to Applicant

1. REASON FOR APPROVAL

In the opinion of the Local Planning Authority the proposal, subject to the conditions listed above, would not cause undue harm to interests of acknowledged importance, with particular reference to:

- impact on the openness of the Green Belt
- visual impact of service road

As such the proposal complies with Policy E4 of the North Yorkshire County Structure Plan (Alteration No.3 Adopted 1995) and Policies GB1 and HE2 of the City of York Local Plan Deposit Draft.

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