

Home Farm, Staplefield

Application for change of use of Grain Store Two Gymnasium for air Acro Gymnastics.

Background

The Baker family through their farming company, Bulstrode Farm Ltd have been farming at Home Farm Staplefield, for 90 years and the farm is currently managed by the third and fourth generations of the family.

The farming business has gone through many changes but in the last 20 years farming has concentrated on beef and arable enterprises.

The beef enterprise is a Sussex cattle suckler cow herd. With calves being bred and reared and sold either as heavy stores (18 – 24 months) or finished cattle (30 – 36 months) and heifer replacement being homebred. Effectively a closed herd for health reasons with no cattle being bought in. All hay, haylage and silage fed to the cattle is home grown so too concentrate feed such as barley and oats which are grown and rolled and milled on site. The grassland is split evenly between permanent pasture and long term grass leys and the majority is managed under a Countryside Stewardship scheme (CSS) as low input grassland or legume rich grassland. This land is all managed by a grazing regime, the Sussex cows and their calves or yearling followers.

The suckler herd is focussing on producing quality pure bred Sussex calves and therefore the management of the grassland is tailor made to sustain the Sussex herd of 35 cows, 35 calves and followers to maximum 100 head and to achieve the objectives of the CSS and SFI..

The arable enterprise involves combinable crops. a rotation of winter wheat, winter barley and winter oats mixed with spring beans.

A farm of 390 acres of which 370 acres are owned and 20 acres rented in; 150 acres of arable with 240 acres of grass leys and permanent pasture. In 2024 the National Trust after 50 years served notice to take back 20 acres of rented in arable land. which reduced the arable acreage to 130 acres. Then after the abysmal winter of 2024/2025 45 acres of winter wheat failed due to the wet ground conditions reducing the arable area to 85 acres. At this acreage arable farming became economically unviable.

The failed winter wheat crop was replaced with a Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) 3 year over winter bird cover.

The decision was therefore taken to cease in hand arable farming. The remaining 85 acres of arable land is now being farmed under a joint venture with a local farmer based in Bolney, he can now spread his costs over a slightly larger acreage. The harvested grain will be moved to Bolney for cleaning, storage and ultimately sale.

A muck for straw deal has been done whereby the manure from the Sussex herd is spread on the arable land in exchange for the straw required for bedding down the beef suckler herd and this reduces the need to purchase inputs or transport the muck to other sites.

The Joint venture is beneficial to both the joint venture farmer and to the Baker family - it helps support two farming business, allowing the contract farmer to spread costs and bring his son back into the business and it supports the beef suckler herd at Home Farm with a reliable source of locally produced straw.

Proposal

The grain store which was built in 2020, to replace a very old farm building which did not conform with the requirements of Red Tractor farm assurance for the storage of grain.

Now the arable land is being farmed under a joint venture, the grainstore is no longer required for farming purposes at Home Farm and therefore an alternative use is sought.

This building is a modern steel framed barn with a roller shutter door to ensure it was fully enclosed and bird and vermin proof. It already has a large area of hardstanding to the front to allow the turning and loading of tractors and corn trailers and grain lorries.

The building already has the benefit of three phase electricity and a water supply.

As with all farms, there is a need to diversify in order to supplement income and secure the future of the farm for beef production and enhancement of the landscape and nature. We already provide access over the farm's headlands for local residents to walk and ride on, as there are limited footpaths and bridleways in the village and we have agreed to donate land to the village for the creation of a community orchard.

The council have already granted planning permission for the change of use of other buildings on the farm to offices and areas for use as lorry parking. The change of use from a grain store to a bespoke training facility for Air Acro gymnasts continue with the theme of on farm diversification which is promoted and supported by Government policy.

Air Acro Gymnastics would use the building as a dedicated training space for a group of gymnasts who currently do not have access to a consistent or suitable facility.

Air Acro gymnasts compete at a high level, with several representing the town, their country and country at international competitions. Despite this, they do not have a permanent training venue and have faced ongoing disruption due to the lack of an appropriate space. Consistent access to a safe and suitable building is essential for them to train effectively, progress in their sport, and remain competitive at an international standard.

Beyond competitive success, this group contributes significantly to the local community. The gymnasts regularly take part in community events, including displays at town days and local celebrations, helping to promote sport, inspire young people, and create a sense of pride within the community. Their presence at these events is always well received and reflects positively on the district.

In addition, inclusion and wellbeing are at the heart of this programme. Over 50% of the team have a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or experience anxiety. Gymnastics provides them with structure, focus, confidence, and a vital outlet for emotional regulation. For many, it is not simply a sport but a crucial support for their

mental health, personal development, and sense of belonging. Disruption to training has a disproportionate impact on these athletes, who thrive on routine and familiar environments.

Providing access to this building would allow these gymnasts to train safely and consistently, continue representing the town with pride, and maintain an inclusive programme that supports some of the community's most vulnerable young people. We believe this aligns strongly with the council's commitment to community wellbeing, inclusion, and positive opportunities for young people.

This proposed change of use of the grain store does not entail any alterations to the building externally, and internally the only alteration is to create a small office and WC within a freestanding unit which can be removed at any time.