



Serving the Communities of Castleton and Marshfield

Chairperson: Ms Cath Davis Clerk: Mr G C Thomas

Tel: 01633 375812

e-mail: marshfieldcommunitycouncil@gmail.com

Head of Planning
Newport City Council
Civic Centre
Newport
NP20 4UR

17/10/2025

Dear Sir/Madam

Connex 25/0741

Proposal: CONSTRUCTION OF STABLE BLOCK, ALTERATIONS TO ACCESS, AND ECOLOGICAL ENHANCEMENTS

Site: Land North Of And Adjacent To St Mary's Church, Church Lane, Marshfield, Cardiff

Comments

Safe Use of a Recreational Route, Highway and Traffic

Church Lane is a narrow, single-vehicle-width unclassified highway bordered by narrow soft verges. It serves as an important and popular route within the community, forming a convenient semi-circular loop that connects with Marshfield Road at two points. The lane offers walkers and cyclists' picturesque views over the surrounding countryside and passes several notable historic landmarks, including the 17th-century Court Farm and the 11th-century Church of St Mary's. Further along lies Church Farm, dating from the 18th century, positioned opposite the church on a holding with post-medieval origins. The stone stable conversion at Church Lodge contributes to the area's historic character, enhancing the lane's appeal as a tranquil and scenic route enjoyed by families, children, and churchgoers alike.

Vehicular traffic along Church Lane mainly consists of cars accessing local properties and the church. Since the farm is no longer in operation, the number of tractors and lorries has significantly decreased. However, there is concern that the proposed application could lead to an increased number of larger vehicles using this narrow route, where limited verge space offers little room for safe passing. Large lorries will inevitably be necessary during construction if planning permission is granted. Afterwards, there will be horse-drawn vehicles and delivery lorries related to horse-keeping using this lane, raising concerns about the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

Historic and Heritage Setting

Marshfield is fortunate to be home to the beautiful 11th-century Church of St Mary's, a cherished place of worship that stands as a cornerstone of the community's spiritual and historical heritage. The church is a **Listed Grade II*** Norman church, built in 1135 and of architectural and historic interest, and is of exceptional importance. The proposed stables would intrude upon and degrade the church's historic setting, harming its aesthetic and cultural value. The block-work stables clad with wooden slats would appear out of character with the surrounding landscape and historic appearance of the church. The site may contain significant archaeological remains, and construction could irreversibly damage evidence of historic importance. Planning Policy Wales (TAN 24) requires that development should preserve or enhance heritage assets. In this case, the development would cause harm to the church's setting with no overriding public benefit, contrary to planning policy. The application would diminish the historic and cultural character of the church and its surroundings, negatively impacting both local heritage and community identity.

The church and its surrounding churchyard exude an atmosphere of peace, reverence, and timeless beauty. Within its serene grounds, where mature trees, vibrant greenery, and carefully tended lawns create a sense of calm, many local families find comfort in visiting the resting places of their loved ones. It is a place for quiet reflection, contemplation, and remembrance, an environment that offers solace and connection across generations. There is concern that the proposed development will bring increased noise, activity, and disruption directly adjacent to the church, threatening to disturb the tranquility that defines this sacred setting. Recent works on the site have already introduced noise, frequent vehicle movements, and general disturbance, undermining the stillness and spiritual calm that make St Mary's such a treasured and peaceful haven for the Marshfield community.

The recent return of a former vicar, a young, devoted Welsh clergyman whose energy, faith, and enthusiasm have rejuvenated the parish, has brought renewed vitality to St Mary's Church. His leadership has inspired an increase in congregation numbers, breathing new life into worship and community participation. As a result, church services and events attract greater attendance; there are particular concerns about disturbances from the application site, which may be exacerbated by any further developments or increased traffic in the area. It is therefore essential to preserve the peace and accessibility of this historic and much-loved place of worship to ensure it continues to serve the community with dignity and respect.

Environment, Protected Landscape and Visual Impact

The application site is contained within the St Brides SSSI protected landscape, and under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*, it is protected for its reed and ditch network, marginal aquatic habitats and assemblage of aquatic plants and invertebrates that need to be carefully considered in planning applications. Under Section 6 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, Newport City Council should,

'Seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions'.

Chapter 6, Planning Policy Wales Edition 12, builds this duty into national planning policy; it is not optional. It means that biodiversity and ecosystem resilience must be a core consideration in all planning decisions, not just designated sites; however, it is essential in this case, particularly for the SSSI. Planning decisions should aim to achieve a Net Benefit for Biodiversity, resulting in an overall positive impact on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience.

This site has already experienced significant environmental degradation due to previous activities. These involve a mature roadside hedge that was scrubbed out, burning has taken place on the field, large quantities of gravel have been laid over the roots of trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs); these trees have been damaged and show signs of demise. In addition, substantial amounts of topsoil have been displaced across an area of recognised archaeological sensitivity and within a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Grassland management has been poor, with invasive weeds left unchecked and no evidence of effective pasture management. These actions demonstrate a lack of appropriate environmental stewardship, raising serious concerns that the current landowner does not possess the necessary expertise or understanding to manage the site responsibly or in accordance with environmental and land-use best practices. Given the site's sensitive ecological and heritage context, any further development risks causing additional irreversible harm, undermining the environmental integrity of the area and the historic character of its surrounding setting.

The mature hedgerow that was removed provided effective natural screening and shelter for the site and supported a variety of wildlife, including birds, invertebrates, and small mammals. The removal of this well-established natural screen was both unfortunate and difficult to comprehend, as it had provided an effective and attractive visual barrier. Its loss resulted in a more open and visually harsh outlook that detracts from the area's character and setting, which neither landowner has made little effort to repair. In an attempt to satisfy the Enforcement Notice, *laurel* plants were introduced; this is a well-known invasive species. Other plants, such as *maple* and *rhododendron*, were also planted in the field and are recognised as toxic to equines. While the landowner identifies as an experienced horse owner, this planting choice suggests a lack of awareness regarding essential aspects of equine care and land management. This apparent lack of care has been evident under both current and previous ownership, which does not inspire confidence that the site will be appropriately managed or enhanced in the future. The creation of a large open area with extensive hardcore surfacing gives the impression of an urban-style development that is out of keeping with the site's historic and rural character. As the hardcore material is proposed for use elsewhere within the development, this incongruous appearance is likely to remain.

Site and Scale of Application, Stable Design, Manure Store, Stocking Levels

The revised siting of the stable building brings it notably closer to an existing mature hedgerow, public right of way and to the public highway. Its proximity to the road means that it will now be visible to walkers approaching from the direction of the church and from the nearby public vantage points. The proposed blockwork structure with timber cladding would appear visually prominent and would not be in keeping with the traditional stone character of the nearby buildings, including the adjacent church. This could result in harm to the character and appearance of the rural setting and

aims of Planning Policy Wales Chapter 6, development proposals must respect local character, landscape setting, and the distinctiveness of place.

The justification statement suggests that the blockwork stables will be “mobile,” but the inclusion of fixed footings would prevent this. The proposal should therefore be treated as a permanent structure and assessed accordingly under relevant planning policies for new buildings in the countryside. It is noted that the proposal includes the creation of an additional gateway onto a rural lane that currently has a national speed limit (60 mph). There appears to be no evidence of either planning or local highway authority consent for this new access point. The location of the access on a stretch of road with limited visibility raises significant highway safety concerns, particularly if vehicles need to reverse onto the carriageway. The site area of approximately 2.7 acres appears limited for the number of horses proposed. The British Horse Society (BHS) recommends a stocking density of one horse per 1–1.5 acres for permanent grazing. Based on these guidelines, the land would only reasonably support a maximum of two horses or ponies. The indication that up to six ponies and two foals would be accommodated, therefore, represents overstocking, with potential impacts on land quality, animal welfare, and surface water management. Consideration should be given to reducing the number of stables to reflect the site’s capacity if permission were to be granted. There appears to be some uncertainty regarding whether change of use permission has been granted. Application 11/0659 (Certificate of Lawfulness) authorises the use of two stables and a barn functioning as a garage. However, the permission does not extend to the surrounding land, which was historically used by the farmer for grazing cattle and sheep and therefore retains its agricultural designation.

The introduction of a concrete manure storage area raises potential environmental concerns. Should the cover become dislodged or not used consistently, rainfall could percolate through the manure and cause effluent pooling on the hardstanding. This increases the risk of nutrient-rich runoff entering nearby watercourses (Church Reen) of the SSSI. Furthermore, the proposed use of soakaways for surface water drainage may not be suitable in combination with animal waste storage, as it could facilitate effluent seepage.

The introduction of external lighting in what is currently a dark rural area will cause light pollution and disturbance of nocturnal wildlife species. While the addition of a bat box and bird box is noted, this represents a minimal biodiversity enhancement. The proposal does not demonstrate a proportionate or effective approach to biodiversity net gain.

Breach of Planning Control and Non-Compliant Behaviour

It is understood that both the previous and current landowners, believed to be related as father and son-in-law, have undertaken a series of unauthorised and inappropriate works on the site. As mentioned previously, these include the removal of a mature hedgerow, the importation and tipping of substantial quantities of hardcore, and groundworks carried out without due regard to the mature horse chestnut trees protected under Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs). These activities have caused visible deterioration to the affected trees and altered the site’s natural character. Significant volumes of soil have also been displaced within a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and an archaeologically sensitive area, undertaken without the benefit of professional archaeological

oversight or consent. A few months ago, cars were observed being stored on the field area, adjacent to the trees, where the gravel was previously. This was without planning permission, raising concerns over potential contamination from oil or other pollutants seeping into the SSSI.

Furthermore, the removal of the close-board fencing and leaving the widely spaced post-and-rails has proved inadequate for safely containing livestock, resulting in repeated escapes of small ponies onto the public highway. This has created avoidable safety hazards for both animals and road users, contrary to the aims of Policy SP3 (Transport and Accessibility) and Policy GP7 (Environmental Protection and Public Safety) of the Newport Local Development Plan (LDP).

Additionally, members of the local community have reported instances of verbal abuse and intimidating behaviour from the landowners, allegedly aimed at deterring the public from lawfully using the route for recreation. Such conduct not only undermines community well-being but also conflicts with the objectives of Policy GP2 (General Amenity) and the Welsh Government's broader commitment to promoting safe, inclusive, and accessible environments for all. For these reasons, it appears that the landowner has shown little intention of engaging constructively or harmoniously with the local community. The pattern of behaviour and activity on the site has fostered an atmosphere of hostility and intimidation, which is wholly inconsistent with the principles of good neighbourliness and community cohesion promoted in Planning Policy Wales and Newport City Council's Local Development Plan. In light of these concerns, and given the negative social and environmental impacts already experienced, it is considered that this application should be refused because it fails to demonstrate respect for the surrounding community, the local environment, and the shared public interest.

Given the historic and ongoing issues associated with the site, as well as the pattern of unauthorised activity and non-compliance demonstrated by the landowners, it is highly likely that this site will continue to generate complaints, enforcement action, and community concern into the future, if permission is granted. Allowing the proposal to proceed would therefore risk creating a long-term source of controversy and administrative burden for Newport City Council, contrary to the principles of sustainable, responsible, and well-managed development promoted in Planning Policy Wales and the Newport Local Development Plan.

Marshfield Community Council respectfully request that the application be refused due to the impacts described above.

Yours sincerely,

Gerald Thomas

Clerk

<http://www.marshfieldcommunitycouncil.org>