

Belmont Farm Closure Frequently asked Questions

Why did you not apply for planning?

Belmont Estate has planning as a mixed use farm consisting of equestrian, agricultural and residential uses which were noted by the Planning Inspector. Following professional advice we deemed diversification to include the Children's Farm as a natural development in keeping with the community needs and environment.

What was your objection to Planning conditions being imposed?

There were early negotiations with Barnet Council regarding the Children's Farm within our existing mixed use planning, however the conditions they wanted to impose would have made the operation of the Children's Farm unviable. The majority of Barnet's conditions were subsequently rejected by the Inspector as unreasonable.

Why did you build the Children's Farm without separate planning?

The advice from our planning expert was we did not need to apply for planning as the Children's Farm was an acceptable diversification of the existing mixed use.

Our initial talks with Barnet Planning were principally over the conditions they wanted to impose on the existing use of the land and buildings. We were in constant communication with all parties up until November 10 when a foreclosure notice was issued. The majority of these conditions were subsequently rejected by the Inspector.

What's the effect on your neighbours?

No complaints were logged by the neighbours regarding the "operation" of the Children's Farm with the council during these negotiations. Belmont has always been a diverse farming unit with many uses over the years. The car park has always been there, predating the neighbouring property which was recently built to overlook it.

The inspector found that the movement in and out of the car park does not lead to a significant reduction in highway safety. Further she said there is no evidence to show that visitor numbers exacerbates traffic congestion on the Ridgeway.

What was the Appeal Hearing for?

The appeal was made against the enforcement notice issued by the Council of the London Borough of Barnet, issued on the 5th November 2010

Why build the Children's Farm in Green belt?

In our view the farm promotes the openness of the green belt providing public access to it. Our farm provides the following:

- Access to the open countryside for the neighbouring urban population
- Sustainable outdoor recreation for the urban area
- The retention of attractive landscapes and the enhancement of landscapes, near to where people live
- Improvement of damaged and derelict land
- The securing of nature conservation interests
- The retention of land in agricultural, forestry and related uses

The Children's Farm adheres to all of these.

The buildings

The existing buildings used for the housing of animals, the café, toilets, party room and education room were found by the Inspector to be in keeping with their semi-rural surroundings because of their low profile and timber cladding. According to the Inspector, "the re-use of the buildings that were in a derelict condition has not had a materially greater impact on the openness of the green belt and the purposes of including land within it."

Is the farm an educational and community facility?

The rationale was to provide an educational facility where children could learn about animals and farming. It has become a much valued source of education and a real asset to the community. The farm provides access to the countryside as a place for outdoor education and children's play, which encourages a greater appreciation of the farming sector and food production as well as promoting a healthy living. According to the Planning Inspector "The role of the children's farm as a community and educational resource has substantial weight"

Is Belmont Farm Diversification necessary?

The Government's top priority in reforming the planning system is to promote sustainable economic growth and jobs. Recognition of diversification into non-agricultural activities is vital to the continuing viability of many farm enterprises.

The Inspector confirmed that Belmont Farm is a sustainable location, accessible by various means of public transport and within walking or cycling distance of residential areas. Current government policies on farming encourages Belmont Farm to diversify hence the decision to become an educational and community resource

Why have bird and animal enclosures on green belt land

As part of farming safety for animals and people we have erected bird enclosures and fencing. Any farm operation where animals are concerned fencing is needed. The inspector has deemed the fences to be permanent structures and therefore a breach of planning control in a green belt area.