



An
Bord
Pleanála

Inspector's Report

ABP-321724-25

Development

Retention of an equestrian development, and a detached building which was used as an unapproved dwelling, but now to be retained and used as a farm office. The application includes a new two-storey, detached farmhouse and all associated site works.

Location

Skreen, Tara, Co. Meath.

Planning Authority

Meath County Council

Planning Authority Reg. Ref.

2460897

Applicant(s)

Eddie Brewer

Type of Application

Permission

Planning Authority Decision

Refuse permission

Type of Appeal

First Party

Observer(s)

John & Nathalie Sheridan

Date of Site Inspection

30th April 2025

Inspector

Bébhinn O'Shea

Contents

1.0 Site Location and Description	3
2.0 Proposed Development	3
3.0 Planning Authority Decision	4
4.0 Planning History	7
5.0 Policy Context	7
6.0 Natural Heritage Designations	11
7.0 EIA Screening	11
8.0 The Appeal	12
9.0 Assessment	14
10.0 AA Screening	26
11.0 Water Framework Directive Screening	27
12.0 Conclusion and Recommendation	28
13.0 Reasons and Considerations	29

Appendix 1 – Form 1: EIA Pre-Screening

Form 2: EIA Preliminary Examination

Appendix 2 - Images

1.0 Site Location and Description

- 1.1. The site is located on a local road in Skreen, Co. Meath, east of Tara and c. 12 km from Navan, in an area of open rolling hilly landscape. There is a small settlement to south east called Obertstown and a medium level of sporadic and clustered housing in the vicinity along with a GAA club. The road on which the site is accessed from is very straight and open with an 80km limit signage and with traffic picking up considerable and excessive speed.
- 1.2. The site of the development measures 2.8 hectares. It has an irregular formation; the part nearest the road having the nature of an infill rural housing site. The site extends from this point, to the rear of 3 adjacent dwellings, and onwards uphill to the north east. Levels increase notably from the road.

2.0 Proposed Development

Retention permission is sought for an equestrian development including

- Three stable buildings (Stable A 18m x 5m x 3.4m (LxWxH) Timber clad; Stable B 19m x 5m x 3.4 m Timber clad; Stable C 16m x 7.5m x 4.1m Render and part timber clad),
 - sand arena,
 - horse walker,
 - structure (previously unauthorized dwelling unit) to be used as farm office 7m x 5m x 5m LxWxH, painted timber cladding
 - hardstanding for parking,
 - internal driveway,
 - external lighting,
 - revised entrance and timber fence at front boundary,

Permission is also sought for a two-story detached dwelling 8m x 6.5m x 18m, with single storey return, finished in render, stone cladding and metal roof

- secondary wastewater treatment facility,

- equine waste facilities.

The facility is stated to have a capacity of 18 horses (as well as rugged outdoor animals).

3.0 Planning Authority Decision

3.1. Decision

The Planning Authority refused permission for 5 reasons, summarised below:

1. Insufficient local need demonstrated therefore development would materially contravene policy RD POL1 and RD POL2 of the CDP and be contrary to the Section 28 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines.
2. Development would exacerbate ribbon development, result in backland development, result in precedent for further such inappropriate development and would be contrary to Policy RD POL 3 of the CDP.
3. The development is in the Tara Skryne Hills landscape area, with high sensitivity to development and an exceptional landscape value. In the absence of a visual impact assessment or landscape impact assessment, the development would have a detrimental impact on the landscape character area, contrary to Policy HER POL 52 and HER OBJ 50.
4. Proximity of sand arena to neighbouring dwelling would result in loss of residential amenity to neighbouring dwelling and depreciate the value of property
5. Inadequate information in relation to animal waste management, waste from the farm office means the proposed development would be prejudicial to public health and cause water pollution.

3.2. Planning Authority Reports

3.2.1. Planning Reports

The Planning Report

- Considered that the applicant had not demonstrated that his predominant occupation is equine related or that it requires the applicant to live on site permanently and therefore rural housing need has not been demonstrated.
- Considered that the development constitutes ribbon development as there are 5 existing dwellings located within 230m of road frontage.
- Noted a proposed birch grove along the northern boundary along the entrance road and noted an existing mature boundary south of the sand arena at the adjacent dwelling to south, but considered that the proximity of the sand area to the dwelling north of the access road would result in a negative impact on the residential amenity of this dwelling, both by reason of noise and loss of privacy.
- Noted the site levels increase steadily from the public road, that a site section had not been submitted and that there were concerns regarding the level of the dwelling above that of the public road and the backland nature of the dwelling that is located to the rear of existing properties.
- Noted concerns regarding the sporadic layout of the development and impact that this could have on the landscape character area and protected views 44 and 47.
- Noted that this landscape character area has a medium potential capacity to accommodate one off dwellings and a low potential capacity to accommodate large agricultural buildings and therefore any structures should be clustered together to minimise visual obtrusion on the landscape.
- Noted the applicant has not submitted a visual impact assessment to demonstrate the impact the development has or would have on the Tara Skryne Landscape Character Area .
- Noted that the existing development can be viewed from Protected View Skryne Church.
- Noted condition of the Transportation report in relation to maintenance of sightlines, entrance set back and layout and road drainage.

- Considered the wastewater treatment for the proposed welling to be acceptable but noted lack of information in terms management of animal waste and wastewater from the chalet now proposed for use as a farm office.
- Screened out the need for the need for AA or EIA

3.2.2. Other Technical Reports

- Environment Wastewater Section: Sought FI in relation to wastewater from the proposed farm office
- Environment Surface Water /Flooding Section: Conditions in the event of planning
- Environment Water Quality Section : Required FI in relation to number of animals, adequacy of soiled water tanks, adequacy of dung store area, management of run-off, locations for proposed land spreading.
- Transportation: Sightlines have been demonstrated. The entrance is too close to allow a vehicle with trailer/horsebox pulling off the road prior to opening the gate. No objection subject to conditions – these relate to provision and maintenance of sightlines, entrance layout, and drainage.

3.3. Prescribed Bodies

Referred to Uisce Eireann and Inland Fisheries; no response on file.

3.4. Third Party Observations

Three submissions were received on the planning application. One submission expressed support for the application, stating that the business is expanding and can lead to employment opportunities, and that the applicant needs to live beside his business on security advice. Two other submissions raised concerns including:

- *Impact on residential amenity:* Access from public/vehicles a safety and security issues for homes adjacent - Noise behind homes from vehicles - Lightspill from development and vehicles accessing it – Overlooking - Backland development,

- *Traffic safety at entrance:* Inadequate visibility at the entrance, inaccurate drawing, no consent to recess boundary wall to facilitate sightlines
- *Drainage:* Surface water drainage, potential flooding. Potential unauthorised septic tank on site
- *Visual impact/rural character:* Ribbon development, roads through the site destroy the rural setting

4.0 Planning History

AA190411 - ABP305132: (A portion of current proposed site, nearest the road)
 Planning permission granted by MCC and refused by ABP for a dwelling on grounds of rural housing policy, ribbon development and prejudicial to public health (waste water treatment plant)

5.0 Policy Context

5.1. National Planning Framework (First Revision 2025)

NPO 28 Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under urban influence, i.e. within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere: In rural areas under urban influence, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area and siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements; In rural areas elsewhere, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.

5.2. **NPO 30** Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture,

energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting biodiversity and the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.

5.3. Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005)

The Guidelines identify a number of rural area typologies and gives an overview of these area typologies and policies for same, and other planning considerations. A distinction is to be made between 'Urban Generated' and 'Rural Generated' housing need.

Appendix 3 sets out that in areas under strong urban influence, urban generated development should be directed to areas zoned for new housing development in cities, towns and villages in the area of the Development Plan.

Circular SP 5/08 was issued by the Department of Environment Heritage and Local Government in 2009, to clarify how the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines should be applied to ensure that local need criteria, policies and practices conform with Articles 43 and 56 (Freedom of Establishment and Free Movement of Capital) of the European Community Treaty. The Circular sets out that objectives and provisions in development plans and their application in the development management processes should not discriminate against planning applicants wishing to establish a full-time home-based business in an area in favour of those who are deemed to qualify as "locals" through the particular local need assessment criteria.

5.4. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region (RSES)

Section 4.8 (Rural Places: Towns, Villages and the Countryside) of the RSES indicates that support for housing and population growth within rural towns and villages will help to act as a viable alternative to rural one-off housing, contributing to the principle of compact growth. Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 4.80 is relevant to the development proposal which notes that 'Local authorities shall manage urban generated growth in Rural Areas Under Strong Urban Influence (i.e. the commuter catchment of Dublin, large towns and centres of employment) and Stronger Rural

Areas by ensuring that in these areas the provision of single houses in the open countryside is based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area, and National Planning Framework – Project Ireland 2040

5.5. Development Plan

5.5.1. The Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027 (MCDP) is the relevant development plan.

5.5.2. **Chapter 4 - Economy and Employment Strategy** and sets out support for the equine industry. Policy ED POL 28 is “To support and promote the equine industry in the County as an economic and employment provider.”

5.5.3. **Chapter 8 - Cultural and Natural Heritage Strategy** includes

HER POL 52: To protect and enhance the quality, character, and distinctiveness of the landscapes of the County in accordance with national policy and guidelines and the recommendations of the Meath Landscape Character Assessment (2007) in Appendix 5, to ensure that new development meets high standards of siting and design.

HER OBJ 50: To require landscape and visual impact assessments prepared by suitably qualified professionals be submitted with planning applications for development which may have significant impact on landscape character areas of medium or high sensitivity

HER OBJ 56: To preserve the views and prospects listed in Appendix 10, in Volume 2 and on Map 8.6 and to protect these views from inappropriate development which would interfere unduly with the character and visual amenity of the landscape.

5.5.4. **Chapter 9 - Rural Development Strategy** includes Rural Housing Policy

The site is located on unzoned lands, in an area designated as being a “Rural Area under Strong Urban Influence” in the MCDP, and the following policies relate to this area.

RD POL 1: To ensure that individual house developments in rural areas satisfy the housing requirements of persons who are an intrinsic part of the rural community in which they are proposed, subject to compliance with normal planning criteria.

RD POL 2: To facilitate the housing requirements of the rural community as identified while directing urban generated housing to areas zoned for new housing development in towns and villages in the area of the development plan.

RD POL 3: To protect areas falling within the environs of urban centres in this Area Type from urban generated and unsightly ribbon development and to maintain the identity of these urban centres.

5.5.5. **Section 9.4 Persons who are an Intrinsic Part of the Rural Community** sets out the criteria under which rural housing proposals will be considered:

- Proposals on suitable sites in rural areas relating to natural resources related employment where the applicant can:
 - *Clearly demonstrate their significant employment is in the bloodstock and equine industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture sectors and who can demonstrate a need to live in a rural area in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. In these cases, it will be required that the applicant satisfy the Planning Authority with supporting documentation that the nature of the activity, by reference to the area of land and/or the intensity of its usage, is sufficient to support full time or significant part time occupation. The applicant shall satisfy the Planning Authority as to the significance of their employment. Where persons are employed in a part time capacity, the predominant occupation shall be bloodstock and equine industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture related. It should be noted, that where an applicant is also a local of the area, the onus of proof with regard to demonstrating the predominance of the agricultural or rural resource employment shall not normally be required*

5.5.6. Section 9.5 sets out the 'Development Assessment Criteria' which the Planning Authority will take into account in assessing one off housing proposals. Section 9.5.2 expands on Ribbon Development. Section 9.6 sets out siting and design criteria

5.5.7. Section 9.7.1 acknowledges the importance of the equine industry economically and culturally, as part of the agriculture sector. Section 9.8.1 Relates to Agricultural Buildings

5.5.8. **Chapter 11 - Development Management Standards and Land Use Zoning**

Objectives sets out the objective for rural areas (RA):

Objective: To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity, the rural landscape, and the built and cultural heritage.

Guidance: The primary objective is to protect and promote the value and future sustainability of rural areas. Agriculture, forestry, tourism and rural related resource enterprises will be employed for the benefit of the local and wider population. A balanced approach involving the protection and promotion of rural biodiversity, promotion of the integrity of the landscape, and enhancement of the built and cultural heritage will be adopted.

6.0 **Natural Heritage Designations**

River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA 6.5 km to north west

River Boyne and River Blackwater SAC 6.5km to north west

Balrath Woods p NHA 5.17 km to north

Nearest watercourse 300m from site flowing to River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA approx. 25km downstream

7.0 **EIA Screening**

The proposed development has been subject to preliminary examination for environmental impact assessment (refer to Form 1 and Form 2 in Appendices of this report). Having regard to the characteristics and location of the proposed development and the types and characteristics of potential impacts, it is considered that there is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment. The proposed development, therefore, does not trigger a requirement for environmental impact assessment screening and an EIAR is not required.

8.0 The Appeal

8.1. Grounds of Appeal

The appeal consists of a covering statement, and then a report on the proposed development, largely as submitted with the planning application, including lengthy consideration of national and local planning policy, details of case law, and other planning decisions to support the applicants proposal. Additions/amendments to the report, typically referencing the PA decision, are noted (p. 24/27 Principle under RA zoning, p 31, p. 35 Ribbon Development, p. 37 Visual Amenity p. 42 Equine waste, Appendix E additional accounting details, Appendix R (new) Skip invoices.

Overall I summarise the grounds of appeal as follows:

- The PA failed to apply policy to cover applicants with a commitment to suitable small-scale business to be based at their home in the countryside. Circular letter SP5/08 seeks to accommodate individuals who plan on running a new business and who would not already satisfy the remaining eligibility tests. The fact that the “applicant’s predominant occupation is not Equine related at present” (as per the Planning Report) is not a relevant consideration. The PA does not question the validity of the Business Plan or provide evidence to dismiss the instrument. A qualifying candidate need satisfy just one of the listed tests to qualify for a dwelling
- The applicant’s holding is sufficient in area to accommodate an equestrian business of the type proposed. A number of cases are cited in relation to the adequacy of site size to accommodate equine developments, where the range of equine activities rather than site size was considered in terms of viability where it was not deemed necessary for an applicant to be full time farming , where the individuals need for a rural house could stem from having to attend a farm on a daily basis. It has been repeatedly accepted that an individual with responsibility for animals has a particular requirement for a dwelling on the landholding on which s/he is working. Prior residential links to an area where it is intended to erect a dwelling are not explicitly required.
- The conclusion of ribbon development of the PA overlooks the infill nature of the site; the development does not extend a line of houses. The development would not be visible from the road. Section 9.5.2 of the CDP is relevant in this instance.

- There is precedent for backland development. Cases are also cited of dwellings constructed on larger sites behind existing dwellings.
- The applicant is conscious of the shape of the landholding and that most of the property is located behind existing homes. The development has been sited beside a line of tall dense trees to provide a satisfactory relationship with adjacent houses. The dwelling has been designed so that there are no openings on first floor section allowing overlooking. No FI request was issued in relation to matters of impact on residential amenity. Some matters of concern may have been addressed by conditions (e.g. change of surface to grass to address noise of horses hooves)
- The PA conclusion that there would be an impact on views from Skryne Church is based on a mis-identified site in long range images. The development is not visible from Boyne Valley or Skryne Church views, due to distance, vegetation, and changing land levels
- No FI request was issued in relation to matters of impact on residential amenity, waste and the wastewater treatment plant, which could also have been addressed by condition.
- All waste will be managed in compliance with Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters. It is noted that the land could be used for equestrian purpose without consent

Appendices accompany the appeal. (These are noted and referenced further during discussion in the Assessment below.)

8.2. **Planning Authority Response**

All matters outlined in the submission were considered in the course of the assessment. Requests the decision be upheld.

8.3. **Observations**

One valid observation was received. This re-iterates matters raised in submissions on the application: Loss of privacy, light spill, noise, traffic, nuisance, unsafe entrance and unachievable sightlines, backland development, ribbon development,

poor drainage and flooding, possible unauthorised septic tank, roads impact on rural setting and drainage

9.0 **Assessment**

9.1. Having examined the application details and all other documentation on file, including all of the submissions received in relation to the appeal, the reports of the local authority, and having inspected the site, and having regard to the relevant local/regional/national policies and guidance, I consider that the substantive issues in this appeal to be considered are as follows:

- Principal of Development
- Rural Housing Policy
- Landscape and visual impact
- Impact on Residential Amenity
- Access and Traffic Safety
- Drainage and waste

9.2. **Principal**

9.2.1. Having regard to the objective for this location (To protect and promote in a balanced way, the development of agriculture, forestry and sustainable rural-related enterprise, community facilities, biodiversity) and policy to support the equine industry, I consider the proposed development of an equestrian development is acceptable in principle, subject to other planning considerations, assessed below. Rural housing policy may also be considered, as set out below.

9.3. **Rural housing policy**

9.3.1. In relation to Circular SP 5/08, detailed at 5.2 above and relied upon in the appeal, the Circular required Development Plans to be reviewed to ensure compatibility with the provisions of Articles 43 and 56 of the EC Treaty. It is noted that the current MCDP is the second DP prepared since this time (2009). It is noted that

Appendix 14 of the MCDP states that Council has implemented the policies and objectives of the Guidelines. Furthermore I note that Section 9.4 of the provides for persons who can clearly demonstrate their significant employment is in the bloodstock and equine industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture sectors and who can demonstrate a need to live in a rural area in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment, along with those deemed to qualify on the basis of local ties. As the provisions of the Circular are incorporated into the MCDP, I do not consider that the Circular in itself warrants further explicit consideration, and the MCDP can be relied upon.

- 9.3.2. Therefore the relevant Rural Housing Policy is Section 9.4 of the CDP, set out at section 5.4 above. The appellant is correct in the statement that a qualifying candidate need satisfy just one of the listed tests to qualify for a dwelling. I note that the appellant has not sought to qualify as a person local to or linked to a rural area. As such the relevant category is set out above again below for ease of reference.

“The Planning Authority will support proposals for individual dwellings on suitable sites in rural areas relating to natural resources related employment where the applicant can:

Clearly demonstrate their significant employment is in the bloodstock and equine industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture sectors and who can demonstrate a need to live in a rural area in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. In these cases, it will be required that the applicant satisfy the Planning Authority with supporting documentation that the nature of the activity, by reference to the area of land and/or the intensity of its usage, is sufficient to support full time or significant part time occupation. The applicant shall satisfy the Planning Authority as to the significance of their employment. Where persons are employed in a part time capacity, the predominant occupation shall be bloodstock and equine industry, forestry, agri-tourism or horticulture related. It should be noted, that where an applicant is also a local of the area, the onus of proof with regard to demonstrating the predominance of the agricultural or rural resource employment shall not normally be required.”

The key issue is whether the applicant meets the above requirements. I have reviewed all documentation in this regard and note particular content below.

9.3.3. The applicant's rural housing form states that his address is a dwelling at Old Mill, Ratoath, Co. Meath, and that he owns an apartment in Ratoath. It states his occupation as "farmer" and his employer as "Skyrne Equestrian". No other occupation is stated.

9.3.4. The appeal report states

"the applicant plans on establishing a small scale, full-time, equestrian livery facility on this tract, in line with a bespoke business plan which forms part of this present application submission. This operation, which will focus on the provision of accommodation and animal husbandry (as directed by a veterinary surgeon), would be administered by Mr. Eddie Brewer, aided by part-time or casual labour when needed."

"In that [Meath County Council] opposes this proposal on the basis that the applicant's predominant occupation is not equine related at present, this is not a relevant consideration and aside from additional accounting information being included as part of appendix E, which was not available when this application was lodged and which shows that the applicant is engaged in farming in his own land, we are aware of many cases in which rural housing was permitted for individuals who envisage a change of career."

9.3.5. Supporting documentation includes:

- Electricity utility bill, bank detail, state agents brochure for property
- Vets letter confirming services since 2022
- Income tax return 2021
- Letter from accountant confirming turnover for Skyrne Equestrian for Dec 2022, 2023, Jan-Sept 2024. Also overall turnover for 2024 for Skyrne Equestrian, Precast Structures Ltd, Apartment in Ratoath for 2024
- Horse passport
- Insurance cover 2024

9.3.6. A Business Plan is submitted with the application. The following content is noted:

- The applicant purchased the lands in 2022 and commenced providing accommodation-only livery. Works were carried out to upgrade fencing, install a

horse water and new sand arena as part of a four year plan to which would provide the applicant with an income for the future.

- The applicant worked his entire life in the construction industry and now wishes to spend his remaining years as a self-employed equestrian livery business operator. A home is proposed to enable him to commit fulltime to animal husbandry responsibilities.
- Currently there are 4 horses in accommodation only livery (where owners look after the feeding, training and mucking out themselves). Year 1 projects 6 horses accommodation only/6 horses full livery; Year 4 projects 6 horses in accommodation only livery/12 in full livery.
- Sectoral/market analysis is provided
- Finance plan with income, overheads, and projected profits are set out (p. 17-20).

9.3.7. Contrary to the view of the appellant, I consider that the fact that the Applicants predominant occupation is not equine related at present is a relevant consideration. The policy of the MCDP is so written to require current, predominant employment in the equine industry, not to support housing accompanying, for example, leisure/hobby enterprises. The following is required (emphasis added):

- **Clear demonstration** that applicants **significant** employment **is** in the bloodstock and equine industry **and** demonstrate a need to live in a rural area in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. (The applicant shall satisfy the Planning Authority as to the significance of their employment.)
- Where persons are employed in a part time capacity, the predominant occupation shall be bloodstock and equine industry
- The nature of the activity must be is sufficient to support **full time or significant part time occupation.**

9.3.8. The information on the application does not demonstrate that the applicant has a source of employment significantly or predominantly in equine. No income tax returns post 2021 were submitted. Turnover statements from the applicant's

accountant do not constitute income from employment. The narrative in the appeal does not seek to argue the applicant's case in relation to current employment.

- 9.3.9. There is a gap in information in relation to the applicant's employment. Other information on the application/appeal suggests that the applicant is also employed in construction. The absence of any income/revenue details from 2022 onwards does not enable a conclusion to be reached as to either (i) the level of income from the equine operation or (ii) any income which may exist from other employment. Therefore there is an incomplete picture in terms of employment, and the relevant policy of the MCDP is based on employment.
- 9.3.10. In addition, I do not consider the applicant's business plan contains a clear demonstration that the applicant would have a need to live in the immediate vicinity of their employment in order to carry out their employment. It is stated that the enterprise would be administered by the applicant, aided by part-time or casual labour when needed. The applicant's role is described as a business operator. The applicant lives in a nearby settlement 15 mins from the site. A separate office building is proposed (conversion of former unauthorised dwelling). In terms of justification under Rural Housing Policy, further substantiation on this aspect is required in terms of demonstrating full time or significant part time occupation with a need to live in the immediate vicinity of their employment, to comply with the MCDP.
- 9.3.11. I therefore conclude that the applicant has not satisfied section 9.4 of the Meath CDP Rural Housing Policy and adequately demonstrated rural housing need as defined in that plan. I do not consider, however, that there is a material contravention of policy RD POL 1 and RD POL 2, as set out by the PA, as the development engages and accords with these policies to a degree. Section 9.4 of the MCDP elaborates on what constitutes persons who are an 'Intrinsic Part of the Rural Community', but this policy is not precise or definitive, and contains a subjective requirement to satisfy the Planning Authority. Therefore, while the proposal does not sufficiently satisfy the policy of the MCDP, I consider it is not a material contravention.

9.4. Landscape and visual impact

9.4.1. There are a number of Protected Views in the vicinity, nos. 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 49. Appendix 10 of the MCDP details these views in terms of location, direction, description and significance. Having considered these, the views potentially affected include:

43	Hill of Tara Car Park	East	View east to Skryne. Settled landscape. Historic features.	Local significance
44	Hill of Tara	Panorama	Views across settled landscape with visible development including foreground powerlines, agricultural buildings, houses, quarries and roads. View to the east: across settled working landscape with a variety of structures and development visible including historic structures such as Skryne. Distant industrial plants.	National significance
47	Skryne Church	Panorama	View to the north east: very distant panorama including Carlingford peninsula. Foreground is a settled working landscape containing many visible structures including houses, telecom masts, and distant factories.	National significance

9.4.2. I do not consider that the proposed development would impact on views from Protected View 43, 44. From my observation at these view points and the surrounding area, the distance and intervening topography prevents views of the site.

9.4.3. The site and landholding are however visible to the naked eye from Protected View no. 47 and as such there is an impact. This view is of national significance. However, I note that the description of this view to the north east is “very distant panorama including Carlingford peninsula” and I do not consider that the proposed development will impact on this aspect of the protected view - the development will have a cumulative impact on the foreground of the view.

9.4.4. The site is in the Tara Skryne Hills Landscape Character Area which has ‘exceptional’ landscape value, ‘high’ landscape sensitivity and is of national/international importance. Recommendations in the Landscape Character Assessment (Appendix 14 of the MCDP) include:

- Seek to consolidate existing settlements by locating new development within urban areas rather than as one-off developments within rural areas.

Potential Capacity remarks include:

- Low potential capacity for large-scale agricultural buildings due to the high sensitivity and exceptional value of this LCA and the views afforded from the hills particularly the Hill of Tara.
- The landscape would have a medium potential capacity to accommodate one off houses with careful planning in terms of the local vernacular, design, location, scale and materials and cumulative effects.

9.4.5. The roof of the farm office for retention is visible across the landscape from Skryne Church. The proposed dwelling will be forward of this, though positioned behind a hedgerow. The proposed dwelling is a large 2 story house, on elevated lands. It will be visible intermittently within this landscape area and when trees/hedgerows are not in leaf. I do not consider that this impact in itself is detrimental, however the cumulative impact of these two structures would detract from the character of the landscape. Cumulative effects are acknowledged as a consideration in the LCA in terms of accommodating one-off houses.

9.4.6. I do not consider that the timber stable structures A and B are visually obtrusive; their materials, scale and siting adjacent hedgerows at relatively lower locations within the site assists in their absorption into the landscape. Stable block C is

visible in the landscape, however its positioning closer to the road and its height allow it to be absorbed into an existing cluster of ribbon development.

- 9.4.7. While the appellant disputes the assessment visual impact of the proposed development, I note that no visual landscape or visual impact assessment has been submitted as part of the appeal, as required by HER OBJ 50.
- 9.4.8. I consider that the material and treatment of the entrance, while well maintained, is visually obtrusive and out of keeping with the rural character of the area.
- 9.4.9. With regard to ribbon development, the MCDP describes this: “Ribbon development is considered to be a high density of almost continuous road frontage type development...” Policy RD Pol 3 is *“To protect areas falling within the environs of urban centres in this Area Type from urban generated and unsightly ribbon development and to maintain the identity of these urban centres.”* The nearest urban centre in Obertstown (a rural node). Section 9.5.2 is clear that the degree to which the proposal might be considered infill development, is a factor in determining whether a given proposal will exacerbate ribbon development.
- 9.4.10. In this instance, given the infill nature of the front of the site, and distance from the nearest urban centre, which is a minor settlement, I do not consider the proposed development would exacerbate ribbon development or conflict with RD POL 3 and therefore I disagree with the Planning Authority in this regard.
- 9.4.11. In terms of backland development, the proposed dwelling is in part backland in nature, being to the rear of existing properties, albeit at a distance. There is no specific policy in the MCDP in relation to backland development. However it is generally accepted that, aside from impacts on residential amenity, backland development can be a piecemeal haphazard type of development, which detracts from the character of the area and can appear as suburbanisation. In this instance, I do not consider that undue impacts on residential amenity arise from the more significant backland element of the development (house stables and north eastern portion of site). However, I am of the view that the backland and upland siting of the dwelling will detract from the rural character of the area, as set out above.
- 9.4.12. To conclude, I consider that the proposed farm office (to be retained) and dwelling, and in their scale and siting, do and would detract from the landscape character of the area, which has exceptional value and is of national/international importance,

and also has a negative impact on the foreground of a protected view. In the event of grant of planning permission, a detailed landscaping plan and boundary/entrance proposal should be sought.

9.5. Impact on Residential Amenity

Having regard to the proximity of the development to existing dwellings, there is potential for impacts on residential amenity.

- 9.5.1. **Overlooking:** I do not consider that the structures within the proposed development will enable overlooking of adjacent residences, having regard to use, distance, design and screening.

However, there is extremely close physical relationship with the dwelling to the south; I note that the rear amenity space of this dwelling will be entirely visible to users of the facility. I also note that, despite a fence along the entrance road, there is potential for overlooking from riders on horseback from the sand arena/paddock adjacent the dwelling to the north of the development and from any riders that may leave the site on horseback. Proposed planting would take several years to establish sufficiently to mitigate against this.

Traffic/Disturbance: There is no specific information in the application on likely traffic movements. There are 18 stable spaces, and rugged animals are also to be accommodated. I consider it reasonable to expect that traffic movements would relate to

- Movement of animals in and out of the site by horsebox/larger vehicle.
- Owners coming to care for animals in accommodation-only livery. Regular and frequent, typically twice a day.
- Owners coming to care for/exercise/train animals in full livery.
- Staff – Throughout the day. Part time and casual labour proposed
- Domestic movements from dwelling - Likely throughout the day
- Deliveries – occasional, no set time
- Maintenance/waste removal – very occasional.

9.5.2. I therefore consider that there will be a significant volume of traffic accessing the development, which will have considerable impact in the context of the access point and road running directly beside the adjacent dwelling. Proposed birch planting will have limited mitigation on noise at this proximity. In addition, the access point has controlled gates, requiring vehicles to wait for gates to open, sustaining noise at this point. Furthermore, there is no parking area delineated for vehicles. It is unclear whether traffic is intended to park at the lower portion of the site or at the upper backland north eastern portion introducing disturbance and light from vehicles to the rear of dwellings.

I consider that the frequency of movements to the site would detract significantly from the amenities of adjacent dwellings, particularly that to the north, due to noise and disturbance from traffic, given the existing location of the entrance.

9.5.3. **Lighting:** The application refers to the retention of external lighting. No lighting is indicated on drawings and no technical detail is provided. Reference is made in submissions/observations, accompanied by photographs, to light spill from floodlights. The site layout plan indicates that flood light has been removed.

9.5.4. On site inspection I observed a small number of solar panel lights attached to fences along the roadway which appear to be motion activated. I also noted security-type LED floodlighting on the structure proposed to be retained as an office. There was also occasional level LED floodlighting in the vicinity of where Stables A/B and semi covered canopies are located. There were also high level small to medium size LED flood lights at the sand arena to the front of the site (which is between dwellings).

9.5.5. It is not clear what the applicant seeks to retain; number, location, direction, lux, purpose of lighting. There is potential for light pollution to the adjacent dwellings, give their proximity and the backland nature of much of the development. The introduction of lighting on the north eastern more elevated backland part of the site would also detract from the rural character of the area.

9.5.6. **Noise:** Noise from traffic is dealt with above. There is also potential noise impact associated with the operation of the development. I observed the horse walker in operation upon my site inspection but did not consider it sufficiently loud or tonal or

impulsive to constitute a nuisance. I note the proximity of the sand arena and paddock 2 to the two adjacent dwellings, c. 8 and 12 metres. I consider it unlikely that with a maximum of 18 animals these areas would be so intensively and simultaneously used (i.e. by a large number of galloping horses) that the noise of hooves would be such that it would significantly detract from residential amenity in this rural area. However there is potential for noise/disturbance in the evening or from groups of people at training activities, for example. There is no significant distance, or structure or vegetative screening present to mitigate against this. In the event of a grant of planning permission, I recommend the Board consider limiting operating hours of the facility or of these two areas, or omission of the sand arena, given the proximity of the development to existing dwellings.

9.6. Access and Traffic Safety

- 9.6.1. Having inspected the site and reviewed the drawings, I do not consider that the site layout plan accurately reflects the line of the current roadside boundary of the existing dwelling to the north, in terms of its line in proximity to the road's edge. There is a rendered and capped block wall of c. 1.4 metres at this location. (I also note a utility pole, although that potentially may be moved.) I note that the owners of this property have not given consent to the removal/alteration of the wall.
- 9.6.2. The Transportation section has reported no objection submitted to conditions including:
- Provide and maintain unobstructed sightlines of 90 metres to the nearside edge of the road from a setback of 2.4 metres, in accordance with TII document DN-GEO-03060, from the entrance. The nearside road edge shall be visible over the entire sight distance.
- 9.6.3. The sightline of 90m appears available to south but would be limited to north due to the adjacent property's front boundary wall, creating an obstruction c. 7 m from the proposed point of exit. This means the nearside road edge would not be visible over the entire sight distance and vehicles would have to be further out onto the road, than suggested in drawings, in order to have adequate visibility. This constitutes traffic hazard.

9.7. Drainage and waste

- 9.7.1. **Drainage:** Submissions raise concerns re. flooding. The site is not within Floodzone A or B or at risk from fluvial flooding. Surface water is proposed to be disposed to soak pits, and not any existing channels. I consider that this is reasonable; but while there is adequate land area to incorporate a number of soak pits to the north eastern portion of the site, land area is limited along the access road due to the confined nature of this part of the site and presence of sand arena. This area may require greater consideration given the surfaced area of the access road.
- 9.7.2. I note that the Environment Section of the Planning Authority has considered surface water disposal and recommends conditions, requiring the submission of details prior to commencement of development, including Condition No. 3 “ All surface water from the proposed development shall discharge to a suitably sized soakaway this shall be in accordance with the requirements of BRE365. No surface water shall be discharged directly to an existing drainage ditch/watercourse.”
- 9.7.3. I consider that this is reasonable and sufficient to safeguard against any potential surface water run-off arising from the proposed development.
- 9.7.4. In terms of wastewater treatment, a Site Characterisation and Site Suitability Assessment Report accompanies the application, the location is within an area where Groundwater Protection Response R1 is “ Acceptable subject to normal good practice (i.e. system selection, construction, operation and maintenance in accordance with this CoP)” No ground water was encountered within the trial hole, fractured rock was encountered at 1m and rock at 2.1m. Sandy silt surface soil was observed, uncompacted. T Value was 43.67 and P value 19.75. Required separation distances are met. A Secondary Treatment System and soil polishing filter is proposed. While I note remarks in submissions regarding the wet nature of soil in the area, the assessment complies with the EPA Code of Practice and I did not observe any signs of wet conditions upon inspection. It is also noted that the Planning Authority did not raise concerns on this matter. I have no basis on which to conclude differently on this matter.

- 9.7.5. **Waste:** Refusal reasons included lack of information on wastewater and animal waste.
- 9.7.6. The building to be retained as an office contains a WC and other water goods. There was no soil pipe evident upon site inspection and there is no indication in the application of where wastewater from this structure is disposed of. The Environment Section sought information on any existing WWTP. This has not been addressed in the appeal , which does not clarify the existing wastewater arrangements. The appeal does however suggest that the WC could be removed by condition. I do not object to this, in the event of a grant of planning permission, however I consider in the interest of individual welfare of staff or patrons it would be preferable to have an authorised wastewater discharge arrangement.
- 9.7.7. The application included equine waste facilities. This is not specified the site layout plan shows a proposed animal waste skip. Soil water tanks are also shown along with an existing dungstead. The Environment Section sought information on the number of animals, and dimensions and capacity of waste storage features, as well as details of proposed off-site disposal. The appeal states that no further information was sought on these matters and that waste will be managed in compliance with Good Agricultural Practice for Protection of Waters, and this can be done without the need for consent. However, while it is noted that the landspreading of manure is governed by another code, the applicant applied for the facility, therefore it is reasonable that the PA be clear on the facility it is being asked to permit.
- 9.7.8. I do not consider that these issues would be reason for refusal in themselves, but were included by the Planning Authority, along with the substantive reasons for refusal, as the matters had not been concluded upon. I do not consider that these issues warrant reason for refusal in themselves.

10.0 AA Screening

- 10.1.1. I have considered the proposed equestrian development and dwelling in light of the requirements S177U of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.
- 10.1.2. The subject site is located near Screen Co. Meath, c. 6.5km of the River Boyne and River Blackwater SPA and SAC. The nearest watercourse is at a distance of 300m

from the site and ultimately discharges to the River Nanny Estuary and Shore SPA over 25km downstream.

10.1.3. The development comprises the retention of an equestrian development and the construction of a dwelling; this comprises three stable buildings, with a capacity to accommodate 18 horses, sand arena, horse walker, external lighting, a detached building to be used as a farm office, fence, internal roadway and WWTP and equine waste facilities (skip for dung). No nature conservation concerns were raised in the planning appeal.

10.1.4. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because it could not have any effect on a European Site.

The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The nature of the works and the development
- The distance from the nearest European site and lack of connections
- Taking into account screening report/determination by Meath County Council

10.1.5. I conclude, on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development would not have a likely significant effect on any European Site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Likely significant effects are excluded and therefore Appropriate Assessment (under Section 177V of the Planning and Development Act 2000) is not required.

11.0 Water Framework Directive Screening

11.1. The subject site is located in Screen, Tara Co. Meath, c. 300m from the Hurley_020 waterbody which has a status of “Good” and is “Not at Risk”; and within the Lusk-Bog of The Ring Ground Waterbody IE_EA_G-014 which has a Status of “Good” and is “At Risk”.

11.2. The proposed development comprises the retention of an equestrian development and the construction of a dwelling; this includes three stable buildings, with a capacity to accommodate 18 horses, sand arena, horse walker, external lighting, a detached building to be used as a farm office, fence, internal roadway and WWTP

and equine waste facilities (skip for dung). Animal waste is proposed to be removed from the site.

11.3. No water deterioration concerns were raised in the planning appeal.

11.4. I have assessed the equestrian development and dwelling and have considered the objectives as set out in Article 4 of the Water Framework Directive which seek to protect and, where necessary, restore surface & ground water waterbodies in order to reach good status (meaning both good chemical and good ecological status), and to prevent deterioration. Having considered the nature, scale and location of the project, I am satisfied that it can be eliminated from further assessment because there is no conceivable risk to any surface and/or groundwater water bodies either qualitatively or quantitatively. The reason for this conclusion is as follows:

- The relatively small scale nature of development
- The distance from the nearest river waterbody and lack of hydrological connection
- General obligations to adhere to the Good Agricultural Practice Regulations

11.5. I conclude that on the basis of objective information, that the proposed development will not result in a risk of deterioration on any water body (rivers, lakes, groundwaters, transitional and coastal) either qualitatively or quantitatively or on a temporary or permanent basis or otherwise jeopardise any water body in reaching its WFD objectives and consequently can be excluded from further assessment.

12.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

The proposed development consists of an equestrian development for retention and a proposed dwelling house. As per the above assessment, I am of the opinion that

- The equestrian development would detract from the amenities of adjacent properties.
- The applicant has not adequately demonstrated rural housing need in compliance with MCDP.
- Both the dwelling and aspects of the equestrian development have/would have impacts on visual amenity and landscape character.

- Both the dwelling and equestrian development would use the entrance, which would be hazardous due to inability to achieve sightlines on the ground.

In this regard, I recommend permission be refused for the development in its entirety, for the reasons and considerations set out below.

13.0 Reasons and Considerations

1. Having regard to the proximity of the entrance, access road, and elements of the development to the adjacent dwellings north and south of the entrance, and the topography of the site in relation to adjacent properties, it is considered that the proposed development would have a negative impact on the residential amenities of nearby dwellings through overlooking, noise/disturbance and light spill, which would seriously injure the amenities and depreciate the value of property in the vicinity and be contrary to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
2. The application site is located in a Rural Area Under Strong Urban Influence, as identified in the S28 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities and the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, where housing is restricted to persons demonstrating local need in accordance with RD POL 1, RD POL 2 and Section 9.4 of that that Plan. This policy is that proposals for individual dwellings, relating to natural resources related employment, will be supported on suitable sites in rural areas. In this instance, the applicant has failed to demonstrate that his significant and predominant employment is in the bloodstock and equine industry and that he has a need, on this basis, to live in the rural area in the immediate vicinity. The proposed dwelling would therefore contravene Policy RD POL 1 and RD POL 2 of the Meath County Development Plan and be contrary to the Section 28 Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities 2005, and to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.
3. The application site is located within the Tara Skryne Hills Landscape Character Area as defined in Appendix 5 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021-2027, which has 'exceptional' landscape value, 'high' landscape sensitivity and is of national/international importance. The site is also located

within Protected View 47 panoramic view from Skryne Church, which includes the view to the north east. Due to their backland and upland location, the farm office to be retained and the proposed dwelling will impact on the foreground of that Protected View 47 Skryne Church, and contribute to a cumulative impact of the built environment on the character of the rural landscape. The proposed development would therefore interfere with the character of the landscape and with a view which has been identified for preservation, and would be contrary to Objective HER OBJ 56 and Policy HER POL 52 of the Meath County Development Plan 2021 – 2027, and to the proper planning and development of the area.

4. Having regard to the configuration of the existing roadside boundary wall to the north of the access point, and the absence of any demonstration of consent of the owner to the alteration of that boundary, the applicant has not demonstrated to a satisfactory degree that adequate sight distance can be achieved to the north of the entrance. The proposed development would therefore endanger public safety by reason of traffic hazard.

I confirm that this report represents my professional planning assessment, judgement and opinion on the matter assigned to me and that no person has influenced or sought to influence, directly or indirectly, the exercise of my professional judgement in an improper or inappropriate way.

Bébhinn O'Shea
Senior Planning Inspector

09th May 2025

Form 1 - EIA Pre-Screening

Case Reference	ABP 321724
Proposed Development Summary	Retention and completion of equestrian centre and detached building and construction of dwelling house
Development Address	Screen, Tara, Co., Meath
	In all cases check box /or leave blank
1. Does the proposed development come within the definition of a 'project' for the purposes of EIA? (For the purposes of the Directive, "Project" means: - The execution of construction works or of other installations or schemes, - Other interventions in the natural surroundings and landscape including those involving the extraction of mineral resources)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a 'Project'. Proceed to Q2.
	<input type="checkbox"/> No, No further action required.
2. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 1, Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended)?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes, it is a Class specified in Part 1. EIA is mandatory. No Screening required. EIAR to be requested. Discuss with ADP.	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, it is not a Class specified in Part 1. Proceed to Q3	
3. Is the proposed development of a CLASS specified in Part 2, Schedule 5, Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) OR a prescribed type of proposed road development under Article 8 of Roads Regulations 1994, AND does it meet/exceed the thresholds?	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, the development is not of a Class Specified in Part 2, Schedule 5 or a prescribed type of proposed road	The equestrian development is not of a Class specified.

<p>development under Article 8 of the Roads Regulations, 1994.</p> <p>No Screening required.</p>	
<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class and meets/exceeds the threshold.</p> <p>EIA is Mandatory. No Screening Required</p>	<p>State the Class and state the relevant threshold</p>
<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes, the proposed development is of a Class but is sub-threshold.</p> <p>Preliminary examination required. (Form 2)</p> <p>OR</p> <p>If Schedule 7A information submitted proceed to Q4. (Form 3 Required)</p>	<p>The proposed dwelling is of Class 10(b)(i) Construction of more than 500 dwelling units</p>

Form 2 - EIA Preliminary Examination

Case Reference	ABP 321724
Proposed Development Summary	Construction of dwelling house (Equestrian development 'not a project' as per Form 1)
Development Address	Screen, Tara, Co., Meath
This preliminary examination should be read with, and in the light of, the rest of the Inspector's Report attached herewith.	
Characteristics of proposed development (In particular, the size, design, cumulation with existing/ proposed development, nature of demolition works, use of natural resources, production of waste, pollution and nuisance, risk of accidents/disasters and to human health).	Site of 2.8 hectares, including equestrian development. Use of natural resources and waste production is relatively minor. No particular risk of pollution. Distant from water courses. Groundwater of moderate vulnerability.
Location of development (The environmental sensitivity of geographical areas likely to be affected by the development in particular existing and approved land use, abundance/capacity of natural resources, absorption capacity of natural environment e.g. wetland, coastal zones, nature reserves, European sites, densely populated areas, landscapes, sites of historic, cultural or archaeological significance).	Rural area, 4 no. dwellings and farm buildings nearby. Scenic hilly landscape with moderate potential for visual absorption. No p/NHAs European sites nearby. No National Monuments within site but notable concentration west around Screen and towards Tara , of national and international historical, cultural and archaeological significance.
Types and characteristics of potential impacts (Likely significant effects on environmental parameters, magnitude and spatial extent, nature of impact, transboundary, intensity and complexity, duration, cumulative effects and opportunities for mitigation).	The development would not result in the production of any significant waste, emissions or pollutants.
Conclusion	
Likelihood of Significant Effects	Conclusion in respect of EIA

There is no real likelihood of significant effects on the environment.	EIA is not required.
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Inspector: _____ **Date:** _____