



**SUB-MATTER 6B COUNTRYSIDE AND COAST**

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- 6B.1 ***Does the plan set out a positive, integrated strategy for the Region's countryside in general? Would it be appropriate to include a 'countryside quality' indicator as a measure of the success of the strategy?***
- 6B.4 ***Would it be appropriate to provide more regional – specific guidance on the opportunities that may be available to improve land-use management and access including the provision of green space in town and country.***
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**Introduction**

1. Arena Leisure Plc (ALP) is the owner of three major racecourses within the Region. These are at Windsor, Lingfield and Folkestone. These three racecourses, together with other racecourses within the Region such as at Kempton, Sandown, Ascot and Epsom, play an important role in terms of recreation/leisure/tourism provision and the quality of those living and working within the Region. Windsor, Lingfield and Folkestone are all located within the countryside.
2. The retention of these racecourses is considered to be a high priority on the regional agenda and a regional policy on this is required. There are also occasions where new 'enabling/facilitating' development at these racecourses is essential as a means of supporting their retention. This would assist in the management of the countryside for the enjoyment of all while, at the same time as offering the potential to contribute towards regeneration, in terms of employment, housing and leisure. This could all be delivered at these racecourses in a highly sustainable way. It is, therefore, crucial that strategic guidance is given to provide clear and consistent support for these important recreational/ leisure facilities within the countryside and for much needed enabling development at the racecourses.

## **Policy Background**

3. In this context, it will be recognised that part of the Government's objectives for sustainable development in rural areas (PPS7) is to promote a range of uses to maximise the potential benefits of the countryside, fringing urban areas and to provide appropriate leisure opportunities to enable urban and rural dwellers to enjoy the wider countryside. There is also an objective to promote the development of the English region's by improving their economic performance so that all are able to reach their full potential by developing competitive, diverse and thriving rural enterprise that provides a range of jobs and underpins strong economies.
4. Importantly, paragraph 5 of PPS7 confirms that Planning Authorities should support a wide range of economic activity in rural areas. Taking account of Regional priorities expressed in RSS, Local Planning Authorities should identify suitable sites for future economic development, particularly in those rural areas where there is a need for employment creation and economic regeneration. They should set out their criteria for permitting economic development in different locations, including the future expansion of business premises, to facilitate healthy and diverse economic activity in rural areas.
5. It is clear that the RSS does have a responsibility to set clear priorities with regard to businesses within rural areas and we consider that this should apply specifically to racecourses.
6. Paragraph 32 of PPS7 supports horse riding and other equestrian activities, as these are popular forms of recreation in the countryside that can help to diversify rural economies. In addition, paragraph 34 advises that Regional Planning Bodies and Local Planning Authorities should recognise through RSS and LDDs that tourism and leisure activities are vital to many rural economies as well as sustaining many rural businesses. These industries are a significant source of employment and help to support the prosperity of country towns and villages.
7. It adds that RSS and LDDs should support, through planning policies, sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit rural businesses, communities and visitors and which utilise and enrich, but do not harm, the character of the countryside. It also confirms in paragraph 35 that the provision of essential facilities for tourist visitors is vital for the development of the tourism industry in rural areas. As such, Local Planning Authorities should also plan for and support the provision of general tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations where identified needs are not met by existing facilities. They should also allow appropriate facilities needed to enhance visitors' enjoyment and/or improve the financial viability, of a particular

countryside feature or attraction, providing they will not detract from the importance of the feature, or the surrounding countryside.

### **The issues**

8. The provision of leisure/ recreational facilities within the countryside that offers the opportunity for all members of the public to enjoy the open air and countryside clearly has strong support at national policy level. There are very limited other options for formal large scale outdoor pursuits that also enable large parts of countryside to be kept open to the public and be well managed. The Government has recognised that there is a serious lacuna in the leisure industry in the UK in that it is primarily alcohol based. Therefore, the viability of a facility such as a racecourse, where alcohol is not the key focus, which is open to families and which should have the support of all elements of the community is critical to assist in reducing the 'alcohol problem'. The retention of racecourses is critical to not only to the economy but for the way the country uses its leisure time.
9. Racecourses within the Region meet this need and offers greater potential to achieve these goals. However, there must be clear and strong policy support the retention of these racecourses and the ability for these to have 'facilitating development' to assist their viability. There have been a number of planning applications submitted recently for enhancements to racecourse facilities but these are currently undertaken without the backing of regional policy support. Clear guidance is, therefore, required in the South East Plan.

### **Proposed Changes to The Plan**

10. Paragraph 1.12 of the draft South East Plan states that the commercial and financial viability of land management systems should be encouraged in ways that maintain and enhance that character. However, there is the clear opportunity to provide policy support for these important facilities within the countryside in this section of the draft Plan. Racecourses, therefore, merit a specific reference in the draft Plan with a policy that provides clear and unequivocal support for their retention and enhancement through facilitating sustainable development.
11. This could be added to Policy C3 as an addendum to part (iii) by stating "racecourses within the Region play an important and vital role in provided outdoor recreation and leisure facilities for the local population and visitors. The retention of racecourses is supported and, where appropriate, facilitating development proposals to support the retention of racecourses will be supported. Such development should be sustainable and meet the needs of the area."

12. In addition, further explanation should be provided in the supporting text, to explain (as outlined above) why development at racecourses should be supported and encouraged through LDD policies and during the determination of planning applications.