

AIRPETS, SPOUT LANE NORTH, HEATHROW AIRPORT, MIDDLESEX, TW19 6BW -

PLANNING STATEMENT

Application for replacement and upgrade of perimeter safety & security fencing, including secondary fencing and gates to separate secure exercise areas located within the site.

The proposal involves the erection of high weld mesh fencing and high weld mesh fencing with timber infill.

The site is within the Green Belt and also within the Colne Valley Regional Park.

The external fencing is required to comply with external agencies such as DEFRA requirements for bio-security and security in general, in the interests of protecting the public and other animals from potentially unchecked and infected animals, and to protect the animals from potential theft.

Some internal subdivision within the site is required to provide safe and separate exercise areas for operational purposes and in compliance with legislation.

Location:

The site lies adjacent to Heathrow Terminal 5, to the west of the A3044 with vehicular and pedestrian access via Spout Lane North with Bedfont Court to the west.

Neighbours

North – Largely vacant land with nursery business.

East – Heathrow Airport Terminal 5

South – Commercial site with reservoir.

West – Mixed residential, rubbish processing and other minor industrial and commercial uses.

The site comprises an area of relatively open land, including car parking and animal exercise areas to the east fronting the A3044 and a large group of buildings comprising kennels, offices and other ancillary buildings spread over the rest of the site. There is some ancillary residential accommodation located in the south west corner of the site.

The site is currently bounded by a low open fence along the east boundary and along part of Spout Lane North with a mixture of more substantial security fences, timber panel fences and hedges around the remainder of the site.

Access:

Access to and from the site is from Spout Lane North. Spout Lane North has a dedicated slip lane off and on to the A3044 (Stanwell Moor Road) providing good safe access to Heathrow Airport and the surrounding main roads.

Planning History:

Approved Planning Use:

Use of the building as offices for the operation of the Airpets business including the minibus service used to transport clients/pets to and from their homes and/or to and from Heathrow Airport including parking of a minibus on the site (Application for a Certificate of Lawful Development for an Existing Development).

Background to Airpets

The use of the site for the housing of pets stretches back over 50 years when the Airpets business was established. The company has grown organically over the years, both in size and complexity, establishing itself as a successful kennelling business and for the import and export of pets and other wildlife.

With the kennel and ancillary services located so close to Heathrow Airport, the business has become more and more popular. The location also has strategic advantages for Heathrow Airport on an operational level.

Pet travel by air is a highly specialised and increasingly regulated sector of air freight. Whilst demand for these essential services continues to grow, the need for stricter regulation and complex bespoke facilities to meet their exacting requirements has led to a shortfall in supply.

The modern world brings with it new challenges. Increased vigilance is a necessary requirement of the sector. Accordingly, legislation governing the operation and security of sites such as this is now ever more onerous and more complex.

Airpets recognises that it needs to upgrade the site security and operational and animal safety by replacing its fences. Timber fences on the northern and western boundary are in any case dilapidated and in need of replacing, whilst existing mesh fencing is in poor condition and inadequate.

Proposed Site Perimeter Fencing

There are two types of fencing proposed – Type A is 3m high rigid mesh galvanised steel fencing panels, polyester powder-coated green (RAL 6005 – see attached elevation drawing), with matching gates. Type B is identical but with a timber slat infill to give greater privacy and some acoustic attenuation.

The upgrade of the existing site fencing is required for the following reasons:

Security

The site falls in the London Borough of Hillingdon. According to data from the Metropolitan Police, Hillingdon is the borough where the most pets are stolen. Security of the site has been compromised on a number of occasions with trespassers climbing the current low-level fences. Whilst theft of animals is becoming a serious problem there are other reasons that security needs to be improved.

Legislation governing the movement and control of pets and wildlife now requires strictly defined levels of security to ensure the health and safety of the public, staff, and animals. Existing fences are no longer compliant and need to be upgraded.

Airpets is a licenced quarantine premises and one of the licencing requirements (Article 9 of the Rabies (Importation of Dogs, Cats and Mammals) Order 1974) is to have a 3m perimeter fencing to prevent the escape of animals, the entry of non-quarantine animals and the unauthorised entry of persons.

DEFRA's Animal and Plant Health division also recommend 3m high fencing to prevent dogs from escaping.

Privacy

The site will potentially be home to valuable, vulnerable and regulated animals, and it is both a practical consideration and a condition of the licences and insurance for Airpets to maintain appropriate levels of privacy.

Noise

The Airpets site is opposite Heathrow Airport and is less than 500m from the southern runway. In addition, the A3044 also runs adjacent to the site and commercial operations located on Spout Lane North generate significant traffic and other noise. The proposed fences (where they have timber infill) will contribute to noise reduction on the site.

Reasons for subdivision of animal exercise areas

Separation of animals to avoid infection.

The ability to rotate the use of paddocks to reduce the likelihood of them becoming unusable due to excessively wet and or dry weather.

Many of the dogs have to be exercised at least twice a day. The logistics of this requires the creation of numerous separated areas where the dogs can exercise. Dogs exercise off the lead and have to be separated from other animals for health and safety reasons.

Planning Considerations:

The site is currently reasonably open landscaped land along the Stanwell Moor Road (A3044), with hedgerow and planted borders along Spout Lane and Bedfont Court.

Further to the previous application and specifically to preserve the green corridor effect of Colne Valley Regional Park the fencing proposals have been amended as follows:

- All fencing is now to be green weld mesh type, infilled with timber slats except at the front of the site. Timber slats will reduce visibility where additional security is required by legislation and by the relevant licencing authorities.
- The extent of the proposed fencing has been reduced to the frontage facing Stanwell Moor Road, with the fence line pulled back to maintain the green corridor effect at the front of the site.
- Existing hedgerows will be retained, and the new fence located behind so it will be barely visible.

There is currently perimeter fencing of varied types and these will all be removed, except for along the frontage to Stanwell Moor Road where the existing low fence which delineates the site boundary will be retained.

By these amendments we believe we will be able to preserve the open character and appearance of the Green Belt in accordance with guidelines set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

By locating the fences behind existing high hedges we are maintaining visual amenity and preserving hedgerow habitats.

In respect of Policy DME1 4: Development in the Green Belt or on Metropolitan Open Land, we can confirm that:

- The visual amenity and character of the Green Belt and Metropolitan Open Land has largely been preserved.

In respect of DMHB 11: Design of new development we can confirm as follows:

- Regarding local topography the ground is reasonably flat and views both from and to the site are restricted.
- The location of the proposal is such that there will be no impact on neighbouring open spaces and their environment.
- The development will have no effect on landscaping, trees, biodiversity, or green infrastructure.
- The development will in no way adversely impact on the amenity, daylight and sunlight of adjacent properties and open space.
- The proposed development will not affect the satisfactory redevelopment of any adjoining sites which have development potential.

The site is currently open landscaped land which provides an attractive green appearance along the Stanwell Moor Road (A3044) and Spout Lane. The impact of the development will be minimal in respect of the visual amenities and openness of the Green Belt and to the appearance of the Colne Valley Regional Park.

As the development is within the Green Belt it is necessary to consider whether very special circumstances exist to justify the proposals.

Very Special Circumstances:

We would argue that very special circumstances exist to justify the upgrade of fences, and that in any case the proposal will be of minimal impact.

We believe that the revised proposals minimise any harm by reason of inappropriateness and that any residual harm is outweighed by other considerations – in this case the necessity for this long-established local business to update its facility if it going to continue to thrive in the international pet travel sector.

The facility is long established, and now entering a new phase of its development. To not update its fence protection will significantly damage its business prospects moving forward.

The facility is of a specialist nature and needs to adapt to the new and more stringent legislation and logistical requirements of the ever-changing world we live in.

There are insufficient such facilities available in the UK.

This facility is ideally located to serve Heathrow airport.

Licencing details and letters of support are all available but are of a sensitive nature and need to remain confidential. Please advise how these can be viewed on this basis.

The current level of security of the site is no longer acceptable. Security has been compromised on a number of occasions with trespassers being able to enter the site. Perhaps as important is that legislation and licensing of the site requires security from within as well – so that potentially dangerous, sick, or just valuable animals cannot escape and or contaminate other animals and staff.

Please note that upgrading the fences will not be sufficient in isolation. It will be a legal and licencing requirement to supplement the high fence with additional CCTV and tight audited management protocols on a permanent basis.

Clarifications on amendments made since the previous refusal:

Whilst the proposals would help with constraints that arise from the COVID 19 pandemic or similar, the determining factor is the ongoing and permanent need to comply with national legislation in respect of animal health and security during their stay and during the transit process. It is not anticipated that such legislation will become any less onerous over time.

Dogs are not walked during exercise, but must be allowed to run free. Dogs must be kept separate from other animals. Fences are the only way of keeping animals safe and secure when running free.

An acoustic report has now been carried out that demonstrates that the new site boundary fencing will marginally attenuate external noise levels.

In terms of harm to the Green Belt, we have sought to minimise any negative impact on the visual amenity by selecting a fence type with minimal visual impact, by setting the fence line back from the main road to maintain a deep green corridor, and by setting the remaining fences behind existing hedgerows (replacing existing fences).