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Longcroft

LUXURY CAT HOTEL

Application Supporting Statement

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1. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

1.1. This Statement has been produced by planning consultants on behalf of Longcroft Luxury Cat Hotels (referred to in this statement as either 'LLCH' or 'the Applicant') in

support of a planning application to install a building to provide short-term boarding accommodation for cats. The boarding accommodation will be a commercial activity (probably 'sui generis') and will only be ancillary to the existing residential use.

1.2. The following Statement identifies and appraises the relevant planning issues and in particular:

- Explains the nature of the proposal;
- Sets out the national and local planning policy context for the proposal; and
- Identifies and appraises relevant planning issues.

1.3. Finally, the conclusions present a brief review of the content of this Statement in support of the case.

2. ABOUT THE APPLICANT & THE EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT

2.4. The LLCH provides a low-key, high quality, niche service for cat owners requiring short-term accommodation for their cats for periods of more than 3 days (the minimum stay). It serves those not wishing to use conventional catteries which are usually of a much larger scale. The accommodation in a LLCH is efficiently maintained and all materials used are the very best available (such as odour free cat litter). The main structure is made by a specialist manufacturer of this type of accommodation, from durable materials that do not deteriorate over time, or harbour odours. This again differs from the conventional cattery model which tends to generate much greater activity and make use of timber partitioning which deteriorates through its occupation and retains odours.

2.5. LLCH is a successful and proven business model that is now being offered as a franchise (franchisees are known as 'Longcroft Partners'). Its benefit for Longcroft Partners is that it allows them to work part time from their home to supplement their income, whilst providing an important and much needed service for owners. The business is meticulously run to the highest standards of animal welfare.

2.6. The original Cat Hotel at 23 Longcroft Lane, Welwyn Garden City, AL8 6EB opened in June 2010 (and in 2012 won a 'Smarta 100 Business' award). The site is in a conservation area and in determining the application (reference W6/2009/88/EM), the planning officer found that *"the proposed development does not have an unacceptable harmful impact on the amenities of the area in which it is located"*.

2.7. Since June 2010 two more outlets, at St Albans (38 Longacres, AL4 0DR) and Haywards Heath (Rooks Acre, Scaynes Hill Road, Lindfield, RH16 2QQ) have opened. These are also operating well, without any difficulties in terms of the effect upon their neighbours.

2.8. The application reference for the St Albans outlet was 5/11/2931 and the officer granted permission because the proposed development was considered acceptable *"as it is compatible with the character of the locality. There will be no adverse impact on*

neighbouring properties".

2.9. At Haywards Heath (application reference: 12/03523/FUL) a cattery was considered by the officer at Mid Sussex District Council to be *"a quiet business and the new building will not be readily visible from public space".*

2.10. Since the operation at Haywards Heath commenced, the Longcroft franchise is being rolled out elsewhere, with planning permission recently being granted for facilities in Winchmore Hill (in the Chilterns AoNB and a Conservation Area); close to Royston in North Hertfordshire; and at Cuffley also in Hertfordshire.

2.11. Finally, it should be mentioned that no dogs are ever boarded at a LLCH facility. Many established catteries also have kennelling (there is a cattery on Lidsey Road, just few miles away from the application site which does this), which may have different effects upon the amenity of a residential area. Furthermore, separating the two types of animal is better for the welfare of the cats.

3. THE NEED FOR THIS FACILITY

3.12. There are an estimated 12 million cats in this country, yet only some 2,000 catteries. Of these existing facilities, many tend to be old, poorly maintained, and built from unsuitable materials such as timber, which are not easy to keep clean because they harbour bacteria. When they go away, responsible owners of cats want to be able to leave their animal where they are confident that it will be looked after properly, in the type of conditions that it is used to at its usual home.

3.13. The originator of the cat hotel concept noted the mismatch between the unserved demand and existing provision and resolved to fill this gap. The operation is clearly fulfilling this need, as the majority of the business for each of the existing outlets is repeat bookings and typically a client will use the facility about 4 times a year. As a result the client base is relatively small, and becomes known to the Longcroft Partners very quickly.

4. THE APPLICATION PROPERTY AND SURROUNDING AREA

a. The Application Property

4.14. The application property is a house midway along Level Mare Lane, and its junctions to the A29 Fontwell Avenue and the A27 Arundel Road.

4.15. 'Fairacres' is a single storey semi detached house probably built in the early part of the Twentieth Century. It is built of rendered brick with a tile roof. The rear garden is long, providing considerable scope to accommodate buildings.

4.16. There exists the potential to park a number of vehicles at the front of the house and there is a gravelled track along one side of the house, which is wide enough to permit

vehicular access to the rear garden.

4.17. There is no recent planning history relating to this property upon the Council's on-line Planning Register.

b. **The Surrounding Area**

4.18. The surrounding area is rural with occasional farms, houses and some businesses, in what is otherwise mostly agricultural fields.

4.19. The closely adjoining properties on Level Mare Lane are a mix of ages, with some post-war development interspersed with older properties. Although a rural road, Level Mare Lane is sufficiently wide for two vehicles to pass.

4.20. There are no features of historic interest in the vicinity, which are likely to be affected by development at 'Fairacres'

5. THE PROPOSALS

5.21. The following section outlines the operational elements of the proposed facility in relation to matters such as staffing, and other development management matters including highways and residential amenity. Under the terms of the Environmental Health licence there is space to accommodate up to 22 cats within the 8 room facility, although the optimum number is considered by the Applicant to be up to 16. The overall level of the investment into the local economy is about £50,000.

5.22. It should be noted that in the time that of the three existing LLCH sites have been in operation, there has never been a single complaint received regarding any element of their operation, on issues such as smell, noise, or disruption from vehicular activity.

5.23. **Description of the main cattery building** - The accommodation is of the highest quality available, of a type used by the RSPCA & Blue Cross rescue centres all over the UK. It is manufactured from uPVC (either white, or wood grain finish), glass and has a polycarbonate roof. Its dimensions are similar to a domestic outbuilding which is permitted development under Part E of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order, GPDO). The proposed height of the unit is 2400mm at the front and 2100mm to the rear, which allows space for the cats to climb and exercise. The base of the building measures 4340mm in depth with a length of 12390mm (or about 53.77m^2 in area). The proposed building sits on a simple concrete shed base.

5.24. The doors frames are again either white, or wood-grain uPVC, with galvanised safety mesh in the centre. There will be G9 low energy lamps with diffusers offering low night light in the sleeping areas and G9 low energy lamps in the safety corridor with prism diffusers. There is no external lighting. Each room will have a thermostatically controlled heated sleeping area. The flooring will be of impervious ceramic floor tiles for easy, hygienic cleaning, even the grout used is impervious, to ensure that no bacteria is harboured. All cat furniture is bespoke, made locally from impervious and antimicrobial materials to enable hygiene standards to be maintained. A wooden pergola, decorated

with natural plants and seasonal hanging baskets is added to the exterior of the structure.

5.25. **Other structure** – In order to separate the cat hotel operation from the residential house, there is also to be a freestanding timber structure to accommodate the necessary storage and the customer drop-off/pick-up reception. This structure is to be 5 metres by 3 metres and will be 2.5 metres high to its ridge.

5.26. **Duration of stay** - The shortest stay period offered is three days and typically the average stay is ten days. However it has been known for clients to leave their cats for longer periods during a working trip abroad or a house renovation. On average, a client uses the facility about 4 times a year.

5.27. **Hours of operation** - Clients arriving at the property are scheduled in on an appointment-only basis between working hours of 9am - 5.30pm. No one arrives without a prior appointment. There are no visitors permitted on a Sunday, or on any Bank Holidays.

5.28. **Vehicular Turnover** - vehicular activity is very low due to the appointment-only operation, and niche clientele attracted. The Applicant has established that even over the busiest business period, there was an average of one car per day stopping for ten minutes at a time whilst clients checked their pets in and out. There is no need for specialist deliveries and any supplies are sourced by the Longcroft Partner as part of a normal domestic shopping trip.

5.29. **Staffing** - Due to the small size of the operation no staff are needed.

5.30. **Noise** - cats are very quiet creatures anyway, but the materials used for the building are also very effective in noise reduction. The building exceeds all Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) guidelines. Since opening in June 2010 there have been no issues of noise at the Welwyn Cat Hotel. Similarly there has been no noise issue at either St Albans, or Haywards Heath.

5.31. **Hygiene** - Cats are very clean animals and due to the fact that this is a premium service, cleaning standards are meticulous. Due to the antibacterial, impervious, construction of the building and floor, the regime to sanitise a room in between cats staying is a light spray to all surfaces with a veterinary grade cleanser. Accordingly, there is no surface water, need for additional drainage, or hosing of the floor. Isolation facilities can be provided if required by the Environmental Health Team.

5.32. **Odour** - The impervious construction and cleanliness regime does not allow odour to form. Furthermore, the Applicant uses a corn-based cat litter, which neutralises smells.

5.33. **Waste Disposal** - Due to the small size of the operation, waste is negligible, at approximately a carrier bag per week. All waste is double bagged and stored in a metal bin until either:

- it is collected by a commercial waste carrier, or
- it is taken to a waste reception site by the Longcroft Partner.

5.34. No waste from the cat accommodation is amalgamated with general household waste.

6. PLANNING POLICY AND GUIDANCE

NATIONAL POLICY

6.35. This section reviews and identifies relevant guidance and policy from both national guidance and the Development Plan. National Government guidance is now presented in the National Planning Policy Framework, or NPPF, which replaced most of the existing policy in Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs). However, many ministerial statements (including the various statements which accompanied the March 2011 and 2012 Budgets) and the HM Treasury's 'Plan For Growth' remain extant. The following are of relevance to this application.

NPPF

6.36. The NPPF reiterates that applications should be determined in accordance with the 'Development Plan', which forms the *"starting point for decision making"*, *"unless other material considerations indicate otherwise"*. The NPPF states that it is *"a material consideration in determining applications"*. (NPPF, paragraphs 11, 12 & 13 & Annex 1 paragraphs 208-219, as well as Annex 1 to PPS1).

6.37. In his Foreword to the NPPF the Minister for Planning is very clear that *"Development means growth" and that "Sustainable development is about positive growth"*, emphasising that *"planning must be a creative exercise in finding ways to improve the places in which we live our lives"*. Similarly, paragraphs 186 and 187 urge a 'positive' approach to decision-taking, with Local Planning Authorities looking for *"solutions rather than problems"*.

6.38. According to paragraph 7 *"there are three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental"*. The economic role means *"contributing to building a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation"*. The social role of planning is to support *"strong, vibrant and healthy communities.....with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being"*; and the environmental role, amongst other things, means using resources prudently. These roles are *"mutually dependent"* (NPPF, paragraph 8).

6.39. The promotion of sustainable development is the *"golden thread running through both plan-making and decision-taking"*. *"Pursuing sustainable development involves seeking positive improvements in the quality of the built, natural and historic environment...*[and amongst other things]... *making it easier for jobs to be created in cities, towns and villages..... improving the conditions in which people live, work, travel and take leisure"* (paragraph 9).

6.40. The NPPF's 12 *"Core planning principles"* are set out at paragraph 17 and include measures which seek to promote more sustainable development at a national level. Planning should;

- *"proactively drive and support sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs. Every effort should be made objectively to identify and then meet the housing, business and other development needs of an area, and respond positively to wider opportunities for growth. Plans should take account of market signals, such as land prices and housing affordability, and set out a clear strategy for allocating sufficient land which is suitable for development in their area, taking account of the needs of the residential and business communities";*

- *support....sustainable economic development to deliver the homes, business and industrial units, infrastructure and thriving local places that the country needs".*

- *"take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs".*

6.41. *"Economic development"* (defined in the Glossary at Annex 2 as including uses *"within the B Use Classes, public and community uses and main town centre uses"*) is supported throughout the NPPF and planning policies should *"support economic growth in rural areas in order to create jobs and prosperity"*, especially if it helps in the diversification of the economy (see for instance paragraphs 21 & 28). Local Planning Authorities *"should plan proactively to meet the development needs of business"* (paragraph 20) and *"Investment in business should not be over-burdened by the combined requirements of planning policy expectations"* and *"flexible working practices such as the integration of residential and commercial uses within the same unit"* should be facilitated (paragraph 21).

6.42. The Treasury's 'Plan for Growth' and the 2011 Budget statements, all of which underpin the NPPF, state that the default answer to applications should be 'yes'. There should be a positive attitude towards all development which generates wealth and creates employment because *"economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards"* (paragraph 8).

6.43. These positive attitudes are further evidenced by paragraph 19 of the NPPF which states:-

"The Government is committed to ensuring that the planning system does everything it can to support sustainable economic growth. Planning should operate to encourage and not act as an impediment to sustainable growth. Therefore significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system".

6.44. Section 8 of the NPPF is headed *"Promoting healthy communities"* and the planning system is noted as having the potential to *"play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities"*. Paragraph 70 continues *"To deliver the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should.....plan positively for the provision and use of shared space, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments; for the benefit of the community"*. In the rural areas there is a particular focus upon the *"retention and development of local services and community facilities"* (NPPF, paragraph 28).

LOCAL PLANNING POLICY

a. The Development Plan

6.45. The relevant development control policies are the 'saved' policies of the Arun District Local Plan (ADLP) which was adopted in 2003. There are no notations upon the Proposals Map affecting the application land.

6.46. Policy GEN3 (*"Protection of the Countryside"*) states that, in the countryside, development will be permitted where it helps to diversify the rural economy. This recognition of the contribution made to the local economy by small firms is also recognised in such policies as DEV1 *"Conversion of Rural Buildings for Industrial or Business Uses"* and DEV8 *"Circumstances in which Additional Development may be Permitted - Local Firms"*.

6.47. More generally, schemes will be expected to display high quality design; make efficient use of land; promote sustainable development; provide for vehicle parking in accordance with standards; and not have an undue impact upon adjoining occupiers (Policies such as GEN7 *"The Form of New Development"*, GEN12 *"Parking in New Development"* & GEN32 *"Noise Pollution"*).

6.48. The parking standards are set out at Appendix 2 to the ADLP, however, there is no set standard for the subject form of development.

7. PLANNING ISSUES

General Policy Background

7.49. Government statements of planning policy are relevant to the determination of applications. Decision-making should be approached positively and solutions sought (see NPPF, paragraphs 186 & 187). According to paragraph 7 of the NPPF it is the 'social role' of planning to support *"strong, vibrant and healthy communities.....with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being"*. Paragraph 70 of the NPPF requires that in order *"to deliver social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should....plan positively for the provision of....community facilities* [and take an] *integrated approach"*.

7.50. Likewise the ADLP seeks to provide and improve on local community services whilst protecting residential amenity (see for instance ADLP Policy GEN 7).

Need

7.51. There is a considerable shortfall in the provision of short-term accommodation for cats in the country as a whole. Because of this limited choice, the accommodation that there is may often be over-subscribed, even if its quality is indifferent.

7.52. The other cattery in Lidsey Road also provides kennelling, making it less than ideal as accommodation. There is a need for a facility that has the provision of quality accommodation for cats as its sole focus.

Sustainable Economic Investment

7.53. Overall, it can be seen from national planning policy in the NPPF (as well as the Treasury's 'Plan for Growth' and subsequent Budget statements, all of which underpin the NPPF and which state that the default answer to applications should be 'yes') that there should be a positive attitude towards all development which generates wealth and creates employment because *"economic growth can secure higher social and environmental standards"* (NPPF, paragraph 8). Proposals which allow *"flexible working practices...*[and] *the integration of residential and commercial uses within the same unit"* should be facilitated by the Planning System (NPPF, paragraph 21). The 'Development Plan' is also supportive of economic development especially that which helps diversify the rural economy within such policies as GEN 3 (similar support for local enterprise also appears in Policies DEV 1 & DEV 8).

7.54. The current proposal involves investment into the application premises (amounting to some £50,000), will help to diversify the rural economy and will enable the integration of flexible working practices as the NPPF encourages.

7.55. It is clear that, as an investment into the area that this application should be supported, under the terms of Government policy and the various Council initiatives to promote employment and investment, whilst strengthening the rural economy.

8. OTHER DEVELOPMENT CONTROL MATTERS

8.56. **Transportation & Parking** - As this is an activity that does not fit neatly into the Use Classes Order, there is no standard for parking provision. At the property there is no shortage of space for any necessary customer parking and there is also ample space to enable vehicles to be able to turn and exit in a forward gear. The application site is not close to any major highway junction, so there will be no impact upon the network from traffic generation. In any event, as explained, the parking requirements are minimal and customers only make occasional visits, to pick-up or drop-off, of about 10 minutes duration. This level of visitation is no different from normal domestic use.

8.57. There are no other deliveries associated with the activity, as items needed for the business are bought by the operator as part of the normal domestic shopping trip.

8.58. **Design** - The main building has been designed by a specialist manufacturer for pets to provide maintenance free, high quality accommodation that is mindful of animal welfare. This means that the building has to have sufficient height to enable the cats to climb and exercise. The design parameters have been broadly set by those of Part E of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order, and the dimensions of, and the materials used, are comparable with those permitted for domestic outbuildings. The uPVC (which is regularly used in domestic conservatories and could be used in this location for an extension that did not require planning permission) is not only heat efficient, it also provides a much better environment for cats than timber, which is more traditionally used by established catteries. Timber does not endure well (it deteriorates quickly when exposed to the elements, is degraded through the cats scratching and is less hygienic, because it is prone to retaining odours and more difficult to clean than uPVC). In this case the building will not be visible from any public viewpoint, as it is too far from the highway to be seen. The other proposed structure (the reception/storage area) is a conventional outbuilding of a type and specification that one would normally associate with domestic curtilage.

8.59. **Residential amenity** – the length of the garden in this case means that the cat hotel will be a considerable distance away from any neighbouring houses. In any event, there has been no history of complaint relating to any of the existing LLCH facilities already in operation (and these are all in residential areas). The few visits generated are only by appointment, during normal working hours and there are no HGV deliveries associated with this activity.

8.60. In relation to other elements which could possibly have an effect upon local amenity (such as external lighting, smells, waste disposal or noise), there is also no issue. There is no external lighting; odours are controlled by the use of uPVC which is easy to maintain and clean; waste is to be disposed of by means of an appointed contractor; and the uPVC acts to screen out any noise from within the accommodation.

9. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

9.61. In the light of the above we **summarise** the position as follows:

- This application relates to the installation of a building to provide short-term boarding accommodation of 8 rooms specifically for cats. The boarding accommodation will be a commercial activity, but will remain ancillary to the main use of the property as a dwelling. It will be operated by the house's current occupier.

- There are an estimated 12 million cats in this country yet only some 2,000 licensed catteries. Of these existing facilities, many tend to be old, poorly maintained, and built from unsuitable materials, such as timber, which are difficult to maintain and keep clean. Others, including one that is probably the nearest to the application site, also provide accommodation for dogs and, where available, cat owners prefer using facilities dedicated to the care of cats.

- The mismatch between demand and supply (there are deficiencies in both quality

and quantity) has been noted by the Applicant company and the operation was started. There are now 3 of these facilities in operation (with a further 3 about to open), the planning authorities in each case concluding that the activity was compatible with the character of the area. Since these operations have commenced, there is no history of any residential amenity problems, such as noise, waste control, or odours.

• Both of the proposed buildings have the design attributes of a normal domestic outbuilding that can be erected as permitted development under Part E of the Town & Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order. Notwithstanding its domestic appearance, it is a type used by the RSPCA and Blue Cross and so meets high standards of animal welfare.

• Customer visitation will be only by appointment and during the hours of 9am - 5.30pm, Monday to Saturday. In terms of vehicle movements this equates to an average of one car per day stopping for ten minutes at a time. No staff are employed, so there are no additional vehicle movements and there are no deliveries.

• The application site is away from other sensitive land uses and the new building will not be visible from the road network.

• In terms of Central and Local Government policy, all development should consider the wider effect upon the core objective of achieving sustainability. Decision-making should be approached positively and enterprise (particularly that which enables working from home and strengthens or diversifies the rural economy) and new investment, which improves local services should be supported (see the NPPF and the Development Plan).

9.62. As a consequence of the above we **conclude**

• The application will help to meet a shortfall for a much needed service.

• In terms of the *"powerful new presumption in favour of sustainable development so that the default answer to development is 'yes'..."* (HM Treasury *"Plan for Growth"*), the proposal is clearly in accordance with Government policy promoting investment which generates wealth and employment. The proposal is also in accord with the aims and objectives of the NPPF, HM Treasury's *"Plan for Growth"* and the broad principles of the 'Development Plan', including the aims and intentions of policies such as ADLP GEN 3. Therefore, it is requested that this application be granted.