

Lambourn training monorail gets green light

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LAMBOURN'S future as a horseracing centre of excellence has been boosted by planners' approval of a futuristic horse training monorail. Despite some local objections, planning chiefs have given the go-ahead for the revolutionary Kurtssystem project at Kingwood Stud. The facility represents a major investment in Lambourn by owner Mehmet Kurt, one of Turkey's leading industrialists and racehorse owners who has owned the winner of the Turkish Derby twice. The proposed covered track will be approximately 1,500 metres in length is intended to aid in the monitoring, development

and training of young thoroughbred racehorses, as well as the rehabilitation of those horses undergoing rest and recuperation. Mr Kurt's spokesman, Tony Lodge, said the application represented a "vote of confidence in Lambourn and will help keep it at the centre of British racehorse training." He added: "The Kurtsystem could have gone to Newmarket but didn't. We believe the project will boost Lambourn as a centre of racehorse research and development and excellence in the UK. "Mr Kurt is passionate about the welfare of horses, not just winning races; this system can also be used for the training and rehabilitation of horses which have been injured." The project had prompted objections from the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) group on the grounds that the development would have a "negative impact on the natural character and qualities of this nationally protected landscape." However the objection was withdrawn after the plans were amended. The West Berkshire Group of Ramblers warned that footpaths cross the site; John Ermin, of Lambourn Woodlands, was concerned at noise potential and William Eaton-Evans claimed the proposal would destroy a number of paddocks. He added: "Should the venture fail it would not be easy to return these paddocks to their original use." The project won the backing of Lambourn Parish Council and the Lambourn Trainers' Association. In granting permission, planners ordered a public footpath at the site to be redirected and safely maintained. An officer's report stated: "The proposal is not considered to run contrary to social and environmental sustainability due to the existing use of the site. The development proposal and introduction of the built form are not considered to result in a long term unacceptable level of impact on the character and appearance of the AONB. "In respect of economic sustainability the proposal is considered likely to actively promote the rural economy in this area." The Kurtsystem allows the horse to be loosely tethered into a monorail 'car' or cabin and led around an all-weather covered track at varying speeds dependent on their training progress and circumstances. The system can accommodate speeds which would allow the horse to reach a walk. Everything is closely monitored on CCTV from a central point and staff accompany the cabins on the system. Kingwood Stud is one of the leading thoroughbred training centres in the country, having produced a significant number of top class racehorses since it was founded in 1924. It occupies an area of some 67 hectares and includes 25 open paddocks of various sizes, 62 stables, two indoor and one outdoor school, two horse walkers and an allweather racing track. Mr Kurt, aged 65, bought Kingwood Stud in 2011. A prominent owner and breeder, he has had numerous racing successes in his native Turkey, including the winners of the 1993 and 1999 Turkish Derby.