



HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION

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| TO: | Horsham District Council – Planning Dept |
| LOCATION: | Stonehouse Farm Handcross Road Plummers Plain West Sussex |
| DESCRIPTION: | <p>Full Planning Application to form a comprehensive masterplan including:</p> <p>1. Rationalisation and enhancement of existing commercial facilities (Use Classes E(g) B2 and B8 at Stonehouse Business Park including demolition of two buildings and their replacement with new Class E(g), B2 and B8 facilities. Extension of existing building to form a new office and wardens' accommodation. Existing mobile home removed.</p> <p>2. Decommissioning of the Anaerobic Digester and re-use of the existing 2no buildings for storage and office uses (Class E (g) and B8) and the diversion of a public footpath.</p> <p>3. Residential redevelopment of the Jacksons Farm site including the demolition of existing barns to provide 3no. dwellings with access, parking, and landscaping.</p> |
| REFERENCE: | DC/25/0403 |
| RECOMMENDATION: | Advice |
| SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION: | |
| While little visual change is anticipated in regard to Lots 2 & 8, the proposals are likely to result in an increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside location, which along with noise and light pollution, will detract from the tranquillity of the character of the area, contrary to Policy 26 of the HDPF. Concern is also raised with Lot 9 due to the introduction of domestic and other urbanising features, likely to have an eroding effect on the rural qualities of the character area and setting of the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), contrary to Policy 30. | |
| Nevertheless, it is considered that these concerns could be effectively reduced with appropriate mitigation measures in place, as discussed below. Therefore, if the principle of the change of use is found acceptable, we recommend that changes are made to the proposals to better conserve the rural and agricultural qualities of the immediate and wider context of the sites, and to partially mitigate the identified adverse effects of the schemes. | |
| We welcome the site wide masterplan and are supportive of it in principle, noting that the delivery of the overall scheme will further contribute towards mitigating the adverse effects identified. | |

MAIN COMMENTS:

Lot 9 (Jackson's Ridge) - Residential redevelopment of the Jacksons Farm site including the demolition of existing barns to provide 3no. dwellings with access, parking, and landscaping.

Site description & context

1. The proposed development site lies outside of any defined settlement or Built-Up Area Boundary (BUAB), in a countryside location. The site is rectangular in shape, and comprises a group of agricultural buildings, structures, and associated areas of hardstanding. The southern boundary is defined by stock fencing and slopes into an open, undeveloped agricultural field. The eastern and western boundaries are defined by mature vegetation, comprising scrub, hedgerow and mature trees, offering a degree of enclosure. To the north, the site adjoins Hammerpond Road, which separates the site from the adjacent High Weald National Landscape (previously known as AONB). The northern boundary, in its western section, is defined by a combination of close board fence and mature trees, the latter located within the highway verge. In the eastern section, the boundary is marked by wire stock fence and mature trees. There is limited to no understorey or hedgerow vegetation along this section of the northern boundary, which allows for longer-range views across the valley and the wooded areas of the High Weald to the south.
2. As noted above, the site is located just beyond the boundary of the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) to the north of Hammerpond road, but within a broader area defined by Hammerpond road and Handcross road. This area forms a distinct 'finger of land' that is enveloped by the designation and as such, contributes to the setting of the High Weald.
3. Both the immediate and wider landscape context can be described as rural in nature, composed of wooded and agricultural landscape features that are indicative of its Local Landscape Character area (LCA). The site is surrounded by a strong and well-defined field pattern, defined by hedgerow and hedgerow trees, occasionally interspersed by shaws, scattered dwellings, and traditional farmsteads contributing to the area's historic rural fabric. A large area of Ancient Woodland (AW) lies to the north and stretches across the landscape horizontally to the east and west. A further strip of AW lies to the south-east, reinforcing the wooded character of the area.
4. Overall, the area is notably quiet and tranquil, positively contributing to the scenic and perceptual qualities of the High Weald.
5. Two Public Rights of Way (PRoW) are located in proximity of the site. PRoW 1708 runs along the eastern boundary, on a south-north direction, ending at Hammerpond Rd. PRoW 1702 connects at Hammerpond Rd and continues further north. Open views of the site and its existing structures are available from PRoW 1708. Users of the footpath experience the site within the context of its rural and agricultural surroundings. Three residential dwellings along Hammerpond Rd can also be seen from this PRoW. While these buildings could be perceived as urbanising detractors, their visual effect is successfully mitigated by generous spacing between built form and the presence of existing mature vegetation, which assists in their integration into the wider landscape. Other views into the site are available from Hammerpond Rd itself, due to the lack of understorey vegetation along the site's boundary and intermittent gaps in the mature treeline. When available, views from Hamerpond road include the valley and undulating hillside, also within the HWNL, contributing to the area's scenic qualities.
6. Access to the site is via Hammerpond Rd, a narrow, verdant lane running east-west and bounded by woodland, mature trees and vegetation. The road retains a distinctly rural character, notwithstanding the occasional dwellings and farmsteads located along its route. These properties predominately share a traditional vernacular, featuring the use of brick and tile hanging. Many are set back from the road and screened by layers of dense vegetation, which helps to soften their presence and maintain the rural character of the

area. As such, these dwellings are not experienced as major detractors to the countryside setting.

7. Beyond the presence of nearby dwellings, relatively few urbanising detractors can be experienced in the site's immediate setting, but these include sections of closeboard fence and the spread of *Prunus laurocerasus* (Cherry laurel) along the roadside to the east. While limited in extent, these features introduce an element of urbanisation that contrasts with the predominantly rural character.
8. Due to its elevated position, long to medium distance views are experienced towards the site from Handcross road and the areas of the High Weald to the south of Handcross road.

Landscape Character

9. At a local level, the proposed site falls within N1 – Mannings Heath Farmlands Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined by the Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003). However, the site additionally shares characteristics of L1 - St Leonard's Forest, of which it abuts.
10. Key relevant characteristics of N1 experienced within the site and contextual landscape include: *broad flat topped ridge and undulating valley; open character; mixed arable/pasture farmland with a fragmented hedgerow pattern; local historic vernacular of sandstone, tile hanging and brick; and scattered farmsteads along roads.*
11. Key issues of N1 include: *past loss of hedgerows and introduction of suburban features along main roads.*
12. Sensitivity to change in the N1 LCA is moderate, however, areas such as the proposed site, which have a '*stronger network of hedgerows and woodland*' are of higher sensitivity with key sensitivities to: *introduction of suburban features and infill development along roads.*
13. Relevant planning and land management guidelines for N1 state to:
 - a. *Ensure any new development responds to the historic settlement pattern and local design and materials.*
 - b. *Conserve and enhance tree cover around village fringes and on approach roads.*
 - c. *Restore lost, fragmented hedgerows and conserve single oaks within them.*
 - d. *Conserve and manage existing ancient woodland.*
14. The overall character of L1 is described as having a '*sense of isolation and remoteness*'. Key relevant characteristics of L1 experienced within the site and contextual landscape include: *narrow flat topped ridges; regular pasture and arable fields; ridgetop roads; a few isolated farmsteads; and traditional local building materials of sandstone, tile hanging and brick.*
15. Key issues of L1 include: *urban fringe development along ridgetop roads, e.g. ribbon development; suburbanisation along roads, e.g. pastiche architecture, inappropriate fences, boundaries, gates; and localised erosion of lanes from car parking.*
16. Sensitivity to change in the L1 LCA is high with key sensitivities to: *suburbanisation/urban edge development and small scale incremental changes to roads.*
17. Relevant planning and land management guidelines for L1 state to:
 - a. *Conserve the traditional dispersed settlement pattern. Any further infill and extension of ribbon development along roads, or building of new large dwellings on existing plots, would further erode this pattern and therefore damage character.*
 - b. *Screen visually intrusive urban fringe development along ridgetop roads with selective tree planting.*
 - c. *Conserve the strongly wooded character of the area.*
 - d. *Take opportunities to restore heathland.*

Assessment

18. HDPF Policy 26 is a strategic policy that safeguards the rural character and undeveloped nature of the countryside. Development is only acceptable if it is essential to the countryside location and serves a clearly defined rural function as per criteria 1 to 4 (e.g. agriculture, recreation, sustainability). It must also be appropriately scaled, avoid increasing activity levels, and respect the landscape character, including its natural features, tranquillity, and historical patterns.

19. The proposals are not essential to the countryside location or fall within any of the criteria associated with a defined rural function and therefore contrary to the first part of this policy.

20. While acknowledging the developed condition of the site, and that the proposed dwellings are of a smaller floor space than existing, the current structures on site are typical of the rural setting, reflecting its use as a dairy farm, and therefore expected within the countryside location.

21. The proposals are of a modern take inspired on barn conversions, reutilising typical materials used in agricultural builds, such as timber cladding and zinc and the built form is of a height comparable to the existing farm buildings. The boundary treatment proposed along the front boundary with Hammerpond Road, is an estate railing and hedgerow planting. The new dwellings are set back, in line with the adjacent development pattern.

22. The proposals are likely to contribute to a small increment on the overall level of activity experience within Hammerpond road, however it is recognised that this is unlikely to be over and above the level activity experienced when the dairy farm was in operation.

23. In the absence of a Landscape and Visual Appraisal to demonstrate otherwise, it is our professional judgement that the current proposals would give rise to an eroding effect on the existing landscape character and setting of the HWNL. This is as a result of the introduction of domestic and other urbanising features, to the detriment of the current rural and agricultural qualities experienced on PRoW 1708 and Hammerpond Rd.

24. However, taking into account the site's condition and the proposed layout, the proposals are considered of an appropriate scale, reflect the existing development pattern and to a more limited extent respect the landscape character. Further measures along the southern boundary of the site – in the form of additional planting – are required to mitigate the adverse effects identified, but we are satisfied that subject to minor changes being secured, the proposals are broadly in accordance with the second part of HDPF Policy 26.

25. HDPF Policy 30 supports proposals, within or close to the High Weald National Landscape, where it can be demonstrated that there will be no adverse effects on the natural beauty and enjoyment of the protected landscape. As discussed above, the proposals will give rise to adverse effects on the scenic and perceptual (tranquillity) qualities of the High Weald and therefore the proposals are contrary to this policy. Nevertheless, subject to minor changes (secured prior to determination) these adverse effects could be partially mitigated when taking into account the wider masterplan and other planting proposals outside this red line boundary.

Design Considerations

The following measures and considerations are recommended in order to secure a more considered mitigation strategy to reduce the identified adverse effects, noting in addition that it must be sensitive to the rural surrounds and aim to minimise urbanising detractors:

26. While the site isn't within the High Weald National Landscape, it's within its setting and therefore proposals should endeavour to conserve and enhance the National Landscape by demonstrating the following:

- Ensure new developments and land use changes protect undisturbed soils, minimise use of permanent impermeable surfaces, and ensure best practice is complied with to protect soils during construction from compaction, pollution and erosion*
- Protect wildlife-rich habitats such as ancient semi-natural woodland from external lighting, and where lighting is needed, require minimised and ecologically informed*

lighting schemes regarding location, direction, lux levels, colour temperature and light fitting design.

- c. *Seek to reduce light pollution by ensuring that flood-lit facilities such as car parks are turned off when not in use, through agreements and planning conditions.*
- d. *Ensure that planning decisions (site allocations and development management decisions) consider the impact of development on the intrinsic rural character of the landscape and seek to avoid intrusive development.*
- e. *Avoiding operations which sterilise soil or cover it with impermeable materials or plastic grass.*
- f. *Prioritise the specialist management of ecologically rich road verges in highway management... refraining from planting non-native species.*

27. In addition, we recommend that planning and land management guidelines for the N1 LCA, under point 13, are adhered to. This includes conserving and enhancing tree cover.

28. High Weald National Landscape Dark Skies Planning Advice states that developments should be located away from dark sky sensitive areas, avoiding AW in particular. Any lighting design details must ensure that light spill is prevented in order to retain the rural character of the local landscape and prevent indirect deterioration of key landscape features.

29. In addition, the extensive use of large, glazed openings is likely to contribute to increased levels of light pollution, which would be detrimental to the rural character and dark skies. We recommend that the scale of glazing is reduced and/or appropriate measures be incorporated to minimise light spill.

30. To mitigate the visual effects discussed and enhance integration with the surrounding landscape character, hedgerow and hedgerow tree planting must be delivered along the southern boundary. This will contribute to softening the appearance of the development from the PRoW, Handcross road and the HWNL. Furthermore, to increase its mitigation benefits, this planting should be implemented as advance planting, to also reduce adverse effects during the construction period.

31. The extent of hard landscape proposed to the front of the dwellings appears visually dominating and out of keeping with the identified rural character. A reduction is required to ensure the proposals sympathetically integrate with the surrounding landscape.

32. We note in addition that there is discrepancy with the materiality of these areas; described as '*permeable paviours*' in the Planning Statement, '*impermeable areas*' in the Drainage Strategy and '*permeable gravel surface*' in the DAS. We advise that proposed access and driveways are fully permeable, for example, using gravel in line with other driveways on Hammerpond Rd.

33. Service runs must be considered from the outset so that the tree planting, and therefore landscape mitigation, is not diluted later on in the process. Service runs should be indicated in the landscape strategy to demonstrate that it can be delivered. We already note conflicts between the drainage strategy and the landscaping proposals.

34. While these specific details may be secured via condition, we would expect the following addressed within the proposals:

- a. A range of tree sizes proposed, including 20-25cm at key strategic locations, to enhance the character of the area and contribute to the reduction of light pollution.
- b. Given the available views from PRoWs, the HWNL and the proximity of AW, a planting palette that reflects the local landscape character, N1 and L1 LCA, must be used.

Lot 8 (AD Plant and Main Livestock Building) - Decommissioning of the Anaerobic Digester and re-use of the existing 2no buildings for storage and office uses (Class E (g) and B8) and the diversion of a public footpath.

Site description & context

35. The layout and external form of the build structures remain unchanged. Nevertheless, we have identified key considerations outlined in the assessment section below, which should be taken into account as part of the proposal review.

36. As with Lot 9, the proposed site is located outside any settlement or BUAB, in a countryside location. As such, the proposals must demonstrate compliance with HDPF Policies 25 and 26.

37. PRoW 1708 abuts the site's eastern boundary, running in a south-north direction towards Lot 9. As result, open views towards the site are available to and experienced by sensitive receptors within the countryside, who currently enjoy the surrounding rural and agricultural landscape.

38. The site is situated within the N1 LCA, sharing the relevant planning and land management guidelines listed above under point 13.

39. Existing access is currently via PRoW 1708, which is also proposed to be re-routed further to the east of the site.

Assessment

40. While limited visual change is anticipated to be experienced from PRoW 1708 as a result of the proposals, the development is likely to incrementally lead to increased activity within the countryside location, contrary to HDPF Policy 26. In particular, the proposed logistics and distribution use under Use Class B8 is likely to generate HGV movements and operational activity, which may result in adverse effects on the receiving landscape.

41. The additional light and noise pollution generated by the development and its associated use will detract from the tranquillity and sense of place of the rural countryside setting, over and above that experienced with the current use.

Design Considerations

42. If the change of use is justified, a robust mitigation strategy must be implemented to reduce likely adverse effects to the landscape character.

43. The tree survey submitted, does not include all trees and vegetation present on site, therefore the RPAs of the mature treeline on the western boundary are unclear. A comprehensive survey of all vegetation is essential to accurately assess the likely effects of proposals on existing landscape features. In the absence of this information, we are not confident that the drainage strategy and increased areas of hardstanding will avoid adverse effects on this treeline. RPAs must be respected unless there is clear and reasonable justification to encroach upon them. It is therefore recommended that these missing trees are surveyed and that the drainage proposals and site plan are revised accordingly.

44. We note that the level of hardstanding remains consistent with the existing Site Wide Masterplan, but it has been extended within the proposed Site Layout Plan. The necessity of this extension is unclear, and we recommend it remains unchanged, as originally set out in the Site Wide Masterplan. This precautionary approach is advised to minimise impacts on fibrous rooting systems, which are critical to the health and long-term retention of the mature trees on the western boundary.

45. The Site Wide Masterplan indicates a woodland area to the immediate south of the southern track, however this appears as a hedgerow and open field in the Site Layout Plan as Proposed. Please include the proposed woodland area in plan to demonstrate consistency with the Site Wide Masterplan, noting that woodland will be regarded as a positive mitigation measure in order to reduce adverse visual effects as experienced along PRoW 1708 and the HWNL.

46. As a result of the discrepancies identified in points 43-45, a revised drawing must be submitted, accurately portraying existing and proposed boundary vegetation, drainage and hard landscaping. Please note that the drainage strategy must consider an easement zone where tree planting is restricted, and should seek to retain the existing hedgerow on the southern boundary.

47. Of particular concern is the absence of mitigation planting previously approved under references DISC/20/0293 and DC/19/1122. These planting proposals were specifically required to offset the adverse effects identified in application DC/15/183, and as such should be delivered in combination with the current proposals. We highlight the importance of tree planting along the bund and the inclusion of specimen Oak trees within the proposed hedgerow, both of which are essential to the mitigation strategy.

48. As per Lot 9, due to the proximity of AW and the High Weald National Landscape, as well as the high degree of visibility afforded given its position within a valley and abutting PRoW 1708, this site is located within the setting of a dark sky sensitive area. Any lighting design details must ensure that light spill is prevented in order to retain the rural character of the local landscape and prevent indirect deterioration of key landscape features.

49. While these specific details may be secured via condition, we would expect the following addressed within the proposals:

- A range of tree sizes proposed, including 20-25cm girth trees at key strategic locations to enhance the character of the area and contribute to the reduction of light pollution.
- Given the available views from the PRoW and HWNL, and the proximity of AW, a planting palette that reflects the local landscape character area N1, must be used.
- Hardscaping materials should reflect the rural character of the location.
- Detailed SuDS information. We recommend the following:
 - The ground contouring, inlet and outlet design should be carefully considered to maximise the amenity value.
 - Attenuation areas should be combined with variations in vegetation structure to ensure habitat diversity and landscape effect. These should be included within the planting schedule and their specific maintenance within the LMMP.
 - We recommend that consideration is given to the use of blue green roofs including on ancillary structures such as bin and cycle stores. If proposed, we expect to see details within a plant schedule and specific maintenance within the LMMP.

Lot 2 (Stonehouse Business Park) - Rationalisation and enhancement of existing commercial facilities (Use Classes E(g) B2 and B8 at Stonehouse Business Park including demolition of two buildings and their replacement with new Class E(g), B2 and B8 facilities. Extension of existing building to form a new office and wardens' accommodation. Existing mobile home removed.

Site description & context

50. Minor layout and building changes proposed. We highlight some key points below, which should be taken into account as part of the proposal review.

51. As per Lots 8 & 9, the proposed site is located outside of a settlement or BUAB, in a countryside location. The southern boundary abuts Handcross Rd, delineating the site from the adjacent High Weald National Landscape. As a result, proposals should demonstrate compliance with HDPF Policies 25, 26 and 30.

52. Occasional glimpse views are available from PRoW 1708, located further west within the wider landscape. As previously discussed, these views are experienced by receptors within the countryside, perceived in the context of the surrounding rural and agricultural landscape.

53. Views of the site are available from Handcross Rd, a verdant road predominately bounded by open fields, hedgerow and mature trees. Hedgerow oaks are a common feature along this road and in combination with the open, undeveloped fields contribute to the rural, countryside context. While the main focus of receptors on Handcross Rd will be on the road, the views afforded are read in line with the open, undeveloped nature of the rural surrounds of the High Weald National Landscape.

- 54. The site is wholly situated within the N1 LCA, sharing the relevant planning and land management guidelines listed under point 13.
- 55. The existing site access from Handcross Rd is to be retained.

Assessment

- 56. Little to no visual change is anticipated to be noted from PRoW 1708 and Handcross Rd as a result of the proposals. We acknowledge that the commercial use is already present on site, however the proposals are likely to result in an increment of activity in the countryside location, subject to the type of businesses that will ultimately occupy the premises.
- 57. It is our judgement that the additional light and noise pollution would likely detract from the tranquillity of the High Weald National Landscape and sense of place of the rural countryside setting.
- 58. Furthermore, HDPF Policy 30 supports proposals within or close to the High Weald National Landscape that demonstrate no adverse effects on the natural beauty of protected landscapes.

Design Considerations

- 59. With the above in mind, minor modifications to the proposals and information is requested. This is to secure a better considered scheme that includes robust mitigation measures that reduce the identified adverse effects.
- 60. Please see point 26 for relevant guidance on conserving and enhancing the abutting National Landscape.
- 61. In addition, we recommend adherence to the planning and land management guidelines for the N1 LCA, which includes the conservation and enhancement of tree cover and hedgerow oaks.
- 62. High Weald National Landscape Dark Skies Planning Advice states that developments should be located away from dark sky sensitive areas, avoiding AW in particular. Lighting design details must ensure that light spill is prevented in order to retain the rural character of the local landscape and prevent indirect deterioration of key landscape features.
- 63. Submitted drawings and survey do not clearly differentiate between existing and proposed trees and vegetation, and contain discrepancies. For example, the site layout plan indicates a mature oak tree that has since been felled, resulting in increased visibility into the site from Handcross Rd. Existing vegetation must be detailed in order to establish the landscape baseline and design a suitable mitigation strategy.
- 64. We also note that the tree survey submitted has not surveyed all trees and vegetation on site. As above, an accurate baseline is required. The highlighted areas in yellow have not been surveyed:



65. The mature oaks on the southern boundary are key landscape features within the character area and play a strategic role in their ability to partially screen the site from receptors on Handcross Rd as well as the adjacent High Weald National Landscape. Their retention and enhancement is therefore of upmost importance. To safeguard their longevity and to mitigate adverse visual effects exacerbated by recent tree loss, we request the following modifications:

- a. Replacement oak in lieu of the removed mature oak.
- b. Hedgerow planting to fill gaps in existing hedgerow.

66. While details may be secured via condition, please note that we will expect to see the following information included:

- a. A range of tree sizes proposed, including 20-25cm girth trees at key strategic locations to contribute to the LCA and minimise light pollution.
- b. Given the abutting High Weald National Landscape, the proposed planting palette should reflect the N1 LCA.
- c. Hardscaping materials, noting that they should, where possible, reflect the rural character of the location.
- d. Detailed SuDS information. We recommend the following:
 - i. The ground contouring, inlet and outlet design should be carefully considered to maximise the amenity value.
 - ii. Attenuation areas and swales should additionally be combined with variations in vegetation structure to ensure habitat diversity and landscape effect. These should be included within the planting schedule and their specific maintenance within the LMMP.
 - iii. We recommend that consideration is given to the use of blue green roofs are introduced to ancillary structures such as bin and cycle stores. If proposed, we expect to see details within a plant schedule and specific maintenance within the LMMP.

RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: If you're minded to recommend the application for approval without the concerns addressed above please get in touch as specific conditions will be required.

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| NAME: | Elly Hazael Trainee Landscape Architect (Planning) |
| DEPARTMENT: | Specialists Team - Strategic Planning |

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| DATE: | 06/06/2025 |
| SIGNED OFF BY: | Inês Watson CMLI Specialists Team Leader (Landscape Architect) |
| DATE: | 02/07/2025 |