



Horsham District Council  
Parkside  
Horsham  
West Sussex  
RH12 1RL

15<sup>th</sup> October 2025

Dear Jason Hawkes

**Reference: DC/25/1312**

**Proposal: Hybrid planning application (part outline and part full planning application) for a phased, mixed use development comprising: A full element covering enabling infrastructure including the Crawley Western Multi-Modal Corridor (Phase 1, including access from Charlwood Road and crossing points) and access infrastructure to enable servicing and delivery of secondary school site and future development, including access to Rusper Road, supported by associated infrastructure, utilities and works, alongside: An outline element (with all matters reserved) including up to 3,000 residential homes (Class C2 and C3), commercial, business and service (Class E), general industrial (Class B2), storage or distribution (Class B8), hotel (Class C1), community and education facilities (Use Classes F1 and F2), gypsy and traveller pitches (sui generis), public open space with sports pitches, recreation, play and ancillary facilities, landscaping, water abstraction boreholes and associated infrastructure, utilities and works, including pedestrian and cycle routes and enabling demolition. This hybrid planning application is for a phased development intended to be capable of coming forward in distinct and separable phases and/or plots in a severable way. | Land West of Ifield Charlwood Road Ifield West Sussex**

Please find the Woodland Trust's comments below. Our comments are based on a review of the information provided in the planning application. We are an evidence-led organisation, using our policy and planning expertise to assess impacts of development on ancient woodland and veteran trees.

**Woodland Trust Position**

The Trust **objects** to this application on the basis of: -

- loss of a veteran oak tree identified as T368 in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment
- potential deterioration of other ancient and veteran trees
- deterioration of a number of ancient woodlands designated as Ancient Semi Natural Woodland on Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory (AWI)

**Planning Policy**

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), paragraph 193, states: "*When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:-*

*c) development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons<sup>70</sup> and a suitable compensation strategy exists;"*

Footnote 70 defines exceptional reasons as follows: “For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat.”

The applicant has not demonstrated “wholly exceptional reasons” for this development and as such this application does not comply with national planning policy.

### **Consultation Direction**

The Town and Country Planning (Consultation) (England) Direction 2024 published 26<sup>th</sup> January 2024 requires local planning authorities in England to consult the Secretary of State before granting planning permission for certain types of development. This now includes development which would result in the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, where the local planning authority considers that potential adverse impacts cannot be mitigated. We would advise that if the council were minded to approve the application it would need to be referred to the Secretary of State.

### **Impact on Ancient and Veteran Trees**

Ancient and veteran trees are irreplaceable habitats and afforded a high level of protection in planning policy. They possess unique features which provide a rich and diverse range of habitats, playing host to countless other species. In particular, many rare invertebrate, fungi and lichen species are dependent on the decaying wood provided by such trees<sup>1</sup>. Veteran trees are disproportionately valuable parts of the natural environment and where they occur outside of woods they are also particularly important for landscape connectivity<sup>2</sup>. They are an essential part of our landscape and cultural heritage.

### **Identification of veteran trees**

The Arboricultural Impact Assessment (AIA) identifies four veteran trees and one ancient tree using the RAVEN methodology: -

- Ancient oak T376
- Veteran oak T365
- Veteran oak T368
- Veteran oak T394
- Veteran oak T449

We note that it is stated in the 2021 Assessment, in Appendix B of the AIA, that in addition to the veteran trees listed above, others have been found that are “*veteran species*”. We do not understand what is meant by this as veteran trees are not a species of tree. However, if this is intended to refer to ‘specimens’, rather than ‘species’ then it is unclear why these additional trees are not considered veteran in the AIA.

With regards to the methodology used for determining veteran status, the AIA states that tree T326, identified as veteran in the 2019 Tree Survey, is shown not to be veteran using the RAVEN methodology. We are not aware of the methodology used for identifying veteran trees in the 2019 Tree Survey, however the Trust does not use, or agree with, the RAVEN methodology as a means of applying ancient and veteran status.

We consider that the application of a standard ‘tick box’ methodology and use of disqualifying factors such as size is not in line with government guidance. The Arboricultural

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ancienttreeforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ancient-tree-guide-6-special-wildlife.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [Ancient and veteran trees. An assessment guide. \(woodlandtrust.org.uk\)](https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/ancient-and-veteran-trees-an-assessment-guide/)

Association provides further information here [Arboricultural Association - VETcert \(trees.org.uk\)](https://trees.org.uk). The Woodland Trust has recently published guidance on how to assess ancient and veteran trees, which can be found here [Recognising Ancient And Veteran Trees - Woodland Trust](#). This guidance is closely aligned with the definition of veteran trees provided in government policy, legislation and guidance, specifically Planning Practice Guidance – Natural Environment, NE and FC standing advice, and Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitats) Regulations 2024.

Identifying and evaluating veteran features requires the application of knowledge, experience and judgement. We acknowledge that government definitions do not provide precise, measurable parameters against which to easily recognise veteran trees. However, Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice<sup>3</sup>, Planning Practice Guidance, and expert reference texts do provide clear instruction that tree girth should not be used as the main qualifier for veteran classification.

### **Loss of veteran oak tree T368**

The proposals include the loss of veteran oak tree T368 in order to facilitate construction of the Crawley Western Multi-Modal Corridor. It is stated in the Planning Statement that *"Given the strategic nature of the scheme and the public benefits, it is considered that wholly exceptional reasons exist which justify the loss of this veteran tree and which clearly outweigh the loss of this habitat."*

However, there does not appear to be any further discussion or analysis to support this assertion. The NPPF is clear that where loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitat has been identified there must be wholly exceptional reasons to approve the development. The strengthened test of *"wholly exceptional"* was introduced in July 2018. Prior to this, the test related to whether the need for and benefits of a development clearly outweighed the loss or deterioration that would occur. With the strengthened test, it is necessary also to demonstrate that the situation is *"wholly exceptional"*. This sets a high bar.

The examples provided in Footnote 70 in the NPPF are *"For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat."* Although the three examples of infrastructure projects are not a closed list, they indicate that wholly exceptional reasons are likely to be associated with essential infrastructure that is considered to provide clear public benefit. The reference to hybrid bills further indicates that such developments will not be common. Hybrid bills are quite rare - they are used to secure parliamentary approval to construct and operate major infrastructure projects of national importance (such as HS2).

In the Planning Statement the applicant makes the case that there are no alternative designs that would avoid the loss of veteran trees. However, it is important to first establish that the infrastructure is essential and that the public benefits **clearly** outweigh the loss of the veteran tree, before any design iterations are discussed. There is no discussion in the documentation to present the case that there are wholly exceptional reasons for this development.

### **Potential deterioration of other ancient and veteran trees**

With regards to the potential deterioration of trees T376, T365, T394 and T449 it is stated that the impact is likely to be low, *"subject to appropriate protection"* during construction of

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions>

the Crawley Western Multi-Modal Corridor. It is not clear whether the reference to appropriate protection is intended to refer to providing the trees with an un-encroached veteran tree buffer or whether it is proposed to use engineering solutions within the buffer zone.

Any works within the root protection areas of veteran trees is likely to affect their long-term vitality and future retention. With respect to the formation of any new hardstanding, we would also draw attention to sub-clause 7.4 (Permanent hard surfacing within the RPA) of the BS 5837:2012 which states that ***“This subclause does not apply to veteran trees, where it is recommended that no construction, including the installation of new hard surfacing, occurs within the RPA”***.

### **Ancient Woodland**

Ancient woodland is an irreplaceable habitat of great importance for its wildlife, soils, recreational and cultural value, historical and archaeological significance, and the contribution it makes to our diverse landscapes. It is a scarce and threatened resource, covering only 2.5% of England’s land area. It has a high level of protection in planning policy.

Natural England and the Forestry Commission define ancient woodland as follows:-

*“Ancient woodland takes hundreds of years to establish and is defined as an irreplaceable habitat. It is a valuable natural asset important for: wildlife (which include rare and threatened species); soils; carbon capture and storage; contributing to the seed bank and genetic diversity; recreation, health and wellbeing; cultural, historical and landscape value. It has been wooded continuously since at least 1600AD. It includes:-*

- *Ancient semi-natural woodland [ASNW] - mainly made up of trees and shrubs native to the site, usually arising from natural regeneration.*
- *Plantations on ancient woodland sites [PAWS] - replanted with conifer or broadleaved trees that retain ancient woodland features, such as undisturbed soil, ground flora and fungi”*

Both ASNW and PAWS woodland are given equal protection in government’s National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) regardless of the woodland’s perceived condition, its size or features.

In May 2022, the Government published an updated policy statement on ancient woodland, entitled ‘Keepers of Time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England’<sup>4</sup>. The Keepers of Time policy accentuates the importance of ancient woodland, stating: *“Ancient woodlands, ancient wood pastures and parkland and ancient and veteran trees are irreplaceable habitats which must be protected. Their long-standing presence, species and form serve as a rich cultural record of past management practices”*.

### **Impact on Ancient Woodland**

The site boundary is adjacent to a number of ancient woodlands. A development of this scale in a location with diverse habitats including wooded areas, wetlands, river corridors and over mature trees, has potential to cause significant detrimental impacts from:-

- intensified public activity within and adjacent to the woodland
- noise pollution and emissions from traffic

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keepers-of-time-ancient-and-native-woodland-and-trees-policy-in-england/keepers-of-time-ancient-and-native-woodland-and-trees-policy-in-england>

- fragmentation and loss of semi-natural habitats
- hydrological impacts from changes to surface or groundwater flows

The applicant has not provided supporting analysis to demonstrate that it will be feasible to mitigate impacts on the ancient woodlands arising from the above. As such, in its current form, the application is contrary to National Planning Policy Framework para 193 (c) and does not reflect Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice (see Annex A for details).

Further details of the potential impacts that we consider should be addressed at Outline stage can be found below.

### ***Intensified activity within and adjacent to the ancient woodland***

The AIA states that areas of ancient woodland will be provided with a minimum 30 metre buffer, increased to 35 metres for Hyde Hill ancient woodland, with no footpaths or SUDs within 15 metres.

The provision of a buffer larger than the minimum 15 metres specified in the standing advice is welcomed. However, the development has potential to give rise to indirect impacts on ancient woodland such as noise, disturbance, vegetation damage, trampling, litter, removal of deadwood, fire damage, cat predation, and pollution and disturbance from dog walking.

The applicant has not provided any modelling or analysis to assess the likely intensified use of the ancient woodlands arising from the development and there is no discussion to demonstrate why these particular buffer widths are considered appropriate.

### ***Traffic***

Increased traffic in proximity to ancient woodland can lead to deterioration of the ecological condition of the woodland as a result of traffic emissions and traffic noise. Emissions may increase the deposition of air pollutants such as nitrogen oxide and ammonia, affecting soils, ground flora and vegetation. Noise pollution has potential to affect wildlife, including bats, insects and acoustic predators.

The impact of traffic emissions and noise on ancient woodland and its wildlife does not appear to have been assessed.

### ***Mitigation – buffer zones***

The standing advice states that larger buffer zones are more likely to be needed if development is **close to residential areas** or if a significant **increase in traffic** is anticipated.

This development is of a considerable scale. The situation of the adjacent ancient woodlands would change significantly with the introduction of 3000 new homes and associated infrastructure including employment, education, and the Crawley Western Multi-Modal Corridor. For larger developments we would recommend buffer zones of **at least 50 metres** as a precautionary principle unless it can be clearly demonstrated that smaller buffers would suffice. In this particular case the scale of the development may require buffers larger than 50 metres in order to mitigate deterioration of ancient woodland.

### ***Fragmentation and loss of adjacent habitat***

The ancient woodlands are currently surrounded by semi-natural habitats including small wooded areas, hedgerows, individual trees and wetlands. The application would introduce

extensive areas of housing, employment and associated infrastructure on land connecting the ancient woodlands. Without significant mitigation these changes have potential to impact habitat connectivity and integrity, affecting the dispersal, feeding and nesting of species relying on woodland edge habitats and species using adjacent open ground.

The applicant needs to demonstrate that the extent of connected undisturbed habitat will protect against gradual deterioration of the ecological condition of the ancient woodlands.

### ***Drainage and SUDs***

The ancient woodlands are in close proximity to numerous wetland areas, streams and ponds. Ancient woodland ecosystems are sensitive to disturbance, and alterations to the surrounding hydrology can impact on soil moisture levels and the ecological condition of the woodland. Alterations to drainage patterns upstream of a woodland can cause changes to the hydrological regime for the woodland. Implementation of SUDs could change surface or ground water flows, in turn impacting the woodland.

The standing advice is clear that sustainable drainage schemes should only be approved if any changes to the water table do not negatively affect ancient woodland.

The hydrology and drainage assessments submitted as part of the application do not appear to have considered the potential impact on ancient woodland arising from alterations to drainage patterns.

Although the position of SUDs basins can be micro-sited at a later stage to ensure avoidance of root protection areas, the applicant needs to demonstrate that the strategy for drainage will not lead to deterioration of the ancient woodlands by altering the hydrological conditions in surrounding habitats.

### **Conclusion**

The Trust **objects** to this planning application on the basis of loss of veteran oak tree T368, potential deterioration of other ancient and veteran trees, and deterioration of ancient woodlands.

Protection for ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees is outlined within National Planning Policy Framework at paragraph 193 (c). The test is whether there would be a negative impact, not whether the magnitude of the impact is acceptable. The applicant has not provided information to demonstrate that there are wholly exceptional reasons for the development. In addition to the loss of a veteran tree, this application has significant potential for indirect impacts on irreplaceable habitat, contravening national planning policy.

Please contact us at [planningcasework@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:planningcasework@woodlandtrust.org.uk) to discuss any of the points raised in this letter.

Kind regards

C Johannesen  
Programme Officer - Woods Under Threat

**Natural England and Forestry Commission's standing advice:-  
Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions**

**Direct and indirect effects of development:-**

*Development, including construction and operational activities can affect ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees, and the wildlife they support on the site or nearby.*

*Direct effects of development can cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees by:-*

- *damaging or destroying all or part of them (including their soils, ground flora or fungi)*
- *damaging roots and understorey (all the vegetation under the taller trees)*
- *damaging or compacting soil*
- *damaging functional habitat connections, such as open habitats between the trees in wood pasture and parkland*
- *increasing levels of air and light pollution, noise and vibration*
- *changing the water table or drainage*
- *damaging archaeological features or heritage assets*
- *changing the woodland ecosystem by removing the woodland edge or thinning trees - causing greater wind damage and soil loss*

*Indirect effects of development can also cause the loss or deterioration of ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees by:-*

- *breaking up or destroying working connections between woodlands, or ancient trees or veteran trees - affecting protected species, such as bats or wood-decay insects*
- *reducing the amount of semi-natural habitats next to ancient woodland that provide important dispersal and feeding habitat for woodland species*
- *reducing the resilience of the woodland or trees and making them more vulnerable to change*
- *increasing the amount of dust, light, water, air and soil pollution*
- *increasing disturbance to wildlife, such as noise from additional people and traffic*
- *increasing damage to habitat, for example trampling of plants and erosion of soil by people accessing the woodland or tree root protection areas*
- *increasing damaging activities like fly-tipping and the impact of domestic pets*
- *increasing the risk of damage to people and property by falling branches or trees requiring tree management that could cause habitat deterioration*
- *changing the landscape character of the area*

**Mitigation measures**

*Mitigation measures will depend on the type of development. They could include:-*

- *putting up screening barriers to protect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees from dust and pollution*
- *measures to reduce noise or light*
- *designing open space to protect ancient or veteran trees*
- *rerouting footpaths and managing vegetation to deflect trampling pressure away from sensitive locations*
- *creating buffer zones*

### **Use of buffer zones**

*Buffer zones can protect ancient woodland and individual ancient and veteran trees and provide valuable habitat for woodland wildlife, such as feeding bats and birds. The size and type of buffer zone should vary depending on the:-*

- *scale and type of development and its effect on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees*
- *character of the surrounding area*

*For example, larger buffer zones are more likely to be needed if the surrounding area is:-*

- *less densely wooded*
- *close to residential areas*
- *steeply sloped*

### **Buffer zone recommendations**

*Where possible, a buffer zone should:-*

- *contribute to wider ecological networks*
- *be part of the green infrastructure of the area*

*A buffer zone should consist of semi-natural habitats such as:-*

- *woodland*
- *a mix of scrub, grassland, heathland and wetland*

*The proposal should include creating or establishing habitat with local and appropriate native species in the buffer zone.*

*You should consider if access is appropriate. You can allow access to buffer zones if the habitat is not harmed by trampling.*

*You should not approve development proposals, including gardens, within a buffer zone.*

*You should only approve sustainable drainage schemes if:-*

- *they do not affect root protection areas*
- *any change to the water table does not negatively affect ancient woodland or ancient and veteran trees*