

Objection by the Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield

Planning Application DC/25/1019, Land West of Shoreham Road, Small Dole,

Outline planning application for up to 45 dwellings (including affordable homes) with all matters reserved apart from access.

1. Introduction

The Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield (CPRH) was formed in 2018. We strive to protect and enhance the rural environment of our parish. We support housing development that meets local needs and aligns with the neighbourhood and district planning strategies.

CPRH objects strongly to the current application for the following reasons.

The proposed development of up to 45 dwellings on land west of Shoreham Road (DC/25/1019) is wholly inappropriate and must be refused. The site lies immediately adjacent to the South Downs National Park (SDNP) and would cause unacceptable harm to its setting, in direct conflict with national planning policy. It also conflicts with the Henfield and Upper Beeding Neighbourhood Plans, represents an unsustainable location reliant on private car use, and repeats planning harms that have already been identified by Horsham District Council and the Planning Inspectorate in recent decisions.

Approval of this application would undermine both the credibility of neighbourhood planning and public trust in the plan-led system.

2. Harm to the South Downs National Park

The South Downs National Park is the most significant protected landscape in this area. The site is highly visible from the National Park and lies within its immediate setting.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is explicit:

- Paragraph 189 requires that development within the setting of National Parks must be “sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.”
- Paragraph 11d, Footnote 7 makes clear that where designated landscapes such as National Parks are harmed, the presumption in favour of sustainable development does not apply.

The applicant’s own assessment admits that the views from New Hall Lane will be significantly affected for at least 15 years until tree planting matures. This amounts to long-term harm to the National Park setting and the rural landscape character of Small Dole.

Development of this scale in such close proximity would urbanise the western edge of the village, introduce movement, lighting and activity, and permanently alter the setting of the

SDNP. This is contrary to the NPPF and to Horsham District Council's own duty to conserve and enhance the National Park.

3. Conflict with the Henfield and Upper Beeding Neighbourhood Plans

The site conflicts directly with the adopted Henfield Neighbourhood Plan (HNP, made 2021) and the Upper Beeding Neighbourhood Plan (UBNP, made 2021).

When both Plans were being prepared, Henfield and Upper Beeding Parish Councils signed a Memorandum of Understanding to ensure that the small village of Small Dole was treated consistently and not over-allocated with housing. The agreed and democratically endorsed position was that only one large site, at Oxcroft Farm (within Upper Beeding), should be allocated for development.

This agreement was widely consulted upon, supported in referenda, and forms part of the spatial strategies of both Neighbourhood Plans.

If this application proceeds, the joint neighbourhood plan strategy would be overturned, resulting in:

- A 23% population increase in one step (Oxcroft Farm + Shoreham Road), fundamentally changing the character of Small Dole (2021 Census: 786 residents).
- The undermining of democratic decision-making and local trust in neighbourhood planning.

The NPPF (paragraph 14) states clearly that where a neighbourhood plan is in place and less than five years old, its policies should outweigh the presumption in favour of development. Both Neighbourhood Plans are within date and must carry overriding weight.

4. Unsustainable Location

Small Dole has very limited services and facilities:

- No schools
- No medical facilities
- Only one small shop

The proposed site is remote from even this limited centre. Residents would be wholly dependent on private cars. This is contrary to the aims of sustainable development set out in the NPPF, which seeks to minimise travel demand and reliance on the car.

This was the basis for Horsham District Council's refusal of development on this site in 2015, and nothing has changed since to alter that conclusion.

5. Harm to Landscape and Settlement Character

The site forms part of the open countryside on the western edge of Small Dole. Development would:

- Extend the built form into the countryside.
- Erode the compact character of the settlement.
- Be highly visible from the SDNP and from residential areas including Shoreham Road, Downsview and New Hall Lane.

Horsham District Council has previously concluded that development here would cause “harm to open and rural landscape character, integrate poorly with the settlement, and result in the urbanisation of the site, to the detriment of the character of the landscape and visual amenities of the area.” That conclusion remains valid today.

6. Planning History

This site has a long planning history which consistently demonstrates its unsuitability:

- 2015 Refusal (DC/15/0353): HDC refused permission for housing on this site on the grounds of unsustainability and landscape harm. The Council was prepared to defend this decision at appeal, but the developer withdrew.
- 2025 Appeal Decision (Brooklands, APP/Z3825/W/24/3356684): The Planning Inspector dismissed an appeal for just two houses on land adjacent to the application site, citing unsustainability and landscape harm. If even two houses were judged unacceptable further away, then 45 dwellings on this more exposed site are wholly inappropriate.

These decisions are up-to-date, highly relevant, and confirm that the grounds for refusal remain strong.

7. Credibility and Community Trust

Approving this application would undermine confidence in the planning system.

The community has engaged constructively in neighbourhood planning, with both Henfield and Upper Beeding producing made Neighbourhood Plans that explicitly rejected this site. Those plans were endorsed by referenda, with strong public support.

To now allow a speculative developer to overturn that democratic process would be a betrayal of trust and a serious blow to confidence in plan-led development.

8. Policy Conflicts

The proposal is contrary to multiple strands of national and local policy:

- NPPF para. 11d & Footnote 7: Presumption does not apply due to harm to the SDNP.
- NPPF para. 14: Neighbourhood Plans less than 5 years old outweigh presumption in favour.
- NPPF para. 189: Development must protect the setting of the National Park.

- Henfield Neighbourhood Plan (2021): Explicitly rejects this site.
- Upper Beeding Neighbourhood Plan (2021): Allocates Oxcroft Farm as the sole major site for Small Dole.
- HDC planning decisions: Both historic (2015) and recent (2025) confirm unsustainability and landscape harm.

9. Conclusion

The proposed development of up to 45 dwellings west of Shoreham Road, Small Dole (DC/25/1019), is wholly inappropriate. It would:

- Cause serious and irreversible harm to the setting of the South Downs National Park.
- Directly conflict with the Henfield and Upper Beeding Neighbourhood Plans.
- Be located in an unsustainable village with inadequate services.
- Urbanise the rural landscape and damage settlement character.
- Repeat and magnify planning harms already identified in refusals and appeal decisions.

CPRH urges Horsham District Council to refuse this application in its entirety.

To do otherwise would disregard adopted neighbourhood plans, undermine the NPPF's protection of National Parks, and erode public confidence in the planning system.

Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield

