

From: Planning@horsham.gov.uk <Planning@horsham.gov.uk>
Sent: 21 August 2025 20:26:46 UTC+01:00
To: "Planning" <planning@horsham.gov.uk>
Subject: Comments for Planning Application DC/25/0629
Categories: Comments Received

Comments summary

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning Application comments have been made. A summary of the comments is provided below.

Comments were submitted at 21/08/2025 8:26 PM.

Application Summary

Address:	Former Novartis Site Parsonage Road Horsham West Sussex RH12 5AA
Proposal:	Residential development comprising approximately 206 dwellings, including the conversion of 'Building 3' and demolition of 'Building 36'. Vehicular access taken from Wimblehurst Road. Car and cycle parking, landscaping and open space and associated works. The replacement of the existing cedar trees at the site.
Case Officer:	Jason Hawkes

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Customer Details

Address: 13A Richmond Road Horsham

Comments Details

Commenter Type:	Member of the Public
Stance:	Customer objects to the Planning Application
Reasons for comment:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Design- Loss of General Amenity- Overdevelopment- Trees and Landscaping
Comments:	The lack of public consultation over the proposed felling of the avenue of 90-year-old Blue Atlas Cedars on the former Novartis site represents an undermining of local environmental democracy,

of local sustainability, and of planning for climate mitigation, for biodiversity and for community health and welfare.

At the time of writing, more than 1,600 people have signed a public petition calling for these majestic trees to be saved. Are the views of so many people to be ignored?

What meaningful public consultation has there been on the issue of the future of these trees?

Particularly when, just five years ago, Horsham District Council - and West Sussex County Council, who own the site - declared the retention of the grand avenue of trees lining the drive on the former Novartis site as 'crucial' to the redevelopment of the land. The developers also agreed to this.

But in a shocking about-turn, the council is now suggesting these healthy, mature trees can be felled - because they're in the way of what's now being proposed.

This is not about stopping housing - it's about preserving valuable trees already on site and building new homes around them for the benefit of residents and the environment.

The loss of the cedars wasn't mentioned at the public consultation event held by developers Lovells and Muse just before Christmas, which, unsurprisingly, due to the timing and an apparent lack of publicity, few people attended. I heard about it only by chance - and saw nothing about the destruction of this much loved and environmentally important avenue of trees anywhere.

A serious omission, particularly when the outline planning permission given for the redevelopment in 2020 made it abundantly clear that the protected blue cedars were to be retained.

Under UK planning law and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), public consultation is not a token gesture. It is a statutory requirement designed to ensure that planning decisions reflect not only developer interests - but also the views, knowledge and lived experience of the community. It should also be open and factually correct.

The cedars' importance is reflected in the fact they have Tree Preservation Orders on them, are listed as Heritage Assets locally and are recorded on the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory.

So - has the Woodland Trust been asked for its comments on the felling of these trees?

And how does the cedars' death sentence sit with the much-trumpeted 'Wilder Horsham District' project, HDC's nature

recovery partnership with the Sussex Wildlife Trust, running for the past five years and recently extended until 2028?

The project's aim is 'to work closely with local communities and landowners to help reverse the decline in species and habitats and enrich the natural environment for all residents and visitors.'

Several of the documents on HDC's planning portal are not only misleading, but contain several omissions and inaccuracies about the redevelopment of the land.

Blue atlas cedars can live to well over 150 years. And yet, I was told by the clerk of North Horsham Parish Council, when I spoke to her a few weeks ago, that the developers suggested at a 'Novartis liaison meeting' at NHPC back in May - they had little more than 20 years life left in them. The truth is, they could live for another 60 years at least and be enjoyed by several generations to come.

That was the first time, to my knowledge, that the cedars' replacement with dawn redwoods was first mentioned in anything resembling a public forum. (Although I understand the event was by invitation only).

I know several people who, despite spending hours reading the hundreds of documents on HDC's planning portal, had not been able to find this information.

What about transparency and accountability? What about the impact on public trust here?

Unlike blue atlas cedars - which are evergreen and give year long biodiversity and refuge for wildlife - dawn redwoods are deciduous and lose all their needles in the autumn, not growing back until the spring.

Reading the latest documents to appear on the portal, it now appears the developers intend to replace the mature cedars with what sound like saplings - they will take several decades to equal the stature and huge environmental benefits of the current trees.

Claims on the planning portal citing potential health and safety fears about the blue cedars need to be viewed alongside what is now considered the industry standard in tree safety management. The National Tree Safety Group (NTSG) leads a nationally recognised approach to tree safety management across the UK. The organisation was formed in response to 'growing concerns about the unnecessary removal of trees from the UK's streets, parks and landscapes.'

The NTSG also provides what it describes as 'common-sense' risk management guidance that is proportionate to the actual risks

from trees, and recognises the importance of trees, and the many benefits they provide to society and the environment.

The NTSC states: 'There has been widespread concern about how tree management addresses public safety, and a fear of litigation has caused many landowners to remove trees for 'health and safety' reasons. This fear can affect how landowners make judgements, shifting the focus away from the benefits and the overall extremely low risk involved.

'The tendency to remove trees from an unreasonable fear of them failing and causing harm disregards evidence that associated deaths and injuries are rare: despite millions of people passing under trees every day, on average, fewer than five deaths each year are caused by trees.'

But according to HDC's latest landscaping and arboricultural reports: '....cedars can pose an increased risk where pedestrian access, vehicle traffic, and occupied buildings are located nearby.'

While accepting the loss of the Atlantic cedars will impact the site's visual character, the document continues: '...any final decision on this should be balanced against the potential increased safety risks these mature cedars would pose in an urban setting; weighed against replacing them as part of a coordinated, forward-looking landscape plan which could ensure that appropriate species can be selected to enhance the amenity of the site more sustainably.'

So what about the many mature trees of the same species already growing in residential gardens as well as heavily-used public areas throughout the Horsham District?

Just last week, in Horsham Park, a group of children were given a story-telling session beneath the boughs of one. The same species grow at Leonardslee Gardens and at Wakehurst Place, too. As well as at many public places and homes throughout the country.

What about the loss of biodiversity the felling of the cedars on the former Novartis site will cause?

The legal requirement for new developments is to have a 10% gain in biodiversity - but the Biodiversity Net Gain assessment under the current plans, with so many trees felled, shows that site will suffer a 71% loss of biodiversity.

Suggestions of using bio-diversity 'credits' elsewhere makes little sense - with the land bordered on two sides by increasingly congested roads - and on the other two by railway lines.

We are facing a climate emergency - as the recent amber heat

alerts clearly illustrate. Urban trees can reduce heat through shade and transpiration. They also act as sound barriers, reducing noise levels and also absorb air pollutants including nitrogen dioxide from traffic and industrial areas, absorb carbon, can prevent flooding and provide a vital habitat for wildlife. The list of benefits is huge. Yet it seems, from all that I've read - and it's taken days to try to go through it all - the most compelling reason behind felling them is because they are now in the way of the revised development.

Both HDC planning advice, and the NPPF, state that 'if significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated, or as a last resort compensated, and if the latter cannot be provided, then 'planning permission should be refused'; this should therefore apply to the healthy cedar trees, which have been protected by law since 1990.

With so much growing opposition to the loss of these trees - surely there has to be some sort of formal public consultation about their future - as well as an independent assessment on their health - before any decision on what's to be built on the land is decided.

We have a democratic right not only to participate in shaping our community, but for our views to be listened to.

Thank you.

Kind regards

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