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**D&M PLANNING** <sup>Ltd</sup>  
*Town Planning Consultants*

LAND TO THE SOUTH WEST SIDE OF  
ROWHOOK HILL, ROWHOOK, WEST  
SUSSEX  
Our Ref. 127/26/MS

## RESPONSE TO CONSULTEE COMMENTS – LANDSCAPE

LPA REF. [DC/26/0185](#)

REGRAIDING OF LAND LEVELS TO FORM A  
HARDSTANDING AREA ASSOCIATED WITH  
HORTICULTURAL USE

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## CONTENTS

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1. **Introduction**
2. **Description of Site and Surrounding Area**
3. **Proposal**
4. **Planning Policy**
5. **Planning Considerations & Response to Comments**
6. **Conclusion**

### Appendix 1:

- Business Plan Appraisal

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

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1.1 D&M Planning Ltd have been instructed by the applicant (Mr James Lord) to prepare this detailed response to the comments raised in the email sent by planning officers dated 17<sup>th</sup> June 2026.

1.2 Within the email officers of the Council requested further information in response to the comments raised by the Council's Landscape Officer – a copy of this is held on the planning file dated 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2026. In particular, questions were asked regarding the following:

- *Clarification of the proposed and ongoing use of the site (e.g. horticultural, agricultural, forestry) and how the scale of development relates to this use;*
- *Justification for the extent of the hardstanding and regrading works, including evidence that these are necessary and proportionate;*
- *Further detail regarding the extent of earthworks, including clarification of the mounding currently on site and whether regrading is proposed;*
- *Assessment of how the development avoids or mitigates harm to the rural landscape character, having regard to Policies 25 and 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework;*
- *Clarification of the level of activity associated with the use, including vehicle movements, to enable a proper assessment of its impact on the countryside.*

1.3 Since the request for these comments was made there has been a material change in circumstances relevant to the determination of the application. On 17<sup>th</sup> August 2026, the Government introduced the revised and updated National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The changes at a national level are significant and have a material impact on the determination of the application

1.4 For the purpose of decision making, paragraph 2 of Annex A states:

*Development plan policies (or parts of those policies) which are materially inconsistent with national decision-making policies in this Framework should be given very limited weight. The only exception to this is where they have been examined and adopted or made against this Framework. Other development plan policies should not be given reduced weight simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of this Framework.*

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- 1.5 It is self-evident that the Council's Development Plan was not examined and adopted against the 2026 Framework and therefore there is not only a necessity to consider the new policies of the NPPF but also to consider whether the relevant policies in the Development Plan themselves are materially inconsistent with those in the NPPF to the extent that they should only be afforded very limited weight. Given the significance of the changes to the policies within the NPPF including in some instances the 'watering down' of weight to be given to some adverse impacts, and the increase in weight to be given to other benefits there is a high probability that the policies of the Development Plan are to varying degrees inconsistent with those within the NPPF.
- 1.6 In light of such, whilst this submission will be focused on addressing the comments raised there will be a need to do so in light of the new policies contained within the NPPF.
- 1.7 This submission, therefore, will including the following sections: site description, proposal, planning policy, response to comments and conclusion.

## 2.0 Description of Site and Surrounding Area

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- 2.1 The application site consists of an approximately 4-acre parcel of land located to the south west of the highway along Rowhook Hill.
- 2.2 It is understood, as confirmed by comments from neighbouring objections, that the site was previously operated as a Christmas Tree Farm with conifer plantation accessed by an agricultural access point onto the highway.
- 2.3 The land is of poor agricultural quality consisting of heavy Weald Clay.
- 2.4 In more recent times the site has been subject of infestation by way of a Ips Typographus beetle which is regulated as a quarantine pest. The site was therefore subject of a Plant Health (Ips Typographus)(England) Order 2019 which is used by the Forestry Commission to help take steps in preventing the spread of the pest. Following the order of such the applicant removed a number of trees from the site. Therefore, currently the site is largely barren of any trees.
- 2.5 A track and area of hard surfacing (subject of the application) have been installed on site. A refurbished shed is located within the area of hard surfacing.
- 2.6 The surrounding area is largely rural in nature, punctuated by a number of buildings for both residential and commercial uses.

## 3.0 Proposal

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- 3.1 The application is retrospective in nature and seeks to regularise the engineering works comprising of the regrading of land and the formation of an area of hard surfacing, as shown on the submitted plans.
- 3.2 The purpose of such works is to assist in the re-establishment of the Christmas Tree Farm on site. The track being installed to provide access to the area of hard surfacing from which relevant operations, maintenance and harvesting can be undertaken.
- 3.3 For the avoidance of doubt the proposed use of the land would remain as agricultural as defined by Section 336 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). This definition being:

*“agriculture” includes horticulture, fruit growing, seed growing, dairy farming, the breeding and keeping of livestock (including any creature kept for the production of food, wool, skins or fur, or for the purpose of its use in the farming of land), the use of land as grazing land, meadow land, osier land, market gardens and nursery grounds, and the use of land for woodlands where that use is ancillary to the farming of land for other agricultural purposes, and “agricultural” shall be construed accordingly;*

- 3.4 As set out in the submitted business plan (Appendix 1) the majority of trees grown would be sold at a wholesale level to other businesses which would fit within the established approach to such sites to the extent it would not result in material change in use of the land.

## **4.0 PLANNING POLICY**

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- 4.1 For the purposes of Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, planning applications are required to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2 The approved Development Plan for this site therefore comprises the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015.
- 4.3 The Local Planning Authority in the process of adopting a new Local Plan, which is subject to main modifications with a need for further sessions to be held later in the year. It is our contention that given the context of the new NPPF this could only be afforded, at best, very limited weight.

### **Planning Policy Constraints**

- 4.4 The site is subject to the following policy constraints:
- Countryside location outside of a defined settlement

### **Central Government Planning Policy Guidance**

- 4.5 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was first introduced in March 2012. The NPPF has recently been updated with the latest revised version being published in August 2026. There is also the NPPG and the National Design Guide (NDG); recent case law has confirmed that these should be afforded the same weight as policies within the NPPF.
- 4.6 The new NPPF has moved from a system of paragraphs to those concerning policies divided under relevant headers and sections. These are also split between policies which apply to plan making and those that apply to decision making. Paragraph 8 sets out that plan making policies should not be used when making decisions on development proposals.
- 4.7 Paragraph 3 of the NPPF makes it clear that the NPPF is a material consideration in decision making and that it should be read alongside the policies in the development plan. This includes, as set out in paragraph 7, the specification of weight to be given to certain benefits and limited circumstances in which it is expected that permissions be refused.

- 4.8 For the purpose of decision making, paragraph 2 of Annex A states:

*Development plan policies (or parts of those policies) which are materially inconsistent with national decision-making policies in this Framework should be given very limited weight. The only exception to this is where they have been examined and adopted or made against this Framework. Other development plan policies should not be given reduced weight simply because they were adopted prior to the publication of this Framework.*

Accordingly, if policies in the Development Plan are materially inconsistent with those in the NPPF they should only be afforded very limited weight.

- 4.9 Paragraph 16 and 17 states the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. It states that in achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives (economic, social and environmental), which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives).

- 4.10 Policy S3 of the NPPF sets out the continued commitment to the presumption in favour of sustainable development. This then directs to policies S4 (for those proposals in settlements) and S5 (for those proposals outside settlements). It continues to state that:

*In all locations, development proposals that accord with both an up-to-date development plan and the decision-making policies in this Framework should be approved without delay.*

- 4.11 The most relevant sections of the NPPF in relation to this proposal are 3 (Decision Making); 4 (Achieving Sustainable Development); 7 (Building a strong, effective economy), 14 (Achieving well-designed places); 15 (Promoting sustainable transport); and 19 (Conserving and enhancing the natural environment)

- 4.12 Section 3 deals with how decision making should be undertaken, the objective being that it ensures that development proposal are informed by appropriate information and decided in a proportionate, timely and effective manner. The most relevant policies are DM3 (Determining development proposals), DM6 (Use of planning conditions and obligations) and DM7 (Relationship with other regulatory regimes).

- 4.13 Section 4 deals with how sustainable development can be achieved. The objective of the policy being to meet development needs in a sustainable pattern including maximising the potential for growth. The relevant policies for the proposal are considered to be S3

(Presumption in favour of sustainable development), S5 (Principle of development outside of settlements).

- 4.14 Section 7 deals with economic growth. The objective being for policies to enable businesses to invest, expand and adapt to opportunities and challenges. The relevant policies for the proposal are considered to be: E4 (Rural business development).
- 4.15 Section 14 deals with achieving well-design places. The objective of the section being to promote high quality, healthy, inclusive and sustainable places through design. The relevant policies to the proposal are considered to be: DP3 (Key principle for well-design places).
- 4.16 Section 15 deals with the promotion of sustainable transport. The objectives being to ensure that transport considerations are fully considered throughout the planning process. The relevant policies are considered to be TR3 (Location development in sustainable locations); TR6 (Assessing transport impacts).
- 4.17 Section 19 deals with the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment and landscape. The relevant policies are considered to be N2 (Improving the natural environment).

### **Local Development Plan**

- 4.18 The approved Development Plan for this site comprises the policies of the Horsham District Planning Framework.
- 4.19 The following policies are considered to apply to this application, those in bold being referenced in the request from officers of the Council:

Policy 1 – Sustainable Development

Policy 10 – Rural Economic Development

Policy 24 – Environmental Protections

**Policy 25 – District Character and Natural Environment**

**Policy 26 – Countryside Protection**

Policy 40 – Sustainable Transport

- 4.20 At this juncture we highlight that we consider Policies 25 and 26, being those referenced in the Council's submission to be materially out of date with the NPPF. Accordingly, in line with Annex A they should be afforded very limited weight in the balancing exercise.

4.21 Further relevant guidance also considered as part of the proposed development:

- NPPG

## 5.0 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS & RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

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- 5.1 The main purpose of this section of the statement is intended to provide clarity to comments raised as part of the consultation exercise. Whilst this is the case, however, it is relevant to consider the impacts of the revised NPPF in doing so. Accordingly, we have undertaken a light touch proportionate approach to such set out below. We will then provide comments in direct response to those raised

### Principle of Development

- 5.2 In line with Policy S5 of the NPPF only certain forms of development should be approved outside of settlements. If the development accords with one of the listed sorts, then it *should be approved, unless the benefits of doing so would be substantially outweighed by any adverse impacts*. Essentially, if it conforms with one of the exceptions a tilted balance is undertaken in favour of the development.

- 5.3 One of the exceptions listed in Policy S5 1.a is *Development for: agriculture, horticulture and forestry....* Evidently, as set out in Section 3 the proposal would accord with such and would meet this form of development as listed.

- 5.4 In considering the balance exercise required by S5 1. the policy states at S5 2.:

*In applying this policy, the circumstances in which the benefits of approving development proposals are likely to be substantially outweighed by adverse effects include, but are not restricted to, situations where the development proposal would fail to comply with one of the national decision-making policies which state that development proposals should be refused in specific circumstances*

- 5.5 As the proposed development is required for the retention of works relating to the agricultural use of the land, as set out in the business plan, we consider the principle of works to be acceptable and should be approved unless the adverse effects substantially outweigh the benefits. This balancing exercise we highlight is new and has moved on since the application was submitted. A failure to not undertake this balancing exercise would be tantamount to unreasonable behaviour.

### Rural Economy

- 5.6 Policy E2 of the NPPF sets out that decision making should support business growth including giving substantial weight to the economic benefits of proposals for commercial development which allow businesses to invest.
- 5.7 Policy E4 continues in direct relation to the rural economy and sets out that it should be supported including through *development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based businesses*. There is also a recognition that such business may need to be located outside settlements as is the case here.
- 5.8 This submission is supported by a detailed business plan setting out how the reintroduction of the Christmas Tree Farm to the land would be profit generating once it had time to establish. Said plan also highlights the commitment of the applicant to achieve such notably through their investment in the land to date.

### Impact on the Countryside

- 5.9 The wording of the policies within the NPPF relating to the impact on the countryside have materially changed since the original submission to the extent that the policies within the Development Plan should now be considered to be materially inconsistent. For example, Policy N2 no longer requires decisions to *recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside*. Policy N2 by contrast states:

*To contribute positively to the natural environment, and support nature's recovery, development proposals should:*

*a. Consider the environmental qualities of land proposed for development, including habitats, landscape character and the natural beauty of the countryside, and identify opportunities for those qualities to be conserved or enhanced (including through requirements for biodiversity net gain where these apply);*

*b. Take into account the quality of agricultural land (including that classified as best and most versatile agricultural land, and its grade), and if significant development of agricultural land is necessary, use areas of poorer quality land where possible;*

*c. Take suitable opportunities to connect to and strengthen ecological networks that extend beyond the site, drawing on the measures proposed by*

*Local Nature Recovery Strategies, National Forest Strategies and Community Forest Plans, where present, and other relevant assessments;*

*d. Conserve and enhance existing natural features of visual, historic or nature conservation value (such as established trees and hedgerows) where possible; and use appropriate landscaping to help create a well-designed place and integrate the development into its surroundings;*

*e. Use green infrastructure provided as part of the scheme and nature-based solutions to secure multiple benefits: such as for biodiversity; surface water and pollution management (including maintaining flow rates and water quality); climate change mitigation and adaptation, and recreation;*

*f. Minimise any adverse impacts on biodiversity and include features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs. Development proposals should incorporate integrated nest boxes (commonly known as swift bricks) into their construction unless there are compelling technical reasons which prevent their use, or would make them ineffective; and*

*g. Ensure that green infrastructure and other features to support nature are located and designed to minimise risk of future failure, and that appropriate measures are in place for any necessary long-term management.*

*2. If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated or, as a last resort, compensated for, then the development should be refused.*

*3. Development proposals may incorporate biodiversity enhancements which exceed the statutory objective for biodiversity net gain, but this should only be a requirement where it is set out in up-to-date development plan policies for specific site allocations. Decisionmakers should not give weight to other development plan policies which require biodiversity gains which go beyond the statutory framework, including where a policy requires gains for development proposals which are exempt.*

- 5.10 This, we consider, is a material change to the previous paragraphs of the NPPF with the regard to be given to the character of the countryside outside of protected landscapes being essentially watered down. It is also contended that the result of such, when also read in conjunction with S5, is to render Policies 25 and 26 of the Development Plan as being materially inconsistent to the extent they should be afforded *very limited weight*
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- 5.11 In relation to Policy N2, for the purposes of this application we contend that the proposed development evidently takes into account the quality of the agricultural land. As is set out in the supporting business plan the agricultural value of the land is very low and the proposed reintroduction of the Christmas Tree operation is the only viable option. Accordingly, in line with those policies relating to the rural economy this should be supported.
- 5.12 Additionally, it is highlighted that the proposal has considered the environmental qualities of the land for the proposed development. The justification for the works as set out is to provide an opportunity from which the applicant can access the land and operate the business from. To this extent the track has sought to follow the natural contours of the land so far as practical and to minimise the extent of which land has been regraded to allow for the use.
- 5.13 Critically, for the purposes of the application it is also highlighted that the works have been carried out with the ecological value of the site in mind. In this context this has been for the removal of trees as required by the Forestry Commission and the necessity to replant and then to re-establish the business. The proposed access and parking providing a point from where this can be carried out in a suitable manner. Namely, it allows for the necessary trees to be brought to site, stored as required, planted out and maintained without the need for continuous movements to and from the site entrance.

#### Conclusion on new NPPF Policies

- 5.14 The upshot of the changes to the NPPF is for greater support and weighting of the benefits of the proposal to be given. These benefits we contend would not be substantial outweighed by any adverse impacts particularly noting the very limited weight to be afforded to the policies within the Development Plan.
- 5.15 We will under the following sub header provide a response to those comments made by consultees.

#### **Response to Consultee Comments**

- 5.16 As set out above comments were made by the Council's Landscape Officer prior to the publication of the new NPPF. We have, however, sought to address all of those points below. These comments should be read in conjunction with the appended business plan which demonstrates that the proposed operation would be profitable within the first 10-year period and continue to generate such from there on.

5.17 The concerns raised within the commentary appear to be in relation to the impact of the works on the character of the area with these being described as *urbanising factors*. Questions are also asked regarding mounds of earth and the proposed future use. The landscape officer concludes that based on the lack of information the development would not conserve or enhance the key features and characteristic of the landscape character area.

5.18 These are summarised as set out in Section 1 of this report as being the following

- *Clarification of the proposed and ongoing use of the site (e.g. horticultural, agricultural, forestry) and how the scale of development relates to this use;*
- *Justification for the extent of the hardstanding and regrading works, including evidence that these are necessary and proportionate;*
- *Further detail regarding the extent of earthworks, including clarification of the mounding currently on site and whether regrading is proposed;*
- *Assessment of how the development avoids or mitigates harm to the rural landscape character, having regard to Policies 25 and 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework;*
- *Clarification of the level of activity associated with the use, including vehicle movements, to enable a proper assessment of its impact on the countryside.*

5.19 Before proceeding we highlight that the Landscape Officer's comments do not set out what the key features and characteristics of the landscape are. The comments also acknowledged the limited extent to which the site is visible from public vantage points. The requirements of the new NPPF clearly specify that any harm identified by the Local Planning Authority on such basis must be supported by a clear justification and evidence as to why such conclusions have been reached. While we do not currently consider the Council to have reached that threshold, we set out the below comments to assist with the determination of the application. For ease of reference these are structured around the bullet points set out above.

#### Clarity of Use

5.20 The proposed wider use of the land is to re-establish the Christmas Tree Farm. There is an acceptance between the Council, the applicant and third parties that such use had previously been carried out on site but had ceased. The proposed wider use of the land is intended to reinstate this use bringing back a commercially viable operation. This intention has, however, been subject to delay since the applicant's ownership of the land in part due to the infestation which has had to be addressed.

- 5.21 From the perspective of the use class order and giving regard to the definitions set out within the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) this use would clearly fit within the definition of *agriculture* being the cultivation of trees for decoration, specifically at Christmas. It does not constitute forestry in that trees being felled in future are not to be used for their timber.

Justification for extent of hardstanding and works

- 5.22 This submission is supported by a business plan clearly setting out that the development would be profitable within ten years once planted trees have matured sufficiently to be sold.
- 5.23 The proposed development has been installed to enable the business to operate. The proposed development serves a function in the short, medium and long term. The location of the hard surfacing and routing of the access has been informed by the site's topography, features such as the borehole, proximity to the now refurbished building. The critical impact on its positioning, however, is so that the wider site can be accessed in a suitable manner from a central location aiding in the operation of the enterprise going forward. The size of the area has been informed by the necessity for the vehicles that would access the land, the storage that would be needed for the business and the amenities to be provided whilst working on site (w/c etc).
- 5.24 In the short term there is a fundamental need for the applicant to comply with the Order issued by the Forestry Commission. This, alongside the need to reinstate the Christmas Tree Farm, requires the planting of a significant number of trees. Prior to works being undertaken there was limited space within the site for such trees to be brought to site, unloaded, stored etc. whilst also permitting for said vehicles to manoeuvre so that they may enter and exit the site in a safe manner. The hardstanding, as accessed by the track, provides for these necessities. Vehicles are able to enter the site, unload, turn around and exit the site without issue. Noting that the soil is heavily clayed and therefore liable to slippage and generating unsuitable conditions for manoeuvring, there is a clear need for this to be undertaken on the surfacing as opposed to on undeveloped land.
- 5.25 In the medium term, once the planting has been undertaken there will be a need to maintain the trees to ensure their ongoing health to maturity where they can be sold. This, as set out in the business plan, will require the employment of seasonal workers who will need to safely access the site, park and carry out their duties. It is the applicant's intention that the trees will be watered using water abstracted from the borehole which would be pumped to suitable containers so as to allow for watering to occur. In addition to watering, however, there will be a need to maintain the boundaries of the site to reduce the likelihood of wildlife damaging the stock. The proposed hard surfacing would

continue to provide necessary and suitable spacing for these duties to be exercised alongside room to provide for the necessary storage of such materials.

- 5.26 In the longer term the operation will require the need for maintenance, tree felling and replanting. These operations will need to operate continuously alongside one another with peak times during November and December. During such times the degree of activity on site is expected to be higher than at any other time of the year. The hard surfacing would provide space for trees once felled to be stored, packaged and then moved off site. As set out in the business plan the vast majority of trees would be for wholesale limiting the number of movements out of site with multiple trees being able to leave at one time. There would, however, be a smaller set of sales direct to consumers. The hard surfacing and access would also serve such demands allowing customers to arrive, select a tree and leave with it. It is not uncommon for similar enterprises to benefit from such provisions with areas of hard surfacing facilitating multiple benefits throughout the year and being adapted for such needs.
- 5.27 The extent of the hard surfacing has been deliberately considered so as to meet all of these identified needs principally for parking, loading/unloading, storage of materials and also to provide space for necessary welfare provisions. The location of the surfacing as set out has been informed by the site features with the access track in support of such.

#### Earthworks

- 5.28 It is understood from our client that all of the earth that forms the mounds on site is from within the site itself and does not include anything imported. These mounds have been created as a by-product of the operation for which permission is being sought. Any work to move or regrade has been placed on hold whilst it is being determined.
- 5.29 Further, it is clear from a site visit the extent of regrading as evidenced by the various tree stumps around.
- 5.30 We are informed that once planting on the land begins the earth is proposed to be used throughout the site as additional topsoil with it being spread evenly across where required. The regrading would therefore follow the initial phases of planting as a staged operation. Whilst the soil is not of particularly high quality, it is the applicant's consideration that its reuse will assist with the establishment of the first crops minimising initial expense that could otherwise be needed.

### Landscape Character

- 5.31 In assessing the impact on the wider landscape character the new NPPF represents a significant change in approach. As set out above we consider that given the analysis is much more rounded and not solely focused on the character (reference to intrinsic character and beauty no longer being relevant) then there is a question about the consistency of Policies 25 and 26 of the Development Plan and the weight to be afforded to such.
- 5.32 Before considering the visual impacts on this setting therefore we highlight the proposal as an agricultural operation which responds to the quality of the land should be afforded substantial benefits. Evidently, it is an established and agreed position that the site at large was a former Christmas Tree Farm; as set out it is the applicant's intention to restore it to such operational use with the development being a necessity towards facilitating such.
- 5.33 The legibility of the site as a former Christmas Tree Farm has largely been altered owing to the order from the Forestry Commission for the extensive felling on site. Prior to this it is understood that, although somewhat unkept, it had the appearance of a clearly planned and managed Christmas Tree plantation with trees arranged in such a manner to facilitate their felling. This is evident by the arrangement of stumps in the land set out in rows and grids. As a result of the reintroduction of the use as a whole, as facilitated by the proposed development, this would be reintroduced.
- 5.34 In landscape terms the Council's Landscape Appraisal records the site as sitting within character area I1 being *Rowhook and Rudgwick Wooded Ridge*. The appraisal describes the key characteristics of such as being:
- *Undulating ridges. Low escarpment at Rowhook*
  - *Densley wooded character*
  - *Steep sided ghylls, with hidden hammer ponds near Roman Wood*
  - *Secluded small to medium size pasture fields with sinuous and straight boundaries*
  - *Remnant parkland in the north east*
  - *Ridgetop villages and hamlets*
  - *Rich collection of timber frame buildings in Rudgwick and surrounding area*
  - *Local landmark of Rudgwick Church spire*
  - *Clay pits/brickworks*
- 5.35 It continues to state:

*This area has a very strong structure of large woodlands, hedgerows and shaws which wrap over undulating ridges of Weald Clay. The pasture fields are sometimes entirely enclosed by woodland and shaws with very sinuous boundaries. Other areas are hedged with standard oak trees. Much of the landscape has a parkland and estate farmland character. There is a general lack of settlement, apart from a few ridgetop village and hamlets linked by narrow lanes. These have a local mix of traditional building materials, half timber and brick and tiles.*

- 5.36 The assessment also recognises that some large woodlands, such as the site, have been coniferised. The key sensitivities to be managed, as identified by the appraisal, include seeking to reduce such.
- 5.37 We do not consider the management intentions to restore woodland as opposed to conifers to be an appropriate ambition particularly given that it is the aim of the applicant to restore the land back to being a viable Christmas Tree Farm. Such a use has other wider benefits to the rural character, notably, its economy (including job creation) beyond just the planting of trees.
- 5.38 It is our contention that once the Christmas Tree Farm is up and running and trees are planted that the proposed development would be largely screened from the surrounding area. This would restore the character of the area to one of being a Christmas Tree Farm as, we understand, was the case prior to the order from the Forestry Commission. Conifer trees would be planted in a suitable plantation arrangement which when viewed from a distance would add to the canopy of woodlands in the area, albeit in a managed way. We emphasise at this juncture that agricultural enterprises, particularly of the scale envisaged, are practical and functional in their appearance as is the case here. Once the business has reestablished it is clear that the impact on the surrounding area would be minimised and the landscape restored in line with the wider wooded appearance of the landscape character area, albeit that this would be as part of a managed enterprise.

#### Clarification of movements

- 5.39 The accompanying business plan outlines how the general operation would be carried out. Initially there would be a stage of planting, then a stage of maintenance before the farm can become fully operational with trees being sold.
- 5.40 The initial planting stage would be fairly intensive as the applicant will seek to plant within the most optimal conditions to minimise the loss of stock when they are at their most vulnerable as younger saplings. To plant in unseasonally wet, hot or dry conditions would be counterintuitive.

- 5.41 Once the saplings have been established the movements to and from the site would be minimised to a schedule of maintenance. Such a schedule would be materially affected by the variable weather conditions. For example, if there are periods of extended drought there would be an increased need for maintenance so as to water and care the stock. Movements, however, would not be significant and even in the driest conditions there would not be a need for the amount of involvement as other agricultural operations, particularly those involving livestock.
- 5.42 Once trees have reached maturity to the point they can be sold there is a likelihood of shorter intense uses on the site around the festive season during November and December when the sales market is at its greatest. Owing to the nature of the business plan with the majority of revenue being through wholesale, this would be minimised and managed so as to reduce the need for vehicles entering and exiting the site.
- 5.43 At this juncture we highlight that given the former Christmas Tree Farm operated seemingly without concern we see no reason why, once established, this should be any different.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION

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- 6.1 This statement relates to the retrospective application for regrading of land levels to form a hardstanding area associated with horticultural use, currently being determined under LPA reference DC/26/0185.
- 6.2 This statement has been prepared in response to the comments made by the Council's officers with the aim of providing further information to justify the development. This is supported by the business plan demonstrating how the proposed Christmas Tree Farm would be profit generating within the next ten years,
- 6.3 The statement also includes comments regarding the application of the new policies within the NPPF. These policies form a material consideration to the determination of the proposal. It is highlighted in accordance with Policy S5 there is a tilted balance to be performed in favour of the development.
- 6.4 We trust that we have provided sufficient clarity to demonstrate that the hard surfacing and regrading are reasonably needed and justified for the proposed enterprise. The area providing sufficient room for the short-, medium- and long-term vision of the site. The area provides space for vehicles to load/unload trees, and manoeuvre while also providing space for storage and operational activities as required.
- 6.5 The proposed operation at large would restore the site to its previously wooded condition with trees planted in a manner suitable for the agricultural operation including their maintenance and future sale. This is similar to the previous enterprise that operated from the land without issue or constraint. Once established the trees would conserve the character of the landscape more widely contributing to its wooded appearance.
- 6.6 It is clear, as evidenced by their investment to date, that the applicant is committed to this rural enterprise. This should gain substantial support noting the benefits to the wider rural economy, agricultural setting and wider use of the land.
- 6.7 We trust this information is of assistance to the determination of the case.