

Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone Management & Grants Copse Restoration Statement

Submitted in response to the comments of Andy Clout, Assistant Arboricultural Officer, Horsham District Council (dated 26/08/26)

Site:	Lock House, Lock Lane, Partridge Green, West Sussex, RH13 8EG
Applicant:	Mr Nick Sutton
Adjacent habitat:	Grants Copse Ancient Woodland (part of a c. 7.3ha parcel including Hookshile Wood)
Purpose:	To set out (1) how the 15m buffer will be permanently excluded from domestic/garden use, (2) a 20-year woodland restoration and planting scheme, and (3) the management already undertaken which has produced the current recovering ground flora

1. Introduction

This statement responds directly to the three principal concerns raised in the Tree Officer's consultation comments on application DC-26-0924: that the proposed West of proposed house recreational/garden area would compromise the semi-natural character of the 15m buffer to Grants Copse Ancient Woodland (AW); that the current condition of the AW understorey reads as decline; and that a long-term woodland management and replanting scheme should be provided to support the application.

The applicant does not consider re-siting the building necessary, and instead sets out below the commitments and evidence needed to satisfy the buffer, restoration and management requirements the Officer has identified, consistent with Natural England's standing advice and the approach the Officer himself proposes as an alternative to refusal.

2. The 15m Buffer Will Not Be Urbanised

The Officer's central objection is not the 15m distance itself — which the submitted block plan already achieves as a minimum to the build line — but the intended domestic use of the land within that distance. The applicant accepts this point and commits to the following, to be secured by planning condition and/or a management plan condition:

- **No garden, paths or curtilage use:** the full 15m zone between the ditch (Eastern AW boundary) and the building will be permanently excluded from the residential curtilage of the holiday cottage. It will not be laid to lawn, planted as ornamental garden, or used for patios, play equipment, washing lines, sheds or any other domestic paraphernalia. All gardens and residential paraphernalia will be located to the East of the proposed building.
- **Physical demarcation:** a permanent low-key post-and-rail boundary will be installed along the 15m line, distinct in character from any garden fencing, to prevent informal creep of mowing, storage or recreational use into the buffer. This is in addition to (and outlasts) the temporary construction-phase tree protection fencing shown on the Tree Protection Plan.

- **No hard surfacing or lighting:** no paths, hardstanding, or external lighting will be installed within the buffer, avoiding the light, noise and access pressures the Officer identifies as indirect effects on the AW.
- **Land-use restriction to run with the land:** the applicant is content for this to be secured by condition (and/or a unilateral undertaking) so that neither this nor any future occupier can bring the buffer into domestic use without a fresh application.

On this basis the 15m already shown on the submitted block plan is not a garden with a buffer alongside it, but a genuinely semi-natural buffer with the garden stopping short of it.

3. Twenty-Year Woodland Restoration & Planting Scheme

The applicant is willing to commission a Forestry Commission-recognised woodland management plan, prepared by a qualified woodland/ecological consultant, as a condition of any permission — extending, if the Officer prefers, to the 25-year term he has suggested. In advance of that detailed survey work, the following scheme sets out the applicant's intended approach and can form the basis of the formal plan:

Years 1–5

- Continued control of cherry laurel and other invasive regrowth along the drive corridor to keep the woodland floor open to light.
- Replacement underplanting with native understorey species appropriate to the AW's semi-natural broadleaf/yew character — e.g. hazel, hawthorn, holly, spindle and hornbeam — in the areas cleared of laurel.
- Replacement standard planting for ash lost to ash dieback (including T9 and T11, identified for felling in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment) with locally native species such as oak, field maple and hornbeam, sited to avoid the Root Protection Areas of retained trees.
- Retention of suitable deadwood/habitat piles from felling works rather than removal off-site, to support the wood-decay invertebrates and fungi typical of AW.

Years 5–10

- Ongoing monitoring for further ash dieback and phased, licensed removal and replacement only where trees present a genuine safety or phytosanitary risk.
- Establishment monitoring of the new understorey and standard planting, with beating-up (replacement of failures) as required.
- Continued management of the regenerating ground flora (wild garlic, bluebell, naturalised daffodil — see Section 4) to prevent recolonisation by laurel or bramble.

Years 10–20

- Canopy gap monitoring and further underplanting where gaps have not naturally regenerated.
- Long-term invasive species control (laurel, and sycamore regeneration if it becomes a problem).
- Annual or biennial written inspection log, extending the arboricultural supervision already committed to in the Arboricultural Method Statement (Absolute Arboriculture, June 2026) to cover woodland condition as well as tree safety, with copies available to the LPA on request.

The applicant recognises that the precise species list, planting densities and locations should be finalised through site-specific ecological survey rather than fixed at this stage, and proposes this as a matter for the pre-occupation condition requiring the full woodland management plan.

4. What Has Already Been Done, and Why the Woodland Looks the Way It Does

The Officer's report reads the current absence of understorey as unexplained recent decline. The applicant can account for it directly: approximately five years ago, two pieces of management work were carried out in and along the drive corridor adjoining Grants Copse:

- **Removal of cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus*):** a dense, evergreen hedge of this well-documented invasive species had grown up along the drive. Laurel casts deep shade year-round and is recognised as one of the principal causes of ground flora loss and arrested natural regeneration in ancient and semi-natural woodland; its removal is standard good practice in ancient woodland and PAWS (Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site) restoration.
- **Removal of dead and fallen trees, particularly ash affected by ash dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*):** standing dead and hung-up material was cleared for safety reasons and to reduce the spread of infection, consistent with Forestry Commission guidance on managing Chalara in ash populations.

The effect of both interventions has been to restore light to the woodland floor. In the years since, the base of the retained trees has regenerated naturally into a spring ground flora carpet of wild garlic, bluebell and naturalised daffodil — species widely used as ancient woodland indicators and a positive sign that the seed bank and soil structure of the AW remain intact and responsive to appropriate management.

This history should reframe the Officer's reading of the site: the current condition is not the result of undocumented felling with no replacement, but the visible mid-point of an active, beneficial restoration already under way, which the applicant now proposes to formalise and extend through the 20-year (or 25-year) scheme in Section 3.

5. Summary of Commitments

- The full 15m buffer to remain permanently free of garden, paths, hard surfacing, lighting and domestic use, physically demarcated and secured by condition.
- A Forestry Commission-recognised woodland management plan for Grants Copse, covering a 20–25 year replanting and restoration programme, to be submitted and approved prior to occupation.
- Replacement native planting for felled/lost trees (including the ash losses) and restoration of understorey in areas previously cleared of laurel.
- Continued invasive species control and annual/biennial arboricultural and woodland condition monitoring, with logs available to the LPA.
- Recognition, supported by the evidence in Section 4, that recent management has already begun the AW's recovery and that this application secures its continuation rather than placing it at risk.