

HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Dept
LOCATION:	The Warren Horsham Road Handcross Haywards Heath
DESCRIPTION:	Permission in Principle for a minimum and maximum of 7no. dwellings (including 4 flats above replacement garages, 3 dwellings on land off Handford Way, and to replace 2 existing dwellings (one on the site of the existing summer house outbuilding), and Estate Office extension to create up to 600 sq m of Class E floorspace.)
REFERENCE:	DC/26/0782
RECOMMENDATION:	Objection

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION:

The proposed development is considered to give rise to unacceptable adverse landscape effects given the site's positioning within the protected High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) and its immediate context which abuts irreplaceable Ancient Woodland (AW). NPPF 189 states that, '*Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues*'.

While all matters are reserved, the proposed development through its built form, associated urbanising features, and resulting loss of trees and woodland, is likely to have an eroding effect on the rural qualities of the character area and HWNL. Further, the proposals will result in an increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside location, which in combination with its intensified use, will incur greater light and noise pollution than the existing baseline, detracting from the setting of the HWNL. The increase of activity generated by proposals will additionally detract from the tranquillity and sense of place of the protected landscape setting, over and above that experienced with existing dwellings.

This may be further exacerbated subject to proposed access, if the principle is established, and resulting loss of woodland along the southern boundary to facilitate it. The current well treed boundary provides valuable visual containment and positively contributes to the HWNL setting.

The proposed development is not essential to its countryside location and is contrary to Policies 25, 26, 30, and 31 of the HDPF and therefore the principle of development within the site is not supported on landscape grounds.

See detailed comments below.

MAIN COMMENTS:

Site Description & Context

1. The proposed site is located outside of the Built-Up Area Boundary (BUAB), in a countryside location. It falls entirely within the HWNL, a protected national landscape (previously known

as AONB). It comprises woodland, a country house, gardens, a pond and various dwellings and areas of hardstanding.

2. The site is bounded to the southeast by Handcross Road and to the southwest by Hammerpond Road, Handford Way and several dwellings. Existing access is from Handcross Road; a densely wooded B road offering both glimpse and open views into the site through its well-treed southern boundary. These views are read in line with the context of the rural, countryside location.
3. The northern boundary abuts designated Ancient Woodland (AW), which also falls within the red line boundary to the northwest. AW is classified as an irreplaceable habitat and is highly significant to both the character and the ecological function of the area. Development, including construction and operational activities can affect AW, ancient and veteran trees, and the wildlife they support on the site or nearby.
4. A Tree Preservation Order (TPO) falls along the southwestern section of the site within woodland, coinciding with proposed development.
5. Multiple public rights of way (PRoWs) are located in the surrounding area, providing access and enjoyment of the countryside to sensitive receptors. Those that offer views into the site include:
 - a. PRoW 1706 within the site, running west-east.
 - b. PRoW 1705 along the western boundary and within the site, running southwest to northeast.
6. Views into the site from the footpath network are widely available and experienced by sensitive receptors within the countryside, who currently enjoy the surrounding wooded landscape, positively contributing to the enjoyment of the countryside.
7. The site and its immediate context hold strong rural qualities on account of its predominately undeveloped nature, landscape features and woodland setting, typical of the HWNL. It is notably quiet and tranquil, positively contributing to its rural character. While the existing dwellings to the southwest introduce some urbanising features, they are not perceived as significant intrusions on the countryside setting by virtue of vegetated frontages set within large grounds.
8. Urbanising influences are limited to the paddock associated with Warren Lodge and small areas of closeboard fencing along Handcross Road.
9. The wider character is heavily wooded and is both quiet and remote in nature, positively contributing to its rural qualities.

Landscape Character Area

10. The proposed site falls within L1 – St Leonard's Forest Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined by the Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003).
11. The site and the surrounding contextual landscape are deemed representative of the local landscape character area, exhibiting many of the key characteristics identified and described, including being '*densely wooded*', a '*strongly enclosed landscape with confined views*' with, '*a sense of isolation and remoteness*' and featuring a '*hidden hammer pond*'.
12. Relevant key issues include: *suburbanisation along roads, e.g. pastiche architecture, inappropriate fences, boundaries, gates; and Rhododendron invasion along roads.*
13. Overall sensitivity to change is high, with key sensitivities to: *Suburbanisation/urban edge development; and small scale incremental changes to roads.*
14. Relevant Planning and Land Management Guidelines state to:
 - a. *Conserve the traditional dispersed settlement pattern. Any further infill and extension of ribbon development along roads, or building of new large dwellings on existing plots, would further erode this pattern and therefore damage character.*
 - b. *Conserve the strongly wooded character of the area.*
 - c. *Conserve and manage ancient semi-natural woodland and pollarded trees.*
 - d. *Take opportunities to restore heathland.*
 - e. *Restructure conifer plantations where possible to include a higher native deciduous element.*
 - f. *Conserve existing native tall hedgerows and plant new ones*
15. Proposals must consider the characteristics and issues of the LCA, and address the relevant Planning and Management Guidelines in order to conserve and enhance the landscape character.

National Landscape

16. In regard to development within a National Landscape, NPPF 190 states that, 'Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a. *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
 - b. *the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
 - c. *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated'*
17. The HWNL Dark Skies Planning Advice states that developments should be located away from dark sky sensitive areas, avoiding AW in particular.
18. Proposals must meet the objectives of the HWNL for its landscape and habitat qualities, which include but are not limited to:
- a. *Protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.*
 - b. *Protect landform and geological features.*
 - c. *Enhance and restore shaws and gill woodlands.*
 - d. *Preserve the dark skies of the HWNL by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.*
19. Based on current information, the proposals are not essential to the countryside location nor meet the exceptional tests that would justify its location within the HWNL.

Proposals

20. While cognisant that all matters are reserved, concern is raised regarding the feasibility of proposals, particularly given the limited information provided.
21. For example, access details have not been provided, however it appears from the sketch that an additional access is proposed via Handcross Road, possibly coinciding with PRoW 1706. To facilitate this proposed access, removal of multiple, mature trees will be necessary, and thus will likely to give rise to residual adverse landscape and visual effects.
22. In addition, many of the proposed plots are wooded or well treed, reflective of the HWNL and L1 LCA, therefore considerable tree removal is likely necessary to facilitate proposals.
23. The extension and creation of up to 600m² of Class E floorspace may be acceptable in principle, however:
- a. Its proposed use is unclear; described varyingly as offices, stores and a heritage centre throughout the documentation. The intensification of use and increase in the level of activity is thus unclear.
 - b. As with the other plots, there is no information provided regarding proposed car parking, access, lighting and the relationship between proposals and the surrounding woodland, therefore landscape and visual effects cannot be assessed.
24. As above, and as per 16c, effects on the landscape character or visual amenity have not been identified or assessed. Therefore, we are unable to determine if the principle of development can be established without significant adverse effects, irrespective of its HWNL, woodland and countryside setting.

Planning Policy

25. The proposals fail to comply with the following policies:
- a. HDPF 25; the proposals do not protect, conserve or enhance landscape character given the introduction of domestic and urbanising features above the existing baseline, and likely removal and weakening of the green infrastructure network to facilitate development.
 - b. HDPF 26; the proposals are not essential to the countryside location, and do not meet the criteria for defined rural functions. The introduction of urbanising detractors including associated light pollution, hard landscape and car parking above the existing baseline, is likely to give rise to localised adverse effects on key features and characteristics of the landscape character area. Proposals are also likely to lead to an increase of the overall level of activity in the countryside.
 - c. HDPF 30; the proposals do not enhance the natural beauty and public enjoyment of the HWNL, nor promote its special qualities.
 - d. HDPF 31; while all matters are reserved, tree and/or woodland removal will likely be required in order to facilitate development, thus proposals do not maintain, conserve or enhance existing green infrastructure or habitats. This established woodland significantly contributes to the character and visual qualities of the area and HWNL.

- e. Lower Beeding Neighbourhood Plan (LBNP) Policy 2; while all matters are reserved, proposals are unlikely to conserve and enhance the natural environment and landscape character of the Parish, as per 25a.
- f. LBNP Policy 3; as above, proposals are likely to result in the loss of existing green infrastructure.

RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: N/A

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SIGNED OFF BY:	Inês Watson CMLI Specialists Team Leader (Landscape Architect)
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