

CPRH Objection to Planning Application DC/26/0006:

Land South of the Bowling Club, The Daisycroft, Henfield, West Sussex BN5 9RN: Erection of 9 detached dwellings with associated parking, landscaping, hardstanding, access and associated works

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

CPRH does not object to the principle of development on this site. The site is allocated in the Henfield Neighbourhood Plan (HNP) under Policy 2.4: Land South of the Bowls Club, off Furners Mead, Henfield, and we support the delivery of appropriately designed housing for older and downsizing residents on this land.

We object strongly to this application as currently submitted, however, because it fails to respect the carefully considered conditions under which the allocation was made. The Neighbourhood Plan guardrails exist precisely to protect the amenity of existing residents, the setting of the Henfield Conservation Area and its listed buildings, the landscape character of the area, and the ecological value of the site. This proposal, as designed, breaches those guardrails in multiple significant respects. A fundamental redesign is required before this application can be supported.

1. Failure to comply with the single-storey requirement (Policy 2.4(c))

The single most fundamental departure from the Neighbourhood Plan allocation is the proposal to build chalet-style and two-storey dwellings on a site explicitly allocated for single-storey development only.

HNP Policy 2.4(c) is unambiguous: the proposal must comprise single-storey dwellings suitable for older and downsizing households to meet local need. The supporting text at paragraph 5.34 reinforces this, stating that the topography of the site and its proximity to the Victorian cottages along Henfield Common North make it suitable only for single-storey dwellings.

The application proposes three 2-bedroom, three 3-bedroom and three 4-bedroom dwellings. Plots 1, 2 and 9 are chalet-style dwellings of approximately 6.35-6.5 metres in height, with habitable rooms in the roof. While these are the lowest of the proposed dwellings, they cannot be considered single-storey: they have bedrooms at first-floor level within the roofspace and do not meet the policy requirement. Plots 3, 4 and 5 are fully two-storey dwellings of approximately 6.5 metres in height, with first-floor bedrooms. Plots 6, 7 and 8 are the largest dwellings on the site, also two-storey but

substantially taller at approximately 7.8 metres - these are large family homes entirely inconsistent with the downsizing purpose of the allocation.

The landscape consultants Place Services, advising Horsham District Council, have confirmed this concern, noting that the proposals are contrary to the single-storey requirement of Policy 2.4 and that the predominantly single-storey character along The Daisycroft provides a clear policy precedent. Place Services further note that increased building heights have required the introduction of flat roof elements which are out of character, indicating that the scale of the proposed development exceeds what is appropriate for this locality.

This breach of Policy 2.4(c) alone is sufficient grounds to refuse this application. It is not a technical or marginal non-compliance: it goes to the heart of why this site was allocated in the first place.

2. Failure to protect the setting of the Conservation Area and the listed building (Policy 2.4(b))

HNP Policy 2.4(b) requires the proposal to preserve or enhance the historic significance of the setting of the Henfield Conservation Area, and in particular to preserve the nearby listed building and its setting. It also requires a green buffer zone in the south-west part of the site.

The Henfield Conservation Area lies immediately to the south of the site, and a Grade II listed building lies to the south-west. The Neighbourhood Plan supporting text at paragraph 5.33 explicitly identifies the proximity of this listed building as one of the reasons why the development needs to be low rise and low density, and why a buffer zone in the south-western area of the site is necessary.

The proposed development fails this test in two ways. First, as noted above, the buildings are not low rise. Second, while an area of open space is shown to the south-west, Place Services have found that the orientation of dwellings backing onto it and the narrow linking path between plots are not appropriate in terms of amenity, passive surveillance or good design. The buffer zone as proposed does not function as a coherent open space and does not provide the meaningful separation between the development and the listed building that the policy requires. Place Services recommend that the open space be extended across the southern boundary to form a cohesive buffer, and CPRH endorses this view.

The application also fails to adequately address Policy 2.4(a), which requires the design to demonstrate an understanding of the elements which contribute to the character of the landscape and to ensure appropriate scale and massing in keeping with the character of the surroundings. Place Services have confirmed that this has not been sufficiently addressed in the submitted material.

3. Failure to respect landscape character and key views (Policy 2.4(a) and 2.4(e))

HNP Policy 2.4(e) requires the proposal to take account of visibility and key views, and in particular to provide mitigation against visibility from the south. Policy 2.4(f) requires the proposal to maintain and enhance the site's rural character, retaining existing field boundaries where appropriate and enhancing with native species.

The Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment identifies the site within Landscape Character Area D2: Henfield and Small Dole Farmlands, assessed as having high sensitivity to change, with key sensitivities including large-scale housing and the cumulative impact of suburbanisation. The relevant planning and land management guidelines require development to respond to traditional local design and materials and to conserve and manage existing hedgerows.

The objector at Heather Cottage, 6 Henfield Common North, has noted on the basis of a commissioned topographic survey that the proposed development site slopes significantly, with a drop of approximately 4 metres across the site and a further drop of 1.2 metres over approximately 7 metres from the southern site boundary to the ground floor level of adjacent properties. At the heights proposed, the new dwellings will be visible from multiple points along Henfield Common North, a protected view, contrary to Policy 2.4(e).

Place Services have confirmed that the proposed layout and building heights do not respond to the requirements of the allocation policy and that the scheme conflicts with Policies 25, 26, 31, 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework.

Photograph 2 illustrates the landscape and topographical issues.

4. Risk to protected trees (Policy 2.4(f) and HDPF Policy 31)

Two mature oak trees (T2 and T3) on the eastern boundary of the site are protected by Tree Preservation Order. Place Services have noted that these trees exhibit features towards potential veteran tree status and that the Preliminary Ecological Assessment confirms they meet all six relevant condition criteria - though the assessment itself incorrectly records only five, an error which should be corrected.

The proposed layout places bike and bin sheds within their Root Protection Areas of both TPO trees. This is entirely unacceptable. Place Services have identified that this risks long-term harm to these important landscape assets through root damage and pressure, and creates conditions likely to generate future requests for crown reduction. This conflicts directly with HDPF Policy 31, which seeks to protect and enhance green infrastructure and biodiversity, and with Policies 25 and 26, which seek to conserve landscape character and safeguard key natural features.

5. Inadequate ecological information (Policy 2.4(g))

HNP Policy 2.4(g) requires a full ecological and biodiversity assessment to be submitted as part of the application, with any reasonable mitigation implemented in full.

NatureSpace, advising Horsham District Council under its Great Crested Newt District Licence, has confirmed that the development falls within the red impact risk zone for great crested newts, that there are seven ponds within 500 metres of the site (the closest only 74 metres away), and that there are recent great crested newt records within 100 metres. NatureSpace has requested further information, specifically eDNA survey results for all ponds with ecological connectivity to the site, before determination can proceed. This information has not yet been provided.

In the absence of this information, the application cannot be determined in accordance with Policy 2.4(g) or the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. CPRH strongly supports NatureSpace's request for further ecological information prior to determination.

6. Road access and Public Right of Way HEN-2547 (Policy 2.4(i))

Road access is over the narrow, unadopted Daisycroft (maintained by current residents), via an awkward entrance immediately outside Little Orchard. The impact on residential amenity does not appear to have been considered. Although a bin collection area is to be provided to avoid bin lorries entering the site, it is unclear how other large vehicles such as fire engines would be able to negotiate the turns. Photograph 1 illustrates the situation.

West Sussex County Council's Public Rights of Way officer has confirmed that the proposed development entrance crosses Public Footpath HEN-2547, and that the existing hedge at the point where the footpath enters the grounds of Henfield Bowls Club is proposed to be removed. Further information has been requested by WSCC to clarify how the footpath will be accommodated, protected and maintained both during construction and on completion.

HNP Policy 2.4(i) requires all roads, cycle ways and footpaths to conform to West Sussex Highway Standards. The application cannot be determined until the treatment of this footpath has been satisfactorily resolved.

7. Impact on Henfield Bowling Club

The proposed development is immediately adjacent to Henfield Bowling Club and shares the same access road from The Daisycroft. The development access would branch from this road only a few metres before the clubhouse, and the construction of the access requires the removal of an existing hedge.

The trustees of the Bowling Club have raised concerns that the development must not have an adverse impact on the club and its members. Specifically, they have asked for assurance that members can continue to enjoy existing facilities without disruption during and after construction, that safe and unhindered access to the clubhouse and unrestricted parking are maintained, and that the club's main sources of income - including allotment fees and membership subscriptions - are not adversely affected.

The allotment gardens are owned by the Bowling Club and represent an important income stream. While they are not directly within the development footprint, the club is concerned that increased traffic and reduced parking along the access road may make the allotments less attractive to holders, with consequent financial impact on the club.

HNP Policy 2.4(h) requires vehicular access into the site to be provided in a way which does not have an unacceptable impact on the amenities of the occupiers of adjacent residential properties. The same principle should apply to the Bowling Club. The application as submitted does not adequately demonstrate how the club's access, parking and amenity will be protected throughout construction and in perpetuity.

8. Drainage (Policy 2.4(l))

HNP Policy 2.4(l) requires the development to be based on a comprehensive drainage strategy that addresses how seasonal groundwater would be satisfactorily accommodated.

The objector at Heather Cottage has set out in detail the significant topographic challenges posed by the site, which slopes from north-east to south-west with a total drop of approximately 4 metres. Properties on Henfield Common North sit at a lower level than the proposed development, and there is an existing history of flooding in the area associated with hard landscaping introduced by earlier developments in Furners Mead and The Daisycroft. The proposed cellular soakaway in the south-west corner of the site is stated to be sized for a 1-in-100-year plus 45% storm event, but given the evident vulnerability of the area to flooding and the increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events, CPRH shares the concern that this may be insufficient. A robust and independently verified drainage strategy must be provided and assessed before any permission is granted.

It is also unclear what precautions would be taken to prevent sewage spills and smells from the pumping station to be located immediately behind Friars Cottage and The Finches.

Photograph 3 illustrates the topographical fall towards the houses of the Conservation Area.

Conclusion

CPRH supports the principle of developing this allocated site to provide single-storey homes for older and downsizing residents of Henfield. That is precisely what the Neighbourhood Plan intended. However, the application as submitted represents a fundamental departure from the allocation policy in respect of building heights and dwelling types, and raises serious unresolved concerns regarding the setting of the Conservation Area and listed building, landscape impact, protected trees, ecology, rights of way, drainage, and the amenity of the adjacent Bowling Club.

We urge Horsham District Council to refuse this application in its current form and to require the applicant to bring forward a revised scheme that genuinely complies with all the criteria of HNP Policy 2.4 - delivering the low-rise, low-density, single-storey development for older residents that the community agreed to when it adopted its Neighbourhood Plan.



Photograph 1: Site entrance from the narrow, unadopted Daisycroft, showing the difficult access past Little Orchard on the right.



Photograph 2: Landscape view looking south-east showing the protected oaks and the height of the field above neighbouring properties in the Conservation Area. The public footpath on the left continues through woodland to Henfield Common.



Photograph 3: View south across field to houses of the Henfield Conservation Area showing houses that have been flooded by surface run-off.