Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone Statement & Grants Copse Restoration

Planting, protection and management of the 15m buffer to Grants Copse Ancient Woodland

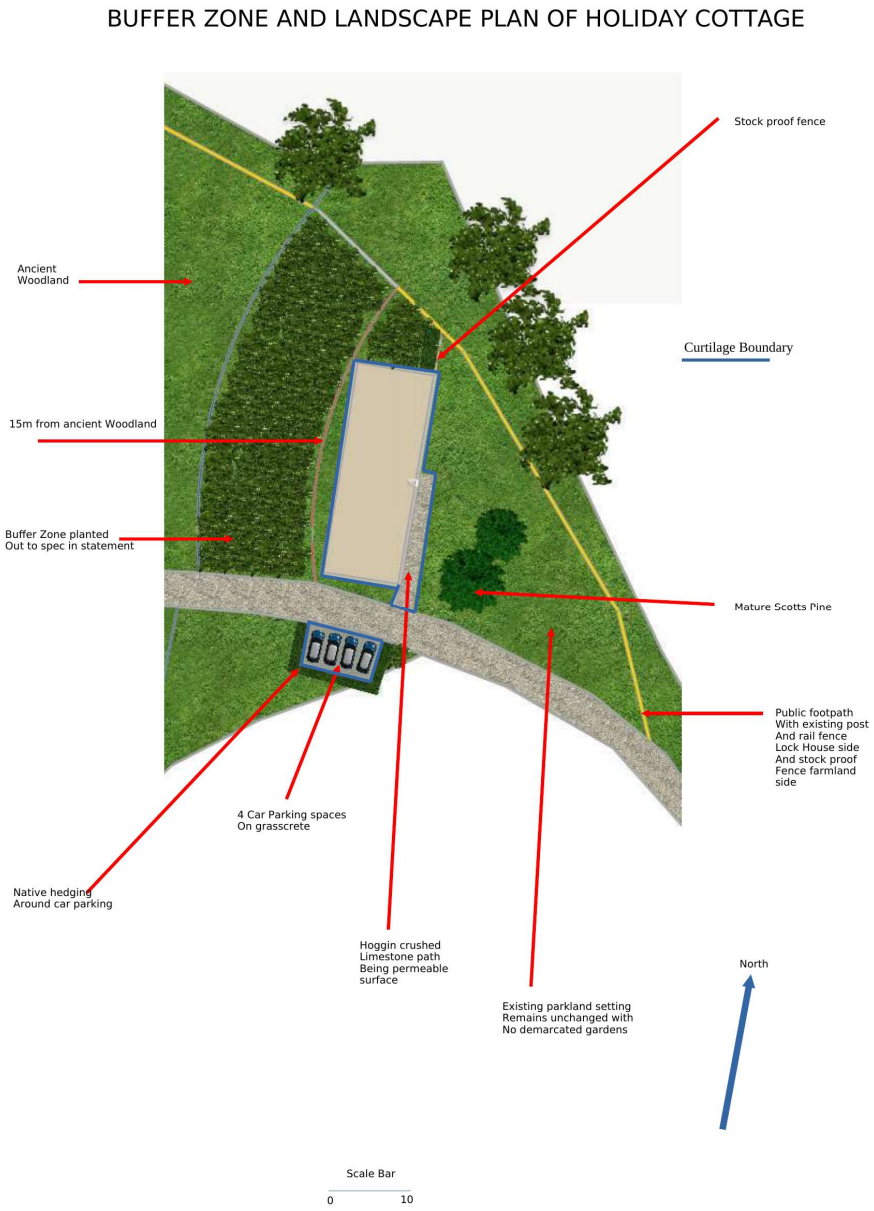
Site:	Lock House, Lock Lane, Partridge Green, West Sussex, RH13 8EG
Applicant:	Mr Nick Sutton
Adjacent habitat:	Grants Copse Ancient Woodland (part of a c. 7.3ha parcel including Hookshile Wood)
Purpose:	To show how the buffer and the ancient woodland are protected from the holiday let, how the buffer is planted and maintained, and how Grants Copse will be restored

1. Purpose

This statement accompanies the application for a coach house holiday let at Lock House. It shows how Grants Copse Ancient Woodland is protected, how the 15m buffer between the woodland and the building is planted and managed, and how the copse itself will be restored under a Forestry Commission Woodland Management Plan.

Protection of the woodland is built into the scheme and does not rely on the behaviour of guests. The building has no door or window facing the woodland, the buffer is planted and fenced, and the curtilage of the holiday let is drawn tightly around the building. The land between the building and the woodland is mown amenity grass today. The proposal replaces it with a dense thorny thicket, with native trees along the woodland edge, which is closed to access.

2. Buffer Zone and Landscape Plan



Buffer Zone and Landscape Plan, showing the curtilage boundary in blue.

- **Curtilage.** The curtilage of the holiday let, outlined in blue, is limited to the building, the hoggin path along its east side and the four parking spaces south of the drive. It lies wholly outside the buffer.
- **Buffer zone.** The whole of the land between the woodland edge and the west wall of the building is planted as dense thorny blackthorn scrub, with native trees near the woodland edge (Section 4). It contains no building, surface, path, lighting, drainage, garden or recreational use.
- **No access.** The only entrance is on the east side. The west elevation has no windows, no dormers and only dummy stable doors, so there is no way out of the building into the buffer. A stock-proof fence closes the buffer at its northern end.
- **Parkland unchanged.** Outside the curtilage, the existing parkland remains as it is, with no demarcated garden. Guests use the estate's communal pool, tennis court and grounds, which lie away from Grants Copse.
- **Parking and path.** Four spaces on grasscrete enclosed by native hedging, and a permeable hoggin path to the entrance. No other surfacing.
- **Footpath.** The public footpath to the east keeps its existing post and rail fence on the Lock House side and stock-proof fence on the farmland side.

3. How the Woodland Is Protected

The planning officer's report on the previous application listed the indirect effects to which ancient woodland is sensitive. Each is addressed below.

Effect	Measure
Human access and disturbance	No door or window on the woodland side. Tight curtilage on the east side. A dense blackthorn thicket running up to the west wall, with a stock-proof fence and signs. Booking terms prohibit entry to the buffer and woodland. One operator with an on-site host who checks the buffer at each changeover.
Light	No external lighting anywhere. No windows facing the woodland. Low-VLT glass (0.40 to 0.65) and blackout curtains on the east side.
Hydrology	No drains, soakaways or services in the buffer. Surface water taken east, away from the woodland, under a drainage strategy approved by condition. The boundary ditch is not altered.
Soil compaction and root disturbance	No-dig foundations on helical (screw) piles, with no foundation trenches or bulk excavation. No vehicles or machinery in the buffer. Mowing of the buffer stops altogether.
Shading	The building lies east of the woodland, at least 15m from it, with a 7.27m ridge well below the tree canopy. It does not shade the woodland.
Litter, pollution and garden waste	Refuse is taken to the estate's communal bin store. No bins, fuel, chemicals, compost or garden waste kept near the woodland. No fertiliser or pesticide in the buffer.
Pressure to fell edge trees	The buffer contains nothing that people use, so there is no pressure to fell or reduce woodland-edge trees for safety.
Construction	Protective fencing to BS 5837 along the buffer line before work starts. All access, storage and working on the east side. Arboricultural supervision at key stages. No site lighting on the west side.

4. Buffer Planting

The buffer is planted as a single block of dense thorny scrub across its whole width, from the woodland edge up to the west wall of the building. Scrub of this kind is a natural woodland-edge habitat. It shelters the woodland, gives nesting cover for birds, and once established is impenetrable to people and dogs.

Thorny scrub: blackthorn

The scrub is blackthorn (Prunus spinosa), a native shrub chosen for this site because:

- **It thrives on heavy clay.** Blackthorn is one of the most characteristic shrubs of the Low Weald clays and is common in the hedges and woodland edges around Partridge Green.
- **It forms a dense thicket.** It suckers freely from its roots, so the planting thickens and closes up of its own accord into a continuous, impenetrable barrier.
- **It resists deer once established.** Its stiff, sharply spined stems deter browsing and make the thicket self-protecting. Young plants are guarded for their first two to three years until they have formed a thicket.

- **It is valuable for wildlife.** Early white blossom for pollinators, sloes for birds and mammals, and a food plant for the rare brown hairstreak butterfly, which breeds in the Sussex Weald.

Item	Specification
Species	Blackthorn (Prunus spinosa), UK-grown and of UK provenance.
Stock	Bare-root whips, 40 to 60cm.
Spacing	Staggered rows at 0.6m, about three plants per square metre, so the thicket closes within three to five years.
Extent	The whole buffer, from the woodland edge to the west wall of the building.
Planting	By hand, by notch, between November and March. No machinery, no regrading and no imported topsoil or fertiliser. Positions adjusted around the roots of existing trees.
Protection	Spiral or mesh guards for the first two to three years. Peat-free mulch.
Timing	The first planting season after work starts, and before the building is first occupied.

Trees along the woodland edge

Closer to the woodland edge, a number of native trees will be planted at irregular spacing within the scrub: English oak (Quercus robur), Scots pine (Pinus sylvestris) and rowan (Sorbus aucuparia), the same species as the restocking in Grants Copse. Each tree is planted in a cleared circle within the scrub and protected by an individual deer-proof cage, inspected regularly. The circle is kept clear of blackthorn until the tree is above the height of the thicket. No ash, no non-native species, and no cherry laurel or rhododendron will be planted.

5. Maintenance

Period	Work
Years 1 to 5	Spring and autumn checks. Hand weeding around young plants until the thicket closes. Watering in drought in the first two summers. Failed plants replaced each winter. Guards, cages and fence repaired. Circles around the trees kept clear of blackthorn.
Years 3 onwards	Guards removed once the thicket has closed. The thicket is left to grow, except that it is cut back from the building wall and from the fence line every two to three years, in January or February.
Year 10 onwards	Tree cages removed when the trees no longer need them. Small sections of the thicket may be coppiced in rotation to keep it dense.
Every year	Cherry laurel, rhododendron and other invasive regrowth removed. Fence and signs inspected. No herbicide other than stump treatment of laurel, and no pesticide or fertiliser. All cutting outside the bird nesting season.

6. Grants Copse Woodland Management Plan

A Small Woodland Management Plan for Grants Copse was submitted to the Forestry Commission in September 2026. The Commission’s Woodland Officer inspected the copse on 29 September and gave written advice on 30 September. The final plan, revised to address that advice and the UK Forestry Standard,

was submitted to the Forestry Commission on 7 October 2026 and is registered as a document with this planning application. It runs for ten years with a five-year review, and will be renewed to give a 25-year programme of restoration, as the Council's Arboricultural Officer recommended.

- Restocking with rowan, English oak and Scots pine where ash was lost to ash dieback, each tree in a deer-proof cage.
- A native shrub understorey of hazel, hawthorn and holly in the areas cleared of laurel.
- Protection and enrichment of the bluebell and wild garlic ground flora, with the copse managed as woodland, not garden.
- Annual removal of cherry laurel regrowth, and control of grey squirrel.
- Retention of veteran trees and deadwood. Ash trees T9 and T11 retained.
- Annual inspection record of tree safety and woodland condition, available to the Council.

Grants Copse lies outside the application site but is owned by the applicant, and there is at present no obligation to manage it. The applicant accepts a pre-commencement condition that no development shall begin until a Forestry Commission-approved Woodland Management Plan has been approved by the Council. Income from the holiday let funds the work.

Past management

About five years ago, a dense hedge of invasive cherry laurel planted along the drive in the 1940s was removed, together with ash killed by ash dieback. Both are recognised good practice in ancient woodland. Light has since returned to the woodland floor, and bluebell, wild garlic and other ground flora have regenerated strongly. The copse remains dominated by 25 mature oaks and 16 mature conifers. The Woodland Management Plan continues this recovery.

7. Securing the Measures

Each measure is a physical feature that an officer can check on a single site visit: the absence of openings on the west side, the curtilage, the planting, the fence and the signs. The applicant will accept conditions to the following effect, and will enter into a unilateral undertaking if the Council prefers:

- Curtilage limited to the area shown on the Buffer Zone and Landscape Plan, and the buffer kept free of buildings, surfaces, paths, lighting, drainage and domestic use.
- No door or window to be formed in the west elevation.
- Tree protection fencing in place before work starts.
- Buffer planting, fence and signs completed before first occupation, with failed plants replaced for ten years.
- A Forestry Commission-approved Woodland Management Plan approved before development starts.
- A short monitoring report with photographs sent to the Council each year for five years, then every five years.
- Removal of permitted development rights for outbuildings, hard surfaces, fences, walls and gates.