

Objection by the Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield

Planning Application DC/23/0189 – Sandgate Nurseries, Henfield

1. Introduction

The Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield (CPRH) strongly objects to the above application for an extra care facility at Sandgate Nurseries. This proposal conflicts directly with the adopted Henfield Neighbourhood Plan (HNP), is inconsistent with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), and would cause irreversible harm to the village's heritage, biodiversity, and visitor economy.

The Council's Local Plan is out of date, but the HNP remains the only adopted plan in force and within date. Under NPPF Paragraph 14, where the presumption in favour of sustainable development at Paragraph 11d) would otherwise apply, the adverse impacts of development that conflicts with the neighbourhood plan are likely to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits — provided the plan is less than five years old and meets its identified housing requirement. The HNP meets these criteria, and therefore should carry overriding weight.

2. Breach of Trust and Community Confidence

The community was assured through the neighbourhood planning process that Sandgate Nurseries was not an appropriate development site. The HNP spatial strategy, supported by over 90% of voters at referendum, deliberately focuses growth to the north and east of the village, protecting the sensitive heritage and ecological assets to the south-west.

The subsequent attempt to allocate Sandgate in the draft Local Plan was met with strong and united opposition from residents, the Parish Council, neighbouring parishes, and our MP. The Local Plan was found unsound before the case against Sandgate was even heard at the public examination.

It is therefore deeply concerning that this application returns in a different form — now as an extra care facility — which is even less suitable for this location. This undermines public trust in the plan-led system and the Government's neighbourhood planning agenda, and risks disengaging the community from future collaborative planning efforts.

3. Why an Extra Care Facility is Even Less Suitable

While the retirement community proposal was itself contrary to policy, an extra care facility intensifies the unsuitability:

- **Increased traffic and service movements** – Extra care facilities typically generate higher volumes of traffic from staff shifts, care workers, medical personnel, deliveries, waste collection, and emergency vehicles. All access would still route through the Henfield Conservation Area, exacerbating existing congestion and harming the setting of over 60 listed buildings.

- **Emergency access and noise impacts** – Frequent ambulance and emergency service call-outs would increase noise and activity, further degrading the tranquillity valued by residents and visitors.
- **Accessibility and isolation** – The site is distant from essential services, shops, and community facilities, forcing reliance on private transport or care-provided transport, contrary to sustainability principles. The bus provision is inadequate (two early morning outbound buses, no return service).
- **Conflict with HNP spatial strategy** – Locating specialist accommodation on the periphery, away from village amenities, is contrary to best practice in extra care provision, which emphasises integration with the wider community.

The applicant has provided no evidence of having secured an experienced care provider to operate the facility, nor of a clear plan to deliver the necessary services in a sustainable way. Given the well-documented difficulties other Henfield-based organisations face in recruiting staff locally — often having to bring workers in from Brighton and beyond — there is serious doubt over the viability of the proposal. The likely outcome is high staff turnover, increased reliance on agency workers, and additional travel movements from outside the area, further undermining sustainability and increasing traffic impacts. Without a credible operator and staffing plan, the application cannot be considered deliverable in practice.

4. Harm to Implementation of the Neighbourhood Plan

The proposal would directly obstruct key projects the HNP seeks to deliver:

- **Nature and biodiversity** – The site forms part of an identified wildlife corridor and Opportunity Area for habitat restoration, home to rare species such as the Brown Hairstreak butterfly. Development would sever the green link along Hollands Lane to the river paths, undermining Horsham’s nature recovery programme.
- **Heritage and rural character** – The setting of Camellia Cottage, the last double-sided loose farmstead in Henfield, would be urbanised. Hollands Lane, a historic route and bridleway dating to at least 1548, would lose its rural character. Increased traffic through the Conservation Area would cause further erosion of heritage value.
- **Visitor economy** – The site borders the Horsham Heritage Trail and the embryonic birdwatch trail. The tranquillity and wildlife that underpin these attractions would be compromised, undermining tourism and local economic aims.

5. Policy Context

The application fails to comply with:

- **NPPF Paragraph 14** – The HNP is within date and meets its housing requirement. Its policies therefore outweigh the presumption in favour of development under Paragraph 11d).

- **NPPF Paragraphs 185, 196–197** – Fails to conserve and enhance heritage assets and biodiversity.
- **HNP Policy 1 (Spatial Strategy)** – Development focused to the north/east; protection of the south-west’s heritage and ecology.
- **Sustainability principles** – Horsham’s own sustainability assessments rated Sandgate as one of the least suitable sites.

Many more suitable sites were promoted during the Local Plan consultations, several of which are already coming forward through planning applications without the heritage, biodiversity, and access conflicts present at Sandgate.

6. Conclusion

The Sandgate Nurseries proposal is fundamentally incompatible with the adopted Henfield Neighbourhood Plan, fails national and local policy tests, and would cause substantive and irreversible harm to heritage, biodiversity, community projects, and the visitor economy.

CPRH urges the Council to refuse DC/23/0189 in its entirety, both to uphold the integrity of the neighbourhood planning process and to protect Henfield’s rural character for current and future generations.

Campaign to Protect Rural Henfield



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