



HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Dept
LOCATION:	Land North-west of Southwater
DESCRIPTION:	Outline planning application, with all matters reserved (except for primary access to the highway) for a phased development comprising: the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of residential dwellings (including affordable housing) (Use Classes C2 and C3); a mixed-use neighbourhood centre (Use Classes E and F); education facilities (Use Class F1(a)); business and employment floorspace (Use Classes B2, B8 and E(g)); redevelopment of existing agricultural buildings including construction of a building for community use (Use Classes E and F2); improvements to public rights of way; sports pitches; gypsy and traveller pitches/plots; public open space; landscaping, and associated infrastructure.
REFERENCE:	DC/26/0366
RECOMMENDATION:	Advice (Southwater Site) Advice (Christs Hospital site)
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION: The application site comprises a large area of agricultural land containing mature field boundary trees, hedgerows and areas of woodland. Two wooded areas within the site are designated as Ancient Woodland, these being Courtland's Wood and Smiths Copse. The site also supports a substantial number of mature, over mature and veteran trees, which contribute significantly to landscape character and biodiversity of the site. The area covered by the proposed development was originally surveyed in 2022 as part of the previously withdrawn application DC/22/1916 and has since been updated following further walkover surveys undertaken in 2025. The updated survey retains the original tree numbering and BS5837:2012 categorisations, with the principal update being the identification of a number of additional veteran trees, reflecting a more refined assessment of the age, condition and ecological value of these important and irreplaceable habitat resources. The survey has recorded 122 individual trees, 153 groups of trees, 71 hedgerows and seven woodland areas across the entire application site.	

The trees at the site have been categorised in accordance with BS5837:2012. The higher quality trees, including Category A and B specimens, are predominantly associated with existing field boundaries, woodland edges and veteran trees. I note that trees such as Ash have not been downgraded in response to declining condition arising from Ash Dieback disease, which I consider to be an appropriately precautionary approach at this stage of the proposed scheme.

The identification and treatment of veteran trees is in line with current best practice and Natural England Standing Advice.

A number of trees within and immediately adjoining the site are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, including individual, group and woodland designations, these being:

- TPO/0598, none of the trees are within the site, although some are immediately adjacent to the site boundary.
- TPO/0159, the trees are located within the site and are listed as T70 and G82 in the tree survey.
- TPO/1429, only one tree is located within the site and is listed as T112 in the tree survey.
- TPO/1477, none of the trees are within the site, but the crowns of the trees overhang the site and are listed as G152 in the tree survey.
- TPO/1543, some of the trees are within the site, and some are immediately adjacent to the site boundary.
- TPO/1558 – trees located to the west of the existing sports pavilion on Church Lane proposed to be removed under DC/22/1916; now retained.

MAIN COMMENTS:

Tree, Hedgerow and Woodland Removal observations

No Category A tree's, veteran trees or areas of Ancient Woodland (on the Southwater site or the Christs Hospital Site) are proposed for removal as advised with the AIA, and additional plans such as the Christ's Hospital Car Park illustrative layout drawing (no. UK0043490.9681-WSP-XX-XX-DR-TP-0110), which indicates the veteran Ash T9 situated at the Christs Hospital Site is intended to be retained and its buffer shown to be free from any development, in accordance with the standing advice.

Tree removals are relatively small in number given the overall size of the site. The removals are mostly associated with the formation of access points, internal roads and areas of poor quality or declining vegetation.

The majority of removals relate to trees of lower arboricultural and public amenity value. The more visually prominent field boundary trees and woodland blocks are largely retained.

The following individual trees are proposed for removal:

- T118 – Small semi-mature oak adjacent to the existing concrete agricultural access at Two Mile Ash Road, removed to facilitate formation of the western site access.
- T138 – Hawthorn growing within the unmanaged hedgerow H6, removed to ease constraints associated with the Worthing Road (East) access.

- T139 – Declining ash tree within Group G6, showing symptoms associated with ash dieback, removed in association with the Worthing Road (East) access.
- T129 – Small tree within scrubby vegetation at the northern end of Group G49, removed to accommodate the Two Mile Ash Road access.
- T130 – Small tree within the same scrubby vegetation at the northern end of Group G49, also removed for the Two Mile Ash Road access.

The following groups of trees are identified as being partly removed, rather than fully lost:

- G6 – Partial removal associated with the Worthing Road (East) access, specifically including the removal of T138 and T139 within this group.
- G49 – Partial removal at the northern end of the group, comprising scrubby vegetation and including T129 and T130, to facilitate the western access onto Two Mile Ash Road.

The proposals also seek the removal of a section of woodland identified as W3, the area covered by the loss equates to less than 100 square metres and represents less than 0.2% of the overall woodland area, the removals are located at the south-eastern tip of the woodland to enable formation of the Worthing Road (North) access near the Hop Oast Roundabout; this woodland is not designated as Ancient Woodland.

Two hedgerows are proposed to be removed in full, with smaller sections of other hedgerows removed to facilitate access and movement through the site. The extent of the set out in the AIA hedgerow removal lengths comprise access and major removals at H6 (25m), H41 (175m) and H66 (175m), totalling 375m, along with standard sections at H7, H8, H25, H40 and H55 (each 20m), multiple sections at H36 (20m + 20m + 10m, totalling 50m), and smaller sections at H54, H57, H59 and H60 (each 10m), which together account for a further 190m; overall, this results in an approximate total hedgerow loss of **565 metres**.

In England, almost 50% of countryside hedgerows have been lost since the 1940s, and as such these important landscape and ecological resources should be retained wherever possible, any proposed removal needs to be robustly justified, and any losses need to be appropriately compensated for elsewhere within the site.

Ancient Woodland Observations

The site includes two areas of designated Ancient Woodland, Courtland's Wood and Smiths Copse, both of which are classified as irreplaceable habitats under the NPPF. The woodlands are proposed to be retained in full and have been allocated appropriate buffer zones of between 15 and 25 metres; this is positive, and the wider 25m buffers are also welcome.

The indicative layout shows undeveloped green corridors linking the woodland areas and the wider green infrastructure network. On the basis of the submitted information I am satisfied that the proposals can avoid direct impacts on Ancient Woodland, and that indirect development and post-development impacts such as compaction, hydrological change and increased disturbance can be addressed by removing any existing designated footpaths from the ancient woodland and the buffer zones.

As such, to avoid the condition of the woodlands deteriorating post-development, the woodlands and their buffer zones should be treated as areas of restricted public access.

The justification for this approach is due to the sensitive nature of the site and the fact that these woodlands represent irreplaceable habitats, the introduction of increased human activity, coupled with the domestication and urbanisation of the surrounding fields, may place these areas under threat.

A local example would be Pond Farm Gill, situated within the centre of Southwater, where since its enclosure following surrounding development of the area from the 1990s onwards, the overall condition of the woodland has significantly deteriorated as a result of the increase in human activity. Given the evident risks associated with intensified use of such sites following nearby new development, appropriate safeguards must be put in place to minimise threats to the Ancient woodland within the site post-development.

Veteran Trees observations

The site supports a notable number of veteran trees, 14 have been recorded at the; they are mostly Oak, and a single Ash. These trees are of significant ecological and landscape value and have been correctly identified as irreplaceable features. Root Protection Areas (RPAs) / VT Buffer Zones, for the veteran trees have been calculated in accordance with Natural England Standing Advice, resulting in larger RPAs than would be derived using BS-5837 alone, which is capped at 15m whereas the RPAs of veteran trees are not, which affords them greater degree of protection.

The veteran trees recorded in the AIA are:

(Christ's Hospital Site)

1. T9 Ash - Christ's Hospital Car Park location indicated on the illustrative layout drawing (no. UK0043490.9681-WSP-XX-XX-DR-TP-0110) - Tree with hollow, fungal fruiting bodies within hollow and on branches, ground compaction, lichen, moss, large trunk wound, water shoots with some ash dieback, historic damage, significant dead wood

(Southwater site)

2. T55 Oak - Basal cavities, fungal fruiting bodies between buttress roots, trunk decay, significant dead wood.
3. T57 Oak - Large trunk wound/hollow/lost leader - lightning strike, brown rot.
4. T59 Oak - Old pollard at 3m, ivy clad, dead wood.
5. T65 Oak - Fungal fruiting bodies at base, ivy clad, epicormic growth, old pollard at 2m, historic damage, dead wood.
6. T72 Oak - Large old pruning wound with exposed heartwood, significant dead wood, historic damage, restricted access.
7. T79 Oak - Branch cavities, dead wood.
8. T80 Oak - Desiccated fungal fruiting bodies at base, buttress root damage, old pollard, dead wood, branch cavity.
9. T84 Oak - Buttress root damage, historic damage, stag heading.
10. T94 Oak - Large trunk wound with exposed heartwood, significant historic storm damage, cavities.
11. T95 Oak - Basal cavity, trunk cavities, dead wood.
12. T96 Oak - Off site, old pollard at 3m, dead wood
13. T99 Oak - Ivy, old pollard at 2m, stem wound with exposed heartwood, significant dead wood.
14. T116 Oak - Twin stem, trunk cavity, historic damage, dead wood.

The layout as currently set out places the veteran trees within areas of public open space rather than within private domestic gardens. This is a positive and sensible approach, which should reduce the risk of future pressure for pruning or removal due to shading, nuisance or perceived risk.

The long-term management of veteran trees is proposed to be secured through a dedicated Veteran Tree Management Strategy; this will need to be secured by condition. This is important, because it is widely recognised that veteran trees retained within development sites are particularly vulnerable to post-development pressures and can be susceptible to rapid physiological decline resulting from a range of factors associated with changes to their environment. These include soil compaction, alterations to ground levels and drainage, increased human activity, and heightened scrutiny related to perceived safety risks. Such pressures can accelerate deterioration and undermine both the ecological and heritage value of these trees.

Should the development proceed, all veteran tree buffer zones should be clearly defined and protected, for example through post-and-rail fencing around the edge of the buffers in order to restrict access and prevent soil compaction, in accordance with current guidance. All the veteran tree buffer zones **MUST NOT** be treated as amenity or recreational space and should be maintained in perpetuity.

Interpretive signage should also be installed at appropriate locations to explain the purpose of the buffer zones. This would also assist in addressing duty-of-care considerations under the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984, particularly in relation to future residents' perceptions of risk associated with large veteran trees.

Root Protection Areas and Layout Relationships Observations

The overall site layout as set out in the indicative layout plans, appears to reasonably favourable towards the mature trees that currently border the fields within the site. The service roads for the proposed dwellings are mostly shown to be located around the edge of the fields, the new homes and, more importantly, their rear gardens are for the most part sited in a central location away from any retained trees. This layout would in theory reduce the threat of post-development pressure to have the trees at the site heavily pruned or possibly removed due to concerns with their proximity to the dwellings post-development.

However, one observation with the site layout and the impact this may have on off-site trees is with the line of dwellings in the north of the site to the west of New Road, and the property Willow Croft. Due to the line of mature trees in this area and the orientation of the dwellings as proposed (east to west) and their gardens, future residents will have concerns with shade cast by the trees over the gardens and rear of the properties, as well as general tree-related detritus. I recommend that consideration is given to creating a 3m to 4m wide buffer between the end of the rear gardens and the trees on the eastern boundary in this area.

If the scheme is approved, at the reserved matters stage, any proposal to locate built development or associated infrastructure such as underground services within the RPA of a retained tree should be regarded as an exceptional measure and would require clear and robust arboricultural justification. This should be supported by detailed evidence demonstrating that no reasonable alternative layout solutions exist and that the long-term health, stability and amenity value of the tree would not be compromised. Given the greenfield nature of the site, where layout flexibility is inherently greater, the threshold

for such justification would be high, and development within RPAs should only be contemplated where it can be demonstrably shown to be unavoidable and fully compliant with BS 5837 principles.

Furthermore, having regard to the underlying soil conditions associated with the Low Weald (clay soil), which may be susceptible to post-development shrink-swell behaviour, careful consideration should be given to the potential for future subsidence risk where trees are retained near new structures. This reinforces the importance of early and ongoing arboricultural input to inform site layout, foundation design and species selection for new tree planting; this would help to ensure long-term compatibility between any newly planted and retained trees and the proposed development.

Mitigation, Planting and Management Observations

The proposals include extensive new tree and hedgerow planting, together with the provision of large areas of public open space. The scale of proposed planting is significant and, over time, will help to reinforce landscape structure, improve species and age diversity and offset the limited tree losses associated with the development.

I note that long term management of trees and landscaped areas is proposed to be secured through a management company and Landscape and Ecological Management Plans. This is appropriate given the scale of the site and the presence of veteran trees and woodland.

ANY RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: Yes - If minded to approve or recommend approval - 3.9 AMS Standard Condition and a bespoke Veteran Tree Management Plan (VTMP) & Supervision and Monitoring Plan conditions.

3.9 Arboricultural Method Statement – Protection details required

Pre-Commencement Condition: No development shall commence, including demolition pursuant to the permission granted, ground clearance, or bringing equipment, machinery or materials onto the site, until an Arboricultural Method Statement detailing all trees/hedgerows on site and adjacent to the site to be retained during construction works, and measures to provide for their protection throughout all construction works, has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The development shall be implemented and thereafter carried out at all times strictly in accordance with the agreed details.

Any trees or hedges on the site which die or become damaged during the construction process shall be replaced with trees or hedging plants of a type, size and in positions agreed by the Local Planning Authority.

Reason: As this matter is fundamental to ensure the successful and satisfactory protection of important trees and hedgerows on the site in accordance with Policy 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

Pre-Commencement Condition: no development shall commence until an Arboricultural Supervision and Monitoring Plan has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

- i. The Plan shall include but not be limited to the name and qualifications of the appointed Arboriculturist, define the scope of supervision (including works within or near Root Protection Areas), and set out a schedule of inspections (pre-

commencement, key stages, ongoing monitoring, and post-construction) with procedures for addressing non-compliance.

- ii. The appointed Arboriculturist shall undertake the approved supervision and submit written reports to the LPA within 20 working days of each visit. Development shall be carried out in accordance with the approved Plan and any agreed remedial measures.

This condition shall only be discharged following completion of the development and submission of satisfactory evidence of monitoring and compliance.

Reason: To ensure the protection and retention of important trees and hedgerows in the interests of amenity, biodiversity, and environmental sustainability, in accordance with Policy 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

Veteran Tree Management Plan (VTMP)

Regulatory Condition: No occupation of the development hereby permitted shall take place until a Veteran Tree Management Plan (VTMP) has been submitted to and approved in writing by the Local Planning Authority. The approved VTMP shall be implemented in full prior to first occupation and thereafter retained and managed for the lifetime of the development.

- i. The VTMP shall provide for the retention of all veteran trees and identify minimum buffer zones in accordance with current best practice. These buffer zones shall be permanently protected by post-and-rail fencing or other approved means and excluded from public access. No amenity or recreational use, paths, seating, play equipment, lighting, or other infrastructure shall be permitted within the buffer zones unless otherwise approved in writing.
- ii. The VTMP shall include details of interpretive signage and long-term management, inspection, and maintenance of fencing and signage.

Reason: To safeguard the long-term health, setting, and ecological value of veteran trees, in accordance with Policy 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework and paragraph 193c of the NPPF 2024.

NAME:	Andy Bush Arboricultural officer (Planning)
DEPARTMENT:	STRATEGIC PLANNING - SPECIALISTS
DATE:	17/04/26