Horsham District Council

DELEGATED APPLICATIONS - ASSESSMENT SHEET

APPLICATION NO./ADDRESS:
DC/24/1534
Huddlestone Farm, Horsham Road, Steyning, West Sussex, BN44 3AD

DESCRIPTION:
Creation of an access track.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

None

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The site encompasses approximately 0.19 hectares of land and is situated roughly 300 meters north of Huddlestone Farm. It forms part of a larger agricultural holding primarily used for grazing. A portion of the site is currently utilized as an access track for farm vehicles associated with Huddlestone Farm. The site is predominantly rural in character and closely associated with the operations of an active dairy farm.

Horsham Road (B2135) lies immediately to the west, while the town of Steyning is located further south. The surrounding landscape consists of extensive farmland, used for arable cultivation or livestock grazing, with fields delineated by a network of hedgerows and mature trees. To the east of the site lies Huddlestone Wood, enhancing the rural setting.

The site is not subject to any statutory or non-statutory designations or protections related to biodiversity, landscape, or cultural heritage. It is entirely within Flood Zone 1 and does not contain any heritage assets. The closest listed buildings are '1 and 2 Huddlestone Farmhouse' (Grade II), situated approximately 200 meters south of the site at their nearest point.

Additionally, part of the site, as identified in the accompanying plan, benefits from planning permission for a construction access track associated with the approved Adur Valley Solar Farm (DC/22/0100).

DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICATION

Creation of an access track. The proposed access track forms approximately 400m, the access track is to form an alternative route into the solar farm, which was previously permitted by Horsham District Council, as part of a solar farm with associated infrastructure (DC/22/0100). This application sets out an alternative access route to the Solar Farm; it will facilitate the construction of the project using an existing farm access track, thereby minimising the land removed from active agricultural use.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES
The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Horsham District Planning Framework (2015):
Policy 1 - Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development

Policy 2 - Strategic Policy: Strategic Development
Policy 30 – Protected Landscapes
Policy 31 - Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
Policy 33 - Development Principles
Policy 34 - Cultural and Heritage Assets
Policy 35 - Strategic Policy: Climate Change
Policy 36 - Strategic Policy: Appropriate Energy Use
Policy 37 - Sustainable Construction
Policy 38 - Strategic Policy: Flooding

Horsham District Local Plan (2023-40) (Regulation 19):
Strategic Policy 1: Sustainable Development
Strategic Policy 6: Climate Change
Strategic Policy 7: Appropriate Energy Use
Strategic Policy 8: Sustainable Design and Construction
Strategic Policy 10: Flooding
Strategic Policy 13: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
Strategic Policy 14: Countryside Protection
Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
Strategic Policy 19: Development Quality
Strategic Policy 20: Development Principles
Policy 21: Heritage Assets and Managing Change within the Historic Environment

Supplementary Planning Guidance:
Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing SPD (2017)
Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule (2017)

Parish Design Statement:
Policy SNDP1 – Green Infrastructure & Biodiversity
Policy SNDP2 – Responsible Environmental Design
Policy SNDP3 – Contribution to Character

Planning Advice Notes:
Facilitating Appropriate Development

REPRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES
Where consultation responses have been summarised, it should be noted that Officers have had consideration of the full comments received, which are available to view on the public file at www.horsham.gov.uk

Consultations:

HDC Tree Officer: No Objection - The proposed new section of upgraded access track is partially located within the minimum recommended 15-meter buffer zone of Huddlestone Ancient Woodland. While this is typically a concern, the site's existing characteristics suggest that direct impacts on the roots of boundary trees are unlikely due to the presence of a ditch that limits rooting activity along the woodland perimeter. However, no tree survey or arboricultural impact assessment has been submitted, which limits a thorough evaluation of potential impacts on other scattered mature trees along the proposed route.

To minimize environmental impacts on sensitive rooting areas, a revised engineering specification using a permeable stone-filled web is recommended. This approach would protect the rooting environment of affected trees. The mature oak at Nutwood House is sufficiently distant from the proposed works and is not expected to be adversely impacted. Efforts should be made to maintain or create a semi-natural habitat buffer between the development and the ancient woodland where possible.

West Sussex Highway Authority: No Objection - In summary, the LHA does not consider that this proposal would have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or result in 'severe' cumulative impacts on the operation of the highway network, therefore is not contrary to the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 116), and that there are no transport grounds to resist the proposal.

Place Services: No Objection - The ecological reports submitted by the applicant, including the Precautionary Method Statement for Amphibians and Reptiles, Biodiversity and Ecology Management Plan (both December 2024), and the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (July 2024), have been reviewed in relation to the potential impacts on designated sites, protected species, Priority habitats, and the proposed mitigation measures. It is noted that there are no buildings on-site, and all trees will be retained; therefore, no further bat surveys are required. The site does provide suitable habitat for reptiles, including grass verges, hedgerows, and woodland edges. The implementation of the Precautionary Method Statement is supported and should be secured by condition to mitigate impacts on amphibians and reptiles.

There is sufficient ecological information to determine the application, with the mitigation measures identified ensuring the conservation and enhancement of protected species and habitats. While comments on Great Crested Newts fall under the remit of the NatureSpace Partnership, the biodiversity enhancements proposed under the Biodiversity and Ecology Management Plan are supported and should be secured through conditions. A separate Biodiversity Enhancement Layout, detailing enhancement locations, is recommended to ensure compliance with the LPA's statutory duties, including the biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 and the delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain. Subject to these measures, the proposal is deemed acceptable in terms of ecological impacts.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS:

Representations:
Two neighbours have raised objections regarding the proposed development. Concerns over highway access and parking highlight the poor visibility at the proposed access point on the brow of the B2135, particularly southward, near the entrance to Old Calcot Farmhouse. Neighbours request assurances that the access road will be removed upon project completion and question why the existing substantial road to Huddlestone Farm, already accommodating articulated lorries, cannot be utilized instead.

Further objections relate to loss of general amenity, including increased parking demand, noise, and disturbance, as well as privacy, light, and noise impacts, particularly for properties near the site. There is also concern over the potential removal of trees and low-lying vegetation near the B2135 to improve visibility lines, which could exacerbate these impacts. Neighbours stress that these issues must be addressed as the project progresses.

Lastly, comments on design question the suitability of the proposed access route and suggest alternative measures to reduce the impact on local residents and the surrounding environment.

Parish Comments:
Steyning Parish Council: Objection - On the basis that the concerns raised by the representation letter by Nutwood House and lack of clarity of the proposed access road changes.

Member Comments:
None received

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY:

The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the same Act, which sets out their rights in respect to private and family life and for the home. Officers consider that the proposal would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles.

The application has also been considered in accordance with Horsham District Council's public sector equality duty, which seeks to prevent unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people in a diverse community, in accordance with Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. In this case, the proposal is not anticipated to have any potential impact from an equality perspective.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development:

The proposed development involves the installation of approximately 400 meters of access track to provide an alternative route to the previously approved solar farm (DC/22/0100). This track will utilize an existing farm access route, minimizing the loss of active agricultural land. The development is directly linked to the solar farm's implementation and aligns with the planning permission granted under DC/22/0100. The access track will be constructed to the same specifications and methodology as the previously approved track, ensuring consistency in design and approach.

The proposal is temporary and fully reversible, with no anticipated harm to the countryside's key characteristics. The principle of development is acceptable, subject to conditions consistent. Environmental considerations, including ecological surveys, confirm that the development will avoid impacts on designated sites, mature trees, and ancient woodland, with buffer zones and precautionary measures in place to protect habitats and species. The planning statement details the construction phase which states adhering to best practices, including pre-works checks and protective measures for nearby habitats.

Given its limited environmental and amenity impacts, the development supports the implementation of the solar farm while ensuring compliance with relevant policies and safeguarding the surrounding natural environment.

Design and Appearance:

The proposed design and layout of the access track have been carefully considered to align with Policies 25, 32, and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF). These policies prioritize high-quality design that respects and enhances the character, distinctiveness, and natural landscape of the site and its surroundings.

The application proposes the installation of a 400m access track as an alternative route to the previously approved solar farm (DC/22/0100). This alternative route utilizes an existing farm access track, minimizing the need for land removal from active agricultural use. The track will be constructed using the same specification and methodology as the access route approved under the earlier application, ensuring consistency with prior permissions. The design incorporates a permeable surface to reduce environmental impact and blends with the rural setting, preserving the site's agricultural character.

The proposed development is temporary and fully reversible, ensuring that it will not result in permanent changes to the landscape. By utilizing the existing farm track and maintaining much of the site’s natural frontage, the visual impact on the locality will be minimal. The scheme has been designed to avoid harm to key features of the countryside, including mature trees, hedgerows, and habitat connectivity. The careful siting of the access track within the existing plot ensures that the works do not detract from the visual amenities of the area or disrupt the wider rural character.

In summary, the proposed design is sensitive to the surrounding context, preserves the visual integrity of the site, and complies with relevant local planning policies, ensuring the development integrates seamlessly with its environment.

Amenity Impact:

Policy 33(2) of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) seeks to ensure that developments do not cause unacceptable harm to the amenity of nearby occupiers and users of surrounding land. In considering the proposed dog exercising field, it is important to acknowledge the concerns raised by neighbours, particularly in relation to privacy, noise, and the potential for overdevelopment.

The proposed access track is approximately 300 meters north of Huddlestone Farm, located within a rural, agricultural setting. Concerns about noise and disturbance from increased traffic have been addressed, as the track is intended solely to support the temporary construction phase of the approved solar farm (DC/22/0100). The track is not proposed for permanent or high-frequency use. Furthermore, the proposed route minimizes disruption by utilizing an existing farm access alignment, which already accommodates similar vehicular movements.

Noise impacts during construction are expected to be limited and temporary, with works confined to standard working hours. Best practices, including dust suppression and limiting heavy vehicle movements to daylight hours, will further mitigate disruption. These measures ensure that any inconvenience to neighbouring properties will be minimal and short-lived.

In terms of privacy and light, the proposed access track is sufficiently distant from the nearest residential properties, including Nutwood House, to avoid direct impacts. No lighting is proposed along the track, preserving the rural character of the area and preventing light pollution. Additionally, existing hedgerows and vegetation along the site boundaries will be retained, helping to screen the development from view and mitigating potential visual impacts.

Concerns about highway safety at the junction with the B2135 have also been considered. The Local Highway Authority (LHA) has raised no objections to the proposal, confirming that visibility splays meet required safety standards. Importantly, the track's temporary nature ensures that it will be removed, and the site restored upon completion of the solar farm project.

With regard to vegetation, neighbours raised concerns about potential tree removal near the B2135. The Tree Officer has confirmed that the mature oak at Nutwood House will not be affected and impacts on other trees can be mitigated through permeable construction techniques. To further safeguard existing vegetation, a condition requiring a tree protection plan is recommended.

Overall, the proposal has been designed to minimize impacts on residential amenity while facilitating the delivery of essential infrastructure for the solar farm. Temporary impacts during construction are considered acceptable, subject to mitigation measures, and the proposal complies with relevant policies of the HDPF.

Highways Impacts:

West Sussex County Council (WSCC), in its role as Local Highway Authority (LHA), was reconsulted by the Local Planning Authority (LPA) after the applicant submitted additional documents. The LHA had previously requested visibility splay diagrams, which the applicant has now provided. These diagrams show visibility splays of 2.4m x 215m to the north and 2.4m x 91m to the south for the access point on Horsham Road. The access point was also assessed as part of the previous application for the solar farm (DC/22/0100) and approved for construction traffic. Given that the proposed access for this application is similar to the previously approved arrangement, the LHA raised no concerns. The LHA concluded that the proposal would not have an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the operation of the highway network and is in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), specifically paragraph 116. Therefore, there are no transport grounds to resist the proposal. Should the LPA approve the application, the LHA recommends the imposition of certain conditions and informative.

Ecology:

The ecological reports submitted by the applicant, including the Precautionary Method Statement for Amphibians and Reptiles, Biodiversity and Ecology Management Plan (both December 2024), and the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (July 2024), have been reviewed in relation to the potential impacts on designated sites, protected species, Priority habitats, and the proposed mitigation measures. It is noted

that there are no buildings on-site, and all trees will be retained; therefore, no further bat surveys are required. The site does provide suitable habitat for reptiles, including grass verges, hedgerows, and woodland edges. The implementation of the Precautionary Method Statement is supported and should be secured by condition to mitigate impacts on amphibians and reptiles.

There is sufficient ecological information to determine the application, with the mitigation measures identified ensuring the conservation and enhancement of protected species and habitats. While comments on Great Crested Newts fall under the remit of the NatureSpace Partnership, the biodiversity enhancements proposed under the Biodiversity and Ecology Management Plan are supported and should be secured through conditions. A separate Biodiversity Enhancement Layout, detailing enhancement locations, is recommended to ensure compliance with the LPA's statutory duties, including the biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 and the delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain. Subject to these measures, the proposal is deemed acceptable in terms of ecological impacts.

Water Neutrality:

The application site falls within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone as defined by Natural England which draws its water supply from groundwater abstraction at Hardham. Natural England has issued a Position Statement for applications within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone which states that it cannot be concluded with the required degree of certainty that new development in this zone would not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Arun Valley SAC, SPA and Ramsar sites.

Natural England advises that plans and projects affecting sites where an existing adverse effect is known will be required to demonstrate, with sufficient certainty, that they will not contribute further to an existing adverse effect. The received advice note advises that the matter of water neutrality should be addressed in assessments to agree and ensure that water use is offset for all new developments within the Sussex North Water Supply Zone.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021) mandates that every development must achieve at least a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG (unless the development qualifies as exempt under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024) and that every planning permission granted for the development of land in England shall be deemed to have been granted subject to the condition that development must not be begun unless a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority and the planning authority has approved the Plan.

The Biodiversity Gain Plan must show how the development will achieve the required minimum 10% BNG using the statutory biodiversity metric tool, and must demonstrate how the habitats will be managed and maintained for 30 years, starting from the date the development is completed. Any off-site gains and significant on-site enhancements will be secured over this period by way of a Legal Agreement.

The Applicant has submitted a Biodiversity Metric which demonstrates a 10.21% net gain in habitat units and -3.06 in watercourse units is achievable by way of onsite biodiversity gains as well as the purchase of statutory biodiversity credits from the Environment Bank. A legal agreement is not required to secure the maintenance and monitoring of the gains for the required 30 years, maintenance and monitoring will be secured by way of informative.

Conclusions:

The proposed installation of a 400-metre access track to facilitate the construction of the approved solar farm (DC/22/0100) has been carefully considered and is deemed to be acceptable under relevant planning policies. The development minimizes the impact on active agricultural land by utilizing an existing farm access route, ensuring that the visual and environmental effects are minimal and reversible. The design of the access track adheres to high-quality standards, maintaining the rural character of the site and its surroundings.

With a temporary and reversible nature, the proposal avoids long-term environmental harm and addresses key concerns such as noise, privacy, and traffic safety. The proposed construction measures, including the protection of vegetation and mitigation of potential ecological impacts, ensure that the development will not compromise the amenity of nearby residents or the surrounding natural environment. Furthermore, the Local Highway Authority has confirmed that the proposal will not result in adverse impacts on highway safety.

Ecologically, the development aligns with policies for biodiversity enhancement, ensuring compliance with relevant statutory duties, and proposes measures to achieve a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of 10.21%. The mitigation and monitoring measures, along with the implementation of a Precautionary Method Statement for protected species, demonstrate a commitment to safeguarding local wildlife habitats.

In terms of water neutrality, the applicant has taken the necessary steps to address potential concerns, and the proposed development ensures compliance with both environmental and water management requirements.

Overall, the proposal represents would not adversely impact on the landscape, residential amenity, and the local ecology. The temporary nature of the access track, combined with the proposed mitigation measures, ensures that the development is consistent with both local planning policies and sustainability goals.

Recommendation: Application Permitted

Conditions:

2 **Standard Time Condition**: The development hereby permitted shall begin before the expiration of three years from the date of this permission.

Reason: To comply with Section 91 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990.

3 **Pre-commencement (Slab Level) Condition**: A Biodiversity Enhancement Layout for biodiversity enhancements listed in the Ecological Appraisal (Deepdene Ecology Ltd., July 2024)) shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the local planning authority.

The content of the Biodiversity Enhancement Layout shall include the following:
A) detailed designs or product descriptions for biodiversity enhancements; and
b) locations, orientations and heights for biodiversity enhancements on appropriate drawings.

The enhancement measures shall be implemented in accordance with the approved details prior to occupation and all features shall be retained in that manner thereafter.

Reason: To enhance protected and Priority species & habitats and allow the Local Planning Authority to discharge its duties under paragraph 187d of the NPPF 2024 and s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (as amended) and Policy 31 of the Horsham Development Framework.

4 **Pre-occupation Condition**: No development shall commence until such time as the vehicular access serving the development has been constructed in accordance with the details shown on the drawing titled "Proposed Site Access Arrangement" and numbered "SK01, Rev. A".

Reason: Reason: To ensure safe and suitable access to the site for all users, maintain highway safety, and facilitate the efficient operation of the development, in accordance with Policy 40 and 41 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

5 **Regulatory Condition**: All mitigation and enhancement measures and/or works shall be carried out in accordance with the details contained in the Precautionary Method Statement for

Amphibians and Reptiles (The Ecology Co-op, December 2024), Biodiversity and Ecology Management Plan (The Ecology Co-op, December 2024) and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (The Ecology Co-op, July 2024) as already submitted with the planning application and agreed in principle with the local planning authority prior to determination.

This will include the appointment of an appropriately competent person e.g. an ecological clerk of works (ECoW) to provide on-site ecological expertise during construction. The appointed person shall undertake all activities, and works shall be carried out, in accordance with the approved details.

Reason: To conserve and enhance protected and Priority species and allow the Local Planning Authority to discharge its duties under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended and s40 of the NERC Act 2006 (as amended) and Policy 31 of the Horsham Development Framework.

6 **Regulatory Condition**: The materials to be used in the development hereby permitted shall strictly accord with those indicated on the application form and approved plans.

Reason: To enable the Local Planning Authority to control the development in detail in the interests of visual amenity and in accordance with Policy 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

NOTE TO APPLICANT

Works within the Highway - Implementation Team

The applicant is required to obtain all appropriate consents from West Sussex County Council, as Highway Authority, to cover the off-site highway works. The applicant is requested to contact The Implementation Team Leader (01243 642105) to commence this process. The applicant is advised that it is an offence to undertake any works within the highway prior to the agreement being in place.

NOTE TO APPLICANT

Biodiversity Net Gain Condition
Paragraph 13 of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 states that planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to the "biodiversity gain condition" which means development granted by this notice must not begin unless:

(a) a Biodiversity Gain Plan has been submitted to the planning authority, and
(b) the planning authority has approved the plan.

The planning authority, for the purposes of determining whether to approve a Biodiversity Gain Plan if one is required in respect of this permission is Horsham District Council.

This permission will require the submission and approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan before development is begun.

For guidance on the contents of the Biodiversity Gain Plan that must be submitted and agreed by the Council prior to the commencement of the consented development please see the link: Submit a biodiversity gain plan - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

Statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements
There are statutory exemptions and transitional arrangements which mean that the biodiversity gain condition does not always apply. These can be found at Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 74-003-20240214 of the Planning Practice Guidance, which can be found at https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain.

Irreplaceable habitat
If the onsite habitat includes irreplaceable habitat (within the meaning of the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat Regulations 2024) there are additional requirements for the content and approval of Biodiversity Gain Plans.

POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE STATEMENT
Statement pursuant to Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received, in order to be able to, where possible, grant permission.

Plans list for: DC/24/1534
Schedule of plans/documents **approved**:

Plan Type	**Description**	**Drawing Number**	**Received Date**
Details plan	Visibility Splay	SK01 REV A	27.11.2024
Supporting Statement	Planning	P1-01-PSS	02.10.2024
Plans	Internal Access Road Detail	AV5.0 REV 01	02.10.2024
Location plan		BY-01-P23 REV 02	02.10.2024
Supporting Docs	Preliminary Ecological Appraisal	P6603	19.03.2025
Supporting Docs	BNG Metric	NONE	19.03.2025
Supporting Docs	Biodiversity Impact Calculation Report	NONE	19.03.2025

DELEGATED

Case Officer sign/initial Shazia Penne Date: 10.04.2025

Authorising Officer sign/initial RHERMITAGE Date: 29.04.2025