

Objection to Planning Application DC/26/0934

Impacted property: The Old Bakery, Henfield Road, Cowfold, West Sussex, RH138DR

Re: Demolition of existing vacant storage buildings and erection of 9 residential units, provision of open space and retention of pond

I wish to register a strong objection to Planning Application **DC/26/0934**.

My objections are set out below:

1. Highway and pedestrian safety
2. Drainage and flood risk
3. The impact of proposed Plot 8 (and to a lesser extent Plot 9) on The Old Bakery and other adjoining properties
4. Landscape character and environmental impact

I recognise the need for appropriate housing development, however, I believe this proposal would result in unacceptable impacts which have not been adequately addressed. Furthermore it is outside the Neighbourhood Plan which has already agreed new housing provision in the village and which has been supported by a majority of residents.

1. Highway and Pedestrian Safety

My principal concern is the safety of the proposed access onto the A281.

The access is narrow and visibility is restricted. Vehicles exiting the site already have difficulty obtaining a clear view of approaching traffic. Visibility is affected by hedging to one side and by the commercial vehicle premises (SMG) and associated vehicle display on the other. This is further compounded by the number of vehicles that are parked on the road outside these premises and the fact that cars driving south are invariably on the wrong side of the road due to cars parked in the Henfield Road including in front of the Public House

The entrance is also close to, and opposite, other access points including Eastman's Lane, creating an awkward and potentially hazardous junction arrangement on an already busy road.

The proposed development will increase the number of vehicle movements using this restricted access. In addition, there appears to be inadequate provision for pedestrians. This is particularly concerning given that the development is intended to provide family housing and that pedestrians, including families with children, already use this area to access facilities within Cowfold.

I understand that the number of houses on the Summer Meadows development which shares the access road to Watermeadow was restricted to 8 houses due to access concerns.

The safety issue cannot be considered in isolation.

There are other proposed developments in the southern part of Cowfold, including DC/26/0913 for 40 houses, DC/26/0472 for 9 houses and I understand a further proposed small development in the land south of the SMG garage.

These developments all place additional pressure on the same section of the A281. Their access points are relatively close together and, in a number of cases, involve narrow access roads and restricted visibility.

The cumulative effect of these developments must therefore be properly assessed. It would be inappropriate to assess each application independently when the combined result will be substantially increased traffic movements, multiple access points and increased pedestrian activity on an already busy and constrained section of road.

I believe that the proposed access, particularly when considered alongside the cumulative impact of other development proposals, represents an unacceptable highway and pedestrian safety concern.

2. Drainage and Flood Risk

Drainage is also a major concern. The application acknowledges that the site contains heavy clay soils with limited capacity to absorb water. The proposed development will increase the amount of roofs and other hard surfaces and will therefore generate additional surface water run-off.

The applicant acknowledges that this additional water cannot simply be absorbed into the ground and will need to be accommodated by drainage infrastructure.

However, there are longstanding concerns regarding flooding and drainage capacity in this part of Cowfold. Local residents have experienced surface water problems, and drains in the lower part of the village have been known to overflow.

The existing drainage system is already under pressure. Before planning permission can properly be granted, there must be clear and convincing evidence that the additional surface water generated by this development can be safely accommodated without increasing flood risk to existing properties or elsewhere within the village.

I note that Southern Water has confirmed that the proposed surface-water disposal arrangements have not yet been provided and there is a need to demonstrate that an appropriate surface-water drainage solution is technically feasible, has adequate capacity and will not increase drainage or flood risk to neighbouring properties.

This assessment must also take account of the cumulative impact of the other proposed developments in the area.

Therefore I believe that a detailed and deliverable drainage strategy should first demonstrate:

- that the existing drainage infrastructure has sufficient capacity;
- that the development will not increase flood risk to neighbouring properties;
- that the cumulative impact of other proposed developments has been considered;
- that appropriate provision has been made for increasingly frequent severe rainfall events; and
- that the long-term maintenance and responsibility for the drainage system is clearly established.

The proposed development should not be permitted to increase the burden on an already constrained drainage system without clear evidence that the additional run-off can be safely managed.

3. Particular Impact on Old Bakery and Proposed Plot 8 (and to a lesser extent Plot 9)

I am particularly concerned about the impact of proposed Plot 8 which is located behind my property, The Old Bakery, and to a lesser extent Plot 9 which will have a bigger impact on my neighbours to the North

The Old Bakery has a highly unusual and restricted rear amenity area. The property has only a 7.25-foot patio at the rear, rather than a conventional rear garden.

Beyond the patio is a 6-foot boundary fence, which I am required to maintain under an existing covenant.

The very limited size of the rear patio has historically been mitigated by the property's open outlook towards the existing rural woodland and landscape beyond. This open and rural aspect provides an important sense of light, openness and amenity to a property which otherwise has virtually no rear garden.

The proposed development will fundamentally change this.

Instead of looking towards a rural woodland setting, The Old Bakery's aspect will look towards a new residential property, proposed Plot 8, and its associated domestic garden and activity.

This represents a particularly significant loss of amenity because The Old Bakery has no substantial rear garden to compensate for the loss of its existing outlook.

The impact should not simply be assessed in terms of the new house itself. There is also a serious concern regarding the future use of the garden and land associated with Plot 8.

Without appropriate long-term protection, future owners could erect sheds, outbuildings, pergolas, gazebos, play equipment or other structures, either permanent or temporary. Trees, hedges and shrubs could also be planted and allowed to grow substantially above the height of the existing 6-foot boundary fence.

This could result in a further loss of daylight and openness to the rear of The Old Bakery and create an oppressive and enclosed environment.

Protection of The Old Bakery

If the Council is minded to approve the development, I strongly request that appropriate and legally enforceable protection is secured for the benefit of The Old Bakery.

In particular, consideration should be given to a planning condition or other appropriate legal mechanism which is binding on future owners of Plot 8 and which provides for:

- no permanent or temporary structures within an agreed area adjoining the boundary with The Old Bakery above an agreed maximum height;
- specific control over sheds, outbuildings, pergolas, gazebos, raised structures and other garden buildings;

- a detailed landscaping scheme which specifically considers the impact on daylight, sunlight and residential amenity at Old Bakery;
- appropriate control and long-term maintenance of trees, hedges and shrubs adjoining The Old Bakery; and
- the retention and proper maintenance of suitable boundary treatment.

I appreciate that a blanket restriction on all planting above a particular height may not be appropriate. However, the exceptional circumstances of The Old Bakery should be recognised.

The property has only a 7.25-foot rear patio, and the loss of its existing rural outlook is therefore disproportionately significant.

The Council should ensure that the impact of Plot 8 includes not only the proposed building itself but also the likely long-term effect of the domestic garden, planting and structures associated with that property.

If adequate and permanent protection of residential amenity cannot be secured, I believe the impact of Plot 8 on The Old Bakery would be unacceptable.

4. Landscape Character and Environmental Impact

Relevant landscape guidance seeks to conserve the rural and undeveloped character of the area, protect hedgerows and woodland, and ensure that development responds appropriately to the historic settlement pattern.

I do not believe that the current proposal adequately achieves these objectives.

The development will introduce additional houses, roads, hard surfaces, gardens, vehicles and domestic lighting into an area which currently makes an important contribution to the rural character of this part of Cowfold.

There are also significant concerns regarding the loss or reduction of mature trees, hedgerows, scrubland and woodland habitat.

The application refers to ecological mitigation and enhancement. However, replacement planting cannot provide an immediate substitute for established mature trees and existing habitat.

This is particularly important in the context of comments made by Horsham Planning Officers in relation to other applications. Those comments identify potential adverse effects of development on mature and veteran trees, including:

- damage to roots and soils;
- soil compaction;
- changes to drainage and water levels;
- damage to habitat connections;
- increased light and noise pollution;
- increased disturbance to wildlife; and
- the fragmentation and deterioration of woodland habitat.

These considerations are directly relevant to this application.

The proposed development appears likely to result in many of the types of impact identified by Horsham's own Planning Officers. The introduction of roads and hard surfaces close to retained trees and woodland, together with the removal of existing vegetation and the creation of domestic gardens, has the potential to cause both direct and indirect environmental damage.

I am also concerned that the mitigation proposals are described in general terms without sufficient certainty regarding their long-term delivery, funding and management.

The loss of established woodland, hedgerows and mature trees cannot simply be justified by planting replacements which will take many decades to reach comparable ecological and landscape value.

The development would also increase light, noise and domestic activity in an area which currently has a relatively tranquil and rural character.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out above, I respectfully request that Planning Application DC/26/0934 be refused.

My objections are based principally on:

1. Safety:

The narrow and constrained access onto the busy A281, restricted visibility, the impact of the SMG commercial vehicle premises, inadequate pedestrian provision and the cumulative effect of several nearby development proposals.

2. Drainage:

The heavy clay soils, significant additional surface water run-off and the lack of certainty that the existing drainage infrastructure can safely accommodate the development without increasing flood risk.

3. Impact on The Old Bakery and adjoining properties:

The particularly severe impact of proposed Plot 8 (and to a lesser extent Plot 9) on The Old Bakery, which has only a 7.25-foot rear patio and currently relies upon its open rural outlook to provide light, openness and residential amenity.

4. Landscape and Environment:

The loss of rural character, mature trees, hedgerows and established habitat, together with the urbanising effects of additional housing, roads, gardens, vehicles, lighting and domestic activity.

These matters should not be considered individually or in isolation.

In particular, the Council must consider the cumulative impact of multiple developments in the southern part of Cowfold, especially in relation to highway safety, drainage and the gradual urbanisation of this important rural area.

I therefore respectfully urge Horsham District Council to refuse Planning Application DC/26/0934.

If, however, the Council is minded to grant permission, I request that the application is not approved without substantial further assessment and appropriate enforceable measures to protect highway safety, drainage, neighbouring residential amenity and the rural landscape and environment.