



Working together to care for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Horsham District Council

Emailed to

17th July 2026

Dear Mr Holmes

DC/26/0782 Permission in Principle for a minimum and maximum of 7no. dwellings (including 4 flats above replacement garages, 3 dwellings on land off Handford Way, and 2 dwellings to replace an existing summerhouse and garages), and Estate Office extension to create up to 600 sq m of Class E floorspace.)

The Warren Horsham Road Handcross Haywards Heath

Thank you for consulting us on the above application.

In summary, the High Weald National Landscape Unit objects to this proposal on the following grounds:

- **The proposed development would result in the encroachment of residential development into existing woodland, and would urbanise the rural character of the area, having an adverse impact on the landscape character of the HWNL, contrary to objectives S1, W1 and PQ2 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan, such that the proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the HWNL and would therefore be contrary to NPPF para 189.**
- **The application has wholly failed to adhere to the Historic England guidance on Enabling Development, in terms of the prescribed process to be following in submitting such a case, the purpose, eligibility and calculation of works that constitute a 'conservation deficit', and the extent of information to be submitted to support such a case, and therefore the application should not be considered 'Enabling Development' under the specific NPPF definition and Historic England procedure, but rather simply as development considered on its own merits.**

It is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority to decide whether the application meets legislative and policy requirements in respect of National Landscapes (AONBs). Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities to **seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs** in making decisions that affect the designated area.

Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) will normally mean avoiding harm, and conserving and enhancing the character components identified in the AONB Management Plan; supporting the Management Plan Objectives as set out for each of these; and following any Management Plan Actions set out for each.¹²

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF requires that: "Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest

¹ [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)

² [CROW-s.85-duty-guidance-for-LPAs_NLA-Briefing-Nov-24.pdf](#)

One of the National Landscapes family

Anglesey
Arnside and Silverdale
Blackdown Hills
Cannock Chase
Chichester Harbour
Chilterns
Clwydian Range
Cornwall
Cotswolds
Gower
Cranbourne Chase and Dee Valley
West Wiltshire Downs
Dedham Vale
Dorset
East Devon
Forest of Bowland
Howardian Hills
High Weald
Isle of Wight
Isles of Scilly
Kent Downs
Lincolnshire Wolds
Llyn
Malvern Hills
Mendip Hills
Nidderdale
Norfolk Coast
North Devon
North Pennines
North Wessex Downs
Northumberland Coast
Quantock Hills
Shropshire Hills
Solway Coast
South Devon
Suffolk Coast and Heaths
Surrey Hills
Tamar Valley
Wye Valley

status of protection in relation to these issues” and that “the scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited”.

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029](#) is adopted by all the relevant local authorities with land in the High Weald National Landscape as their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it, and is a material consideration for planning applications affecting the HWNL.

Analysis of the Proposal Against the High Weald AONB Management Plan

The Management Plan Statement of Significance defines what makes the High Weald special and identifies the qualities that justify its designation as a nationally important landscape. The High Weald’s natural beauty is described by eight key components of character around which the Management Plan is structured, including Objectives for each component.

Of particular relevance to this proposal are the following Management Plan Objectives:

- Settlement S1: *To protect the historic pattern and character of settlements.*
- Woodland W1: *To maintain and restore the existing extent and pattern of woodland cover and particularly ancient woodland*
- Woodland W2: *To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.*
- Aesthetic & Perceptual Qualities PQ2: *To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.*

Impacts of the proposed residential development on Settlement and Landscape Character

Settlement is one of the eight key defining components of the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape set out in the Management Plan, and objective S1 is underpinned by the following rationale: *To protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.*

Woodland is a further key component set out in the Management Plan, with Objectives supported by Woodland Action ‘e’. *“Recognise the ecological and landscape value of non-designated woodland and trees, and ensure design of new housing development retains existing woodlands, shaws and other trees in and adjacent to schemes, for ecological and landscape character benefits”.*

The application site comprises an area of undeveloped woodland that is rural in character, which forms part of the wider HWNL landscape. The site displays a number of the character components of natural beauty of the HWNL; the site overall is heavily wooded, the bulk being designated as Priority deciduous Woodland under the Natural England Priority Habitats Inventory, while the northern edge of the site is bounded by designated Ancient Woodland (Hyde Gill Ancient replanted Woodland).

An area of the priority deciduous woodland would need to be cleared to make space for each of the three development plots ‘on land off Hanford Way’; this would be contrary to Objective W1 and Woodland Action ‘e. of the HW AONB Management Plan. Meanwhile the two ‘replacement dwellings’ appear to be replacing apartment units lost in the main house through reorganisation and combining of apartments, with one of these being created in a ‘restored’ Edwardian summerhouse (though described in the application description as to ‘replace an existing summerhouse’ – however, as this is a PIP application, no information regarding that restoration and replacement dwelling creation has been submitted.

We consider that the proposed development of the three new dwellings and the ‘replacement dwellings’, by virtue of their location, the clearing of existing woodland, and their introduction of residential curtilages and associated inevitable domestic paraphernalia, would undermine the setting and character of the

locality, encroaching into the undeveloped woodland of the HWNL in this location, which contributes positively to the landscape character and appearance of the HWNL. It is considered the new dwellings would result in an urbanising incursion into the wooded rural landscape, and would erode the aesthetic and perceptual qualities of this part of the HWNL.

It is also noted that this is PIP application, all matters are effectively reserved, and while it is appreciated that details of the layout and appearance would be considered at a subsequent stage, the proposal would inevitably result in the site being changed from woodland to built development, and the harms identified above relate to the principle of residential development of the site. Moreover, the references in the submitted Background to the Project report page 19 (landscape led design) are irrelevant at this stage, as the application is for PIP and thus building design is not before us for consideration at this stage.

For the above reasons, the proposal is therefore considered to be contrary to objectives S1, W1 and PQ2 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan. As such, the development of the site would not conserve or enhance the landscape and scenic beauty of the HWNL and would be contrary to para 189 of the NPPF.

‘Enabling Development’

We note that the applicant makes a number of references in the submitted documents to ‘Enabling development’. However, ‘Enabling Development’ justification is a very specific concept provided for in the NPPF paras 84 and 221, with a procedure set out in detail by Historic England (HE) (link here: [HEAG](#)), for securing the future conservation of a heritage asset (the heritage asset in this case being the late Victorian/Edwardian building that is The Warren) – **not** to cross-fund the various works (such as new garages/stores/parking areas, footpaths, landscaping and interpretation material) listed as ‘public benefits’ in the table on page 6 of the submitted Heritage Project Summary Presentation, a table which entirely misunderstands the HE Enabling Development guidance and procedure.

It is important to note that Enabling Development should be to address the ‘conservation deficit’, not the costs of the works per se – para 9 of the HE Guidance states *‘The case for enabling development rests on there being a conservation deficit. Simply put, this is the amount by which the cost of repair (and conversion to optimum viable use if appropriate) of a heritage asset exceeds its market value on completion of repair or conversion.’*

The HE guidance (summarised in its para 29, and explained in detail in paras 30-80) sets out the scope and extent of information needed both support and the assess cases for Enabling Development, including a clear sequence of: condition survey of the heritage asset in need of conservation repairs, conservation management plan, assessment of costs, assessment of market value of the heritage asset, calculation of the ‘conservation deficit’, and preparation of development appraisal and delivery plan. In particular, the heritage info submitted (normally a Conservation Management Plan) will need to specify and financially quantify the necessary repairs and maintenance of the heritage asset. **None of this information has been submitted in this application.** Para 14 of the HE guidance sets out that the financial information submitted would need to demonstrate that *“The sums of money generated through enabling development are provided to directly solve the conservation needs of the place, The amount of enabling development that can be justified will be the minimum amount necessary in order to address the conservation deficit and to secure the long-term future of the assets.”*

The submitted documents simply include a brief (unspecified and uncoded) reference to the restoring of architectural features in the submitted ‘Background to the Project’ report (p 22), and a somewhat vague and unsubstantiated reference on p26 of the submitted Background report (and on p15 of the submitted ‘Heritage Project Booklet’) that the enabling development would *‘remove up to £200,000 of estimated restoration costs from the management company, and make a significant capital contribution to a Heritage Restoration Fund’*. Page 26 of the submitted Background report goes on to say that *‘The whole of*

the proceeds of the enabling development will be used to complete The Warren Heritage Project – again, the application fails to distinguish between any works (and costs) that are to ‘directly solve the conservation needs of the place’, (i.e. the necessary repairs and maintenance of the heritage asset) and those works (costs) that are attributable to wider estate management / landscape enhancement.

In summary, the application has wholly failed to adhere to the HE guidance in terms of the purpose, eligibility and calculation of works that constitute the ‘conservation deficit’, the prescribed process to be following in submitting such a case, and the extent of information to be submitted to support such a case (including survey, conservation management plan and financial information).

It is therefore recommended that the application should *not* be considered ‘Enabling Development’ under the NPPF and Historic England procedure.

Land Management enhancements and the AONB Management Plan

We note that the application contains a number of references to previous discussions with the High Weald AONB (NL) Unit.

We would take this opportunity to clarify that we, the HWNL unit, have never discussed, nor given any support to, development proposals at this site; in fact we have consistently advised the applicant that any land management advice we offer is given strictly for the purposes of land management only, to support the efforts of landowners, farmers, foresters, and others within the High Weald to conserve and enhance the National Landscape, and does not constitute any endorsement of, or support for, any development proposals, including where these are proposed in order to fund any future land management projects.

It is noted that the application proposes a number of land management enhancements to the site, including woodland management and new planting, and removal of non-native invasive species, along with improved public access, described in the submitted Background to the Project report page 19. However, these mitigation measures are not considered to excuse the identified harms to the natural beauty of the HWNL of the proposed residential development.

Whilst improved land management, public access and new habitat creation is laudable in itself, we do not usually support any argument that improved land management ‘justifies’ or ‘offsets’ any harms to the natural beauty of the HWNL caused by new development (as described earlier in this response), not least since such improved land management, habitat creation etc, is not predicated on, or contingent on, any development proposal (various agri-environmental and other grant schemes are available). the AONB Management Plan clearly sets out in the ‘Land-based economy and rural living’ section, that *“For clarity, the pursuance of the above objectives or actions set out in this section should not harm the other character components or be at the expense of their contribution to the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB”* while the People & Access Principles And Investment Priorities in the Management Plan clarify that *“Pursuance of any of these priorities or actions should not involve harm to any of the character components set out in Part 1 of this Plan.”*

In this regard, we wholly disagree with the applicant’s suggestion, in their submitted ‘NPPF Policy Assessment’ that *‘the result of the Project is an overall net enhancement’* or in their submitted ‘Background to the Project’ report page 50 that *‘the proposals are overall positive for the AONB’* - in this way, the applicant has misinterpreted and misunderstood the HW AONB Management Plan; in assessing impacts of planning proposals on the High Weald National Landscape, such impacts are not subject to any ‘balancing’ exercise – the AONB Management Plan Statement of Significance sets out that *“Each core component of natural beauty is of equal and stand-alone importance in its own right, (i.e., they cannot be ranked) and any policy or action may be considered harmful to the AONB if it results in the loss of, or material harm to, any of these components of character.”*

Ecology

As a PIP application, we have no information submitted with which to consider the impact of development on ecology and habitats of the HWNL, including indirect impacts to the Ancient Woodland to the north of the site, nor the impact local wildlife including protected species such as bats and reptiles. However, the clearing of woodland habitat for new development is in principle inevitably a concern for implications for ecology.

The above comments are advisory and are the professional views of the HWNL Unit's Officers on the potential impacts on the High Weald landscape. They are not necessarily the views of the HWNL Joint Advisory Committee.

Yours sincerely,

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Advising on an outstanding medieval landscape; connecting people, protecting beauty, restoring soils and nature.

Background Information about the High Weald National Landscape (AONB)



N.B. From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is referred to as such in legislation. The statutory purpose “to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape” remains unchanged.

The High Weald was designated in 1983 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is an exceptionally beautiful medieval landscape covering 564 square miles across the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

The High Weald National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership established in 1989 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. The JAC is supported by a small, dedicated staff team, the High Weald NL Unit, which provides advice on how to conserve and enhance the NL. The advice provided by the NL Unit assists public bodies and statutory undertakers to meet their duty as set out in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 **to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs in making decisions that affect it.**

The High Weald NL Unit is not a statutory body but an advisory one. It is not a local planning authority and the responsibility for determining planning applications remains with the 15 local authorities. The HWNL Unit is not a statutory consultee on planning matters and it remains each local planning authority's decision whether or not they seek its advice on a particular planning application.

The scope of the advice in this letter is set by the statutory High Weald [AONB Management Plan](#), which has been adopted by all partner authorities, as ‘their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’.