

ASHINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

CONSULTATION COMMENTS

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Department
SITE ADDRESS:	The Sports Pavilion, Church Lane, Ashington, West Sussex, RH20 3JY
PROPOSAL:	Change of Use of the site to create a small-scale wellness retreat, to provide sauna, cold water therapy and relaxation facilities. Erection of a timber-framed reception/office, changing rooms, a mobile sauna, outdoor showers, two cold plunge pools, timber decking, a timber pergola and associated landscaping.
REFERENCE:	DC/26/1205
RECOMMENDATION:	OBJECTION
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION: Please find below, a consultation response from Ashington Parish Council following discussion of the application at the Ashington Parish Council Planning Committee meeting on 23rd September 2026.	
ANY RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: N/A	
NAME:	Lee English, Clerk to Ashington Parish Council
DATE:	29th September 2026



Ashington Parish Council

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29th September 2026

Submitted by email to planning@horsham.gov.uk

PLANNING APPLICATION DC/26/1205 - FORMAL OBJECTION

The Sports Pavilion, Church Lane, Ashington, RH20 3JY

Change of Use of the site to create a small-scale wellness retreat, to provide sauna, cold water therapy and relaxation facilities. Erection of a timber-framed reception/office, changing rooms, a mobile sauna, outdoor showers, two cold plunge pools, timber decking, a timber pergola and associated landscaping

Dear Planning Officer,

Ashington Parish Council OBJECTS to planning application DC/26/1206

The Council recognises that the proposal is relatively modest in physical scale and that leisure facilities can, in principle, contribute positively to community wellbeing. The objection arises from the sensitivity and constraints of this particular location and from the cumulative effect of introducing a further dedicated commercial use within the Recreation Ground and Community Cluster.

The application site forms part of Ashington Recreation Ground and lies within the Community Cluster identified by the made Ashington Neighbourhood Plan. It is close to residential properties, opposite the Grade II* listed Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, adjacent to the Church Lane/Foster Lane junction, and would operate alongside existing sporting, community and commercial uses, including the neighbouring gym. The gym is currently the subject of HDC enforcement investigation EN/26/0248 concerning an unauthorised change of use.

The highway context is also changing materially. Planning permission DC/23/0406 has been approved for 152 dwellings and associated facilities, with vehicular access from Church Lane. The Church Lane/Foster Lane junction will therefore have an increased future role in serving development traffic. The implications of DC/26/1205 should be assessed against that committed future context, not present-day conditions alone.

The Council considers that the proposal should not be assessed simply as a small standalone leisure facility. The relevant planning question is whether this additional

use, together with its structures, fencing, parking, operating activity and landscape changes, can be accommodated satisfactorily without unacceptable effects on community and recreational amenity, highway safety, heritage significance, landscape character, biodiversity or neighbouring residential amenity.

1. Recreation Ground and Community Amenity

The application describes the existing site as “unused green space”. The Parish Council considers that this understates its existing function and planning context. The site forms part of Ashington Recreation Ground and lies within the Ashington Community Cluster identified by Policy ASH8 of the made Neighbourhood Plan.

The Council accepts that a sauna is itself a leisure use and does not object simply because the proposed operation is commercial. The material issue is whether it is appropriate to enclose and dedicate part of generally available Recreation Ground land to a single fee-paying operation, and whether the effect on the remaining community and recreational resource has been properly assessed.

HDPF Policy 43 supports appropriate community and leisure provision while protecting existing community, leisure and recreational facilities. National planning policy similarly protects existing open space and recreational land. The application should therefore demonstrate, proportionately to its scale:

- the extent and existing function of Recreation Ground land that would cease to be generally available;
- why its enclosure and dedicated use are justified;
- whether the proposed leisure provision adequately offsets any loss of generally accessible recreation space;
- the effect on the openness, usability and functioning of the Recreation Ground as a whole; and
- the implications when considered alongside the changing pattern of uses within the wider Community Cluster.

The concern is therefore the incremental restriction of generally available community and recreational space without adequate assessment of its cumulative consequences, not commercial activity in itself.

2. Neighbouring Gym, EN/26/0248 and the Planning Baseline

The proposed development would operate alongside the neighbouring gym as well as sporting and other community activities. These uses share the same constrained Recreation Ground environment and create overlapping demands for parking, access, pedestrian movement and residential amenity.

The Parish Council notes that the planning status of the neighbouring gym is currently the subject of HDC enforcement investigation EN/26/0248. The Council

does not seek to prejudge that investigation. However, where the lawful nature and intensity of the gym affect parking demand, vehicle movements, operating hours, pedestrian activity or cumulative amenity effects, they form part of the planning baseline against which DC/26/1205 must be assessed.

The application should not be determined on assumptions about parking capacity or neighbouring activity that may prove inconsistent with the lawful planning position. Where the outcome or planning implications of EN/26/0248 could materially affect the assessment of DC/26/1205, the Council considers that determination should await a sufficiently clear and reliable baseline.

3. Parking, Traffic, Pedestrian Movement and the Future Highway Context

The Recreation Ground already serves sporting and community activities that can generate concentrated periods of demand. The neighbouring gym generates separate customer and staff movements, while the proposed sauna would add a further destination with customer turnover, staff movements, servicing and deliveries.

The relevant question is not simply whether individual spaces can be allocated to the sauna, but whether there is adequate effective parking capacity at realistic peak periods, taking account of all lawful and established uses sharing the site. HDPF Policies 40 and 41 are therefore relevant.

This assessment must also recognise the committed future highway context. DC/23/0406 provides for 152 dwellings and associated development with access from Church Lane. Highway safety and the detailed access arrangements were material considerations in that application. DC/26/1205 should therefore be assessed against the traffic environment that will exist once that development is implemented, rather than present traffic levels alone.

The Parish Council is particularly concerned that additional parking associated with the sauna and neighbouring uses may be displaced onto Church Lane or Foster Lane. In this location, displaced parking could affect visibility, pedestrian movement and the safe operation of the junction. The assessment should therefore consider the combined effect of the sauna, the lawful use of the gym, Recreation Ground and community activities, on-street parking and committed traffic from DC/23/0406.

The area is also used by pedestrians accessing the Recreation Ground and Community Cluster, including children and families associated with the nearby primary school. Existing pedestrian routes should remain safe, convenient and unobstructed.

4. Junction Visibility and Boundary Treatment

The Parish Council has a specific highway-safety concern about the boundary treatment at the Church Lane/Foster Lane junction. The corner has historically

benefited from the visibility afforded by relatively open Sussex-style rail fencing. The proposal introduces substantially higher and more solid boundary treatment, elements of which appear already to have been installed.

The significance of this change is not simply visual. The height, solidity and position of fencing may affect intervisibility between vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians. That issue assumes greater significance because the junction will have an increased future role once the 152-home development under DC/23/0406 is implemented.

The Local Highway Authority should therefore confirm that:

- appropriate visibility is retained at the Church Lane/Foster Lane junction, taking account of committed future traffic;
- existing and proposed fencing, gates and other structures are compatible with the necessary visibility requirements;
- parked vehicles associated with the sauna, gym and other uses would not materially compromise those sightlines;
- safe pedestrian and cycle movements can be maintained; and
- the submitted plans accurately show the position and height of all relevant boundary treatment.

The supporting photographs submitted with this representation are relied upon as evidence of the former open boundary treatment, the present relationship between the site and junction, and the effect of the more solid fencing on visibility and enclosure.

5. Character, Building Line, Hedgerow, Biodiversity and Heritage Setting

The proposal should be considered in relation to the established pattern of development along Church Lane and the open character of the Recreation Ground. The proposed structures sit forward of the established building line formed by existing development along Church Lane. Although modest individually, their siting makes them more prominent in views along and across Church Lane and contributes to the perception of built development advancing into the Recreation Ground. HDPF Policy 32 requires development to respond appropriately to local character and its relationship with its surroundings.

The Parish Council is also concerned about the removal of established hedgerow vegetation associated with the site. Regardless of any separate enforcement or consent issue, the material planning point is that the removal altered the site before determination of this application. The former hedgerow contributed to screening, the landscaped character of the Recreation Ground edge, the setting of the listed church, separation from the public realm and local habitat connectivity.

The planning assessment should therefore take account of the site condition before the hedgerow was removed and should not treat the more exposed current condition as the historic or appropriate baseline. The application should demonstrate the

landscape and ecological function of the removed vegetation, the effect of its loss, and what replacement planting or biodiversity enhancement is necessary. HDPF Policies 25 and 31, together with national policy on the natural environment and biodiversity, are relevant.

The site also occupies a sensitive position opposite the Grade II* listed Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul. The Parish Council does not seek to overstate the likely degree of heritage harm, but considers that the combined effect of forward siting, structures, decking, equipment, solid fencing, loss of hedgerow screening, enclosure and associated activity requires an express and proportionate assessment under HDPF Policy 34 and national heritage policy.

The supporting photographs are relied upon as evidence of the former hedgerow and screening, the established Church Lane building line, the open Recreation Ground character and the relationship between the application site and the listed church.

6. Residential Amenity and Operating Hours

The proposed operating hours of 05:00 to 21:00 every day are a material concern given the proximity of residential properties. Potential effects are not limited to activity inside the sauna and include customer and staff arrivals and departures, vehicle noise, conversations and external activity, deliveries and servicing, cleaning and waste handling, external lighting and mechanical plant.

A 05:00 commencement would introduce activity during a particularly noise-sensitive period. The effect should also be considered cumulatively with activity associated with the neighbouring gym and other uses within the Community Cluster.

If the development were otherwise considered acceptable, appropriate operating hours and controls over ancillary activity may provide mitigation. Any restriction should apply to relevant operational, servicing and delivery activity, not merely advertised customer opening times. External lighting and noise-generating equipment should likewise be specified and controlled where necessary.

7. Accuracy of Submitted Information and Foul Drainage

The Parish Council has identified matters requiring clarification, including:

- the description of the site as “unused green space” despite its location within the Recreation Ground;
- the relationship between the proposal and the established Church Lane building line;
- apparent inconsistencies concerning the site/highway relationship, parking and pedestrian arrangements;
- the position and form of existing and proposed fencing;
- the removal of established hedgerow vegetation and the correct landscape baseline; and

- uncertainty in the information concerning foul drainage.

These are not raised as administrative objections in themselves. They are material where they affect the ability to assess recreation land, parking capacity, junction visibility, pedestrian safety, landscape character, biodiversity, heritage setting or residential amenity. The application should be determined against accurate plans and an accurate understanding of the site before works associated with the proposal took place.

Foul drainage is not advanced as a principal reason for objection if an adequate solution can readily be demonstrated. However, the Local Planning Authority should be satisfied that the proposed arrangements are clear and capable of accommodating wastewater generated by the proposed use.

Conclusion and Matters for Determination

Ashington Parish Council maintains its objection to DC/26/1205.

The Council recognises the modest physical scale of the development and does not object to leisure or commercial activity in principle. The concern is the interaction between the proposal and its particular surroundings, and the cumulative effect of adding another dedicated use to a constrained and changing community location.

In determining the application, the Parish Council asks the Local Planning Authority to address expressly the following matters:

- 1. Existing use of the land:** Whether the site has been correctly assessed as part of the Recreation Ground and existing community/recreational provision rather than simply as “unused green space”.
- 2. Loss and enclosure of Recreation Ground land:** Whether the extent to which generally available Recreation Ground land would become enclosed and dedicated to a single commercial operation has been adequately identified and justified.
- 3. Community Cluster and Policy ASH8:** Whether the proposal supports the continuing function of the Recreation Ground area as Ashington’s Community Cluster and has proper regard to the cumulative change in community facilities and land.
- 4. Policy 43 and national open-space policy:** Whether the relevant development-plan and national policy tests relating to existing community, leisure, recreation and open-space provision have been satisfied.
- 5. EN/26/0248 and the planning baseline:** Whether the planning implications of the neighbouring gym enforcement investigation are sufficiently established to provide a reliable baseline for DC/26/1205.
- 6. Inter-relationship with the gym:** Whether the lawful nature and intensity of the gym have been properly reflected in assumptions concerning parking, vehicle movements, operating hours, pedestrian activity and residential amenity.

7. **Timing of determination:** Whether DC/26/1205 can properly be determined before EN/26/0248 is sufficiently clarified where its outcome could materially affect the assessment.
8. **Cumulative parking capacity:** Whether adequate parking exists at realistic peak periods when the sauna, gym, sporting and community activities operate concurrently.
9. **Parking displacement:** Whether additional demand would result in parking on Church Lane or Foster Lane and whether this would materially affect highway or pedestrian safety.
10. **DC/23/0406 future traffic:** Whether the assessment takes proper account of the committed future traffic associated with the approved 152-home development and the increased importance of the Church Lane/Foster Lane junction.
11. **Junction visibility:** Whether existing and proposed solid fencing maintains satisfactory visibility for vehicles, cyclists and pedestrians, including in the committed future traffic context.
12. **Effect of parked vehicles on visibility:** Whether parking associated with the sauna, gym and other uses could compound any reduction in visibility caused by boundary treatment.
13. **Pedestrian movement:** Whether safe and convenient pedestrian routes can be maintained between the village, school, Recreation Ground and Community Cluster.
14. **Established building line:** Whether siting structures forward of the established Church Lane building line is an appropriate response to the prevailing spatial pattern and character.
15. **Open character of the Recreation Ground:** Whether the structures, decking, fencing and enclosure would have an acceptable effect on the open character and appearance of this part of the Recreation Ground.
16. **Hedgerow removal and screening:** Whether the landscape and visual consequences of the removed hedgerow have been assessed against the proper pre-removal baseline and whether adequate replacement screening is required.
17. **Biodiversity and ecological connectivity:** Whether the ecological function of the removed hedgerow has been identified and appropriately addressed through replacement or enhancement.
18. **Setting of the Grade II* listed church:** Whether the combined effects of forward siting, structures, solid fencing, loss of hedgerow screening, enclosure and associated activity preserve the significance of the church, including the contribution made by its setting.
19. **Residential amenity:** Whether customer and staff activity, vehicle movements, servicing, lighting and plant would have an acceptable effect on nearby residents.

- 20. Operating and ancillary hours:** Whether operation from 05:00 is appropriate and whether any permission requires enforceable controls over customer, staff, delivery, servicing, cleaning and waste activity.
- 21. Lighting and plant:** Whether external lighting and noise-generating equipment can be satisfactorily controlled.
- 22. Accuracy of plans and baseline evidence:** Whether the application drawings and supporting information accurately show the highway relationship, pedestrian routes, parking, fencing, development footprint, established building line and pre-removal landscape condition.
- 23. Foul drainage:** Whether the foul-water arrangements are clearly specified and adequate for the proposed use.
- 24. Overall cumulative effect:** Whether, taking all matters together, this additional dedicated use can operate satisfactorily without unacceptable effects on community and recreational amenity, highway safety, parking, landscape character, biodiversity, heritage significance or residential amenity.

Parish Council's Overall Position

The substantive issues are inter-related. Parking cannot reliably be assessed without understanding the lawful and realistic demands of the neighbouring gym; parking displacement and solid boundary fencing may combine to affect junction visibility; the junction itself will operate in a changed future traffic environment once DC/23/0406 is implemented; the loss of hedgerow screening and forward siting affect both local character and the setting of the listed church; and operating activity must be considered in relation to nearby residents and other Community Cluster uses.

For these reasons, the Parish Council considers that DC/26/1205 should not be determined until the Local Planning Authority has sufficient reliable information to assess these matters against both the proper site baseline and the committed future context. In particular, where EN/26/0248 materially affects parking, highway or amenity assumptions, a sufficiently clear planning baseline should first be established.

If the Local Planning Authority nevertheless considers the principle of development acceptable, the Parish Council requests consideration of amended plans and enforceable conditions, as appropriate, relating to siting and layout, boundary treatment and junction visibility, parking and pedestrian routes, replacement hedgerow/landscaping and biodiversity enhancement, operating/servicing/delivery hours, external lighting, noise-generating plant and foul drainage.

Until these matters have been satisfactorily addressed, Ashington Parish Council maintains its objection to planning application DC/26/1205.

Yours faithfully,

Lee English

Clerk to Ashington Parish Council

Relevant Planning Policy Framework

This representation has been framed having regard to the current National Planning Policy Framework (August 2026), the adopted Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (including Policies 25, 31, 32, 34, 40, 41 and 43), and the made Ashington Neighbourhood Plan (including Policy ASH8).

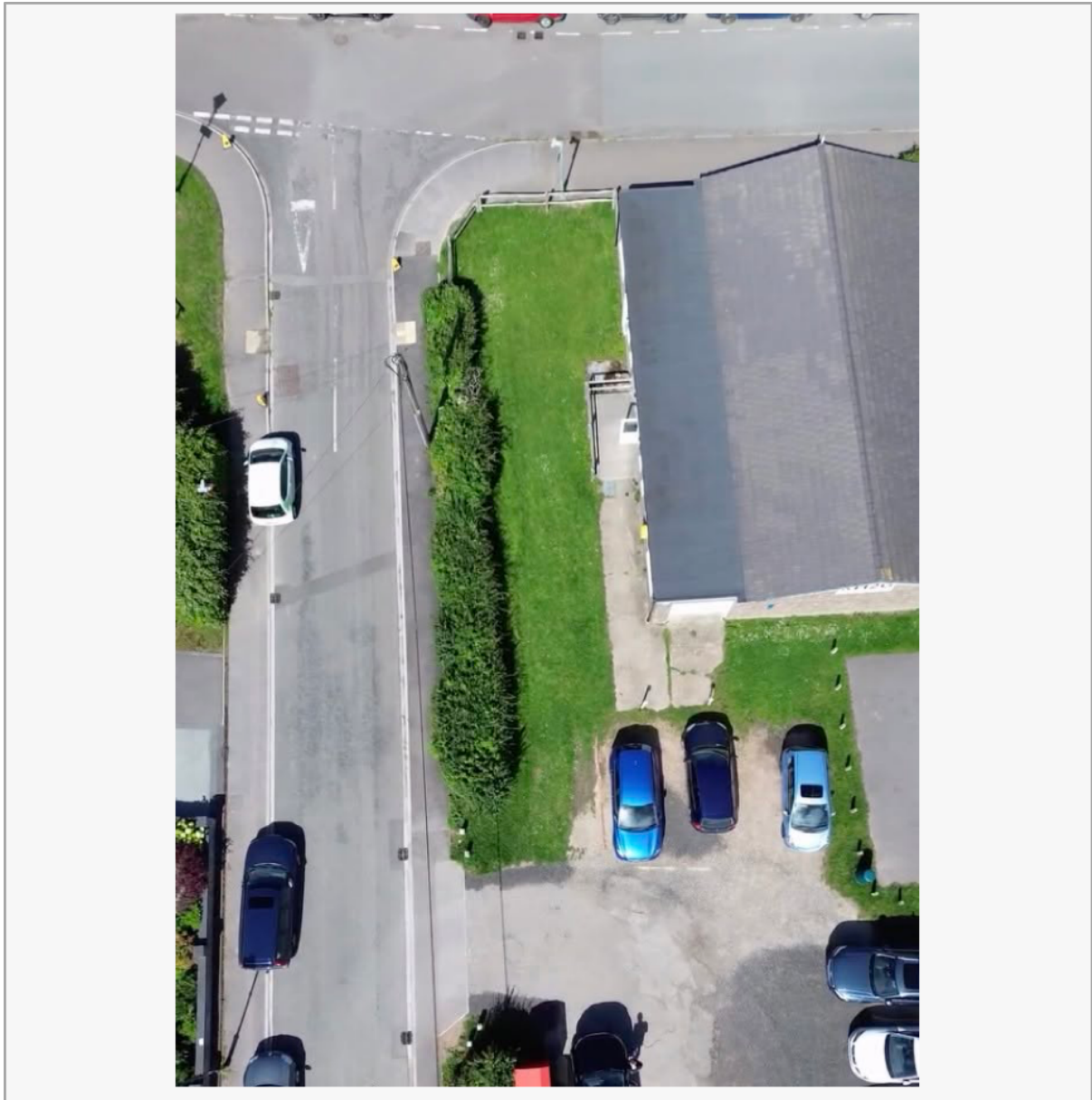
Supporting Photographs

The supporting photographs in Appendix 1 form an integral part of the Parish Council's objection. They should be viewed alongside Sections 4 and 5 and the corresponding checklist items. In particular, they evidence:

- the former hedgerow and its screening function;
- the previous open boundary treatment at the Church Lane/Foster Lane corner;
- the relationship between the site and the junction;
- the established building line along Church Lane;
- the open character of the Recreation Ground; and
- the relationship between the application site and the Grade II* listed church.

Appendix 1 Photographic evidence

Figure 1 Applicant's pre-work aerial photograph



Description: Aerial view showing the substantial continuous mature hedge along the Church Lane frontage immediately before works commenced.

Source: Applicant's social-media promotional material

Date: Late June 2026, immediately before the recorded commencement of works on 28 June 2026

Relevance: Illustrates pre-commencement condition of site and surrounding hedge

Figure 2 Site shortly after works commenced



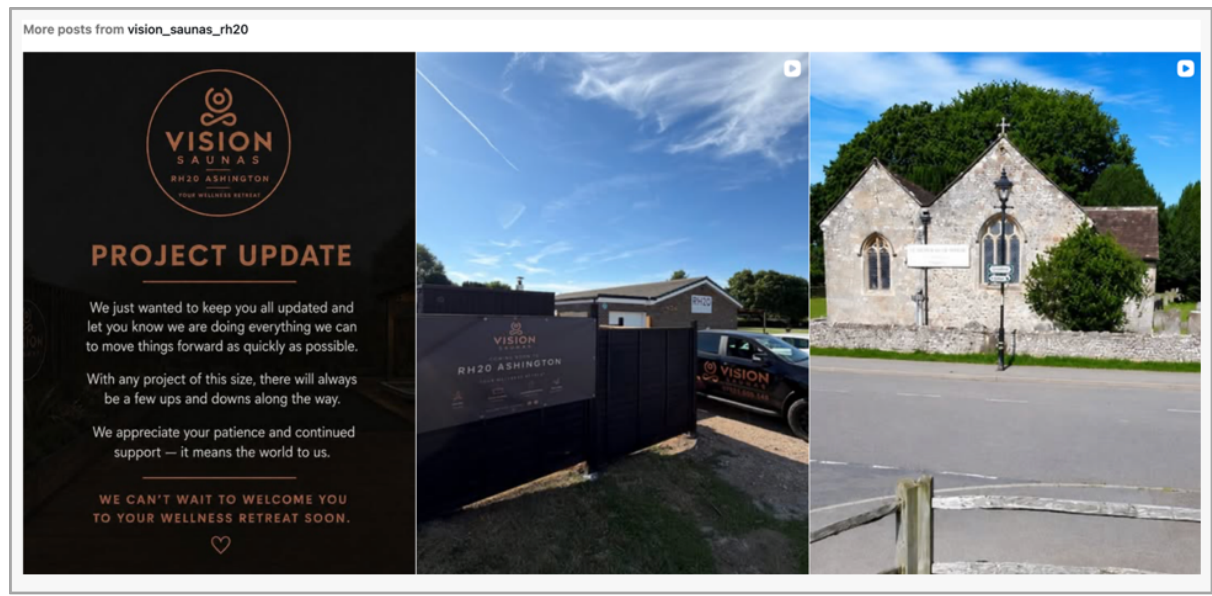
Description: View showing the extent of frontage vegetation removal, increased exposure of the former Scout building and the narrow residual boundary areas.

Source: Photograph supplied by Ashington Parish Council

Date: 11 Sept 2026

Relevance: Proposed fencing to the frontage reduces visibility splays at Church Close Junction replacing former open Sussex Rail fencing

Figure 3 Vision Saunas project update

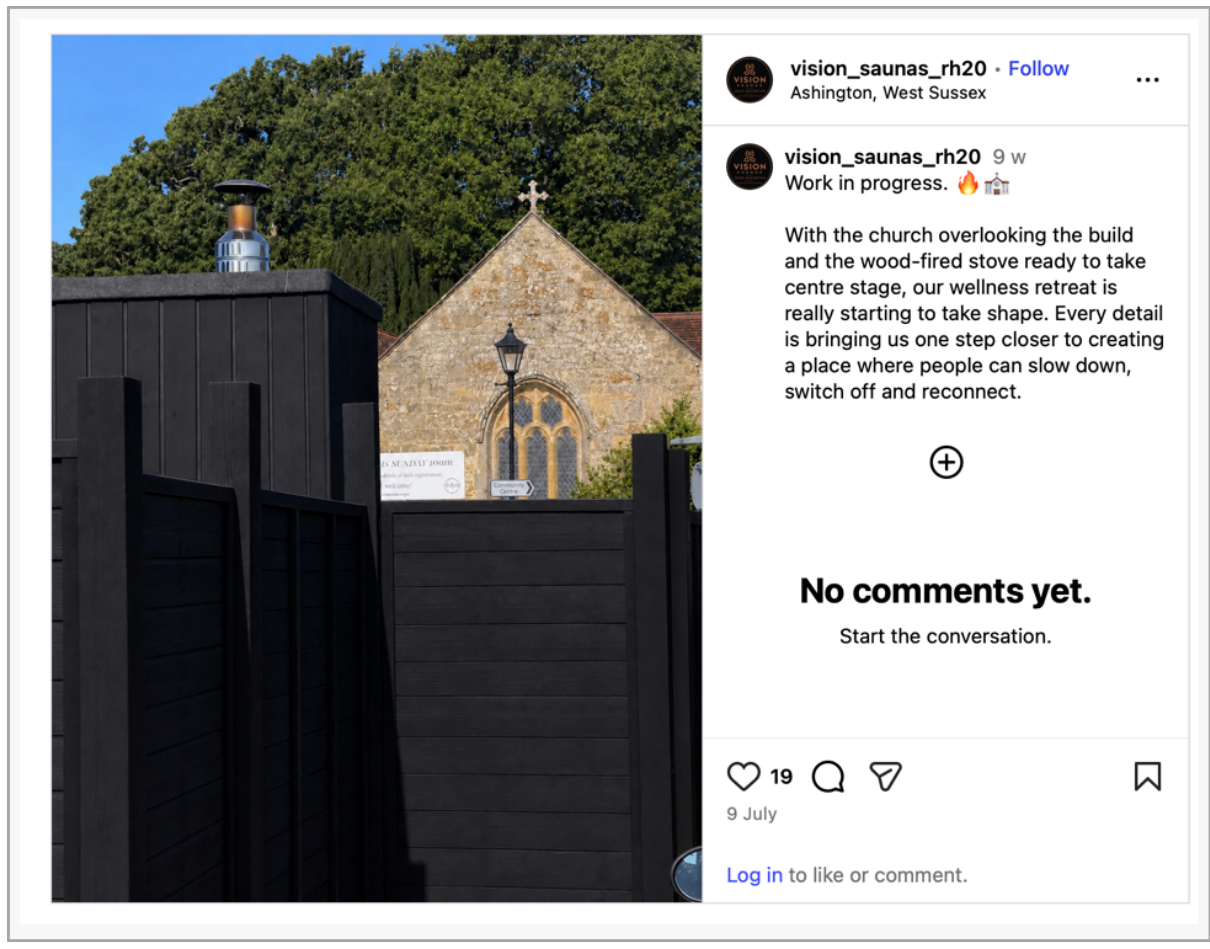


Description: Complete social-media screenshot showing the Vision Saunas RH20 branding, dark fencing and promotional description of the project and wellness retreat.

Source: Vision Saunas social-media account
https://www.instagram.com/vision_saunas_rh20/

Date: July 2026

Figure 4 Work in progress post showing church and wood-fired stove



Description: Complete screenshot of the post describing the church as overlooking the build and identifying the proposed wood-fired stove, with the church visible behind the enclosure.

Source: Vision Saunas social-media account
https://www.instagram.com/vision_saunas_rh20/

Date: Post appears dated 9 July 2026.

Relevance: Evidence of inter visibility

Figure 5 Current site condition and access arrangement



Description: Current photograph showing the visible frontage and access context (gate, passage, fence, former Scout building), remaining planting area and relationship with Church Lane.

Date: 12 Sept 2026

Relevance: Comparison shot with pre-commencement photograph taken by the applicant (Fig 1) showing extent of hedge removal.

Figure 6 Church Lane Building Line



Description: Current photograph showing building lines on Church Lane former Scout building, remaining planting area and relationship with the proposed frontage area.

Date: 12 Sept 2026

Relevance: Illustrates that proposed development sits forward of existing building line