Planning Inspectorate

Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 14 April 2026

by L Francis BA (Hons) MA MRTPI

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 26 May 2026

Appeal Ref: 6004875
Fairfield Stud, Guildford Road, Broadbridge Heath, West Sussex RH12 3PG

- The appeal is made under section 78 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) against a refusal to grant planning permission.
- The appeal is made by Andrew Goodman against the decision of Horsham District Council.
- The application Ref is DC/25/1001.
- The development proposed is the erection of three self/custom build dwellings with associated landscaping and parking.

Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

Preliminary Matters

2. The proposed dwellings would be self/custom build, as stated in the description of development on the planning application form. However, specifying the proposal as self/custom build in the description of development is not sufficient to ensure that the dwellings are constructed as self/custom build. There is no mechanism before me for guaranteeing the delivery of the proposal as self/custom build units. A planning obligation would be the most appropriate method of ensuring that the units would be self/custom build rather than market housing.

3. I have been provided with a copy of the Regulation 19 version of the draft Horsham District Local Plan 2023-2040. No draft policies were referred to in the reasons for refusal and their relevance to this proposal has not been explained within the Council's case. As I have no evidence as to whether there are outstanding objections to the policies put to me, or how they might relate to the proposal, I can attach no more than limited weight to the emerging policies.

Main Issues

4. The main issues are:

    - whether the proposal would be a suitable location for housing having regard to the Council's spatial strategy; and,

    - the effect of the appeal proposal on the character and appearance of the area.

Reasons

Location

5. The appeal site is located is located outside of the defined built-up area boundary of Broadbridge Heath. It is therefore within the countryside as defined by the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (HDPF).

6. Policies 1 and 2 of the HDPF outline its strategic aims, including a presumption in favour of sustainable development, and setting out a focus for development in and around the key settlement of Horsham. Elsewhere growth can take place within towns and villages which have defined built-up areas in accordance with the settlement hierarchy set out in Policy 3.

7. Policy 4 supports settlement expansion on sites outside the built-up area boundaries in some circumstances. The appeal site is not allocated within the HDPF or the Slinfold Neighbourhood Plan 2018 (the NP).

8. Whilst the appeal site is not isolated as it is near other dwellings, it does not adjoin a settlement edge. Based on my observations on site, along with the evidence submitted, my view is that there is a clear separation between the built-up area boundary and the appeal site though the intervening field, belt of trees and brook. The appeal site reads as distinctly separate from the edge of Broadbridge Heath. Although there are defensible boundaries in the form of the trees and hedges lining Guildford Road and along the boundaries to the houses to the west, the appeal site itself is not contained by defensible boundaries insofar as it is currently part of open paddocks. The proposal would not therefore meet the limiting criteria of Policy 4.

9. Policy 26 only permits development in the countryside where such a location is essential, and the proposal meets one of four criteria. There is limited evidence before me which indicates that the scheme would meet any of the exceptions listed.

10. HDPF Policy 2 is delivered in the context of maintaining the district's rural character whilst ensuring, amongst other things, suitable access to services and local employment. In terms of access to services and facilities, the appeal site is located geographically close to Broadbridge Heath.

11. My attention has been drawn to a pedestrian gate to the south-east side of the site, within the ownership of the appellant, allowing access onto a wide grassed verge. There would be a short walk to the roundabout, over which it is possible to cross the road using the traffic islands separating the carriageways, then continue along a footpath to the services within Broadbridge Heath. These services include a convenience shop, post box, and bus services. These are within 10 minutes' walk of the appeal site. There is street lighting along the route. Whilst the walk is level, it would not provide convenient access for those using buggies, wheelchairs or mobility aids. Nevertheless, the location of the appeal site is such that for potential future residents there would be an alternative to the private car for access to every-day services.

12. In advance of the adoption of a new Local Plan, the Council has produced the guidance note 'Facilitating Appropriate Development', dated 2022 (FAD) relevant to the provision of new homes. Paragraph 5.7 of the document sets out that given that the Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing supply, recognising that it is likely to receive applications outside of defined built-up area boundaries and on un-

allocated sites. Given this position, the FAD details that the Council will positively consider applications that meet five criteria, similar to those set out by HDPF Policy 4. There is no requirement for the site to be allocated, but it must adjoin the settlement edge as defined by the built-up area boundary. I have also been referred to the Shaping Development in Horsham District Planning Advice Note 2025; this largely repeats the relevant criteria for housing development proposals within the FAD.

13. Despite its location outside the built-up area boundary, the appeal scheme would be located in a reasonably sustainable location in terms of its access to services and facilities by means other than private car. Nevertheless, there would be conflict with Local Plan Policies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 26 insofar as they set out the Council's strategy for the location of development. Taken together, these policies aim to deliver sustainable development, focus development to within the defined built-up area boundaries and ensure the sustainable delivery of housing though its provision in the most appropriate locations. Although it is not adopted planning policy, there would also be conflict with the FAD insofar as the appeal site would not be located adjacent to a defined built-up area boundary.

Character and Appearance

14. The appeal site comprises part of the paddocks to the east of Fairfield Stud, which is a dwelling and associated stables, yard and sand school. There is a gated vehicular access from Guildford Road leading to a driveway which bisects the paddocks before reaching the yard, sand school, stables and house.

15. There is some sporadic residential development along Guildford Road. Close to the appeal site, this includes dwellings known as Fairfields, Fairfield Cottage, Coromandel and Stable Cottage, accessed by driveways leading off Guildford Road. Along with the dwelling at Fairfield Stud, they form a loose collection of buildings, surrounded by the Fairfield Stud paddocks, Guildford Road and agricultural land. A brook runs to the south. The appeal site and surrounding land is screened from Guildford Road by a belt of trees and vegetation which continues alongside the brook, and along the boundary between the northern paddock and Fairfields.

16. The site is close to, but visually separate from Broadbridge Heath and the Lawson Hunt industrial estate. There are some urbanising features around the site, including the lay-by with a catering van, some street lighting and the metal gates to Fairfield Stud itself. From the appeal site, there is an awareness of surrounding activity associated with the nearby settlement, dwellings and roads. Despite this, the appeal site and its immediate surroundings retain a semi-rural character, with the paddocks, trees and vegetation providing an open and verdant quality to the surroundings.

17. Two detached dwellings, separate garages, their gardens, access and parking would occupy a substantial portion of the northern paddock. To the south paddock, a further 1.5 storey dwelling and garage would be set in a large plot adjacent to the sand school. Taken together, the plots including the dwellings, outbuildings, hardstanding and residential paraphernalia would form a dispersed development over a large area across the north and south paddocks. The proposed dwellings in the northern paddock would have some visual relationship with the loose cluster of existing dwellings, but the house in the south paddock would be further removed and would appear more incongruous. Taken together, the proposed houses due to the dispersed nature of development would not relate closely in visual terms to the

existing cluster of buildings and would not appear as an extension to it. Nor do I consider they would be visually related to Broadbridge Heath to the south given the visual and physical separation provided by the land to the south and the road adjacent to the industrial estate.

18. Taken together, the domestic use, extent of hardstanding and the enclosure of the individual plots would suburbanise the character of the area. Whilst I acknowledge that the proposal would not develop the paddocks in their entirety, the piecemeal development as proposed would nevertheless harmfully erode the open and verdant character of the appeal site and its surroundings. Consequently, the proposal would diminish the contribution the paddocks make to the semi-rural character of the area.

19. Whilst I acknowledge the proposed housing would replace two existing timber outbuildings, these buildings in themselves do not detract from landscape and are consistent with equestrian use of the appeal site.

20. The Council conclude that the architectural detailing and materials would draw on the local vernacular; the evidence does not lead me to disagree.

21. In conclusion on this main issue therefore, I find that the proposal would be harmful to the character of the countryside through the piecemeal suburbanisation and consequent harm to the open and verdant character of the area. This would conflict with Policies 25, 26 and 33 of the HDPF and Policy 5 of the NP. Taken together and amongst other things, these policies seek to protect the countryside from inappropriate development and support development that respects the character of the surrounding area.

Other Matters

22. I have been referred to an appeal allowed in 2007 (reference APP/Z3825/A/06/2027642) for new metal gates and brick wall to meet with the existing hedge. The Inspector in this appeal was satisfied that the ‘suburban’ appearance of the gates would not be out of character with the area. This was due to the amount of hard surfacing, the industrial nature of the nearby built development and the degree of vehicular and commercial activity including the layby and catering van. The Inspector also commented however that past the appeal entrance, the area does display the ‘rural characteristics described by the Council’. I have necessarily based my view on my observations at my site visit, along with the evidence submitted. The Inspector’s view in the 2007 appeal does not lead me to conclude that the character of the appeal site as a whole is suburban.

23. The appeal decision at Duckmoor, Billingshurst (reference APP/Z3825/W/21/3283823) concerned the provision of 83 dwellings, including 4 self/custom build plots. he issues of location of development and effect upon the character and appearance were relevant in the appeal. I have had regard to this decision. However, although the appeal raised similar issues, the scale of the scheme is significantly larger, and the overall planning balance is necessarily individual to each proposal. Consequently, I do not consider the decision indicates that this appeal should be allowed.

24. My attention has been drawn to an appeal decision to allow permission in principle for five self/custom build dwellings at Great Barford, Bedford (appeal reference APP/K0235/W/24/3349671). The Inspector noted that there was a deficit of self-build plots when considering demand, and attached significant weight to the benefit of

providing 5 self-build dwellings. I have had regard to this decision, though given its location is unrelated to the appeal site, it has limited direct relevance to my decision.

25. A decision of the Council to grant planning permission for 2 dwellings at Potters Field, Partridge Green (reference DC/24/1887) has also been drawn to my attention. This was an outline permission, relating to land that was described by the Council as a 'small undeveloped infill plot lying between existing housing'. The benefits of the scheme were judged to outweigh the policy conflict in terms of the location of development and landscape harm. I do not regard the appeal site as an 'infill' plot, and I do not consider the on-site situation would have been directly comparable to the scheme before me, or would indicate that the appeal should be allowed.

26. I have been referred to the Slinfold Parish SHELAA undertaken in 2018. The assessment is out of date, and my attention has not been drawn to any updated version. There is little compelling evidence to suggest that had an updated assessment been carried out, the appeal site would have been included in it as a 'developable' site.

27. I note that the appellant had pre-application advice from the Council, and the appeal scheme has responded to the advice given. I appreciate that the appellant has attempted to overcome the concerns raised, but the scheme before me would still result in a proposal that would harm the character and appearance of the area, for the reasons I have already outlined.

Other Considerations

28. The delivery of three family sized homes would be a social benefit and would contribute to the Council's housing supply. Small developments can be built out quickly and present the opportunity to make an immediate difference to housing land supply. There would be socio-economic benefits arising from construction and subsequent local spend from new residents. The scheme would also support the viability of local services and facilities, the site being walkable to Broadbridge Heath. Some ecological enhancements would also be delivered, and the dwellings would contain sustainable features including air source heat pumps, solar panels and rainwater harvesting. Taken together, whilst these are significant benefits, given the small scale of the proposal I attribute them moderate weight in favour of the scheme.

29. The dwellings are said to be self-build, for which there is specific support within the Framework. The evidence indicates that the Council has a significant shortfall in supply in relation to demand for self-build plots. Whilst the self-build nature of the proposed dwellings would be a significant benefit, no mechanism for guaranteeing the dwellings as self-build is before me, and as such this tempers the weight I can afford to it as a benefit. Similarly, whilst the appellant indicates that the buildings' prefabrication and manufacture would be carried out locally, there is no mechanism before me which would secure this.

30. The Council is satisfied with the effect of the proposal on the living conditions of both future occupiers and neighbouring residents, highway safety, parking, trees and ecology and drainage, subject to appropriate conditions. The evidence does not lead me to disagree with these conclusions. However, an absence of harm in these respects is a neutral factor in my determination of the appeal.

31. The Council acknowledges that it is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable housing sites, with the Council's delegated report confirming a supply of

one year. This is a substantial shortfall, indicating that the need for housing is pressing.

32. In these circumstances paragraph 11d)ii of the Framework is applicable. Footnote 8 of the Framework establishes that the policies which are most important for determining the application are deemed out-of-date. Consequently, permission should be granted unless any adverse impacts would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole, having particular regard for key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well designed places and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.

Planning Balance

33. The appeal proposal would be harmful to the character and appearance of the area, and I have judged the magnitude of this harm as significant. The Framework requires development to be sympathetic to local character. The conflict between the proposal and HDPF Policies 25, 26 and 33 should be given significant weight.

34. The appeal scheme also conflicts with the Council's strategy for the location of development. The HDPF sets out a clear strategy for focussing growth on Horsham and the built-up area. The guidance contained in the FAD modifies this by supporting development adjacent to built-up area boundaries and on unallocated sites. The harm I have identified arises from the conflict with the spatial strategy. This harm is, to a degree, offset by the fact that for some, the services and facilities of Broadbridge Heath would be accessible by walking. The Framework also aims to achieve sustainable travel and to promote sustainable development in rural areas, housing should be located where it will enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. It does not contain any policies which specifically prohibit development outside towns and villages. Consequently, I consider that insofar as they relate to the location of development, the conflict between the proposal and HDPF Policies 2, 3 and 4 should be given limited weight.

35. Taken together, the harm I have identified to the character and appearance of the area, and to a more limited degree, the conflict with the strategy for the location of development, would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal when assessed against the policies in the Framework taken as a whole.

Conclusion

36. The material considerations do not indicate that a decision should be made other than in accordance with the development plan. For the reasons given above the appeal should be dismissed.

L Francis

INSPECTOR