

Statement of the Local Planning Authority

PLANNING INSPECTORATE REFERENCE 6009474
LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY REFERENCE DC/26/0271

Town and Country Planning Act 1990

Planning appeal by **Maria Bloxham** at: Contact Agent

Appeal to be determined by an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State by way of **written representation**.

June 2026

1. Introduction

This appeal is against DC/26/0271 for the refusal of the following development:

“Permission in principle for the erection of up to 9 no. self-build park homes.”

- 1.2 This is submitted on behalf of Horsham District Council in respect of the above appeal, which has been made on the grounds of non-determination. It is advised that had the Local Planning Authority been in a position to determine the application, it would have refused permission in principle for the following reasons: -

Reasons for Refusal: -

1. The development, by reason of its scale and permanence, would result in a significant intensification of activity within a countryside location. The introduction of nine permanent residential units would lead to the fragmentation and formalisation of an otherwise undeveloped and informal paddock, replacing its rural character with a distinctly domestic form of land use. The resultant level of activity would dominate the sporadic and low-intensity pattern of development that characterises the locality, eroding the undeveloped and tranquil qualities of the countryside and blurring the distinction between settlement and rural openness. The proposal would therefore fail to protect the rural character, sense of place and landscape qualities of the area. The development is contrary to Policies 25, 26, 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).
2. The development would introduce an incongruous and suburban residential form into an open countryside context. The formalisation of the site through permanent residential units, together with associated domestic paraphernalia, activity and vehicular movements, would domesticate the site and materially alter its character. This level and type of activity would be detrimental to the amenity of nearby residential occupiers and would fundamentally conflict with the established settlement pattern, which is defined by limited, dispersed development set within a predominantly rural landscape. The proposal would therefore fail to respect local character and would result in harm to the appearance and rural qualities of the locality. The proposal is contrary to Policies 2, 25, 26, 32 and 33 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

2. The Appeal Site

- 2.1 The application site lies outside any defined built-up area boundary and is therefore located in the countryside for planning policy purposes. It is situated approximately 850 metres from the built-up area of Bucks Green and around 1.2 kilometers from the built-up area of Rudgwick.
- 2.2 The site is accessed from Naldretts Lane and is enclosed by boundary hedging and trees to

the north, east and south, with post-and-rail fencing forming the western boundary. Mature trees are present along the southern and western boundaries, and partially along the northern boundary.

- 2.3 The surrounding area is mixed in character. Land to the north, east and west has a residential influence, while the land to the south comprises a network of fields and field boundaries forming part of the wider rural landscape. Horsham Sports Club is located approximately 600 metres to the west, and Chesworth House lies around 500 metres to the south.
- 2.4 Despite its relative proximity to the built-up areas of Bucks Green and Rudgwick, the immediate context of the site is characterised by countryside with only limited and sporadic residential development. The wider landscape is pastoral and well wooded, with small farms and cottages dispersed along rural lanes. The site also lies close to settled gypsy pitches, which form part of the existing pattern of low-intensity development in the locality.

3. Relevant Planning History:

DC/25/0369	Campsite for 60 days starting 11th April 2025	OBJN on 24-04-2025
DC/24/1502	Change of use to four pitch settled gypsy site along with the formation of hardstanding and utility/day room buildings.	Permitted on 18/12/2025
DC/19/2309	Change of use to four pitch settled gypsy site along with the formation of hardstanding and utility/day room buildings	Application Refused on 07.01.2020 and dismissed at appeal on 07.11.2022.
DC/19/1362	Retrospective change of use of land for the stationing of caravans for residential purposes for four gypsy pitches, along with the formation of hardstanding and four utility/ day rooms ancillary to that use	Application Permitted on 04.10.2019
DC/19/0897	Change of use to eight pitch settled gypsy site along with the formation of hardstanding and utility/day room buildings	Application Refused on 04.10.2019
DC/13/2170	Change of use of land for the stationing of caravans for residential purposes for 4 No. gypsy pitches along with the formation of hardstanding and 4 No. utility/dayrooms ancillary to that use	Application refused on 14-03-2014

4 The appellant's case

- The Housing context including the lack of demonstrable 5 year housing land supply, and that the Local Authorities housing policies are out of date resulting in a tilted balance that should have resulted in an approval
 - The sustainability of the location
 - The lack of landscape harm and neighbour harm
 - Any outstanding matters should be dealt with by way of condition
- 4.1 The intention of the Local Planning Authority Statement of Case is to outline a response to the Appellant's Statement and to outline the policy considerations the Local Planning Authority would have assessed had they been in a position to determine the application.

5 The Case for the Local Planning Authority

- 5.1 The Permission in Principle consent route is an alternative way of obtaining planning permission for residential development. It separates the consideration of matters of “principle” for the proposed development, from the “technical details” of the development.
- 5.2 As such, the Permission in Principle route has two stages: the first being the “Permission in Principle” stage (subject of this current application), which establishes whether the site is suitable in-principle; and the second being the “Technical Details consent” stage which is when the detailed development proposals are assessed.
- 5.3 The scope of the Permission in Principle application (being the first stage) is limited to location, land use, and amount of development, as explained in Paragraph 012 of the Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) (Permission in Principle):

‘The scope of permission in principle is limited to location, land use and amount of development. Issues relevant to these ‘in principle’ matters should be considered at the permission in principle stage. Other matters should be considered at the technical details consent stage. In addition, local authorities cannot list the information they require for applications for permission in principle in the same way they can for applications for planning permission.’

- 5.4 The PPG 020 (Reference ID: 58-020-20180615) further states that:

‘It is not possible for conditions to be attached to a grant of permission in principle and its terms may only include the site location, the type of development and amount of development. Local planning authorities can inform applicants about what they expect to see at the technical details consent stage.’

Location:

- 5.5 Policy 2 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) sets out the district’s growth strategy, directing development to the most sustainable locations, primarily within the main settlements. The HDPF identifies the settlement hierarchy as the most sustainable approach to housing delivery, with development focused in Horsham, Southwater and Billingshurst. Elsewhere, only limited development is supported, and only where it accords with an adopted Neighbourhood Plan.
- 5.6 Policy 3 of the HDPF reinforces this strategy by seeking to retain the existing settlement pattern and ensuring that development takes place in the most sustainable locations.
- 5.7 Policy 4 of the HDPF relates to development outside built-up area boundaries and states that settlement expansion will only be supported where all of the following criteria are met: the site is allocated in the Local Plan or a Neighbourhood Plan and adjoins an existing settlement edge; the scale of expansion is appropriate to the settlement; the proposal meets identified local housing needs; the development does not prejudice comprehensive long-term development, either individually or cumulatively; and the development is contained within a defensible boundary, with landscape and townscape character maintained or enhanced.
- 5.8 The proposal site does not meet these criteria. It is not allocated in the Local Plan or an adopted Neighbourhood Plan, does not adjoin a defined settlement edge, and is located in an isolated and unsustainable rural location with poor access to services and public transport. Any residential development would therefore be heavily car-dependent and would not represent a sustainable pattern of growth with Naldretts Lane being unlit and without pedestrian pavements. As such, the proposal conflicts with Policies 3 and 4 of the HDPF and is unacceptable in

principle.

- 5.9 In countryside locations, proposals must also be assessed against Policy 26 of the HDPF, which seeks to protect the countryside from inappropriate development unless it is essential, appropriately scaled, and meets one of four criteria: supporting agriculture or forestry; mineral extraction or waste disposal; quiet informal recreation; or enabling the sustainable development of rural areas. The proposal does not meet any of these criteria and is not considered essential to its countryside location.
- 5.10 Policy 11 of the HDPF requires development to be of a scale and type appropriate to its location and to add to the quality or range of accommodation and experiences for residents and visitors. The site's current lawful use as a caravan park contributes to the tourism accommodation available in the district. No evidence has been provided to demonstrate that this use cannot continue. The proposed development would therefore result in the loss of an existing tourism function, contrary to Policy 11.
- 5.11 The age of the HDPF means that consideration must be given to whether relevant policies are out of date under NPPF paragraph 11(d), particularly in relation to housing delivery and the five-year housing land supply. The Council currently cannot demonstrate a five-year supply, with supply calculated at approximately 1.7 years. However, the Council has adopted the supplementary document *Shaping Development in Horsham District* to guide decision-making in this context.
- 5.12 Paragraph 5.12 of that document confirms that applications outside defined BUABs and on unallocated sites may be considered positively where all of the same criteria set out in HDPF Policy 4 are met, including adjacency to settlement boundaries, appropriate scale, meeting local housing needs, avoiding cumulative harm, and maintaining landscape character. The proposal does not meet these criteria and therefore does not benefit from this positive consideration.
- 5.13 Overall, although the adopted Local Plan is over five years old, the proposal fails to comply with the spatial strategy, countryside protection policies, and the criteria set out in the *Shaping Development in Horsham District* document. It is not essential to a countryside location, does not meet local housing need, and would represent unsustainable and inappropriate development.
- 5.14 Overall, given that the proposed development would not be considered to be essential to the countryside location, it would be contrary to Policies 2, 3,4 and 26 of the HDPF and the proposal would not accord with the *Shaping development in Horsham district document*, the development would be unacceptable in principle.

Land Use:

- 5.15 The current application seeks permission for the erection of nine static caravans, arranged in two linear rows forming a concentrated block close to Naldretts Lane.
- 5.16 Policy 19 of the HDPF recognises that park homes can contribute to low-cost housing provision, provided that developments meet a local housing need, are used for permanent accommodation, and are not constrained by flooding, poor drainage or ground instability.
- 5.17 While the proposal is for permanent accommodation and does not identify ground stability constraints, no evidence has been submitted to demonstrate that the development would meet a defined local housing need such that the use of the land for permanent park home has not been satisfactorily justified. There is no information indicating that the units would address affordability, older persons' housing, or local district-wide need. As such, the proposal does not comply with Policy 19.

- 5.18 The applicant has cited examples to demonstrate that the land use of the development should be concluded to be acceptable. One such example is an application DC/23/1224, which approved three two-bedroom residential park homes for year-round occupation. However, that permission related to an established park home site accommodating 46 permanent static park homes, and is therefore not directly comparable to the current proposal. Furthermore, it is noted from the Appellant's statement that they seek to argue that the Local authority have approved other residential uses on less sustainable locations. It is considered that each application is considered on its own merits and the nature of development that may be acceptable in one location may not be acceptable in another depending on factors not limited to planning history, number of units, affordable provision, location, siting, design, residential amenity reasons, landscape reasons, harm to the character of the site and countryside. Whilst it is useful in some instances to compare decisions of directly comparable sites, none of those used within the Appellant's statement are immediately relevant such that they would be reasonable in advancing that the Local Authority were being inconsistent in their decision making.
- 5.19 Whilst matters such as drainage are not usually considered as part of Permission in principle applications as a stand alone consideration, given the principle of development in the proposed location would include assessment of policy 19 which requires barriers in terms of flooding, drainage or ground stability to be considered these barriers must form part of the assessment. No information has been provided to suggest that the units would be used to meet a local housing need, with no information suggesting how the units would meet an affordable housing need, accommodation for over 55s or affordable rental property. Whilst it is acknowledged that the Applicant's Statement highlights a general district wide need for housing, it has not been satisfactorily demonstrated that the park homes proposed would contribute to local housing need.
- 5.20 RNP1.1 Proposals for sustainable development will be supported. Outside of defined built up areas (as shown on the Policies Map) new residential development will only be supported on allocated sites or where they would accord with the residential exception policies in the development plan.
- 5.21 The proposed static caravans would introduce a level of permanence and suburban form beyond that associated with the site's existing tourism use. Whilst it is acknowledged that the site does sporadically host tourism uses that include non-permanent caravan occupation and the wider Sussex Topiary Site contains settled gypsy accommodation, this tourism use allows for some retention of countryside character, particularly outside the summer season. The introduction of permanent residential units would significantly increase visual impact and result in an incongruous and domesticated appearance that does not reflect the local vernacular.
- 5.22 Given the rural countryside context, the proposed use would be more detrimental to the character of the area than the existing lawful use. The fixed built form and associated residential activity would result in an unacceptable intensity of development, eroding the site's rural character and introducing urbanising influences into an otherwise rural landscape. Although boundary hedgerows and trees could provide some screening, this is seasonal and would be insufficient during winter months.

Overall, the permanence, layout, type and level of activity would appear cramped and visually intrusive, resulting in material harm to the character of the locality. The proposal would therefore represent an incongruous and inappropriate form of development in the countryside and is contrary to Policies 25, 32 and 33 of the HDPF.

Amount of Development:

- 5.23 Policies 25 and 33 of the HDPF promote development that protects, conserves and enhances landscape character and ensures that proposals reflect the locally distinctive character of

settlements.

- 5.24 Policy 32 requires high quality design. Proposals should consider landscape characteristics, with development seeking to provide an attractive, functional and accessible environment that complements the locally distinctive character of the district. Buildings should contribute to a sense of place, and should be of a scale, massing, and appearance that is of a high standard or design and layout which relates sympathetically to the landscape and built surroundings. Policy 33(2) of the HDPF states that development will be required to ensure that it is designed to avoid unacceptable harm to the amenity of occupiers/users of nearby property and land.
- 5.25 However, within the context of a Permission in Principle application, the consideration of “amount” is not confined solely to visual or layout impacts. It must also address whether the scale of development proposed is appropriate having regard to the site’s countryside location and its position outside the defined settlement hierarchy.
- 5.26 The appeal scheme would introduce a new development into what is currently a grassed field. Aside from the settled gypsy pitches, the character of the area is rural with only minimal activity associated with its countryside location.
- 5.27 The increase of 9 permanent caravan homes would contribute to growth outside the settlement boundary in a manner that conflicts with the Development Plan’s objective of directing new housing to defined sustainable locations. The amount of development is therefore not neutral in policy terms; it would establish a precedent for residential use that is unrelated to the settlement strategy and would cumulatively erode the distinction between settlement and countryside.
- 5.28 The proximity of the development with those permanent gypsy pitches within the wider Sussex Topiary site would result in a concentration of residential development on this part of Naldretts Lane and would end in a significant number of permanent homes within a limited application site. Such a consolidation of the number of permanent caravans which would be for year round residential use away from the Built up area boundary would be detrimental to the undeveloped rural character of much of the road and be seen cumulatively.
- 5.29 Naldretts lane is a narrow single track road. The submitted information has not demonstrated that the proposed number of pitches would be an acceptable number and it is not known how many vehicle movements would be associated with the proposed development. Due to the number of proposed pitches, the level of activity on site and formalisation resulting from the proposal would be a significant change to the character of the countryside location that would fail to protect, conserve or enhance the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area.
- 5.30 Due to the number of pitches proposed, each of the plots within the application site would have a very limited amenity space. It is acknowledged that an area of communal garden is indicated as part of the submitted block plan, however this would itself be limited.
- 5.31 Whilst it is noted that the application is a Permission in principle, which would not typically look at making an assessment of layout, plans have been submitted, which if approved under the current application would be attached to the decision notice, such that the layout would be considered acceptable. Given that the detail has been given, an assessment will be made in this instance.
- 5.32 The quantum of development, being 9 park homes within a limited application site and its tight formation in terms of its layout would lead to a lack of privacy for the future occupiers and would result in a mutually obtrusive appearance. Overall, the development would represent a cramped form of development without sufficient residential amenity. The future occupiers would have unacceptable space within their residential units and would be anticipated to

experience harm from noise given the close proximity between the park homes.

6 Conclusions

- 6.1 In determining a Permission in Principle application, the Local Planning Authority is required to consider only the location, land use and amount of development. Matters such as layout, appearance, access, landscaping, drainage and environmental mitigation are reserved for any subsequent Technical Details Consent stage. It is noted that the Appellant's statement argues the use of conditions should be used to make the application acceptable where details have not been provided.
- 6.2 Had the application been determined within the statutory determination period, the delegated report would have considered the merits of the proposal such as housing. It is noted that the Appellant has drawn attention within their statement that the no objection comment from WSCC Highway authority and the economic benefits of the construction hobs arising from the proposal should be considered in favour of the development. The lack of objection from Highways would be considered neutral in the planning balance and given that the park homes would be brought to site fully assembled they would not require construction.
- 6.3 The proposal does not accord with the overarching spatial strategy set out in Policies 2, 3, 4 and 26 of the HDPF, which direct development towards sustainable, well-connected settlements and seek to protect the countryside from inappropriate residential encroachment. It is acknowledged, however, that these policies are not fully compliant with the NPPF.
- 6.4 The application site is not allocated for development within the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) or a Made Neighbourhood Plan, nor does it form a logical extension to the established settlement pattern. Instead, the proposal would represent an encroachment of residential development into the countryside, resulting in a noticeable urban intrusion into the wider landscape and contributing to the erosion of the distinction between settlement and countryside.
- 6.5 It is acknowledged that the site benefits from a temporary permission for use as a campsite for 60 days from 11 April 2025 (DC/25/0369), and that permission has recently been implemented for four settled gypsy pitches within the wider site. However, these uses differ materially from the current proposal. The campsite represents a temporary and seasonal use, with no lasting impact on countryside character, while the gypsy pitches comprise a lower quantum of development and are considered under different policies. By contrast, the proposed development would introduce a permanent residential use, resulting in intensified activity and long-term harm to the character of the countryside.
- 6.6 The Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply, and paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF therefore applies. This establishes a presumption in favour of granting permission unless either the application of policies protecting areas or assets of importance provides a clear reason for refusal, or the adverse impacts of the proposal would significantly and demonstrably outweigh its benefits when assessed against the Framework as a whole. Footnote 7 to paragraph 11(d) clarifies that such protective policies are those relating to habitats and other designated assets.
- 6.7 In this context, conflict with countryside and spatial strategy policies attracts reduced weight. To assist decision-making where the development plan is out of date, the Council has published the Facilitating Appropriate Development document, which sets out criteria for supporting housing development outside built-up area boundaries. These include adjacency to a settlement edge, appropriate scale, demonstration of local housing need, avoidance of prejudicing long-term development, and containment within defensible boundaries that protect landscape character.

- 6.8 The application site fails to meet these criteria. It does not adjoin a settlement edge, and no evidence has been provided to demonstrate that the proposed nine permanent static homes would meet a specific local housing need. The proposal therefore conflicts with both the development plan policies and the guidance contained within the Facilitating Appropriate Development and *Shaping Development in Horsham District* documents. This conflict is afforded moderate weight against the proposal. In addition, the loss of tourist accommodation within the district, where such provision is limited, attracts further moderate adverse weight.
- 6.9 The delivery of nine permanent residential units in the context of a housing land supply shortfall is afforded significant weight in favour of the proposal. However, this benefit is outweighed by the identified harms. The quantum of development would be unacceptably cramped and would result in harm to the character of the site and the wider locality, as well as poor amenity conditions for future occupiers. This conflict with Policies 25, 32 and 33 of the HDPF attracts moderate weight against the proposal.
- 6.10 On balance, when all material considerations are taken into account, the adverse impacts of the development are considered to significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. It is therefore recommended that planning permission be refused.

7 Suggested Conditions

- 7.1 Should the Inspector be minded to allow the appeal, it is not possible to attach conditions to a Permission in Principle.