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## Appeal Decision

Site visit made on 11 August 2026

**by A Wright BSc (Hons) MRTPI**

an Inspector appointed by the Secretary of State

Decision date: 3 September 2026

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### Appeal Ref: 6009817

#### **Woodside Equestrian Centre, Forest Road, Colgate, West Sussex RH12 4TF**

- 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 S Novell against the decision of Horsham District Council.
  - The application Ref is DC/26/0206.
  - The development proposed is the retention of top surface to majority of existing hardcore area and its use for the parking of vehicles in connection with the use of the equestrian centre and re-siting of lorry containers onto historic hardsurfaced area.
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### Decision

1. The appeal is dismissed.

### Preliminary Matters

2. The top surfaced parking area has already been installed and there are lorry containers on the site. The proposal is to retain the top surfaced parking area and place the lorry containers on a different part of the site.
3. A new National Planning Policy Framework (the Framework) was published on 17 August 2026 which replaces the previous version. I invited the Council and the appellant to consider whether the new Framework has relevance to this appeal. My decision reflects the latest version of the Framework and the response received from the Council.

### Main Issues

4. The main issues in this appeal are:
  - whether the site is a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to local and national planning policies; and
  - whether the proposal would conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape.

### Reasons

#### *Suitability of the location*

5. The appeal site lies in the countryside, outside any defined built-up area. Policy 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015 (HDPF) seeks to avoid inappropriate development in the countryside. It requires any proposal outside built-up area boundaries to be essential to its countryside location and meet at least one of four specified criteria. Amongst other things, it also requires proposals to not significantly increase the overall level of activity in the countryside.

6. Policy S5 of the Framework states that only certain forms of development should be approved outside settlements. This includes development for rural businesses where a location outside settlements is shown to be necessary, with which Policy 26 of the HDPF is broadly consistent.
7. Policy 10 of the HDPF supports sustainable rural economic development where it is appropriate to the countryside location. It requires such proposals to contribute to diverse and sustainable farming enterprises, or for other countryside-based activities, contribute to the wider rural economy. In either case, the development must be accommodated within buildings appropriate for conversion or deliver substantial environmental improvement. This generally accords with Policy E4 of the Framework which sets out the types of development which should be supported to enable the sustainable growth of businesses in rural areas.
8. The proposed scheme includes re-siting the existing storage containers to a different position. These are used by various small mainly Horsham-based businesses to provide secure, affordable storage of equipment associated with their trade, such as building materials and carpets. They operate as a separate commercial activity which is not dependent on a rural location and could reasonably be accommodated within established employment areas. Therefore, in line with the Inspector's findings on the previous appeal for container and touring caravan storage on the property<sup>1</sup>, the proposal is not essential to a countryside location. As such, it conflicts with Policy 26 of the HDPF.
9. Revenue from the appellant's equestrian business has been reducing for some time and the rental income from the containers subsidises the losses from this, enabling the retention of a small number of employees. Nonetheless, the proposed storage containers are not functionally linked to the equestrian or other land-based rural use. Whilst they help with the viability of the existing equestrian business, the commercial storage use does not diversify a farming enterprise, contribute to the wider rural economy or deliver environmental improvement, nor is it within a converted building. Therefore, it fails to accord with Policy 10 of the HDPF.
10. The appellant compares the number of potential vehicle movements generated by the lawful equestrian business with those potentially generated by tenants of the storage containers. However, there is no empirical evidence to justify the figures put forward and as such I am not satisfied that the proposed use does not significantly increase the overall level of activity on this site in the countryside.
11. Consequently, I conclude that the site is not a suitable location for the proposed development, having regard to local and national policies. This is contrary to Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF. Further, the proposal does not provide the types of development supported by Policies S5 and E4 of the Framework.

### *National landscape*

12. The appeal site lies adjacent to Forest Road, a rural lane with a verdant character, enclosed by hedgerows, mature trees and dense vegetation. It slopes down from the lane towards two containers, a portacabin and large buildings associated with the existing long-established equestrian use. There are existing large areas of hardstanding between the road and the structures.

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<sup>1</sup> Appeal ref: APP/Z3825/W/25/3374616 'the previous appeal/scheme'

13. The site is within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) where there is a statutory duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty. In addition, Policy N4 of the Framework states that proposals within National Landscapes (NLs) should be limited in scale and extent and sensitively located and designed to avoid harm to the statutory purposes and special qualities of the landscape. It requires substantial weight to be placed on the importance of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of NLs.
14. Policy 30 of the HDPF generally reflects the statutory and national policy requirements. It also requires proposals within protected landscapes, including the NL, to have regard to the management plan for the area and to demonstrate how key components of natural beauty will be conserved, amongst other things.
15. Having regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, the HWNL is one of the best surviving medieval landscapes in north-west Europe. Its natural beauty is derived from the essentially rural and small-scale landscape character, rich in wildlife and cultural features, created by historic and locally distinctive agricultural and forestry practices. Features include abundant ancient woodland, and a mosaic of fields created by woodland clearance often bound by hedgerows and woods.
16. The Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment outlines the characteristics of the St Leonard's Forest Landscape Character Area (LCA) within which the site lies. This character area is very densely wooded, with the combination of forest cover and ghylls creating a strongly enclosed landscape with confined views. It includes a medium scale field pattern of regular arable fields which divide the woodlands. This area is identified as being highly sensitive to change, including from suburbanisation and changes in farmland management.
17. The appeal site comprises an equestrian use within a wider open area of paddocks and fields surrounded by tree belts and woodland. Therefore, the site and its setting are characteristic of the HWNL and the LCA.
18. The submitted information includes photographs of trial holes to demonstrate that the pre-existing surface of the proposed parking area was hardsurfaced. Nonetheless, as found in the previous appeal, these are limited in size and provide only a snapshot of ground conditions at discrete points, so they are insufficient to demonstrate the extent, continuity or overall footprint of any alleged historic hard surfacing. In any event, there is little to indicate that the hardsurfacing is lawful, such as a lawful development certificate<sup>2</sup>, and there are references to part of the site being previously grassed and part of an agricultural field.
19. The appellant states that a larger parking area is needed due to the equestrian activities which are carried out on the land and to allow access to the existing buildings. However, the introduction of an extensive artificial top-surfaced area and its use for parking vehicles have an urbanising effect. This harmfully erodes the undeveloped, pastoral character of this part of the site and surrounding landscape. The lorry storage containers would be sited alongside the two existing containers and portacabin, set against a backdrop of sizeable equestrian buildings on a historic area of hardstanding. Nevertheless, a long row of metal clad containers in this location would appear as a bulky and utilitarian addition, at odds with the rural setting and exacerbating the urbanisation of the landscape.

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<sup>2</sup> Under section 191 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)

20. The roadside vegetation provides some screening of the proposed parking area in views from Forest Road, which could be enhanced by additional native hedgerow planting along this boundary. However, parts of it would remain apparent in views into the site at the access point, through which the containers would also be evident. In any event, the high protection afforded to NLs does not exist only in visually prominent locations. The top-surfaced area, its use for parking and the installation of containers would erode the largely open, undeveloped landscape character. Although this erosion would be relatively localised, the proposed scheme would not conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the HWNL.
21. Consequently, I conclude that the proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the HWNL. This would be contrary to Policies 25 and 30 of the HDPF which amongst other things seek to protect landscape character, including by conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the HWNL. The proposal would also conflict with Policy N4 of the Framework and would therefore not further the statutory purposes of protected landscapes.

### **Other Matters**

22. The Council did not find harm or development plan conflict in relation to the impact on ancient woodland. Nonetheless, even if I were to agree with the Council on this point, the absence of harm would be a neutral matter which would not carry weight in favour of the proposed scheme.

### **Planning Balance**

23. As set out above, the proposed containers provide secure, affordable storage for nearby businesses and an income to subsidise the operation of the equestrian business, enabling the retention of some staff. However, I have found that the site is not a suitable location for the proposed development and would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the HWNL, contrary to Policies 10, 25, 26 and 30 of the HDPF and Policy N4 of the Framework. Therefore, in this case, the benefits do not substantially outweigh the adverse effects, including to the character of the countryside, for proposals which do not fall within the categories outlined in Policy S5 of the Framework.

### **Conclusion**

24. The proposal conflicts with the development plan as a whole and the material considerations, including the Framework, do not indicate that the appeal should be decided other than in accordance with it. The appeal should therefore be dismissed.

*A Wright*

INSPECTOR