



18 Holm Oaks, Cowfold

Single-storey side and rear extensions, loft conversion, rear dormer and front rooflights

Local Planning Authority	Horsham District Council
Relevant comparator appeal	APP/Z3825/D/10/2130421 – 24 Holm Oaks, Cowfold
Purpose of statement	To support a full householder planning application and explain why the proposal should be approved, with particular regard to the appeal decision at 24 Holm Oaks.
Prepared from	The uploaded existing/proposed drawings for 18 Holm Oaks, the refusal material and approved appeal decision relating to 24 Holm Oaks, and current published Horsham planning policy/guidance.

Executive position. The central planning point is straightforward: the Planning Inspector has already accepted, within the same Holm Oaks estate and under the same historic restriction removing permitted development rights, that a substantial rear roof extension can be acceptable where it is rear-facing, set below the ridge, read in the context of the dwelling, and only very limitedly perceived from the public realm. The present proposal at No. 18 engages the same core considerations. The single-storey extensions are plainly subordinate and acceptable. The loft conversion and rear dormer are also acceptable because they do not produce material harm to the character or appearance of the host dwelling, the wider street scene, or neighbouring amenity. The appeal at No. 24 is not merely background history: it is a powerful material consideration which points firmly towards approval here.

1. Introduction and purpose

This statement accompanies a householder planning application at 18 Holm Oaks, Cowfold, for single-storey side and rear extensions together with a loft conversion incorporating a rear dormer and front rooflights. The purpose of the statement is to identify the correct planning issues, explain why the proposal accords with current development plan and national design policy, and address in a direct and forensic way the most obvious matter likely to concern the Local Planning Authority: the acceptability of the rear dormer in light of Horsham's usual caution about broad rear dormers.

The statement is deliberately framed in robust terms because there is already a directly comparable and highly relevant appeal decision within the same development at 24 Holm Oaks. That appeal demonstrates that a broad rear dormer is not objectionable in principle in this location. The correct question is not whether the Council normally prefers smaller pitched dormers in abstract terms, but whether this particular proposal at this particular property causes material planning harm when assessed on its actual visibility, siting, scale, relationship to the dwelling, and effect on the character of the area. For the reasons below, it does not.

2. Site and surroundings

Holm Oaks is a small residential cul-de-sac in Cowfold comprising detached dwellings of similar broad suburban character. The application property sits within the original estate where permitted development rights for enlargement and alteration were removed by condition on the original 1996 estate permission. The consequence is procedural rather than substantive: works which might elsewhere fall to be considered under permitted development require express planning permission here.

What matters for present purposes is that the application site shares the same essential locational characteristics that were material in the appeal at 24 Holm Oaks. It is part of the same estate; it occupies an edge position in the cul-de-sac context; and the rear of the plot relates to peripheral green/woodland land rather than to an exposed, continuous public frontage. The rear roof slope is therefore not part of the principal public townscape in the way a front roof plane would be.

3. The proposal

The submitted drawings show two elements. First, a single-storey side and rear extension at ground floor level. These additions are visually subservient, clearly read as secondary to the original dwelling, and do not present any unusual design concern. Second, the roof is to be converted to habitable accommodation through a rear dormer / rear roof extension with front rooflights. The dormer is set below the main ridge and reads as a rear-facing insertion within the roof form rather than an above-ridge excrescence.

The proposed materials and detailing, including the darker rear upper-level treatment shown on the submitted elevation, help the roof extension read as recessive when viewed against the host building. The overall proposal therefore continues to present the host dwelling as a two-storey detached house with subordinate additions, rather than as a fundamentally re-composed or over-dominant building.

4. Current planning policy context

The current development plan position is that Horsham District Council's adopted local plan remains the Horsham District Planning Framework 2015. In design terms, the most relevant provisions are Strategic Policy 32 (The Quality of New Development) and Policy 33 (Development Principles). In broad terms these require development to provide an attractive, functional and adaptable environment; complement local character; optimise the potential of the site; avoid unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity; achieve a high standard of design in scale, massing and appearance; relate sympathetically to built surroundings; and use high quality materials.

National policy is to the same effect. The National Planning Policy Framework emphasises that good design is fundamental to sustainable development and that planning decisions should ensure proposals function well, are visually attractive, and are sympathetic to local character, while allowing appropriate change. Development that is not well designed should be refused; the converse is that development which responds properly to local design policy and guidance should carry significant weight in favour of approval.

Horsham's published guidance on home extensions is also relevant, but it must be read as guidance, not as a rigid rulebook. The Council states that dormers should not project above the ridge, should be set into the roof slope and be proportionate to the existing roof. It also states that pitched roof dormers are normally preferred and flat box-like dormers are normally avoided. However, the same guidance expressly recognises that the advice may need to be modified depending on the characteristics of the site and surrounding area, and that all applications must be considered on their individual merits. That flexibility is important here.

5. Why the appeal at 24 Holm Oaks is a powerful material consideration

The appeal decision at 24 Holm Oaks is unusually relevant because it concerns the same estate, the same historic removal of permitted development rights, and the same broad design debate: whether a substantial rear dormer on one of the Holm Oaks houses harms character and appearance. Although the policy numbering at the time referred to the former Core Strategy and General Development Control Policies, the Inspector's factual reasoning remains directly material because the key issue then and now is design effect on the dwelling and surrounding area.

The refusal material for No. 24 shows precisely what the Council objected to. It considered that the rear dormer remained bulky and incongruous, that it ran across the rear roof slope, that the dwelling was visible in the cul-de-sac and from a public footpath in Eastlands Wood, and that two pitched dormers would be preferable. Importantly, even then, the officer report did not identify any material harm to neighbouring residential amenity. The real debate was therefore never one of overlooking, loss of light or overbearing effect; it was almost entirely a debate about visual character.

6. Forensic breakdown of the Inspector's reasoning at No. 24

The Inspector's reasoning should be examined closely because it explains why the Council's broad objection to a substantial rear dormer did not withstand scrutiny on appeal.

1. The Inspector first identified the main issue narrowly and correctly: the effect of the development on the character and appearance of the house. That is the same principal issue here.
2. The Inspector then attached weight to the actual siting of the property within Holm Oaks. The house was at the southern end of the cul-de-sac and backed onto woodland. The rear elevation was not visible from the street.
3. The dormer was accepted despite extending almost across the full width of the rear roof slope because, critically, it was set below the ridge and inset from the sides. In other words, breadth alone was not determinative.
4. The Inspector attached significance to the fact that wider views of the rear were limited. Oblique neighbouring relationships and dense tree cover along the public footpath materially reduced perception from the surrounding area.
5. The Inspector expressly addressed the Council's preferred alternative of two pitched dormers and rejected the notion that this preference controlled the outcome. The Inspector accepted that such an alternative would not provide the accommodation sought and concluded that the actual appeal scheme caused no material harm.
6. The Inspector concluded that the proposal would be sympathetic with the built surroundings, would not materially harm the appearance and character of the house, and would comply with the relevant design policies.

7. Direct comparison: No. 24 appeal scheme and No. 18 proposal

When the reasoning from No. 24 is applied to the current proposal, the route to approval is clear. This is not a case where the comparator is from another village, another house type, or another policy context. It is from the same development and addresses the same design concern.

Comparator point	24 Holm Oaks appeal	18 Holm Oaks proposal
Estate context	Same Holm Oaks estate; PD rights removed by original 1996 permission.	Same Holm Oaks estate; same need for express planning permission because PD rights were removed.
Principal design issue	Substantial rear dormer alleged to be bulky/incongruous.	Substantial rear dormer likely to attract the same type of concern.
Public visibility	Rear not visible from the street; wider views limited by siting and woodland context.	Rear roof addition is likewise not part of the principal street scene and is experienced mainly from limited/private viewpoints.
Ridge and side relationship	Inspector attached weight to dormer being below ridge and set in from sides.	The submitted proposal is similarly kept below the main ridge and read as a contained rear roof insertion rather than an above-ridge addition.
Amenity	No material neighbour amenity harm identified.	No unusual amenity harm arises from the proposal; the issue remains visual/design-led rather than residential-amenity-led.
Council preference	Council preferred smaller pitched dormers.	That abstract preference cannot override an acceptable scheme where actual harm is absent.

In short, the features that carried the appeal at No. 24 are not absent here. They are present in materially the same form: rear-facing design, sub-ridge positioning, limited public visibility, and no identified residential amenity harm. The comparison is therefore supportive, not incidental.

8. Assessment of the current proposal

8.1 Single-storey side and rear extensions

The single-storey additions are straightforwardly acceptable. They remain clearly subordinate to the original dwelling, do not compete with the main two-storey form, and are of a type commonly accepted in domestic design terms. Their siting at ground floor level means they do not intrude into wider views in any significant way. They preserve the legibility of the host house and do not undermine the spacing or character of the cul-de-sac.

8.2 Rear dormer and loft conversion

The rear dormer should not be judged by label. Whether a rear dormer is acceptable does not turn on whether it can be described in shorthand as 'full width' or 'box-like'. The planning judgment must focus on actual design effect. Here, the dormer remains below the main ridge, is read only on the rear roof slope, and does not disrupt the principal front elevation or the public street scene. The darker external treatment shown on the elevation further reduces its visual prominence.

Even where Horsham's guidance expresses a normal preference for pitched dormers, the guidance itself recognises that site-specific circumstances matter and that each proposal must be considered on its own merits. In a rear-facing position within this woodland-edge cul-de-sac context, the decisive question is whether the proposal causes material visual harm. It plainly does not. The roof extension is substantial, but controlled. It is a disciplined and purposeful domestic enlargement, not a crude over-dominant addition.

8.3 Character, appearance and the street scene

The proposal preserves the essential character of the dwelling as a detached house within a suburban cul-de-sac. The front elevation remains orderly and recognisable. The more substantial design intervention

occurs at the rear, where public visibility is materially lower. This distinction is important because Horsham's own guidance says that dormer criteria are particularly important where a dormer is visible from public vantage points and especially where it appears on the front of a dwelling. That is not the present circumstance.

Nor is there any principled basis to say that the rear dormer would materially damage the wider street scene. The street scene is experienced primarily from the front and side approaches within Holm Oaks. The rear dormer does not dominate those views. It follows that the proposal is fully consistent with the present design policy requirement for sympathetic scale, massing and appearance.

8.4 Neighbouring amenity

There is no sound basis for refusing the scheme on residential amenity grounds. The submitted design does not introduce an unusual or policy-significant degree of overlooking, dominance or loss of light. That is consistent with the position at No. 24, where even the refusal material did not identify neighbour amenity harm as a reason for refusal. The current scheme is therefore to be judged on its actual visual effect rather than by reference to speculative amenity concern.

9.0 Additional Horsham approvals

- **31 East Street, Billingshurst – DC/19/0628.** Horsham approved an **enlarged rear dormer**. The officer report says the dormer was acceptable because it was **centrally positioned**, kept **appropriate distances to the roof edges**, and was **not clearly visible from a public vantage point**; on that basis it was considered not to harm the street scene or conservation area and to comply with **HDPF Policies 32, 33 and 34**. Committee minutes then confirm that **planning permission was granted**.
- **139 Churchill Way, Broadbridge Heath – DC/23/1303.** Horsham approved a loft conversion with a **rear dormer**. The officer report says the dormer was of a form **subservient to the main dwelling and roof**, would not appear **unduly prominent or incongruous**, and would not cause **unacceptable harm to privacy or amenity**. The committee minutes confirm the application was **granted subject to conditions**.
- **5 Trundle Mead, Horsham – DC/25/1187.** Horsham approved a remodelled dwelling including **rear dormers**. The officer report records that the street already contained examples of **front, side and rear dormers**, that the proposed dormers were **clearly subservient additions**, and that their positioning/design would not result in **harmful overlooking or loss of privacy**. The committee minutes confirm **approval in accordance with the officer recommendation**.
- **14 Saxon Road, Steyning – DC/25/0527.** This is not a final approval precedent because the committee item was **withdrawn**, but the officer report is still very useful. It expressly states that **pitched roof dormers are usually preferred**, yet still concludes that a **rear flat-roof dormer** can be acceptable **on balance** where there are similar dormers in the wider area and the dormer is to the rear and **cannot be viewed from the street scene**.
- **18 Saxon Road, Steyning – DC/19/2155.** I have not pulled the original decision notice yet, so I would use this cautiously. However, Horsham's own 2025 officer report at 14 Saxon Road expressly records that **No. 18 Saxon Road has a relatively large flat roof dormer approved under DC/19/2155**. That is useful as supporting evidence of Horsham's accepted approach to rear flat dormers.

10. Consistency in decision-making

Planning decisions are not determined by strict precedent in the way court cases are, but consistency is nonetheless a central component of lawful and rational decision-making. Where a directly comparable appeal decision exists, especially within the same small development and involving the same category of domestic roof enlargement, it must be afforded real weight. The closer the factual alignment, the stronger the planning justification that would be required to reach a different conclusion.

Here, any refusal directed simply to the breadth or generalised 'box dormer' character of the proposal would be difficult to sustain. The Inspector at No. 24 already considered a broad rear dormer on the Holm Oaks estate and found that actual visibility, siting, limited public perception and the absence of material harm outweighed the Council's design preference for smaller pitched dormers. Unless a material distinction can be demonstrated, the same planning logic should be applied to No. 18.

In this respect, the position of No. 24 is not better than No. 18 in any way that justifies opposite outcomes. The comparator appeal is therefore not merely supportive; it is compelling.

11. Planning balance and conclusion

The proposal comprises a coherent package of domestic improvements to an existing dwelling. The single-storey extensions are clearly subordinate and acceptable. The loft conversion and rear dormer create additional accommodation in a way that keeps the principal visual change to the rear, below the ridge and outside the principal public street scene. The design causes no material harm to the character or appearance of the dwelling, no material harm to the wider area, and no unacceptable harm to neighbouring amenity.

Against the current policy framework in the Horsham District Planning Framework and the National Planning Policy Framework, the proposal is a well-designed householder extension scheme which should be approved. Most importantly, the appeal decision at 24 Holm Oaks demonstrates that Horsham's general dislike of broad rear dormers cannot justify refusal where, as here, the actual planning consequences are limited and acceptable. The same conclusion should be reached on the present application.

12. Requested determination

For all of the reasons set out above, planning permission should be granted.