



DELEGATED APPLICATIONS - ASSESSMENT SHEET

APPLICATION NO./ADDRESS:

DC/26/0206

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

DESCRIPTION:

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 hard surfaced area (Retrospective)

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY:

DC/21/0325	Prior notification for access to paddocks for management and maintenance purposes	Prior Approval Required and REFUSED on 07.04.2021
DC/24/1405	Retention of top surface of existing hardcore areas and continued use of part of land for the storage of lorry containers and touring caravans.	Application Refused on 24.09.2025 Appeal Dismissed on (ref. APP/Z3825/W/25/3374616) Split Decision on 13.08.2024
DC/24/0894	Application to confirm the erection of a dwellinghouse for residential purposes for a period in excess of ten years (Lawful Development Certificate - Existing)	

DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE

The application site is an equestrian site located outside of the built-up area and within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL).

The site is an irregular shape, comprising newly laid hardstanding on what would have been part of wider field sub-parcels, and the northern boundary abuts Forest Road, delineating the site from the designated Ancient Woodland, Spurs orchard Wood.

The western and southern boundaries are defined by stock fencing, and a newly planted non-native hedgerow defines the northeastern boundary.

DESCRIPTION OF THE APPLICATION

The application seeks retrospective planning permission for:

- The retention of a top surface applied to an existing hardcore area, and its use as a car park in connection with the equestrian centre; and
- The siting of up to 8 lorry containers within the southern part of the site.

This application follows the refusal of planning permission under reference DC/24/1405 and the subsequent dismissal of appeal ref. APP/Z3825/W/25/3374616.

The current proposal differs from the refused scheme in the following respects:

- Removal of touring caravans from the proposal (previously up to 10 units).
- Reduction in quantum of storage, now limited to a maximum of 8 lorry containers.

- Reconfiguration of the site layout, with storage relocated away from the roadside boundary to a more southerly position.
- Defined use of part of the site as a car park associated with the equestrian use, rather than mixed storage across the site.
- Indication that areas of hardstanding may be reduced and that boundary treatment (fencing/hedgerow planting) could be introduced.

Notwithstanding these amendments, the development remains retrospective and continues to comprise hardstanding and storage use within a countryside location. It is also noted that a similar amended scheme was put forward during the appeal process; however, the Inspector declined to consider it on the basis that it represented a materially different proposal to that originally determined.

RELEVANT PLANNING POLICIES

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

Horsham District Planning Framework (2015):

Policy 1 - Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development
 Policy 2 - Strategic Policy: Strategic Development
 Policy 3 - Strategic Policy: Development Hierarchy
 Policy 7 - Strategic Policy: Economic Growth
 Policy 9 - Employment Development
 Policy 10 - Rural Economic Development
 Policy 24 - Strategic Policy: Environmental Protection
 Policy 25 - Strategic Policy: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
 Policy 26 - Strategic Policy: Countryside Protection
 Policy 30 - Protected Landscapes
 Policy 31 - Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
 Policy 32 - Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development
 Policy 33 - Development Principles
 Policy 35 - Strategic Policy: Climate Change
 Policy 36 - Strategic Policy: Appropriate Energy Use
 Policy 38 - Strategic Policy: Flooding
 Policy 39 - Strategic Policy: Infrastructure Provision
 Policy 40 - Sustainable Transport
 Policy 41 – Parking

Horsham District Local Plan (2023-40) (Regulation 19):

Strategic Policy 1: Sustainable Development
 Strategic Policy 2: Development Hierarchy
 Strategic Policy 6: Climate Change
 Strategic Policy 7: Appropriate Energy Use
 Strategic Policy 8: Sustainable Design and Construction
 Strategic Policy 9: Water Neutrality
 Strategic Policy 11: Environmental Protection
 Strategic Policy 13: The Natural Environment and Landscape Character
 Strategic Policy 14: Countryside Protection
 Strategic Policy 15: Settlement Coalescence
 Strategic Policy 16: Protected Landscapes
 Strategic Policy 17: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
 Strategic Policy 19: Development Quality
 Strategic Policy 20: Development Principles
 Strategic Policy 23: Infrastructure Provision
 Strategic Policy 24: Sustainable Transport
 Policy 25: Parking
 Strategic Policy 29: New Employment
 Strategic Policy 30: Enhancing Existing Employment
 Policy 31: Rural Economic Development

Policy 32: Conversion of Agricultural and Rural Buildings to Commercial, Community and Residential Uses

Policy 33: Equestrian Development

Supplementary Planning Guidance:

Planning Obligations and Affordable Housing SPD (2017)

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule (2017)

Planning Advice Notes:

Shaping Development in Horsham (SDPAN)

Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

REPRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS RESPONSES

Where consultation responses have been summarised, it should be noted that Officers have had consideration of the full comments received, which are available to view on the public file at www.horsham.gov.uk

Consultations:

HDC Arboricultural officer: Comment [Summary]

No tree survey or arboricultural impact assessment has been submitted with the application.

From my observations, the majority of the mature roadside trees bounding the site are beech (occasional sycamore), likely remnants of former unmanaged/lapsed management of hedge planting.

These trees are very prominent with the local street scene and make an important visual contribution to the sylvan landscape character acting as a buffer to the land beyond.

The area within the site adjacent to the road, where the block plan indicates scalplings and associated structures/caravans are to be removed, would foreseeably result in an improved rooting environment for the mature trees situated along the Northern boundary.

In respect of the former similar application for development (Ref: DC/24/1405), the Tree Officer formerly commented upon the fact that from an arboricultural perspective, the theoretical minimum recommended 15m Ancient woodland (AW) buffer to the designated AW to the north (Spurs Orchard Wood), would partly fall within the site.

However, while this may be the case, due to the location of Forest Road and the longstanding relationship between the AW and the engineered Road to its south, the works at the site will have had no direct impact on the trees within the edge of the AW.

Therefore, in this instance, it would not seem appropriate for this theoretical buffer to be applied in relation to the potential arboricultural impacts of development at the subject site.

HDC Landscape Architect: Comment (09.03.26) [Summary]

Overall, we judge that the development does not seek to conserve and enhance the purposes of the National Landscape, under the CRoW Act 2000. This type of development is also largely incompatible with the aims of the AONB Management Plan from a landscape perspective.

We judge that the use of hardstanding and storage has a more adverse effect on the landscape character than that of previous uses. However, effects on landscape character are relatively localised.

If minded for approval, we advise that the scheme introduces further soft landscaping along the north-western boundary to further reduce visual effects along Forest Road, which is the only visual receptor affected by the development. The relocation of caravans and containers away from the north-western edge of the site does however reduce the visual impacts associated with the development.

We also advise the above recommendations are considered in accordance with guidance set out within the High Weald Colour Study.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS:

Representations:

0 letters of Objection or support have been received

Parish Comments:

Colgate Parish Council: Objection (16.03.26)

Colgate Parish Council OBJECTS to this application as it unacceptably effects the character and appearance of the area.

Colgate Parish Council seek clarification as to whether a change of use is required from equestrian and mixed use to car parking and the storage of containers.

Colgate Parish Council seek further clarification as to what is proposed to be stored in the containers and will businesses be run from the containers. Colgate Parish Council requests confirmation as to whether change of use would then be required for this aspect of the application.

Colgate Parish Council requests confirmation as to whether the caravans have been removed from the site.

Colgate Parish Council would request that if the storage containers are allowed that a condition be applied on the type of goods stored. i.e. non-hazardous or flammable.

Member Comments:

None received

HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY:

The application has been considered having regard to Article 1 of the First Protocol of the Human Rights Act 1998, which sets out a person's rights to the peaceful enjoyment of property and Article 8 of the same Act, which sets out their rights in respect to private and family life and for the home. Officers consider that the proposal would not be contrary to the provisions of the above Articles.

The application has also been considered in accordance with Horsham District Council's public sector equality duty, which seeks to prevent unlawful discrimination, to promote equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between people in a diverse community, in accordance with Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010. In this case, the proposal is not anticipated to have any potential impact from an equality perspective.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

Principle of Development

The application site lies outside any defined built-up area and is therefore located within the countryside for the purposes of planning policy, in accordance with paragraph 4.7 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF). As such, the proposal falls to be assessed against the requirements of Policy 26 (Countryside Protection), alongside Policy 10 (Rural Economic Development).

Policy 26 of the HDPF seeks to protect the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside by restricting development to that which is essential to its countryside location. It further requires that development does not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in activity, and that it conserves and enhances the key characteristics of the relevant landscape character area.

Policy 10 supports sustainable rural economic development where it is appropriate to its location, contributes to the rural economy or farming enterprises, and maintains the quality and character of the

countryside. It also requires that development is either accommodated within existing buildings suitable for conversion or results in environmental improvements that reduce the impact on the countryside.

The proposal seeks the retention of hardstanding and the continued use of part of the site for the storage of lorry containers and touring caravans. The applicant has submitted supporting information, including an updated Planning Statement and financial evidence, which reiterates that income from storage and parking activities subsidises the existing equestrian business.

However, this matter was explicitly considered as part of a recent dismissed appeal relating to the same site and use. The Planning Inspector concluded that, whilst the storage use may provide financial support to the equestrian enterprise, this does not amount to an essential need for the development to be located in the countryside, nor does it demonstrate that the use is functionally or operationally linked to the rural character of the site.

The current submission does not introduce any materially new or substantive evidence to alter that conclusion. In particular:

- The financial information provided again demonstrates economic benefit to the applicant but does not establish a functional or locational requirement for the storage use to be situated in this countryside location.
- The storage of containers and caravans remains a commercial activity of a general industrial/storage nature, which is not inherently dependent on a rural setting and could reasonably be accommodated within established employment areas.
- The proposal is not directly related to agriculture, forestry, or other land-based rural activities, nor does it meaningfully support recreation in or enjoyment of the countryside.

Whilst it is acknowledged that rural diversification can be supported under Policy 10, this is typically where development is closely aligned with the existing rural enterprise and compatible with its setting. In this case, the storage use operates as a separate commercial activity, and the reliance on it to subsidise the equestrian use does not, in itself, justify its acceptability in policy terms.

Furthermore, the nature of the use, including the extent of hardstanding and the level of activity associated with storage operations, results in a material intensification of use of the site, which conflicts with the requirement under Policy 26 to avoid significant increases in activity in the countryside.

Taking into account the appeal decision, which is a significant material consideration, and in the absence of compelling new evidence to justify a different conclusion, it is considered that the proposal fails to demonstrate that the development is essential to its countryside location or that it represents an appropriate form of rural economic development.

Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF, as it constitutes an unjustified and inappropriate form of development in the countryside that fails to maintain the character of the area or support the rural economy in a policy-compliant manner.

National Landscape and Landscape Impact

Policy 25 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) requires development proposals to protect, conserve and enhance landscape character, taking into account areas of landscape importance and their key characteristics. Policy 30 further requires that within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), development must conserve and enhance natural beauty, with particular regard to landscape character, local distinctiveness, and the setting of the designated area.

Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) confirms that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these matters.

The application site is located within the HWNL, approximately 1km east of Horsham, within the St Leonard's Forest Landscape Character Area (LCA L1), which forms part of the Forest Ridges and Ghylls Landscape Character Type. This landscape is characterised by a densely wooded, intimate and enclosed character, comprising a mosaic of woodland, irregular pasture and fields, with strong tree

cover and limited long-distance views. The area exhibits a high sensitivity to change, with particular vulnerability to incremental suburbanisation and changes in land management.

The site itself comprises part of an agricultural field which has been subject to the introduction of extensive hardstanding and associated storage uses. The northern boundary adjoins Forest Road, beyond which lies an area of Ancient Woodland, which contributes to the wooded and enclosed character of the local landscape.

In assessing the proposal, significant weight is given to the findings of the recent appeal decision relating to the site, wherein the Planning Inspector concluded that the introduction of hardstanding and storage uses resulted in harm to the character and appearance of the National Landscape, and that such harm arose not solely from visibility, but from the erosion of the intrinsic rural character of the site.

The current submission includes amendments to the layout, notably the relocation of containers away from the north-western boundary and the removal of touring caravans. The Council's Landscape Officer acknowledges that these changes would reduce visual effects along Forest Road, which is identified as the primary visual receptor, and that further boundary planting could provide additional screening.

However, the Landscape Officer maintains that the development does not conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape and is incompatible with the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan. In particular, it is noted that the introduction of hardstanding and storage use represents a more harmful land use than the previous agricultural condition, resulting in an adverse effect on landscape character, albeit one that is relatively localised.

Notwithstanding the limited extent of visual effects, it is important to distinguish between visual impact and landscape character harm. As identified by the Inspector, and reaffirmed by the Landscape Officer, the principal issue arises from the introduction of urbanising and suburbanising features—including hard surfacing, storage containers and associated activity—into a rural and highly sensitive landscape. These features are incongruous with the prevailing pattern of development, which is characterised by dispersed farmsteads, woodland cover, and pastoral land uses.

Furthermore, no Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been submitted to robustly assess the extent of landscape or visual effects, and therefore the assessment relies on professional judgement, informed by site context and the previous appeal findings. The absence of such evidence weighs against the proposal.

While it is acknowledged that additional planting along the north-western boundary could reduce intervisibility from Forest Road, such mitigation would not address the fundamental change in character of the site, nor would it align the development with the key characteristics of the High Weald, including its wooded, undeveloped and tranquil qualities. Mitigation planting is therefore considered to have limited weight and cannot overcome the identified policy conflict.

The proposal would also result in a perceptible increase in activity and intensity of use within the site, further contributing to the erosion of the rural character and tranquillity of the area, contrary to the objectives of conserving the special qualities of the National Landscape.

Taking all matters into account, including the appeal decision and the Landscape Officer's advice, it is concluded that the proposal would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape, resulting in harm to its character and qualities. The development therefore conflicts with Policies 25 and 30 of the HDPF and the provisions of the NPPF.

Impact on Ancient Woodland

Paragraph 193(c) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, such as Ancient Woodland, should be refused unless wholly exceptional reasons exist. Policy 25 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) similarly seeks to protect important landscape features, including trees and woodland, which contribute to landscape character and visual amenity.

The site lies to the south of an area of designated Ancient Woodland (Spurs orchard Wood), separated from the application site by Forest Road. The site frontage along Forest Road is defined by a line of mature roadside trees, predominantly beech, which are prominent within the street scene and make a significant contribution to the wooded and enclosed character of this part of the High Weald National Landscape.

No tree survey or Arboricultural Impact Assessment has been submitted in support of the application. Notwithstanding this, the Council's Tree Officer has reviewed the proposal and advises that, whilst a theoretical 15m buffer to the Ancient Woodland would extend into part of the application site, the presence of Forest Road and the established relationship between the road and the woodland means that the development is unlikely to have resulted in direct arboricultural harm to the Ancient Woodland itself. This position is consistent with the conclusions reached in relation to the previous application and subsequent appeal.

In respect of the mature roadside trees along the northern boundary, these are identified as forming an important visual and landscape buffer. The Tree Officer notes that the removal of hardstanding and associated structures from areas closest to the road, as indicated in the revised layout, would likely improve the rooting environment for these trees, which weighs moderately in favour of the proposal from an arboricultural perspective.

However, the absence of a detailed arboricultural assessment introduces a degree of uncertainty as to the full extent of any impacts within root protection areas (RPAs), particularly given the historic encroachment of hardstanding and storage uses toward the northern boundary. The Landscape Officer has also highlighted the importance of these trees in maintaining the enclosed character of Forest Road and the screening of the site.

Notwithstanding these considerations and having regard to the Tree Officer's advice and the appeal findings, it is not considered that the proposal would result in direct or unacceptable harm to Ancient Woodland, nor would it give rise to a level of arboricultural impact sufficient to warrant refusal on this basis alone.

However, it remains the case that the wider development, including hardstanding and storage use, contributes to harm to the character of the landscape, in part through its relationship with the boundary vegetation and the erosion of the site's rural setting. This matter is more appropriately considered under landscape character and National Landscape policy, rather than as a direct impact on Ancient Woodland.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG):

Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as inserted by the Environment Act 2021) requires that most developments achieve a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), unless the development falls within one of the exemptions set out in the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024.

Where applicable, planning permissions are deemed to be subject to a condition requiring the submission and approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan prior to commencement, demonstrating how the development would deliver the required 10% net gain using the statutory biodiversity metric, and how such gains would be secured and maintained for a period of at least 30 years.

The application is described in part as retrospective. To the extent that the development has already been carried out, it would not be subject to the mandatory BNG requirement, as the statutory provisions apply only to development granted planning permission after the relevant commencement dates.

However, the current proposal also includes elements of operational development, including the retention and potential extension of areas of hardstanding, which may exceed the applicable de minimis thresholds. On the basis of the information submitted, it has not been clearly demonstrated whether the proposal, in whole or in part, would qualify for exemption from the BNG requirements.

In the absence of sufficient information, it is not possible to conclude definitively whether the development would be subject to mandatory BNG. Nevertheless, this matter does not form a reason for refusal in this instance.

Should planning permission be granted, it would be necessary to secure compliance with the statutory requirements, where applicable, through the imposition of a condition requiring the submission and approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan prior to the commencement of any further development falling within the scope of the legislation.

Planning Balance and Conclusion

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The development plan in this instance comprises the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF), with particular regard to Policies 10 (Rural Economic Development), 25 (The Natural Environment and Landscape Character), 26 (Countryside Protection) and 30 (Protected Landscapes). In addition, significant weight is given to national policy set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including the requirement to give great weight to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty within National Landscapes.

Furthermore, the site lies within the High Weald National Landscape, and therefore the Council is subject to the statutory duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to seek to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area.

Benefits of the proposal

The proposal would enable the use of the site for storage purposes, which provides a source of income to support the existing equestrian enterprise. It is acknowledged that this may contribute to the viability of the business and provide some limited economic benefit, including the retention of employment associated with the site.

In addition, amendments to the scheme, including the removal of touring caravans, the relocation of containers away from the site frontage, and the potential for additional boundary planting, would reduce the visual effects of the development, particularly along Forest Road. The Tree Officer also advises that the revised arrangement may result in some localised improvement to the rooting environment of boundary trees.

These matters are afforded moderate weight in the planning balance.

Harm identified

Notwithstanding the above, the proposal gives rise to a number of significant harms. Firstly, the development represents an inappropriate form of development in the countryside, which has not been demonstrated to be essential to its rural location, contrary to Policies 10 and 26 of the HDPF. The storage use is not functionally or operationally dependent on a countryside location, and the financial benefits to the applicant do not outweigh the policy requirement to restrict development to that which is essential.

Secondly, and most significantly, the proposal results in harm to the character and appearance of the High Weald National Landscape. The introduction and retention of extensive hardstanding and storage use, together with associated activity, represents an urbanising and suburbanising influence which is incongruous with the prevailing rural character of the area.

While it is acknowledged that visual effects are relatively localised and have been reduced through amendments to the scheme, the harm identified relates fundamentally to the erosion of landscape character, rather than visibility alone. As such, mitigation through planting and layout changes is limited in its ability to address this harm.

The proposal therefore fails to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the National Landscape, contrary to Policies 25 and 30 of the HDPF, and conflicts with the requirements of the NPPF.

In this regard, great weight is afforded to the harm to the National Landscape, in line with national policy and the statutory duty under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

In respect of biodiversity and arboriculture, it is noted that the proposal would not result in direct harm to Ancient Woodland, and some limited arboricultural benefits may arise from the revised layout. These matters weigh neutrally in the overall balance. Biodiversity Net Gain requirements, where applicable, could be addressed by condition and do not weigh against the proposal.

Appeal Decision

Significant weight is given to the recent appeal decision relating to the same site and substantially the same development. The Planning Inspector concluded that the development resulted in harm to the character and appearance of the area and failed to demonstrate an essential need for a countryside location.

The current submission does not introduce materially new evidence or changes sufficient to justify a different conclusion. As such, the appeal decision is a highly material consideration which weighs heavily against the proposal.

Overall Planning Balance

When assessed against the development plan as a whole, the limited economic and operational benefits of the proposal, and the modest visual improvements secured through amendments, are outweighed by the identified harm.

In particular, the proposal conflicts with the spatial strategy for the countryside and results in harm to the character and appearance of the High Weald National Landscape, to which substantial weight must be given.

There are no material considerations, either individually or cumulatively, that would indicate that a decision should be taken other than in accordance with the development plan.

For the reasons set out above, the proposal is considered to conflict with Policies 10, 25, 26 and 30 of the Horsham District Planning Framework, and the provisions of the National Planning Policy Framework.

The identified harms, particularly in respect of the High Weald National Landscape, significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal. Accordingly, planning permission should be refused.

Recommendation: Application REFUSED

Reasons:

- 1 The proposed use of the land for the storage of containers and associated commercial activity has not been demonstrated to be functionally or operationally dependent on a countryside location, nor has it been shown to represent sustainable rural economic development in accordance with the development plan. The proposal is therefore contrary to Policies 10 and 26 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).
- 2 The proposal would result in the retention of extensive hardstanding and a commercial storage use which introduces urbanising and suburbanising features into a rural and highly sensitive landscape. This results in harm to the character and appearance of the site and the wider area

fundamentally from the erosion of the site's rural character and its incompatibility with the key characteristics of the High Weald National Landscape, including its undeveloped, wooded and tranquil qualities. As such, mitigation measures are insufficient to overcome the identified harm. The proposal therefore fails to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and special qualities of the High Weald National Landscape, and is thus contrary to Policies 25 and 30 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) and Paragraph 189 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

POSITIVE AND PROACTIVE STATEMENT

Statement pursuant to Article 35 of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. The Local Planning Authority has acted positively and proactively in determining this application by assessing the proposal against all material considerations, including planning policies and any representations that may have been received, in order to be able to, where possible, grant permission.

Plans list for: DC/26/0206

Schedule of plans/documents **not approved**:

Plan Type	Description	Drawing Number	Received Date
Location plan		1A	05.02.2026
Block plan		2A	05.02.2026
Site plan	Proposed	3B	05.02.2026

DELEGATED

Case Officer sign/initial Daniel Holmes Date: 30/03/2026

Authorising Officer sign/initial RHERMITAGE Date: 31.03.2026