



HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Dept
LOCATION:	Toat Cafe Stane Street North Heath West Sussex
DESCRIPTION:	Outline Planning Application for up to 100 residential dwellings (including 35% affordable), pharmacy, shop/cafe and open space, all matters reserved except access.
REFERENCE:	DC/26/0826
RECOMMENDATION:	Holding objection / Modification
SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION: The biodiversity metric submitted demonstrates that the development will have a -50.15% net loss (-9.14 units) in area habitat and a -17.56% net loss (-0.78 units) in hedgerow on-site. A bespoke off-site solution demonstrates that with these enhancements, a +21.19% net gain (+3.86 units) in area habitat and a +10.55% net gain (+0.47 units) in hedgerows will be delivered. However, there are several concerns pertaining to the baseline assessment of the site, which is the reason for the holding objection. Furthermore, there are questions regarding the feasibility of the off-site BNG as currently proposed, concerns relating to the layout and design of the development and subsequent impacts on retained habitats, and discrepancies between documents regarding post-development habitats. Recommendations are also made with regards to the West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy priorities. Such matters may be addressed at Reserved Matters.	
MAIN COMMENTS: The comments below relate solely to the BNG proposed in the above application. The comments are not considered exhaustive. All other ecology matters will be reviewed by Place Services and NatureSpace, where appropriate. As currently submitted, the biodiversity metric demonstrates that the development will have a -50.15% net loss (-9.14 units) in area habitat and a -17.56% net loss (-0.78 units) in hedgerow on-site. As there is no net gain on-site, this cannot be considered as significant on-site BNG and therefore a legal agreement to secure on-site proposals is not required. The applicant has put forward bespoke off-site proposals, which bring the overall figures to +21.19% net gain (+3.86 units) in area habitat and a +10.55% net gain (+0.47 units) in hedgerows. Please note that all off-site BNG requires a legal agreement to register on the Biodiversity Gain Site Register. HDC will need notification from the applicant if they wish to secure the site with HDC. An alternative approach is to include the off-site area within	

the red line boundary, and in doing so negate the need for registration of off-site land and the associated additional administration and fees, although this will still require a legal agreement as it will become significant on-site BNG as per HDCs definition (which can be found on the HDC BNG webpage). In this case, an upfront monitoring fee will be required, and monitoring reports will need to be submitted to HDC typically in years 1,2,5,10,15,20,25 and 30.

However, there are concerns pertaining to the baseline and post-development habitat proposals which are likely to change the above calculated figures.

Baseline

1.0 For the field to the north of the site comprising both on- and off- site, the baseline habitat has been recorded as non-cereal crop as of the relevant date. Having undertaken a site visit, this is not agreed, as there is now a mosaic of other neutral grassland to the east of the field (with a similar composition of that recorded to the south of the field) and tall ruderal to the west (the latter is likely where the contaminated materials were stored). Please see photograph below. There is also extension of bramble scrub into the main field area from the peripheries, which can also be seen on satellite imagery.



1.1 In addition to the above, a ditch network runs across the site. Starting along the central tree line dissecting the fields, a dry ditch accompanies this hedgerow habitat and as such this should be modified in the metric to 'associated with ditch'. A dry ditch is also present centrally within the site, but as this appears to be relatively dry for the majority of the year, this can remain under grassland classification.

1.2 A wet ditch is located within 5m of the red line boundary along the north of the site which was holding water at the time of the site visit (during a heatwave), and multiple water-thriving species are present, such as mint, willows and sedges (see photograph below). It is assumed that this ditch is regularly fed water from the nearby carwash. As such, this triggers the watercourse module of the metric and thus net gains in watercourses must be achieved. The Drainage Report (KPT Properties Ltd, 2026) depicts a proposed outfall into this ditch from the on-site SuDS (drawing no. TCP0101), and therefore the increase in watercourse encroachment must be considered in the metric. The private gardens of Plots 48-54 also appear to back on to the ditch riparian zone. It is recommended to respect the 5m ditch riparian zone, but if not and deemed acceptable

by the Case Officer, then such riparian encroachment must also be accounted for within the metric.



1.3 Section 12.5 of the Outline Application Statement (MCA Architects) states that 15 trees are due to be removed as part of the proposal. From the submitted Arboricultural Method Statement (David Archer Associates, 2026), 5x of these trees (tree nos. 31, 34, 36, 37 and G7) are considered of a large size class ($>60\text{cm}$ and $\leq 90\text{cm}$). It does not appear that all trees to be removed (including all trees of a medium size class or higher located within linear habitats, as per the metric user guide) have been accounted for in the metric, and there appear to be tree numbers missing from the explanatory table (5.2.2) in the BNG Assessment when cross-referencing with the Arboricultural report. Please can the trees considered within the baseline and marked as lost be further clarified within the metric user comments column so the corresponding areas and cross-referenced trees can be identified and reviewed.

1.4 In addition, not all habitats in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (Enims, 2025) are accompanied by a botanical species list (see linear habitats for example).

1.5 Given the above, the baseline assessment is considered incorrect, and further information and modifications are required to overcome the holding objection.

Post-development

2.0 Given public access and proposal of an adjacent car park, it is advised that the proposed lowland meadow in the northern field of the site will likely be subject to too much disturbance to be achievable. It is recommended to downgrade to other neutral grassland in moderate/good condition (depending on proposed management and baseline condition) however this is only considered achievable if there is sufficient alternative open space comprising of modified grassland for recreational kickabout, play, and dog-walking. It is therefore advised to seek HDC Landscape's comments on this latter point. It is recognised that this amendment currently results in the trading rules not being met, and therefore the final design and/or off-site solution will need to be reconsidered.

2.1 I echo the HDC Arboriculturalist's point about RPAs of retained boundary trees overlapping private gardens. There should be a buffer between the boundary and residential plots, and these should be vegetated to further mitigate impacts from artificial light illumination.

2.2 Section 13.4 of the Outline Application Statement details the planting of over 100 trees. However, creation of individual trees is not demonstrated within the BNG Assessment or metric. Please can this be clarified.

2.3 There are discrepancies between Table 5.3.1 of the BNG Assessment (ROAVR Group, 2026) and the entries within the metric for post-development habitats. For example, the table details an ornamental pond, however only a non-priority pond is proposed to reach a moderate condition. Both are mapped on the post-development habitat map. Adding to this, the Landscape Strategy (Kevin Murphy Landscape and Garden Design, 2026) refers to detention basins which are designed to drain, and therefore it is questioned whether one or both of these should be classified as SUDS within the metric instead. In addition, there is no entry for artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface.

2.4 The landscape strategy refers to creation of a community orchard – confirmation is requested on its inclusion as it does not appear in the BNG Assessment or metric.

2.5 The landscape strategy refers to reinforcing retained green corridors, and landscape screening by tree planting at the access road joining the A29. These are not demonstrated in the BNG proposals and should be included.

2.6 Any hedges or introduced shrub proposed to be planted outside the private curtilages of the plots should be included the metric and BNG post-development habitat plan.

Strategic significance

3.0 Areas of the site fall within highlighted priorities of the West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Specifically, the north of the site is highlighted as a priority area for creation of new woodland. As such, we would wish to see the post-development habitats and layout in accordance with this priority. This would also provide a measurable uplift from a high 'strategic significance' within the metric.

Draft HMMP

4.0 No draft HMMP has been submitted, as per HDCs local validation list. However, as no significant on-site BNG is being proposed, it is considered acceptable to condition the submission of this document. Note that with the above modifications that it may then be considered as significant on-site BNG. It is advised to consult Natural England's HMMP template, checklist, and accompanying document for expected content.

4.1 Note that if minded to approve, and the applicant wishes to retain the proposals of grassland enhancement to off-site, then a HMMP will be required as an obligation within the legal agreement.

ANY RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS:

If minded to approve:

Informative

Scenario 1: BNG Required

Condition

Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)

Pre-Commencement Condition:

The development hereby permitted shall not commence until a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (the HMMP), prepared in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Plan and including:

- (a) a non-technical summary;
- (b) the planned habitat creation and enhancement works to create or improve habitat to achieve the biodiversity net gain in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Plan, together with a timetable for its provision;
- (c) the management measures to maintain habitat in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Plan from the completion of development; and
- (d) management responsibilities of the people or organisation(s) delivering the HMMP

has been submitted to, and approved in writing by, the Local Planning Authority.

The created and/or enhanced habitat specified in the approved HMMP shall be managed and maintained in accordance with the approved HMMP. Any proposed or retained planting, which within a period of 5 years after the completion of development, dies, is removed, or becomes seriously damaged or diseased shall be replaced in the next planting season with others of similar size and species unless the Local Planning Authority gives written consent to any variation.

Reason: To ensure the development delivers a biodiversity net gain on site in accordance with Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and Policy 31 of the Horsham District Planning Framework (2015).

NAME:	Linsey King Ecology Officer (Planning)
DEPARTMENT:	Strategic Planning - Specialists
DATE:	29/07/2026