

LPA Planning Application reference: DC/25/1957

Oaklands Stud, Forest Grange, West Sussex RH13 6HX

Landscape Character and Visual response to correspondence received from Place Services (Essex County Council) on behalf of Horsham District Council

Demolition of pole barn. Conversion of existing stable building into 1 no. detached dwelling with associated works.

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On behalf of the Applicant, Andrea Starns

Ref: HLA 678 R101

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I.0 Introduction

- I.1 Harper Landscape Architecture LLP (HLA) has reviewed the landscape consultation response prepared by Place Services on behalf of Horsham District Council, dated 28 July 2026, in relation to Planning Application *DC/25/1957*.
- I.2 The comments have been considered against HLA's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA), report reference *hla 678 R01*, and Appendix I Viewpoints 1–5, report reference *hla 678 R02*, both dated June 2026.
- I.3 Place Services does not dispute the principal landscape character baseline identified within the LVIA. The principal areas of disagreement concern the professional judgements of landscape susceptibility and magnitude of change, together with the extent of the red-line boundary, potential domestication and the cumulative position then arising from the pending appeal under *DC/25/1428*.
- I.4 Since the Place Services response was issued, the appeal relating to *DC/25/1428* has been dismissed. This response therefore updates the cumulative assessment, addresses the Inspector's findings insofar as they are relevant to *DC/25/1957*, and records the additional landscape controls that the Applicant is willing to accept. It should be read as an addendum to the submitted LVIA.
- I.5 Following issue of the LVIA, revised drawings were prepared by Manorwood Construction Ltd, dated 3 September 2026. These drawings therefore post-date the LVIA and have been reviewed separately as part of this response.
- I.6 The revised drawings do not alter the development assessed within the LVIA in a manner which requires its landscape or visual judgements to be revisited. Rather, they provide greater definition and certainty regarding the relationship between the proposed residential use and the wider equestrian landholding. In particular, the revised Block Plan defines a tightly contained domestic curtilage around the converted building; retains the adjoining paddocks and sand school outside that curtilage; identifies the footprint of the removed pole barn for reinstatement to lawn; retains the existing landscape framework; and provides additional native hedgerow planting.
- I.7 HLA has reviewed these amendments against the baseline, assessment and conclusions of the issued LVIA. They are consistent with, and reinforce, the landscape mitigation and containment principles upon which the LVIA assessment was based. The LVIA therefore remains unchanged and should be read alongside this response and the revised drawings.

2.0 Landscape Susceptibility

- 2.1 Place Services considers that the Low landscape susceptibility applied within the LVIA understates the susceptibility of the Site and wider landscape, having regard to the Site's location within the High Weald National Landscape and the recognised qualities of tranquillity, remoteness, woodland and pastoral character.
- 2.2 HLA acknowledges that susceptibility is a matter of professional judgement and that another suitably qualified practitioner may reasonably arrive at a different conclusion. HLA has therefore reconsidered the judgement in light of the Place Services response and the subsequent appeal decision, but maintains the judgement set out within the submitted LVIA for the particular type and scale of development proposed.
- 2.3 The LVIA does not judge susceptibility to be Low because the wider landscape lacks value or sensitivity. On the contrary, it identifies the ALLC as having Medium–High Landscape Value, recognising its High Weald location, Ancient Woodland associations, recreational value, wooded and pastoral character and moderate levels of tranquillity and remoteness.
- 2.4 The Low Susceptibility judgement relates specifically to the ability of the Site and the identified landscape receptors to accommodate the type and scale of development proposed; it is not a judgement that the High Weald National Landscape or its valued characteristics are of low susceptibility to residential development generally. The proposal would take place within an established equestrian holding containing existing stable buildings, two permitted pole barns, hardstanding, fencing, lighting, vehicles and associated infrastructure. It would not introduce a new dwelling into an undeveloped field or materially alter the surrounding woodland framework, field pattern, landform or dispersed settlement character. The Site is strongly contained by existing mature woodland and vegetation, with limited intervisibility with the wider landscape. The retention of the positive attributes of the ALLC, reuse of the existing stable building and removal of the pole barn are central to HLA's judgement.
- 2.5 HLA therefore considers the Low Susceptibility judgement to remain reasonable when applied to this tightly defined conversion proposal, subject to the curtilage and ancillary controls set out in Section 4. Place Services' preference for a higher susceptibility represents a legitimate difference in professional judgement rather than a methodological error. Even if a higher susceptibility were adopted, the limited physical and visual change, removal of the pole barn and proposed controls would remain important when determining the magnitude and significance of effect.

3.0 Magnitude of Change and Domestication

- 3.1 Place Services also considers that the magnitude of change has been underestimated, principally because of the change from equestrian to residential use and the potential for domestic features to alter the character of the Site.
- 3.2 HLA agrees with the general proposition that a change from equestrian to residential use is not automatically visually or functionally neutral. However, the magnitude of landscape change must be assessed in the context of the actual development proposed, rather than by reference to the change of use in isolation.
- 3.3 The Site already contains a stable building, two permitted pole barns, sand school, hardstanding, fencing, lighting, parked vehicles and associated equestrian infrastructure. The LVIA expressly recognises that these features locally reduce scenic quality, naturalness and tranquillity.
- 3.4 The proposal reuses the existing stable building and does not materially increase its footprint, height or massing. One of the two existing permitted pole barns would be removed, thereby reducing the amount of built form within the Site, while the second permitted pole barn would remain as part of the established equestrian holding. The revised Block Plan confirms that the footprint of the removed pole barn would be returned to lawn and enclosed by 1.2 m high post-and-rail fencing. The existing woodland, trees, hedgerows and wider landscape framework would be retained, with additional native hedgerow planting proposed to reinforce the existing landscape structure and containment of the Site. The adjoining paddocks and sand school would remain outside the defined domestic curtilage and retain their established equestrian character. Collectively, these measures would limit the physical extent of landscape change, reduce the amount and influence of built form and maintain the established field, woodland and vegetation structure of the Site. These are material considerations when judging the size and scale of landscape change.
- 3.5 HLA accepts that residential occupation could introduce domestic activity and ancillary features. A number of the physical features commonly associated with residential use already have equivalents within the equestrian baseline, including hardstanding, parked vehicles, fencing, lighting and functional structures. Nevertheless, uncontrolled garden expansion, outbuildings, lighting, hardstanding or conspicuous domestic paraphernalia could increase the suburbanising influence of the Site. The revised Block Plan now expressly provides for this, defining a tightly contained domestic curtilage around the converted building while leaving the paddocks and sand school outside the residential area. With those controls, the additional domestic influence would be limited and strongly contained by the established landscape framework.
- 3.6 On that controlled basis, HLA maintains the Low magnitude judgement. The change would be geographically limited to an already developed part of the equestrian holding; the existing building would be reused without a material increase in footprint, height or massing; one of the two permitted pole barns would be removed; and the defining characteristics of the wider wooded High Weald landscape would remain intact.

- 3.7 The difference between HLA and Place Services is therefore one of professional judgement concerning the degree of change, rather than a disagreement that some change in character would occur.

4.0 Wider Red-Line Boundary and Landscape Controls

- 4.1 Place Services reasonably seeks clarity about the extent and treatment of the residential curtilage and the potential introduction of domestic infrastructure within the wider application boundary. The landscape conclusions of the LVIA assume a restrained conversion whose domestic use remains closely associated with the existing stable building.
- 4.2 Following preparation of HLA's response, the Applicant has provided revised drawings prepared by Manorwood Construction Ltd, dated 3 September 2026. The revised Block Plan (Drawing 2405TA_001 Rev 001) now identifies a tightly defined domestic curtilage around the converted stable building, shown by an orange dashed line. The domestic curtilage is confined to the building and the immediately associated external area required for residential use, parking and circulation. Importantly, the adjoining paddocks, existing sand school and wider equestrian land remain outside the domestic curtilage. The wider application boundary does not therefore equate to the extent of the proposed residential curtilage. The revised plan provides a clear spatial distinction between residential and equestrian land which, if secured through the planning permission, would directly respond to the concern identified by Place Services regarding the potential for residential domestication to extend into the wider Site.
- 4.3 The revised Block Plan also confirms the retention of the existing paddocks and their associated post-and-rail, stock and electric fencing; the existing sand school; existing native hedgerows and trees; the mature Leylandii planting; and the existing field shelter. The footprint of the pole barn to be removed would be returned to lawn and enclosed by 1.2 m high post-and-rail fencing. The plan therefore retains the established equestrian and field structure of the land surrounding the proposed dwelling rather than incorporating these areas into an enlarged domestic garden.
- 4.4 The Applicant is also willing to accept the removal of permitted development rights for extensions, alterations that would materially change the external appearance, outbuildings, sheds, greenhouses and other garden structures, additional or enlarged hardstanding, and new walls, gates or fences. This would ensure that any later expansion of the domestic footprint or suburbanising development would require express planning permission.
- 4.5 No new hardstanding should be provided other than that shown on the revised Block Plan and required for access, parking and immediate circulation. Existing trees, vegetation, grass, hardstanding and tracks are identified on the plan as remaining unaltered. The revised proposals also incorporate additional native hedgerow planting using a mixed native species composition and a double-staggered planting arrangement. This would reinforce the existing vegetated structure of the Site and provide additional landscape containment appropriate to the wooded High Weald context. The proposed planting should be implemented and thereafter maintained in accordance with the approved landscape scheme.
- 4.6 External lighting should be restricted to the minimum required immediately around the building, using low-level, downward-directed fittings with warm colour temperatures and

no avoidable upward or outward light spill. Security floodlighting and lighting within the wider paddocks, sand school or garden should not be permitted.

- 4.7 The converted building should retain its simple rural form, roofline and recessive external appearance. External materials, openings, rainwater goods, meter boxes, flues and other details should accord with the approved drawings and should not give the building an overtly suburban character.
- 4.8 The Applicant is willing to accept proportionate controls over conspicuous domestic paraphernalia within publicly visible external areas, including washing lines, trampolines, play equipment, sheds and greenhouses. Refuse and recycling storage should be located close to the building and screened by the building or approved planting.
- 4.9 Taken together, the revised Block Plan, tightly defined domestic curtilage, retention of the surrounding paddocks and sand school in equestrian use, restoration of the removed pole-barn footprint to grass, retention of existing landscape features, proposed native hedgerow planting and the planning controls identified above directly address the uncertainty identified by Place Services. They provide a clear distinction between the domestic and equestrian components of the Site and would ensure that the proposal remains a conversion of an existing rural building within a tightly contained domestic envelope, rather than facilitating the progressive conversion of the surrounding paddocks or sand school to residential garden.

5.0 Published Landscape Character

- 5.1 HLA agrees with Place Services regarding the relevant hierarchy of published landscape character assessments. The Site lies within NCA 122 High Weald, the High Weald National Landscape, HW2 High Weald Forests and LI St Leonard's Forest.
- 5.2 These landscape receptors were considered within the LVIA. The assessment concluded that the proposal would retain the extensive woodland framework, enclosed character, pastoral landscape pattern and dispersed settlement character which define the wider landscape.
- 5.3 The effects at these larger landscape scales were judged to be limited and Not Significant because the proposal is confined to the reuse of an existing building within an established equestrian holding and would not materially alter the characteristics upon which those published assessments are based.
- 5.4 HLA therefore maintains those conclusions.

6.0 Visual Effects

- 6.1 Place Services has not raised any substantive disagreement with HLA's selection of representative viewpoints, the submitted visual baseline, or the visual impact and effect judgements reached within the LVIA. No separate disagreement with the visual assessment is therefore identified within the Place Services response.
- 6.2 The viewpoint assessment demonstrates that the Site is highly visually contained by the existing woodland framework and mature vegetation. Viewpoints 2, 4 and 5 have no meaningful view of the proposed development, whilst only filtered and limited views are available from Viewpoints 1 and 3. These represent the locations from which the greatest potential visual effects were identified.
- 6.3 At Viewpoint 1, the completed development was assessed as resulting in a Negligible Adverse and Not Significant visual effect. At Viewpoint 3, the removal of one of the two permitted pole barns would reduce the amount of visible built form, resulting in a Negligible Beneficial and Not Significant visual effect. Following establishment of the proposed planting, the effects at both locations would remain Not Significant.
- 6.4 The removal of one of the two permitted pole barns, together with supplementary native woodland-edge planting, would reduce the amount and influence of built form apparent within these already limited and filtered views and reinforce the existing wooded containment of the Site.
- 6.5 HLA therefore maintains the submitted conclusion that the proposal would result in no Significant Adverse visual effects. It is noted that Place Services has not identified an alternative visual effect judgement or otherwise challenged this conclusion.
- 6.6 HLA has considered whether photomontages or additional visualisations are necessary. The principal physical changes comprise alterations to an existing stable building, removal of one of the two permitted pole barns and supplementary planting. The submitted elevations, Site photographs, ZTV and representative viewpoint photographs enable those changes to be understood, while Place Services has not challenged the viewpoint selection or identified a location requiring further visual evidence. In HLA's professional judgement, photomontages would not materially improve the assessment or alter the visual conclusions. If the Council identifies a specific unresolved view, a proportionate verified visualisation could be prepared for that location.

7.0 Appeal Decisions and Cumulative Effects

- 7.1 Since Place Services prepared its consultation response, the appeal relating to *DC/25/1428* for two settled Gypsy accommodation pitches at Oaklands Stud has been dismissed by the Planning Inspectorate (Appeal Ref. 6009237), by decision dated 27 August 2026. That appeal proposal therefore does not form part of the future cumulative baseline for the purposes of the current assessment. There is consequently no combined cumulative effect between *DC/25/1428* and *DC/25/1957* to assess.
- 7.2 The appeal decision is nevertheless a material consideration. HLA has considered the Inspector's findings concerning harm to the High Weald National Landscape, residential domestication, local field pattern, screening and the statutory duty to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing natural beauty.
- 7.3 The dismissed proposal was materially different from *DC/25/1957*. It would have introduced two mobile homes, associated residential occupation, parking, turning and domestic paraphernalia into the sand-school area. The Inspector found that these changes would have an urbanising effect and that the proposed hedgerows, together with the retained septic tank, would subdivide the existing field pattern.
- 7.4 The earlier dismissed appeal relating to *DC/24/0974* likewise concerned a materially broader mixed equestrian and settled Gypsy accommodation use involving new residential occupation of land. *DC/25/0462* concerned a different conversion and extension scheme; its appeal was withdrawn and there was consequently no Inspector's determination of its landscape effects.
- 7.5 *DC/25/1957* does not introduce detached residential units into the sand school or adjoining paddocks. It principally comprises the conversion and reuse of an existing stable building together with removal of one of the two permitted pole barns. The footprint, height and massing of the stable building would not materially increase, and the surrounding woodland framework, field pattern, paddocks and principal landscape structure would remain.
- 7.6 The distinction is important. The principal residential built form under *DC/25/1957* already exists within the equestrian baseline, and the proposal reduces the overall amount of built form through removal of one of the two permitted pole barns. The proposal does not rely upon new screening to assimilate detached residential units placed within an intact paddock or the sand school.
- 7.7 HLA nevertheless recognises that the sequence of decisions at Oaklands Stud increases the importance of demonstrating that *DC/25/1957* would not facilitate incremental domestication. The revised Block Plan now provides that distinction explicitly. The domestic curtilage is tightly contained around the converted stable building, while the adjoining paddocks and sand school remain outside it and retain their existing equestrian character and boundary treatments. The footprint of the removed pole barn would be returned to lawn and additional native hedgerow planting provided. Together with controls over hardstanding, lighting, outbuildings, boundaries and domestic paraphernalia, these measures are integral to the landscape case advanced in this response.

- 7.8 The planning history does not establish that every residential proposal at Oaklands Stud must cause the same landscape harm; each proposal must be assessed on its own form, location, extent and effects. It does, however, demonstrate the sensitivity of the High Weald National Landscape to incremental residential encroachment and the need for enforceable limits. The current conversion is genuinely distinct for the reasons set out above.
- 7.9 Accordingly, the dismissal of *DC/25/1428* removes the cumulative scenario identified by Place Services. Its reasoning reinforces the need for a tightly controlled conversion but does not alter HLA's conclusion that *DC/25/1957*, subject to the identified amendments and controls, would not result in Significant Adverse landscape or visual effects.

8.0 Conclusions

- 8.1 HLA has carefully considered the landscape consultation response prepared by Place Services on behalf of Horsham District Council in relation to Planning Application *DC/25/1957*. The response concerns HLA's judgements of landscape susceptibility and magnitude of change, potential domestication, the wider red-line boundary and the cumulative position then arising from *DC/25/1428*. Place Services has not raised substantive disagreement with HLA's representative viewpoints, visual baseline or visual effect judgements.
- 8.2 HLA acknowledges that landscape susceptibility and magnitude necessarily involve professional judgement and that another suitably qualified practitioner may reasonably reach a different conclusion. Having reviewed the Place Services comments, however, HLA considers that the Low Susceptibility judgement remains reasonable and consistent with the methodology applied within the LVIA. This judgement relates specifically to the ability of the landscape to accommodate the type and scale of development proposed and does not imply that the wider landscape is of low value. The ALLC was separately assessed as having Medium to High Landscape Value.
- 8.3 HLA similarly maintains the Low magnitude of landscape change on the controlled basis now advanced. The proposal would reuse an existing stable building without materially increasing its footprint, height or massing, while one of the two permitted pole barns would be removed. The established woodland framework and field pattern would be retained and supplemented, and the defining positive landscape attributes and characteristics of the ALLC would remain materially unchanged.
- 8.4 HLA accepts that residential occupation would change the character of activity at the Site and could introduce domestic influences. The revised Block Plan now defines a tightly contained domestic curtilage immediately associated with the converted building, leaving the adjoining paddocks and sand school outside the residential area. Together with the proposed controls over permitted development, hardstanding, lighting, boundary treatments, outbuildings and conspicuous domestic paraphernalia, this provides an appropriate and enforceable basis for ensuring that additional domestication remains limited and strongly contained.
- 8.5 The revised Block Plan (Drawing 2405TA_001 Rev 001, dated 3 September 2026) now provides the landscape definition sought by HLA. It identifies the domestic curtilage separately from the surrounding equestrian land, retains the paddocks and sand school outside that curtilage, retains the existing landscape framework and provides for additional native hedgerow planting and restoration of the removed pole-barn footprint to lawn. Subject to the controls set out in Section 4, the proposal would therefore remain a restrained conversion of an existing building rather than an extension of residential use across the wider paddocks or sand school. This directly addresses the uncertainty identified by Place Services.
- 8.6 HLA also maintains its assessment of effects upon the published landscape character areas. The proposal would not materially alter the extensive woodland framework, enclosed character, pastoral landscape pattern or dispersed settlement character which

define the wider landscape. Effects upon NCA 122 High Weald, the High Weald National Landscape, HW2 High Weald Forests and LI St Leonard's Forest would therefore remain Not Significant.

- 8.7 The visual assessment demonstrates the particularly strong containment of the Site. Place Services has not identified an alternative visual effect judgement or otherwise challenged HLA's conclusion. The limited and filtered changes identified from Viewpoints 1 and 3, together with the absence of meaningful views from Viewpoints 2, 4 and 5, support HLA's conclusion that the proposal would result in no Significant Adverse visual effects.
- 8.8 HLA has also had regard to the Planning Inspectorate's decision dated 27 August 2026 dismissing Appeal 6009237 relating to DC/25/1428, together with the earlier planning history. The decisions reinforce the sensitivity of the High Weald National Landscape to incremental domestication, residential encroachment and subdivision of the established field pattern.
- 8.9 The current proposal is materially different from the dismissed Gypsy accommodation schemes. DC/25/1957 reuses an existing stable building and removes one of the two permitted pole barns rather than placing detached residential units within the sand school or paddocks. The revised Block Plan now demonstrates this distinction spatially, with a fixed and tightly contained domestic curtilage and the adjoining paddocks and sand school remaining outside the residential area. Together with the identified planning controls, the proposal would retain the established woodland framework and field pattern and avoid the wider residential encroachment and subdivision identified as harmful in the previous appeals.
- 8.10 The dismissal of DC/25/1428 means that scheme no longer forms part of a future cumulative baseline. The appeal decision therefore removes the combined cumulative scenario identified by Place Services while reinforcing the need for the tightly controlled, landscape-led form of conversion now proposed.
- 8.11 The proposal also makes effective use of an existing building, removes one of the two permitted pole barns and provides supplementary native planting rather than introducing a new dwelling into an undeveloped part of the Site. These are positive landscape considerations. Matters relating to highways, residential amenity, drainage, biodiversity and housing land supply fall to the Council's overall planning balance and are not relied upon as substitutes for an acceptable landscape response.
- 8.12 Having reviewed the Place Services comments, the subsequent appeal decision and the revised drawings, HLA maintains the landscape and visual judgements and overall conclusions of the submitted LVIA, subject to the defined domestic curtilage and landscape controls identified in this response. The differences concerning susceptibility and magnitude represent legitimate differences in professional judgement. On the controlled basis now proposed, DC/25/1957 would not result in Significant Adverse landscape character or visual effects and there is no surviving cumulative effect with DC/25/1428.

