HORSHAM DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Dept
LOCATION:	The Slips West End Lane Henfield West Sussex
DESCRIPTION:	Use of land for the stationing of 5 static caravans for residential purposes and associated day rooms.
REFERENCE:	DC/25/0519
RECOMMENDATION:	Holding objection/Modification

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION:

While the principle of development is considered acceptable, there are concerns with the long-term retention of the protected trees. The trees are of a recognised landscape value and their loss or the deterioration of their condition - by lopping and encroachment into RPAs - would give rise to adverse effects on visual amenity and landscape character. Therefore, we recommend that the layout is reviewed with this in mind, and that consideration is given to the loss of one pitch so that the proposals can sit more comfortably within the receiving landscape.

MAIN COMMENTS:

Site description & context

1. The proposed development site is located outside of the defined Built-Up Area Boundary (BUAB) of Henfield, in a countryside location. It comprises a narrow, grassed field, bounded by various lengths of hedgerow and trees on all sides. There are two runs of power and water supplies present to support its current camping function.
2. The northern boundary is defined by a dense Prunus laurocerasus (Cherry laurel) hedge and a culverted, tarmac driveway for access. The southern boundary is defined by further laurel hedging and the western boundary by a line of Corylus avellana (Hazel) to the south, and mixed native trees and hedgerow to the north. The eastern boundary is less defined, save for a short length of laurel hedgerow and six mature, category A & B Quercus robur (Oak) trees. These oaks, in addition to two further oaks on the western boundary, are protected under Tree Protection Order (TPO) 1537. They are of a recognised landscape value and make a significant contribution to the landscape character of the area.
3. The site and its immediate context hold predominately rural and agricultural qualities on account of the undeveloped fields and agricultural features found adjacent to the site on all sides, save for sporadic dwellings to the south. The undeveloped nature of the proposed site itself, including the native vegetation and mature oaks, also contributes to the rural character, however, the suburban features such as laurel and caravans, when present, are experienced as urbanising detractors. Notwithstanding, the area is notably quiet and tranquil, positively contributing to its rural qualities.

4. The wider landscape context is mixed in character. There is a predominance of undeveloped, agricultural fields defined by hedgerow and shaws, however there are urbanising influences due to the proximity to Henfield. This includes the recently built housing development, located north of West End Lane on the western edge of Henfield, as well as the ribbon of development located further west on West End Ln.
5. Multiple public rights of way (PRoW) are located in the surrounding area, providing access and enjoyment of the countryside to sensitive receptors. These include the following:
    a) PRoW 2524/Stonepit Lane to the north, running east-west
    b) PRoW 2503 to the north-east, running north
    c) PRoW 2528 to the north-west, running north
    d) PRoW 2581 to the west, running in a southwest direction
    e) PRoW 2582 and 2583 to the south, running west and east respectively
6. Views into the site from the footpath network are not available due to intervening vegetation and local topography. However, views of the boundary vegetation are possible from PRoW 2581 & 2582.
7. Access is via West End Ln; a narrow, verdant lane characterised by coppiced trees, mature trees and hedgerow. Views of open countryside are available to the north which contribute to the rural qualities of the area, however the lane becomes more suburban on approach to the ribbon of development noted under point 4. Views into the site are available from West End Ln. While not a designated public right of way, the lane is frequently used by walkers due to its connectivity with the wider footpath network, and as such it's afforded high to moderate value. For wheeled users, such as cyclists and motorists, the views are afforded low-moderate value due to their transient nature. Nonetheless, these views are experienced by receptors travelling through the countryside and contribute to the rural qualities of the area, influencing the perception of the site within its broader rural context.

<u>Landscape character</u>

8. The proposed site falls within D2 – Henfield and Small Dole Farmlands Landscape Character Area (LCA) as defined in the Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003).
9. The site and the surrounding contextual landscape are deemed representative of the local landscape character area, exhibiting some of the key characteristics identified, including: *small to large size regular and irregular fields with a variable hedgerow pattern; variable hedgerow pattern, low and gappy in parts, strong in others;* and *Ancient coppice with oak and ash standards.*
10. Relevant key issues for D2 include: *previous and continuing loss of hedgerows through field rationalisation*.
11. Overall sensitivity to change is high, with key sensitivities to: *cumulative impact of small scale incremental change, e.g. suburbanisation*.
12. Relevant Planning and Land Management Guidelines state to:
    a) *Ensure any new development does not intrude onto visible ridgelines.*
    b) *Conserve and manage existing hedgerows, especially where they surround small scale irregular field patterns.*

<u>Assessment</u>

13. While proposals are not essential to the countryside location or meet the criteria for defined rural functions, they are not considered to increase the overall level of activity in the countryside, given the site's existing use as camping facilities, and therefore do not contravene this part of Policy 26 of the HDPF.
14. Policy 23 is a strategic policy for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation. It does not preclude this type of development in the countryside location provided the site is located in or near to existing settlements, within reasonable distance to a range of local services and

amenities (d). Amongst other tests, it also expects development to not have an unacceptable impact on the character and appearance of the landscape and the amenity of neighbouring properties, and to be sensitively designed to mitigate any impacts on its surroundings (e).

15. Therefore, while no tree removals are currently proposed, concern is raised with the long-term retention of the existing landscape features that positively contribute to the character of the area. The mature oaks and hazel treeline are shown to be enclosed behind and in close proximity to caravans or day rooms, and with structures, hardstanding and private amenity use within their RPAs, placing them at considerable risk of future pressure for lopping or felling. This would further erode the site's landscape character and amenity value. We echo the tree officer's recommendations to review the layout and consider a reduction in the number of units to ensure that the proposals are more sensitive to the protected trees.
16. As a result, we cannot be confident that the proposals meet Policies 25, 31 and 33 (6) of the HDPF, given the uncertainty surrounding their ability to protect, conserve or enhance landscape character and possibly weaken the green infrastructure network.
17. In the absence of an LVA to demonstrate otherwise, it is our professional judgement that the current proposal would give rise to localised adverse effects on visual amenity and have an eroding effect on the landscape character. This is due to the large increase in hardstanding, the loss of the site's undeveloped character, and the increased amount of urbanising features within the area, all of which are inconsistent with the countryside setting. Furthermore, there remains uncertainty as to whether the current layout can be accommodated without harm to valued landscape features protected under TPO 1537. This would be to the detriment of the current rural qualities experienced within the local landscape.

<u>Considerations</u>

18. Plans should be updated to reflect the ditch present on the western edge of the proposed development site.
19. Please provide a plan detailing existing and proposed services above and below ground, such as drainage, power, communications cables and pipelines, to demonstrate the proposals do not conflict with existing and proposed landscape features.
20. We recommend that the layout is revised to integrate the existing landscape features more sympathetically and to reduce risk of felling pressure as noted under point 15. We recommend that existing mature vegetation and trees are excluded from individual plot ownership, and that the layout be adjusted to ensure a more appropriate relationship between the existing green infrastructure and the stationing of caravans, day rooms and associated amenity space.
21. In addition, we consider there to be further opportunity to soften the appearance of urbanising features. We note, for example, recommendation to plant fruit bearing trees in the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). These should be added to the revised layout in order to soften the appearance of the development from West End Ln.
22. Closeboarded fencing is advised against in this location, please amend to reflect post & rail fence with native hedgerow.
23. While permeability is welcomed, further information is required in regard to hard landscaping, noting that the proposed treatment should be sympathetic to the rural surrounds.
24. Further information is requested in regard to the enhanced grassland area, and if this is to be wildflower turf as recommended within the PEA.
25. Trees, treelines and hedgerows, which are key characteristics of the local landscape, can deteriorate due to increasing levels of light pollution. Therefore, light spill must be considered sensitively so as not to cause potential adverse effects. In addition, given the openness of the surrounding undeveloped fields, lighting should be absent or restricted. We note that in the appeal decision notice under APP/Z3825/W/24/3345055, for the site

for 3 pitches located 1 field to the north, it states that, '*A condition restricting external lighting is reasonable given the rural location of the appeal site'*. Given the similarly rural location, we recommend that this condition is also applied to this site.

26. While not compulsory, we recommend that the laurel on site is removed and replaced with native hedgerow, as indicated in the planting schedule for the southern boundary. This is to minimise the urbanising appearance that is incongruous with the rural qualities experienced on West End Ln. This will also minimise competition with native species, as highlighted in the PEA, given the invasive nature of laurel and its propensity to overshade other planting.

RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: N/A

NAME:	Elly Hazael Trainee Landscape Architect (Planning)
DEPARTMENT:	Specialists Team - Strategic Planning
DATE:	14/07/2025
SIGNED OFF BY:	Inês Watson CMLI Specialists Team Leader (Landscape Architect)
DATE:	15/07/2025