



Horsham District Council
Parkside
Chart Way
Horsham
West Sussex
RH12 1RL

19/03/24

For the attention of: Amanda Wilkes

Ref: DC/23/0189 - Sandgate Nursery West End Lane Henfield

Thank you for consulting us on the outline planning application for the erection of a continuing care retirement community of up to 72 units of accommodation (Use Class C2) and up to 10 starter homes (Use Class C3) with associated community facilities including medical centre and on-site laundry and catering facilities, with access, infrastructure, open space, landscaping and associated works (all matters reserved except for access).

This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site. A site visit was undertaken on 27/02/24.

Summary

Not supportive on landscape grounds	
Supportive subject to attached recommendations and / or conditions	
Further information required prior to determination	X
No landscape comments / does not wish to comment	

Context

The application site is located on the western settlement edge of Henfield and comprises a broadly rectangular parcel of former plant nursery land. The red line boundary (RLB) includes a portion of West End Lane. The northern boundary of the site is defined by vegetation and the access gateway. The eastern boundary abuts existing residential garden boundaries. The southern boundary is defined by fragmented vegetation and a bridleway further. To the west, the site boundary is defined by vegetation and abuts the curtilage of listed building Dears Farmhouse (1353991).

The site is central to an extensive network of Public Rights of Way (PRoW). Namely bridleway HEN 2583/7 which follows a path along the southern boundary. Footpaths HEN 2562/1 and HEN 2561/4 connect with this bridleway and extend across the landscape to the south, the topography also falls toward the south of the site. In the wider context, bridleway HEN 3513/1, located 120m east along West End Lane, also forms part of the Downs Link and long-distance path 'Disused Railways of Sussex'.

The site is abutted on the southwestern corner by a priority habitat of deciduous woodland. The South Downs National Park is approximately 2.6km south of the site and visible from bridleway HEN 2583/7 west of the site.

A portion of the site to the south lies within Network Enhancement Zone 1 and Network Enhancement Zone 2. National Habitat Network Maps Guidance state that these areas have been identified as *land connecting existing patches of primary and associated habitats which is likely to be suitable for creation of the primary habitat...Action in this zone to expand and join up existing habitat patches and improve the connections between them can be targeted here* (Zone 1) and Zone 2 extends over other areas e.g. areas without suitable soil types or over areas of urban development to identify where other actions, such as the provision of green infrastructure or changes in land management, might also be undertaken to improve resilience.

Planning Context

Horsham District Planning Framework

The Horsham District Planning Framework (2015) (HDPF) Proposals Maps identifies the site as being located outside the defined built-up area boundary and therefore designated as countryside. Relevant landscape specific policies include;

Policy 25: 'The Natural Environment and Landscape Character' sets out that development proposals will be required to protect, conserve, and enhance the landscape character, taking into account areas identified as being of landscape importance, the individual settlement characteristics, and maintains settlement separation.

Policy 26: Countryside Protection sets out a presumption against development unless for agriculture, forestry minerals, quiet informal recreation or ensures the sustainable development of rural areas. The Policy also states that development permitted must be of a scale appropriate to its countryside character location and must not lead, either individually or cumulatively, to a significant increase in the overall level of activity in the countryside and/or conserves, and / or enhances, the key features and characteristics of the landscape character area in which it is located.

Policy 30: 'Protected Landscapes' aims to protect the public enjoyment of the High Weald National Landscape (ANOB) and the South Downs National Park. The policy also requires major development to demonstrate why the proposals are in public interest and what other alternatives have been considered.

Policy 31: 'Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity' requires development to contribute to the enhancement of existing biodiversity and should also be compliant with Policy 33: Development Principles which states that proposals should be distinctive in character, respect the character of the surrounding area (including its overall setting, views and green corridors) and, where available and applicable, take account of the recommendations/policies of the relevant Design Statements and Character Assessments.

Henfield Neighbourhood Plan 2017-2031 (2021)

The Henfield Neighbourhood Plan was adopted in 2021 and identifies the site as outside of the built up area. The Site has not been identified as a strategic site. Relevant policies from a landscape perspective include [inter alia]: Policy 1: A Spatial Plan for the Parish; Policy 4: Transport, Access and Parking; Policy 10: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity; Policy 11: Local Green Spaces; Policy 12: Design Standards for Development

Policy 1 states that development outside of the built-up boundary will be supported only when *"they conform, as appropriate to their location in the neighbourhood area, to national, HDPF and South Downs Local Plan policies in respect of development in the countryside and that development proposals within or affecting the South Downs National Park should conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area."*

Policy 4 ensures the connectivity of development through pedestrian routes and cycle ways stating that proposals should *"demonstrate that safe pedestrian routes from residential and employment sites to community facilities including education, health and recreational facilities can be achieved; irrespective of whether the road network is adopted."*

Policy 10 identifies West End Land and Hollands Lane as having significant hedgerows/wildlife corridors. *“Development proposals will be supported, provided their layout and landscape schemes comply with the following principles as appropriate: a. the amenity value of the existing landscape including hedgerows, scrub, trees and ponds is maintained; and the proposals result in positive visual and landscape impact.”*

Review of submitted information

LVIA

The application has been supported by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) (January 2023) undertaken by Neil Tully Associates. The LVIA has been carried out in accordance with the principles set out within the ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’ Third Edition (GLVIA3). The viewpoint photography is dated January 2023 providing a ‘worst case scenario’. However, does not comply with the minimum typology according to the LI TGN 06/19: ‘Visual Representation of Development Proposals’ where Type 1 provides the minimum standards for assessing viewpoints and includes sketch / outline / arrows for visualisation. Notwithstanding this, we would prefer to see Type 3 (Photomontage / Photowire) for a development of this size.

Furthermore, although we agree that views from the South Downs National Park (SDNP) are unlikely (as mentioned in para. 4.26 of the LVIA) we would advise this is still explored and assessed to rule out impact. A reciprocal view of viewpoint 5 would have offered a good indication to intervisibility between the site and the SDNP.

The assessment has correctly identified the site as lying within National Character Area 121 ‘Low Weald’, LW11: Eastern Scarp Footslopes of the Landscape Character Assessment of West Sussex (2003) and LCA D2 ‘Henfield and Small Dole Farmlands’ of the Horsham District Landscape Character Assessment (2003).

Notwithstanding the above discrepancies with the photography, we generally agree with judgements made with the LVIA which identifies the sensitivity of the site and reliance on existing vegetation to maintain the intimate nature of the site. We concur that it is vital to retain and enhance as much of the boundary vegetation as possible.

Recommendations

Layout

The proposed site layout (dwg no. SNH/P23/02 rev.B) establishes an indicative development framework infilling the Sandgate Nursery site between Holland’s Lane and West End Lane. The site area abuts the edge of the existing settlement boundary of Henfield. Vehicle access into the development is from West End Lane.

The main point of arrival into the development is weak, as currently shown, with the side elevation of plot 78 dominating the street scene. The long straight run of dwellings along the eastern edge of the site is dominated by frontage parking/driveways, which reduce the opportunity for landscaping. (Many of the proposed trees indicated on this plan, within dwelling frontage is very unrealistic with the proposed tree planting difficult to achieved as shown.)

The indicative layout does not include any public open space or play provision.

The indicative layout fails to include a suitable street hierarchy which gives the impression of a vehicle dominated development. It is unclear how the Holland’s Lane and West End Lane pedestrian routes connect to the wider public realm or pavements. The importance of connecting this development into the existing community (whilst encouraging walking and cycling) should be a key objective of the development. (See Henfield Neighbourhood Plan Policy 4.)

Some of the proposed retention basins show footpaths passing directly through these features. Whether this is a drawing error or not, the SuDS features should be designed and integrated into the site wide Green Infrastructure yet function as appropriately designed retention features.

Building heights and density

The proposed development should be informed and led by the surrounding built context of the site. Building heights and development density should be carefully considered to inform a balanced development layout whilst introducing variety across the site. As currently shown, the illustrative layout proposes standard uniform development dwellings. As the proposals develop, we would expect to see further analysis and evidence of a context led development with densities transitioning across the site from the existing development at Holland's Road to the east to the rural edge to the west. A series of site wide parameter plans would be useful to show this.

Green Infrastructure (GI)

The site wide green infrastructure includes a series of pedestrian routes through the development which is positive. However, the majority of the green infrastructure has been compressed into the northern edge of the development between SuDS features and the roads. There are opportunities to improve this by creating green links through the development utilising some for the pedestrian desire lines. The orchard space needs further consideration for its use and purpose as a landscape feature and space in such a dominant central location of the site.

Conclusion

From a landscape perspective, while we accept the principle of development on the site, we advise that careful consideration is taken for the sensitivity of views to and from the site including those toward and beyond bridleway HEN 2583/7 and further to the South Downs National Park. Reliance on screening outside the scope of the site should not be accepted.

Furthermore, a building heights parameter plan would offer a better understanding of the response to topography on site. And a better understanding of how the proposals aim to meet requirements of policy 4 of the Henfield Neighbourhood Plan through strategic and sustainable transport connections given the rural nature of West End Lane.

Finally, the site offers a unique opportunity to create a strong sense of place describing the historic nature of the landscape local and wider, in terms of the historic land use as a plant nursery and the disused railway line, now the Downs Link.

If you have any queries regarding the above matters, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Cohen BSc (Hons)

Assistant Landscape Consultant

Peter Dawson CMLI

Built Environment Manager

Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of Horsham District Council

Please note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.