HORSHAM COUNCIL

Horsham District Council

DISTRICT CONSULTATION

TO:	Horsham District Council – Planning Dept
LOCATION:	Valewood Farmhouse Valewood Lane Barns Green
DESCRIPTION:	Alterations and change in use of building to holiday let use
REFERENCE:	DC/25/1940
RECOMMENDATION:	**Holding objection / More info / AW protection measures needed**

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS & RECOMMENDATION:

As highlighted in my previous response to application DC/21/2424, Vale Wood lies approximately 8 metres to the southwest of the existing building and is designated as Ancient Woodland (AW) through its inclusion in the *Revision of the Ancient Woodland Inventory for West Sussex* (January 2010). Assessment of the 1975 and 1909 Ordnance Survey maps indicates that the site was heavily wooded during this period, which is likely to have contributed to its inclusion in the AW Inventory. The woodland is also protected by Woodland Tree Preservation Order TPO/0733 and is identified as Priority Habitat – Deciduous Woodland on the DEFRA MAGIC Map (see below).



A key tree / AW concern arising from the proposed change of use of the existing building, and the wider site as defined by the red line boundary on the Location and Block Plans (Drawing No. 1894.1/01), relates to the domestication of the site and the resulting change in context. This domestication has the potential to harm the adjacent AW through well-documented impacts, including chemical pollution, increased disturbance, habitat fragmentation, the introduction of invasive non-native species, and cumulative long-term effects, as identified by Corney et al. (2008).

Main Comments

Current Government guidance requires a minimum 15-metre buffer zone between development and ancient woodland to prevent harmful development and post-development impacts. Although the land immediately east of the building is currently hardstanding, the building itself lies within this buffer. As a result, the proposed change of use, together with any associated drainage, landscaping, or alterations (including likely new hard surfacing) at the rear of the existing building, would fall within the ancient woodland (AW) buffer zone. In the absence of robust safeguards, this presents a clear risk of harm to the AW, the Priority Habitat of deciduous woodland, and to trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO).

The proposed change of use of the wider site would also effectively create a new residential curtilage and garden area that would in places fall within the AW buffer. Standing advice is explicit that development, including gardens, should not be approved within buffer zones. Even if occupancy is seasonal, a habitable use would imply increased activity, disturbance, domestic paraphernalia, and pressure for incremental change, thereby undermining the buffer's purpose.

Paragraph 180(c) of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that development causing the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland, should be refused unless wholly exceptional reasons are demonstrated, and appropriate compensation is secured.

The application, in its current form, fails to demonstrate that wholly exceptional reasons exist to justify the conversion of the existing structure, which is located within the AW buffer, into what is, in effect, a habitable unit, and the creation of a new recreation/garden area in parts of the existing field shown to be within the red site boundary line, that fall within the AW buffer. Although the Design and Access Statement refers to service installation, which in authors opinion wont adversely impact the AW. However, no substantive evidence has been provided to support this claim or appropriately demonstrate how harm to the AW would be avoided or how trees within it would be protected during the construction phase of the scheme and safeguarded against post-development impacts. These unresolved issues place the proposal in conflict with NPPF paragraph 180(c), as previously identified under application DC/21/2424.

ANY RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS: N/A

NAME:	Andy Bush Arboricultural Officer
DEPARTMENT:	Strategic Planning (Specialist Team)
DATE:	31/12/25