Rec'd 13/3/26

[redacted]
Park Manager
Raylands Park
Jackrells Lane
Southwater

11 March 2026

To the Planning Inspector,

RE: Planning Inspector Reference 6003043 Horsham District Council Reference DC/24/0204 Relocation of Holbrook Animal Rescue with associated buildings

I write in my capacity as Park Manager of Raylands Park, which lies immediately adjacent to the appeal site at Jackrells Lane, Southwater. For the avoidance of doubt I am writing to respectfully ask the inspector to reject this appeal and uphold Horsham District Councils decision to refuse permission. I have lived and worked at Raylands Park for 18 years and during that time have been directly responsible for the day-to-day management of the park, land stewardship and ecological enhancement of the surrounding land. As both the park manager and a long-term resident, I experience the character of this landscape on a daily basis.

My purpose in writing is to explain the ecological sensitivity of this location, the extensive rewilding that has taken place at Raylands Park over many years, and the harm that would arise from the proposed development. I also wish to highlight ecological and amenity impacts that are already being observed following land clearance, fencing and increased activity on the appeal site.

Raylands Park and the adjoining land have been subject to long-term and deliberate ecological management over many years. This has included the creation and protection of wildlife corridors, the establishment of wildflower areas and long grass habitats, reinforcement of native hedgerows and the avoidance of pesticides and harmful land management practices. As part of this work, efforts have also been made to encourage and support the recovery and reintroduction of species that are now considered rare or threatened in the local area. The aim of this approach has been to allow the landscape to develop into a functioning ecological network.

As a result of this sustained ecological approach over many years, the land now supports a functioning ecological network. Species regularly observed include bats, owls, great crested newts, toads and other amphibians, grass snakes, hedgehogs, small mammals and a wide range of bird species which migrate yearly to this location. Owls regularly forage across this land, relying on healthy small mammal populations supported by the rewilded habitats.

A key reason these species have been able to thrive is the relatively high level of tranquillity in this part of the countryside. The surrounding landscape currently experiences very low levels of activity, noise and lighting, creating conditions that allow wildlife to forage, move and breed successfully. In my experience managing this land, the ecological value of the area is closely connected to this existing tranquillity.

Because the area is so quiet, sound travels very clearly across the surrounding countryside, particularly during the evening and night-time periods when background noise levels are extremely low. It is not unusual to hear individual noises from considerable distances, and even a single barking dog can carry clearly across the landscape.

In recent months I have already experienced disturbance associated with dogs being walked on the appeal site. Even limited activity of this nature is noticeable because of the otherwise quiet conditions that exist here.

The proposed rescue centre would involve housing more than 30 dogs on the site, with associated outdoor activity and barking. In my experience of how sound travels across this landscape, the presence of this number of dogs would represent a substantial change to the existing environment. Barking from multiple dogs is typically intermittent and unpredictable, and unlike occasional rural noises it can occur repeatedly throughout the day and night.

In a landscape that is currently very quiet, these types of sounds carry clearly across open fields and hedgerows. Regular barking and activity from a large number of dogs would therefore be clearly audible within Raylands Park and across the surrounding countryside.

Wildlife in this area relies heavily on the current quiet conditions. Sustained disturbance from barking dogs and associated activity can affect how animals hunt, breed and move between habitats. The presence of a large number of domestic dogs therefore has the potential to disrupt feeding patterns, breeding behaviour and movement routes for many of the native species that currently use this landscape.

I am particularly concerned about the impact on amphibians. This area forms part of an established migration route used by toads and newts emerging from hibernation and travelling to five neighbouring ponds that form part of the local breeding network. Each year, during seasonal movements, significant numbers of amphibians cross land in and around the appeal site as they move between terrestrial habitats and breeding ponds.

Since activity on the appeal site has increased I have personally observed great crested newts killed on nearby roads, along with numerous toads during migration periods. These observations indicate that existing disturbance is already having ecological consequences even before the proposed development has commenced.

Great crested newts are a European Protected Species and their breeding sites and resting places are afforded strict legal protection. Migration routes and habitat connectivity are critical to their survival. Disturbance through fencing, lighting, increased activity and vehicle movements can disrupt these routes and fragment the habitats on which these species depend.

I am also concerned that fencing erected on the appeal site has already begun to create barriers to wildlife movement. On several occasions I have had to assist deer that had become trapped or disorientated as a result of these new physical barriers.

In addition, the ecological information submitted by the appellant appears to rely primarily on a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. In my experience managing this land, ecological activity varies significantly across seasons, particularly during amphibian migration periods. Without comprehensive seasonal surveys the ecological value of this land and the function of the wildlife corridor are likely to have been underestimated.

The ecological value of this landscape is closely linked to its current tranquillity and low levels of disturbance. Introducing a high-activity use involving barking dogs, vehicle movements, increased human presence and artificial lighting would fundamentally alter the quiet rural conditions that currently allow the local ecological network to function.

More broadly, based on my experience managing Raylands Park and observing this landscape over many years, I find it difficult to understand how such a noise-sensitive and

ecologically sensitive location came to be selected and pursued for this type of development in the first place.

My understanding is that planning officers advised the applicant over a prolonged period to consider alternative locations, and that at the original Planning Committee meeting a local councillor offered assistance in helping to identify a more suitable site. In circumstances where a development of this scale involves housing a large number of dogs and introducing a high level of activity, it would seem reasonable to expect that potential alternative locations would be explored fully before selecting land that is clearly sensitive in ecological and tranquillity terms.

In my view, it would have been far preferable for an appropriate location to have been identified at the outset rather than pursuing development on land that is demonstrably quiet, environmentally sensitive and closely connected to the ecological network surrounding Raylands Park.

Once wildlife corridors are disrupted and species populations decline, these ecological systems are extremely difficult to restore. The ecological value that has developed here over many years cannot simply be recreated elsewhere.

I wish to make clear that I support animal welfare and recognise the important work carried out by rescue charities in caring for domestic animals in need. However, the suitability of a site must be considered carefully. In this case, the proposal would introduce an intensive use that risks displacing established wildlife and undermining habitats that have developed naturally over many years. In effect, it would replace a functioning ecological environment supporting native species with a use that could be located in a less sensitive setting. Domestic animals undoubtedly deserve safe and appropriate homes, but in my view this should not come at the expense of the tranquillity, wildlife habitats and ecological networks that already exist at this location.

For these reasons I respectfully ask the Inspector to consider not only the important work carried out by the rescue charity, but also whether this particular location is appropriate for such a use. In my professional judgement, the ecological sensitivity and tranquillity of this landscape mean that the environmental costs of locating the development here would be unnecessarily high when less sensitive alternatives could reasonably be explored.

The observations set out in this letter are based on my long-term experience managing the land at Raylands Park and my day-to-day knowledge of the surrounding landscape and wildlife habitats developed over the past 18 years.

Yours faithfully,

[redacted]

Park Manager
Raylands Park

6003043
Case officer: RACHEL MARTEN
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13 MAR 2026
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