

Re: Objection to Planning Application DM/26/1132 – Land Parcel to the North of Nos. 42–54 Hurst Road, Hassocks

We write to object to the above application for a tractor parking area, donkey enclosure, donkey stable, three shepherd huts and a wildlife pond. We are residents of Belmont Lane, a short distance beyond the application site, and so are directly familiar with the lane and the access arrangements in question. We have no objection to the keeping of two donkeys, but object to the application overall for the reasons below.

1. Unauthorised and retrospective works – misleading application

Significant elements of the scheme have already been carried out before any grant of permission. The three shepherd huts are already in situ, and two accesses – a large and a small gate – have been formed onto Belmont Lane. The application form and supporting statement describe an “*existing vehicular access*”, but to our knowledge no formal access from this field onto Belmont Lane has existed in living memory; long-standing residents confirm there has been none for 40–50 years. The access appears to have been created in breach of planning control. The application description is therefore inaccurate: these elements are retrospective and the description should be amended to reflect that the huts and access already exist.

2. Highway safety – the new access onto Belmont Lane

Belmont Lane is a narrow, single-track private lane that is also a public footpath and bridleway. The newly formed vehicular access is, in our view, genuinely dangerous. The egress meets the lane at a sharp angle, and visibility to the south is poor; a driver pulling out has little sight of approaching traffic, and is hard to see. Because the lane carries pedestrians, dogs and walkers, and horse riders as well as vehicles, the risk of a serious conflict or accident is materially increased. We consider this an unacceptable highway-safety harm and a reason for refusal in its own right.

3. Inappropriate development in the countryside and local gap

The site lies in open countryside and within the local gap between Hassocks and Hurstpierpoint, where development is resisted to prevent coalescence (District Plan Policies DP12 and DP13). The three shepherd huts are, in substance, residential accommodation rather than agricultural development, amounting to a material change of use of the land. There is no agricultural justification for siting living accommodation here: the scale of the proposed donkey-keeping is very modest, and the applicant's family's adjoining property (Crossways) has a large garden and curtilage capable of accommodating such structures. The huts would have an urbanising effect on this undeveloped field, harming the character and appearance of the area and eroding the gap between the two settlements, contrary to DP12 and DP13.

4. Ecology and biodiversity net gain

No ecological information has been submitted, so there is no assessment of impact on protected or priority species, contrary to Policy DP38. The application claims the de-minimis exemption from biodiversity net gain based on a habitat loss below 25 sq m. That appears unsustainable: the stable and its concrete apron, the tractor parking area and the footprint of the three huts plainly exceed 25 sq m in combination. On the applicant's own figures, the proposal therefore engages the biodiversity net gain requirement, and the necessary information has not been provided.

5. Weight to be given to representations in support

We note a representation in strong support submitted from Crossways, Belmont Lane. We understand Crossways to have bought the land shortly before July 2025, and then at some point

it has transferred to be in the next door family applicant's ownership and occupation. We raise this only so that the apparent weight of independent local support is considered in its proper context: a representation emanating from the applicant's own family members should not, with respect, be treated as third-party endorsement of the scheme.

6. Precedent

Permitting a new access onto Belmont Lane in these circumstances would set an unwelcome precedent. Other properties on the lane could reasonably expect to form their own accesses, and we are conscious that a substantial housing scheme is proposed on the west side of the lane. Allowing this access risks the incremental opening-up of a quiet single-track bridleway to vehicular traffic.

Conclusion

For these reasons we respectfully request that the application be refused. The principal grounds are:

- Unauthorised, retrospective works and an inaccurate application description;
- Unacceptable highway-safety harm from a poorly sited and dangerous new access onto a single-track bridleway;
- Unjustified, non-agricultural development harming the open countryside and the Hassocks–Hurstpierpoint gap (DP12, DP13);
- Change of use of the land;
- Insufficient ecological information and an unsustainable biodiversity net gain exemption (DP38).

Given that key elements have already been built without consent, we would ask that the application be determined on its current timetable (by 9 July 2026) rather than held open to allow the position to be regularised retrospectively.