

Cowfold Parish Council

Minutes of the Planning Meeting of the Parish Council held on Monday 13th April 2026 commencing at 7.30pm in the Allmond Centre.

Cllrs Present	Towle – Vice-Chair Howell	Payne Thorpe Bennison	Clark Dittmer
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Clerk - Trevor Parsons. There were 14 members of the public present.

Prior to opening the meeting members of the public were invited to speak. Residents spoke of their objections to DC/26/0472. In addition, the planning applicant spoke and gave his reasons for the development.

1. Apologies

Apologies received from Cllr Reading

2. Declaration of Interests

None declared

3. DC/26/0388

Proposal: Demolition of existing agricultural barns and erection of 1no. dwelling, detached annex and garage, provision of on-site car parking, cycle storage and landscaping.

Location : Moatfield Farm Kings Lane Cowfold West Sussex

Councillors discussed the application but objected unanimously for the following reasons:

Outside boundary, loss of agricultural buildings and overdevelopment

4. DC/26/0472

Proposal : Erection of 9no. dwellings with associated car parking spaces, detached carports, garages and landscaping.

Location : Land at 521816 122277 Eastlands Lane Cowfold West Sussex

Cowfold Parish Council strongly objects to planning application DC/26/0472 for the erection of 9 dwellings at Eastlands Lane.

This objection is firmly policy-led, having regard to the Development Plan, comprising the Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF) and the Cowfold Neighbourhood Plan (CNP), together with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

The Parish Council considers that the proposal results in clear, fundamental and cumulative conflict with the Development Plan as a whole, and that the harms identified attract significant weight in the planning balance.

2. Development Plan Status and Statutory Weight

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. No material considerations have been put forward by the applicant.

The Horsham District Planning Framework remains an adopted statutory document and carries full weight.

The Cowfold Neighbourhood Plan, formally made in 2025, is recent, up-to-date and part of the statutory Development Plan, and therefore carries significant weight in decision-making.

Under the NPPF:

- Paragraph 30 confirms that Neighbourhood Plans form part of the Development Plan
- Paragraph 38 requires decisions to be plan-led
- Paragraph 11(c) requires applications to be determined in accordance with the Development Plan where it is up-to-date

The emerging Horsham Local Plan is not yet adopted and remains subject to examination and unresolved objections. In accordance with paragraph 48 of the NPPF, only limited weight can be attributed to emerging policies at this stage.

No material considerations have been presented that outweigh the clear and multiple conflicts with the Development Plan.

3. Countryside Location and Conflict with Settlement Boundary

The application site lies outside the defined built-up area boundary and is therefore located within the countryside.

- CNP Policy 9 supports residential development within the built-up area only
- CNP Policy 10 supports windfall development within existing settlements

The proposal is unallocated, lies outside the settlement boundary, and represents unjustified encroachment into the countryside.

No rural exception policy applies, and no site-specific justification has been provided.

The site has previously been assessed through the Council's SHELAA process (Ref: SA747 & SA0572) and identified as countryside adjoining the settlement boundary. The Council's own evidence confirms that, unless allocated, development in this location would conflict with the HDPF spatial strategy.

The proposal therefore conflicts with:

- HDPF Policy 3 (Development Hierarchy)
- HDPF Policy 26 (Countryside Protection)
- CNP Policies 9 and 10
- NPPF Paragraphs 11, 15 and 174

These policies are core strategic policies, designed to direct development to sustainable locations and protect the countryside from incremental encroachment.

The proposal represents speculative, unplanned development, which fundamentally undermines the plan-led strategy.

4. Harm to Landscape Character and Rural Setting

The site forms part of the rural edge of Cowfold and provides an important transition between the settlement and open countryside.

The proposed development would:

- Introduce suburban built form into an undeveloped greenfield site
- Erode the clearly defined settlement edge
- Urbanise the transition between village and countryside
- Adversely affect views to and from the surrounding landscape

This conflicts with:

- HDPF Policy 25 (Natural Environment and Landscape Character)
- HDPF Policy 33 (Quality of New Development)
- CNP Policy 2 (Design and Character)
- NPPF Paragraphs 130 and 174

The Parish Council does not consider that landscaping would overcome this harm. Planting would take many years to establish and cannot replicate the openness of the existing site or mitigate the permanent urbanising effect.

The harm is therefore inherent to the development of this site and attracts significant weight.

5. Impact on Trees, TPOs and Adjacent Woodland

The site is affected by Tree Preservation Orders, and Eastlands Lane is lined with mature TPO-protected oak trees which make a significant contribution to local character.

The site also directly adjoins Eastlands Wood, a designated Priority Habitat, and forms part of a wider woodland network.

The proposed development would:

- Place pressure on protected trees, including encroachment into root protection areas
- Create future pressure for pruning or removal due to proximity to dwellings
- Result in potential long-term harm to protected trees
- Introduce harmful edge effects to Eastlands Wood (lighting, noise, domestic activity)
- Fail to provide an adequate buffer to protect woodland integrity

The applicant's own evidence identifies the site as part of a Priority Habitat Network, reinforcing its environmental sensitivity.

This conflicts with:

- CNP Policy 2 (Green Infrastructure)
- HDPF Policy 25
- NPPF Paragraphs 174 and 180

6. Ecological Impact

Eastlands Wood and the surrounding tree network are likely to support protected species and form part of a wider ecological corridor.

The proposal would result in:

- Habitat loss and fragmentation
- Increased disturbance from lighting and domestic activity
- Degradation of woodland edge conditions

In the absence of robust and comprehensive ecological evidence, the precautionary principle must apply.

The proposal therefore gives rise to likely significant ecological harm.

7. Inappropriate Form of Development and Housing Mix

CNP Policy 9 and Policy 13 require development to reflect local character and provide a balanced housing mix.

The proposal for 9 large detached dwellings:

- Represents a low-density, executive-style scheme
- Does not reflect the established pattern of development
- Fails to provide a balanced mix of housing
- Does not respond to identified local needs

This conflicts with:

- CNP Policies 9 and 13
- HDPF Policy 32 (Quality of Development)
- NPPF Paragraph 130

8. Access and Highway Concerns

Access is proposed via Eastlands Lane, a narrow rural lane and Public Right of Way lined with TPO-protected trees.

The proposal includes footfall statistics which the Parish Council believe do not reflect the reality of usage – having been taken mid-week during November. The route is popular with pedestrians at weekends and in the Spring and Summer months. Furthermore, not all access points to Eastlands Lane have been measured.

The proposal would:

- Increase traffic along a constrained rural route
- Create conflict between vehicles and pedestrians
- Require urbanising interventions (widening, passing places)
- Risk harm to tree root protection areas

This results in both highway safety concerns and harm to rural character.

9. Sustainability of Location

The site is only moderately accessible to services and facilities.

The proposal would:

- Increase reliance on private vehicles

- Fail to provide safe and convenient pedestrian connections
- Not represent a sustainable pattern of development

This conflicts with NPPF Paragraphs 8 and 105.

10. Failure to Maximise Energy Efficiency and Low Carbon Design

The submitted Energy Statement demonstrates a minimum-compliance approach, rather than a policy-led strategy.

10.1 Failure to Properly Apply the Energy Hierarchy

HDPF Policy 36 requires a sequential approach:

- Be Lean
- Be Clean
- Be Green

While presented, the hierarchy is not properly followed:

- The “Be Clean” stage is effectively dismissed, not robustly assessed
- Options are rejected primarily on practicality and site layout grounds
- The scheme defaults to individual systems without demonstrating that more efficient solutions are unviable

This represents a failure of policy application, not compliance.

10.2 Limited Renewable Energy Provision

Solar provision is modest and does not maximise on-site generation.

No evidence is provided that roof capacity or orientation has been optimised.

This conflicts with:

- HDPF Policy 36
- CNP Policies 1, 2 and 13
- NPPF Paragraphs 152–157

10.3 Reliance on Standard Measures

Carbon savings rely heavily on:

- Air Source Heat Pumps
- Fabric improvements

These are now baseline Building Regulations measures, not enhanced sustainability features.

10.4 Lack of Detail and Future-Proofing

The scheme lacks:

- A clear fabric-first strategy
- Overheating assessment
- Battery storage or smart systems
- Future-proofing for energy infrastructure

Given the site's environmental sensitivity, a higher standard should be expected.

11. Status of the Cowfold Neighbourhood Plan

The applicant has suggested that the Cowfold Neighbourhood Plan is:

- "out of date on adoption"
- "cannot be relied upon"
- "fails the Basic Conditions"

The Parish Council strongly disagrees.

The CNP:

- Has been independently examined. The examiner stated "I am satisfied that the approach taken in the submission of the plan is both evidence-based and robust."
- Meets, and in fact exceeds the Basic Conditions of Policy 15 of the HDPF of 44, by an increased provision of 70 units.
- Has been endorsed by referendum
- Is formally adopted and part of the Development Plan

Under NPPF Paragraphs 30 and 38, it must be given full weight.

No clear or compelling evidence has been provided to justify reducing its weight.

The proposal is in clear conflict with multiple CNP policies, which remain fully applicable.

12. Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development

The Parish Council acknowledges housing land supply may be raised.

However:

- The CNP is recently adopted and up-to-date
- The proposal conflicts with its spatial strategy
- The site is unallocated

The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not override the requirement for plan-led decision-making.

13. Plan-Led Development and Site Allocation

The site has been assessed through the SHELAA process and not allocated.

Granting permission would:

- Undermine the plan-led system
- Pre-empt plan-making
- Conflict with evidence-based site selection
- Set a harmful precedent

14. Recommended Reasons for Refusal

Should the Local Planning Authority be minded to refuse the application, Cowfold Parish Council considers that the following reasons are robust, defensible and directly supported by the Development Plan:

- 1. Principle of Development / Countryside Location** The proposed development lies outside the defined built-up area boundary of Cowfold within the countryside. As an unallocated site, the proposal represents unjustified and unsustainable encroachment into the countryside, contrary to HDPF Policies 3 and 26, CNP Policies 9 and 10, and NPPF Paragraphs 11, 15 and 174.
- 2. Landscape Harm and Settlement Edge** The proposal would introduce urbanising built form into a sensitive rural edge location, eroding the clear settlement boundary and harming the character and appearance of the area. This is contrary to HDPF Policies 25 and 33, CNP Policy 2, and NPPF Paragraphs 130 and 174.
- 3. Trees, Woodland and Biodiversity Impact** The development would result in unacceptable pressure on TPO-protected trees and harmful edge effects on adjacent Priority Habitat woodland, with insufficient buffering or mitigation. This is contrary to HDPF Policy 25, CNP Policy 2, and NPPF Paragraphs 174 and 180.

4. Unsuitable Form of Development and Housing Mix The proposed low-density executive housing fails to reflect local character or provide an appropriate housing mix to meet local needs, contrary to CNP Policies 9 and 13, HDPF Policy 32, and NPPF Paragraph 130.

5. Highway Safety and Rural Character The proposal would intensify use of a constrained rural lane and Public Right of Way, resulting in conflict between users, potential harm to protected trees, and urbanising interventions, contrary to HDPF Policy 40, CNP Policy 2, and NPPF Paragraphs 110 and 111.

6. Unsustainable Location The site is not sustainably located, with limited accessibility to services and reliance on private vehicles, contrary to NPPF Paragraphs 8, 105 and 109.

7. Failure to Comply with Energy and Climate Policy The proposal fails to properly apply the energy hierarchy required by HDPF Policy 36, does not maximise renewable energy generation, and relies primarily on baseline Building Regulations compliance rather than a genuinely low carbon strategy. This conflicts with HDPF Policy 36, CNP Policies 1, 2 and 13, and NPPF Paragraphs 152–157.

15. Conclusion

The proposed development is unacceptable in principle and gives rise to significant and demonstrable harm.

It:

- Conflicts with multiple Development Plan policies
- Lies outside the settlement boundary
- Harms landscape character and rural setting
- Harms the view of listed Heritage assets
- Impacts protected trees and priority habitat
- Fails to provide appropriate design and housing mix
- Relies on constrained and harmful access
- Does not represent sustainable or policy-compliant development
- Creates material harm to the plan without public benefit

There are no material considerations that outweigh these conflicts.

Cowfold Parish Council therefore strongly recommends that planning permission is refused.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm