

Examination of the Horsham District Local Plan 2023–2040

HEARING STATEMENT

Matter 6b: Strategic Policy HA3 — Land North West of Southwater

Representor: Save Rural Southwater (SRS), represented by Gordon Sullivan

Hearing session: Friday 16 October 2026, AM — Albery House, Springfield Road, Horsham, RH12 2GB

Relates to original representations: 1186961 and 1190510 (Strategic Policy HA3); 1186954 and 1190488 (Strategic Policy 9 — water and wastewater infrastructure, insofar as relevant to HA3's deliverability under this Matter)

Scope: This statement is confined to the matters identified in the Inspector's agenda for Matter 6b (transport and movement; design, layout and facilities; impacts and mitigation; delivery) and does not repeat the case set out in full in the original representations referenced above.

Introduction

This statement addresses evidence and analysis that has arisen since SRS's original representations were made in February 2024, structured under the four headings set out in the Inspector's agenda for this session. SRS's position, developed in full in its original representations, is that Strategic Policy HA3 is unsound. This statement explains why that conclusion is reinforced, not undermined, by everything that has happened since.

Since those representations, Berkeley Homes has submitted a full outline planning application for the site (DC/26/0366). It is now possible, for the first time, to see clearly how Horsham District Council and its partners intend the site to be developed, rather than assessing HA3 as a policy proposition in principle. That clarity has not resolved SRS's concerns; it has crystallised them. Across transport, design, environmental impact and infrastructure delivery, the application has surfaced a series of specific, evidenced problems which, taken cumulatively, demonstrate that Southwater does not meet the NPPF's tests of sustainable development for a strategic allocation of this scale.

i. Transport and Movement

Highway access arrangements. Hop Oast Roundabout is already operating at or near capacity. The signalisation proposed for the roundabout manages existing flow rather than adding capacity, and the related Pollards Hill junction has not been addressed in the evidence published to date. Separately, a link road is proposed within the site, but no mechanism has been demonstrated to prevent continued rat-running through Two Mile Ash Road, Church Lane and Kerves Lane, all of which already carry traffic seeking to avoid the existing network.

The application also proposes only a single point of emergency access into the development; this has not, so far as SRS is aware, been demonstrably resolved in the evidence published for the site.

Sustainable transport, the Downs Link and rail stations. The agenda specifically raises the completion of the Downs Link and the relationship to the railway stations at Christ's Hospital and Horsham. SRS has not seen published evidence confirming a safe, direct, fully off-road walking and cycling connection from the development to Christ's Hospital station or to the Downs Link, and asks the Inspector to require this evidence before the site's sustainable transport credentials can be accepted. A shared footway/cycleway is proposed within the site boundary, but the wider Worthing Road corridor connecting the site to the existing village and its schools remains, on the evidence available, unresolved and unsafe for children and other non-car users.

Severance across the A24 and school-run journeys. More broadly, no safe, sustainable transport option or connection has been demonstrated between Southwater and the area north of the A24 for the purpose of school-run and other everyday journeys. In the absence of such a connection, the car is not a choice for these journeys but the only practical option, and this is true today, before any of the development proposed under HA3 is built. Southwater is not, on the evidence available, well connected enough to allow safe, uncongested access to schools and other facilities for its existing population. Adding a further 1,000 homes and the associated trip generation would be expected to make existing access to facilities worse, not better, for

residents already living in the village, not only for those in the new development. SRS submits this is a matter the Inspector should weigh directly against the spatial strategy's stated objective of reducing the need to travel and improving access to services.

ii. Design, Layout and Facilities

Physical integration and the neighbourhood centre. The application's masterplan includes a new cluster of shops, services and facilities intended to function as a secondary centre for Southwater. This conflicts with the Southwater Neighbourhood Plan's core principle (SNP1.1(a)) that Southwater should remain a single-centre settlement with facilities centred on Lintot Square. Rather than physically integrating with the existing village, the proposal risks creating a second, competing focal point, fragmenting rather than reinforcing Southwater's identity as a single community.

School location and access. The agenda raises the location of the proposed school as part of social and community facility provision. SRS is not aware of any published evidence confirming that children living in the existing village, not just the new development, would be able to walk or cycle to the proposed school safely, without reliance on the unresolved road network addressed in Section i above. A school allocation without a demonstrated safe, non-car access strategy for the whole community it is meant to serve is not evidence of sound design.

The Southwater Neighbourhood Plan identified a deficit in community and recreational infrastructure that predates this proposal; any assessment of facility provision under this heading should be made against that existing deficit, not against the application's own facilities considered in isolation.

This proposal must also be understood against Southwater's growth trajectory over recent decades, which the agenda's reference to physical integration and impact on the village requires the Inspector to weigh. The village's built footprint has already trebled since the mid-1980s, following more than 40 years of continuous large-scale housebuilding, and almost 300 previously approved homes remain to be built. Since SRS's original representations alone, further committed development at Broadacres (c.350 homes) and the Horsham Golf Club site (c.800 homes) — the latter to the north of the A24 — has added a further c.1,150 homes: some two-and-a-half to three times the entire housing figure identified for Southwater in its Neighbourhood Plan. This growth, on both sides of the A24, is converging on the same village centre, schools and roads addressed under Transport and Movement above. Southwater has, in that sense, already absorbed several times over what a settlement of its scale and character would ordinarily be asked to accommodate. SRS submits that a further 1,000 homes under HA3 would not be an incremental addition to that pattern but a step which the village's physical and social fabric cannot sustainably absorb.

The risk of overdevelopment is compounded by the fact that the application itself is not clear or consistent about the scale of development proposed. The applicant's Planning Statement describes the scheme as delivering approximately 1,000 new homes, while the applicant's own Environmental Statement (Bat Survey Report Rev A, February 2026) describes the same site as intended for a residential-led development of up to 1,500 homes, and the site area given in the Design and Access Statement differs from the area given in the Bat Survey Report. SRS does not rely on any particular figure from within this inconsistency, because the inconsistency is itself the point: the true scale of development that the Council and the Inspector are being asked to endorse has not been fixed, and the risk of a scheme materially larger than the headline figure suggests has not been properly assessed, tested against reasonable alternatives, or consulted upon on a consistent basis. A proposal whose own promoter cannot state consistently how large it is should not be relied upon to demonstrate that Southwater can safely absorb it, whatever the eventual number turns out to be.

iii. Impacts and Mitigation

Landscape and countryside. SRS is not aware of any Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment considering the combined effect of this proposal together with the committed Broadacres (c.350 homes) and Horsham Golf Club (c.800 homes) developments in the same settlement. Assessing this scheme in isolation understates its true cumulative landscape harm.

Heritage assets. As at September 2026, no technical heritage impact assessment has been published addressing the effect of the proposal on the setting of the Grade II* Great House Farmhouse, notwithstanding that the farmhouse is acknowledged on the applicant's own masterplan.

Wildlife and biodiversity. No arboricultural survey or tree protection plan has been published for Courtland Wood and Smith's Copse, the ancient woodlands adjoining the site. Given the site's clay geology and consequent constraints on-site habitat creation (addressed further below), any Biodiversity Net Gain strategy relying heavily on off-site credits should be treated with caution, and full ecological survey work — including for species such as badgers with established ranges across the site — should be completed and published before, not after, the allocation is confirmed.

Bats. Contrary to SRS's understanding when its original representations were made, the applicant has in fact undertaken bat surveys of the site (Environmental Statement Volume II, Appendix 8.7, Bat Survey Report Rev A, February 2026). Automated detector surveys at 14 locations across the site between June 2021 and August 2022 recorded at least ten bat species or species groups — an assemblage CPRE Sussex, in its objection of 31 March 2026, describes as exceptionally diverse for any single site in southern England. The results include Barbastelle recorded at exceptional activity levels at one location, along the edge of Smith's Copse; a probable Bechstein's bat roost; and a confirmed Brandt's bat roost. Barbastelle, Bechstein's and Brandt's bat are Species of Principal Importance under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, and Bechstein's bat is among the rarest mammals in Britain. Despite these findings, the applicant's own report concludes the site is of no more than 'low district importance' for bats — a conclusion CPRE Sussex has formally disputed as inconsistent with the survey's own results.

Barbastelle is the qualifying species for The Mens Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and the site falls within that SAC's Wider Conservation Area under the Natural England / South Downs National Park Sussex Bat SAC Planning and Landscape Scale Enhancement Protocol. On this basis, the site's hedgerows, woodland edges and other linear habitat features connecting roosts to foraging areas may be functionally linked to the SAC, engaging the Habitats Regulations Assessment process notwithstanding that the site itself lies outside the SAC boundary. NPPF paragraph 193(a) requires that planning permission be refused where significant harm to biodiversity cannot be avoided — including by locating on an alternative site — adequately mitigated, or compensated for; the applicant has not identified an alternative site. SRS submits that the discrepancy between the survey's own findings and its 'low district importance' conclusion should be independently reviewed before HA3 can be treated as sound.

Climate change mitigation, drainage, flood risk and utilities. The site lies on Weald Clay, a non-aquifer geology with very low infiltration capacity, on which conventional soakaway-based SuDS solutions do not function. Development at this scale would therefore rely on above-ground attenuation engineering, and there is a recognised hydrological risk that changes to groundwater levels and root-zone hydrology from such engineering could harm the adjoining ancient woodlands — Courtland Wood and Smith's Copse — even without direct physical encroachment on their boundaries, as well as harming the site's remaining arable land. No WSCC-approved surface water drainage strategy has been published, despite WSCC's statutory role as Lead Local Flood Authority, and specific technical questions therefore remain unanswered: what attenuation volume has been calculated for the impermeable clay substrate; what discharge rate is proposed relative to receiving watercourse capacity; whether the NPPF's 40% climate change allowance has been correctly applied to both rainfall intensity and peak flow; and what legally secured long-term maintenance arrangements exist for the attenuation assets on which the whole drainage strategy would depend.

This is not merely SRS's own technical concern: on 9 September 2026, Southern Water told Horsham District Council's Communities and Place Policy and Scrutiny Committee that reliance on SuDS to relieve pressure on wastewater drainage is not compatible with the capacity available at either works serving the site, given its poor soil drainage — corroborating, from Southern Water's own evidence, the same soil and drainage constraint SRS raises here, and reinforcing the risk to the adjoining ancient woodland described above.

iv. Delivery

This is the area in which the evidence has changed most decisively since SRS's original representations, and SRS asks the Inspector to treat it as central to this session.

On 9 September 2026, Southern Water gave evidence to Horsham District Council's Communities and Place Policy and Scrutiny Committee — George Taylor (Director, Wastewater), Daniel Witcher (Future Growth Lead) and Aaron Kidd (Senior Stakeholder Manager). Southern Water confirmed that no investment is planned within its current five-year investment programme (2025–2030) to increase capacity at Barns Green Wastewater Treatment Works, and that Barns Green is already operating near capacity — evidenced by

Horsham District Council's own refusal, on 4 August 2026, of a 68-home scheme at Barns Green. Mr Witcher separately identified a fundamental misunderstanding between the Council, Southern Water and the applicant as to which works was even intended to serve this site, Southern Water having understood the connection was to Horsham Wastewater Treatment Works rather than Barns Green. Critically, Mr Witcher confirmed that neither works has the capacity to serve an additional 1,000 homes at Southwater.

This should not come as a surprise. Southern Water's own published performance record shows a company rated 'lagging behind' by its industry regulator, Ofwat, for every year of the 2020–2025 regulatory period — the only company in England with that distinction for the full five years — and which has incurred over £330 million in regulatory fines, criminal penalties and underperformance payments over the same period, including a £90 million criminal fine for thousands of hours of illegal sewage discharge. Southern Water has missed its own leakage reduction targets in every year of the current regulatory period despite overspending its wholesale water budget by more than 50%, and suffered a major supply interruption failure as recently as December 2024. SRS submits that a company with this record should not be relied upon, without independent verification, to deliver the volume of water and wastewater infrastructure this scheme would require.

That lack of confidence is reinforced, not allayed, when Southern Water's own consumption assumptions are examined. The capacity modelling relied upon for new development assumes a household consumption figure that is itself an aspirational future target rather than a measure of current usage, and which sits well below both the national average consumption figure published by the industry regulator and the actual consumption reported by residents of comparable recent developments in the district. Applying Southern Water's own stated occupancy and consumption assumptions against its own five-year investment programme indicates a shortfall, in the near term, between the volume of water this scheme would require and the volume Southern Water has actually planned and funded to supply. Neither the Council nor Southern Water has demonstrated, using realistic and internally consistent figures, that sufficient water volume — as distinct from notional treatment capacity — would actually be available to serve this development within the timescale the Plan assumes.

This is Southern Water's own evidence, not SRS's assertion. On this evidence, wastewater capacity for this site — if it is delivered at all — would not be expected within the current investment period, meaning realistic delivery would fall late in, or beyond, the Plan period to 2040. Masterplanning and build-out rate assumptions for HA3 cannot be treated as reliable while the site's most basic infrastructure prerequisite remains unfunded and unprogrammed. No funding or phasing mechanism has been demonstrated that would resolve this. SRS submits this constitutes, in the Inspector's own terms, a potential delivery impediment of the first order, sufficient on its own to render the site undeliverable within a meaningful part of the Plan period.

Conclusion

Southwater has already contributed several times over what its Neighbourhood Plan identified as an appropriate share of housing growth, following more than 40 years of continuous development and a built footprint that has already trebled since the mid-1980s. SRS submits that the further 1,000 homes proposed under HA3 would not simply add to that pattern but would exceed the village's capacity to function as a sustainable community, consistent with the specific, evidenced concerns on transport, design, environment and delivery set out above.

Taken together, the evidence addressed under all four headings above points to the same conclusion: Strategic Policy HA3 is not effective (it is not deliverable within the Plan period), is not justified (reasonable alternatives, including the scale set out in the Southwater Neighbourhood Plan, have not been shown to have been properly tested), and is not positively prepared (it does not rest on an objectively assessed and evidenced infrastructure and access strategy). SRS asks the Inspector to conclude that HA3 is unsound and should be removed as a strategic site allocation, with the associated housing numbers found elsewhere within the Horsham District Council area. In the alternative, SRS asks that HA3 not be confirmed sound unless and until Southern Water provides written, dated confirmation of funded wastewater capacity; a WSCC-approved drainage strategy and independent ancient woodland hydrological assessment are in place; a cumulative landscape assessment and full ecological/heritage survey work are completed and published; and a safe, non-car access strategy to the site, the proposed school and the rail network is demonstrated.

Word count of this statement (excluding heading block and appendix): approximately 2,770 words.

Appendix: Exhibits Relied Upon (not counted towards the word limit)

- Minutes and/or recording of the Communities and Place Policy and Scrutiny Committee, Horsham District Council, 9 September 2026
- Horsham District Council decision notice and committee report, application for 68 homes at Barns Green, refused 4 August 2026
- HDC/WSCC objections tracking summary for application DC/26/0366, September 2026
- CPRE Sussex objection letter to application DC/26/0366, 31 March 2026 (Barns Green storm overflow data; challenge to the applicant's Bat Survey Report conclusions)
- Applicant's Environmental Statement Volume II, Appendix 8.7, Bat Survey Report Rev A, February 2026
- Applicant's Planning Statement for DC/26/0366 (dwelling numbers) and Design and Access Statement (site area), for comparison against the Bat Survey Report's figures
- Independent analysis of Southern Water's published performance data (Ofwat, Environment Agency and Southern Water Annual Performance Reports, 2015–2025)
- Environment Agency Event Duration Monitoring (storm overflow) data for Barns Green Wastewater Treatment Works
- Southern Water correspondence dated 12 July 2022 and 17 January 2023 regarding wastewater routing for the site
- Ofwat PR24 Final Determination for Southern Water, December 2024
- Southwater Neighbourhood Plan (2021), policy SNP1.1(a)
- Applicant's Flood Risk Assessment and Outline Drainage Strategy for DC/26/0366 (or written confirmation that none has been published)