



29/01/2024

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Mid Sussex District Council
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SPECIALIST LANDSCAPE ADVICE

Thank you for requesting advice on this application from Place Services' landscape advice service. This service provides advice to planning officers to inform Mid Sussex District Council planning decisions with regard to potential landscape impacts from development. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant or other interested parties may have, must be directed to the Planning Officer who will seek further advice from us where appropriate and necessary.

Application: DM/23/2867
Location: Land East Of Ansty Way Cuckfield Bypass Cuckfield West Sussex
Proposal: Change of use of farmland and woodland to parkland reserve to include public access and instigation of long-term management and rewilding regime, including establishment of pedestrian and cycle tracks, with new pedestrian and cycle access points off Cuckfield Road to the south and Staplefield Road to the north. Proposals to include the addition of two wooden viewing platforms and two hides. Sports pitches at Beech Farm Field to remain in sports use.

Dear Stephen,

Thank you for consulting the Landscape Advisor to Mid Sussex District Council on the above application.

With reference to the above-named application and submitted documents received by Place Services asking in relation to Landscape issues, our comments are made below following a review primarily of 'ES Volume 3: Addendum to Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment December 2023,' and a site visit made by the landscape consultant on 13/12/2023.

Summary

- We agree with the judgement that it is likely that the proposals in themselves will have minor adverse or negligible impacts on the Site in terms of landscape character or visual effects.

- The proposals could contribute to the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan, but a detailed management plan and details of proposed governance and funding models are needed to demonstrate this.
- It is understood that the premise of the parkland reserve is reliant on the approval for the neighbouring residential application of the 1450no. dwellings under DM/23/2866. In that context, the proposals are not acceptable.

Site Context

The application is for a 103ha Parkland Reserve which would be brought forward in conjunction with the proposed development of a 98ha Garden Community to the east of Ansty (Reference: DM/23/2866). The site is located to the west of Haywards Heath, south and west of Cuckfield, north of Burgess Hill, and adjacent to the small village of Ansty.

The Site is located within the High Weald AONB. It is also identified that *‘Mid Sussex is a heavily constrained District, with approximately 50% of the District classified as being in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), and further constraints provided by the South Downs National Park and Ashdown Forest 7km zone of influence. These designations place constraints on where development can reasonably be delivered and provides challenges in delivering the quantum of housing that Mid Sussex requires.’*

The new Parkland Reserve is proposed to the north of the A272. It is largely bounded to the west by woodland (including Walks Wood, Beechy Bottom and Henmead Wood) which is an Ancient Replanted Woodland in part. New England Ancient Woodland also defines part of the eastern boundary although is located outside of the Site. A watercourse and access track defines the southern boundary, which is also the primary entrance to the Site connecting to the proposed Garden Community and the A272. The Site also extends north to each Staplefield Road, Haywards Heath RFC and Whitemans Green Recreation Ground.

Three Public Rights of Way (PRoW) cross through the Site running east-west. The High Weald Landscape Trail, a 95-mile route between Horsham and Rye, crosses through the centre of the Site. Cuckfield Park and Grounds are located to the immediate east of the Site (including Grade II* listed Gatehouse and Park) and Pookchurch Vineyard (Highweald Wine Estate) is located close to the west of the Site, on the opposing side of Deaks Lane.

Planning Context

Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) (2018)

The current Development Plan for Mid Sussex District Council consists of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (2018), and the Site Allocations DPD (2021) and provides the overarching development plan guiding development management decisions across the district. As identified in the planning statement, with regard to this proposal, the following policies are particularly relevant:

- Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
- Policy DP16: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Policy DP26: Character and Design

- Policy DP34: Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets
- Policy DP37: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- Policy DP38: Biodiversity

Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan (2017)

The Site largely lies within the [Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan](#) area, which was formally made on 2nd February 2017. Policy AS3 High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is relevant to this application considering its location within the AONB. Proposals must [inter alia] conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB, meet the objectives of the AONB Management Plan, and must provide an assessment of any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which it could be moderated.

Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan (CNP) (2014)

Whilst the majority of the site lies within the Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan Area, part of the eastern edge of the Site is located within the CNP Area.

Key External Views (Map 5 – Page 33) are identified within the CNP and within the [Cuckfield Views Assessment \(2012\)](#). View 2 (Whitemans Green Recreation Ground), View 12 (Brighton Road – West across Cuckfield Park) and View 13 (Cuckfield Park) provide long views towards the Site and across to the ridge of the South Downs National Park. The Site does however benefit from extensive internal and boundary vegetation which restricts views into the Site although does allow long views from higher elevation across to the South Downs ridge.

High Weald AONB Management Plan (2019-2024)

A number of objectives identified in the AONB Management Plan relevant to the application include:

- S1: To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside.
- S2: To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement.
- R1: To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways.
- R2: To enhance the ecological function of routeways.
- W1: To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland.
- W2: To enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.
- FH2: To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.
- FH3: To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats.
- OQ1: To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald.
- OQ3: To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.
- OQ4: To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value.

Submission draft District Plan – Regulation 19 (November 2023).

A new District Plan is currently being prepared through the District Plan Review process. The site was subject to a draft allocation (DPH5 Land at Ansty Farm) in the [Draft Regulation 18 Local Plan in January 2022](#) and was supported by planning policy officers as a technically suitable location for strategic development proposals. The site was removed from the final Regulation 18 draft Local Plan due to apparent severe highways impacts on four junctions off site. It is also worth noting that in the Mid Sussex District Council District Plan 2021-2039 Assessment of the Impact of the SHELAA Sites on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Regulation 19), it is concluded that the impact of the joint development of the housing and the country park would have a **high** impact on the AONB (National Landscape).

The Submission draft District Plan – Regulation 19 identifies Ansty as a ‘small village’ in the Settlement Hierarchy.

The proposals are currently contrary to the adopted local development plan and to the Submission draft District Plan – Regulation 19.

Review of submitted information

The application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken by Fabrik (Volume 3 of the Environmental Statement). An Addendum (December 2023) has also been provided relating specifically to the Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve which forms part of the Ansty Garden Community.

The assessment should be carried out in accordance with the ‘Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment’, Third Edition (‘GLVIA3’) (2013) prepared by the Landscape Institute (LI) and Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA). We would have expected the Type 1 Viewpoint Photographs to be submitted at A1 width. We also note that the ‘approximate extent of the site’ has not been included on all of the submitted Viewpoint Photographs.

The methodology within the LVIA (Appendix V3.1 – Page 112) outlines the approach taken to assessing the potential landscape and visual impacts of the development. We generally agree with the methodology used to undertake the assessment of landscape and visual impact.

As acknowledged in the LVIA (Paragraph 1.3) the site visits and field work used to inform the assessment were undertaken in February and March, and therefore in a reduced leaf cover. For a development of this scale and in such a prominent location, we are pleased to see the fieldwork and photography has largely been undertaken during winter to ensure that a ‘worst-case scenario’ is being appraised.

The assessment includes a desktop study, a review of the landscape and visual baseline, an assessment of landscape and visual receptors, and a summary and conclusion. The Site’s characteristics are reasonably described and the range of views that are available have been appropriately summarized. However, we consider the assessment itself underestimates the likely effects of the proposed development on landscape character and visual amenity.

Landscape character

The LVIA assessment of Landscape Character references the National Landscape Character Assessment (NCA 122: High Weald) and Cuckfield Landscape Character Assessment (Area 33 Ridge

Top Playing Fields). We would however have expected the inclusion of A Landscape Character Assessment for West Sussex (HW4: High Weald Fringes) and A Landscape Character Assessment for Mid Sussex (LCA10: High Weald Fringes).

County Character Assessment: At a county level, the [Landscape Character Assessment of West Sussex](#) identifies the Site as being located within LCA [HW1 High Weald Fringes](#). Key characteristics of this LCA include the wooded, confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity, long views over the Low Weald to the downs, significant woodland cover, a dense network of hedgerows and trees, small irregular shaped assart fields and larger fields, network of footpaths and some busy roads.

Key issues within this LCA include the continued amalgamation of fields, the visual impact of new urban and rural development and gradual suburbanisation of the landscape. Long views from open ground have a high sensitivity to the impact of new urban development. Land Management Guidelines include [inter alia]:

- Maintain and restore the historic pattern and fabric of the woodland and agricultural landscape for scenic, nature conservation and recreational purposes;
- Protect existing views from the area and avoid skyline development, paying particular attention to the siting of telecommunications masts;
- Increase screening of prominent parts of new development on the southern fringes of Haywards Heath;
- Seek to protect the tranquil and historic character of rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value;
- Minimise the effects of adverse incremental change by seeking new development of high quality that sits well within the landscape and reflects local distinctiveness.

Appendix A (Table A.1 Contextual Landscape Receptors) does not include an assessment of the landscape character impacts on the Landscape Character Assessment of West Sussex. We would have expected this to be included within the assessment.

District Character Assessment: At a district level, the [Cuckfield Landscape Character Assessment \(April 2012\)](#) identifies the northern part of the Site as being located within Landscape Character Area (LCA) 33 Ridge Top Playing Fields. Key characteristics of this LCA include; part of the main east-west ridge sloping south, bound by the B1125 to the north, adjoins edge of Whitemans Green, playing fields and recreation ground, extensive views of the South Downs and wider National Park.

The LCA Capacity Summary describes the Site as; large south facing parcels of land with recreational use, open to wider AONB to the south with extensive views across to the South Downs. This LCA has moderate value, major sensitivity and negligible/low capacity which indicates *“that development would have a significant and detrimental effect on the character of the landscape. Any development in these character areas should only be on a very small scale and proposals would need to demonstrate no adverse impacts on the setting to the settlement or the wider landscape”*.

Within 33 Ridge Top Playing Fields, the LCA is assessed as having moderate value, major sensitivity, and an overall negligible/low capacity for development. Within the LVIA, the LCA is assessed as having **medium** sensitivity and **low** magnitude of effect resulting in a **minor adverse – negligible** significance

of effect. Since the proposals are low level, do not require built development and constitute minor physical change in the landscape, we agree with the judged significance of effect.

Following the identification of landscape character areas, the assessment appraises the landscape susceptibility, landscape value and landscape sensitivity of the Site in Appendix A Assessment of Landscape and Visual Effects. Landscape value is assessed using GLVIA Box 5.1.

Based on the above, we are of the judgement that development within this landscape will not have a significant impact on the local landscape character and therefore agree with the concluding judgements of the LVIA. We do however note the absence of the Landscape Character Assessment of West Sussex within the assessment.

Visual Amenity

The LVIA has been supported by 9 Photographic Viewpoints selected based on a range of representative views from within the study area and includes publicly accessible routes within the Site (Figure 2.7).

We note that the photography included within the LVIA has not been fully completed in line with the Visual Representation of Development Proposals Technical Guidance Note (TGN) 06/19 (Landscape Institute, September 2019. Type 1 (Annotated Viewpoint Photographs) have been used within the assessment. We would also have expected the annotated extent of the site to have been included on every submitted viewpoint alongside photographic technical details.

Within the LVIA, assessed viewpoints have been assessed as having **high** value (by virtue of presence within the AONB) and **low** susceptibility, resulting in **medium** sensitivity. Receptors have largely been judged to have **negligible** or **no change** in significance of effect. Where the significance of effect is judged to be **minor adverse** from PRoW receptors and users of Whitemans Green Recreation Ground, this is owed to the perceived increase in activity within the Site.

Considering the type of proposals within the Site, we agree with this judgement and that the perceived changes will likely be owed entirely to the presence of more pedestrian and cyclist activity within the Site.

Whilst there are locations where additional viewpoints would have been useful (i.e. Deaks Lane and longer distance viewpoints), the proposals are low level, small in scale and require minimal changes to the existing and therefore the assessed visual impact on the landscape will likely be minimal. We are therefore satisfied with the viewpoints included within the submitted assessment.

Other Matters

Whilst the proposals in isolation are acceptable in principle and do not result in significant landscape impacts, based on this application's association and reliance on neighbouring residential development under DM/23/2866 which will cause significant detrimental effects, the proposal is not acceptable from a landscape perspective.

The Mid Sussex District Council District Plan 2021-2039 Assessment of the Impact of the SHELAA Sites on the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Regulation 19) states of the joint development proposals:

*'As a large site, it impacts on most of the AONB character components. Development of the site would result in the loss of currently undeveloped land, potentially agricultural land or valued grassland. There are waterbodies and watercourses within the site. There are no sandstone outcrops on or adjacent to the site, however, there is underlying sandstone geology on part of the site. There is ancient woodland within the site. The site is in a rural and tranquil area and has dark skies. Staplefield Road to the north of the site is a historic drove route and there are other historic tracks crossing the site along with PROW. The site is associated with Cuckfield Park. Development of this site would lead to coalescence between Ansty and Cuckfield. **The northern part of the site is within the High Weald AONB but is not proposed for built development. It is proposed as a country park, however, the creation of a country park may lead to impacts on the AONB. The design and management of the country park must be consistent with the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.'***

As this is a full application for change of use (and not part of an outline application) we would expect that details of the anticipated funding and governance model for the proposed country park would be submitted alongside an outline landscape and ecology management plan for the next ten years. Due to the scale of the linked housing development, that it lies in the setting of an AONB (National Landscape) and the parkland is actually within the AONB (National Landscape) we would suggest a Community Management Organisation (CMO) is set up along the lines of the Chilmington Management Organisation in Ashford, Kent www.cmo.org.uk. This CMO takes the form of a community development trust, an independent not for profit organisation with the relevant local authority and parish councils as well as the developer sitting on the board. In the case of Ansty, it would be expected that the AONB (National Landscape) partnership would also have a role. Whilst the Chilmington development is proposed to be up to three times in scale in terms of housing numbers, the same principles apply. An independent environmental organisation with experience of working in this way, such as The Land Trust (<https://thelandtrust.org.uk/work-with-us/how-we-work/land-management/>) could be employed as part of this process.

No additional parking is proposed providing outside access to the parkland reserve. Whilst we recognise that the proposals are designed to be a greenspace associated with the development of DM/23/2866 and that additional parking is not provided on this basis, it is expected that the development of new outdoor greenspace provision will invite dedicated trips via car for dog walking and other purposes. It can therefore be anticipated that the proposed development to the east of Ansty Road will be utilised as parking for access to Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve along with the existing car-park at the sports ground or indeed along the roadside. This will therefore affect the perceived design and experience of both the new development where additional vehicles that have not been accounted for are likely to be parked on the western edge and the rural landscape beyond. The Toucan crossing proposed for Ansty Road in the planning statement should be a Pegasus Crossing

to allow horses to use the existing bridleways in the proposed country park and any bridleways proposed as part of the new development.

The proposals provide more access to the High Weald AONB. Whilst this supports some objectives of the Management Plan (i.e. S1, OQ1, OQ3, OQ4), increased access may encourage pedestrian access to the on-site Ancient Woodlands and other sensitive habitats which are currently not at risk of pedestrian harm. Consideration for preventing access to sensitive areas of the Site must be had to ensure that increased access does not impact on Objectives W1 and W2. Increased access also brings increased antisocial behaviour, dog-fouling and littering in all habitats which will need managing.

Conclusion

The proposed interventions associated with this application comprise an additional cycle path and circular walking routes, habitat creation, conservation cattle/pigs, recreation fields, multifunctional greenspaces, additional access and ecological protection zones. All proposed features are low level and require minimal built interventions which have a reduced landscape and visual impact on the surrounding landscape.

We agree with the judgement that the proposals will likely have minor adverse – negligible impacts on the Site in terms of adverse landscape character and visual effects. The proposals could also beneficially contribute to the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan, for example for ecological and recreational benefits. However, without a detailed management plan, and details of governance and funding models this cannot be demonstrated.

Notwithstanding the above, it is understood that the premise of the parkland reserve is reliant on the approval for the neighbouring residential application under DM/23/2866. Isolated, the proposals within Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve are not unacceptable from a landscape and visual impact perspective, however the context of the proposals in their reliance on the approval of the 1450no. dwellings is not acceptable.

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Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of Mid Sussex District Council

Please note: This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.