

From: planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk <planninginfo@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 16 June 2026 10:51:37 UTC+01:00
To: "Caroline Grist" <caroline.grist@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: Mid Sussex DC - Online Register - Comments for Planning Application
DM/26/1315

Comments summary

Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning Application comments have been made. A summary of the comments is provided below.

Comments were submitted at 16/06/2026 10:51 AM.

Application Summary

Address:	Land West Of Gatesmead Wickham Way Haywards Heath West Sussex
Proposal:	Proposed 49 new homes together with open space and associated infrastructure.
Case Officer:	Caroline Grist

[Click for further information](#)

Customer Details

Address:	30 Summerhill Close Haywards heath
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Comments Details

Commenter Type:	Neighbour or general public
Stance:	Customer objects to the Planning Application
Reasons for comment:	
Comments:	Dear Planning Officer, I am writing to formally object to the above planning application. I am a local resident and am concerned that this proposal would cause significant harm across a range of material planning considerations, as set out below. I request that these representations are registered and given full weight in the determination of this application.

1. Harm to the Setting of a Grade II Listed Building*

Wickham Farmhouse, a Grade II* Listed Building, is located to the south of the application site. This is among the highest tier of listed buildings in England and its setting deserves the most stringent level of protection.

Significantly, the applicant's own Design and Access Statement (DAS) acknowledges that this site was initially rejected at Stage 2c of Mid Sussex District Council's Local Plan site selection process specifically because of the perceived impacts on this and other off-site Grade II* listed buildings, with the site found "unsuitable for development" as a result.

The site is only being reconsidered now because the Local Plan Inspector has required the Council to increase its annual housing requirement. That change in circumstance does not resolve the underlying heritage harm - it merely provides a reason for the Council to revisit the suitability question. The heritage impacts remain.

The applicant proposes a 61-metre no-build buffer on the southern boundary as mitigation. However, a setback distance does not neutralise harm to the setting of a heritage asset. The built form of 49 dwellings, associated roads, parking, lighting and activity within a historically open and tranquil field would materially alter the character of the setting of Wickham Farmhouse in a way that a no-build zone alone cannot address.

The Council is required under Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings, their settings and features of special architectural or historic interest. The test is not merely whether harm can be partially mitigated, but whether it can be avoided. It cannot here.

The application is supported by a Built Heritage Assessment, the findings of which the Council's Conservation Officer should scrutinise carefully. Officers should also be aware that the Built Heritage Technical Note submitted to the local plan process in March 2026 was provided by the applicant specifically to address their own acknowledged rejection from that process - it should not be treated as independent or dispositive.

2. Encroachment into the Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone

Birchen Wood, to the north of the site, is designated Ancient Woodland - a habitat which is irreplaceable and subject to the strongest protections under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Paragraph 186(c) of the NPPF states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

The applicant's DAS explicitly acknowledges that the access road earthworks would encroach within the 15-metre ancient woodland buffer zone. The DAS attempts to minimise this by stating that the incursion is "significantly small" and its impact "negligible". This assessment should be treated with scepticism - it is the applicant's own characterisation of harm caused by their own scheme, in a document produced to support their own application.

Ancient woodland buffers exist precisely because ground disturbance, compaction, and changes to drainage and hydrology near woodland edges can cause harm that is slow to manifest and impossible to reverse. Any encroachment into the buffer zone requires independent assessment, not reliance on the applicant's own view that the impact is small. The Council's ecologist and arboriculture officer should be asked to provide an independent assessment of whether the earthworks within the buffer zone are acceptable.

3. Ecology: Inadequate Protection of Priority Habitats and Species Rush Pasture (Section 41 Priority Habitat)

The site contains rush pasture in the north-east quadrant, identified in the applicant's ecological documents as High Value (HVP). Rush pasture - Purple Moor-grass and Rush Pasture - is a Section 41 priority habitat listed under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, meaning it is of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England.

Rather than avoiding harm to this habitat, the applicant proposes translocation - moving the rush pasture to another part of the site. Translocation is not equivalent to in-situ retention. It carries inherent ecological risk, is not always successful, and is not an appropriate response to a priority habitat where avoidance is achievable. The applicant has not demonstrated that the development cannot be reconfigured to avoid loss.

Nightingale - Red List Species

The applicant's own ecological survey data records a Nightingale near the south-west corner of the site. The Nightingale is a Red List species under the Birds of Conservation Concern 5 (BoCC5) assessment - the UK's most threatened bird category - and a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

The presence of a Red List species on or adjacent to the application site is a highly material consideration. The Council should require a detailed assessment of the likely impact of the proposed development on this species, including its territory, foraging habitat and nesting areas, before the application can be determined.

Biodiversity Net Gain - Unverified Claim

The applicant states that the development will deliver 10%

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). This is a legal requirement under the Environment Act 2021, not an optional commitment. However, the BNG figure presented in the application documents is an aspiration based on the applicant's own modelling at the point of application - it is not a verified or independently assessed calculation.

Given the presence of a Section 41 priority habitat being translocated rather than retained, and a Red List species on site, there is a genuine risk that the BNG metric as currently presented does not accurately reflect the actual ecological impact of the scheme. The Council should require independent verification of the BNG calculation before granting consent.

Woodland Loss at the Access Point

The applicant's ecological documents confirm that the construction of the access road requires the cutting through of a section of woodland - not merely hedgerow removal, as is sometimes characterised. This involves the removal of a number of mature trees in the north-eastern corner of the site. Mature trees provide irreplaceable ecological function and the loss of this woodland section should be treated as a significant harm, not a technical convenience.

4. Highway Safety and the Single Point of Access

All vehicle movements associated with the 49 proposed dwellings - residents, visitors, deliveries and emergency services - would be routed through Gatesmead, an existing residential street of approximately 700 metres in length. This is the sole vehicular access to the site.

The DAS acknowledges that concern about road safety and the current access to Gatesmead was one of the three most prominent themes in responses to the applicant's own public consultation. The applicant's response is that a construction management plan will be agreed with the Council and that a full Transport Assessment will be submitted. This is not a solution to the fundamental problem - it is a procedural commitment to manage a problem that stems from the design of the scheme itself.

Gatesmead is a residential road that was not designed to serve as a distributor route for additional development of this scale. Routing all traffic - including construction vehicles during what could be a multi-year build programme - through this street would materially increase conflict between vehicle movements and the existing residential environment, including pedestrians and children.

No alternative access route has been explored or demonstrated to be genuinely impossible. The Council's highway authority (West Sussex County Council) should be asked to comment specifically on whether a single point of access via Gatesmead is appropriate

for a development of this scale, and whether adequate visibility splays and junction capacity exist to accommodate the increase in traffic.

5. Pressure on Local Infrastructure

The DAS acknowledges that the development will require a financial contribution toward local services and infrastructure, but does not specify any sums, or provide any evidence that identified capacity exists in local primary schools, GP surgeries, or other services to absorb the additional demand generated by 49 new households.

Haywards Heath already faces significant housing growth pressure, with the Local Plan Inspector having required the Council to plan for 1,200 to 1,300 new dwellings per year - substantially above the previously planned figure. This has placed cumulative pressure on infrastructure across the town. A bare commitment to make an unspecified financial contribution is insufficient to demonstrate that local infrastructure can accommodate this development without detriment to existing residents.

The Council should require the applicant to provide detailed evidence of capacity at named local schools and GP surgeries, and to confirm the specific level of contributions proposed prior to any resolution to grant permission.

6. Planning Policy Context

The DAS frankly acknowledges that the main housing policies in Mid Sussex's adopted development plan are "currently out of date" because the Council cannot demonstrate a five-year housing land supply. This triggers the presumption in favour of sustainable development under NPPF paragraph 11(d). However, this presumption is not unconditional - it does not apply where the adverse impacts of granting permission would "significantly and demonstrably outweigh" the benefits, when assessed against the policies of the Framework taken as a whole.

In this case, the adverse impacts are substantial and well evidenced:

- * Harm to the setting of a Grade II* Listed Building, where the site was already rejected in the local plan process on these grounds
 - * Encroachment into the buffer zone of Ancient Woodland - an irreplaceable habitat
 - * Loss of Section 41 priority rush pasture habitat through translocation rather than in-situ retention
 - * Potential harm to a Red List species (Nightingale) recorded on or adjacent to the site
 - * Unacceptable highway impact from routing all development traffic through a single existing residential road
 - * Undemonstrated infrastructure capacity
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When these impacts are weighed against the benefits of the scheme - principally the delivery of 49 homes including 30% affordable provision - it is my submission that the adverse impacts significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits. Planning permission should therefore be refused.

Summary of Grounds of Objection

- * The development would cause harm to the setting of a Grade II* Listed Building (Wickham Farmhouse), a concern already identified as grounds for rejection during the local plan process
- * Access road earthworks encroach into the 15-metre buffer zone of Birchen Wood, designated Ancient Woodland
- * The proposed translocation of Section 41 priority rush pasture is not equivalent to retention and is an inadequate response to a priority habitat
- * A Red List Nightingale has been recorded on or adjacent to the site; detailed species assessment is required before determination
- * The 10% Biodiversity Net Gain claim is unverified and requires independent assessment
- * Removal of a section of woodland (not merely hedgerow) is required at the access point
- * All traffic is routed via a single existing residential street (Gatesmead), which is inadequate for a development of this scale
- * Infrastructure capacity has not been demonstrated; financial contributions are unspecified

The Value of this Space to the Local Community

Beyond the formal planning considerations set out above, I want to draw the Council's attention to the very real role this land plays in the daily lives of local residents. This site is well-used and well-loved as informal open space - for dog walking, running through and around, and children playing in a safe, accessible green environment away from traffic. It provides something that cannot easily be replaced: a natural, open space within walking distance of homes where families, individuals and the wider community can spend time outdoors, connect with nature, and benefit from the physical and mental health advantages that green space provides. The loss of this land to residential development would remove that resource permanently. Whilst the applicant proposes some public open space within the scheme, this is not equivalent - a managed residential development with a play area and mown grassland is a fundamentally different environment to the open, natural space that exists today. The NPPF recognises at paragraph 103 that existing open space should not be built upon unless it can be demonstrated to be surplus to requirements. No such demonstration has been made here.

I urge the Council to refuse this application.

Kind regards