

UNION 4 PLANNING

Padel Centric Ltd

Land to the south of Crabbet Park, Crawley Down

Proposed development comprising construction of a padel tennis facility (Use Class E(d)) with ancillary office, changing facilities and warmup studio, business centre, member shop and café (all within Use Class E), car and cycle parking, bin storage, with associated access and works.

SEQUENTIAL TEST AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

July 2026



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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Sequential Test and Impact Assessment has been prepared by Union4 Planning on behalf of Padel Centric Ltd ('the Applicant') in support of the proposed development of a padel tennis facility on land to the south of Crabbet Park, Crawley Down. This document is submitted as part of the application for this proposal to Mid-Sussex District Council as the local planning authority.
- 1.2 The proposed development comprises construction of a padel tennis facility (Use Class E(d)) with ancillary office, changing facilities and warmup studio, business centre, member shop and café (all within Use Class E), car and cycle parking, bin storage, with associated access and works.
- 1.3 The introduction of padel tennis, an innovative racquet sport, to the site is intended to cater for one of the fastest growing sports in the UK. The proposed development will provide a modern facility that will introduce new people to the game, complementing and enhancing the existing offer of sporting facilities in Crawley and the surrounding area.

Overview and Background

- 1.4 Policy DP2 of the Mid-Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 identifies that a sequential test must be applied to main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with the District Plan and a relevant Neighbourhood Plan.
- 1.5 As identified in the Local Validation Checklist (updated September 2024), a Retail Impact Assessment (including a Sequential Test), is required for proposals that include creation of floorspace exceeding 500sqm gross of main town centre uses as defined in the NPPF, outside of main town centres which are not in accordance with an up-to-date local plan. This includes assessing the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal, and the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and wider area.
- 1.6 The Applicant has adopted a sequential approach in seeking to identify suitable sites and/or premises to accommodate a padel tennis facility. Although this sequential approach is summarised in the submitted Planning Statement alongside this application, this report has been prepared to explain in detail the sequential approach that was undertaken.
- 1.7 This report sets out that there are no reasonable alternative sites available within town centre centres and that the application site is the most sequentially preferable site. An impact assessment is also provided which confirms that there will be no adverse impacts on the vitality and viability of the Town Centres and other district and local centres within a 10-minute driving-time distance of the site.

- 1.8 The physical and spatial requirements of a padel tennis facility provide very clear parameters in which the site search was conducted. The Applicant requires a floorplate comprising approximately 2,000 sqm, which is deemed sufficient to accommodate 6 double courts in close proximity to each other. The requirement to accommodate a minimum of 6 double courts is a prerequisite to ensure the padel tennis facility is commercially viable on its own and can operate efficiently. As such, this baseline has been used as part of the Sequential Test.

Structure of this Sequential Test and Impact Assessment

- 1.9 This Sequential Test and Impact Assessment is structured as follows:
- Section 2 provides an overview of the application site location and description.
 - Section 3 sets out the relevant policy context pertaining to the Sequential Test and Impact Assessment.
 - Section 4 illustrates the search area for alternative sites applied to the Sequential Test to determine their suitability for the proposed development.
 - Section 5 provides an Impact Assessment with regard to the vitality and viability of defined Town, District and Local Centres.
 - Section 6 provides a summary and conclusions.

2.0 Site Location and Context

- 2.1 The application site ('the Site') is located within the open countryside within the north-western extent of Mid-Sussex. More specifically, the site is positioned to the east of the M23, and directly to the south of the Crabbet Park retail area.

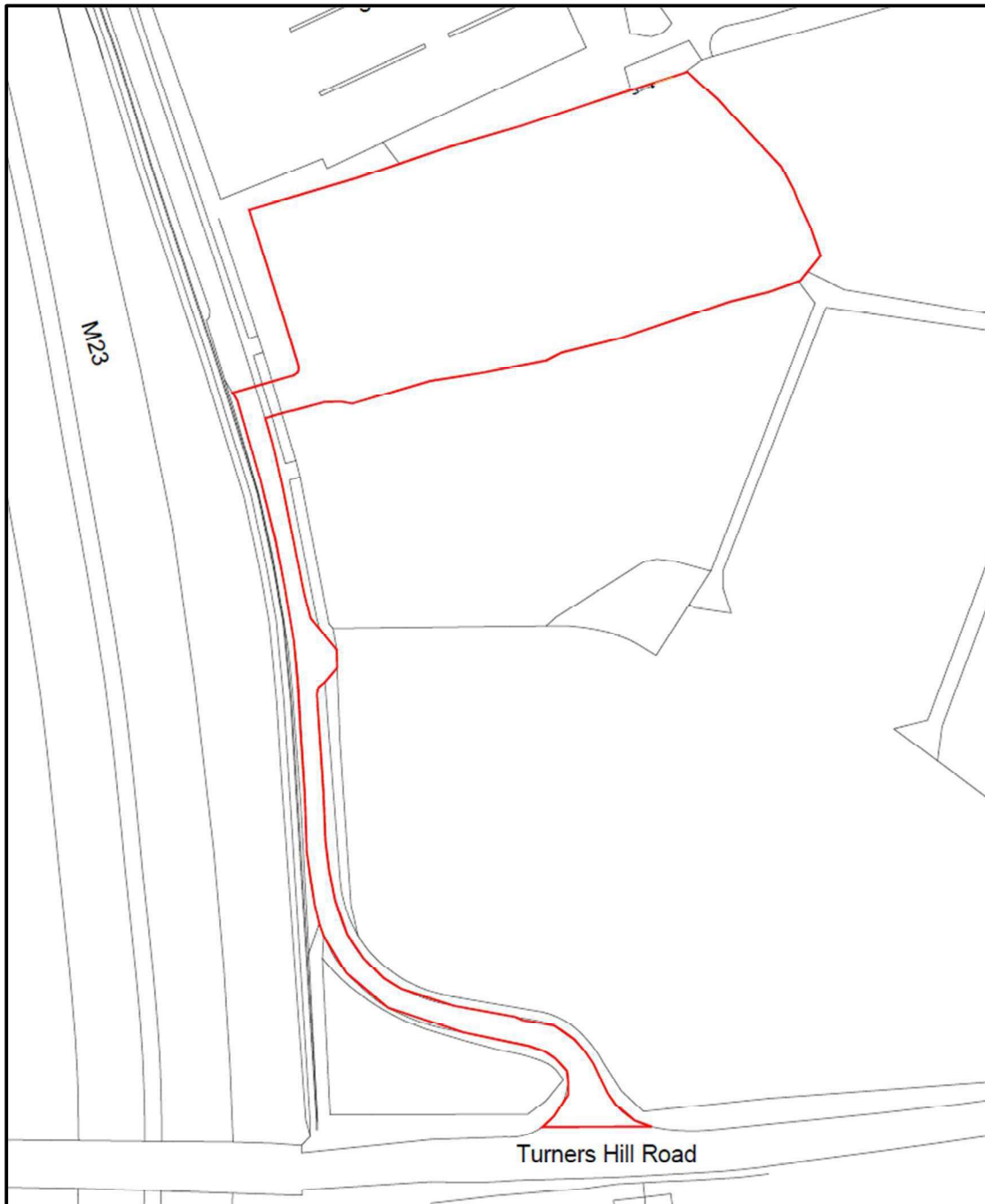
Figure 1: Site Location and Context



Source: Google Maps (2025); annotated by Union4 Planning

- 2.2 The Site comprises an area of approximately 0.7 hectares, consisting of a grazing paddock and private access track up to the adopted Highway (Turners Hill Road). The Site is bounded by fencing to the north, separating the car parking area serving Crabbet Park. The site is also bounded by fencing to the south, hedgerow to the west and established tree canopy to the east.
- 2.3 The red line boundary for the Site is indicated below in Figure 2 overleaf.

Figure 2: Red-line boundary



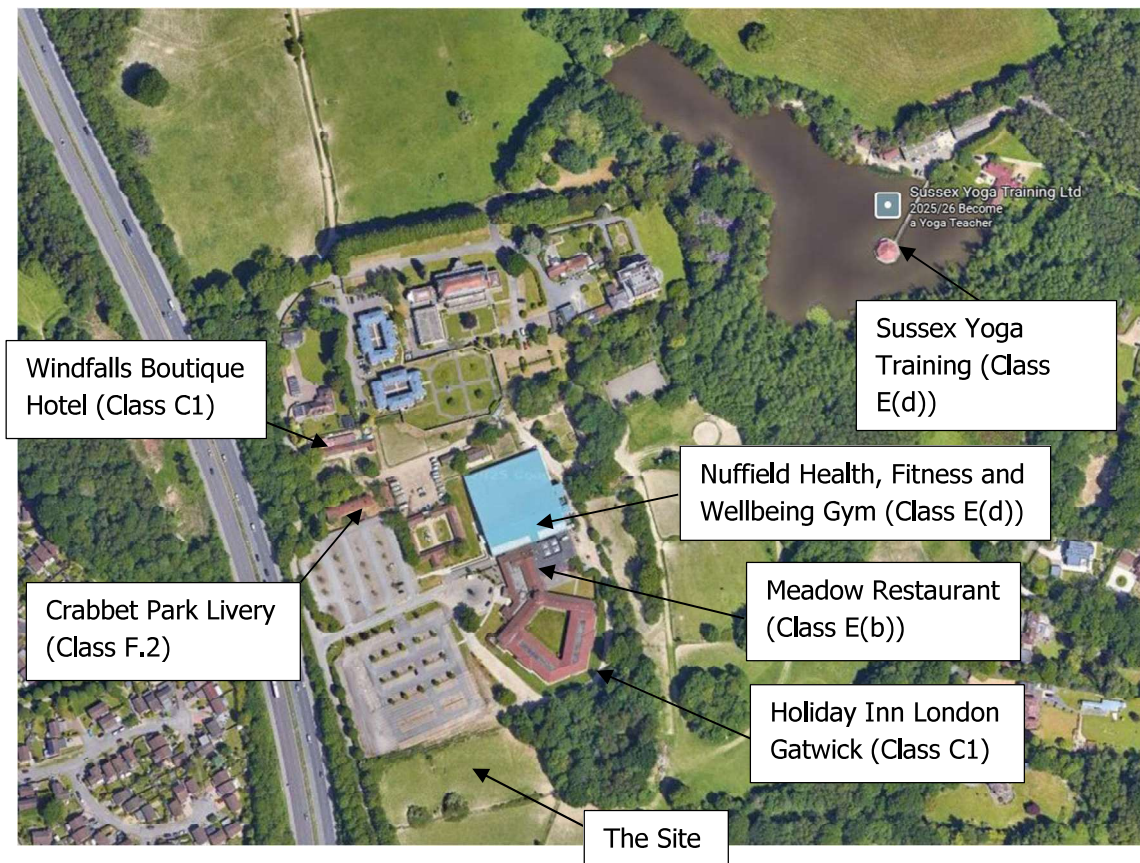
Source: Gavin Jones Architecture (2026)

Site Surroundings

- 2.4 The immediate surrounding area to the north is commercial in nature, with a series of retail/leisure uses including a hotel (Holiday Inn London Gatwick), a gym (Nuffield Health Crawley) and a horse-riding school (Crabbet Park Livery), all within approximately 125m of the Site. Please see Figure 3 which identifies the leisure uses at Crabbet Park and the surrounding area. Crabbet Park also contains a number of residential dwellings further to the south of the commercial/leisure cluster.

- 2.5 The immediate and wider surrounding area to the east and south is primarily agricultural in nature, with grazing fields located around the Site. Woodland type areas are dotted in the surrounding area, including to the east of the Site.
- 2.6 Beyond the M23 to the west, the surrounding area is predominantly residential in nature. The nearest housing to the Site is located approximately 90m to the west, with a substantial tree canopy border on both sides of the M23 separating them.
- 2.7 The nearest Town Centre to the site is Crawley Town Centre, located within the administrative area of Crawley Borough Council, approximately 3.1km west from the Site. The closest Town Centre to the Site in the Mid-Sussex Council administrative area is East Grinstead Town Centre, approximately 8.25km to the east of the Site. Both Town Centres include multiple Class E and Sui Generis uses.

Figure 3: Existing leisure uses at Crabbet Park and surrounding area



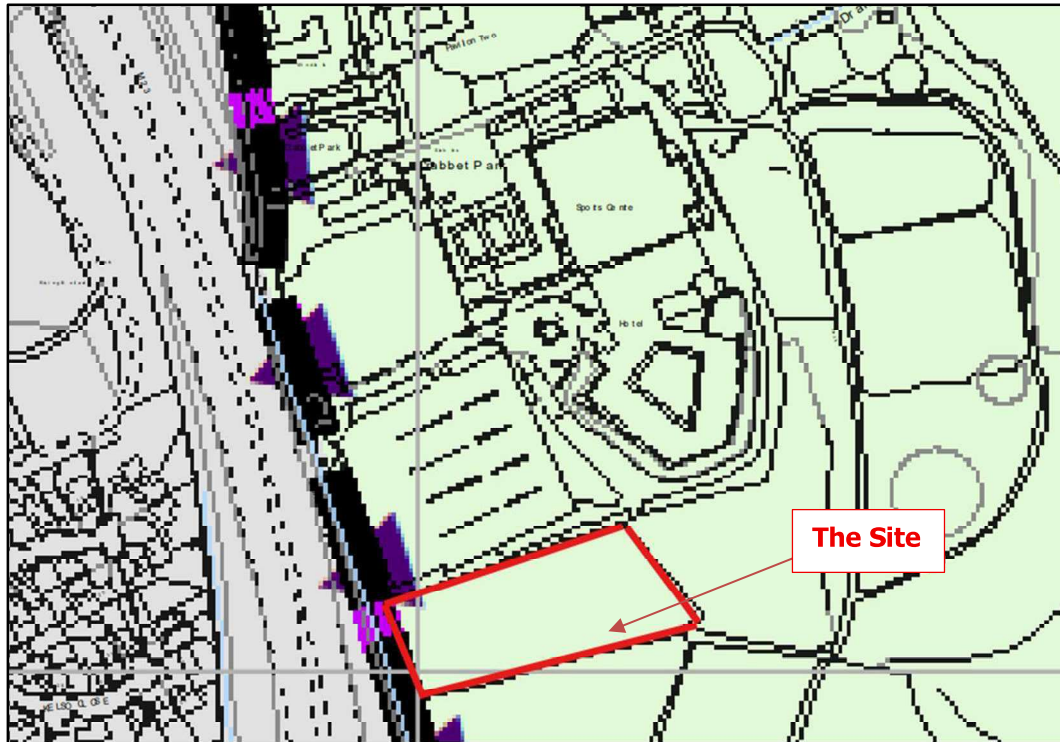
Source: Google Maps (2025); Annotated by Union4 Planning

Site and Surrounding Designations

- 2.8 According to the Mid Sussex District Council Policies Map, the Site is located within a designated Countryside area. Please see Figure 4 for an extract of the Policies Map showing the Site.
- 2.9 Approximately 200m south of the Site is the designated High Weald National Landscape. However, the Site is concealed from the National Landscape through the presence of a well-established tree

line and hedgerow which bounds the private road serving the site and along Turners Hill road to the south, and the woodland area which bounds Old Hollow Road to the south-east of the Site. This is illustrated in Figure 5 below.

Figure 4: Mid-Sussex District Council Policies Map Extract



Source: Mid Sussex District Council (2025); annotated by Union4 Planning

Figure 5: Site (Red line) interaction with the High Weald National Landscape (Green Box) against existing tree/hedgerow buffer zone (Purple shape).



Source: Google Earth (2025); Annotated by Union4 Planning

Transport Network and Accessibility

- 2.10 The Site will connect to the M23 motorway via a private access road that forms a ghosted right turn lane priority junction with Turners Hill Road some 200 metres to the south of the site.
- 2.11 Turners Hill Road runs in an east-west alignment, providing a connection between the B2110 to the east at Turners Hill village and the B2036 to the west in Pound Hill, Crawley. The M23 serves connections to Gatwick Airport and Greater London to the north, the wider Crawley area to the west, and Brighton to the south.

3.0 Policy Basis for Sequential Test and Impact Assessment

- 3.1 The policy basis for a Sequential Test and Impact Assessment is outlined in both local and national planning policy.

National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024)

- 3.2 At the national level, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was revised on 12 December 2024. Chapter 7 of the NPPF is entitled 'Ensuring the vitality of town centres', with Paragraph 91 stating as follows:

"Local planning authorities should apply a sequential test to planning applications for main town centre uses which are neither in an existing centre nor in accordance with an up-to-date plan. Main town centre uses should be located in town centres, then in edge of centre locations; and only if suitable sites are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered."

- 3.3 Paragraph 92 further details the following in relation to the Sequential Test:

"When considering edge of centre and out of centre proposals, preference should be given to accessible sites which are well connected to the town centre. Applicants and local planning authorities should demonstrate flexibility on issues such as format and scale, so that opportunities to utilise suitable town centre or edge of centre sites are fully explored."

- 3.4 In relation to the Impact Assessment, the NPPF details in Paragraph 94 as follows:

"When assessing applications for retail and leisure development outside town centres, which are not in accordance with an up-to-date plan, local planning authorities should require an impact assessment if the development is over a proportionate, locally set floorspace threshold (if there is no locally set threshold, the default threshold is 2,500m² of gross floorspace). This should include assessment of:

- a) the impact of the proposal on existing, committed and planned public and private investment in a centre or centres in the catchment area of the proposal; and*
- b) the impact of the proposal on town centre vitality and viability, including local consumer choice and trade in the town centre and the wider retail catchment (as applicable to the scale and nature of the scheme)."*

National Planning Policy Guidance

- 3.5 The National Planning Practice Guidance ('the PPG') also refers to the Sequential Test and was last updated in July 2019 on this subject matter. The PPG states as follows:

"... The application of the test will need to be proportionate and appropriate for the given proposal. Where appropriate, the potential suitability of alternative sites will need to be discussed between the developer and local planning authority at the earliest opportunity.

The checklist below sets out the considerations that should be taken into account in determining whether a proposal complies with the sequential test:

- *with due regard to the requirement to demonstrate flexibility, has the suitability of more central sites to accommodate the proposal been considered? Where the proposal would be located in an edge of centre or out of centre location, preference should be given to accessible sites that are well connected to the town centre. It is important to set out any associated reasoning clearly.*
- *is there scope for flexibility in the format and/or scale of the proposal? It is not necessary to demonstrate that a potential town centre or edge of centre site can accommodate precisely the scale and form of development being proposed, but rather to consider what contribution more central sites are able to make individually to accommodate the proposal.*
- *if there are no suitable sequentially preferable locations, the sequential test is passed.*

In line with... [the] National Planning Policy Framework, only if suitable sites in town centre or edge of centre locations are not available (or expected to become available within a reasonable period) should out of centre sites be considered. When considering what a reasonable period is for this purpose, the scale and complexity of the proposed scheme and of potentially suitable town or edge of centre sites should be taken into account."

(Paragraph 011, Reference ID: 2b-011-20190722)

3.6 The PPG also includes details on how to conduct the Impact Assessment in decision-making:

"The following steps need to be taken in applying the impact test:

- *establish the state of existing centres and the nature of current shopping patterns (base year)*
- *determine the appropriate time frame for assessing impact, focusing on impact in the first five years, as this is when most of the impact will occur*
- *examine the 'no development' scenario (which should not necessarily be based on the assumption that all centres are likely to benefit from expenditure growth in convenience and comparison goods and reflect both changes in the market or role of centres, as well as changes in the environment such as new infrastructure);*

- *assess the proposal's turnover and trade draw* (drawing on information from comparable schemes, the operator's benchmark turnover of convenience and comparison goods, and carefully considering likely catchments and trade draw)*
- *consider a range of plausible scenarios in assessing the impact of the proposal on existing centres and facilities (which may require breaking the study area down into a series of zones to gain a finer-grain analysis of anticipated impact)*
- *set out the likely impact of the proposal clearly, along with any associated assumptions or reasoning, including in respect of quantitative and qualitative issues*
- *any conclusions should be proportionate: for example, it may be sufficient to give a broad indication of the proportion of the proposal's trade draw likely to be derived from different centres and facilities in the catchment area and the likely consequences for the vitality and viability of existing town centres*

A judgement as to whether the likely adverse impacts are significant can only be reached in light of local circumstances. For example, in areas where there are high levels of vacancy and limited retailer demand, even very modest trade diversion from a new development may lead to a significant adverse impact.

Where evidence shows that there would be no likely significant impact on a town centre from an edge of centre or out of centre proposal, the local planning authority must then consider all other material considerations in determining the application, as it would for any other development.

The design year for impact testing will need to be selected to represent the year when the proposal has achieved a 'mature' trading pattern. This is conventionally taken as the second full calendar year of trading after the opening of each phase of a new retail development, but it may take longer for some developments to become established."

(Paragraph 018, Reference ID: 2b-018-20190722)

Mid-Sussex District Local Plan 2014-2031 (March 2018)

- 3.7 The Mid-Sussex District Plan was adopted in March 2018, forming part of the Development Plan for the Council. The document sets out the vision and planning policies for Mid-Sussex up to 2031.
- 3.8 Policy DP2 refers to 'Town centre development' and is the key policy concerning the submission of a Sequential Test and Impact Assessment, detailed as follows:

"Town Centres

These are defined as the town centres of Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath which meet the needs of their communities and those of the surrounding large and small villages and countryside areas...

Sequential Test for Town Centre Uses

A sequential test must be applied to planning applications for main town centre uses that are not in an existing centre and are not in accordance with the District Plan and the relevant Neighbourhood Plan. The sequential test will require:

- *Applications for main town centre uses to be located in town centres; or, if suitable sites are not available*
- *In edge of centre locations where the site is accessible and well connected to the town centre; or, if suitable sites are not available*
- *At accessible out of centre sites that are well connected to the town centre.*

Where an application fails to satisfy the sequential test, or fails to meet other requirements of this policy, it should be refused.

For the purposes of the sequential test, Neighbourhood Centres do not perform the same function as Town Centres. Proposals in Neighbourhoods should reflect their role in meeting the day to day needs of the local community."

3.9 Policy DP6 refers to the 'Settlement Hierarchy'. Policy DP6 further helps to identify the Town Centres in Mid-Sussex. This includes the following areas:

- **Town Centre:** Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath

3.10 No District or Local Centres are identified in the Mid-Sussex District Plan. Furthermore, no definition of edge of centre and out of centre was provided in the Mid-Sussex District Plan. As such, the next section will explore edge-of-centre and out-of-centre locations as defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF. Please see below for their definitions.

'Edge-of-centre: ... *For all other main town centre uses, a location within 300 metres of a town centre boundary... In determining whether a site falls within the definition of edge of centre, account should be taken of local circumstances.*

'Out-of-centre: *A location which is not in or on the edge of a centre but not necessarily outside the urban area.'*

Summary

3.11 On the basis that the proposed padel tennis facility would comprise a gross external floor area of 2878 sqm, it is recognised that this would exceed the 2,500 sqm threshold set out in the NPPF,

thereby requiring a Sequential Test. The site also exceeds the 500 sqm gross floor area threshold in the Mid-Sussex Validation Checklist, thereby requiring an Impact Assessment.

4.0 Sequential Approach to Site Selection

Introduction

- 4.1 The Applicant commenced this wider site selection process by identifying available sites and premises that were advertised and being actively marketed on online sources. It also involved on-going discussion with local agents who were aware of potential sites and premises coming onto the market.
- 4.2 This section sets out the site selection process, the suitability of development of a padel tennis facility in the Town, District and Local Centres, and consideration of out-of-centre locations.

Scale and Format of Site Selection

- 4.3 The physical and spatial requirements for a padel tennis facility establishes very clear parameters for the site search. Firstly, the Applicant requires a floorplate comprising approximately 2,000 sqm as a prerequisite to ensure the padel tennis facility is commercially viable and can operate efficiently.
- 4.4 Further to this, an existing building requires a minimum floor-to-ceiling eave height of 5.5 metres to allow sufficient clearance for the sport. In ideal circumstances, the clearance above the padel courts should be a minimum of 7 metres, thereby meaning that the ridge height of buildings needs to be higher than the aforementioned 5.5 metres.
- 4.5 The availability of on-site car parking provision is preferable, but not essential. In this regard, sites and premises with ease of access to public transport can help to address any absence or shortfall in car parking provision.
- 4.6 In summary, with consideration of the scope for flexibility with the type of development proposed, the minimum floor space requirement (2,000 sqm) and the eaves height requirement (5.5 metres) provides the key physical parameters which underpinned the site selection process.

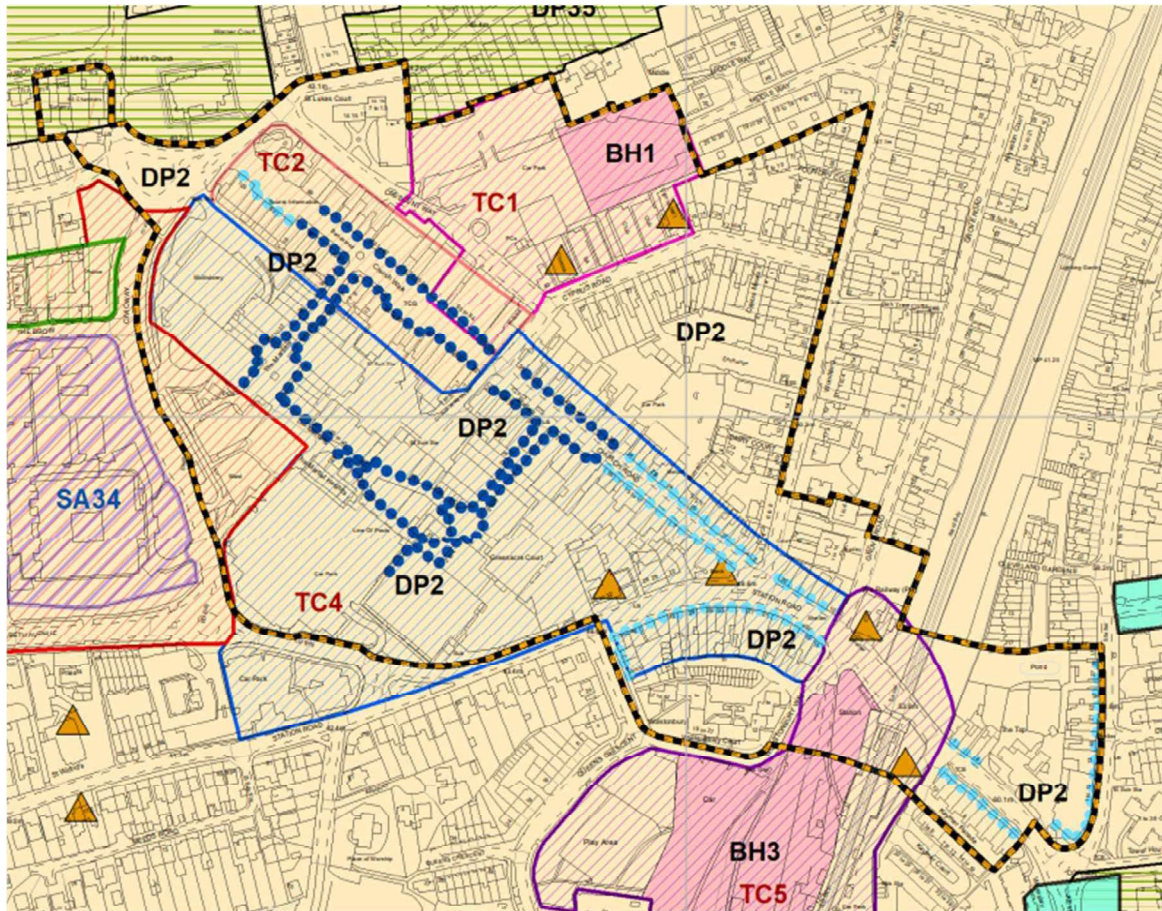
Town Centres – Suitability for Development

- 4.7 The Applicant has made contact with commercial property agents within Burgess Hill, East Grinstead and Haywards Heath Town Centre, with a review undertaken of available premises and vacant sites.

Burgess Hill Town Centre

- 4.8 For ease of reference, the physical extent of the town centre is shown in Figure 1 overleaf.
- 4.9 According to the Rightmove Commercial Property finder, there are 27 sites in Burgess Hill Town Centre that were/are available to rent/buy during the course of the search. Appendix A of the report includes details of the 27 sites with commentary and analysis provided for each of the sites.

Figure 1: Burgess Hill Town Centre Boundary (Orange/Black Dotted Area)



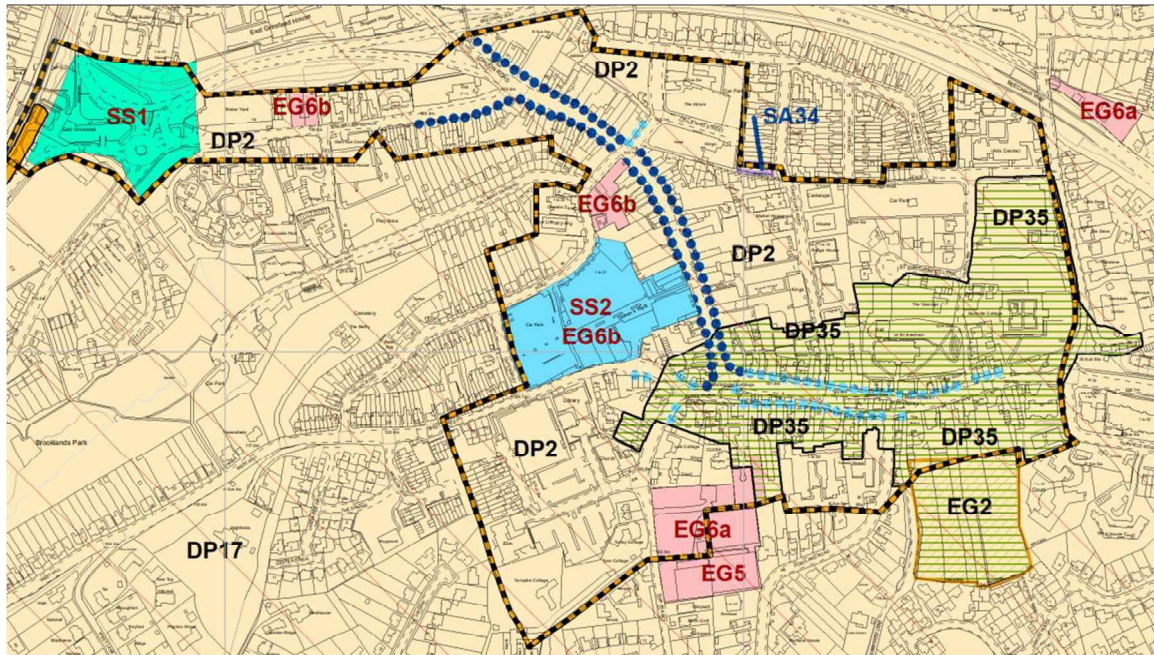
Source: Mid-Sussex District Council Policies Map (May 7a: Burgess Hill Inset, June 2022)

- 4.10 As shown in Appendix A, the floor areas of the available premises in the town centre fall well short of the minimum 2,000 sqm required by the Applicant. In addition, the internal configuration of all the premises would prevent padel tennis courts being installed, whilst the minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 5.5 metres also poses a significant constraint to finding suitable premises.
- 4.11 As such, there were and are no available commercial units or premises within Burgess Hill Town Centre that would provide the requisite physical requirements to accommodate the prospective padel tennis facility. In this regard, there were a range of smaller units which were occupied by former retail and commercial uses, but none of these provided the format needed.
- 4.12 The Applicant also considered the potential for the amalgamation of existing buildings in the town centre, including demolition and reconfiguration of existing buildings. Despite the town centre having relatively small amounts of listed buildings and being within no conservation area, even if the commercial units were available, it would require multiple small units being demolished to achieve an acceptable floorspace and eaves height equivalent to establish a padel tennis facility. As such, the loss of commercial units in the town centre to provide the facility would prove unviable and be at the detriment to other town centre uses.

East Grinstead Town Centre

- 4.13 For ease of reference, the physical extent of the town centre is shown in Figure 2 overleaf.
- 4.14 According to the Rightmove Commercial Property finder, there are 9 sites in East Grinstead Town Centre that were/are available to rent/buy during the course of the search. Appendix B of the report includes details of the 9 sites with commentary and analysis provided for each of the sites.

Figure 2: East Grinstead Town Centre Boundary (Orange/Black Dotted Area)

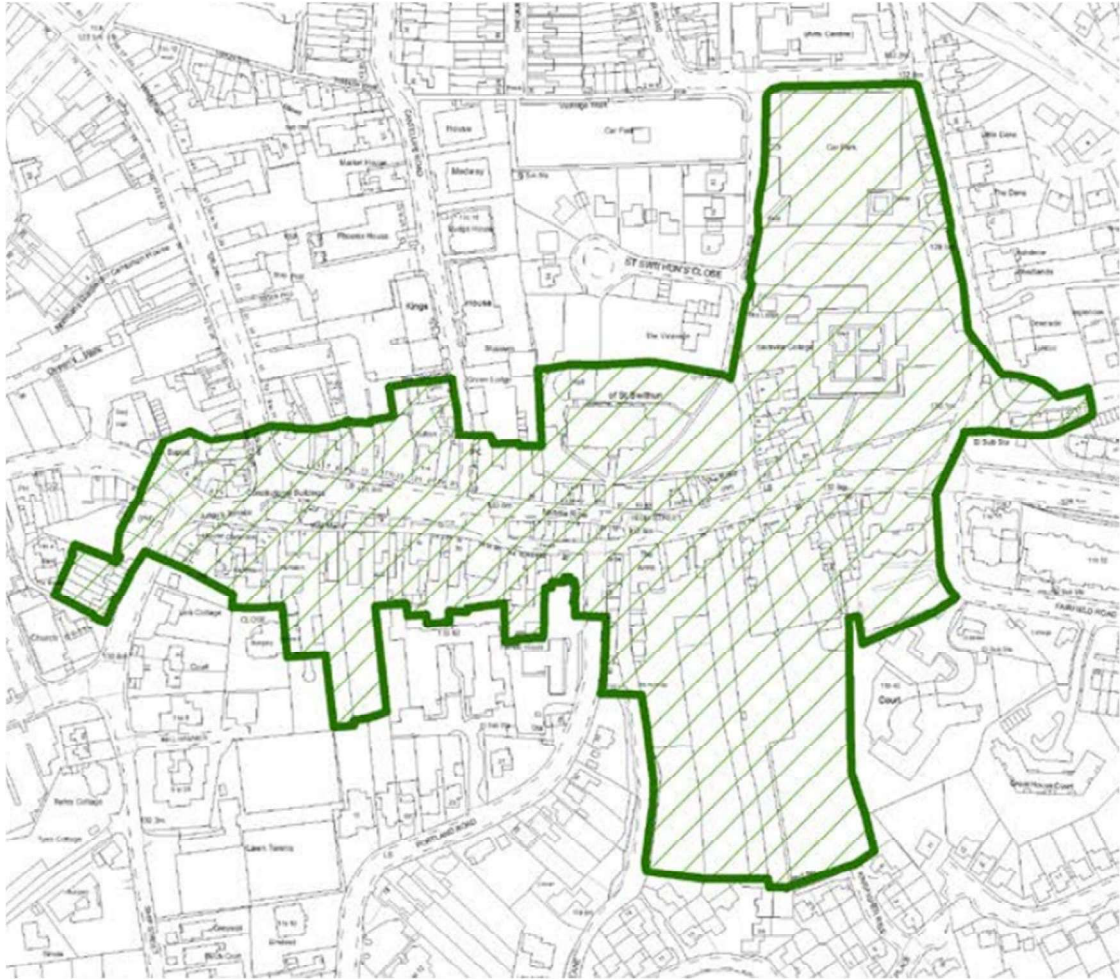


Source: Mid-Sussex District Council Polices Map (May 11b: East Grinstead Inset, June 2022)

- 4.15 As shown in Appendix B, the floor areas of available premises in the town centre again fall well short of the minimum 2,000 sqm required by the Applicant. As with Burgess Hill, the internal configuration of the premises available would prevent padel tennis courts from being installed, whilst the minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 5.5 metres also poses a significant constraint to finding suitable premises, with Item 3 (16 London Rd, East Grinstead RH19 1AG) in Appendix B for example requiring the loss of residential units above to be able to potentially meet height requirements.
- 4.16 As such, it is concluded that there are no available commercial units or premises in East Grinstead Town Centre that would provide the physical requirements to accommodate the prospective padel tennis facility. There was a range of small and medium sites which were occupied by former retail and commercial uses, but none of these provided the format needed.
- 4.17 The applicant also considered the potential for the amalgamation of existing buildings in the town centre, including demolition and reconfiguration of existing buildings. However, heritage sensitivities in the town centre would make these options difficult to achieve. East Grinstead Conservation Area (Figure 3) particularly constrains site availability alongside the proximity of listed

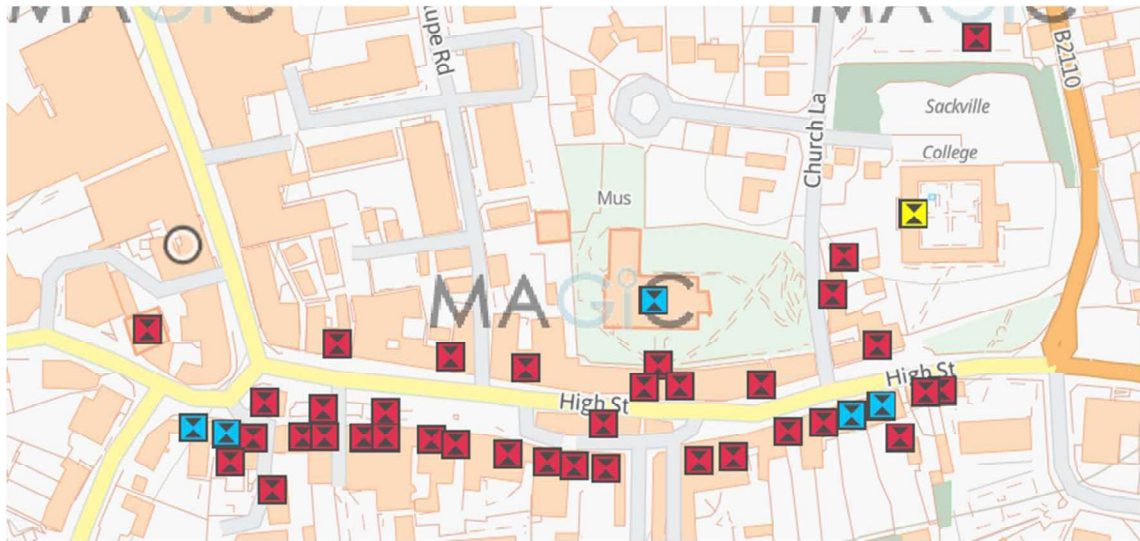
buildings. These listed building are particularly concentrated down the High Street where most commercial and retail sites would be available as shown in Figure 4 overleaf.

Figure 3: East Grinstead Conservation Area



Source: Conservation Areas in Mid-Sussex (Published August 2018)

Figure 4: Heritage Assets in East Grinstead High Street

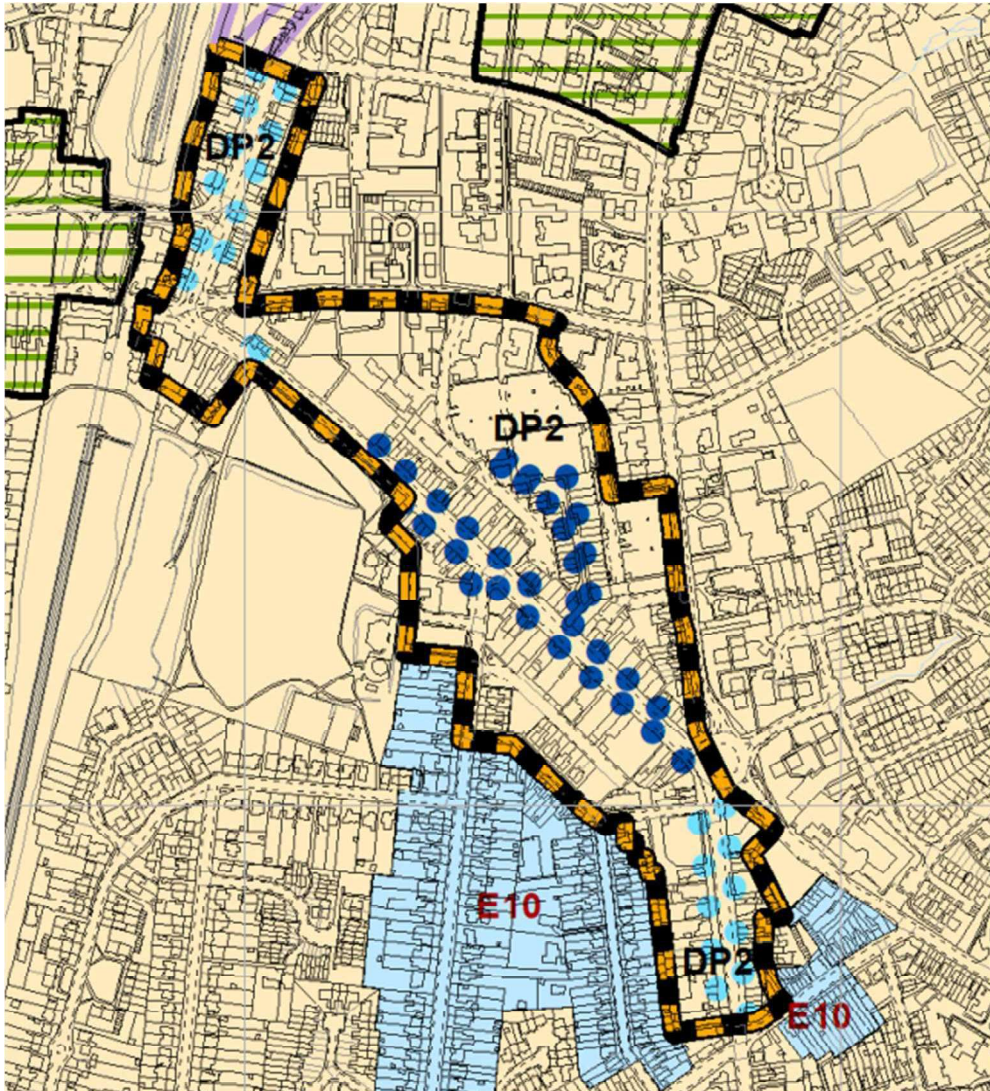


Source: MAGICMap (2025)

Haywards Heath Town Centre

- 4.18 For ease of reference, the physical extent of the town centre is shown in Figure 5 overleaf.
- 4.19 According to the Rightmove Commercial Property finder, there are 5 sites in Haywards Heath Town Centre that are/were available to rent/buy over the course of the search. Appendix C of the report includes details of the 5 sites with commentary and analysis provided for each of the sites.
- 4.20 As illustrated in Appendix C, the floor areas of the available premises in the town centre fall well short of the minimum 2,000 sqm required by the Applicant. In addition, the internal configuration of most of the premises would prevent padel tennis courts from being installed, whilst the minimum floor-to-ceiling height of 5.5 metres also poses a significant constraint to finding suitable premises.
- 4.21 As such, there were and are no available commercial units or premises within Christchurch Town Centre that would provide the requisite physical requirements to accommodate the prospective padel tennis facility, as with Burgess Hill and East Grinstead Town Centre respectively.
- 4.22 As with Burgess Hill and East Grinstead, the Applicant also considered the potential for the amalgamation of existing buildings in the town centre, including demolition and reconfiguration of existing buildings. Despite the town centre having relatively small amounts of listed buildings and being within/surrounded by no conservation area, even if the commercial units were available, it would require multiple small units being demolished to achieve an acceptable floorspace and eaves height equivalent to establish a padel tennis facility. As such, the loss of commercial units in the town centre to provide the facility would prove unviable and be at the detriment to other town centre uses.

Figure 5: Haywards Heath Town Centre Boundary (Orange/Black Dotted Area)



Source: Mid-Sussex District Council Polices Map (May 13: Haywards Heath Inset, June 2022)

Edge-of-Centre Locations

- 4.23 The assessment of sites in Burgess Hill, Haywards Heath and East Grinstead Town Centre) was followed by a search of edge-of-centre locations within 300 metres of the all 3 Town Centre boundaries (the closest Town Centre to the Site).

Burgess Hill Edge-of-Centre

- 4.24 According to Rightmove commercial property finder, there are an additional 5 sites available within this catchment area to rent/buy, as follows:

139 Lower Church Road

- 4.25 The first site is a retail property for sale at 139 Lower Church Road, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 9AA, located approximately 125m west from Burgess Hill Town Centre (please see Figure 6 below).

Figure 6: 139 Lower Church Road Site



Source: Rightmove (2025)

- 4.26 139 Lower Church Road only offers approximately 42sqm of floor area. There is no ability to expand the premises to meet the 2,000sqm minimum spatial requirement, and as such the location was ruled out.

2 Oak Hall Park

- 4.27 The second site is parcel of land for sale adjacent to the eastern side of 2 Oak Hall Park, Burgess Hill, West Sussex, RH15 0BX, located approximately 110m south from Burgess Hill Town Centre (please see Figure 7 overleaf).
- 4.28 The parcel boasts approximately 500sqm of land, advertised for either commercial or residential type development. There is again no ability to expand this premises to meet the 2,000sqm minimum requirement. It is also considered that the proximity of the any type of padel tennis use

directly affronting residential units as noise-sensitive uses would not be acceptable to Mid Sussex District Council. On these reasons alone, the location was ruled out.

Figure 7: Land adjacent to 2 Oak Hall Park Site



Source: Rightmove (2025); Google Maps (2025); Annotated by Union4 Planning

Units 3 and 4 School Close

- 4.29 There are a pair of light industrial units that are being advertised as available to rent together at Units 3 and 4 School Close, Burgess Hill, RH15 9RX, located approximately 250m west of Burgess Hill Town Centre (please see Figure 8 overleaf).
- 4.30 The brochure states that the property comprises three interlinked warehouse / production bays with a more recent two storey extension to the front for a showroom. The units are arranged over 2 floors, with the main warehouse accommodation at ground level (1,213sqm) with office and workshop at first floor level (254sqm), forming a combined Gross Internal Area (GIA) of approximately 1,450sqm.
- 4.31 Given the above, the unit does not meet the 2,000sqm minimum spatial requirement for a padel tennis facility. The loss of suitable employment land to provide the facility is also considered non-beneficial and is likely to be refused by Mid Sussex District Council. For these reasons alone, the location was also ruled out.

Figure 8: Units 3 and 4 School Close Site



Source: Rightmove (2025); Google Maps (2025)

Land off Mill Road

- 4.32 Lastly, a parcel of land was available from a private no-through road off Mill Road, Burgess Hill, RH15 8DN which is advertised as available to buy, located approximately 28m south of Burgess Hill Town Centre boundary (please see Figure 9 overleaf).
- 4.33 The brochure states that the parcel of land comprises of a yard-type area where a garage used to be present. Planning permission has been secured and implemented for the demolition of the existing structure and erection of a single storey replacement garage (Ref: DM/20/1382). The site consists of an area of approximately 77sqm, bounded by residential curtilages to the east, west and south. This is way below the floorspace requirements of 2,000sqm required for a padel tennis facility. Furthermore, the location is deemed unsuitable for a padel tennis facility given the dominant residential use of the immediate and wider surrounding area. For these reasons, the location was also ruled out.