



Mid Sussex District Council
Planning Services
Oaklands
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1SS

Our Ref: HY/IM/33472
Planning Portal Ref: PP- 13649572

28 January 2025

Dear Sir/ Madam,

APPLICATION FOR THE CHANGE OF USE OF THE CURRENT WOODSHOP TO CLASS E USE AND ASSOCIATED CAR PARKING AT BOWDERS FARM, BALCOMBE.

On behalf of the applicant, Balcombe Estate (hereafter referred to as "the applicant"), this letter accompanies an application for planning permission for the change of use application of the current wood shop at Bowders Farm, to Class E Use (Commercial, Business and Service use), together with the use of adjacent land for ancillary car parking

The Application Submission

The application, which has been submitted via the Planning Portal (ref. PP- 13649572), comprises the following documents:

1. Application form and certificates;
2. Site Location Plan; drawing number 001;
3. Block Plan, drawing number 002;
4. Existing Floor Plan (drawing number 2458SL Rev. C);
5. Proposed Floor Plan (drawing number 2458SL Rev. G);
6. Detailed Car Park Plan, drawing no. 003; and
7. Photographs of the Site.

The requisite fee, £578 (alongside the Planning Portal admin fee) will be paid by the applicant upon submission of the application.

The Application Site

The Application Site comprises an existing building and hardstanding on land at Bowders Farm, which is located to the west of Haywards Heath Road, Balcombe.

The existing building provides a footprint of 241.6 sqm, and has been in commercial use for some time. Following the grant of planning approval for a partial change of use, the first commercial use was a Wood Working Premises, operated by John Hollis Furniture,

which ceased in 2017. Subsequently the building was used as flexible office workspace, commercial storage for a local business and community use, and an art studio.

The hardstanding, which covers 559 sqm, to the east of the existing unit was formally an agricultural barn unit and a covered yard in use as a cattle yard. This has since been demolished, following prior approval, due structural issues which made the structure at risk of collapse.

The site is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is located in flood zone 1. There are no listed buildings on the Site nor is it located within a Conservation Area. There are listed buildings within close proximity to the site including Bowders Farmhouse (Grade II listed) to the north of the Site, 'Naylands' (Grade II listed) located to the east, to the east of Haywards Heath Road and 'The north west Lodge of Balcombe Place with the gate-piers adjoining' (Grade II) located to the south-east (see Figure 1 for listed buildings).

Bowders Farm is part of Balcombe Estate which is a 3,500 acre traditional family-run estate centred on the village of Balcombe in West Sussex within the High Weald AONB. The Estate is currently used for a mix of farmland and actively managed forest and woodland. There are numerous properties a part of the estate including residential and commercial properties for rent; a self-catering holiday cottage; and a venue for Weddings & special occasions, Balcombe Place.



FIGURE 1: INDICATIVE SITE LOCATION (RED LINE) & SURROUNDING HERITAGE ASSETS (STAR ICON)

Relevant Planning History



Planning permission was granted in 2008 for the change of use of the former 'calf unit' to a wood working premises (LPA Ref. 07/03409/COU).

The Decision Notice included a planning condition (condition 4) which reads:

The proposed premises shall be used for a wood working shop and for no other purpose (including any other purpose in Class(es) B2 of the Schedule to the Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1987).

Reason: To protect nearby residential amenity and in the interest of highway safety and to comply with Policy B3 and C13 of Mid Sussex Local Plan.

This condition has the effect of limiting the use of the building to a wood working shop only.

The Proposed Development

Bowders Estate is currently refurbishing the building to create six units to provide a local commercial offer. Planning permission is therefore sought for the change of use of the unit to Class E use with no restrictions. It is anticipated these will be occupied by local business and operators.

It forms part of the Bowders Estates' aspirations to invest into the farm to provide a local rural economic destination, which complements the existing local businesses operating in units to the west. The Site fronts onto Haywards Heath and the investment into this building will create an attractive destination, with roadside visibility, which will complement the wider agricultural farm holding. This will result in a significant improvement to the appearance of the site compared to the demolished barns.

The hardstanding, which will be finished in a natural design using gravel, to the east of the building (the former cattle yard) is proposed to be in use as an associated car park to serve the commercial units. The car park will be finished in natural design and will be screened by new hedgerow that has been planted by the roadside.

We confirm that the application is for the change of use only. No external changes are sought as part of this application and no additional floorspace is proposed. Further, no changes are proposed to the principal access from Haywards Heath Road.

Relevant Planning Policy

Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the statutory Development Plan (SDP), unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The SDP for MSDC comprises the adopted Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031. The relevant policies are identified below.

Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (MSDP)

Relevant policies include:

- DP1 Sustainable Economic Development
- DP12 Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
- DP14 Sustainable Rural Development and the Rural Economy
- DP16 High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

We note the Council is currently preparing a new District Plan 2021-2039. This emerging Plan is currently at Examination. Accordingly, some weight can be afforded to the policies contained within the emerging plan.

The **National Planning Policy Framework** (NPPF, 2024) provides national policy guidance which is a material consideration in the determination of applications. The NPPF places a firm emphasis on supporting a prosperous economy, in particular facilitating the sustainable growth and expansion on all types of business in rural areas; and the development and diversification of agricultural land (para. 88).

Planning Assessment

Planning permission is sought for the change of use of an existing building and associated hardstanding only to provide investment into an established local rural business to provide further diversification and economic opportunities.

No additional floorspace is proposed as part of this application.

The principle of proposals which support the rural economy is supported by planning policy at all levels, reflecting the requirements of NPPF Paragraph 88 as noted above.

MSDP Policy DP1, 'Sustainable Economic Development', makes provision for allowing new small-scale economic development in the countryside, with priority given to the re-use of adaption of rural buildings for employment opportunities. This principle of development is further supported by policy DP14: Sustainable Rural Development and the Rural Economy, in which the policy supports sustainable growth and the vitality of the rural economy. It does this by confirming that proposals which diversify activities on existing farm units will be supported as long as they are of a scale which is consistent to the location of the farm holding; and would not prejudice the agricultural use of a unit. The application site has not been in agricultural use for some time, and does not create any additional floorspace. As such the proposals comply with the elements of Policy DP14.

Whilst the development is located in the countryside, and therefore Policy DP12 applies, given the compliance with Policy DP1 and DP14, the proposal is in accord with the provisions of Policy DP12 and will ensure the continued protection and enhancement of the countryside. The proposed class E change of use space will be contained within an existing farm building therefore causing no urbanising effect. Additionally the landscape visual improvement from the removal of the dilapidated cattle yard structure has aided enhancement of the countryside landscape.



Following suit this further supports the provisions of Policy DP16 that development within the High Weald AONB needs to conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. IN addition, the proposals are of a small nature, and will support the economic and social wellbeing of the AONB.

It is noted that the range of uses proposed through this change of use include town centre uses as defined by the NPPF (Annex 2). The NPPF Section 7 seeks to control the location of town centre uses to ensure the continue vitality and viability of town centres. This is done through the application of both the sequential and impact tests (as set out in paragraphs 91 and 94 accordingly).

In terms of the sequential test, paragraph 93 confirms that the sequential approach should not be applied to applications for small scale rural offices or other small scale rural development.

Paragraph 94 makes clear that the impact test is required if the development is over a proportionate locally set threshold which is this case is 500 sqm (as set out in MSDP Policy DP2). The proposed Class E floorspace is just 241.6 sqm.

Accordingly, the application complies with the provisions of the Sequential and Impact tests and further assessment is not required.

Summary

This planning application fully complies with the provisions of the development plan, and will facilitate a local rural business, diversifying its agricultural use. We look forward to working with officers on the determination of the application.

We trust the enclosed with enable validation of the application and we look forward to receiving confirmation in due course. However, if you require any further information at this stage, please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleague Isabella Mash.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of Hannah Young.

Hannah Young MRTPI
Associate Director
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