



26/02/2025

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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/25/0015
Location: Land West Of Turners Hill Road And South Of Huntsland Turners Hill Road Crawley Down West Sussex
Proposal: Outline planning application (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved) for the erection of up to 200 dwellings, and associated infrastructure including new access points off of Turners Hill Road with associated spine roads and car and cycle parking; the provision of open space and associated play facilities; utilities infrastructure, surface water drainage features, and associated features, on land west of Turners Hill Road and south of Huntsland, Crawley Down, West Sussex.

Dear Steven,

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

Summary

The proposed development will cause permanent impacts on the landscape character which can be partially mitigated through some additional layout amendments and mitigation measures. We recognise the Reg 19 Allocation for Site DPA9 and judge that there is some capacity to accommodate development within the site. We advise that the recommendations included within this letter are considered and embedded in any proposals coming forward to reduce the impacts on both the landscape character and the visual amenity.

Site Context

The application site is located to the west of Crawley Down village and comprises several undulating pasture fields which are surrounded by established vegetation and woodland. Worth Way/the Sussex

Border Path defines the southern boundary utilising an old, elevated railway line. Farmsteads and isolated properties are located in the surrounding countryside and appear close to the site boundaries.

Planning Context

Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) (Adopted March 2018)

Policies of considered relevance include [inter alia]:

- Policy DP12 Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
- Policy DP16: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Policy DP22 Rights of Way and other Recreational Routes
- Policy DP26 Character and Design
- Policy DP37 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- Policy DP38 Biodiversity

The MSDP is currently being updated and reviewed. The Submission District Plan (Reg 19) identified the site as occupying **the southern half** of [DPA9](#) 'Land to the west of Turners Hill Road, Crawley Down' (SHELAA ref. 688). Policy requirements (relevant to landscape) include:

- *"2. Follow a sequential approach by directing development away from areas of flood risk and mitigate impacts through integration of SUDS to deliver biodiversity/environmental improvements and flood resilience.*
- *3. Address any impacts associated with Ancient Woodland (on and adjacent to the site) including Front Wood, Wallage Wood, Wallage Lodge Shaw, Bushy Wood, Pescotts Wood (east and west parcels), which will be excluded from development.*
- *4. Provide a woodland buffer to existing vegetation along the southern boundary and set development back from the Worth Way to mitigate potential visual impact to the route and help enhance its setting.*
- *5. Provide a 5m landscape buffer to existing hedgerows.*
- *6. Integrate and enhance the existing PRoWs within the site and retain the character of PRoWs that border the site.*
- *7. Provide suitable pedestrian and cycle connections to Crawley Down, including via the Worth Way.*
- *8. Integrate development with the site to the north (DPA10) such as through the design of the site layout and by providing pedestrian and cycling connections between the developments, green infrastructure and ecological corridors.*
- *9. Provide suitable access to Turners Hill Road to each of the three areas of the site. The northern access is to be via Wychwood Place and the middle access and route through site is to be separate from Huntsland which will remain a no through road and public right of way.*
- *10. Avoid development in the most sensitive areas, including the central ridge.*
- *11. Provide a country park in southern part of site and along western boundary linking the north and south parts of the site. It meets the requirements of other relevant development plan policies."*

Crawley Down Neighbourhood Plan (January 2016)

The following policies are considered relevant to this application:

- Policy CDNP 01 (Securing Sustainable Local Infrastructure)
- Policy CDNP 02 (Retention and Enhancement of Recreational and Local Green/Open Spaces)
- Policy CDNP 05 (Control of New Developments)

- CDNP 06 (SuDS)
- CDNP 08 (Coalescence)
- CDNP 09 (Protect and Enhance Biodiversity)

Mid Sussex Landscape Capacity Study (2007/2014)

The site is identified as located within Parcel 3 (Crawley Down Northern Fringe). The sensitivity of this character area is judged as **substantial**, owed to the substantial areas of woodland and intact hedgerows, well defined settlement boundary, sloping ground, significant areas of woodland links and contributes to prevention of increased coalescence with groups of scattered settlement. The landscape value is however judged as **slight** (2007), with a **medium capacity** (2014).

The 2014 study defines medium capacity as (Table 3.4, Page 47) *“there is the potential for limited smaller-scale development to be located in some parts of the character area, so long as there is regard for existing features and sensitivities within the landscape”*.

Review of Submitted Information

The application has been supported by the submission of a Landscape and Visual Impact Appraisal (LVIA) undertaken by SLR Consulting Limited. Overall, we generally agree with the submitted Methodology within Appendix A.

Landscape Character

The submitted LVIA references *National Character Area 122 (The High Weald)* of the Natural England National Character Areas (2014), *Landscape Character Area HW1 (High Weald)* of the West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (2005), *Landscape Character Area 6 (High Weald)* of the Landscape Character Assessment for Mid-Sussex (November 2005) and *Parcel 3 (Crawley Down Northern Fringe)* of the Mid Sussex Landscape Capacity Assessment (HDA, July 2007).

Key characteristics of the Landscape Character Area 6 (High Weald) include; wooded, confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity, attractive, locally secluded and tranquil, drained by sinuous gill streams, long views over the Low Weald, significant woodland cover, sense of enclosure, pattern of small irregular assart fields, rich biodiversity.

At the site visit carried out on 20th February 2025, we confirmed that the site is very characteristic of the local landscape character descriptions. As a representative landscape of the LCA this increases the sensitivity of the site.

The LVIA sensitivity assessment of HW1 and Area 6 LCAs states that *“the site forms a small part of the wider High Weald landscape which is the largest of the character areas in the district”* (Table C-2). We disagree with the justification that the sensitivity is reduced owed the development being comparably smaller than the LCA in which it sits in. The harm cannot be dependent on the scale at which the landscape character assessment report has been undertaken, and whether the LCA boundary is larger than other surrounding LCAs. As stated in the LI’s Notes and Clarifications (TGN 2024/01), *“the focus should be on what would be affected and where, not restricted to the proportion of a landscape character area or designated area affected”* (Para 3(3)).

Table C-4 within the LVIA provides an overview of the assessed landscape effects. We question whether the judged effects for the local area of Crawley Down Northern Fringe are too low being assessed as moderate/minor negative effects. The experience of this character on the edge of Crawley Down can be well-experienced owed to the number of PRowWs and the character is uniquely separate from the character of the village itself, owed to the extent of vegetation on the village edge. However, where our judgements may differ these are not deemed substantial.

The application site is representative of the characteristics of the local relevant LCAs, where features such as the significant surrounding woodland cover and sense of enclosure have contributed to increasing the susceptibility of the site to development. Whilst we would have judged the effects on character higher than that included within the assessment, we note that the effects are contained to the character of the site itself and no further into the countryside.

Visual Amenity

Our primary concern is in regard to the views from Viewpoints 5 (Figure 1) and 10 (Sussex Border Path/Worth Way) which provide open views of the proposed built development without a large, vegetated buffer. Views into the site are more prevalent from the eastern extent of the footpath joining Worth Way where the path runs alongside the boundary with very limited intervening vegetation (Figure 1). Close-distance views are available from this footpath to the field which is proposed for development.



Figure 1: Viewpoint 5

Crawley Down village is currently well contained by surrounding trees, however this proposed development extends the urban edge into the countryside which can be viewed from further afield. Views from Worth Way/Sussex Border Path and connecting footpath are of rolling pastoral landscapes with layers of vegetation, where this proposed development in Fields 4 and 6 would limit the receptors ability to appreciate the countryside views.

Notwithstanding our concerns, we agree that there would be **major/moderate** effects at Year 1 from Viewpoint 5 and **moderate** effects from Viewpoint 10.



Figure 2: View from Sussex Border Path/Worth Way of application site

The site does benefits from being surrounding by characteristic woodland cover and established boundary vegetation which contributes to reducing the visual effects of the development from a number of surrounding visual receptors. This also forms precedence for significant mitigation measures in the form of tree and hedgerow planting which would not appear out of character with the surrounding area.

Although the roofline may be perceptible from Viewpoint 15, this will be seen in context with the existing roofs in Crawley Down settlement. We therefore agree with the **minor** overall visual effects for this viewpoint.

We would have expected an additional viewpoint receptor from the PRoW to the north of the site, providing open views into Field 5 (Figure 2). This receptor provides close-distance views of the application site and would also experience significant effects owed to the high magnitude of change expected and susceptibility of receptors. This viewpoint is likely to experience similar level of effects to Viewpoint 5 (**major-moderate adverse** effects at Year 1).



Figure 3: View of Field 5 from the PRoW

Although not experiencing significant effects, we judge that mitigating the effects from views from 7 and 8 needs to be a priority. At present, the PRowS which run to the west of the site are perceptually separated from any significant built development and there is a sense of being in the rural countryside. Since the proposed development is located on the opposite valleyside, the built development will be visible, and the sense of rurality will be lost in this location. This rurality should be maintained from Viewpoints 7 and 8, by planting extensive tree and hedgerow planting close to the PRowS. This form of mitigation will be acceptable since views across the valley of the rolling countryside are limited and are not notable in this elevated location.



Figure 4: Field 3 in the foreground (park) and Fields 4/6 (developed) on the opposite valleyside

A similar approach should also be applied to Viewpoint 3, where views of the countryside are available from the northern PRow between buildings in the yard (Figure 4). This boundary requires substantial tree and hedgerow planting to retain the sense of countryside in this location. We advise heavy stock sizes are proposed on this boundary with a large, vegetated landscape buffer.



Figure 5: View of Field 4 (developed)

Overall, considering that PROWs run along three of the site boundaries, the available public views into the site are limited owed to the surrounding woodland and vegetation. The retention of the outer fields and public open space also contributes to reducing visual effects, by setting the development back from the most sensitive visual receptors. There are further opportunities for additional mitigation planting to filter views of the proposed development.

We do however acknowledge that the whole development site has limited visual receptors, all of which are located on the immediate site boundaries. Visual effects are agreed to be localised and limited, however the value of these views should not be undervalued given their particular sensitive locations.

Review of the Submitted Proposal

The built development zones are contained to the eastern fields of the application site (Field 4, 5 and 6), allowing Fields 3 and 7 to provide public open space and landscaped buffers to the wider countryside. We agree that the fields selected to be developed are the least sensitive options. Field 4 is likely the most sensitive owed to its location protruding into the countryside, however this can be mitigated through landscape planting.

Policy CDNP 08 'Prevention of Coalescence' states that development will be permitted if *"it does not significantly reduce the gaps between the village and neighbouring settlements"* (CDNP), including to Crawley to the west. The proposed development extends the built edge of Crawley Down ~430m west towards Crawley town, breaking into the countryside to the west of Turners Hill Road. The proposed development site encroaches into the countryside and erodes an area which forms the separation between Crawley Down village and Crawley town. However, the development does not form a significant erosion of this gap and the separate identities of the two settlements remains.

We judge that the LVIA has underassessed the impacts on landscape character, which are judged as **moderate/minor** within the LVIA. Whilst we judge the effects on local landscape character should be considered moderate, we note that the submitted LVIA methodology identifies significant effects as major/moderate or higher. We therefore do not judge that the proposed development would *"detract significantly from the openness and character of the landscape"* (CDNP 08) in accordance with the requirements of Crawley Down Neighbourhood Plan.

Policy DP12 'Protection and Enhancement of Countryside' of the Mid Sussex District Plan is applicable to this application. We judge that the proposed development will cause adverse impacts on the intrinsic character and beauty of this area of the landscape, and the ability of surrounding receptors to enjoy this countryside landscape.

We do however note that the proposed design and layout has contributed to reducing the impacts on the character and beauty of this area of the landscape by protecting important features and setting the development away from sensitive edges, allowing for a sense of the countryside character to be partially retained along surrounding PROWs.

Appendix A of the Planning Statement confirms that all Ancient Woodland has a 15m buffer and all hedgerows have a 5m buffer.

All development is based on the frontages facing onto the POS and outer edges of the site, which enhances the visual amenity and security of the scheme.

A shared pedestrian/cycle route that also connects to the surrounding PRoWs and accords with Policy DP22 of the Mid Sussex District Plan.

Recommendations

If minded for approval, we have the following recommendations regarding the design and layout:

- Ancient Woodland Front Wood is located on the eastern edge of the site, and partially forms the separation between Fields 5 and 6. The only development impacts to directly affects the Ancient Woodlands is the proposed pedestrian route connecting Field 5 to Field 6. Whilst we do not object to the inclusion of a pedestrian route, in the interest of connectivity, we advise that the physical impacts of new access routes into this woodland is considered. A year-round accessible walkway should be proposed through the woodland, encouraging people to stay to the path and not deviate into the woodland. A no-dig surface treatment should also be used to reduce impacts on the root protection areas of trees.
- SuDS are appropriately located on the lowest ground levels within the site. Owed to the SuDS features being located within the POS and form the countryside edge, we encourage the basin design to be heavily planted to ensure this 'urban' feature is well integrated into this location. The basin design should avoid having steep banks, precast concrete headwalls with metal railings, and bare banks which appear unnatural.
- Additional SuDS features would also be beneficial within the built areas of the development, in the form of swales or rain gardens which can be located alongside roads and paths.
- Policy requirement 4 of the DPA9 draft allocation requires *"a woodland buffer to existing vegetation along the southern boundary and set development back from the Worth Way to mitigate potential visual impact to the route and help enhance its setting"*. We welcome that no rear garden dwellings face on to Worth Way, which improves the visual amenity of views from this route. We would advise that consideration is had for how some views are to be maintained from Worth Way and the adjacent footpath which runs along the site boundary. This should be addressed within the DAS.
- The northern access adjacent to Huntsland entrance and PRoW will require the removal of a large number of trees and hedgerow. This will provide additional views into the application that are currently screened by the existing trees and vegetation. The submitted Tree Protection Plan excludes this area of the site.
- Additional planting should be proposed on the northern edge of the site, adjacent to the most west barn located along Huntsland PRoW. Open views of the countryside edge exist here between the buildings (Viewpoint 3), however since there is a sense of rurality in this area, we advise that further attempts are made to retain this and additional planting is proposed to visually screen Field 4.

- Viewpoint 5 from the footpath adjacent to the southern boundary (also adjacent Worth Way) is the most sensitive receptor to this site. Significant planting should be proposed along this southern boundary to filter views of the proposed development.
- Any higher storey buildings should be located towards the eastern edge of the site, closer to the existing urban edge of Crawley Down.
- Whilst we recognise this is only an outline scheme, we note that the most westerly dwelling in Field 4 is exposed on three sides to POS, with the rear façade also exposed to the POS within Field 4. The design of this dwelling is important as this is very exposed and is the focal building from a number of different directions.

Summary

The proposed development will cause permanent adverse impacts on the landscape character which can be partially mitigated through some additional layout amendments and mitigation measures. We recognise the Reg 19 Allocation for Site DPA9 and judge that there is some capacity to accommodate development within the site. We advise that the above recommendations are considered and embedded in any proposals coming forward to reduce the impacts on both the landscape character and the visual amenity.

Yours sincerely,

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Landscape Consultant

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.