

Planning Statement

1. Introduction

This Planning Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application (reference DM/25/3236) for the erection of an outdoor classroom at **Balcombe Church of England Primary School**.

The proposed development will provide an outdoor classroom to support wraparound childcare provision and has been made possible through **successful Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Funding**. The development will create **20 additional wraparound care places** for primary-age children, responding to identified local and national need for increased childcare capacity.

The school lies within the **High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**. Accordingly, this statement considers the development in the context of national planning policy, local planning policy, and the **High Weald AONB Management Plan**, demonstrating that the proposal accords with relevant objectives and conserves the special qualities of the AONB.

2. Site and Context

Balcombe CE Primary School is an established educational facility serving the local community. The site is located within the built-up area of Balcombe village and is surrounded by a mix of school buildings, playing areas, and associated landscaping.

The site lies within the **High Weald AONB**, a protected landscape designated for its distinctive rural character, historic settlement pattern, and wooded landscape. The proposed outdoor classroom is located within the existing school grounds and does not extend development into undeveloped countryside.

3. Description of the Proposed Development

The proposal comprises the erection of a **single-storey outdoor classroom building** to be used for educational and wraparound childcare purposes.

Key features of the development include:

- Constructed from **Grade 4 redwood pine**
- **Felt shingle tile roof** with waterproof membrane
- **Log-clad ceiling** and timber sub-frame base
- **75mm Jablite insulation** to roof, floors, and walls
- **Four glazed windows** using 6.4mm laminated double glazing
- **Sapele hardwood doors**
- Connected to **electricity**
- No water supply
- **Guttering and downpipe** with a water butt for rainwater collection

The building is modest in scale and designed to sit comfortably within its surroundings. The use of timber and natural materials reflects the rural context and complements the character of the AONB.

4. Need and Justification

The proposal is driven by a clear and demonstrable need to expand childcare provision in line with government policy and funding objectives.

The **Childcare Expansion Capital Grant Funding** was awarded to support the delivery of additional childcare places, particularly wraparound care for school-age children. The proposed outdoor classroom will:

- Create **20 additional wraparound care places**
- Support working families by extending childcare availability before and after school
- Enhance the school's educational and pastoral offer
- Provide flexible, outdoor-focused learning opportunities

Without this development, the school would be unable to deliver the additional childcare places secured through the grant funding, resulting in an unmet local need and the loss of public investment.

5. Planning Policy Context

5.1 National Planning Policy

The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** places significant weight on:

- Supporting sustainable development
- Promoting healthy and safe communities
- Supporting education and childcare facilities
- Conserving and enhancing protected landscapes, including AONBs

The NPPF recognises that **great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in AONBs**, while also allowing for development that meets local community needs where impacts are appropriately managed.

The proposed development supports social sustainability, enhances educational infrastructure, and is sensitively designed to minimise landscape and visual impacts.

5.2 Local Planning Policy – Mid Sussex

Relevant local planning policies support:

- Development of educational facilities within existing settlements
- Provision of community infrastructure
- Sustainable design and construction
- Protection of landscape character within the High Weald AONB

The proposal is located within the existing school site, is proportionate in scale, and does not result in inappropriate encroachment into the surrounding countryside.

6. High Weald AONB Management Plan

The High Weald AONB Management Plan seeks to conserve the special qualities of the landscape while supporting the social and economic well-being of local communities. The proposed development accords with the **Objectives and Actions** of the Management Plan in the following ways:

6.1 Conserving Landscape Character

- The building is modest in scale and located within an existing developed site
- Timber construction and natural materials reflect traditional rural forms
- The development avoids skyline intrusion and long-distance views

6.2 Supporting Community and Social Well-being

- The proposal supports local families through increased childcare provision
- It strengthens the role of the village school as a community asset
- It aligns with the Management Plan's objective to support sustainable rural communities

6.3 Sustainable Design and Resource Use

- Use of timber as a renewable material
- High levels of insulation to improve energy efficiency
- Rainwater harvesting via a water butt
- No requirement for water supply infrastructure

Overall, the proposal demonstrates that development within the AONB can be delivered in a way that is **low-impact, context-sensitive, and community-focused**, consistent with the Management Plan.

7. Impact Assessment

7.1 Landscape and Visual Impact

Given its location within the school grounds and its modest scale, the development will have **no significant adverse impact** on the character or appearance of the AONB.

7.2 Residential Amenity

The use is ancillary to the existing school and will not give rise to unacceptable noise, disturbance, or overlooking beyond what already exists.

7.3 Sustainability

The proposal represents a sustainable form of development by reusing an existing site, supporting local services, and reducing the need for additional travel.

8. Conclusion

The proposed outdoor classroom at Balcombe CE Primary School represents a **well-justified, policy-compliant, and sustainable form of development**.

The proposal:

- Meets an identified local and national need for childcare provision
- Is supported by secured government grant funding
- Respects the character and special qualities of the High Weald AONB
- Accords with national and local planning policy
- Supports the social and educational needs of the local community

On this basis, it is respectfully requested that **Mid Sussex District Council grants planning permission** for the proposed development.