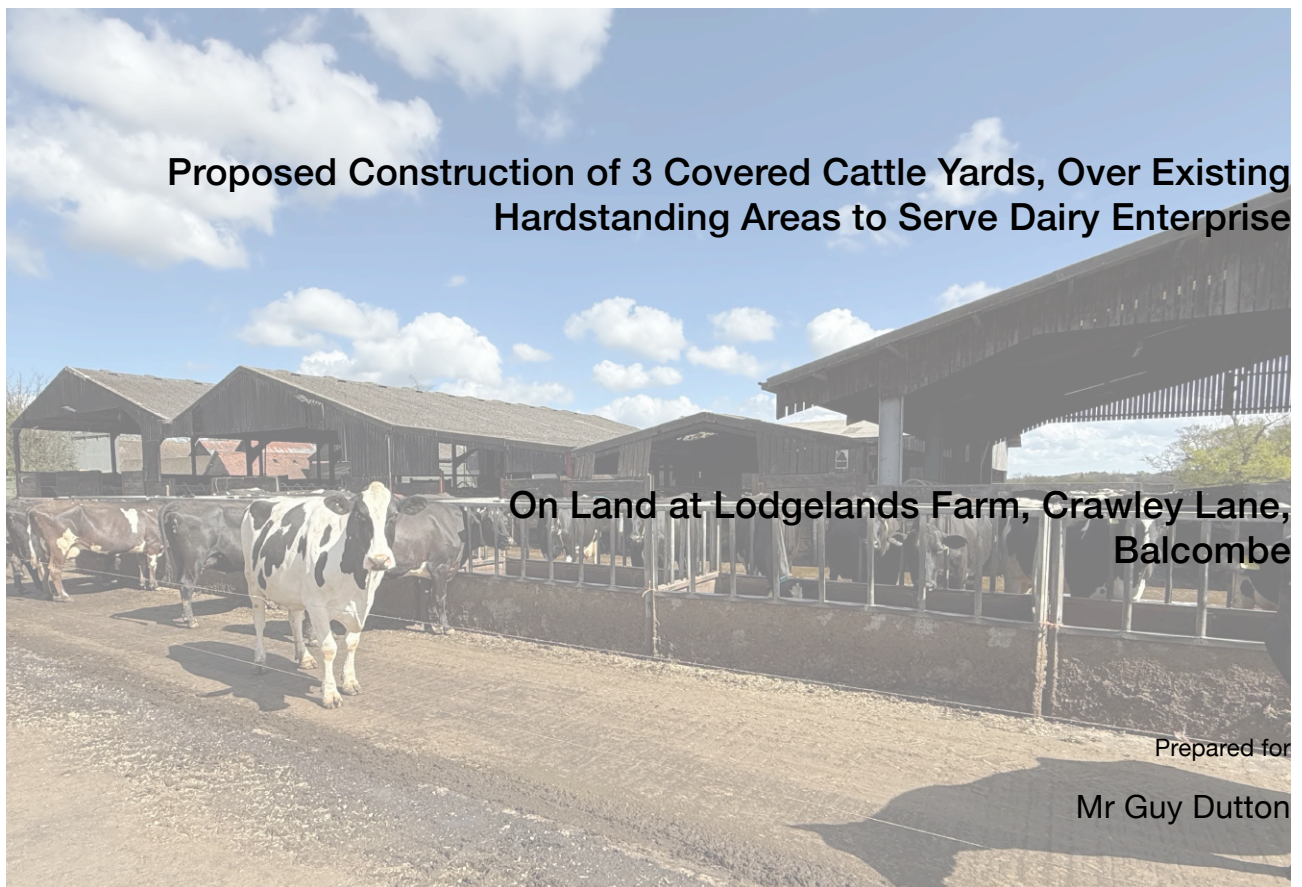


Planning, Design and Access Statement



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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This Planning, Design and Access Statement is in support of a full planning application for the construction of 3 covered cattle yards over existing hardstanding areas within the long established farm centre of Lodgelands Farm, Crawley Lane, Balcombe.
- 1.2. The farm comprises a predominantly dairy enterprise of some 530 Holstein Friesians including followers. The enterprise is managed from the farm centre at Lodgelands Farm and that extends to some 200 acres (80 hectares). This comprises part of a larger farming unit that in total extends to some 548 acres (221.6 hectares).
- 1.3. The existing farm centre comprises a range of buildings of mixed age, form, and materials. It includes cattle housing buildings, a dairy building, and a silage clamp. Between and around the buildings are areas of open hardstanding that are used by the cattle, particularly for feeding during the winter months. To the southwest of the buildings is a slurry lagoon.
- 1.4. The application scheme seeks to construct buildings to cover the majority of these open yards. This would enable separation of rainwater and slurry, reducing the quantum, and enable improved management, of slurry arising from the agricultural operation, particularly during the wetter, winter months.
- 1.5. This Statement details the site and its surroundings, sets out relevant planning background, summarises planning policy, and assesses the scheme in accordance with the requirements of the Development Plan and other material considerations, including the National Planning Policy Framework.

2. SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

- 2.1. The application site is located some 3km to the south of Crawley, 1km to the north of Balcombe, and a little over 4km to the northeast of Handcross.
- 2.2. The farm holding is accessed via Crawley Lane, which runs from London Road, (to the south) to the B2110, (to the north). It is located immediately to the southwest of Crawley Lane (Figure 1).
- 2.3. The farm centre is comprised of buildings of a mixed age and form. The older, more traditional buildings are located close to Crawley Lane and are typically constructed in brick under a plain tile roof and are immediately to the south of the main farm access. To the north of these is a more modern steel framed building with a mono pitch roof constructed of concrete panels and vertical timber boarding above, and is open fronted.
- 2.4. Immediately to the southwest of the farm access are the main group of farm buildings which are separated by an existing open cattle yard.
- 2.5. The northern group comprises a series of connected buildings which are of steel framed construction, predominantly open-sided with profile sheet roofs, and which have broadly north-south ridgelines. These grouped buildings comprise the main cattle housing area serving the farm holding. These buildings collectively measure some 70m in length, (northeast to southwest), and 25m in-depth, (northwest to southeast).



- 2.6. Immediately to the south of these buildings is a hardstanding area comprising a cattle yard. This is 12.74m in width and a maximum of some 63m in length, and includes two cattle feed silos.
- 2.7. To the south of the yard is the dairy building. This is substantively constructed of blockwork and concrete panels to the lower walls with sheeting and vertical timber boarding above under a profile sheet roof which has a northeast to southwest ridgeline. It is substantively open at the southwest gable end, which provides access to a further open cattle feed yard which is delineated by concrete panel walls.
- 2.8. To the northwest of the main cattle housing buildings is a further open cattle feed yard area. This adjoins a large hardstanding area comprising a feed clamp. This area is some 65m wide (northeast to southwest) and 40m deep (northwest to southeast). The feed clamp is cut into the rising land and along its northwestern edge is in excess of some 4m below surrounding natural ground level.
- 2.9. To the southwest of the farm buildings is a slurry lagoon, serving the main cattle housing and two adjacent open feed yards. To the south of this is a dirty water lagoon.
- 2.10. The farm centre is predominantly surrounded by agricultural land, that is mainly laid to grass. Some 80m northwest of the feed clamp are buildings comprising residential dwellings and a wedding venue.
- 2.11. There are also residential dwellings fronting Crawley Lane to the north of the main farm access, and immediately to the east of the traditional farm buildings.

- 2.12. The field parcels that surround the farm centre are generally bound by blocks of trees and woodland. Beyond these to the west, forming a cutting through the woodland block, is the main London to Brighton railway line.
- 2.13. The topography of the area generally falls from a high point to the north in a southerly direction. It also falls more gently from east to west.

3. PLANNING BACKGROUND

- 3.1. As part of the preparation of this application, the applications register, as held online by the Local Planning Authority, has been inspected. This has revealed a number of previous planning applications relating to the Lodgelands Farm. These are summarised below.
- 3.2. **02/00809/AGRDET** - Proposed silage clamp - Prior Approval granted on 29th April 2002.
- 3.3. **12/02385/FUL** - Proposed construction of new livestock building and extension of existing maize silage clamp, and manure lagoon - planning permission granted 31st August 2012.
- 3.4. The application comprised a number of elements. It envisaged the extension of the main cattle buildings at the southwestern end on land that at that time comprised a silage clamp. Immediately to the northeast of this it was proposed to expand the existing silage clamp, whilst land to the southeast of the proposed extended building would be utilised to expand the existing slurry lagoon (Figure 2).



Figure 2 - View looking north over slurry lagoon to cattle housing

- 3.5. The application submission set out that Lodgelands Farm extended to some 80 hectares, rented from the Balcombe Estate. It was noted another farm known as Woodward's Farm was rented from the estate and was of a similar size, all were laid to grass. Both farms were held under the terms of the 1986 Agricultural Holdings Act.
- 3.6. It was noted that both farms were used as dairy units with 200 cows milked at Lodgelands Farm and 140 cows milked at Woodward's Farm.

- 3.7. The application proposal was brought forward as part of plans to amalgamate the two herds and have all the cows milked at Lodgelands Farm, to facilitate maintaining the viability of the enterprise.
- 3.8. It was envisaged that the applicant would rear about 85 heifers per annum as dairy replacements. Once the heifer calves were born at Lodgelands Farm they would be transferred to Woodward's Farm, where they would remain until old enough to be brought back to Lodgelands Farm and enter the milking herd. Any bull calves born would be sold to other farms to be reared as beef producing cattle.
- 3.9. The Local Planning Authority's Rural Agricultural Adviser noted the proposal envisaged increasing the number of cow cubicles at Lodgelands Farm from 240 to 320 spaces. The works were considered reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit.
- 3.10. **DM/15/0853** - Proposed construction of a 42m x 20m livestock dairy building - planning permission granted 1st May 2015.
- 3.11. The application related to the proposed construction of a livestock dairy building on land a short way to the southeast of the then existing cattle housing building and immediately northeast of the slurry lagoon.
- 3.12. The supporting submissions set out the intention to expand the milking cow herd to some 400 head, comprising an increase over the then existing 350 milking cows (excluding associated followers).
- 3.13. It was noted that the total area farmed amounted to some 548 acres (221.6 hectares) of which some 450 acres (182 hectares) was farmed under an Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy, 48 acres (19.4 hectares) was the subject of an annual contract agreement, and some 50 acres (20 hectares) was subject of an annual grazing licence. It was noted the majority of the land was pasture, with some 110 acres (44.5 hectares) used for the production of maize fodder.
- 3.14. It was noted that Lodgelands Farm had been in the Dutton family since 1957 when the tenancy was taken on from the Balcombe Estate. It started as a dairy business and had grown significantly over time. It was noted that Lodgelands Farm operates as a sole dairy farm which had previously been split into two milking units (Woodward's Farm and Lodgelands Farm) but which had been integrated into the sole use of Lodgelands Farm as the milking operative centre in 2012.
- 3.15. It was noted the application was submitted in light of the limitations of the then existing milking parlour (which had been installed over fifty years ago) and was no longer deemed fit for purpose. The application therefore envisaged the construction of a new 42m x 20m agricultural building to house the new milking parlour and race system.
- 3.16. In granting planning permission, the Case Officer's Delegated Report set out the view that the works were considered reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture within the unit, would not significantly affect neighbouring residential amenity, were acceptable from a visual perspective, and that the character and appearance of the surrounding Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty would be preserved.

- 3.17. **DM/18/4477** - Proposed installation of four freestanding micro cheese dairy containers - planning permission granted 17th January 2019.
- 3.18. The application proposals related to the installation of freestanding structures of modular construction immediately to the southeast of the dairy building. The supporting submissions set out that the scheme would enable the processing of up to 500 litres of milk per day to produce cheese. It was noted that the micro cheese dairy would be operated by a company of which the tenant farmer is a partner of the business.

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1. The application proposal envisages the construction of three buildings over existing hardstanding open cattle yards that are part of the existing Lodgelands farm centre.
- 4.2. The applicant is a tenant farmer of Lodgelands Farm and is a fourth generation member of his family to have farmed from the site. The holding has evolved over the last circa 15 years, reflecting the needs for ongoing rationalisation and expansion of dairy operations in order to maintain viability.
- 4.3. The works have included additional cattle housing, replacement and expansion silage clamps, expansion of the slurry lagoon, and provision of a replacement dairy unit, together with the more recent addition of the provision of a micro cheese processing facility.
- 4.4. These all reflect the requirement to expand the dairy herd unit to some 530 head including followers, with the dairy unit at Lodgelands Farm serving the enterprise which in total extends to some 200 hectares (500 acres) of which some 80 hectares (200 acres) is at Lodgelands Farm.
- 4.5. The application proposals envisage the erection of buildings to cover three areas that comprise hardstanding feed yards used as part of the management of the dairy herd and operation of the dairy unit.
- 4.6. The buildings would comprise utilitarian steel framed structures that would be predominantly open to all sides, with infilling of the gable ends in timber boarding, under shallow pitched, profile fibre cement sheet roofs.
- 4.7. The three buildings would comprise the following:
- Covering of the open cattle yard area at the southeastern end of the dairy building comprising a structure some 10.7m x 19.28m (thereby extending to some 206.27m) with a north-east to south-west ridgeline;
 - Covering of the open cattle yard area between the dairy building and main cattle housing building comprising a structure some 12.74m in width and 44.39m in length (thereby extending to some 565.58m²) with a north-east to south-west ridgeline; and
 - Covering of the open cattle yard area to the north of the main cattle housing building and south of the silage/feed clamp comprising a structure some 12.5m in width and 64.50m

in length (thereby extending to some 806.28m²) with a triple pitched roof with ridge lines orientated broadly north-west to south-east.



Figure 3 - View looking east of feed yard to the north of cattle housing

- 4.8. The primary purpose of the application is to collect rainfall that currently discharges onto the hardstanding area, mixes with slurry and is therefore discharged into the adjacent slurry lagoon. By capturing rainwater from the roofs it would then be discharged from the farm centre as clean water through pipework to the local watercourse. This would reduce the quantity of dirty water that would be defined as slurry and need to be discharged to the slurry lagoon.
- 4.9. The total area of feed yards that would be covered as a result of the development would be some 1578.13m².
- 4.10. The annual average rainfall in the Balcombe area is approximately 763mm per annum. As a result of this, the proposed works would result in the capture and avoidance of some 1204.11m³ (1.204 million litres) from falling on the hardstanding and being categorised as dirty water/slurry per annum.
- 4.11. This will significantly improve the operation of the farm holding within the constraints and capacity of the existing dirty water/slurry lagoons.

5. PLANNING POLICY

- 5.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 state that planning applications should be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 5.2. The approved Development Plan in relation to this application, for the purposes of the Act, comprises the Mid Sussex District Plan (2018), the Mid Sussex District Site Allocations Development Plan document (Adopted June 2022) and the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan (Made September 2016).

- 5.3. Material considerations include the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), together with Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) adopted by the LPA, such as the Mid Sussex Design Guide, and the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan.
- 5.4. The LPA are currently in the process of producing a new District Plan which, once adopted, will replace the existing, and form the key planning document for the district up to 2039.
- 5.5. The Draft Submission Plan 2021-2039 was published for Regulation 19 Consultation in early 2024 and submitted for Independent Examination during that year. Critical feedback has recently been received from the appointed Inspector.
- 5.6. Given the status of the Emerging Plan it is afforded only limited weight in the assessment of planning applications at this time, in accordance with Paragraph 49 of the NPPF.

6. NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 6.1. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's planning policy for England and how these are expected to be applied. It was most recently updated in December 2024.
- 6.2. The NPPF sets out that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development made up of the three dimensions of economic, social, and environmental, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways. (Paragraph 7 and 8).
- 6.3. Paragraph 10 states that to ensure sustainable development is pursued in a positive way, at the heart of the NPPF is a presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- 6.4. Paragraph 11 states that for decision-taking this means approving development proposals that accord with an up to date Development Plan without delay; or where there are no relevant Development Plan policies or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out of date, granting permission unless (i) the application of policies in the NPPF that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed; or (ii) any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole, having particular regard to key policies for directing development to sustainable locations, making effective use of land, securing well designed places, and providing affordable homes, individually or in combination.
- 6.5. Paragraph 39 states that local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed developments in a positive and creative way. It states that decision-makers should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 6.6. Chapter 6 sets out policies for building a strong, competitive economy.
- 6.7. Paragraph 85 states that planning policies and decisions should help create the conditions in which businesses can invest, expand, and adapt. It notes that significant weight should be

placed on the need to support economic growth and productivity, taking into account both local business needs and wider opportunities for development.

- 6.8. Paragraph 88 states that planning policies and decisions should enable, amongst other things, (Paragraph 88(a)) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings; and (Paragraph 88(b)) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land based rural businesses.
- 6.9. Paragraph 89 notes that planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to, or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. It notes that in these circumstances, it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings and does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable.
- 6.10. Chapter 9 relates to promoting sustainable transport.
- 6.11. Paragraph 109 states that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of promoting sustainable transport objectives. Significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. It notes this can help to reduce congestion and emissions and improve air quality and public health. It notes however that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport options will vary between urban and rural areas and this should be taken into account in decision-making.
- 6.12. Paragraph 115 states that in determining planning applications it should be ensured that, amongst other things, safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users.
- 6.13. Paragraph 116 notes that development should only be prevented or refused on highway grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network, following mitigation, would be severe, taking into account all reasonable future scenarios.
- 6.14. Chapter 12 relates to achieving well designed and beautiful places.
- 6.15. Paragraph 131 states that the creation of high quality, beautiful, and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities.
- 6.16. Paragraph 135 states that planning policies and decisions should ensure that developments, amongst other things, will function well and add to the overall quality of the area not just for the short term, but over the lifetime of the development; are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping; and are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change.

- 6.17. Chapter 15 relates to conserving and enhancing the natural environment.
- 6.18. Paragraph 187 states that planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by, amongst other things, protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological values and soils; recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services; minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity; preventing new and existing development for contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land stability.
- 6.19. Paragraph 189 states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in, amongst others, National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. It notes that the conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas.
- 6.20. It notes that the scale and extent of development within designated landscapes should be limited.
- 6.21. Paragraph 190 states that when considering applications for development within National Landscapes, permission should be refused for 'major development' other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. It states that consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:
- a) The need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it or refusing it upon the local economy;
 - b) The cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
 - c) Any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.
- 6.22. The footnote to this guidance states that whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision-maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined.

7. MID SUSSEX DISTRICT PLAN

- 7.1. The Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) was adopted in March 2018 and seeks to guide development up to 2031.
- 7.2. Policy DP1 states that the total number of additional jobs required within the district over the Plan period is estimated to be an average of 543 jobs per year. It states that this will be achieved in a number of ways, including supporting existing businesses, and allowing them room to expand, and seeking the provision of appropriate infrastructure to support business growth.

- 7.3. It notes that in order to provide new employment land and premises, the Local Planning Authority will allow new small scale economic development in the countryside where it is in accordance with relevant 'development in the countryside' policies.
- 7.4. The policy states that effective use of employment land and premises will be made by, amongst other things, permitting the appropriate intensification, redevelopment and/or extension of employment uses provided it is in accordance with other policies in the Plan, and giving priority to diversification of activities on existing farm unit where it is in accordance with 'development in the countryside' policies.
- 7.5. Policy DP12 states that the countryside will be protected in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. It notes that development in such areas will be permitted provided it maintains and where possible enhances the quality of the rural landscape and character of the district and is necessary for the purposes of agriculture or is supported by a specific policy reference elsewhere in a Development Plan document.
- 7.6. Policy DP16 relates to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (now National Landscape). It notes that development within this area will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, in particular the identified landscape features or components of natural beauty and to their setting; the traditional interaction of people with nature and appropriate land management; the character and local distinctiveness, settlement pattern, sense of place and setting of the AONB; and the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage. The policy notes that small scale proposals which support the economy and social well-being of the AONB that are compatible with the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty will be supported.
- 7.7. Policy DP21 relates to transport. It requires development to support the objectives of the West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-2026. It notes that to meet these objectives, decisions on development proposals will take account of a range of criteria, including that the scheme is suitably located to minimise the need to travel, noting there might be circumstances where development needs to be located in the countryside, such as a rural economic use.
- 7.8. The policy requires schemes to provide adequate car parking for the proposed development, avoid severe additional traffic congestion, and protect the safety of road users and pedestrians.
- 7.9. Policy DP26 relates to character and design. It states that all development should be well designed and reflect the distinctive character of towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside. It requires applicants to demonstrate that development:
- Is of high quality design and layout and includes appropriate landscaping and green space;
 - Contributes positively to, and clearly defines, public and private realms;
 - Creates a sense of place while addressing the character and scale of surrounding buildings and landscaping;
 - Protects open spaces, trees, and gardens that contribute to the character of the area;

- Does not cause significant harm to the amenities of existing nearby residents and future occupants of new dwellings, including taking account of the impact on privacy, outlook, daylight and sunlight, and noise, air and light pollution;
- Creates a pedestrian friendly layout that is safe, well connected, legible, and accessible;
- Positively addresses sustainability considerations in the layout of the building and design; and
- Optimises the potential of the site to accommodate development.

7.10. Policy DP38 states that biodiversity will be protected and enhanced by ensuring development contributes and takes opportunities to improve, enhance, manage, and restore biodiversity and green infrastructure so that there is a net gain in biodiversity.

7.11. Policy DP41 relates to flood risk and drainage. It states proposals will need to follow a sequential risk based approach to ensure development is safe across its lifetime and not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. It encourages the use of sustainable drainage systems, (SuDS) and for these to be sensitively designed and located to improve biodiversity and enhance landscaping. It notes the preferred hierarchy of managing surface water drainage from development is infiltration measures; attenuation and discharge to water courses; and if these cannot be met; discharge to surface water only sewers.

8. BALCOMBE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

8.1. The Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan (BNP) was formally ‘made’ on 22nd September 2016.

8.2. The vision for the Plan area up to 2031 is that *“our countryside will have been protected to maintain our rural setting, and we will have enriched our enviable community spirit”*. In order to achieve this, the Plan identifies a number of objectives. This includes to protect and enhance the countryside and its rural setting.

8.3. Policy 1 states that development proposals outside of the defined built up area boundary will be required to conform to Development Plan policies in respect of the control of development in the countryside.

8.4. Policy 3 states that the scale, density, massing, height, landscape design, layout and materials of all development proposals, including alterations to existing buildings, will be required to reflect the architectural and historic character and scale of the surrounding buildings and to avoid any significant detrimental effect on the landscape and natural beauty of the High Weald AONB.

9. HIGH WEALD AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY MANAGEMENT PLAN

9.1. On 22nd November 2023 all Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty were renamed as ‘National Landscapes’. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty became known as the High

Weald National Landscape. All existing planning guidance and policies that relate to AONBs apply in the same way to the High Weald National Landscape.

- 9.2. Within this report reference is made to both National Landscape and the AONB. This is interchangeable and reflects the wording of policies and policy documents.
- 9.3. The High Weald AONB was first designated in 1983. It covers a little under 1,500 square kilometres and four counties and 11 districts. It includes some 3,500 historic farmsteads and 17 market towns and villages.
- 9.4. The High Weald AONB Management Plan (HWMP) was first published in 2004. The most recent version was approved by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee for adoption by Local Planning Authorities on 27th March 2024, and seeks to cover the period 2024-2029.
- 9.5. The HWMP sets out under the heading ‘Natural Beauty and the Legislative Purpose of AONBs (National Landscapes)’, that the purpose of the AONB designation is to conserve and enhance natural beauty.
- 9.6. It notes that government guidance on AONBs provides a useful non-technical definition:

“‘Natural beauty’ is not just the look of the landscape, but includes land form and geology, plants and animals, landscape features, and the rich history of human settlements over the centuries.”¹

- 9.7. The HWMP sets out that the High Weald AONB Statement of Significance is:

“The High Weald is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in northwest Europe. Despite its large size and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and accommodating significant social and technological changes.

The natural beauty of the High Weald AONB is derived from the essentially rural and small scale landscape character, rich in wildlife and cultural features. It has been created by historic and locally distinctive agricultural and forestry practices, with the story of its past visible throughout. The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well connected green and blue infrastructure, with a high proportion of natural surfaces. Food production and semi natural habitat are interwoven in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife. A dense network of historic routeways and Public Rights of Way provides access for people to get close to nature and experience its natural beauty. The pattern and landscape setting of dispersed historic settlements enriches its natural beauty with small, irregular fields and pasture, hedgerows and ancient woodlands interspersed with the rich clay tiled roofscapes of historic buildings. Greenness, a sense of tranquillity and dark skies contribute to the perceptual and scenic qualities people enjoy.”²

¹ Page 14 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

² Page 16 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024 - 2029

- 9.8. The HWMP notes that it articulates natural beauty through 8 core character components which are rooted in historic characterisation of the High Weald landscape as a whole. These components encompass finer grain key characteristics, which include habitats, features of interest and cultural associations, and all contribute a distinct and recognisable landscape whose natural beauty exceeds the sum of its parts.
- 9.9. It notes that each core component of natural beauty is of equal and stand alone importance in its own right (i.e. they cannot be ranked). It notes that these core character components comprise:
- Natural systems (geology, soils, water and natural climate) - a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (ghylls, streams) functioning under an oceanic climate;
 - Settlement - dispersed historic settlement, including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages founded on trade and non agricultural rural industries;
 - Routeways - a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks, and paths);
 - Woodland - an abundance of ancient woodland in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws;
 - Field scapes and heath - small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows, and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing, with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and in river valleys (reclaimed marshland);
 - Dark night skies - intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible;
 - Aesthetic and perceptual qualities - arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timeliness; rurality and tranquility; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets, and gardeners inspired by the landscape; and
 - Land based economy and rural living - with roots extending deep into history and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.
- 9.10. Within the fieldscape and heath character component, the HWMP notes that “*the existence of a flourishing and progressive agriculture is fundamental to... the preservation and enhancement of the characteristic landscape*” (taken from the report of the National Parks Committee, Sir Arthur Hobhouse, 1947).³
- 9.11. Objective FH1 of the HWMP is to secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management. It notes that the rationale for this is to contribute to sustainable domestic food and non food agricultural

³ Page 37 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029

production, to support a working countryside, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to reduce the dependency of the UK on non sustainably managed agricultural land and the need for long distance transport that produces air pollutants, causing harm to health and the environment.

- 9.12. Within the land based economy and rural living character component, Objective LBE3 seeks to improve agricultural and forestry infrastructure along with skills development for rural communities and related sectors that contribute positively to conserving and enhancing natural beauty. The rationale for this is to foster land based economic activities that support conservation of the AONB and to provide opportunities for economic activity that support appropriate land management objectives and the AONB designation.

10. CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.1. In the assessment of this application, it is considered the main issues are:

- Principle of Development;
- Layout and Design;
- Landscape Effects;
- Whether the Scheme Constitutes 'Major Development';
- Amenity;
- Drainage; and
- Traffic and Parking

- 10.2. Each of these are now considered in turn.

Principle of Development

- 10.3. The application site is in a countryside location for the purposes of applying planning policy.
- 10.4. The site is the centre of a long established agricultural enterprise. It is a predominantly dairy enterprise, which has been operating from Lodgelands Farm by the applicant's family for the last four generations.
- 10.5. Over the last circa 15 years, Lodgeland's Farm has been upgraded and expanded to become the main farm centre for the agricultural unit, that in total extends to some 548 acres, of which circa 200 acres is at Lodgelands Farm.
- 10.6. The recent works to the farm centre have included new and extended livestock buildings, a replacement livestock dairy building, and the installation of micro cheese processing facilities.
- 10.7. This reflects the commitment of the applicant to maintain a viable agricultural dairy unit, that comprises some 530 head, including followers.
- 10.8. The application works comprise buildings to cover existing feed yards that are located in and around the main cattle housing and dairy unit. These buildings will facilitate the improved

management and operation of the agricultural operations, in particular by significantly reducing the level of slurry that must be managed on the site. The roofs of the buildings will capture and redirect rainwater away from the site before it mixes with slurry within the feed yards, and which is then discharged into the slurry lagoon.

- 10.9. All tiers of planning guidance support the development of agricultural businesses in principle.
- 10.10. At a national level, Chapter 6 of the NPPF sets out support for building a strong, competitive economy, and Paragraph 88 states that planning decisions should enable, amongst other things, the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through the conversion of existing buildings and well designed new buildings, and support the development of agricultural and other land based rural businesses.
- 10.11. This approach is reflected in the Development Plan within Policy DP12 of the MSDP. This sets out support for development that maintains and where possible enhances the quality of the rural landscape and character of the district and is necessary for the purposes of agriculture.
- 10.12. Objective LBE3 of the HWMP sets out support for the improvement of agricultural infrastructure, given that fostering land based activities that support the conservation of the national landscape contributes to both the purposes of its designation and wider land management objectives.
- 10.13. On this basis, it is submitted that the principle of providing additional buildings within and around the farm centre to support and underpin the vitality and viability of the well established agricultural operation is acceptable in principle.

Layout And Design

- 10.14. The proposed buildings would cover the existing feed yards that are immediately to the north and south of the main cattle housing building, together with the open yard to the southwest of the dairy building that is an intrinsic part of management of the cattle during milking.
- 10.15. The location of the proposed buildings is a reflection of their functional purpose, and they are of utilitarian design.
- 10.16. The proposed structure to the southeast of the existing dairy unit comprises an extrusion of the proportions and form of the existing building. It would have a roof profile that is the same as the existing structure.
- 10.17. The building between the dairy unit and the feed yard would have an eave line matching the adjacent dairy unit. The ridgeline would run parallel to this structure, but given its smaller width, it would be marginally lower.
- 10.18. The building to the north of the cattle housing would be comprised of three roof pitches, all of comparable width and proportion. The ridgelines would run broadly northwest to southeast, reflecting the alignment of the ridgeline of the adjacent cattle housing buildings.

- 10.19. The eave lines and ridge lines would be marginally higher than the adjacent cattle housing building. This reflects the need for agricultural machinery to be able to access this area of the building, including to reach the adjacent feed clamp immediately to the northwest. There is a change in levels from the access track immediately to the north of the building, and as a result, this requires the proposed building covering the feed yard to be set at a higher eave line than the adjacent structures (Figure 4).



Figure 4 - View looking south-east over silage clamp to yard to cattle housing

- 10.20. The layout and design of the buildings is a reflection of their required purpose. They are of agrarian form and would readily integrate into the farm building group.
- 10.21. In consideration of previous, comparable applications for buildings at Lodgelands Farm, most recently, the dairy unit, the LPA's Case Officer Delegated Report (CODR) concluded that the buildings were acceptable from a visual perspective.
- 10.22. Having regard to the above, it is considered that the layout and design of the buildings is in accordance with Chapter 12 of the NPPF, Policy DP26 of the MSDF, and Policy 3 of the BNP.

Landscape Effects

- 10.23. The site is in a rural location, within the designated High Weald National Landscape.
- 10.24. Mid Sussex District Council commissioned a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) in November 2005. This identified 10 Landscape Character Areas, of which the application site is located within the High Weald (Area 6). This is defined as the High Weald Forest Ridge. It is noted to comprise an area where numerous ghyll streams which have carved out a landscape of twisting ridges and secluded valleys, in an ancient, densely wooded landscape. The characterisation of the area is summarised as:
- Wooded, confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity, perceived as attractive, locally secluded and tranquil;

- Complex sandstone and clay hilly landscape of ridges and secluded valleys centred on the western end of Forest Ridge of the High Weald plateau deeply cut by numerous ghyll streams and with sandrock craggs;
- Headwater drainage of the river Medway originates here, the southern part of the area drained by the deep sinuous ghyll streams running to the river Ouse;
- Long views over the Low Weald to the Downs, particularly from the High Forest Ridge;
- Significant woodland cover, a substantial portion of it ancient, including some larger woods and a dense network of hedgerows and shaws, creating a sense of enclosure, the valleys damp, and secluded;
- Pattern of small irregular assart fields, some larger fields and small pockets of remnant heathland;
- Pockets of rich biodiversity concentrated in the valleys, heathland and woodland;
- Dense network of twisting, deep lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths;
- Dispersed historic settlement pattern on high ridges, hilltop and higher ground, the principle settlements of East Grinstead and some expanded and smaller villages; and
- London to Brighton railway line crosses the area.

- 10.25. The LCA notes that the backbone of the High Weald is known as the Forest Ridge, comprising a crest of uniformly high ground running north-west through the Mid Sussex District through West Hoathly, and Selsfield Common to Turners Hill. It notes from this ridge spring numerous ghyll streams, which deeply dissect the landscape to create an interlocking array of twisting ridges and secluded, steep sided narrow valleys. It notes that this includes the deep valley system below Balcombe which contains the Ardingly Reservoir.
- 10.26. It notes that a densely wooded landscape, covers the terrain, particularly the deep ghylls. It notes that between Balcombe and Handcross is a large network of woodlands based on the upper Ouse streams.
- 10.27. It notes that whilst regular shaped fields extend from the south into the High Weald, they become more intermixed with a landscape of small, irregular shaped fields, predominantly used for livestock grazing. These are noted as characteristic of historic assart pastures.
- 10.28. The application site and its surroundings are considered to be typical of the High Weald Landscape Character Type as defined within the Mid Sussex District LCA.
- 10.29. The topography of the area generally falls north to south, within a heavily wooded landscape, with irregular shaped field pastures laid to grass.
- 10.30. There are extensive blocks of woodland both to the northeast and southwest of Crawley Lane, which create a relatively secluded and tranquil landscape.

- 10.31. There are no Public Rights of Way within immediate vicinity of the application site. Public views are therefore limited to those along Crawley Lane. Within the vicinity of the application site, the highway is typically bounded to either side by indigenous hedgerows, with numerous individual tree specimens. As a result of this, together with the houses and farm buildings located close to the public highway, there are limited public views of the application site.
- 10.32. The proposed works envisage buildings in and around the existing farm centre, and cover existing hardstanding yards. Whilst the buildings to the north extend the existing group of structures, this would be set within the context of the silage clamp beyond this, as well as the slurry lagoon to the southwest.
- 10.33. The land rises to the north, and the existing silage/ feed clamp is cut into this rising land (by up to some 4m). The farm centre is set below this rising ground level and buildings located further to the north (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - View looking south from higher ground toward farm centre

- 10.34. Within views to the south and west, the new buildings would be substantively screened by existing structures, or seen within their immediate context.
- 10.35. The application buildings would comprise a modest consolidation of the existing farm centre which is characterised by typically modern, utilitarian, agrarian structures.
- 10.36. At a national level, paragraph 189 of the NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes.
- 10.37. This is reflected in Policy DP16 of the MSDP, which states that development will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the HWMP. The policy notes that small scale proposals, which support the economy and social well-being of the AONB, that are compatible with the conservation enhancement of natural beauty, will be supported.

- 10.38. The proposals will have little visual effect beyond their immediate confines, and will reflect the established character of the farm centre. They will not materially expand the footprint of existing infrastructure of the site.
- 10.39. It is considered that the provision of the lightweight structures to serve the agricultural enterprise is entirely in accordance with the agricultural landscape character of the area.
- 10.40. In consideration of the most recent application for additional built form on the site, comprising the dairy building in 2015, the LPA's CODR concluded that the building would preserve the character and appearance of the surrounding designated landscape.
- 10.41. A recent High Court judgment handed down on the 3rd March 2025 (Citation number [2025] EWCH 726 (Admin)), has clarified that whilst the statutory duty in respect of National Landscapes has been changed by Section 245 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, if a decision maker is satisfied that the proposed development will leave the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the protected landscape unharmed, they may grant planning permission on the basis that they have discharged their legal duties in respect of protection of the National Landscape.
- 10.42. In this instance, it is concluded, as with previous proposals for new buildings on the site over the last circa 15 years, that the scheme will preserve the character of the protected landscape.
- 10.43. Notwithstanding this, it is also material to note that the HWMP emphasises that a flourishing and progressive agricultural industry is fundamental to the preservation and enhancement of the characteristics of the High Weald landscape. It is a specific objective of the HWMP to secure agriculturally productive use of the High Weald and to facilitate the delivery of improvement to the agricultural infrastructure of the area, as this positively contributes to conserving and enhancing natural beauty through agricultural land management.
- 10.44. On this basis, even were the LPA to conclude the scheme would have some limited detrimental visual effect, this would be outweighed by the positive contribution the development would make to underpinning the vitality and viability of the agricultural unit. The loss of dairy units from the High Weald is a significant challenge to maintain an agricultural character to the landscape. This is a material consideration that weighs significantly in favour of the application.
- 10.45. Overall, it is considered that the application proposal accords with the requirements of Chapter 15, and in particular Paragraph 189, of the NPPF, Policy DP12 and DP16 of the MSDP, Policy 3 of the BNP, and the requirements of the HWMP.

Whether The Scheme Constitutes 'Major Development'

- 10.46. Paragraph 190 of the NPPF states that in considering applications for development within National Landscapes, permission should be refused for 'major development' other than in exceptional circumstances and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.
- 10.47. The footnote that accompanies this policy states that whether a proposal is 'major development' is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and

setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated.

- 10.48. In respect of these tests, it is material to note that the 'nature' of the scheme is agricultural infrastructure; its 'scale' is comparable to the existing agricultural buildings that comprise part of the farmstead, including those that have been granted planning permission by the LPA over the last circa 15 years; and the setting of the scheme is a long established farm centre used for dairy operations, which include cattle housing, feed yards, dairy, silage/ feed clamps, and a slurry lagoon.
- 10.49. In considering whether the scheme could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes of designating the landscape, it is material to note that the site is contained and has little impact on its surroundings, including public vantage points.
- 10.50. Land rises to the north, and this both screens and provides a background context to the farm centre. There are other buildings, including older agricultural structures and residential dwellings closer to the public highway, which screen the farm centre from public view from Crawley Lane. The existing buildings on the site would also substantively screen the application works.
- 10.51. The proposed development is of agrarian form, and the HWMP notes the importance of facilitating and fostering an agricultural industry, which enables the delivery of appropriate land management objectives, that support the purpose of the designation.
- 10.52. For these reasons, it is considered that the development should not be deemed 'major development' for the purposes of Paragraph 190 of the NPPF.
- 10.53. Notwithstanding these submissions, and in the event it is concluded the works do represent, 'major development', consideration is given as to whether the scheme is justified by the exceptional circumstances, and is in the public interest, having regard to the 3 tests set out in Paragraph 190.
- 10.54. Paragraph 190(a) states that consideration should be given to the '*need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy*'.
- 10.55. This Statement has set out the need for the development, to facilitate the continued successful operation and management of the dairy herd. The works will enable a reduction in the quantum of slurry generated from the site, which will improve overall site management. In the event that planning permission is refused, this would present practical challenges to the ongoing operation of the agriculture unit, which which has by necessity, increased in scale to maintain viability over the last few years.
- 10.56. Paragraph 190(b) requires an assessment of the '*cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way*'.
- 10.57. The proposed works are required in relation to the management and operation of the dairy unit, which operates from Lodgelands Farm, supported by the surrounding agricultural land. It is not

practical to locate the development beyond the designated area. The structures are required to capture rainwater to prevent it falling on the open yard; there is no other ready means of achieving this in an alternative way.

- 10.58. Paragraph 190(c) requires consideration of '*any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated*'.
- 10.59. This Statement details that the scheme would have no detrimental effect on the landscape. Furthermore, it would have no detrimental effect on recreational opportunities. Through the scheme, the separation of rainwater from slurry arising from the cattle yards would have a positive effect on the environment. The scheme therefore has a positive overall environmental effect.
- 10.60. On this basis, it is considered the scheme would represent an exceptional circumstance in which major development can be permitted within a designated national landscape, in the public interest.

Amenity

- 10.61. The application site is in a rural location, generally set away from residential properties.
- 10.62. The nearest dwellings in proximity of the application site are located to the north-east fronting, and accessed from Crawley Lane. They include the dwelling to the north of the existing cattle housing (Lodgelands Farm), which is occupied by the applicant.
- 10.63. There is also a dwelling to the northeast of the dairy (Lodgelands), with other dwellings located on the north side of Crawley Lane beyond the access to the site.
- 10.64. There is a detached residential dwelling to the northwest of the site (Cushat Law), and beyond this is Highley Manor which is used as a wedding venue.
- 10.65. The application works will not result in any material increase in the size of the dairy herd at Lodgelands Farm, or activity at the farm centre. The works are solely intended to improve the management and operation of the holding. It will significantly reduce the amount of slurry generated at the site and discharged into the existing slurry lagoon.
- 10.66. The effect of the works will therefore be to improve the operations of the site and reduce the quantum of slurry generated. This is considered to be a benefit in local amenity terms.
- 10.67. The buildings will have little effect on local amenity. There will be generally little change in views of the site from properties to the north-east, fronting Crawley Lane, given the existing layout of the farm centre, and the location of the proposed additional buildings. These will be between and adjacent to existing structures.
- 10.68. The building on the northwestern edge of the cattle housing building will be visible in views south from the dwelling known as Cushat Law. These views would be from higher ground toward the application site. Given the change in levels, the additional buildings would be in part screened from view by the existing topography, with the upper parts visible against the

backdrop of the existing cattle housing building. The buildings would be located a minimum of some 140 metres from this dwelling at their nearest point.

- 10.69. Having regard to these factors, it is considered that the works would not have any undue impact on local residential amenity. On this basis, the application is in accordance with the requirements of Policy DP26 of the MSDP.

Drainage

- 10.70. The application buildings would cover existing feed yards that comprise part of the farm centre.
- 10.71. These are used by the dairy herd, in particular during milking, and in the wetter, winter months when animals are overwintered in the cattle housing.
- 10.72. Through the use of the feed yards, slurry generated from the herd is discharged from the yards into the adjacent slurry lagoon immediately to the southwest of the building group. Rainwater falling on the open feed yards combines with the slurry and is thus currently also discharged into the slurry lagoons.
- 10.73. The proposed buildings would cover hard standing yard areas, that in total extend to some 1578 square metres. Annual average rainfall in the Balcombe area is some 763mm per annum.
- 10.74. By capturing the rainwater that would otherwise fall on the feed yards, via the roofs of the new buildings, it will capture and divert up to some 1,204,113 litres of rainwater from the slurry lagoon.
- 10.75. The rainwater would be directed via enclosed gutters and drainage system away from the yard, enabling discharge to the fields and local water course.
- 10.76. The proposed works will not materially increase the level of surface water generated at the site, but instead separate this from the slurry/ dirty water arising from the dairy herd operations or the extent of hardstanding area.
- 10.77. The proposed works would therefore represent an improvement in the management and discharge of surface water from the site.
- 10.78. On this basis, the proposed works are in accordance with Policy DP41 of the MSDP

Traffic And Parking

- 10.79. The application works will not materially change the existing agricultural operations; they relate to improved surface water management at the farm centre.
- 10.80. This will not result in any material change in traffic movements to and from the site.
- 10.81. The works would be likely to reduce the management time required to deal with slurry generated from the site (on the basis the quantum would be reduced), but this is unlikely to have a material impact on staffing or traffic movements.

- 10.82. On this basis, the effect of the works on traffic and parking will be neutral. The works would therefore be in accordance with the requirements of Chapter 9 of the NPPF and Policy DP21 of the MSDP.

11. SUMMARY

- 11.1. The application proposals relate to an existing, long established agricultural unit that has been run by the applicant's family for the last four generations. It is the main farm centre for the dairy operation that is operated from the circa 548 acre unit, of which some 200 acres is in and around Lodgelands Farm. Over the last circa 15 years, the farm centre has evolved and developed in accordance with the requirement to improve operations and maintain viability.
- 11.2. The application proposals seek to cover over existing open feed yards. This would enable the capture and separation of rainwater that currently falls on the yard (and thus must be treated as slurry), to negate this discharging into the adjacent lagoon. The works would reduce the quantum of slurry generated from the site, in particular during the wetter winter months.
- 11.3. The buildings are of functional, utilitarian design and integrate with the existing buildings that comprise the farm centre.
- 11.4. All tiers of planning guidance set out support for prosperous rural economy, and in particular agriculture.
- 11.5. The HWMP acknowledges that ensuring a thriving land based economy supports the land management objectives and purposes of the designation of the High Weald National Landscape.
- 11.6. The scheme is located in area that has limited public visibility. The works would be confined to the immediate farm centre, and would be screened by, or seen within the context of, the existing farm buildings.
- 11.7. The evolution of the farm centre of the over the last 15 years has been acknowledged by the LPA as being necessary, and acceptable in landscape and visual impact terms.
- 11.8. The scheme is of comparable character to the existing buildings on site, and it is considered that they would integrate with and preserve the visual amenity and landscape characteristics of its surrounding.
- 11.9. Having regard to the nature, scale and setting of the works, it is considered that it does not represent 'major development' within the High Weald. In the event that the LPA reach an alternative conclusion, it is considered that the works are nonetheless justified as an exceptional circumstance having regard to the need for the development, the inability for the works to be provided outside the designated area or in some other way, and the absence of detrimental effect on the landscape and recreational opportunities of the area.
- 11.10. The site is in a generally rural location, and there are limited residential properties in proximity of the site. Having regard to the relationship of the works to these properties, and the existing farm centre, it is considered the scheme will have no undue impact on local residential amenity.

- 11.11. The proposals will represent an improvement in the surface water drainage strategy for the site.
- 11.12. The works will not generate any additional traffic or movement in and around the farm centre.
- 11.13. Overall, the scheme is considered to be wholly in accordance with the requirements of both national and local planning policy, including as set out in the Development Plan. In particular, the scheme is in accordance with Chapters 6, 9, 12, and 15 of the NPPF, Policy DP1, DP12, DP16, DP21, DP26, and DP41 of the MSDP, Policy 1 and 3 of the BNP, and the requirements of the HWMP.
- 11.14. It is considered that there are no material considerations that weigh against the scheme, and on this basis, planning permission should be granted.