

Temporary (36 months) permission for change of use of existing tennis courts to padel courts and associated works at the existing tennis courts at St Francis Sports and Social Club, Colwell Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

Planning and Heritage Statement



On behalf of Hurstwood Sports Group Limited

June 2025

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This Planning and Heritage Statement has been prepared on behalf of Hurstwood Sports Group Limited for a Temporary (36 months) permission for change of use of existing tennis courts to padel courts and associated works at the existing tennis courts at St Francis Sports and Social Club, Colwell Road, Haywards Heath, West Sussex.
- 1.2 This Statement should be read in conjunction with plans of the proposal and indicative images prepared by Inspired Homes And Gardens.
- 1.3 This report demonstrates there are no technical barriers to planning permission being issued and that the proposal complies with the relevant provisions of the development plan.

2.0 The Site and Surrounding Area

- 2.1 The site comprises two tarmacked tennis courts in a poor state of repair adjacent to the St Francis Swimming Pool on the Princes Royal Hospital campus to the south of Southdowns Park Road on the eastern side of Haywards Heath.
- 2.2 The site lies within the development boundary for Haywards Heath where the principle of development is acceptable.
- 2.3 The site is outside of any Conservation Area. The nearest listed building (Main Block of St Francis' Hospital - Grade II Listed) is approximately 100 metres to the north of the site.
- 2.4 The site is in flood zone 1, the lowest risk zone.



Figure 1: The location of the site.

- 2.5 The surrounding area is built up with a mixture of urban form including hospital buildings, residential development and other leisure facilities. The home of St

Francis Rangers Football Club is to the south with football pitches and a club house of limited architectural merit.

3.0 The Proposal

- 3.1 The proposal seeks a temporary planning permission for the change of use of tennis courts to padel courts and associated works for a period of 36 months. The proposal is intended to be a first phase of a wider redevelopment and enhancement of St Francis Sports Club enabling the applicants to establish a revenue stream and provide the community with a valuable sports facility whilst the planning application (not yet submitted) for the larger more complex proposal is considered.
- 3.2 The proposed development features two padel courts and a practice court / junior court for beginners in addition to a central area for socialising or waiting for the court to become free.

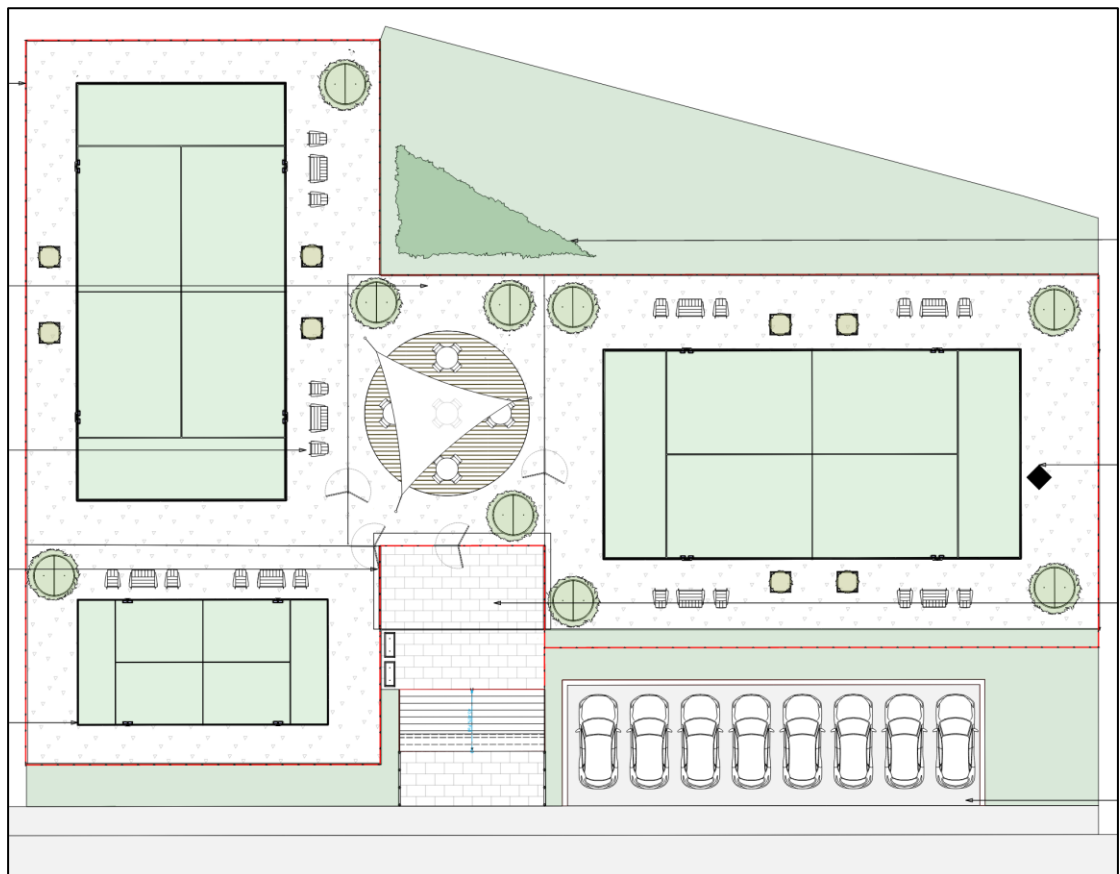


Figure 2: The layout of the proposed development

- 3.3 Parking is already in situ serving the dilapidated tennis courts.

3.4 An illustrative CGI of the proposed development is shown below.



Figure 3: Illustrative CGI of the proposed development.

4.0 Relevant Planning Policy

4.1 Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (2004) requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the policies in the development plan unless other material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.2 This section identifies key relevant planning policy that indicates the proposed development should be supported. It also identifies a number of important material considerations that also militate in favour of the grant of permission in this particular case.

The Development Plan

4.3 The development plan, so far as it is material to any future application, is as follows:

- Mid Sussex District Plan (2018)
- Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

4.4 In addition to these documents, there is also a need to consider relevant Planning Policy contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (2025) (NPPF).

Mid Sussex District Plan (2018)

4.5 The Mid Sussex District Plan sets out the overarching strategic objectives for the District and provides everyday development management policies too.

4.6 Policy DP1 seeks to encourage economic development including by encouraging high quality development of land and premises to meet the needs of 21st century businesses among other things.

4.7 Policy DP6 confirms development will be permitted within towns and villages with defined built-up area boundaries.

4.8 DP24 relates to leisure and cultural facilities and activities. Development that provides new or enhanced leisure activities and facilities will be supported.

- 4.9 DP34 concerns listed buildings and other heritage assets. Development will be required to protect listed buildings and their settings. In the case of this application, this is achieved by giving special regard to protecting the setting of a listed building.

Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

- 4.10 The Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan provides policies on a local level specific to the neighbourhood plan area.

- 4.11 Policy L8 relates to the St Francis Sports Site and allocates land for the enhancement of the existing facilities. Proposals will have to demonstrate:

- that the height, scale, design and materials of any proposed buildings are appropriate to the site and its location;
- the height, scale, design and materials of the development will not harm the setting of the adjacent listed building;
- there is no harm arising to the adjoining ancient woodland;
- that satisfactory vehicular arrangements and servicing are secured;
- that there will be no unacceptable levels of light, noise, air or water pollution to the nearby residential properties;
- that adequate car and cycle parking can be provided onsite; and
- that the development will safeguard the amenities of the neighbouring properties

National Planning Policy Framework (2025)

- 4.12 The National Planning Policy Framework sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF was originally published in March 2012, but has been revised and updated since with the most up-to-date version published in February 2025.

- 4.13 Paragraph 2 reiterates that planning law requires that applications be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It also advises that the NPPF is a material consideration.
- 4.14 Paragraph 7 states the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and articulates the well-known definition of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- 4.15 Paragraph 8 articulates the three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives: economic, social, and environmental.
- 4.16 Paragraph 39 relates to decision making. It indicates that decisionmakers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.
- 4.17 Paragraph 96 indicates planning decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which enable and support healthy lives, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities – for example through the provision of sports facilities, amongst other things.
- 4.18 To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should, *inter alia*, plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities such as sports venues as per paragraph 98.
- 4.19 Paragraph 124 confirms that planning decisions should promote an effective use of land in meeting the need for homes and other uses, while safeguarding and improving the environment and ensuring safe and healthy living conditions. Strategic policies should set out a clear strategy for accommodating objectively assessed needs, in a way that makes as much use as possible of previously-developed or 'brownfield' land.

- 4.20 Paragraph 129 places importance on supporting development that makes efficient use of land.
- 4.21 Paragraph 202 refers to heritage assets and advises that they should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.
- 4.22 Paragraph 207 advises that in determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting. The level of detail should be proportionate to the assets' importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance.
- 4.23 Paragraph 210 advises that in determining applications, account should be taken of the desirability of new development making a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness.
- 4.24 Paragraphs 212 advises that when considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.
- 4.25 Paragraph 213 applies insofar as it requires any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset from development within its setting to provide clear and convincing justification.
- 4.26 Paragraph 215 guides that where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
- 4.27 Paragraph 219 advises that LPAs should look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance and for proposals that make a positive contribution or better reveal its significance should be treated favourably.

5.0 Relevant Planning Issues

- 5.1 As with all planning applications, there are a number of issues that need to be assessed prior to planning permission being granted. These are discussed below.

Principle of Development

- 5.2 The application site is within the development boundary for Haywards Heath and therefore the development is acceptable as a matter of principle in line with Policy DP6 of the Mid Sussex District Plan. The development is also supported by policy L8 of the Neighbourhood Plan as demonstrated below.

Policy L8

- 5.3 Policy L8 is supportive of the principle of redevelopment of sporting facilities at St Francis Sports Club subject to various criteria being met. The scheme's response to this criteria is set out below:

- that the height, scale, design and materials of any proposed buildings are appropriate to the site and its location – the proposed scale is no greater than the existing fencing around the decrepit tennis courts and is in keeping with the site's location. The materials are conventional for this type of facility and uncontroversial.
- the height, scale, design and materials of the development will not harm the setting of the adjacent listed building – The development causes no harm to the significance of the adjacent listed building. It would have a, at worst, a neutral impact on the setting.
- there is no harm arising to the adjoining ancient woodland – Ancient woodland is not proximate to the application site. No harm would arise.
- that satisfactory vehicular arrangements and servicing are secured - The existing vehicular access would remain unaltered.

- that there will be no unacceptable levels of light, noise, air or water pollution to the nearby residential properties – [lighting has been sensitively considered and can be controlled via the use of an appropriately worded planning condition.](#)
- that adequate car and cycle parking can be provided onsite – [Existing car parking spaces that currently serve the tennis courts are maintained.](#)
- that the development will safeguard the amenities of the neighbouring properties - [the development will not have an adverse impact on neighbouring properties amenity due to the limited degree to which the site's existing use is altering and the distance to the nearest residential properties.](#)

Heritage

- 5.4 The application site is proximate to Main Block of St Francis' Hospital - Grade II Listed) is approximately 100 metres to the north of the site. The list entry confirms:

"Hospital, formerly purpose built lunatic asylum. 1859 by H E Kendall junior in a free Lombardo-Venetian style. Yellow brick with red brick decoration and slate roofs. Very long complex range of 57 bays, comprising a 7 bay centre with 2 bay towers flanking it, and wings each of 24 bays including a slim terminal tower. The centre, and sections of the wings, are crowned by wide gables (the centre with an oculus), and the red brick cornice like the bands of the same material, is continuous. Windows are sashes with glazing bars, cambered headed to ground and third floor, round-headed between. The centre has all round-headed windows, those to ground floor with mullions and roundels, the towers have blind arcading above and below heavy cornices and end in pyramidal roofs. The first floor windows to centre have balconies in stone or cement. To either side of this block are further wings of 23 bays with simpler details. A single storey wing projects from the towers at each end. On the entrance facade a hammer-headed block comes forward with 3 main sections. The central one has round-headed windows and round-arched decoration. A triple feature encloses the modern glass doors and

a painted carved tympanum. Broad flight of steps to door. Sashes are generally of two or four panes on this side. Entrance hall has elaborate fireplace and plasterwork over doors. Built as the Sussex Lunatic Asylum."

- 5.5 The NPPF contemplates three possible degrees of harm in relation to designated heritage assets, no harm, less than substantial harm and substantial harm. In this case, no harm is present. This is because the heritage asset derives its significance primarily from its architectural qualities as described above rather than its setting.
- 5.6 In any event, the development would accord with paragraph 219 in that the proposal would enhance the setting of the heritage asset through sensitively enhancing a brownfield site.

Sports provision

- 5.7 Paragraphs 96 and 98 of the NPPF both provide strong support for the provision of sports facilities. In this case, it's particularly beneficial that the enhanced facilities will be located on brownfield land.
- 5.8 Padel is experiencing rapid growth globally and in the UK with increased participation from a diverse range of demographics. The volume of searches for "padel" on Google has grown by an impressive 18% per year since 2016, highlighting the rising interest in the sport around the world. The total number of new padel courts in the UK increased from 250 in 2023 to 489 in 2024 highlighting a growing demand for courts¹.

- 5.9 The LTA Padel website confirms

"Here in Britain, we're experiencing our own padel boom, with over 230,000 people playing on an annual basis. Since we've been appointed as the national governing body for padel, the number of courts in the Britain has also been on the rise, having hit 760 courts across the country at the end of 2024²."

- 5.10 It goes on to describe padel as *"the world's fastest growing sport"*.

¹ Playtomic Global Padel Report 2024 Release

² <https://www.ltapadel.org.uk/play/why-is-padel-so-popular-in-the-uk/#:~:text=Played%20on%20an%20enclosed%20court,growing%20sports%20in%20the%20world.>

- 5.11 In light of the above, there is a clear need for the development to service increasing demand and it will assist people in living healthy active lifestyles as encouraged by the NPPF.

6.0 Conclusion

- 6.1 This Statement has identified a raft of supportive planning policy and guidance confirming that the proposal should be acceptable when assessed against the Development Plan so far as it is material to the determination of this planning application. Given the growing popularity of padel, there is a clear need for the development of the application site to be brought forward immediately.
- 6.2 The development is expressly supported by Policy L8 of the Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan and due to the scheme's sensitive design the proposal complies fully with the criteria set out in this policy.
- 6.3 Overall, the proposal complies with the provisions of the development plan and therefore planning permission should be granted subject to appropriate conditions.