

PLANNING STATEMENT

IN RELATION TO:

***‘Provision of a freestanding solar array comprising
10 panels with an associated GRP enclosure for
inverter and battery storage, to serve the approved
holiday lodge accommodation’***

**Great Bentley Plantation, Borde Hill Lane,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex , RH16 1XP**

November 2025

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 We submit this application on behalf of our Client, Arley Hill Ventures.
- 1.2 Planning permission has been granted for *'the provision of 5 No. Self-contained holiday lodges. Conversion of an existing structure to provide a new reception building. (Amended plans received 15/02/2024 to include the removal of the new access)'* at Great Bentley Plantation, Borde Hill Lane, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 1XP (application **DM/23/3218** refers).
- 1.3 More recently a S73 application (**DM/25/0251**) has been submitted for the variation of conditions 2 and 5 of planning application DM/23/3218 - to allow for design changes and provision of the drainage strategy. This application remains under consideration by MSDC Planning Officers.
- 1.4 As explained in the recent submissions for DM/25/0251 our Clients now finalised their plans for the site. Following a review of the proposed development, the Applicants have decided to take a more 'off-grid' approach to the scheme, to reduce the environmental and ecological impact, whilst also significantly reducing the extent of the groundworks required. This consists principally of a change to the services to the site (i.e. power and water), so the site layout and composition will stay largely the same as previously approved, but will consist of a few physical/visible alterations. Pertinent to this application is that in order to generate electricity, the Applicants intend to set up a centralised solar plant to service all the huts, the position of which is near the approved Reception building. The reason for this is that it was shown to be the most efficient placement of the panels for year round electricity generation. A backup generator will top up solar production when required and LPG gas will provide additional energy to heat water. LPG tanks will be stored on the side of the huts.

- 1.5 During our discussions with the Planning Officer (Katherine Williams) in respect of the S73 application changes, we were advised by her that the proposed standalone solar array *“did not form part of the original consent. Due to this it is not considered that this can included under the current application and will require separate permission”*. This further submission acts on this Officer advice.
- 1.6 This Planning Statement is submitted in support of the above application. This statement should be read in conjunction with the drawings detailed below:
- Drawing No. 2265 – (10)000 Revision A. Site Location Plan.
 - Drawing No. 2265 – (21)000. Proposed Block Plan, Proposed Layout Plan & Proposed Elevations.

2.0 SITE CIRCUMSTANCES

- 2.1 The Application Site comprises part of a larger site that benefits from planning permission for 5 no. holiday lodges, and a reception building with associated infrastructure. It lies within a section of former woodland and agricultural land, which is part of the wider Borde Hill Estate. The site is positioned approximately 1.25km west of Borde Hill Lane and 3.5km north-west of central Haywards Heath. It is connected to the main road via an existing track. The site area for the solar array and GRP enclosure (including the access track that links to Borde Hill Road to the east) measures approximately 0.37 hectares.
- 2.2 The land surrounding the site comprises a mixture of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland, Ancient Replanted Woodland, Priority Habitat Deciduous Woodland and Wood pasture, Parkland fields, ponds and ditches. Below is an extract from the previous EclA report that accompanied the application for the holiday lodges. This shows the red line for the wider site. It also highlights that there are no ecological constraints applicable to the area of land in which the solar array is to be located.



Fig 1. Map showing Habitats of importance for nature conservation within and surrounding the site (*courtesy of previous EclA*)

- 2.3 In terms of site designations, the site is located outside the defined built up area boundary for Haywards Heath within designated countryside. The site lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site also lies within National Character Area **122: High Weald** and centrally within the West Sussex Landscape Character Area **HW3: Ouse Valley**, with the southern parts of the Borde Hill Estate lying within **HW4: High Weald Fringes**.
- 2.4 Part of the Borde Hill Estate is a Listed garden/parkland, however this Application Site lies largely outside of that area. The only part of the red line site area that falls within the heritage designation is the existing access track and the proposed access onto Borde Hill Lane.

3.0 PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 The Application Site sits within a wider area of land that benefits from planning permission granted in May 2024 for 'the provision of 5 No. self contained holiday lodges. Conversion of an existing structure to provide a new reception building (amended plans received 15/02/2024 to include the removal of the new access). (MSDC Application ref: **DM/23/3218**)
- 3.2 More recently a Section 73 application has been submitted and then revised for amended drawings and drainage details pursuant to conditions attached to the above planning permission (MSDC application **DM/25/0251** refers). This S73 application is undecided at the time of writing.
- 3.3 According to the Council's online planning records, Borde Hill Estate has an extensive planning history; however none of this history relates directly to the Great Bentley Plantation and in our view these Applications are not of relevance to this current proposal.

4.1 THE PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The application seeks planning permission for the installation of a proposed ground-mounted array of 10 solar photovoltaic panels at the application site. The panels which will be arranged in 2 rows, with a ground area measuring 18.6 sqm.
- 4.2 The proposal includes a ducted cable from the proposed array to the inverter and battery storage within a proposed green painted GRP enclosure (measuring 4 sqm), which will be positioned immediately adjacent to the proposed array.
- 4.3 The proposals will replace an area allocated for 2no. vehicle charging spaces as shown on the approved plans for the holiday let use. As a result of going 'off-grid', there will not be sufficient electricity generated from the solar plant to provide electric charging spaces. These can be provided at the Borde Hill Garden facilities so guests will have the option to charge their vehicle if needed.

5.0 PLANNING POLICY

(i) National Planning Policy Framework

- 5.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was originally published on 27th March 2012 and updated most recently on 12th December 2024. This sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.
- 5.2 The NPPF confirms that planning law, as set out at Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, requires that applications for planning permission to be determined in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

(ii) Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (March 2018)

- 5.4 The Mid Sussex District Council adopted its District Plan on 28th March 2018. According to the District Council's Policy Map, the site is located within the countryside and within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The site also lies within National Character Area **122: High Weald** and centrally within the West Sussex Landscape Character Area **HW3: Ouse Valley**, with the southern parts of the Borde Hill Estate lying within **HW4: High Weald Fringes**. The following policies are considered relevant:
- **Policy DP12** – Protection and Enhancement of Countryside;
 - **Policy DP16** – High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty;
 - **Policy DP19** – Sustainable Tourism;
 - **Policy DP26** – Character and Design;
 - **Policy DP29** – Noise, Air and Light Pollution;
 - **Policy DP34** – Listed Buildings and other Heritage Assets;
 - **Policy DP36** – Historic Parks and Gardens;
 - **Policy DP37** – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows;

- **Policy DP38** – Biodiversity;
- **Policy DP39** – Sustainable Design and Construction; and
- **Policy DP40** – Renewable Energy Schemes.

(iii) Ansty, Staplefield & Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2031

5.5 The Neighbourhood Plan was formally ‘made’ in February 2017. Its policies are of a relatively general nature and it does not appear to have any policies that would be directly relevant to this proposal for tourism accommodation. The only policy of relevance is:

- **Policy AS3** – High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

(iv) Other Planning Guidance

5.6 The following documents are also of relevance:-

- High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024;
- High Weald AONB – Guidance on the selection and use of colour in development;
- Eco-camping in the High Weald AONB: A review of the potential environmental impacts and recommendations for future development.

5.7 We are aware that the District Council has adopted the 'Mid Sussex Design Guide' SPD that aims to help deliver high quality development across the district that responds appropriately to its context and is inclusive and sustainable. The Design Guide was adopted by the Council on 4th November 2020 as an SPD for use in the consideration and determination of planning applications.

(v) Emerging Policy

5.8 A new District Plan was formally submitted for examination to the Planning Inspectorate on 8th July 2024. However due to initial concerns raised by the examining Inspector and a number of unresolved objections, it is not considered that any weight can be given to this emerging policy document at this stage.

6.0 PLANNING ASSESSMENT

The Principle of Development

- 6.1 **Policy DP12** of the Mid Sussex District Plan states: *“The countryside will be protected in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. Development will be permitted in the countryside, defined as the area outside of built-up area boundaries on the Policies Map, provided it maintains or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District, and:-*
- *it is necessary for the purposes of agriculture; or*
 - *it is supported by a specific policy reference either elsewhere in the Plan, a Development Plan Document or relevant Neighbourhood Plan.”*
- 6.2 **Policy DP40** of the Mid Sussex District Plan relates to renewable energy and states: *“Proposals for new renewable and low carbon energy projects... including community-led schemes, will be permitted provided that any adverse local impacts can be made acceptable, with particular regard to:-*
- *Landscape and visual impacts, including cumulative impacts, such as on the setting of the South Downs National Park and High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the appearance of existing buildings;-*
 - *Ecology and biodiversity, including protected species, and designated and non-designated wildlife sites;-*
 - *Residential amenity including visual intrusion, air, dust, noise, odour, traffic generation, recreation and access.*
- Assessment of impacts will need to be based on the best available evidence, including landscape capacity studies...”*
- 6.3 The proposal is for a renewable energy scheme to provide power to the approved development of 5 no. holiday lodges. The proposal would be located a significant distance from the main road, Borde Hill Lane, and due to the existing vegetation and topography, there would be limited views of the proposed panels from public

footpaths. The proposals are to replace an area previously set aside for vehicle charging spaces, and therefore a change to the natural condition of this part of the site was previously approved.

- 6.4 As explained above, the developers of the holiday lodge scheme have decided to take a more 'off-grid' approach to the development, to reduce the environmental and ecological impact, whilst also significantly reducing the extent of the groundworks required. Part of their plans include generating electricity on-site using the proposed centralised solar panels, which is to be positioned close to the approved Reception building, to replace the previously approved parking spaces with electric vehicle charging. The off-grid approach will not generated sufficient electricity to allow charging of vehicles on-site, however such facilities are available at nearby Borde Hill Gardens (a short distance to the south of the site), so guests will have the option to charge their vehicle if needed.
- 6.5 The proposed ground-mounted array will provide 2 no. rows with a total of 10 panels. The array covers an area of land that measures just 18.6 sqm, and the array is also low in height. The GRP enclosure is small, and will be coloured green. Therefore the scale of the proposals is clearly very modest and discrete. Consequently the proposals are considered to maintain the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District and that any adverse local impact is considered to be acceptable. It is therefore considered that the principle of the proposal would be supported by policy DP40 of the Mid Sussex District Plan and comply with policy DP12 of the Mid Sussex District Plan.

Character & Visual Amenities

- 6.6 The Application site forms a small part of a larger site that benefits from an approved planning permission for five holiday cabins. These lodges are to be split across two areas, with one cabin occupying the existing meadow to the southwest of the site, and four occupying the felled woodland in the northwest part of the site. Minor

changes to the approved scheme are currently being considered by way of a Section 73 application, however the revisions that are subject to that variation of conditions application do not materially affect the layout, scale or nature of the originally approved scheme.

- 6.7 **Policy DP26** of the Mid Sussex District Plan states: *“All development and surrounding spaces... will be well designed and reflect the distinctive character of the towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside.”* The policy has a number of requirements, including that developments should be *“of high-quality design and layout and includes appropriate landscaping and greenspace; creates a sense of place while addressing the character and scale of the surrounding buildings and landscape; 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...; positively addresses sustainability considerations...”*
- 6.8 **Policy DP16** refers to the AONB landscape, and specifies that development in this area *“will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan”*. It also says 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. Development on land that contributes to the setting of the AONB will only be permitted where it does not detract from the visual qualities and essential characteristics of the AONB, and in particular should not adversely affect the views into and out of the AONB by virtue of its location or design.”
- 6.9 The changes are considered minor in nature and would not alter the essence of the original development. The Application site forms part of a larger site that will still provide 5 No. holiday lodges within the Borde Hill estate, which would create a new business within a rural area, therefore supporting the rural economy.

- 6.10 The proposed works are of a very modest scale and have been sited sensitively in order to ensure that the proposed works will not adversely impact on the scale and character of the existing and surrounding buildings and landscape. The natural beauty of the AONB will be conserved. Therefore, the proposal is considered to comply with the policies DP16 and DP26 of the Mid Sussex District Plan and the Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD
- 6.11 In respect of heritage considerations, the minor nature and location of the proposed solar array will ensure that there will be no impact on the setting or function of the Grade II* listed park and garden, which is centred on the formal gardens around Borde Hill House. Additionally, given the distance between the site and listed buildings, and the lack of intervisibility, it is not considered that the proposal will have a material impact on the setting of any listed building.
- 6.12 When considering the approved scheme for 5no. holiday lodges, it is noted that the Conservation Officer noted that *“the proposed lodges are located a short distance to the west of the boundary of the northern part of the registered parkland. However, due to the intervening topography and planting it is in my opinion unlikely that there will be any marked visual impact in terms of views looking from the parkland...”* It is considered that the provision of a small solar array within this wider holiday lodge site would also be well screened by topography and planting, and we expect the Conservation Officer will be able to reach the same conclusions with respect to this additional proposal.

Residential Amenity

- 6.13 The Planning Application site adjoins Borde Hill Lane to the East and is surrounded by open countryside and woodland to all other sides. The main body of the Site is well enclosed and set a considerable distance from any public highway. There are no residential properties within close proximity of the main part of the site.

- 6.14 As such, the proposed minor changes would not cause any material harm to the residential amenities of any dwelling. Given the lack of identified demonstrable harm to residential amenities, it must be concluded that the proposal would be in accordance with **Policy DP26** of the District Plan

Ecology & Biodiversity

- 6.15 As set out above, the proposed solar array is to be ground mounted, with the addition of a small (4sqm) GRP enclosure. This will replace an area allocated under the previous permission for 2no. parking spaces with electric vehicle charging (which is instead provided elsewhere at Borde Hill Gardens, and will be available for guests to use).
- 6.16 The part of the site where the solar array and enclosure is to be provided is of low-ecological value. This is identified above in Section 2 of this Statement. The site currently comprises low quality grassland. The proposed installation will cause a temporary disturbance to the grassland and cable route during installation, however, once installed there will be no habitat loss. The solar panels are to be mounted on frames above the grassland. This will result in additional shading of the grassland but, given the low ecological value of the grassland, this is not considered likely to have a significant ecological impact. The proposals are therefore able to demonstrate compliance with planning policy DP38 of the Mid Sussex District Plan.
- 6.17 In terms of the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), the proposals are exempt by virtue of the small area of the development (less than 25sqm) which means it is classified as 'de minimis' for the purposes of BNG.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 In conclusion, the proposed development would represent a renewable energy scheme to provide power to the approved holiday lodge scheme at Borde Hill Estate. The proposals will maintain the quality of the rural landscape character of the AONB, with no adverse local impact arising.
- 7.2 The proposal meets all the necessary policy requirements, and will cause no harm to any matter of identified acknowledged importance. In our opinion the overwhelming weight of evidence supports the granting of permission.
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November 2025