

Planning Department
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1SS

06 March 2025
Ref: SL/Let/P2223

Dear Sir, Madam

Full Planning Application for 'Conversion and minor external amendments of existing property to form 2no. 1-bedroom flats at the former office / laundry / store building' at Old Farm Close, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 7GA.

On behalf of the applicant, **Hyde Housing Association**, ECE Planning Ltd have been instructed to prepare a Full Planning Application for the aforementioned development which seeks to convert the existing office, laundry and store building into 2no. 1-bedroom flats on ground and first floor level.

The Full Planning Application has been submitted online via the Planning Portal reference **PP-13798844** and includes the following documents/drawings:

- Planning Application Forms
- Planning Covering Letter
- Architectural Drawings including Location and Block Plans
- Parking Survey Summary Report
- Therm Energy Letter and Compliance Specification

The Site

The application site is situated within the Built-Up Area of Haywards Heath within a well-established residential area accessed off Rocky Lane / A272 to the south.

The application site is a part of a wider residential development reference approved under HH/067/98 which received planning permission for the construction of new buildings to provide new staff/family accommodation (Total 39 units) and housing association properties (total 18 units) with associated parking, gardens (private and communal areas) toddlers play area **and management office/laundry.**

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The use of the building on this site, was permitted as a management office and laundry, which was ancillary to the wider residential use of the development. The residential element was used as key worker accommodation by the hospital to the north, with the office space and laundry functioning as ancillary to the wider scheme.

However, the site has been vacant and unoccupied since our clients, Hyde Housing Association, took over the site from the previous owners, L&Q in May 2015. As such, the building has been vacant for 9 years.

The site includes a detached building which sits at the end of the cul-de-sac of the Old Farm Close Estate which was developed in 2002. Please refer to Figure 1 which details the application site.

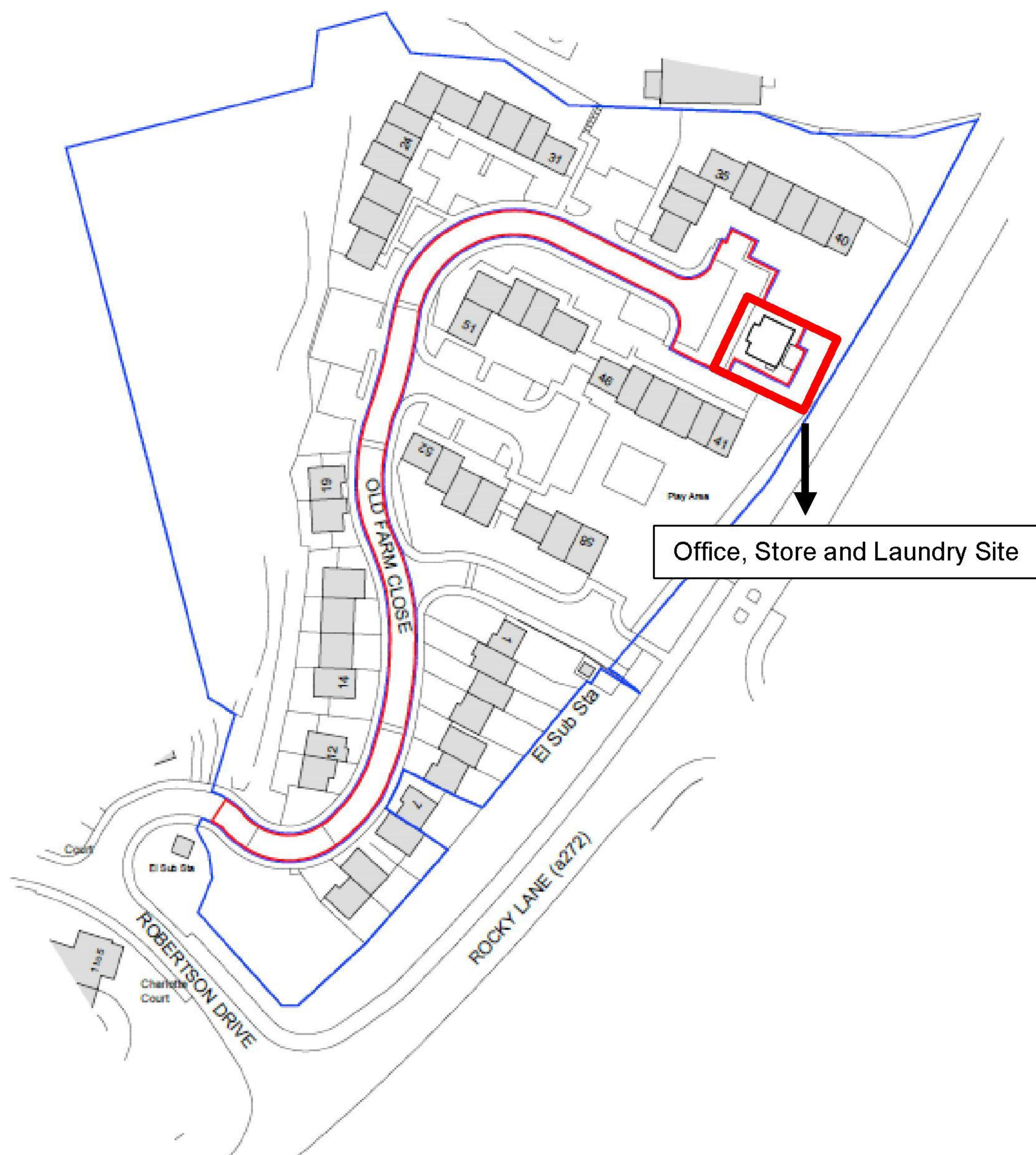


Figure 1- The Site

Architecturally, the building adopts a traditional residential form, featuring a steeply pitched hipped roof finished with brown tiles. The exterior is composed of red brick, incorporating subtle decorative brick detailing at the gable ends.

The building has three entrance doors, along with an additional side porch and entrance. The front elevation features five uniform windows, while the rear elevation has no windows. The design suggests that the building was intentionally designed to resemble a dwelling from the exterior, as shown in Figure 2. It is likely that the previous developers designed the building to blend seamlessly with the surrounding residential properties, potentially basing it on a standard house type.



Figure 2- Front Elevation of the Site (Google Maps)

Surrounding the site is shared amenity space to the northeast and southwest of the building, with a shed to the rear. Beyond this, a dense tree buffer provides a natural screen between the building and Rocky Lane (A272).

The immediate surroundings include a tarmac area at the front of the site, which provides 9no. unallocated parking spaces serving the surrounding properties within the development. It is likely that the spaces were provided for occupiers of the office space when built out.

The site has no policy constraints which would restrict the proposals presented in this application.

Planning History

A search of the Council's planning application register has been undertaken and reveals the following applications pursuant to the site. As follows:

Reference HH/067/98 - Construction of new buildings to provide new staff/family accommodation (Total 39 units) and housing association properties (total 18 units) with associated parking, gardens (private and communal areas) toddlers play area and management office/laundry at the Land south of Hurstwood Park Hospital, Hurstwood Lane, Haywards Heath, West Sussex. Approved 27 April 2001.

This application gained planning permission for the management office and laundry which we are seeking to convert into 2no. 1-bedroom flats.

The Proposal

The proposal seeks to convert the existing office, store and laundry on both levels into 2no. 1-bedroom flats, one at ground floor and the other at first floor level. Each flat will have an open plan kitchen and dining room, bedroom, bathroom and associated cupboard space.

The ground floor flat will be approximately 51.7sqm and the first floor flat will be approximately 66.5sqm, all compliant with National Described Space Standards

To facilitate the conversion, minor external amendments are proposed including,

- The existing entrance door on the front elevation is being removed and replaced with a window to match surrounding dwellings.
- Existing windows on the side and rear elevations are being removed and infilled with matching brickwork. New windows are proposed in different locations to suit the new residential layout.
- New windows are added to the rear of the property, again, to suit the new residential layout.
- The existing side porch and the window above is being removed, and the doorway is being infilled with matching brickwork.
- Photovoltaic (PV) solar panels are proposed on the side and rear roof space of the building.

Please refer to Figures 3 and 4 for the proposed and existing elevations of the scheme.



Figure 3 - Existing Elevations



Figure 4- Proposed Elevations

Shared amenity spaces are also sought to be retained to the northeast and southwest of the building, as per the existing arrangements present in the development. Landscaping improvements include the introduction of low-level hedge to mitigate any privacy concerns while retaining the amenity space.

Additionally, the proposal includes the demolition of the existing shed, with a new replacement shed of a similar footprint to provide suitable bin and cycle storage in line with policy requirements. To facilitate this change, a small amount of hardstanding is sought to be removed and landscaped as per the submitted plans.

Please refer to the submitted drawing set for further information on the proposals.

Relevant Planning Policy

In accordance with Section 36 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, an application for planning permission shall be determined in accordance with that development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

The relevant Development Plan for this application comprises the Mid Sussex Local Plan 2014-2031. The Local Plan is currently under review and is at a reasonably advanced stage of Examination, with the first round of hearings held in October 2024; some of the policies in the emerging plan are therefore gathering weight.

Mid Sussex District Local Plan (2018)

The main policies of relevance are as follows,

- DP1: Sustainable Economic Development
- DP4: Housing
- DP5: Meeting Future Housing Need
- DP6: Settlement Hierarchy
- DP21: Transport
- DP26: Character and Design
- DP27: Dwelling Space Standards
- DP38: Biodiversity
- DP40: Renewable Energy Systems

Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan (2016)

The main policies of relevance are as follows,

- Policy E1: Green Infrastructure
- Policy E9: Design
- Policy H8: Windfall Sites

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) and Guidance

Other policy documents which are material to this application include,

- Affordable Housing SPD

- Design Guide SPD
- Development and Infrastructure and Contributions SPD

Other Relevant Guidance

- West Sussex County Council Guidance on Parking at New Developments (2020)

Planning Appraisal

Principle of Development

The site was previously used as an office, laundry, and storage building ancillary to the residential use of the wider estate but has remained vacant for several years due to a lack of demand for these facilities.

The proposal seeks to repurpose the disused building to create two 1-bedroom flats, retaining and utilising the existing structure with only minor external alterations to support the new residential use and should be viewed positively in design terms, given the surrounding context.

Policy DP6 (Settlement Hierarchy) of the Mid Sussex Local Plan states,

‘Development will be permitted within towns and villages with defined built-up area boundaries. Any infilling and redevelopment will be required to demonstrate that it is of an appropriate nature and scale (with particular regard to DP26: Character and Design) and not cause harm to the character and function of the settlement’.

Paragraph 73 of the National Planning Policy Framework (recently revised in December 2024) states,

‘Small and medium sized sites can make an important contribution to meeting the housing requirement of an area, are essential for Small and Medium Enterprise housebuilders to deliver new homes and are often built out relatively quickly. To promote the development of a good mix of sites local planning authorities should:

(d) support the development of windfall sites through their policies and decisions – giving great weight to the benefits of using suitable sites within existing settlements for homes’.

Identified in **Policy DP6** of the Mid Sussex Local Plan the site lies within the designated built-up area of Haywards Heath which is categorised as a ‘Category 1’ settlement. The settlements characteristics and function are as follows,

‘Settlement with a comprehensive range of employment, retail, health, education leisure services and facilities. These settlements will also benefit from good public transport provision and will act as a main service centre for the smaller settlements’.

The site therefore forms part of an existing highly sustainable Category 1 settlement where development proposals that are of an appropriate nature and scale and maintain characteristics and function of the settlement are considered acceptable. There is a presumption in favour of sustainable development within the built-up area, and as such, the proposal is considered acceptable in principle, subject to all other material considerations.

Delivery of housing on such a site would be accounted for in the Council’s housing trajectory within the windfall allowance. As such it should be noted that the provision of two 1-bedroom flats would be a small but very valuable contribution to the District’s local housing supply, particularly in delivering smaller units that are in demand. While the contribution is modest, it is nonetheless valuable.

It is considered to be entirely acceptable, representing an appropriate form of windfall development and has no detrimental impact on the surroundings. The proposal would make effective use of land (in accordance with Section 11 of the NPPF) and is within a highly sustainable location.

Given its location, long-term vacancy, and contribution to local housing supply, the proposal represents a sustainable and appropriate form of development. The scheme complies with Policy DP6 (Settlement Strategy) by delivering residential development within a built-up area, making efficient use of an existing vacant building.

The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in principle.

Design

Policy DP26 (Character and Design) of the Mid Sussex District Plan states:

“All development and surrounding spaces, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings and replacement dwellings, will be well designed and reflect the distinctive character of the towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside.”

The application seeks to utilise the existing building, with external alterations limited as described in the proposal section above. In summary, the main changes include the removal and addition of windows and doors and upgrading the sustainability of building with PV panels on the southern elevation of the scheme and internal fabric performance upgrades.

As shown in Figure 2, the windows and doors appear to be original from when the building was constructed in 2002 and are therefore in poor condition. As part of the proposals, the application seeks to upgrade all windows and doors with new replacements that match the existing design, improving both the buildings appearance and performance.

It is also considered that the removal of the door to the front of the property is a positive change and provides a uniform appearance to the building.

The majority of the building will remain unchanged, and the proposed alterations are minor in nature, ensuring they do not compromise the overall design and appearance of the property. Consequently, the proposal is considered to be of an appropriate design, size, and scale, maintaining the existing building and its character.

Residential Amenity

Policy DP26 (Character and Design) of the Mid Sussex District Plan states that proposals should:

‘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’.

As the proposal is not seeking to enlarge the footprint of the building it can be reasonably concluded that the change of use would not cause significant harm in relation to reduction in sunlight and daylight and a loss of outlook.

The proposal does not include any new windows or doors on the side elevations of the property but simply seeks to reposition the windows on the east elevation to suit the new residential layout. As a result, the existing relationship between neighbouring properties will be maintained, ensuring there is no increase in overlooking or loss of privacy for surrounding residents.

As set out in the proposals section, the scheme retains the existing amenity space surrounding the property, which will be used by new residents of Old Farm Close. No private allocated external amenity space is proposed for the two new residential units. This is considered acceptable in this instance given the existing shared amenity found locally and open space provision within the estate.

To further safeguard privacy, a new low-level hedge is proposed along the side elevation of the building. This hedge is specifically intended to prevent direct views into the low-level windows from neighbouring properties when the shared garden amenity space is in use.

The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in residential amenity terms.

Highways and Parking

Policy DP21 (Transport) of the Mid Sussex District Plan states that proposals should,

“Be sustainably located to minimise the need for travel; promote alternative means of transport to the private car, including provision of suitable facilities for secure and safe cycle parking; not cause a severe cumulative impact in terms of road safety and increased traffic congestion; be designed to adoptable standards, or other standards as agreed by the Local Planning Authority, including road widths and size of garages; and provide adequate car parking in accordance with parking standards as agreed by the Local Planning Authority or in accordance with the relevant Neighbourhood Plan”

A Parking Survey Summary Report has been submitted to support the application. The report has been commissioned to review the existing parking conditions locally to the site. A two-night parking beat count survey was undertaken across the nights of Tuesday 14th and Wednesday 15th January 2025 respectively.

The survey was undertaken by an independent third party, comprising of two beat counts across local streets within walking distance of the site. The extents of the survey can be found in the submitted reporting.

The full results of the survey can be found in the submitted report. As shown within the summary tables provided as part of the results output, there was a moderate level of parking occupancy across the local provisions during the respective nights of the survey.

The parking stress figures across both nights are summarised in the table below, alongside an average value. These figures have been derived through a count of the theoretically available spaces against the relative occupancy of these spaces at the time of counting (including both on and off-street bays). It should be noted that any informal or sub-optimal parking (e.g. on dropped kerbs or within tuning areas) is excluded.

Tuesday 14/01	Wednesday 15/01	Average
73%	72%	73%

Table 1 - Observed Parking Stress

The results of the survey highlight an average parking stress level of 73% which would be below the typical threshold of 85% at which parking stress would be considered 'high'. It should be noted that these figures account for all parking provisions locally to the site (including parking courts), however when considering the solely on-street provisions, the level of parking stress is similarly not significant.

The results of the survey confirm that there would be sufficient local capacity to accommodate any additional parking demands as a result of the development proposals, albeit the scale of the development would likely result in an insignificant impact in these terms.

In addition, sufficient space has been provided on site to provide a shared cycle store to the rear for both of the flats. The shed will provide enough space for 1no. bike per dwelling.

Please refer to the submitted documentation for further information on the proposals.

Ecology and Biodiversity

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) seeks to conserve and enhance the natural environment, and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has been a legal requirement for redevelopment sites since January 2024. However, the legislation provides a 'de minimis exemption' for certain applications that meet specific criteria. As follows:

4.— (1) The biodiversity gain planning condition does not apply in relation to planning permission for development which meets the first and second conditions.

(2) The first condition is that the development does not impact an onsite priority habitat.

(3) The second condition is that the development impacts—

(a) less than 25 square metres of onsite habitat that has biodiversity value(1) greater than zero; and

(b) less than 5 metres in length of onsite linear habitat.

The proposals have been fully reviewed, with the only planned external amendments being the addition of a low-lying hedge to the flank of the building (shown indicatively on the Indicative BNG Site Plan). As the proposed external amendments including amendments to external store on existing hardstanding and the new hedge remains below the 25-square-metre threshold, the proposals do not trigger mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements under the legislation.

The addition of a native hedge species should be seen as an ecological benefit to the site. Additionally, all existing trees, including the dense tree belt at the rear, will be retained, preserving the sites natural screening and habitat value. We expect the detail of the landscaping proposals to be secured through an appropriately worded condition.

The proposal is therefore considered acceptable in biodiversity terms.

Sustainability

Policy DP39 (Sustainable Design and Construction) of the Mid Sussex District Plan states that proposals should,

“All development proposals must seek to improve the sustainability of development and should where appropriate and feasible according to the type and size of development and location, incorporate the following measures:

-Use renewable sources of energy”.

The proposal represents a highly sustainable form of development by reusing and repurposing an existing structure, thereby minimising the embodied carbon impact associated with the original building.

The policy requires the proposals to use renewable sources of energy. As part of the submissions, the applicant has commissioned Therm Energy to produce a letter of compliance.

The document outlines the thermal compliance assessment for the conversion of a property into two flats, in accordance with Part L1(a) (Material Change of Use) of the Building Regulations. The assessment includes revised SAP Thermal Calculations and a Predictive Energy Assessment, considering updated internal floor areas.

The main compliance requirements focus on ensuring that exposed elements, including walls, floors, and openings, meet minimum thermal standards, alongside the installation of an efficient heating system with appropriate controls. The predicted EPC rating for the flats is C, but this could be improved to B with the installation of PV panels, 1.4 kWp for the ground floor flat and 1.5 kWp for the first floor, preferably on a south-facing elevation.

The construction specification confirms that existing insulation levels comply with regulations, though increasing roof insulation from 200mm to 300mm is recommended to enhance energy efficiency. The heating system will include a 90% efficient mains gas combi boiler, complemented by room thermostats, TRVs on radiators, and ventilation through either background ventilators with intermittent extract fans or passive stack ventilation.

New double-glazed UPVC windows and doors will be installed to meet energy performance requirements. Upon completion, SAP and EPC certification will require verification of insulation installation, heating system details, and window and door specifications. While solar PV is not mandatory for compliance, its installation is encouraged to improve EPC ratings and overall energy efficiency.

As such, the applicants are upgrading the fabric performance of the building to reduce energy use in the first instance; ensuring heating systems are energy efficient reducing energy consumption; and producing energy in the form of solar panels shown indicatively on the roof plan and elevations. As such the proposal is considered to represent a highly sustainable improvement upon the existing property.

Conclusions

This letter has been prepared by ECE Planning on behalf of the Applicant, **Hyde Housing Association**, in support of a Full Planning Application at Old Farm Close, Haywards Heath. The description of development reads,

‘Conversion and minor external amendments of existing property to form 2no. 1-bedroom flats at the former office / laundry / store building’

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The proposal seeks to repurpose the disused building to provide 2 no. 1-bedroom flats making an efficient use of a brownfield site within a highly sustainable location.

The proposed conversion will retain the existing character and appearance of the building, with only minor external alterations proposed. These changes are considered appropriate in design terms and will have no adverse impact on the building's appearance or the surrounding area.

The scheme includes appropriate facilities for both cycle and vehicle parking. Additionally, the proposed development will have no impact on the local highway network, as the change in use is minimal, and the site is well-connected to public transport and local amenities.

The proposed development is therefore considered to be in accordance with local planning policy and National Planning Policy Framework, and we respectfully request that planning permission is approved without delay.

If you have any further queries or require further information, please contact me on 01903 248777.

Yours sincerely
ECE Planning

