

Planning Services
Development Management
Planning Division
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 1SS

1st September 2025

Dear Sir/ Madam,

RE: FULL APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED ACCESS TRACK TO HILL HOUSE FARM COTTAGE, HANDCROSS ROAD, STAPLEFIELD, HAYWARDS HEATH, WEST SUSSEX, RH17 6EE

This covering statement is submitted on behalf of Victoria Hogg in support of a full planning application for the creation of an access track linking Hill House Farm and the public highway to Hill House Cottage, Staplefield.

The application is made to provide a safe and suitable means of access to a dwelling that is currently isolated within the countryside. At present, the cottage has no formal access, and during poor weather conditions it is often inaccessible on foot due to waterlogging and boggy ground. There is also no provision for emergency vehicle access or routine deliveries.

The proposed track will establish a permanent and practical connection to the farmyard and, in turn, the public highway, thereby ensuring that the property can be accessed safely and consistently throughout the year. This statement outlines the relevant planning matters and justifications.

This covering statement should be read in conjunction with the submitted application forms and accompanying drawings.

- Drg No. 342- 001 Rev A

- Hill House BNG report_Issue2
- Hill House PEA Issue2
- Hill House_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_Calculation_Tool_Issue 2

Location

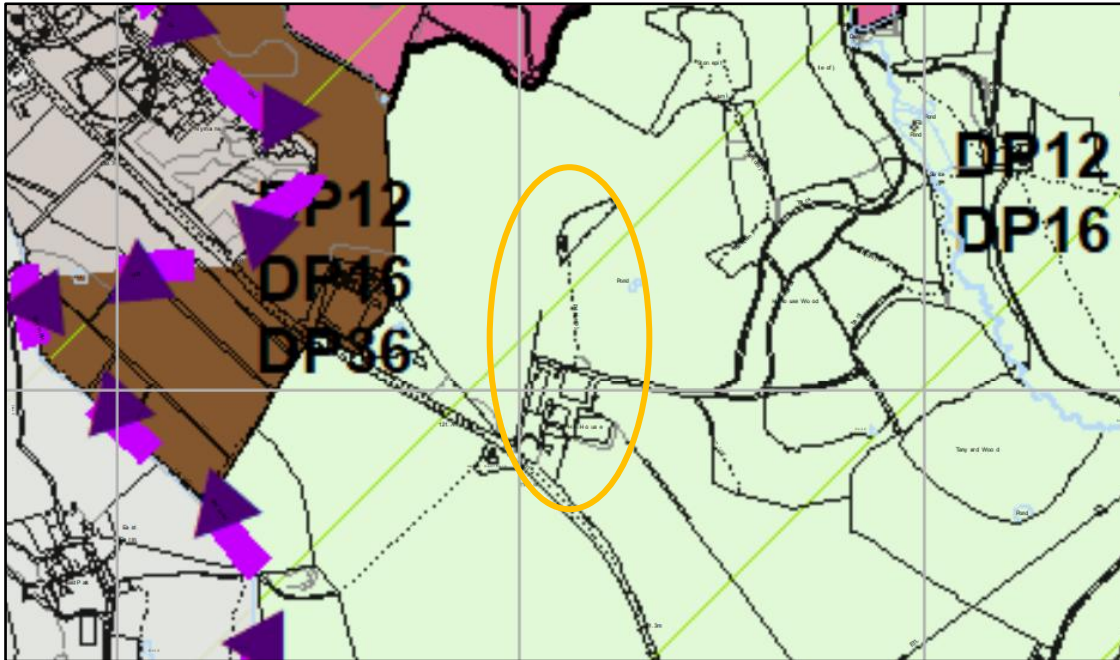
The application site is situated centrally within an open field, immediately to the north of Hill House Farm. The proposed trackway would be positioned along the northern boundary of the farm's existing hardstanding and extend for approximately 115 metres in length.



Gate connecting the farm to the field where the cottage is located

The surrounding landscape is defined by expansive open fields (in the ownership of the National Trust), which contribute to the rural and undeveloped character of the area. The only built development in the

immediate vicinity comprises Hill House Farm and Hill House Cottage, with the wider setting remaining predominantly agricultural and undeveloped.



Extract from Policy Map (Ansty & Staplefield) general site area outlined in orange

The application site lies within an area designated for the Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside and falls within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscapes).

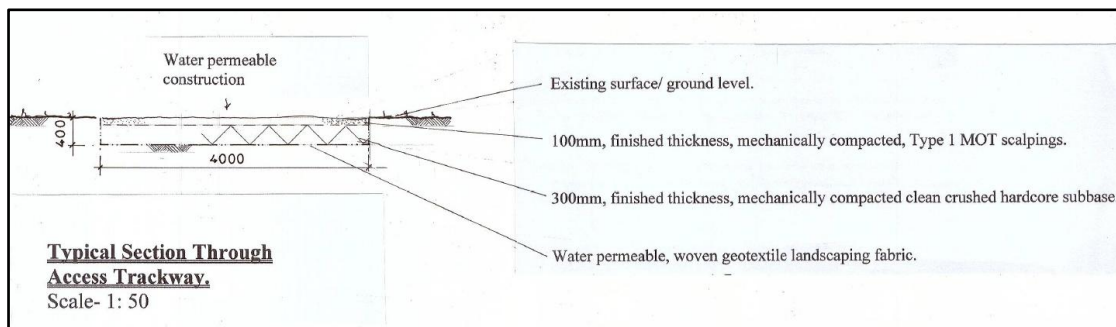
The site is not subject to statutory or local heritage designation: it is neither a listed building nor a locally listed asset, and it does not fall within a designated conservation area.

Planning History

A search of the Council's online planning history has been undertaken and revealed there are no previous applications relating to the site or surrounding area.

Proposed Development

The proposed development comprises an access track across an open field connecting Hill House Cottage, which currently has no formal access. The proposed access spans from the northern boundary of Hill House Farm and connects the dwelling (Hill House Cottage) to the hard standing within the farm. The existing hard standing in the farm then connects the Cottage to the Highway.



(Proposed cross section of trackway)

The proposed development comprises the excavation within the field to a depth of approximately 400mm. Following excavation, a water-permeable geotextile membrane will be laid to provide stability and aid drainage. This will be overlain by a 300mm layer of crushed hardcore, followed by 100mm of Type 1 MOT to create a durable sub-base. A thin layer of topsoil will then be spread across the surface, allowing the track to naturally re-vegetate over time and integrate into the surrounding landscape.

The existing concrete access route through the farmyard will be retained and will continue to provide the principal hardstanding connection between the public highway, farmyard and the existing dwelling.

Planning Policy

The relevant planning policies are set out below. The development plan comprises the adopted Mid Sussex District Plan (2014–2031). Policies from this plan, as well as those in the draft Mid Sussex District Plan (2021–2039),

are referenced; however, the draft plan currently carries little weight for the purposes of the planning application process.

Mid Sussex District Plan (2014-2031)

Policy DP16 – AONB: Policy DP16 requires that development within the High Weald AONB conserves or enhances the area’s natural beauty and has regard to the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan. This includes protecting key landscape features, local distinctiveness, settlement pattern, wildlife, and cultural heritage, while also supporting small-scale proposals that benefit the social and economic well-being of the area.

Policy DP28 – Accessibility: Policy DP28 requires that all development provides safe, convenient and inclusive access so that it can be used easily by all members of the community. This applies to new buildings, extensions, changes of use, public spaces and transport infrastructure.

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

NPPF Paragraph 115 relates to access to new developments, however in this context the proposal would provide suitable access to an existing development. Paragraph 115 b) states “In assessing sites that may be allocated for development in plans, or specific applications for development, it should be ensured that: safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users;”.

NPPF Paragraph 190, our proposal is not for major development within the national landscape.

Planning Considerations

Principle of Development

The application seeks consent for the formation of an access track to serve Hill House Cottage, which currently lacks a formalised access. Policy DP28 of the Mid Sussex District Plan (2014-2031) requires all development to provide

safe, convenient, and inclusive access so that it can be used easily. At present, access to the cottage is limited and unsatisfactory, requiring movement across open pasture. The proposed track would remedy this deficiency by establishing a safe and durable route that connects to the existing concrete access within the farmyard and onward to the public highway.

The principle of providing a safe and functional means of access to an existing dwelling is therefore fully consistent with Policy DP28. The proposal also accords with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024), paragraph 115(b), which requires that safe and suitable access to development can be achieved for all users. In this case, the proposal represents a modest and proportionate intervention to ensure that an established dwelling benefits from appropriate access arrangements, supporting its continued residential occupation without introducing any new dwelling or intensification of use.

Visual Impact

The site lies within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (National Landscape) and within an area designated for the protection and enhancement of countryside. Development in such locations is guided by Policy DP16 of the District Plan, which requires that proposals conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the landscape and have regard to the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

The proposed track is modest in scale and purpose, designed solely to serve Hill House Cottage. Its construction method is deliberately low impact, comprising excavation, a geotextile membrane, layers of hardcore and MOT, and a thin soil covering to allow natural re-vegetation. This approach ensures the surface will assimilate into the surrounding pasture and avoids the introduction of a permanent engineered feature that might detract from the character of the AONB. The proposed track will avoid scarring the landscape from vehicles currently accessing the house.

The proposal therefore preserves the open rural qualities of the field and respects the distinctive settlement pattern and landscape features that

characterise the High Weald. It introduces no new built form and avoids harm to scenic beauty, consistent with both Policy DP16 and the NPPF (2024), paragraph 182, which requires great weight to be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes. The track also supports the continued viable use of the cottage as a sustainable residential dwelling, thereby contributing to the social and economic well-being of the rural area in a manner that does not compromise landscape objectives.

Ecology and Biodiversity Net Gain

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report have been prepared by The Ecology Partnership (August 2025) in support of the application. Policy DP38 of the Mid Sussex District Plan requires development to conserve and enhance biodiversity, safeguard designated sites, and provide appropriate mitigation. The NPPF (2024, paragraphs 186–188) similarly seeks to minimise impacts and secure net gains.

The surveys confirm that the site largely comprises modified grassland and ruderal vegetation of low ecological value, with no priority habitats present. The nearest designation is Cow Wood and Harry's Wood SSSI, 215 metres to the north, but no adverse impacts are anticipated given the scale and nature of the proposal.

Protected species constraints are limited. No bat roosting features were identified, and the site offers negligible foraging opportunities. The grassland is considered sub-optimal for great crested newts and reptiles, although precautionary clearance under ecological supervision is recommended. No evidence of badgers was recorded within 30 metres, though a pre-commencement walkover is advised. The site is generally unsuitable for ground-nesting birds but works should avoid the nesting season or be preceded by an ecologist's check. Other protected species are highly unlikely to be present.

The PEA concludes that, subject to these precautionary measures, no significant ecological harm will arise. Modest enhancements, such as bird and

bat boxes and log piles within the curtilage of Hill House Cottage, are recommended, ensuring compliance with Policy DP38.

The BNG Report, prepared using the statutory DEFRA metric, assessed baseline habitats at 0.1 units. The proposed track, which will naturally re-vegetate, is expected to result in a small net loss of 0.0135 units (-3.5%). To achieve the statutory 10% net gain, the report confirms that this deficit will be offset through the purchase of off-site habitat units, secured by condition.

Accordingly, the scheme will not result in significant ecological harm and will deliver measurable biodiversity net gain in line with national and local policy requirements.

Summary

The proposed access track represents a modest and carefully considered intervention, designed solely to provide Hill House Cottage with a safe, functional, and all-year-round means of access. The scheme responds directly to an identified deficiency, addressing the absence of formal access while ensuring that emergency vehicles, deliveries, and residents can reach the property consistently and safely.

The design is deliberately low-impact, employing construction methods that allow the track to assimilate naturally into the landscape and preserve the open rural character of the site. In doing so, the proposal safeguards the scenic beauty and distinctive qualities of the High Weald AONB, in full accordance with Policy DP16 of the Mid Sussex District Plan and paragraph 182 of the NPPF.

The development is also fully aligned with Policy DP28 and paragraph 115 of the NPPF, ensuring safe and suitable access for all users. Ecological assessments confirm that the site is of limited biodiversity value and that no significant harm will arise, with appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures secured. The required 10% Biodiversity Net Gain will be achieved through off-site provision.

Taken together, the proposal accords with the relevant provisions of the development plan and the NPPF. It delivers essential infrastructure for an existing dwelling in a sensitive, proportionate, and environmentally responsible manner, and should therefore be supported by the Local Planning Authority.

If you require any further information please contact Paul Burgess paul.burgess@lewisplanning.co.uk or Tobias Deacon toby.deacon@lewisplanning.co.uk at Lewis & Co Planning

Yours faithfully,
Lewis & Co Planning
September 2025