

Save Sugworth Farm: Councillor Site Visit Briefing

Application DM/25/3129 | Borde Hill Lane, Haywards Heath | May 2026

Thank you for taking the time to visit this site. This briefing covers the key points we would like you to see and understand on the ground today. Please take it away for reference.

What Is Being Decided

The developer Fairfax Acquisitions has applied for Outline Planning Permission (OPP) for up to 117 dwellings on land at Borde Hill Lane/Balcombe Road. This is the critical stage: OPP tests whether building on the site is acceptable in principle. If approved, a full application will follow - but at that stage it will be too late to stop or significantly limit the scale of the development. The second stage deals with layout and design.

This site is not in the approved District Plan. It therefore has no basis for approval. Mid Sussex District Council's (MSDC) own sustainability appraisal concluded no significant housing was needed in Haywards Heath only a few years ago. The Planning Inspectorate is on record agreeing with this in May 2022. The Site was rejected as wholly unsuitable by MSDC during all site appraisals up to 2023. The only thing that has changed is pressure for house building. The site remains inappropriate.

The site is currently in the *draft* District Plan with an allocation of 60 houses with this volume taking into consideration many complexities about the site including damage to landscape and visual appraisal with overurbanisation of north Haywards Heath; flooding risk; damage to High Wealth AONB; damage to listed buildings including Sugworth Farm; and damage to nature.

The current OPP application is for 117 houses - nearly double what MSDC officials believe is manageable. It must be rejected. Haywards Heath Town Council, Cuckfield Parish Council and Ansty & Staplefield Parish Council have joined with 100s of local residents to object to scale and nature of this proposed development.

Stop 1: The Roundabout - Standing at the Junction

Key message: The existing roundabout works perfectly well. The proposed replacement is an enormous piece of urban highway infrastructure that is completely unnecessary for this scale of development - and the roads feeding into it cannot be widened.

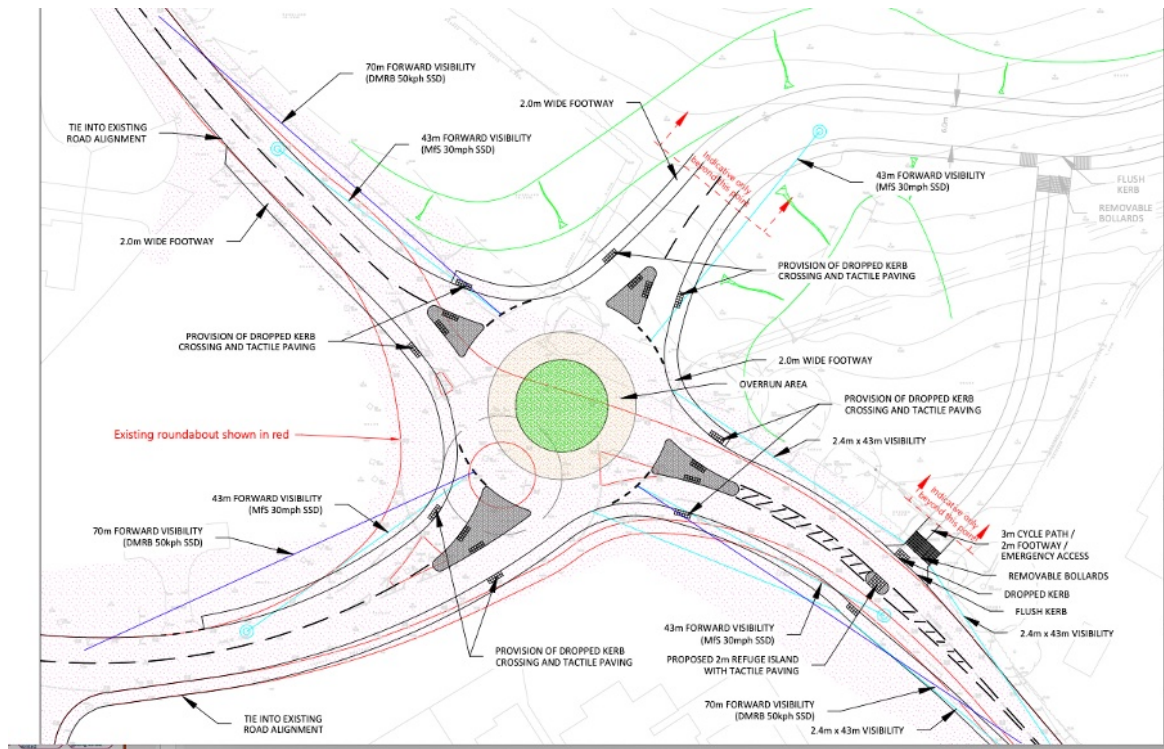
The existing roundabout

The current roundabout was built in 2020 as a condition of the Penland Green development (210 homes). Redrow Homes stated at the time it was designed to 'meet current and future needs.' It is only five years old.

There are no significant safety problems at the roundabout itself. Accidents occur on the approach roads - not at the junction.

What is proposed instead

The developer proposes to demolish the existing roundabout and replace it with a structure more than twice the diameter, with four formal arms pushing out into the open field. Look at the plan below - the red circle is the existing roundabout. The proposed replacement dwarfs it.



Developer's drawing: the red circle shows the EXISTING roundabout. The proposed replacement (black) is dramatically larger.

BORDE HILL LANE ROUNDABOUT: THE REALITY OF WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED		
EXISTING ROUNDABOUT Aerial View A modest rural junction set within the landscape	ORIGINAL PROPOSED DESIGN Developer's Drawing - Existing shown in red The red dotted circle is the EXISTING roundabout - dwarfed by the proposed replacement	REVISED PROPOSED DESIGN (April 2026) Latest submitted drawing Described as 'reduced' - the scale and rural impact remain unchanged

Left: the existing junction from the air. Centre: developer's own drawing showing existing (red) vs proposed (black). Right: the April 2026 'revised' design - no meaningful change.

Why this roundabout is not needed

- The Penland Green access road, just a few metres away on Balcombe Road, serves over 200 properties and is a fraction of this size. There is no justification for a roundabout of this scale to serve a maximum of 117 homes.
- The roundabout at the hospital, where it joins the bypass and the A272 - two major roads - is no larger than the existing roundabout here. This is a rural junction serving country lanes.
- Two of the four arms on the developer's own drawings are marked 'indicative only beyond this point' - meaning they have not resolved where those arms will go or

whose land they will take. Permission should not be granted for infrastructure whose extent is unknown.

- Visibility splay lines on the drawings extend 70 metres into the open field on every arm. This is a massive land take that has not been properly assessed in the landscape impact work.
- The developer's own drawings note that street lighting is 'to be confirmed at detailed design stage' - meaning permanent street lighting on this rural lane is already anticipated. This would cause significant light pollution harm to the High Weald National Landscape setting.

The approach roads cannot be widened - ever

Even if the roundabout were justified, the roads feeding into it cannot be improved to match. All three are ancient country lanes with permanent physical constraints:

- **Borde Hill Lane** runs alongside the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden of Borde Hill - it cannot be widened without causing harm to a nationally designated heritage asset. It also passes under the viaduct.
- **Balcombe Road** is bounded by existing properties and passes under the railway viaduct - a fixed physical constraint.
- **Hanlye Lane** is bounded by existing properties and the Borde Hill estate boundary.

Building a larger roundabout simply moves traffic from one bottleneck to multiple bottlenecks on roads that are fundamentally unsuitable for increased volumes. There are already near-misses and congestion at the Penland Road turning on Balcombe Road, just past the roundabout.

The roundabout sits significantly higher than the development site

Standing here, note the significant drop from the road level down into the field. The planned roundabout footprint sits above the proposed housing land. A huge amount of excavation would be required to build in at this level. This engineering challenge and the associated earthworks have not been properly addressed or costed in the application.

Stop 2: The Gatehouse and Drainage - Borde Hill Lane

Key message: The existing drainage in this area is already failing badly. The proposed development - and especially the new roundabout - takes no account of this whatsoever.

What to look at here

- Look at the ditch opposite Willow Tree Cottage. This is not a formal drainage feature - it is simply a channel that residents have had to dig themselves to divert water run-off from the Borde Hill estate.
- Water runs off the Borde Hill parkland, through the Gatehouse entrance, across Borde Hill Lane, and into this ditch. Without it, the water would flood Willow Tree Cottage and Saxonmead. Residents have to actively manage this themselves.
- There is no kerbing at the Gatehouse entrance to direct this water into the drain. It simply flows across the grass verge and down the road.
- In winter, this water freezes on Borde Hill Lane. Drivers approach this stretch at 50-60mph as they slow for the roundabout. This is a serious and documented safety hazard.
- The run-off then continues down the hill and floods the gardens of properties on the opposite side of Borde Hill Lane.

The drainage failure at the roundabout

- Multiple drains along the roundabout are blocked. This is visible on the ground.
- When the current roundabout was built, the South Lodge driveway was made from the old Hanlye Lane roadway and a drain was punched into the old tarmac. This drain does not function - the water does not flow into it and instead runs straight across the road.
- The new roundabout plans make no provision for these existing drainage failures. There is no proposal to unblock the drains, address the Gatehouse run-off, or prevent the road flooding.
- Building 117 houses with all their roads, driveways and roofs will dramatically increase the volume of surface water entering a system that is already failing.

The wider flooding picture

- The stream running through the site (Scrase Stream/West Common Stream) has already caused flooding on Penland Road, Borde Hill Lane, Turners Mill, Burrell Road and Mill Green Road.
- The fields themselves are extremely boggy with marshy vegetation and standing water in autumn and winter - visible evidence that this is not suitable building land.
- The development of Penland Green has already made flooding significantly worse for gardens in Orchard Way. This is a documented pattern of development making existing problems worse.
- The Lead Local Flood Authority has removed its formal objection subject to conditions - but the underlying drainage problems have not been resolved, only deferred to a later stage. Flooding should be demonstrably safe before permission is granted, not afterwards.

Stop 3: The Path and Pedestrian Safety - Borde Hill Lane

Key message: The application completely ignores the existing pedestrian use of Borde Hill Lane - and the new development and roundabout would make it significantly more dangerous.

- There is an established informal path on the right-hand side of Borde Hill Lane, used daily by residents, walkers, runners, dog walkers and people accessing the public footpath network through the Borde Hill estate.
- The developer assumes all pedestrians will use the new Gatehouse entrance. This is wrong. That entrance leads only to Borde Hill Gardens for paying customers. Staff, nursery users, and public footpath users have no obligation to pay for access.
- Even when the new Gatehouse is open, most users of the public rights of way will continue to walk along Borde Hill Lane. The application makes no provision for their safety.
- 117 additional dwellings will dramatically increase traffic on this lane. Years of construction traffic will precede this. There is no proposal for a formal footway along Borde Hill Lane.

The damage to the path - look at this while you are here

- Borde Hill Estate installed a waste pipe along the path. After pressure from residents to repair the original damage, they appear to have levelled out the worst of the damage caused by the diggers.

- However, no attempt has been made to replant the verge, restore the path surface, or return it to its previous condition. This is how the estate treats its duties as a neighbour and landowner.
- This same estate has a financial interest in the development proceeding - the trustees sold the Penland Green land to Redrow in 2015.

Stop 4: Looking into the Field – from Borde Hill Lane properties

Key message: These are rich, biodiverse, agricultural fields that flood every winter – and form part of a continuous landscape with the High Weald AONB. Proposed houses would be built to close too existing properties on Borde Hill Lane.

- Note the character of the land - boggy, with marshy vegetation and wet areas. Ducks are regularly seen in two parts of the site in autumn and winter. This is wetland habitat being proposed for 117 homes.
- The site is immediately adjacent to the High Weald National Landscape, separated only by Borde Hill Lane. An independent report found that even 60 houses would cause major harm to the AONB.
- Surveys have confirmed legally protected dormice and several bat species live on this site. Red kites, barn owls, kestrels, deer and orchids have all been observed here by residents.
- Ancient woodland (Flat Wood) lies just metres from the northern boundary. A Roman road runs through the site.
- Look back at the existing properties on Borde Hill Lane - in particular Willow Tree Cottage. The new housing would sit above these properties on the slope. The road access to the development would also sit above the existing houses. This has significant implications for noise, light, and visual amenity for existing residents.
- The Grade II* Registered Park and Garden of Borde Hill is immediately to the west. Historic England describes the Sugworth Farm land as part of the parkland setting. The MSDC Conservation Officer has confirmed the site makes a direct contribution to the significance of Grade II listed Sugworth Farmhouse.

Stop 5: Looking into the Field – from Orchard Way properties

Key message: The proposed volume of houses is inappropriate. It means houses must be built right on the boundary of properties on Orchard Way and tower over these properties looking down into their gardens and rooms.

- The gradient of the land is a significant factor and must be taken into consideration in the outline planning approval. It rises steeply many metres in height from the stream at the bottom up the site as a whole. A hill builds up and overshadows properties at the end of Orchard Way.
- Two story houses built on the hill overlooking Orchard Way, is equivalent to a multi-story block of flats and would deeply affect privacy and noise pollution of all existing families living at the end of Orchard Way.
- A permanent, year-round watercourse flows through the gardens in Orchard Way. The proposal for a small pond south of Orchard Way (no. 6 & 7) is inadequate to manage the regular flooding in this part of the field.
- The site simply cannot appropriately hold 117 houses – and even 60 houses as proposed by MSDC officials would require significant fast growth screening, a

minimum 50m buffer from properties from properties and more significant flood protection measures.

Summary: Why This Application Should Be Refused

The fundamental concerns with this application are significant and are not resolved by minor amendments by Fairfax in April 2026 cutting the total number of dwellings by 8 houses (125 to 117) and slightly shrinking an already unjustified roundabout.

- ❑ The site is not in the current District Plan and OPP approval should not be granted before the Inspector's review is concluded and the Plan approved by MSDC.
- ❑ 117 houses is still nearly double the 60 maximum suggested by MSDC's own draft plan taking on board the complexities of the site and surrounding area.
- ❑ The High Weald National Landscape and six listed buildings will be harmed particularly Sugworth Farmhouse as articulated by MSDC's Heritage Officer - the developer has not mitigated the potential damage.
- ❑ Flooding risk is real, documented, and worsening - the application defers resolution rather than demonstrating safety
- ❑ The proposed roundabout is unjustified, over-engineered, and the approach roads cannot be widened to match higher traffic volumes
- ❑ The existing drainage failures on Borde Hill Lane are not addressed - and will be made worse
- ❑ Protected dormice and bats have been confirmed on site - mitigation has not been demonstrated at outline stage
- ❑ Local schools are full according to WSCC response to the planning process and local infrastructure cannot cope with 117 additional homes
- ❑ Pedestrian safety on Borde Hill Lane is ignored despite the development dramatically increasing traffic

The process closed on 8th May 2026. Application reference: DM/25/3129.

Save Sugworth Farm Action Group | May 2026