
Planning Statement

Land North of Ansty – Proposed delivery of a new Parkland Reserve

Prepared for:

Fairfax Acquisitions Limited & The Norris Family

Prepared by:

Savills (UK) Limited



Planning Statement

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1. Introduction

1.1. This Planning Statement supports a Planning Application in relation to Land North of Ansty, near Haywards Heath, Mid Sussex District, submitted to Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) jointly on behalf of Fairfax Acquisitions Limited and the Norris Family.

1.2. The application is for the following:

Change of use of farmland and woodland to parkland reserve to include public access and instigation of long-term management and rewilding regime, including establishment of pedestrian and cycle tracks, with new pedestrian and cycle access points off Cuckfield Road to the south and Staplefield Road to the north. Proposals to include the addition of two wooden viewing platforms and two hides. Sports pitches at Beech Farm Field to remain in sports use.

1.3. This submission is made following pre-application advice received from MSDC Officers at a meeting on 10 October 2023, which has assisted and help to inform the design and layout of the scheme. In addition Fairfax have consulted with nearby residents through a public consultation process, with events held on the 20th and 23rd September at Ansty Village Hall. Both elements of engagement were in conjunction with the wider proposals for a new garden community on land east of Ansty.

1.4. This planning statement should be read in conjunction with the plans and documents listed within the cover letter accompanying this application.

Structure of the Planning Statement

1.5. This section has provided an introduction to the application. The structure of the remainder of this Planning Statement is as follows:

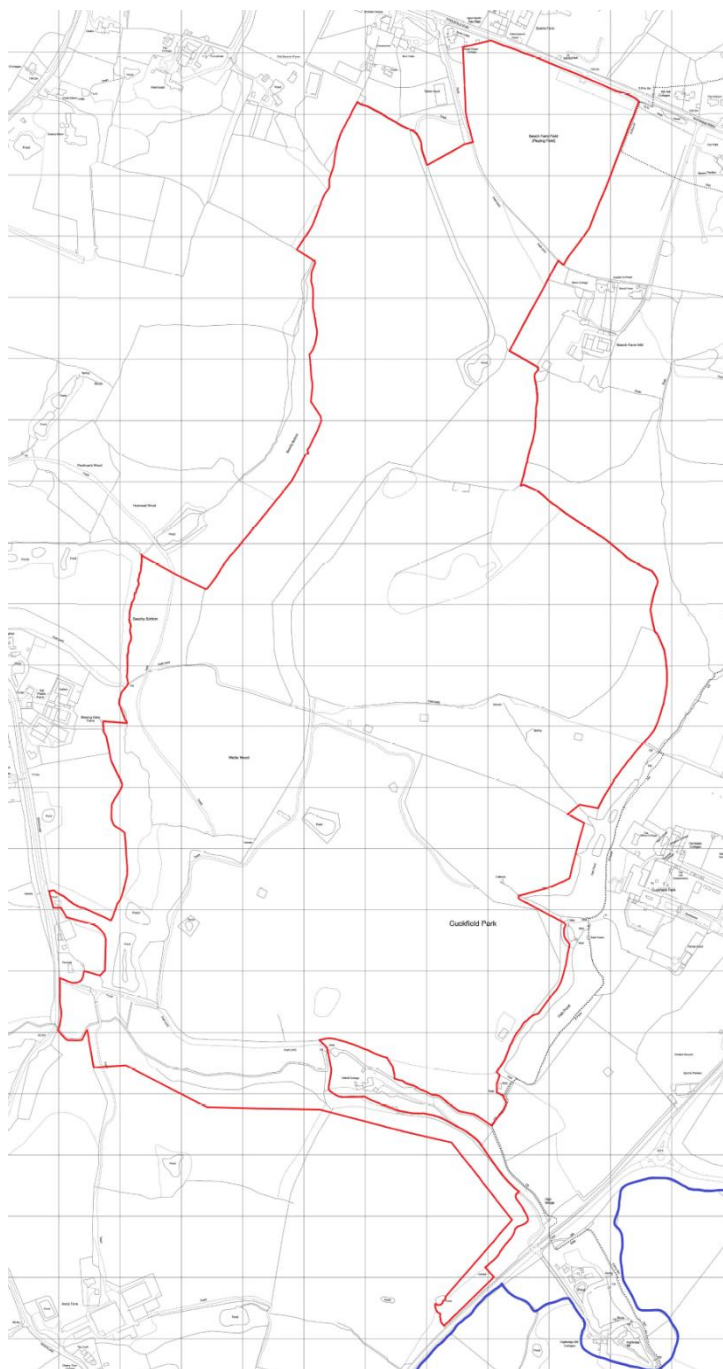
- A description of the site and surroundings (Section 2)
- Overview of the site's planning history (Section 3)
- Detail of the pre-application advice and Public Engagement undertaken (Section 4)
- Outline of the proposed development (Section 5)
- An overview of the relevant planning policies and guidance (Section 6)
- Planning considerations (Section 7)
- Conclusion (Section 8)

2. Site and Surroundings

- 2.1. The proposed Parkland Reserve, to be known as Beechy Bottom Parkland Reserve, comprises approximately 103ha of land. The site is currently a mixture of fields and woodlands, with areas of hedgerow and scrub also present, as well as existing sports pitches at Beech Farm Field (adjoining Staplefield Road) on the northern edge of the site. In terms of its broad geographic location, the site is located to the south and west of Cuckfield, and north of Ansty. The site lies entirely within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
- 2.2. Public Rights of Way run East-West centrally across the site (footpath 58CR - Part of the Sussex Diamond Way), and also across the north-eastern corner (footpath CR49), as well as a bridleway which connects the southern part of the site with the A272 (59CR). The topography gently undulates across the site, with a general trend of sloping downhill from north to south. The site is predominantly classified as being in Flood Zone 1, with the lowest risk of fluvial flooding, however there are small areas of Flood Zone 2 alongside the stream at the southern edge of the site. The site does not lie within or adjacent to a Conservation Area, does not contain any listed buildings, but does contain areas of ancient woodland.
- 2.3. It lies outside of the settlement boundaries of Cuckfield and Ansty, between Staplefield Road (to the north) and the A272 (to the south), and on its very north-eastern tip lies adjacent to the Cuckfield Village Boundary. The site is predominantly bounded by mature trees and hedgerows, separating it from further agricultural fields and woodlands. On its northern edge it includes Beech Farm Field - home to Cuckfield Cosmos Football Club - and is directly adjacent to Whitemans Green Recreation Ground, which is the home ground of Haywards Heath Rugby Club.
- 2.4. The Parkland Reserve would be brought forward in conjunction with the proposed development of a 98ha Garden Community to the east of Ansty.

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Site Location Plan extract

3. Planning History

- 3.1. The site has not been subject to any recent, relevant planning applications.

4. Pre-Application Feedback and Public Engagement

- 4.1. Consultation regarding the site proposals has been held with a number of different parties, including MSDC Officers, Design South East, and through a Public Consultation process.

Informal Advice

- 4.2. The provision of this site as part of wider proposals for a new garden community to be developed on Land to the East of Ansty has previously been promoted to MSDC as part of a potential site allocation in the emerging Mid Sussex Local Plan. An initial draft Regulation 18 Plan and Officer Report was presented to the Mid Sussex District Council Scrutiny Committee for Housing, Planning and Economic Growth on 19 January 2022. This version of the plan included the wider site as part of a draft site allocation. The Regulation 18 Plan presented to the same committee and approved for Public Consultation in 18 October 2022 had removed the proposed site allocation in its entirety.
- 4.3. Whilst having to consider that the proposals were part of a wider site allocation, the provision of significant additional public open space has been welcomed and no specific technical objections raised to this part of the proposals.

MSDC Pre-application advice

- 4.4. A pre-application meeting was held with MSDC Officers on 10th October 2023. At the meeting, the development site and Parkland Reserve were both discussed.
- 4.5. It was clarified to officers that at such time that planning applications were to be submitted, the Parkland Reserve and the Garden Community aspects of the proposals would come forward as two separate planning applications, as one would be a change of use in the AONB, and one would be major development outside of the AONB. They would ultimately be linked through a legal agreement (or planning condition), and that would mean that one would not come forward without the other.
- 4.6. Officers sought clarity over where within the Parkland Reserve ancient woodland was located, as any new public access would have to be restricted in order to protect the woodland. It was clarified to officers that the proposals would not be introducing new footpaths or cycleways through ancient woodland, and that the new north-south route would run through more recent plantation woodland and along the edge of fields. The introduction of wildlife such as highland cows for grazing would also see parts of the existing fields fenced off and would allow for general access to area of ancient woodland controlled.
- 4.7. It was clarified that the proposals would provide a pedestrian and cycle link between Staplefield Road and the A272, and formalise areas of land that were already incorrectly used by members of the public for dog walking. The off-site highways works included as part of the Garden Community development would allow for the installation of a pedestrian crossing point, ensuring that easy access to the site and the north-south link could be achieved by existing Ansty residents and those of the new development. Overall Officers were accepting of the Parkland Reserve proposals and did not raise any specific concerns.

Public consultation

- 4.8. Prior to submitting this planning application, the applicant sought to engage with the local community on the wider proposals as a whole. A website and virtual public consultation were held, along with two in-person drop-in events at Ansty Village Hall on 20th September 2023 (4:30pm – 7:30pm) and 23rd September 2023 (10am-2pm).
- 4.9. The comments received primarily focussed on the proposed housing-led mixed development of the parcel to the south of the A272. Of the comments received regarding the Parkland Reserve, concerns were raised that the park would increase traffic and parking difficulties in Cuckfield, that the Parkland Reserve would be used for the disposal of spoil from the development area, and that there was no need for the park because people already had free access to that land.
- 4.10. The comments received both in writing and verbally at the public consultation have been considered and where appropriate the proposals have been amended to address the concerns raised.

West Sussex County Council Highways

- 4.11. A formal pre-application enquiry meeting was held with WSCC Highways officers in June 2023 to discuss the wider development proposals as well as the Parkland Reserve proposals, and a written response was received on 7th July 2023. Ardent Engineers acted on behalf of the applicant for all highways matters.
- 4.12. A Toucan Crossing is proposed on the A272 Cuckfield Road, providing access and connectivity between the Parkland Reserve and the new garden community for both pedestrians and cyclists. This design and layout of this crossing were found to be acceptable.

Design Review Panel

- 4.13. A meeting with the Design South East (DSE) Design Review Panel (DRP) was held on 18 August 2023. This meeting included a site visit and walkthrough, as well as a presentation to the panel.
- 4.14. The DRP made a number of comments and recommendations. They welcomed the intent to deliver the Parkland Reserve aspect with the development scheme, and offered comments focusing on how to best encourage active travel and minimise car use, healthy placemaking, and the site's integration with the proposed Garden Community development.
- 4.15. Of particular concern to the panel was the commercial aspects of the project and the long term management regime, so that the benefits delivered could be guaranteed in perpetuity.
- 4.16. Following on from the pre-application advice received, a number of changes have been made to the proposals. Changes to the design have emanated from the feedback given and the further studies conducted, and included.
- Refinements to the pedestrian links and A272 road crossing that enable site access.
 - Analysis as to how to limit public access into the areas of ancient woodland on the site.

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- Extended pedestrian and cycle connectivity plan provided, with further detail provided on pedestrian and cycle routes through the scheme and their connectivity to the wider area.
- Further detail provided on tree loss and long-term tree management strategy.
- Additional information provided on the opportunity for productive landscapes within the scheme.

5. The Proposal

- 5.1. The proposals are for the change of use of existing agricultural land and woodland into a new Parkland Reserve which will comprise the following:
- New 103ha Parkland Reserve
 - New north-south pedestrian and bicycle link between Staplefield Road and A272 Cuckfield Road
 - Enhancement of existing east-west public rights of way
 - Installation of 2 new wooden viewing platforms and 2 hides
 - Formal creation of designated dog walking area
 - Introduction of new walking routes within the site
 - Management of existing woodland areas
 - Introduction of ecologically restricted zones for wildlife habitat support and significant biodiversity net gain
 - Pond restoration
 - Planting of native species hedgerows, broadleaved trees, and wildflower meadow
- 5.2. The works proposed on this part of the Site will be minimal in development terms and be of a low impact. They will entail minor upgrades to the two existing east-west footpaths and the creation of a new north-south footpath to connect the two existing footpaths and generally to provide greater public accessibility. The use of the site as a Parkland Reserve would firmly support the objectives of the High Weald AONB and its management plan.
- 5.3. Improved access to the site will be provided in the south east, with the implementation of a new crossing on the A272 to provide connectivity between the Parkland Reserve and the Garden Community development.
- 5.4. The High Weald Landscape Trail route where it crosses the site will be enhanced, with a viewing platform installed so that walkers can take in views of the AONB and South Downs beyond. The provision of public open space, native species planting and active woodland management will be incorporated into the proposed scheme in order to enhance the site and provide appropriate amenity and ecological enhancement.
- 5.5. These proposals are linked to the provision of a 98ha mixed use development for a new garden community on land to the East of Ansty that lies to the southeast of this site. The land subject to both applications is under the control of one landowner, and both applications will be linked by a legal agreement to ensure that they come forward together.

6. Planning Policy Framework and Relevant Background

- 6.1. The current Development Plan for Mid Sussex District Council consists of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (2018), and the Site Allocations DPD (2021). The Ansty and Staplefield Neighbourhood Plan (2017) is also relevant to these proposals.
- 6.2. A new District Plan is currently being prepared through the District Plan Review process. A Regulation 18 consultation was held between 7 November and 19 December 2022, to which Savills made detailed representations on behalf of Fairfax.
- 6.3. An initial draft Regulation 18 Plan and Officer Report was presented to the Mid Sussex District Council Scrutiny Committee for Housing, Planning and Economic Growth on 19 January 2022. This version of the plan included the site as part of a site allocation. The Regulation 18 Plan presented to the same committee and approved for Public Consultation in 18 October 2022 had removed the proposed site allocation.
- 6.4. The following policies are therefore considered most relevant to this application

Adopted Development Plan

- 6.5. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 directs LPAs to determine planning applications in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 38(3) of the Act sets out that the Development Plan includes the “*development plan documents (taken as a whole) which have been adopted or approved in relation to that area*”.
- 6.6. Mid Sussex District Council’s District Plan (2014-2031) was adopted in March 2018 and provides the overarching development plan guiding development management decisions across the District. With regard to this proposal, the following policies are particularly relevant:
 - *Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside*
 - *Policy DP16: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
 - *Policy DP26: Character and Design*
 - *Policy DP37: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows*
 - *Policy DP38: Biodiversity*

The National Planning Policy Framework

6.7. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) sets out the overarching framework used for assessing planning applications and preparing Local Plans, based on the Government's aims for the planning system, detailing principles and guidance. The National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides additional guidance to support the NPPF.

6.8. The NPPF seeks to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, through meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

6.9. Sustainable development has three interdependent objectives that need to be supported in mutually supportive ways:

Economic Role – helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity;

Social Role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs;

Environmental Role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land

6.10. Paragraph 12 of the NPPF reiterates the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making. Reflecting section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 (the Act), paragraph 12 states:

“The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.”

6.11. The following chapters are the most relevant in considering the application:

- Chapter 11 Making Effective Use of Land
- Chapter 12 Achieving well-designed places,
- Chapter 15 Conserving and Enhancing the natural environment

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

- 6.12. The Government published the PPG in 2014 and has updated relevant parts as appropriate since then. The PPG provides further detailed guidance to accompany the NPPF, including on matters such as climate change, design, flood risk, health and wellbeing, Local Plans, noise, transport and the calculation of housing needs using the standard methodology. Relevant sections, as applicable to the scheme, have been considered and will be referred to through this planning statement.

Ansty & Staplefield Neighbourhood Plan

- 6.13. The Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan was formally made on 2nd February 2017. With regard to this proposal, the following policies are considered to be relevant:
- *Policy AS2: Preventing Coalescence*
 - *Policy AS3: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
 - *Policy AS8: Improvement of Community Facilities*
 - *Policy AS13: Traffic Management*
 - *Policy AS14: Walking And Cycling Routes*

High Weald AONB Management Plan

- 6.14. Whilst not planning policy, the High Weald AONB Management Plan is an important consideration in decision making. Whilst it is not a policy document in the same manner as the District Plan, it contains a number of objectives that seek to protect and enhance the AONB.
- *Objective R1 – To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways*
 - *Objective R2 – to enhance the ecological function of routeways*
 - *Objective W1 – To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland*
 - *Objective W2 - To enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.*
 - *Objective FH1 To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management*
 - *Objective FH2 - To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.*
 - *Objective FH3 - To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats*
 - *Objective OQ1 - To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald*
 - *Objective OQ3 - To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.*
 - *Objective OQ4 - To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value*

Emerging District Plan

6.15. The Mid Sussex District Plan 2021-2039 (published for Regulation 18 Consultation between 7th November and 19th December 2022) identifies a number of emerging policies that are considered relevant to the proposals. Given their emerging nature and potential to change, these have been listed and not repeated in full. Given the emerging status of the new District Plan, these policies can be attributed no more than limited weight. This is based upon the approach taken in appeal APP/D3125/W/17/3182718, where the emerging Local Plan had reached examination stage, the plan was at the time subject to a consultation on main modifications, but was still only afforded limited weight.

- *DPS1: Climate Change*
- *DPS2: Sustainable Design and Construction*
- *DPS4: Flood Risk & Drainage*
- *DPS5: Water Infrastructure and Water Environment*
- *DPS6: Health and Wellbeing*
- *DPN1: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery*
- *DPN2: Biodiversity Net Gain*
- *DPN3: Green Infrastructure*
- *DPN4: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows*
- *DPN7: Noise Impacts*
- *DPN8: Light Impacts and Dark Skies*
- *DPN9: Air Quality*
- *DPC1: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside*
- *DPC2: Preventing Coalescence*
- *DPC4: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty*
- *DPB1: Character and Design*
- *DPT1: Placemaking and Connectivity*
- *DPT2: Rights of Way and Other Recreational Routes*
- *DPT3: Active Travel*
- *DPT4: Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure*
- *DPI5: Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities*
- *DPI6: Community and Cultural Facilities and Local Services*

Relevant Background and Context

6.16. Whilst this application for this site does not propose the delivery of housing, it will be linked by legal agreement to the proposed development of up to 1,450 dwellings on land to the East of Ansty. It is therefore pertinent to consider how the site has previously been considered, and the wider picture of housing provision and delivery in the District and beyond.

7. The Planning Balance

7.1. Section 38 (6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides that all decisions must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan, when taken as a whole, unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 39 of the Act requires decision makers to exercise their functions with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development.

7.2. This section identifies the key issues that are material to the planning balance required in respect of this scheme and presents the case in favour of the grant of planning permission.

Principle of Development

7.3. This planning application proposes a material change of use of the site from agricultural and forestry uses to a Parkland Reserve.

7.4. There is minimal physical development proposed on the site, with only the erection of two wooden viewing platforms, two wooden hides, the introduction of permeable pathway running north-south from Staplefield Road in the north to the A272 Cuckfield Road in the south, and the erection of some fencing but only where absolutely necessary.

7.5. National Planning Policy supports planning decisions that contribute and enhance the natural and local environment through protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and minimise impacts on and provide net gains for biodiversity. Paragraph 176 of the NPPF explicitly identifies that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and that the scale and extent of development within these areas should be limited.

7.6. The adopted Mid Sussex District Plan identifies in policy DP16 that *“Development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as shown on the Policies Maps, will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan. 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”*.

7.7. The proposals are for a change of use of a site in the AONB. The only new built form will be permeable hardstanding for a pedestrian/cycle route, two hides and two viewing platforms for pedestrians, and fencing to ensure that wildlife present on site is appropriately contained. The proposals will protect and enhance the landscape through providing net gains for biodiversity, provide greater area for and formally authorised public access to part of the local landscape that is recognised as having scenic beauty, and above all protect the landscape in perpetuity by becoming a Parkland Reserve. The proposals will not detract from the visual qualities and essential characteristics of the AONB, adversely affect views into and out of the AONB, and through appropriate management will enhance the quality of the rural landscape and character of the District.

- 7.8. The proposals are therefore in accordance with the NPPF, Adopted Planning Policies DP12, DP16, DP37 and DP38, and emerging planning policies DPC1 and DPC4. They will also accord with the objectives of the High Weald Management Plan, in particular objectives W1, W2, FH3, OQ1, OQ3, OQ4

Design, Layout, and Appearance

- 7.9. The site is currently private land containing a number of fields and woodlands, with the very northern edge of the site being a playing field/sports pitches known as Beech Farm Field. Currently there are east-west Public Rights of Way that run across the site (including the High Weald Landscape Trail), but no formal connection north-south. The delivery of the parkland reserve will see the former agricultural use on the fields cease, but as part of the site management process managed livestock will be introduced, along with the creation of areas of open parkland. A new north-south connecting route will be installed that is suitable for both pedestrians and cyclists, with a new off-road cycle route providing a connection that links Stapleford Road to the North with the A272 to the south. The proposals will allow for circular routes to be taken within the park, providing access to significant areas of land which are not currently publicly accessible, and provide a range of experiences as the topography and landscape changes.
- 7.10. Given the existing sensitive nature of this part of the site, the existing landscape will be carefully managed through the introduction of conservation management methods including grazing regimes and re-wilding. The proposals will include measures to promote biodiversity enhancements and diversity, including a long-term management plan overseen by a site warden.
- 7.11. Currently, the northernmost part of the site includes Beech Farm Field, adjacent to Staplefield Road. This field is adjacent to Whitemans Green and is currently leased to a local sports club as additional sports pitches. The approval of the development proposals will see Beech Farm Field formally gifted to Cuckfield Cosmos Football Club, enabling them to make long term investment into these facilities, so enhancing the ability of the club to organise training and play additional matches.
- 7.12. Overall the delivery of a parkland reserve site will enhance public access to the countryside, increase biodiversity and conservation practices across the site, enhance existing sporting clubs/facilities, and deliver a significant social benefit to the wider Ansty/Cuckfield/Haywards Heath community. The proposals deliver a number of aspects that reflect the principles set out in the High Weald Management Plan, most notably OQ3, which seeks to develop and manage access opportunities to the High Weald AONB that allow opportunities for all to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB whilst conserving its beauty. The creation of a parkland reserve, with enhanced cross-site mobility and connectivity, will assist in meeting that objective.

Highways and Movement

- 7.13. The provision of the site will not result in any additional highways impacts. Access to the site will come primarily from local residents of Cuckfield, Ansty, and the new Garden Village development to the east of Ansty. For those that do wish to travel to the site, the existing car parks present at Beech Farm Field and Whiteman's Green will provide opportunities for parking to members of the public who arrive by car, as will the Garden Village development area. The intention however is that this local facility will not create wider journeys as it is designed very much as local facility to be access on foot by those living in relatively close proximity and will not be advertised more widely as a public recreational resource.
- 7.14. As part of the works to ensure the site is readily accessible, a new crossing will be installed on the A272. Analysis conducted as part of the Garden Village proposals has examined existing and predicted traffic flows on the A272 in its current form and how it would change in the event of the Garden Village and Parkland Reserve coming forward. The analysis has found that in conjunction with the provision of three roundabouts to allow for access into the Garden Village site, the provision of a new pedestrian crossing (most likely a Toucan crossing) on the A272 will be the most appropriate form of crossing that will allow cyclists and pedestrians access to the site from the south.
- 7.15. As identified in the Davies Landscape Architects Document, the site has two Public Rights of Way that cross east-west, but there is no public access to the remainder of the site. The proposals will result in the provision of a north-south connecting route that is suitable for both pedestrians and cyclists, with a new off-road cycle route linking Stapleford Road to the North with the A272 to the south.
- 7.16. This will enable any pedestrians or cyclists to reach Whiteman's Green or Beech Farm field without needing to utilise the A272 or head through Cuckfield, making the journey more direct.
- 7.17. The proposals will allow for circular routes to be taken within the park, providing access to significant areas of land not currently publicly accessible, and provide a range of experiences as the topography and landscape changes

Ecology

- 7.18. Ecological work has been conducted across the site to understand the habitats and wildlife that are present. The site is currently a mixture of fields and woodland. With the fields at the centre of the site last being in agricultural use, the areas of ecological interest are largely limited to the field edges, woodland and hedgerows.
- 7.19. Notwithstanding that the application is for a change of use from farmland to parkland reserve, and the change of use of the site will see a shift from agricultural practices to wildflower meadows that will be managed by grazing livestock, surveys have been undertaken to identify the on-site presence of wildlife. The surveys have found evidence of bats, dormice, newts, and breeding birds. From a habitats perspective, the surveys have identified modified grassland, neutral grassland, veteran & ancient trees, mixed deciduous woodland, broadleaved woodland, plantation woodland, ancient woodland, scrub, bracken, and species rich hedgerows.

- 7.20. The introduction and precise route of a new north-south off road pedestrian/cycle route masterplan has been designed and located so that it sits harmoniously with the existing landscape character. As set out in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment and the detailed proposals for the site prepared by DLA, some of the woodland on the western part of the site is classified as ancient replanted woodland. The route therefore has been identified to follow a route that is not impactful to the existing ancient woodland and does not necessitate any tree removal in order for it to be implemented.
- 7.21. Whilst the scale of new built form is miniscule, the ecological work conducted has identified that due to the proposals resulting in enhanced use of the site by members of the public, mitigation measures should be put in place. This will both help achieve the rewilding goals of parts of the site, but will also ensure that existing flora and fauna are not negatively impacted. These measures include the conversion of the two modified grassland blocks into species diverse grassland; restoration of ponds, planting of standard trees, veteranisation of poplar trees over time, installation of new hedgerows, and installation of new nesting opportunities through the installation of bird and bat boxes.
- 7.22. Furthermore, the creation of the parkland reserve alongside the delivery of the proposals will result in the creation of new habitat that improves foraging and nesting/roosting opportunities for wildlife in the local area.
- 7.23. Given the existing sensitive nature of this part of the site, no new lighting will be installed. The existing landscape will be sensitively managed through the introduction of conservation management methods including grazing regimes and re-wilding. The proposals will include measures to promote biodiversity enhancements and diversity, including a long-term management plan.
- 7.24. Further detail on the Ecological considerations of the proposals can be found in the accompanying Ecological report prepared by Ecologic.

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 7.25. Further detailed work has been undertaken to establish the achievability of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and accordance with the principles set out in emerging policy DPN1: *Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery*.
- 7.26. A Biodiversity Impact Calculation using the Defra Metric 4.0 has been produced for both the Ansty Garden Community and for the proposed Parkland Reserve. The purpose of these calculations are to demonstrate that the wider development proposals comply with Paragraphs 174b and 175d of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), particularly that the development will “*identify and pursue opportunities for measurable net gains for biodiversity*” and further will seek “*opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity*”. The proposals have also sought to comply with the Environment Act 2021, which from January 2024 requires large developments to achieve 10% biodiversity net gain for each broad habitat type present at a proposed development site.

- 7.27. The Parkland Reserve is a proposal specifically designed for biodiversity and targeted protected species enhancement in addition to wider public access. There is a considerable uplift in calculated habitat units of 18.04% and in hedgerow units of 0.89%. As a proposal specifically seeking to enhance biodiversity value, the Parkland Reserve does not require a target uplift in biodiversity value, but will act to help offset the impact on the Ansty Community Garden development and the uplift of 177.39 that has been calculated within the Metric 4.0 will be used to achieve a total of just over 20% biodiversity net gain in habitat units. Achieving a 20% uplift in habitat units for the Ansty Garden Community proposal further aligns with policy DPN2 of the draft Mid Sussex District Plan 2021 - 2039, which requires “*a minimum percentage of biodiversity net gain of 20% for significant sites DPSC1 - DPSC3*”.

8. Conclusion

8.1. This Planning Statement supports the submission of an Outline Planning Application in relation to Land North of Ansty, near Haywards Heath, submitted to Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) jointly on behalf of Fairfax Acquisitions Limited and the Norris Family.

8.2. The application is for the following:

Change of use of farmland and woodland to parkland reserve to include public access and instigation of long-term management and rewilding regime, including establishment of pedestrian and cycle tracks, with new pedestrian and cycle access points off Cuckfield Road to the south and Staplefield Road to the north. Proposals to include the addition of two wooden viewing platforms and two hides. Sports pitches at Beech Farm Field to remain in sports use.

8.3. The application to change the use of the site from private farmland to a Parkland Reserve, along with the introduction of viewing platforms and a new north-south off road pedestrian/cycle route through the site connecting Staplefield Road and the A272 will enhance connectivity in the local area, and enhance public access to the AONB. Planning policy and the High Weald AONB Management Plan both wish to see the AONB preserved, and changing the use of the land to a Parkland Reserve will ensure the land remains open and accessible to the public in perpetuity.

8.4. Through the change of use, the fields immediately to the south of Beech Farm Field will be utilised as a dog walking area with roam free access, whilst the larger fields located centrally in the site will be ecologically managed in order to enhance biodiversity, and simultaneously have (where appropriate) footpaths introduced around the outside of the fields to enable a variety of walking loops to be undertaken. Two viewing platforms will also be installed and two hides for watching wildlife, and, through the installation of the north-south pedestrian/cycle route, accessibility across the site and to the AONB will be significantly enhanced.

8.5. This process will also result in Beech Farm Field in the north of the site being gifted to the Cuckfield Cosmos football club, ensuring that they are in control of their own site and ensuring their continued presence as a community asset.

8.6. As a whole, the proposals have been robustly justified, bring significant public benefits and are in accordance with National Planning Policy, the Mid Sussex Local Plan, High Weald AONB Management Plan, and the principles set out in the emerging Local Plan. Accordingly Mid Sussex District Council are respectfully requested to grant planning permission.

Planning Statement

Land North of Ansty – Proposed delivery of a new Parkland Reserve



Appendices

Planning Statement

Land North of Ansty – Proposed delivery of a new Parkland Reserve



Appendix 1 Relevant Planning Policies

Adopted Development Plan

- 8.7. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 directs LPAs to determine planning applications in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 38(3) of the Act sets out that the Development Plan includes the “*development plan documents (taken as a whole) which have been adopted or approved in relation to that area*”.
- 8.8. Mid Sussex District Council's District Plan was adopted in March 2018 and provides the overarching development plan guiding development management decisions across the District. With regard to this proposal, the following policies are particularly relevant:
- 8.9. Policy DP12: *Protection and Enhancement of Countryside* states that
- “*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 supported by a specific policy reference either elsewhere in the Plan, a Development Plan Document or relevant Neighbourhood Plan.*”
- 8.10. Policy DP16: *High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty* sets out that:
- “*Development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as shown on the Policies Maps, will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan. 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.*”
- 8.11. Policy DP26: *Character and Design* states that all development must demonstrate that:
- It is of a 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
- 8.12. Policy DP37: *Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows* clarifies that the District Council will support the protection and enhancement of trees, woodland and hedgerow, with special regard had for the protection of ancient woodland.

Trees, woodland and hedgerows will be protected and enhanced by ensuring development

- *incorporates existing important trees, woodland and hedgerows into the design of new development and its landscape scheme; and*
- *prevents damage to root systems and takes account of expected future growth; and*
- *has appropriate protection measures throughout the development process; and*
- *takes opportunities to plant new trees, woodland and hedgerows within the new development to enhance on-site green infrastructure and increase resilience to the effects of climate change;*

Development should be positioned as far as possible from ancient woodland with a minimum buffer of 15 metres maintained between ancient woodland and the development boundary.

8.13. Policy DP38: *Biodiversity* states that biodiversity will be protected and enhanced by ensuring development meets multiple criteria, including:

- *Contributes and takes opportunities to improve, enhance, manage and restore biodiversity and green infrastructure, so that there is a net gain in biodiversity, including through creating new designated sites and locally relevant habitats, and incorporating biodiversity features within developments*
- *Protects existing biodiversity, so that there is no net loss of biodiversity.*
- *Minimises habitat and species fragmentation and maximises opportunities to enhance and restore ecological corridors*
- *Promotes the restoration, management and expansion of priority habitats in the District*
- *Avoids damage to, protects and enhances the special characteristics of nationally designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty*

Designated sites will be given protection and appropriate weight according to their importance and the contribution they make to wider ecological networks.

The National Planning Policy Framework

8.14. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) sets out the overarching framework used for assessing planning applications and preparing Local Plans, based on the Government's aims for the planning system, detailing principles and guidance. The National Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) provides additional guidance to support the NPPF.

8.15. The NPPF seeks to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development, through meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

8.16. Sustainable development has three interdependent objectives that need to be supported in mutually supportive ways:

Economic Role – helping to build a strong, responsive and competitive economy by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity;

Social Role – supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed and safe built environment, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs;

Environmental Role – contributing to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land

- 8.17. Paragraph 12 of the NPPF reiterates the statutory status of the Development Plan as the starting point for decision making. Reflecting section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act, 2004 (the Act), paragraph 12 states:

“The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.”

- 8.18. Chapter 11 focuses on the need to make an efficient use of land. Paragraph 117 identifies, except where there is a conflict with the NPPF, that policies and 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.”*

- 8.19. Chapter 12, *Achieving well-designed places*, sets out that the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Therefore it is important that developments will function well and add to the quality of the area over their lifetime; are visually attractive; are sympathetic to local character and history; maintain a strong sense of place; optimise the potential of the site to accommodate an appropriate amount of development and support local facilities; and create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible.

- 8.20. Chapter 12 also focuses on the importance of creating high quality places, recognising that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places to live and work, and helps make development acceptable (paragraph 124).

- 8.21. Paragraph 127 goes on to state that decisions and policies should ensure that developments:

“a) will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;

b) are visually attractive as a result of good architecture, layout and appropriate and effective landscaping;

- c) are sympathetic to local character and history, including the surrounding built environment and landscape setting, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation or change (such as increased densities);*
- d) establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live, work and visit;*
- e) optimise the potential of the site to accommodate and sustain an appropriate amount and mix of development (including green and other public space) and support local facilities and transport networks; and*
- f) create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users; and where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine the quality of life or community cohesion and resilience.”*

8.22. Chapter 15 *Conserving and Enhancing the natural environment* sets out how (Para 174) *Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);*
- b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;*
- c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;*

8.23. It also recognises in paragraph 176 states that “*great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty... The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should therefore be limited.*”

Planning Practice Guidance (PPG)

8.24. The Government published the PPG in 2014 and has updated relevant parts as appropriate since then. The PPG provides further detailed guidance to accompany the NPPF, including on matters such as climate change, design, flood risk, health and wellbeing, Local Plans, noise, transport and the calculation of housing needs using the standard methodology. Relevant sections, as applicable to the scheme, have been considered and will be referred to through this planning statement.

Ansty & Staplefield Neighbourhood Plan

8.25. Policy AS2: Preventing Coalescence

Development proposals are expected to demonstrate that they would not result in the coalescence with any neighbouring settlement either individually or cumulatively or result in the perception of openness being unacceptably eroded between the following areas:

- *Ansty and Burgess Hill*
- *Brook Street and Cuckfield*
- *Ansty and Cuckfield*

Planning permission will not normally be granted for development which:

- *Contributes towards the ad hoc or isolated development of dwellings outside the built up area, including infilling of built up frontages or linear development along roads.*

8.26. Policy AS3: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Development proposals within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in the neighbourhood plan area (as shown on the Proposals Map) must demonstrate how they address the requirements of the NPPF, policies of the Mid Sussex Local Plan 2004 or the District Plan once it is adopted;

- *conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB area; and*
- *demonstrate how they meet the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan; and*
- *for major development, proposals must include an assessment of:*
 - a) *the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;*
 - b) *the cost of, and scope for, developing elsewhere outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and*
 - c) *any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated.*

8.27. Policy AS8: Improvement of Community Facilities

Proposals that would result in the improved provision of community facilities will be strongly supported. In the case of the Village Centre in Ansty and the Pavilion in Staplefield, this is particularly the case for proposals that would re-provide and improve such facilities on the existing site.

8.28. Policy AS13: Traffic Management

The provision of traffic management solutions to address the impacts of traffic arising from development at north west Burgess Hill will be strongly supported. This includes either directly provided solutions or the use of contributions from development to contribute towards the costs of provision.

8.29. Policy AS14: Walking And Cycling Routes

The provision of improved walking and cycling routes to Cuckfield, Haywards Heath and other surrounding villages will be strongly supported. Ansty and Staplefield Parish Council will work with Mid Sussex District Council, West Sussex County Council and other interested parties to put in place an improved walking and cycling network.

High Weald AONB Management Plan

8.30. Whilst not planning policy, the High Weald AONB Management Plan is an important consideration in decision making. Whilst it is not a policy document in the same manner as the District Plan, it contains a number of objectives that seek to protect and enhance the AONB.

- *Objective R1 – To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways*
- *Objective R2 – to enhance the ecological function of routeways*
- *Objective W1 – To maintain the existing extent of woodland and particularly ancient woodland*
- *Objective W2 - To enhance the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.*
- *Objective FH1 To secure agriculturally productive use for the fields of the High Weald, especially for local markets, as part of sustainable land management*
- *Objective FH2 - To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands.*
- *Objective FH3 - To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats*
- *Objective OQ1 - To increase opportunities for learning about and celebrating the character of the High Weald*
- *Objective OQ3 - To develop and manage access to maximise opportunities for everyone to enjoy, appreciate and understand the character of the AONB while conserving its natural beauty.*
- *Objective OQ4 - To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value*

Emerging District Plan

- 8.31. The Mid Sussex District Plan 2021-2039 (published for Regulation 18 Consultation between 7th November and 19th December 2022) identifies a number of emerging policies that are considered relevant to the proposals. Given their emerging nature and potential to change, these have been summarised and not repeated in full as they hold limited weight due to the plan's early stage of production.
- 8.32. *DPS1: Climate Change*, which identifies that the council will seek to reduce carbon emissions, maximise carbon sequestration, and how the plan will seek to address issues around climate change adaptation and mitigation
- DPS2: Sustainable Design and Construction*
- 8.33. *"All developments are required to submit a Sustainability Statement to demonstrate how through its design, construction, operation and use it will contribute to the reduction of carbon emissions, increase resilience to the impacts of climate change and improve sustainability".*
- DPS4: Flood Risk & Drainage*
- 8.34. *"Proposals for development will need to follow a sequential risk-based approach, ensure development is safe across its lifetime and not increase the risk of flooding elsewhere. The District Council's Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) should be used to identify areas at present and future flood risk"* The policy goes on to state that Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) should be implemented in all new developments of 10 dwellings or more, and that the long term maintenance and management of such SuDS must be identified through a maintenance and management plan.
- DPS5: Water Infrastructure and Water Environment*
- 8.35. Development should protect and enhance water resources and water quality and take measures to control pollution of the water environment.
- DPS6: Health and Wellbeing*
- 8.36. All new development must be designed to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places, which enable and support healthy lifestyles and address health and wellbeing needs in Mid Sussex, as identified in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and West Sussex Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

DPN1: Biodiversity, Geodiversity and Nature Recovery

- 8.37. Biodiversity will be protected and enhanced by ensuring development: Protects existing biodiversity; Takes appropriate measures to avoid and reduce disturbance to sensitive habitats and species; Contributes and takes opportunities to improve, enhance, manage and restore biodiversity and green infrastructure, so that there is a net gain in biodiversity.

DPN2: Biodiversity Net Gain

- 8.38. Development (as defined in the Environment Act 2021 or its secondary legislation or as amended by the government) will need to deliver a net gain in biodiversity which will contribute to the delivery of ecological networks, green infrastructure and nature recovery

Level of Biodiversity Net Gain

- 8.39. Biodiversity net gain will be calculated and assessed using the Government's published biodiversity metric. The biodiversity net gain calculation and assessment should be completed by a suitably experienced and qualified ecologist and submitted in full with the application for development.
- 8.40. The minimum percentage of biodiversity net gain required will be 10% as set out in legislation (or as amended by the government) or greater where it is required in another policy or a Supplementary Planning Document. The Council will encourage a higher level of biodiversity net gain and developments should seek to maximise opportunities, especially where development is located in or in proximity to the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas or priority habitats.

DPN3: Green Infrastructure

- 8.41. Green Infrastructure will be protected and enhanced, and will be expected to demonstrate that opportunities have been taken to:
- *Strengthen connectivity and resilience of ecological networks; and*
 - *Improve resilience to the effects of climate change; and*
 - *Support health and wellbeing by providing access to green space, nature and rights of way.*

DPN4: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows

- 8.42. Existing trees, woodland and hedgerow will be protected; new trees woodlands and hedgerows will be encouraged in suitable areas;

DPN7: Noise Impacts

- 8.43. The natural environment and people's health and quality of life will be protected from unacceptable levels of noise.

DPN8: Light Impacts and Dark Skies

- 8.44. The natural environment and people's health and quality of life will be protected from unacceptable levels of light pollution. Development proposals must demonstrate that all opportunities to reduce light pollution (including sky glow, glare and light spillage) have been taken and that lighting proposals present the minimum amount of lighting necessary to achieve its purpose.

DPN9: Air Quality

- 8.45. The natural environment and people's health and quality of life will be protected from unacceptable levels of poor air quality. The use of active and sustainable travel measures and green infrastructure to reduce pollution concentrations and exposure is encouraged. Development proposals will need to take into account the Council's air quality guidance.

DPC1: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside

- 8.46. 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.

- 8.47. The best and most versatile agricultural land (Grades 1, 2 and 3a) will be protected from non-agricultural development proposals and will be protected from being covered by artificial surfaces that will prevent future use of the soils. Where significant development of any grade of agricultural land is demonstrated to be necessary, detailed field surveys should be undertaken and proposals should seek to use areas of poorer quality land in preference to that of higher quality.

- 8.48. Development proposals should demonstrate they are informed by landscape character. The Mid Sussex Landscape Character Assessment, the West Sussex County Council Strategy for the West Sussex Landscape, the Capacity of Mid Sussex District to Accommodate Development Study and other available landscape evidence (including that gathered to support Neighbourhood Plans) will be used to assess the impact of development proposals on the rural and landscape character.

DPC2: Preventing Coalescence

- 8.49. The individual towns and villages in the District each have their own unique characteristics. It is important that their separate identity is maintained. When travelling between settlements people should have a sense that they have left one before arriving at the next.

DPC4: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

- 8.50. Development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as shown on the Policies Maps, will only be permitted where it conserves and enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

DPB1: Character and Design

- 8.51. All new development should be of high quality and must respond appropriately to its context, be inclusive and prioritise sustainability. This includes: the design and layout of new buildings, alterations to existing buildings and the design of surrounding spaces. All applicants will be required to demonstrate that development takes into account: site context; layout streets and spaces; the structure of the development, high quality building design, and residential amenity

DPT1: Placemaking and Connectivity

- 8.52. Development shall provide appropriate infrastructure to support the vision and objectives of the West Sussex Transport Plan 2022-2036 and meet the requirements of the NPPF. In doing so, this will include the provision of a Transport Assessment / Statement, Sustainable Transport Strategy and Travel Plan; demonstrate how all relevant sustainable travel interventions will be maximised and taken into account; development will be designed to prioritise sustainable and active modes of travel; and create liveable communities that strive to embody the 20-minute neighbourhood concept whilst delivering attractive and healthy places.

DPT2: Rights of Way and Other Recreational Routes

- 8.53. Rights of way, Sustrans national cycle routes and recreational routes will be protected by ensuring development does not result in the loss of or does not adversely affect a right of way

DPT3: Active Travel

- 8.54. Development will be required to help remove barriers to active travel and create a healthy environment in which people chose to walk and wheel

DPT4: Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

- 8.55. Development will be required to provide adequate and integrated car parking, taking account of local guidance documents; shall meet the requirements of Schedule 1 Part S of the Building Regulations regarding Electric Vehicle Charging, and shall provide a minimum of 2 'fast' charging points

DPI5: Open Space, Sport and Recreational Facilities

- 8.56. Development that provides new and/or enhanced open space, leisure, sport and recreational facilities, including allotments, to support healthy lifestyles and in accordance with the strategic aims of the Playing Pitch Study, Play & Amenity Green Space Study and Community Buildings Study (or as the studies are updated) will be supported.

DPI6: Community and Cultural Facilities and Local Services

- 8.57. The provision or improvement of community and cultural facilities and local services that contribute to creating sustainable communities will be supported where the proposal is not in conflict with Policy DPC1: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside

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