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Cuckfield Parish Council

Objection to Planning Application DM/25/3129

Land at Borde Hill Lane, Haywards Heath, West Sussex

1. Introduction

Cuckfield Parish Council **OBJECTS** to planning application **DM/25/3129** for a residential development of **125 dwellings** at Land at Borde Hill Lane, Haywards Heath. The proposal represents **overdevelopment relative to plan expectations**, would cause **significant harm to the landscape setting of the High Weald National Landscape (AONB)**, would **harm the setting and significance** of the **Grade II* Borde Hill Estate**, and would **exacerbate existing congestion** on the local highway network, particularly **Ardingly Road** and at the **Ardingly Road / London Road** roundabout in Cuckfield. These harms conflict with the **Development Plan** and the **NPPF**, and **significantly and demonstrably outweigh** the scheme's benefits even if the **tilted balance** at **NPPF paragraph 11(d)** is engaged.

2. Policy Context

- **Mid Sussex District Plan (2014–2031)**: Relevant policies include **DP12** (Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside), **DP16** (High Weald AONB), **DP20** (Securing Infrastructure), **DP21** (Transport), **DP26** (Character and Design), and **DP34** (Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets). These policies require development to conserve the countryside and AONB setting, secure appropriate infrastructure, avoid severe residual transport impacts, achieve context-responsive design, and protect heritage assets and their settings.
- **Ansty, Staplefield & Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan (2015–2031, made Feb 2017)**: Relevant policies are **AS1 (New Housing Development)**, **AS2 (Preventing Coalescence)**, **AS3 (Local Gaps)**, **AS4 (High Weald AONB)**, **AS6 (Design)** and **AS7 (Transport)**. These seek small-scale, proportionate growth; protection of gaps and rural character; conservation of the High Weald and its setting; high-quality, context-led design; and avoidance of unacceptable highway impacts.
- **NPPF (December 2024, as amended Feb 2025)**: The **presumption in favour** and **tilted balance** are set out at **paragraph 11(d)**; **Section 16 (paras 202–214)** deals with the historic environment and requires **great weight** to conservation of designated heritage assets, **clear and convincing justification** for any harm, and a **public benefits test for less than substantial harm**.
- **High Weald National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan 2024–2029**: A statutory plan adopted by MSDC in **July 2024**; it is a **material consideration** and requires conservation and enhancement of the High Weald's special qualities and careful management of impacts on its **setting**.

2. Excessive Housing Density and Principle of Development

The Parish Council notes that the site is identified in the **Draft District Plan Allocations** for approximately **60 dwellings**, yet the current application seeks consent for **125 dwellings**, representing **more than a 100% increase** over the anticipated scale of development.

This level of development constitutes a **significant and unjustified intensification** of the site and fails to respect:

- The scale and capacity assumptions underpinning the emerging allocations work;
- The rural edge-of-settlement character of this location; and
- The ability of existing infrastructure to accommodate such growth.

The proposal therefore conflicts with:

- **Policy DP4 (Housing)**, which requires development to be appropriately located and of a scale consistent with the spatial strategy; and
- **Policy DP6 (Settlement Hierarchy)**, which seeks to direct growth in a manner proportionate to settlement size and function.

The application undermines the spatial strategy and assumptions about **landscape capacity** and **infrastructure** and conflicts with **DP12** and **DP26** for countryside protection and locally responsive design. It is also at odds with **AS1**, which supports **small-scale, proportionate** housing with robust environmental and highway assessment.

4. Landscape Impact: Adjacency to the High Weald National Landscape (AONB)

The site occupies a sensitive **rural transition** immediately adjacent to the **High Weald**, a nationally important landscape characterised by an historic field pattern, routeways, woodlands and dark skies. The **urbanising form, scale and activity** associated with **125 units** would **erode the rural edge**, introduce **lighting and movement** harmful to tranquillity, and **adversely affect important views**, contrary to:

- **DP16** and **DP12** (protection of AONB and countryside);
- **AS4** (conserving the AONB and its **setting**) and **AS3/AS2** (Local Gaps and avoiding coalescence); and
- The **High Weald Management Plan 2024–2029** adopted by MSDC (material consideration).

Given the statutory purpose to **conserve and enhance natural beauty**, great weight should be afforded to avoiding this harm.

5. Heritage Impact: Grade II* Borde Hill Estate (Designated Heritage Asset)

The site lies in the **setting** of the **Grade II* Borde Hill Estate**. The **intensity and proximity** of the development would **diminish the ability to appreciate the Estate's significance**, through visual encroachment, lighting, activity and erosion of rural context. Under **NPPF Section 16**, **great weight** must be given to conservation; **any harm** requires **clear and convincing justification**, and where **less than substantial harm** is identified it must be weighed against the **public benefits**. The Council considers that the asserted benefits do **not** outweigh the harm at this sensitive location. The proposal therefore conflicts with **DP34** (protecting listed buildings and settings) and **DP26** (context-led design), and with **AS6** and **AS4** (design/landscape responses that respect heritage and the High Weald setting).

6. Highways and Transport

Ardingly Road through **Cuckfield** is already subject to **peak-hour congestion**, and the **Ardingly Road / London Road** roundabout is **known to be over capacity during peaks**. The scheme would add to these pressures. It also proposes a **new roundabout**, despite the **considerable disruption** experienced during construction of the existing only a few years ago. Without clear, effective and deliverable mitigation, residual cumulative impacts are likely to be **severe**, contrary to **DP21** (Transport) and **DP20** (Securing Infrastructure), and **AS7** (Transport). Evidence from transport work in this corridor highlights the sensitivity of the **Ardingly Road/London Road network** and the need for robust, proportionate solutions; WSCC's highways programme underlines the requirement for evidence-based schemes to avoid displacement of congestion and to manage construction impacts.

7. The NPPF "Tilted Balance" (Para 11(d))

Cuckfield Parish Council recognises that MSDC may currently be unable to demonstrate a **five-year housing land supply**, potentially engaging **NPPF paragraph 11(d)**. However, the tilted balance **does not** override protective policies where there is a **clear reason for refusal** related to **designated heritage assets** and, in any event, **great weight** must continue to be given to conservation under **Section 16**. Here, the combined **heritage, AONB/landscape, design** and **highway** harms are **significant**, conflict with the **Development Plan**, and **significantly and demonstrably outweigh** the claimed benefits. Refusal is therefore justified.

8. Policy Conflicts (Summary)

Mid Sussex District Plan:

- **DP12** – Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside.
- **DP16** – High Weald AONB (National Landscape).
- **DP20** – Securing Infrastructure.
- **DP21** – Transport (avoid severe residual cumulative impacts).
- **DP26** – Character and Design (context-responsive, high-quality design).
- **DP34** – Listed Buildings & Other Heritage Assets.

A&SPC Neighbourhood Plan: **AS1, AS2, AS3, AS4, AS6, AS7.**

- **AS1** – New Housing Development (small-scale, proportionate; robust environmental/visual/highway assessment).
- **AS2** – Preventing Coalescence (including **Brook Street–Cuckfield** and **Ansty–Cuckfield**).
- **AS3** – Local Gaps (protect openness; resist urbanising impacts).
- **AS4** – High Weald AONB (protect AONB and its **setting**).
- **AS6** – Design (respond positively to local character/landscape/heritage).
- **AS7** – Transport (no unacceptable highway impacts or worsened congestion).

High Weald National Landscape (AONB) Management Plan 2024–2029

- Statutory management plan adopted by MSDC; **material** to planning decisions; emphasises conserving/enhancing special qualities and managing **setting** impacts.

9. Conclusion

For the reasons above, **Cuckfield Parish Council** requests that **Mid Sussex District Council REFUSE** application **DM/25/3129**. The proposal's **excessive density, harm to the landscape and AONB setting, harm to the setting of the Grade II* Borde Hill Estate, and unacceptable transport and construction impacts** conflict with the Development Plan and with the **NPPF**. These harms **significantly and demonstrably outweigh** any benefits

Even if the **NPPF paragraph 11(d) tilted balance** is engaged regarding the current land supply issue, these harms—particularly to a **nationally important landscape** and a **Grade II* listed estate**—**significantly and demonstrably outweigh** the benefits. Refusal is therefore justified.

10. Suggested Refusal Reasons (for decision notice drafting)

1. **Landscape/AONB:** By reason of its **scale, density and urbanising form** adjacent to the **High Weald National Landscape**, the proposal would **harm the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside and the setting of the AONB**, contrary to **DP12, DP16, DP26, AS2–AS4, AS6**, and the **High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024–2029**.
2. **Heritage:** The development would **harm the setting and significance** of the **Grade II* Borde Hill Estate** without **clear and convincing justification**, and the public benefits would **not outweigh** that harm, contrary to **NPPF Section 16, DP34** and **DP26**.
3. **Transport/Infrastructure:** The scheme would **exacerbate congestion** along **Ardingly Road** and at the **Ardingly Road / London Road** roundabout, and the proposed **new roundabout** would result in **unacceptable construction impacts** so soon after recent works, contrary to **DP21, DP20** and **AS7**.

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