

Delegated Decision

Sign off Sheet

Ref. No:	DM/25/1415	Case Officer:	Tracie Axford
Application Type:	Full Application		
Proposal:	Retrospective planning application for the Duke of Edinburgh Award porta-cabin office that has been located in the Blackland Farm top car park since September 2022.		
Site:	Girlguiding, Campsite Office, Blackland Farm, Grinstead Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead, West Sussex, RH19 4HP		
Validation Date	10 Jun 2025	Overall Expiry Date:	2 Jul 2025
Pre-Commencement Conditions Required:		Pre-Com Conditions Date Agreed:	
Recommendation:	Permission	Recommendation Date:	19 Sep 2025
Target Date:	5 Aug 2025	Recommending Officer Signature:	<i>Tracie Axford</i>

Date Legal Agreement Completed: (if applicable)		No of Representations:	0
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Signed and Agreed By:	<i>Steven King</i>	Date:	19 Sep 2025
Comments:			

MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

DM/25/1415

Girlguiding, Campsite Office, Blackland Farm, Grinstead Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead, West Sussex

Retrospective planning application for the Duke of Edinburgh Award porta-cabin office that has been located in the Blackland Farm top car park since September 2022.

Mr Mark Sinclair

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

None

SUMMARY OF CONSULTEES

None

WEST HOATHLY PARISH COUNCIL

The Parish Council has no objections to this application.

INTRODUCTION

The application seeks retrospective permission for the Duke of Edinburgh porta-cabin office that has been located in the Blackland Farm top car park since September 2022.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

EF/24/0010 - Structure to the front of site. The case was reported to MSDC in January 2024 by a member of the public stating that a new structure had been sited on the car park at the front on the site. The structure is the subject of this application.

The site is well established as an outdoor activity centre and there have been numerous applications for development at the site associated with this use.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The site is part of the wider Blackland Farm activity centre situated in a rural location in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are a number of buildings and outdoor events areas including camping, archery, climbing etc. The site is situated on a historic lane as identified in the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The application seeks retrospective planning permission for a porta-cabin located in the car park for Blacklands Farm, which is used as a Duke of Edinburgh scheme office, and has been in place since September 2022.

The porta-cabin is clad in a dark grey/black timber measuring approx. 3.1m wide and 4.1m long. The rear elevation is approx. 3.4 m high. The roof slopes from the rear elevation to the front elevation and at the front elevation the building stands at approx. 3.2m high. There is a door to the south elevation and window to the elevation facing the car park. The cabin rests on timber slats and is not fixed to the ground.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND LIST OF POLICIES

Planning legislation holds that the determination of a planning application shall be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Using this as the starting point the development plan for this part of Mid Sussex consists of the District Plan, Site Allocation Development Plan Document (DPD) and the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan.

National policy (which is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance) does not form part of the development plan, but is an important material consideration.

Mid Sussex District Plan

The District Plan was adopted on 28th March 2018. The relevant policies are:

DP12 - Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside

DP16 - AONB

DP19 - Sustainable Tourism

DP26 - Character and Design

Site Allocations DPD

The SADPD was adopted on 29th June 2022. It allocates sufficient housing and employment land to meet identified needs to 2031.

There are no relevant policies.

West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan

The West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan was made and is a material planning consideration with full weight attached. The following policy is considered relevant:

WHP2 - Historic Lanes

Other Material Considerations

Mid Sussex District Plan 2021 - 2039 - Submission Draft (Regulation 19)

The District Council is reviewing and updating the District Plan. Upon adoption, the new District Plan 2021 - 2039 will replace the current District Plan 2014-2031 and its policies will have full weight. In accordance with the NPPF, Local Planning Authorities may give weight to relevant policies of the emerging plan according to the stage of preparation; the extent to which there are unresolved objections to the relevant policies; and the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the NPPF. The draft District Plan 2021-2039 (Regulation 19) is currently at Examination and the stage 1 hearings were concluded on the 31st October 2024. There are unresolved objections to some of the Policies in the draft District Plan and as such, only minimal weight can be given to the Plan and this planning application has been assessed against the policies of the adopted District Plan.

Relevant policies:

DPS1 - Climate Change

DPS2 - Sustainable Design and Construction

DPB1 - Character and Design

DPC1: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside

DPC4: High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan

ASSESSMENT

It is considered that the main issues that need to be considered in the determination of this application are as follows;

- Impact upon the AONB
- Design and Character
- Biodiversity Net Gain

Impact upon the High Weald AONB

The legal framework for AONBs, (also known as National Landscapes) in England and Wales is provided by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 which at Section 82 reaffirms the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty. Section 84 of the CRoW requires Local Planning Authorities to *'take all such action as appears to them expedient for accomplishment of*

the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the AONB'. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (2023) amended section 85 of the CROW Act, to create a new duty on relevant authorities to *'seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area when discharging their functions in AONBs'*. A similar ethos is found within The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan which is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications in the AONB.

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF states:

'Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation and enhancement of wildlife and cultural heritage are also important considerations in these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks.'

Policy DP16 also seeks to maintain and enhance the quality and character of the AONB, and states: *'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, in particular;*

- the identified landscape features or components of natural beauty and to their setting;*
- the traditional interaction of people with nature, and appropriate land management;*
- character and local distinctiveness, settlement pattern, sense of place and setting of the AONB; and*
- the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage.*

Small scale proposals which support the economy and social well-being of the AONB that are compatible with the conservation and enhancement of natural beauty will be supported. 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.'

A similar ethos is found within The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plan and the High Weald Housing Design Guide 2020.

The policies relating to development in the AONB seek to provide for high quality design which seeks to preserve and enhance the visual appearance and character of the AONB.

Policy DP12 in the District Plan seeks to maintain the quality of the rural landscape of the District and states that development will be permitted where it is necessary for agriculture or is supported by a specific policy reference elsewhere in the Plan, a Development Plan Document or a relevant Neighbourhood Plan policy. In this case policy DP19 provides support for the development.

With respect to tourism related development, policy DP19 of the District Plan states the following:

'Tourism related development in the countryside (defined as the area outside of the built-up area boundaries on the Policies Map), including extensions to existing facilities, visitor accommodation and the re-use of rural buildings will be permitted provided:

- o it supports the sustainable growth of the rural economy; and*
- o maintains or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District, in accordance with Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside.'*

The porta-cabin on site exists as an office to support young people taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme which complements and enhances the facilities on offer at Blackland Farm, in accordance with DP19 of the district plan.

The porta-cabin is not visible from wider views and matches the other outbuildings which are situated at the entrance of the site. Although it is adjacent to the highway and in a prominent position, the development can be considered to match the character and appearance of the site and comply with the aims and objectives of the planning policies and the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024.

Given the design, form and scale of the proposal in relation to the surrounding buildings, and that it would be constructed in materials similar to those of the existing outbuildings it is considered that proposal would not have an impact on the AONB and would conserve it, thereby complying with policies DP12 and DP16 in the District Plan.

Design and Character

Policy DP26 of the Mid Sussex District Plan relates to character and design and states:

'All development and surrounding spaces, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings and replacement dwellings, will be well designed and reflect the distinctive character of the towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside. All applicants will be required to demonstrate that development:

- is of high quality design and layout and includes appropriate landscaping and greenspace; - contributes positively to, and clearly defines, public and private realms and should normally be designed with active building frontages facing streets and public open spaces to animate and provide natural surveillance;*
- 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;*
- protects valued townscapes and the separate identity and character of towns and villages;*
- does not cause significant harm to the amenities of existing nearby residents and future occupants of new dwellings, including taking account of the impact on privacy, outlook, daylight and sunlight, and noise, air and light pollution (see Policy DP27);*
- creates a pedestrian-friendly layout that is safe, well connected, legible and accessible;*
- incorporates well integrated parking that does not dominate the street environment, particularly where high density housing is proposed;*
- positively addresses sustainability considerations in the layout and the building design;*
- take the opportunity to encourage community interaction by creating layouts with a strong neighbourhood focus/centre; larger (300+ unit) schemes will also normally be expected to incorporate a mixed use element;*
- optimises the potential of the site to accommodate development.'*

The porta-cabin is located within the car park for the Blacklands Farm Activity Centre. It is a steel frame construction with a dark black timber clad exterior. It is not fixed to the ground as it is currently sitting on timber slats. The roof is metal and slopes slightly from rear to front. The timber cladding matches the dark timber cladding of the existing office also located in the same car park. Within the car park, there are further small outbuildings including a shop and a wood shed.

Policy WHP2 of the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan is concerned with Historic Lanes and states *'Where appropriate, development proposals should demonstrate that they will preserve the historic and rural character of the Historic Lanes'*

The porta-cabin is visible, as are the other buildings situated in the car park, from the highway which is designated a Historic Lane in the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan. It is not considered that the porta-cabin has a significant impact on the historic and rural character of the Historic Lane as it matches the other outbuildings in the car park and does not detract from the historic and rural character of the area.

It is therefore considered that the proposal accords with policy DP26 of the District Plan and WHP2 of the Neighbourhood Plan.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain this application comprises development below the de-minimis threshold meaning that this development is exempt from providing biodiversity net gain.

PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

Planning legislation requires the application to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is therefore necessary for the planning application to be assessed against the policies in the Development Plan and then to take account of other material planning considerations including the NPPF. The Development Plan in this instance consists of the Mid Sussex District Plan, the Site Allocations Development Plan Document and the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan.

The development is considered to support a rural tourist business and preserves the area of outstanding natural beauty in which it lies and is considered to comply with policies DP12, DP16, DP19, DP21 and DP26 of the District Plan, policy WHP2 of the West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan and the contents of the NPPF.

Decision: Permission

Case Officer: Tracie Axford