



Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1SS

Our ref: 13882
Date: 05 February 2026

For the attention of: Joseph Swift

Application ref: DM/26/0073
Location: Land Off West Hoathly Road East Grinstead West Sussex
Proposal/Description: The erection of 44 new homes with access from West Hoathly Road, vehicle and cycle parking, landscaping, drainage, and associated infrastructure and highway works.

Thank you for consulting with Place Services on the above Full planning application. This letter sets out our consultation response on the landscape impact of the application and how the proposal relates and responds to the landscape setting and context of the site.

1.0. Site Context

- 1.1. The Site is located to the south of East Grinstead, and comprises a singular sloping grassland parcel, located between Sunnyside Recreation Ground, West Hoathly Road and other grassland fields separated by established treed boundaries. The Site is located within the High Weald National Landscape. Ancient Woodland forms the south-east site boundary, and an area of Priority Habitat (Deciduous Woodland) is located within the site.

2.0. Planning Policy Context

Mid Sussex Capacity Assessment (2007)

- 2.1. The Site is located within Area 12 'Sunnyside High Weald' and is assessed as having substantial sensitivity. This is owed to the moderate woodland network, the setting of East Grinstead, location in the valley and separation with other settlements. The area has a substantial value owed to the location within the AONB, surrounding designations and scenic beauty. It has an overall low capacity, owed to the *"Predominately pasture and largely rural sitting on slopes which run NW-SE, south of East Grinstead provides soft edge to town."*
- 2.2. The later 2014 assessment by LUC defines low/medium capacity for LLCA 12. As summarised in Table 3.4 *"A Low/medium capacity rating indicates that development is likely to have an adverse effect on most of the character area and while smaller*



development may be possible in a very few locations within the character area, it will not be suitable for strategic scale development”.

Mid Sussex District Plan (2018)

- 2.3. Policies considered relevant include: Policy DP12 Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside, DP15 New Homes in the Countryside, DP16 High Weald AONB, DP26 Character and Design, DP37 Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows and DP38 Biodiversity.

East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan

- 2.4. Policies considered relevant include: Policy EG1 High Weald AONB, EG3 Promoting Good Design and EG5 Housing.

High Weald AONB Management Plan

- 2.5. The Management Plan includes specific Actions for Public Bodies, for example, ensure limited disturbance to landform and soils, ensure introduction of SuDS, deliver new housing consistent with AONB character, minimise erosion of AONB through character.

3.0. Review of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)

- 3.1. The application has been accompanied by a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) undertaken by CSA in December 2025 (Ref: CSA/6703/02 Rev.B). Overall, we are generally satisfied with the submitted methodology (Appendix G) that has informed the assessment.

Landscape Character

- 3.2. The site is located within Area 6 High Weald of ‘A Landscape Character Assessment for Mid Sussex 2005’. Key characteristics of the LCA include a wooded, confined rural landscape, secluded valleys, significant woodland cover and a sense of enclosure, pattern of small irregular assarted fields.
- 3.3. Table 5 assesses the Effects on Landscape Character. The Site is assessed to have moderate-substantial adverse effects at Year 1, reducing to moderate adverse at Year 15. We consider this a fair assessment of the effects associated with the development of this site.
- 3.4. The Immediate Surroundings are assessed to have medium-high sensitivity, slight magnitude of change and slight adverse effects at Year 1. Whilst the methodology does not include a table which shows how combined judgements of magnitude of change with sensitivity result in overall sensitivity, we judge that a combination of slight magnitude of change and medium-high sensitivity judgements would results in effects that exceed slight adverse. The development density and layout do not accord with other existing development outside the built edge of East Grinstead, which is larger plots of sparse development.

- 3.5. The High Weald National Landscape is a valued landscape and should have been included as a separate landscape receptor within the LVIA, drawing on the characteristic features of the National Landscape and the impact of the development on these features. This assessment should be incorporated into the LVIA to ensure that the influence of the development on the National Landscape and its special qualities is fully understood and appropriately addressed.

Visual Effects

- 3.6. We consider the included viewpoint photography to be taken from representative locations surrounding the site. Viewpoint Photographs were undertaken in October 2025, with vegetation largely in full-leaf, therefore not representing the worst-case scenario. However, judgement justification makes reference to winter views and differences compared to the submitted photographs, which is welcomed.
- 3.7. Views into the application site are available from West Hoathly Road and Coombe Hill, located on the west edge of the site. A footpath runs along the western edge of West Hoathly Road until it reaches Coombe Hill Road, halfway along the site.
- 3.8. The LVIA judges that West Hoathly Road has medium sensitivity and substantial-moderate magnitude of change, resulting in a moderate adverse effect. Based on the provided methodology, we consider that the effects on this visual receptor would exceed moderate adverse, and are likely to be substantial-moderate at Year 1, owed to the impact on the undeveloped character on entrance to the National Landscape, and the new urban development pattern which changes the countryside view.
- 3.9. Dunnings Hill Road is located north of the site, and is elevated in the landscape, allowing views to the sloping site on the other side of the valley. The site is visible from Dunnings Hill Road, with views available of the grassland field over the roofs and surrounding vegetation. This forms the vegetated edge of East Grinstead on entrance to the High Weald National Landscape.
- 3.10. Development within the site extends to the southern site boundary, located on the highest elevation area of the site. Therefore, as users travel south along Dunnings Lane, views will be available of multiple rooflines situated on the sloping landform. The LVIA (Table 6 – Visual Effects) assesses this receptor has medium sensitivity, slight magnitude of change and slight adverse overall effect. We consider that this elevated view towards the countryside edge of the High Weald National Landscape, which is proposed to be interrupted by a series of rooflines extending up the valleyside, will have an effect that exceeds slight adverse.
- 3.11. Whilst views of the site are largely localised, it is noted that this is a characteristic of the LCA, where the extent of surrounding woodland and vegetation creates an enclosed and intimate character.

4.0. Review of the proposals

- 4.1. The Site is located outside the built-up area boundary (BUAB) of East Grinstead and is therefore located within the countryside and within the High Weald National Landscape (former AONB).
- 4.2. Within the Draft Submission (July 2024) version of the Mid Sussex District Plan, it is noted that the site falls within Draft Allocation DPA 4 'Land Off West Hoathly Road'. However, the Adopted District Plan remains the primary policy framework for this site, where the site's location within the National Landscape is an important landscape consideration.
- 4.3. Policy DP16 of the Mid Sussex District Plan and Policy EG1 of the East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan state that development will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty.
- 4.4. The Site exhibits much of the characteristics of the Area 6 High Weald LCA. The site is wooded and confined in character, located within a valley and surrounding by significant woodland cover which provides a sense of enclosure, and is located within a pattern of small irregular assarted fields.
- 4.5. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) states that development within National Landscapes must "*seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty*". Within this scheme, enhancements to the National Landscape are limited to the western site boundary, where hedgerow and tree planting contributes to the multi-layered planting approach set out within the High Weald Design Guide. However, the introduction of a large number of houses and hard surfacing within an undeveloped sloping field on the edge of East Grinstead does not largely contribute to enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape.
- 4.6. Key characteristics of the National Landscape (as set out in the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029) which we consider most relevant to the site include:
 - Natural Systems: The site forms the valleyside of small stream (Sunnyside Brook) which is located north of the site.
 - Settlement: Expansions of settlement is noted as uncharacteristic after the AONB designation in 1983.
 - Woodland: There is a high proportion of Ancient Woodland, thick hedges and shaws surrounding the site.
 - Landscapes and Heaths: The site is an individual small field and is located at a right angle to the watercourse. It is also an assarted field with woodlands which form the boundaries.
 - Aesthetic and Perceptual Qualities: The site has a sense of intimacy and enclosure, a recognisable mosaic of open fields and wooded habitat, and unexpected elevated long views to East Grinstead.

- 4.7. Objective FH2 of the High Weald Management Plan sets out the aim to “*To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands*”. This objective refers to maintaining the fields as well as the field boundaries. It is therefore important to consider that whilst the boundaries are being retained, the character of the assarted medieval field structure and the perception of it is also retained.
- 4.8. On departure from East Grinstead, elevated views are available from Dunnings Road of the undeveloped countryside on the other side of the valley within the High Weald National Landscape. Introduction of built form into the site would result in layers of rooflines visible where development is situated on a sloping landform on the opposite valleyside. The development of this site would therefore have an adverse effect on the entrance into the High Weald National Landscape along this route. Removal of development on the highest elevation land would contribute to reducing the visual impact from Dunnings Road.
- 4.9. Owing to the site location on a valleyside, tree and hedgerow planting proposed on the northern boundary will have a limited contribution to visually mitigating the effects of the proposals from elevated areas in East Grinstead.
- 4.10. Within the Mid Sussex Capacity Assessment, the site is located within Area 12 Sunnyside High Weald. The 2014 Capacity Assessment assesses the LLCA as having a low/medium capacity for development, where development is likely to have an adverse effect, while possible for some smaller development. Owing to the function of the site as a gateway to the National Landscape, we therefore consider the site to have an adverse effect on the local and National Landscape.
- 4.11. Development on the edge of East Grinstead would also erode the rural character, which is currently defined by Sunnyside Recreation Ground and development in a looser arrangement and on larger plots. Comparatively, the proposed development is residential in nature, introducing urbanising features into the National Landscape.
- 4.12. We recognise that the development parcel topography faces East Grinstead and therefore relates to the settlement edge. However, the elevated views back towards the site visually situate East Grinstead on the edge of the High Weald National Landscape. Development of the site would erode the perception of location on the edge of this valued landscape.
- 4.13. A new entrance from West Hoathly Road is also proposed to form access into the development site. This would further introduce urbanising features into the National Landscape by requiring the removal of hedgerow and a new formal entrance on this rural road.
- 4.14. The western site boundary could be further enhanced with woodland edge planting to contribute to the LCA characteristics, which are largely enclosed and wooded. This would somewhat reduce the visual impact along West Hoathly Road.

- 4.15. Ancient Woodland is located on the eastern site boundary and is a key feature of this National Landscape. The developed area is located outside of the 15m buffer zone which contributes to reducing the impacts on the woodland. However, development in close proximity to the woodland would still contribute to disturbance of this feature.
- 4.16. The Design and Access Statement (DAS) does not make specific reference to how the proposals adhere to the guidance set out within the High Weald Housing Design Guide (2019), nor the High Weald Colour Study (2017). We would expect the submission to address how the design reflects the guidance to reduce the impacts on this highly valuable landscape.
- 4.17. Overall, we judge that the proposed scheme is limited in its conservation and enhancement the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

Recommendations and compliance with the High Weald Housing Design Guide (2019)

- 4.18. From a landscape perspective, we have concerns regarding the principle of this development within the National Landscape. However, we advise that the following is considered to reduce the effects of the proposals in accordance with the High Weald Housing Design Guide (2019):
- 4.19. The southern part of the site is the most sensitive to development, given its distance from the settlement edge of East Grinstead, and the elevated landform. Development on this edge of the site is more visible and will sit higher in the views from the edge of East Grinstead.
- 4.20. Reducing the perception of multiple layers of rooflines is a primary consideration within the design of this scheme. Views of a series of rooflines on a sloping landform will result in increased perception of urbanisation within the National Landscape.
- 4.21. Visual connectivity is an important tool for wayfinding. Views are currently available from within the site towards the edge of East Grinstead, which should be incorporated into the design to help people orient themselves. Views towards the edge of East Grinstead should be presented within the DAS to demonstrate how this has been integrated into the design.
- 4.22. The HWHDG states (Page 15) “*where sites form a new edge to the countryside, transitions need to be soft so that development sits appropriately in the landscape*”. The proposed development abuts houses and hard rear boundaries up to the vegetated and permeable outer edges of the site which are located furthest from the built edge of East Grinstead. A softer approach to the most southern boundary and other vegetated boundaries should be explored.
- 4.23. Hard boundaries are formed where rear gardens meet the outer vegetated boundaries of the scheme. Softer boundary treatments would contribute to fully integrating these proposals into the landscape.

- 4.24. The HWHDG states (Page 15) “*Trees and hedgerows can help to blend a development into the landscape in long views*”. Further emphasis should be placed on planting the streets with trees which will break up with multiple layers of rooflines and reduce the visual impact of a new development. The roads should therefore be characterised by tree planting on both sides of the street, with larger stock sizes on primary streets.
- 4.25. Trees should also be proposed within the rear gardens. For example, Plots 10-23 should have trees planted within the rear of the rear gardens to soften the surrounding development and proposals on the higher topography areas of the site.
- 4.26. The development is also located on a sloping site, where notable cut and fill earthworks will be required. Earth moved should be kept on site where possible.
- 4.27. The gap in the hedgerow to form the entrance should be minimised to retain its function as an ecological corridor.
- 4.28. Page 24 of the HWHDG states “*Where there is private front curtilage, however small, within the High Weald it is typically enclosed, either by hedgerows, low walls, wooden picket fences or occasionally metal railings*”. This approach to soft landscaping and boundary treatment should be implemented. Close-board fencing should be minimised wherever possible.
- 4.29. Page 30 of the HWHDG states “*Plots/driveways should be separated by hedges to help green the street*”. Throughout the scheme, there are a number of parking spaces between plots which serve different houses. These should be separated by hedges and other boundary treatments such as low picket fences.
- 4.30. Herringbone block paving is not typical of the High Weald and should not be used (Page 37, HWHDG).

5.0. Summary

- 5.1. Overall, we have some professional differences in judgement regarding the impacts assessed within the LVIA. For some localised receptors, we consider that the level of effects has been underestimated.
- 5.2. The Site is located within the High Weald National Landscape. We consider that the proposed scheme offers only limited regard to the requirements of Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) in conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the National Landscape.
- 5.3. The Site acts as a gateway to East Grinstead from the High Weald National Landscape, which can be perceived by users of Dunnings Road. We judge that it is important to retain this visual and physical connection to the adjacent National Landscape.

- 5.4. The submitted application must further demonstrate alignment with the High Weald Management Plan, the High Weald Housing Design Guide and the High Weald Colour Study.
- 5.5. If minded for approval, we advise the above recommendations are considered in accordance with guidance set out within the High Weald Housing Design Guide and the High Weald Colour Study.

Please contact us if you have any queries in relation to this advice.

Place Services – Landscape Team

Email: landscape@essex.gov.uk



Place Services provide landscape advice on behalf of Mid Sussex District Council

Please note:

This letter is advisory and should only be considered as the opinion formed by specialist staff in relation to this particular matter.

We are unable to respond directly to applicants/agents or other interested parties. Any additional information, queries or comments on this advice that the applicant/agent or other interested parties may have, must be directed to the Planning Officer at the relevant LPA, who will seek further advice from us where appropriate.