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9th July 2025

Dear Mr Watt,

DM/25/0484 – 60 KEYMER ROAD, HASSOCKS

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to comments on the application at 60 Keymer Road, Hassocks.

Design

As you know the design of the building has been informed by consultation with the Mid Sussex Design Review Panel, which was wholly supportive of the current design. Specifics raised in the consultation process were previously addressed in detail in our additional response provided on 20th May 2025.

The applicant and architects have provided the following response to the questions raised:

“In response to the Case Officer’s question about the height of the development, unfortunately it is not a simply a case of the developer being willing or not to consider this. I can confirm we did initially try. However, as illustrated by the time it has taken to develop a scheme, the effort that has gone into the shaping the form, and ultimately the still “high risk” conclusion of the viability appraisal, this site can simple not come forward without the quantum of accommodation proposed. Also,

we feel a wider duty to maximise the use of previously developed brownfield land, which does not contribute to the character of the village, to accommodate much-needed housing in Mid Sussex while mitigating greenfield development.

More specifically addressing the design itself, it seems the clearly emotive topic of height needs to be considered in more nuanced terms than simply “four storeys”, as was given by the opportunity to consider it with MSDC’s Design Review Panel. Clearly, there is a distinction to be made between the relative height, the absolute height, and the perceived height, which is not simply semantic.

The relative height is four storeys, being three storeys of residential over a ground floor of non-residential issues and car parking. Despite what has been repeatedly said, this is not unprecedented in Hassocks – see Hassocks Lodge or Ewart Close as examples. The former additionally has a pitched roof on top of its four storeys, rather than one storey being accommodated within the roofscape as often happens through the village. Both buildings also sit on higher ground. This brings us onto absolute height. As illustrated in the Design & Access Statement, the site at 60 Keymer Road sits at a low point in the villages, with Keymer Road rising to both the East and the West. As such, one does not need to go far in either direction to find buildings whose roof ridges are higher in absolute terms, and as such are more prominent in the wider landscape.

Which brings us on to the issue of perceived height that, as also illustrated in the Design & Access Statement, is set by the key datums along Keymer Rd that form the character of the village. These are the first floor fascia that delineates the non-residential ground floor uses, and then the eaves, above which both inhabited and uninhabited roofs sit. This eaves line at the head of the second floor, is adopted in the design, creating a three-storey height façade as seen elsewhere along Keymer Road such as Orion Parade and Holmwood Court. Above this sits a mansard roof in which the top storey is accommodated. Again, an approach precedent in the village, prominently in the building farming the entrance to Grand Avenue or in the more recent developments opposite the Primary School.

Finally, the site sits at a point along Keymer Road where the streetscape widens, with the parade opposite the site setting back from the road, and then widens again further in front of Orion Parade. The massing of the proposal responds to this change

in scale of the streetscape, and actively looks to help create a threshold between the distinct spaces identified in the Hassocks Centre Townscape Analysis, reinforcing the “important sense of arrival to (the) village centre” noted in the Hassocks Village Townscape Appraisal. Through reinstating street frontages, the proposal simultaneously reconnects the parade on the east side of Dale Avenue and Orion Parade back into the village centre.

As the Design and Access Statement sets out, all these considerations, along with Mid Sussex’s own Design Guide, have informed the design that has simultaneously had to address equally emotive issues such as Car Parking, Flood Risk, Sustainability, Biodiversity, Community Infrastructure, etc. The Design Review Panel, having had the benefit of consider all of this, reached their recorded conclusion – which is available within the submitted Design and Access Statement. We would be happy for this to be uploaded to the Council’s planning register as a standalone document if this is seen to offer greater transparency in how the current design has been considered and arrived at.

As noted at the outset, for this development to come forward it must deliver a minimum quantum of accommodation, which cannot be achieved in a design that is one storey shorter. However, as outlined above, we strongly feel that regardless of this, the proposal represents a thoroughly and sensitively considered response to the townscape of the village and results in a high-quality design that has improved the currently poor streetscape and lack for frontage presented by a brownfield site that (in the view of others) “does not positively contribute to a sense of place” and whose “character, scale, form, colour and facing materials all undermine local distinctiveness” and a forecourt that “undermines the rhythm of the shop facades” (quotes from the Hassocks Townscape Character Appraisal).”

Individual aspects of the public consultation, pre-application and design review panel process have informed the design development are comprehensively detailed at section 4.15 of the Design and Access Statement.

Ground Conditions

We are not clear on what evidential basis the question of subsidence has been raised but can provide the following response.

Having consulted the project's civil and structural engineers (HOP Consulting), they are surprised that the issue of potential subsistence has been raised, and specifically at this stage. Clearly, many buildings have been constructed in the village centre without encountering such issues.

We note that the site, and much of the development along Keymer Road, lies over the high-strength Folkestone Formation, comprising medium- and coarse-grained, well-sorted cross-bedded sands and weakly cemented sandstones. We further note that the proposal does not involve the removal of any mature trees, which can lead to heave in clay soils. That said, the potential for subsidence (and heave) will be comprehensively investigated through pre-construction works to determine geotechnical parameters for the design of the substructure.

Risk of movement will be mitigated through a compliant detailed design for the foundations, which will be compliant with all relevant standards and subject to scrutiny by the local authority Building Control process.

More generally, the project has been informed by assessments of the site and its features that have informed the development of proposals from the outset, including an assessment of the geological and hydrogeological features of the site.