



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

Our ref: 18847
Date: 24 June 2026

For the attention of: Caroline Grist

Application ref: DM/26/1315
Location: Land West Of Gatesmead Wickham Way Haywards Heath
West Sussex
Proposal/Description: Proposed 49 new homes together with open space and associated infrastructure.

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.

This review is based on a desktop study with a site visit undertaken on 21/06/2026, of the above-referenced application and its submitted documents. Our Landscape comments are as follows:

1.0. Site Context

- 1.1. The Site is located close to the northern edge of Haywards Heath. A railway line forms the western site boundary, Old Wickham Lane and residential houses form the southern boundary, grassland fields form the western and northern site boundaries, with another area of residential properties at Gatesmead to the north-east. The surrounding area and field boundaries are characterised by woodland. The High Weald National Landscape is located approximately 0.6km to the north.
- 1.2. Public Rights of Way (PRoW) HAH-47BCU forms the eastern boundary, and PRoW HAH-46CCU Sussex Diamond Way forms the southern site boundary.
- 1.3. The Site itself is known as Wickham Fields open space.

2.0. Planning Policy Context

- 2.1. The Mid Sussex District Plan (MSDP) (Adopted 2018) includes the following relevant policies; Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside; Policy DP37: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows and Policy DP38: Biodiversity.

- 2.2. Within the 2023 Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA), the Site is identified as Site 988 'Land to the North of Old Wickham Lane Haywards Heath'. The achievability states that *"There is a reasonable prospect that site could be developed within the Plan period"*.
- 2.3. The Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan includes the following relevant policies:
- Policy E1 states: *Planning applications which would result in the loss of existing open spaces of public value will generally be resisted except where:*
 - *They are supported by an open space assessment that demonstrates the open space is no longer needed or*
 - *Proposals for equivalent or better alternative provision are made in a suitable location or*
 - *There is a proven need for essential utility infrastructure where the benefits outweigh any harm or loss and it can be demonstrated that there are no reasonable alternative sites available."*
 - Within Figure 4, the site is identified as Policy E5, which states: *"The land outside the proposed built up area is designated as a local gap between Haywards Heath and neighbouring Town/Parishes, see figure 4, to create a landscape buffer that will support and enhance ecological connectivity, maintain the landscape character of the areas and individual settlements. New development outside the built up area will only be permitted if it:*
 - *would not unduly erode the landscape character of the area or its ecology*
 - *would not harm the setting of the town and*
 - *would retain and enhance the separate identity of communities"*.
 - Policy E8, E9, E10, E11 and E12 are also considered relevant.
- 2.4. Within the Mid Sussex Landscape Capacity Assessment (2007/2014), the Site is located within Area 45 Haywards Heath North Weald. The 2007 assessment judges that the Area has a slight sensitivity, moderate value and medium/high capacity. The revised 2014 assessment judges an overall medium capacity, which is defined as *"A Medium capacity rating indicates that there is the potential for limited smaller-scale development to be located in some parts of the character area, so long as there is regard for existing features and sensitivities within the landscape"*.

3.0. Review of the Landscape and Visual Appraisal

- 3.1. A Landscape and Visual Appraisal (LVA) has been undertaken by David Jarvis Associates in April 2026 (Ref: 3403-4-4-4-LVIA-0001-S5-P2 Rev P2).
- 3.2. The Methodology has been included within Appendix 1. The approach within the methodology is judged to be in accordance with best practice Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, 3rd edition (GLVIA3).

Landscape Character

- 3.3. Within the West Sussex Landscape Management Guidelines (2003), the Site is located within Landscape Character Area (LCA) HW4 High Weald Fringes. Key characteristics of the LCA include:
- Wooded, often confined rural landscape of intimacy and complexity partly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).
 - Significant woodland cover, a substantial portion of it ancient, and a dense network of shaws, hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
 - Pattern of small, irregular-shaped assart fields and larger fields, and small pockets of remnant heathland.
 - Network of lanes, droveways, tracks and footpaths.
 - London to Brighton Railway Line crosses the area at Haywards Heath.
- 3.4. We welcome the tabulated approach of assessing the effects on landscape character in Table 6.1, with effects judged for both the Site and the Study Area in context of LCA HW4.
- 3.5. Within Table 3.1, the recreational value for both the Site and the Study Area is assessed as **medium**. Given the presence of PROWs on the east site boundary, the long-distance Sussex Diamond Path on the southern boundary, and the informal recreational routes through the Site and to the north which has been utilised for many years, we would consider that the recreational value has been underassessed.
- 3.6. The effects on individual landscape features are not assessed within the submitted LVA. For example, the trees and the landform should have been included as individual landscape receptors within the submitted assessment. Given the extent of development proposed across this sloping site, and the fragmentation of the internal field boundaries, these elements should have been assessed individually.
- 3.7. We recognise that Wickham Fields is not a formalised public open space; however, we highlight the important recreational value that is placed on this Site for residents who enjoy this space for dog walking and countryside access. We consider that the submitted LVA does little to acknowledge this recreational value, despite its strong contribution to residents and experience of the local landscape character of interconnected irregular shaped enclosed fields.
- 3.8. We largely concur with the assessed **major/moderate adverse** landscape effects on The Site. Where our judgements may differ, these are not deemed substantial.

Visual Amenity

- 3.9. Viewpoint photography was undertaken in December 2025, where the reduced leaf cover represents the worst-case scenario, which is welcomed. We consider the included viewpoints within the Viewpoint Location Plan (Dwg no. 3403-4-4-4 LV-0007 S4-P1) to be representative of available surrounding views.

- 3.10. Given the surrounding wooded character and the built edge of Haywards Heath, we acknowledge that views into the Site are limited to the immediate surroundings.
- 3.11. The Sussex Diamond Path runs along the southern boundary and is represented by Viewpoints 6-9. Para 7.10 of the LVA assesses that the footpath will experience **low** magnitude of change, which when combined with **high** sensitivity will result in **moderate adverse** effects at Year 1.
- 3.12. Table App1.8 within the Methodology defines low magnitude of change as “*The proposed development would result in a small alteration to the identified view or visual amenity*”. Given the proximity of the Sussex Diamond Path to the site, with elevated views out across the countryside edge of Haywards Heath, we would consider that this assessment has underplayed the magnitude of change on this receptor and would be better assessed as medium. Based on the methodology provided, we would therefore consider the overall effects on the Sussex Diamond Path to be **major/moderate adverse**.
- 3.13. The Site is currently utilised for recreational walking routes by residents, with informal routes running through and around the Site. We would therefore have expected these informal routes to be separate receptors and be represented by viewpoint photography. Whilst we acknowledge that Wickham Fields is not a formalised public open space which may justify the omission of viewpoints within the site from the LVA photography, we note that Viewpoints 10, 12 and 13 are taken from informal walking routes outside of the Site. Given this context, we consider it important that the LVA includes visual receptors from within the Site.
- 3.14. Given the length of time that the Site has been used and valued by residents for recreational purposes, we raise concerns regarding the adverse visual impact that the proposed development will have on these users. In accordance with the methodology provided and Table App1.10, we judge that visual receptors within the Site would experience **major adverse** (significant) effects.
- 3.15. We do however note that Para 8.7 states that major adverse effects are acknowledged for some receptors, however this should have included the visual receptors from within the Site.
- 3.16. The Site also forms part of the countryside transition from the urban edge of Haywards Heath into the countryside to the north, for users of PRoW HAH-47BCU and other informal walking routes travelling north via Viewpoint 10.
- 3.17. Overall, we have concerns regarding the visual impact of the proposals on recreational users of the site, which is not reflected in the submitted LVA. Visual effects on surrounding PRoWs, the Sussex Diamond Path and the informal walking routes connecting to the Site have been assessed, with only minor differences in professional judgement.

4.0. Review of Proposals

- 4.1. Residential development associated with Haywards Heath is situated to the south and the north-east, with existing infrastructure (London to Brighton railway) to the west. We therefore recognise that the site relates well to the edge of Haywards Heath and forms a contained parcel of land with limited opportunity for further northern expansion. This spatial relationship contributes to reduce some of the concerns regarding the development of this Site.
- 4.2. The wooded character helps to visually screens the Site from the wider landscape, with very limited views into the Site from beyond the perimeter edge. This contributes to the visual containment of this Site, as demonstrated by the submitted Wirelines for Viewpoints 11 and 12.
- 4.3. Although there is no current right of way through the Site, its longstanding use for passive informal recreation contributes to the extent of its local significance. The Site shares many of the characteristics of the High Weald National Landscape, including the wooded character, assarted fields, and a network of lanes and footpaths, which further increases the importance of this site as a recreational space and the opportunity for locals to experience the wider character close to Haywards Heath.
- 4.4. The Site is considered as an informal open space with walking routes connecting to the Sussex Diamond Path, PRoW HAH-47BCU and the routes to the north. It is a well-used space which has important recreational value to the local residents of Haywards Heath. We consider that the LVA has underplayed the recreational importance of this Site, where the development would be a local loss for dog walkers and other users.
- 4.5. Whilst we acknowledge that the development of the Site would introduce formalised walking routes through the centre of the scheme (Planning Layout, Dwg no. 25714/5000F), the character of these walking routes will be fundamentally changed from the enclosed countryside character currently experienced. The effects on changes on the function of the Site is a primary concern from a landscape perspective, in relation to both landscape character and visual amenity.
- 4.6. DMMO 3/22 is an ongoing request for the formalisation of a footpath towards the western edge of the Site, and follows an existing route used by locals. We note that the proposed footpath route through the Site is not reflected in the proposed development, nor is it referenced as a visual receptor within the LVA.
- 4.7. Policy E5 within the Haywards Heath Neighbourhood Plan states: *“The land outside the proposed built up area is designated as a local gap between Haywards Heath and neighbouring Town/Parishes, see figure 4, to create a landscape buffer that will support and enhance ecological connectivity, maintain the landscape character of the areas and individual settlements. New development outside the built up area will only be permitted if it:*

- *would not unduly erode the landscape character of the area or its ecology*
- *would not harm the setting of the town and*
- *would retain and enhance the separate identity of communities”.*

- 4.8. Based on Policy E5 requirements, we do not consider that the Site would affect the separate identity of settlements given the adjacent trainline and the residential land uses surrounding the Site. However, we consider that development of the Site would erode the landscape character of the area. This is acknowledged within the submitted LVA which acknowledges the **major/moderate adverse** effects on the Site.
- 4.9. Whilst the Site is not a formal open space, Policy E1 within the Neighbourhood Plan should also be considered, given that this Site has public value.
- 4.10. The existing hedgerows within the Site are evident on historic mapping, forming part of the remnant medieval field pattern. The proposed development layout within the Landscape General Arrangement (3403-5-2-1 DR-0001 S4-P6) would fragment the existing strong field pattern, with housing and access routes replacing sections of existing hedgerows. This would disrupt both the physical structure and visual perception of the small, assarted fields, resulting in the erosion of the surviving medieval landscape field pattern.
- 4.11. From a landscape perspective, we consider that the scheme is not landscape-led and does not respect the existing field pattern through the Site. The proposed layout unduly affects the character of the Site by fragmenting the strong landscape structure, which would have benefitted from being further reinforced with planting as opposed to being partly removed to facilitate additional houses.

5.0. Summary

- 5.1. Notwithstanding the absence of formal public open space designation, we consider that the Site has notable recreational value and amenity function, where its longstanding use for passive informal recreation contributes to the extent of its local importance. The Site is well connected to surrounding PRowWs and to other informal routes to the north, and also connects to surrounding residential areas, providing a recreational space for local residents and a gateway to the National Landscape.
- 5.2. The submitted LVA should include the informal walking routes as a visual receptor within the assessment, to reflect the recreational use of the Site and also to remain consistent with the other informal routes that have been included as receptors outside of the Site. This would contribute to the LVA to better represent the recreational value of the Site.
- 5.3. We have substantial concerns regarding the development of the Site, given the impacts on the localised landscape character. This is also acknowledged within the submitted LVA. We consider that development on the Site will result in suburbanisation of a valuable recreational resource and experience, in its role in an accessible green space and countryside edge to Haywards Heath.

- 5.4. We consider that the proposed layout has not been designed sensitively in response to the existing remnant medieval field pattern and assarted fields throughout the Site. The layout is not landscape-led and does not reinforce or enhance the individual small field parcel character.

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.