

Planning Policy Advice

Application Ref:	DM/25/3020
Application Type:	Outline planning application
Address:	Land to the West of Courthouse Farm, Copthorne Common, Copthorne
Description:	Outline planning application for the erection of an extra-care retirement community (Use Class C2) and community pavilion, including associated parking, outdoor amenity space, landscaping and drainage, with all matters reserved except for the new access proposed from Copthorne Common Road
Date:	29 th May 2026
Policy Officer:	Jennifer Hollingum
DM Officer:	Joanne Fisher

Development Plan

The Development Plan comprises the adopted Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (2018) which is currently under review, and the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) (2022). The site falls within the boundary of the Copthorne Neighbourhood Plan which was made in September 2021.

The saved policies of the Mid Sussex Local Plan (2004) and the Small Scale Housing Allocations DPD (2008) are not relevant to this development proposal.

Below are the Development Plan policies considered key to the consideration of the development proposal.

Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (2018)

- Policy DP4: Housing
- Policy DP6: Settlement Hierarchy
- Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
- Policy DP15: New Homes in the Countryside
- Policy DP20: Securing Infrastructure
- Policy DP21: Transport
- Policy DP22: Rights of Way and Other Recreational Routes
- Policy DP26: Character and Design
- Policy DP27: Dwelling Space Standards
- Policy DP28: Accessibility
- Policy DP29: Noise, Light and Air Pollution
- Policy DP30: Housing Mix
- Policy DP31: Affordable Housing
- Policy DP37: Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- Policy DP38: Biodiversity
- Policy DP39: Sustainable Design and Construction
- Policy DP41: Flood Risk and Drainage

- Policy DP42: Water Infrastructure and the Water Environment

Copthorne Neighbourhood Plan (2021)

- CNP1: General Development Requirements
- CNP3: Homes for older people
- CNP10: CA3: Copthorne Common and Woodland
- CNP13: Our Economy
- CNP14: Sustainable Transport
- CNP15: Car Parking

Emerging District Plan

The Mid Sussex District Plan has been reviewed to ensure it remains effective and consistent with national policy. The review process commenced in 2021 and the draft Mid Sussex District Plan (2021-2039) was submitted for Examination in July 2024.

Hearings were held in February and March 2026. The Inspector in his Post Hearings letter [IDJB-12] has asked the Council to test a higher housing figure in the range of 1,200 to 1,300 dwellings per annum. This work is progressing and will continue over the next few months.

At this stage, policies within the draft District Plan have minimal weight.

Site selection process

All potential housing and employment sites are included within the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA). The SHELAA provides the palette of sites that are assessed for their suitability for allocation in the Development Plan. A site selection methodology has been developed and tested at Examination (of the adopted Site Allocations DPD). The site selection methodology has been used to assess the SHELAA sites, and identify those sites with potential for development, via allocation in a Development Plan Document.

There are 3 steps to the site assessment process, which are:

Stage 2(a) – Relationship to existing settlements – Sites that are disconnected from existing settlements are rejected and not subject to further assessment.

Stage 2(b) – Showstopper constraints – Where environmental constraints and deliverability considerations result in very negative impact against the site assessment criteria. Sites with showstopper constraints are rejected and not subject to further assessment.

Stage 2(c) – Overall Assessment – Sites that remain in the pool are subject to full assessment. Sites may be rejected at this stage if there are a combination of negative impacts. Sites may also be rejected at this stage if the loss of the site's current use is contrary to national policy.

For the purposes of plan making, sites that remained in the pool after Stage 2(c) were subject to further testing including Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulations Assessment and transport modelling. This is Stage 3 of the site selection process. Those sites remaining in the pool after this stage were proposed for allocation in the Submitted District Plan.

The site has been submitted to the Council and is included in the SHELAA as site #990. This site has been assessed through the site selection process for 140 dwellings. In summary, the site was rejected at Stage 2(c) – Overall Assessment. The reason for this is:

National Planning Policy gives considerable weight to the protection and enhancement of the natural and historic environment. The site is adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site at Copthorne Common. Development has potential to impact on the Local Wildlife Site with no mitigation identified. The site is therefore considered unsuitable for development and has been excluded from further assessment.

On the 15th May 2026 the Council published its list of additional sites for in-combination testing [SSP7]. The conclusion of the Post Hearings Site Selection Review – Initial Conclusions is that this site (SHELAA ID #990) is suitable for further testing. This is for a yield of 86 dwellings rather than C2 use. The justification for the conclusion is:

The site lies beyond the settlement pattern of Copthorne, breaching the A264 which forms the southern extent of the village. However, the site is within proximity to the existing southern extent of Copthorne and could represent a sustainable extension to the village. Copthorne is also located close to Crawley and therefore this site could assist in meeting their unmet housing needs. The site also lies immediately adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site which borders the north, west and southern boundary. It would need to be demonstrated that there would be no harm caused to these sites.

There are currently two live planning applications that have been submitted for this site proposing either a residential or care home scheme. On balance, it is considered that this site should be subject to further testing.

No weight, in the decision-making process, can be given to the inclusion of this site in the pool of sites for further testing. The outcome of this further work has not yet concluded and is subject to further consideration during the District Plan Examination.

Site location

The site is not allocated for development in the adopted or emerging development plan, however, it is on the list of additional sites for in-combination testing during summer 2026.

The site is outside of the built-up areas as shown on the adopted Policies Maps and therefore Policy DP6: Settlement Hierarchy and Policy DP12: Protection and Enhancement of Countryside are relevant. The site is not contiguous with the existing built-up area. The adopted District Plan defines contiguous as 'sharing a common border, touching'.

The site is separated from Copthorne by the A264 and the Copthorne Common Local Wildlife Site. Development of the site would lead to built form to the south of the A264 where currently there is little development.

The Council has undertaken a Settlement Sustainability Review, which enabled a classification of the district's settlements, taking into account service provision and accessibility. Policy DP6 of the adopted District Plan sets out this hierarchy. The site is in Copthorne, a Category 2 settlement, which is categorised as a larger village acting as a Local Service Centre.

Copthorne Common Local Wildlife Site

Copthorne Common is a designated Local Wildlife Site. It is adjacent to the site to the west and south. Policy DP38: Biodiversity requires development to avoid damage to, protect and enhance the special characteristics of Sites of Nature Conservation Importance (now known as Local Wildlife Sites). It is important that any potential direct or indirect impacts on the Local Wildlife Site from the development proposal are fully assessed and mitigated. There may also be opportunities to create or enhance ecological connectivity as part of the

development layout and design including with reference to the priorities and measures in the emerging West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

C2 use

The proposal is for extra-care retirement community accommodation (also referred to as Housing with care). The Applicant's Planning Statement suggests the provision of 101 extra-care units comprising a mix of 1-, 2- and 3-bedroom units (houses and apartments). The Planning Statement also suggests that the units will be a mix of market and private rent. The units are self-contained, enabling independent living, with a basic care package which can be adapted to reflect any increasing care needed by residents.

Specialist accommodation and care home facilities falling within C2 are considered social infrastructure. Policy DP25: Community Facilities and Local Services supports the provision of such facilities that contribute to creating sustainable communities.

Policy DP30: Housing Mix supports the delivery of a range of housing types to meet the accommodation needs of the local community, including specialist accommodation and care homes. The Council's 2021 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) indicates that there is a need for extra-care accommodation within the district. The SHMA is the Council's most recent evidence of need. The development will contribute to meeting this need.

SA39: Specialist Accommodation for Older People and Care Homes – Policy SA39 in the Site Allocations DPD sets out criteria for considering proposals for specialist accommodation for older people and care homes. The reference to the level of identified needs within SA39 is considered to be superseded by the conclusions of the 2021 SHMA, as referenced above.

Housing land supply position

Whilst Mid Sussex District Council has performed excellently in respect of the Housing Delivery Test, a new standard method formula was published in December 2024 alongside the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which gives Mid Sussex a significantly higher housing requirement than the current District Plan. As a result and having regard for the need for an appropriate buffer, the Council is unable to demonstrate a five year supply of deliverable housing sites as per the requirements of paragraph 78 of the NPPF.

Infrastructure

The Planning Policy team would expect the standard infrastructure contributions to be made but will leave it to other consultees to provide the detail.

Good pedestrian and cycling connectivity is important to encourage active travel and to access local services and facilities, and to avoid the development being too heavily car dependent.

Other relevant matters

As the site is located on the edge of a settlement, a landscape-led and high quality design will be important. The Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD is also relevant. The Planning Policy team will leave it to other consultees such as the Council's Urban Designer to comment on detailed design matters.

Tye Cottage is a Grade II listed building located to the north-east of the site. The Planning Policy team will leave it to other consultees such as the Council's Conservation Officer to comment on heritage matters.

Development should be directed away from any areas of existing surface water flow paths that may cross the site and any flood risk associated with the drainage ditches that cross the site and the watercourse on the site boundary in line with national policy and guidance and an appropriate flood risk assessment and drainage strategy should be prepared.

Mandatory biodiversity net gain will apply to the development proposal. A biodiversity net gain of at least 10% will need to be delivered. The Council encourages higher levels of biodiversity net gain as well as on-site biodiversity enhancements such as swift bricks, bird boxes, bat boxes, bee bricks, hedgehog highways and native wildflower planting with nectar- and pollen-rich flowers.