

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



30th May 2025

Dear Ms Richardson

Re: DM/25/0090 -Land At Eastwood Farm Shaves Wood Lane Albourne West Sussex

Having now reviewed the comments received from Places Services (PS) your Landscape Consultants and the South Downs National Park Authority (NP) I have the following observations:

1. PS note that the views, outlook and aspect are not affected by the development proposals, owed to the secluded nature of the development, the very limited views of the site and therefore have limited concerns over visual impact.
2. PS acknowledge that the development proposals include some large areas of new woodland planting adjacent to the Ancient Woodland which they consider will enhance the characteristics of the SDNP.
3. NP is pleased over the repurposing of the existing barns for hay and stable bedding etc. NPs advice was to leave the barns in situ and repurpose them without increasing their intensity of use or size due to the barns being sited within ancient woodland and its buffer – this advice is why the existing yard cannot be used to accommodate the equestrian development; therefore, the buildings are in an open field but connected to East Wood Farmhouse
4. PS's comments appear to be based solely on a desk study of policies and publicly available resources like Google Earth, with no indication of a site visit or inspection of public rights-of-way.
5. Regarding the absence of photographic evidence to support the Landscape and Visual Assessment (LVA), the photographs were prepared but unfortunately not uploaded at the time of submission. These are provided as part of this rebuttal.

6. I note the comment regarding the “*Landscape Institute TGN 02/21 Assessing Landscape Value Outside National Designations*” and would draw your attention to paragraph 2.19 of the LVA which states:

The site, albeit adjacent to the South Downs National Park boundary, is not within an area covered by a national or local landscape designation, however as noted in paragraph 5.26 of the GLVIA 3rd Edition where it states “...the fact that an area of landscape is not designated either nationally or locally does not mean that it does not have any value...” paragraph 5.27 goes on to identify the Landscape Character Assessment stating “... planning policies and/or landscape strategies and guidelines may give indication of which landscape types or areas, or individual elements or ascetic or perceptual aspects the Landscape are particularly valued...”

On this basis the Character Assessment relevant to this planning application are identified and examined in the following paragraphs dealing with Landscape Character.

7. Although I have not directly noted TGN 02/21, I have further examined the relevant elements that make up the landscape value within the LVA paragraphs 2.41 Landscape Character to paragraph 2.54 which leads into paragraph 3.4 which states:

Sensitivity measures whether the local landscape can accommodate development without longer term harm or degradation. It reflects the existing land use(s), pattern and scale of the landscape, degree of enclosure and value placed on the landscape.

8. The examination of the elements that make up the landscape value as detailed within TGN 02/21 are shown within Section 2 of the LVA which can be summarised in table form:

TABLE 1 Landscape Value			
Factor	Definition	Indicators	Evidence Provided
Scenic Quality	Defined by elements such as colour, texture, form, and composition that contribute to the landscape's aesthetic appeal.	Presence of iconic views, harmonious landforms, or distinct natural features.	Photographs, expert visual assessments.
Recreational Value	Includes accessibility, facilities, and diversity of activities supported by the landscape.	Accessibility, trails, variety of activities available.	Maps showing footpaths no public access into the site
Cultural and Historic Significance	Landscapes that tell historic narratives or hold cultural importance, such as monuments or sacred sites.	Historic landmarks, cultural practices linked to the landscape.	Historic Mapping and description of historic development of the site and surround area
Natural Value	Measures the presence of rare species, habitats, and overall biodiversity.	Species diversity, presence of protected habitats.	Biodiversity surveys, ecological report provided by Ecologist
Tranquillity	Focuses on noise levels, remoteness, and the absence of urban intrusion.	Low noise levels, absence of development.	SDNP Tranquillity mapping accessed and value quoted

Functionality	Evaluates the landscape's practical contributions, such as crop production or water purification.	Agricultural productivity, forestry yield, water management systems.	Reference made to previous owner's family use of the property and creation of ponds in the valley as part of farm diversification. The new owners long term plans for the property in from new minor country estate
Perceptual and Symbolic Value	Encompasses emotional connections, cultural associations, and the identity of the landscape within a community.	Community attachment, symbolic landmarks.	Perception of continued fragmentation and gentrification of historic agricultural holdings with farmhouse losing their direct connection to their historic landholding. Changes in land use such as introduction of vineyards.

9. Consequently, I have not explicitly referenced TGN 02/21 in the LVA, I have conducted the assessment in accordance with the GLIVA 3rd Edition Guidance, which precedes the TGN. The overall approach remains consistent; thus, I disagree with the assertion that I have not evaluated the landscape value within the LVA.

10. With regard to Landscape Character, PS state that:

The assessment (Paras 3.4-3.11) only assesses the general effects on landscape character, as opposed to the effects upon each of the LCAs and site and immediate context. Para 3.4 confirms that the assessment is of the local landscape character, however we would have preferred the assessment to provide effects for each of the relevant LCAs.

11. It is to be noted that within GLIVA 3rd edition in paragraph 5.13 it states:

Existing assessments must be reviewed critically as their quality may vary, some may be dated and some may not be suited to the task in hand. Before deciding to rely on information from an existing assessment a judgement should be made as to the degree to which it will be useful in informing the LVIA process. It should be reviewed in terms of:

- when it was carried out and the extent to which the landscape may have changed since then;*
- its status, and whether or not it has been formally adopted, for example, as supplementary planning guidance;*
- the scale and level of detail of the assessment and therefore its suitability for use in the LVIA, while noting that larger-scale assessments can often provide valuable context;*
- any other matters which might limit the reliability or usefulness of the information .*

12. PS introduce the West Sussex Landscape Character Assessment (WSLCA) character area LW11 Eastern Scarp Footslopes whereas I have focused on the Mid Sussex District Landscape Character Assessment (MSLCA) and the South Downs National Park 2020 Landscape character Assessment (SDLCA). PS criticises the LVA and states “...*however we would have preferred the assessment to provide effects for each of the relevant LCAs....*”
13. Firstly, I would question the introduction of the WSLCA when a note on the LW11 Eastern Scarp Footslopes clearly identifies that this area includes the MSLCA (Area 3) Hurstpierpoint Scarp Footslopes and therefore in terms of resolution the MSLCA is clearly a more relevant scale assessment for the current proposals.
14. Secondly when you compare the Key features MSLCA (Area3) Hurstpierpoint Scarp Slopes against the SDLCA Adur to Ouse Scarp Footslopes character area they are clearly similar (see Table 2) and the same can be said for the Landscape Management / Development Considerations (see Table 3). This is to be expected as the landscape does not respect the imposed boundaries of character assessments at a macro scale which are dictated by the resolution scale of the assessments carried out by the relevant bodies. They are useful for contextual background. The LVA has looked at the microscale of the site itself and local context using the SDNP LCA as the most recent and up to date assessment.

Table 2 Comparison of Key Characteristics: SDNP J2 vs MSDC Hurstpierpoint Scarp Slopes		
Feature	J2 Key Characteristics	Hurstpierpoint Scarp Slopes Characteristics
Relief	Undulating lowland landscape with chalk, mudstone, and sandstone bands.	Undulating low sandstone ridges and gentle Gault Clay vales.
Woodland	Frequent small blocks of ancient woodlands interwoven with more recent plantations and game coverts.	Concentration of ancient woodland on heavier Gault Clay soils.
Views	Visually dominated by steep chalk scarp forming a dramatic backdrop to valleys.	Dominated by steep downland scarp with scenic southward views.
Landscape	Arable fields on Lower Chalk, irregular pastoral fields on clay soils, and Sandy soils supporting dry acid grasslands.	A mosaic of arable and pastoral rural landscapes, featuring small and larger fields with woodlands, shaws, and hedgerows.
Villages	Spring-line villages at the base of the chalk scarp (e.g., Edburton, Fulking) and settlements on sandstone outcrops.	Characteristic spring-line villages, some historic, and expanded ridge-line suburban development.
Infrastructure	Well-developed network of rights of way and scenic parklands like Danny Estate.	Crisscrossed by roads (including A23) and the London to Brighton Railway, with modest country lanes.
Biodiversity	High biodiversity with hedgerows, woodland, and designed water bodies such as mill ponds.	Rich biodiversity in woodland, ponds, and stream valleys.
Building Materials	Unified use of flint, brick, rendering, and clay tile roofs.	Varied traditional rural buildings using flint, timber framing, Horsham stone, and local bricks.

Table 3 Comparison of Landscape Management/Development Considerations		
Aspect	J2 Character Areas	Hurstpierpoint Scarp Slopes
Historical Landscape	Conserve intact medieval and early post-medieval landscapes, including fields originating as woodland assarts and historic parklands (e.g., Plumpton, Danny, and Newtimber Parks).	Maintain and restore the scenic historic pattern and fabric of the agricultural landscape, including irregular patterns of smaller fields.
Grassland Conservation	Conserve and extend chalk grassland (e.g., Beeding Hill to Newtimber Hill SSSI) and unimproved acid grassland on sandstone outcrops (e.g., around Ditchling).	Promote the creation of arable field margins and corners, including alongside streams.
Woodland Conservation	Conserve ancient deciduous woodland (e.g., Tottington Wood LWS) and restore conifer plantations to native species.	Plan for long-term woodland regeneration, plant new small broadleaved farm woodlands, and manage existing woodlands.
Hedgerows and Trees	Use broadleaved woodland planting to screen developments and conserve the settlement pattern of nucleated spring line villages.	Conserve, strengthen, and manage hedgerows and hedgerow trees, replant lost hedgerows, and conserve single oaks in hedgerows to maintain succession.
Development Impact	Minimise excessive lighting, signage, and 'suburban' features; consider views to and from scarps like Devil's Dyke and Black Cap.	Avoid skyline development, ensure new development has minimal visual impact, and integrate it within the landscape.
Water Bodies	Not specifically mentioned.	Maintain and manage lakes, ponds, and their margins for landscape diversity and nature conservation value.
Rural Features	Protect the character of rural lanes and manage land uses to maintain rural character.	Protect rural lanes and manage road verges to enhance their nature conservation value.
Urban Fringe	Screen urban fringe developments, such as garden centres and nurseries, to prevent erosion of rural character.	Increase tree cover in and around villages, agricultural developments, and along urban routes like the A23 Trunk Road.
Horse Grazing	Not specifically mentioned.	Reduce the visual impact of horse stabling and grazing under the downland edge near Edburton.

15. Within the LVA I identify in paragraph 2.53 and 2.54 that the current MSDC & SDNP LCA's do not acknowledge that the fragmentation and gentrification of farmsteads have disrupted the agricultural landscape, with some land being sold off for uses like vineyards, driven by climate change and suitable soils. It also fails to recognise the adjacent development of Wickwoods Country Club Hotel & Spa and Colman's Carvan Park directly to the south of the site.
16. Table 4 below identifies the potential effects of development on adjacent character areas and the LVA's response to them. This addresses PS comments on the effects upon each of the LCA's, site and Immediate context.

Table 4 Potential Character Area Cross Boundary Effects		
Effect	Description	LVA Response
Visual Influence	Adjacent areas can affect each other's perceived character, either reinforcing harmony or introducing contrast in landform, vegetation, and built structures.	The scheme is effectively visually screened by adjacent Ancient Woodland thereby limiting visual connectivity. No views are possible from the Southdown's scarp located to south of the site. Built structures are similar in scale as those seen on Wickwoods Country Club & Spa (150m SE) and in the farm 400m to the north of the site. The site and adjacent land where ponds are located are manmade and artificial and not natural features, although over time they have been naturalised.
Ecological Connectivity	Natural features like woodlands, rivers, and habitats often span multiple areas, influencing biodiversity and ecological resilience.	Pond on the site within the landholding are manmade and have provided opportunities for natural regenerations and habitats to establish over time. Proposals include large areas of new woodland planting and areas designated for Wildflower Meadow and Orchard Planting
Cumulative Impact	Changes in land use, development, or infrastructure in one area can alter perceptions and functionality in neighbouring areas, leading to broader landscape shifts.	The removal of the agricultural tie on the dwelling has potentially removed the historic link with associated land. The proposed development on the site is consistent with historic minor estate developments in the local area and can be seen as securing the clients land holding as a whole and development of a sustainable parkland landscape.
Perceptual Experience	Transitions between character areas shape how people experience the landscape, affecting scenic quality and the overall sense of place.	The boundary between the adjacent character areas is arbitrary as extensive Ancient Woodland extends westwards within the client's landholding. The series of pond that run north to south along the valley adjacent to the site are manmade have a direct influence on scenic quality and sense of place. The proposal seek to expand on these lakes and associated landforms to aid assimilating the new built forms into the edge of the ancient woodland. This is compared to the adjacent piecemeal development which has occurred on the land to the south in and around Wickwoods Country Club & Spa which is within the National Park which have resulted in a significant development of discordant features on the edge of the Ancient Woodland and visible from Shaves Wood Lane.

18. On this basis I am of the opinion that although we have not made a direct comparison of the effects upon the two-character areas relevant to the proposals, the LVA clearly identifies the relevant aspects of both character areas and assesses them on a micro scale within the sites direct context and its location within the setting of the National Park .
19. In terms of the judgement within the LVA, PS suggest that a sensitivity of Moderate to High is more suitable than the Moderate that the LVA suggests. This reference is not in accordance with methodology I have used for the LVA and is taken from the 2014 MSDC Landscape Capacity Study carried out by Land Use Consultants (LUC) where the site lies within a reduced size character area designated as 80 Trusler's Hill Lane Footslopes. This new character area was designated primarily through desk study as detailed in paragraph 3.4¹ of the LUC study.
20. I would question the suggested increase in sensitivity by PS on the basis that:
- a. There is no evidence that a site visit has been undertaken by PS in order to assess the potential impact of the scheme at a microscale relevant to the scale of this project. They appear to just rely on the LUC to formulate the 80 Trusler's Hill Lane Footslopes.
 - b. Area 80 Trusler's Hill Lane Footslopes consist of the wider area to the north and southeast of the site and I would question the statement in relation to the site that *"...Its strong intervisibility with and function as an immediate setting to the South Downs National Park..."* as there is little by way of intervisibility between the site and the National Park. This is acknowledged by PS in term of MSDC Policy DP18 'Setting of the South Downs' stating that *"...The views, outlook and aspect are however not affected by the development proposals, owed to the secluded nature of the development and very limited views into the site..."*. This constraint is not recognised by the LUC description of the character area which is more characteristic of areas where there are direct open views into the National Park and the South Downs. As an example, the LUC references the 'Singing Hills Golf Course' within their description, situated to the southeast of the site. This area is notably more open, offering views into the National Park and the South Downs. The LUC study also overlooks the adjacent Wickwoods Country Club Hotel & Spa and Colman's Caravan Park directly to the south of the site. This omission appears to be a result of the arbitrary boundary set between the character assessments of the SDNP and MSDC.

¹ 2014 Mid Sussex Capacity Study by Land Use Consultants (LUC) page 41

- c. The assertion that the online ponds and the associated water edge character is a natural feature of the local area is not correct. They were created historically by damming up the small stream that runs pass the western side of the site. The pond that is within the site has been formed by the earthworks to construct the online ponds and is only fed by field surface run off and is ephemeral in nature. All these earthworks are generally constructed with steep gradients greater than 1 in 3 whereas the proposed are at a maximum of 1 in 3 to minimise the footprint of the development.
- d. The field has been crossed by the trackway down to the lakes where historically the field has been a single parcel of land thereby introducing a bisecting feature into the pastoral scene.
- e. We note PS comment that the development could be accommodated within the site, but question whether the scale and distribution of the proposal is too extensive considering their disconnect from any other built development. The proposals have had to be sited in an open field rather than the existing yard due to the yard and existing barns being sited within ancient woodland and its 15m buffer. The SDNPA does not want any new development within the ancient woodland or its buffer.
- f. I would highlight that the site is adjacent to Wickwoods Country Club, Hotel and Spa which accommodates the hotel and restaurant building, an indoor tennis court building, indoor paddle court building, 9 retreat lodges, 5 holiday lodges, spin studio building; open air spa garden, tennis courts with floodlights and carpark which have been developed within the National Park boundary.
- g. The layout of the facilities has been focused around a level plateau on the basis that hard surfacing slopes and horses do not mix with potential for accidents and injuries to both horses and riders. The elimination of heavily engineered structures such as retaining walls and barriers are both a safety and visual issue whereas soft embankments where level change is required are more sympathetic in a countryside location such as this.

21. I acknowledge the acceptance of PS of my assessment in terms of magnitude within the LVA as being Moderate Adverse. However, my original assessment indicated the site is of Moderate sensitivity in accordance with the methodology used for the LVA due to the detractors identified in paragraph 16.

22. Regarding summary table 8 of the LVA, PS state that the LVA “...*overstates the anticipated effects...*” of mitigation over a 15-year period. To ensure that the mitigation achieves the indicated effect, the PS and the SDNP recommendation for additional mitigation measures have been incorporated into amended plans which have been submitted with this rebuttal. These additional mitigation measures include:

- a. The removal of structural tree planting outside of the courtyard area.
- b. Additional woodland planting in the southeast to extend onto the proposed bank to help soften this feature and enhance the setting of the Ancient Woodland and SDNP.
- c. Further additional woodland planting is proposed along the western boundary of the site. This will aid to reinstate the original historic assartment of the woodland that created the open field with the provision of an additional 5,803m² of woodland bringing the total area of new woodland up to 8,626m² when compared to the original proposals.
- d. Replacement of the proposed porous tarmacadam with unbound natural stone surfacing which is more suitable in this countryside location.
- e. Native species hedges will be planted in double staggered rows in the suggested species ratios (planting details submitted).
- f. An AIA has already been submitted with an outline AMS included.
- g. The species mix is focused on diverse native species and those ornamental species suited to their location and insurance against climate change.
- h. Development avoids the root protection area of all trees within and surrounding the site.
- i. The resurfacing of the trackway will use a no-dig surface solution.
- j. The native species selected would add landscape and arboricultural value.
- k. Lighting will be minimised.

23. I kindly request that PS reflect on their views as to how the development is judged against relevant MSDC policies. These are summarised in table 5.

Table 5 Summary of Development Proposals and Concerns		
Main Points	Details	FLA Response
Development Location	Located in Trusler's Hill Lane Footslopes with low/medium capacity for development near the South Downs National Park.	LUC assessment does not respond to adjacent Wickwoods Country Club Hotel & Spa and Carvan Park or the lack of intervisibility between the site and the SDNP. There are remains of a historic agricultural building on the edge of the pond to the southwest edge of the site.
Landscape Impacts	Adverse effects on the landscape character and setting of the South Downs National Park; concerns about large buildings and extensive earthworks.	Large buildings are present both to the north and south of the site. SDNP have stated that redevelopment of the existing farmyard buildings would not be acceptable as they lie directly within the ancient woodland
Policy Compliance ALC2	Policy states proposals should enhance and not detract from the SDNP's visual qualities; woodland planting is positive, but built structures may detract.	Additional planting as suggested by PS will be included in an amended scheme. Building will reflect the local vernacular of agricultural style of building as compared to the Industrial style used on adjacent Wickwoods Site.
Building Scale	Indoor arena (9.3m height, 68m x 26m footprint) and other structures significantly exceed existing development in scale.	Scale of the buildings is commensurate with the proposed use and with the existing yard are not available for redevelopment due to the restriction placed on the property by SDNP. Large building are present both within the Wickwoods site to the south and the farm complex to the north
Earthworks	Concerns about 2m and 3m banks for arena and menage, unnatural terrain alterations, and highly raised land (up to 3m).	Embankments are required to keep site footprint to a minimum and are designed around a maximum of 1in3 gradient which is consistent and less than the landforms in and around the manmade ponds along the valley floor. Natural embankments were introduced to remove the highly engineered retaining walls required within the pre application scheme which would highly intrusive. The proposed levels of indoor arena in the pre application scheme would have had a notably greater visual impact to views from the north when viewed against the backdrop of the ancient woodland
Proposed Pond	Unnatural design with elevated banks (4m fall) and disconnection from natural ponds.	As detailed above for earthworks and to reiterate the pond are not natural, they are manmade with ponds adjacent to the site created in the 1990's

24. I would suggest that PS arrange to undertake a site visit and review their comments in light of the additional information I have provided.

25. Given this rebuttal, the amended plans and the additional information now submitted, I hope you can now support this proposal.

Yours sincerely

Trevor R Furse CMLI MCI Hort ISA