

PLANNING STATEMENT

Householder application for planning permission

**Birch House, London Road, Balcombe,
Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT**

Loft conversion with internal alterations

Document control	
Site address	Birch House, London Road, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT
Local planning authority	Mid Sussex District Council
Application type	Householder application for planning permission
Existing use	Single dwellinghouse (Use Class C3)
Proposed use	Single dwellinghouse (Use Class C3) — no change of use
Designations	Balcombe Conservation Area; High Weald National Landscape (High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
Project reference	2026-06-RH17

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Planning Statement is submitted by 1 Stop Design & Build on behalf of the applicant in support of a householder application for planning permission to Mid Sussex District Council.
- 1.2 The application site is Birch House, London Road, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT ("the Site"), a detached two storey dwellinghouse in single family occupation within Use Class C3.
- 1.3 The development proposed is: **"Loft conversion with internal alterations."**
- 1.4 This Statement assesses the proposals against the development plan and against material considerations, and sets out why planning permission should be granted. It is the policy companion to the Design and Access Statement submitted with the application, which sets out the design rationale, the evaluation of design options and the heritage assessment in full. To avoid duplication, this Statement does not repeat that material but cross-refers to it where relevant.
- 1.5 The Statement is structured as follows. Section 2 describes the Site and the building. Section 3 summarises the proposals. Section 4 sets out the statutory and policy framework. Section 5 identifies the main issues. Sections 6 to 12 assess those issues in turn. Section 13 provides a policy compliance summary. Section 14 sets out conditions the applicant would accept. Section 15 sets out the planning balance and conclusions.

2. THE SITE AND THE EXISTING BUILDING

- 2.1 Birch House is a detached two storey dwellinghouse on London Road (B2036), one of the two principal routes through the village of Balcombe. The dwelling sits on an established plot with mature boundary planting and generous garden ground to the rear, set back from the highway behind a driveway and integral garage.
- 2.2 The building has a complex, multi-pitched roof with a principal ridge at 9.440 m above the site datum, a projecting front gable with bay window and canopy, subsidiary hipped and mono-pitched elements at pitches ranging from 5 to 45 degrees, and two retained brick chimney stacks.
- 2.3 The dwelling has been extended at ground floor level. A contemporary flat-roofed rear extension accommodates the 31 m² kitchen and dining room and is finished in vertical timber cladding with dark grey framed windows and doors. It is a completed and established part of the building and establishes the existing material language of the rear elevation.
- 2.4 The existing accommodation comprises, at ground floor, a kitchen/dining room of 31 m², playroom of 13 m², living room of 17 m², hallway of 11 m², WC and integral garage of 18 m²; and at first floor, three bedrooms of 17 m², 13 m² and 10 m², a single bathroom of 5 m² and a landing. Above these is an unconverted roof void of approximately 52 m² on plan, in storage use only, with no fixed staircase and no habitable accommodation.
- 2.5 The Site lies within the Balcombe Conservation Area and within the High Weald National Landscape. Birch House is not a listed building, is not within the curtilage of a listed building, and is not identified as a non-designated heritage asset. There are no protected trees on the Site and the Site is not within a flood zone.

3. THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

3.1 The proposals convert the existing roof void into habitable accommodation and make consequential internal alterations. They comprise:

- a bedroom of 19 m², study of 9 m², bathroom of 4 m² and landing of 5 m² formed within the existing roof space, giving approximately 37 m² of habitable accommodation;
- a single L-shaped dormer to the rear and inner return of the roof, with a face height of 2.560 m, contained wholly below the existing ridge and finished in vertical timber cladding with dark grey glazing to match the existing ground floor rear extension;
- three conservation-profile rooflights set flush within the front roof slope;
- a new internal staircase from the existing first floor landing to the new loft landing, and associated internal alterations at first floor level.

3.2 The design rationale, including the four options tested and the reasons for the approach adopted, is set out at Sections 5 to 7 of the Design and Access Statement.

Parameter	Existing	Proposed
Number of dwellings	1	1 (no change)
Use class	C3	C3 (no change)
Footprint	As existing	No change
Ridge height	9.440 m	9.440 m (no change)
Eaves line	As existing	No change
Bedrooms	3	4, plus a study
Bathrooms	1	2
Front elevation	As existing	Unchanged save for three flush conservation rooflights
Chimney stacks	2	2, both retained unaltered
Parking	Integral garage and driveway	Retained unaltered
Trees and boundary planting	As existing	Retained in full
Garden ground	As existing	Retained in full

4. STATUTORY AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

The statutory framework

- 4.1 Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 requires that the application be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires the local planning authority to have regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations.
- 4.2 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires that, in the exercise of planning functions in respect of land in a conservation area, special attention be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. Where harm to a conservation area is found, that harm must be given considerable importance and weight.
- 4.3 Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as amended by the Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023, requires relevant authorities to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The development plan

- 4.4 The development plan for the Site comprises the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014–2031 (adopted 28 March 2018), the Mid Sussex Site Allocations Development Plan Document (adopted 29 June 2022) and the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2031 (made 22 September 2016). The Neighbourhood Plan forms part of the development plan and carries full weight.
- 4.5 The policies of most direct relevance are DP26 (Character and Design), DP34 (Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets), DP35 (Conservation Areas), DP37 (Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows), DP38 (Biodiversity), DP39 (Sustainable Design and Construction) and DP41 (Flood Risk and Drainage), together with the design guidance of the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan.

Material considerations

- 4.6 The National Planning Policy Framework is a material consideration. Chapter 12 requires that development be visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and history including the surrounding built environment, and that it maintain a strong sense of place. Chapter 16 requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected, requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, and provides that where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm that harm is to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.
- 4.7 Other material considerations include the Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD, the National Design Guide, the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan and the Council's published description of the Balcombe Conservation Area. The emerging Mid Sussex District Plan 2021–2039 was submitted for examination in July 2024 and has not been adopted; it is a material consideration carrying limited weight.
- 4.8 Statutory biodiversity net gain does not apply to householder development. The Community Infrastructure Levy is not currently in place in Mid Sussex.

5. THE MAIN ISSUES

5.1 The main issues raised by this application are:

- the principle of converting the roof space of an existing dwelling in this location;
- the effect of the proposals on the character and appearance of the Balcombe Conservation Area, engaging the statutory duty under section 72(1);
- the quality of the design and its relationship to the host building and the wider village;
- the effect on the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape;
- the effect on the living conditions of neighbouring occupiers;
- parking and access, given the increase from three to four bedrooms;
- trees, biodiversity, drainage and sustainable construction.

6. PRINCIPLE OF DEVELOPMENT

6.1 The Site is an existing dwellinghouse within the built-up area of Balcombe. The development plan supports the alteration and extension of existing dwellings within settlements where design, heritage and amenity considerations are satisfied. Policy DP26 expressly applies to alterations and extensions to existing buildings and does not exclude them in principle. There is no policy which prevents the conversion of a roof space in this location.

6.2 The proposals also represent a particularly efficient form of development. The whole of the additional accommodation is won from a volume that already exists, already roofed and already enclosed. No greenfield land is used, no garden ground is lost, no tree is affected, no new footprint is created and no additional infrastructure is required. In a village within a National Landscape and a Conservation Area, meeting a household's needs inside an existing envelope is the least harmful means of doing so available.

6.3 The proposals enable an existing family, currently living in a three bedroom house served by a single bathroom, to remain in Balcombe in accommodation suited to their needs. That is a modest but real social benefit consistent with the objectives of the development plan.

6.4 The principle of the development is acceptable. The determinative issues are heritage, design and amenity, addressed below.

7. HERITAGE: THE BALCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

7.1 A full heritage assessment is set out at Section 8 of the Design and Access Statement. The position is summarised here.

7.2 The heritage asset affected is the Balcombe Conservation Area. The Council's published description identifies the features which particularly contribute to the character of its residential parts as the attractive stone walling; the large detached houses set predominantly in spacious gardens, and the extensive grass verges bordering wide roads, which contribute to the overall open character of the area; and the number of hedgerows and fine trees. The same description records that the buildings here are of varying ages and styles.

- 7.3 Two consequences follow. The significance of this part of the Conservation Area rests principally on spatial and landscape attributes rather than on architectural uniformity, and the Conservation Area does not depend for its significance on a repeated house type, a consistent roof form or a single material palette.
- 7.4 The proposals do not affect any of the attributes from which that significance derives. The plot and its boundaries are unchanged. The spacing between Birch House and its neighbours is unchanged. The set-back from London Road is unchanged. All trees, hedges and boundary planting are retained. The footprint, height and mass of the building are unchanged, the ridge remaining at 9.440 m exactly as existing. The front elevation, including its gable, bay, canopy, fenestration and both chimney stacks, is retained without alteration.
- 7.5 The dormer is confined to roof slopes facing away from London Road, is contained below the existing ridge so that the silhouette of the building against the sky is unaltered, and is screened in public views by the building itself and by retained mature boundary planting. Where seen, it reads as a single considered contemporary element in a locally characteristic material, related directly to the existing timber-clad ground floor extension beneath it. It makes no attempt to imitate historic forms and creates no false impression of age.
- 7.6 The three rooflights to the front roof slope are the only change visible from London Road. Set flush within the plane of the roof with slim black frames, they read as dark recesses within the tiled slope. Rooflights of this kind are a common and accepted feature of roofs within conservation areas.
- 7.7 The character and appearance of the Balcombe Conservation Area is accordingly preserved. The statutory duty under section 72(1) is discharged and the proposals accord with Policies DP34 and DP35 of the District Plan and with Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 7.8 If, contrary to that assessment, the Council were to identify harm, it would fall at the lowest end of less than substantial and would be clearly outweighed by the public benefits of the scheme: the retention and efficient use of an existing building within the Conservation Area; the avoidance of any pressure to extend into the garden ground and tree cover which give this part of Balcombe its character; the substantial improvement in the thermal performance of the roof; and the delivery of family accommodation that allows an existing household to remain in the village.

8. DESIGN AND CHARACTER

- 8.1 Policy DP26 requires all development, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings, to be well designed and to reflect the distinctive character of the towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside.
- 8.2 The design responds directly to the character of the host building and its setting. The scale of the building is unchanged: the ridge, the eaves line, the footprint and the relationship of the house to its plot are all as existing. The dormer is set within the roof slope rather than perched upon it, does not extend beyond the eaves or the flank walls at any point, and is aligned to but never exceeds the existing ridge.
- 8.3 The decision to form a single L-shaped dormer rather than a series of small separate dormers was taken deliberately and is explained at Section 6 of the Design and Access Statement. The

existing roof already carries several changes of pitch and direction and two chimney stacks. A scatter of small dormers across it would add visual clutter to an already complex roof, while a single calmly detailed element in a recessive material reads more quietly and resolves as one legible design idea.

- 8.4 The material palette is neither arbitrary nor imported. The rear of Birch House already reads as a contemporary timber and dark-glazed composition at ground floor level. Extending that language upward produces a coherent rear elevation in which the two contemporary interventions are legible as a single idea set against the retained traditional body of the house. Vertical timber boarding is, further, one of the characteristic building materials of the High Weald, appearing throughout the villages of the designated landscape on buildings both historic and modern, and timber is identified as a local material in Balcombe's own design guidance. The cladding will silver naturally to a soft grey and recede further into the backdrop of retained boundary planting.
- 8.5 The dark grey glazing keeps the openings reading as shadow rather than as frames, materially reducing the apparent bulk of the dormer face compared with lighter framing. The flat roof of the dormer is finished in a dark membrane concealed behind the fascia and is not visible from any ground level viewpoint.
- 8.6 The proposals accord with Policy DP26, with the design guidance of the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan, with the Mid Sussex Design Guide and with Chapter 12 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

9. HIGH WEALD NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

- 9.1 There is no change to the footprint, height or silhouette of the building and therefore no change to its contribution to views across the wider landscape. No woodland, tree, hedgerow, field boundary or historic routeway is affected. No new built form is introduced into open land. The natural beauty of the National Landscape is conserved.
- 9.2 The proposals also further the purpose of the designation. They meet a household's accommodation needs within an existing building rather than through new development in a sensitive landscape, they employ a material rooted in the Wealden building tradition, and they improve the environmental performance of an existing dwelling. The duty under section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, as amended, is satisfied.

10. LIVING CONDITIONS OF NEIGHBOURING OCCUPIERS

- 10.1 There is no increase in the height, footprint or mass of the building. It follows that no additional overshadowing, loss of daylight or sunlight, or overbearing effect can arise on any neighbouring property. The dormer is contained within the existing roof volume and does not project beyond the eaves or the flank walls at any point.
- 10.2 The dormer windows face over the applicant's own rear garden, which is generous in depth and enclosed by mature planting retained in full. The outlook is across land within the applicant's ownership. Given that separation and screening, no material overlooking of any neighbouring habitable room window or private garden arises.

- 10.3 The applicant would raise no objection to a condition requiring any flank-facing glazing to be obscure-glazed and non-opening below 1.7 m, and to a condition removing permitted development rights for further roof alterations, should the Council consider either necessary.
- 10.4 The proposals accord with Policy DP26 in respect of residential amenity.

11. ACCESS, HIGHWAYS AND PARKING

- 11.1 The existing vehicular access from London Road is retained without alteration in position, width or visibility. There is no highway safety implication and no additional access is created.
- 11.2 The proposals increase the dwelling from three to four bedrooms. The integral garage and the existing driveway are retained in full and no parking space is lost. The frontage provides off-street parking and turning appropriate to a dwelling of this size, consistent with the parking standards applied by the Council and by West Sussex County Council as highway authority.
- 11.3 The Site is within the built-up area of Balcombe, within walking distance of the village facilities and of Balcombe railway station on the London to Brighton main line, so it is well placed for travel by means other than the private car. Any additional trip generation from one further bedroom in an existing dwelling is negligible.
- 11.4 Access into the building is unaltered. Internally, the new staircase is designed to comply with Approved Document K, the new accommodation is served by a bathroom on the same floor, and doorway widths and circulation are set out in accordance with Part M as it applies to work in an existing dwelling. Means of escape will be provided in accordance with Approved Document B by way of a protected stair enclosure from loft level to the final exit with interlinked mains-powered smoke detection.
- 11.5 Refuse storage and collection arrangements are unchanged and remain adequate.

12. TREES, BIODIVERSITY, DRAINAGE AND SUSTAINABILITY

Trees

- 12.1 No tree, hedge or area of boundary planting is affected. All works are confined to the roof of the existing building. No excavation, scaffolding foundation or material storage will encroach on the root protection area of any tree. The proposals accord with Policy DP37.

Biodiversity

- 12.2 Statutory biodiversity net gain does not apply to householder development. The applicant is aware of the protection afforded to bats and their roosts under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, and the works will be carried out in accordance with those obligations. The proposals accord with Policy DP38.

Drainage and flood risk

- 12.3 There is no increase in roof area, footprint or impermeable surface, so surface water run-off is unchanged and existing drainage arrangements remain adequate. Rainwater goods disturbed by

the works will be reinstated to match. The Site is not within a flood zone. The proposals accord with Policy DP41.

Sustainable design and construction

- 12.4 Converting the roof space requires the roof plane to be insulated to current standards, materially improving the thermal performance of the dwelling and reducing its energy demand and carbon emissions in use. The proposals reuse an existing building rather than requiring new construction, and timber cladding is a renewable, low-embodied-carbon material requiring no chemical finish where left to weather naturally. The proposals accord with Policy DP39.

13. POLICY COMPLIANCE SUMMARY

Policy	Assessment	Compliance
DP26 — Character and Design	Scale, footprint, ridge height and front elevation unchanged; single coherent dormer confined to rear slopes; materials matched to the existing rear extension and drawn from the Wealden tradition; no material effect on neighbouring living conditions.	Complies
DP34 — Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets	No listed building or non-designated heritage asset is affected. The designated heritage asset is conserved in a manner appropriate to its significance.	Complies
DP35 — Conservation Areas	The spatial and landscape attributes from which the significance of the Conservation Area derives are wholly unaffected; the public realm experience of the Site is essentially unchanged; the character and appearance of the Conservation Area is preserved.	Complies
DP37 — Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows	No tree, hedge or boundary planting affected; no root protection area encroached upon.	Complies
DP38 — Biodiversity	Works carried out in accordance with the applicant's obligations in respect of protected species; no habitat lost.	Complies
DP39 — Sustainable Design and Construction	Reuse of an existing building; roof insulated to current standards; renewable, low-embodied-carbon cladding material.	Complies
DP41 — Flood Risk and Drainage	No increase in roof area or impermeable surface; run-off unchanged; Site not within a flood zone.	Complies
Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan and design guidance	Timber is identified as a local material; the scheme is contained within the existing envelope and respects the character of the village and its High Weald setting.	Complies
Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD	Dormer contained below the ridge and within the roof slope, confined to elevations away from the public realm, expressed as a single element on a complex roof.	Complies

Policy	Assessment	Compliance
NPPF Chapters 12 and 16	Well designed, sympathetic to local character; significance described and conserved; great weight given to the conservation of the designated heritage asset.	Complies

14. CONDITIONS

14.1 The applicant would accept the following conditions, which would secure the quality of the development as assessed above:

- a condition requiring the development to be carried out in accordance with the approved drawings;
- a condition requiring samples or full details of the timber cladding, including species, board width, profile, fixing detail and finish, to be submitted to and approved in writing before that part of the works commences;
- a condition requiring details of the rooflights, confirming a conservation profile set flush within the plane of the roof slope, to be submitted to and approved in writing before installation;
- a condition requiring the colour and finish of all new windows and doors to match the existing ground floor rear extension;
- a condition requiring any tiles disturbed by the works to be reinstated, with any shortfall made up in reclaimed tiles to match the existing roof;
- a condition requiring both existing chimney stacks to be retained unaltered in height, material and detail;
- a condition requiring any flank-facing glazing to be obscure-glazed and non-opening below 1.7 m;
- a condition removing permitted development rights for further alterations or additions to the roof.

14.2 The applicant offers these conditions in order to give the Council direct control over the detailing on which the assessment in this Statement depends.

15. PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

15.1 The proposals convert an existing, unused roof void into a bedroom, study and bathroom, entirely within the existing envelope of the building.

15.2 In summary:

- The principle of converting the roof space of an existing dwelling within the built-up area of Balcombe is acceptable and supported by the development plan.
- There is no increase in footprint, no increase in ridge height, no loss of garden ground and no loss of trees or boundary planting. The plot pattern, spacing, set-back and landscaped setting from which the significance of this part of the Balcombe Conservation Area derives are entirely unaffected.

- The front elevation and the roof silhouette are preserved without alteration. The only change visible from London Road is three flush conservation rooflights.
 - The dormer is confined to roof slopes facing away from the public realm, contained below the existing ridge, designed as a single coherent element on a complex roof, and finished in materials matching the existing ground floor rear extension and drawn from the building tradition of the High Weald.
 - The character and appearance of the Conservation Area is preserved, and the statutory duty under section 72(1) of the 1990 Act is discharged.
 - The natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape is conserved and the duty under section 85 of the 2000 Act is satisfied.
 - No material effect arises on the living conditions of any neighbouring occupier.
 - Access, parking and refuse arrangements are unchanged and remain adequate; the internal works meet Approved Documents B, K and M.
 - The proposals improve the thermal performance of the dwelling and meet a household's needs within an existing building rather than through new development in a designated landscape.
- 15.3 The proposals accord with Policies DP26, DP34, DP35, DP37, DP38, DP39 and DP41 of the Mid Sussex District Plan, with the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan, with the Mid Sussex Design Guide and with the National Planning Policy Framework. There is no conflict with the development plan read as a whole.
- 15.4 No harm to any heritage asset arises. The benefits of the scheme — the efficient reuse of an existing building within a Conservation Area and a National Landscape, the avoidance of pressure to extend into garden ground and tree cover, the improvement in the thermal performance of the dwelling, and the provision of accommodation which allows an existing household to remain in the village — weigh positively in the balance.
- 15.5 The application accordingly falls to be determined in accordance with the development plan under section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. There is no material consideration which indicates that permission should be withheld. The Council is respectfully requested to grant planning permission, subject to the conditions set out at Section 14.