

Delegated Decision

Sign off Sheet

Ref. No:	DM/26/0075	Case Officer:	Rachel Richardson
Application Type:	Change of Use Application		
Proposal:	Change of use of former grainstore to gymnastics club training facility.		
Site:	Home Farm, Slaugham Road, Staplefield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6AP, ,		
Validation Date	26 Jan 2026	Overall Expiry Date:	27 May 2026
Pre-Commencement Conditions Required:		Pre-Com Conditions Date Agreed:	
Recommendation:	Permission	Recommendation Date:	2 Jul 2026
Target Date:	23 Mar 2026	Recommending Officer Signature:	<i>Rachel Richardson</i>

Date Legal Agreement Completed: (if applicable)		No of Representations:	1
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Signed and Agreed By:	<i>Joanne Fisher</i>	Date:	2 Jul 2026
Comments:			

MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

DM/26/0075

**Home Farm, Slaugham Road, Staplefield, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6AP,
Change of use of former grainstore to gymnastics club training facility.
Ms Kaye Baker**

SUMMARY OF REPRESENTATIONS

A letter in support has been received commenting as follows:

'Strongly support - physical activity is to be encouraged as much as possible. Use of a redundant farm building makes perfect sense. Farming is hard - and it is important to make each part of the farm pay its way.'

SUMMARY OF CONSULTEES

WSCC Highways: None received.

MSDC Environmental Health: No objection.

MSDC Food Safety: If planning permission is to be granted then Mid Sussex Environmental Health should be consulted on internal layout when the development is at a suitable stage. Any toilet should be separated from the kitchen by 2 internal doors that seal shut and with an internal lobby in between.

MSDC Contaminated Land: No objection.

Southern Water: The development site is not within Southern Waters supply area.

PARISH COUNCIL OBSERVATIONS

No objection but have pointed out that this is a retrospective use.

INTRODUCTION

Planning permission is being sought retrospectively for a change of use from a grain store to a gymnastics club training facility.

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

None.

SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

The site is located at Home Farm in Staplefield, and the building subject of the planning application, comprises a grain store which has been part (eastern half) converted and used as an indoor gymnastics training facility. The western half of the building provides a shelter for cattle. The grain store is located on the southern part of the farm complex and is accessed from Slaugham Road via an existing yard area to the eastern side of the buildings. The Farm is surrounded by open countryside.

For the purposes of planning policy the site is located in the countryside and outside of the built up area boundary as defined in the District Plan.

APPLICATION DETAILS

The grain store has already been converted and is in use. All of the alterations are internal and reversible.

The applicant has provided the following information:

- o What is the parking arrangement? 'No increase in parking spaces. There are 10 spaces which are the existing 10 spaces, no new spaces have been added or are required'*
- o Approx 25 gymnasts train at any one time and max 10 spectators but rarely are their spectators as parents drop the gymnasts and return to collect them at the end of their training, training can be at least a couple of hours long for each gymnast'*
- o When is it open, between which hours? 'training 4 - 8pm on weekdays and 9am - 1pm on Saturdays, no training on Sundays'*
- o When did the use start and where was it operating previously? 'Formal training by Gymnasts started on 1st April 2026 and previously they were based at The Triangle in Burgess Hill, due to the need for an independent dedicated gym which would be for the exclusive use of Air Acro gymnastics rather than a shared space where use was restricted and space for the storage of apparatus and equipment was limited.'*

LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND LIST OF POLICIES

Planning legislation holds that the determination of a planning application shall be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Specifically Section 70 (2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 states:

'In dealing with such an application the authority shall have regard to:

- a) The provisions of the development plan, so far as material to application,*
- b) Any local finance considerations, so far as material to the application, and*
- c) Any other material considerations.'*

Section 38(6) Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 provides:

'If regard is to be had to the development plan for the purposes of any determination to be made under the planning Acts the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.'

The requirement to determine applications "in accordance with the plan" does not mean applications must comply with each and every policy, but is to be approached on the basis of the plan taken as a whole. This reflects the fact, acknowledged by the Courts, that development plans can have broad statements of policy, many of which may be mutually irreconcilable so that in a particular case one must give way to another.

Under section 38(5) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 if a policy contained in a development plan for an area conflicts with another policy in the development plan, the conflict must be resolved in favour of the policy which is contained in the last document to be adopted, approved or published.

Using this as the starting point the development plan for this part of Mid Sussex consists of the District Plan, Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) and Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan.

National policy (which is contained in the National Planning Policy Framework and National Planning Policy Guidance) does not form part of the development plan, but is an important material consideration.

Mid Sussex District Plan

The District Plan was adopted at Full Council on 28th March 2018.

Relevant policies:

DP1 - Sustainable Economic Development
DP12 - Protection and Enhancement of Countryside
DP16 - High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
DP17 - Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
DP21 - Transport
DP24 - Leisure and Cultural Facilities and Activities
DP26 - Character and Design
DP29 - Noise, Air and Light Pollution

Site Allocations DPD

The SADPD was adopted on 29th June 2022. It allocates sufficient housing and employment land to meet identified needs to 2031.

Relevant policies.

None.

Neighbourhood Plan

Ansty, Staplefield and Brook Street Neighbourhood Plan (made February 2017)

Relevant policies:

AS3 - High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
AS8 - Improvement of Community Facilities

Other Material Considerations

Mid Sussex District Plan 2021 - 2039 - Submission Draft (Regulation 19)

The District Council is reviewing and updating the District Plan. Upon adoption, the new District Plan 2021 - 2039 will replace the current District Plan 2014-2031 and its policies will have full weight. In accordance with the NPPF, Local Planning Authorities may give weight to relevant policies of the emerging plan according to the stage of preparation; the extent to which there are unresolved objections to the relevant policies; and the degree of consistency of the relevant policies in the emerging plan to the NPPF. The draft District Plan 2021-2039 (Regulation 19) is currently at Examination and hearings were concluded on the 19th March 2026. The District Plan remains at Examination until the Inspector has published his report, until that time only minimal weight can be given to the Plan and this planning application has been assessed against the policies of the adopted District Plan.

Relevant policies:

DPN7 Noise Impacts
DPN8 Light Impacts and Dark Skies
DPS6 Health and Wellbeing
DPC1 Protection and Enhancement of the Countryside
DPC4 High Weald AONB
DPC6 Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC
DPB1 Character and Design
DPE1 Sustainable Economic Development
DPT4 Parking and Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

Mid Sussex Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)

The Council has adopted a 'Mid Sussex Design Guide' SPD that aims to help deliver high quality development across the district that responds appropriately to its context and is inclusive and sustainable. The Design Guide was adopted by Council on 4th November 2020 as an SPD for use in the

consideration and determination of planning applications. The SPD is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024)

The NPPF sets out the government's policy in order to ensure that the planning system contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. Paragraph 8 sets out the three objectives to sustainable development, such that the planning system needs to perform an economic objective, a social objective and an environmental objective.

Paragraph 12 of the NPPF states '*The presumption in favour of sustainable development does not change the statutory status of the development plan as the starting point for decision-making. Where a planning application conflicts with an up-to-date development plan (including any neighbourhood plans that form part of the development plan), permission should not usually be granted. Local planning authorities may take decisions that depart from an up-to-date development plan, but only if material considerations in a particular case indicate that the plan should not be followed.*'

Paragraph 39 of the NPPF states '*Local planning authorities should approach decisions on proposed development in a positive and creative way. They should use the full range of planning tools available, including brownfield registers and permission in principle, and work proactively with applicants to secure developments that will improve the economic, social and environmental conditions of the area. Decision-makers at every level should seek to approve applications for sustainable development where possible.*'

With specific reference to decision-taking paragraph 48 states that planning decisions must be taken in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

ASSESSMENT

It is considered that the main issues that need to be considered in the determination of this application are as follows,

- o Principle
- o Impact on AONB and countryside
- o Impact on residential amenity
- o Highways
- o Ashdown Forest
- o Planning Balance and Conclusion

Principle

Policy DP1 allows for sustainable economic development and in part states that it seeks to:

'encourage the high quality development of land and premises to meet the needs of 21st century businesses; supports existing businesses and allows them room to expand, and allows small scale economic development in the countryside (in accordance with development in the countryside policies).'

Policy DP1 also allows for effective use of employment land and premises by protecting existing employment land and premises, permitting appropriate intensification, conversion, redevelopment and or extension for employment uses (subject to complying with other policies in the plan), and gives priority to the re-use and adaptation of rural buildings for business and to the diversification of activities on existing farm units (in accordance with development in the countryside policies).

DP12 seeks to protect and enhance the countryside and states in part:

'The countryside will be protected in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. Development will be permitted in the countryside, defined as the area outside of built-up area boundaries on the Policies Map,

provided it maintains or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District, and

o It is necessary for the purposes of agriculture; or
o It is supported by a specific policy reference either elsewhere in the Plan, a Development Plan Document or relevant Neighbourhood Plan.'

DP24 in part states:

'Development that provides new and/or enhanced leisure and cultural activities and facilities, including allotments, in accordance with the strategic aims of the Leisure and Cultural Strategy for Mid Sussex will be supported.'

Policy AS8 in the Neighbourhood Plan states:

'Proposals that would result in the improved provision of community facilities will be strongly supported. In the case of the Village Centre in Ansty and the Pavilion in Staplefield, this is particularly the case for proposals that would re-provide and improve such facilities on the existing site.'

The proposed use involves the re-use and adaptation of a rural building for a business (to facilitate a gymnastics training centre) and through the diversification of activities on existing farm units. This would be in accordance with DP1 subject to complying with countryside policies and other relevant issues below. As said above, the proposed would provide an improved leisure facility for the community and wider to utilise which is also in accordance with AS8.

Impact on Character of the Area

One of the objectives of achieving sustainable development is to ensure that proposals 'contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment' (para 8, NPPF).

The site falls outside of the built up area (within the countryside). It is therefore necessary to consider the impact of the proposal in the local landscape in terms of the visual impact on the area.

Policy DP12 of the District Plan relates to the protection and enhancement of the countryside. In part it states:

'The countryside will be protected in recognition of its intrinsic character and beauty. Development will be permitted in the countryside, defined as the area outside of built-up area boundaries on the Policies Map, provided it maintains or where possible enhances the quality of the rural and landscape character of the District, and:

o it is necessary for the purposes of agriculture; or
o it is supported by a specific policy reference either elsewhere in the Plan, a Development Plan Document or relevant Neighbourhood Plan.'

The supporting text sets out the following:

'The primary objective of the District Plan with respect to the countryside is to secure its protection by minimising the amount of land taken for development and preventing development that does not need to be there. At the same time, it seeks to enhance the countryside, support the rural economy by accommodating well designed, appropriate new forms of development and changes in land use where a countryside location is required and where it does not adversely affect the rural environment. It is therefore necessary that all development in the countryside, de-fined as the area outside of built up area boundaries, must seek to maintain or enhance the intrinsic beauty and tranquillity of the countryside.'

Para 187 of the NPPF requires proposals to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by 'recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside'.

The site is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The legal framework for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England and Wales is provided by the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023. Section 245(6)(a) sets out the primary purpose of AONBs: to conserve and enhance natural beauty. It also requires Local Planning Authorities to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the area of outstanding natural beauty'.

Policy DP16 of the Mid Sussex District Plan relates to the AONB and states that:

'Development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), as shown on the Policies Maps, will only be permitted where it conserves or enhances natural beauty and has regard to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, in particular:

o the identified landscape features or components of natural beauty and to their setting;
o the traditional interaction of people with nature, and appropriate land management;
o character and local distinctiveness, settlement pattern, sense of place and setting of the AONB; and
the conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage'.

DP26 states:

'All applicants will be required to demonstrate that development:

o is of high-quality design and layout and includes appropriate landscaping and greenspace;
o contributes positively to, and clearly defines, public and private realms and should normally be designed with active building frontages facing streets and public open spaces to animate and provide natural surveillance;
o creates a sense of place while addressing the character and scale of the surrounding buildings and landscape;
o protects open spaces, trees and gardens that contribute to the character of the area;
o protects valued townscapes and the separate identity and character of towns and villages;
o does not cause significant harm to the amenities of existing nearby residents and future occupants of new dwellings, including taking account of the impact on privacy, outlook, daylight and sunlight, and noise, air and light pollution (see Policy DP29);
o creates a pedestrian-friendly layout that is safe, well connected, legible and accessible;
o incorporates well integrated parking that does not dominate the street environment, particularly where high density housing is proposed;
o positively addresses sustainability considerations in the layout and the building design;
o take the opportunity to encourage community interaction by creating layouts with a strong neighbourhood focus/centre; larger (300+ unit) schemes will also normally be expected to incorporate a mixed use element;
o optimises the potential of the site to accommodate development.'

The proposed use of the grain barn involves no external changes to the physical appearance of the building. It would involve using an existing access and existing hard surfaced area for parking. As such, it is considered that the proposed use would maintain the intrinsic beauty and tranquillity of the countryside and would not adversely affect the views into and out of the National Landscape, AONB. As such, it is considered that the proposed use would comply with DP12, DP16, DP26 and AS3 as well as the provisions contained in the NPPF.

Impact on Residential Amenity

Policy DP26 in part states:

'does not cause significant harm to the amenities of existing nearby residents and future occupants of new dwellings, including taking account of the impact on privacy, outlook, daylight and sunlight, and noise, air and light pollution (see Policy DP29);'

The applicant has confirmed that the facility has approximately 25 gymnasts training at any one time and a maximum of 10 spectators, but these generally parents dropping off their children who don't stay and

return to collect them at the end of the session. The applicant commented that parents are not encouraged to stay and watch their children because it can influence how they perform/train.

The grain store is used as a training facility 4 - 8pm on weekdays and 9am - 1pm on Saturdays, with no training on Sundays.

The closest residential property is around 42m to the west of the gymnasium. These dwellings to the west are within the farm holding and mainly occupied by the applicant's family and or persons employed on the farm. 42m is also a considerable distance from the grain store and there is also a cattle shed between the dwelling and grain store. For the use proposed and the times the building is utilised, as well as the distance from the grain store building to the nearest dwellings it is not considered that there would be any significant harm to residential amenity as a result of noise. The building is only accessible from the eastern side and on the opposite side to the dwellings and cattle and there would be no significant harm resulting from light spillage or illumination. No external lighting is proposed.

It should also be noted that there are no objections from Environmental Health.

As such, and in terms of residential amenity, the proposed use is considered to comply with DP26 and the national guidance contained within the NPPF.

Highways

Policy DP21 of the Mid Sussex District Plan requires development to: be sustainably located to minimise the need for travel; promote alternative means of transport to the private car, including provision of suitable facilities for secure and safe cycle parking; not cause a severe cumulative impact in terms of road safety and increased traffic congestion; be designed to adoptable standards, or other standards as agreed by the Local Planning Authority, including road widths and size of garages; and provide adequate car parking in accordance with parking standards as agreed by the Local Planning Authority or in accordance with the relevant Neighbourhood Plan.

Paragraph 110 of the NPPF states that the planning system should actively manage patterns of growth in support of promoting sustainable transport objectives. Significant development should be focussed on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes. It notes this can help to reduce congestion and emissions, and improve air quality and public health. It notes however that opportunities to maximise sustainable transport options will vary between urban and rural areas, and this should be taken into account in both Plan-making and decision-making.

Paragraph 115 of the NPPF states that, in determining planning applications it should be ensured that, amongst other things, appropriate opportunities to promote sustainable transport can be, or have been, taken up given the type of development and its location; and that safe and suitable access to the site can be achieved for all users. Paragraph 116 of the NPPF states 'Development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.'

The Local Highway Authority has not commented on this application. However, the existing access would and is being utilised. The road within the farm lies on the eastern side of the complex and away from the farm use. There is an existing hard surfaced area to the east of the grain store which has sufficient parking and turning areas for farm vehicles so will be more than adequate for cars to serve the use. There is no increase in parking spaces. There are 10 spaces which are the existing 10 spaces, no new spaces have been added or are required.

It is considered that the proposed use would not be prejudicial to highway safety and there are no highway ground to resist this proposal. The proposed use is considered to comply with DP21 and the NPPF in this respect.

Ashdown Forest

Under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the 'Habitats Regulations'), the competent authority - in this case, Mid Sussex District Council - has a duty to ensure that any plans or projects that they regulate (including plan making and determining planning applications) will have no adverse effect on the integrity of a European site of nature conservation importance. The European site of focus is the Ashdown Forest Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

The potential effects of development on Ashdown Forest were assessed during the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process for the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031. This process identified likely significant effects on the Ashdown Forest SPA from recreational disturbance and on the Ashdown Forest SAC from atmospheric pollution.

A Habitats Regulations Assessment has been undertaken for the proposed development in this planning application.

Recreational disturbance

Increased recreational activity arising from new residential development and related population growth is likely to disturb the protected near-ground and ground nesting birds on Ashdown Forest.

In accordance with advice from Natural England, the HRA for the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014-2031, and as detailed in District Plan Policy DP17, mitigation measures are necessary to counteract the effects of a potential increase in recreational pressure and are required for developments resulting in a net increase in dwellings within a 7km zone of influence around the Ashdown Forest SPA. A Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) and Strategic Access Management and Monitoring (SAMM) mitigation approach has been developed. This mitigation approach has been agreed with Natural England.

This planning application does not result in a net increase in dwellings within the 7km zone of influence and so mitigation is not required.

Atmospheric pollution

Increased traffic emissions as a consequence of new development may result in additional atmospheric pollution on Ashdown Forest. The main pollutant effects of interest are acid deposition and eutrophication by nitrogen deposition. High levels of nitrogen may detrimentally affect the composition of an ecosystem and lead to loss of species.

The potential effects of the proposed development are incorporated into the overall results of the transport model prepared for the Mid Sussex Transport Study, which indicates there would not be an overall impact on Ashdown Forest. This means that there is not considered to be a significant in combination effect on the Ashdown Forest SAC by this development proposal.

Conclusion of the Habitats Regulations Assessment

The Habitats Regulations Assessment concludes that there would be no likely significant effects, alone or in combination, on the Ashdown Forest SPA and SAC from the proposed development.

No mitigation is required in relation to the Ashdown Forest SPA or SAC.

A full HRA (that is, the appropriate assessment stage that ascertains the effect on integrity of the European site) of the proposed development is not required.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain this application comprises development below the de-minimis threshold meaning that this development is exempt from providing biodiversity net gain.

PLANNING BALANCE AND CONCLUSION

Planning legislation requires the application to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is therefore necessary for the planning application to be assessed against the policies in the Development Plan and then to take account of other material planning considerations including the NPPF. The Development Plan in this instance consists of the Mid Sussex District Plan, the Site Allocations Development Plan Document and the Ansty and Staplefield Neighbourhood Plan.

Courts have confirmed that the Development Plan must be considered as a whole, not simply in relation to any one individual policy. It is therefore not the case that a proposal must accord with each and every policy within the Development Plan.

Given the above assessment, the proposed use is considered to be acceptable and complies with the criteria of all relevant policies and as such it is recommended that permission be granted.

Decision: Permission

Case Officer: Rachel Richardson