

**DUCKYLS FARM CENTRE,
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WEST HOATHLY,
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PLANNING STATEMENT

4 March 2026
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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Statement accompanies a planning application for development on land at Duckyls Farm Centre, West Hoathly comprising:

The demolition of an outbuilding and the erection of a barn and workshop for use by residents of the care centre and people using the centre through day care services.

- 1.2 The Duckyls Farm Centre is a specialist residential care home and day facility for adults with learning disabilities. The Centre provides a "care farm" environment where residents and day visitors can engage with nature and animals to develop life skills and independence. The application site is currently occupied by a wooden shed and a polytunnel and is used for horticulture purposes in connection with the Farm's agricultural/care services use.

- 1.3 This application follows two stages of pre-application advice provided by the Council in May/June 2024 and in April 2025 (ref: DM/25/0716).

- 1.4 The submission is accompanied by:

- Drawings prepared by GML Architects;
- Design and Access Statement prepared by GML Architects;
- Landscape And Visual Impact Assessment prepared by Enviropass;
- Tree Survey and Report by Euroforest Silviculture;
- Energy & Sustainability Statement by Base Energy;
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal by Greenspace Ecological Solutions;
- Biodiversity Gain Plan by Greenspace Ecological Solutions;
- Flood Risk Assessment by Innervision Design;
- Sustainable Drainage Strategy by EGY and
- Foul Drainage Assessment by EGY.

- 1.5 This statement sets out the site's planning history and pre-application advice in Section 2. Section 3 provides a summary of planning policy relevant to the development proposals, with Section 4 describing the application site and its surroundings. Sections 5 and 6 provide a description of the proposal and an assessment of it against the planning policy goals. A summary is provided at Section 7.

2.0 PLANNING HISTORY

Planning applications

- 2.1 In 1987 planning permission was gained for development described as “Training Centre/Guest House” (Ref: HO/066/87).
- 2.2 In 1992 planning permission was granted for an “Agricultural training centre for persons with learning difficulties. Revised accommodation layout” (Ref: HO/013/92).
- 2.3 In 2024 planning permission was granted of development described as:
- Change of use from agricultural building to offices and a multipurpose space to be used ancillary to the care home, partially demolish the unstable structures to the front and insert new doors and windows. (Ref: DM/23/2491)*
- 2.4 Permission was also granted in 2024 for the “Addition of 3 new signs to signpost Duckyls Farm to road traffic” (Ref: DM/24/0091)
- 2.5 Also, in 2024 the Council confirmed that its Prior Approval was not required for works described as “Re-surfacing of existing track to provide safe access to different parts of the farm” (Ref: DM/24/0984)
- 2.6 At the present time there is a live planning application for the “installation of a single-storey timber building on the footprint of a former outbuilding” (Ref: DM/25/3010).

Pre-application advice 2025

- 2.7 The Council’s most-recent pre-application advice was set out in an e-mail of 23 April 2025 from Hamish Evans. In summary the informal views provided stated that:
- the farm centre would benefit from a sui generis planning use, being comprised of an agricultural use combined with a residential institution use,
 - the development would be considered acceptable in principle, subject to impact upon the character of the area and other policy considerations,

- due to the topography of surrounding land and established trees and woodland, it is considered that the buildings would appear relatively contained within the landscape,
- the proposed buildings would be relatively well-screened from wider views, and they would not appear visually prominent within the landscape,
- Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of the design of the scheme.
- Care should be taken to ensure that the proposed buildings are effectively sited so as to avoid impacting adjoining trees.
- Care should be taken to ensure that development proposals preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution.
- A Planning Statement, Tree Report, Arboricultural Impact Assessment, Arboricultural Method Statement, Sustainability Report, Preliminary Ecological Report, Foul Surface and Surface Water Drainage Assessment should be included with any application submitted, as well as the necessary BNG information.

3.0 PLANNING POLICY

3.1 Under section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 the Council and other decision makers are required to determine planning applications *"in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise"*. The development plan relevant to the site presently comprises:

- Mid Sussex District Plan (March 2018).
- Mid Sussex Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2022).

3.2 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 National Planning Policy Framework, 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 Framework. The draft District Plan 2021-2039 (Regulation 19) is currently at Examination, and the stage 1 hearings were concluded on the 31 October 2024. There are unresolved objections to some of the Policies in the draft District Plan and as such, only minimal weight can be given to the emerging Plan. As such, this planning application should solely be assessed against the policies in the adopted District Plan.

Development Plan

3.3 The following policies contained within the Mid Sussex District Plan are of relevance to the consideration of the proposal:

- 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)
- DP25 - Community Facilities and Local Services
- DP26 - Character and Design
- DP28 - Accessibility
- DP29 - Noise, Air and Light Pollution

- DP37 - Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows
- DP38 – Biodiversity
- DP39 - Sustainable Design and Construction
- DP41 - Flood Risk and Drainage

3.4 There are no policies within the Mid Sussex Site Allocations Development Plan Document (2022) that are of direct relevance to the application proposal.

Other considerations

3.5 Other planning considerations include:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
- High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019-2024
- Mid Sussex Design Guide (2020)
- West Hoathly Neighbourhood Plan

4.0 SITE AND SURROUNDINGS

Application site

- 4.1 The application site comprises a roughly rectangular parcel of land with an area of approximately 0.4 hectares. It is bounded by woodland on the western side and predominately open countryside to the north and east. To the south there is a field boundary and a copse. The site is occupied by a wooden shed, a polytunnel and raised beds and has been used for horticultural purposes in connection with the care centre use. The site slopes noticeably downwards from the western boundary (approx. 148.0m AOD) to the eastern edge (approx. 141.0m AOD).
- 4.2 There is a substantial mature Oak tree within the north part of the site together with smaller trees nearby to the west and south.
- 4.3 The site is situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

Surroundings

- 4.4 The site is on the western edge of the overall Duckyls Farm Centre estate which comprises about 36.5 hectares of countryside to the north-west of West Hoathly. The main Farm Centre buildings are situated in the south-west corner of this land adjacent to Selsfield Road and comprise a cluster of former farm buildings.
- 4.5 An agricultural track links the nucleus of the Farm Centre to the application site to the north-east of it.
- 4.6 There is a public footpath approximately 100m to the south of the application site.

5.0 THE PROPOSAL

- 5.1 The proposal comprises: the demolition of a dilapidated outbuilding and the erection of a barn and workshop for use by residents of the care centre and people using the centre through day care services.

Use

- 5.2 The application site has been used for horticultural purposes as part of the sui generis agricultural/residential institution use that has been ongoing at Duckyls Farm for many years. The proposal would continue this use and therefore is does not involve a change of use of the land.

Operational Development

Demolition

- 5.3 The proposal would include the demolition of the dilapidated timber-clad shed and the temporary relocation of the neighbouring polytunnel, which will be reinstated in its existing position post-development.

Main Barn

- 5.4 The main element of the proposal is an approximately 13m by 45m barn situated within the north-west corner of the site. This would primarily provide indoor space for animals and for the storage of feed and hay. Ancillary to this an office, classroom and welfare facilities are proposed at the southern end of the barn.

Workshop

- 5.5 The proposal also includes the erection of an approximately 10m by 14m workshop building with a kitchen/social area and welfare facilities for residents and day visitors.
- 5.6 Both buildings would be clad in green profiled metal cladding in line with the principles and colour palettes included in the *High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Guidance* on the selection and use of colour in

development. They would incorporate timber framed windows where natural light is needed internally.

- 5.7 The proposal includes the planting of additional trees to the east of the main barn to provide additional screening.

Need

- 5.8 Duckyls Farm Centre is operated by Diagrama Community Services (part of Diagrama Foundation UK). It supports people with learning disabilities and autism, providing opportunities for them to live their best life. Currently twelve people with a learning disability reside on site which gives them access to the farm where they have the opportunity to learn new skills, work with animals and live alongside nature. In 2024 Diagrama was awarded a contract with West Sussex County Council to provide day opportunities for people within the District who have learning disabilities, physical and sensory impairment, acquired brain injury and/or autism. This service currently caters for 27 people.
- 5.9 The main farm centre facilities are currently housed within a group of buildings located close to Selsfield Road in the south-west corner of overall estate. This cluster of buildings includes an agricultural barn which is in close proximity to the neighbouring residential property at Duckyls Farmhouse.
- 5.10 Duckyls Farm Centre provides care for a wide variety of needs which often involves a significant physical disability; however, the purpose of the farm is to allow these individuals to be the farmers (with the help of our staff who are fully trained) and conserve, maintain and make productive the land. This primarily includes for the first few years, planting, surveying, maintaining, making safe and other infrastructure tasks such as fencing, drainage and the creation of raised beds. These activities are generally carried out some distance from the existing buildings including within the application site, which contains raised beds and a polytunnel.
- 5.11 The proposal would enable Diagrama to provide:

- i) the necessary levels of handwashing and toilet facilities in line with DEFRA and HSE requirements in a central part of the estate close to where residents and visitors spend their time, therefore avoiding the need to return to the farm sporadically.
 - ii) calming/quiet indoor space who may need quiet time.
 - iii) space to store hay and animal feed, agricultural equipment, tools and PPE close to where they are needed.
 - iv) a permanent craft workshop
 - v) animal housing when required (the existing buildings are not suitable)
 - vi) indoor space for use during inclement weather to ensure learning can continue.
 - vii) tea and coffee facilities
- 5.12 The proposed building would allow for better infection control when farming as individuals with special needs are harder to keep safe and encourage cleanliness. When working with animals and on the land, this becomes even higher risk without nearby washing facilities.

6.0 ASSESSMENT

6.1 This section considers the following:

1. Land use
2. Principle of development
3. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
4. Design
5. Trees
6. Biodiversity
7. Sustainability

1. Land use

6.2 As noted above the application site forms part of the Duckyls Farm Centre and has been used for purposes associated with the agricultural/residential care use of the wider Farm Centre for many years. The proposal would involve the continuation of the existing use of the site and therefore it does not involve a material change of use of the site.

2. Principle of development

6.3 The proposal would result in an increase in built development within the countryside. District Plan Policy DP12 seeks to protect the countryside and to this end 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:

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

6.4 Duckyls Farm Centre constitutes a community facility/local service as defined in the District Plan. Therefore, the proposal is supported by District Plan Policy DP25 which states that: “*The provision or improvement of*

community facilities and local services that contribute to creating sustainable communities will be supported". The principle of development therefore accords with Policy DP12.

3. The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

6.5 The site is also 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'.

6.6 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:

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

6.7 The District Plan seeks to direct new development to areas of existing built-up areas so as to reduce its visual impact on the countryside. However, in response to the pre-application submission the Council expressed the view that:

"due to the constrained layout and topography of the site, there is limited room to accommodate new buildings close to existing buildings at the farm centre."

6.8 And noted that:

Whilst the proposed buildings would be sited some distance from the existing group of buildings, in a relatively open position, due to the topography of surrounding land and established trees and woodland, it is considered that the buildings would appear relatively contained within the landscape.

- 6.9 This is backed up by the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) provided with the application which demonstrates that the proposed buildings would be set against a backdrop of dense woodland, and the use of green cladding would ensure the building are relatively discreet elements in the landscape.
- 6.10 For these reasons, the LVIA concludes that there would not be an adverse impact on the landscape quality of the AONB and the proposal would comply with the requirements of Policy DP16 of the District Plan, The High Weald Management Plan and paragraph 182 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

4. Design

- 6.11 In terms of general design, District Plan Policy DP26 states:

All development and surrounding spaces, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings and replacement dwellings, will be well designed and reflect the distinctive character of the towns and villages while being sensitive to the countryside....

- 6.12 For the reasons set out above the proposal would be sensitive to the countryside and it therefore accords with Policy DP26.

5. Trees

- 6.13 District Plan Policy DP37 supports the protection and enhancement of trees, woodland, and hedgerows, and encourage new planting. To this end the policy states that:

Development that will damage or lead to the loss of trees, woodland or hedgerows that contribute, either individually or as part of a group, to the visual amenity value or character of an area, and/ or that have landscape, historic or wildlife importance, will not normally be permitted.

- 6.14 The Tree Survey and Report concludes at paragraph 6.1.1 that the proposed development “will have minimal potential impact on the trees in their current setting. Assuming the trees are protected during construction operations.” Tree protection can be secured by the imposition of a planning condition requiring the submission and approval of details prior to commencement.
- 6.15 The proposal includes the provision of new trees to the east of the main barn. The siting, species and management of this landscaping can also be secured by a planning condition.

6. Biodiversity

- 6.16 District Plan Policy DP38 seeks to protect and enhance biodiversity by avoiding damage to sensitive habitats and species and the High Weald AONB.
- 6.17 The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) found:
- i) no evidence of badgers (para 6.4.1)
 - ii) no buildings with suitability for roosting bats (6.4.5)
 - iii) potential for dormice in hedgerows and scrub (6.4.7)
 - iv) further surveys for Great Crested Newt to be disproportionate (6.4.10)
 - v) further surveys for reptiles to be disproportionate (6.4.16)
- 6.18 The PEA identifies a series of ecological enhancements that can be secured via the imposition of planning conditions if deemed necessary.

7. Sustainability

- 6.19 District Plan Policy DP39 states that:

All development proposals must seek to improve the sustainability of development and should where appropriate and feasible according to the type and size of development and location, incorporate the following measures:

- *Minimise energy use through the design and layout of the scheme including through the use of natural lighting and ventilation;*
- *Explore opportunities for efficient energy supply through the use of communal heating networks where viable and feasible;*

- *Use renewable sources of energy;*
- *Maximise efficient use of resources, including minimising waste and maximising recycling/re-use of materials through both construction and occupation;*
- *Limit water use to 110 litres/person/day in accordance with Policy DP42: Water Infrastructure and the Water Environment;*
- *Demonstrate how the risks associated with future climate change have been planned for as part of the layout of the scheme and design of its buildings to ensure its longer term resilience*

6.20 Policy DP39, together with Principle DG37 of the Council's Design Guide, are addressed in the Energy & Sustainability Statement which sets out at section 9 measures that can be put in place to achieve the policy objectives. Amongst the recommendations made are the use of thermally efficient construction techniques and the provision of roof-mounted solar panels and an Air Source Heat Pump. The report estimates that a 5.9% reduction in CO2 emissions when compared with Approved Document Part L 2021 baseline can be achieved.

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

- 7.1 Duckyls Farm Centre is a specialist residential care home and day facility for adults with learning disabilities. In 2024 it was awarded a contract by West Sussex County Council to deliver Day Opportunities at the Farm therefore triggering the need for improved facilities close to where many farm activities occur. In particular a need has been identified for handwashing and toilet facilities, indoor space for use during inclement weather, classroom space, tea and coffee facilities, a permanent craft workshop and indoor space for animals and the storage hay and animal feed, agricultural equipment, tools, and PPE close to where they are needed. The proposed pair of buildings would cater for this need.
- 7.2 Duckyls Farm Centre constitutes a community facility/local service as defined in the District Plan. Therefore, the proposal is supported by Policy DP25 which states that: *"The provision or improvement of community facilities and local services that contribute to creating sustainable communities will be supported"*. It follows that the proposal accords with the second bullet point under Policy DP12.
- 7.3 The application site is situated within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There is a clear need for additional agricultural/care services buildings in the location proposed. The buildings would be set against a backdrop of dense woodland and the use of green cladding would ensure they are relatively discreet elements in the landscape. As such the proposed buildings would not have an adverse impact on the landscape quality of the AONB and the proposal accords with Policies DP16 and DP26, and the aims of The High Weald Management Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 7.4 As outlined in the preceding Sections, and the supporting reports, the proposal takes on board the need to adequately protect trees and biodiversity and would incorporate sustainable construction methods.
- 7.5 For the reasons set out above the proposal responds positively to pre-application advice provided and accords with development plan policy.