

Balcombe Cricket Club

Change of use of land outside the boundary of the cricket playing area for the replacement of existing practice nets

26 January 2026 - Version 3

Balcombe Cricket Club

Status: submitted to planning authority

Summary

Balcombe Cricket Club has some old nets used for practice. The club would like to update these nets as they have reached the end of their life.

The club has also expanded in recent years and would like to enclose the nets to enable it to expand training activities and enable players to train during matches.

The requirements from cricket authorities in England have changed since the current nets were installed. A bigger gap is needed between the playing area and the practice nets.

The club has analysed options for the nets and identified the best solution to be behind the current nets. It would require a change of use from woodland to recreation use for 25m by 8m.

The woodland impacted is not priority habitat and only a small number of trees would be impacted by the change in use. Some of the trees impacted are Ash trees that are suffering from Ash Die Back.

Biodiversity Net Gain impacts will be managed by purchasing off site habitat units.

1.0 The need for new nets

Balcombe Cricket Club needs to replace its practice nets. The current nets are old and the surface is no longer safe for practice. The location and type of nets are also problematic.

Figure 1a: Front view of existing nets



Figure 1b: Side view of existing nets



The problems with the type of nets and the location are as follows:

1. The England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) recommends that practice nets are installed at least 3 metres from the boundary of the playing area. This is for the safety of those playing the game and using the nets. As can be seen below, the current net surface is within the playing area boundary.
2. The nets are not enclosed. This means that the ball can be hit out of the nets into the playing area, or from the playing area towards the nets and therefore presents a significant Health & Safety risk for the club.

The cricket club has expanded in recent years. The number of games playing has increased from around 100 scheduled games a year in 2015 to 200 in 2025. This is largely due to the growth in the junior section.

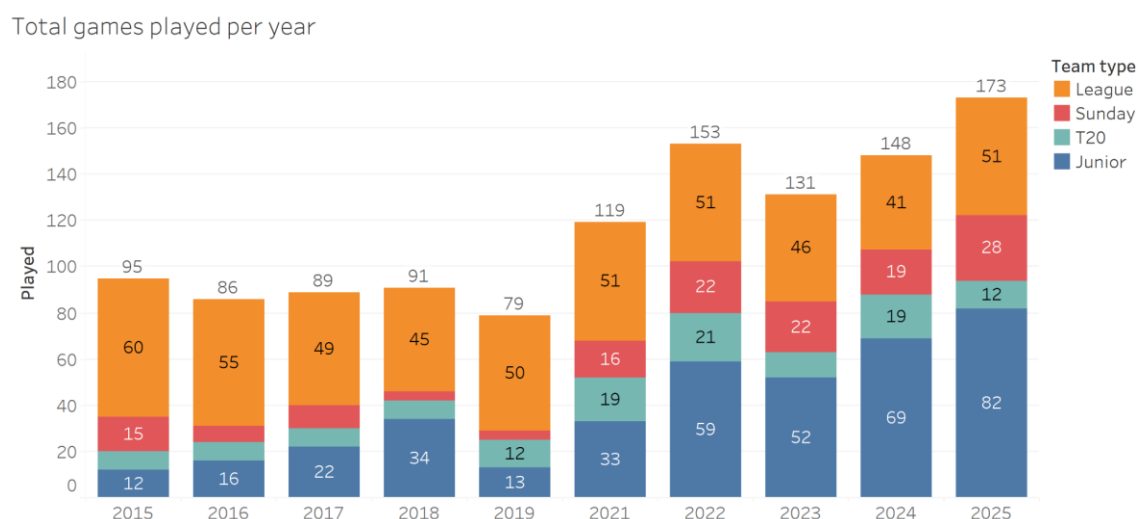
The junior section now has over 150 members and in 2025 fielded its first girls team. The club wants to continue this development and offer members safe facilities in which to play and practice.

Balcombe Cricket Club is a grass roots club. This growth has been mainly driven by increasing the junior section of the club. Much of this growth is from increasing the participation of children in the village. At years 4 and 5 we typically get 70 to 80% of children in the village playing in the mini section of the club. We also have some players from other nearby villages and some from Maidenbower. The growth is not coming by taking players from other clubs.

The training is very good and the club spends money every year developing coaches for the players. This season we have 7 children in the Sussex pathway programmes. Of those children 5 attend state schools. This is perhaps not a lot for some of the large clubs in the region but it is a significant achievement for a village club.

In order to continue to develop cricketers at Balcombe we need to improve the practice facilities.

Figure 2: Cricket games played by Balcombe 2015-2025



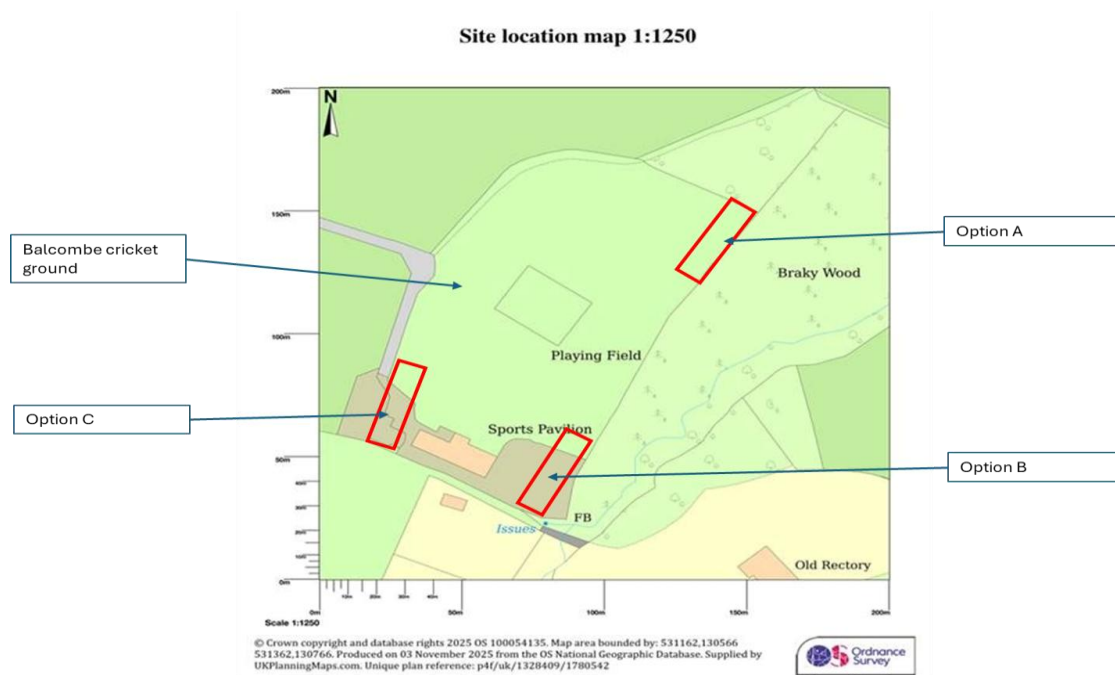
2.0 Location

2.1 Options for new nets

The club has reviewed all the potential locations at the club. To replace the club nets with a similar facility that meets the safety requirements, the club needs a space of 33m by 8m.

Figure 3 below shows this area marked on a location plan of Balcombe Cricket Club. Three options have been considered. It can be seen that none of the locations allow for the placement of the practice facilities without crossing the playing boundary.

Figure 3: Location map with options for new nets



Option A: This is the location of the current facility, but replacement of the nets in line with the ECB requirements would encroach onto the playing area substantially and therefore makes this option not viable.

Option B: The land behind option B is a wall and behind that a swimming pool, therefore the nets would extend onto the playing area if located in this position. The area also contains the services to the club house and the land falls away to the east, therefore making this area impractical for locating the nets.

Option C: This location would require use of the existing car park area for siting the nets. Parking is already at a premium with congestion and insufficient spaces regularly occurring on match days, therefore the loss of any parking spaces would not be appropriate. This would also have the most significant impact visually as it is an entirely new facility closest to the houses in the village. For these reasons, the location has not been considered further.

Option D: Whilst not shown on the map in Figure 2, the 'back pitch' located to the South-West of the pavilion has also been discounted as a potential option. The land slopes significantly, is clearly visible from the village and is almost entirely used as part of the playing area, therefore leaving insufficient space for the construction of nets. Furthermore, the owners of this land (being separate from the rest of the club) would not support construction of nets in this location.

2.2 Proposed Location

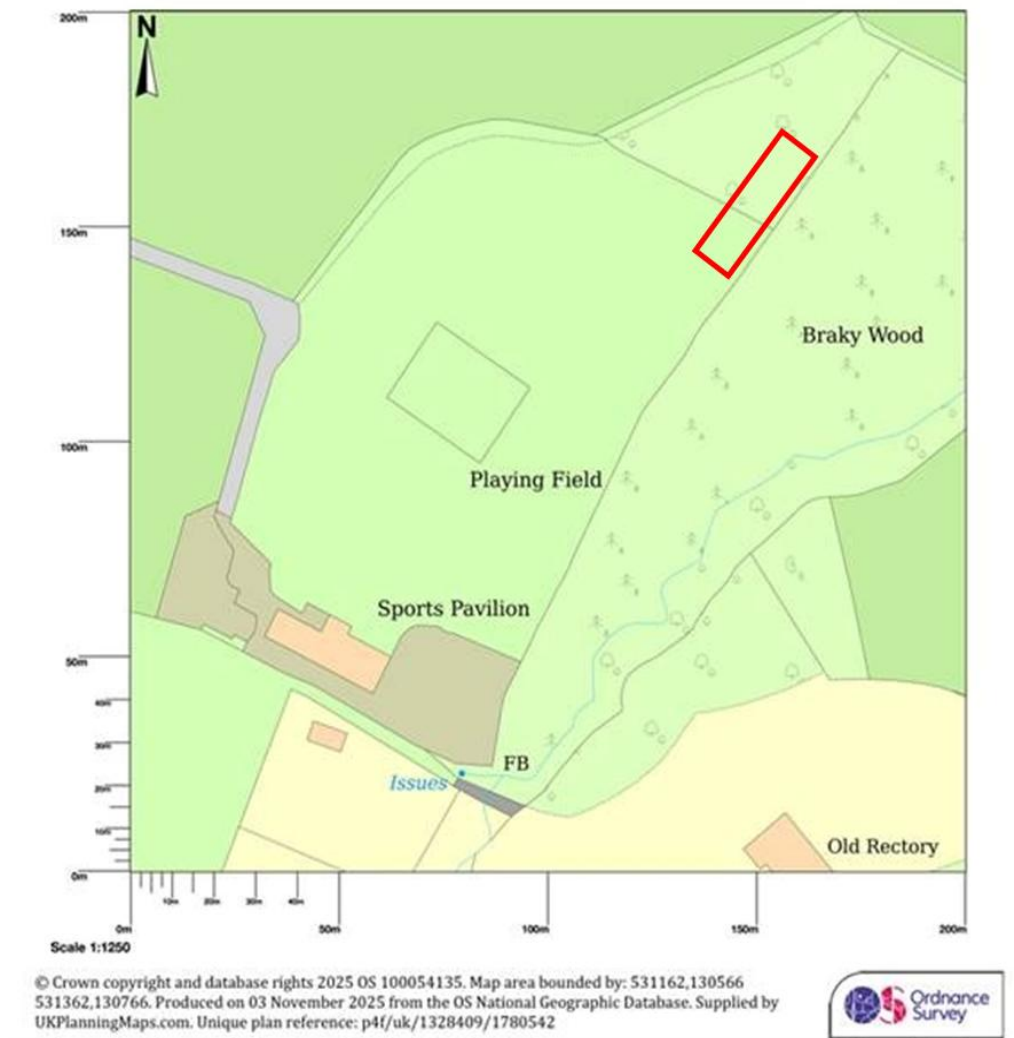
As no land is available within the existing boundaries of the playing area, consideration has been given to an alternative option which meets the practical requirements of being:

- Outside the boundary of the playing area
- On level ground
- No more visually intrusive than the current facilities.

After consultation with relevant parties the club believes the best location would be to extend the nets behind the current area. This is shown in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Proposed location of nets

Site location map 1:1250



3.0 Design

3.1 ECB specifications for practice nets

The ECB specifications are as follows:

- Carpet length – Minimum 26m long (Recommended 30m long)
- Cricket Cage (Minimum ECB Spec) – Length 18.25m long x 3.65m wide x 3.65m high (most popular is 21.9m long x 3.65m wide x 4m high) 4m high is due to spinners throwing the ball higher.
- Distance from middle stump to practice facility would be a minimum of 45.72m
- Nets must be orientated so that the direction of play is no more than 55° from North.

Figure 5 below shows the ECB's required 50-yard boundary plus 3-yard run-off from the last track on the square, and where a 30m x 7.3m two-lane practice area would need to be located to remain outside this playing area.

Figure 4: Position of new nets to comply with ECB specifications



4.0 Planning Policy

Relevant planning policy is contained within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the Mid-Sussex District Plan 2014-2031 (adopted March 2018).

Paragraph 91 of the NPPF states that “policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which... enable and support healthy lifestyles... for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sport facilities...”.

Policy DP24 (Leisure and Cultural Facilities and Activities) of the MSDC District Plan identifies that “it is essential for existing facilities to be retained and improved”. The District Plan also refers to MSDC’s Leisure and Cultural Strategy to increase participation in arts and culture, sports and physical activity.

The proposed development aims to improve the existing facilities at Balcombe Cricket Club and to provide safe and accessible infrastructure, particularly for young people, and is therefore supported by the above policies.

5.0 Proposed Development

The plan therefore is to move the nets 25m into the scrub area behind the current location, and to fully enclose the nets. Figure 5a shows the existing layout and Figure 5b shows the proposed layout of the new nets. The area covered by the nets is not changing, though the enclosure is a new addition.

Figure 6a – Existing site layout

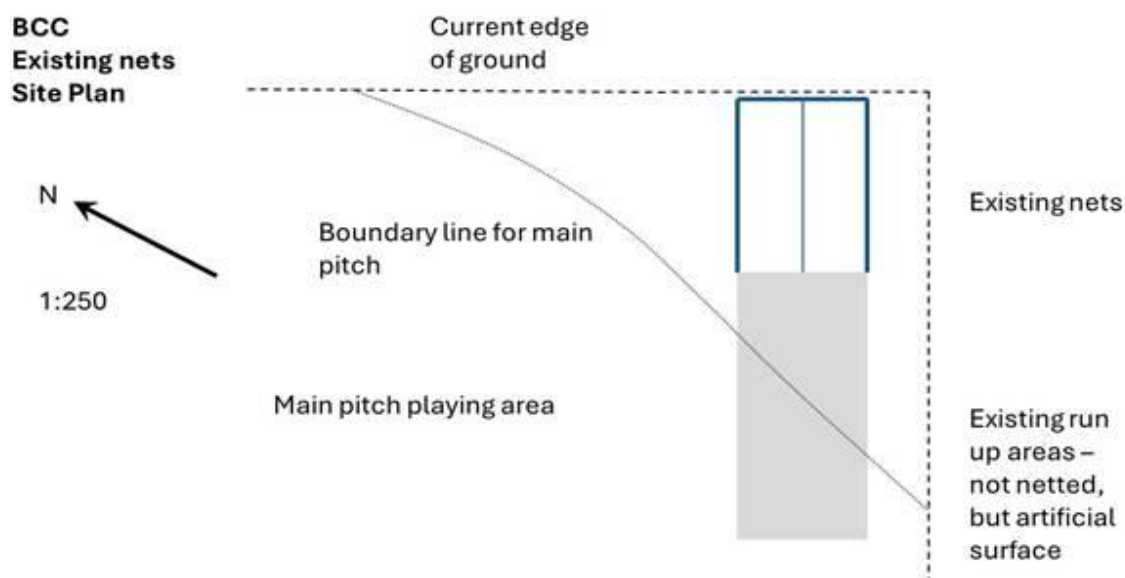
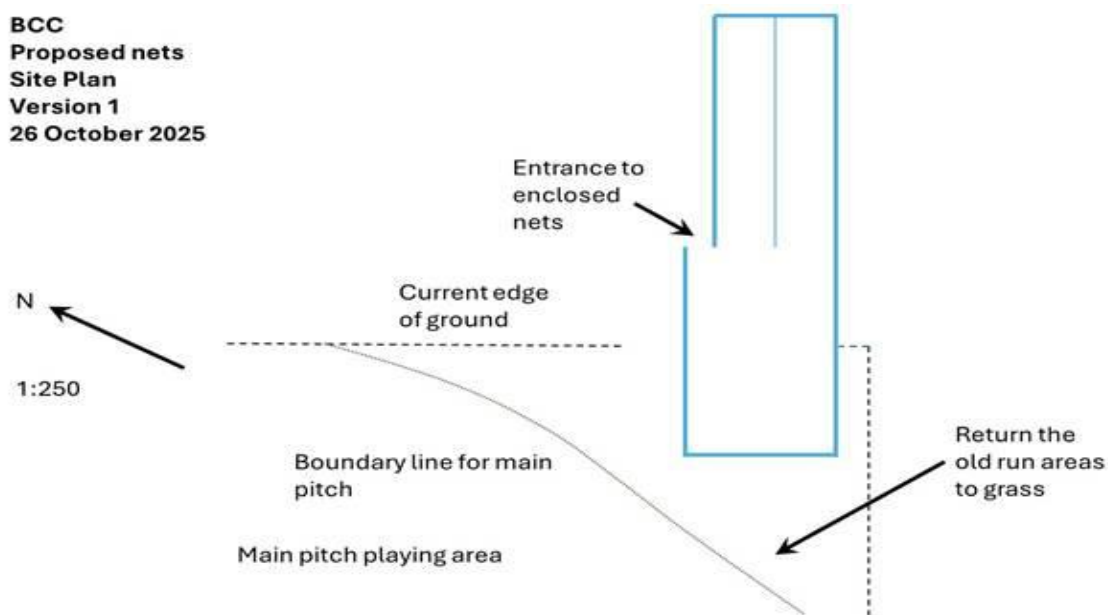


Figure 6b – Proposed site layout



Not to scale. Separate copy correct to scale submitted separately.

6.0 Biodiversity

6.1 BNG

The proposed development measures 25m x 8m, i.e. 0.02 hectares. The existing habitat comprises an area of bramble and bracken, together with 6 mature holly and ash trees, the latter suffering from ash dieback (*chalara fraxinea*). A pre-development habitat survey of the area suggests that it is in a moderate condition and that the area is of level 2 significance. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric tool calculates that we would need to purchase 0.26 habitat units.

The club will purchase Biodiversity Net Gain habitat units to offset those lost by the proposed development. Specific units have not yet been identified but details will be provided in the Biodiversity Gain Plan should the Planning Authority grant permission.

The area is under the draft threshold for BNG as described in parliament by the housing minister on 16th December 2025.

6.2 Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site

The adjoining woodland is designated as a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS). The current forestry crop is Norway Spruce, approximately 30-40 years old; there is little to no ground flora, aside from the occasional bramble, and limited shrub layer other than a small amount of rhododendron ponticum at the southern end. The woodland is extensively used by members of the public, on foot and on bicycles, with substantial numbers of dog walkers on a daily basis.

Any environmental benefit provided by this woodland is at canopy level and that will soon be lost due to the presence of Ips Typographus (European eight-toothed spruce bark beetle) in the local area which would result in an enforced clear fell should an infestation occur, or the proactive felling by the landowner.

The proposed development will be located adjacent to the existing facilities and will have no detrimental impact on the PAWS.

6.3 Priority habitat

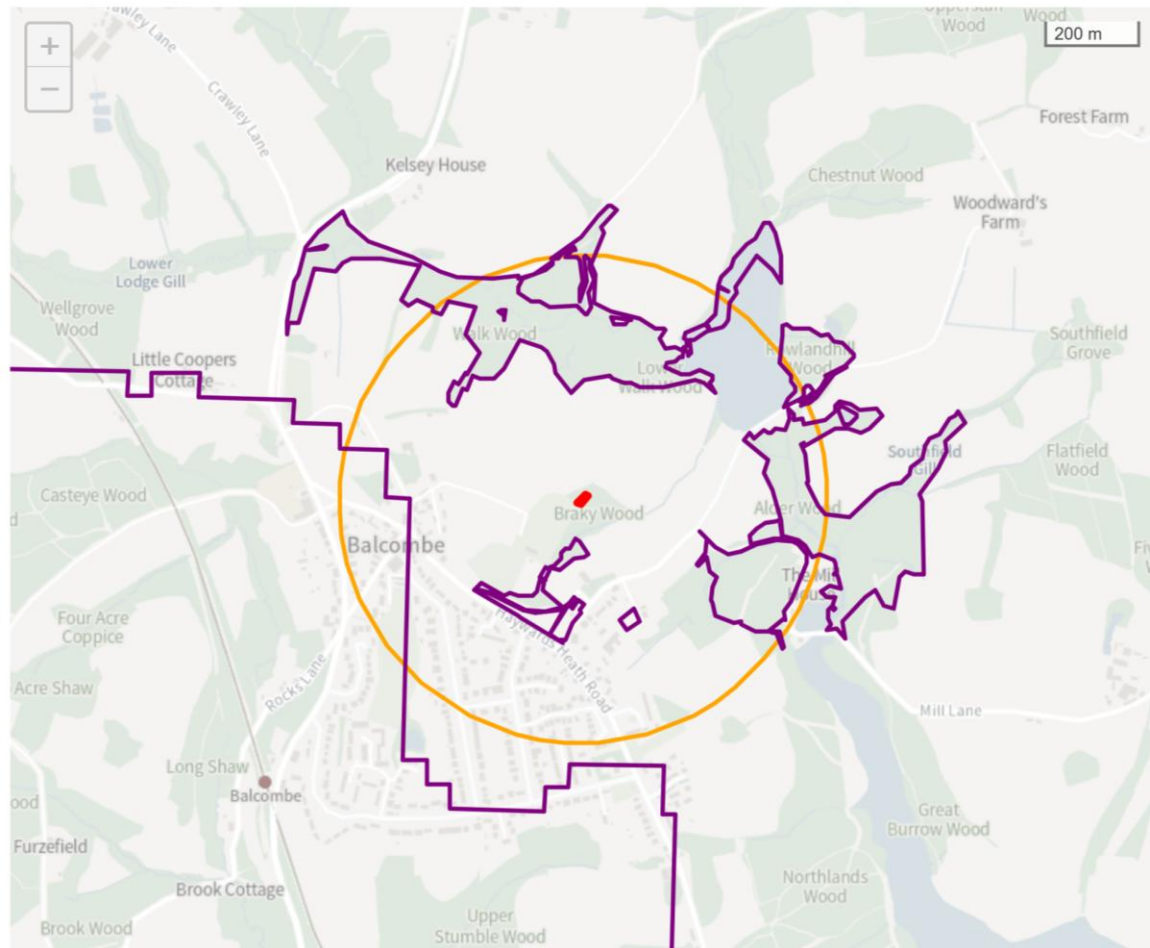
Some parts of Braky Wood to the south east of the site are ancient woodland. The extract from the MAGIC website shows the priority woodland habitat near the site. It can be seen that the proposed site for nets is not near the priority habitat, nor is it in the buffer zone for the priority habitat.

Figure 7: MAGIC priority woodland habitat map



Analysis using the Joe Bloom tool shows a similar result. Braky wood contains some priority habitat areas, but these are in the area adjacent to the other end of the cricket field and not in the area next to the proposed site.

Figure 8: Map of priority habitats near site (marked in purple lines - source: www.joesblooms.com)



7.0 Access plan to the Site

The works for cricket nets are not the same as for buildings. The materials are lighter and the equipment smaller. The contractors we have spoken to are used to using cricket fields to access the working areas.

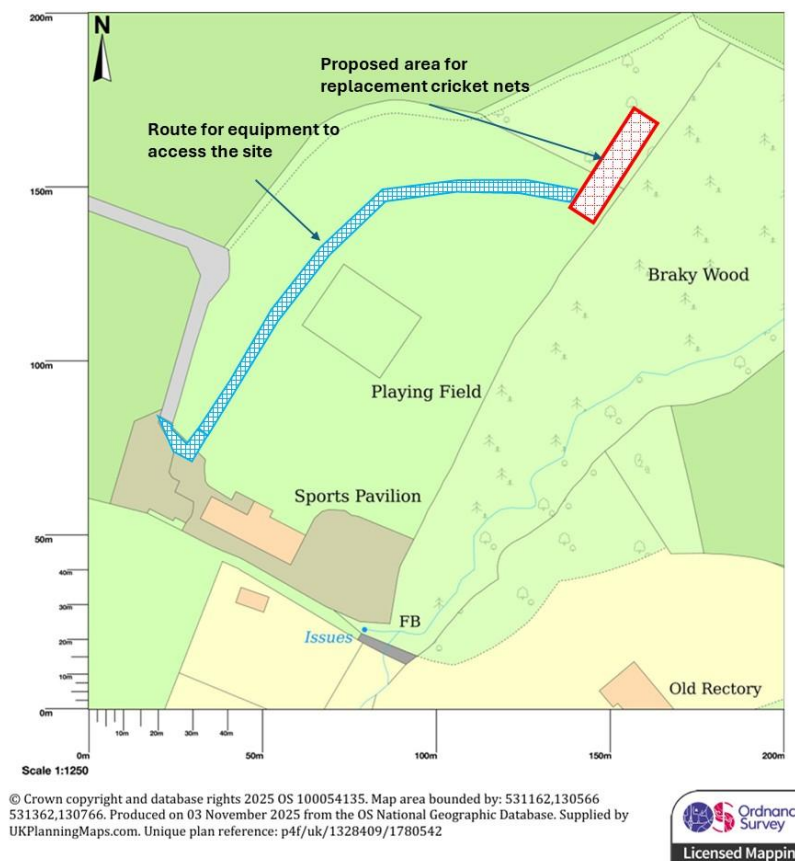
The equipment will be smaller and less than 3 tonnes. The contractors have confirmed they can access the area from the track to the cricket club over the cricket field.

The route they will use from the track is indicated on the map below.

Figure 9: Site location map showing access route



Site location map 1:1250



8.0 Heritage statement

The postcode used for the club is RH17 6PE. This post code covers the cottages near the village shop in Balcombe. Post is not delivered to the cricket club, but the club uses the postcode as the track entrance is in the RH17 6 PE postcode.

Figure 10 shows a map of the Balcombe Conservation area with the proposed site marked in red. The site is outside the conservation area. Therefore the club does not believe a heritage statement is required.

In discussion with the land owners the aim has always been to design a solution which does not have a visual impact on Balcombe or the residents.

Figure 1: Balcombe Conservation Area and proposed site marked in red

