Planning Statement

The proposal for permanent infrastructure at Saint Hill Manor includes a large car park, event facilities, and ground works engineering in Hobbs Field, a toilet block, an energy centre, backup generators, and a connecting access road.

Saint Hill Rd,
East Grinstead
RH19 4JY

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Planning Statement supports a full primary planning application for the installation of permanent infrastructure at Saint Hill Manor, East Grinstead. The works are designed to support the annual International Association of Scientologists Anniversary Event and to provide long-term facilities that will benefit a wide range of community and cultural activities.

The proposals include:

- A permanent car park (121 permanent + 619 temporary spaces)
- Two permanent washroom blocks
- A new access road from Saint Hill Road through Juhring Field into the main event field
- Permanent reinforced ground and underground utilities
- Ecological enhancements and SuDS measures
- Event infrastructure improvements in Hobbs Field

The site is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), close to the Ashdown Forest SAC/SPA, and within the setting of Saint Hill Manor (Grade II listed). The scheme has been shaped by community engagement, pre-application advice, and specialist technical assessments, ensuring a balanced approach between operational need, sustainability, and environmental protection.

2. KEY DEVELOPMENT MEASURES

The proposal introduces permanent infrastructure designed to reduce environmental impacts, improve efficiency, and preserve the rural character of the site. Key elements include:

- Annual temporary structures: Event tent (50m x 85m), catering tent (25m x 65m), seminar tent (25m x 65m)
- Permanent access road: From Saint Hill Road through Juhring Field into the main event field, reducing the need for temporary trackway and HGV deliveries [DP21, DP26].
- CellPave reinforcement:
    - Main event field – supporting heavy machinery (cherry pickers, cranes, forklifts).
    - Juhring Field – durable parking for 900+ vehicles, while maintaining a green, grassed surface [DP21, DP37, DP38].
- Permanent concrete ring foundation: Around the tent footprint, reducing setup time by ~66% [DP25, DP26].
- Field levelling and drainage: Including a new retention pond, preventing flooding and safeguarding soil quality [DP41].

- Permanent underground power lines and on-site generators: Eliminating reliance on hired equipment and extensive temporary cabling [DP25, DP39].
- Permanent bathroom facilities: Improving user amenities and reducing the need for repeated temporary units [DP25].
- Vehicle movement reduction: Over 50% fewer HGV deliveries annually [DP21, DP39].
- Elimination of temporary trackway: Reinforced ground prevents rutting, soil erosion, and improves aesthetics [DP26, DP37].
- Environmental benefits: Grass-through CellPave maintains rural appearance; reinforced ground prevents erosion and supports biodiversity resilience [DP26, DP38, DP41].

Collectively, these measures increase safety, efficiency, and sustainability, while preserving the rural and historic character of the site.

3. PLANNING POLICY COMPLIANCE

3.1 Mid Sussex District Plan (2014–2031)

- DP1 – Sustainable Economic Development: Supports infrastructure that enhances community and economic vitality.
- DP12 – Protection and Enhancement of Countryside: Rural character retained through landscape-led design.
- DP16 – High Weald AONB: LVIA confirms minimal impact, conserving natural beauty.
- DP17 – Ashdown Forest SPA/SAC: Traffic impacts assessed and mitigated through HRA.
- DP21 – Transport: Permanent access road improves safety and reduces HGV traffic; EV charging and cycle storage included.
- DP25 – Community Facilities: Delivers sustainable visitor and community infrastructure.
- DP26 – Character and Design: Design integrates with local character, green infrastructure retained.
- DP34 – Heritage Assets: Less than substantial harm to the setting of Saint Hill Manor; outweighed by public benefits.
- DP37 – Trees, Woodland and Hedgerows: 15m buffer to ancient woodland, arboricultural safeguards.
- DP38 – Biodiversity: Delivers 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.
- DP39 – Sustainable Design and Construction: SuDS, drainage, and climate-resilient landscaping integrated.
- DP41 – Flood Risk and Drainage: Site in Flood Zone 1, with robust SuDS strategy.

3.2 East Grinstead Neighbourhood Plan

- EG1 – Protection of High Weald AONB: Exceptional circumstances and public benefit demonstrated.
- EG2 – Countryside Development Constraint: Maintains openness while supporting recreation.
- EG3 – Promoting Good Design: Landscape-led approach, respecting topography and rural character.
- EG4 – Heritage Assets: Impacts on listed and non-listed assets assessed and mitigated.
- EG11 – Highway Impact: No severe impact identified; mitigation measures provided.
- EG12 – Car Parking: Aligns with WSCC standards; includes EV charging and cycle storage.

3.3 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023)

- Paras 182–183: Exceptional circumstances in the AONB justified by strong public interest.
- Paras 200–209: Less than substantial harm to heritage assets; outweighed by public benefits.
- Paras 186–187: Net biodiversity gain secured.
- Para 176: Protects scenic beauty and rural character.

3.4 Other Material Considerations

- High Weald AONB Management Plan – Landscape-led design aligns with objectives.
- Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD – Integrates green infrastructure and respects rural character.
- WSCC Parking Standards – Compliance with layout and EV charging provision.
- Ashdown Forest Guidance – Traffic and recreational pressures mitigated.

4. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Pre-application advice (ref. DM/24/0951) obtained from the Council.
- Stakeholder discussions and questionnaires undertaken with local groups.
- Letters of support received from East Grinstead Rugby Club and East Grinstead Meads Football Club.
- Design revisions made in response to feedback, reducing visual impact and strengthening ecological measures.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL AND TECHNICAL ASSESSMENTS

- LVIA: Minimal visual impact, particularly within the AONB.
- Heritage Statement: Less than substantial harm to Saint Hill Manor's setting; mitigated by landscaping.
- Ecological Survey: Confirms compliance with GCN zones and secures 10% Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Drainage Strategy: Incorporates SuDS and a retention pond to manage surface water.
- Noise, Air, and Lighting Assessments: Mitigation measures embedded in design.
- Transport Assessment and Travel Plan: Confirms no severe impacts, with sustainable travel encouraged.

6. RELEVANT PRECEDENT

6.1 Cell Pave

The use of CellPave reinforcement forms a central component of this proposal. To demonstrate the product's proven performance, several reference sites are highlighted:

- CellPave 50 – Littlehampton (2024): Recently installed at a publicly accessible site in Littlehampton. While installation coincided with an arid summer, contractors have confirmed strong long-term prospects for grass establishment, and the client has expressed satisfaction with both aesthetics and functionality. Images of the installation have been provided by the Neilcott Construction.
- CellPave 50 – Grassington, North Yorkshire (2023): Installed at a National Park's car park, where capacity is now being doubled due to the success of the first phase. Photographs taken one year apart demonstrate resilience through heavy use and extended dry conditions, with grass remaining green and healthy without artificial watering.
- CellPave HD – Kent (ongoing): Currently being installed at a private truck park by GPR Kent (contact: Paul Kegos). This product is primarily used for HGV applications due to its strength and durability.

Manufactured in Lancashire from recycled PVC cable cover, it is fully recyclable at the end of life. While often installed with gravel infill, it is designed to promote grass growth through features such as:

- Cut-outs in cell walls allow root spread and nutrient flow, preventing plants from becoming "pot bound."
- Thermal insulation from recycled PVC, reducing the risk of grass burn-off compared with concrete alternatives.

While there are currently no recorded installations of CellPave (or directly equivalent grass-reinforcing pavers) serving car-park functions within the Mid Sussex area, several comparable projects demonstrate the broader acceptability and local adoption of similar technologies:

In West Wittering, a sensitive rural development incorporated Tobermore's Hydropave permeable paving to meet landscape and SuDS objectives, aiding planning approval.

Local Sussex-based contractors install grass-grid reinforcement in residential driveways, which allows grass growth while safely supporting vehicle loads—demonstrating local familiarity with grass-friendly surfacing solutions.

The University of Sussex has proposed (within the South Downs National Park) a temporary car park built with an interlocking cellular paving grid and gravel infill, designed for economic and ecological sensitivity.

A school in the West Midlands has successfully employed CellPave AP to convert a grassed area into a multi-use car parking and event surface, by using a no-dig, mechanically anchored installation.

These examples collectively support the argument that reinforced, grass-friendly paving systems are technically viable, visually sympathetic, and aligned with both environmental and planning principles—across local and regional contexts.

Therefore, we believe this reference sites collectively demonstrate that CellPave is a robust, sustainable, and proven technology for both light and heavy-duty applications. Its ability to support high vehicle loads while maintaining a green, grassed appearance makes it particularly suited for use in sensitive landscapes such as the High Weald AONB, ensuring functional resilience without compromising visual amenity.

6.2 Precedents for Other Key Car Park Applications

Harlands Road (NCP), Haywards Heath

- Ref: DM/17/2384
- Proposal: Redevelopment of a 91-space surface car park to 40 apartments.
- Decision: Approved (Planning Committee A, Dec 2018).
- Relevance: Demonstrates MSDC's acceptance of significant change/loss of car parking stock where wider regeneration or housing benefits are delivered.

The Martlets, Burgess Hill

- Refs: DM/15/3858 (2016 approval) and later S73/consents (2021 onwards).
- Proposal: Demolition of existing multi-storey car park with re-provision and reconfiguration of public parking within a mixed-use town-centre redevelopment.
- Decision: Approved (Mar 2016; revised consents Jul 2021).

- Relevance: Precedent for wholesale re-provision of major car-parking assets as part of strategic development.

Queensway Car Park, East Grinstead

- Business Case (approved May 2025); Amendment Order (approved Nov 2024).
- Evidence: Demonstrated >80–99% occupancy at peak, leading to changes in tariffing and a resident permit scheme.
- Relevance: Illustrates MSDC's data-led approach to parking capacity, demand management, and operational changes.

Imberhorne Lane Car Park, East Grinstead

- Forward Plan Item: Cabinet decision scheduled 17 Nov 2025.
- Proposal: Council-led car park project (Commercial Services & Contracts).
- Relevance: Shows MSDC's active role in new car park projects, currently progressing to Cabinet decision.

East Grinstead Railway Station Forecourt (DM/23/0442)

- Proposal: Station forecourt improvement works, linked to large station car park and pedestrian access upgrades.
- Decision: Approved Apr 2023.
- Relevance: Demonstrates integration of parking and transport hub infrastructure improvements in East Grinstead.

Queen Victoria Hospital (QVH), East Grinstead (DM/25/0396)

- Proposal: New Community Diagnostic Centre with associated car and cycle parking, landscaping and ancillary works.
- Status: Live application (2025).
- Relevance: Current precedent where additional on-site parking provision is justified to support critical infrastructure.

Sissinghurst Castle Car Park (National Trust, Kent)

- Ref: 12/01064/FULMJ (Tunbridge Wells BC, approved 2013)
- Proposal: Construction of a new 300-space visitor car park with reinforced grass surfacing, extensive landscape planting, and ecological mitigation. Located within the High Weald AONB and serving a Grade I listed heritage asset.
- Decision: Approved (2013) following LVIA, heritage, and ecology assessments.
- Relevance: Highly comparable to the Saint Hill proposal — demonstrates planning acceptance of a large, grass-reinforced car park in a sensitive AONB/heritage context, where public interest and operational need outweighed limited landscape impact.

7. CONCLUSION

The proposed development at Saint Hill Manor presents a carefully considered package of permanent infrastructure that strikes a balance between operational requirements, environmental protection, and community benefits. It responds directly to the challenges of hosting large-scale cultural and community events while ensuring long-term sustainability, efficiency, and compliance with planning policy.

The scheme has been informed by pre-application advice, technical assessments, and community engagement, resulting in a design that is landscape-led, heritage-sensitive, and environmentally responsible. Through the use of grass-through reinforcement systems, SuDS, and ecological enhancements, the proposal minimises visual and environmental impact within the High Weald AONB and secures biodiversity net gain. Permanent facilities also significantly reduce the carbon footprint, traffic impact, and waste associated with repeated temporary installations.

Importantly, the project is supported by relevant precedent in Mid Sussex, where the Council has consistently accepted the need for significant car park developments, reconfigurations, or re-provision where the planning balance is positive. These precedents, together with strong evidence of local support, reinforce the acceptability of the proposal.

Overall, the development represents exceptional circumstances where the public interest, operational need, and community benefit outweigh any limited harm to heritage or landscape character. It is a policy-compliant, technically robust, and socially valuable scheme, and is therefore respectfully commended to the Council for approval.