

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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Working together to care for an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Mid-Sussex District Council
Emailed to steve.ashdown@midsussex.gov.uk
4th August 2025

One of the National Landscapes family

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Dear Mr Ashdown

DM/23/2866 Outline planning application (All matters reserved except for access) for the redevelopment of land to the east of Ansty to create a new Garden Community, comprising of the erection of up to 1,450 homes (including 30% affordable housing), up to 90 residential care units (C2 class), a primary school, a SEND school, health hub, sports facilities including all weather hockey pitches and tennis centre, allotments, retail, community and employment uses together with ancillary and associated development including new and enhanced pedestrian/cycle routes, open spaces, and landscaping Land East Of Ansty Way Cuckfield Bypass Cuckfield West Sussex

Thank you for consulting us on the above application.

In summary, the High Weald National Landscape Unit objects to this proposal on the following grounds:

- **The proposed development, by virtue of its very large scale and its proximity to the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), would result in a significant and discernible extension of built development into the surrounding countryside, creating a large new urbanisation adjacent to and abutting the HWNL, and would introduce an abrupt change of landscape character in close proximity to the HWNL, and a loss of natural landscape contiguous with the HWNL. Further, it would adversely impact on perceptual qualities of the HWNL of tranquillity and rurality, due to the level of noise, activity and lighting that would inevitably be associated with a development of such large scale, in such close proximity to the HWNL. The proposal would thereby harm the setting of the HWNL, being contrary to objectives S1, S2, W2, DS1, DS2 and PQ2 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.**
- **For these reasons, the proposed development would not be sensitively located so as to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the HWNL, would fail to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the HWNL and would therefore be contrary to NPPF 189.**

It is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority to decide whether the application meets legislative and policy requirements in respect of National Landscapes (AONBs). Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities to **seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs** in making decisions that affect the designated area. It is important to recognise that the duty can therefore apply to development outside, but in the setting of, a National Landscape which affects it.

Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the High Weald National Landscape will normally mean avoiding harm, and conserving and enhancing the character components identified in the AONB Management Plan; supporting the Management Plan Objectives as set out for each of these; and following any Management Plan Actions set out for each.¹²

¹ [Guidance for relevant authorities on seeking to further the purposes of Protected Landscapes - GOV.UK](#)

² [CRoW-s.85-duty-guidance-for-LPAs_NLA-Briefing-Nov-24.pdf](#)

Paragraph 189 of the NPPF requires that: “Great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues” and that development within their settings “should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas”.

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029](#) is adopted by all the relevant local authorities with land in the High Weald National Landscape as their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it, and is a material consideration for planning applications affecting the HWNL.

Analysis of the Proposal Against the High Weald AONB Management Plan

The Management Plan Statement of Significance defines what makes the High Weald special and identifies the qualities that justify its designation as a nationally important landscape. The High Weald’s natural beauty is described by eight key components of character around which the Management Plan is structured, including Objectives for each component.

Of particular relevance to this proposal are Management Plan Objectives:

- S1: *To protect the historic pattern and character of settlements.*
- S2: *To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure new development reflects the character of the High Weald in its siting, scale, layout and design.*
- R1: *To maintain the historic pattern, morphology and features of routeways*
- W2: *To protect and restore the ecological quality and functioning of woodland at a landscape scale.*
- DS1: *To preserve the dark skies of the High Weald AONB by minimising light pollution, obtrusive external lighting and internal light spill from domestic, commercial and public premises in both existing and new developments within the High Weald, and from highways lighting.*
- DS2: *To protect wildlife and habitats from light pollution across the High Weald.*
- PQ2: *To protect the unspoilt rural landscape with its intrinsic sense of naturalness, valued views, and the extent of green space which foster experiences of rurality and tranquillity.*

The application site is outside of, but abutting, the HWNL, and is considered to be within the setting of the HWNL. The NPPF clarifies that development within the setting of AONBs “*should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas*” (para 189), while the NPPG elaborates “*Land within the setting of these areas [AONBs] often makes an important contribution to maintaining their natural beauty, and where poorly located or designed development can do significant harm.*” and that “*Development within the settings of these areas [AONBs] will therefore need sensitive handling that takes these potential impacts into account.*”³

The HW AONB Management Plan therefore sets out that it is not only development within the boundary of the HWNL that needs to be informed by consideration of the Management Plan, and that poorly located or designed development on land within the setting of the NL can do harm, and that this is especially the case where the landscape character of land within and adjoining the designated area is complementary. The Management Plan also sets out that, due to the high synergy in character between the HWNL boundary and the wider High Weald National Character Area (NCA 122), land within the NCA 122 should be considered as falling within the setting of the HWNL. The application site does lie within NCA 122.

Settlement is one of the five defining components of the natural beauty of the High Weald AONB set out in the Management Plan; the Statement of Significance highlights that the pattern and landscape setting of dispersed historic settlements which enriches the natural beauty of the area, and Objective S1 is underpinned by the following rationale: *To protect the distinctive character and landscape settings of*

³ NPPG Paragraph: 042 Reference ID: 8-042-20190721

towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads, remove despoiling influences, and maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation and green infrastructure) between settlements that contribute to local identity.

Impact on character of the setting of the HWNL

The proposal is an outline application for a new Garden Community, comprising of the erection of up to 1,450 homes along with various educational, health and recreational amenities and infrastructure over some 247 acres of farmland and woodland to the east and north-east of the village of Ansty, and to the immediate east of, and abutting the boundary of, the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL), with the A272 forming the boundary between the site and the HWNL.

The proposed development would not relate well to the established pattern of development in the area; it would attach a large new 'community' of up to 1,450 houses, onto the small village of Ansty, around which the HWNL boundary skirts, subsuming and overwhelming the existing village, significantly altering its character and landscape setting, and creating a large new urbanisation adjacent to and abutting the HWNL, thereby conflicting with AONB Management Plan Objective S1, and that part of S2 that relates to scale.

There is a clear intervisibility between the site and the HWNL, and therefore, the site makes a positive contribution to the setting of the HWNL. The scale of development proposed would result in a significant and discernible extension of built development into the surrounding countryside and would introduce an abrupt change of landscape character in close proximity to the HWNL, and a loss of natural landscape contiguous with, and of similar character to, the HWNL, thereby causing harm to the character of the setting of the HWNL.

The submitted Design & Access Statement, p18, reflecting the LVIA, promotes that "*Within the wider landscape, views of the site are obscured due to the intervening woodland, trees and topography. As such, there is little to no inter-visibility between the site and the adjacent wider and elevated landscape of the High Weald AONB beyond its immediate eastern edge and setting (viewpoints 3 and 6).*" In disagreeing with this 'little to no inter-visibility', we would highlight that the submitted report itself contradicts this; viewpoints 3 and 6 are in fact described in that report as '*open views of part of the site occur from the road corridor of the A272, to the west and northwest of the site, which partly forms the edge of the High Weald AONB (viewpoint 3)*' and '*From the surrounding landscape, views from the PRoW network are limited to those in close proximity to the site boundaries (viewpoint 6)*' – this viewpoint is from a PRoW within the HWNL. That the views are 'limited to those in close proximity', or 'filtered' views through trees, or restricted to those from the eastern edge of the HWNL, in no way diminishes the importance of that intervisibility and the potential for harm to be caused to the natural beauty of the HWNL.

Despite the undeveloped landscape 'buffers' proposed on the illustrative masterplan material and the Green Infrastructure Parameters Plan, these areas are shown to include play areas/pitches to the school, and the areas are not shown to extend to the north-western edge of the northern parcel. Whilst they may in some locations minimise direct inter-visibility, overall, such buffers are not considered to address all the impacts on the HWNL outlined in these comments.

Also concerning is that the submitted Building Heights Parameter Plan proposes tall buildings of 3 storeys/15m ridge height in the area for the 'local centre', located only some 130m from the HWNL boundary. Such building heights are uncharacteristic of High Weald settlements, (see High Weald Housing Design Guide) and as such, would exacerbate the incongruity of the proposed new development in the landscape in the setting of the HWNL. **Therefore, and without prejudice to our overall objections to the proposal, should the LPA be minded to grant permission, it is recommended that the parameter plans, are specifically excluded from the approved drawings, in order that these issues can be addressed in future parameter plans at reserved matters stage.**

Tranquillity & Dark Skies

Meanwhile the scale of the proposed development would adversely impact on perceptual qualities of the HWNL of tranquillity and rurality due to the level of noise, activity and lighting that would inevitably be associated with a development of 1,450 new houses and the associated education, health and recreational infrastructure, in such close proximity to the HWNL, thereby conflicting with Objective PQ2 of the AONB Management Plan.

It is a concern that the submitted RPS Lighting Impact Assessment, whilst acknowledging the AONB Management Plan, and setting out, in para 5.1 the *Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Note for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light*, and list of 'Environmental Zones', (for which AONBs fall into zone E1), the consultants go on to erroneously base their assessment on an environmental zone classification of E2. In fact, the ILP Guidance Note clarifies that where an area to be lit lies close to the boundary of two zones the obtrusive light limitation values used should be those applicable to the most rigorous zone – this means that where a rural site is outside of, but adjacent or very close to the AONB boundary, as is the case with this application, zone E1 should be used.

The lighting assessment, whilst being carried out for an outline proposal only, suggests that streetlighting would be proposed in the development (paras 7.2 and 8.1). However, the HWNL is characterised by villages with little or no streetlighting, and the adverse urbanising effects of street lighting are set out in the AONB Management Plan, and this is expanded in the HWNL Dark Skies Planning Advice Note (2024). Ansty village currently has no streetlighting, and to introduce such uncharacteristic street lighting into the proposed new development would exacerbate its adverse impact on the setting of the HWNL.

Impacts on Ancient Woodland

The site includes a number of areas of designated ancient woodland (ASNW) including Highbridge Mill Shaw. In this regard, and whilst acknowledging this is an outline application, a number of layout aspects of the indicative Concept Masterplan and Parameter Plans are concerning – for example, the proposed locating of the 'local centre' – a high activity area – in close proximity to the ASNW of Highbridge Mill Shaw, with resulting indirect impacts on the ASNW, the proposed routing of a main internal access road again in close proximity to that same ASNW, and the inclusion of a somewhat isolated double parcel of development proposed north of Highbridge Mill Shaw ASNW, between it and other existing woodland to the north and north-east (priority habitat deciduous woodland and Highbridge Mill ASNW), fragmenting and reducing the functional inter-connectivity of these important habitats. Those habitats will also have functionally inter-connectivity through to similar just over the boundary within the HWNL. **Therefore, and without prejudice to our overall objections to the proposal, should the LPA be minded to grant permission, it is recommended that the parameter plans, Concept Masterplan as well as all other indicative masterplans, are specifically excluded from the approved drawings, in order that these strategic layout issues can be addressed in future parameter plans/masterplans.**

Toucan Crossing

Lastly, the indicative masterplan also proposes taking cycle paths up the north-western part of the site, to cross the A272 with a Toucan crossing, details for which have also been submitted. Such a traffic light controlled system would introduce intrusive lighting and urbanising highways infrastructure, along with increased activity and disturbance, in a highly rural stretch of the A272 bordering the HWNL, and crossing into the HWNL in an area of Priority Habitat Deciduous Woodland. The purpose of the crossing is purely for connecting the proposed development with an area of 'Parkland Reserve' on the west side of the A272, (separate planning application ref 23/2867). The infrastructure associated with the crossing would exacerbate the impact of the residential development in the setting of the HWNL, bringing intrusion right up to the HWNL. As such, this part of the proposal would not conserve and enhance the HWNL, and would be contrary to Management Plan Objective PQ2 and associated Action 'i'.

We have already submitted objections to the application for the 'Parkland Reserve', which itself appears to be unnecessary to provide green space and recreational access for the new 'Garden Community', since the residential scheme itself proposes extensive, significant green infrastructure within its own site boundary to the east of the A272, including ancient woodland, other retained woodland, 'community growing areas', 'wild open spaces to connect with nature', 'multi-functional public open space', sports facilities and a range of other green open spaces as shown on the illustrative masterplan material. **In view of the additional urbanising highways infrastructure in this application, intrusive and uncharacteristic to this rural location, and which only serves to connect the development to an area of countryside unnecessary for the development, we request that should the LPA be minded to grant permission for the housing application, this crossing be excluded from the approved drawings.**

Design

As this is an outline application, with all matters apart from access reserved, the submitted Design Code has not been assessed in the preparation of these comments. However, it is noted that the Design Code contains substantial detail, much of it pertaining to the layout approach. **In view of our above comments, regarding potential layout impacts on the setting of the HWNL, it is recommended that should the LPA be minded to grant permission for the housing application, the Design Code be specifically excluded from the approved drawings, in order that these issues can be addressed in future parameter plans/masterplans/Design Codes at Reserved Matters stage.**

Summary

It is considered that the proposed development, by virtue of the scale of development and its proximity to the HWNL, would harm the setting of the HWNL. It would result in a significant and discernible extension of built development into the surrounding countryside, creating a large new urbanisation adjacent to and abutting the HWNL, and would introduce an abrupt change of landscape character in close proximity to the HWNL, and a loss of natural landscape contiguous with the HWNL. It would also adversely impact on perceptual qualities of the HWNL of tranquillity and rurality due to the level of noise, activity and lighting that would inevitably be associated with a development of such large scale, in such close proximity to the HWNL. The proposal would thereby be contrary to objectives S1, S2, W2, DS1, DS2 and PQ2 of the High Weald AONB Management Plan, would conflict with para 189 of the NPPF which seeks to ensure that development within the setting of the National Landscape avoids or minimises adverse impacts on it, and would fail to conserve and enhance the landscape character and natural beauty of the HWNL.

For various reasons set out in these comments, and without prejudice to our overall objections to the proposal, should the LPA be minded to grant permission, it is recommended that the Parameter Plans, the Concept Masterplan, as well as all other indicative masterplans, and the Design Code, are specifically excluded from the approved drawings, in order to seek to address the various strategic layout issues in future parameter plans/masterplans at the reserved matters stage.

The above comments are advisory and are the professional views of the HWNL Unit's Planning and Design Advisor on the potential impacts on the High Weald landscape. They are not necessarily the views of the HWNL Joint Advisory Committee.

Yours sincerely,

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Planning & Design Advisor, High Weald AONB Unit

Advising on an outstanding medieval landscape; connecting people, protecting beauty, restoring soils and nature.

Appendix 1: National Planning Policy for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 paragraph 189 requires **great weight** to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas. **The scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited**, while development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas.

Paragraph 190 says “When considering applications for development within National Parks, the Broads and National Landscapes, permission should be refused for major development⁶⁰ other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest.

Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated”.

Footnote 67 says: “whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined”. **It is recommended that the case officer undertakes a clear and transparent assessment of whether the proposal is major development, using the key characteristics and landscape components of the National Landscape as set out in the Management Plan.**

NPPF paragraph 11 explains the presumption in favour of sustainable development. Part d says that where there are no relevant development plan policies or the relevant ones are out of date (for instance in applications involving new housing where there are housing supply or delivery deficits) then permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a strong reason for refusing the development proposed⁷; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”.

National Landscapes are listed in footnote 7 and the most relevant policies in the Framework are paragraphs 189 and 190. A recent court of appeal case⁴ confirms that, if a proposal’s impact on an AONB (NL) is sufficient to provide a clear reason for refusal under NPPF 189 or 190, then the presumption in favour (or ‘tilted balance’ expressed in ii) above) should be disengaged. The decision-maker should therefore conduct a normal planning balancing exercise, applying appropriate weight to each consideration, to come to a decision. This will of course include giving great weight to the National Landscape as required by NPPF 189.

⁴ Monkhill Limited vs Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Waverley Borough Council Case No: C1/2019/1955/QBACF

Background Information about the High Weald National Landscape (AONB)



N.B. From November 22nd 2023, all AONBs are to be known as National Landscapes. The High Weald National Landscape remains designated an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is referred to as such in legislation. The statutory purpose “to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the designated landscape” remains unchanged.

The High Weald was designated in 1983 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is an exceptionally beautiful medieval landscape covering 564 square miles across the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

The High Weald National Landscape Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership established in 1989 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. The JAC is supported by a small, dedicated staff team, the High Weald NL Unit, which provides advice on how to conserve and enhance the NL. The advice provided by the NL Unit assists public bodies and statutory undertakers to meet their duty as set out in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 **to seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs in making decisions that affect it.**

The High Weald NL Unit is not a statutory body but an advisory one. It is not a local planning authority and the responsibility for determining planning applications remains with the 15 local authorities. The NL Unit is not a statutory consultee on planning matters and it remains each local planning authority’s decision whether or not they seek its advice on a particular planning application.

The scope of the advice in this letter is set by the statutory High Weald [AONB Management Plan](#), which has been adopted by all partner authorities, as ‘their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it’.