

Summary of the Proof of Evidence

Landscape, Visual Impact and High Weald National Landscape

1. This Proof of Evidence considers the effects of the proposed development on landscape character and value, on the setting of the High Weald National Landscape, and on the risk of coalescence between Ansty and Cuckfield. It also explains why I consider that the Appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment underestimates the scale and significance of the effects.
2. The appeal site lies adjacent to, and within the setting of, the High Weald National Landscape. As set out in my evidence, the site shares key landscape characteristics with the adjacent designated area, including geology, landform, water systems, historic field patterns, woodland structure, routeways and perceptual qualities. Despite the proximity of Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill, the site retains a strongly rural character, with intact farmland, ancient and semi-natural woodland, a network of public rights of way, tranquillity and dark skies.
3. Applying Landscape Institute Technical Guidance Note 02/21, I have assessed the site against the recognised factors for landscape value. On that basis, I conclude that the appeal site meets the criteria to be defined as a Valued Landscape. While it does not benefit from national designation, it possesses landscape qualities that elevate it above more everyday countryside.
4. The appeal site forms part of the setting of the High Weald National Landscape. There is a shared boundary of approximately 0.6 kilometres along the A272, clear intervisibility between the site and the National Landscape, including from the High Weald Landscape Trail, and a recognised continuity of landscape character across the designation boundary, as acknowledged in the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan. The site contributes to the rural character, tranquillity and dark skies associated with the High Weald.
5. The proposed development would result in the loss of approximately 100 hectares of countryside and would fundamentally change the character of the appeal site. As set out in my evidence, the historic field pattern, soils and landform would be substantially altered, and a rural landscape of small scale and intimacy would be replaced by an extensive urban development of up to 1,450 dwellings and associated infrastructure. The proposed access arrangements, including three new roundabouts and associated highway works, would require vegetation removal and landform changes, opening up views into the development and altering the rural character of surrounding roads.

6. The proposed development would also introduce domestic, street and highway lighting, with potential additional lighting from community and sports facilities. As explained in my evidence, this would adversely affect the dark skies of the appeal site and, due to the site's proximity, the dark skies of the High Weald National Landscape. The resulting effects on tranquillity would be most noticeable during winter months.
7. My evidence also demonstrates that the scale and extent of the development would lead to physical and perceived coalescence. The proposed development would be significantly larger than the existing village of Ansty and comparable in scale to Cuckfield. The open tract of countryside that currently separates the two settlements would be substantially reduced, eroding the sense of separation between them, contrary to local and neighbourhood plan policies.
8. I consider that the Appellant's Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment underestimates both the value of the landscape and the magnitude and significance of effects. In particular, the High Weald National Landscape is not treated as a landscape receptor, the effects of access infrastructure and night-time lighting are understated, and the visually verified montages do not fully represent the effects of the proposed development.
9. In conclusion, the appeal site is a Valued Landscape that forms part of the setting of the High Weald National Landscape. The proposed development would cause harm to landscape character, tranquillity and dark skies, would result in coalescence, and would conflict with national policy, the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan, and relevant local and neighbourhood plan policies. For these reasons, the appeal should be dismissed on landscape grounds.

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11 May 2026