Examination of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2021–2039

Hearing Matter 7

MM80: Grange View House, London Road, Albourne

MM82: Land East of London Road, Albourne

Hearing statement submitted by residents of London Road, Albourne:

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Background

As residents directly affected by the proposed developments, we consider that MM80 and MM82 are unsound because the evidence does not show that development on this scale can be accommodated without unacceptable effects on Albourne's historic character, infrastructure and environment. These concerns apply to each development individually and become more significant when their cumulative effects are considered alongside committed and proposed development in Albourne, Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common.

This representation addresses the matters identified by the Inspector for the Examination of the Mid Sussex District Plan 2021–2039. The response is organised below under headings that correspond with the agenda for the hearing on 5 November 2026.

a) Character of the Area

Compatibility of MM80 and MM82 with Albourne's scale and character

Albourne Parish is rural area of approximately 700 residents and 270 dwellings. Its housing growth has generally taken the form of small developments within Albourne village, itself containing 150 dwellings. The expansion of the village includes Wellcroft Cottages in the 1930s, Barn Close and Leyfield in the 1970s, none exceeding 30 homes at any one time, together with individual dwellings added gradually within the village and along London Road. A significant increase in dwellings is ongoing as a retirement village is already under construction on a brownfield site west of London Road and will provide a further 84 dwellings, anticipated to complete in 2028, adding a conservative estimate of more than 100 residents to the village and parish on completion in 2028.

MM80 and MM82 would represent growth on an unprecedented scale, approximately doubling the village's population after the retirement village has been completed.

Although substantial, the retirement village scheme makes productive use of a brownfield site which over 40 years ago was a nursery and retail site containing concrete roads and other intrusive features. The retirement village will add pressure to already constrained infrastructure and represents the maximum level of growth the village can reasonably absorb for the foreseeable future.

Even if considered in isolation, the addition of the proposed developments MM80 and MM82 would materially alter the character of the village. When combined with other developments included in the District Plan or under consideration in Sayers Common and Hurstpierpoint, they risk creating a suburban environment in which Albourne's historic and rural character and identity as a village would be overwhelmed by modern housing and is therefore unsound.

Heritage Assets and Rural Setting

The developments will have a considerable effect on Albourne's heritage assets and rural setting. Indeed, the south-western part of the parish of Albourne lies within the South Downs National Park.

Records held by the Diocese of Chichester trace Albourne's history to 1291, with evidence of a small settlement along The Street in 1594. By 1681, there were 13 houses along The Street and a further three or four immediately to the north.

Important historic buildings in Albourne include Gallops, part of which is a medieval hall house; Finches, Bounty Cottage and Souches, which have sixteenth-century origins; Goldsmiths, a fifteenth-century house; Inholmes Cottage and Bishops Place dating from the seventeenth century and Albourne Place, a large seventeenth-century manor house formerly occupied by William Juxon, later Archbishop of Canterbury.

Along London Road, in front of the proposed MM80 and MM82 sites, are several listed buildings dating from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. These include Mole Manor, formerly Elm Cottage and prior to that the Old White Horse coaching inn, which dates from the seventeenth century, and Elm House (formerly Elm Villa), Hillbrook House (formerly Leecroft)and Tipnoaks, which date from the early nineteenth century and are all listed buildings recognising the importance of preserving the architectural and historic significance. The latter three houses are of significance as their history is closely linked to London Road, the coaching business and its local expansion in the early nineteenth century, when Brighton became established as a fashionable seaside resort and the road was widened to be the turnpike road from London.

Nearby Woodbine Cottage (formerly Tipnoak Cottage) bears a blue plaque marking it as the birthplace of James Starley, inventor of the bicycle.

Albourne's history blends medieval ecclesiastical and manorial traditions, notable local figures, and a long agricultural past and its buildings and community shaped by rural life. MM80 and MM82 would materially alter the setting of Albourne's historic buildings and the rural character in which they are experienced. Their effects would be intensified by other proposed or committed development in Sayers Common and Hurstpierpoint, increasing the risk that Albourne's distinct village character would be replaced by a more suburban form of development. The evidence supporting the developments is unsound as it does not demonstrate how this harm would be avoided or adequately mitigated.

b) Access and Movement

Movement Patterns to and from the Sites

We have previously set out our concerns that movement to and from the sites would be severely constrained by the junctions of the B2116 and B2118, as well as by the bottleneck through Hurstpierpoint High Street. To add to this, it is important to regognise the considerable hazard that will arise from the cumulative access of vehicles from MM80 together with vehicles from existing Hillbrook Ridge houses using the proposed access track. It is a 3m-wide, single-carriageway turning into the site at a right-angled bend that creates a blind spot and exiting onto the B2118 opposite the access to the retirement village under development. It will create a road safety hazard (already declared three years ago as 'unsafe' by Mid Sussex District Council) together with a stationary

tailback on the B2118. This will be compounded by traffic turning left from the MM82 site on the B2116 at Albourne traffic lights to reach the A23, to avoid the Hurstpierpoint High Street bottleneck.

Improvements to Hassocks station do not materially improve transport choices for current or future Albourne residents because the station cannot be reached conveniently by a direct bus or cycle route. Most journeys would therefore be made by car through Hurstpierpoint High Street. This historic street forms a critical part of the B2116 route between Albourne and Hassocks, but its limited width, on-street parking and traffic-priority arrangements restrict opposing traffic flows. At pinch points, vehicles must give way and pass in sequence, reducing capacity and making journey times vulnerable to delay.

These constraints are particularly relevant during peak commuting periods and school arrival and departure times, when traffic demand is increased. Additional vehicle movements generated by the proposed developments would therefore affect not only junction capacity at the intersection of the B2116 and B2118 in Albourne because of the planned single exit from MM82 onto the B2116 but would also significantly increase the traffic on the intervening road to and from Hurstpierpoint, impacting its pinch points and increasing interactions with parked vehicles and pedestrians. Vehicles often (inappropriately) mount the pavement to avoid traffic at the pinch points and are hazardous to pedestrians. This will get worse and thus an expansion of the housing on this ground alone is unsound.

Numerous representations have already identified the constraints that the High Street presents for regular commuting, the material issues recently summarised in a report commissioned by the Hurstpierpoint Society [1].

Improvements to Hassocks station are no solution to mitigating the movement of cars from either MM80 or MM82 as the route to the station requires car travel through Hurstpierpoint. Access and movement for people who would live at developments would create congestion and issues of such magnitude that the proposition is unsound.

Bus and Footpath Links

Public transport is limited. Bus service 273 to from Crawley to Brighton runs every hour during the day, less frequently in the early morning and evening while service 100 to from Pulborough to Burgess Hill runs hourly during the day. There are no dedicated cycle routes. Cycle users who adhere to the legal requirements of the Highway Code must contend with intimidatingly busy and pothole riddled roads. Some cyclists ignore the Highway Code and use the footpath, endangering pedestrians. Although footpaths across the fields connect the village with shops in Hurstpierpoint, there are no other practical active-travel links to essential facilities.

c) Social and Community Infrastructure

[1] https://hurstpierpointsociety.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/08/Full-CTA-Aug-26-update-inc-Appendices-vFinal.pdf

Albourne has a village hall and a primary school serving a wide catchment across the Downland villages. A volunteer-run shop is in Sayers Common, but the nearest pharmacy and shops are in Hurstpierpoint. NHS general practice and private dental services are available in Hurstpierpoint. NHS health services are already operating beyond capacity. Formal evidence submitted to the District Plan Examination in February 2026 stated that primary care infrastructure across the Burgess Hill and Villages Primary Care Network had reached a critical operational bottleneck. Additional housing will overwhelm access for both existing and future residents.

Whilst there is a village recreation ground with a small children's playground and open green play space there are no sports or other formal recreational facilities in Albourne; the nearest leisure and sports provision is in Hassocks and then Burgess Hill.

The village is home to Albourne C of E Primary School which serves the Downlands Villages. It is already functioning at its stable intake limit with no current plans or requirements for physical expansion. The neighbouring Twineham Primary School closed in August 2026, exacerbating pressure on the primary school. The nearest state intermediate and senior School is Downlands School in Hassocks - accessed only through the bottleneck of Hurstpierpoint. There is no direct bus service or cycle path to access either school from the Downlands Villages and Albourne.

The proposed developments would therefore increase demand for education, healthcare, recreation and everyday services without demonstrating that sufficient additional capacity would be available when required. Because residents would need to travel outside the village to access most essential services, the developments would also increase dependence on private cars. In the absence of a clear, funded and deliverable infrastructure strategy, these proposed developments are clearly unsound.

The community infrastructure will not cope with the doubling of the village population. The infrastructure implications must also be assessed cumulatively rather than site by site. The proposed developments would add to the demand arising from the retirement village and planned development in Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common, drawing on many of the same schools, health services, shops, community facilities and transport routes. Without a clearly workable plan to increase infrastructure capacity, which is already at or beyond current needs, the proposals are unsound.

d) Site Conditions and Environmental Effects

Habitats and Biodiversity

Albourne is surrounded by agricultural land with small pockets of undisturbed wildlife habitat. The retirement village site development has resulted in the loss of significant area of undisturbed land and thus considerable loss of wildlife habitat The green space behind the London Road properties, which would be lost to MM80 and MM82, provides an important wildlife refuge between the A23 and London Road. Its loss would cause significant harm to local habitats and native species.

The MM82 site supports a wide range of wildlife. Residents and ecologists have recorded a significant population of ground-nesting pheasants, as well as sparrowhawks, buzzards, red kites, bats and woodpeckers nesting in trees along the proposed MM82 development boundary. Other recorded bird species include blackbird, song thrush, robin, blue tit, great tit, long-tailed tit, coal tit, goldfinch, greenfinch, chaffinch, bullfinch, starling, goldcrest, dunnock, collared dove, wood pigeon, tawny owl, great spotted woodpecker, green woodpecker, magpie, crow, jay, wren, nuthatch, treecreeper, sparrow and chiffchaff. Two ponds bordering Woodbine Cottage and Elm Studio would directly adjoin MM82; ducks breed there in spring and herons visit in winter. Construction, followed by noise and artificial light from the development, would significantly disturb these habitats.

There are numerous deer in the area, many rabbits, hedgehogs, foxes and moles. Plus, slow worms, newts, frogs and toads. There is mention of biodiversity net gain in the development proposals – this is inconceivable given the loss of the green space and the mitigations proposed would not be of the form that would support the type of fauna and flora currently in place. In its current form, the proposed MM82 development is an informal undisturbed green space, which supports a richness of species and abundance of invertebrates/pollinators that is unlikely to be equalled by a maintained play area. In addition, most significant trees bordering the sites are in the gardens of houses on London Road, in particular Woodbine Cottage and Elm Studio. A large noisy building site, with accompanying pollution, followed by dense housing development, adjacent to these woods, would undoubtedly challenge the abundant existing wildlife they currently host.

Overall, the developments would lead to habitat loss and habitat fragmentation, which limits wildlife feeding and breeding. The disturbance from noise and light would disrupt nocturnal animals, and constant human and vehicle noise would cause sensitive species to abandon surrounding areas.

Artificial light at night would add to this harm. Research by the University of Exeter[2] and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH)[3] records how light spill can alter natural cycles, fragment habitats and affect key species. Buglife[4] estimates that up to one-third of insects attracted to artificial lights die from exhaustion, thermal contact or increased exposure to predators. The UKCEH research also reports disruption to moth reproduction and caterpillar feeding.

Bats are legally protected and can be affected by light-driven habitat fragmentation. UK Research and Innovation-funded field experiments indicate that blue-spectrum LEDs and high-pressure sodium lighting can create barriers for light-sensitive species, including *Myotis* bats, long-eared bats

[2] Sanders, D., Frago, E., Kehoe, R., Patterson, C. and Gaston, K. J. (2021). 'A meta-analysis of biological impacts of artificial light at night'. *Nature Ecology & Evolution*, 5, pp. 74–81. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-020-01322-x.

[3] Boyes, D. H., Evans, D. M., Fox, R., Parsons, M. S. and Pocock, M. J. O. (2021). 'Street lighting has detrimental impacts on local insect populations'. *Science Advances*, 7(35), eabi8322.

[4] Buglife – The Invertebrate Conservation Trust (n.d.), *Light Pollution*. Available at: Buglife: Light Pollution (accessed 12 October 2026).

and horseshoe bats. The Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals guidance[5] therefore supports strict lighting mitigation within development design.

The village's principal open space is the surrounding countryside, and the field which would be lost to MM82. Footpaths across the field that will be lost to MM82 form the walking access to Hurstpierpoint from Albourne without walking down Albourne Road, where the pavements are very narrow and full of overgrown hedges etc in the summer, particularly brambles and stinging nettles.

The rural habitats within and around Albourne are of considerable ecological value. The evidence above shows that MM80 and MM82 would remove and fragment established green space, disturb feeding and breeding habitats, and expose insects, bats and other wildlife to increased noise and artificial light. Given Albourne's rural character and proximity to the South Downs National Park, substantial weight should therefore be given to protecting this connected habitat and the wildlife it supports. The proposed mitigations are unsound.

Surface Water and Flood Risk

Although the proposed developments are not in a designated flood risk area, Woodbine Cottage and Elm Studio experience flooding every winter from the runoff from the field behind. The water primarily runs towards London Road, and therefore the proposed mitigations at the south end of the site would not be effective in preventing an increased run off due to the concreting over of the current land soakaway. This problem has been viewed by previous inspectors the mitigations proposed are inadequate and unsound.

Foul Drainage and Water Supply

There is a history of development in the area going ahead without suitable foul drainage infrastructure being in place, for example there was repeated disruption from Starley Close, a development of only 4 houses, after the houses had been occupied in mid-2024. Southern Water, responsible for foul drainage to the village admitted having not assessed the site adequately. Furthermore, many houses on London Road must use septic tanks as there are no facilities for foul drainage. Given the lack of suitable infrastructure in the area, the developments would be unsound as it would be unrealistic to support the sewerage improvements required for 260 additional houses.

Similarly, it is unrealistic to allocate sites in a village which has been repeatedly without water supply and with ongoing low water pressure for months, with no likelihood of imminent improvements. South East Water is currently unable to supply the existing residents adequately and it is unsound to put further stress on this struggling infrastructure - the pressure on water supply suggests that the proposed developments are unsound.

[5] Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) and Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) (2023). *Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night*. Guidance Note GN08/23. Rugby: Institution of Lighting Professionals. Available at: GN08/23—Bats and Artificial Lighting at Night (accessed 12 October 2026).

Noise Environment

Homes along London Road already experience substantial noise from the A23 and the B2118, particularly at night, when residents need to keep windows closed. Developing the field will remove the buffer to the A23, the developments would result in increased traffic along the B2118 to access the A23, while construction activity and additional traffic would increase disturbance. The resulting noise would materially affect residential amenity, the area's rural setting and the character of London Road and the historic listed buildings further demonstrating that the proposed developments MM80 and MM82 are unsound.

Conclusion

The two additional developments proposed in the Mid-Sussex District Plan, MM80 and MM82, are unsound as they do not satisfy the relevant tests. The central concern is not only that the developments would change the entire nature of the village, but that the evidence supporting the developments does not demonstrate that:

1. the proposed scale of development is compatible with Albourne's character;
2. the effects on already overstretched health, education, transport and related road infrastructure can be addressed satisfactorily;
3. the identified heritage, ecological, drainage and noise constraints can be resolved without unacceptable harm.

We also ask the Inspector to consider MM80 and MM82 in the context of their combined effects on Albourne and the wider area, including other proposed and committed development in Albourne, Hurstpierpoint and Sayers Common.