EXAMINATION OF THE MID SUSSEX DISTRICT PLAN 2021-2039

Further Hearing Statement - November 2026

Matter 7 continued - Sites Added by the Draft Main Modifications

MM88 - Land West of Truggers, Handcross

Representor: Caroline Birthwright
Existing representation: Sites 642 and 820 - Staplefield
Issue addressed: Accessibility to employment, retail, social and community facilities and the consistent application of the post-hearing site-selection methodology

1. Purpose and scope

This short statement develops the soundness objection made in my duly-made Main Modifications representation concerning the operation of Stage 2(a) of the Council's site-selection process at settlements without a defined Built-Up Area Boundary.

It does not introduce a new objection and does not invite the Inspector to determine the individual planning merits of Site 642 or Site 820, nor to substitute either site for MM88.

My original representation expressly raised the potential circularity whereby Staplefield has no defined Built-Up Area Boundary, sites associated with it are assessed principally by reference to the defined boundaries of Cuckfield or Handcross, and those sites are then rejected as disconnected before their actual physical and functional relationship with Staplefield can be assessed in detail.

This statement responds specifically to the Inspector's MM88 agenda issue concerning accessibility to employment, retail, social and community facilities.

2. The post-hearing methodology

MS-12 requires a more granular assessment of sites, consideration of mitigation and a more positive approach to planning in which potential benefits are articulated and weighed. It also requires clear documentation of the rationale and planning balance.

MS-12 further states that the settlement hierarchy will not be applied rigidly and identifies relevant considerations including thriving settlements, existing and new services and facilities, local social and economic benefits, schools, local shops and sustainable travel.

The subsequent site-selection evidence similarly recognises that constrained sites require consideration of the particular circumstances of the individual site, including benefits potentially arising from development, and the contribution sites may make to wider settlement ambitions and services and facilities.

The concern is whether those principles could operate consistently where a settlement has no defined Built-Up Area Boundary if its candidate sites were excluded at Stage 2(a).

3. Warninglid and Staplefield

Warninglid provides a particularly relevant comparison because, like Staplefield, it is a Category 4 settlement within the High Weald National Landscape.

Warninglid Sites 1192 and 1193, each assessed for eight dwellings, were allowed to progress beyond Stage 2(a) on the basis of their closer proximity to Warninglid's defined built-up area/settlement boundary. They subsequently received more detailed assessment and were ultimately rejected.

The significance of this comparison is not that the Warninglid sites should have been rejected earlier or that Site 642 must therefore be allocated. It is that Warninglid's defined boundary provided a means by which proximity to that settlement could be recognised at the gateway stage.

Staplefield has no equivalent defined Built-Up Area Boundary. All six Staplefield candidate sites were rejected at Stage 2(a).

My original representation therefore asked whether the absence of a boundary was operating mechanically and preventing the actual physical and functional relationship of sites with Staplefield itself from receiving equivalent consideration.

4. Relevance to accessibility and community facilities

My original representation identified Staplefield's Village Hall, primary school, Village Green, recreation facilities, public houses, churches, bus stops, weekly mobile shop, pharmacy delivery point and other community facilities. It did not suggest that the existence of those facilities automatically makes every form of

development sustainable; rather, they are relevant to assessing a site's physical and functional relationship with the settlement.

Site 642 illustrates the methodological issue because it immediately adjoins Staplefield Village Hall and existing built development, fronts Cuckfield Road and lies close to village services and community facilities. The Council's own development-management assessment has previously described the land as being "on the edge of the village of Staplefield."

The question raised is therefore not whether Site 642 should be allocated, but whether its relationship with Staplefield itself was capable of receiving equivalent consideration at Stage 2(a) when there was no defined Staplefield boundary against which proximity could be measured.

5. Soundness question

In examining the accessibility of MM88 to employment, retail, social and community facilities, I respectfully ask the Inspector to consider whether the Council has demonstrated that these considerations were applied consistently when determining which reasonable alternatives were permitted to proceed beyond Stage 2(a).

In particular, I respectfully ask the Council to explain:

- How was the physical and functional relationship between a candidate site and its settlement assessed at Stage 2(a) where that settlement had no defined Built-Up Area Boundary?
- Why was "closer proximity" to Warninglid's defined boundary sufficient for Sites 1192 and 1193 to progress to detailed assessment, while the relationship of Staplefield sites with Staplefield itself did not result in equivalent progression?
- How did the Stage 2(a) process ensure that the absence of a defined boundary did not itself prevent consideration of accessibility to existing services and community facilities and the wider positive-planning considerations identified in MS-12?

These questions concern the consistency and justification of the site-selection process rather than the relative planning merits of individual omission sites.

6. Requested outcome

My original representation sought reconsideration rather than automatic allocation. It proposed that where a promoted site relates to a settlement without a defined Built-Up Area Boundary, Stage 2(a) should assess its actual physical and functional relationship with that settlement, including existing built form, pedestrian connectivity and access to services and facilities.

I maintain that position.

If the Council cannot demonstrate that sites associated with settlements without defined boundaries were given an equivalent opportunity to satisfy the Stage 2(a) gateway, I respectfully ask the Inspector to consider whether the affected reasonable alternatives should be reconsidered under a methodology which assesses their actual relationship with their own settlement.

Such reconsideration would not predetermine the outcome for Site 642, Site 820 or any other site. It would ensure that the resulting strategy is supported by a justified, effective and consistently applied site-selection process.

Caroline Birthwright
October 2026