

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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Working together to care for one of England's finest landscapes

Mr S Ashdown
Planning Services Division
Mid Sussex District Council
Haywards Heath
RH16 1SS

15th April 2016

Dear Mr Ashdown,

Re: Planning Applications: DM/15/4706 and DM/15/ 4711 proposed development at land east of Brighton Road, Pease Pottage

Thank you for your letter requesting our views on additional information associated with landscape matters submitted recently in support of the two applications referred to above.

My original letters (dated 15th January 2016) concerning these two applications outlined my views on the potential impacts the proposed development at this site may have on the High Weald landscape and I welcome the additional information submitted by the applicant in their paper 'Response to comments on landscape and visual matters.' Given the duty placed on local planning authorities by Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to 'the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs,' it is the responsibility of Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC) to decide whether the applicant has adequately considered and fully addressed all the matters raised in those letters - this is not something we can do on MSDC's behalf.

I do however wish to re-iterate the point that a proposed development of this size and scale - 600 houses on a greenfield site in open countryside within the High Weald AONB - cannot be considered as anything other than a major development. Paragraph 116 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires MSDC to refuse the granting of planning permission except in exceptional circumstances and where it can clearly demonstrate that the proposed development is in the public interest and its benefits would outweigh the adverse impacts resulting from the development. This development proposal must be assessed in accordance with the three tests set out in paragraph 116 of the NPPF.

Cont/

Anglesey
Arnside and Silverdale
Blackdown Hills
Cannock Chase
Chichester Harbour
Chilterns
Clwydian Range
Cornwall
Cotswolds
Gower
Cranbourne Chase and Dee Valley
West Wiltshire Downs
Dedham Vale
Dorset
East Devon
Forest of Bowland
Howardian Hills
High Weald
Isle of Wight
Isles of Scilly
Kent Downs
Lincolnshire Wolds
Llyn
Malvern Hills
Mendip Hills
Nidderdale
Norfolk Coast
North Devon
North Pennines
North Wessex Downs
Northumberland Coast
Quantock Hills
Shropshire Hills
Solway Coast
South Devon
Suffolk Coast and Heaths
Surrey Hills
Tamar Valley
Wye Valley

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I note the points raised in the letter dated 4th February 2016 from Nexus Planning and their opinion that there are alternative and suitable locations for residential development unaffected by AONB or National Park designations.

You will be aware that I was also consulted by MSDC on the inclusion of this site as an additional allocation in the emerging District Plan and it was my opinion that allocating this site for housing would result in an extension of Crawley into the open countryside and into the AONB, which would erase the current and clear demarcation between the urban area of Crawley and the AONB and detract from the rural quality of the site. I also made the point that allocating greenfield sites in open countryside for large-scale residential developments along the inside of the designated AONB boundary could on their own and cumulatively erode the integrity of the AONB boundary resulting in a coerced/*de facto* change to the designated AONB boundary – indeed, the applicant has stated that the allocation for housing at this site effectively removes it from the AONB.

As part of this consultation I also raised my concerns with the wording of draft District Plan Policy DP9A, i.e. ‘Although the site is within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), its landscape quality is distinctly variable. This quality is particularly poor on the western side of the site adjacent to the motorway and the service station, and there would be potential for development to enhance the visual quality of this area.’ This draft wording has been used by the applicant in the recently submitted paper ‘Response to comments on landscape and visual matters’ to justify the proposed development.

The wording of draft District Plan Policy DP9A misunderstands the AONB designation, which requires that the ‘natural beauty’ of an AONB is consistent across the entire AONB and any area considered of less ‘value’ in terms of its ‘natural beauty’ would have been excluded from the designation when it was established in 1983. The landscape quality of the High Weald is consistently high as befits its designation as an AONB and the designation is firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area i.e. those components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct landscape for at least the last 700 years and will continue to define it into the future.

Draft District Plan Policy DP9A appears to justify the site’s allocation by suggesting it is appropriate to build on a site considered unsightly in some way (what assessment has been used to support the opinion that the landscape ‘is particularly poor’ at this site?) and that the subsequent major and permanent change to the landscape would be a contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the High Weald’s landscape. Given the site’s AONB designation, the opposite argument could be made - if this area is of poor landscape quality it should instead be a priority site for landscape conservation, restoration and enhancement, which could be achieved without the building of 600 houses and the subsequent and permanent loss of the site’s current rural quality.

Paragraph 17 of the NPPF states that the planning system ‘should be genuinely plan-led’ and as far as I am aware, the District Plan is yet to be adopted. Submitting planning applications for this site at this stage might be seen to undermine the efforts of MSDC and also the planning process by pre-determining decisions about the locations for housing development that are central to the emerging District Plan.

These comments are advisory and are intended to provide Mid Sussex District Council with my professional views on the potential impacts to the High Weald landscape and these comments are not necessarily the views of the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee. This advice is given following a desk-based assessment using the information available at the time and it is subject to change and additional consideration according to circumstances. It remains the responsibility of Mid Sussex District Council to decide whether there is an overriding justification of the need for the proposed development at this location, how the AONB will be conserved and enhanced by the development, and that the proposed development’s benefits outweigh its potential adverse impacts or harm to the AONB.

Yours sincerely,

Jason Lavender

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Advising on the management of a nationally important landscape