MS-07f:
Sites Added by the draft Main Modifications – Haywards Heath

Hearing Statement
October 2026

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Sites Added by the draft Main Modifications - Haywards Heath

MM65 and MM66: Land at Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, Haywards Heath

Overview

1. Sites MM65: Field rear of North Colwell Barn and MM66: Land at North Colwell Farm, Lewes Road, are located on the eastern side of Haywards Heath adjacent to the existing built-up area of the town. As one of the three towns within the district, Haywards Heath is a Category 1 settlement which is the highest tier in the settlement hierarchy due to its range of services and facilities.

2. An outline planning application with all matters reserved except for access, for up to 80 dwellings was received by the Council in February of 2025 with Planning Application Ref. DM/25/0445. This relates to the same area as site MM66. The application was recommended for approval by officers but refused in August 2025 by District Planning Committee. An appeal was lodged by the applicant.

3. Following the initial hearings held in February/March 2026 and the Inspector's conclusion that additional sites needed to be found to meet an increase housing requirement, sites MM65 and MM66 were proposed for allocation for 9 and 80 dwellings respectively. This was based on their performance against the site selection criteria and overall assessment against the revised site selection methodology (MS-12). As a result, the Council wrote to the Planning Inspectorate (and other parties) on 2nd June 2026 to notify them that it would no longer be appropriate to resist the grant of planning permission on the appeal site, and that it would not be defending the reasons for refusal.

4. The appeal Public Inquiry opened on 28th July 2026 with the final sitting day on 13th August. The Inquiry concluded on 14th September 2026 following submissions from all parties in relation to the publication of a new National Planning Policy Framework. A decision is expected imminently.

5. The Council notes that the matters subject to this hearing statement have been debated at great length during the Inquiry and therefore does not seek to re-open debate on matters that are currently being considered by the appeal Inspector.

Access and Sustainability

6. Criterion 1 of Policies MM65 and MM66 require suitable access to be provided from the A272 Lewes Road. Policy MM65 further recognises that the track may require upgrading or that access could be integrated with site MM66, whilst policy MM66 requires the provision of a pedestrian

crossing, unless otherwise agreed with the Highways Authority, to facilitate safe connectivity with local services and community facilities.

7. The outline planning application for site MM66, currently subject to appeal, has demonstrated, in detail, that suitable vehicular access can be achieved from the A272 Lewes Road via a simple priority junction. The proposed access arrangements have been designed in accordance with relevant local and national highway standards and are consistent with the requirements of policies MM66.

8. The Local Highway Authority have raised no objection to the proposed access arrangements. The Council therefore maintains that sites MM65 and MM66 can accommodate safe and suitable vehicular and pedestrian access and that the policy requirements relating to access are deliverable.

9. Sites MM65 and MM66 comprise a logical extension to the existing built-up area boundary of Haywards Heath, a Category 1 Settlement identified within the District Plan as a key focus area for growth.

10. Haywards Heath benefits from a comprehensive range of services and facilities, including employment, schools, healthcare, retail, leisure and community infrastructure. Residents of sites MM65 and MM66 would have access to services within this settlement therefore reducing their need to travel long distances for their essential needs to be met.

11. The Council's Site Selection Conclusions Paper (SSP8) assesses the relative sustainability of sites with regard to accessibility and proximity to key services. Both sites MM65 and MM66 were assessed as having fair accessibility to public transport, whilst scoring positively for access to key services including primary education, healthcare and retail provision. The Council concludes that these two sites are in a sustainable location based on the consistent application of the site selection methodology.

12. It is noted that this position is not agreed by all parties, and that the Rule 6 party at the Inquiry sought to challenge the site's locational sustainability by reference to the Department for Transport's Connectivity Tool. Whilst the Department for Transport Connectivity Tool is not a requirement of the NPPF 2023 under which the Mid Sussex District Plan is being examined under, it acts as a useful additional indicator of accessibility.

13. The Connectivity Tool provides a 'score' between 0 – 100 for individual grid squares. A higher score means the square is better-connected, relative to other squares. As this is relative to England and Wales as a whole, including major cities, it is inevitable that areas within a rural district such as Mid Sussex won't consistently score highly. The tool incorporates a Local Authority Band whereby scores can be viewed relative to just the district.

14. Using the Local Authority Band methodology, sites MM65 and MM66 are predominantly 'B', the second highest rating, which reflects a relatively good level of connectivity in the context of Mid Sussex. This approach enables sites to be assessed against local conditions rather than national

benchmarks, recognising that even the most connected locations within the district achieve scores significantly below the theoretical maximum score.

15. It is important to note that of the additional 35 site allocations proposed through the schedule of Main Modifications, sites MM65 and MM66 rank within the top 30% of sites when assessed using the Connectivity Tool. This aligns with the Plan Strategy to direct growth to Category 1 settlements as they are likely to be better connected to local services and facilities. This further provides support for the conclusion that the sites represent sustainable locations for growth and are well placed to contribute towards meeting the district's housing needs during the plan period.

16. The Council therefore concludes, having regard to the site selection process and the outline planning application, that the allocation of sites MM65 and MM66 is consistent with the spatial strategy of directing development towards the district's most sustainable settlements to contribute towards identified housing requirements.

Ancient Woodland

17. The NPPF defines ancient woodland as an area that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600 AD, including ancient semi-natural woodland and plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS).

18. The Council's position is that neither site MM65 nor site MM66 contains ancient woodland. This conclusion is consistent with the evidence submitted through the outline planning application and appeal process, including arboricultural assessments. The Council and site promoters agree that there is no evidence to support a conclusion that ancient woodland is present within either allocation.

19. During appeal proceedings, concerns were raised by the Rule 6 Party that the north-east boundary feature on the north-east edge of the site may comprise Ancient Woodland. Although this is not the position of the Council, were a different conclusion to be reached, an appropriate buffer could be incorporated, and the site would remain a suitable allocation for development.

20. The Rule 6 Party also suggested that the hedge running north to south in the centre of the site is ancient woodland. This hedge separates the east and west sections of the site meaning development would require access through it. The Council maintains the position that this hedge is not ancient woodland and therefore an appropriate buffer would not be required for the site to be suitable for development.

21. The Council does acknowledge that ancient woodland is located immediately adjacent to the allocations (Cains Wood), to the south and east of the sites. The Council also acknowledges the presence of nearby priority habitat (deciduous woodland). Accordingly, both policies include specific requirements to safeguard these ecological assets.

22. Criterion 4 of MM65 and Criterion 6 of MM66 require the provision of an appropriate buffer to the ancient woodland and priority habitat. The Council considers these requirements to be consistent with national policy which seeks to protect irreplaceable habitats.

23. The outline planning application demonstrated that a 15m buffer from Cains Wood can be accommodated within the developable area whilst still meeting the indicative yield for the site. The Council is therefore satisfied that the policy requirements are achievable and do not undermine the deliverability of the allocations.

24. The Council has seen the representations raising concern that the requirement to 'ensure enhancements to the ancient woodland and priority habitat' may not be effective where those habitats lie outside the site owners' control.

25. The Council agrees that the current wording could be interpreted as requiring enhancements to habitats beyond the site boundary. To provide greater clarity, ensure the policy is effective and deliverable, and maintain consistency with other site allocations adjacent to ancient woodland and priority habitats, the Council proposes a minor modification that focuses on the provision of buffers within the site that protect, support and improve the ecological function of adjacent ancient woodland and priority habitats. The criterion 4 of MM65 and 6 of MM66 could be amended as follows:

    "4/6. Provide an appropriate buffer to the adjacent ancient woodland (Cains Wood) and priority habitat (deciduous woodland) to the south and east of the site **having regard to the objectives of the West Sussex Local Nature Recovery Strategy.** ~~and ensure enhancements to the **adjacent** ancient woodland and priority habitat (deciduous woodland)~~."

26. The Council therefore considers that Policies MM65 and MM66 contain an appropriate framework to protect the adjacent ancient woodland and nearby priority habitat, whilst ensuring that development delivers key ecological enhancements. Subject to the proposed minor modifications, the policies are effective, deliverable and consistent with national policy.