MID SUSSEX DISTRICT PLAN 2021-2040 EXAMINATION

MAIN MODIFICATION MM71 - LAND WEST OF OCKLEY LANE, HASSOCKS

SHELAA Site 1137 - Proposed allocation: 250 dwellings

Annalisa Longhi Collins | 3 October 2026

Statement to the Inspector

I submit this statement further to my previous representation objecting to the proposed allocation of Land West of Ockley Lane for residential development.

I recognise the need for Mid Sussex to provide additional housing. My objection is not to new housing in principle. My concern is whether the evidence demonstrates that this particular allocation of 250 dwellings in this sensitive location is justified and sound, having regard to the constraints already identified in the Council's own evidence.

My comments relate specifically to the issues identified by the Inspector for MM71: movement; landscape and countryside, including settlement identity; and infrastructure.

1. **Settlement separation and coalescence**

This is my principal concern.

The site occupies countryside between Hassocks/Keymer and Burgess Hill. The importance of maintaining separation between the settlements is already recognised locally through the Hassocks Neighbourhood Plan.

More importantly, the proposed MM71 policy itself explicitly recognises the risk.

Requirement 15 states that the three northern fields must remain in agricultural use, public open space or nature conservation and must be permanently safeguarded from future development "to prevent coalescence with Burgess Hill."

I respectfully suggest that this raises an important soundness question.

If part of the site must be permanently protected specifically to prevent coalescence, then the potential erosion of settlement separation is clearly an acknowledged consequence of developing this location rather than merely a subjective concern raised by residents.

The issue is also wider than whether buildings belonging to Hassocks and Burgess Hill literally meet.

Settlement separation is experienced through landscape, openness and the perception of leaving one settlement before entering another. Development can materially erode that distinction well before physical coalescence occurs.

The Council's site assessment reinforces this concern. It identifies the site as lying between Hassocks and the Burgess Hill Built Up Area Boundary and records low capacity to accommodate development based on the landscape evidence.

I therefore ask the Inspector to consider whether retaining only the three northern fields provides a sufficiently substantial, defensible and permanent gap to preserve the separate identity and setting of Hassocks/Keymer and Burgess Hill over the lifetime of the Plan and beyond.

I also ask that this issue is assessed cumulatively with Ockley Park and other existing and committed development, rather than viewing MM71 as an isolated development.

2. **Landscape and countryside**

The Council's own site assessment scores landscape negatively and identifies low landscape capacity.

I acknowledge that the proposed policy attempts to mitigate landscape effects through landscape-led design, retention and enhancement of trees and hedgerows, buffers and protection of the northern fields.

However, mitigation does not remove the need to establish that allocating the site is justified in the first place.

There is an important distinction between demonstrating that landscape harm can be reduced and demonstrating that the remaining harm is acceptable.

The location performs both a landscape function and a settlement-separation function. I therefore ask the Inspector to consider whether the proposed buffers and landscape measures genuinely overcome the harm arising from extending built development further north into this remaining countryside.

3. **Movement, access and sustainable transport**

The Council's site assessment records site access positively, and I therefore do not suggest that a physical access cannot be constructed.

My concern is instead whether a development of 250 dwellings in this location would represent genuinely sustainable development and whether its cumulative transport effects have been sufficiently demonstrated.

The same Council assessment rates:

- bus accessibility/frequency as Fair;

- train accessibility as Poor; and

- public transport overall as Negative.

MM71 consequently requires substantial measures to improve connectivity, including:

- a footway and cycle path along Ockley Lane;

- connections to the pedestrian/cycle route alongside the railway;

- pedestrian connections to Ockley Park;

- sustainable transport measures;

- highway works; and

- contributions towards improvements at Hassocks Station.

These measures are welcome if development proceeds. However, their necessity also demonstrates that the site does not presently enjoy particularly strong sustainable-transport accessibility.

I recognise that the Council states that strategic transport modelling has not identified a transport "showstopper" associated with the site.

However, the absence of a strategic "showstopper" is not, by itself, the same as demonstrating that the allocation will have acceptable effects on the local highway network or that future residents will have realistic alternatives to private-car use.

I therefore ask the Inspector to consider whether the evidence demonstrates:

1. the cumulative traffic impact of MM71 together with Ockley Park and other committed development;

2. whether the proposed walking and cycling infrastructure will be delivered sufficiently early to provide realistic alternatives to car travel;

3. whether the quality and frequency of public transport are adequate for a development of this scale; and

4. whether the proposed sustainable-transport measures are sufficiently certain and deliverable rather than dependent upon later negotiation.

4. Ancient woodland, trees and biodiversity

The site is adjacent to Ockley Wood ancient woodland.

MM71 requires an appropriate buffer to the ancient woodland, enhancement of that woodland, protection and enhancement of priority deciduous woodland, improved woodland connectivity, new woodland creation, retention of trees and hedgerows and provision of a wildlife/nature area.

I welcome those requirements if the allocation remains.

However, their extent demonstrates the ecological sensitivity of the location.

A development of 250 homes brings more than the physical footprint of buildings. It introduces roads, lighting, noise, domestic activity, pets, recreation and increased human activity close to sensitive habitats.

I therefore ask the Inspector to be satisfied that the proposed buffers are based upon appropriate ecological evidence and are sufficiently wide and robust to provide meaningful long-term protection, rather than merely providing physical separation between buildings and the woodland boundary.

4. **Surface water and drainage**

I recognise that the Council's assessment places the site within Flood Zone 1, and I do not suggest that the site is at high risk of fluvial flooding.

My concern relates specifically to surface water.

The concept masterplan submitted for MM71 identifies an area of surface-water flood risk and shows proposed SuDS basins and swales. MM71 itself requires surface-water flow paths and watercourses to be considered within the layout and drainage strategy.

I therefore ask the Inspector to consider whether sufficient evidence exists at this stage to demonstrate that development of 250 dwellings can be satisfactorily drained without increasing surface-water risk elsewhere.

Given the scale of the development and the acknowledged surface-water constraints, I do not believe that this question should simply be deferred in its entirety to a subsequent planning application.

5. **Infrastructure and cumulative growth**

MM71 requires financial contributions towards education, health, community buildings, local community infrastructure, emergency services, libraries, sustainable transport and improvements at Hassocks Station.

Developer contributions are clearly appropriate, but the requirement for a contribution does not itself demonstrate that infrastructure capacity exists or that necessary improvements will be delivered when required.

The Inspector is therefore respectfully asked to consider:

- existing capacity within local services;

- the cumulative demand created by recently constructed, committed and proposed housing;

- whether required improvements are realistically deliverable;

- when those improvements would be provided relative to occupation of the development; and

- whether appropriate mechanisms exist to ensure infrastructure is delivered before existing services become further pressured.

7. The Council's case for allocation

I recognise that there is evidence supporting the allocation.

The Council's Sustainability Appraisal concludes that site 1137 represents an overall sustainable option; strategic transport modelling has not identified a "showstopper"; the site lies within Flood Zone 1; access is considered capable of being provided; and the site is available for development.

I do not seek to disregard that evidence.

However, the soundness question requires consideration of the evidence as a whole.

Against those positive factors are several significant constraints expressly recognised within the Council's own evidence and within MM71:

- low landscape capacity;

- a location between Hassocks/Keymer and Burgess Hill;

- negative overall public-transport accessibility;

- proximity to ancient woodland and priority habitat;

- surface-water flow paths requiring specific consideration;

- extensive landscape and ecological mitigation requirements; and

- most importantly, the requirement permanently to safeguard three fields specifically to prevent coalescence with Burgess Hill.

These factors should not simply be treated as matters capable of being resolved later through detailed design.

Taken collectively, they go directly to whether the principle and scale of development in this location are justified.

Conclusion

I recognise the significant housing pressures facing Mid Sussex and the difficult choices involved in preparing the District Plan.

Nevertheless, housing need does not remove the requirement for individual allocations to be justified by proportionate evidence and capable of being delivered without unacceptable harm.

I therefore respectfully ask the Inspector to determine whether the evidence demonstrates that MM71 is justified and effective, particularly in relation to settlement

separation, landscape capacity, sustainable transport, cumulative traffic impacts and infrastructure.

If the Inspector is not satisfied on these matters, I respectfully request that the allocation of 250 dwellings at Land West of Ockley Lane be removed from the Plan.

If the Inspector concludes that an allocation should remain, I ask that consideration be given to whether the proposed scale of 250 dwellings is appropriate and whether a lower quantum of development would better protect settlement separation and landscape character.

In that event, I also request that the requirements concerning the permanent undeveloped gap, ancient woodland and ecological buffers, surface-water management, sustainable transport and infrastructure delivery are expressed in sufficiently precise terms to ensure that they are enforceable and delivered at the appropriate stage.

I respectfully ask the Inspector to give particular consideration to whether the proposed allocation, even with the mitigation contained in MM71, would result in an unacceptable erosion of the remaining physical and perceived separation between Hassocks/Keymer and Burgess Hill.