

High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

Woodland Enterprise Centre
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Rother District Council
Emailed to planning@rother.gov.uk
Cc kate.cole@eastsussex.gov.uk

9th August 2018

Dear Mrs Shepherd,

RR/2018/1787/P Erection of 30 dwellings, Strand Meadow, Burwash

Thank you for your consultation on the above planning application. This is a full planning application for a scale of development that was previously granted outline planning permission under RR/2017/582.

In summary, the High Weald AONB Unit objects to this proposal on the following grounds:

- **The proposal does not address the declining affordability of housing in the High Weald, providing only market housing which is unaffordable for most existing residents;**
- **The poor design of the houses and layout is uncharacteristic of the historic settlement of Burwash and would be detrimental to the character of the area and the AONB contrary to Objectives S2 and S3 of the Management Plan;**
- **The development has potential ecological impacts on the site and adjacent ancient woodland which are not addressed in the application material contrary to Objectives G1, W2 and FH3 of the Management Plan.**

It is the responsibility of Rother District Council to decide whether the application meets legislative and policy requirements in respect of AONBs. Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 requires local authorities to have regard to 'the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs' in making decisions that affect the designated area.

The National Planning Policy Framework paragraph 172 requires great weight to be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas.

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan](#) has been adopted by all the relevant local authorities, including Rother District Council, as their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it. Applicants should be required to demonstrate whether their proposal conserves and enhances the AONB by contributing to meeting the objectives of the Management Plan. A suggested template for carrying out this assessment is

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included at the end of the High Weald AONB [Legislation and Planning Advice Note](#).

To assist with this assessment, a map of the application site and its context is attached which identifies the AONB character components affected by the proposed development. These are:

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** The topography of this site is very challenging for built development. It is a steep sided valley with a spring / springs issuing from near the southern boundary, cutting down through the site to the north-western boundary where it flows north-east into Shrub Wood, an ancient woodland and then into the River Rother.
- **Settlement:** Burwash is a medieval village with most of the historic development along the ridgetop route, now the A265. More modern development north of the ridge is located off Shrub Lane in Strand Meadow and Rother View.
- **Routeways:** Historic public rights of way cross land to the north and west of the site, connecting into the wider countryside and back into the centre of Burwash. Shrub Lane is also a historic route.
- **Woodland:** As mentioned above, the main area of ancient woodland is Shrub Wood to the north-east, but there are also smaller areas of woodland and shaws within the fields to the north and west.
- **Field and Heath:** the application site comprises three Medieval (AD 1066 - AD 1499) assart fields with historic field boundaries.

It is noted that the application has been submitted as a full planning application rather than reserved matters to the outline primarily because the applicants wish to remove the requirement for affordable housing on viability grounds. It is also noted that viability was the justification for intensifying the amount of development on the site from the original allocation of 17 units in the 2006 Local Plan. The top five issues identified in the Management Plan for the settlement component include: "The need to address the declining affordability of housing and the provision of workspace for rural businesses as part of the sustainable development of settlements, in order to maintain rural function". Whilst it is understood that viability would be challenging given the topography, this suggests that the site is not suitable for housing development, not that the provision of much needed affordable housing should be compromised to achieve anything on this site.

Design standards should also not be compromised due to viability and the topographical difficulties of the site. Objective S2 of the Management Plan is "To protect the historic pattern of settlement" and Objective S3 is

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“To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald”. It is considered that the proposed design conflicts with both objectives. It appears to take its design clues from the existing town houses in Strand Meadow, which were built prior to the designation of the AONB and are not characteristic of the historic settlement of Burwash. The proposed houses are excessively high and bulky on the street frontage, which is most likely to be publicly visible from both within the site and the adjacent public rights of way. Their architectural design is uninspiring 1970s style, out of scale and character with the historic settlement and would detract from the setting of Burwash. The proposed layout also shows parking spaces dominating the street, including spaces adjacent to the stream. This gives the development a very hard, urban character, at variance with its edge of countryside location.

It is noted that the ecological report submitted with the application identifies a number of habitats within and adjacent to the site, including Acid/Neutral Flushes along the watercourse running from the springs on the southern boundary, which the ecologist considers to be a nationally rare habitat. Whilst this report makes detailed recommendations on how these habitats should be conserved, it is not clear how these have been taken into account in the application proposal or how they will be maintained in the long term.

The intensity of housing development proposed on this site is likely to put pressure on these habitats from informal use by residents and changes to the flows in the watercourse as a result of drainage proposals and adjacent hard surfaces. This would be contrary to Objective G1 of the Management Plan which is “To restore the natural function of river catchments” and FH3 which is “To enhance the ecological function of field and heath as part of the complex mosaic of High Weald habitats”.

I note that ESCC as Lead Local Flood Authority has raised concerns about the proposed management of surface water run-off from the site and also the proposed sewage treatment facility that discharges into the stream. These comments understandably focus on the flood risk potential of these measures, but there is also an ecological implication for the Acid/Neutral Flushes and the stream which then runs into ancient woodland (Shrub Wood). Ancient Woodland is irreplaceable habitat and an important component of the AONB and damage to it would be contrary to Objective W2 “To enhance the ecological functioning of woodland at a landscape scale”. The ecological report does not consider the impact on Shrub Wood.

Given the significant ecology on and affected by the proposed development, it is recommended that Rother District Council consults the County Ecologist for her views on the proposals.

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In conclusion, the High Weald AONB Unit objects to the proposed development on the following grounds:

- The proposal does not address the declining affordability of housing in the High Weald, providing only market housing which is unaffordable for most existing residents;
- The poor design of the houses and layout is uncharacteristic of the historic settlement of Burwash and would be detrimental to the character of the area and the AONB contrary to Objectives S2 and S3 of the Management Plan;
- The development has potential ecological impacts on the site and adjacent ancient woodland which are not addressed in the application material contrary to Objectives G1, W2 and FH3 of the Management Plan.

The above comments are advisory and are the professional views of the AONB Unit's Planning Advisor on the potential impacts on the High Weald landscape. They are not necessarily the views of the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Claire Tester MRTPI
Planning Advisor, High Weald AONB Unit
Advising on the management of a nationally important landscape

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Background Information about the High Weald AONB



The High Weald was designated in 1983 as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is an exceptionally beautiful medieval landscape covering 564 square miles across the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership established in 1991 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. The JAC is supported by a small, dedicated staff team, the High Weald AONB Unit, which provides advice on how to conserve and enhance the AONB. The advice provided by the AONB Unit assists public bodies and statutory undertakers to meet their duty as set out in 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 in making decisions that affect it.

Unlike National Park authorities, the High Weald AONB Unit is not a statutory body but an advisory one. It is not a local planning authority and the responsibility for determining planning applications remains with the 15 local authorities. The AONB Unit is not a statutory consultee on planning matters and it remains each local planning authority's decision whether or not they seek its advice on a particular planning application.

The scope of the advice in this letter is set by the statutory High Weald [AONB Management Plan](#), which has been adopted by all partner authorities, as 'their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it'.

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The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership between: East Sussex, West Sussex, Kent and Surrey County Councils; Horsham, Mid Sussex, Tandridge, Sevenoaks, Wealden and Rother District Councils; Tunbridge Wells, Hastings, Ashford, Crawley, and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Councils; Defra; and organisations representing farming, forestry, community, business and recreation interests.

