

# High Weald Joint Advisory Committee

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

Wealden District Council  
Emailed to [Planning@Wealden.gov.uk](mailto:Planning@Wealden.gov.uk)

21<sup>st</sup> April 2021

Dear Mr Robins,

## **WD/2020/0200 Conversion of existing buildings to residential use and addition of two new dwellings, Skinners Farm, Wadhurst**

Thank you for your consultation on the above application and the amended plans of 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021.

It is the responsibility of the Local Planning Authority 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. A summary of the national planning policy for AONBs is appended to this letter.

The [High Weald AONB Management Plan](#) has been adopted by all the relevant local authorities with land in the AONB as their policy for the management of the area and for the carrying out of their functions in relation to it, and is a material consideration for planning applications. The Management Plan includes a commitment from the Joint Advisory Committee partners (including the Local Planning Authorities) that they will **use the Management Plan as a 'checklist' against which to assess the impact of policies and other activities on AONB purpose** to fulfil the requirements of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, s85. A template to assist with this assessment is provided in the [Legislation and Planning Advice Note](#).

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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One of the  
AONB Family

## The Proposal

The proposed development has the following elements:

- The conversion of a former granary to provide a three-bedroom dwelling;
- The conversion of a sussex barn (Colyers Barn) to provide a four-bedroom dwelling;
- The conversion of a dairy to provide a four-bedroom dwelling;
- The conversion of a former oast as ancillary accommodation to Skinners Farmhouse to provide two-bedroom first floor apartment with games room and home office below;
- The separation of the former annexe from Skinners Farmhouse to provide separate two-bedroom dwelling with associated landscaping and external works;
- The construction of a new shared sewerage treatment tank.

The development also includes retrospective listed building consent for works to Skinners Farmhouse, the granary, the sussex barn and the oast.

## Analysis Against the High Weald AONB Management Plan

The attached plan shows the AONB Landscape Components represented on and around the application site. The following Management Plan key characteristics, objectives and proposed actions are considered relevant to this proposal.

<b>Settlement</b>	
Relevant Key Characteristics	<p>High density of historic farmsteads, with a long continuity of settlement in the same place; their position strongly influenced by topography and routeways.</p> <p>Farmsteads typically arranged around routeways, with loose courtyard plan-types common and dispersed plan-types particularly characteristic. Tend to be relatively modest, typically comprising a farmhouse and a barn, often aisled to at least one side with small-scale ancillary structures, mostly for cattle, which face into their own, generally small, yards.</p> <p>High numbers of pre-1750 timber-framed farm buildings with typologies representing locally-distinctive historic agricultural practices, including oasts and other structures associated with the hop industry (hop-pickers' huts); where a complete range exists, these are rare and particularly significant.</p> <p>Villages and hamlets typically unlit contributing to intrinsically dark landscapes.</p> <p>A limited palette of local materials: clay as tiles and brick, timber as weatherboard and framing, and some localised instances of stone.</p> <p>Green-ness of roads and streets with trees, hedges and verges dominant.</p>
Relevant Objectives	<p>S1 To reconnect settlements, residents and their supporting economic activity with the surrounding countryside. Rationale: To understand and enhance the synergy of the local economy, society and environment, and the relationship with the surrounding</p>

	<p>countryside and wild species, that defines sustainable rural settlement. To provide opportunities for economic activity that supports land management objectives and AONB designation.</p> <p>S2 To protect the historic pattern and character of settlement. Rationale: To protect the distinctive character of towns, villages, hamlets and farmsteads and to maintain the hinterlands and other relationships (including separation) between such settlements that contribute to local identity.</p> <p>S3 To enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald and ensure development reflects the character of the High Weald in its scale, layout and design. Rationale: To protect and enhance the character and quality of buildings in the High Weald, and re-establish the use of local materials as a means of protecting the environment and adding to this distinctiveness.</p>
Relevant Proposed Actions	<p>Ensure there is reference to the AONB Management Plan in local plans and other public documents, and ensure its use as material consideration in planning decisions.</p> <p>Require an archaeological assessment for the development affecting historic farmsteads.</p> <p>Promote use of the High Weald Design Guide and historic characterisation to guide settlement planning.</p> <p>Protect the relationship between historic settlement and its associated green spaces and routeways.</p> <p>Promote and utilise the High Weald Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development.</p> <p>Support innovation in timber technology and its use in construction.</p> <p>Use local fencing materials or native planting for boundaries.</p> <p>Reflect local landscape character and use of local provenance species in new landscaping scheme ensuring improved connectivity.</p> <p>Require developments to maximise measurable gains for biodiversity and opportunities for birds, bats and other wild native species in the design of buildings, curtilages and open spaces.</p> <p>Make space for wildlife to thrive around buildings, gardens and urban spaces.</p>
<b>Routeways</b>	
Relevant Key Characteristics	<p>A dense radiating network with a variety of origins.</p> <p>Typically present by the 14th century, with many extending back into pre-history and pre-dating settlements.</p> <p>Many lost, stopped or diverted routeways evidenced by holloways, earth banks and depressions in the ground.</p>
Relevant Objectives	<p>R1 To maintain the historic pattern and features of routeways. Rationale: To maintain a routeway network that has a symbiotic relationship with settlement location, hinterlands and identity, and is a rare UK survival of an essentially Medieval landscape; and to protect the individual archaeological features of historic routeways.</p>

Relevant Proposed Actions	Give consideration to the historic alignment of roads, tracks and paths in decision making. Ensure that routeways are recognised as non-designated heritage assets in the planning process.
<b>Field and Heath</b>	
Relevant Key Characteristics	Fieldscape dominated by historic farmsteads surrounded by their own fields resulting from Medieval farming in severalty i.e. land held by individuals rather than in common.
Relevant Objectives	FH2 To maintain the pattern of small irregularly shaped fields bounded by hedgerows and woodlands. Rationale: To maintain fields and field boundaries that form a part of the habitat mosaic of the High Weald; and to maintain this key component of what is a rare UK survival of an essentially Medieval landscape.
Relevant Proposed Actions	Give great weight to medieval field systems in planning decisions especially where there is a high degree of intactness and strong presence or relationship with other notable landscape and heritage features. Require development masterplans to protect and enhance existing field patterns including hedges, ditches or other boundary features, and where possible to restore them when lost, particularly within retained public spaces.
<b>Other Qualities</b>	
Relevant Key Characteristics	Locally distinctive and nationally-important features which enrich people's experience of the High Weald <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditional and locally distinctive buildings including barns, oast houses...</li> </ul> Other perceived qualities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scenic beauty and glimpsed long views</li> <li>• Unspoilt rural landscape with a sense of naturalness unusual in South East England</li> <li>• Intrinsically dark landscapes with a sense of remoteness and tranquillity</li> <li>• Human-scale landscape with a sense of intimacy</li> </ul>
Relevant Objectives	OQ4 To protect and promote the perceptual qualities that people value. Rationale: To ensure that the special qualities people value, such as tranquillity, dark skies, sense of naturalness and clean air, are recognised and taken account of in AONB management.
Relevant Proposed Actions	Maintain an understanding of the perceptual landscape qualities people value and consider these in policy documents and decisions Follow the Institute for Lighting Professionals guidance; promote information on dark sky-friendly lighting; install outside lighting only when needed and use dark sky-friendly lighting. Identify and protect valued views and act to reduce scenic impact of intrusive developments.

## Comments on Impacts

The conversion of existing farm buildings to residential accommodation can bring new purpose and relevance to historic farmsteads and support rural communities. The details of the proposed changes to the listed buildings are a matter for the District Council's Conservation Officer to advise on; the focus of the High Weald AONB Unit's advice is the impact on the character of the medieval farmstead as a whole, arranged around its routeways and set within its fields. In this respect, the key changes will be around the establishment of residential curtilages and parking facilities together with any other ancillary residential paraphernalia.

This application has undergone a number of iterations since its first submission and those elements previously of concern to the Unit have been removed. The Unit welcomes the positive engagement on this site and would make the following comments:

- The use of a single natural coloured surface for the access tracks and the parking areas is recommended as a unifying feature that will help the development feel like one farmstead settlement rather than a collection of individual dwellings.
- The use of park rail fencing for boundaries facing inwards to the farmyards and routeways also supports the informal unified feel of the farmstead.
- The use of native hedgerows and post and rail fences for the boundaries with the adjacent fields is supported as providing a softer edge to the fields and limiting views of any residential paraphernalia within the gardens.
- The ecological enhancements proposed are supported, in particular the provision made for swallows which could be affected by the proposals.
- It is noted that the reinstatement of the lost routeway to the south-east of the existing farmstead has now been removed from the plans. This is regrettable and the desirability of restoring this route should be considered in any future plans.

## Recommended Conditions

In the event that the Local Planning Authority considers that the development is acceptable in principle, it is recommended that the following detailed requirements are met:

- The [High Weald Colour Study](#) should be used to select the colours of external materials of structures and hard surfacing so that they are appropriate to the setting of the High Weald AONB landscape (Management Plan objective S3);
- Drainage proposals should seek to restore the natural functioning of river catchments and avoid polluting or increasing flow to watercourses (Management Plan objective G1);
- Local habitats and species should be protected and enhanced as appropriate and conditions applied to prevent loss of existing habitats including hedgerows (Management Plan objectives G3, R2, W1, W2, FH2, and FH3);
- Native, locally sourced plants should be used for any additional landscaping to support local wildlife and avoid contamination by invasive non-native species or plant diseases (Management Plan objective FH3); and
- Controls over lighting should be imposed (Institute of Lighting Professionals recommended light control zone E1) to protect the intrinsically dark night skies of the High Weald (Management Plan objective QQ4).

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 an outstanding medieval landscape; connecting people, protecting beauty, restoring soils and nature.*

## Appendix: National Planning Policy for Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraph 172 requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing 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 scale and extent of development within these designated areas should be limited.

In the event that the decision-maker concludes that development is ‘major’ in terms of its impact on the AONB, paragraph 172 of the NPPF states that “Planning permission should be refused for major development<sup>55</sup> other than in exceptional circumstances, and where it can be demonstrated that the development is in the public interest. Consideration of such applications should include an assessment of:

- a) the need for the development, including in terms of any national considerations, and the impact of permitting it, or refusing it, upon the local economy;
- b) the cost of, and scope for, developing outside the designated area, or meeting the need for it in some other way; and
- c) any detrimental effect on the environment, the landscape and recreational opportunities, and the extent to which that could be moderated”.

Footnote 55 says: “For the purposes of paragraphs 172 and 173, whether a proposal is ‘major development’ is a matter for the decision maker, taking into account its nature, scale and setting, and whether it could have a significant adverse impact on the purposes for which the area has been designated or defined”. **It is recommended that the case officer undertakes a clear and transparent assessment of whether the proposal is major development, using the key characteristics and landscape components of the AONB as set out in the Management Plan.**

NPPF paragraph 11 explains the presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision-making this means that proposals in accordance with the development plan should be approved. Part d says that where there are no relevant development plan policies or the relevant ones are out of date (for instance in applications involving new housing where there are housing supply or delivery deficits) then permission should be granted unless:

- i. the application of policies in this Framework that protect areas or assets of particular importance provides a clear reason for refusing the development proposed<sup>6</sup>; or
- ii. any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in this Framework taken as a whole”.

Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty are listed in footnote 6 and the most relevant policy in the Framework is paragraph 172. A recent court of appeal case<sup>1</sup> confirms that, if a proposal causes harm to an AONB sufficient to refuse planning permission if there were no other considerations, then the presumption in favour (or ‘tilted balance’ expressed in ii) above) should be disengaged. The decision-maker should therefore conduct a normal planning balancing exercise, applying appropriate weight to each consideration, to come to a decision. This will of course include giving great weight to the AONB as required by NPPF 172.

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<sup>1</sup> Monkhill Limited vs Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and Waverley Borough Council Case No: C1/2019/1955/QBACF

## 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.

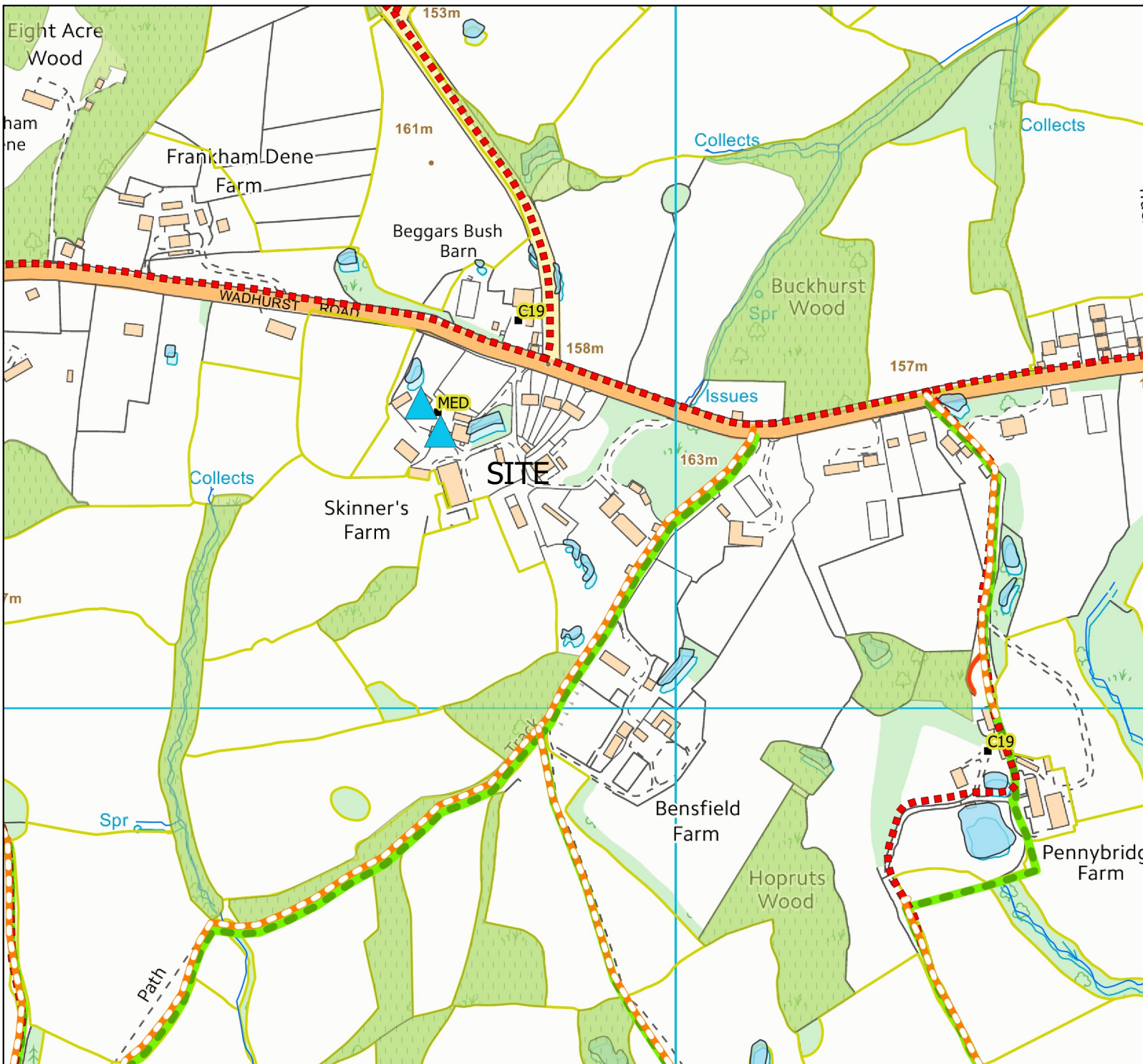
The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee is a partnership established in 1989 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing farming, woodland, access and community interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. 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'.



# Skinner's Farm, Wadhurst



## Key:

- HW AONB Components
- Geology Landform Water Systems
  - G1 watercourses
  - G1 ponds
- Settlement
  - S2 historic farmsteads
- Routeways
  - R1 historic routeways PROW
  - R1 historic routeways roads
  - W1 ancient woodland
  - FH2\_historic\_field\_boundaries
  - ▲ HW\_Listed Buildings

0 75 150 225 m



For further info please refer to the High Weald AONB Management Plan, which may be downloaded from our website (see address below).

**Researched and produced by the High Weald AONB Unit**

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