

High Weald AONB Unit

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Advising on the management of a nationally valued landscape

Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Plan, Public Consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Herstmonceux Neighbourhood Plan (draft).

The High Weald AONB Unit is a small specialist Unit who advise on the care and management of the High Weald AONB. The comments below are an assessment of the extent to which the proposals will impact on the objectives for the AONB defined by the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2004, adopted as Council policy in respect of the AONB.

The Unit welcomes the Neighbourhood Plan and in particular welcomes and supports the references to the High Weald AONB, Policy EN6, and the status given to the AONB in the Vision. It is noted that the plan avoids any significant new build in the AONB (other than brown field sites at Cowbeech). As a result the plan is unlikely to have any significant impacts directly on the AONB and does not appear to directly affect the components of natural beauty identified by the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

There remains some concern relating to the identification of the Limes Cross site for housing and the potential impact of this on the Setting of the High Weald AONB. The site is well elevated and quite prominent in relation to the village and sits atop the ridge top road that forms the boundary with the AONB to the north. The AONB falls away significantly on the northern side of the ridge and there are very open and extensive views into the AONB. The proposed development site has the potential to create an impact on the setting and views to and from the AONB in this location.

The plans housing policy 3(ii) sets a criteria for the site selection based on an assessment of relative landscape sensitivity (using the 2009 Wealden Landscape Character Assessment). However this assessment notes that the site has extensive views both to the South Downs but critically that the site has "open views to North of High Weald". The same assessment also notes that the "higher central area kept as OS with adjacent recreation" indicating that the most elevated section of the site connecting the two recreation grounds is in fact very sensitive because of the views it commands. The site as proposed remains an elevated site with open views to both north and south of nationally designated and sensitive landscapes, both of which may be affected by a major new build on this site. In this context it is not clear on what basis the site meets the criteria in policy 3(ii) as it is probably the most sensitive site or area compared to the other southerly sides of Herstmonceux (on the basis that the northern edges are within the AONB and thus of far greater sensitivity because of the designation). The other southerly sides are less exposed to the High Weald AONB and while they have some long distance views of the South Downs these do not appear to be as significant as the views from the Limes Cross site, nor do the other areas have a direct impact on the setting of the High Weald AONB.

Given the proximity of the AONB to this site and the potential impacts on its Setting it is considered that additional work on the site in the form of a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment is required to assess the impacts on the AONB. It is not clear that the site is relatively less sensitive than other areas around Herstmonceux (to the south), and is in fact considered to be more sensitive in the landscape given its elevated and exposed situation. The allocation of this site is not supported in this regard as it is likely to have major impacts on the AONB.

The exclusion of the James Avenue site for consideration for housing is supporting because of the impacts on the AONB and affects on the setting in accordance with the refusal of planning permission.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on the neighbourhood plan. This statement contains the professional views of the Policy Manager and not the views of the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'AS', is positioned above the contact information.

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