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Mockbeggars Farm, Uckfield - Planning Statement

March 2022 MWB/JK/15693

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by DHA Planning on behalf of Obsidian Strategic Asset Management Ltd (hereafter "Obsidian" or "The Applicant"), in relation to the proposed residential development at Mockbeggars Farm, Uckfield. The site falls within the administrative area of Wealden District Council (WDC).

1.1.2 The full description of the proposed development is as follows:

> *Outline application for the development of 60no. dwellings, access and internal roads, parking, ancillary structures, landscaping and open space, drainage and other associated works. All matters reserved apart from access.*

1.1.3 This statement provides an overview of the application site and proposals. It assesses the planning merits of the scheme with regard to the planning policy framework and material considerations, and subsequently concludes that the proposal is acceptable in planning terms and therefore that planning permission should be granted.

1.2 Application documents

1.2.1 This Planning Statement forms part of a suite of documents that support the planning application, and it is intended to be read in conjunction with the following documents and plans.

Document	Author
Completed Application Form	DHA Planning
Cover Letter	DHA Planning
Design & Access Statement	OSP Architecture
Arboricultural Development Report	*Tree:* Fabrik
Arboricultural Survey (including RPA)	*Tree*: Fabrik
Biodiversity Checklist	Aspect Ecology
Ecological Appraisal	Aspect Ecology
Energy & Sustainability Report	Green Tiger Sustainability
Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy	Glanville
Heritage Statement	Savills
Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Aspect Landscape Planning
Transport Assessment (including Access Design and Pedestrian Crossing)	DHA Transport
Statement of Community Involvement	Development Intelligence

Table 1.1: Submitted application documents

Plan	Drawing Number
Site Location Plan	20179–S101
Site Survey Plan	20179-S102
Coloured Sketch Layout	20179-C101-B
Coloured Sketch Street Elevations	20179-C102
Land Use Plan	20179-C103
Landscape Strategy Plan	7397-ASP3-B

Table 1.1: Submitted application plans

2 Site and surroundings

2.1 The Site

2.1.1 The application site comprises approximately 3.62 hectares of land at Mockbeggars Farm, on the east side of London Road, Uckfield and is currently in agricultural use (pastoral). It is formed of two separate fields, separated by an existing hedgerow and broadly equal in size, with gentle variations in ground levels and topography. The site is generally very well contained with limited views into and out of the site available from public vantage points. Farm vehicle access is currently provided via a track off London Road.

2.1.2 The site's boundaries are made up of a mixture of hedgerows and post and wire fencing. The site adjoins existing development in each direction, mainly comprising large detached residential properties to the south and east, plus agricultural buildings adjoin the site to the north west, beyond which is a caravan dealership and a used car dealership. Two existing dwellings sit to the north east, and an area of ancient woodland (Round Wood) sits to the south east of the site.

2.1.3 The site sits approximately 1.3km north of Uckfield town centre, within the wider Uckfield urban area. It occupies a position between Ringles Cross to the south and Budletts to the north. Further afield is Five Ash Down to the north and Maresfield to the north west.

2.1.4 The site has been submitted through the previous call for sites (ref: 1005/1410), it was not submitted prior to January 2019 and is not assessed within the Council's most recent SHELAA.



Figure 2.1: Site Location

Surrounding Area

2.1.5 The site benefits from close proximity to Uckfield, Maresfield and Five Ash Down. Uckfield is a district centre which provides a range of services and amenities including employment, healthcare (including Uckfield Hospital) and education (including Uckfield College). An established footpath exists on London Road providing safe walking opportunities to each of these settlements. Nearby amenities include the Bonners C of E Primary School and the Stepping Stones Pre-School south of Maresfield, approximately 1km north of the site, accessible by public footpath. The Blue Asia Restaurant sits 200m north of the site and the Ringles Cross Public House is 500m to the south.

Accessibility

2.1.6 The site benefits from access to nearby bus stops on London Road and Coopers Green Road, providing frequent services to Uckfield (town centre), Haywards Heath, East Grinstead, and intervening towns and villages. Uckfield railway station sits 2km to the south of the site.

2.1.7 The site is well connected to the wider strategic road network as London Road connects directly to the A26 and A272 at the Budletts roundabout, 500m to the north, as well as the A22. This provides convenient access to towns such as East Grinstead, Tunbridge Wells, Haywards Heath, Lewes and Eastbourne, as well as intervening settlements including Polegate and Hailsham.

2.2 Constraints

Settlement boundary

2.2.1 The site is located outside the defined settlement boundary of Uckfield. Nevertheless, the site adjoins existing built development contained east of London Road and west of Five Ash Down. Given that the settlement boundary was defined through the Local Plan, adopted in 1998, it is considered to carry very limited weight at this time.

Ancient Woodland

2.2.2 Round Wood, adjoining the south and eastern boundaries of the site, is designated as Ancient Woodland and is recorded as a Natural England priority habitat.

2.3 Planning History

2.3.1 According to Wealden District Council's online planning history there have only been two planning application on the site:

Reference	Proposal	Decision / Date
T/1967/100/F	ERECTION OF GARAGE AND SMALL ADDITION TO HOUSE.	APPROVED 09/02/1967
WD/2010/2053/O	DEVELOPMENT OF A FIVE PITCH TRAVELLERS CARAVAN SITE, LANDSCAPING AND ACCESS.	REFUSED 24/12/2010

2.3.2 Due to the nature and time period of the planning applications, neither are considered to be of particular relevance to this proposal.

Pre-Application Enquiry

2.3.3 Pre-application discussions were held with WDC in June 2021. This comprised a meeting with Stacey Robins and related to an initial proposal for 95 dwellings plus landscaping, open space and access as shown within figure 2.2 below.



Figure 2.2: 95 Home Scheme Presented to Pre-application Enquiry

2.3.4 A written response was received in July 2021. The written response by Stacey Robins stated that:

- This site being set outside or at the very periphery of Uckfield would not be isolated in the context of the NPPF, and is likely to be deemed acceptable for residential development.

- Relating to the layout, there are areas of the site that with some adjustment could create a sense of place and add to the quality of the area whilst delivering much needed housing.

- There some parts to the site that have too much development, the flat blocks look awkward and out of place.

- Some of the fine detail work (parking numbers, bays, alignments etc.) together with points of concern (incorporation of SuDS and buffers to the Ancient Woodland etc.), all point to an adjusted layout.

- Fundamentally, it looks like considerably fewer units being realised on this site.

2.3.5 Subsequently and in consideration of the Officers feedback, Obsidian reduced the number of dwellings to 80, presenting a revised scheme as shown in figure 2.3 below. The predominant change was a reduction in flats with clusters of maisonettes provided instead. Additional open space was provided, and garden sizes were increased.



Figure 2.3: 80 Home Scheme Presented to Pre-application Enquiry

2.3.6 Within a written response dated 13 September 2021, the Officer confirmed that the changes were heading in the right direction, and that the omission of flat blocks was welcome. However, the swapping of flats to maisonettes also raised a concern, and again the feedback was give that the unit numbers needed to drop, with a scheme of about 60 units being appropriate for the location.

2.3.7 Obsidian arranged a further discussion regarding the potential for a scheme of 60 private and affordable units, plus 10 custom and self-build homes. This reduction in unit numbers was partly driven by removing maisonettes from the scheme and incorporating 2 bedroomed dwellings. This third option was discussed with officers of WDC, and whilst it was acknowledged that there is a lot of space on the site, the advice was strongly that there should be a further reduction in unit numbers, and that a scheme of 60 homes was likely to be considered appropriate to the site.

2.3.8 Obsidian have subsequently decided to pursue a proposed lower density development of 60 homes on the site and is the subject of this application.

Nearby Applications and Decisions

Land West of Five Ash Down, Coopers Green (WD/2020/1088/MAO)

2.3.9 An outline planning application for the development of up to 35 residential dwellings was refused in April 2021.

2.3.10 The reasons for refusal were:

- The site lies outside any development boundary and within open countryside where the principle of residential development would be unacceptable;
- The proposed development would be detrimental to the visual and rural setting of the site and cause harm to the character and appearance of this part of Coopers Green. The proposed scheme would result in the loss of an existing field, which would extend development between Coopers Green and Five Ash Down resulting in an unacceptable coalescence of built form and a harmful urbanising impact on the character and appearance of the area;
- The development, if permitted, would appear as a high density suburban housing estate, out of keeping with the edge of village location and the existing low density development and would have a negative impact on the biodiversity of the site and protected species; and
- The development does not therefore meet the definition of sustainable development within the National Planning Policy Framework and the adverse harm identified would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits of the proposal.

2.3.11 An appeal has been lodged.

2.3.12 The refusal of the application at Five Ash Down is considered to be of particular relevance to the consideration of this application as described through this Planning Statement. There are similarities between the sites given their respective locations north of Uckfield, however there are clear differences, not least that the field at Five Ash Down is much more open and prominent within the locality, whereas the site at London Road is well enclosed and plays no role in preventing merging of settlements. Nevertheless, Obsidian have paid close regard to the reasons for refusal and the decision making process, and this planning application has been formulated accordingly.

2.3.13 This Planning Statement provides further commentary on the relevance of the refused planning application at Five Ash Down in greater detail within section 5.

Downlands Farm, Uckfield (WD/2006/2855/MEA)

2.3.14 A planning application for a major development of 750 dwellings, plus significant provision of employment, education, retail and community uses was lodged in

October 2006 for land at Downlands Farm, which occupies a significant area of land north west of Uckfield, stretching broadly from London Road to Rocks Road, east of the A22 and west of Snatts Road.

2.3.15 Outline planning permission was refused by WDC in February 2007. The subsequent appeal was conjoined with two separate appeals relating to separate sites at Bird In Eye, to the south east of Uckfield, and the appeals were recovered by the Secretary of State (SoS). The Inspector recommended that all three appeals be dismissed, and the SoS agreed and dismissed the appeals in February 2009.

2.3.16 In considering the appeals, the SoS agreed with the Inspector that Downlands Farm was further away many, although not all, of the town centre facilities than the competing Bird In Eye sites, and concluded that the accessibility of the site presented a problem which weighed against a grant of permission for the scheme.

2.3.17 It is important to consider that the appeal was determined against a significantly different planning context. WDC were able to demonstrate a 5 year housing land supply at the time, and the SoS found no good case for releasing the site on grounds of housing need at the time. The appeal was determined in accordance with the development plan at the time which comprised the Local Plan and the East Sussex Structure Plan. The proposal at Downlands Farm (and the Bird In Eye sites as well) was clearly not in accordance with the development plan. The SoS considered that the Downlands Farm proposal was unacceptable in terms of landscape impact and traffic impact. The overall balance of ecological considerations did also not weigh in its favour. Whilst the provision of affordable housing was considered to carry some weight in favour of the proposals, there were not considered to be sufficient material considerations in favour of the scheme to outweigh the conflict with the development plan.

3 Development Proposal

3.1 Proposed Development

3.1.1 This application seeks outline planning permission for 60no. dwellings, plus access and internal roads, parking, ancillary structures, landscaping and open space, drainage and other associated works.

3.2 Residential Dwelling Mix

3.2.1 The proposed development will comprise a mix of 2, 3, 4, and 5 bedroom homes including 35% affordable housing and 3 custom/self-build plots. As the application is submitted in outline form, the mix is not proposed to be fixed, nevertheless an indicative mix is set out which comprises:

Unit Type	**Number**
Private	
2 bed house	12
3 bed house	15
4 bed house	4
5 bed house	5
Self/Custom-Build	
3 bed house	1
4 bed house	2
Affordable	
2 bed house	12
3 bed house	8
4 bed house	1

Affordable Housing Statement

3.2.2 Of the 60 proposed homes, 21 will constitute affordable housing units, which amounts to 35% of the total development and is therefore policy compliant. This will be secured through a section 106 agreement.

3.2.3 Of the 21 affordable dwellings, 12 are proposed to be 2-bedroom houses, eight are proposed for 3-bedroom houses, and one is proposed for a 4-bedroom house, however this mix is provided for indicative purposes only.

3.2.4 Of the 21 affordable dwellings, it is envisaged that eight will be social rented units, nine will be affordable rented units, and four will be intermediate affordable (shared ownership), as per the requirement of the Affordable Housing Local Plan.

3.2.5 All of the units are in excess of the Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS).

3.2.6 For further information on affordable housing proposed for the scheme refer to the submitted Design & Access Statement, Accommodation Schedule, and drawings.

Self/custom build

3.2.7 As noted, three of the dwellings (5%) will be for self/custom build, indicatively located in the south west corner of the proposed development.

3.3 Design

3.3.1 This application is in outline form with all matters reserved other than access. Accordingly, the main design considerations are reserved for future consideration. Nevertheless, the site layout has been informed by a study of local vernacular, consideration of the site's constraints and opportunities, and in accordance with the National Design Guide and the Wealden Design Guide as well as planning policy at local and national levels.

3.3.2 The layout respects the site's setting as a transition between the dense urban area of Uckfield and the wider countryside surrounding the settlement and has been conceived on a landscape led basis providing ample green open spaces. The site layout plan provides for a density of approximately 16.6 dwellings per hectare (gross).



Figure 3.1: Illustrative Sketch Layout Plan

Character Areas

3.3.3 The indicative layout features three distinct character areas, informed by the existing context of the site. These areas sometimes overlap but provide a coherent structure to the development helping to relate the site with the character of Uckfield and the immediate surrounding residential character.



Figure 3.2: Character Areas

3.3.4 The character areas can be described as:

1. London Road Frontage

   The entrance area to the site will provide open space and high quality landscaping to protect the setting of Round Wood and retain the existing hedgerow long London Road. The proposed dwellings will front onto London Road or the primary access road which connects the different areas of the development. Key features within this character area will include tree planting, post-and-rail fencing and high quality planting.

2. Woodland Edge

   With a backdrop of existing mature trees and planting, these dwellings have a frontage onto London Road, tucked behind the existing retained hedgerow. This character area will feature shared surface streets.

3. Village Streets

   The dwellings are arranged around a series of shared surface streets, with the larger houses fronting onto the open spaces and landscape buffers. further detached dwellings back onto the eastern boundary enhanced with new trees and planting. Robust landscaping will be provided to the eastern edge.

Appearance

3.3.5 The dwelling design is put forward indicatively at this stage. The proposed architecture incorporates a unifying palette of materials that is considered to be appropriate to the locality, including a variety of locally sourced bricks, timber boarding and tile hanging with contrasting bricks used for details such as window headers or cills. Roofs will be a variety of gable or hipped, with plain red/orange tiles.



Figure 3.3: Typical House Elevations

Access

3.3.6 Access to the site is to be gained from a new simple priority junction access from London Road midway along the western boundary. A carriageway width of 5.5 metres will be provided on the site spine road and kerb radii at the proposed access will be 8 metres to accommodate larger vehicle movements.

3.3.7 A two-metre wide pedestrian footway is proposed on the southern site of the access junction, linking to the proposed new pedestrian crossing on London Road.

3.3.8 Visibility sight lines of 171 metres to the south and in excess of 215 metres to the north can be provided, in excess of the requirements of the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

Parking

3.3.9 It is indicatively proposed to provide two allocated spaces per residential dwelling in addition to a further six unallocated resident parking spaces and 12 unallocated visitor spaces. This will be confirmed at a future Reserved Matters stage.

3.3.10 Safe and secure cycle parking facilities will be provided within the curtilage of each dwelling, sufficient to store at least two bicycles per residential unit.

Landscaping

3.3.11 The design of the proposed development is landscape led, informed by the site constraints including the Ancient Woodland, and the site's position on the urban edge. The development is deliberately low density whilst a significant proportion is to be left as open space, including a 20m buffer zone to the ancient woodland.

3.3.12 Details of landscaping are reserved for future determination. However, the illustrative site layout plan provides an overview of the areas which make up the key structural elements of the landscape and ecology strategy for the site which have been informed by landscape and ecological assessments including:

- Existing vegetation including trees along the boundaries of the site would be retained and strengthened with new mixed tree and shrub planting to filter views towards proposed residential development. By providing extensive new hedgerow and tree planting throughout the scheme, the proposals will achieve Biodiversity Net Gain;
- Attractive mixed, native tree belts with an understorey of mixed, native shrubs would be provided along the boundaries to screen views towards proposed residential development;
- The use of hard and soft landscape features within the development which complement the architectural forms and which reflect the character and appearance of the townscape within the surrounding area;
- A mixture of attractive native street trees would be provided within the development to break up views towards built form and to soften car parking areas;

- Proposed planting would all be native and locally appropriate to increase the biodiversity value of the site; and

- Tree-lined streets in accordance with NPPF paragraph 131 would be included.



Figure 3.4: Landscape Strategy Plan

3.4 Domestic Waste and Recycling

3.4.1 The refuse strategy has been considered with regard to the requirements of WDC.

3.4.2 Refuse vehicle turning areas can be accommodated within the site to ensure compliance with the refuse carry and collection distances and to limit undue and excessive reversing distances.

3.4.3 The number and types of refuse bins and recycling boxes provided for each property will comply with the requirements of the local authority. The refuse provision will be in the form of bins kept in rear gardens with rear access, within garages or within sheds.

4 Planning Policy

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Section 70 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 states that where an application is made to a local planning authority for planning permission, in dealing with such an application the authority shall consider the provisions of the development plan, so far as material to the application, and to any other material considerations and under section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the determination must be made in accordance with the plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.1.2 The development plan in place for Wealden consists of the adopted Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (2013), the 'saved' policies of the adopted Wealden Local Plan (1998) and the Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (May 2016).

4.2 Development Plan

Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan (2013)

4.2.1 **Settlement Hierarchy** – The Core Strategy classifies Uckfield as a 'District Centre' which serves the function of:

> *An accessible settlement by road and public transport containing a range of District centre shops, employment opportunities and facilities including secondary school. Not reliant upon other centres within the District to meet day to day needs, but requires support from other secondary or primary centres to meet needs of the residents.*

4.2.2 The Core Strategy local plan is the overarching planning policy document for Wealden District Area and sets out the vision for the future development of the area to 2027. The following policies are of interest to this proposed development:

4.2.3 **SPO3** and **WSC1 Provision of Homes and Jobs 2006-2027** – sets out that development will be focused in and around the settlements of Hailsham/Hellingly, Polegate/Willingdon/Stone Cross and Uckfield to help stimulate investment in those centres.

4.2.4 **Strategic Planning Objective SPO7** states that the district will encourage a reduction in the need to travel by car by concentrating development where it can most closely relate to public transport opportunities.

4.2.5 **Strategic Planning Objective SPO10** states that the district will seek to avoid allocation of land for housing growth in areas subject to medium and high flood risk.

4.2.6 **Strategic Planning Objective SPO11** recognises a shortfall of open space in the district.

4.2.7 **WCS2 Distribution of Housing Growth** – provides an overview of the areas that will provide for new housing development within the district. Uckfield is planned

to take on 1,000 new dwellings (1,742 total) over the plan period. It was originally intended that housing delivery on individual sites would be addressed by a further DPD, but this has not been produced.

4.2.8 **WCS5 Managing the Release of Housing Land** – outlines that the release of land for housing will be managed so that it will deliver the level and broad distribution of development set out in Policy WCS2. The release of land will be dependent on the timely provision of infrastructure necessary to deliver housing, including affordable housing. The adequacy of housing land supply will be assessed regularly through reviews of the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment, the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and through regular housing land availability monitoring.

4.2.9 **WCS7 Effective Provision of Infrastructure** - the release of land for development will be conditional upon there being sufficient capacity in the existing local infrastructure to meet the requirements generated by the proposed development. Where development would create the need to provide additional or improved community facilities, services and infrastructure to mitigate its impact, a programme of delivery must be agreed with the relevant infrastructure providers which will ensure that these improvements are provided at the time they are needed. These may involve coordinating contributions from the development with other investment streams. This approach will ensure that the necessary improvements can be completed in a timely manner to support growth. Arrangements for the provision or improvement of infrastructure to the required standard will be secured by planning agreement/obligation, or by condition attached to the planning consent or by any other appropriate mechanism.

4.2.10 **WCS8 Affordable Housing** – this has been superseded by the Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan, which is discussed further below.

4.2.11 **WSC12 Biodiversity** – in order to contribute to the biodiversity targets in the Sussex Biodiversity Action Plan, the Council will prevent a net loss of biodiversity, ensure a comprehensive network of habitats, biodiversity features and ecological networks are maintained.

4.2.12 **WCS13 Green Infrastructure** – all new residential development will be required to contribute to the green infrastructure network and where appropriate to make provision for new or enhancement of existing open space. Where the scale of development would be too small to make on-site provision, the Council will seek developer contributions either towards the improvement of existing open spaces or towards the provision of open space elsewhere.

4.2.13 **WCS14 Presumption in Favour of Sustainable Development** – when considering development proposals, the Council will take a positive approach that reflects the presumption in favour of sustainable development contained in the National Planning Policy Framework. Where there are no policies relevant to the application or relevant policies are out of date at the time of making the decision then the Council will grant permission unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Adopted Wealden Local Plan Saved Policies (1998)

4.2.14 The Local Plan significantly pre-dates the NPPF, and therefore limited weight can be attached to its saved policies, and it must be considered in that context.

4.2.15 **GD2 Development Boundaries** – outside the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, development will be resisted unless it is in accordance with specific policies in this Plan

4.2.16 **EN1 Sustainable Development** – the Council will pursue sustainable development, having regard to the principles contained in Government guidance and its own Strategy for the Environment, in considering the location, layout and design of development, renewable energy and waste management proposals and in assessing the effects of proposals on the environment, including on water and air quality.

4.2.17 **EN2 Settlement Pattern** – The Council will seek to maintain the existing settlement pattern and ensure that major new developments generating significant travel movements are located efficiently in relation to existing development and to public transport.

4.2.18 **EN8 Low Weald -** Development within the Low Weald will only be permitted if it conserves the low rolling agricultural character of the landscape. In considering any proposal, particular regard will be had to:

(1) areas of unspoilt and remote countryside;

(2) the setting of settlements;

(3) areas on the fringe of adjacent statutorily designated landscapes;

(4) the retention of woods, boundary trees and hedges;

(5) attractive vernacular buildings and groups of buildings.

4.2.19 **EN12 Protection of Trees and Woodlands** - The Council will seek to retain and enhance the contribution of trees and woodland areas to the landscape character of the District, including the amenity value of trees in built up areas. This will be promoted by:

(1) endorsement of the principles and guidelines contained in the Trees and Woodland Strategy for East Sussex.

(2) support for the preparation of local Trees and Woodland Conservation and Management Plans.

(3) encouragement for woodland management through participation in tree and hedgerow planting schemes by farmers, voluntary organisations and others, and where appropriate, as part of development proposals.

(4) making Tree Preservation Orders where appropriate to protect trees and woodland areas of significant amenity value.

(5) giving weight to proposals, including business proposals, that help to sustain and manage forestry and woodland areas when considering them against other policies of the Plan.

(6) resisting development proposals which would result in the loss of trees which make a valuable contribution to the character of the landscape, a settlement or its setting.

4.2.20 **EN13 Ancient semi-natural Woodland -** The Council will resist development proposals that involve the clear felling or otherwise prejudice the ecology of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands, as defined by English Nature.

4.2.21 **EN14 Landscaping Within Developments** - In appropriate cases, the Council will require landscaping, including surface treatments, to be carried out as part of development proposals. Where required, such schemes should:

(1) seek to retain existing trees, significant hedgerows and another valuable site features.

(2) normally comprise primarily native species.

(3) complement the scale and character of the proposed development and the locality.

(4) have regard to associated nature conservation benefits.

(5) be implemented at the earliest practicable opportunity and thereafter satisfactorily maintained during the early years.

4.2.22 **EN16 Nature Conservation** - States that when considering any development proposal, including its design and layout, the Council will have regard to the implications for nature conservation and wildlife habitats. Particularly the need to safeguard the active residence of protected species, to the integrity and continuity of landscape features of major importance for wild flora and fauna, and to appropriate opportunities for encouraging habitat protection, enhancement and management.

4.2.23 **EN17 Important Countryside Gaps -** Development will not be permitted which would reduce countryside gaps between a list of settlements, which includes Uckfield, Maresfield and Five Ash Down.

4.2.24 **EN18 Protection of Open Areas Within Settlements -** The Council will resist the loss of open areas and undeveloped gaps within settlements which contribute to the character or amenities of the locality.

4.2.25 **EN27 Layout and Design of Development** – Proposals for development will be permitted when the following layout and design criteria are met:

(1) the scale, form, site coverage, density and design of the development and the use of materials and landscaping should respect the character of adjoining development and, where appropriate, promote local distinctiveness. The design, materials and landscaping should be of an appropriate high standard.

(2) the proposed development should not create an unacceptable adverse impact on the privacy and amenities of adjoining developments and the neighbourhood by reason of scale, height, form, noise and traffic movements.

(3) the proposed development should ensure a satisfactory environment for the future occupants, including adequate provision for daylight, sunlight, privacy, garden space and/or appropriately landscaped amenity areas.

(4) the proposed development should not constitute an unacceptable back land or 'tandem' form of development.

(5) regard has been paid to crime prevention measures whenever possible and appropriate.

4.2.26 **EN28 Design of Development for People with Disabilities** - Proposals for the development of land and buildings that are open to the public or used for employment and education purposes, including extensions, alterations and changes of use of buildings where reasonable and practicable, should provide suitable access and facilities for people with disabilities.

4.2.27 **EN29 Light Pollution** - In considering development proposals which include external lighting, the Council will require:

(1) light spillage to be minimised.

(2) the use of the minimum intensity of light necessary to be compatible with safety and security objectives

4.2.28 **DC1 Agricultural Land** - Land falling within Grades 1, 2 and 3a of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food agricultural land classification system will be protected from development, wherever possible.

4.2.29 **DC17 Housing in Countryside** – outlines that housing development will not be allowed outside development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, unless it conforms with other policies in the Plan.

4.2.30 **HG5 Dwelling Mix with New Development Schemes** - Within the development boundaries, as defined on the Proposals Map, the Council will seek a mix of dwelling types and sizes, on new estate developments. Wherever possible, estate development should provide for the creation of smaller individual housing areas by making good use of existing tree belts and hedgerows, open spaces, natural features, road network, and dwelling layout and design.

4.2.31 **HG6 Crime Prevention in New Housing Developments** - Within large new housing developments, regard should be paid to crime prevention in the design and layout of the housing areas, particularly in terms of street lighting, security of property and surveillance of access roads, footpaths, amenity space, parking areas and landscaping where this is consistent with good layout and design.

4.2.32 **HG7 Energy Consideration in New Housing Developments** - Within housing development, consideration should be given to energy conservation in the design and layout of new housing areas, particularly with regard to the aspect of the development, the housing type proposed and the orientation of the dwellings.

4.2.33 **TR3 Traffic Impact of New Development** - Planning applications for new development will be permitted where the following criteria are met:

(1) the proposed development does not create or perpetuate unacceptable traffic conditions.

(2) a satisfactory means of access (vehicular, cycle and pedestrian) is provided to meet Local Planning and Highway Authority standards.

(3) where appropriate, the provision of suitable public transport facilities.

4.2.34 **TR12 Cycling -** in dealing with development proposals the Council will take into account the Cycling Strategy for East Sussex.

4.2.35 **TR13 Footpaths and Bridleways** - The Council will seek to secure the provision of safe and convenient pedestrian routes in new developments.

4.2.36 **TR16 Car Parking Standards** - In considering all development proposals, the Council will require the on-site provision of vehicle parking and servicing in accordance with the standards set out in Appendix 6.

4.2.37 **LR1 Provision of Outdoor Playing Space -** The Council will seek to ensure that adequate outdoor playing space is provided in towns and villages within the District in accordance with the levels recommended by the National Playing Fields Association. This will be achieved by:

(1) protecting existing outdoor playing space or other open space with recreational or amenity value (Policy LR2);

(2) the provision of children's play space in new residential developments of 30 or more dwellings (Policy LR3);

(3) the provision of artificial turf pitches on appropriate sites.

4.2.38 **LR3 Children's Play Space in Developments of 30+ Dwellings** - The Council will require new residential development of 30 or more dwellings to contain children's play space at a rate of 0.6 – 0.8 hectares per thousand population, including an equipped area at a rate of 0.2 – 0.3 hectares per thousand population. This space should:

(1) be located where it can be used safely, conveniently and without causing excessive noise or other disturbance to adjoining areas;

(2) be properly drained, laid out, equipped and landscaped;

(3) be additional to any amenity, incidental or other open space.

A capital sum, or other arrangement to the satisfaction of the District Council, will be sought for future maintenance.

4.2.39 **LR5 Informal Amenity Space in New Residential Developments** - The Council will seek the provision of informal amenity space, additional to the outdoor playing space required under Policy LR3, in all large new housing developments, where appropriate, incorporating existing landscape features such as trees, hedgerows, etc.

4.2.40 **CS2 Drainage** – Planning applications will be permitted only where adequate provision is made for surface and foul water drainage to meet Local Authority standards, taking into consideration the adequacy or otherwise of the existing systems it will feed, to avoid increasing the risk of flooding by surcharging mains or increasing surface water run-off to watercourses.

4.2.41 **CS4 Recycling Enclosures: Residential Development** - Within new housing developments over 40 dwellings, when appropriate, the Council will seek the

provision of a purpose built enclosure for the containment of recycling facilities which should be located where it can be used safely and conveniently, without causing nuisance or excessive disturbance to residential amenities, and be accessed directly from the main estate road.

Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (2016)

4.2.42 The Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan supersedes local plan policy WCS8 concerning affordable housing.

4.2.43 **AFH1 Affordable Housing** - New housing developments, including affordable housing, will be expected to provide for a mix of dwelling size, type and tenure that meet the identified housing needs of the local area. New housing developments must make the most effective use of the land, taking into account the character of the local area. Affordable housing is required at a level of 35% of the number of dwellings on development sites with 5 (net) dwellings or more. The presumption is for development sites of 49 net dwellings or less that around 80% of the total number of affordable homes provided will be for social rented accommodation with the remainder being for intermediate accommodation. For development sites of 50 dwellings (net) or more around 40% of the total number of affordable homes provided will be for social rented accommodation, 40% will be affordable rent and 20% intermediate accommodation.

4.3 Other material considerations

National Planning Policy Framework (2021)

4.3.1 The NPPF was originally published in March 2012 to provide a single overarching national policy document. A revised NPPF was published in July 2021 and is a material consideration when determining planning applications.

4.3.2 **Paragraph 7** asserts that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

4.3.3 **Paragraph 8** states that to help achieve sustainable development, it means that the planning system has three overarching objectives as follows.

a) An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure.

b) A social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering a well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and

c) An environmental objective – to contribute to protecting and enhancing our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, helping to improve biodiversity, using natural resources

prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

4.3.4 **Paragraph 11** states that plans and decision should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. For decision making this means.

> c) approving development proposals that accord with an up-to-date development plan without delay; or
>
> d) where there are no relevant development plan policies, or the policies which are most important for determining the application are out-of-date, granting permission 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 proposed6; 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.

4.3.5 **Paragraph 47**, which regards the determining of applications, states that applications should be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

4.3.6 **Paragraph 60** states that in order to support the Government's objective of significantly boosting the supply of homes, it is important that a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay.

4.3.7 **Paragraph 74** states that local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old. Paragraph 74 additionally states that local authorities should identify the following buffers on top of their five-year housing land supply calculations:

(a) 5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land, or

(b) 10% where the local planning authority wishes to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through an annual position statement or recently adopted plan, to account for any fluctuations in the market during that year, or

(c) 20% where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply.

4.3.8 **Paragraphs 79** states that rural housing should be located where it would enhance and maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support

local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby.

4.3.9 **Paragraph 104** regards the promotion of sustainable transport. It states that transport issues should be considered form the earliest stages of development proposals. So that:

(a) the potential impacts of development on transport networks can be addressed.

(b) opportunities from existing or proposed transport infrastructure, and changing transport technology and usage, are realised – for example in relation to the scale, location or density of development that can be accommodated.

(c) opportunities to promote walking, cycling and public transport use are identified and pursued.

(d) the environmental impacts of traffic and transport infrastructure can be identified, assessed and considered – including appropriate opportunities for avoiding and mitigating any adverse effects, and for net environmental gains; and

(e) patterns of movement, streets, parking and other transport considerations are integral to the design of schemes and contribute to making high quality places.

4.3.10 **Paragraph 105** says significant development should be focused on locations which are or can be made sustainable, through limiting the need to travel and offering a genuine choice of transport modes.

4.3.11 **Paragraph 111** states development should only be prevented or refused on highways grounds if there would be an unacceptable impact on highway safety, or the residual cumulative impacts on the road network would be severe.

4.3.12 Within the context of paragraph 111, applications for development should (paragraph 112):

(a) give priority first to pedestrian and cycle movements, both within the scheme and with neighbouring areas; and second – so far as possible – to facilitating access to high quality public transport, with layouts that maximise the catchment area for bus or other public transport services, and appropriate facilities that encourage public transport use.

(b) address the needs of people with disabilities and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport.

(c) create places that are safe, secure and attractive – which minimise the scope for conflicts between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles, avoid unnecessary street clutter, and respond to local character and design standards.

(d) allow for the efficient delivery of goods, and access by service and emergency vehicles.

(e) be designed to enable charging of plug-in and other ultra-low emission vehicles in safe, accessible and convenient locations.

4.3.13 **Paragraph 124**, in regard to achieving development of an appropriate density, states that development should be supported that makes an efficient use of land. Decision should consider:

(a) the identified need for different types of housing and other forms of development, and the availability of land suitable for accommodating it.

(b) local market conditions and viability.

(c) the availability and capacity of infrastructure and services – both existing and proposed – as well as their potential for further improvement and the scope to promote sustainable travel modes that limit future car use.

(d) the desirability of maintaining an area's prevailing character and setting (including residential gardens), or of promoting regeneration and change; and

(e) the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places.

4.3.14 **Section 12** sets out policies that work towards achieving well-designed places. It states that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities (paragraph 126). Planning decisions should ensure that developments will function well and add to the overall quality of an area, are visually attractive, sympathetic to local character and history. They should establish or maintain a strong sense of place, using the arrangement of streets, spaces, building types and materials to create attractive, welcoming and distinctive places to live. Furthermore, they should create places that are safe, inclusive and accessible and which promote health and well-being. (Paragraph 130).

4.3.15 **Paragraph 131** requires planning decisions to ensure that all new streets are tree-lined, with opportunities taken to incorporate trees elsewhere in developments.

4.3.16 **Section 15** sets out policies to conserve and enhance the natural environment. It states that the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystems including of best and most versatile agricultural land, trees and woodland, should be recognised (paragraph 174).

4.3.17 **Paragraph 180(c)** states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats such as an ancient woodland should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and **paragraph 180(d)** states that development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Wealden Design Guide 2008 (adopted Supplementary Planning document)

4.3.18 The Wealden Design Guide is formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) as part of the Council's Local Development Framework (LDF) and

provides further detailed guidance in the interpretation of saved policies EN1 and EN27 from the adopted Local Plan. It is intended to encourage a higher standard of design for development within the district. It is therefore an important consideration for this proposal. Section 7 on New Residential Development and Section 8 on Designing the Public Realm are most relevant to this application.

Wealden Climate Emergency

4.3.19 In July 2019 WDC declared a climate emergency. A Climate Emergency Plan was published in December 2019. In relation to new development the action plan states that:

- Future development should achieve a high standard of energy efficiency
- A transformation in the transport sector must take place, including a focus on increasing the switch to zero emission vehicles

5 Planning Considerations

5.1 Principle of the development

5.1.1 This application seeks outline planning permission for a new residential development with associated access, parking and landscaping at Mockbeggars Farm, Uckfield. All matters are reserved except for access, although indicative details are provided to demonstrate how the site could be developed.

5.1.2 The application site adjoins the built confines of Uckfield and is close to the settlements of Maresfield and Five Ash Down. The site is well connected to Uckfield and further afield, with a footpath in place along London Road and bus stops nearby. Uckfield Town Centre lies approximately 1.3km to the south of the site.

5.1.3 The Core Strategy (2013) classifies Uckfield as a 'District Centre', which is in the highest tier of the settlement hierarchy in terms of settlements within Wealden, and not reliant on other centres within the District to meet day to day needs. It provides a broad range of services and facilities that are within walking distance including a secondary and further education, healthcare, primary school, pre-school, employment and other local services. The site benefits from conveniently located bus services on London Road with regular services to other nearby settlements, whilst Uckfield itself also has a main line railway station. It is considered that the site falls within a sustainable location, and the site should be considered as acceptable for residential development, as advised by officers within written pre-application feedback.

5.1.4 Paragraph 79 of the NPPF states that housing should be located where it would enhance or maintain the vitality of rural communities. Planning policies should identify opportunities for villages to grow and thrive, especially where this will support local services. Where there are groups of smaller settlements, development in one village may support services in a village nearby. The addition of 60 new dwellings and the associated new residents would help to support the vitality of nearby rural services in Maresfield, Cooper's Green and Five Ash Down.

5.1.5 The Core Strategy and saved Local Plan policies collectively seek to locate new housing within the defined settlements and protect the countryside from encroachment. However, for reasons set out below, the development plan in Wealden is out of date by virtue of the district's lack of five-year housing land supply. The defined settlement boundary for Uckfield dates back to the 1998 Local Plan and is now considered out of date and of little current relevance. It is considered that there are other material considerations in this case meaning that on balance the proposed development of this site must be considered appropriate.

Housing supply and delivery

5.1.6 Footnote 8 to paragraph 11 of the NPPF is clear that policies for the supply of housing cannot be considered up to date if the Local Planning Authority cannot demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land.

5.1.7 Paragraph 74 of the NPPF requires that local planning authorities should identify and update annually a supply of specific deliverable sites sufficient to provide a minimum of five years' worth of housing against their housing requirement set

out in adopted strategic policies, or against their local housing need where the strategic policies are more than five years old.

5.1.8 Paragraph 74 additionally states that local authorities should identify the following buffers on top of their five-year housing land supply calculations:

(a) 5% to ensure choice and competition in the market for land; or

(b) 10% where the local planning authority wishes to demonstrate a five-year supply of deliverable sites through an annual position statement or recently adopted plan, to account for any fluctuations in the market during that year; or

(c) 20% where there has been significant under delivery of housing over the previous three years, to improve the prospect of achieving the planned supply.

5.1.9 The government's most recently published HDT (2021 Measurement, published January 2022) confirms that Wealden only achieved 82% of its housing requirement. As such, a 20% buffer should be applied to the Council's current five-year housing supply figure.

5.1.10 WDC is currently unable to demonstrate a five-year housing land supply as required by the NPPF. The Council's most recent monitoring report on their five-year supply as of 1st April 2021 (published in December 2021) confirms that the Council could demonstrate 3.66 years supply when applying the 20% buffer. Authorities which cannot meet at least 85% of their Housing Delivery Test (HDT) should apply a 20% buffer to their housing land supply position.

5.1.11 There is no doubt that housing need is pressing and a significant consideration in the planning balancing judgement to be made on this application. In such circumstances, the NPPF is clear, planning permission should be granted unless the adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits when considered against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.

Pre-Application Engagement

5.1.12 Obsidian has undertaken engagement with officers and members of WDC, and other key stakeholders, and this has significantly informed the application which has now been submitted. The pre-application discussions with officers are set out within section 2.2 of this report, and the key feedback was that the site is likely to be deemed acceptable for residential development, but that the initial scheme put forward (95 homes) was too dense. Subsequent revisions to 80 and 70 homes were also not considered to be reflect the surrounding context, and strong advice was given by officers that the site's capacity should be in the region of 60 homes.

<u>Relevant Nearby Decisions</u>

5.1.13 Officers highlighted a recent planning decision on land west of Five Ash Down as being of particular relevance. That application (ref: WD/2020/1088/MAO) was refused by planning committee, primarily due to the visual and rural setting of the site, and the loss of an existing field extending development between Coopers Green and Five Ash Down.

5.1.14 Obsidian have paid close attention to the Five Ash Down proposal as it sits close to the subject site at Mockbeggars Farm. There are, however, clear differences between the two sites. Principally, Mockbeggars Farm is far more visually enclosed. It is surrounded by development on all sides and is well contained by this existing development and mature vegetation. It is also set behind London Road. The land at Mockbeggars Farm does not make any perceptible contribution to the separation of settlements.

5.1.15 Nevertheless, Obsidian have sought to set development back from the London Road, maintaining the existing mature hedgerow as far as is practicable. The development is deliberately low density, as strongly encouraged by officers through the pre-application process, and significant areas of open space will be provided. This will include a 20m buffer to the Round Wood Ancient Woodland, and additional tree and hedgerow planting.

5.1.16 The Five Ash Down proposal is of interest to the consideration of the scheme at Mockbeggars Farm. There are however clear differences between that proposal and the scheme put forward at Mockbeggars Farm, and Obsidian have made a positive response through the pre-application process by reducing proposed density considerably and incorporating significant new areas of open space and opportunities for BNG.

5.1.17 Officers also highlighted a historic Secretary of State decision to dismiss an appeal at Downlands Farm, a very large strategic site to the north west of Uckfield, stretching from Rocks Road to London Road. Geographically the site sits close to Mockbeggars Farm, being on the opposing side of London Road at its eastern extremity. However, the proposal was not of comparable scale at 750 homes proposed, plus very substantial levels of employment, education, retail and community uses. 13 years have passed since the appeal was determined and the material considerations attached to this site bear limited weight in determining this planning application.

5.1.18 The Secretary of State provided commentary on the accessibility of Downlands Farm, noting that it is sited further away from the town centre facilities than the two Bird In Eye sites, which were duly under consideration at the same time. This weighed against a grant of permission for the scheme.

5.1.19 Ultimately however, the Secretary of State elected to dismiss the appeal as the proposals were clearly contrary to the development plan in place at the time. In weighing up the planning balance, the key reasons counting against the scheme were stated to be landscape impact, traffic impact and ecological considerations. Each of these are site specific to the historic proposals at Downlands Farm.

5.1.20 It is critically important to consider the respective material planning contexts and considerations in place during the determination of the Downlands Farm appeal in February 2009, and the current planning context in 2022. Not least, the planning system has changed very considerably; the South East Plan (SEP) was adopted shortly after the appeal decision was issued, replacing the East Sussex Structure Plan which had been in place at the time. The SEP was subsequently revoked, and the NPPF published. This has brought with it the 'severity test' for the consideration of highways matters.

5.1.21 WDC's development plan is now considerably out of date. There have been at least two failed attempts to adopt development plan documents since 2009, and

WDC's five-year supply position is severely under delivering much needed new homes. This was not the case in February 2009.

5.1.22 This appeal decision is of some interest to the consideration of the proposals at Mockbeggars Farm. However, when considering the vast difference between the two sites, the two proposals, and the planning context in place 13 years ago, it is considered that the relevance of the Downlands Farm decision has diminished and is of very little significance to the consideration of the current application for Mockbeggars Farm. In particular, the principal reasons for refusal related to the site-specific issues of ecology and landscape impact. With regard to traffic and accessibility considerations, the Inspector and Secretary of State's conclusions related to an entirely different planning context, a significantly larger scheme and a planning system which did not include the NPPF's severity test. It is therefore clear that the proposals for Mockbeggars Farm must be judged on their own merit, and with an updated consideration of the sustainability of the site in the context of local and national planning policy.

Stakeholder Engagement

5.1.23 In addition to the pre-application engagement with WDC officers, the applicant has undertaken a period of public consultation with the local community, local councillors and parish councils. Letters were sent to 302 local addresses, and the following local stakeholders were contacted in November 2021:

- Cllr Peter Waldock, ward councillor for Uckfield North
- Cllr Claire Dowling, county division member for Uckfield North
- Buxted Parish Council
- Uckfield Parish Council
- Maresfield Parish Council

5.1.24 A website was launched, and the consultation was covered on the local news platform UckfieldNews.com.

5.1.25 Over the course of the consultation, 46 members of the public provided direct feedback. The key themes are set out within the Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) which accompanies this application.

5.2 Impact Upon the Character and Appearance of The Area

Ancient Woodland

5.2.1 When determining planning applications, the NPPF states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats, such as ancient woodland, should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists (paragraph 180c).

5.2.2 In this case, there is no ancient woodland within the site, but there is a pocket of Ancient Woodland close to the site. Round Wood lies adjacent to the site's south and eastern boundaries and is designated as Ancient Woodland. A Preliminary

Ecological Assessment has been undertaken for the site, and in accordance with Natural England's standing advice, has recommended the scheme be developed with a 15m 'buffer zone' from the edge of the woodland, in accordance with Natural England's standing advice.

5.2.3 Whilst a buffer of at least 15m has been advised, following pre-application advice received the proposal has been designed with a greater buffer of 20m to the Ancient Woodland to provide added protection against adverse harm. The 20m buffer is shown on the plan reference C101.

5.2.4 With the buffer, the site can accommodate 60 units, whilst maintaining an appropriate density of dwellings for this edge of settlement location, without having any adverse impact on the Ancient Woodland and creating opportunities for ecological gain.

Landscape and Visual Impact

5.2.5 A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) has been prepared by Aspect Landscape Planning and has been submitted alongside this application.

5.2.6 The site is not covered by any qualitative landscape designations at a national or local level. Furthermore, it is considered that neither the site nor its immediate setting represent a "valued landscape" with reference to para 174(a) of the NPPF.

5.2.7 As a result of the proposals for residential development, whilst some change is acknowledged to the immediate landscape character of the site itself, the change is restricted to the site only and reduces within the immediate setting and furthermore in the wider setting. The established vegetation structure and mature treescape which exists within the locality provides positive landscape features, which also help to integrate the existing built form and settlement edge of Uckfield within the wider landscape. This ensures that the proposals within the site are not readily perceived and as a result would not have a significant impact upon the wider landscape character. Furthermore, the site itself is influenced far more greatly by a number of urbanising components associated with the existing development around the site, than the wider rural landscape setting of the character area. The retention of the vast majority of the mature vegetation structure and treescape will ensure the character of the London Road will be maintained.

5.2.8 The density, height, bulk, scale and massing of the proposed development is reflective of the immediately adjoining residential areas and as such will not appear over-bearing, out of scale or out of character in terms of its appearance with existing development in the vicinity.

5.2.9 Views of the site are limited and are restricted to the immediate setting only, and only experience glimpsed or partial views between the retained existing vegetation structure, predominantly from the immediately adjoining London Road and the track north-east of the Site, with potential glimpsed views from the PRoW (UCK 1/1). The existing mature vegetation structure and built form associated with the site and the immediate localised setting provides a strong degree of visual and physical containment to the site. Where there are views available, the proposals would be seen, for the most part, in the context of the existing built environment which is evident in views which will ensure the proposed development will not appear out of context to that which already exists.

5.2.10 It is considered that the proposals comply with the aims and objectives of the NPPF, adopted Wealden District Core Strategy adopted 2013 and the saved policies from the Wealden Local Plan adopted 1998. It is therefore considered that the site and receiving environment have the capacity to accommodate the proposals. The proposals will not result in a significant change to the landscape character or visual environment over the longer term and, as such, it is considered that the proposed development can be successfully integrated in this location and is supportable from a landscape and visual perspective.

5.3 Design and Layout

5.3.1 National Planning Policy emphasises the importance of design and new development. The overall aim for the scheme was to create a development which respects the character and appearance of the area.

5.3.2 The proposed design considerations have been set out in the Design & Access statement and the accompanying plans, which includes a detailed analysis of the site, justification for the layout, scale, amount, and external appearance. The application is submitted in outline with all matters reserved aside from access. Nevertheless, indicative designs have been presented, and have been informed by the Wealden Design Guide (2008).

Design and Layout

5.3.3 Local Plan policy EN27(a) requires developments to ensure the scale, form, site coverage, density and design of the development and the use of materials and landscaping to respect the character of the area and promote local distinctiveness.

5.3.4 Specific comments from the pre-application engagement on the layout have been taken into consideration. This has led to increased landscaping and open space and fewer dwellings including the removal of maisonettes. 95 dwellings were originally proposed, and this has ultimately been revised down to 60 dwellings, in a mix of two-to-five bedroom to ensure a good mix throughout the site.

5.3.5 The architecture incorporates a unifying palette of materials that is considered to be appropriate to the locality, including a variety of locally sourced bricks, timber boarding and tile hanging with contrasting bricks used for details such as window headers or cills. Roofs will be a variety of gable or hipped, with plain red/ orange tiles.

5.3.6 The layout of the proposed scheme has been informed by the constraints and opportunities offered by the site such as the Ancient Woodland buffer zone and lack of existing vehicular access. The layout respects its setting as a transition between the dense urban area of Uckfield and the wider countryside surrounding the settlement and has been conceived on a landscape led basis providing ample green open spaces.

5.3.7 The indicative accommodation schedule is summarised in the Design & Access Statement. A range of housing tenures and sizes are proposed to create a mixed and vibrant community. In order to best meet local market needs the mix has been focused on the small-to-medium sized households with a predominance of 2- and 3-bedroom homes. The dwelling types are terraced, semi-detached, and detached houses.

5.3.8 The dwelling mix has been designed in excess of Nationally Described Space Standards, and each dwelling has been provided with outdoor amenity space with many plots enjoying frontages onto the site's open spaces and generously landscaped site boundaries, in accordance with Policy LR5 of the Local Plan and the Wealden Design Guide.

Open Space and Landscaping

5.3.9 The proposed development features a high-quality landscaping scheme and significant areas of open space. This includes a 20m buffer to the Ancient Woodland plus areas of recreational space including potential for community gardens and children's play to encourage health and wellbeing of individuals and the community through nature based activities.

5.3.10 SUDS are proposed, which addition to their drainage function will provide ecological and visual value, whilst tree-lined streets are proposed in line with paragraph 131 of the NPPF. Ornamental tree, hedge and shrub planted is also proposed, including fruiting and flowering species offering wildlife interest. New hedgerow planting is also proposed, set back from the visibility splays.

5.3.11 The submitted Landscape Strategy Plan should be referred to, as well as the Design and Access Statement, for more detailed considerations of the open space and landscape strategy.

Density

5.3.12 Density, site layout and detailed design are derived from on analysis of the surrounding context as a transition between urban and rural.

5.3.13 The proposal has responded to comments made in the pre-application meeting over the density of the development, to reduce this from 95 to 60 dwellings. The density is 16.6 dwellings per hectare and is characterised by medium- and low-density parcels that reflect the settlement character of the surrounding area whilst providing much needed homes.

5.4 Transport

5.4.1 The highway impacts of the proposed development have been carefully considered. DHA Transport have prepared a Transport Assessment which provides a detailed critique of the development, its impact on the highways network and any highways safety implications.

Access

5.4.2 The site access comprises a new priority junction features visibility splays which are in excess of those required by the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB). A Stage 1 Road Safety Audit has been undertaken and a designer's response has adequately addressed the issues raised.

Junction Capacity & Trip Generation

5.4.3 Junction capacity assessments have been carried out at key junctions on the highway network in proximity of the site. All junctions assessed have been demonstrated to operate within their design capacity in all scenarios, with the one exception being the London Road/A272 junction.

5.4.4 Movements from the A272 turning right onto London Road are demonstrated to exceed the practical capacity at this arm of the junction in the AM peak hour in the 2027 scenario, with or without the development. It is noted however that the development impact on this arm is minimal, with only a 1.68 percent uplift in traffic movements. This has been demonstrated to result in an increase of 0.4 queuing vehicles in the AM peak hour, with no increase in the PM peak hour.

5.4.5 The proposed development will generate the equivalent of one vehicle movement every two minutes during the AM and PM peak traffic hours. The impact can clearly not be considered as 'severe' with reference to NPPF paragraph 111.

5.4.6 Given the above, it is concluded that the proposed development should not have any adverse transport impacts and therefore there should be no sound transport-based objections to the proposals.

Accessibility

5.4.7 The site occupies an accessible location. The nearest bus stop is located approximately 300m to the north on London Road, with a further pair of bus stops 400m to the south. These provide a wide range of services to Uckfield Town Centre, Tunbridge Wells, Haywards Heath, East Grinstead and intervening towns and villages.

5.4.8 The nearest railway station to the site is Uckfield, located approximately 2.2km to the south. The station is operated by Southern and provides on average an hourly service to London Bridge via Crowborough and Edenbridge. The station is accessible by foot, taking approximately 25 minutes to walk from the site, however this journey averages only 15 minutes door-to-door using the bus services summarised above and is a 4-minute drive. Car and cycle parking are available at Uckfield railway station as well as taxi services.

5.4.9 In terms of services and amenities there is a public house in close proximity, with a good range of facilities within Uckfield to the south. The nearest convenience store is only 1.1km to the south, a 14 minute walk.

5.5 Flood Risk and Drainage

5.5.1 A Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) prepared by Glanville has been submitted in support of the application. The site is at a low risk of flooding due to it laying in fluvial Flood Zone 1.

5.5.2 The development will not increase the flood risk, either on this site or to neighbouring properties, and so complies fully with the NPPF 2021 and current PPG.

5.5.3 A drainage scheme has been proposed for the disposal of surface and foul water from the development. This will include sustainable drainage techniques to accommodate surface water run-off from the site. Flood risk will not increase either on-site or elsewhere due to the proposed development.

5.6 Developer Contributions and Affordable housing

Affordable Housing

5.6.1 The scheme will provide 60 dwellings, requiring the scheme to have a provision of affordable units, as per the policy set out in Wealden's Affordable Housing Delivery Local Plan (2016).

5.6.2 Of the 21 affordable dwellings, 12 are proposed to be 2-bedroom houses, eight are proposed for 3-bedroom houses, and one is proposed for a 4-bedroom house, however this mix is provided for indicative purposes only.

5.6.3 Of the 21 affordable dwellings, it is envisaged that eight will be social rented units, nine will be affordable rented units, and four will be intermediate affordable (shared ownership), as per the requirement of the Affordable Housing Local Plan.

5.6.4 All affordable units are designed to meet Nationally Described Space Standards (NDSS).

5.6.5 The proposed development also includes 3 custom/self-build plots, representing 5% of the total.

5.6.6 For further information on affordable housing proposed for the scheme refer to the submitted Design & Access Statement, Accommodation Schedule, and drawings.

S106 Heads of Terms

5.6.7 In addition to providing affordable housing on the basis above, Obsidian confirms that they will provide appropriate infrastructure contributions, where requests are proportionate, the relevant tests are met, the infrastructure is not already being provided through CIL and the infrastructure requested is necessary to make the development acceptable.

5.6.8 In this instance, Obsidian are not aware of any particular or specific infrastructure requirements over and above those provided through CIL. The Section 106 is therefore considered to be limited to matters of affordable housing and potentially the management of open space.

5.7 Other Matters

Heritage and Archaeology

5.7.1 A Heritage Statement has been prepared by Savills and is submitted with this application.

5.7.2 The Statement concludes that there are no known heritage assets on the site and it is not considered that any Listed Buildings in the area, including Budletts House, will be affected by the proposed development.

5.7.3 Any archaeological fieldwork mitigation considered necessary could be carried out under the terms of a suitably worded archaeological planning condition set out under the granting of planning consent.

Agricultural Land Classification

5.7.4 The application site is classified as Grade 3 (pre-1988 classification) according to DEFRA's agricultural land classifications maps. It is also the case that the vast majority of the area around Uckfield is also Grade 3 meaning that there would not be any sequentially preferable sites around Uckfield in Agricultural Land Classification terms.

Ecology

5.7.5 An Ecology Appraisal has been undertaken by Aspect Ecology and accompanies this application. The site has been assessed for potential impacts on protected species and concludes that it is unlikely that the proposal will result in significant harm to the ecology of the site appropriate avoidance, mitigation, and compensation measures.

5.7.6 In terms of priority species, activity surveys for bats were carried out and found that hedgerows and woodland supported foraging and commuting bats, particularly the central hedgerow and off-site ancient woodland. The vast majority of bats recorded at the site were Common and Soprano Pipistrelle which are common and widespread and tolerant of lighting.

5.7.7 The ancient woodland will be buffered by 20m from development, thereby retaining foraging and commuting opportunities. The access road will fragment the central hedgerow but in order to compensate for this small loss of habitat, new hedgerow planting at the north-west, north and north-east site boundaries will provide enhanced connectivity compared to the existing situation as these boundaries are currently formed of garden fences and a short well maintained hedgerow. Long-term nesting opportunities will be maintained, if not enhanced, under the proposals through new landscape planting and provision of nest boxes.

5.7.8 Precautionary safeguards will also be implemented during vegetation clearance in respect of dormouse, reptiles and amphibians.

5.7.9 The identified habitats of greater ecological values include five hedgerows and the abutting ancient woodlands. As noted, the ancient woodland will be protected with a 20m buffer to development and will therefore not to be impacted by the development proposals. The proposals include the loss of small sections of hedgerows for construction of the access road. However, new native species-rich hedgerow planting, particularly at the eastern site boundaries will compensate for this small loss of hedgerow and overall provide a net gain in hedgerows on site. All other hedgerows will be retained and protected during the construction phase of the proposals.

5.7.10 NPPF para 174(d) states that decisions should contribute and enhance the natural and local environment by providing net gains for biodiversity. The new Environment Act outlines a requirement for developments to provide a biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% by law although this requirement is to be phased in for November 2023 and is therefore not a legal requirement at the time of this application.

5.7.11 The Design & Access Statement outlines the ecological mitigation and enhancement measures proposed. These include:

- Protection and enhancement of the Ancient Woodland to the south and east boundary of the site with a 20m buffer to development;
- Existing vegetation including trees along the boundaries of the site would be retained and strengthened with new mixed tree and shrub planting and new hedgerow planting;
- Attractive mixed, native tree belts with an understorey of mixed, native shrubs would be provided along the boundaries;
- Proposed planting would all be native and locally appropriate to increase the biodiversity value of the site;
- SUDS features utilising green infrastructure, including swales which will provide ecological benefits; and
- Integration of bat and bird boxes into new buildings.

Trees and Hedgerows

5.7.12 An Arboricultural Development Report has been prepared by *tree:* Fabrik and has been submitted with the application.

5.7.13 A total of 35 individual trees, 3 groups, 6 hedgerows and 1 woodland were assessed within the survey schedule including 10 category 'A' trees and woodland, 11 category 'B' trees, 21 category 'C' trees, groups and hedgerows and 3 'U' category trees and groups.

5.7.14 This report concludes that whilst some tree loss will occur, the trees identified for removal are of low quality (seven trees of category 'C' and 'U') and in the context of the tree stock, the removal is limited. The trees identified for retention can be adequately protected during demolition and construction phases in accordance with BS5837 (2012) and can be successfully integrated within the proposed development.

5.7.15 A small section of internal hedgerow is required to be removed to facilitate internal infrastructure, however, this is poorly connected and new hedgerow planning with native species is proposed meaning the loss would not have a significant impact on the appearance of the local landscape. A section of boundary hedgerow is also required to be removed to provide access to the site.

5.7.16 New tree and hedge planting is proposed as part of the landscape strategy which will result in a net gain in the distribution of canopy cover and provide a cohesive

and sustainable landscape that will contribute positively to the local and wider environment in the medium and long term.

Sustainable Design and Construction

5.7.17 The scheme has been designed to include a range of sustainability principles in terms of the layout, natural resources and minimising environmental impacts. The scheme seeks to deliver a range of enhancements with respect to issues such as the quality of surface water run-off, the ecological and recreational value of the site as set out in section 7.1 of the Design & Access Statement and the accompanying Energy Statement prepared by Green Tiger.

5.7.18 Obsidian are committed to sustainable design principles and their schemes regularly exceed building regulation standards, planning policy requirements and industry benchmarks. At Mockbeggars Farm, the scheme will follow a fabric first approach, and will incorporate Air Source Heat Pumps. This is demonstrated by an Energy and Sustainability Report which has been prepared by Green Tiger Sustainability and accompanies this application. As a result, the development will achieve a 20% reduction in carbon emissions over the requirements of Part L.

6 Conclusion

6.1.1 This statement has been prepared in relation to an outline planning application for 60 residential dwellings (including 35% affordable housing) at Mockbeggars Farm.

6.1.2 The application follows a thorough pre-application engagement process with officers of Wealden District Council, which has resulted in a reduction in dwelling numbers on the site from 95 as originally proposed, to 60 as submitted. As a result, the scheme put forward is of a low density, considered to be appropriate to the context and surroundings, whilst significant areas of open space are proposed including a 20m buffer to the Ancient Woodland and potential for community gardens, along with swales and children's play.

6.1.3 The site is considered to fall within a sustainable location. It benefits from the excellent range of services on offer in Uckfield and given its location close to Maresfield and Five Ash Down, it will help to support the vitality of viability of these settlements in accordance with paragraph 79 of the NPPF.

6.1.4 The application, whilst submitted in outline form, includes many indicative details. Obsidian have paid close regard to the landscape, environment and other sustainability considerations, and have followed guidance and requirements of local and national planning policy including the Wealden Design Guide. As a result, the indicative scheme provides the following key benefits:

- 60 new homes including 21 affordable homes (35%) to help provide much needed housing in an area with a substantial shortfall of five year housing land supply;
- 5% self/custom built units;
- Significant areas of Public Open Space including food growing areas and children's play areas;
- Tree-lined streets, additional trees and new hedgerow planting;
- 20m buffer to the Round Wood ancient woodland; and
- Sustainable construction and renewable energy generation, equating to a 20% improvement over Part L requirements.

6.1.5 At present, Wealden District Council is unable to demonstrate a five-year supply of housing land and so the ability to deliver housing at this sustainable location should be viewed favourably. Furthermore, in accordance with paragraph 11(d) of the NPPF, planning permission must be granted unless any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits.

6.1.6 The NPPF is clear that Local Planning Authorities should approach decision taking in a positive way to foster the delivery of sustainable development.

6.1.7 The site is therefore suitable, available and achievable and is considered deliverable in order to meet the Council's immediate housing need.

6.1.8 In weighing up the planning balance, reviewing all submitted information and assessing the proposal, it is absolutely clear that the overall benefits of the proposal outweighs any perceived harm.

6.1.9 For the reasons given above, we respectfully request the Council give this planning application favourable consideration and grant planning permission for the proposed development at Mockbeggars Farm.