PINS Ref: APP/C1435/W/23/3330872
Land at Mockbeggars Farm, Uckfield – WD/2022/0648/MAO

Uckfield TC Statement of Case for Public Hearing – commencing 06.02.24

1.0 Introduction

1.1 We would like to thank the Inspector for providing Uckfield Town Council (UTC) with an opportunity to present local information relevant to the site and the surrounding context.

1.2 We ask that the following matters be prioritised for consideration within this hearing. These matters have not been sufficiently scrutinised and whilst raised by residents, no mitigation has been forthcoming by the appellant.

1.3 The level of consultation undertaken by the appellants has been unacceptable and contrary to Wealden's Statement of Community Involvement (2020).[1] Adjacent property owners and residents of Ringles Cross Cottages (who if the application were successful would see their ability to park, removed).[2] were missed from the 300 leaflet drop to residents. At no point were Buxted PC or UTC invited to meet with the appellants and had more engagement been undertaken with these parties, a more thorough understanding of the landscape and heritage of the wider site could have been explored within their independent evaluations. Despite the reduction proposed in housing numbers from initial pre-application discussions, there has been no significant change or understanding given to the landscape and historic nature of this setting to mitigate the concerns raised by local residents and both parish/town councils.

1.4 With local knowledge of the site and the adjacent land and infrastructure, UTC strongly objects to this planning application. UTC understands the need for housing but supports the right type of housing in the right location. UTC wishes to challenge the appellants, and support the case outlined by residents, with an overview on the:

- Location of the application outside the development boundary;
- Impact on ancient woodland, wet woodland and hydrology;
- Highway safety and impact on the existing highway network;
- Impact on the ecological value and biodiversity of this site, and connecting areas;
- Impact on heritage and non-designated heritage assets;

2.0 Location of application outside the development boundary

2.1 The application does not maintain the development pattern of Uckfield town or Buxted Parish; breaching existing parish boundaries and conflicting with WDC LP 1998 Chapter 17 (17.4) SP GD2 and DC17[3]. The scale of this application would severely impose on the rural setting and cluster of properties forming the chain of homes along London Road and Coopers Green Road. This small area is rich in heritage with five listed properties, a registered park and garden and a number of non-designated heritage assets. Including properties historically linked to the origins of the Buxted Park estate dating back to the

[1] Wealden DC, Statement of Community Involvement, 2020, p.35, para.8.7
https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Final-SCI-doc-REV-1.pdf
[2] Adjoining neighbour/letter, Wealden DC Planning Portal, 2023, uploaded 02.06.23
file:///C:/Users/UTC001/Downloads/WD-2022-0648-MAO_Representations_22.0648%20Maidment%2002.06.2023_Redacted.pdf
[3] Wealden DC, Adopted Local Plan, 1998, p.161, Chap. 17, para.17.4
https://www.wealden.gov.uk/UploadedFiles/Chapter17.PDF

12th Century[4], carriageways supporting Royal visits to Lord and Lady Nevill, Victorian cottages at Ringles Cross, Durrant House used for military purposes in WW2 and a line of homes built in the 1930s in Coopers Green Road.

2.2 The site of the application on the farthest boundaries of Buxted Parish and Uckfield Town would make access to amenities challenging. With no change to infrastructure or amenities within Buxted or Uckfield, retail, leisure and service sector industries all still remain central within the town. The scale of this application presents an unacceptable form of development in open countryside outside of the Uckfield development boundary, on the fringe of Buxted parish. It would dissolve the distinct characteristics and defined villages of Buxted, Five Ash Down and Maresfield.

3.0 Impact on ancient woodland, wet woodland and hydrology

3.1 The application is contrary to the preservation of ancient woodland at Round Wood and other key parcels of ancient, wet woodland and hedgerow which create a corridor of connectivity for habitats east to west from Views Wood through to Butchers Wood (appendix A).

3.2 Mr Waldock (June 2022)[5] stated that "*nearly all the woodland included can be considered as Ancient Woodland because it has existed since at least 1600AD*." This is further enforced by the National Character Area Profile 122 – High Weald, which describes the interconnection of ancient woodlands, ghyll woodlands, wooded heaths and shaws, and in particular "*smallholdings with extensive archaeology*" as key characteristics."[5]

3.3 The proposed buffer zone between Round Wood and the development is most concerning. 15m is the bare minimum required[6], with no due consideration for other impacts such as the close proximity of property no. 52[7] and play provision within this buffer zone, creating increased noise and disturbance to wildlife as referenced in the decision of APP/C1435/W/22/3307820.[8] DEFRA (May 2022) stated that "*Ancient trees and woodlands are a part of our natural heritage and they are simply irreplaceable. They provide unique ecological conditions and support whole ecosystems that cannot be found anywhere else*."[9]

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[4] Buxted Park Handpicked Hotels, Our Hotel, 2024
https://www.handpickedhotels.co.uk/buxtedpark/welcome/inspiration/our-heritage
[5] Mr Waldock, Letter sent on 25 July 2022 to Wealden DC, Comments submitted to Hearing for 06.02.24
[6] Natural England and Forestry Commission, Guidance on Ancient Woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees, 2022 https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ancient-woodland-ancient-trees-and-veteran-trees-advice-for-making-planning-decisions
[7] Proposed Indicative Amenity Space Plan (Feb 2023) WD-2022-0648-MAO_Plans_20179 - C104 (garden sizes).pdf
[8] The Planning Inspectorate, Case Management System - Land at Bird in Eye Farm, Decision, Oct 2023
https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3307820
[9] DEFRA, Keepers of Time, 2022, p.4, para. 3
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/628f7bdfe90e070394dbc10f/Keepers_of_time_woodlands_and_trees_policy_England.pdf

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3.4 Uckfield is situated on a flood plain. Local knowledge and ArcGIS mapping[10] indicate the extent of water courses from little Horsted Roundabout to Black Down Roundabout all feeding directly into either the River Uck or the Shortbridge Stream; feeding into the River Ouse (appendix B).

3.5 Flood risk cannot be assessed solely on this site. Assessment of land immediately adjacent, including Mockbeggars Farm provides evidence of wet grassland and natural watercourses. As a farm for at least 400 years, there are two wells, one within the cellar with a drain system around the cellar walls with water and running sand present. Excess water exits the cellar and travels to a natural culvert to the gate and collects around the property on the land adjacent to the site, travelling towards the track leading to London Road. This culvert system consists of both surface water and ground water and continues further underneath London Road, towards Budletts Wood by the footpath Uckfield 1/1[11], and under the Uckfield bypass through culverts, before joining Shortbridge Stream[12].

3.6 There is a risk of impact from development on the headwaters, which could impact the ghyll woodlands, potentially changing the water quality feeding into Shortbridge Stream. These habitats are vulnerable to change and urbanisation.

3.7 The addition of SUDs to the existing hydrology could pose a risk of subsidence to Mockbeggars Farm and Spring Cottage, (clay soil). Development of this site and urban creep threatens the farm's livestock from ground water contamination. UTC request site visits undertaken during the hearing include Mockbeggars Farm. The appellant also needs to have due regard for the Uckfield Surface Water Management Plan 2016.[13]

3.8 All new SUD systems are utilising the streams that feed into the River Uck and River Ouse which historically flood. In November 2022 Uckfield had its flood defences tested as the river broke its banks during heavy and prolonged rainfall.

3.9 In this location, ALL natural hydrology leads to the Shortbridge Stream, which is an EU designated salmonid stream and has a Water Framework Directive[14]. Eels can be seen under the footbridge and in the ancient and wet woodland. No mitigation that UTC is aware of has been considered by the applicants to mitigate potential risks to biodiversity adjacent, within the ancient woodland (edge effect) and watercourses across Budletts Common and into Shortbridge Stream.

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[10] ArcGIS mapping – Layer titled Risk of flooding from Surface Water (1 in 30 yrs, 1 in 100 yrs and 1 in 1000 yrs) https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=befb443e57404e9b8707cddf28c56eca

[11] East Sussex Rights of Way, Map of Rights of Way, 2024 (https://row.eastsussex.gov.uk/standardmap.aspx)

[12] Mr Thompson, Evidence on the Water Environment, (Core Document – MRSG), 2024 Mockbeggars-Evidence-by-Dr.-Alan-Thompson.pdf (wealden.gov.uk)

[13] East Sussex County Council, Uckfield Surface Water Management Plan, 2016 https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/flooding/surface-water-management-plans

[14] DEFRA and Environment Agency, Water for Life & Livelihoods, 2009, pg.41 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7c387fe5274a25a914146f/annexD.pdf

4.0 Highway safety and impact on the existing highway network (pedestrian/vehicular)

4.1 With five planning applications approved in south Uckfield, there is already additional pressure on the highway network and no improvements planned for sustainable transport to support the town's growth. Uckfield's unusual linear design has one single road through the town centre which is divided by the river. The bypass is not dualled and restricts future modelling.

4.2 The new access point off London Road, changes to the layby and traffic calming measures, along with the congestion already experienced within the town with increased vehicular movements from other large-scale developments will naturally lead people away from Uckfield town centre, thus impacting the local economy. The Secretary of State (2009) dismissed an appeal of Land at Downlands Farm based on its inability to meet headroom figures of 300 units, and the subsequent impact on traffic movements.[15] In recent years, 1,846 units have either been approved or are being considered for approval in Uckfield including Cysleys farm, Eastbourne Road, Horsted Pond Farm, Mallard Drive, Ridgewood Farm/Seghers Place, Ridgewood House, Siggs Yard, South side of Lewes Road. All will directly impact the town's highway capacity.

4.3 East Sussex Highways in WD/2022/2785/MAO (June 2023),[16] advised that the modelling provided revealed the town centre junctions were already operating at capacity. Any temporary closure or restriction on the Bypass or High Street/London Road causes tail backs as far as Eastbourne Road and Lewes Road during peak times (AM and PM).

4.4 There is a significant level of police crash data for the area and data is prevalent in the northern areas of the town at Coopers Green, London Road and the A22 Uckfield Bypass. If traffic movements increase in this location for essential journeys, further stress will be placed on junction capacity and road user safety. Crash data from the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (appendix C) shows there have been two fatal incidents and a serious crash in Coopers Green Road. Ringles Cross junction continues to see frequent vehicular incidents, some more severe than others, and of those recorded, there have been five crashes (three serious). Visibility is limited at this junction and the navigation of two junctions in close proximity, parked cars from properties with no frontages and business entrances, all adds to the confusion (see appendix D).

4.5 East Sussex Walking & Cycling Strategy (June 2018)[17] referenced traffic movements in London Road/Ringles Cross. More recent data in May 2023 (appendix E) recorded 21,000 movements at Blackdown Roundabout, along the Maresfield Bypass and south and north at this roundabout along the Uckfield Bypass. Budletts roundabout and Blackdown roundabout on the A22 bypass record frequent accidents, and this area is

[15] Secretary of State, Appeal Decision APP/C1435/A/07/2046982/NWF – Downlands Farm, Uckfield (dated 25.02.09), 2009, CD12.2
[16] East Sussex Highways, Response to application WD/2022/2785/MAO, 2023 https://planning.wealden.gov.uk/plandisp.aspx?recno=159828
[17] Sustrans, East Sussex Walking & Cycling Strategy, 2018, p.8, Chap. 300 https://consultation.eastsussex.gov.uk/economy-transport-environment/escc-lcwip-2020/supporting_documents/Appendix%205I%20%20Sustrans%20LCWIP%20Report%20Uckfield%20Final.pdf

prone to deer crossing.

4.6 Residents already use minor roads as shortcuts including Church Street/Rocks Road and Snatts Road. This site is close to these roads which are narrow, poorly lit, with limited or narrow pavements. The traffic lights at the top of Church Street do not have pedestrian control, and in 2023 enquiries with ES Highways saw a crossing refused again due to the size of this junction.

4.7 The two applications of Downlands Farm and Mockbeggars are intrinsically linked; highway safety, capacity, ecological value, landscape, characteristics, heritage and historical importance. If approved, the SANGS car park to be sited in Snatts Road will cause increased vehicle movements where the road bends; having restricted visibility. For context, the car park at Horsted Green sees approx. 6,000 traffic movements per month. We also raised concerns with the safety of a new pedestrian access at the junction of Snatts Road and Rocks Road (see photos in appendix F).

4.8 Critical points that need to be considered:
(i) only one of the proposed pedestrian/cycle routes would be sufficiently attractive to users due to safety and accessibility;
(ii) The point at which pedestrians exit the development would be on a straight stretch of London Road which due to its rural setting sees vehicles accelerating either from Ringles Cross or from Budletts Roundabout. ES Highways raised concern of risk of side impact collisions and difficulties with judging speeds – asking for furniture to slow traffic;[18]
(iii) Pavements are narrow in Ringles Cross and poor visibility of pavements as a road user exiting the junction of Coopers Green Road onto London Road;
(iv) Existing pavements not easily accessible for those using disability units or pushchairs and no improvements proposed beyond Snatts Road;
(v)There is a limit to what can be achieved in road or pavement widening due to properties along the highway having minimal frontages or business entrances.

4.9 Walking distance from the site into town takes approximately 40- 45 minutes, and would present a steep uphill incline on return. It is therefore not suitable for commuters wishing to use the train station, or those less able, or with young children. With limited streetlighting it could increase fear of safety.

5.0 Impact on the ecological value and biodiversity of this site, and connecting areas

5.1 The revised NPPF requires all major developments to deliver 10% 'biodiversity net gain' from January 2024. The planting of new saplings in front of Round Wood to increase biodiversity net gain would not make up for the detrimental impact of this development on the ecological and historical value of adjacent land.

[18] East Sussex Highways, Response to planning app WD/2022/0648/MAO, 16.02.23 (CD11.2)
file://fp3/DEF$/Attachments/PLANNING/WD-2022-0648-MAO/Comments% (wealden.gov.uk)

5.2 The field layouts, habitats and woodlands in this area haven't changed since the 1600s and with a number of listed properties and non-designated heritage assets, it should form part of a conservation area. Mrs Blandford's statement[19] is one of many which document the key findings within the landscape adjacent to the site, and support the submissions by the Mockbeggars Residents' Steering Group.[20]

5.3 This is reinforced by Glanville's Flood Risk Assessment (Jan 2022) which highlights that "*Geological records published by the British Geological Survey (BGS) indicate the entire site is likely to be underlain by bedrock geology comprising sandstone from the Ardingly Sandstone Member*."[21]

5.4 We support the residents' submissions presenting evidence of the National Character Profile High Weald landscape (nationally protected) [22]
"A faulted landform of clays, sand and soft sandstones with outcrops of fissured sandrock and ridges running east–west, deeply incised and intersected with numerous gill streams forming the headwaters of a number of the major rivers – the Rother, Brede, Ouse and Medway – which flow in broad valleys." The emphasis on the connecting habitats and green corridor between the Buxted Park estate and West Park Local Nature Reserve can be further proved with photos of the same rocky outcrops in West Park Local Nature Reserve, Lake Wood, and the property grounds of Durrant House (appendix G).

5.5 Historically the northern aspect of Uckfield holds great importance and have an intrinsic link, from the SSSI of Buxted Park, to Budletts Common, land at Downlands Farm, Lake Wood (LWS), Shortbridge Stream and West Park LNR. The land on the western side of Coopers Green Road at Durrant Field is very different to the land in which Durrant House and Mockbeggars Farm sit. This wildlife corridor is rich in habitats supporting endangered species including the European eel, other amphibians, birds and mammals particularly bats, which have been further detailed in the Resident Steering Group's submissions[23] It is critical to the long-term biodiversity of the High Weald as outlined in the Wealden Green infrastructure Study (May 2017)[24]. As detailed by Mr Waldock, these features meet the criteria of the High Weald AONB. Adequate consideration has not been given to biodiversity, contrary to NPPF Paragraph 118 and the fragmentation of ecological networks.

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[19] Mrs Blandford, Adjoining/neighbour letter – Wealden Planning Portal, uploaded 13.06.23
WD-2022-0648-MAO_Representations_appreciating local landscapes (2).pdf
[20] Mockbeggars Residents' Steering Group, Submissions, 2023, CD14.6
Mockbeggars Farm objection (wealden.gov.uk)
[21] Glanville, Flood Risk Assessment & Drainage Strategy on behalf of Obsidian, 2022, CD3.9
WD-2022-0648-MAO_Statements-Reports_Flood Risk Assessment Part 1 (1).pdf
[22] Natural England, NCA Profile: 122 High Weald Landscape Profile, 2013
https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4706903212949504#:~:text=The%20High%20Weald%20National%20Character,per%20cent%20of%20the%20NCA.
[23] Mockbeggars Residents' Steering Group, Submissions, 2023, CD14.6
Mockbeggars Farm objection (wealden.gov.uk)
[24] Chris Blandford Associates, Wealden Green Infrastructure Study, 2017
https://www.wealden.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/planning-policy-evidence-base/bio-diversity-and-green-infrastructure/

5.6 The site sits adjacent to landscape and property which meets the criteria of a Local Green Space within the NPPF – with beauty, history, tranquility and wildlife as all key considerations. It therefore holds particular local significance to local residents.

5.7 The proposed layout of the development sees property boundaries abut right up to the boundary of Mockbeggars Farm; currently a smallholding with livestock grazing by the boundary. As far as we were aware, livestock had to be further than 400m from any other residence other than your own. The smallholding has been part of the established farm for over 400 years, and could now be at risk, as harmonious coexistence is unlikely in such close proximity. The noise emanating from geese, cockerels, chickens and pigs already established on the smallholding would be protected by the 'Agent of Change' principle which we would argue, would cause an unacceptable noise level to dwellers of the properties on the boundary. Had the appellant visited Mockbeggars Farm, they would have seen this for themselves. Any high fencing would pose a risk to existing wildlife corridors and hydrology.

5.8 Referencing the decision of APP/C1435/W/23/3322028[25], we feel that due to the substantial evidence of High Weald characteristics in this location and the need for these areas to be conserved as per NPPF 182, the development would pose significant harm to the character and appearance of this area.

6.0 Impact on heritage and non-designated heritage assets

6.1 UTC supports the concerns raised by residents living in the immediate vicinity of the application on the grounds that the development could pose significant harm to adjacent properties with heritage and historical value.

6.2 There are five listed properties in the local area of Coopers Green/London Road[26] and a further five properties which meet the criteria of a non-designated heritage asset due to architectural merit, their historic association and aesthetic value (see appendix H).

6.3 Buxted Park estate is Grade II listed and a registered rural park and garden, which is further designated as a SSSI and National Monument for medieval landscape.

6.4 Without repeating the extent of detail that residents living in these adjacent properties have presented,[27] NPPF at paragraph 199 states "*that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets through an understanding of the impact of a proposed development on their significance and this is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance*. The conservation reports are disappointing and do not appreciate the rural and tranquil nature of the area that this application is sited in.

[25] The Planning Inspectorate, Case Management System - Land adjacent Burfield, Decision, Jan 2014
https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3322028
[26] Historic England, Mapping tool, 2024
Search the List: Map Search | Historic England
[27] Mockbeggars Residents' Steering Group, Submissions, 2023, CD14.6
Mockbeggars Farm objection (wealden.gov.uk)

6.5 In APP/C1435/W/22/3307820[28] the Inspector found that the "*proposal would conflict with spatial planning objective SP02 of the CS which requires protection of the historic environment.*" It recognised that in determining planning applications, account should be taken to enhancing the significance of a heritage asset. In the case of Durrant House, Mockbeggars Farm and the Barn at Mockbeggars Farm, which sit immediately adjacent to the site, the view from their property would be lost, the biodiversity and hydrology of the site which maintains the High Weald key characteristics would be at significant harm, and the history of this very special area, would lose its significance. As in NPPF Para. 199, great weight needs to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets.

7.0 Conclusion

7.1 With no direct contact being made by the appellants with residents directly adjacent and in view of the site, before or during the submission, the policies outlined in appendix I should be taken into account when considering this application as we feel that the statements of objections provide evidence that this application is contrary to these.

7.2 The King's Speech (Nov 2023) expressed that communities were to be put at the heart of the planning system. Our local experience and concerns with regards to landscape characteristics, hydrology, highway safety and heritage are in the public interest and this application will pose significant harm to the existing ecology and historical landscape of Mockbeggars, and Coopers Green.

[28] The Planning Inspectorate, Case Management System - Land at Bird in Eye Farm, Decision, Oct 2023 https://acp.planninginspectorate.gov.uk/ViewCase.aspx?caseid=3307820

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Mapping of ancient woodland

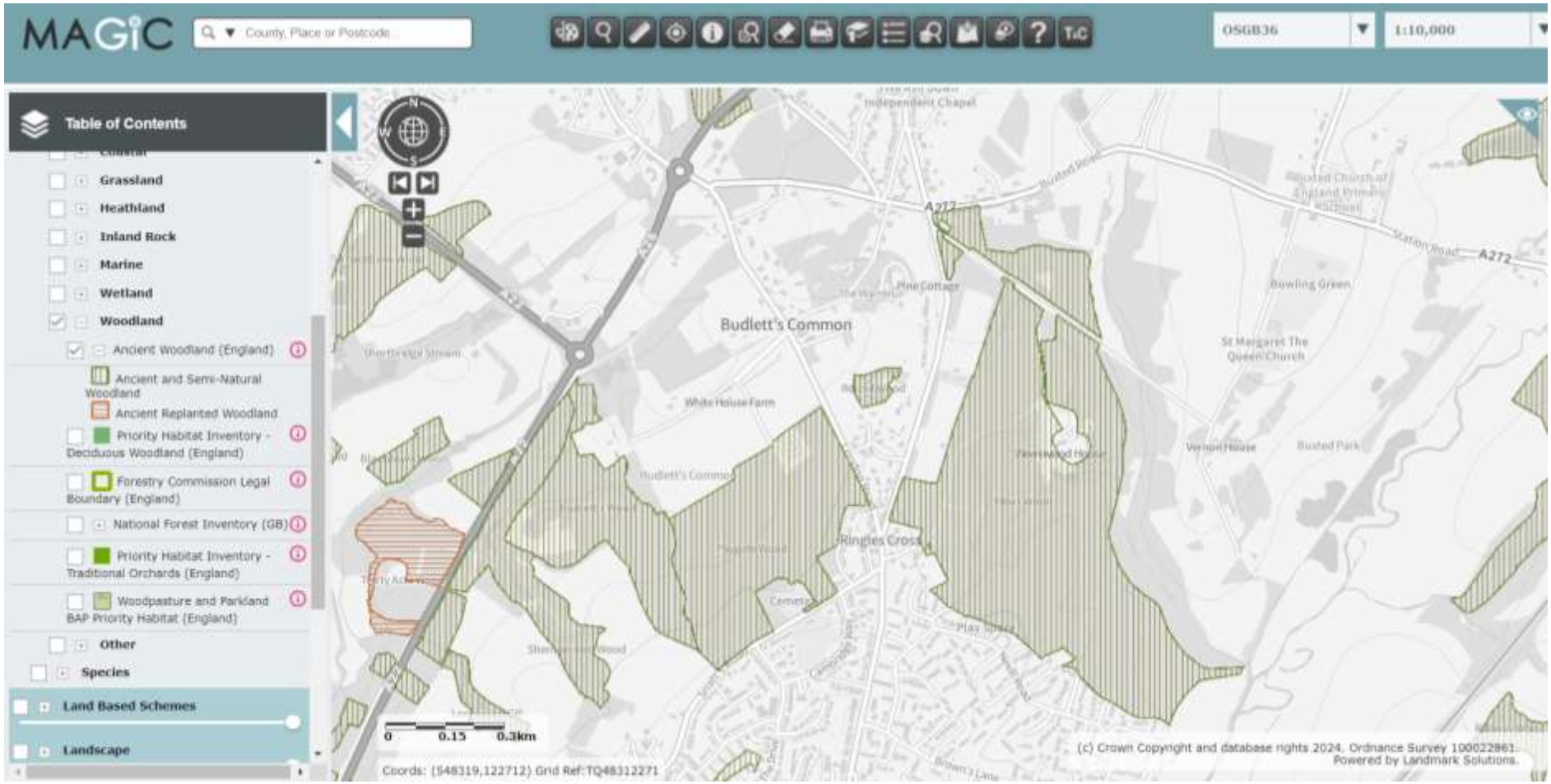


Fig 1. DEFRA Magic Maps – Layer of Ancient and Semi-Natural Woodland (Jan 2024)

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Appendix B – Mapping of 'Risk of flooding from surface water' (1 in 30 yrs, 1 in 100 yrs and 1 in 1000 yrs)

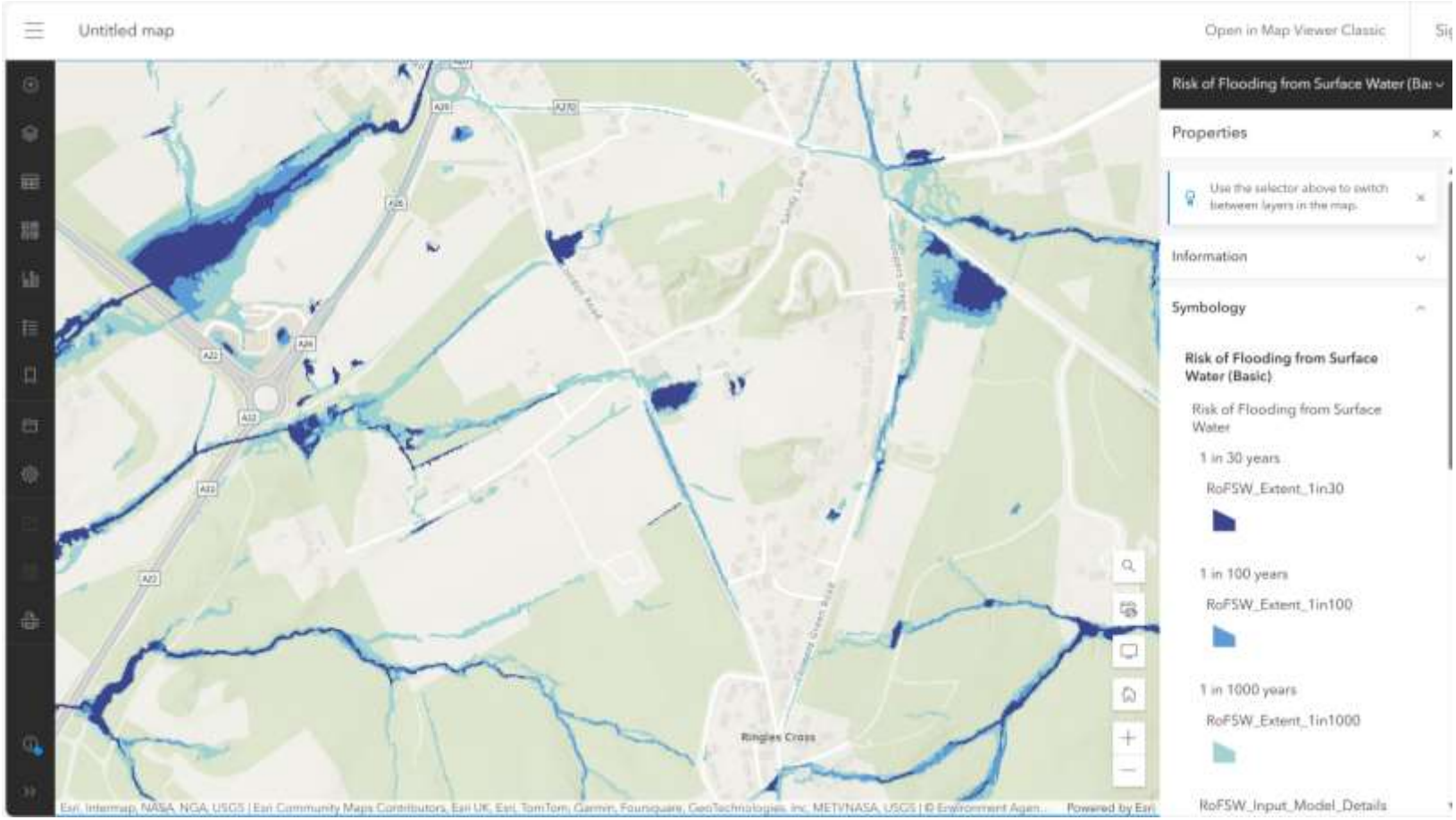


Fig. 2. ArcGIS Mapping
Risk of Flooding from Surface Water (Basic)
https://www.arcgis.com/apps/mapviewer/index.html?layers=befb443e57404e9b8707cddf28c56eca

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Appendix C – Crash data

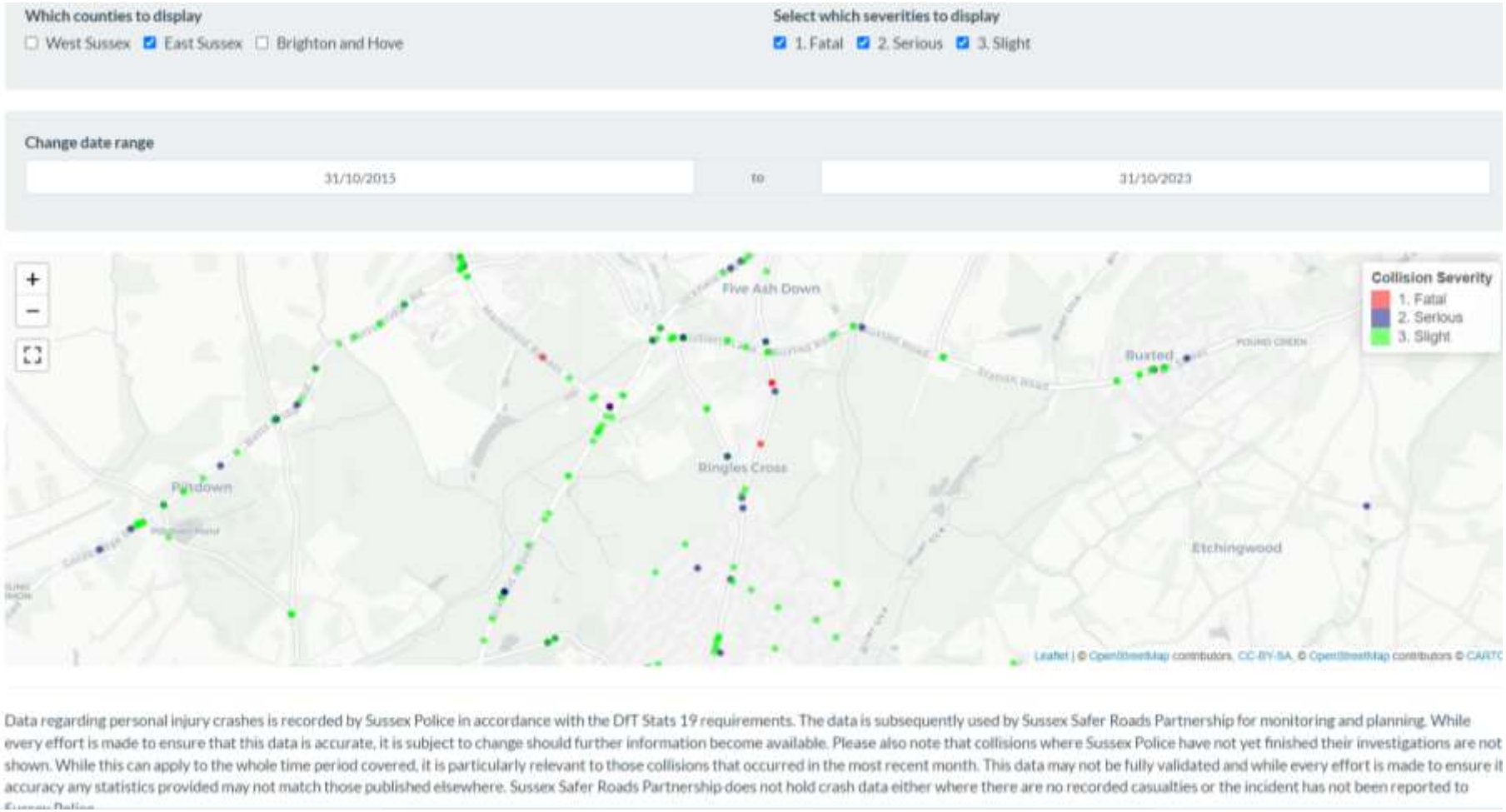


Fig.3: Fatal, serious and slight crash data – 31.10.2015 to 31.10.2023 (north of Uckfield)
Sussex Safer Roads Partnership Data Portal
Extract includes data back to 2015, to include normal traffic movements prior to pandemic.

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Appendix D – Photos of Snatts Road and junction of Coopers Green Road/London Road



Fig. 4: View from Claremont, looking west on Snatts Road. Vehicles have to move out on bend to pass parked vehicles day and night. This is close to the proposed entrance to the SANGS.



Fig. 5: View from Ringles Cross junction looking into Snatts Road. Parked vehicles line the entrance into Snatts Road daily



Fig. 6: View looking north from Coopers Green Road at junction with London Road

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Appendix E
Data from ES Highways – traffic movements at Blackdown roundabout (A22 Uckfield Bypass/A22 Maresfield Bypass)

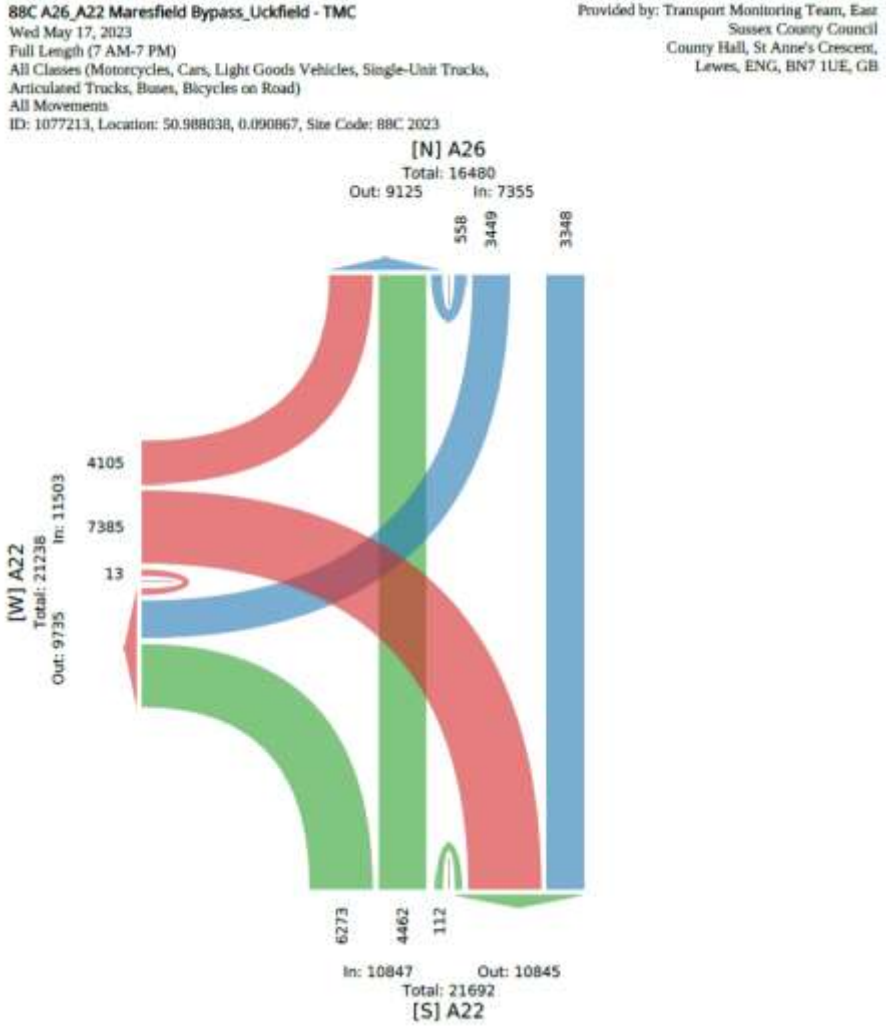


Fig. 7 – East Sussex Highways. Provided to Uckfield TC for purpose of compiling draft Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan earlier in 2023.

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Appendix F – Photo of Snatts Road on junction with Rocks Road (proposed pedestrian crossing in this location as part of Downlands Farm application)

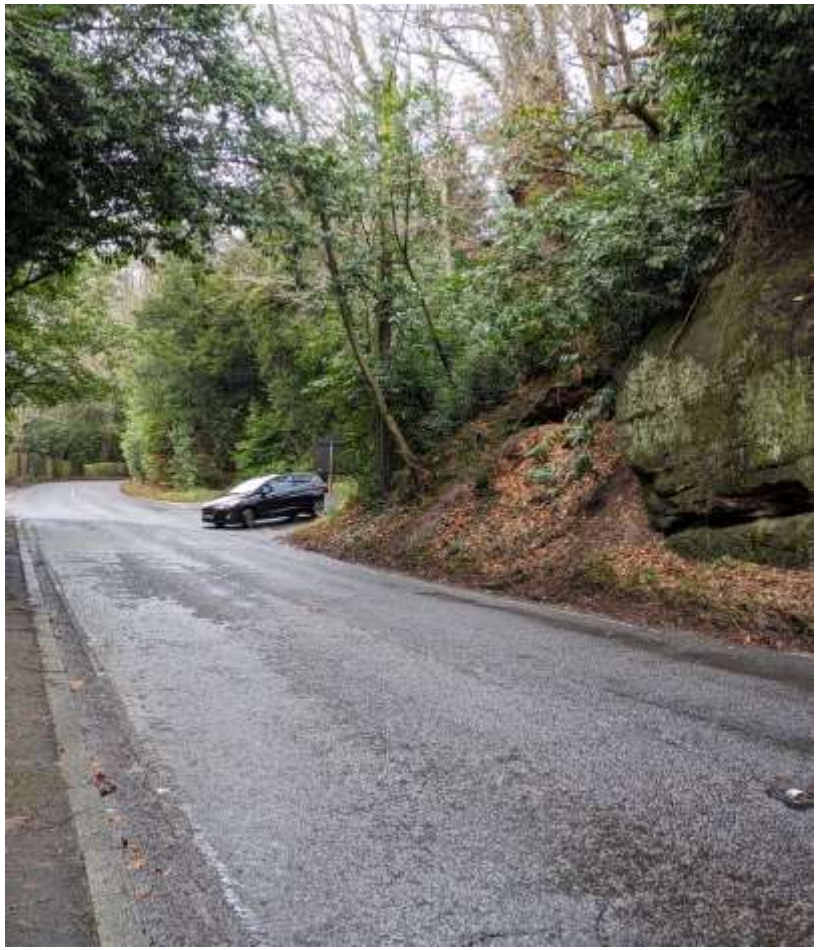


Figure 8: Photo taken on Rocks Road near to junction with Snatts Road looking West. Further evidence of rocky outcrops characteristic of the High Weald landscape.

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Appendix G – photos of rocky outcrops at Durrant House, Lake Wood and West Park Local Nature Reserve



Fig. 9 – Photo of rocky outcrops at Durrant House, Coopers Green



Fig. 10 – Photo of rocky outcrops at Lake Wood both in the foreground and background



Fig. 11 – Photo of rocky outcrops at West Park Local Nature Reserve on southern side of Rocks Road opposite Lake Wood

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Appendix H – listed properties and properties we consider non-heritage assets

Listed properties
Budletts House – Grade II
Blackhouse Farmhouse- Grade II
Coopers Cross House – Grade II
Five Wents – Grade II
Stone Cottage – Grade II

Plus properties on Buxted Park estate – Grade II*

Non - designated heritage assets
Durrant House
Eagle Rock
Mockbeggars Farm
Wagon Barn at Mockbeggars Farm
Spring Cottage

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Appendix I – we consider the application to be contrary to the following policies:

Wealden District Core Strategy Local Plan 2013
WCS7
WCS12-
WCS13

SP02
SP07

Wealden Local Plan 1998
LP 1998 GD2
LP 1998 DC17

EN1
EN2
EN6
EN12
EN13
EN14
EN15
EN16
EN17
EN18
EN20

National Planning Policy Framework
NPPF 15 – regulation 63
NPPF 101 to 103
NPPF 105
NPPF 106
NPPF 111
NPPF 130

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NPPF 174 (a) (b) (d)
NPPF 175
NPPF 180 (a) (c)
NPPF 181
NPPF 182
NPPF 185 (a) (b)
NPPF 186 (a)
NPPF 187 (a)
NPPF 191
NPPF 199
NPPF 201
NPPF 206

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