

THE RURAL PLANNING PRACTICE



Planning Statement

Change of use of land from agricultural to grass camping pitches

ADDRESS Hever Camping, Wilderness Farm,

ON BEHALF OF Hever Camping

PREPARED BY The Rural Planning Practice

DATE Month Year **ISSUE** DRAFT

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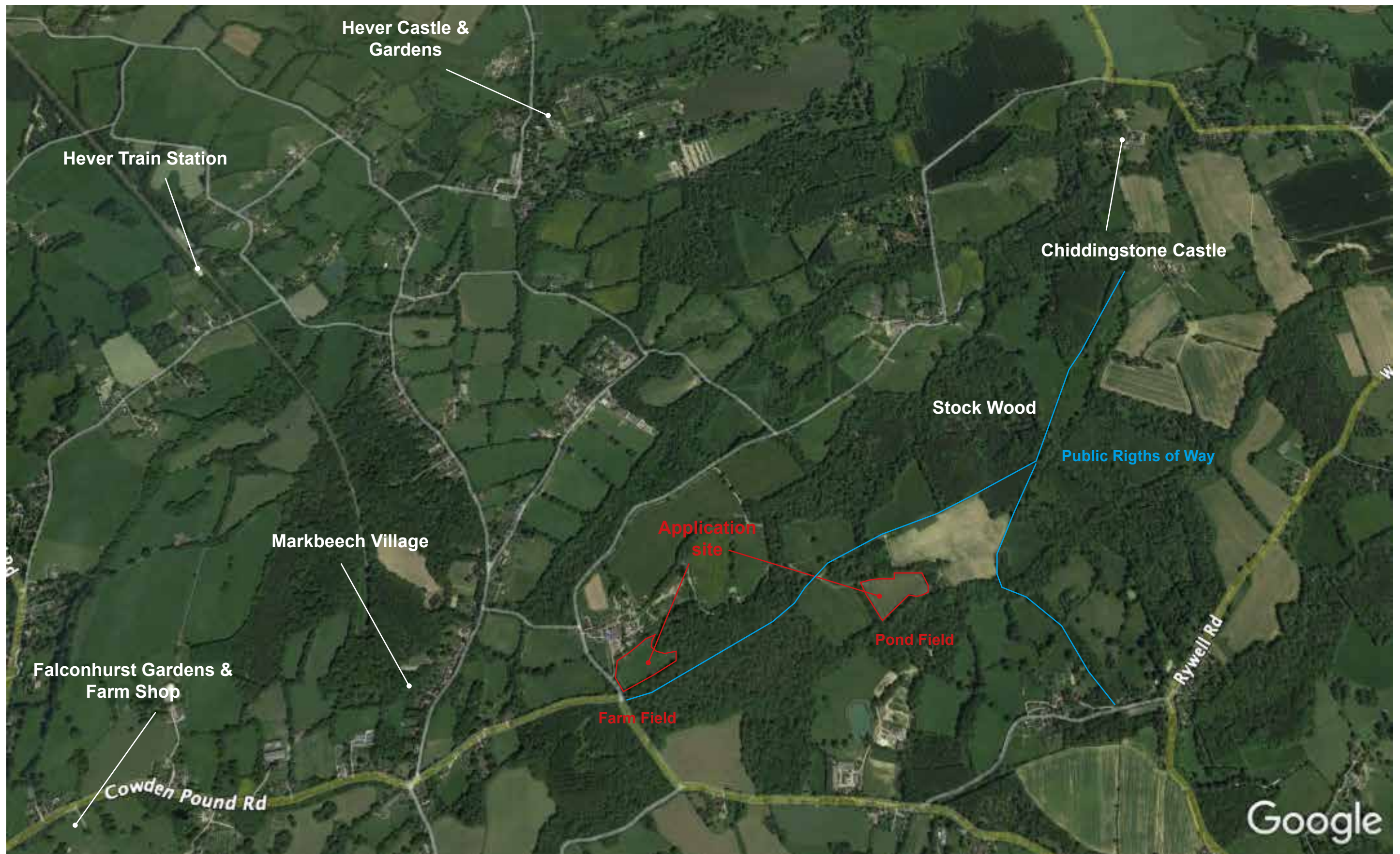


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Site Context Plan





1. Introduction

- 1.1. This planning statement has been prepared to support a full planning application for a change of use from agricultural to seasonal camping at Wilderness Farm, Wilderness Lane, Hever.
- 1.2. The application seeks permission for seasonal use of land as a campsite with grass pitches and associated facilities in form of an outdoor toilet and shower blocks.
- 1.3. The site is conveniently located close to numerous tourist attractions. The seasonal use as a campsite represents an important diversification activity in this rural area and supports other local businesses.
- 1.4. This planning application is accompanied by the following documents:
 - Duly completed application form;
 - Planning Statement;
 - Site Location Plan;



Figure 1 - view of the Pond Field from public footpath



2. Site Context and Background

- 2.1. The application site consists of two agricultural fields which form part of the wider holding of the Wilderness Farm. These are identified on the context plan overleaf, as well as on the site location plan.
- 2.2. Wilderness Farm was originally an estate for nearby Hever Castle, providing milk from their dairy herd for the estate. The dairy herd was replaced with arable farming.
- 2.3. The application fields are no longer used for arable farming due to their topography, however other, more suitable fields within the wider farm holding are regularly leased out for arable farming.
- 2.4. Some Wilderness Farm fields are regularly rented out for grazing livestock kept by neighbouring farms.
- 2.5. As the farming activity has been declining alternative sources of income have to be found to maintain the farm. A small music festival took place on site before Covid19 Restriction which significantly affected the festival seasons of 2020 and 2021.
- 2.6. Wilderness Farm is located within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The proximity of historic castles, together with a good network of public footpaths makes this area an ideal location for a campsite. The most prominent attractions within an easy reach of the application site are:
 - Hever Castle and Gardens are located north of the site (as indicated). The 13th century castle is known for its connection to Anne Boleyn and offers tours of its panelled rooms, fine furniture, tapestries one of the best collections of Tudor portraits. The landscaped gardens are known for Italian sculptures, yew maze and restored Tudor gardens.
 - Chiddingstone Castle is located to the north-east of the application site. It has several period rooms where a private collection of Japanese, Egyptian and Buddhist artefacts are on display. The castle is surrounded by landscaped grounds which include woodland, a lake and a Victorian Orangery.
 - Falconhurst Gardens are open to visitors from April through to September. The farm shop offers local produce, fresh bread and home baked goods. Cut flowers and plants from the Gardens are also available.
- 2.7. Further places of interest include local pubs in Markbeech and by the Chiddington Castle, both of which are popular with campers as they are within an easy walking distance (approx 1 mile) and could be reached on foot.
- 2.8. Hever and Cowden train stations are both within easy reach of the site.
- 2.9. Public Rights of Way are located in the vicinity of the application site as indicated on the context plan overleaf. The network of footpaths and bridleways in the area allows for long circular walks as detailed later in the Statement.



Figure 2 - signage for both campsite users and PROW users

Planning History

2.10. The application sites have no known planning history.

2.11. Hever Campsite has previously operated within the confines of Schedule 2, Part 4, Class B of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 and its later amendments that allow for temporary use of land for no more than 28 days in total in any calendar year.

2.12. Wilderness Farm as a whole has a complex planning history with the most relevant planning applications being:

- SE/98/2638 - Conversion of listed barn to residential - Granted
- SE/00/01161/FUL - Cart Lodge - conversion to form three-bedroom holiday let accommodation - Granted
- 02/00138/LDCEX - lawful development certificate for existing use for mixed-use of land and buildings for agricultural contracting and engineering - Granted
- SE/05/01414/FUL - Conversion of an existing barn (cart lodge) to form a three-bedroom residential unit - Granted
- SE/06/01314/FUL - Conversion of an existing barn (cart lodge) to form a four-bedroom residential unit with mezzanine floor - Refused



Figures 3 and 4 - existing facilities block serving the Farm Field area



3. Development Proposal

- 3.1. Hever Camping has so far operated under the provisions of Schedule 2, Part 4, Class B of the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 2015 and its later amendments that allow for temporary use of land for no more than 28 days in total in any calendar year. This provision was doubled during the summer season of 2020 and 2021 to a total of 56 days. This allowed Hever Camping to thrive.
- 3.2. As the client base has now expanded, the demand for camping can no longer be satisfied under the GPDO provisions alone. As such, the application seeks a change of use from agricultural to seasonal use as a campsite with associated facilities.
- 3.3. Granting this planning application would allow the operators to secure relevant licences.
- 3.4. The camping season is to be from 1st April until 30th October of each year. This can be secured through an appropriately worded planning condition. Outside the camping season, the fields will continue to be grazed by livestock.
- 3.5. The application area includes two independent fields known as the 'Pond Field' and 'Farm Field'. Their location is indicated on the context map overleaf.
- 3.6. The access to both fields will utilise the existing farm access and the internal farm tracks as indicated on Figure 5 below.





Figure 6 - existing toilet block serving the Pond Field area



Figures 7 and 8 - examples of mobile shower blocks for both Pond Field and Farm Field areas



- 3.7. The Pond Field is grassed and bounded by a woodland area. There are no permanent buildings on site, but there is a small wendy house within the woodland which is used for outdoor and education activities by local scouts groups. During the camping season, outdoor activities for children are also held.
- 3.8. There is a toilet block located within a small strip of woodland which is connected to a septic tank (figure 6). Its location is indicated on the map included in Appendix 2. A small shower block will be added to expand the washing facility in this location - figures 7 and 8 include examples of how the future shower blocks may look like. The new shower blocks will be fully mobile and can be removed or stored elsewhere.
- 3.9. The Farm Field is grassed and is also bounded by woodland. The access to this field is from the main Wilderness Farm access as indicated in the accompanying materials (figure 5). The main utility block for this field is located within the farmyard itself.
- 3.10. All mobile facilities can be removed from both fields. This could be secured through an appropriately worded planning condition.
- 3.11. Hever Camping has its own website with detailed information about the location of the site and the nearby attractions and places of interest. The website also contains Terms and Conditions which specify the user's responsibilities such as arrival times, quiet night times and limits, and disposal of waste. These are also clearly displayed on utility blocks.



Figure 9 - Campsite rules



Figure 10 - livestock grazing during winter months



4. Planning Policy Considerations

- 4.1. Section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and Section 70(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 requires that planning applications must be determined in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 4.2. The Development Plan for the Sevenoaks District for the purpose of 38(6) comprises the Core Strategy 2011, and the Allocations and Development Management Plan 2015. Other material considerations are the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (“the NPPF”), and the Planning Policy Guidance.
- 4.3. Core Policy LO8 outlines its support for development which supports, maintains and diversifies the rural economy, provided that it is compatible with policies for protecting the Green Belt, and the High Weald AONB.
- 4.4. Core Policy SP1 requires development to take account of the guidance in the AONB Management Plans. It further requires new development to create safe, inclusive and attractive environments that meet the needs of users; to incorporate principles of sustainable development; and to maintain and enhance biodiversity.
- 4.5. Core Policy SP8 gives priority to business uses, or tourist facilities, in the conversion of buildings in rural areas. While this proposal seeks a provision of tourist type facilities to diversify the existing rural enterprise, this policy provides broad support for the proposal.
- 4.6. Policy EN1 provides a detailed basis for control of development, including that in the AONB. It requires proposals to create high-quality designs. The application proposal does not propose buildings that would significantly exceed the scale, height, material or site coverage expected for this type of development. The toilet and shower blocks positioned by the Pond Field are of appropriate scale and character expected.
- 4.7. The topography and character of the site (and its surrounding area) are fully respected, and the natural features are preserved and fully incorporated within the proposal. The access arrangements for vehicles and pedestrians utilise the existing network of farm tracks and public rights of way.
- 4.8. The application site is located in a secluded rural location. As such, no existing residents will be subject to excessive noise, vibration, odour, air pollution or overlooking which would be caused by the proposed change of use and the provision of sanitary facilities. As such, the proposal fully complies with the requirements of Policy EN2.
- 4.9. Policy LT1 states that “*the benefits to the local economy will be recognised in considering proposals for tourist accommodation and facilities*”. In this context, the provision of the campsite on site will provide support to other local businesses such as village shops, restaurants and other tourist attractions during the opening season.
- 4.10. This should be considered to be a major planning benefit as those who are using a campsite are likely to use more local services and facilities compared to those who stay at a self-catering provision. There are two



pubs which are within easy walking distance from the campsite and these are very popular with the returning customers.

Green Belt considerations

- 4.11. The site is located within Metropolitan Green Belt where development is strictly controlled.
- 4.12. The National Planning Policy Framework (2021) ('the NPPF'), particularly Section 13, provides an overarching policy framework for decision making for proposals located within Green Belts.
- 4.13. The NPPF states that the fundamental aim of the Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and that, the essential characteristics of the Green Belt are its openness and permanence. The proposed change of use will only take place between 1st April and 30th October of each year, assuring that no structures are left in the field during the remaining months of the year. As such the openness of the Green Belt will be periodically maintained along with its permanence.
- 4.14. The proposal will also maintain all five purposes of the Green Belt as it does not result in unrestricted urban sprawl or in the merging of neighbouring towns. No permanent built form is proposed thus the countryside remains safeguarded from encroachment. The setting and special character of historic towns are not impacted by the proposal. The character of the proposal and the change of use from agricultural to camping has no impact on urban regeneration and the ability of other developments to recycle derelict and other urban lands.
- 4.15. Paragraph 147 of the NPPF notes that inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. Paragraphs 149 and 150, however, detail exceptions to this rule.
- 4.16. One such exception is material changes in the use of land for outdoor sport or recreation [para 150e)] and the provision of appropriate facilities in connection with a change of use for outdoor recreation [para 149b)] as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purpose of including land within it.
- 4.17. The proposal seeks a material change of two agricultural fields into camping during the spring and summer seasons.
- 4.18. The Cambridge Dictionary defines "*camping*" as an "*activity of staying in a tent on holiday*" with a strong implication being that camping is associated with outdoor recreation. In this context, the change of use into camping fields would be interpreted as an appropriate development in the Green Belt which does not conflict with the five purposes of including land within it. Tents are fully removable shelters made from canvas or similar materials. They are temporary structures that do not conflict with the openness of the Green Belt as they are fully removed once their use is finished.
- 4.19. The existing utility and the new mobile shower blocks are located within a strip of woodland which forms the border of the Pond Field. These facilitate the basic sanitary provision for the campers during the camping season. Such facilities are appropriate in the context of the use of land for camping and thus considered to fall within the exceptions listed in paragraph 149 of the NPPF.



High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Considerations

- 4.20. The application site is located within the High Weald AONB. As such, the proposal is briefly assessed against the objectives of The High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024.
- 4.21. As outlined throughout this Statement, the form, scale, materials and design of the proposed development would not have a harmful impact on the character of the landscape in this location.
- 4.22. The temporary use of tents and other removable structures will assure that the landscape features will be maintained and conserved, including its tranquillity. As such, the proposal complies with the requirements of Policy EN5
- 4.23. The use of the area would not alter any of the historic field patterns and would not require diversion or alteration of the Public Right of Way which crosses Wilderness Farm. The camping activity will have a low impact on the surrounding woodland area.
- 4.24. The existing field patterns will not be altered. Outside of camping season, the fields will be used for livestock grazing as part of sustainable land management.
- 4.25. One of the visions of the Management Plan is to encourage the means to access the landscape easily and for people to enjoy outstanding quality multi-sensory experiences and increased contact with nature. Proposed actions to do so include support for landscape-inspired health and wellbeing activities. By its nature, camping allows visitors to experience the beauty of the landscape, as well as its qualities such as night skies and opportunities for long-distance walks. In this respect, Hever Camping contributes to the vision and relevant objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan.

Other Material Considerations

- 4.26. The proposal has no intention to introduce any form of permanent outdoor lighting. Any external lighting will be related to temporary structures only, and therefore will be extremely limited. The compliance with Policy EN6, which is concerned with outdoor lighting, could be secured through an appropriately worded condition.
- 4.27. The application site is in a secluded location where the majority of noise pollution is contained within the site. Any noise will be directly related to the recreational use of the site and would be limited to the spring and summer seasons only. Compliance with Policy EN7 can be secured through an appropriately worded condition.
- 4.28. Hever Camping represents a farm diversification on the farm which has historically been used for grazing of livestock. The proposal is broadly supported by paragraphs 84b) and c) of the NPPF which states that planning decisions should enable the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses, and should also enable sustainable rural tourism and leisure development that respect the character of the countryside.

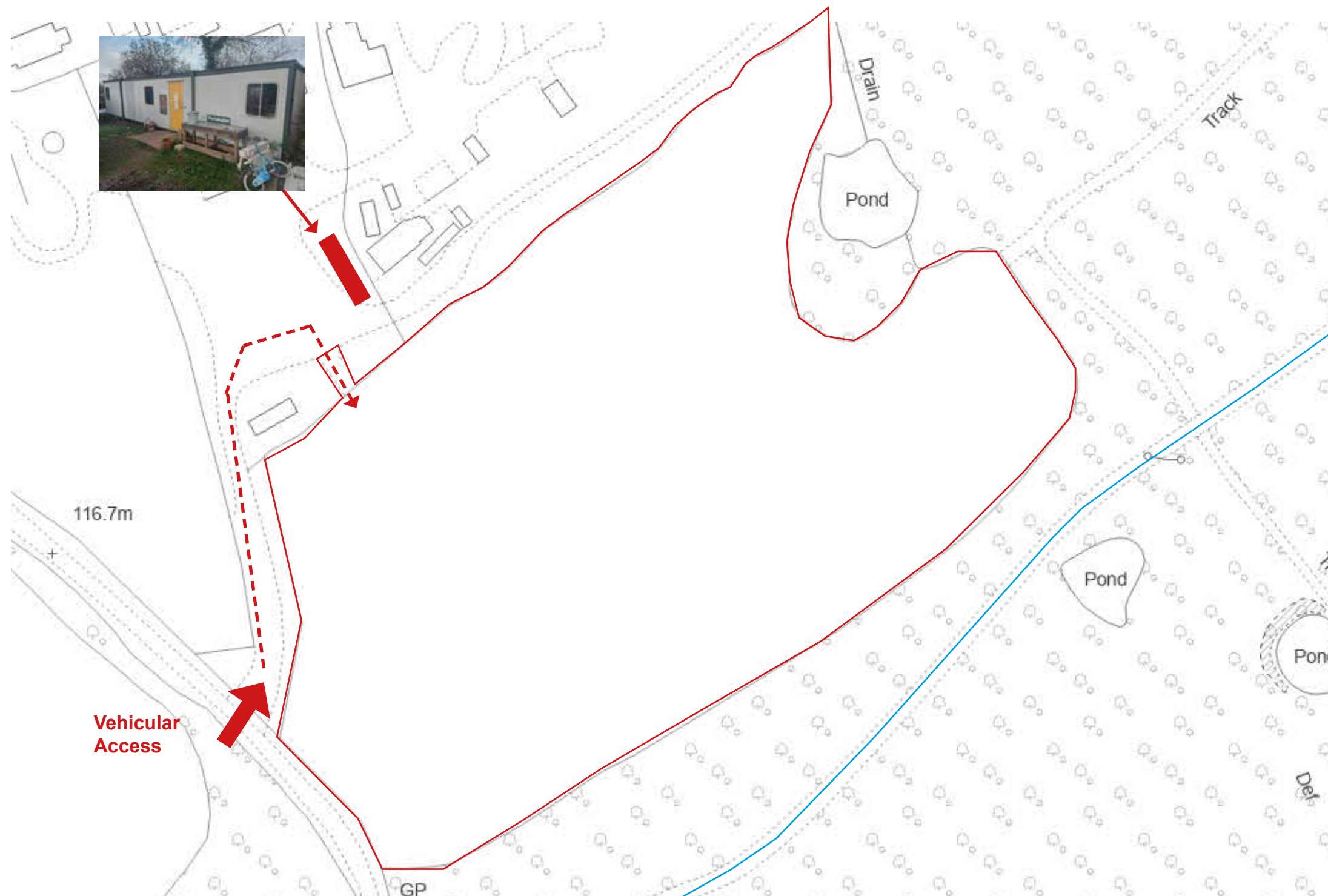


5. Conclusion

- 5.1. The material change of use from agricultural use to camping is considered to be an appropriate form of development in the Green Belt as noted by paragraph 150e) of the NPPF.
- 5.2. The provision of facilities in connection with outdoor recreation falls within exceptions listed in paragraph 149 of the NPPF and thus the erection of toilet and shower blocks within the area of Pond Field are considered to be appropriate development in the Green Belt.
- 5.3. The application proposal is broadly supported by paragraph 84 of the NPPF and by the High Weald AONB Management Plan both of which support sustainable rural tourism, and farm diversification projects.
- 5.4. The proposal was carefully considered against the visions and objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019 - 2024.
- 5.5. It has been demonstrated throughout this statement that the application proposal accords with relevant policies of Sevenoaks District's Local Development Plan, in particular with Core Policies LO8, SP1, SP8 and policies EN1, EN2, EN5, EN6, EN7 and LT1 of The Allocation and Development Management Plan 2015.
- 5.6. It is therefore respectfully requested that the planning permission is issued without a delay.



Appendix 1 - Location of facilities for Farm Field





Appendix 2 - Location of existing and proposed sanitary facilities at Pond Field location

Public Rights of Way

