Uckfield Town Council
'Focused' Local Plan (Regulation 18) Consultation

Response to Question 15
Supporting information – Local Geological Report

To include a copy of the local geological report as part of the Uckfield TC evidence base in the local plan. This report is important for Uckfield and geological habitats. https://www.uckfieldtc.gov.uk/council-services/open-spaces/

Uckfield TC received a copy of a Case Study produced by consultants on behalf of Natural England, which illustrates the benefits and value of integrating geodiversity into nature recovery, using the High Weald of Sussex and Kent as an example. The study covers the whole of the High Weald but, in order to provide a more detailed analysis, focuses in particular on a local study area between Ashdown Forest and Uckfield, in East Sussex Geodiversity and Nature Recovery in the High Weald

Therefore, the case study pdf to be submitted in the local plan regulation 18 consultation at question 15.

Introduction. Each major site has had a review for Sustainability. A local plan shapes the everyday lives of residents and the long-term character of our parishes, so it is vital that environmental consequences are tested clearly and transparently. The proposed topic-led sustainability appraisal gives the parish council a practical, evidence-based framework to review each candidate site from an environmental perspective. By translating technical material into plain, site-specific findings, the appraisal enables councillors to judge whether a site genuinely protects landscape, biodiversity and local services, or whether it would cause unacceptable and potentially irreversible harm.

The Environment Committee is uniquely placed to contribute to the plans committee work because of its hands-on knowledge of local places, habitats and community pressures. Committee members bring practical experience of footpaths, woodlands, local wildlife, school capacity and traffic pinch points that are rarely captured in desk studies alone. The appraisal harnesses that local expertise in a structured way, ensuring that parish knowledge is recorded consistently, tested against objective criteria and presented in a form that officers, inspectors and neighbouring parishes can understand and act upon.

The sustainability appraisals are presented as a constructive, evidence-led tool that strengthens the parish's voice in the Local Plan process and supports the planning committee responding to the local plan on behalf of the town council.

Each topic in the appraisal are issues which matter locally, the appraisal tests these issues, and the practical consequence for the site. This approach produces clear, defensible outcomes that can be attached to representations at Regulation 18/19, used to request further evidence from the district, or to propose alternative, lower-impact options and amend the development boundaries on clear, sound, justified evidence.

Where evidence is lacking, the appraisal flags the gap rather than relying on general assertions.

As this goes to the committee next week, the appraisal is presented as a tool for constructive engagement: it is not simply a list of objections but a means to improve the plan for Uckfield, by identifying significant risks, alternative sites or where policy safeguards are genuinely required (such as Green Settlement Gaps to prevent parishes merging into one another, valued local green spaces policy and improving ancient woodland protection and safeguards). By using the site specific appraisals these are designed to strengthen the parish's voice, note the topics often referred to by residents and councillors, support representations inspection-ready within a limited consultation time, and help improve outcomes for the area that protect local character, nature and services while allowing sustainable development where it is truly appropriate.

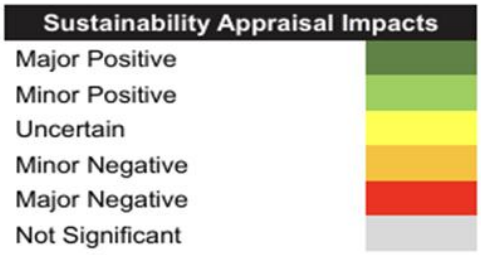
The appraisal relies on local knowledge, published datasets and desk-based checks; where parish knowledge and officer assessments differ, the appraisal records the town parish view. Cumulative and connectivity effects are treated

as central: a site that appears acceptable in isolation may be unacceptable when combined with other allocations that fragment corridors, increase recreational pressure on reserves, or reduce ecosystem resilience. For this reason the sustainability appraisal explicitly tests each site's contribution to landscape-scale functions such as the Nature Recovery Network, woodland mosaics, riparian systems and pollinator routes and other related topics.

Sustainability Appraisals - Impact assessments

Major sites are being reviewed using a sustainability appraisal specifically created for this local plan consultation February 2026-March 2026 consultation period.

The impacts have been scored as follows:



Green — Major Positive or Acceptable Meaning: Evidence shows the site either delivers environmental benefits or causes no material adverse effect for this topic. What is required to record Green: Existing evidence is recent and robust based on the live planning application and the local assessment; the topic does not block allocation.

Yellow — Uncertain - Yet To Be Assessed / Evidence Required Meaning: Current evidence is insufficient, uncertain, or to be reviewed, or absent for this topic. Practical implication: No final R/A/G judgement is made until the required evidence is received and reviewed; use Yellow to drive the council's evidence requests.

Amber — Minor Negative Meaning: The topic shows adverse effects. The site is requested as unsuitable.

Red — Major Negative or Minor Negative - Unacceptable Meaning: The topic indicates likely irreversible or very significant harm (for example to statutory or irreplaceable features, severe hydrological or connectivity loss). What is required to record Red: The assessment of the evidence as local site knowledge identifies the harms, or based on the knowledge online or available through desk-based studies. It is expected this view will be contrary to planning officers views who think this may fall to conditions or mitigation. Practical implication: A Red outcome should lead to exclusion of the site unless there are exceptional circumstances. UTC do not believe these are exceptional circumstances and the site should not be included in regulation 19.

Grey — Excluded from assessment Meaning: The topic is not relevant to this particular site (for example outside the spatial extent or already addressed by separate policy).

Example Environmental Column Glossary — topics

Each paragraph below explains about the environment topic column, why it matters, and the practical consequences for the site. The appraisal records a status using the following colour/status layers below - using the colour system provided by Wealden in other documents.

1. Impacts to Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)

SSSIs are statutory, nationally important sites designated to protect specific habitats or species. The appraisal must test whether the allocation would increase recreational pressure, pollution, nutrient enrichment or hydrological change that could damage the SSSI's features. If there is any realistic risk of adverse effect, the site should be ruled out unless robust avoidance or legally enforceable mitigation is demonstrated.

2. Impact to Habitats of Principal Importance, Woodlands, National Forestry Inventory (NFI), Species of Principal Importance, BAP habitats, Trees Outside Woodland and ATI Tree Inventory

These habitats and notable trees are the core elements of local biodiversity and are often protected by law or policy. The assessment must map and quantify any loss or degradation, including indirect effects (edge impacts, shading, root damage). Where priority habitats or veteran trees are affected, the default planning approach is avoidance because replacement is rarely possible. Local knowledge is used and not satisfied by developer assessments on the cumulative impacts.

3. Impact to Local Nature Reserves and non designated biodiversity areas

Local Nature Reserves and non designated patches provide refuges and stepping stones for wildlife and are essential for local ecological networks. The appraisal considers how the site's development would reduce the value or connectivity of these places. Cumulative loss, direct or indirect harm also includes non designated sites, cumulative harm caused by development in the area can be as damaging as loss of designated sites and should be treated seriously.

4. Impact to Woodland Trust site(s)

Woodland Trust sites are identified for their high ecological value and public benefit. The appraisal flags any proximity or indirect impacts (access pressure, hydrological change, invasive species risk, change) and reviewed our tests whether the site would reduce public access or degrade woodland condition. Where impacts are likely, the site is unsuitable unless demonstrably avoidable.

5. Impacts to Nature Recovery Network (NRN)

The NRN is the strategic framework for restoring and connecting habitats at landscape scale. The appraisal must test whether the allocation severs NRN links, reduces the potential for habitat restoration, or prevents delivery of Nature Recovery objectives. If the site undermines NRN function it conflicts with national and local nature recovery ambitions.

6. High Weald Geodiversity Geological Network

Geodiversity underpins soils, hydrology and habitat types and contributes to landscape character. Our appraisal assessed if any geological features or exposures of value and tested whether development would damage them or the processes they support or the geological network. Loss of geodiversity or fragmentation on their High Weald character network can have knock on effects for biodiversity and landscape quality, assessment of area supporting the Nature Recovery Network and High Weald Geological corridors. High Weald Geology in a well preserved medieval environment is internationally rare as stated in the national character area assessment, in the High Weald character area

7. Ancient Woodland(s) — direct and indirect harm identified

Ancient woodland is effectively irreplaceable: its soils, fungi and specialist species have developed over centuries. The appraisal tested for both direct loss and indirect impacts (root zone damage, changes to hydrology, increased recreational pressure, indirect or direct loss harm or deterioration). Where ancient woodland is at risk, avoidance is the only acceptable outcome in most policy frameworks.

8. Cumulative Harm and habitat loss to interconnected BOA 48 or 49 / BOA arc fragmented

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) are strategic places for habitat restoration; the Uckfield and Buxted biodiversity arc are linked between BOA 48 and 49 and are an important wildlife landscape scale corridor. The appraisal reviews whether the allocation fragments that arc or reduces its capacity to deliver connectivity and restoration. Fragmentation here would undermine long term nature recovery and should weigh heavily against allocation. Short term gains in the BOA will not be supported if it will lead to harm.

9. 400m cat predation zone; bat assemblage, Core Sustenance Zone (CSZ); SSSI Impact Risk Zone (IRZ)

Many species and protected features have recognised influence zones (e.g., 400 m buffers for ground nesting birds or cat predation, bat commuting/foraging zones). Our appraisal tests whether the site falls within these buffers and models likely disturbance, lighting and predation effects. If the site may lie inside critical zones of importance, the

presumption should be against development unless exceptional mitigation is proven. CSZ is a Core Sustenance Zone and important for rare and endangered species.

10. Impacts to Woodland Priority Habitat Network

Priority woodland networks, on MAGIC maps, and sustain species populations and ecological processes across the landscape. Our appraisal reviews the map of the woodland network, and if / how the site enhances and contributes to it, and tests whether development would break key links or reduce habitat area below functional thresholds. Loss of network integrity reduces species resilience and recovery potential.

11. Impacts to Natural England (NE) RP065 (Threatened Species Recovery) and actions required

National recovery programmes (e.g., RP065, 2025 assessments) set actions and priorities for threatened species recovery. The appraisal tests whether the allocation may conflict with those recovery actions or increase extinction risk for RP065 listed species. If the site undermines recovery plans, it is inconsistent with national biodiversity commitments.

12. Impacts an area important to Darker Skies (light pollution, nocturnal species, stars)

Low light levels are important for nocturnal wildlife (bats, moths) and for public amenity (stargazing, tranquillity). The appraisal tests potential light spill from roads, housing and security lighting and the consequent impacts on nocturnal species and dark sky value. Where dark sky quality is high, development should be avoided or strictly controlled.

13. Air Quality — town and reserves

New development increases traffic and emissions that can degrade air quality, harming human health and sensitive habitats (lichens, bryophytes, some woodlands). The appraisal must model likely changes in pollutant concentrations and test impacts on nearby reserves and SSSI features. If air quality thresholds for habitats or people have not been identified, the allocation is unsound.

14. Impacts FLL (Functionally Linked Land) / ecological network / stepping stones

Functionally linked land provides feeding, commuting and dispersal habitat for species tied to statutory sites and movement corridors including ecological networks. The appraisal uses this to identify these functional links and test whether development severs them or reduces their effectiveness. Loss of FLL undermines statutory site protection and species viability.

15. Ecosystem resilience (cumulative harm) and Green Blue Infrastructure (GBI)

Green blue infrastructure provides multiple services — habitat, cooling, drainage and recreation — and underpins ecosystem resilience. The appraisal tests whether the site’s loss reduces GBI connectivity or capacity to deliver services, especially when combined with other allocations. Reduced resilience increases vulnerability to drought, pests and climate extremes.

16. Improves or harms the sense of place surrounding the environment

Sense of place — the combination of landscape, views, tranquillity and local identity — is a material planning consideration. Our appraisal assesses how the allocation would change local character, views from key vantage points and the experience of residents and visitors. Loss of sense of place has social and economic consequences that planning must weigh and impacts on the environmental sustainability of the site.

17. Enjoyment and wellbeing of GBI / wildlife areas (health & wellbeing)

Accessible green spaces and wildlife areas support physical exercise, mental health and community cohesion. The appraisal must quantify how the site’s loss would introduce access to nature, or sever recreational routes and rights of way being urbanised. These human benefits are part of sustainable development and must be protected. The enjoyment is also from the perspective of the existing community and a rural landscape.

18. Noise or Light Pollution / disturbance

Construction and increased traffic generate noise that disturbs wildlife and reduces amenity for residents and visitors. The appraisal should model noise levels, identify sensitive receptors (breeding birds, bat roosts, quiet recreation areas) and test whether disturbance would be significant. Where noise would materially harm species or people, the site is unsuitable, or where noise reduces the enjoyment of the natural environment.

19. Biodiversity hotspot and habitats supporting designated sites / irreplaceable habitats

Some areas of Uckfield parish function as local biodiversity hotspots, supporting disproportionately high species richness, rare habitat types and ecological processes that underpin nearby designated sites. The appraisal reviews local and county evidence (surveys, SxBRC/NBN records and local knowledge), and codes the risk to the biological hotspot extent, and its functional links to designated sites, and Functionally Linked Land, and evaluates the likelihood and magnitude of harm from the proposed allocation, including direct loss and indirect effects (edge impacts, hydrological change, recreational pressure, nutrient enrichment). If a parcel is judged to be a biodiversity hotspot or to support irreplaceable or county/national level features, this is recorded as a **major negative**. Such sites should be excluded from allocation due to permanent or landscape scale change likely to harm the ecology and biodiversity; avoidance is the only sound option.

20. Resilience of natural environments — drought / water / flood

Natural land helps buffer droughts and floods through storage, infiltration and shading. The appraisal considers how land use change may affect water retention, groundwater recharge and downstream flood risk. Reducing natural resilience increases long term costs and vulnerability for existing communities and habitats.

21. Impacts to important Riparian Habitats and Freshwater Ecosystems — wet woodland, ghylls, primeval swamp

Riparian and wetland mosaics are biodiversity rich and provide water quality and flood attenuation services. The appraisal reviews these features, hydrological impacts from runoff and abstraction, downstream or connected habitats, and assess risks to species. Damage to these habitats has immediate and long term ecological consequences.

22. Impacts Wooded Slopes of the High Weald

Wooded slopes are a defining element of the High Weald landscape and support specialist communities. The appraisal reviews the maps and considers the visual impacts, soil stability and habitat loss on slopes, and whether development would erode the High Weald’s character. Protecting slopes preserves both biodiversity and landscape identity.

23. Lowland hay meadow, acid grassland, purple moor grass and rush pastures (BAP habitats)

These grassland and wet grassland communities are priority habitats with high conservation value and limited extent. The appraisal must identify their presence, test risks from nutrient enrichment, drainage or trampling, and recognise that restoration is slow and uncertain. Loss of these habitats is a significant, often irreversible, harm.

24. Impacts intricate mosaic of habitats supporting ancient woodland

Ancient woodland depends on a surrounding mosaic of hedgerows, meadows and scrub that provide complementary resources and other habitats. Our appraisal treats these mosaics as a functional unit and assesses whether fragmentation may reduce the woodland’s ecological integrity and create unintended effects and edge effects. Breaking the mosaic undermines specialist species and long term woodland health.

25. Cumulative loss and cumulative displacement of wildlife

Small, repeated losses across a parish add up to major declines in populations and connectivity. The appraisal considers the combined effect of this allocation with others, not just the site in isolation. If cumulative impacts are shown to be impacting our wildlife, the allocation is deemed unsustainable.

26. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species impacts, wildlife assemblage — Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre (SxBRC) data

Local biological records provide evidence of species presence and conservation status. The appraisal used records online (e.g. SxBRC and National Biodiversity Network NBN) to test likely impacts on assemblages and to identify species that need targeted surveys. Ignoring local data risks under

27. Environmental Sustainability (overarching test)

Indicating irreversible harm. This is the central question: does the allocation support long term environmental health, biodiversity recovery and community wellbeing? The appraisal synthesises all topic tests to determine whether the site contributes to or undermines sustainability objectives. A site that fails multiple environmental tests cannot be justified.

28. Ecological impact — Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) or Site of Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) does not address

Biodiversity Net Gain and SANGS can help in some cases but cannot compensate for loss of irreplaceable habitats, severed connectivity or landscape scale functions. The appraisal tests whether proposed mitigation is realistic, deliverable and permanent; where it is not, avoidance is required.

29. Conserve and Enhance Natural Environment — NPPF 15 policy test

National policy requires plan makers to conserve and enhance the natural environment and avoid harm to irreplaceable habitats. The appraisal explicitly tests consistency with the NPPF (and PPG where relevant) and assesses whether the allocation meets those policy tests. Failure to do so makes the plan unsound.

30. Ecosystem resilience — drought / water / flood (services emphasis)

Beyond habitat area, the appraisal considers the site’s role in delivering ecosystem services: water regulation, carbon storage, pollination and micro climate moderation. Losing these services increases adaptation costs and reduces the landscape’s capacity to cope with climate change.

31. Impacts important Riparian Habitats and Freshwater Ecosystems (repeat emphasis)

Given the centrality of water to local ecology, the appraisal gives a focused review, separate test to water dependent habitats and species, including migratory and freshwater fish. This ensures hydrological impacts are not diluted among other headings.

32. Cumulative loss and displacement across reserves and hedgerows

Hedgerows and small reserves form the connective tissue of the countryside; their incremental loss fragments populations. The appraisal assesses cumulative loss in the parish networks, and tests whether remaining corridors are identified, and if sufficient allowance has been factored for species movement inside and outside the red-line boundary.

33. Conserve and Enhance Heritage Environment as per NPPF

Biodiversity and heritage are linked: landscape change can harm the setting of historic assets and the cultural value of the countryside. The appraisal assesses overall ecological loss would affect heritage significance and whether the allocation undermines historic landscape character.

34. Enjoyment and wellbeing of wildlife areas — health & wellbeing (repeat emphasis)

Nature access supports mental and physical health, social cohesion and local identity to the existing community (a value assessed as part of sustainability). The appraisal must quantify loss of recreational routes urbanised, or severed routes and reduced tranquillity, and weigh these social harms against any benefits of development.

35. Impacts intricate mosaic of habitats, interconnected habitats supporting ancient woodland (final reiteration)

This final reiteration emphasises that mosaics are functional ecological units: hedgerows, meadows, scrub and woodland together sustain specialist species. The appraisal must treat fragmentation of the mosaic as a major negative and test whether any mitigation would realistically restore function.

36. Buglife B Lines (pollinator networks)

Pollinator corridors (Buglife B Lines) are mapped routes that maintain forage and nesting resources across landscapes. The appraisal checks the route, whether the site lies on or severs B Lines, assess loss of forage continuity and test whether mitigation would maintain pollinator movement. Loss of pollinator networks reduces the wider ecosystem health.

37. 1.5 km recreational influence zone / RAMS buffer — designated nature sites (Recreational disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy) — Following academic peer led evidence of disturbance of dog walkers (1), we have applied a conservative 1.5 km walking catchment proxy around statutory and non statutory nature sites (e.g. SSSIs, LNRs, ancient woodland, BOA arc etc). The appraisal tested whether the allocation falls within this zone, quantify likely increases in recreational visits and dog walking pressure from new dwellings, and require a plan level RAMS (costed mitigation package, monitoring, governance and enforceable triggers) Local walking catchment maps included openstreet, MAGIC mapped distances, local knowledge and locality of the proposed site to nearby sites, peer reviewed disturbance evidence and RAMS precedents as indicative of the needs to Uckfield and local parishes important reserves which need additional supporting measures. Habitat erosion, particularly pathways and routes off rights of way were assessed for important nature reserves.

Requesting Policy - Local Wildlife Site Assessments

Uckfield Town Council is requesting that Wealden District Council include a district-wide Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) which may include Local Geological features (rock outcrops as identified in High Weald character assessments for safeguarding) Call for Sites in the Local Plan because the district is entering a period of growth and the plan must actively deliver the vision of **people and nature thriving together**. A formal Call for Sites, run in partnership with Wilder Wealden and Sussex Wildlife Trust, will provide an accessible, auditable and timely mechanism to identify important places that are currently missing from mapped records. This additional oversight will surface previously unknown or overlooked sites, strengthen the ecological evidence base that underpins allocation decisions, and ensure that nature-network functions and ecological corridors are properly considered alongside housing and infrastructure needs. Adopting this approach is a sound, justified and proportionate planning response that supports parish engagement, improves spatial clarity ahead of unitary reorganisation, and demonstrates constructive cooperation in line with the NPPF plan-making expectations.

Wealden District Council will run a district-wide Local Wildlife Sites Call for Sites, in partnership with Wilder Wealden and Sussex Wildlife Trust, inviting parish councils, community groups, landowners and residents to submit candidate sites. Submissions will be assessed against the updated 2026 Sussex LWS assessment framework — including **habitat criteria, species criteria and supporting criteria** — using a transparent methodology and published timetable. Accepted sites will be added to a definitive GIS layer and taken into account in plan-making so that allocations which would materially harm locally important wildlife sites or ecological connectivity are avoided. This sound justified and proportionate approach will include officer and partner support to help parishes prepare evidence and is intended to encourage all parishes to review their natural environments for appropriate consideration and potential inclusion. Further information and the Sussex LWS resources are available at https://lws-sussex.org.uk/sussexLWS.php and the Local Sites guidance can be found at https://lws-sussex.org.uk/downloads/localsites.pdf.

Local Wildlife Sites are a vital component of Sussex's nature networks. They provide refuges where special habitats and species can persist, create stepping stones and corridors that allow wildlife to move and adapt across the landscape, and offer accessible places for people in towns and villages to connect with nature. In the countryside they help to connect up natural spaces so that wild plants and animals can move and adapt to changes happening around them; in urban and peri-urban areas they are often the places where communities experience and value the natural

world. Recognising and mapping these sites now will help deliver the Local Plan's biodiversity and green-infrastructure objectives and will materially strengthen the evidence base required at Regulation 19.

Uckfield Town Council is making this request because there has been a long interval since new LWS nominations were actively assessed, leaving a clear gap in the plan-making evidence base. A formal Call for Sites, run with Sussex Wildlife Trust and Wilder Wealden, provides a timely, proportionate and auditable means to identify and map locally important wildlife sites against the updated 2026 criteria. This approach fills missing entries on current maps, supports parish capacity to nominate sites (including those without neighbourhood plans), and demonstrates constructive cross-party technical cooperation that will improve biodiversity outcomes and spatial clarity ahead of the unitary reorganisation.

This proposal is consistent with national guidance on the role of non-statutory local sites in conserving biodiversity and local character. As DEFRA guidance explains, in a country rich in wildlife, habitats and geological heritage we must take a range of integrated approaches to conserve this legacy; local government, interest groups and local communities at grass-roots level have a key role to play. Non-statutory Local Sites — of which there are many across England — make a vital contribution to delivering biodiversity and geodiversity targets, provide widely distributed wildlife refuges, and through their connecting, stepping-stone and buffering qualities support wider site networks. Including a district-wide LWS Call for Sites in the Local Plan recognises this role and provides the practical route to identify and protect these "jewels" in the wider countryside.

To be effective and inspection-ready, Wealden should adopt the Sussex 2026 criteria as the assessment standard, publish the Call for Sites form and methodology, include a Call for Sites (pre-Regulation 19 and remaining open through Regulation 19), provide positive partner collaboration and officer support for parish submissions, create and publish a definitive GIS layer with an audit trail of decisions, and include a cooperation statement in the Regulation 19 submission describing partner roles and parish engagement. This combined, collaborative approach will help ensure the Local Plan is sound, justified and capable of delivering better outcomes for both people and nature.

Defra information found here Local Sites - guidance on their identication, selection and management