



**PLANNING and GENERAL STATEMENT  
BY  
GROOMBRIDGE MEN'S SHED (GMS)**

Prepared by Richard Thirkell, Treasurer, Groombridge Men's Shed

February 2020

## 1. Background

Men's Sheds is a National Organisation originally set up by Age UK but which has now grown and developed into a freestanding entity.

Loneliness and low self esteem amongst men particularly, but not exclusively, among the retired has become a recognised social issue. The purpose of a Men's Shed is therefore to provide a facility where men can meet regularly, talk, share practical skills in making/ repairing things either for themselves or for others, and come away feeling fulfilled. Men Sheds also get involved in community projects helping to maintain parks and green spaces and making things for schools, libraries, and the like. Further details of Men's Sheds as an organisation may be found on [www.menssheds.org.uk](http://www.menssheds.org.uk).

Groombridge Men's Shed (GMS) was originally conceived in early 2019 and is now a properly constituted Society with a Committee and 50 locally based members. As a result, it is now seeking permanent premises from which to base future activities.

A copy of GMS's Skelton Business Plan appears as an Appendix to this Statement.

## 2. Influences on Choice of Location

For GMS to function optimally, the following criteria are considered important:

- Easy access for village residents and members (within walking distance for the majority of members)
- On-site car parking, especially for disabled members
- Easy loading/unloading
- Close proximity to service connections (water, electricity, and drainage)
- Reasonable security of tenure and socially minded owner/landlord.

A number of locations were considered but there was only one 'stand out' proposition, this being the subject of this Planning Application.

## 3. Local Support

The Site, which is part of the Groombridge Recreation Ground. The whole of the Recreation Ground is owned Freehold by The Rosemary Newton Trust (the Newton family once owned Groombridge Place). A stated aim of the Trust is to allow the land *'to be used for the purposes of recreation and other leisure activities for the use of the inhabitants of the Parish of Groombridge in the interests of social welfare'*.

The Rosemary Newton Trust leases the whole of the Recreation Ground to Withyham Parish Council.

In this context:

- (i) The Rosemary Newton Trust has given consent in principle to the erection of a Men's Shed on The Site subject to all necessary Statutory Consents.
- (ii) Withyham Parish Council has resolved to support this Planning Application and, in principle, to grant a sub-lease to GMS (subject to agreement of terms and legal formalities). It has also seen GMS's Skeleton Business Plan as part of this process.

In addition, 184 local residents have signed the petition appended to this report in support of this Application.

Further, the Groombridge Village Hall Committee has given consent, in principle, to GMS linking into the Hall's water, electricity, and drainage supplies.

Finally, letters of support from the Groombridge Medical Centre and St Thomas Parish Church are attached.

Late Breaking News: Wealden District Council has awarded Groombridge Men's Shed a significant grant under the Community Grants Scheme towards the cost of constructing the Shed , subject to Planning Permission.

#### **4. Design & Access Considerations**

The Design considerations form the subject of a separate report, submitted as part of this Planning Application, and prepared by GMS's Architect, Zara Bloomfield of Studio Bloom.

As will be seen from the submitted plans, access to the site will be required across the Car Park controlled by Wealden District Council (WDC). WDC has been approached on this by GMS and the response received is as follows:

*'We have no objections in principal for providing access across our car park. I suggest you progress this further with us when your planning application is completed. We can provide you with a simple licence to use the car park at a minimal cost.'*

#### **5. Transport & Traffic**

The central location of the proposed Men's Shed in the village means that it is within walking distance for the vast majority of members. While on site car-parking will be provided this will be primarily for those who cannot walk to the Men's Shed by reason of disability.

Further, the opening hours envisaged in the Skeleton Business Plan (attached) will avoid peak traffic usage of the car-park.

It is relevant to point out that while there are 50 members of Groombridge Men's Shed the proposed Shed building is of a size that cannot accommodate all of them at one time. Realistically, it is anticipated that between 4 and 8 members will attend the Shed on any one day.

## **6. Heritage Statement**

The proposed development sits on land that formerly formed part of Groombridge Place (Grade 2 Listed) and falls within the ambit of the designated Heritage Park & Garden under entry number 1000933.

The proposed development is at the periphery of the Heritage Park and Garden in a location that has for many years been part of the recreation ground area used by the local community. It is separated from the historic garden and house by agricultural land and is not visible from the house or its gardens.

It is therefore not considered that the proposed development will have any adverse impact on the Heritage Asset.

## **7. Public Right of Way**

A Public Right of Way crosses the frontage of the site. This will be preserved and clear demarcations will be put in place to avoid pedestrian/vehicle conflict. See Architect's Design Statement.

## **8. Town Planning Policy Considerations**

A Pre-Application meeting was held under ref PE/2019/0561/E .

The record of discussion contains the following summation:

*'Support the need/requirement for a new building in suggested location for a community 'Men's Shed'. Add value to the community. Location ideal.'*

*'Design and materials of building would be acceptable'*

Guidance was offered by WDC on additional information that could be submitted in order to 'front load' the Planning Application and make it as comprehensive as possible. This comprised:

- (i) A Tree Report: A report has now been commissioned from D Stevens Arboriculture and Tree Services relating to the two mature Oak trees on The Site. A copy is appended to this Statement. It will be noted that one of the two mature trees on the site have been found to be unhealthy. The recommendation is that the canopy of this tree should be removed and the remaining trunk left has a habitat for insects, fungi etc. The other mature tree on The Site has been found to be healthy and that while the positioning of the proposed Men's Shed is within the 'drip line' of this tree it is considered that pile foundations would be appropriate. In response, GMS is proposing the use of screw-pile foundations to support a slightly raised timber floor. Please see the Architect's Design Statement accompanying this Application.
  
- (ii) Landscaping Proposals: As the scheme will require the removal of brambles and naturally seeded scrub, GMS was recommended to produce a landscaping scheme. This has been done and appears in the Architect's Design Statement. This scheme also details the permeable car-park surface,

### Planning Policies

The PreApplication meeting drew attention to the following additional Policies, which are now addressed.

**NPPF 2019 - Section 8 Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities** - Paras 91 to 95 expand at length on the need for social facilities in central locations to support the well being of the local community. Please refer, as well, to the letters of support from the Groombridge Medical Centre and St Thomas Parish Church attached. In addition, Vitality Villages (part of Action in Rural Sussex) has also recognised the issue of loneliness in the demographic that Men's Sheds are aimed at and is active in helping to promote the formation of Men's Sheds throughout Wealden District.

**Wealden Local Plan 1998 - Policies LR7 and LR8** - These Policies relate community facilities both inside and outside the Development Boundary.

The Site is technically just outside the Development Boundary.

As far as LR7 is concerned, it is submitted that the relatively small size of the proposed development coupled with its very close proximity to, and

spatial relationship with, the Village Hall (also just outside the Development Boundary) satisfies the requirements of LR7.

As regards LR8, it is submitted that the three criteria defining ‘exceptional circumstances’ are met namely:

1. The proposed development is essential to meet the needs of the local community (as evidenced above)
2. The proposed development cannot be accommodated satisfactorily within the development boundary (as evidenced above)
3. The proposed development would not be unduly intrusive in the landscape or detrimental to the character or appearance of the countryside (as evidenced by the Architect’s Design Statement.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy EN6** - This policy relates to development within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (which is the case here) and is aimed at conserving or enhancing the natural beauty and character of the landscape. It is submitted that the Architect’s choice of materials and landscaping proposals will mean that the proposed building will blend into and compliment the character of the local village neighbourhood.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy EN12** - This policy relates to retention of trees. Please see the Tree Report (attached) and the notation in red on Plan No 1090/11B as regards piled foundations. This follows the Arboriculturist’s recommendations.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy EN18** - This policy relates to the loss of undeveloped open areas within settlements. It is submitted that the small scale of this development on an area that has been neglected for many years means that the loss of ‘open amenity’ is not significant, if at all.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy EN29** - This Policy concerns external lighting and light spillage. No external lighting is proposed apart from a LED down-lighter attached to the building next to the main door.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy EN27, DC19 (HG10)** - These policies set out layout and design criteria. The Architects drawings have been developed with the stated criteria in mind.

**Wealden Local Plan - Policy TR3, TR13, and TR16** - These policies relate to Traffic and Transport. Attention is therefore drawn to Section 5 above on Traffic & Transport.

**Wealden Design Guide** - The Architect's Design Statement has had this in mind