

LONDON OFFICE

Mr Hamish Evans
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 1SS

Direct Dial: 0207 973 3627

Our ref: P01597199; L01597200

11th September 2025

Dear Mr Evans

**Arrangements for Handling Heritage Applications Direction 2015
& T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015
& Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990**

**SUNTE HOUSE BIRCHEN LANE HAYWARDS HEATH WEST SUSSEX RH16 1RZ
Application Nos DM/25/1705; DM/25/1706**

Thank you for your letters of 22nd August 2025 regarding the above applications for listed building consent and planning permission. On the basis of the information available to date, we offer the following advice to assist your authority in determining the applications.

Historic England Advice

Significance of Sunte House

Sunte House is as a remarkable example of a multiphase country house probably of early 17th-century origin, complete with the associated farmstead and set within landscaped grounds that retain vestiges of the original parkland setting and wider countryside.

An earlier farmhouse stood on the site and was altered in the late 17th or early 18th century as a conscious display of wealth and status. As part of this gentrification process, two formal and largely symmetrical principal elevations were created to the south and east, each exhibiting key features of the Restoration style.

A major phase of development followed in the second half of the 19th century, when the main house and rear service buildings were extended to the north and the grounds formally landscaped. The latter work included creation of a principal axial approach with a circular carriage drive and side paths leading to a walled kitchen garden to the west and an ornamental garden in the Victorian Gardenesque style to the east.

The coherent position of the kitchen garden - located near the ancillary buildings and



4TH FLOOR, CANNON BRIDGE HOUSE, 25 DOWGATE HILL, LONDON EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700
HistoricEngland.org.uk

farmyard to the north-east of the house - and the ornamental garden, designed to be accessed and enjoyed from the reception rooms, illustrates the original dual use of the estate, for both husbandry and pleasure. This contributes to an understanding of the relationship and hierarchy between the house, its outbuildings, and the landscape.

More recently alterations, carried out to the main house in the late 1980s, have reconfigured historical rooms and spaces within the late 19th-century extension at ground floor level and across the upper floors. Despite this, the plan form of the late 17th-/early 18th-century core survives and makes an important contribution to the building's significance. The house's substantial landholding has also been encroached upon by modern development, affecting its immediate setting.

Sunte House holds remarkable aesthetic and historical significance, enriched by its association with the well-regarded anthropologist and writer Geoffrey Gorer (1905-85) who lived at the property from the 1950s. These values are reflected in the house's grade II* statutory listing.

Impact of the Proposals on Significance

The current proposals follow pre-application engagement with Historic England in November/December 2024.

The submission seeks planning permission and associated listed building consent for:

- Internal and external alterations to the main house;
- Enclosure of the north-east courtyard;
- Extension of the former dairy and a glazed link to the tool shed;
- Construction of a pool house in the kitchen garden; and
- Alterations to access and parking arrangements.

Main House

The current proposals for internal alterations to the main house incorporate several positive revisions to the pre-application scheme, notably:

- Retention of the 19th-century secondary staircase and stair lobby in the coeval northern section of the house, thereby avoiding unjustified loss of historic fabric and preserving the legibility and integrity of the plan form.
- Revision of kitchen circulation to avoid the harmful removal of wall section



4TH FLOOR, CANNON BRIDGE HOUSE, 25 DOWGATE HILL, LONDON EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700
HistoricEngland.org.uk

flanking the chimney breast in the north-western extension.

- Reduced alterations to the first floor, ensuring retention of its cellular historic layout, still preserved notwithstanding later partitioning in the 1980s.

The scheme also proposes the replacement of all windows with double-glazed units. A schedule of windows has been submitted, though it lacks detail on age and heritage value for many of them. This information is essential to assess which units should be retained, repaired, or replaced, as later windows that replicate historic patterns can contribute to significance. Accordingly, they should be repaired where possible; if replacement is necessary, exact copies should be made.

Relevant guidance, can be found in the following Historic England advice publications:

Historic England Technical Advice: Traditional Windows: Their Care, Repair and Upgrading (February 2017)

Historic England Advice Note 18 (HEAN18): Adapting Historic Buildings for Energy and Carbon Efficiency (July 2024).

Northern Outbuildings and Courtyard

Evidence indicates that until the 1980s the dairy was connected to the north gable of the house. It is proposed to reinstate this connection and introduce a glazed link between the dairy and the tool shed to improve circulation and access to the house. The new northern entry porch would lead from the linked functional spaces into the north-eastern courtyard, that would be covered with a glazed roof to form a ground floor circulation core to the house.

Amendments since the pre-application stage include the redesign of the courtyard roof as a glazed flat section and the reversion of the dairy extended roof to a pitched form, reducing visual impact. The glazed link's pitched roof has also been lowered beneath the half-hipped roof of the dairy, thus reducing dominance and visibility from the eastern landscaped grounds.

While these changes are welcome, the proposed large, glazed element connecting the house and dairy would introduce an unsympathetic component in proximity of the listed building and disrupt the coherence of the reinstated form, causing harm to significance.

The Walled Kitchen Garden

Although the former kitchen garden has undergone several alterations, including the reconstruction of the northern boundary wall, its footprint has been largely retained.

It is proposed to construct a single-storey pool house abutting the extant northern

wall, to accommodate an internal pool, changing facilities, sauna and plant. Covered by a low-pitched oversailing roof, the structure would extend along the existing wall which, although not original, delineates the historical northern boundary, providing some legibility of the former layout and use of the garden.

Notwithstanding the reduction in the length of the proposed structure from the previous iteration, it would still introduce a substantial massing and unsympathetic built form. This would impact the character of the kitchen garden and the contribution it gives to an understanding of the historical functioning and relationship between the standing buildings and the surrounding land. In addition, the almost complete concealment of the existing wall would compromise the legibility of the former layout and use of the originally enclosed garden.

New Access and Parking Area

Proposals include the creation of a dedicated parking area to the north-west of the house, along with the realignment of the existing historic curved pathway leading from the turning circle towards the kitchen garden.

Introduction of formal and unsympathetic features within the house's historical landscaped setting, which currently retains an informal and attractive character, would adversely impact the significance of the grade II* listed building.

We would recommend siting any additional parking in a more discreet location and retaining the layout and vernacular character of the existing pathway in order to avoid harm to significance.

Relevant Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024) sets out the government's policies for decision-making on planning proposals. Section 16 of the document specifies how the historic environment should be conserved and enhanced and makes it clear in paragraph 208 that conflicts between the conservation of the heritage asset and any aspect of the proposal should be avoided or minimised.

Paragraph 212 states that when considering the impact of a proposed development on a heritage asset, local planning authorities should give great weight to preserving the asset's significance, and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be. As Sunte House is listed at grade II* and is, therefore, among the top 5.8% or so of all listed buildings in the Country, its conservation must be given the greatest weight.

The NPPF states that any harm or loss to the significance of a designated heritage asset, from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting, should require clear and convincing justification (paragraph 213). It also requires decision makers to determine whether the harm is substantial, or less than substantial. If the

harm is deemed to be less than substantial, paragraph 215 requires the harm to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal.

Relevant is also paragraph 219 which states that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within the setting of heritage assets to enhance or better reveal their significance.

Historic England Position on the Proposals

We consider the proposals an improvement on the earlier, pre-application scheme and are broadly content with the internal alterations to the main house. However, some elements would still cause harm to significance. We consider this harm to fall within the lower half of the “less than substantial” spectrum, under the NPPF.

We recommend the following revisions to reduce harm and meet the requirements of paragraph 208 of the Framework:

- Omit the large, glazed element linking the dairy to the main house, replacing it with a more traditional form and solid materiality.
- Further reduce the massing of the pool house and redesign it as a lightweight, less conspicuous structure.
- Relocate additional parking to a more discreet location.
- Retain the historic western pathway in its current alignment and character.

In addition, the window schedule should be completed with information on the age and significance of each unit to inform a sympathetic approach to thermal upgrading.

Recommendation

Historic England has concerns regarding the applications on heritage grounds.

We consider that the issues and safeguards outlined in our advice need to be addressed in order for the applications to meet the requirements of paragraphs 208 and 219 of the NPPF.

In determining these applications, you should bear in mind the statutory duty of sections 16(2) and 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings or their setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest which they possess.

Your authority should take these representations into account and seek amendments, safeguards and further information as set out in our advice.

If there are any material changes to the proposals, or you would like further advice, please contact us.

Yours sincerely

Luciana Gallo

Luciana Gallo RIBA PhD FSA

Assistant Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

London and South East Regions Group

M: 07384 826 458



4TH FLOOR, CANNON BRIDGE HOUSE, 25 DOWGATE HILL, LONDON EC4R 2YA

Telephone 020 7973 3700

HistoricEngland.org.uk