

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 12 March 2025 15:34:13 UTC+00:00
To: "Caroline Grist" <Caroline.Grist@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/24/3139 The Calf Unit, Bowders Farm, Balcombe

Hi Caroline

Initial comments on the above planning application.

The application site is a former agricultural building forming part of the historic farmstead associated with Bowders Farmhouse, which is a Grade II listed building dating originally from the 15th century (according to the list description) and located in a rural position outside Balcombe. The current proposal relates to a U shaped yard of brick built buildings which is located to the south of the farmhouse, attached to the eastern end of an earlier timber framed and weatherboarded barn. A brief historical map regression exercise suggests that the barn predates the buildings around the yard (with the possible exception of the southern range), which would tend to be supported by observations on site, and that the yard replaced a previous farmyard in the same position. The buildings around the surviving yard appear to date from the late 19th or early 20th century (although see above w.r.t. the southern range which would require some further investigation), but the barn, which is quite modest in size for a building of this nature, contains some substantial timbers which may suggest a significantly earlier date of construction (or else re-use of these timbers). Bowders Farm is recorded in the West Sussex Historic Farmstead and Landscape Character assessment as a historic farmstead of the Medieval period.

We currently have before us an application for change of use of the farm courtyard, but it is evident that physical works to the building have taken place, including removal of a roof structure previously enclosing the courtyard at the centre of the buildings, alterations to openings, installation of new or replacement uPVC framed windows and doors, and addition of plastic rainwater goods. These works would require planning permission. A modern (mid-late 20th century) barn to the road frontage has also recently been demolished, and replaced with a hard surfaced parking area.

An important initial question to resolve will be whether the buildings in question would be regarded as curtilage listed. The farmyard buildings clearly predate 1948, and are in close proximity to the house. Under the relevant Historic England guidance the questions remain therefore, as to the use of the buildings historically (clearly they were functional parts of the same farmstead, so this box would be ticked) and at the time of listing (1983), and to their ownership historically (again as part of the same farmstead this would appear obvious) and in 1983. The applicant will need to supply the necessary missing information in order for the Council to come to an informed decision on this matter. If the buildings are regarded as curtilage listed, listed building consent will then be required for any works (external or internal) which are judged to affect their special interest. If not, I would consider it likely that we would regard them as non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) of historical and architectural interest within the local context, given their age, character and contribution to the narrative of the Bowders Farm historic farmstead. They also have group value with and contribute positively to the setting of the listed farmhouse.

In terms of initial comments on the current proposal I would firstly note that the current application is not accompanied by a Heritage Statement, which would be a validation requirement given the location of the site within the setting of Bowders Farmhouse. Such a Heritage Statement would be a useful vehicle to consider the question of curtilage listing, and should also include an assessment of the age and level of interest of the buildings (including the attached barn to the rear of the courtyard) and their contribution through setting to the significance of the listed farmhouse. This latter should be based on the staged approach set out in Historic England guidance GPA Note 3 *'The Setting of Heritage Assets'*.

With respect to the proposed change of use, given that the agricultural use of these buildings appears to have ceased, I would not have an objection in principle. Whilst the removal of the barn and the restoration of the U shaped historic farm courtyard has potential to enhance the significance of these buildings, and their contribution to the setting of the farmhouse, aspects of the other physical works which have taken place to date do raise a number of concerns:

- The removal of the roof structure over the courtyard is unlikely to be contentious based on an understanding that this was installed in the second half of the 20th century, however further information will be required to confirm.
- The alterations to the previously existing form of window and door openings require further information for informed comment, in respect of the prior appearance of the building and the extent of impact on historic fabric. Where infilling of doorways is considered acceptable in principle, it is unlikely that we will support retention of the current blockwork infill.
- The replacement black woodgrain effect uPVC windows and door frames that have been installed throughout would not normally be considered acceptable in the context of a historic farm building, and in particular one which is within the setting of a listed farmhouse. This will require a compelling justification. As a starting point, we will need full information on the appearance and materials of the previous windows and doors.
- Likewise we would not normally support plastic rainwater goods etc. on a historic farm building. Again, it will be useful to learn what was used previously on the building, where guttering was present.

In respect of the further prospective works discussed on site, more information will be required for informed comment. As we noted, the inclusion of necessary repair works to the barn to the rear of the courtyard is encouraged.

As noted above, a 20th century barn which was located to the east of the courtyard has been removed. Planning permission does not seem to have been sought or given for this, but I would be guided by you as to whether this would be required. Given the modern nature of the building I consider it unlikely that there would be any objection in heritage terms to this work, and indeed there may be benefit in these terms in better revealing the farm courtyard, as well as the listed farmhouse, in views from the adjacent road.

The hard surfaced parking area which has replaced the barn does however raise some concerns in terms of its scale and its visual prominence in views of the farmhouse and historic farmstead from the road. Although these concerns will be weighed against the benefit of the removal of the barn, it may be that will require at the least some amendments to the extent and form of the parking area, and/or additional softening and screening by appropriate fencing and/or planting. We will be in a better position to comment on this when further information on the context of the works is received.

Further comments can be made on receipt of the further information set out above.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

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