

I wish to object most strongly to this application because of the proposed development site's proximity to the conservation area in which the historic medieval and beautiful listed building that is Estcots Farmhouse sits. I believe that such a development would be contrary to DP34 and DP35 planning policies.

1. Estcots Farmhouse deserves to be singled out for special care and protection because of its unique and wonderful character and because of its special contribution to East Grinstead. Adult students of local history and classes of schoolchildren have enjoyed conducted tours around the house and gardens in recent years. It is a rare example of a 15th century, Wealden, medieval hall house, rebuilt at its west end in the 16th century and extended on the north side in the mid-17th century. Its name can be traced back to 1285. Many people, including architects and historians, have confirmed that this is an historic house of rare beauty and interest, comparable in date and merit to buildings in the town's High Street but with the difference that it is set in an area of natural beauty and tranquillity. It has been described as a "little piece of Old England".
2. A former Councillor and Chairman of Mid Sussex District Council's North Area Planning Committee described Estcots Farmhouse as, 'This Jewel that East Grinstead is fortunate to have.' He added that a planning approval on this site, 'would be a tragedy.' Bernard Gillbard, former Chairman of East Grinstead Town Council Planning Committee, stated that, 'Many people in East Grinstead hold Estcots Farmhouse and its environs in very high esteem,' and that this conservation 'area is unique.' He also objected strongly to development on this proposed site.
3. To illustrate the importance of Estcots Farmhouse, it has featured in numerous newspaper articles, been written up in considerable detail in an article called, 'Historic Houses of Sussex,' in the Sussex County Magazine, and even chosen by Mr Michael Leppard for the books, '100 Buildings of East Grinstead,' and, 'A History of East Grinstead.' Viscountess Frances Wolseley also included a significant feature on Estcots Farmhouse in the book, 'Historic Houses of West Sussex & their Owners'.
4. After many previous failed attempts to develop the proposed site, between 1980 and 2004, including an application for a bungalow in 1990, the conclusion has always been that the proposed development 'would seriously detract from the setting of Estcots Farmhouse, a Grade II building of architectural merit and historic character.' Furthermore, 'The proposed development would detract from the amenities of the residents of the adjoining property to the rear by virtue of overlooking and loss of privacy.' None of this has changed over the years other than the past development proposals were contrary to Planning Policies B10, B12 & B15 and are now contrary to DP34 & DP35. How can the Council pass such an application that does not have 'regard to the desirability of preserving the listed building or its setting' and does not 'protect the setting of the conservation area and in particular views into and out of the area'? If the application is approved, it is likely to damage irretrievably the setting of Estcots Farmhouse and will create a sense of urban enclosure.

5. Estcots Farmhouse does not provide enough screening from the proposed development. The relevant trees are deciduous in nature and cannot be relied on to remain alive indefinitely. The Laurel bushes are not a permanent feature and should be removed soon and replaced to avoid damage to the structure of the wall. Anything growing above the wall should therefore be excluded when assessing screening. As shown in Figure 1, the wall is of variable height and only 2 m in the highest places and as low as 1.58 m in places.

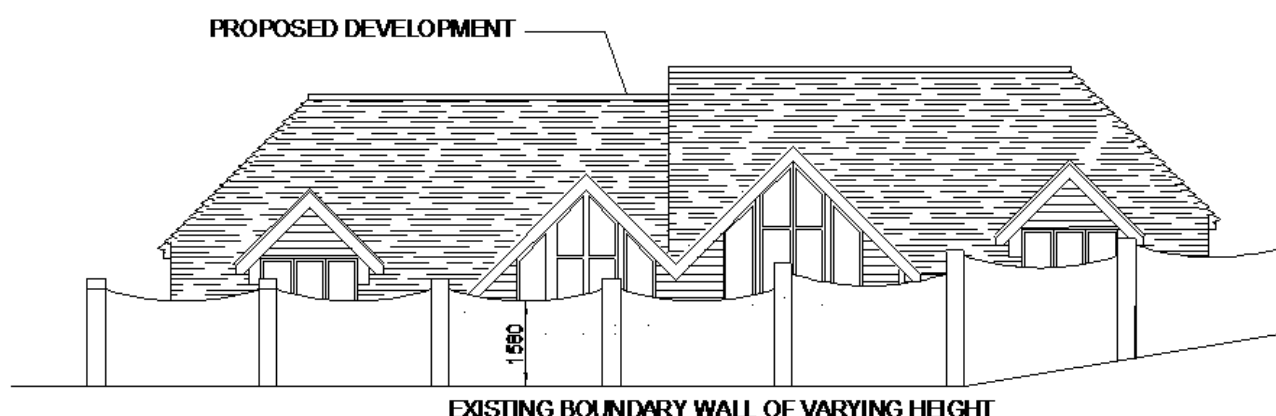


Figure 1 View looking from Estcots Farmhouse to the proposed development

6. In order to screen the new buildings, a continuous wall of evergreen foliage would be required. As the main vista of Estcots farmhouse is southwards, this would impose an oppressive sense of enclosure to the property, thereby spoiling its setting. The Councillor, Stephen Barnett, recognised in 2004 that this conservation area is, 'a very special place in East Grinstead,' and that, 'an impenetrable screen of vegetation would have a bad effect on the setting of the listed buildings and the conservation area.' He added that, 'Once built I do not believe any significant screening could survive in a narrow shaded patch between the house and boundary wall.' Adequate screening would also have a significant impact on the amount of daylight able to reach the application buildings, which would cause harm to their future owners as well.
7. The Heritage statement written on behalf of No. 19, Estcots Drive does not take into account the effect of the proposed houses on Estcots Farmhouse but merely looks at the view from ground level. This is totally missing the point as the buildings are not below ground! The views between the proposed rear windows and the conservation area were not addressed. If the author of the heritage statement had viewed the impact of the proposed houses from inside Estcots Farmhouse and imagined the height of the proposed buildings, she would have concluded there would be harm to a heritage asset and it would be contrary to Sections 66 and 72 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) 1990 and Historic England's GPA3, step 3. That harm would be detrimental and permanent.

8. I would argue that the proposed development, although described as 1.5 storeys, is in effect a pair of 2 storey semi-detached buildings, judging from the height of their upper windows, some of which even have balconies facing Estcots Farmhouse. There are, in fact, 13 windows, including two French windows, at the back of Estcots Farmhouse facing south towards the proposed development as 11 out of its 14 rooms, including all the principal rooms upstairs and downstairs, face south. It is inevitable that these rooms and rear garden would be overlooked as shown in Figure 2 below. The Estcots Farmhouse bathroom curtains would have to remain closed as it is not permitted or desirable to replace the beautiful old windows with their ancient wrought iron catches with modern frosted glass.

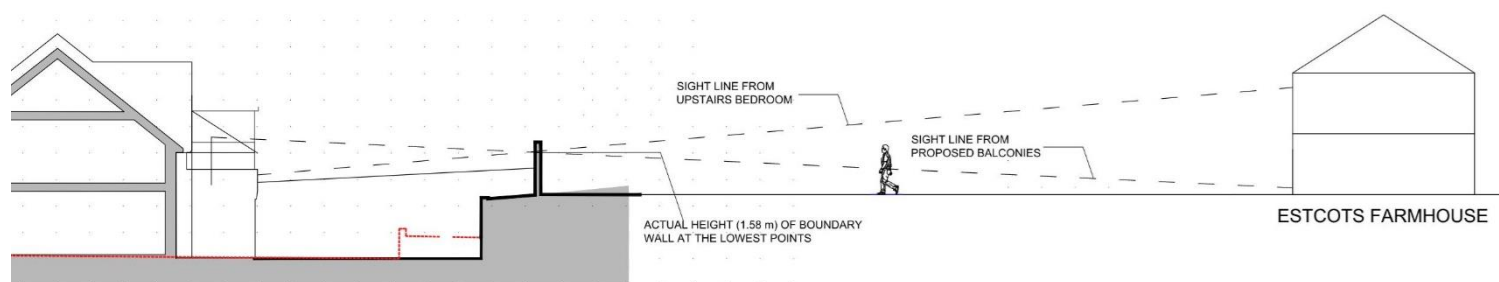


Figure 2 Sight lines overlooking and from Estcots Farmhouse

9. Obviously, the proposed buildings will benefit the owner of No.19 Estcots Drive, whilst greatly reducing the enjoyment of owning and living in Estcots Farmhouse. This little piece of old England with its tranquillity and rustic charm would feel under siege. As the National Planning Policy, para 132 states, 'as heritage assets are irreplaceable, any harm or loss should require clear and convincing justification.'
10. The inter-relationship between Estcots Farmhouse and the original garden can still be appreciated from its existing curtilage. The boundary of the application site to No.17 Estcots Drive is thought to be a remnant of the old Estcots Farmhouse walled kitchen garden and still runs into the grounds of Estcots Farmhouse. This wall links the application site to the conservation area.
11. It would be extremely sad to lose the historic ornamental pond with its biodiversity in favour of development. The Meridian Line that runs through Estcots Farmhouse and grounds also runs through the proposed site. Bisecting the frontage of the site is a Meridian Line Marker (Figure 3), which I understand needs to be protected and maintained by East Grinstead Council and hopefully will not have to be moved.



Figure 3

Meridian Line Mark in Estcots Drive at the front of the proposed development

12. The setting of a Conservation Area is important as viewed from outside the area as well as viewed from within the area. Currently from Estcots Drive, there is a view in the distance of Estcots Farmhouse's impressive old chimney stacks, the tiled roof and some of the property below. This would disappear behind the proposed new buildings.
13. It is true that previous developments have been planned with some consideration. The bungalow, No.17, Estcots Drive, is mainly hidden by the old high kitchen garden wall. The house No.19, Estcots Drive is further down the hill and therefore does not too seriously affect the environment of Estcots Farmhouse. However, because of the topography of the land, the proposed new buildings would completely dominate the garden and rear of Estcots Farmhouse, thus eliminating privacy both outside and inside the house. I understand that the roofline of the proposed buildings will be even higher than Nos. 17 & 19. No expense was spared in renovating, maintaining and landscaping Estcots Farmhouse sympathetically and within listed building rules. If the environment of Estcots Farmhouse were damaged, who would be willing to invest time and money in maintaining the listed building? There is a serious problem of listed buildings falling into disrepair because of the high expense involved in maintaining them. It would not have been purchased had it had a dominating development close to its boundary wall at the time. The encroachment of the proposed development cannot be appreciated by merely looking at the application plan.

I understand the need for properties in this area but not at any cost. I am not against infilling where there is a housing need, providing it is not damaging to other people and special properties. Please allow the environment of this medieval farmhouse to remain protected and unspoilt for present and future generations and East Grinstead, rather than be an infill too far, and refuse this application.