

LONDON OFFICE

Mr Hamish Evans
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Direct Dial: 0207 973 3627

Our ref: P01597193; L01597203

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/25/1708; DM/25/1709**

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.

Introduction

The site has an extensive planning history. Notably, the cottage and the former farmyard buildings are subject to extant approvals for the formation of two dwellinghouses, granted in 2005 (05/02450/FUL; 05/02781/LBC). Formal confirmation of implementation, and continued validity, of the existing consents was approved in May 2021.

The consented scheme amalgamates the floorspace of the cottage with the stables and cowshed buildings to form one dwelling, and converts and extends the barn as a second dwellinghouse.

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

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



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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 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 submission seeks planning permission and associated listed building consent for:

- External and internal alterations to the curtilage-listed former agricultural buildings (stables, cowshed, byre) to provide incidental residential and service space associated with Sunte House;
- Internal reconfiguration and amalgamation of the curtilage-listed cottage with part of the cowshed to form a separate two-bedroom dwellinghouse, and



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- Conversion of the curtilage listed barn for flexible ancillary use to the main house.

Former Agricultural Buildings and Cottage

The curtilage-listed former agricultural buildings are located to the north-east of the house and comprise the stables, the cowshed, the byre and the barn arranged around a central courtyard. In addition, a small cottage, built in the first half of the 19th century, stands to the west of the stables.

The buildings have undergone significant alterations since construction. In particular, 20th-century works to the stables, cowshed and byre have introduced concrete block walls and entailed loss of original internal features. Nevertheless, they still evoke the character of a traditional farmstead with distinct building types illustrating their former agricultural use. On this basis, the proposed internal partitioning of those buildings can be considered acceptable.

Externally, it is proposed to timber-clad existing blockwork infill between exposed timber frames above the existing stone and brick plinths, and introduce extensive glazed fenestration. The existing roof profiles would be retained, with conservation rooflights added to the stables and cowshed. The stables roof would receive new slate in place of the existing modern clay tiles, with addition of solar panels to reduce the development's carbon footprint.

At pre-application stage, we recommended designing the farmyard elevations to reflect the area's rural and utilitarian character through appropriate materials and detailing, with limited new openings. While mitigation measures such as ledged-and-braced doors, shutters and hit-and-miss timber screens to the proposed fenestration have been introduced, the balance of glazing to solid on courtyard elevations remains disproportionate and does not succeed in sustaining the traditional character of the farmyard. The harm is exacerbated by introduction of rooflights, which are uncharacteristic of traditional farm buildings.

In addition, although we understand the rationale for proposing slate tiles on the stables to reduce the visual impact of solar panels, slate would disrupt the visual unity achieved by the consistent use of clay tiles on surrounding buildings.

The Barn

The large barn is the most historically significant building within the farm courtyard and its southern elevation forms the northern boundary along the grade II-listed garden wall.

Although extended to the west in the late 19th century and altered in the 1980s with blockwork on its western and southern elevations, it retains evidence of its mid to late 17th/early to mid-18th century origins. Internally, the structure displays a historical timber frame, which illustrates its former agricultural use. Externally, despite

alterations, the barn strongly contributes to the visual integrity of the former historic farmyard and aids the understanding and legibility of the site's development.

Following pre-application negotiations, the earlier proposal to convert the barn to an independent dwelling has been significantly revised. Sympathetic internal changes include retention of the double-height volume, with facilities introduced in the northern section beneath the catslide roof and a new stair at the north gable providing access to a small mezzanine.

Externally, the previously proposed domestic entrance porch and the large number of windows and doors - which would have given the barn a suburban residential character - have been omitted. The primary entrance and existing timber barn doors would now be retained, and modern concrete blockwork clad in horizontal timber weatherboarding would assist in preserving legibility of the building type and enhancing its contextual character within farmyard views.

Unlike the pre-application scheme, which extended the structure to the north, the current proposal reverts to the consented approach of a southerly extension into the walled garden. It is proposed to continue the half-hipped roof profile to align with the current eaves and to introduce a fully glazed façade within a four-bay timber structure supporting the new roof.

While the treatment of the existing barn is acceptable in heritage terms, the extension, as currently designed, would cause harm to significance. The substantial, fully glazed southern elevation would introduce a dominant and incongruous feature, eroding the agricultural character of the building and compromising understanding of its original function.

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 acknowledge and welcome the incorporation of several pre-application recommendations into the current scheme. However, some elements would still cause harm to significance. We consider this harm to fall within the lower half of the “less than substantial” range, under the NPPF.

To reduce harm and meet the requirements of paragraph 208 of the Framework, we recommend the following revisions:

- Reduce the extent of glazing on courtyard-facing elevations to preserve the farmyard’s rural and utilitarian character.
- Locate rooflights on the outer slopes of the farm buildings only, to retain their vernacular appearance.
- While we strongly support use of renewable energy to address the climate emergency, we consider that the proposed array of solar panels on the stables inner roof slope should be sited to a less conspicuous roof or ground-mounted location.
- Replace the proposed slate tiles on the stables with clay tiles to maintain visual consistency with the immediate context.
- Reduce glazing in the barn’s southern extension to lessen visual dominance and retain the introverted character of this rural building type.

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 or 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

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