



February 2026

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Spicers Farmhouse & Barn
Rowhill Lane, Balcombe RH17 6JN



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Address:
Spicers Farm,
Rowhill Lane,
Balcombe,
RH17 6JN



Local Authority: Mid Sussex District Council
Parish ward: Balcombe

1. INTRODUCTION

This Design and Access Statement supports the pre-planning application and listed building consent advice for works to Spicers Farm and Barn, a Grade II listed farmhouse site set within the High Weald National Landscape (formerly AONB), near Balcombe, West Sussex.

The proposals comprise internal reconfiguration, extension, and fabric repairs to the main house, as well as refurbishment of curtilage-listed barns for domestic ancillary use.

These proposals have been informed by a comprehensive Historic Building Assessment, site survey and formal feedback from the pre-planning application. It is supported by an extensive and detailed Heritage Statement prepared by HB Archaeology & Conservation Ltd.

2. SITE INFORMATION

Designations:

- Not within ancient woodland or a 15m buffer zone.
- Not within an Archaeological Notification Area.
- Not within a conservation area.
- Within High Weald National Landscape
- Not within any areas of Tree Preservation Order.

Constraints:

- Not within a brownfield land registry.
- Not within or nearby a section 106.
- Historic England: Grade II listed building (Listed Entry Number: 1025744)

Flood Risks:

- Surface water: Very low chance of flooding
- Groundwater: Unlikely
- Reservoirs: Unlikely
- HM land registry: Tenure type: Freehold

3. SITE AND HERITAGE CONTEXT

Spicers Farmhouse originates from the late 15th, early 16th century, with significant later additions. It retains timber framing, exposed beams, and vernacular features that reflect the historical agricultural development of the region. The property also includes a timber-framed threshing barn and a brick-built dairy — both curtilage listed — reflecting the site's evolution as a working farmstead.

The farmhouse and associated structures are architecturally significant but have been subject to several unsympathetic 20th-century interventions. These include a poorly resolved two-storey rear extension, various window replacements, and water ingress to the basement and attic, as noted in the accompanying Heritage Statement.



4. PROPOSED WORKS

Main House

Ground Floor Reconfiguration:

Adaptation of existing spaces to create an improved kitchen/dining/living area and snug. Incorporation of a basement. Where indicated on the architectural drawings, historic windows are to be upgraded for thermal benefits. This will include replacing the glass in their existing frame for slimline double glazed.

Extension:

A single-storey rear extension is proposed to facilitate internal circulation and permit better use of existing historic rooms.

The proposed extension references the main house with stone cladding matching the colour/tone of the existing stonework on the historic building.



First Floor Adjustments:

For reasons of privacy the second entrance to Bedroom 1 en-suite will be blocked off.

Loft Adjustments:

Using the existing stair access to the loft, these spaces are to become an additional bedroom with en-suite and a play area using the existing roof lights. All existing timber beams within the loft are proposed to be retained.

Roof works:

The roof as existing has no/little insulation, to create a comfortable living space, it is proposed that external mineral wool insulation is implemented across the whole roof to keep the existing timber structure visible internally. This will require the ridge height to increase by approximately 350mm and the existing clay tiles will need to be carefully removed and reinstalled after the insulation has been installed.



Barn & Outbuildings - Restoration

The proposal includes stabilisation, repairs, and thermal improvements to the barn and adjoining outbuildings into habitable residential uses (e.g., home office, games room, additional bedrooms, garden storage & a granny annex).

Key original timber framing will be retained, with modern interventions clearly expressed and set inside of the barn structure to reduce overall impact. As with the house, to retain the timber structure visible internally on the roof, external mineral wool is proposed to be installed on the outer edge of the timbers with the existing clay tiles being removed and reinstalled. On the walls, insulation between the timbers is possible and will still keep the timber structure exposed.



Barn & Outbuildings - Ancillary use

Existing use: ancillary storage to the house

Propose use: ancillary accommodation/study to the house

The proposed conversion of the existing barn is intended solely to provide ancillary accommodation and associated domestic space incidental to the use of the main farmhouse at Spicers Farm. The building will not form an independent planning unit, nor will it be occupied as a separate dwelling.

The accommodation will be used by members of the extended family of the primary occupants of the farmhouse, who regularly visit the property, including family members travelling from Scotland. Due to the constraints of the Grade II listed farmhouse — including its historic cellular layout and sensitivity to internal alteration — it is not feasible or desirable to accommodate larger family gatherings within the main house without causing harm to its historic fabric and plan form (as outlined in the Heritage Statement and Design Rationale).

The converted barn will therefore provide flexible, low-intensity ancillary space, including:

- A communal area for family gatherings and shared activities;
- Informal recreational space, particularly for visiting children;
- A limited number of bedrooms used intermittently by visiting family members (including grandparents);
- A home office space to support modern domestic working practices associated with the main dwelling.

The use of the barn will remain functionally and physically linked to the main farmhouse, with no subdivision, separate access arrangements, or independent servicing that would enable or imply separate residential occupation.



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- Removal or subdivision of historic structural elements;
- Loss of legibility of the original plan form;
- Disruption of surviving timber framing;
- Further erosion of historic fabric already compromised by 20th century interventions.

Such interventions would result in a greater degree of heritage harm than the carefully located rear extension proposed.

In accordance with paragraph 207 of the NPPF (2024), great weight must be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets. Where harm is identified, even if less than substantial, it must be clearly justified and demonstrably the minimum necessary. The proposed extension represents the least harmful means of delivering the functional accommodation required for contemporary family life while preserving the integrity of the principal historic rooms.

5. DESIGN RATIONALE AND HERITAGE JUSTIFICATION

The central principle underpinning this proposal is the long-term conservation of a Grade II listed farmhouse and its associated curtilage structures through sensitive adaptation that sustains viable family occupation.

Functional Necessity and Heritage-Led Approach

While the farmhouse is of a reasonable overall floor area, its plan form reflects its late medieval origins and incremental agricultural evolution rather than modern domestic patterns. The principal rooms are modestly proportioned, cellular in arrangement, and closely associated with surviving historic fabric including timber framing, spine beams and early masonry elements.

The existing kitchen accommodation is constrained within historically significant spaces whose proportions and fabric contribute positively to the building's significance. Enlargement of the kitchen within the existing envelope would necessitate:

Why Internal Reconfiguration Alone Is Not Appropriate

A purely internal solution has been carefully examined and discounted for the following heritage-led reasons:

1. The most suitable rooms for expansion are among the most historically sensitive.
2. Structural timber framing limits lateral enlargement without removal of original fabric.
3. Combining existing rooms would erode the building's historic plan legibility.
4. Servicing upgrades required for a significantly enlarged kitchen would compound intervention within historic walls and floors.

By contrast, the proposed single-storey rear extension:

- Is clearly subservient in scale and massing;
 - Is located on a secondary elevation;
 - Preserves the hierarchy and primacy of the original farmhouse;
 - Avoids removal of significant internal fabric;
- Is reversible in heritage terms.

Viability and Sustainable Use

Paragraph 215 of the NPPF recognises that securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset is a material consideration. For a rural listed farmhouse, continued occupation as a comfortable family dwelling is the most appropriate and sustainable use.

The provision of a well-proportioned kitchen/dining space is not an aspirational enhancement but a functional requirement of modern domestic life. Without modest adaptation, the building risks:

- Ongoing piecemeal internal alterations
- Incremental loss of historic fabric,
- Or diminished long-term desirability and maintenance investment.

The extension therefore supports the asset's conservation by enabling it to function effectively as a 21st-century family home without sacrificing its historic core.

High Weald AONB (National Landscape) Considerations

The High Weald Management Plan supports sensitive renovation of traditional farmsteads where their form and setting are respected. The proposal preserves the agricultural character of the group, maintains the primacy of the original farmhouse, and introduces no suburbanising elements.

The modest extension is visually contained within the existing curtilage and does not affect wider landscape character.



In conservation terms, this approach follows the established principle of minimum intervention to significant fabric, with new work expressed honestly and subordinate to the historic host.

Compliance with Mid Sussex Policy DP34

Policy DP34 requires that proposals:

- Respect historic form, scale and materials;
- Retain and enhance significance;
- Avoid cumulative erosion of character;
- Secure viable re-use.

The extension complies fully with these requirements. It does not compete with the historic massing, does not alter the principal elevations, and is materially recessive. Crucially, it prevents more harmful internal restructuring.

High Weald Management Plan

Supports sensitive renovation of traditional farmsteads and reuse of rural vernacular buildings, provided their form and setting are retained.



6. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The following policies are relevant:

- National Planning Policy Framework (2024)
- Para 207–216: Proposals must assess and minimise harm to designated assets and justify works in terms of public benefit.
- Para 215: Supports heritage-led schemes that secure viable future uses.
- Mid Sussex District Plan (2018)
- Policy DP34 – Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets:
 - Ensures alterations respect historic form, scale, materials and setting.
 - Requires proposals to retain and enhance significance.
 - Encourages viable re-use and discourages deterioration through neglect.

8. CONCLUSION

Spicers Farm presents a rare opportunity to enhance a listed rural building group that has suffered from piecemeal additions and deterioration. The proposals respect and reveal the historic significance of the property while ensuring its continued use as a family home.

This is a scheme rooted in conservation, craftsmanship and contextual sensitivity, and we believe it complies fully with the Mid Sussex District Plan, the NPPF, and good conservation practice.

We respectfully ask the Local Authority to positively review this application and support the subsequent full application.

7. ACCESS CONSIDERATIONS

Access to the site will remain unchanged via Rowhill Lane. The internal configuration has been carefully planned to support lifetime home principles, including the addition of a ground floor WC and shower, and level thresholds where possible.

Parking and turning areas are provided within the existing curtilage and there are no proposed alterations to these.

A small patio is proposed outside of the rear extension to facilitate an outdoor dining/lounge area. This will be on a pedestal system to allow for suitable drainage.



9. PHOTOS: FARMHOUSE



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