

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 27 February 2025 12:40:38 UTC+00:00
To: "Joanne Fisher" <Joanne.Fisher@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/24/2682 Townhouse Farm

Hi Jo

Comments on the above planning application.

The application site consists of a parcel of land located to the extreme southern end of Church Lane, Ardingly. The land, which was previously occupied by farm buildings, is located within the Ardingly Conservation Area and is directly to the west of Grade II listed Townhouse, within its setting. A second listed building, Old Knowles, is a short distance to the north along Church Lane. The surrounding land with the exception of the development along Church Lane is rural, open fields and woods. There are extensive and beautiful views to the south looking across a valley to the bottom of which is Ardingly Reservoir. The site sits adjacent to a crossing of public rights of way, one running south west to north east, and one west to south east, before turning south.

All three of the heritage assets mentioned above are considered to be affected by the proposed development on the site, either directly or indirectly through impact on setting. I would note that the submitted Heritage Statement is not complete in that it does not fully consider the contribution made to the significance of each asset by its setting, or the impact that the proposed development will have on this contribution.

Ardingly Conservation Area is in two parts, the western of which is centred on Church Lane and the church to its northern end. The Council has not yet published an appraisal for the Area but in its document '*Conservation Areas in Mid Sussex*' it identifies several features which are important to the character of the western part of the Conservation Area including the views across the countryside. In my opinion, the special interest of the western part of the Ardingly Conservation Area lies in its origins as the early nucleus of the development of the village centred on the Grade I listed 14th century church. The village has subsequently grown up over centuries in close connection with the surrounding countryside, a connection which is still apparent in the tranquil and rural nature of Church Lane and the extensive rural views from its southern end. Church Lane itself contains a number of listed buildings including the two named above, which were originally the farmhouses for separate but adjacent farms (known during the 19th century as Townhouse Farm and Old Knowle's Farm). These two farms are included in the West Sussex Historic Farmsteads and Landscape Character Assessment as historic farmsteads dating from the post medieval and medieval periods respectively. The farms historically stood in isolation, and were only connected with the village to the north by intervening housing development during the mid-late 20th century. The southern end of Church Lane beyond Old Knowles remains unpaved and is lined by hedgerows to either side.

The rural nature of this southern part of the lane, the transition this provides to the open countryside beyond, and the extensive views over that countryside, make a strong positive contribution to the special character of the western part of the Conservation Area.

The majority of buildings forming part of the former Townhouse Farm, including Townhouse itself, make to a greater or lesser extent, a positive contribution to the rural character of this part of the Area. Townhouse itself is the former farmhouse and a building of great character (described in more detail below). It is not within the development site but would be affected by impact on setting. Associated with it to the north west is a surviving courtyard of farm buildings dating from the 19th century or earlier. These buildings would be regarded as curtilage listed and although again not within either of the proposed development sites would be affected by new buildings on them due to the impact on their setting. I would consider that all of these buildings forming the historic farmstead make a strong positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area through their rural character and contribution to an understanding of the origins and development of the Area. Formerly present on the site under consideration were a range of large modern barns which were recently demolished under an existing permission relating to the site. While of no particular age or architectural interest these buildings made a neutral or low level of positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area by reinforcing the rural character of this southern tip of Church Lane. The character of the approved replacement development on the site is discussed below.

Townhouse

Townhouse is Grade II listed former farmhouse of ashlar construction or facing with a hipped tiled roof. No date of construction is given in the list description, but I would expect it to possess evidential and illustrative historical value, the latter relating to its former use as farmhouse and the way in which this demonstrates the changing socio-economic conditions of the area, as well as fortuitous aesthetic interest. Its significance is enhanced by the group value it shares with the surviving farm buildings to the west and north west.

These associated former farm buildings make a strong positive contribution to the setting of the house, as does the broader rural context, in terms of the appreciation of both its illustrative historical and aesthetic values.

The impact of the approved scheme on the site on the setting of this listed building is discussed below.

Old Knowles

Old Knowles is a Grade II listed former farmhouse a short distance to the north of the pre-application sites along Church Lane. The building, which dates from the 17th century or earlier, is of timber framed construction with brick infilling and a tiled roof. As with Townhouse I would expect the building to possess evidential and illustrative historical value, the latter relating to its former use as farmhouse and the way in which this demonstrates the changing socio-economic conditions of the area, as well as fortuitous aesthetic interest.

The rural nature of the southern end of Church Lane, and the surrounding countryside, make a strong positive contribution to the setting of Old Knowles and the manner in which its special interest is appreciated. I would consider the approach to Old Knowles from the south along the PROW which follows the line of Church Lane to be part of this setting.

Again the impact of the approved scheme on the setting of this listed building is set out below.

Approved scheme

Planning permission was granted in 2022 for works in the vicinity of Townhouse Farm relating to three distinct plots, one of which was the application site. In relation to this site permission was granted for the demolition of the existing modern farm buildings referred to above, and construction in their place of a detached 4 bedroom dwelling house with ancillary outbuildings comprising a garden store, and combined garage and home office. An associated hard and soft landscaping scheme was approved under a subsequent discharge of condition application.

The form and design of all of these buildings, including in particular the house, was subject to protracted discussions between the applicant and Officers, and several rounds of amendments were made. The house, a substantial building, is as approved reflective of a traditional Sussex weatherboarded barn; the outbuildings also are respectful of the traditional agricultural vernacular.

In many circumstances, a new dwelling of this scale in such close proximity to a historic farmstead, including a Grade II listed farmhouse, and within the transitional, semi-rural edge of the Conservation Area, would have been regarded as contentious. However there were particular circumstances pertinent to this site which allowed a positive recommendation to be made:

- The presence on the site of the existing modern barns, which were substantial in scale and of a low quality; and
- The former presence on the site, as demonstrated by historical map regression, of a barn which previously formed part of the farmstead to Townhouse Farm, but is said anecdotally to have been dismantled and moved to Deanlands Place, Horsted Keynes, as well as other agricultural buildings which are now lost, forming a series of farm yards. The approved dwelling and its outbuildings, although not attempting an exact facsimile of the scale or form of the original barn (which are not known with certainty beyond its footprint) or other lost buildings, are in their approximate position, and therefore sited within the historic extent of the farmstead.

In this context, it was considered that the replacement of the existing modern barns with a dwelling and outbuildings which were respectful of the position within the historic farmstead and the rural edge of the Conservation Area, and despite their domestic use related better in form, design and materials to the traditional vernacular architecture of the surviving buildings within the farmstead than the existing modern buildings, could be supported. The decision that the proposal could be supported in heritage terms was very much 'on balance', and depended heavily on the sympathetic design of the buildings concerned, which was achieved in consultation with Officers.

The current proposal.

The current proposal is for an alternative scheme for the redevelopment of the site, comprising a 4 bedroom detached house in a loosely vernacular domestic style, with ancillary outbuildings, and associated hard and soft landscaping.

In my opinion, this proposal raises a number of concerns in relation to the impact on the settings of the Townhouse and its associated historic farmstead, and of Old Knowles, and on the character and appearance of this part of the Conservation Area:

- The scale of the proposed new dwelling is excessive, even when viewed in the context of the approved new dwelling, which is itself substantial. This is both in terms of its footprint and of its bulk, particularly at first floor.

- The overtly domestic nature of the design is inappropriate for this context. As discussed above, given the position of the site in close proximity to Townhouse, and within the extent of its historic farmstead, the permitted new dwelling was only considered acceptable on balance – this was largely due to its design referencing a traditional Sussex barn, which for the reasons set out above is considered an appropriate response to the nature and history of the site. The barn style dwelling would appear appropriate to the context of the farmstead, and importantly would not confuse its narrative by introducing a second dwelling of a scale and appearance suggesting a ‘farmhouse’ alongside the original listed building, unlike the current proposal. The farmhouse was historically the principle building at the focus of the farm’s operations, and of a very different, notably domestic, architectural character to its ancillary, agricultural buildings. For these reasons the current proposal for a substantial, overtly domestic building on the site would detract from the settings of Townhouse and of the surviving curtilage historic buildings within its former farmstead, and hence from their special interests and how these are appreciated.
- The introduction of a new, substantial dwelling of an overtly domestic appearance in this position would also harm both the semi-rural, edge of village character of this part of the Conservation Area. In contrast to the approved scheme, the current proposal would detract from, rather than reinforce, the transitional character of the southern end of Church Lane.
- For similar reasons, the proposal would also detract from the rural setting of Old Knowles, and the positive contribution this makes to its special interest and how this is appreciated.
- I also consider that there are issues with aspects of the detailed design including the treatment of the rear elevation and aspects of the fenestration. Had the principle of the proposal been considered acceptable, amendments in these respects would have been required.

For these reasons I consider that the proposal is harmful to the settings of the listed buildings at Townhouse (including the curtilage listed former farm buildings associated with the house) and at Old Knowles, contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP34. In terms of the NPPF, I would consider the harm caused to be less than substantial, at around the mid point of the scale in relation to Townhouse, and at the lower end of the scale with respect to Old Knowles. Paragraph 215 will apply.

The proposal is also harmful to the character and appearance of the Ardingly Conservation Area, contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP35. IN terms of the NPPF I would place the harm at around the mid point of the scale, such that paragraph 215 will again apply.

This is not an application where I consider that minor amendments could address the issues raised, which are ones of principle- I would suggest instead that if the applicant is keen to pursue amendments to the approved scheme, bearing in mind the points raised above, the application is withdrawn and pre-application advice requested.

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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