

**From:** Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>  
**Sent:** 03 October 2025 11:49:53 UTC+01:00  
**To:** "Stefan Galyas" <Stefan.Galyas@midsussex.gov.uk>  
**Subject:** Stonehurst, Selsfield Road, Ardingly DM/25/2231

Hi Stefan

Comments on the above planning application.

Stonehurst is a substantial country house located in a rural position to the north of Ardingly. The building itself is unlisted but is regarded with its ancillary garden and estate buildings as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA), and the gardens within which it is set are part of an extensive Grade II listed registered park and garden.

The house at Stonehurst was constructed c.1910 to a design by architect Norman Searle for client John Stewart, on the site of an earlier farmhouse, Stone Farm. The building is in a loosely Arts and Crafts style, with brick and hung tile elevations, with mock timbering to gables, and slate roofs. Originally, the house had a large conservatory wrapping around the south-east corner of the building, as well as a tall central tower with a balcony providing views over the surrounding landscape. These features have both been lost, although the base of the tower remains.

The gardens and pleasure grounds around the house were laid out in 1907 to a design by Thomas H. Mawson, with further input from Norman Searle. The formal gardens around the house and the pleasure grounds beyond these are very extensive, particularly to the north and west, extending to incorporate the valley of the Cob Brook and a tributary, mill ponds and woodlands, and also originally retaining some historic buildings including two mills and associated mill cottages. The formal gardens immediately around the house include a series of brick walled enclosures, with buildings incorporated into the walls including an observatory and viewing bastion, as well as a terrace with flanking tea pavilions which extends along the eastern side of the house. Below this terrace are lawns which descend towards the pleasure grounds in the wooded valley below, which are now in separate ownership.

The pleasure grounds (now outside the ownership of Stonehurst) include a house known as Many Waters, which is on the site of the Mill Cottages adjacent to the former Stone Mill, and a folly of the same name. Information within the Heritage Statement submitted with this application indicates that the current house is an early 21<sup>st</sup> century replacement of the earlier buildings on the site, and is therefore not of any heritage value.

Also within close proximity to the site, with its north-eastern boundary lying just to the south-west of Stonehurst house on the opposite side of Selsfield Road, is Wakehurst Place. This grade II\* registered park and garden is very extensive, extending southwards along Selsfield Road, and for some distance to the west. At the heart of the

gardens lie Wakehurst mansion, a Grade I listed building dating from 1590, and its associated 18<sup>th</sup> century stable block (grade II\* listed), as well as a number of ancillary buildings associated with the maintenance of the gardens, which are managed by Kew as their rural outpost. To the south of Stonehurst on the opposite side of the road is Wakehurst's Grade II listed 18<sup>th</sup> century lodge house.

Public rights of way run through the former pleasure grounds in the valley below Stonehurst- a pathway leading down from Selsfield Road into the valley to the north east of the house, and two further paths leading from the point where this path meets the valley floor southwards parallel to the Cob Brook, below the formal gardens to Stonehurst, and north east beside the ponds along the tributary valley.

The current proposal is for works to Stonehurst house comprising the following:

- Reinstatement of the former tower at the centre of the house, above the retained original stump. The tower would be of significant height at c.23m, and would be as far as possible a faithful replica (in its external appearance at least) of the original early 20<sup>th</sup> century design, including the large windows and balcony intended for appreciating the views of the surrounding landscape, including in particular the gardens and pleasure grounds.
- Reinstatement of an orangery to the south east corner of the building, similar in scale and design to the original structure in this position, and built off the surviving dwarf wall.
- Removal of tile hanging from gable ends to all elevations to expose underlying original mock timber framing.

To consider these proposals in turn:

#### Reinstatement of the tower:

The proposed reinstated tower would be a very prominent addition to the existing building. Under other circumstances, it is unlikely that a roof addition of this height and scale would be favourably viewed due to its overbearing relationship to the existing house and the visual intrusion on the local landscape. However, in this particular instance, there is sound evidence that the tower was an important element of the original design of Stonehurst, not only in terms of the architecture of the house itself, but of its interaction with its designed landscape setting.

With respect to the house, the removal of the tower with the retention of its truncated base detracts from the character of the building, and in particular its roofline interest. This stump appears incongruous in the context of the lively roofline of gables and chimneys to either side.

In relation to the gardens and pleasure grounds, the tower provided not only a remarkable context from which to view the landscape around the house, affording wide ranging views including looking down into and along the wooded valley beneath, but was also a designed focal point of views looking from the grounds back towards the house, in particular looking along the line of the tributary valley with its ponds and waterfall. The decorative house at Many Waters (mentioned above) formed an

intermediate focal point in these views, so that the grounds and the buildings within them constituted a designed whole, as is illustrated by contemporary photographs.

In this context, it is my opinion that in relation to the NDHAs at Stonehurst, and of the associated RPG, the proposed reinstatement of the tower has the potential to enhance the significances of the affected assets.

In terms of the detail of the scheme, it is proposed to reinstate the observatory tower as a replica of the original, based on research using historic photographs. The height, proportions and facing materials will be as closely as possible matched to the original tower, with clay hanging tiles, tiled roofs, timber windows and balustrades, and exposed timber framing. It is not entirely clear from the submitted documents how the underlying structure will be constructed, and it would be useful to understand whether this will also be traditionally built, or if not to be assured that any non-traditional methods or materials will not adversely affect the external character and appearance of the building.

A structural report has been submitted with the current application which concludes that the structure of the building is in good condition and would be *'capable of re-supporting a modern version of the upper tower'*. However, it also notes that *'As would be expected of any building subject to conversion or proposed alteration, the building would be subject to a schedule of upgrading and alteration works.'* It is not clear what is meant by the latter statement, or whether the author of the report is suggesting that structural upgrading or alterations would be necessary to facilitate the reconstruction of the tower. It would be helpful if this could be clarified, and if it could be confirmed that no further structural interventions or works beyond those described within the application documents will be necessary for the reconstruction of the tower.

Subject to the above points, the proposal to reinstate the observatory tower is considered to enhance the significance of both the NDHA and the RPG within which it is set.

Due to its height, the proposal will also impact the setting of and views from the RPG at Wakehurst and the Grade II listed South Lodge to the south west. Based on the submitted LVIA and DAS, I would accept that there is unlikely to be any impact on views from the Wakehurst mansion or stables.

The tower will be relatively prominent in views from the north-western corner of the Wakehurst RPG, which is an area of historic parkland surrounding the formal gardens. However, visibility does not equate to harm, and in this case I would consider that the recompletion of Stonehurst as an architectural composition will arguably compensate for any visual intrusion to the skyline looking north-west from the parkland. A similar consideration would apply with respect to views from South Lodge. On balance, it is my opinion that the proposal will preserve the settings of the RPG and listed buildings at Wakehurst.

Conservatory extension:

The proposed conservatory is also a substantial addition to the house. However, again there is good evidence, both documentary and in the surviving fabric of the building, for the former presence of a structure of this nature as part of the original design of the building. The reinstatement of an orangery in this position therefore also has the potential to enhance the significance of the NDHA. It also arguably enhances the relationship of the house with the RPG, given its horticultural association. Although the proposed design is not a facsimile of the original, it is sympathetic to the period and style of the house. This aspect of the proposal is not considered contentious, subject to detail which could be reserved by condition.

#### Removal of hung tiles:

The proposal to remove the hung tiles from the gable ends to the house and expose the underlying mock timber framing will reinstate an original feature of the building's design. This aspect of the proposal should enhance the significance of the NDHA, subject to detail of any repairs which may be necessary to the underlying fabric.

In summary, subject to the above mentioned further information, the proposal is considered to enhance the significance of the NDHA at Stonehurst and the special interest of the RPG within which it is set, and to preserve the settings and special interests of the RPG and listed buildings at Wakehurst.

A number of conditions will be necessary, which would include those suggested below- additional further information may be necessary depending on the response to the queries noted above:

- Details of roofing and facing materials
- New brickwork to match existing adjacent original work in colour, texture and bonding pattern and colour, texture and style of pointing.
- Detailed drawings, at an appropriate large scale, including sections and annotated to show materials and finishes, of the following:
  - - Fenestration and external doors to the observatory tower and conservatory
  - - Typical eaves detail to the observatory tower and conservatory
  - - Observation platform including bracketing and balustrade to the observatory tower
  - - Typical example of the exposed timber framing and infill panels to the observatory tower
  - - Dormer windows to the observatory tower
  - - Capping and finial to the observatory tower
  - - Ridge detailing and finials to the conservatory
  - - Bracketed porch to the conservatory
- Following the removal of the hung tile from the gable ends to the house, the underlying mock timber framing shall be repaired to match as closely as possible the original design and materials. *(I would welcome comments from the applicant*

*as to the wording of this- I am not sure to what extent the original fabric survives underneath the tiles? Is it repair or replacement?)*

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.

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Submit your planning application online.

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

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