

**Land West of Gatesmead, Haywards Heath, West
Sussex**

For: Crest Nicholson

Ref: 5552

Initial Heritage Review

15th July 2026

Introduction

1. This note has been prepared by Smith Jenkins Heritage in respect of the proposed development to land west of Gatesmead, Haywards Heath. This is an initial desktop peer review of the submitted application and the comments received from Historic England. This note will be followed by a full and detailed Heritage Statement which will set out the significance of the heritage assets and the contribution made by setting.

Historic England

2. I note that Historic England has recommended that planning permission be refused owing to the harm identified to the significance of Wickham Farmhouse and Sunte House. Their correspondence dated 19 June 2026 raises the following matters.

Overall conclusion

3. Historic England concludes that:
 - The proposed development of 49 dwellings would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of two Grade II* listed buildings:
 - Wickham Farmhouse – mid-level less than substantial harm.
 - Sunte House – lower-level less than substantial harm.
 - The harm is considered significant enough that planning permission should be refused unless substantial public benefits outweigh that harm.

Historic England's position

4. It is worth noting Historic England's position in that they recommend refusal unless the identified harm is outweighed by public benefits. This does not preclude the local planning authority from granting planning permission where it concludes that the public benefits are sufficient to outweigh the identified harm.
5. Historic England's role is to advise on the effect of proposals on the significance of designated heritage assets and the level of harm arising, rather than to determine the planning balance. It remains for the local planning authority to undertake that balancing exercise and determine the application.

Wickham Farmhouse

6. Historic England's principal concern is the effect on the setting of Wickham Farmhouse.
7. They argue that:
 - The application site is the last remaining area of countryside that has a direct:
 - historic functional relationship;
 - spatial relationship; and
 - visual relationship with the farmhouse.
 - The surviving fields allow the building to be understood as a former medieval and later Wealden farmstead;
 - Development would fundamentally alter this relationship, changing the character from semi-rural to suburban;
 - Instead of being understood as a historic farmhouse, it would appear simply as a large house within the suburbs of Haywards Heath; and
 - The proposal would effectively complete the encirclement of the farmhouse by modern development, eroding its historic context.

Sunte House

8. Historic England accepts that the relationship is weaker than for Wickham Farmhouse but still concludes that:
 - the site contributes to the remaining semi-rural setting of Sunte House;
 - development would further erode understanding of the building as part of a former country estate;
 - this results in low-level less than substantial harm.

Historic landscape

9. The letter places considerable emphasis on the wider historic landscape, noting that:
 - the fields form part of a surviving medieval Wealden landscape;
 - mature hedgerows, historic routeways and former drove roads survive;
 - the relationship between these features and the listed farmhouses helps explain the historic evolution of the area;
 - important views of Wickham Farmhouse can still be obtained from the site and surrounding footpaths.

Public rights of way

10. Historic England also raises concerns that the historic footpath (HAH/47BCU/1), thought to have the characteristics of a former driveway and would lose its attractive rural character through construction of the new access road and surrounding housing.

Mitigation

11. Historic England is not persuaded that the proposed mitigation would adequately reduce the harm. It considers that:
- the proposed landscape buffer would not preserve the rural setting;
 - additional tree planting would take many years to mature;
 - planting could never fully screen the development;
 - suburban elements such as roads, lighting, fencing, gardens and domestic activity would permanently alter the character of the site;
 - future residents would likely create informal routes through planted areas, further reducing their effectiveness.

Neighbouring Crest Nicholson scheme

12. I have been provided with the Appeal Decision relating to the land north of Birchen Lane, which allowed the appeal against the Council's reasons for refusal. I note that there is no reference to this Appeal Decision from Historic England and would have expected it to have formed an important part of the assessment of heritage impacts, particularly given the similarities between the two proposals.
13. In respect of Sunte House, the Inspector concluded that the land to be developed made no contribution to the setting of Sunte House and would not be directly overlooked by it, concluding that:
- Sunte House is now primarily experienced from within its own curtilage rather than in long public views, the land to the north is less sensitive to change, and now the house is barely visible from outside its own grounds;
 - The Inspector also noted that the appellant had responded to Historic England's concerns by removing development from the southern part of the site;
 - The other field parcels to the north of this are screened by well-developed belts of mature trees and hedges which would be sufficient to maintain the rural experience of the approach to Sunte House and its important connection with the wider landscape;
 - The Inspector concluded that these changes resulted in Historic England withdrawing its objection and that any residual harm would be at the lower end of the less than substantial scale;
 - In respect of Wickham Farmhouse, there was no substantive discussion of the effect of the appeal proposals on that heritage asset and its significance was concluded to be preserved.

Impact of Proposals

Sunte House

14. Sunte House is located to the east of the application site and is separated from it by a substantial area of open land bordered by a significant belt of mature trees. Historic England asserts that the application site represents one of the last vestiges of the building's semi-rural setting and that its development would further erode the significance of the listed building.
15. This conclusion is difficult to reconcile with the findings of the Planning Inspector in determining the appeal relating to the adjacent Crest Nicholson site. The Inspector concluded that the significance of Sunte House is primarily appreciated from within its immediate setting, noting that there are no meaningful long public views and that the house is barely visible from outside its own grounds. The Inspector further concluded that the mature tree belts surrounding the estate are sufficient to maintain the rural experience of the approach to Sunte House and its connection with the wider landscape.
16. Having regard to those findings, together with the existing mature vegetation separating the application site from Sunte House, I consider that the application site makes little or no contribution to the significance of the listed building through its setting. The proposed development would not materially alter the way in which the significance of Sunte House is experienced or understood. Accordingly, based on the information before me and the desktop review, I conclude that the proposals would preserve the significance of Sunte House and would not result in harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset. This will be considered in more detail in the Heritage Statement being prepared by Smith Jenkins.

Wickham Farmhouse

17. Wickham Farmhouse lies to the south of the application site and benefits from a well-defined setting enclosed by mature vegetation, all of which is proposed to be retained. The proposed development would be located approximately 50 metres from the access to the farmhouse, with a substantial landscaped buffer and new planting separating the development from the listed building. Based on the submitted plans, aerial photography and available evidence, there may be limited glimpsed views of the proposed development through a small break in the existing vegetation to the north of the farmhouse; however, these views would be filtered by retained and proposed planting.
18. Historic England places considerable emphasis on the 1844 Tithe Map, which demonstrates that the application site historically formed part of the same agricultural holding as Wickham Farmhouse. Whilst this evidences a historic functional relationship, the contribution that the application site now makes to the significance of the listed building through its setting has altered considerably over time. The relationship is no longer experienced as part of a functioning agricultural landscape but as a remnant parcel within an area that has become increasingly influenced by surrounding development. Setting is not static and naturally evolves as places change over time.
19. Historic England also places significant weight on the application site representing the "last vestige" of countryside associated with the farmhouse. In my opinion, this conclusion overstates the contribution that the application site makes to the significance of the heritage asset. The application site cannot reasonably be regarded as the sole remaining contributor to the significance of Wickham Farmhouse through its setting. The farmhouse has already experienced substantial change through twentieth-century development, with its significance now being derived principally from its immediate landscaped setting, mature vegetation, surviving rural characteristics and its historic fabric. Whilst the

application site contributes to that setting to a degree, it is not the defining component of the building's significance.

20. I therefore consider, based on the information before me and the desktop review, that the proposed development would give rise to some limited harm through change within the wider setting of the listed building. However, any visual change would be experienced only in limited views, would be filtered by existing and proposed planting, and would not fundamentally alter the ability to appreciate Wickham Farmhouse as a surviving historic farmstead. In my opinion, the resulting harm would therefore fall at the lower end of the less than substantial spectrum. This will be considered in more detail in the Heritage Statement being prepared by Smith Jenkins.
21. The submitted layout already incorporates significant mitigation through the provision of a substantial landscaped buffer and a looser pattern of development along the site's southern edge. There is scope for relatively modest refinement of the south-east corner of the masterplan by reducing areas of hard surfacing and car parking and increasing soft landscaping. Such amendments would reinforce the landscaped buffer and further reduce any residual visual effects without materially affecting the overall development capacity.

Conclusions

22. In respect of **Sunte House**, based on the information before me, I do not agree that the proposals would result in harm to its significance. The Planning Inspector has previously concluded that the listed building is principally appreciated from within its immediate curtilage, with very limited public views beyond it, and that the mature landscape surrounding the estate maintains its relationship with the wider countryside. Those findings are directly relevant to the current proposals and, in my opinion, have not been adequately reflected in Historic England's assessment. I conclude that the proposals would preserve the significance of Sunte House.
23. In respect of **Wickham Farmhouse**, based on the information before me, I consider that the application site does make a contribution to the significance of the listed building through its wider setting. However, that contribution is limited and should not be overstated. Whilst there is evidence of a historic functional relationship between the farmhouse and the application site, the surrounding area has changed considerably over time and the significance of the listed building is now derived principally from its historic fabric, immediate setting and surviving rural characteristics. The proposed development would alter part of the wider setting but would not fundamentally change the ability to understand or appreciate the building as a historic farmstead. I therefore conclude that the proposals would result in **low-level of less than substantial harm**, rather than the mid-level harm identified by Historic England.
24. In my opinion, the current layout already incorporates appropriate mitigation through the retention of substantial landscape buffers, mature vegetation and the looser pattern of development along the southern edge of the site.
25. These conclusions are based on a desktop review of the application and the surrounding context and will be developed further in the forthcoming Heritage Statement.

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For and on behalf of Smith Jenkins Planning & Heritage
15th July 2026