

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 08 June 2026 15:38:44 UTC+01:00
To: "Andrew Horrell" <Andrew.Horrell@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/26/0673 and 0674 Spicers Farm, Rowhill Lane, Balcombe

Hi Andrew

Comments on the above planning and listed building consent applications. Please pass my apologies to the applicant for the delay in getting these to you, which has been caused by pressure of other work.

Spicers Farm is a historic farmstead located in a rural position to the south of Balcombe. The current proposal, which follows on from pre-application advice, relates to both the farmhouse and the former farm buildings within the historic farmstead.

Development and significance of Spicers Farmhouse:

The Historic Building Survey submitted as part of the Heritage Statement accompanying this application includes an analysis of the development of the farmhouse, which can be summarised as follows.

- The former farmhouse is a Grade II listed building, which, from the submitted historic building assessment, originated as a Medieval hall-house of a 3 cell plan centred on a 2 bay open hall and dating from the later part of the 15th century.
- During the mid-late 16th century this house was modernised by the insertion of a hearth and partial flooring of the central hall.
- Following this during the early 17th century a two-storey cross wing was attached at the northern end- this included integral attics, stair tower and cellars.
- During the mid-late 17th century a substantial chimney stack was inserted within the southern bays of the building, possibly associated with the demotion of this part of the building (the original hall house) to a kitchen and service area. At this point an attic stair was added, suggesting that the first-floor rooms of the southern range were ceiled at this stage to create attics above.
- Later, during the mid-late 18th century the roof of the southern range was entirely replaced- this roof structure although not original is of a high level of interest, particularly the engineered trusses to the southern bay. A hoist wheel, a very rare feature, survives from this period attached to the 18th century roof in front of the late 17th century chimney. Also, at around this point the west and east elevations of the south bay may have been rebuilt in masonry, and the timber frame elsewhere to the southern range and the stair turret of the cross-wing underbuilt.
- During the late 19th and early 20th centuries cladding by tile and weatherboarding was carried out, and further parts of the east and west elevations rebuilt in brick. Internal alterations took place and a new staircase inserted into the north bay of the south range. New windows were inserted into existing openings.

- Further internal alterations were carried out and windows replaced during the later 20th century.

The Survey concludes that the building is of a high level of significance, for reasons including the very high degree of survival of original and early fabric, floor plan and fixtures, dating from the late 15th to the late 18th centuries, as well as the Arts and Crafts era alterations to the property. More detail is given at 6.2.1 of the document. I see no reason to disagree with this analysis of the development and significance of the house.

Development and significance of the former farm buildings:

The surviving farmstead to the east of the house includes a substantial late 16th or early 17th century timber framed barn, with two attached 19th century single-storey brick buildings in a linear arrangement to the south, and further buildings attached perpendicular to the eastern side of its northern end. A brief historical map regression exercise shows that the farmstead has undergone progressive change over the past couple of centuries- during the later 19th century there was a large, enclosed yard between the farm buildings and the house, with a series of smaller yards sitting to the east, within and beyond the angle of the farm buildings. It would appear that the brick buildings to the south of the barn, which appear to have been cowsheds or dairies, were previously open to their eastern side onto these yards, which also included a number of smaller structures, including pig sties, which are now lost. During the latter part of the 20th century, the yards sitting in the angle of the farm buildings were enclosed under a large barn structure which now directly abuts the historic barn and attached brick buildings.

The surviving historic farm buildings including the barn and single storey buildings to the south of it would be regarded as curtilage listed. These buildings, as well as being of interest in their own right, have group value with and contribute positively to the setting of the listed house, enhancing its special interest.

A separate Heritage Statement has been submitted with respect to the farm buildings; this sets out the sequence of development of the farmstead in more detail.

The HS describes the barn as dating from the late 16th or very early 17th century, its construction perhaps contemporaneous with the addition of the northern cross-wing to the house. During the 17th century a further bay was added to the southern end of the building. The original purpose of the barn would have been for crop storage, as is evidenced by the waggon doors to either side of the building. It is suggested that following this period, the building may have fallen into disuse, prior to a campaign of repair and rebuilding during the 19th century, possibly commensurate with the re-ordering of the wider farmstead. These 19th century repairs and alterations appear to have been fairly extensive, but seem to have often sat alongside retained original fabric, so that a substantial quantity of the original framing survives.

The single storey buildings attached to the south of the barn are dated to the reconfiguration of the farmstead between 1840 and 1874. The HS suggests that the southern of the two buildings (B2) was originally an open fronted shelter-shed, and the northern (B1) a cow-house. As the HS notes, these new buildings were well planned and accompanied by a series of yards to the east which illustrated contemporary practice in stock management.

The HS assigns a high degree of significance to the barn, as a particularly interesting and rather rare example of its type. More detail is given at 8.2.1, however in the context of this application I would draw particular attention to the mention of the surviving 4-bay open plan interior, which is in the same form as was arrived at during the 17th century, despite later disuse and restoration.

The later buildings to the south are described as sufficient in fabric and form to illustrate their dates of construction, their intended function and their later evolution, which reflects changes in agricultural practice over time.

Viewed individually and as a group the farm buildings at Spicers Farm as well as illustrating changing carpentry and construction techniques over period spanning the late 16th to the 19th century also demonstrate changes in land management and agriculture, including the transition from arable to livestock farming which is characteristic of the High Farming period (after 1790, but particularly the 1840s to the 1870s).

Spicers Farm is particularly notable in that only 3% of farmsteads within the High Weald National Character Area retain a farmhouse and at least one farm building dating from the 17th century or earlier. The extent of the survival of the historic farmstead layout is also relatively unusual.

Proposed works to the farmhouse:

The current pre-proposal is for a number of internal and external alterations to the farmhouse. To consider these in turn.

1. Single storey extension to the west of the cross-wing.

An extension is proposed to the western side of the cross-wing. This is shown as being over two storeys, incorporating a basement accessed internally via stairs within the extension and externally via escape stairs within a lightwell to the addition's western end. The extension at ground floor level is shown with a flat roof with rooflights hidden behind a parapet and stone-faced elevations. A shadow gap sits between the addition and the existing house to both sides. The extension would be accessed by a doorway which would be created in the existing western elevation of the cross-wing by removing the fabric below the sill of the existing window to this elevation.

At pre-application stage concerns were raised over the principle of an extension in this position and I remain of the opinion that it is contentious. I note that the scale and form of the proposal at ground floor level have been reduced by the omission of the element wrapping around the north-west corner of the house. I also note that the HIA forming part of the HS is broadly supportive of the revised scheme. However, notwithstanding this in my opinion the amended proposal does not address the 'in principle' issues raised by an addition in this position and the adverse impact that it will have on the integrity of the surviving 17th century footprint and plan form of the house, including in particular the highly significant cross-wing. Furthermore, in my opinion the scale of the extension at ground floor, although reduced, remains overbearing, and the form and detailed elevational treatment are unsympathetic to the host building, resulting in an addition of a heavy and incongruous appearance.

The proposal would result in some loss of historic fabric due to the enlargement of the existing window to the western elevation of the cross-wing at ground floor to provide access to the addition. This brickwork dates from the early 19th century rebuilding of this elevation. Viewed in isolation of the above, I do not consider that this relatively modest loss of fabric would have proved contentious. (I note that in this respect the HS appears to refer to an alternative proposal- the comments at 7.2.4. do not appear to relate to the particular circumstances or nature of this aspect of the scheme.)

The current proposal also includes an extension at basement level below the ground floor addition, which was not seen at pre-application stage. Further information would be required for the Council to be assured that this would not adversely impact the structural integrity of the house, including the existing cellars beneath the cross-wing, but notwithstanding this I have concerns about the principle of such an element, which in my opinion will exacerbate the harm caused by the proposed extension at ground floor level. Although there is only a relatively modest lightwell adjacent to the western wing of the addition, this in itself will appear as an incongruous feature in the context of the historic building, and will in closer views increase the apparent scale and bulk of the addition.

For these reasons I consider that the extension to the building at both ground floor and basement level will be harmful to its special interest. I would recommend that these aspects of the proposal are removed.

2. At ground floor relocation of an existing door from the entrance hall to a position within the cross wing
As the submitted HIA notes there is clear evidence of a door in this position- as such this aspect of the proposal is not considered contentious.
3. Insertion of partitions within the existing kitchen area to create a downstairs WC
The northern partition proposed here sits on the line between the Medieval core of the building and the 17th century cross-wing. Reinstating a partition in this

location is not considered contentious. There is no similar evidence for a previous partition in the position of the proposed eastern side of the WC enclosure, however the HIA notes that this area has been subject to previous alteration including the insertion of a staircase during the early part of the 20th century. The impact on the historic plan form of the building is somewhat mitigated by this and by the reinstatement of the partition between the core and the cross-wing. On balance I would not consider this aspect of the proposal to be contentious, although I would suggest that internal elevations (existing and proposed) should be provided to demonstrate the relationship of the WC fittings with any surviving exposed members of the timber frame.

4. Removal WC adjacent to the chimney stack within the main range to convert the space to a storage cupboard.

This aspect of the proposal is not considered contentious.

5. Introduction of partitioning and a fitted cupboard(?) to the opposite side the chimney stack within the main range.

I don't believe that this work was considered at pre-application stage, and it is not addressed by the submitted HIA. Can the applicant please provide further information on what is proposed here- is there to be fitted furniture adjacent to the stack? Is the partitioning full height? It would also be helpful to see photographs of the affected area, as we did not look at it during our site visit, and for a brief addendum to be made to the HIA to consider the impact of the works.

6. Blocking of the doorway between bedroom 2 and the Jack-and-Jill bathroom.

This is a modern doorway and its removal is not considered contentious.

7. At attic level within the cross-wing, works to create a bedroom, storage space and ensuite.

As noted in the HIA, the cross-wing included accommodation at attic level from the outset- this is evident from the deliberate provision of good head room, light from windows to either gable, and stair access via the original stair turret.

Although there does not seem to be evidence that this space was previously subdivided, the principle of its more intensive use as part of the house does not seem therefore to be contrary to its intended purpose. I do have some concerns relating to the insertion of partitioning, but I note that this has been rationalised following pre-application to sit in a better relationship with the original frame. On balance, I consider that the changes to the plan form are acceptable, but further detail will be required of the following aspects:

- Internal elevations of the proposed new ensuite to show how the necessary fittings will be accommodated without harm to or concealment of historic fabric.
- Details of pipe runs to demonstrate how harm or loss to historic fabric will be avoided. Details of any external necessary vents.
- Further information on the approach to flooring (see below).

- Detailed drawings of the partitioning in terms of its design and relationship with the surrounding historic fabric, to demonstrate that this can be achieved without harm to the fabric, and in a manner which is easily reversible.
- Details of the proposal to preserve the graffiti to the plaster of the cross-wing roof. This should be retained and exposed in a manner which will both preserve it and allow its continued appreciation as part of the space.
- Ditto, in respect of the comb-decorated daub to the south of the chimney within the cross wing.

I would prefer to see this information as part of the application rather than by condition (assuming that a position is reached where a positive recommendation is otherwise possible) as these details will be fundamental to the acceptability of the works.

8. Creation of a play room and plant room within the attic to the main range.

As with the cross-wing attic, this space appears to have been intended to be accessible and usable as part of the house, at least since the insertion of the chimney stack and adjacent stair during the 17th century. The current proposal involves the installation of a partition towards the northern end of the space to create a plant room, with the remainder of the space remaining open. I would agree with the comments within the HIA that subject to detail this would allow enough of the attic space to remain open to allow for a continued appreciation of the original character of the room, subject to further details as set out below:

- Can the applicant please provide further detail of the intended use of the plant room? What equipment is to be placed here, and how will the installation be achieved without harm to the surrounding fabric? The details provided should include consideration of any necessary associated wiring, pipework etc.
- Further details of any works to the flooring.
- Confirmation that the wheel hoist to the chimney will be retained in situ.

9. Levelling of floors at attic level

As noted at pre-application stage, the covering of historic floors may be regarded as contentious. I would like to see further detail of this proposal, on a space-by-space basis, which sets out the nature of the existing flooring and its level of interest, and includes typical sectional drawings to show the relationship of the proposed new floor with the existing. I would also suggest that the applicant reconsider the extent of the floating floor and whether this is necessary or justified in particular in areas such as the play room, bedroom or storage areas.

10. Installation of insulation at roof level.

Further detail is required of this work so that the impact on the character of the spaces and of the roof structure can be fully understood. The applicant should provide the following:

- Typical large scale sectional drawings for each part of the roof affected.
- Typical large scale elevational and sectional eaves detail for each part of the roof affected.

- Existing and proposed internal elevations of all affected parts of the frame, ideally cross-referenced with photographs.
- Further information on the soot blackened timbers within the roof of the main range and how these will be protected, so that they remain exposed to view.

11. Replacement of existing rooflights.

This is not considered contentious, subject to detail.

Works are also proposed to the curtilage listed farm buildings, in association with their conversion to ancillary residential use. A structural survey has been submitted which indicates that the buildings should be capable of conversion, and as accommodation will remain ancillary to the house the impact on the character of the setting of the listed farmhouse will be reduced, in that no new separate dwelling is created, and there will be no requirement for subdivision of the curtilage, or other such works which might otherwise be necessary. As such, the principle of the conversion is not regarded as contentious.

To consider the proposed physical alterations to the buildings in turn:

1. Externally to the barn it is proposed to glaze the existing barn door opening.

This element of the proposal has been amended following on from pre-application advice to simplify the form of the proposed glazing, and is now considered acceptable subject to detail. Conditions would be required should a permission be forthcoming in relation to the relationship of the glazing with the head plate, which should be retained, and the design of both the glazing and the doors (noting the recommendations of the HIA in this respect).

2. Insertion of a mezzanine within the main barn space.

Concerns were raised at pre-application stage concerning this aspect of the scheme. I note the intention that the mezzanine should be structurally independent of the framing to be the barn, and that it will have only a low balustrade to the side facing onto the remainder of the space. However, I remain of the opinion that this is an unjustified intrusion into the floor plan and volume of the barn's interior, which as the HIA notes survives in the same form as was arrived at during the 17th century, despite later disuse and restoration, and which makes a strong contribution to the building's significance, as does the intact nature, and visibility, of the framing to the walls and roof, which would also be adversely affected. For these reasons, the mezzanine would be harmful to the special interest of the barn. Paragraph 213 of the NPPF that: *'Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.'* Given the ancillary nature of the accommodation and the extent of the barn's footprint as existing, the mezzanine structure and the subsequent harm arising is in my opinion unjustified, and I would recommend it is removed from the scheme.

3. Formation of an opening in the northern wall of the barn to allow access into the adjacent store, which is proposed to be partly converted for use as WCS, with a bin store retained to the western side, with doors added;

Within the submitted HIA there is a detailed discussion of potential locations for the proposed new doorway which would avoid damage to the earlier members of the frame, and allow sufficient later fabric to remain to allow the form of this to continue to be appreciated. Whilst either of these options could be pursued, the door as shown appears to be a pocket door in a larger opening, which would involve the removal of at least one original stud. This is unacceptable, and should be revised in line with the findings of the HIA. Any revised detail should include a proposed internal elevation and section which also demonstrate how the original sole plate and plinth will be retained at the base of the door and any change in level addressed.

The remainder of the works to the northern lean-to are not considered contentious, subject to detail, with the exception of the loss of the doorway and door to its eastern side. I note the commentary in this respect within the HIA, and I would agree that rather than a simple recess to indicate the position of the doorway the door itself could be retained and fixed shut. Further detail of this is required, ideally during the course of this application, including an appropriate annotation on the proposed plans, and a detailed internal elevation.

4. Insertion of partitioning within the adjacent cowshed to create bedrooms and ensuites, adjacent storage space to be converted for use as an office, with access to a Jack and Jill bathroom created within the main cowshed, and southern cowshed subdivided with partitioning to create a 1 bedroom annexe with bedroom, living room/kitchenette and ensuite.

The extent of the partitioning has been modestly reduced since pre-application, and I note the point made within the HIA regarding the date of the fittings and the relationship of the partitioning and the roof trusses. On balance, this aspect of the proposal is considered acceptable. Detailed drawings of the relationship between the trusses and partitions would be required by condition if any permission were granted.

5. New windows to be added to the west elevation of both cowsheds and to the southern end elevation.

The number and scale of the proposed new windows have been reduced, and in general the proposal is in this respect now more sympathetic to the agricultural character of the buildings. However, the window to the southern end elevation remains overscaled and somewhat domestic in appearance, and I would suggest that this is reduced to similar proportions to those proposed elsewhere.

6. Existing door openings to the southern cowshed to be glazed.

The design of the glazing has been amended following pre-application advice and is now considered acceptable.

7. New rooflights to the eastern roof slope of the dairy and cowshed.

A number of new rooflights are proposed to the side of the building facing away from the farmhouse. This is considered acceptable in principle, subject to detail.

8. Insulation to all buildings

Further detail of this is required in the form of detailed typical large-scale sections, internal elevations, and eaves details, to demonstrate the relationship of the insulation with the historic fabric including in particular members of the timber frame to the barn walls and roof and to the roofs of the dairy and cowshed.

The applicant should also supply details of the proposed treatment of the floors to all buildings.

In summary, as it stands, the proposal because of the inclusion of the extension to the house, and the mezzanine and other aspects of works to the barn as set out above, would be considered harmful to the special interest of Spicers Farm and the associated curtilage listed farm buildings. This will be contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP34. In terms of the NPPF, I would place the harm caused to be less than substantial, at the mid-high level of that range, such that the balancing exercise set out in paragraph 215 will apply.

I would also note that there are several areas where we currently have insufficient information for informed comment, which may or may not prove acceptable once this is provided.

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>

Emily Wade Ma MSc
Conservation Officer
Planning Services
Tel: +44 (0)1444 477385
emily.wade@midsussex.gov.uk <http://www.midsussex.gov.uk>

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