

Steve Ashdown

From: Emily Wade
Sent: 11 March 2024 14:48
To: Steve Ashdown
Subject: DM/23/2867 Land East of Ansty Way, Cuckfield

Hi Steve

Comments on the above planning application.

The application site:

The application site is an extensive area of rural land, including, fields, woodland and watercourses, lying to the west and south west of Cuckfield.

The proposed development and application documents:

The current proposal is for the change of use of the farmland and woodland within the site to a 'parkland reserve' to include public access and instigation of a long-term management and rewilding regime, including establishment of pedestrian and cycle tracks, with new pedestrian and cycle access points off Cuckfield Road to the south and Staplefield Road to the north. The proposals includes the addition of two wooden viewing platforms and two hides. The sports pitches at Beech Farm Field are to remain in sports use.

The application is accompanied by heritage information at Chapter 13 of the Environmental Statement (ES) main text, and a separate Heritage Statement at ES Volume 4 Appendix 1. These documents appear however to relate solely to application DM/23/2866, and do not address the potential impact of the current proposal on heritage assets in the vicinity of the separate site currently under consideration. Indeed, the Heritage Statement states: *'It should be noted that this report only concerns the Proposed Development Site (i.e. the works proposed under DM/23/2866) as the works proposed for the Parkland Reserve Site are not anticipated to affect any built heritage assets.'*

The Heritage Statement is therefore inadequate for purpose, and is in fact somewhat misleading in referring to a separate proposal. I would suggest that this should be addressed, as an appropriately detailed heritage statement is a validation requirement.

Non Designated Heritage Assets within Mid Sussex

The Council does not currently maintain a Local List of buildings of architectural or historical value within the local context, however as is explicitly allowed within the PPG we do, from time to time, identify non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs) during the course of the planning application process. On such asset exists at Old Mill Cottage, Cuckfield Road, which is surrounded by the southern part of the site. The reasoning, or evidence base, for identifying this building as being of interest within the local context is set out in my detailed comments below.

Affected heritage assets:

There are a number of designated and non-designated heritage assets in relatively close proximity to the site, whose settings may be affected by the current proposal. To consider these moving broadly south to north across the site and its surroundings:

- Old Mill Cottage, Cuckfield Road, Ansty

Old Mill Cottage has been identified during the course of a previous unrelated planning application as a NDHA. The building is reputed to date from the 16th century, and a brief on site assessment of the framing to the core of the building, which consists of a possible 3 bay cottage with small cross wing or outshot to the north west, would support a relatively early date of construction. Historical map evidence shows that the cottage was in place by 1792 (it appears on the OS map of this date), but it may be earlier.

The West Sussex Historic Environment Record contains a reference to a monument consisting of a watermill on this site dating from the 18th century or earlier: *'Watermill shown here on maps of 1795 and 1813 but not on later maps. Presumably replaced by High Bridge Mill downstream. The cottages are timber framed but to the NW are the remains of a stone sluice which probably marks the site of the mill.'*

Other sources suggest that prior to the watermill the site may have been in use as an iron works- there were a number of dammed ponds along the mill stream (cf Pondtail Cottage, below), and Cuckfield Manor, located just to the north east, was built by the Sergison family of iron masters, who also owned the site of the mill.

For these reasons Old Mill Cottage (with the associated remains of the watermill and the attractive stone bridge over the mill stream) is regarded as having sufficient architectural and historic interest within the local context to merit consideration as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA).

The former watermill with which Old Mill Cottage was associated is likely to have been a cornmill, similar to its successor further east along the same stream at Highbridge Mill. Although the mill is now lost, its previous presence is evidenced by the surviving stone sluice. The corn mill would have been a vital part of the local rural economy.

Old Mill Cottage and associated structures are likely to be considered to possess architectural interest based on their construction and craftsmanship, as well as evidential value in relation to the remnants of the mill and associated engineering works, and historical illustrative value as a good example within the local context of a partially surviving early watermill grouping. The possible association with the Sergison family at Cuckfield Park and the local iron industry is also of interest. The Cottage also has aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials viewed within the landscape from which they were drawn, and a degree of communal value based on the former mill use, which would have been a focus of local rural life.

Based on the information in front of us I would consider to be an NDHA of a medium-high level of interest within the local context.

The Cottage sits in a relatively isolated rural position. The surviving rural setting of fields and woods which surrounds it makes a strong positive contribution to its significance in the local context, and the manner in which this is appreciated, in particular those parts of that significance which are drawn from its historical illustrative value as a former corn mill, serving the surrounding farms, and its aesthetic value.

The application site surrounds Old Mill Cottage with exception of the entrance track from Cuckfield Road to the east. It constitutes the greater part of the immediate setting of the Cottage outside its own grounds, and in particular the rural setting to the north. It also affects the character of the PROW which runs past Old Mill Cottage from Deaks Lane in the west towards Cuckfield Road, through the site.

- Pondtail Cottage, Deaks Lane Ansty.

Pondtail Cottage is a Grade II listed 17th century or earlier timber framed building located in an isolated rural position to the north of Ansty. The Cottage is located close to a number of ponds and weirs formerly associated (from information provided by the property owner) with the local iron industry.

The building is likely to be considered to possess architectural value based on its construction and craftsmanship, as well as historical illustrative value as a good example of a modest rural Sussex building of its period, with potential association with an important local industry, and aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials viewed within the landscape from which they were drawn.

As such, the surviving rural setting of the listed building is considered to make a strong positive contribution to the special interest of the listed building and the manner in which this is appreciated, in particular those parts of that interest which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values.

The application site is directly adjacent to the Cottage to the east, and makes up a very significant part of the existing rural setting of the listed building.

- Cuckfield Park and Lodge.

Cuckfield Park is a Grade II* 16th century country mansion located in an extensive parkland setting to the south west of Cuckfield village. The house has a formal garden around it which includes a II* listed 16th century gatehouse and walls, and Grade II listed gazebo with further walling. The group also includes a Grade II listed c.1860 lodge house alongside the entrance driveway from South Street to the east.

Cuckfield Park is likely to be considered to possess architectural value based on its design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration, as well as historical illustrative value as a very good example of a country mansion of its period, and aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials viewed within the landscape from which they were drawn.

The associated gatehouse, walls and lodge are likely to possess similar values as very good or good examples of structures of their period and type. They also possess group value with each other and the house.

As such, the parkland and wider rural setting of the house and associated buildings will be considered to make a strong positive contribution to the special interests of the listed buildings and the manner in which those are appreciated, in particular those parts of those interests which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values.

The application site is located a short distance to the west of the Park, on the opposite side of the valley. A public right of way (PROW), the High Weald Landscape Trail, runs east to west just to the north of the listed buildings and on into and through the site.

- Listed buildings to the west of South Street and Ockenden Lane, Cuckfield.

There is a run of listed buildings located to the western side of South Street, continuing up into Ockenden Lane, at the south western edge of Cuckfield village, the rear gardens to which back onto open field over looking the application site.

These buildings are 28 and 29 (Beams End), 27 (Valentine Cottage), Tudor Rose and Little Dormers, and 22 and 23 South Street, and on Ockenden Lane the former village workhouse now comprising Beadles, Old Courthouse, Almoners and Ockenden Lane Flats. All of the buildings are Grade II listed and date variously from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

These buildings are likely to be considered to possess architectural interest based on their construction, craftsmanship, and in some cases design, as well as historical illustrative value as good examples of Sussex village buildings of varying types and periods, and aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials.

As such the surviving rural setting to the west of the buildings will be considered to make a positive contribution to the manner in which their special interests are appreciated, in particular those parts of those interests which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values.

- Ockenden Manor, Ockenden Lane, Cuckfield

Ockenden Manor is a Grade II* listed former manor house located to the western edge of Cuckfield village. The building is likely to be considered to possess architectural interest based on its construction, craftsmanship, and decoration as well as historical illustrative value as a very good example of a late 16th century Manor House, altered and extended over the centuries including by two significant build phases during the 17th and 19th centuries. It also possesses aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials viewed within the context from which they were drawn.

The house, which is now in use as a hotel, is set within formal gardens and has a number of associated outbuildings, including a substantial modern spa building to the north west.

The house is located to the western edge of Cuckfield village, and has a historical relationship to this settlement, but also has an extensive rural setting to the west, which contributes positively to its special

interest as a rural Sussex manor house of some pretension, in particular those parts of that special interest which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values.

The application site, the boundary of which lies a short distance to the west of the hotel's gardens, forms a very significant part of the wider rural of the listed building.

- Old Beech Farm and barn, Staplefield Road, Cuckfield.

Old Beech Farm is a Grade II listed late 16th or early 17th century former farmhouse, with an associated historic farmstead, including a separately listed Grade II barn of the same date, and a couple of other surviving outbuildings which may be regarded as curtilage listed. The farmstead is recorded in the West Sussex Historic Farmstead and Landscape Character assessment as a historic farmstead of the Medieval period.

The buildings are likely to be considered to possess architectural value based on their construction and craftsmanship, as well as a historical illustrative value as good examples of their period and type, and aesthetic value based in part on the use of vernacular materials viewed within the landscape from which they were drawn.

As such the surviving rural setting around the farmstead, which is likely to include the former farmlands of the holding, will be considered to make a strong positive contribution to the special interests of the listed and curtilage listed buildings within it, and the manner in which these are appreciated.

The application site is a short distance to the east and south east of the farmstead, and constitutes a large part of its wider rural setting.

- Cuckfield Conservation Area.

The Council has an adopted character appraisal for the Cuckfield Conservation Area.

The Council has an adopted character appraisal for the Area, which notes that: *'An important characteristic of the conservation area is its relationship with the countryside. The western and southern boundaries of the historic core of the village abruptly meet parkland and countryside. A number of footpaths radiate from the village to the countryside. This interface of historic settlement and countryside is unusual in Sussex where more modern development has usually encircled the settlement.'*

The management proposals also contained in the appraisal include the protection of views into and out of the Conservation Area.

In my opinion, the fundamental significance of the Area, as discussed in the Appraisal, lies in its nature as the historic core of a rural Medieval settlement, which has grown up over many centuries in close connection with the surrounding countryside. As such, the surviving rural setting of the Area, and in particular the surviving close relationship between the Area and the countryside to the south and west make a strong positive contribution to the significance of the heritage asset and how this is appreciated. This will include not only views out of the Area, but also views looking towards it from roads and footpaths to the south and west, and the character of the approaches to it along these routes.

The proposed development site constitutes a significant part of the wider rural setting to the west of the Conservation Area, and in particular affects views looking west from that side of the Area, including from properties along the western side of South Street and Ockenden Lane, as well as far reaching views and vistas looking back towards the village from rural footpaths to west, and the character of the approaches to the village along these footpaths.

Impact of the proposed development on the character of the site:

The current proposal is for the change of use of the site from farmland and woodland to a 'parkland reserve', with associated changes to public access including provision of new pedestrian and cycling routes, hides and viewing platforms.

Although the area would remain open and undeveloped (with the exception of minor built form (hides and platforms)), there would be some potential change to its character in terms of the visual impact of these structures, as well as new footpaths and cycleways, information boards and signage. There would also be a potential increase in noise and business arising from the anticipated intensification of use of the site, which might affect its current rural tranquility.

Impact on the affected heritage assets:

- Old Mill Cottage:

Old Mill Cottage is largely surrounded by the site. The Detailed Masterplan shows construction of a new hoggin cyclepath running east-west to the south of the Cottage, as well as a new footpath running east-west to the north, providing access to a hide in the woodland to the north-east, and associated information boards.

Although there is an existing PROW running past the Cottage, the above works would be likely to result in a noticeable increase in noise and activity within the setting of the NDHA, as well as some potential visual intrusion, which would potentially adversely affect its current tranquil rural character.

Impact: A low level of harm to an NDHA of a mid-high level of interest in the local context.

- Pondtail Cottage, Deaks Lane Ansty.

The Detailed Masterplan shows a new cycleway running in close proximity to the Pondtail Cottage, together with information boards. Although the Cottage is adjacent to Deaks Lane and an existing PROW, this may result in some minor visual intrusion into the existing rural setting of the listed building, as well as an increase in noise and activity.

Impact: Less than substantial harm, low.

- Cuckfield Park and Lodge.

The Detailed Masterplan shows the woodland within the site which is directly to the west of Cuckfield Park as zoned for 'informal access', which is presumed to mean that there would be free access to all areas of the woodland, with no requirement to stick to footpaths. A new footpath and proposed hide are also shown the south west.

Although I would consider it unlikely that the hide would be visible from the listed building or its parkland setting, the free access to the woodland opposite, and the new PROW may result in some increase and noise and activity within the tranquil rural setting to the west of the Park.

Impact: Less than substantial harm, low.

- Listed buildings to the west of South Street and Ockenden Lane, and Ockenden Manor, Ockenden Lane, Cuckfield.

These buildings are at a short distance from the application site, across the valley, and there are likely to be views across the closest part of the site from the buildings and their immediate settings.

Although the site represents a substantial part of their wider rural setting, the Masterplan as submitted suggests that there will be little in the way of physical impact on the part of the landscape which is most prominent in the above mentioned views. There may be some increase in activity from the proposed 'open access' use of the woodland, but in my opinion this is unlikely to be perceptible from across the valley.

Impact: Neutral.

- Old Beech Farm and barn, Staplefield Road, Cuckfield.

The application site is a short distance to the west of the historic farmstead. The part closest to the listed buildings is shown on the Masterplan as 'Dog walking- roam free access'. Given that there is no PROW currently running close to the farmstead, this potential intensification of the use of the woodland in

question, with associated increase in noise and activity, may have some impact on the current relative tranquillity of the assets' rural setting.

Impact: Less than substantial harm, low.

- Cuckfield Conservation Area.

The boundary of the Conservation Area is a short distance to the east of the application site- in closer proximity to it than the listed buildings to the west of South Street and Ockenden lane because of the inclusion of fields and other land beyond the buildings themselves, including the recreation ground. A PROW runs along the line of this boundary, interconnecting with others which run into the Area from the west, having passed through the site.

For these reasons the change of the use of the site is in my opinion likely to have some impact on the character of the setting of the Area, including the character of the approaches to it along the network of PROWs. In my opinion, the intensification of use of the site, including the roam free area which would be located closest to the Conservation Area boundary, will have some impact on the rural tranquillity of this substantial part of the setting of the Area, affecting the traditional rural character of the context within which it is appreciated.

Impact: Less than substantial harm, low.

Summary:

The proposed development would result in some impact on the currently tranquil rural character of a large area of land to the west of Cuckfield village, having some affect on the settings of a number of designated and non-designated heritage assets.

In relation to the designated assets identified, the level of this harm (where harm is present) will be in all cases less than substantial, and at the lower end of that scale.

Paragraph 208 of the NPPF will be relevant, which states that: *'Where a development proposal will lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including, where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.'*

Paragraph 205 will be relevant to the manner in which this balancing exercise is carried out. This states that: *'When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'*

In carrying out the balancing exercise, the great weight which should be given to the conservation of all of the assets identified should be borne in mind.

With respect to the NDHA identified, paragraph 209 of the NPPF will apply, which states that: *'The effect of an application on the significance of a non-designated heritage asset should be taken into account in determining the application. In weighing applications that directly or indirectly affect non-designated heritage assets, a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.'* I have set out my opinion on the scale of harm caused and the significance of the affected asset above.

Within the Mid Sussex District Plan (2014-2031) Policies DP34 and DP35 will be relevant.

Policy DP34 (Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets) states that: *'Development will be required to protect listed buildings and their settings. This will be achieved by ensuring that... Special regard is given to protecting the setting of a listed building.'* It also requires that: *'The Council will seek to conserve heritage assets in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the character and quality of life of the District. Significance can be defined as the special interest of a heritage asset, which may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic.'*

DP35 (Conservation Areas) states that: *'Development will... protect the setting of the conservation area and in particular views into and out of the area.'*

I consider that the current proposal is contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policies DP34 and DP35 for the reasons set out above.

I would also consider the proposal to be contrary to Policy CNP1 (Design of New Development and Conservation) of the Cuckfield Neighbourhood Plan, which states that:

'New development in accordance with the Neighbourhood Plan will be permitted where it:

- a) Is designed to a high quality which responds to the heritage and distinctive character and reflects the identity of the local context of Cuckfield...*
- b) Is sympathetic to the setting of any heritage asset.'*

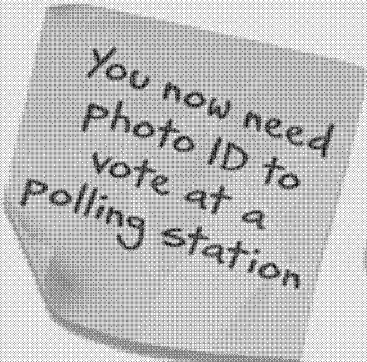
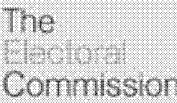
Thanks,

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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