

Design and Access Statement

Report
Design and Access Statement

File Name
023_R_010

Project
Land west of Cockhaise Farm

Client
Lucy and Nick Barr-Hamilton

Author
Architect Benjamin Machin

Date
22.05.26

Revision
-

Purpose of Issue
Planning

This document is designed to be read in conjunction with the drawings and documents also issued as part of this application for Full Planning Permission.

Preface

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a full planning application for a new dwelling at Cockhaise Farm, High Weald, West Sussex.

The proposal seeks to establish a long-term family home embedded within the agricultural and woodland structure of the site. The house and landscape are conceived together as a single architectural, ecological and accessible environment, shaped through careful observation of the land, its patterns of use and its existing environmental qualities.

The scheme has evolved through an extended process of analysis, testing and refinement, including engagement through pre-application discussions and independent Design Review Panel review. The proposal draws from the dispersed rural character of the surrounding landscape, the existing field and hedgerow structure, and the clients’ long-term ambition to steward and inhabit the site in a meaningful and enduring way.

Accessibility forms a fundamental part of the design approach and informs the organisation of the house, gardens and routes across the site from the outset. The proposal is designed to support independent occupation over the long term, integrating step-free movement, accessible external spaces and carefully considered relationships between building and landscape.

Alongside this, the proposal establishes a comprehensive landscape and ecological strategy which significantly enhances the environmental performance of the site. Existing woodland edges and hedgerow networks are reinforced through new planting, meadow landscapes, orchard gardens and woodland habitat creation, resulting in a measurable and long-term biodiversity net gain.

The proposal is therefore understood not as an isolated architectural object placed within the countryside, but as a combined architectural, ecological and landscape project that seeks to reinforce and enhance the qualities already present within this part of the High Weald landscape.

Taken together, the proposal demonstrates an exceptional quality of design through the integration of architecture, landscape, accessibility and environmental stewardship into a coherent and site-specific response. The scheme is considered to satisfy the requirements of Paragraph 84(e) of the National Planning Policy Framework through its outstanding architectural quality, sensitive relationship to the defining characteristics of the local area, and its significant enhancement of the immediate setting.



Contents

1.0	Introduction	6.0	Landscape Statement
1.1	Architect Benjamin Machin	6.1	Landscape Concept
1.2	Strategic Brief	6.2	Landscape Structure
1.3	Schematic Brief	6.3	Landscape Character
2.0	Site Analysis	6.4	Ecology and Biodiversity
2.1	Location	6.5	Experience and Approach
2.2	Site Features	6.6	Integration with Architecture
		6.7	Creating an Accessible Landscape
		6.8	Management and Longevity
		7.0	Design Statement
		7.1	Siting the House
		7.2	Organisation and Layout
		7.3	Structure and Form
		7.4	Atmosphere and Character
		7.5	Interiors
		7.6	Low Embodied Energy Design
		7.7	Low Operational Energy Design
		7.8	Material Culture
		7.9	Local Collaboration
		8.0	Access Statement
		8.1	Access Strategy
		8.2	Approach and Arrival
		8.3	Entrance, Visibility and Highway Safety
		8.4	Parking and Transfer
		8.5	External Movement
		8.6	Access into the House
		8.7	Internal Arrangement
		8.8	Rooms and Use
		8.9	Adaptability
		8.10	Practical Use
		9.0	Conclusion
		A	Appendices
		A.1	Proposed Drawings
		A.2	Pre-application Letter from Mid Sussex Council
		A.3	Feedback Letter from MSDC Design Review Panel 01
		A.4	Feedback Letter from MSDC Design Review Panel 02
3.0	Existing Drawings		
4.0	Planning Policy		
4.1	Overview		
4.2	National Planning Policy Framework		
4.3	Local Planning Policy		
5.0	Design Development		
5.1	Design Philosophy		
5.2	Design Themes		
5.3	Accessibility and Landscape Integration		
5.4	Concept Development		
5.5	Pre-Application Advice and Design Review Panel (initial round of engagement)		
5.6	Design Development following Initial Consultation		
5.7	Pre-Application Advice and Design Review Panel (follow-up round of engagement)		

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Architect Benjamin Machin

The proposal has been developed by Architect Benjamin Machin, a London-based architectural practice working on homes, housing and small buildings. The studio's work is grounded in a close reading of place, with particular interest in the relationship between architecture, landscape and long-term occupation.

The practice approaches rural projects through careful observation of landform, agricultural structure, settlement pattern and existing ecological conditions, seeking proposals that arise from the specific character of a place rather than being imposed upon it. The work is developed through an iterative process of research, drawing, model-making and close coordination with specialist consultants, allowing architecture, landscape and environmental strategy to be considered together from the outset.

The studio has developed a growing body of work concerned with countryside settings, stewardship and low-energy construction, with projects ranging from sensitive alterations to new-build rural dwellings. Particular emphasis is placed on the integration of landscape, material durability, environmental performance and long-term usability.

Architect Benjamin Machin is a RIBA Chartered Practice and Benjamin Machin is registered as an architect with the Architects Registration Board (ARB). The studio has recently been selected for inclusion within New Architects 5, the Architecture Foundation's forthcoming publication recognising emerging architectural practices in Britain.

For this proposal, the architectural approach has been shaped through close collaboration with the clients, landscape designer, planning consultant, ecologists and wider consultant team, resulting in a proposal that seeks to integrate architecture, accessibility and ecological enhancement into a single coherent response to the site.



1.2 Strategic Brief

The strategic brief has been shaped through close discussion with the clients alongside careful analysis of the site, its landscape setting and the practical requirements of long-term occupation.

The proposal seeks to establish a permanent family home closely connected to the land and capable of supporting independent living over time. The house is therefore understood not simply as a dwelling, but as part of a broader landscape strategy combining accessibility, environmental stewardship, food growing and ecological enhancement.

A central requirement of the brief has been the creation of an accessible environment tailored specifically to the long-term needs of the clients and their family. Accessibility informs the organisation of the house, gardens and routes across the site from the outset, rather than being treated as a secondary technical exercise. Step-free movement, accessible thresholds and direct relationships between interior spaces and landscape are integrated throughout the proposal.

The house is arranged as a series of interconnected volumes organised around sheltered external spaces, drawing from the dispersed arrangement of farm buildings, yards and woodland clearings found throughout the surrounding High Weald landscape. The proposal seeks to sit within the existing field structure and woodland pattern rather than appear as an isolated object within open countryside.

Environmental performance and long-term resilience have also formed a central part of the brief. The proposal adopts a fabric-first approach alongside passive environmental strategies, renewable energy generation, low embodied carbon construction and an integrated landscape strategy designed to strengthen biodiversity across the site.

New woodland planting, meadow habitat, orchard gardens and reinforced hedgerow networks transform the existing species-poor pasture into a more diverse and ecologically productive landscape capable of long-term stewardship.

The strategic brief therefore establishes architecture, accessibility, ecology and landscape as inseparable parts of a single project. The ambition has been to create a highly resolved rural dwelling that is specific to its place, responsive to the needs of its occupants, and capable of making a lasting positive contribution to its setting.



Site photograph supplied by the client at briefing stage



Site photograph supplied by the client at briefing stage



Site photograph supplied by the client at briefing stage



Site photograph supplied by the client at briefing stage

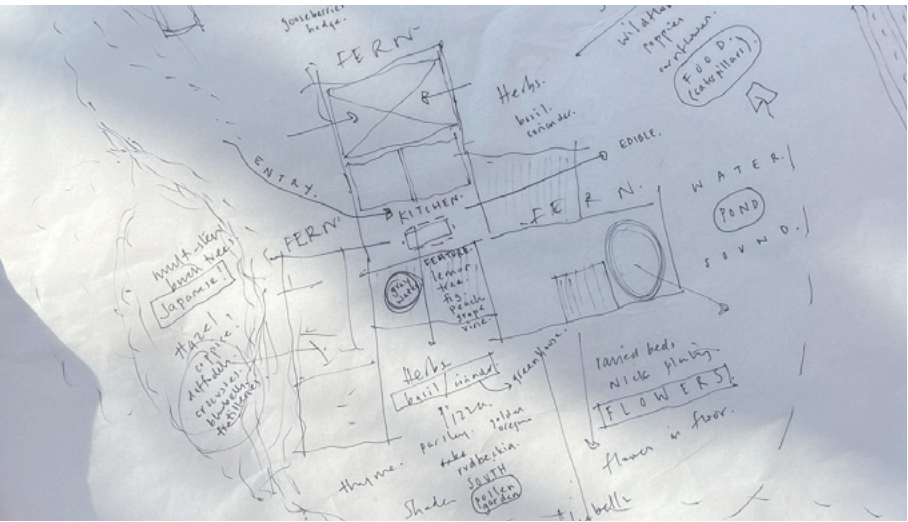
1.3 Schematic Brief

The proposal comprises a new single-storey dwelling and associated landscape strategy set within the wider agricultural and woodland structure of Cockhaise Farm.

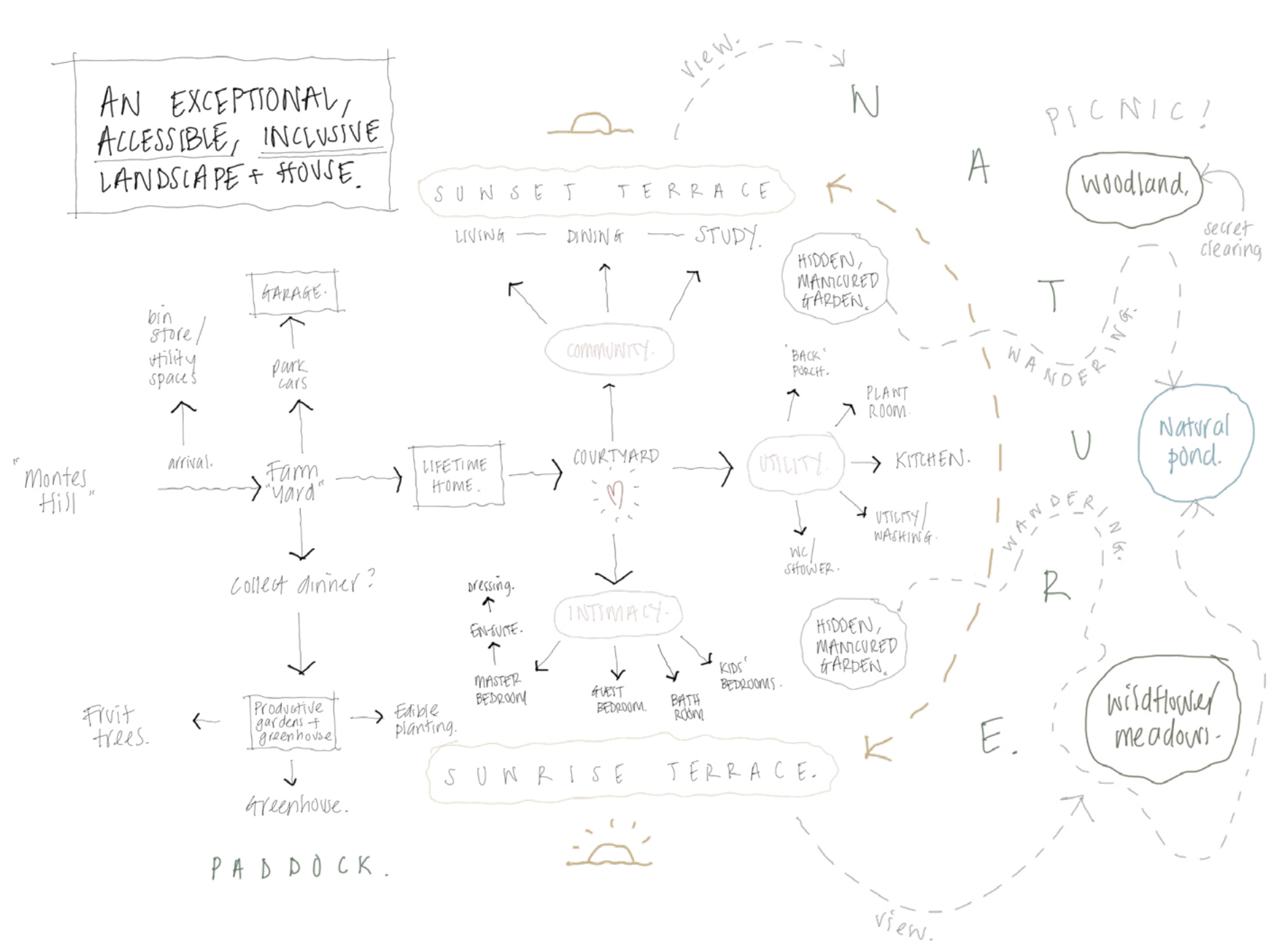
The house is organised as a series of interconnected volumes arranged around a sheltered central courtyard. This arrangement draws from the loose composition of agricultural buildings, yards and woodland clearings characteristic of the surrounding High Weald landscape, allowing the building to break down in scale and respond directly to the grain of the site. The courtyard forms the environmental and spatial centre of the house, organising the relationship between the principal living spaces whilst creating shelter and supporting clear, intuitive movement throughout.

The proposal has been designed specifically to support long-term accessible occupation, with all primary accommodation arranged across a single level and step-free access integrated throughout the house and landscape from the outset. The building is positioned within an integrated landscape framework comprising woodland planting, meadow habitat, orchard gardens and strengthened hedgerow networks, establishing a gradual transition between house, garden and wider countryside whilst significantly increasing ecological value across the site.

The proposal combines low-energy environmental design with low embodied carbon construction, incorporating passive environmental principles, renewable energy generation and bio-based materials including hempcrete and timber construction. Taken together, the scheme seeks to establish a highly site-specific rural dwelling in which architecture, accessibility, ecology and landscape are conceived as part of a single coherent and enduring response to place.



Drawing made in Design Workshop with clients and Design Team



Schematic brief denoting spaces and the relationships between them alongside the fundamental decision to let nature and the natural landscape lead the design process from the function through to the atmosphere of the place

2.0 Site Analysis

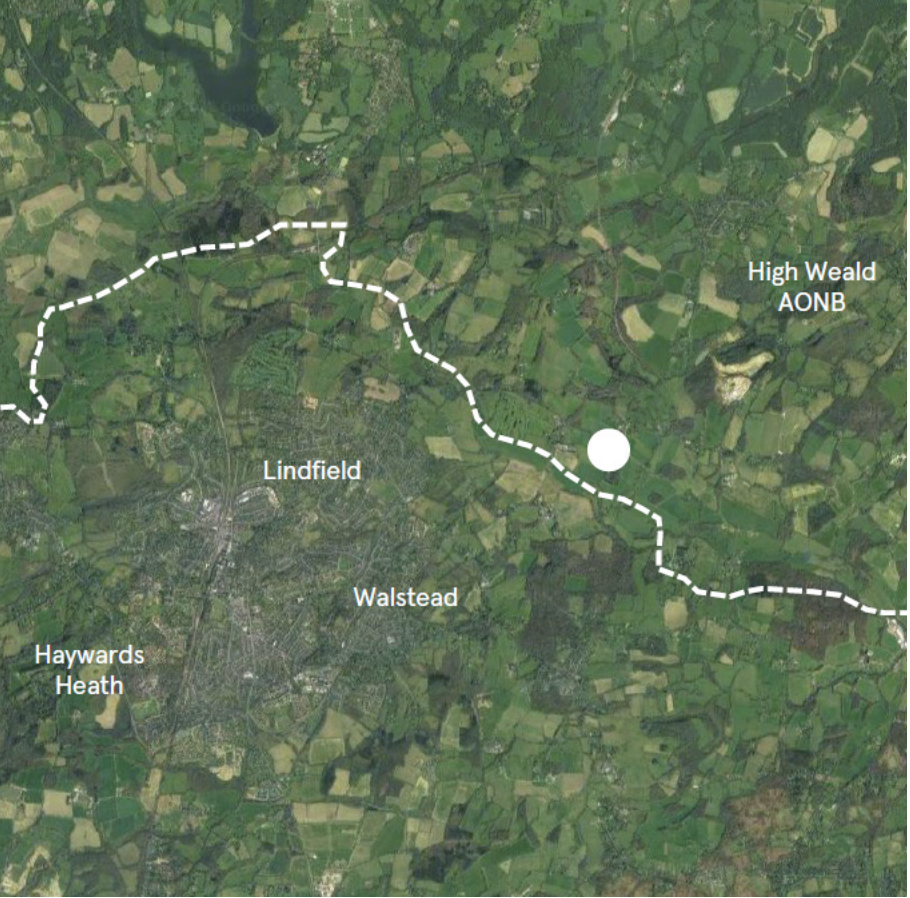
2.1 Location

The application site is located at Cockhaise Farm within the High Weald National Landscape in West Sussex. The site forms part of a wider agricultural landscape characterised by irregular pasture fields, mature hedgerow boundaries, woodland belts and dispersed rural holdings typical of the Low Weald.

The wider landscape remains strongly agricultural and lightly settled. Development is experienced as a series of individual farmsteads, cottages and agricultural yards positioned within a heavily vegetated landscape structure rather than a continuous village form. Buildings are typically filtered by woodland, hedgerows and landform, reinforcing the perception of a settled agricultural landscape rather than open or exposed countryside.



Aerial photograph showing surrounding context of Mid Sussex with the site denoted in white



Aerial photograph showing proximity to Lindfield with site extents denoted in white



Aerial photograph with site extents denoted in white

The site itself occupies part of a larger pasture field associated with Cockhaise Farm and sits adjacent to Brock Shaw ancient woodland to the west and south. Existing woodland edges, hedgerows and subtle changes in topography create a contained pastoral setting with a strong sense of enclosure despite the wider openness of the surrounding landscape.

Access is taken from an existing rural lane and farm entrance, with the approach defined by hedgerows, woodland and existing agricultural boundaries. The proposal therefore emerges from an established rural landscape framework and seeks to reinforce the existing relationship between landform, vegetation, ecology and dispersed agricultural occupation characteristic of this part of Sussex.



Collaged location plan with site denoted with white circle



Drone photograph with site extents denoted in white

2.2 Site Features

The application site forms part of a larger pasture field within Cockhaise Farm and is defined by an established framework of hedgerows, woodland edges and open grazing land typical of the Mid Sussex clay vale landscape.

The field is gently undulating, falling gradually from the north-east toward the south-west. While topographical variation is modest, subtle changes in level combine with woodland and hedgerow boundaries to create a contained and inwardly perceived landscape character.

The principal site characteristics are:

- Mature hedgerow boundaries defining the field perimeter
- Woodland belts associated with Brock Shaw ancient woodland to the west and south
- Open pasture with limited internal subdivision
- A dispersed agricultural setting with filtered views toward neighbouring farm buildings
- Existing agricultural access from Montes Hill through an established field entrance

The site does not occupy a visually prominent ridge or skyline position. Longer views are generally directed across pasture toward woodland horizons rather than toward built form. Existing vegetation creates strong visual filtering and reinforces the contained pastoral character of the field.

Ecological and visual interest is concentrated primarily at the field margins, where woodland edge conditions, hedgerows and drainage features establish stronger habitat diversity and landscape structure. The field interior itself remains simple in character, comprising species-poor grazing pasture associated with long-term agricultural use.

Overall, the site is defined less by dramatic landform or landmark features and more by the relationship between pasture, woodland edge, hedgerow structure and dispersed agricultural occupation – characteristics which informed the proposal from the outset.



Site photograph



Site photograph



Site panorama



Site photograph



Site photograph



Site photograph



Site photograph



Site photograph