



Historic England

LONDON AND SOUTH EAST OFFICE

Ms Caroline Grist
Senior Planning Officer
Mid Sussex District Council
Oaklands
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Our Ref: P10000324
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19/06/2026

Dear Ms Grist

T&CP (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 & Planning (Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas) Regulations 1990

LAND WEST OF GATESMEAD, WICKHAM WAY, HAYWARDS HEATH Application No. DM/26/1315

Thank you for consulting Historic England on the above Planning Application.

Summary

The site is the last vestige of countryside that has a direct spatial, visual and historic functional relationship with Wickham Farmhouse, a grade II* listed building.

The proposal would cause harm to the farmhouse's significance as development on this site will change the landscape context and character from one that is semi-rural to almost wholly suburban. This will result in a change to setting which will make understanding of Wickham Farmhouse's origins as a former medieval, dispersed Wealden farmstead much more difficult to understand. Instead, it will be perceived as a large house within the suburbs of Haywards Heath.

The proposed landscape buffer provided to the south of the development site would not significantly reduce the harm caused by the loss of Wickham Farmhouse's remaining countryside setting.

The proposal would also cause some harm (but to a lesser degree) to the significance of Sunte House (grade II* listed) as it would further erode its semi-rural edge of settlement character.

For Wickham Farmhouse, the level of harm is assessed as less than substantial and at a mid-level within that range and at a lower level within the less than substantial range for Sunte House.



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In line with National Planning Policy, the harm identified should lead to refusal of the application unless it can be convincingly demonstrated that the public benefits clearly outweigh this harm.

Historic England Advice

Significance of the Heritage Assets and Historic Landscape

a) Wickham Farmhouse

The significance and special interest of Wickham Farmhouse is drawn, in part, from its age, its historic function as a farmhouse, its architectural form, and its relevance to the historic evolution and rural history of the area. This significance and special interest are further underpinned by the continued legibility as a former farmstead complex due to the survival of the open countryside adjacent to the north.

While a building on this site is mentioned in 1279 and the foundations may relate to this, Wickham Farmhouse is principally of 16th century origins and a specific type (lobby entrance), fine quality, Wealden farmhouse. High quality 16th and 17th timber framing and fabric still survive, including several rare internal features.

The house contains a massive 17th century chimney stack and a large sloping Horsham stone roof illustrating a building owned by a person of some wealth. Its alteration and extension over the centuries evidence its changing fortunes and eventual high status.

The farmhouse is accessed at the top of Wickham Way and along Old Wickham Lane. The house is approached by a formal designed access marked by entrance piers and gates, and which is bordered by lawn, beech hedge and specimen trees before arriving at further gates which mark the more intimate gardens of the house. This access is also a public footpath.

The 1844 Lindfield Parish Tithe Map explains the land use, ownership and occupancy in the early-mid 19th century. The entirety of the Site and farmhouse at this time are in arable production and owned by a Miss Banister and occupied by her tenant Edward Worsfold. There is therefore a historical functional, ownership and occupancy relationship between this Grade II* listed building and the Site.

b) Sunte House

Sunte House derives significance as a very fine example of a late 17th century country house set within its own landscaped grounds with a remnant countryside setting. It is also grade II* listed. It was later modernised in the Georgian and Victorian periods. It has two principal elevations to the south and to the east, each presenting formal,

largely symmetrical, classical facades, clearly designed as a show of the wealth and status of the owners.

Like Wickham Farmhouse, Sunte House was remodelled from an earlier farmhouse that sustained and continued a dispersed pattern of human occupation and landscape character.

Historic mapping in the form of the First draft Ordnance Survey dated 1808 and the Lindfield Tithe Map show that Sunte House was originally a farm complex with several field parcels associated with it. The formal gardens and parkland were not created until the mid-19th century, with the land to the north where the farm buildings were located and accessed, left as open countryside to be used for the farming activities of the country estate.

c) The surrounding landscape and its contribution to significance

The fields proposed for development are a remnant medieval field pattern of the Weald landscape.

The Weald is recognised as an area within which isolated scattered farmsteads developed, set within a landscape of fields and woodland, that largely took its present form in the medieval period from the process of transhumance, moving livestock from the south to the uplands in the north along drove roads and the clearance of the woodland to create small fields known as 'assarts.'

The assarts, the mature hedgerows that divide them, the small woodlands and historic routeways (that are now footpaths) that border the application site together with the historic listed former farmhouses to the south remarkably all still survive. They illustrate this historic landscape character.

This rural context is particularly evident as one approaches the house along its designed driveway where the application site can be viewed through a farm gate and filtered views obtained through the beech hedge in winter months.

The relationship of the farmhouse with the countryside can also be appreciated when using the wide, possibly, former droveway (footpath HAH/47BCU/1) which borders the site to the east and lies directly to the north of Wickham Farmhouse. Walking southwards along this route, the countryside is experienced through gaps in the hedges and then the users view is terminated by a sight of the farmhouse through its entrance gates.

In addition, for quite a distance within the site (and much further than identified in the applicant's Cultural Heritage Desk Based Assessment), views of Wickham Farmhouse's tall chimney and Horsham stone roof can be appreciated. Views out



across the site from the uppermost floor of the house can also be obtained. Both aspects illustrate the spatial and visual relationship between the site and the farmhouse as well as when using the footpaths.

It is recognised that Sunte House site does not have a historic functional and visual relationship with the site in the way that Wickham Farmhouse has. However, the site does contribute to some degree to the semi-rural setting of Sunte House which is experienced by walkers along the footpath that connects Wickham Farmhouse with Sunte House and when using the former droveway. This enables appreciation of Sunte House origins and historic context as the principal house to former farmstead and later as part of a country estate.

Impact of the Proposal on Significance of Wickham Farmhouse and Sunte House

The proposal is for a housing development of 49 dwellings on an area of countryside to the north of Wickham Farmhouse.

The proposal would cause harm to the significance of Wickham Farmhouse as development on this site will change this landscape context and character from one that is semi-rural to almost wholly suburban.

This will result in a change to setting that will make Wickham Farmhouse's previous context and life as a farm estate much more difficult to understand and instead it will be perceived as a large house within the suburbs of Haywards Heath. Moreover, a full encirclement of Wickham Farmhouse by residential development/land uses would effectively materialise, at odds with its historic rural farmhouse origins.

The harm caused would be less than substantial and at a mid-level within that range.

The proposal would also cause harm to Sunte House as it would erode to some degree its understanding as a former historic country estate. This harm would be less than substantial and a lower level within that range.

The proposal would also have an adverse impact on the Footpath HAH/47BCU/1 to the east of the site which has a very attractive, rural character, and which would be bisected by the new access road to the site from Gatesmead. This footpath has the characteristic of a historic droveway and contributes to the historic landscape character of the area.

Historic England's position on the proposals

The proposal would cause harm to the significance of Wickham Farmhouse through the loss of a valuable piece of countryside that has a functional, visual and spatial connection to the Farmhouse. It provides an appreciation of its origins and historic



rural setting. It would also cause some harm to the significance of Sunte House through the further erosion of its rural setting.

We acknowledge that much of the land that would have originally formed part of Wickham Farmhouse and Sunte House's historic landholdings has already been reduced in size by suburban housing development and that both houses have large, landscaped gardens.

However, once arriving at the top of Wickham Way, there is a clear change in character of the surroundings from suburban to rural. The undeveloped character of the application site together with the landscape designed formal approach along Old Wickham Lane contribute positively to appreciation of entering former historic farm holdings and country estate.

We do not think the proposed mitigation of a landscape buffer significantly reduces the harm as the proposed housing on this site would represent a significant change to the setting of Wickham Farmhouse. This change in character would arise not just from the new houses themselves, but the suburbanising impact of roads, fences, lighting and a more managed landscape that appears as open space within a housing estate.

We also appreciate that it is proposed to supplement the boundaries around the site with additional planting. However, new planting would take time to properly establish and, even if to be actively managed for a long time, could not comprehensively disguise the introduction of residential development nor the associated pronounced domestication of much of the site that would inevitably prevail. It is also likely that the new residents of the housing estate would make access routes through the planting to use the adjacent footpaths.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that great weight should be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, and the more important the asset, the greater the weight (paragraph 212); that any conflict between development proposals and the conservation of heritage assets should be avoided or minimised (paragraph 208); any harm to significance should be clearly and convincingly justified (paragraph 213); and that any *less than substantial harm* should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal (paragraph 215).

As the proposal would affect two highly graded listed buildings, their conservation should be given considerable importance and great weight when undertaking the balancing exercise referred to in paragraph 215.

Recommendation



Historic England

Historic England recommends that planning permission should be refused, given the harm that the proposed development would cause to the significance of Wickham Farmhouse and Sunte House unless your Council considers that this harm would be outweighed by public benefits secured by the development.

Yours sincerely,

Alma Howell

Inspector of Historic Buildings and Areas

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