

HERITAGE STATEMENT

Statement of significance and assessment of impact

Balcombe Conservation Area

Birch House, London Road, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT

Loft conversion with internal alterations

Document control	
Site address	Birch House, London Road, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT
Local planning authority	Mid Sussex District Council
Application type	Householder application for planning permission
Heritage asset affected	Balcombe Conservation Area (designated 1984, boundary extended March 1990) — designated heritage asset
Other designations	High Weald National Landscape (High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty)
Read with	Design and Access Statement and Planning Statement, project reference 2026-06-RH17
Project reference	2026-06-RH17

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This Heritage Statement is submitted by 1 Stop Design & Build on behalf of the applicant in support of a householder application for planning permission at Birch House, London Road, Balcombe, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH17 6HT ("the Site").
- 1.2 The development proposed is: **"Loft conversion with internal alterations."**
- 1.3 The Site lies within the Balcombe Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset. National policy requires an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected, including any contribution made by its setting, to a level of detail proportionate to the asset's importance and sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on that significance. This Statement discharges that requirement.
- 1.4 The Statement identifies the heritage assets affected, sets out the significance of the Balcombe Conservation Area and the contribution Birch House makes to it, and assesses the effect of the proposals on that significance. It concludes on the statutory duty under section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 and, in the alternative, on the balance required by national policy.
- 1.5 It should be read with the Design and Access Statement, which sets out the design rationale and the evaluation of options, and with the Planning Statement, which assesses the proposals against the development plan as a whole.

2. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

- 2.1 This assessment follows the approach set out in Historic England's Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2, Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment, and Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3, The Setting of Heritage Assets. Significance is considered by reference to the heritage values described in Historic England's Conservation Principles: evidential, historical, aesthetic and communal.
- 2.2 The following sources have been consulted:
 - the National Heritage List for England, in respect of designated assets in Balcombe;
 - Mid Sussex District Council, Conservation Areas in Mid Sussex (August 2018), which contains the Council's published description of the Balcombe Conservation Area and its designation and extension history, and reproduces the wording of the Mid Sussex Local Plan 2004;
 - the Mid Sussex District Plan 2014–2031 and the Mid Sussex Design Guide SPD;
 - the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2031 and its associated design guidance;
 - the High Weald National Landscape Management Plan;
 - historic and current Ordnance Survey mapping;
 - site inspection and the measured survey drawings prepared for this application.
- 2.3 Mid Sussex District Council has to date prepared Conservation Area Appraisals for a small number of its thirty-six Conservation Areas. Balcombe is not among them. In the absence of an adopted appraisal, the Council's published description in Conservation Areas in Mid Sussex is

the primary published statement of the special interest of the Balcombe Conservation Area, and this assessment is founded upon it.

- 2.4 The level of detail in this Statement is proportionate to the importance of the asset and to the scale of the proposals, which are confined to the roof of one unlisted twentieth century dwelling within the Conservation Area.

3. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 3.1 Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 provides that, in the exercise of planning functions with respect to any buildings or other land in a conservation area, special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area. Where harm to a conservation area is identified, that harm must be given considerable importance and weight in the decision.
- 3.2 The National Planning Policy Framework requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage asset affected. It requires great weight to be given to the conservation of designated heritage assets, irrespective of the level of harm. Where a proposal would lead to less than substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset, that harm is to be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. The Framework also recognises that not all elements of a conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance.
- 3.3 Policy DP34 of the Mid Sussex District Plan requires heritage assets to be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance. Policy DP35 requires development within a conservation area to conserve or enhance its special character and appearance. Policy DP26 requires development, including alterations and extensions to existing buildings, to be well designed and to reflect the distinctive character of the villages of the District.
- 3.4 The Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan 2015–2031, made on 22 September 2016, forms part of the development plan and carries full weight. Its design guidance seeks development reflecting the local vernacular and the use of local materials, including brick, sandstone, timber and clay tiles.

4. HERITAGE ASSETS AFFECTED

- 4.1 The heritage asset affected is the Balcombe Conservation Area, a designated heritage asset.

Asset	Status and relationship to the Site
Balcombe Conservation Area	Designated heritage asset. Part of Balcombe was designated in 1984, focused on the central village crossroads and extended in linear form as far as St Mary's Church in the north and Mill Lane in the south. The boundary was extended in March 1990 to include, among other areas, the east side of London Road northwards to the original boundary. The Site lies within the Conservation Area.
Birch House	Not a listed building. Not within the curtilage of a listed building. Not identified by the Council as a non-designated heritage asset. A twentieth century detached dwelling which contributes to the character of the Conservation Area principally through its form, plot and landscaped setting.

Asset	Status and relationship to the Site
Listed buildings	The listed buildings of Balcombe are concentrated in the historic core around the central crossroads, extending north towards St Mary's Church, and in the group of older timber framed and brick properties around the junction of Haywards Heath Road and Mill Lane. None is affected. The proposals are confined to the roof plane of an unlisted twentieth century dwelling and there is no intervisibility between the affected roof slopes and any listed building. The setting of no listed building is affected.
Scheduled monuments, registered parks and gardens, registered battlefields	None affected.
Archaeology	None affected. The proposals involve no ground disturbance, no excavation and no change of level.

5. HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGNATION OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 5.1 Balcombe is a village in the northern part of Mid Sussex, set on a ridge between steeply dissected wooded valleys within what is now the High Weald National Landscape. Its historic focus is the crossroads at the centre of the village, where the village green, shops, public house and Victory Hall are grouped, with the parish church of St Mary to the north.
- 5.2 Some of the buildings grouped around the village centre date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and most are pre-twentieth century. A second group of older timber framed and brick properties lies to the south east, around the junction of Haywards Heath Road and Mill Lane; while many of these are Victorian, several are listed and date from the seventeenth century.
- 5.3 From the later nineteenth century the village expanded southwards along its principal roads. This later expansion produced a quite different but equally distinctive townscape: large detached houses of varying ages and styles, set in spacious gardens on tree and hedge lined roads with wide grass verges.
- 5.4 Part of Balcombe was designated a Conservation Area in 1984, the designation being focused on the central crossroads and extending in linear form as far as St Mary's Church to the north and Mill Lane to the south.
- 5.5 The boundary was extended in March 1990 to include two further areas: first, the north-west side of Bramble Hill together with the trees and hedgeline on its south-east side, and the east side of London Road northwards to the original Conservation Area boundary; and second, those parts of Stockcroft Road and Deanland Road not previously covered, together with Victoria Road and part of Oldlands Avenue. The Council recorded that these roads are, for the most part, characterised by large detached houses of varying ages and styles with spacious gardens, set in attractive tree and hedge lined roads with wide grass verges, and that although there had been some recent infill development these areas had retained an attractive character and appearance worthy of Conservation Area status.

- 5.6 The Site lies within this 1990 extension. That designation history matters to the present assessment for two reasons. First, the extension was made in express recognition of a townscape of large detached houses of varying ages and styles — architectural variety is part of what was designated, not something the designation was intended to exclude. Second, the Council’s reasoning identifies plots, gardens, verges, trees and hedges as the qualities which carried this area over the threshold for designation.

6. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE BALCOMBE CONSERVATION AREA

The Council’s published description

- 6.1 The Council identifies the following features as contributing in particular to the character of the Balcombe Conservation Area:
- the attractive stone walling within the area;
 - the large detached houses, set predominantly in spacious gardens, and the extensive grass verges bordering wide roads which contribute to the overall open character of the residential area of Stockcroft Road, Deanland Road and Oldlands Avenue;
 - the number of hedgerows and fine trees, both deciduous and evergreen, in the area;
 - the use of natural and traditional building materials including clay roofing tiles and local stock brick;
 - the ornamental barge-boarding on some of the properties in London Road;
 - the attractive views of rolling countryside.

Assessment by heritage value

Value	Assessment
Evidential	Moderate in the historic core, where standing fabric of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries survives. Low in the later residential streets and along London Road, where the buildings are of nineteenth and twentieth century date and their evidential interest lies principally in the pattern of suburban expansion they represent rather than in individual fabric. Birch House itself holds negligible evidential value.
Historical	High for the Conservation Area as a whole. It illustrates the growth of a Wealden village from a compact historic crossroads settlement to a village which expanded southwards along its principal roads in the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The London Road frontage and the residential streets included in the 1990 extension are legible evidence of that second phase.
Aesthetic	High, and the principal component of significance. It derives from the combination of built form and landscape: large detached houses of varying ages and styles set well back in spacious gardens; wide roads with extensive grass verges; stone walling; abundant hedgerows and mature deciduous and evergreen trees; the use of natural and traditional materials, including clay roofing tiles and local stock brick; ornamental barge-boarding on some London Road properties; and views out to rolling countryside.

Value	Assessment
	The overriding quality is openness and greenness — a spacious, tree-dominated residential landscape rather than a tightly framed architectural set piece.
Communal	Moderate, and concentrated in the village core around the green, shops, public house, Victory Hall and church, where community life is focused. The residential streets and the London Road frontage contribute to communal value chiefly as a valued everyday setting.

Character of the part of the Conservation Area containing the Site

- 6.2 The Site lies on London Road, within the 1990 extension to the Conservation Area. The character here is that of the later expansion of the village: substantial detached houses of varying dates and architectural styles, set back from the road within generous, well planted plots, with mature boundary vegetation, verges and tree cover dominating the street scene.
- 6.3 Two points follow, and they govern the assessment which follows. First, the significance of this part of the Conservation Area is carried predominantly by spatial and landscape attributes — plot size, spacing, set-back, garden ground, boundary treatment, verges and tree cover — rather than by architectural uniformity. Second, the Council's own description twice records that the buildings in these areas are of varying ages and styles. The Conservation Area does not depend for its significance on a repeated house type, a consistent roof form or a single architectural language.

7. BIRCH HOUSE AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SIGNIFICANCE

- 7.1 Birch House is a detached two storey dwellinghouse of twentieth century date set back from London Road behind a driveway and integral garage, with mature boundary planting and generous garden ground to the rear. It has a complex multi-pitched roof with a principal ridge at 9.440 m above the site datum, a projecting front gable with bay window and canopy, subsidiary hipped and mono-pitched elements at pitches ranging from 5 to 45 degrees, and two brick chimney stacks.
- 7.2 The dwelling has been altered. A contemporary flat-roofed rear extension, finished in vertical timber cladding with dark grey framed windows and doors, accommodates the kitchen and dining room and forms an established part of the building. The existing roof void above the two storeys of accommodation is unconverted, approximately 52 m² on plan, in storage use only and served by no fixed staircase.
- 7.3 Birch House is not listed, is not within the curtilage of a listed building, and has not been identified by the Council as a non-designated heritage asset. It is not individually distinguished architecturally and is not among the London Road properties singled out in the Council's description for their ornamental barge-boarding.
- 7.4 Its contribution to the significance of the Conservation Area is positive but general, and is made through:

- its detached form and its generous, well planted plot, which sustain the pattern of large houses in spacious gardens;
- its set-back from London Road and the resulting green, landscaped frontage;
- its retained mature boundary planting, which contributes to the tree and hedge cover the Council identifies as a defining feature;
- its clay tiled roofscape as seen in the street scene;
- its front elevation, with gable, bay, canopy and chimney stacks, as read from London Road.

7.5 Each of these attributes is retained without alteration by the proposals.

8. THE PROPOSALS

8.1 The proposals comprise:

- the conversion of the existing roof void to a bedroom of 19 m², study of 9 m², bathroom of 4 m² and landing of 5 m²;
- a single L-shaped dormer to the rear and inner return of the roof, with a face height of 2.560 m, contained wholly below the existing ridge, finished in vertical timber cladding with dark grey glazing to match the existing ground floor rear extension;
- three conservation-profile rooflights set flush within the front roof slope;
- a new internal staircase from the existing first floor landing, with associated internal alterations at first floor level.

8.2 There is no increase in footprint, no increase in ridge height, no alteration to the eaves line, no loss of garden ground and no loss of trees or boundary planting. Both chimney stacks are retained unaltered. The design rationale and the four options tested are set out at Sections 5 and 6 of the Design and Access Statement.

9. ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT ON SIGNIFICANCE

Effect on the attributes carrying significance

- 9.1 The proposals do not touch the spatial and landscape attributes which carry the significance of this part of the Conservation Area. The plot and its boundaries are unchanged. The spacing between Birch House and its neighbours is unchanged. The set-back from London Road is unchanged. The garden ground is retained in full. Every tree, hedge and area of boundary planting is retained; no root protection area is encroached upon, because the works are confined to the roof of the existing building. The verges and stone walling of the wider street scene are untouched.
- 9.2 The scale of the building is unchanged. The ridge remains at 9.440 m exactly as existing, the eaves line is unchanged and the footprint is unchanged. The silhouette of the building against the sky — the aspect of a roof which registers most strongly in a conservation area street scene, and the aspect most readily harmed by roof alterations — is entirely unaltered.

Effect on the London Road frontage

- 9.3 The front elevation is preserved in its entirety. The gable, bay, canopy, fenestration pattern and both chimney stacks are retained without alteration. Where a property carries decorative frontage detail of the kind the Council values along London Road, that detail is unaffected by these proposals.
- 9.4 The only change visible from London Road is the introduction of three rooflights within the front roof slope. These are conservation-profile units with slim black frames, set flush within the plane of the roof so that they read as dark recesses within the tiled slope rather than as projecting features. Rooflights of this kind are a common and accepted feature of roofs within conservation areas, and they do not disturb the plane, the pitch or the material of the roof. The existing clay tile covering is retained, with any tiles disturbed by the works reinstated and any shortfall made up in reclaimed tiles to match.

Effect of the dormer

- 9.5 The dormer is confined to the rear and inner return of the roof, facing away from London Road and over the applicant's own garden. It is contained wholly below the existing ridge and is set within the roof slope rather than perched upon it, extending beyond neither the eaves nor the flank walls at any point. Views of it from the public realm are limited by the building itself and by the mature boundary planting which is retained in full.
- 9.6 Its form is the product of a deliberate judgement about how best to intervene in a roof of this complexity. The existing roof already carries several changes of pitch and direction and two chimney stacks. A series of small separate dormers distributed across it would add visual incident to a roof which already has a great deal, and would read as a scatter of unrelated additions. A single, calmly detailed element in a recessive material reads more quietly and resolves as one legible design idea, clearly subordinate to the retained principal roof.

Materials: response to the Council's description

- 9.7 The Council's description identifies among the features contributing to the character of the Conservation Area the use of natural and traditional building materials, including clay roofing tiles and local stock brick. That feature is engaged by these proposals and is addressed directly.
- 9.8 First, the clay tiled roofscape of Birch House is retained. The proposals do not replace or reduce the tiled roof: the principal slopes, including the whole of the London Road frontage slope, remain in clay tile, and the dormer occupies only the private rear and inner return. The material which the Council identifies as characteristic remains the dominant material of the roof as experienced from the public realm.
- 9.9 Second, the description is expressed inclusively. It identifies the use of natural and traditional building materials, and gives clay roofing tiles and local stock brick as examples. It is not a closed list, and it does not exclude other natural and traditional materials. Vertical timber boarding is one of the characteristic building materials of the Weald. Weatherboarding appears throughout the villages of the High Weald on buildings both historic and modern, and timber is expressly identified as a local material in the design guidance of the Balcombe Neighbourhood Plan. The cladding proposed is a natural, traditional and locally rooted material, not an alien import.
- 9.10 Third, the material is not introduced to this building for the first time. The rear of Birch House already reads as a contemporary timber and dark-glazed composition at ground floor level.

Extending that language upward produces a coherent rear elevation in which the two contemporary interventions are legible as a single design idea set against the retained traditional body of the house. The alternative — a dormer in a different material above an established timber-clad extension — would produce a less resolved and more visually restless rear elevation.

- 9.11 Fourth, the cladding will silver naturally over time to a soft grey and will recede further into the backdrop of retained mature boundary planting. The dark grey glazing keeps the openings reading as shadow rather than as frames, materially reducing the apparent bulk of the dormer face compared with lighter framing.

Effect on setting and views

- 9.12 The setting of the Conservation Area is unaffected. There is no change to the footprint, height or silhouette of the building and therefore no change to its contribution to the attractive views of rolling countryside which the Council identifies, or to views from the wider High Weald landscape towards the village. No new built form is introduced into open land.

Internal alterations

- 9.13 The internal alterations affect the interior of an unlisted twentieth century building. No historic fabric, plan form or feature of heritage interest is affected. There is no heritage impact.

Cumulative effect

- 9.14 Taken together, the proposals leave every attribute identified in the Council's description of the Conservation Area either wholly unaffected or, in the case of the roofing material and the London Road frontage, substantially retained. There is no cumulative effect which is not apparent from the assessment of the individual elements above.

10. CONCLUSION ON HARM AND THE STATUTORY DUTY

- 10.1 The character and appearance of the Balcombe Conservation Area is preserved. The spatial and landscape attributes which carry its significance in this location — plot, spacing, set-back, garden ground, boundary planting, verges, trees and hedges — are entirely unaffected. The building's height, mass, footprint and silhouette are unchanged. The London Road frontage, which is the aspect of the Site experienced from the public realm, is preserved save for three flush conservation rooflights which do not disturb the plane, pitch or material of the roof.
- 10.2 The one substantial intervention is confined to the private rear roofscape, contained below the existing ridge, expressed as a single considered element rather than a scatter of additions, and finished in a natural and traditional material of the Weald which is already established on the building. It is clearly of its own time and makes no attempt to imitate historic forms, in accordance with good conservation practice and with national policy, which recognises that new work in a conservation area may be of its own time provided it is well designed and respects the character of its setting.
- 10.3 No harm to the significance of the Balcombe Conservation Area arises. The statutory duty under section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 is discharged,

and the proposals accord with Policies DP26, DP34 and DP35 of the Mid Sussex District Plan and with Chapter 16 of the National Planning Policy Framework.

11. THE BALANCE IN THE ALTERNATIVE

- 11.1 If, contrary to the assessment above, the Council were to identify harm to the significance of the Conservation Area, that harm would fall at the very lowest end of less than substantial. It would arise solely from the appearance of a dormer on private rear roof slopes, in a designated area whose significance rests principally on spatial and landscape qualities which the proposals do not touch, and on a building of no individual heritage interest.
- 11.2 Applying the balance required by national policy, and giving great weight to the conservation of the designated heritage asset and considerable importance and weight to any harm, the following public benefits would clearly outweigh harm at that level:
- the retention and efficient reuse of an existing building within the Conservation Area, meeting a household's accommodation needs inside an envelope which already exists rather than through new construction;
 - the avoidance of any pressure to extend into the garden ground, boundary planting and tree cover which the Council identifies as central to the character of this part of the Conservation Area — the proposals secure, rather than erode, the very attributes that carry significance here;
 - the retention of the existing clay tiled roofscape to the London Road frontage and of the frontage elevation in its entirety;
 - a substantial improvement in the thermal performance of the roof, reducing the energy demand and carbon emissions of an existing dwelling within a Conservation Area and a National Landscape;
 - the delivery of family accommodation which allows an existing household to remain in the village.
- 11.3 The balance falls clearly in favour of the grant of planning permission.

12. MITIGATION AND RECOMMENDED CONDITIONS

- 12.1 The assessment above depends on the quality of the detailing. The applicant would accept the following conditions to give the Council direct control over it:
- samples or full details of the timber cladding, including species, board width, profile, fixing detail and finish, to be submitted to and approved in writing before that part of the works commences;
 - details of the rooflights, confirming a conservation profile with slim black frames set flush within the plane of the roof slope, to be submitted to and approved in writing before installation;
 - the colour and finish of all new windows and doors to match the existing ground floor rear extension;
 - any tiles disturbed by the works to be reinstated, with any shortfall made up in reclaimed clay tiles to match the existing roof;
 - both existing chimney stacks to be retained unaltered in height, material and detail;

- all existing trees, hedges and boundary planting to be retained and protected for the duration of the works;
- the removal of permitted development rights for further alterations or additions to the roof.

13. CONCLUSION

- 13.1 The heritage asset affected is the Balcombe Conservation Area, designated in 1984 and extended in March 1990 to include the east side of London Road. Its significance in this location is carried principally by the pattern of large detached houses of varying ages and styles set in spacious gardens, by grass verges, stone walling, hedgerows and mature trees, by the use of natural and traditional building materials, and by views out to rolling countryside.
- 13.2 Birch House is an unlisted twentieth century dwelling which contributes positively but generally to that significance, through its form, plot, set-back, landscaped setting, tiled roofscape and frontage elevation. Every one of those attributes is retained without alteration.
- 13.3 The proposals convert an existing unused roof void into habitable accommodation wholly within the existing envelope. The ridge, eaves, footprint and silhouette are unchanged. The London Road frontage is preserved. The clay tiled roof is retained across the whole of the public-facing slope. The dormer is confined to the private rear roofscape, contained below the ridge, and finished in a natural and traditional material of the Weald which is already established on this building.
- 13.4 The character and appearance of the Balcombe Conservation Area is preserved. No harm to the significance of the designated heritage asset arises, and the statutory duty under section 72(1) of the 1990 Act is discharged. If any harm were found, it would be at the very lowest end of less than substantial and would be clearly outweighed by the public benefits identified at Section 11.