

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 27 January 2026 15:39:31 UTC+00:00
To: "Katherine Williams" <Katherine.Williams@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/25/3028 and 3040 West House Farm

Hi Katherine

Comments on the above planning and listed building consent applications. My apologies for the delay in getting these to you which has been caused by pressure of other work and leave over the Christmas period.

West House Farm is a historic farmstead located in a rural position outside Albourne. The farmstead includes a Grade II listed farmhouse, which dates originally from the late 17th- early 18th century, with a second parallel range and rear wing added in the late 17th/early 19th century, a Grade II listed weatherboarded barn of the mid-late 17th century, and a number of other ancillary buildings which are predominantly ranged around a series of yards to the south-west of the house. These include a late 18th century stable which would 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 post-Medieval period.

A public right of way (PROW) runs east-west just to the north of the farmstead. There would be clear views from this path of the grouping. This path turns to run south along the western side of the farm buildings, with several other PROWs joining from all directions.

The current proposal, which follows on from preapplication advice, is for the extension and conversion of the barn to create a dwelling, conversion of the curtilage listed stable to ancillary accommodation, demolition of modern buildings within the former farmstead, and construction of a new stables building, games room building, and bike and bin store.

Further parallel applications for listed building consent and planning permission have been received relating to works to the listed farmhouse and its immediate setting. Whilst not the subject of the applications currently under consideration, the cumulative impact of all of the proposed works on the historic farmstead and the setting of the farmhouse may be relevant.

At preapplication stage, concern was raised regarding the principle of the conversion of the barn to a separate dwelling, in terms of the potential impact on the character of the farmstead and its currently tranquil rural nature, as well as the likely associated pressure for subdivision and domestication of the settings of the farmhouse and barn. It was noted that although establishing a beneficial long-term use for the building would be desirable, it was reported to be in a good structural condition, and that any formal

application should include a robust justification for a domestic conversion as opposed to another, potentially less invasive, use, such as a continuing ancillary purpose relating to the farmhouse.

The current proposal is accompanied by a Planning Statement and by a Heritage Statement which comment on this issue. A Structural Assessment and Method Statement is also included, although the consideration of the condition of the building and necessary repairs is brief and high-level. The Heritage Statement includes a table (SWOT framework) which considers and rejects alternative uses for the listed barn. Whilst I would not necessarily disagree with some of the conclusions drawn by the SWOT, this also appears to be a very simplified, high level analysis which is not backed up by adequate supporting evidence- for example, we do not have a fully detailed condition survey of the barn, or costings of repairs, or valuations, to demonstrate that any necessary work would not be financially viable were the building retained in a low key use ancillary to the house. In my opinion, therefore, the optimal viable use of the barn has not been adequately demonstrated, and there is no clear evidence that domestic conversion to a separate dwelling is the only or best option to secure the long-term beneficial use of the building. This fundamental aspect of the proposal requires further work, and a more robust justification, if the principle is to be established.

Putting the principle to one side for the moment, I will move on to consider the detail of the proposed physical works forming part of the application before us. These have been amended following on from pre-application advice.

In respect of the barn itself, it is proposed to demolish adjacent structures to either end of the building, which are partly attached and partly detached, and construct in their place two attached extensions. Internally, to the barn the extent of the works to the existing mezzanines is not clear. Partitioning is according to the submitted plans proposed at the western end of the barn beneath the new or retained mezzanine (although there is also some lack of clarity in this respect), and new doors are shown to connect the barn to the extensions. Externally, a number of new or altered openings for windows are shown, including rooflights to the rear (south) roofslope.

The existing structures beside the barn are not of any particular merit, and their removal is not considered contentious. The proposed extensions are also considered acceptable in principle, although that to the eastern end would benefit from being set back in terms of the building line from both front and rear elevations. The elevational treatment and fenestration would also benefit from reconsideration to render the appearance of the additions less domestic and more agricultural in character. In my opinion, the architectural quality and level of detailing of the treatment of the extensions could be improved to provide a development which reflects better the level of interest of the host barn and the setting of the adjacent farmhouse.

New openings are proposed in the end elevations of the building to allow access to the additions. This work is not commented on in detail in the submitted Heritage Statement, and as such we can have no clear idea of the impact that this will have on the historic

fabric of the building. It is clear that some elements of the timber frame to the walls and of the brick plinth to the building have been altered or replaced over time; however, whether original or more modern fabric is now proposed for removal is not clear. This work therefore requires further, more detailed information and justification, including appropriately annotated internal elevations.

The proposal with respect to the existing mezzanine structures is also unclear and raises some concerns in my opinion. The submitted Heritage Statement notes that these date from the late 19th or early 20th century and are indicative of a period of change and intensification of agricultural practice. Although these will be of less interest than the earlier fabric contained within the building, they do therefore have some significance in terms of the narrative of the building and of the wider farmstead, which is recognised by the Statement. The application submission is not consistent as to whether one or both structures are to be removed, with one then replaced with a modern structure- the Structural Assessment indicates both removed with one replaced with a new structure, whereas the Heritage Statement suggests that the western mezzanine will be retained with a new stair access. Whilst there may be some justification for the removal of one mezzanine to better expose the original volume of the 17th century barn, I would question whether the removal of both is justified, particularly where it would then be intended to replace one with modern fabric in the same position? These structures contribute strongly to the '*visible layering of change*' which is remarked upon in the Heritage Statement, and their wholesale removal would require further consideration and justification. This aspect of the proposal requires clarification, and if it is confirmed that it is intended to retain the western mezzanine, it would also be helpful if the applicant could explain why this structure was considered to be more significant than the eastern, which it is certainly proposed to remove.

The submitted Heritage Statement also comments that no new partitioning is proposed within the barn itself, however this is contradicted by the submitted proposed drawings, which show a snug and WC beneath the western mezzanine structure. The HS remarks explicitly that these have been removed from the scheme following negative feedback at pre-application stage, so there does appear to be inconsistency between the drawings and this supporting statement, which should be addressed. I would also repeat the advice given at pre-app. that this partitioning should be removed from the proposal- given the extent of the additions proposed to the barn, no new subdivision within the historic building should be necessary.

In terms of the elevational treatment of the barn, a number of new or altered openings are proposed. It is proposed to retain and to glaze within the cart door openings to both the front and the rear of the building. This aspect of the scheme is not considered contentious, subject to detail. However, elsewhere to these elevations and to the west elevation at high level a number of new openings are proposed. Whereas the re-use of the existing openings to these elevations (with appropriate glazing) may not be considered contentious, it seems that in some cases these existing openings are not used, with instead new windows created, some of which including the long high window to the western elevation and the large window at low level to the rear of the building are

particularly domestic in their appearance. To the front of the building, the new openings lower level, their form, and the artificial symmetry which is introduced to the elevation by their placement are in my opinion particularly inappropriate. The new rooflights to the rear roof slope, while not necessarily contentious in principle, appear oversized. These, and the new openings to the elevations are likely to result in loss of historic fabric, which will be considered to cause further harm to the special interest of the building. This aspect of the proposal requires further reconsideration, and the impact of the works on the historic fabric of the barn should be considered in more detail in the supporting documents, and illustrated on appropriate internal elevations.

A fundamental aspect of the success of conversion proposals to timber framed buildings such as the West House barn will be retaining the visual prominence of the exposed timber frame, which is key to the internal character of the building. The current application is accompanied by a typical section showing that it is proposed to install insulation between the rafters at roof level. Whilst this retains (as shown) the visibility of the very innermost part of the rafter, the depth of the timber which would remain exposed is minimal. In my opinion, this will not be sufficient to preserve the character of this key part of the building's interior, and I would suggest that the proposal is reconsidered, either to reduce the depth of the insulation (if this is possible) or to set it partly internally and partly externally, so that a good depth of timber remains exposed to view to all members of the roof frame. Similar considerations apply with respect to the insulation to the timber framed walls, which also requires reconsideration. I would suggest that existing and proposed internal elevations to demonstrate the continuing visibility of the frame members should also be provided, as these may vary in depth. These drawings should note the position of the tar marks (indicative of the original thatching to the roof) and carpenter's assembly marks to the frame which are noted in the Heritage Statement, to make it clear that these important features providing evidence of the building's construction will be retained exposed to view.

As existing, the barn does not retain historic flooring of interest, but the detail of the proposal for the treatment of this part of the building should also be provided, including typical sectional drawings.

The submitted Heritage Statement refers to repairs to the barn building, specifically to the frame and cladding. Whilst sympathetic repair where necessary would not be considered contentious, and would indeed be welcomed, we have no detailed condition survey of the building to explain the need for this work, or its likely extent, and no detailed specification of the works envisaged. This further information should be supplied (and may feed into the issue of the principle of conversion, discussed above).

In respect of the works to the stable building, again there is not sufficient evidence currently before us to demonstrate that the domestic conversion proposed represents the optimum viable use for this small ancillary building. In particular, as a new stables building is also proposed as part of the application, any further justification of the principle of this work should include a demonstration of why the curtilage listed building is not considered fit to continue in its original intended purpose?

In terms of the physical alterations to the building, externally it is proposed to replace the existing stable doors, but glazing the upper opening of 2 of the 3. Other external works appears to be minimal- this aspect of the proposal is not considered contentious. However, the existing stables building, when viewed on site, has a blocked doorway to the western elevation where an opening has been infilled with concrete blockwork:



This opening does not appear to be shown on the existing or proposed plans relating to the stable building, so that there is no indication of what the proposed treatment of this part of the building would be? It would be helpful if this could be clarified as I doubt (hope!) that it is not proposed to retain the blockwork?

Internally, the building does not appear to retain much in the way of fabric of interest, and the original stall partitioning has been replaced with blockwork -notwithstanding this, the proposal retains sufficient of this plan form to illustrate the original subdivision of the building, which is welcomed. The Heritage Statement does however note the survival of some remnants of lime plaster, and of timber fixing points for mangers, which are important evidence of the original use of the building. There is no commentary on how these features are to be preserved- the Statement and/or drawings should be amended to address this point. In addition, the applicant should provide detailed sectional and elevational drawings as appropriate in relation to the proposal for the insulation of the roof, walls and floor. With respect to the roof, it is noted that this has been lined out with modern boarding, however as it does not appear that listed building consent was obtained for the installation of this boarding we would expect that the historic roof structure above will be retained and exposed in a sympathetic manner, as for the barn.

The proposed new stable building replaces a row of existing moderns building on the site, which is located to the west of the historic farmyard. These buildings are not of any particular merit, and their removal is not considered contentious. The proposed new stable building is similar in footprint, and of an appropriate design. This aspect of the proposal is not considered contentious, subject to detail.

The proposed new games room building and bike and bin store are also shown to the west of the farmstead, broadly in the position of an existing modern building which it is proposed to demolish and replace. These buildings have an agricultural aesthetic sympathetic to the context, and are not considered contentious, subject to detail.

On recent site visits it was noted that the existing entrance driveway to the northeast of the house, which would become the shared access to the barn, is not currently in good condition in some areas. Upgrading of the drive does not appear to be part of the application, but the nature of any work including materials should be carefully considered in terms of the impact on the setting of the farmstead. It would be helpful if the applicant could confirm their intentions in this respect.

In summary, the proposal raises a number of concerns beginning with the principle of the acceptability of the conversion of the barn and stables to residential accommodation, which is not demonstrated. Beyond this, there are several issues with the detail of the proposed works in terms of their design, and their impact on the historic fabric and special interests of the listed and curtilage listed buildings, including the contribution which these make to the setting of West House Farmhouse. As it stands, I would not consider that the proposal meets the requirements of District Plan Policy DP34. On the basis of the information in front of us, and mindful that we have insufficient justification of the principle of the conversion, I would regard the harm arising to be less than substantial, at the mid-high level of that scale.

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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