

To Whom It May Concern,

We write in support of our retrospective planning application for Old House Manor Estate, formerly known as St Cuthmans, which we purchased in May 2021 from the Roman Catholic Diocese of Arundel & Brighton.

At the time of purchase, the property had long been operated as a retreat centre. Guests stayed in individual en-suite rooms, meals were provided from a large commercial kitchen, and all areas of the house were in full use. Typically, each room could be occupied by two people, and each guest would bring their own car. In practical terms, this meant that the intensity of use, car parking demand, water consumption, and general activity at the property was significant.

When we acquired the estate, we understood it to be a large property already used for residential-style occupation. Our focus has always been on providing high-quality accommodation, and with this in mind, we sought to make sensitive improvements that would benefit those living there.

It is also important to note that when we purchased the property, it had already stood empty for several years while on the market. As such, it required a great deal of upkeep, and the ongoing costs of maintaining such a large building are considerable. Without a viable plan for bringing in income, the estate could not have been sustained. If we had not taken the property on, it would almost certainly have fallen into further disrepair and risked becoming an eyesore for the local community. We hope instead that the Council and local residents are reassured to see it maintained to a high standard and preserved in good repair.

When refurbishing the building, our intention was simply to improve the standard of living for residents. We upgraded the en-suite rooms by installing small kitchenettes, believing this would enhance the quality of accommodation for individuals. At the same time, we reduced occupancy from potential double occupancy to single occupancy, thereby lowering the number of people living on site compared to its historic use. The only practical difference is that instead of all residents using the large commercial kitchen and dining areas, each occupier is now able to prepare food for themselves in their own unit.

At the time of making these improvements, we had no idea that the installation of kitchenettes would constitute a planning breach. We genuinely believed we were acting in good faith, improving facilities for residents while reducing the overall intensity of the property's use.

The accommodation is now occupied by local working professionals who value the high standard of living the estate provides. We firmly believe that the changes have resulted in a better quality and more sustainable form of accommodation than what existed before.

We sincerely apologise for not realising that planning permission was required for these works. Our actions were never intended to bypass any planning requirements, but solely to improve the property and the accommodation it provides. We respectfully ask that the Council views this application in the spirit it is intended and supports our retrospective application.

Yours faithfully,

Harriet Hewitt-Dedman

Dedman Lettings Ltd