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Heritage Report

Toat Farm Barn, Toat Farm, Itchingfield, West Sussex

Statement prepared by Chilcroft Heritage Planning
February 2026



Corporate members of:
The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings
Historic Houses Association
The Georgian Group



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1) INTRODUCTION

- 1.1) I am Haig Dalton, founder of Chilcroft Heritage Planning, an established independent heritage consultancy since 2006. Formerly, I was a local planning authority officer within development control departments. I have worked on a wide range of projects, predominantly (but not exclusively) for private sector clients.
- 1.2) I hold a masters degree in Historic Building Conservation (MSc); a postgraduate qualification in Architectural History from the University of Oxford (Oxon); I am an Affiliate member of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC).
- 1.3) Over the last 20 years I have specialised in the historic environment, both in terms of understanding and analysing physical fabric, and in terms of policy application, specifically by assessing impacts, providing advice and supporting development proposals. My experience includes a diverse range of cases relating to the assessment of physical changes to, and development affecting all manner of heritage assets, and their settings.
- 1.4) I have undertaken numerous impact assessments where I have considered the impacts of new development on the historic environment (dealing with physical impacts, setting, townscape, views and inter-visibility), including dealing with the effects of development on heritage assets in rural contexts.
- 1.5) I have provided expert evidence at appeals, including public inquiries, on behalf of both appellants and local planning authorities.
- 1.6) I understand my role in producing this heritage report; to give objective evidence on matters within my expertise, based on my own independent opinion and uninfluenced by the instructing party. I confirm that I have stated the facts and matters on which my opinion is based, and that I have not omitted to mention facts or matters that could detract from my conclusions.

- 1.7) I believe that the facts stated within this Heritage Report are true and that the opinions expressed are correct. I have drawn attention to any matters where I consider I lack sufficient information to reach anything other than a provisional conclusion. I have adhered to the standards and duties of the professional bodies I am a member of, and will continue to adhere to those standards.
- 1.8) I was first approached in late 2024, when I was asked to consider the potential for development of the existing site. My assessment was based on several stages/elements, the first of which was an initial case review, including a site visit in December 2024. At the time of my site visit, I was able to get a sense of the site in leafless conditions. I confirm that I am able to act as the applicant's heritage expert following this initial work and a site visit.
- 1.9) As an independent professional, I have formed my own opinions and have come to my own conclusions about the effects of the proposed development.
- 1.10) I have included in my heritage report photos taken on my original site visit. The photos were taken with a compact digital camera and they have not been digitally altered, aside from cropping superfluous areas of sky and/or foreground. This visual assessment is intended to be informative, but it is not intended to be exhaustive.
- 1.11) This statement will describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by the setting, as required by Para.207 of the *National Planning Policy Framework* (2024). It will assess the significance of the heritage assets by way of Historic England guidance *The Setting of Heritage Assets* (2017) in accordance with their preferred five-step procedure, identify, assess and explore the significance of their setting and consider the applicant's scheme in relation to them.

2) LEGISLATION AND POLICY

- 2.1) Legislation relating to listed buildings and conservation areas is contained in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. Sections 16 and 66 of the Act place a duty on the decision maker to have special regard to the desirability of preserving listed buildings and their settings.
- 2.2) Section 72 of the Act places similar duty on the decision maker with respect to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of conservation areas, however this does not extend to the setting of conservation areas.
- 2.3) The **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** constitutes the Government's current national guidance and policy regarding development in the historic environment. It is a material consideration and includes a succinct policy framework for local planning authorities and decision takers. It relates to planning law by stating that applications are to be determined in accordance with the local plans unless material considerations indicate otherwise.
- 2.4) Paragraph 203 of the NPPF deals with conserving and enhancing the historic environment with emphasis on "significance", defined in Annex 2 as:

"The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting. For World Heritage Sites, the cultural value described within each site's Statement of Outstanding Universal Value forms part of its significance."

- 2.5) Annex 2 of the NPPF defines the setting of a heritage asset as:

The surroundings in which a heritage asset is experienced. Its extent is not fixed and may change as the asset and its surroundings evolve. Elements of a setting may make a positive or negative contribution to the significance of an asset, may affect the ability to appreciate that significance or may be neutral."

- 2.6) Paragraph 207 of the NPPF places a duty on the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected by a proposal, providing a proportionate level of detail. The effects of any development on a heritage asset therefore need to be assessed against the four components of its heritage significance: its archaeological, architectural, artistic and historic interests.
- 2.7) Paragraph 208 of the NPPF notes that local planning authorities should identify and assess the particular significance of any heritage asset that may be affected by a proposal (including by development affecting the setting of a heritage asset) taking account of the available evidence and any necessary expertise. They should take this into account when considering the impact of a proposal on a heritage asset, to avoid or minimise any conflict between the heritage asset's conservation and any aspect of the proposal.
- 2.8) Paragraph 212 states with regard to heritage assets. that great weight should be given to their conservation (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be) irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial or less than substantial harm.
- 2.9) Conservation (for heritage policy) is defined in Annex 2 of the NPPF as:
- “The process of maintaining and managing change to a heritage asset in a way that sustains and, where appropriate, enhances its significance.”*
- 2.10) The importance and relevance of this definition is that it does not suggest conservation to be the same as preservation. Indeed, what sets conservation apart is the emphasis on proactively maintaining and managing change and not on a reactive approach to resisting change. In its simplest interpretation conservation could amount to a change that at least sustains the significance of a heritage asset.

- 2.11) Paragraphs 214 to 215 describe two levels of potential harm that can be caused to the significance of designated heritage assets, namely substantial harm and less than substantial harm. These effects are to be weighed in the planning balance according to the guidance set out within the paragraphs, bearing in mind the statutory provisions above. Substantial harm to or loss of a grade II listed building should be exceptional. Substantial harm to or loss of designated heritage assets of the highest significance, including grade I and II* listed buildings should be wholly exceptional.
- 2.12) Paragraph 215 deals with cases of less than substantial harm and notes that any such harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal. Heritage protection and the conservation of heritage assets are recognised as of benefit to the public.
- 2.13) Harm is defined by Historic England as a change which erodes the significance of a heritage asset.
- 2.14) Paragraph 219 of the NPPF notes that local planning authorities should look for opportunities for new development within Conservation Areas and World Heritage Sites, and within the setting of heritage assets, to enhance or better reveal their significance. Proposals that preserve those elements of the setting that make a positive contribution to the asset (or which better reveal its significance) should be treated favourably.
- 2.15) **The National Planning Practice Guidance** provides advice on enhancing and conserving the historic environment in accordance with the NPPF. The PPG currently relates to the 2019 version of the NPPF but will be updated in due course to reflect NPPF 2023.
- 2.16) In regards to the setting of heritage assets the PPG notes:

“The setting is the surroundings in which an asset is experienced, and may therefore be more extensive than its curtilage.”

2.17) The guidance notes that a thorough assessment of the impact on setting needs to take into account, and be proportionate to, the significance of the heritage asset and the degree to which proposed changes enhance or detract from that significance and the ability to appreciate it.

2.18) In relation to harm the guidance states:

“Whether a proposal causes substantial harm will be a judgment for the decision taker, having regard to the circumstances of the case and the policy in the National Planning Policy Framework. In general terms, substantial harm is a high test, so it may not arise in many cases. For example, in determining whether works to a listed building constitute substantial harm, an important consideration would be whether the adverse impact seriously affects a key element of its special architectural or historic interest. It is the degree of harm to the asset’s significance rather than the scale of the development that is to be assessed. The harm may arise from works to the asset or from development within its setting.”

2.19) Paragraph 020 of the document notes that public benefits can be heritage based and can include:

- Sustaining or enhancing the significance and the contribution of its setting;
- Reducing or removing risks to a heritage asset; and
- Securing the optimum viable use of a heritage asset for the long term.

2.20) The **Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning** Note 3: The Setting of Heritage Assets (Historic England, 2017) is a document published by Historic England as a second edition in December 2017, replacing the earlier 2015 setting guidance. The document provides for a thorough understanding of the setting of a heritage asset and the relationship of the setting to curtilage, character and context.

- 2.21) The guidance document notes, in paragraph 18, that the protection of the setting of heritage assets need not prevent change. The document recognises that not all heritage assets are of equal importance and states that the contribution made by their setting to their significance will also vary. Not all settings have the same capacity to accommodate change without causing harm to the significance of the asset.
- 2.22) As per earlier Historic England guidance, the document advocates a stepped approach to assessing the impact of change within setting on the significance of heritage assets. This stepped approach is:
- Step 1: identify which heritage assets and their settings are affected;
- Step 2: assess whether, how and to what degree these settings make a contribution to the significance of the heritage asset(s);
- Step 3: assess the effects of the proposed development, whether beneficial or harmful, on that significance;
- Step 4: explore the way to maximise enhancement and avoid or minimise harm; and
- Step 5: make and document the decision and monitor outcomes.
- 2.23) Guidance under Step 2 notes that the asset's physical surroundings and how the asset is experienced (such as views, noise, tranquillity, sense of enclosure etc.) should be taken in to consideration.
- 2.24) Step 3 is also important in making it clear that a proposed development should not be assessed in terms of its impact on setting; instead it should be assessed in terms of the impacts on significance. That is to say, what matters is not the extent of visibility of the development or change to the setting of an asset, but the extent of change to its archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic interest. In some circumstances, this evaluation may need to extend to cumulative and complex impacts which may have as great an effect on heritage

assets as large-scale development and which may not only be visual. At the very least the assessment should address the key attributes of the development in terms of its location and siting, form and appearance, additional effects and permanence.

- 2.25) Paragraph 39 notes that options for reducing the harm arising from development may include the relocation of elements of a development or changes to its design. It notes that good design may reduce or remove the harm.
- 2.26) **Section 66 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990** requires great weight to be given to preserving the setting of a heritage asset. In *Jones v Mordue [2015] EWCA Civ 1243* the court confirmed that if the decision-maker has worked through the relevant heritage paragraphs in the NPPF, they will have complied with the s66 duty.
- 2.27) In *Barnwell Manor [2014] EWCA Civ 137* the court confirmed that great weight should be attached to the desirability of preserving the setting of a heritage asset.

3) ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 3.1) The proposed site of Toat Farm is located to the western side of Bashurst Hill, to the west of Itchingfield. The site is not located in a Conservation Area and is situated in a rural environment, within the ribbon development that runs along the side of the highway. The dwelling sits in the middle of its curtilage with the proposed site situated immediately to its south.
- 3.2) Toat Farm dates from the 17th Century or earlier and is a Grade II listed building (**List No. 1354180**). The dwelling remains recorded under its original name of Toat Farmhouse on the Historic England register. The half H-shaped two storey building is timber framed and has been refaced with red and grey header brickwork and tile hung on the upper elevations (**see Fig 1**). It has a gable end roof with Horsham slab and two large brick built chimney stacks to each side. The principal elevation faces east towards Bashurst Hill and uses casement windows, with a recessed front door centred into the H-shape. A further sizable 1.5 storey rear extension was added in the early 20th Century in matching style (**see Fig 2**). Despite the subsequent additions, Toat Farm remains fundamentally typical of the architectural style associated with an farmhouse of the 17th Century and is easily identifiable as such.
- 3.3) Historically the dwelling was constructed as a farmhouse with a collection of former farmstead buildings supporting this use. Like many former farms, this emphasis has now changed and it is now solely for residential use. This change in emphasis does not alter the approach to the listed building or how it would have historically been best appreciated when entering its setting from Bashurst Hill, with the proposed site and former tithe barn off to one side. As the proposals are focused to an area of existing area of the curtilage, the way in which the setting of the listed building is best appreciated is likely to remain unchanged. Toat Farm remains at the heart of a large acreage and the wider appreciation of its setting and how the heritage asset and its significance are best enjoyed, remains largely unchanged, despite the subsequent loss of land including Lower Toat Farm, which is now a separate dwelling in its own right. Regardless, the grounds at Toat Farm remain extensive and it remains possible to appreciate the heritage asset in the context of its former farmstead use.

- 3.4) The proposed site contains a historic former tithe barn which dates from the 17th Century, from the same time as the former farmhouse. It is timber framed with a tiled roof and of three bays, with a pair of central full height doors. The building is fronted with feather edged timber weather boarding and sits on a stone rubble dwarf wall which runs around the base (see **Fig 5 and 6**). The barn was reroofed in the late 20th Century and roofing rafters are not original fabric (see **Fig 8 and 9**), however the main timber frame of the barn remains largely original, complete with original rafter feet and traditional scarfing joints. It is a curtilage listed building and due to the age of the building, would be considered a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. Any proposals should be mindful of the buildings significance and preserve historic fabric, in addition to seeking to provide the vacant building with a long term sustainable use. Historic England guidance states that the best use for a historic building is the one it was originally intended for, however as the former farm is now solely used for residential purposes, it would seem this is now better suited.
- 3.5) The inside of the former tithe barn contains a modern concrete screed covering the centre of the floor, laid over the original brickwork flooring that is still untouched to each side (see **Fig 9 and 10**). This has ultimately harmed historic fabric and decreased its legibility, however its removal would arguably cause greater harm. An opening has been made to the side of the tithe barn between the historic timber posts, linking it with a later side extension (see **Fig 10**). On the south-east side, a casement window of a crude timber construction has been placed over the outside of the barn, overlapping the central timber post. Although it is not original, it is not thought to be harmful and is reflective of the change that the barn has undergone over time (see **Fig 7 and 8**).
- 3.6) To the north-west side of the tithe barn there is a single storey range of open fronted garages that abuts the historic barn (see **Fig 3 and 4**). It is of a traditional design vernacular with timber framing and a tiled roof, that broadly preserves the significance of the historic tithe barn. This existing modern structure sits parallel with the side of the dwelling of Toat Farm (see **Fig 2**) but does not extend beyond the historic rearmost footprint of the original farmhouse, thus remaining subservient. Subject to appropriate design, it is considered capable of replacement.



Fig 1: The proposed site is within the curtilage of Toat Farm, a Grade II listed former farmhouse. Directly to the south, sits a former tithe barn that also dates from the 17th Century.

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Fig 2: The former tithe barn sits side on with the listed building. An existing modern structure (seen here) abuts it and will be replaced along a similar footprint, sitting parallel with the side of the dwellinghouse.

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Fig 3: The proposed site is centred around a former tithe barn that dates from the 17th Century. A modern structure directly abuts the gable end elevation, which the proposed design would seek to improve upon.

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Fig 4: The historic frontage of the tithe barn faces north overlooking the driveway access approach to the listed building. A modern garage block of a traditional style sits to the side of the former tithe barn.

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Fig 5: The historic tithe barn would continue to be used for ancillary use and repaired using traditional feather edged timber weather boarding, to uphold and better sustain the significance of the heritage asset.

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Fig 6: The former tithe barn dates from the 17th Century and is timber framed on a stone rubble base.

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Fig 7: A timber casement window on the side elevation is placed externally behind the central timber post and is reflective of the evolution of the former tithe barn. This will be retained as part of the proposed design.

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Fig 8: Although the former tithe barn has been re-roofed and has modern rafters, the main timber frame itself remains, for the most part, historic fabric with many original oak posts, including traditional scarfing joints.

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Fig 9: The proposed design will retain the full volume of the former tithe barn, to preserve its appreciation.

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Fig 10: The existing side of the barn provides access to the side extension, without any loss of historic fabric.

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4) IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1) Whilst the living arrangements of an owner cannot be a primary consideration in the case of a historic building, they will undoubtedly feature in any residential improvements and done sympathetically, can also preserve or enhance the significance of a heritage asset. Chilcroft Heritage Planning has worked closely with the applicant to facilitate this and ensure that the curtilage outbuilding and its significance, remains the primary consideration.
- 4.2) The proposed development would see the former tithe barn retained for ancillary residential use, including the repair of the historic building and a replacement side extension. In so doing, it would provide for the sustainable long term use of the heritage asset, an approach supported by Historic England guidance. The proposal would utilise the footprint of an existing modern extension and be single storey with timber finishes.
- 4.3) The conversion of former farm buildings for residential use is not a new concept and indeed this is the most common reuse of former tithe barns, where an alternative commercial use is not viable. In this case, the proposed site sits within the existing curtilage of Toat Farm and this will remain unchanged. The former tithe barn has always historically formed part of the ownership of Toat Farm and despite the change in emphasis in the use of that building from farming to residential in the present day, this has not harmed the shared sense of setting between the listed building and non-designated heritage asset. Subject to appropriate design, the existing residential use of this historic building will not alter this association. If anything, the ancillary residential use of this former tithe barn strengthens the bond with the host listed building by providing the historic farmstead building with a long term sustainable use. Although Historic England guidance advocates that the best use for a historic building is the one it was built for, this is plainly not possible in this case and the historic farmstead building has seen little use for some considerable time. Although the subsequent modern garage extension of the building has seen an active use, the same cannot be said of the historic tithe barn that sits beside it. Local Planning Authorities have a duty of care to provide for a buildings long term sustainable use and in the case of the proposed site, ancillary residential use is likely to be best.

- 4.4) An assessment of the significance of the farmstead buildings was led by us as historic building specialists and carried out in the presence of the architectural designer before any design work was initiated. The design here before you represents the conclusions of that assessment and has been worked up around the need to preserve the historic fabric of the building and better reveal its significance, by improving the opportunity for its appreciation.
- 4.5) The principal building of the former tithe barn is a significant building within the historic context of Toat Farm and it is important that any design maintains it as the focal point. The proposed design would utilise all existing openings of doors and windows, without the need to introduce new openings to keep the traditional appearance of the tithe barn as original as possible, avoiding the need to add additional features more associated with domestic use. The existing large door aperture will be glazed with light weight framing to emphasise the former farming use of the building as well as to provide natural light into an otherwise dark interior due to its historic lack of windows. This solution is considered the best balance between the sustainable use of the building and maintaining its significance. From the driveway approach to the listed building, the front elevation of the former tithe barn would also appear largely unchanged with the proposed replacement extension tucked to the side, thus preserving its appreciation. Internally, the former tithe barn would remain open plan with the full height of the building retained across the three bays, allowing for the historic timber frame of the building to remain fully visible and best appreciated from this internal living space.
- 4.6) Although the existing modern side extension arguably preserves the significance of the outbuilding, given its proximity hard up against the side, it is thought to be capable of replacement, subject to appropriate design. The proposed design would see a new single storey structure replace it, along a similar footprint, clad in feather edged timber weather boarding to match the former tithe barn. To increase the appreciation of the historic outbuilding, a glazed link would sit between two, allowing for greater legibility of the side gable end of the former tithe barn, which will enhance its significance. The proposed side extension is of a scale that would be subservient to the historic barn beside it. On balance, the design and material finish is considered to be capable of preserving the significance of the heritage asset.

5) SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Legislation, Policy and Guidance

- 5.1) The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 contains a statutory duty to give considerable importance and great weight to the desirability of preserving the setting of a listed building in the planning balance. Preserving means to do no harm.
- 5.2) The NPPF lays down an approach that corresponds with the statutory duty of the 1990 Act. In cases where harm occurs, the NPPF requires balancing the benefits of a proposal against harm resulting from it.
- 5.3) The Horsham District Council's adopted Development Plan policies require development proposals to conserve heritage assets (such as listed buildings), and their settings.
- 5.4) The guidance in Historic England's GPA3 provides a framework for considering and assessing effects on the setting of heritage assets.

Conclusions

- 5.5) The proposed design is considered to be respectful of the historic former tithe barn and does not attempt to push beyond a comfortable scope of development.
- 5.6) The proposal would not result in the loss of historic fabric, would utilise existing doors and windows without the need to alter the historic building and is sensitive to its historic layout, leaving the volume of the tithe barn exposed.
- 5.7) The proposed design is of an architectural and material quality that would preserve the significance of the non-designated heritage asset. Its proportionate in relation to its scale, bulk and mass and would remain subservient to existing.
- 5.8) The proposal would preserve the setting of the listed building and its shared appreciation from along its driveway access. The proposal would also better provide for the long term sustainable use of the former tithe barn.

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