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Heritage Report

Sweetmans Barn, Ashurst, Steyning, BN44 3AP

Report 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 in the South of England. I have worked on a wide range of projects throughout the United Kingdom, 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 21 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 semi-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 independent and 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 September 2025, when I was asked to provide a heritage report in relation to the proposed development on behalf the applicant for validation purposes. My quote was based on several stages/elements, the first of which was an initial case review and site visit in September 2025. I confirm that I am able to act as the applicant's heritage expert following this initial work.
- 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) 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 the Sweetmans Barn is situated to the western side of the B2135 highway along the ribbon of urban development that sits to each side. It is self-contained with existing vehicular access that leads from the north-east of the site to a large expanse of hardstanding currently used as a driveway.
- 3.2) Sweetmans Barn has planning permission for conversion into a dwelling. The former tithe barn is situated to the far southern side of its plot abutting its eastern boundary. The principal elevation faces west overlooking an enclosed courtyard and smaller former outbuilding (see Fig 6). From the streetscene, the barn sits with its back onto the highway and a stone boundary wall to one side, closest to its vehicular access (see Fig 3).
- 3.3) Sweetmans Barn is a former tithe barn that dates from the 17th Century. It is of a timber framed construction with a half hipped slate roof and modern timber clad weather boarding. It has central bays with full height double doors to the front and rear of the building, consistent with its historic agricultural use. Due to its age and historic fabric, Sweetmans Barn is considered to be a Non-Designated Heritage Asset. Residual fabric and features such as timber beams, stonework, joinery, as well as the plan form, all contribute to its significance.
- 3.4) To the rear of the former tithe barn sits a single storey outbuilding (see Fig 6 and 8). It is of a timber frame construction with a slate roof and was originally open fronted without the later brick infill that we see today. The age of this outbuilding is considered to be from the 18th Century given the stonework to the back and side (see Fig 6). The frontage of this outbuilding faces towards the former tithe barn, creating a courtyard between the two. This sense is reinforced by the inclusion of a historic stone wall with red brick dressings (see Fig 5, 6 and 7) that sits between the two, with a modest opening in the centre providing pedestrian access to the driveway beyond. From the inner courtyard, there is a sense of containment and this evidently would have been historically the case given the age of the 17th Century former tithe barn to one side, the 18th Century outbuilding directly opposite and the 18th Century stone wall to the side. This latter wall is believed to have been built at the same time as the outbuilding as the stonework is interlocking, without any join (see Fig 6).

- 3.5) To the south-east of the proposed site sits the Grade II listed public house of The Fountain Inn (**List No. 1027457**). It dates from the 17th Century and consists of a brick and stone rubble built two storey dwelling with a hipped tiled roof and chimney stack (**see Fig 9**). The building was extended to the southern side in the mid-19th Century with a single storey range, creating an L-shaped floorplan that overlooks the proposed site. Historically, The Fountain Inn owned an outbuilding that abutted the eastern boundary of the proposed site, between the tithe barn and vehicular access. This can be seen in situ at the time of the tithe map of 1897 (**see Fig 2**). Access to this outbuilding was from the highway to the east, indicating that it may have been for stabling in support of visitors to The Fountain Inn. This former outbuilding would have obscured views to the land at the rear of Sweetmans Barn, furthest from The Fountain Inn, including the proposed site. Subject to appropriate design, development here is unlikely to fundamentally harm its setting or see a change of awareness.
- 3.6) To the east sits the oldest building within the setting. The 16th Century dwelling of Blocques (**List No. 1191892**) forms a two storey timber framed building with its principal elevation facing west (**see Fig 10**). Where once the listed building would have been seen as one of the only dwellings in the wider setting, it is now joined by a wider concentration of dwellings along this ribbon of development. The proposed site is further to the west, beyond the highway, and has been no more visible from this aspect in previous centuries, than it is today with limited awareness between the two. What awareness there is extends to glimpsed views through the well-established trees and vegetation along the boundary, inferred more by proximity than anything else. Although the proposed site sits within the setting of this heritage asset, subject to appropriate design, it is unlikely to fundamentally harm this. It is from within its curtilage that the principal elevation of the Grade II listed building to the eastern side is best appreciated, depicting the frontage of the building and entrance. The curtilage/rear garden is centred around a formal grass lawn to the west side of the listed building with the boundary beyond it enclosed by shrubbery, trees and well established vegetation. This provides a barrier to the proposed site beyond; from where few filtered views are possible. The curtilage area remains the most original and historic part of the setting of the listed building, that is of the greatest significance in terms of its setting.



Fig 1: The proposed site of Sweetmans Barn is within the setting of two Grade II listed buildings, with Blocques to the east and The Fountain Inn opposite the highway to the south-east.

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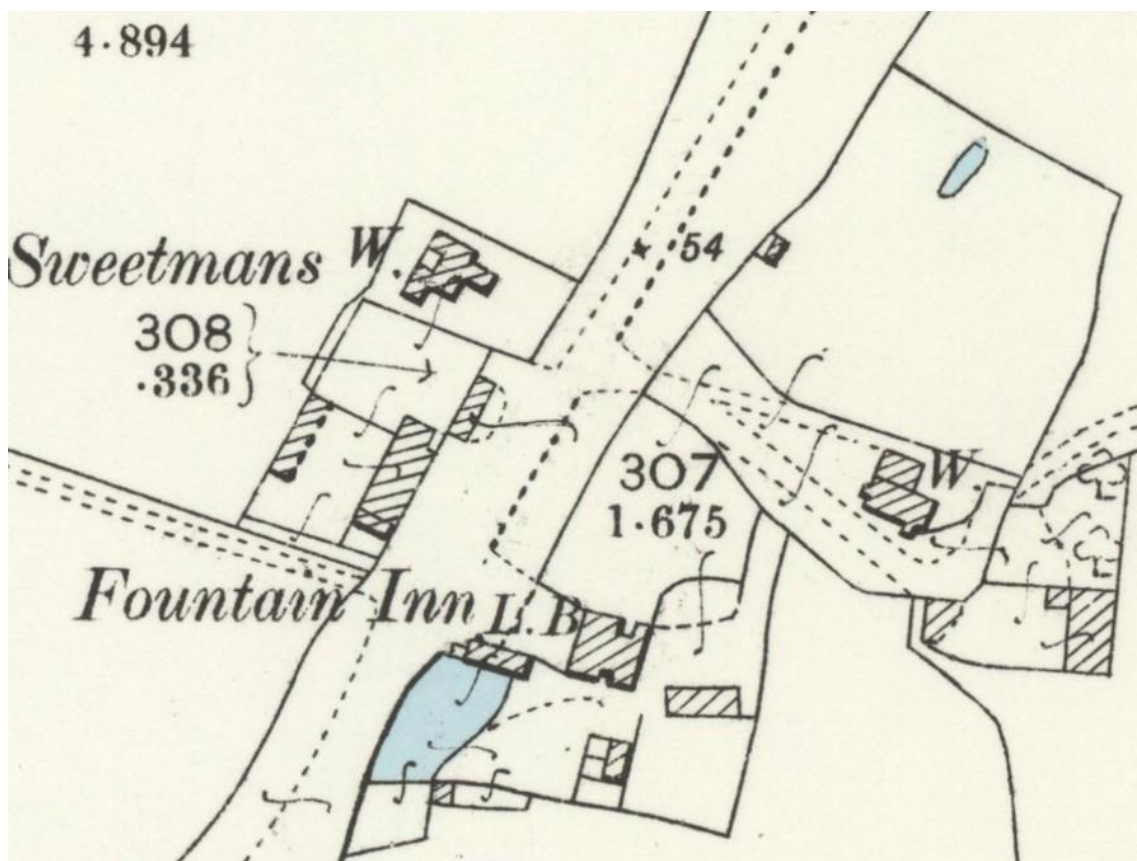


Fig 2: The tithe maps show that historically The Fountain Inn was linked/owned an outbuilding that sat parallel with the eastern boundary wall of Sweetmans Barn, which would have obscured views further westward.

© Ordnance Survey 1897



Fig 3: Sweetmans Barn dates from the 17th Century and its principal elevation faces westwards, with its back to the highway. The proposed site makes a positive contribution to the setting of the listed buildings.
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Fig 4: Historically there were little in the way of through views of the proposed garage location from The Fountain Inn opposite due to the presence of a large outbuilding along this boundary, obscuring this aspect. The proposals are of a design and material that would preserve the setting of the listed building.
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Fig 5: Sweetmans Barn comprises a former tithe barn, constructed from a timber frame with full height central door openings. Due to its age, it is considered to be a Non-Designated Heritage Asset.

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Fig 6: Sweetmans Barn forms part of a historic range of outbuildings to the western side of the site, enclosing a walled courtyard. The proposals would not result in any loss of historic fabric.

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Fig 7: The proposed design would retain the existing historic stone wall and create a linked extension between the former tithe barn and outbuilding, being of a subservient single storey form.

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Fig 8: A single storey outbuildings sits to the rear of the proposed site and dates from the 18th Century, being of a timber frame construction with stone walls to one end. Brick infill was added in the 20th Century.

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Fig 9: The Fountain Inn is a 17th Century building at the heart of the village of Ashurst and sits across the highway from Sweetmans Barn. Its principal elevation as seen here overlooks the proposed site.

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Fig 10: The 16th Century dwelling of Blocques sits to the east of the site and is well set back from the highway. What awareness there is extends to glimpsed views when entering and exiting its curtilage.

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4) IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1) The proposal would see a single storey structure built to the rear of the former tithe barn, linking it up with the smaller outbuilding at the very back of the site. The proposal would be confined within the existing boundaries of the site of Sweetmans Barn, without the need to further develop it. It would utilise an existing stone wall and historic opening, without the need to alter historic fabric. The existing boundary treatments would remain unchanged, creating a sense of familiarity to the streetscene. The proposal would not feel as if it was spilling out into the wider setting. From the B2135 highway, the proposal would be confined to an area of the site that is furthest away, behind and between a line of existing buildings and structures, making any visibly more distant. What awareness there would be would extend to the roofing areas of the proposed single storey structure, albeit due to its height and location set behind a historic wall, it would not be considered to be overly prominent.

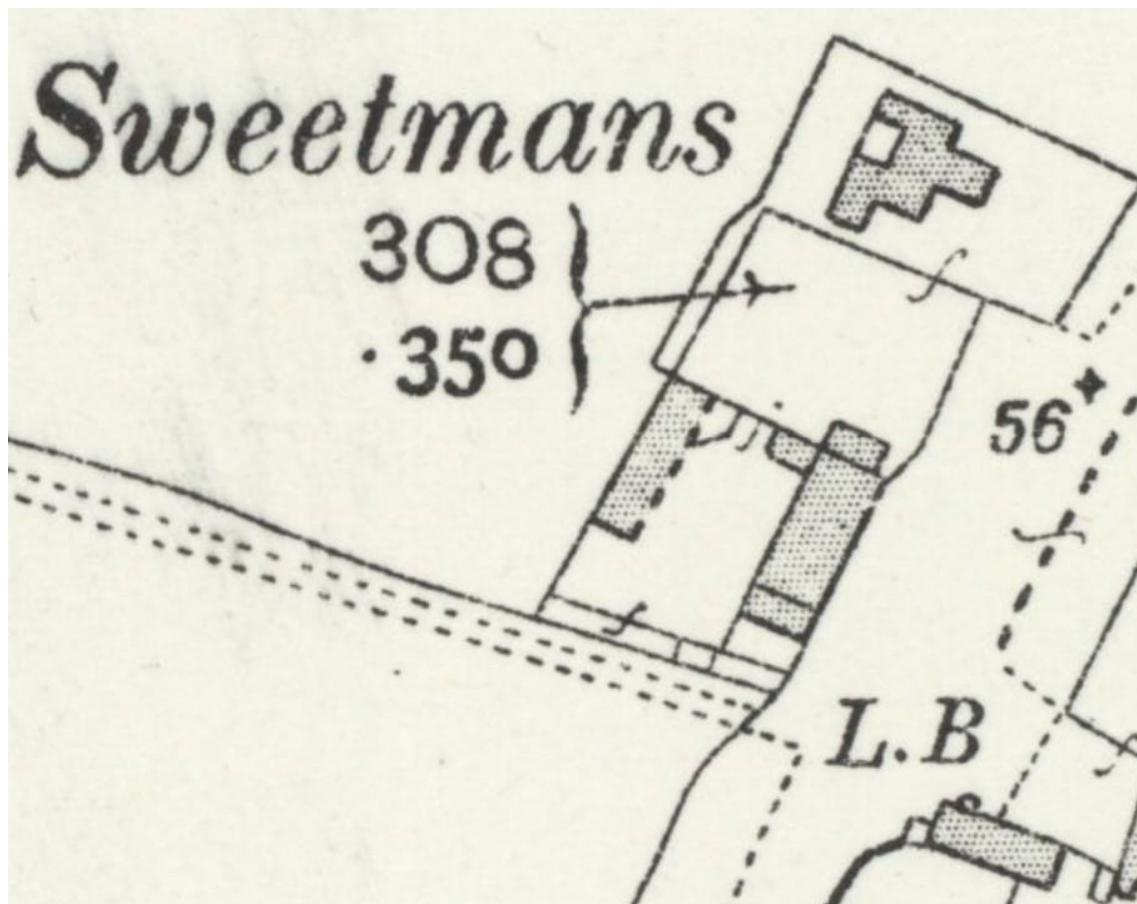


Fig 11: By the early 20th Century, there were built structures spanning between the tithe barn and outbuilding. The proposal would utilise this historic footprint and see a structure placed along the line they once occupied.

© Ordnance Survey 1911

- 4.2) The proposal would see a single storey structure built of a traditional timber clad appearance, linking it up with the former tithe barn and outbuilding to each side. It would utilise the existing stone wall that sits between the two and occupy a footprint that was historically used by other former structures on the site (**see Fig 11**). The 1911 tithe map clearly shows that buildings have been formerly placed here, creating an inner courtyard between the existing pair of buildings. The proposed design would replicate this and although joined, the historic stone wall already largely creates this visual effect and the proposal would only continue this. The 18th Century stone wall would remain in situ and the existing historic opening in the middle utilised for its original purpose, as the main entrance leading into the old farmyard. In so doing, it will preserve its significance without loss of historic fabric. Brick copings are later additions to the historic wall and are not original. The newly proposed structure would link up with the smaller outbuilding beside it by creating a doorway into the brickwork; this brick bring a later modern infill (**see Fig 8**) that cannot be considered historic fabric. From inside the courtyard, the use of glazing would improve the legibility of the historic structure, maintaining a clear distinction between old and new, in accordance with Historic England guidance.
- 4.3) The proposal would be single storey and situated to rear of the site, furthest from the highway and listed buildings. Given the set back and nature of the proposed single storey structure, there would be little to no awareness. When seen in the historic context of the site, the location of the proposed structure would have been largely obscured by the former outbuilding that once sat along the eastern boundary (**see Fig 2**), between it and The Fountain Inn, a Grade II listed building, and the proposed design, its scale and use of materials are considered consistent with this. The proposed site is also situated within the setting of the adjacent Grade II listed Blocques. There is a well established bank of trees and hedging between the heritage asset and proposed site, which provides considerable screening between them. There is likely to be a degree of awareness from the listed building when stood in its curtilage inferred by proximity rather than to any direct visibly. Although the proposal would have an awareness when entering and exiting the heritage asset, on balance the proposal is considered to be of a design and material quality that would preserve the setting of the listed buildings and the significance of the NDHA.

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 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) Sweetmans Barn is considered to be a Non-Designated Heritage Asset by virtue of its age, being a former tithe barn dating from the 17th Century.
- 5.6) A former outbuilding historically abutted the eastern boundary of the proposed site, obscuring views between the Grade II listed The Fountain Inn and the location of the proposal, sitting behind the tithe barn at the rear of the site.
- 5.7) The proposal would utilise a historic footprint that was previously built upon, without any loss of historic fabric. It is of scale and bulk that would remain subservient to the NDHA beside it and therefore preserve its significance.
- 5.8) The proposed single storey design would preserve the setting of The Fountain Inn and Blocques. It is of a design and material quality that will uphold the significance of the heritage assets and how they are appreciated.

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