

Heritage Statement: Southwater House, Church Lane, Southwater, West Sussex RH13 9BT

(List Entry Number: 1409948)

Proposal:

Conversion of the existing stable block and associated modest extension to form a 3-bedroom family dwelling, together with associated landscaping, parking, and access works (including Listed Building Consent for works affecting the setting of the Grade II listed building). This includes the demolition of two garden stores that physically link the stable block to Southwater House.

Applicant: Theme2 Architects

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1. Introduction and Heritage Assets

This Heritage Statement assesses the significance of Southwater House, a Grade II listed former vicarage, and evaluates the potential impact of the proposed conversion and extension of its historic stable block upon the building and its setting. It has been prepared to accompany the planning and Listed Building Consent applications and follows the approach set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024), Historic England's guidance, and relevant local policy.

The principal heritage asset is Southwater House itself (List Entry 1409948), a stone-built Gothic Revival former vicarage of 1854 designed by Joseph Clarke. The stable block forms part of the original stable courtyard and curtilage. Adjoining properties include the Grade II listed Vicarage Cottage to the north-east and Holy Innocents Church. The site lies outside any conservation area but within an established residential area in the built-up village of Southwater.

2. Historic Context and Description of Southwater House

Southwater House was constructed in 1854 as the vicarage for Holy Innocents Church (built 1850). Designed by Joseph Clarke, a Gothic Revival architect and Diocesan Surveyor, it cost over £3,000 – a substantial sum reflecting its high quality. The building remained in ecclesiastical use until 1968, after which it became a private residence.

The listing highlights its architectural interest: an asymmetrical composition of coursed stone rubble with ashlar dressings, tiled roofs, and varied elevational treatments. Key features include fine stained glass in the staircase window, original pine joinery, and several stone fireplaces (one dated 1854, another with Minton tiles).

The building retains a high degree of original features, both externally and internally.



Of particular relevance to this proposal is the former stable courtyard to the north-east.

The listing description notes the service wing terminating in “a former stables with hayloft over,” aligned south-east to north-west, with a central gabled dormer. Whilst described as a service wing there was never a corridor between the two buildings, there is the entrance hall and a larder, a further two garden stores create the physical connection to the stable block and these are accessed by separate doors in the garden. A stone wall encloses the former stable yard with carriage entrance and gate piers, while further single-storey outbuildings (including a former coach house with dovecote) and a brick garden wall complete the ancillary complex.

3. Assessment of Significance

Drawing on Historic England’s Conservation Principles (2008), the significance of Southwater House can be understood through evidential, historical, aesthetic, and communal values.

Evidential Value:

High. The building and its curtilage (including the stable block) provide clear physical evidence of mid-19th century vicarage design and layout. The stable courtyard illustrates the functional requirements of a Victorian parish vicar – stabling for horses, coach house, and service yards and retains fabric that documents construction techniques and later domestic adaptations.

Historical Value:

High. Southwater House embodies the mid-19th century expansion and professionalisation of the Church of England in growing rural parishes. Its construction as part of the new ecclesiastical centre of Southwater (alongside the church) marks a key moment in the village’s transition from a dispersed agrarian settlement to a more nucleated community. The survival of the stable courtyard helps tell the story of how such vicarages operated as small estates supporting both clerical and domestic life.

Aesthetic Value:

High. Joseph Clarke’s carefully composed Gothic design, with its varied massing, quality stonework, and crafted details, creates a building of distinctive character. The ancillary structures, including the stable block with its traditional materials and modest scale, contribute to the overall picturesque and functional ensemble without competing with the principal house.

Communal Value:

Moderate. As a former vicarage in a village setting, it holds value in local memory and as part of the historic streetscape of Church Lane, reinforcing a sense of continuity and place.

The stable block, while modest and functional, derives significance from its direct association with the listed building and its contribution to the historic curtilage and setting.



4. The Proposal

The scheme proposes the sensitive conversion of the existing stable block into a 3-bedroom, 3-bathroom family dwelling.

Works include:

- Internal reconfiguration, including removal and reinstatement of the loft floor at a slightly lower level to achieve better ceiling heights while utilising existing openings wherever possible.
- A modest extension at right angles to the stable block so as to not create overlooking of Southwater House or Vicarage Cottage providing essential living space and framing a private courtyard and garden.
- Limited new fenestration in a vertical agricultural style, primarily on the extension (oriented away from Southwater House and Vicarage Cottage).
- One conservation rooflight on the existing stable.
- Traditional materials (clay tiles, facing stone, brick, and timber) to match the existing vernacular.
- Associated landscaping, permeable parking for 2–3 vehicles within the existing curtilage, and a new separating wall between the two residential units (which will share the driveway via easement).
- The two garden stores linking the stable to the main house will be demolished to clearly separate the two buildings.

5. Impact Assessment

The proposal has been designed with great care to preserve and enhance the significance of Southwater House and its setting.

Impact on the Listed Building:

The works affect only the ancillary stable block, which, while part of the curtilage, is secondary to the principal vicarage. The conversion retains the building's external form, roofline, and rural character. The extension is identical in height, width, and roof pitch to the host structure, remaining visually subservient. New openings are minimal and appropriately detailed; materials will weather to blend with the existing fabric. The demolition of the linking garden stores will remove later accretions and improve the visual separation between the stable and the main house.

Impact on Setting:

The new dwelling will maintain clear physical and visual separation from Southwater House, preserving its legibility as the principal building. The extension and courtyard layout orient views towards the new private garden rather than towards the listed building or neighbouring properties. Existing trees, boundary treatments, and the new separating wall will further protect amenity and views. The scheme utilises previously developed land within the established curtilage and causes no harm to key vistas or the wider once semi-rural character of Church Lane.



Public Benefits:

In accordance with NPPF paragraph 215, any less-than-substantial harm (none is identified here) must be weighed against public benefits. This proposal delivers clear benefits: it secures the optimum viable use of the heritage asset by reducing the maintenance burden on the large, listed building, making Southwater House more sustainable for a single family while delivering an additional family home in a sustainable village location. It prevents potential vacancy or dereliction of the stable block and demonstrates sensitive reuse of a traditional rural building.

6. Conclusion

This proposal represents a carefully considered and sympathetic intervention that respects the special architectural and historic interest of Southwater House.

By converting the historic stable block in a manner that preserves its character and the setting of the principal listed building, the scheme sustains and enhances the heritage asset while delivering practical and public benefits. It fully accords with national and local heritage policies and is commended to the Council for approval.

The depth of the applicants' long family connection to the property informs a design approach rooted in affection and detailed knowledge, ensuring the future of this notable Gothic Revival vicarage designed by Joseph Clarke.

