

Design and Access Statement

Proposal: Conversion of existing stable block and associated extension to form a 3-bedroom family dwelling, together with associated landscaping, parking and access works (and Listed Building Consent for associated works affecting the setting of the Grade II listed building). To include the demolition of 2 garden stores which link the Stable block to Southwater House.

Site: Stable block within the grounds of Southwater House, Church Lane, Southwater, West Sussex RH13 9BT (List Entry Number: 1409948).

Applicant: Theme2 Architects

Date: 7th August 2026

Prepared by: Francis Sumner

1. Introduction

I have prepared this planning submission for my wife Trilby and her sister Sophie who inherited this property on the sad death of their mother Jilly Foster. They lived at Southwater house since their teenage years when Jilly married Peter foster who had bought the house many years before. This is mentioned in this statement solely to convey the depth of knowledge of the house and the affection they have for it.

It is with sadness yet practical considerations that the house has to be sold, practically two families cannot live in the same house and over the passage of time the landscape has changed considerably so that houses such as these now qualify for considerable inheritance tax payments.

This Design and Access Statement (DAS) has been prepared to accompany a full planning application and Listed Building Consent application for the conversion and sensitive extension of the existing stable block within the curtilage of Southwater House to create a 3-bedroom family home. It explains the design process, the proposal's response to its context, and how the scheme accords with national and local planning policy, including Horsham District Council's (HDC) guidance on design, access, and the conversion of rural buildings.

The proposal addresses the practical challenges of maintaining a large Grade II listed former vicarage in a village experiencing significant recent residential growth. Southwater House has remained unsold for over a year despite extensive marketing, largely due to the scale of renovation required for the main house and its numerous outbuildings. By creating a separate, viable residential unit from the stable block, the scheme reduces the maintenance burden on any future owner of the principal listed building, enabling one family to occupy Southwater House and another to occupy the converted stable. This approach secures the long-term viable use of the heritage asset while delivering an additional family home in a sustainable village location.



2. Site Description and Context

Southwater House is a Grade II listed former vicarage (List Entry 1409948) located within the built-up area of Southwater, a “Small Town and Larger Village” in the HDC settlement hierarchy. The stable block is a traditional ancillary structure within its grounds, forming part of the historic curtilage. The site is not within a conservation area but is sensitive due to its relationship with the listed building. The surrounding area is characterised by a mix of historic and modern residential development.

Recent approvals and completions in Southwater have increased the built-up character of the village, contributing to market nervousness around large historic properties with extensive outbuildings. The stable block itself is of modest scale, with traditional materials (stone/tile) consistent with the local vernacular. Existing access is via the established driveway off Church Lane, with ample space for parking and turning within the curtilage. The proposal respects the setting of Southwater House, maintains separation from the principal building, and utilises previously developed land within the established residential curtilage.

3. Planning Policy Context – Support for New Dwellings and Building Reuse

The proposal is strongly supported by national and local policy that encourages the delivery of new homes through the sensitive reuse of existing buildings, particularly where this secures the future of heritage assets.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, December 2024):

Paragraph 84 supports the reuse of redundant or disused buildings in the countryside where it would represent the optimal viable use of a heritage asset. Paragraph 215 requires less-than-substantial harm to the significance of a designated heritage asset to be weighed against public benefits, explicitly including “securing its optimum viable use.” The subdivision of an existing residential building or curtilage to create a new dwelling is also positively referenced. The proposal delivers exactly this outcome: it brings a redundant stable into residential use while enabling the viable long-term occupation and maintenance of the Grade II listed Southwater House.

Horsham District Planning Framework (HDPF, 2015) – the adopted Local Plan:

- **Policy 1 (Strategic Policy: Sustainable Development)** adopts the NPPF presumption in favour of sustainable development.
- **Policy 3 (Strategic Policy: Development Hierarchy)** confirms that development (including infilling and redevelopment) is permitted within the built-up areas of Small Towns and Larger Villages such as Southwater, provided it is of an appropriate nature and scale to maintain the settlement’s character and function. This site lies within the defined built-up area and represents appropriate infill/reuse.
- **Policy 34 (Cultural and Heritage Assets)** requires development to sustain and enhance the historic environment, preserving the significance of designated



heritage assets and their settings. The scheme has been designed to cause no harm to the listed building or its curtilage and will instead secure its optimum viable use.

Policy 32 (Strategic Policy: The Quality of New Development) and **Policy 33 (Development Principles)** require high-quality design that responds to local character.

- Policies 2 and 4 further support the reuse of previously developed land and appropriate housing delivery in sustainable villages to meet local needs.

HDC Guidance on Barn/Stable Conversions:

HDC explicitly supports the residential conversion of traditional rural buildings (including stables) where it retains the rural character of the building and its setting, prevents vacancy/dereliction, and reduces pressure for new-build development in the countryside. The guidance emphasises minimal external alterations, use of existing openings, traditional materials, and subservient extensions. This proposal fully complies.

Southwater Neighbourhood Plan (2019–2031) – made part of the Development Plan:

- **SNP16 (Design)** requires high-quality design using locally sourced or equivalent traditional materials, complementary vernaculars, and respect for neighbouring properties and amenity.
- **SNP17 (Site Levels)** and **SNP18 (A Treed Landscape)** are addressed through retention of existing levels and provision of new tree planting.

The Southwater Parish Design Statement (2011, adopted as SPD) similarly promotes contextually appropriate vernacular design.

Collectively, these policies actively encourage the delivery of new dwellings through the sensitive conversion and extension of existing buildings in sustainable village locations such as Southwater, particularly where this delivers clear heritage and placemaking benefits.

4. The Proposal

The scheme converts the existing stable block into a 3-bedroom, 3-bathroom family dwelling with a modest extension that joins the existing building at a right angle to provide essential living space and frame the resulting courtyard and private garden beyond. Works include:

- Internal reconfiguration removing the existing loft floor and reinstating this with stronger joists and at a lower level to provide taller ceiling heights on the upper level and utilising existing openings wherever possible.
- Limited new fenestration in a vertical, agricultural style to maintain the building's rural character. The new windows are placed on the extension which is orientated 90 degrees to the stable so therefore do not look towards Southwater House or the neighbouring property Vicarage Cottage but instead onto its own private garden.



- One conservation rooflight is added to the existing stable which is the only modification to the existing buildings fenestration.
- Traditional materials clay tiles, facing stone brick to match existing, timber doors/windows).
- Associated hard and soft landscaping, bin/cycle storage, and parking for 2 to 3 vehicles within the existing curtilage.

All works are shown on the submitted drawings

5. Design Principles

Amount: One 3-bedroom dwelling – a modest scale entirely appropriate to the site and the village hierarchy.

Layout: The new dwelling is positioned to maintain clear separation from Southwater House, preserving its setting and legibility as the principal building. Internal layout maximises natural light while retaining the stable's historic form.

Scale: The extension is identical in height, width, and massing to the host stable block and the listed building. It does not compete visually with the main house and the roof pitch will be the same as the existing stable and Southwater House.

Appearance: The design uses traditional vernacular materials and detailing to ensure the converted building remains visually subordinate and rural in character. The extension is finished in materials that weather to match the existing structure.

Landscaping: Existing trees and boundary treatments are retained. Hard landscaping uses permeable surfaces and gravel to maintain a rural appearance. Residential curtilage is kept modest and contained within the existing hardstanding.

6. Amendments made after withdrawing the original application.

We had undertaken a geological survey and submitted a net biodiversity gain report. Sadly, it was not possible to plant the two saplings required in a position where they could be monitored. Horsham Council suggested we either purchase credits or withdraw the application and submit it again on or after the 6th of August 2026 when regulations change with the “introduction of the new 0.2-hectare exemption, which means that the smallest developments will not be required to do mandatory BNG (unless onsite priority habitat is negatively impacted)”

In discussions with Mr. Seán Rix, Senior Conservation Officer from the Specialists Team in the Strategic Planning department he indicated that he was “open to the possibility of dividing the service building from the house”. He requested that section drawings be included in the resubmission.

He also felt that Southwater House given its size and prominence would require its own garage for vehicles but also garden equipment and this is positioned at his suggestion opposite the entry to the Coach House on the other side of the shared driveway.

7. Access

Vehicular and pedestrian access utilises the existing driveway from Church Lane, with no new access points proposed. Parking and turning space is provided within

the curtilage in accordance with HDPF Policy 41. A new wall is to be built to separate the two properties which will share the driveway an easement for which will be written into the amended freehold titles. Emergency vehicle access is maintained via the existing route.

The site is sustainably located within walking distance of Southwater's services and public transport links which include a supermarket, a doctor's surgery, a dentists practice, a library and numerous restaurants and pubs.

8. Heritage, Sustainability and Other Considerations

The proposal causes no harm to the significance of the Grade II listed Southwater House or its setting; instead, it delivers substantial public benefit by securing the building's optimum viable use (NPPF para 215 and HDPF Policy 34).

The scheme promotes sustainable development by reusing an existing building, minimising embodied carbon, and incorporating energy-efficiency measures. It accords with HDPF Policy 35 (Climate Change). The existing and new building will include thermal insulation and all the windows will be double glazed.

Biodiversity net gain is achieved through new planting and habitat creation (HDPF Policy 31). No trees are removed.

9. Conclusion

This carefully considered scheme delivers a high-quality 3-bedroom family home through the sensitive conversion and extension of a traditional stable block. It fully accords with HDC's Design and Access Statement guidance, barn conversion principles, the HDPF (Policies 1, 2, 3, 32, 33, 34 and others), the Southwater Neighbourhood Plan (SNP16-18), and the NPPF.

Critically, it addresses the current market challenges facing large historic properties by enabling the viable division of the site, thereby securing the future of the Grade II listed Southwater House while providing an additional dwelling in a sustainable location.

The proposal represents sustainable, high-quality development that HDC policy actively encourages. We commend it for approval.

