



Chilcroft
traditional excellence

Heritage Report

St John's Farm, Trout Lane, Barns Green, RH13 0JN

Report prepared by Chilcroft Heritage Planning
December 2025



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



**THE
GEORGIAN
GROUP**

Front Cover: Image © Starc Architects 2025

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	4
2.	LEGISLATION AND POLICY	6
3.	ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE	12
4.	IMPACT ASSESSMENT	18
5.	SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	21

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 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, which is co-owned. 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 May 2023, 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. 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 development is situated in a rural environment to the east of Trout Lane, among the ribbon of development that makes up pockets of existing dwellings, farm buildings and other commercial properties. The proposed site has a public footpath that runs from the south-west of the site to the north-west, just to the west of Sussex Barn, a NDHA. The proposed site comprises numerous existing commercial buildings and a large expanse of hardstanding, with existing vehicular access from the south-west, linking up with Trout Lane. Historically, it was part of what was then Heathfields Farm.
- 3.2) The proposed site is largely self-contained within existing hedgerows and trees and additional landscaping is likely to enhance this still further. From Trout Lane, the proposed site is well set back from the frontage of the streetscape with little awareness of the proposed site that lies beyond. What awareness there is, is confined to the vehicular access and the proposed site benefits from a naturally beautiful appeal from this aspect, with trees lining the entrance to the proposed site, giving a sense of seclusion from the existing developed site that lies beyond. Some existing commercial paraphernalia is visible at the end of this vehicular entrance, as witnessed from Trout Lane, which jars with the otherwise rural outlook into the proposed site. Any proposals should be mindful of this and seek to enhance this appearance wherever possible.
- 3.3) The proposed site historically contained a modest smallholding that over time, included a farmhouse and a smattering of other commercial buildings, consistent with the steady evolution of many farmsteads. At the centre of this stood a 17th Century timber framed tithe barn, now known as Sussex Barn and which remains the only historic building within the setting of the proposed site. Sussex Barn is a modestly sized tithe barn with its principal elevation facing north-west, overlooking an enclosed courtyard. The tithe map of 1879 shows that historically the barn was set out as an L-shape (**see Fig 1**), with the western wing of the building having been subsequently lost and replaced with a separate outbuilding. Over time, a smattering of smaller outbuildings were built up around it, predominantly to the south and west sides, as the farmstead gradually evolved and expanded (**see Fig 2 and 3**).

- 3.4) Sussex Barn is of a timber frame construction with timber weather boarding and a tiled hipped roof. The later built outbuilding that sits beside it is of a similar architectural style and material finish with a half-hipped roof. Together they sit at the heart of the setting, with the proposed site extending around them. Due to its age, Sussex Barn is considered to be a Non-Designated Heritage Asset (NDHA) and is now a residential dwelling in its own right, complete with a modest enclosed curtilage that is focused around the former tithe barn and its adjacent, smaller outbuilding (**see Fig 5**). To the western side of this sits a modern 20th Century commercial building of poor quality that replaced an earlier barn on slightly different footings (**see Fig 2**). The angle of the footings and the breezeblock construction shows that this existing building is not the one evidenced in the 1897 tithe map and is therefore considered capable of replacement, subject to appropriate design.
- 3.5) To the south of Sussex Barn, the earlier tithe map of 1879 shows a residential curtilage in the form of a smallholding, centred around a modest dwelling (**see Fig 1**). This dwelling was subsequently replaced with a building that is now the pool house of Heathfield House and by the early 20th Century, had become the far west wing of a large Edwardian farmhouse then established on the site (**see Fig 3**). The principal elevation of Heathfield House faced north-east, parallel with the proposed site, deliberately angled so as not to directly overlook the farmstead to the north-west, creating an element of separation between the two. This large farmhouse was short-lived and had been demolished by the mid-20th Century following the introduction of higher taxes post WW2, being too costly to maintain and keep. It was subsequently replaced with a more modest dwelling in the form of the present day Heathfield House, which was built in the early 1950's. Due to its later construction date, the existing Heathfield House is not considered to be a heritage asset. The author of this report has made an internal inspection of the property and no historic fabric remains.
- 3.6) The significance of Sussex Barn is not substantively derived from archaeological or artistic interest, although it does have a degree of aesthetic value. Whilst there is some potential for archaeological interest in the form of evidence of the building's adaptation and use, this is unlikely to be of inherent special interest, or of considerable heritage significance.



Fig 1: The proposed site historically formed part of what was once the farmstead of Heathfields Farm.
© Ordinance Survey 1879

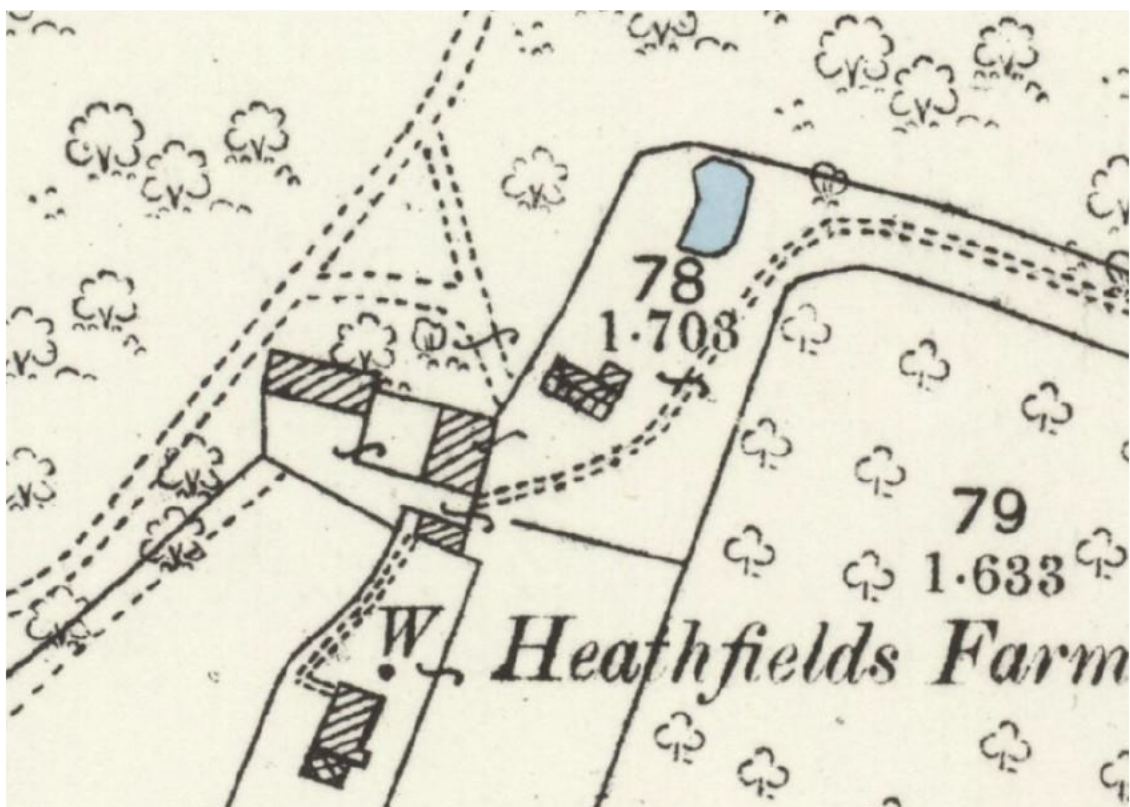


Fig 2: The 17th Century tithe barn of Sussex Barn sits at the centre of the proposed site with subsequent buildings around it having been demolished and replaced. Due to its age, it is considered to be a NDHA.
© Ordinance Survey 1897

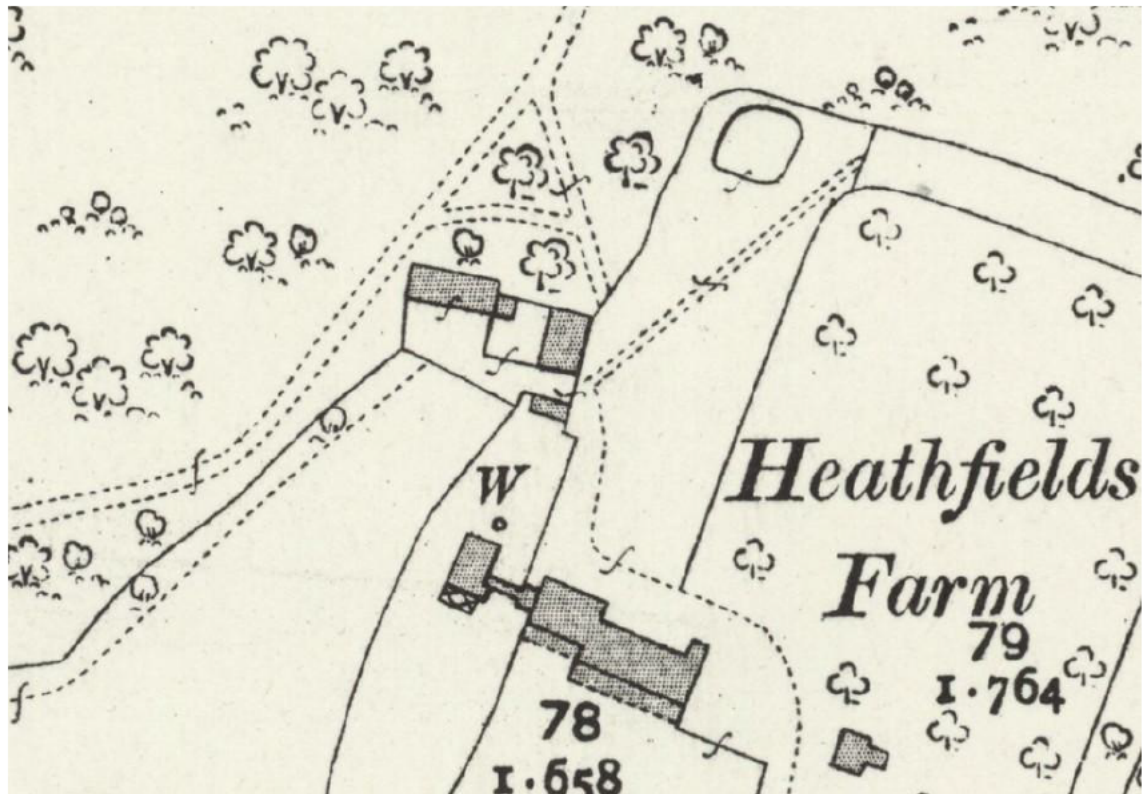


Fig 3: An Edwardian farmhouse known as Heathfield House was established in the early 20th Century and subsequently replaced in the mid-1950's. The later present day dwelling is not considered a heritage asset.

© Ordnance Survey 1911



Fig 4: The present day site contains a large expanse of modern commercial buildings that although well established, do not preserve or enhance the setting of the NDHA or further understanding of its experience.

© Historic England 2025



Fig 5: Sussex Barn (far right) is a former tithe barn that dates from the 17th Century and the only historic building within the setting of the proposed site. The breezeblock building (left) is capable of replacement.

© Chilcroft 2023



Fig 6: To the north-east of Sussex Barn there are an extensive range of modern commercial buildings that although well established, are thought to be capable of replacement, subject to appropriate design.

© Chilcroft 2023



Fig 7: The existing buildings across the site are of no particular quality and do not respond to the rural landscape or significance of the former farmstead. Subject to appropriate design, they could be replaced.

© Chilcroft 2023



Fig 8: The proposed design would utilise the footprints of many of the existing buildings found throughout the site and adapt them to be more reflective of a traditional farmstead, with Sussex Barn as the focal point.

© Chilcroft 2023

4) IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 4.1) The proposed site comprises the immediate setting of the NDHA of Sussex Barn. It falls outside of the curtilage of the heritage asset and together they were historically owned as part of what was then Heathfields Farm. The proposed site comprised a number of historic barns that have been subsequently demolished and replaced with modern late 20th Century commercial buildings. These changes were well established by the time that the significance of Sussex Barn was identified as a heritage asset.
- 4.2) Before coming to any wider conclusions, it should be noted that the significance of the NDHA and its historic interest linked to its age, architectural form, historic fabric and its place within the context of the former farmstead – will not be at all affected. These components of the significance of the heritage asset, and the areas from where it can be best appreciated from its curtilage and principal elevation to the south-west, will be preserved.
- 4.3) The existing commercial yard at St. John's Farm is well established and incongruous to the setting of the heritage asset, having sprung up over time without any thought of design or use of materials. Subject to appropriate design, the redevelopment of this established brownfield site could enhance the setting of the heritage asset. The magnitude of any harm is related only to the extent to which the experience is altered. The proposal has been designed with the heritage asset in mind and was identified at the very start of design work.
- 4.4) The NPPF defines setting as the surroundings in which the heritage asset is experienced. There is presently a degree of separation between the proposed site and the heritage asset and the proposal has adopted additional landscaping. This planting will further preserve the experience of the heritage assets as part of their shared setting. The incorporation of former historic farmland for development more generally, is not a new phenomenon and indeed has already been done in the case of the proposed site, an existing brownfield site. This addition to the setting is not inherently harmful, but a symptom of the way in which places evolve and expand to meet modern day uses. That is implicit in the way in which St. John's Farm is already understood.

- 4.5) From the outset, we had a clear vision for the site and its relationship with Sussex Barn. The appointed Architects were chosen at our instigation and the design evolved following our assessment of significance and an understanding of the context of the former farmstead. The proposed design is of a style that reflects the historic farmstead and responds to it architecturally. Although it evokes a modern interpretation, the broad design and use of materials is considered to be appropriate to the setting of the NDHA and capable of preserving and enhancing the landscape character. It would also ensure the appearance looking into the site from Trout Lane is enhanced (**see 3.2**).
- 4.6) The proposal for four dwellings is considered proportionate and does not seek to push beyond a comfortable scope of development, with care given for well-spaced out buildings, curtilages and an informal rural landscape character that feels at one with its setting. The proposed design would introduce timber frame barn style dwellings to the site which are reflective of Sussex Barn and the former farmstead barns now demolished. This improved vernacular is only likely to enhance the setting of the heritage asset and is broadly welcomed over and above the existing incongruous site. The proposed design would also move built structures further away from the principal elevation of Sussex Barn, opening up views from the public footpath and would adopt a landscaping scheme to soften the overall setting of the proposed site and its context within the rural environment. This is likely to further enhance the appreciation of the setting in and around the curtilage boundaries of the NDHA and improve the wider setting beyond its curtilage. The proposed residential use is also likely to reduce awareness over and above the former commercial use of the site.
- 4.7) The proposed design would adopt the use of L-shaped buildings to reflect the barn vernacular of many of the historic barns once built upon the site and evidenced in the tithe maps (**see Fig 1 and 2**). Both Sussex Barn and a former barn to the north-east of it used L-shaped layouts and so the reintroduction of this design vernacular is broadly welcomed. The design would be centred around Sussex Barn, mimicking the courtyard layout of traditional farmstead outbuildings. The proposed design would ensure that the NDHA remains the focal point and broadly increase opportunity for its appreciation with any new buildings well set back from it, thereby enhancing its significance.

- 4.8) Although the adjoined garage of Unit 4 would be in some proximity to the rear of Sussex Barn, this is in accordance with historic context, with both an existing barn sighted here and a former L-shaped barn having once been in a not dissimilar position (**see Fig 2**). This garage, which would be single storey, is therefore considered proportionate and its location acceptable within the historic context. Furthermore, the removal of the breezeblock built building to the west of Sussex Barn is likely to further opportunity for the appreciation of Sussex Barn and its principal elevation. On balance, the proposal is likely to improve the setting of the heritage asset by enhancing the existing poor quality appearance of the surrounding site. Where there is an effect, this is readily understood in the context of the evolution of the heritage asset, where it can be expected that the setting of a heritage asset will change over time; change in itself is not necessarily harm – it is only harmful to the extent that significance is eroded.
- 4.9) The setting has already changed from its historic origins. The former farmstead has been adapted and become a commercial yard, with modern improvised buildings that having sprung up over time. The present day setting comprises the mid-20th Century dwelling of Heathfield House and late 20th Century dwelling of St John's Farm beside it. Neither are of any historic significance and the former farmstead of Heathfields Farm has not had a farmhouse at its heart for nearly a century. The development of this land has therefore altered the setting of the NDHA beyond its 17th Century origins. This in itself is not surprising and change within the historic environment is to be expected.
- 4.10) The existing site at St John's Farm comprises a selection of commercial buildings, built of a blend of materials from brick and blockwork to corrugated metal. There is a large hardstanding area, an established vehicular access from Trout Lane and the commercial site has clearly been established for some time, dating from the late 20th Century. The proposed site and former farmstead, is typical of an improvised rural commercial site that sprung up in this period. It is of no particular design or layout quality and could easily have been better arranged with thought given to aesthetics and its place in the rural environment. The brownfield site is capable of improvement, subject to appropriate design.

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) The proposed site comprises an existing commercial use brownfield site that currently fails to either preserve or enhance the setting of the NDHA of Sussex Barn and is therefore capable of improvement, subject to appropriate design.
- 5.6) The proposed site historically formed part of the farmstead of Heathfields Farm and the proposed design would invoke traditional materials and a design vernacular, with barn style dwellings constructed with timber framing.
- 5.7) The proposed design would utilise the footprints of many of the existing buildings found throughout the site and adapt their layout to be more reflective of a traditional farmstead, with the NDHA of Sussex Barn as the focal point.
- 5.8) The proposed residential design would correspond to the site's tithe barn vernacular, with the proposal being of a design and material quality that will enhance the setting and appreciation of the Non-Designated Heritage Asset.

© Chilcroft Limited 2025

Registered in England and Wales No. 05951378

All rights reserved. Permission is given to reproduce this document for personal and non-commercial purposes, subject to appropriate acknowledgement. For all other purposes please contact Chilcroft Heritage Planning.

CHILCROFT, A5 New Barn Office, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 9DA
Tel: 01243 631243 | Email: haig.dalton@chilcroft.co.uk