RECEPT

HERITAGE

Example Heritage Impact Statement

Land adjoining Meadow Farmhouse

Proposed dwelling within the setting of a Grade II listed farmhouse

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WEBSITE EXAMPLE / HIS-02

Illustrative example

The property, designations, history and proposals in this report are fictional. The report demonstrates Recept Heritage's assessment approach and is not a site-specific planning submission.

1. Introduction

This Heritage Impact Statement assesses a proposed detached dwelling on land adjoining Meadow Farmhouse, Church Lane, Aldercombe. Meadow Farmhouse is a Grade II listed building. The application site is a separately occupied parcel of the former orchard immediately east of the farmhouse. No physical works to the listed building form part of the proposal.

The assessment addresses the effect of development within the setting of the farmhouse on its architectural and historic significance. It distinguishes change to the surroundings from harm to significance and considers the contribution of the application site, the nature of the proposed change and the resulting heritage effects.

Assessment approach

The assessment follows the staged approach in Historic England’s guidance on the setting of heritage assets: identify the assets and settings affected; establish the contribution of setting to significance; assess the effect of the proposal; consider avoidance and mitigation; and reach a reasoned conclusion. Setting is considered through spatial, historic and visual relationships, not as a fixed-distance buffer.

2. The site and heritage assets

Meadow Farmhouse stands on the southern side of Church Lane at the edge of the village. The listed building comprises a two-storey stone main range with a pitched slate roof, end chimneys and a modest rear service range. Its principal elevation faces the lane, behind a shallow garden and low stone boundary wall.

The application site occupies a rectangular parcel immediately to the east. It is open grass with scattered fruit trees, bounded by a hedge to the lane and by a low wall beside the farmhouse garden. A group of former agricultural outbuildings stands to the south-west of the farmhouse. Fields extend beyond the garden and orchard to the south.

The site lies outside a conservation area. The farmhouse is the only designated heritage asset affected in this example. There is no proposal to demolish or alter the farmhouse, its boundary wall or any historic outbuilding. The principal heritage issue is the introduction of a new dwelling within its former orchard setting.

3. Historic development and significance

Architectural and historic interest of the farmhouse

The farmhouse originated in the eighteenth century and retains the form and materials of a substantial vernacular rural dwelling. Its stone construction, regular principal elevation, slate roof and chimney stacks express its architectural interest. The relationship between the main house and its ancillary ranges illustrates the distinction between domestic accommodation and the working farm.

Its historic interest derives in part from its former role at the centre of an agricultural holding. The building is not understood solely as an isolated stone house: its position beside the lane, relationship with outbuildings and connection with productive land help explain its purpose and status.

Contribution made by setting

Church Lane provides the principal public approach. From the east, the open orchard allows the farmhouse to be seen in a loose rural composition, with its roof and chimneys rising above the low garden boundary. The space separates the house from later village development and reinforces its historic identity as a farmhouse at the settlement edge.

The former orchard has a functional as well as visual relationship with the farmhouse. Its open, planted character reflects productive domestic land associated with the holding. Although the parcel is now separately occupied, that change does not remove the historic association or the contribution of its openness to the appreciation of the listed building.

Views from the farmhouse towards the orchard and fields also sustain the relationship between dwelling and land. These private views are relevant because they help explain significance, not because heritage policy protects a private outlook as an amenity interest.

Relative sensitivity

The part of the orchard nearest the farmhouse and the principal approach from the east are particularly sensitive. The contribution lies in the continuity of open land and the farmhouse’s prominence within it, rather than in each individual fruit tree. The more distant eastern edge offers greater scope for development, but is not disconnected from the historic setting.

4. The proposed development

The initial scheme places a two-storey, three-bedroom dwelling in the western part of the orchard, approximately 9 metres from the farmhouse. It has a ridge height of 7.8 metres and a broad gable facing Church Lane. A new access and two parking spaces occupy the lane frontage. Close-boarded fencing defines its garden beside the farmhouse.

The proposed external materials are buff brick, slate-effect roofing and dark-framed windows. The building would be physically separate from the farmhouse, with no alteration to the listed fabric. That separation avoids direct fabric loss but does not prevent an effect on significance through setting.

5. Assessment of heritage impact

Siting, scale and visual hierarchy

The western siting places a substantial new building within the space that currently allows the farmhouse to be appreciated as the principal dwelling in a loose rural group. Its broad gable and height would compete with the farmhouse in the approach from the east. The effect is not simply that a new house would be visible: it would alter the hierarchy and openness that explain the listed building’s historic role.

Historic and spatial relationships

Development would replace part of the former orchard with a separate domestic plot. The proximity of the new dwelling and its enclosed garden would weaken the connection between the farmhouse and the productive land beside it. The farmhouse would read more strongly as one of a closely spaced pair of houses and less clearly as a rural dwelling with an associated orchard.

Access, parking and boundaries

The new access and parking would add engineered surfaces and domestic activity to the lane frontage. Close-boarded fencing would introduce a visually assertive subdivision beside the farmhouse. These effects reinforce the change from an open orchard setting to a more suburban domestic arrangement.

Overall effect of the initial scheme

The initial proposal would cause less than substantial harm to the significance of Meadow Farmhouse through development within its setting. The harm is limited in extent because the listed fabric and the south-west farm group remain, but it is meaningful: the proposal erodes a setting relationship that contributes to the building’s historic interest. The absence of direct works does not make that effect neutral.

6. Avoidance, design revision and mitigation

A revised design relocates the dwelling to the eastern edge of the parcel, approximately 23 metres from the farmhouse. The dwelling is reduced to a compact one-and-a-half-storey form with a 5.8-metre ridge, a narrower frontage and its main roof ridge aligned with the lane. The farmhouse remains the taller and more visually prominent building.

The revised arrangement retains an open orchard strip between the new dwelling and the farmhouse garden. Existing fruit trees in that strip are retained and supplemented with orchard planting. A low hedge replaces the close-boarded fence. Parking moves behind the new dwelling, reducing the prominence of vehicles and hardstanding in the principal approach.

A restrained palette of muted masonry and natural slate reduces material contrast. External lighting is limited to low-level, downward-directed fittings. These details support the siting strategy; they are not relied upon to conceal an otherwise harmful building.

Effect of the revised scheme

Relocation and reduction in height substantially lessen competition with the farmhouse. The retained orchard strip preserves a meaningful area of open land beside the listed building and allows the principal approach to continue to reveal the farmhouse within a planted setting.

Nevertheless, the orchard would be smaller and part of its historic extent would become a separate residential plot. The revised dwelling would remain evident from the lane and from the farmhouse garden. A residual erosion of the historic land relationship therefore remains. The assessment identifies less than substantial harm at the lower end of that range; it does not describe mitigation as eliminating every adverse effect.

Delivery of mitigation

The reduced building envelope, eastern siting, retained orchard strip, boundary treatment and parking arrangement are integral to the revised scheme. They should be fixed through the application drawings and, where appropriate, planning conditions. Landscape management must retain the orchard character rather than allow later enclosure or conversion of the open strip to parking. Future planting is not treated as an immediate screen or as a substitute for good siting.

7. Policy context and heritage balance

Section 66(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 requires special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building, its setting and features of special architectural or historic interest when determining relevant planning applications. This duty applies even though the proposal entails no works to the listed building itself.

National heritage policy requires significance to be understood, including the contribution made by setting. Harm requires clear and convincing justification and must carry considerable importance and weight in the decision. A finding of less than substantial harm is not a finding that the heritage issue can be given little weight.

The revised scheme provides one additional dwelling. That is a potential public benefit, but its weight depends on the planning circumstances. Private financial return and the applicant’s preference for this location are not, in themselves, public heritage benefits. No repair of the farmhouse, public access or rescue of an at-risk asset is secured by the proposal, and none is counted in the balance.

The assessment does not assume a local housing shortfall or make a compliance claim against a real development plan. The decision-maker would need to establish the weight of the housing benefit and any other evidenced public benefits before deciding whether they outweigh the residual heritage harm.

8. Conclusion

The former orchard contributes to the significance of Meadow Farmhouse by sustaining its rural setting, historic land relationship and prominence in the approach along Church Lane. Development of the parcel can therefore affect the listed building’s significance without altering its fabric.

The initial scheme would erode those qualities through its proximity, scale and suburban plot treatment. The revised scheme materially reduces the effect by moving the dwelling eastwards, lowering its roof and retaining an open orchard strip. A low level of less than substantial harm remains because part of the historic orchard relationship would still be lost.

The revised design is preferable on heritage grounds, but this statement does not provide an unqualified recommendation for approval. The residual harm must be given the required weight and assessed against substantiated public benefits. Avoiding development of the orchard remains the option that avoids the identified setting harm.

Reference framework

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, section 66(1). National Planning Policy Framework, historic environment policies. Historic England, The Setting of Heritage Assets, Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3, second edition (2017). Historic England, Statements of Heritage Significance, Advice Note 12 (2019).