Land at Downlands Farm, Uckfield

Proof of Evidence of:
Edmund Stratford
BA (Hons), MCIfA

In respect of:
Heritage Matters

On behalf of:
Gleeson Land and John Alison Land and Research Ltd

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Section 1
Summary of Proof of Evidence

1.1 This Proof of Evidence in respect of heritage matters has been prepared by Edmund Stratford, an Associate Director at The Environmental Dimension Partnership Ltd (EDP), an independent multi-disciplinary environmental consultancy based in Cirencester, Cardiff and Cheltenham.

1.2 My evidence addresses matters raised in RfR3, identified by Wealden District Council in determining to refuse the planning application in its 21 April 2023 Decision Notice, in respect of the impact on designated and non-designated heritage assets through physical impacts or through changes to their setting.

1.3 Having assessed the appeal proposals, it is my conclusion that the appeal proposals will result in a very low level of less than substantial harm to Maresfield Conservation Area, by introducing new built form (albeit at a distance) into a key view from the conservation area.

1.4 As far as national planning policy is concerned, Paragraph 199 of the NPPF places “great weight” on the conservation of designated heritage assets such as the Maresfield Conservation Area. In addition, Paragraph 200 advises that “clear and convincing justification” should be required for proposed development that causes any degree of harm to a designated heritage asset.

1.5 Of course, Paragraph 202 of the NPPF makes it clear that even harmful development can be acceptable if the public benefits that it would bring forward are of sufficient weight to outweigh the less than substantial harm generated by its implementation.

1.6 Accordingly, for the purposes of the NPPF Paragraph 202 planning balance, the low level of less than substantial harm to this designated heritage asset should be weighed against the public benefits of the appeal proposals by the decision-taker.

1.7 In respect of the Grade II listed Oast Cottage and Barn at Downlands Farm to the east of the appeal site, my assessment concludes that the significance of these assets would not be adversely affected by the appeal proposals. While it is acknowledged that the appeal site historically formed part of the wider agricultural landholding associated with these two listed buildings, the implementation of the appeal proposals would not result in any loss of significance to these assets nor diminish the contribution that their settings presently make to their significance; i.e. there would be no harm to the Grade II listed Oast Cottage and Barn at Downlands Farm.

1.8 Similarly, it is acknowledged that the appeal site historically formed part of the wider landholding associated with the Grade II listed Buckswood Grange to the south. Nonetheless, it is my assessment that the implementation of the appeal proposals would not diminish the contribution that Buckswood Grange's setting presently makes to its significance and therefore the significance of this listed building would not be harmed.

1.9 It is the Appellant's position that if the Council consider that the implementation of the appeal proposals would result in harm to any listed buildings in the wider environs of the

appeal site, then relevant case law indicates that that harm deriving from any change to the setting of these assets could only be at the lower end of the spectrum of less than substantial harm.

1.10 In terms of non-designated heritage assets, my assessment concludes that no such formally identified assets would be harmed through the implementation of the appeal proposals. My assessment concludes that the significance of Partridges Oast would not be harmed though any change to its setting. The same conclusion is found in respect of Lake Wood, which the Council consider to be a non-designated heritage asset.

1.11 If the decision-taker considers the loss of Chicory Cottage, within the appeal site, to be a material consideration in terms of heritage policy; i.e. if it is considered to qualify as a non-designated heritage asset; then the total loss of the building, and accordingly the loss of its very limited heritage interest, will need to be considered in accordance with Paragraph 203 of the NPPF.

1.12 The Appellant has suggested a condition is attached to any planning consent to secure an appropriate programme of building recording in advance of the demolition of Chicory Cottage, should this be deemed necessary, which would provide mitigation for the loss of the building.

1.13 Accordingly, it is concluded that, subject to the application of the Paragraph 202 planning balance within the NPPF in respect of Maresfield Conservation Area, with regard to historic environment matters overall there are no issues that prevent the appeal proposals from proceeding.

1.14 Therefore, there continues to be every reason to believe that the appeal proposals are capable of receiving a positive determination in respect of heritage matters, in terms of both adopted local planning policy and national planning policy. The outline nature of the proposals across the agricultural fields in the appeal site ensures that there are future opportunities to address any heritage issues or concerns that the Council may have in respect of the exact location, scale, layout and character of the development at detailed design stage.

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