

Our ref 215378

Your ref 20260158

The Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings

White House Farm , School Lane, Higham, Rochester Kent ME3 7JH

Redevelopment of barn (building 5), reconstruction of adjoining building (building 8), and construction of a new pool house south-east of the barn.

Dear Mrs Parkin

Thank you for notifying the SPAB of the above application affecting this 16th century Grade II listed barn. Having carefully reviewed the application documents, we have a number of concerns with the application as it currently stands and wish to register our objection.

We do not object in principle to the proposed change of use, which may provide a sustainable future for the historic barn. However, the application currently lacks sufficient detail to allow a proper understanding of the impact on the building's historic fabric and significance.

We draw attention to the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework, and in particular:

207. In determining applications, local planning authorities should require an applicant to describe the significance of any heritage assets affected, including any contribution made by their setting.

212. When considering the impact of a proposed development on the significance of a designated heritage asset, great weight should be given to the asset's conservation.

213. Any harm to, or loss of, the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction, or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification.

We expand on these points below.

The close proximity of the proposed pool building to the barn's southeast elevation would obscure a principal historic façade and extend built form beyond the traditional farmyard arrangement. This reduces the ability to appreciate the barn's historic form and its prominence within the group. We therefore encourage the applicant to explore relocating the pool building further from the barn and/or reducing its scale.

While we do not object to the intended use of building 8, the impact of the proposed rebuilding on surviving historic fabric has not been assessed. The proposed new opening between buildings 5 and 8 affects the barn's historic south elevation and would result in loss of early fabric, yet no justification has been provided. The need for the intervention and the extent of resulting harm both require further assessment.

The Heritage Statement describes the timber frame as being in “excellent condition”, yet the drawings indicate replacement of rafters, wall panelling and bracing. This inconsistency suggests a need for a detailed report by a historic timber-frame specialist or a CARE registered structural engineer. Such a report should identify surviving fabric and recommend appropriate, minimal-intervention repairs consistent with a repair-first approach and replacement of structural timber only where repair is not feasible.

We would also expect to see a full specification and method statements for the proposed works, including:

- thermal upgrades
- changes to doors and windows
- treatments to flooring, walls, and ceilings

If a historic threshing floor has survived, it should be protected in situ.

Given the building’s significance, the involvement of a conservation-accredited architect is strongly recommended. Without the above information, it is not possible to assess the impact of the works on the barn’s historic interest.

Large areas of glazing, particularly to the north gable, would significantly alter the barn’s character. Traditional agricultural buildings are defined by a predominantly solid envelope with limited openings. The barn doors are integral to the identity of the barn and evidence its use, therefore their prominence is a characteristic that requires protection. Any glazing proposals should be carefully detailed to preserve this character and avoid visual harm.

In summary, while we do not object to the proposed change of use, further information and reconsideration of certain elements are required before the impact of the proposals can be properly understood. Until this information is provided, the application does not meet the requirements of the NPPF and should be withdrawn for these points to be addressed.

We hope these comments are helpful.