

4 | Assessment of Significance

Sissinghurst Conservation Area

- 4.15 The Sissinghurst Conservation Area was first designated in October 1971 and is within the purview of the Cranbrook Conservation Area Advisory Committee. The character and appearance of the area is defined through its historic core which is concentrated along the historic ridgetop route which runs linear in form from west to east. Named The Street, the expansion of Sissinghurst grew from this spine and resulted in vertical streets leading off with further twentieth century construction extending past the northern limb.
- 4.16 The area possesses a rich stock of buildings dating to the medieval period and later cloth-making industry demonstrating the historic development of this settlement. The Conservation Area also includes a large number of sixteenth century buildings which reflect the period of economic prosperity and investment. The streets express a wide range of materials and widespread application of cladding which is demonstrated on the eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings which contributes to the local vernacular of the Conservation Area.
- 4.17 In contrast, the modern housing development to the north west of the Conservation Area includes some new development which is accessed from, and relates to, the Street and forms clear extension of the settlement. The older, post-war development to the north of this, including Broad View, Milk House Cottages, Hovendens and Cleavers does not relate to the village as strongly and is obscured from view on approach by mature trees to the west.
- 4.18 The Conservation Area is predominantly made up of residential dwellings and includes modestly-sized cottages and larger family homes as well as local shops and businesses. The Church of the Holy Trinity and adjacent former Sissinghurst Primary School represent buildings with public functions inside the Conservation Area.
- 4.19 The Conservation Area includes eighteen listed buildings as well as undesignated heritage assets which contribute to the character and setting of the Conservation Area.

- 4.20 The Area is also associated with Sissinghurst Castle which sits a mile north east of the village which is now owned and maintained by the National Trust.
- 4.21 The Sissinghurst Conservation Area overall can be attributed with medium interest which is reflected in its designation; it does, however, contain low and neutral elements within its overall significance rating.
- 4.22 Overall, the Conservation Area's significance is derived from its historic core which was established along The Street and expanded north and south from this spine encompassing buildings dating from the sixteenth century onwards. The Appraisal acknowledges the historic development of this area which has expanded in response to local industry, tradition and has captured a vernacular style as a result of the readily available materiality used which has given the village and surrounding context its distinctive character. The Conservation Area Appraisal also identifies the architectural shift post-war which is concentrated to the northern portion of the village, to the south west of the Site.
- 4.23 The Site itself is not mentioned in the Conservation Area Appraisal and there are no evident historical links between the Site and Sissinghurst, however, upon analysis of historic mapping, it is assumed that the site was in private ownership and was associated with a nearby farmstead.
- 4.24 Accordingly, the Area derives significance from its historical and architectural interest evident in its legible palimpsest and from the ability it provides the viewer to appreciate the particular way in which Sissinghurst as a settlement developed historically.



Figure 4.4 View within Sissinghurst Conservation Area, Sissinghurst Road



Figure 4.5 View within Sissinghurst Conservation Area, Sissinghurst Road

Section 5

Assessment of Impact.

5 | Assessment of Impact

Summary of Proposals

- 5.1 The application seeks outline approval for the development of the Site for circa 18 residential dwellings with associated access, parking and landscaping. The development would be contained within the Site to the north of Sissinghurst C of E Primary School, and set back from its perimeter within an appropriate landscape.
- 5.2 The Site will be accessed by a vehicular access point off Common Road at the location of the existing public right of way. This will form part of the landscaping scheme, close to a retained portion of the eastern section of the Site which will be reserved as an ecological protection zone and will also act as visual separation between the development and Sissinghurst Conservation Area.
- 5.3 The proposal includes a rural development pattern which is sympathetic to the heritage of local area, while the scale and form of the new buildings is considered appropriate to the context.



Figure 5.1 Revised indicative layout

Assessment Methodology

5.4 The impact assessment uses as its basis the assessment methodology set out in Paragraphs 193 to 196 of the National Planning Policy Framework and is applied in line with the interpretation established in current case law. As outlined above, it is clear that Section 72(1) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 does not apply in this case, and therefore, the below follows the methodology laid out in paragraphs 193 to 196 of the NPPF.

Impact Assessment

- 5.5 The following analysis, which looks at the principle of development as a whole, in terms of its overall impact on the setting and significance of designated heritage assets within the vicinity of the Site, seeks to assess any impact arising in principle through the change of the Site from an open field to housing.
- 5.6 The Site has been judged to be of negligible significance having understood its historic development in its own right and due to the absence of any built form within its boundary. It is recognised that the character of this land will be affected with the change of use from agricultural to residential development. However, the proposal, viewed in accordance with paragraphs 193-196 of the NPPF, is considered to not cause any harm to the Site itself.
- 5.7 The land is currently viewed and identified as vacant land from vantage points along Common Road, Frittenden Road and more significantly at the crossroads where these two roads forming the north and east boundary meet. It is proposed that the Site boundary, with greater attention given to the exposed boundaries, will be subject to enhanced planting. This application of screening will limit views into the Site from the approach roads as well as improve the views observed from the designated heritage assets to the north east and the wider context. The existing sense of open space to the perimeter along Common Road will be respected, which will maintain the experience created on approach towards the Conservation Area boundary to the south.
- 5.8 Internally, within the Site boundary, a similar approach to new planting will be applied which will help to create a sense of the development being a place in character with this part of the Weald. It is proposed to retain the existing green zone to the east of the site which will retain the historic access route within the Site which was present pre-1797. The south-east area of the site will provide an ecological protection zone.
- 5.9 The site is located within the National Character Area 122 High Weald (the NCA) which is described as having the following characteristics: “a dispersed settlement pattern of hamlets and scattered farmsteads and medieval ridge-top villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries; a dense network of small, narrow and winding lanes, often sunken and enclosed by high hedgerows or woodland strips; an intimate, hidden and small-scale landscape

- with glimpses of far reaching views; and small and medium-sized irregularly shaped fields enclosed by a network of hedgerows and wooded shaws.” While it is recognised that the introduction of development to any undeveloped site within this area, has the potential to alter its character and could therefore be perceived as harmful, in this case the development would reflect the small scale incremental development that the village has traditionally experienced.
- 5.10 The area of the proposed development would extend the settlement of Sissinghurst to the north which has naturally evolved from its historic core (The Street) out to the wider triangular settlement which is predominantly confined within the A229 to the west, Common Road to the east and Sissinghurst Road to the south. The development focused within the vacant land to the north will continue this expansion and, as a result, will help integrate the modern Primary School into the existing form of the village. To reinforce this public benefit, we understand that the landscaping scheme will re-establish the public right of way which will continue to pass through the Site, reinforcing the school’s relationship within its surrounding context. The development will also establish a communal connection between the village and the cluster of dwellings at The Crossways.
- 5.11 This judgement takes into account the suite of paragraphs within Section 12 of the NPPF, which seek to promote good design in all developments. The proposed development consists of a masterplan of appropriate density which recognises the need for landscaping and echoes the existing spatial arrangement of the housing in the local area whilst respecting the setting of nearby listed buildings. It is anticipated that at the reserved matters stage the detailed architecture of the proposed development will be carefully considered to respond in a similar architectural language to existing residential dwellings found within the vicinity. The development will be in accordance with paragraph 192 of the NPPF, in that it will make a positive contribution to local character and distinctiveness, through high quality residential design.

Impact on Surrounding Designated Heritage Assets

The Crossways (Grade II Listed)

- 5.12 The Crossways is located to the north of the Site, adjacent to its boarder along Frittenden Road. As discussed earlier in the report, there is a clear distinction of the ownership of the land historically determined by the buffer zone created by Frittenden Road and the mature hedgerows either side. To reinforce this, The Crossways sits parallel to Frittenden Road which emphasises its connection functionally as an access route to the property from surrounding areas.
- 5.13 In the Officers’ Report to the July 2019 Planning Committee on the previous application (19/00205/OUT), reference was made to the Conservation Officer’s general concerns regarding the ‘change of character both to the setting of the listed buildings and the conservation area’ owing to the proposed development. More specifically in relation to the The Crossways building, the Conservation Officer felt that the listed building, and its near neighbour to the east were ‘appreciated as isolated crossroads buildings rather than as part of a settlement - infilling this site would harm this part of their setting which contributes towards the significance of each, by essentially bringing them into the limits of the development of Sissinghurst’. The Conservation Officer concludes that ‘less than substantial’ harm to significance would arise.
- 5.14 The current application takes a similar approach to development of the open space to the south of The Crossways, and it is anticipated that the Conservation Officer will take a similar view. Icení’s position remains that the significance of Grade II listed The Crossways, lies in its fabric and its immediate setting, including its garden and boundary onto the Frittenden Road/Common Road junction. While the wider setting, including the open space provided by the Site as existing to the south, supports appreciation of the heritage asset and its historical position outside of the village, the contribution made by the open space to the significance of the heritage asset overall can only be considered to be low, at most. The proposed development, however, recognises this contribution and provides a landscaped buffer and appropriate setting back of built form from the north and east

5 | Assessment of Impact

boundaries of the Site. This helps to maintain the rural character of the intersecting roads and separates the development from The Crossways visually and physically. In so doing, harm to the significance of the heritage asset through a change in its setting will be avoided, in our assessment.

5.15 The sensitive masterplanning of the proposed Site has carefully considered the scale, massing and spatial quality of the proposal so that the buildings fit comfortably into the wider settings of The Crossways and other heritage assets, avoiding harm to their significance. The new proposal creates a finer grain form with gaps between the buildings that will break up the building line behind the buffering landscape, including trees. The new masterplan forms individual clusters within the development, reflecting traditional rural farmstead layouts in keeping with the surrounding rural character. In combination with the northern tree buffer, these changes to the design minimise intervisibility between the proposed residential development and The Crossways and avoid the perception that the listed building has been drawn into the built up part of the village.

Carpenter’s Corner (1 and 2, Common Road) (Grade II Listed)

5.16 Carpenter’s Corner is located to the east of the Site on the other side of the Frittenden Road/Common Road junction. Through analysis of the historic development of the Site and its surrounding context, it is clear that Carpenter’s Corner does not hold any relationship to the Site concerned. Clearly labeled as the Carpenter’s house, it is evident that this building would not have had any relationship with the surrounding agricultural landscape except the land within its own boundary. This is reinforced through the buffer zone which was created by Common Road which the property has associated itself with historically and functionally by means of access to the surrounding areas. With this understood, the development of the Site will have, in our assessment, no impact on the critical aspects of the setting of the designated asset or its significance. In addition to this, given the orientation of the principal elevation of Carpenter’s Corner facing away from the site, which reinforces its disconnection from the Site, we consider that the developed Site would have no material impact on the views witnessed from the

heritage asset. Furthermore, the proposal seeks to take precedent from the local vicinity, incorporating sensitive scale and massing whilst maintaining the openness between properties found in the surrounding area, and reflected in the characteristics of Carpenter’s Corner itself.

5.17 As with The Crossways, the Conservation Officer’s concern about development on the Site is that it would cause harm to the setting and significance of Carpenter’s Corner by removing the open space between the building and the village core further south, bringing it into the limits of the Sissinghurst settlement. Again, Icen’s assessment illustrates that the significance of Grade II listed building lies in its fabric and its immediate setting, including its garden and boundary onto the Frittenden Road/Common Road junction. While the wider setting, including the open space provided by the Site opposite, supports appreciation of the heritage asset and its historical position outside of the village to a limited degree, the contribution this makes to the significance of the heritage asset overall can only be considered to be low, at most. The proposed development, however, recognises this very limited contribution and provides a landscaped buffer and appropriate setting back of built form from east boundary. In so doing the rural character of the intersecting roads and the important elements of the setting of the listed house at the junction is maintained. Harm to the significance of the heritage asset through a change in its setting will, therefore, be avoided in our assessment.

5.18 In addition, the perception of rural isolation referred to by the Conservation Officer in respect of Carpenter’s Corner, has already been changed by the more substantial 60 dwelling Countryside Developments scheme which was approved in 2017 and is currently being built directly adjacent to the listed building on the east side of Common Road. In the case of the Countryside development, there is with no road between the heritage asset and new housing to mediate the setting relationship between them.

Sissinghurst Conservation Area

5.19 The Conservation Officer’s view is that an important characteristic of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area is the separation between it and the surrounding settlements, including those to the north, since separation provides ‘an important rural context and

open views with just scattered historic farmsteads to interrupt’. The Conservation Officer is concerned that development on the Site harms the Conservation Area by merging these ‘characteristically dispersed settlements’ into the main village of Sissinghurst further south.

5.20 It should be noted that the more isolated settlements to the north of Sissinghurst, including those close to the Site, are not within the Sissinghurst Conservation Area boundary, whilst the relationship between them and the Conservation area is not directly mentioned within the Sissinghurst Conservation Area Appraisal. It can be reasonably inferred, therefore, that these elements make a relatively low contribution to the Conservation Area’s character and appearance and its significance as a heritage asset.

5.21 That said, the Sissinghurst Conservation Area Appraisal notes at 4.9, that ‘all of the approaches provide a soft transition into the built up centre, allowing Sissinghurst to sit comfortably within its landscape setting, although the northern approach along Common Road has been diminished by more recent developments.’ The Conservation Officer’s concern is that development on the Site would effectively bring the Site into the limits of Sissinghurst itself, undermining the sense of a ‘soft transition’ from the north into the core of the village. Such an interpretation does not, in our assessment, take into account the design of the proposed development, the landscaping that it provides, the distance between the Site and the core of the village or the emerging presence of the much larger Countryside Development on the east side of Common Road.

5.22 As recorded in the historic development section of this report, the use for the Site has been as agricultural land, and, therefore, it has remained as open space. However, the Site has discontinued its agricultural use and has since been left vacant. A sense of open space is still currently provided and will be retained as the design proposal includes a significant amount of landscaping and judicious siting of built form. The new proposed landscape design would conceal the scheme in many views and help to support the rural character of the setting of the Conservation Area, which is at considerable distance further south. There is unlikely to be any intervisibility between the Conservation Area itself and the proposed

development, owing to the distance involved and intervening buildings and treescape.

5.23 In summary, in our assessment the proposed development would result in no material impact on the character and appearance of Sissinghurst Conservation Area, its significance or its setting when experienced on the route towards the village from the north.

Section 6

Conclusion.

6 | Conclusion

- 6.1

A review of the historic development and the current condition of the land to the south west of the cross roads where Frittenden Road meets Common Road has determined it to be of negligible significance in its own right and to make only a very limited contribution to the wider setting and significance of the two grade II listed houses on the opposite side of the junction, known as The Crossways and Carpenter’s Corner.
- 6.2

As the Site is bounded by two well established roads lined with substantial hedgerows and planting, the proposed development would be provided with a buffer zone between itself and the listed buildings at the junction. It is understood that this buffer would be reinforced by additional planting as part of a landscaping scheme for the project. In addition, the proposed development would be composed of built forms of appropriate scale, grain, layout and siting within the Site boundary.
- 6.3

In consequence, it is considered that the proposed development would not result in any harm to the significance of the listed houses close to the Frittenden Road/Common Road junction. In response to previous proposals for the Site, the Conservation Officer has raised concern that development of the Site would result in ‘less than substantial harm’ to the significance of the listed houses. While we disagree in respect of the current application, if the Conservation Officer’s concern remains, it can only be that the harm arising would be of a very low degree of less than substantial harm. We anticipate that the reserved matters process will be important in delivering a detailed design which addresses any concerns the Conservation Officer raises at this stage.
- 6.4

In respect of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area, approximately 0.3 miles south of the Site boundary, the impact of development proposed is judged to have no material impact on the character, appearance or significance of the designated heritage asset. This assessment is supported by the appropriate layout, grain and landscaping established by the scheme. The setting of the conservation area would not be harmed by development to its north and the ‘soft transition’ experienced in the approach to the village core from the north would not be materially affected.
- 6.5

The proposed development is likely to contribute positively to its immediate context and to the local distinctiveness of the area. This is supported through the sensitive design principles which have been applied to the development in Outline, and which will need to be finalised through the reserved matters process.
- 6.6

It is considered that the outline proposals meet the requirements of the relevant National Planning Policy Framework, particularly those set out in Sections 12 and 16. The significance of the Sissinghurst Conservation Area and the nearby listed buildings would not be harmed. We do not consider that there is a heritage basis on which to refuse permission for the proposed development.

Appendix 1

References.

Appendix 1 | References

Ordnance Survey history map series ©100035207

National heritage List for England, <http://historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/>

Sissinghurst Conservation Area Appraisal October 2012, http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/27911/Sissinghurst-Conservation-Area-Appraisal_adopted-Oct-2012.pdf

Tunbridge Wells Borough Local Development Framework – Core Strategy June 2010 http://www.tunbridgewells.gov.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/138636/Core-Strategy-adopted-June-2010.compressed.pdf

British History Online - <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol7/pp90-113>

Proposed Self Build Development (Urban & Rural Ltd.)

High Weald Area of Outstanding Beauty, www.highweald.org

Urban and Rural RIBA – Design and Access Statement

Appendix 2

Listing Entries.

Appendix 2 | Statutory List Entries

Cranbrook, The Crossways

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1101522

Date first listed: 19-May-1986

County: Kent

District: Tunbridge Wells (District Authority)

Parish: Cranbrook

National Grid Reference: TQ 78969 38012

Description

CRANBROOK THE CROSSWAYS, (NORTH TQ 73 NE SIDE) SISSINGHURST 3/96 - The Crossways - II

House. C16 with C17 additions, clad in C19 with additions of late C19 or early C20 date. Timber framed with ground floor of applied close studding with pebble dashed infill and first floor tile hung, and swept over ground floor. Plain tiled roofs, half hipped to right with jettied return gabled wing to left. Bargeboards to gable. 2 gabled dormers on main wing. 2 storeys and attics. Irregular fenetration of 5 windows on first floor and 4 window ground floor, that under left hand jetty being a square bay. Leaded lattice casements. Gabled weather porch with applied timbering and pebble dashed infill to right of centre. Boarded and ribbed door with centre light. Wing to right at rear. Interior: Substantial framing visible. Large wooden bressummer over fireplace.

Listing NGR: TQ7896938012

Cranbrook, The Crossways

Heritage Category: Listed Building

Grade: II

List Entry Number: 1336924

Date first listed: 20-Jun-1967

County: Kent

District: Tunbridge Wells (District Authority)

Parish: Cranbrook

National Grid Reference: TQ 79016 37999

Description

CRANBROOK COMMON ROAD TQ 73 NE & TQ 7837-7937 (east side) 3/81 & 8/81 Carpenter's Corner 20.6.67 Nos 1 & 2 GV II

Farmhouse, later coffin workshop, now cottage pair. C17, clad in C18. Timber framed with red and blue brick chequer cladding, with tile hung first floor to north (front). Wooden eaves cornice to plain tiled half hipped roof with tall ribbed brick stack off-centre to left. 2 storeys; irregular fenestration of 4 windows on first floor and 2 on ground floor, wood framed casements. 2 boarded doors, to left and right, with small hood on brackets. Exposed upright to rear and partial rear catslide outshot. Interior: substantial timber framing.

Listing NGR: TQ7901637999



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