

From: Emily Wade <Emily.Wade@midsussex.gov.uk>
Sent: 17 October 2025 10:38:47 UTC+01:00
To: "Andy Watt" <Andy.Watt@midsussex.gov.uk>
Subject: DM/25/2223 Saint Hill Manor

Hi Andy

Comments on the above planning application.

The site and proposed development

The proposed development site consists principally of two large fields to the north and west of Saint Hill Manor, which is located in a rural position outside East Grinstead. The Manor, which is currently the UK headquarters of the International Association of Scientologists, includes a complex of buildings of varying dates centred on a Grade II 18th century country house. The current proposal, which follows on from pre-application advice, is for the following works associated with events held at the Manor:

- Creation of a car parking area occupying Juhring Field (to the north of the Manor), to provide 760 parking spaces, with permanent hard surfaced parking to the north east and east of the field, and a larger area of temporary cell-web surfaced parking to the centre and south-western parts of the space;
- Provision of a WC block centrally, between the permanent and temporary parking areas;
- Provision of lighting to the permanent parking area;
- Alterations of the existing vehicle access to the northern end of the road frontage including removal of adjacent hedging and trees to create appropriate visibility splays;
- Creation of an asphalt and gravel surfaced access road running along the northern side of the field around the western edge of North Wood and continuing along the western and southern sides of Hobbs Field;
- Partial regrading of Hobbs field and introduction of concrete ring beams/pads;
- Introduction of large areas of cell-web surfacing within Hobbs Field; and
- A WC block to the eastern side of this field, with adjacent to this an emergency generator and substation.

Affected heritage assets

The proposal is considered to affect the settings of a number of heritage assets, including both listed buildings and non-designated heritage assets (NDHAs):

- Saint Hill Manor.

As above, Saint Hill Manor is a Grade II listed neo-classical country house, constructed in 1792 and extensively altered in the 19th century. Originally known as Saint Hill House, the building was constructed in 1792 for Gibbs Crawford, an MP, and had several subsequent notable owners before being requisitioned during World War II for use as a convalescent home for RAF officers undergoing

reconstructive surgery at East Grinstead's Queen Victoria Hospital- the famous 'Guinea Pig Club' associated with pioneering surgeon Sir Archibald McIndoe. In 1959 it was purchased by L Ron Hubbard, founder of the scientology movement. The interior of the building includes the 'Monkey Room' which was painted with an elaborate mural showing 20 different species of monkey in 1945 by Winston Churchill's nephew John Spencer Churchill.

The building is set within landscaped gardens, which include a number of other buildings of varying dates. Beyond these immediate grounds, the setting of the house remains largely rural in character.

Based on the limited information in front of us, the house is likely to be considered to possess architectural interest based on its design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration, historical illustrative value as a good example of a substantial late 18th century country house in the neo-classical style, aesthetic value, and associative value in relation to its various notable occupants and association with both the pioneering work at Queen Victoria Hospital during WWII, and later Scientology. The house also has group value with surviving historical buildings around it within the manor grounds, including the former stables to the south east, and the lodge building adjacent to the entrance driveway to the north, as well as a further lodge building to the east, which would be regarded as curtilage listed.

As such, the surviving rural setting of the Manor would be considered to make a strong positive contribution to its special interest and the manner in which this is appreciated, in particular those parts of that interest which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values. The proposed development affects fields constituting the immediate rural setting of the Manor to the north and west of its gardens.

- North Lodge

North Lodge is a characterful small building located to the north of the Manor, adjacent to the principal entrance to the gardens. It appears, from historical map regression, to date from the late 19th century, and retains a number of period features such as a projecting gabled porch with stone detailing, a prominent corbelled brick chimney stack, and Gothic style windows with pointed heads, stone drip moulds, and casements with elaborately patterned leaded lights. Given its date of construction, proximity to the Manor, common ownership, and historical and continuing functional relationship, the building would be regarded as curtilage listed.

Based on the information in front of us, the Lodge would be likely to be considered to possess architectural value based on its design, construction and craftsmanship, historical illustrative value as a good example of a late 19th century country estate lodge house, aesthetic value, and group value with the Manor house and other surviving historical estate buildings.

In terms of setting, the relationship of the Lodge with the entrance drive, which largely retains its historical configuration, and the remainder of the grounds of the Manor will be significant in contributing to an understanding of its historical function. However, the wider rural setting, including the field directly to the west (Juhring Field), will also make a strong positive contribution to the special interest of this curtilage listed building, in particular its historical illustrative value as part of a country estate, and its aesthetic value.

Listed buildings and NDHA at Saint Hill Green

Saint Hill Green is located a short distance to the south of the main entrance to Saint Hill Manor, along Saint Hill Road. There are a number of listed buildings grouped around the Green- these are early 19th one storey ashlar faced cottages, and include Thetania (no.1 Saint Hill Green), Vittoria Cottage (3) and 4 Saint Hill Green, and 6 and 7 Saint Hill Green. The buildings are similar in period and style and may have been constructed as part of a small planned development, possibly by the Saint Hill estate. They are likely to be considered to possess architectural value based on their design, construction and craftsmanship, historical illustrative value as good examples of rural Sussex cottages of their period, possibly forming part of a planned country estate development, and aesthetic value. They also possess group value with each other and possibly (depending on confirmation of the manner of their development) with other surviving historical buildings within the Saint Hill estate, including the Manor.

Also forming part of this grouping, but not listed, is Gabriels, a further stone built building which was constructed (from historical map regression) in the mid 19th century or earlier as a Boys and Girls School. Again, it is interesting to speculate whether this may have been part of a planned development by the Saint Hill estate. In any case, the building, which retains a number of attractive period features, is of some age and character, and has group value with the adjacent listed cottages, which appear to be similar in date. I would regard it as a building of historical and architectural interest within the local context, i.e. as a non-designated heritage asset.

This building would appear to possess architectural interest, historical illustrative value as a good example, in the local context, of a small early-mid 19th century rural school, possibly part of a planned estate development, and aesthetic value. As above it also has group value with the listed cottages around Saint Hill Green, and potentially with other surviving historical buildings within the Saint Hill Estate.

The surviving rural setting of these buildings, including the generally rural character of the approach to Saint Hill Green along Saint Hill Road, makes a strong positive contribution to their significances and how these are appreciated,

in particular those parts of their significances which are drawn from historical illustrative and aesthetic values.

- Rockwood Park

Rockwood Park, formerly known as Fonthill, and originally as Rockwood, is a substantial building located opposite to the northern part of the site, on the eastern side of Saint Hill Road. The building appears to have been originally constructed as a country residence named Rockwood around the mid- 19th century. A large extension to the northwest was added in the later part of that century, and in 1886 the house was converted for use as an upmarket preparatory school, and was renamed Fonthill. The school closed in 1985 and the building is now understood to be under the ownership of IAS.

The building has considerable character, and retains numerous period features including (particularly to the earlier wing) elevations enlivened with gabled porches, projecting canted bays with pierced parapets, triple Venetian windows with Gothic arched heads and drip moulds, projecting oriel windows, and a small turret.

Based on its age and its surviving architectural character, I would consider that Rockwood Park should be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset (NDHA). I would include within this designation a small building surviving to the road frontage just to the north west of the house, which would appear to be a former stables or similar, as well as the former school chapel which survives as a residential conversion a short distance to the south east within this designation, although this latter building is not in itself as affected by the proposal as the former house/school and stables. All three buildings will possess architectural value based on their design, construction and craftsmanship, as well as historical illustrative value as good examples in the local context of 19th century buildings associated with an upmarket preparatory school created from a country house of some pretension, and aesthetic value.

Although I have not had access to the property from images available on the internet and aerial imagery it appears that Rockwood Park sits in landscaped grounds (although these have been impinged upon by extensive car parking to the frontage). These will contribute positively to the appreciation of its significance as a former country house/prep school. The surviving wider rural setting of the house and associated buildings will also make a positive contribution in this respect. Juhring field, being the greater part of the setting to the east and southeast of the former house and stables, will be of particular importance in this respect.

Impact of the pre-application proposal

The proposed works to the two fields are different in nature.

Juhring Field

In respect of Juhring Field, the proposed introduction of car parking throughout the space will have a marked impact on its character, which will be altered from an open, essentially rural field to a partly hard surfaced car park of 760 car spaces. Although it is noted that the majority of the field would be cell web rather than asphalt, the hard surfaced area is quite extensive, is located adjacent to the road and to the main entrance to Saint Hill as well as the proposed altered vehicle entrance from this road, and it's the urbanising impact of the hard surfaced car park will be exacerbated by the provision of lighting columns, e.v. charging points and other paraphernalia. The plastic cellweb structure although it is designed to allow grass to grow through it is also an artificial material and is likely to have an adverse visual impact on the rural character of the field, particularly when the grass is mown short for events and/or during prolonged dry periods. The adverse impact on this part of the field will be intensified by what appears on plan to be permanent hard landscaped divisions between the parking lanes. It is not clear how individual bays and/or directions of travel are to be demarcated, and it would be helpful if this could be further clarified.

In terms of the lighting, this appears to be proposed only to the permanent parking area and consists of a number of 6m high columns as well as combined e.v./lighting pillars. From the submitted lighting strategy the resulting level of illumination of the area appears fairly intensive, and will have a further urbanising impact on the character of the field, particularly at night. In terms of understanding the visual impact of the fittings themselves in daytime, it would be useful if these could be clearly and individually marked on the submitted landscaping plan, with accompanying notes showing the appearance of each fitting type in the key. This will allow a clearer understanding of the cumulative appearance of the various works within the area.

The proposed new WC block within the field is centrally located between the hard and cell-webbed surfaced areas. This is a relatively prominent position and will further detract from the currently rural character of the space.

The alterations to the existing vehicle access to the northern end of the road frontage include removal of adjacent trees and hedging to allow for improved visibility splays. Any significant loss of vegetation to either side of the entrance, or enlargement of the access itself will be considered to adversely affect the rural character of Saint Hill and the positive contribution this makes to the settings of the above-mentioned heritage assets. However, the information in front of us is currently insufficient to allow a fully informed consideration of this aspect of the proposals. I would suggest that the applicant should be requested to provide fully detailed existing and proposed plans of the entrance layout and adjacent frontage, detailing any changes to the extent and nature of the access and its surfacing, as well as any vegetation which will be lost. Existing and proposed elevations of this part of the road frontage should also be provided.

In addition, the proposed hard surfaced access road across the northern side of the field will further detract from its currently rural character.

Further to the above physical alterations to the space and the associated visual impacts, there will also be a marked increase in noise and business to the area, particularly when the temporary car parking is also in use. This will exacerbate the harm caused to the rural character of the setting of the affected assets.

Therefore although I note the revisions which have been made to the scheme including the reduction in the area of hard landscaping and the introduction of some areas of planting, it remains my opinion that in combination, these works will remove and reverse the positive impact which Juhring Field currently makes, through setting, to the significances of the various heritage assets identified above.

Although without the above mentioned further information it is not possible to comment very precisely on the level of harm that will be caused (which will vary in any case from asset to asset), I would suggest that in all cases the harm caused to the designated assets will be less than substantial, such that the balancing exercise set out in paragraph 215 of the NPPF will apply, bearing in mind also the requirement of paragraph 212 that: *'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 (and the more important the asset, the greater the weight should be). This is irrespective of whether any potential harm amounts to substantial harm, total loss or less than substantial harm to its significance.'* In respect of the NDHAs, paragraph 216 of the NPPF applies.

Broadly speaking, I would expect the impact on each asset of this aspect of the scheme to be as follows (subject to adjustment on receipt of the above-mentioned further information):

- Saint Hill Manor- Less than substantial harm, at the mid-high end of that scale. Although there may not be direct intervisibility between the house and the field, the field forms a significant part of the wider rural setting within which the Manor is appreciated, and particularly affects the character of the approach to it via the historic entrance and driveway through the grounds which are directly adjacent to the site. There are also a number of viewpoints within the grounds from which views of both house and site can be appreciated (albeit looking in opposing directions), the impact on which will directly affect the verdant context within which the listed building is currently appreciated.
- North Lodge- Less than substantial harm, at the higher end of that scale. Juhring Field is directly adjacent to the Lodge and provides a very significant part of its setting. There is clear and direct intervisibility between the site and the Lodge. The impact on the context within which this building is appreciated will be fundamentally altered by the current proposal from a discernible surviving, albeit altered, country estate, to a much more suburban context. This harm is exacerbated by the placement of the hard landscaped permanent parking area and associated works including lighting and the WC block directly adjacent to the Lodge.
- Listed buildings and NDHA around Saint Hill Green- Listed buildings, less than substantial harm, at the lower end of that scale. For the NDHA, which I would

consider (based on the limited information in front of us) to be of a moderate level of interest in the local context, again a low level of harm. The impact on all of these assets is to the character of the approach to Saint Hill Green along Saint Hill Road. The application site is a significant in scale, directly adjacent to Saint Hill Road and would be fundamentally altered in character from rural to suburban; however is at a short distance from Saint Hill Green with no intervisibility between the two. Again, the placement of the permanent car parking directly adjacent to Saint Hill exacerbates this harm. The further information regarding the alterations to the northern vehicle entrance will be relevant here.

- Rockwood Park. A high level of harm to an NDHA of a mid level of interest in the local context. The application site is directly opposite the house at Rockwood Park and diagonally opposite the former stables. It forms a very significant part of the setting of these buildings, with direct intervisibility between the two and a strong impact on the character of the immediate approach to the NDHA along Saint Hill Road. The transformation of the field to an extensive car park will have a significant adverse impact on the setting of these buildings. Again, the placement of the permanent car parking is relevant, as will be the alterations to the northern vehicle entrance, which is directly opposite Rockwood Park.

Hobbs Field

This field is set away from Saint Hill Road and screened from it by woodland and existing buildings around Saint Hill Manor. I would therefore not consider that the proposed works here will materially affect the settings majority of the assets described above, although they will impact on the setting of the Manor itself, which is only a short distance to the east. Although direct intervisibility will be limited, the field has a fairly significant impact on the character of the setting of the Manor complex and its immediate grounds, and will contribute strongly to visitors' impression of the rural landscape within which the Manor currently sits.

The proposed works within this field are less intensive than for Juhring field, but will undoubtedly affect its currently verdant and largely undeveloped character. The introduction of the hard surfaced access road, large areas of cell-web surfacing, concrete ring beams and pads for the erection of a large marquee, as well as new built form consisting of a WC block, generator and substation to the eastern side of the field, and the partial regrading of the field, will have a potentially significant cumulative impact on the character of the space, even when the marquee is not present. In combination, these works will detract from the historic appearance of the area as an agricultural field- it will become quite apparently an event space.

This will detract from the positive contribution which the site currently makes through setting to Saint Hill Manor. Again, I would place the harm caused as less than substantial, at the mid-range of that scale.

Cumulatively, the impact of the works to both fields on Saint Hill Manor will therefore be at the mid-high end of the less than substantial scale.

As submitted, the proposal will also be considered contrary to the requirements of District Plan Policy DP34 (Listed Buildings and Other Heritage Assets) which states that development will be required to protect listed buildings and their settings.

Thanks,

Emily

Please note that this advice is given at Officer level only and is without prejudice to the formal decision of the District Council.

Submit your planning application online.
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

Emily Wade Ma MSc
Conservation Officer
Planning Services
Tel: +44 (0)1444 477385
emily.wade@midsussex.gov.uk <http://www.midsussex.gov.uk>



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