



To: **Quinn Estates**
From: **[REDACTED] Icen Projects**
Date: **11 June 2020**
Title: **Assessment of Heritage Considerations, Land at Elm Tree Farm, Sellindge**

1. The Site known as Land at Elm Tree Farm forms an area of relatively flat land north of the A20, being largely made up of a combination of agricultural fields and utilitarian farm buildings associated with Elm Tree Farm. Modern extensions to Sellindge west of Swan Way and along the A20 Ashford Road ensure that the area is influenced, in character terms, by the presence of built development. This is particularly clear from the A20, where the Site's frontage is flanked by buildings.

a. Heritage Assets: Significance and Setting

2. Within the vicinity of the Site are three heritage assets, Elm Tree Farm House and its associated Barn, and Lees Cottages (all Grade II listed).
3. Elm Tree Farm House has the appearance of an eighteenth or nineteenth century house, but appears to be earlier in its original date of construction; it is notable externally for a near-symmetrical eastern front, and two very large flanking chimney stacks. The southern flue, and the rear catslide roof, of the building are perceptible from the road to the south, but closer to the building, it is better appreciated for its typical Kentish form, with a hanging tile upper storey. The building is also appreciated alongside the associated Grade II listed Barn, a sixteenth century building with a brick and timber-framed and weather boarded form, and a large plain tiled roof that descends nearly to ground level to the west. These two listed buildings viewed together form a strong group, and evidence the long-term presence of a farm on this Site, which historic maps show had a small, tightly formed yard between the house and barn, and was associated with a further remaining L-shaped building just north of the Barn.
4. The assets derive significance from their historic interest, given their age and the evidence that it provides of the presence and practice of historic farming in this part of Kent. Both buildings have been used consistently, and show evidence of continual change over time, and therefore also have archaeological and further historic interest. Finally, the buildings have artistic interest for their attractive vernacular form, which gives them a pleasing rural aesthetic.

5. This yard and grouping forms the immediate setting of the two assets, a setting which experienced considerable change over time, most notably through the extension of the operative farm complex northwards, and the introduction of more recent housing into the vicinity. This complex is on a massive scale when compared to the historic farmyard, and while functionally associated with the listed buildings, it has created a significant visual intrusion into their setting, screening them entirely from view from the north and northeast, including from much of the PROW (HE295) to the east of the farm. The scale and appearance of these buildings detracts from the setting of the listed buildings in our view. Elsewhere, historic maps indicate that an orchard stood to the west of the house, towards Moorstock Road, and this too has been lost, with part of this area being turned into a larger agricultural field. There are agricultural fields within the wider setting of the farmhouse that appear to be associated with the farm historically, but most of these are now detached from the listed buildings themselves. Today, the two buildings appear only as distant glimpsed features from the A20; as a jumble of historic rooflines, from part of Moorstock Road; and in a narrow view from the PROW, between the later bungalow and barns. In these views, the buildings are seen alongside agricultural fields, but always with development scattered throughout, either in the form of large barns or housing; the proximity of this asset to the settlement of Sellindge is always appreciable.
6. Lees Cottages, meanwhile, are a small row of individual cottages that appear to have once formed a single house; certainly, on historic maps, the building appears as a single stand-alone building surrounded by fields, suggesting that it was in single occupancy. It appears to be sixteenth century in date originally, with evidence of seventeenth century additions, and presents as a humble whitewashed agricultural building, informal in its arrangement, with one full storey, and another within its hipped roof. It has been extended over time, and has, for example, a modern conservatory on its western side. The significance of this building lies in its historic and artistic interest, predominantly, as an example of a vernacular rural building of the sixteenth century, with a pleasing aesthetic. Unlike Elm Tree Farm, it does have a clear legible connection with the land surrounding it, but provides evidence of people living on the land outside of more formal farmstead settings.
7. The setting of Lees Cottages has changed considerably over time, and it now sits at the northern end of Downs Way, a 1970s housing estate. It is largely concealed from view from the south accordingly, and as the development is also situated east of Downs Way, is bounded entirely to the south by modern development. To the north, the land is more open, with the land within the Site currently being formed of agricultural farmland. This open land, which is more likely to be directly functionally associated with the formalised Elm Tree Farm, appears to have only a secondary association with the remaining agricultural land surrounding it, as it provides a broadly agricultural context for the building. However, it is, as a result of the close proximity of Downs Way, experienced, at all times, in the context of modern development.

b. Managing Heritage Impact through Mitigation

8. The presence of the identified heritage assets within the vicinity of the Site should not, in my view, act as a reason why the land should not be developed and should not be allocated for development in a Development Plan. It is entirely possible, in my view, to mitigate any potential harms to such a degree that they are removed entirely or can be considered to be fairly balanced against public benefits, including heritage benefits.
9. In the case of Elm Tree Farm House and Barn, it is clear that a significant residential scheme could be designed in such a way as to not only avoid harm to heritage significance, but to also facilitate an opportunity for the enhancement of the significance of these assets. As has been outlined above, these assets are predominantly screened and separated from the wider agricultural land to the north and east by the presence of modern farm buildings; this screening is such that the land north and east of these buildings could be developed, in my view, without impacting on experiences of this pair of assets, or understandings of their development as part of a historic farmstead. Furthermore, the opportunity to remove the modern farm buildings, and to develop a more subservient, appropriately detailed, form of development on this land.
10. In association with some wider landscape buffering, the opportunity exists to re-establish a visual link between the House and Barn and the agricultural land to the north of the farm, enhancing their significance. More immediately, opportunities exist to reintroduce a historic orchard to the west of the Farm House. These enhancements could be brought forward within the context of a development that also looked to preserve the most important views of the House, including some from the A20.
11. The implantation of the package of mitigation measures identified above demonstrates how development of the landholding can avoid heritage harm or suitably mitigate any impact to secure heritage improvements. It is therefore apparent that the presence of these Listed Buildings should not act as a constraint to the land being allocated for development.
12. Additionally, it has been outlined above that Lees Cottages has only a secondary relationship with the open agricultural land to the north, and views of the asset that exist across agricultural fields predominantly act as a means for allowing its rural, vernacular architecture, to be viewed and appreciated. There is the potential, through the allocation of the subject land, to achieve a buffer of open land around the northern side of Lees Cottages, preserving some of the openness in which it can be appreciated from the north and to preserve views of the asset; in these terms, the suggestion by Aecom that any development within the vicinity of the Cottages should be 'at some remove' from the asset can be satisfied. In my view, given the extensive change to this heritage asset's setting to date, and the fact that the agricultural land to the south makes only a limited contribution to the asset's significance, it is possible to mitigate any potential harm to this heritage asset by preserving these views through the retention of a landscape buffer around the cottages, and it does not provide an in principle reason why this land should not be allocated for development.
13. I would conclude that there are no heritage reasons why this Site should not be allocated because of the presence of heritage assets, and would note, instead, that opportunities arise,

through its allocation, to enhance the significance of the two listed buildings at Elm Tree Farm by introducing enhancements to their setting.