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DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT AND PLANNING STATEMENT

Planning Application Document
Falconhurst Barns
Falconhurst, Markbeech, Edenbridge Kent TN8 5NR

January 2016
Version 1.5

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Surrounding area from Google Maps

*Falconhurst Barns
View from Driveway towards
Entrance/Exit (right).*



Introduction

The owners of the Falconhurst Estate wish to repurpose and repair Falconhurst Barns, a discrete set of unused and delapidated agricultural buildings, as a wedding venue.

The site is in the Falconhurst Estate which is a large family owned country estate of pasture and woodland in West Kent.

Falconhurst Barns are part of Falconhurst Farm in the Parish of Markbeech on the outskirts of Markbeech Village and are accessed from Cowden Pound Road.

The barns are part of a complex of nineteenth century farm buildings, leading to the main house, Falconhurst. The buildings are not listed or in a Conservation Area but are in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and of architectural interest in their own right. None of the adjacent buildings are listed but the area is all designated Green Belt Land.

The barns and stables are charming examples of their type with local Wealden Sandstone foundations, red brick floors, timber frame with oak weather boarding, some Flemish bond red brick walls and red clay tile roofs. The barns and associated buildings have evolved over time and have been redundant since the 1960s. At various times the buildings have been added to or amended on an ad hoc basis.

One of the main income streams of the Falconhurst Estate is a tenanted dairy farm. There is, however, a very difficult dairy market in the UK creating an urgent need for diversification on the Estate. Utilising the redundant barns as a venue will create a business in an area the Estate has experience in, and will enable the Estate to diversify.

Falconhurst Estate has been holding operas, jazz and weddings in the gardens since 1996. The weddings have proved an enormous success. They have provided revenue not only to maintain the grounds at Falconhurst but also help support Holy Trinity Church in Markbeech and local businesses such as The Kentish Horse, bed & breakfast, photographers, florists etc. This clear need has led to the engagement of Miller Architects as specialist Conservation Architects and RIBA Chartered Practice to develop a realistic, sustainable and appropriate design solution.

The proposal for the use of the barns allows the Estate to effectively manage parking, noise and any amenity impact on immediate neighbours in Markbeech Village.

The venue would be for 80 guests with separate ancillary residential accommodation for the wedding party and some of their guests.



Falconhurst Barns
View from the Pond



Design

The barns are part of a collection of nineteenth century farm buildings on a drive leading to the main house.

Much of the site, and including the buildings, is hidden from public view from Cowden Pound Road by established vegetation. The barns and stables are charming examples of their type with local Wealden Sandstone foundations, red brick floors, structural timber frame with oak weather boarding, some Flemish bond red brick walls and red clay tile roofs.

The barns and associated buildings have evolved over time and have been redundant since the 1960s. At various times the buildings have been added to or amended on an ad hoc basis. The only section proposed to be demolished is the steel framed, asbestos clad 1950s barn, which is in very poor condition and architecturally detracts from the site. This is to be replaced with a timber framed, oak clad barn, carefully designed to complement the existing architecture.

The design as a Venue has been developed over two years in close consultation with Sevenoaks Planning Department. Great importance has been given to preserving and complementing the architectural quality of the existing Victorian buildings whilst removing some of the less attractive post war modifications. Careful attention has been given to keeping within the existing building footprint. Where an extension is proposed to the rear, it is kept to a minimum size (approx 17% increase in floor space), single storey, against the tree line, and is designed to blend into the existing buildings using the existing palette of materials. The Venue is designed to be accessible to people with disabilities, including wheelchair users. The Wedding Venue and grounds, including the ancillary Bride, Groom and guest accommodation are all wheelchair accessible.

External Lighting has been kept to a minimum, with low level lighting providing the bare essential lighting for health and safety so people can see to get to their cars. Light disturbance to wildlife has been minimum in line with The Bat Conservation Trust's Bats and Lighting guidance.



The Stables



The Small House



The Farm House



Access

Provision and accommodation for people with disabilities has been carefully considered at all stages of the design development of the wedding Venue. The venue can cater for a wide range of disabilities both for those getting married and their guests.

The client already hosts marquee weddings and has a Management Programme catering for people with disabilities. The existing plan would be expanded and adapted. Access is considered at all levels from the website, to the arranging of braille menus and service sheets on request, provision of hearing induction loops and carefully designed acoustic system to assist in the clarity of sound and speech. Guide dogs for those with hearing or visual disabilities can be accommodated with ease. It is likely that the venue will be able to cater for a significantly higher level of disability than many other venues as it is on one level, well laid out and well managed. Tactile maps of the venue and braille room name signs would be provided. Lavatories with facilities for people with disabilities have been proposed in both the main venue and accommodation.

Parking: ample parking provision has been proposed with 2 dedicated disabled parking bays immediately next to the wedding venue and further parking available adjacent to the guest accommodation.

Level access and wide doors: have been designed throughout, with very few areas of the venue and landscape accessible by steps only, and of these none are main spaces or areas.

Landscaping: the hard landscaping is level and tactile, with few steps and plenty of visual contrast. The quality and carefully selected species of planting proposed will give those with poor eyesight a wonderful sense of the smells of the country side.

Guest/Groom/bride accommodation: careful thought has been given to make sure that a full range of disabilities has been catered for thought-out the venue, the accommodation and the landscaping.

Planning Statement

Context

1. Falconhurst is a long-established family-owned estate comprising some 280ha of pasture and woodland on the outskirts of Markbeech village. The estate is focussed around a substantial country house, Falconhurst, and includes a variety of associated buildings of an agricultural nature, many of which are no longer required for such purposes.
2. The estate lies within the High Weald AONB, but none of the buildings are Listed or within a conservation area. Nevertheless, the property as a whole is considered to be a well-preserved example of the type of country estate established on the outskirts of London by successful lawyers, bankers, politicians and merchants in the mid nineteenth century. Many of these have been broken up or have otherwise disappeared over the years, hence Falconhurst, still in the ownership of the same family which developed it, represents a comparatively rare and complete survival of a historically significant and visually important style of country estate.
3. The estate lies wholly within the Metropolitan Green Belt, where extremely restrictive planning policies are applicable. It also lies within the High Weald AONB, a national landscape designation requiring the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty.
4. The present proposal seeks to diversify the range of activities on the estate through the re-use of redundant agricultural buildings as a venue for wedding ceremonies, receptions and similar events. Further details of the history of the estate and the way in which the proposal is to be managed are set out at Annex A.

Pre-application engagement

5. This application follows a series of pre-application discussions with officers of Sevenoaks District Council, during which the scale and extent of the venue has been substantially reduced and various design options have been reviewed and agreed in principle. The process has included:
 - a. A preliminary submission in November 2013, followed by a site visit and officer response in January 2014
 - b. A more detailed submission in June 2014, setting out various layout and access options, all based on a venue capacity of up to 120 people; followed by a further site visit and an officer response in January 2015
 - c. A submission in March 2015 of a specific proposal responding to the concerns raised in the January officer reply, in particular reducing the scale of the scheme to a maximum of 80 guests; followed by an officer response in April 2015 indicating that subject to a number of detailed concerns being satisfied, "I would be in a position to support the proposal for a change of use ... to a wedding venue. I have discussed the proposal at length with my team leader and we are agreed that the change of use of a limited number of residential units on the site to ancillary wedding accommodation would also be acceptable as they would remain within some type of residential use, albeit in connection with the wedding venue use."
6. Pre-application discussions have also been held with statutory consultees, including the Highway Authority and the Council's Environmental Health Officer.
7. In order to inform and obtain the views of local residents, the applicants invited 80 of the closest neighbours, and members of Hever and Cowden Parish Councils, to an exhibition and presentation on the site, on the evening of Friday 16 October 2015. The exhibition remained open on the following day. The event was attended by 59 people and is fully documented at Annex B.
8. The process of preparing the application has therefore been fully in accordance with the advice of NPPF (paras 188-191) on pre-application engagement and front-loading.

Proposal

9. The proposal is to make use of the group of buildings located just inside the main entrance to Falconhurst as a venue offering comprehensive facilities for wedding parties and similar events, with up to 80 guests.
10. The overall layout and the details of each building are shown on the submitted drawings: the principal features of the venue will be
 - a. wedding ceremonies and receptions to be held in a conversion and restoration of the existing barn on the west side of the entrance drive, the building to be extended on its north side and linked to the existing garage building to provide service, storage, catering and other ancillary facilities
 - b. the wedding building to be closely associated with open areas to the west, including landscaped lawns and lake
 - c. a small “groom’s house” to be formed by conversion and restoration of the existing stable building to the south of this area
 - d. accommodation for a bridal party to be formed within the existing “Small House” on the southern edge of the group of buildings
 - e. additional overnight accommodation to be provided with the existing “Farm House” on the eastern side of the group
 - f. the existing access from Cowden Pound Road to be used for all vehicles, with the principal parking area to be located on the south side of the venue; this provides up to 20 car parking spaces, with additional spaces provided close to the Bride’s House, two spaces for disabled persons adjacent to the wedding barn, with two additional spaces alongside, for use by the registrars during wedding ceremonies, and afterwards as taxi pick-up points; overflow car parking is available further south on the existing hardstanding area close to the ruined part of the main house
 - g. the whole site to be landscaped to form an attractive self-contained venue in accordance with policy requirements relating to the location within an AONB and incorporating advice on ecological issues.
11. Management and organisation of the venue will be undertaken by the applicants and their immediate family, building on their experience of marquee wedding events over the last few years. Promotion of the venue will incorporate reference to local businesses and suppliers, including caterers, photographers, musicians, florists, taxis, B&Bs operating in the immediate area. A full description of the proposals for managing the venue is provided at Annex B.
12. The existing buildings are a charming mixture of styles and constructions, starting with the Victorian timber framed barn on a Wealden Sandstone base, with sandstone walls and brick and sandstone out buildings, and a twentieth century steel frame and asbestos roofed infill. The approach has been to retain all the elements of architectural interest but to demolish and rebuild the less sympathetic steel structures with materials more in keeping with the original building, but on broadly the same footprint.
13. Subsequent sections of this document review design and planning issues in the context of the planning policies which are material to the consideration of the application. We also refer to the conclusions of the additional specialist reports which have informed the design and layout, and which accompany the application in accordance with local authority validation requirements:
 - a. Transport statement
 - b. Ecological reports relating to bats, and to reptiles
 - c. Structural survey reports
 - d. Acoustic consultant’s report
 - e. Energy consultant’s report

Relevant planning policies

14. Since the proposal is for re-use and extension of existing buildings in the Green Belt, paras 89 and 90 of the NPPF are of particular relevance:
 - a. The construction of new buildings is inappropriate development in the Green Belt, but the list of exceptions includes “the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building” (para 89)
 - b. Other forms of development which are not inappropriate development include “the re-use of buildings provided that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction”, and they “preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it” (para 90)
15. The NPPF also encourages growth and expansion of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new ones; it also encourages the development and diversification of agricultural and land-based rural businesses (para 28)
16. The development plan comprises the Sevenoaks Core Strategy (CS) adopted in February 2011, and the Sevenoaks Allocations and Development Management Plan (ADMP) adopted in February 2015.
17. Core Strategy policies relevant to this application are:
 - a. SP1, requiring all new development to be designed to a high standard and to respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated
 - b. SP11, seeking conservation and enhancement of biodiversity
 - c. LO8, entitled the Countryside and the Rural Economy: this confirms that the extent of the Green Belt is to be maintained, and requires development in the AONB to conserve and enhance its distinctive character; Development that supports the maintenance and diversification of the rural economy and the vitality of local communities will be supported, provided it is compatible with policies for protecting the Green Belt and the AONB. Supporting para 4.5.32 indicates that particular encouragement will be given to business developments that re-use existing buildings.
18. Relevant ADMP policies are:
 - a. EN1, which enlarges and elaborates on SP1 above, setting out specific design principles for all forms of development
 - b. EN2, requiring the amenity of existing and future occupiers to be safeguarded in terms of noise, vibration, odour, air pollution, activity or vehicle movements, overlooking or visual intrusion
 - c. EN4, requiring the character, appearance and setting of heritage assets, including the AONB, to be conserved or enhanced
 - d. EN5, confirming that Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings will be given the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty; and that proposals within the AONB will be permitted where the form, scale, materials and design would conserve and enhance the character of the landscape
 - e. EN6, setting out principles relating to proposals for lighting that affect the outdoor environment
 - f. EN7, dealing with noise pollution, and requiring that development should not have an unacceptable impact when considered against the indoor and outdoor acoustic environment
 - g. GB7, dealing with the re-use of buildings within the Green Belt, and requiring that:
 - i. the proposed new use, along with any associated use of land surrounding the building, will not have a materially greater impact than the present use on the openness of the Green Belt or harm the existing character of the area; and
 - ii. the applicant can demonstrate through a detailed structural survey and method statement that the buildings are of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete re-construction that would detract from their original character.
 - h. GB8, confirming that extensions to non-residential buildings in the Green Belt will be permitted, provided the design and volume of the proposed extension would be proportional and subservient to the ‘original’ building and would not materially harm the openness of the Green Belt
 - i. H4, seeking the re-use and protection of the existing housing stock
 - j. T1, indicating that all developments will be required to mitigate any adverse travel impacts, including their impact on congestion and safety, environmental impact, such as noise and tranquillity, pollution and impact on amenity and health.
 - k. T2, indicating that vehicle parking provision should be in accordance with the advice of KCC parking standards, subject to the proviso that the Council may depart from established maxima or minima standards in order to take account of specific local circumstances that may require a higher or lower level of parking provision

19. Also of relevance is the Supplementary Planning Document adopted in February 2015, setting out more detailed guidance on the interpretation of policies in the Core Strategy and the ADMP relating to the Green Belt.
20. The planning issues to be addressed in the assessment of this proposal may be grouped under the following headings:
- Green Belt implications
 - Visual considerations – buildings and landscape
 - Diversification of the rural economy
 - Residential amenity, noise etc
 - Biodiversity
 - Transport and highways
24. In terms of the level of activity involved as a result of the proposal, the venue is to be limited to weddings involving up to 80 people/guests, which represents a substantial reduction from the scale which was initially discussed at the initial pre-application stages. As indicated elsewhere, the applicant's experience of arranging wedding receptions of a similar scale indicates a general requirement for up to 27 car parking spaces together with appropriate bus or coach parking and provision for taxi pick-up and drop-off. We therefore conclude that the overall scale of activity associated with a venue of this nature will not be so great as to represent harm to the open character of the Green Belt or to the character of the area more generally.
25. As far as extensions to the existing buildings are concerned, the table below sets out details of the existing and proposed size of each building, by reference to both floorspace and volume

Green Belt

21. The application proposes re-use of existing buildings and an extension to one building, together with additional car parking areas associated with the new use: as far as the Green Belt is concerned, the key question is whether or not this causes prejudice to the openness of the Green Belt.
22. The principal feature of the overall wedding venue proposal is that it is formed within a compact group of closely related existing buildings, such that all relevant activities are confined to a relatively small area within the larger, much more open framework of the Falconhurst estate. The existing buildings form a coherent group, the essential relationship between them is maintained and enhanced, and the related car parking areas are closely connected to them within a comprehensively landscaped setting. Thus, the venue does not extend into wholly undeveloped open areas or the open countryside more generally; the landscape scheme ensures that the compactness of the existing group is retained and limited to the essential requirements of the venue, and at the same time the wider and more open landscape setting remains unaffected. We are therefore able to conclude that in overall terms the proposal will have no material effect on the openness of the Green Belt.
23. Looking at the relevant policies in more detail, we consider firstly those relating to the re-use of existing buildings. The structural survey reports confirm that while the barn, garages and stables have many defects, they are all of permanent and substantial construction and are capable of conversion without major or complete re-construction. The parking areas associated with the new use are in a well-related location and proportionate in terms of size.

Area	Floorspace: sq.m		Volume: cu.m	
	existing	proposed	existing	proposed
Barn & Garage <i>Wedding Venue</i>	315	440	1278	1810
Stables <i>Groom's House</i>	111	111	384	384
Small House <i>Bridal Party</i>	359	359	1312	1312
Farm House <i>Guest accommodation</i>	194	194	715	715
TOTAL	979	1104	3689	4221

26. Three of the four buildings will remain unchanged in overall size, and only the barn will be extended, to connect with the garage block, in order to form the main venue building. As is apparent from the submitted drawings, the extension is required primarily in order to provide service, toilet and related ancillary facilities. Taking the site as a whole, there is an increase in building volume of 532cu.m, or approximately 14% of the existing building volume. In terms of size, location and visual appearance, this extension is visually subservient to the existing buildings and represents an addition which is proportionate in scale and design.
27. Overall, therefore, we consider that the proposal satisfies all the relevant criteria of the NPPF in paras 89 and 90, as well as those of ADMP policies GB7 and GB8, in terms of the size and scale of development, the re-use of existing buildings, the overall level of activity and a proportionate increase in building volume. Consequently we conclude that the proposal represents development in the Green Belt which is not inappropriate, and therefore there is no basis for a refusal of permission on Green Belt grounds.

Visual considerations

28. The architectural treatment proposes sensitive restoration to a group of attractive traditional farm buildings in a manner which maintains their character and respects their agricultural history and their rural setting. At the same time, it is proposed that the overall group be subject to landscape treatment which respects and enhances the immediate setting within the wider context of the AONB.
29. The application site has an extremely low level of visibility and the buildings are neither prominent within the wider landscape nor visible at all from nearby publicly accessible locations including local footpaths and bridleways.
30. Hence we conclude that there will be no perceptible effect on the character and appearance of the AONB, and that the proposal satisfies all the requirements of policies SP1 and EN1 as regards buildings, and those of EN4 and EN5 as regards the natural landscape.

Rural economy

31. The proposal will provide employment opportunities, both on the application site itself in terms of management and maintenance of the facilities, as well as in the wider area in terms of opportunities for local businesses contributing to the activities taking place. These are considered further in the document at Annex B.
32. We conclude that this is entirely consistent with the aims of strategic policy LO8 to support the maintenance and diversification of the rural economy and the vitality of local communities, especially in a re-used building.

Residential amenity

33. Existing residential properties within the application site will remain in residential use, but will form ancillary parts of the wedding venue providing accommodation for bride, groom and other guests. As such, therefore, there are no implications for amenity of these properties.
34. Beyond the application site, there is a very small number of residential properties in the vicinity, with the nearest being approximately 115m away. None have direct views of the application site.
35. Concern was expressed by local residents at the pre-application stage about noise and traffic issues. The application proposals have taken such considerations into account in the proposed layout and management of the site, such that amplified music will be contained within the venue building and will required to cease by 11.30pm. All activity on the site will close by midnight. Details of acoustic attenuation are set out on the submitted drawings and within the specialist report accompanying the application.

36. Assessments of traffic generation are set out in the accompanying transport statement: this confirms that adequate arrangements have been made for all types of vehicles within the application site. The comprehensive nature of the proposed venue, including residential accommodation for guests, ensures that there are significant opportunities for guests to stay overnight, thus reducing the likely levels of late night traffic.
37. In the light of the above considerations we conclude that the amenities of residents in the area will not be adversely affected, and that the requirements of policies EN2 and EN7 are therefore satisfied.
38. Policy EN6 sets out criteria relating to outdoor lighting, with respect to local amenity, impacts on the night sky and on the character of the area. The nature of the proposed use requires a certain level of outdoor lighting in the interests of safety, security and effective management, and indicative lighting proposals are shown on the drawings. It is proposed that these be subject to further detailed submission at a later stage, but there is no reason to expect that there will be any difficulty in providing a suitable scheme which satisfies the policy requirements.

Biodiversity

39. Two ecological reports are provided and we note their conclusions relating to implications for bats and for reptiles. The remediation measures recommended within these documents are incorporated into the scheme and shown on the submitted drawings.
40. We conclude that the requirements of policy SP11 to conserve and enhance biodiversity are satisfied.

Transport

41. We note the conclusions of the submitted transport statement that all material highway safety, parking and access requirements are satisfied, in accordance with policies T1 and T2.

Conclusion

42. Overall, we conclude that the application proposal is consistent with all material requirements of the development plan and the NPPF, hence we respectfully request that permission be granted.
43. We confirm that the proposal is put forward on the basis of a maximum total attendance of 80 persons within the venue (excluding catering and other staff, celebrant and registrar), and that an appropriately worded planning condition to this effect will be acceptable.
44. We also confirm that amplified music will be required to cease at 11.30pm and that the venue will close by midnight each night. An appropriately worded planning condition to this effect will also be acceptable.

Graham P House MSc MRTPI
Chartered Town Planner
December 2015

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Annex A:

Management of Falconhurst Estate
and proposed venue

History of Falconhurst Estate

Falconhurst Estate is a long-established family-owned and run country estate comprising 700 acres of pasture and woodland.

In 1850 a successful lawyer, John Chetwynd-Talbot, held a vision of creating a proper village out of what was then an old Kentish hamlet. It included building a grand country mansion, founding a church and establishing a school. Sadly his life was cut short by tuberculosis, but his wife, Caroline, continued his work and saw the project through. Today the estate is run by John and Caroline's great-great grandson (the applicant for this proposal and his wife).

Falconhurst Estate today

The principal activities of Falconhurst Estate are organic dairy farming and the letting of cottages.

The family endeavours to preserve and enhance the natural and built environment of Falconhurst Estate through the pursuit and implementation of sustainable operations. An example of this was when, 15 years ago, the decision was taken to make the dairy operation organic with the hope of providing a more stable farming operation.

Unfortunately dairy farming, whether organic or not, continues to suffer as an industry. Farmers are increasingly diversifying into non-agricultural activities to supplement their incomes to ensure the viability of their farm enterprises. Falconhurst Estate is no different and diversification into other activities has been growing.



Diversification to date

In addition to the current organic dairy farming and cottage letting activities, the applicants operate a number of diversification activities on the Estate.

For the past 20 years, the applicants have organised a limited number (no more than 28 in any calendar year) of diversification events including community and charity events such as Edenbridge Music & Arts Trust open air opera and jazz performances, One to One social events, RNLI events, National Garden Scheme open days, film shoots and garden marquee wedding receptions. Some of these events include the erection of temporary marquees which are erected and removed for each event.



Proposal

The family wish to build upon the existing diversification activities which take place at Falconhurst Estate, and provide a permanent function venue to cater for weddings/receptions, corporate events, parties and community events.

The site chosen for the proposed venue allows the existing organic dairy farming operations to continue as well as the diversification project. This is a consequence of the agricultural buildings that make up the proposed function venue currently being redundant as they do not meet modern agricultural requirements.

The development will provide a valuable facility that can be used for local community and charity events all year round. It will provide an asset to the village that will have a positive impact on the local rural economy. This proposal will generate direct local employment of both a full and part time nature in the local area and it will support local businesses such as B&Bs, holiday cottages, taxi firms, caterers and suppliers as well as the local churches.

Aims

Our wish is to find a way of ensuring that an economically viable proposal, respectful of the setting, is produced and we feel we have succeeded in this task.

The aims of the proposal include:

- To make efficient re-use of redundant, traditional, agricultural buildings.
- To improve the economic stability of the Estate to ensure its success for existing and future generations. To support the local economy by producing a profitable business development to support local jobs and local businesses. The design must reflect principles that are supported by a ‘tried and tested’ business model in order to ensure its economic success.
- To produce a design that is supportive of the site’s rural setting.
- To promote sustainable ethics in the organisation and delivery of the events. By encouraging all participants to travel to the site by means other than private car in order to reduce dependence on the car. These include minibus, and coach travel. By supporting the use of suppliers in the local economy.
- To improve the character of the setting which is currently suffering from under use and whose buildings are falling into disrepair by providing the site with a viable future.

Principal use

The site has an appealing character as a function venue whose enhancement will contribute to its success. No rights of way run close to the site and very few members of the public get to see and appreciate the setting. This proposed use will allow access to a greater number of people both in the local area and further afield, many of which we would imagine are unaware of its existence.

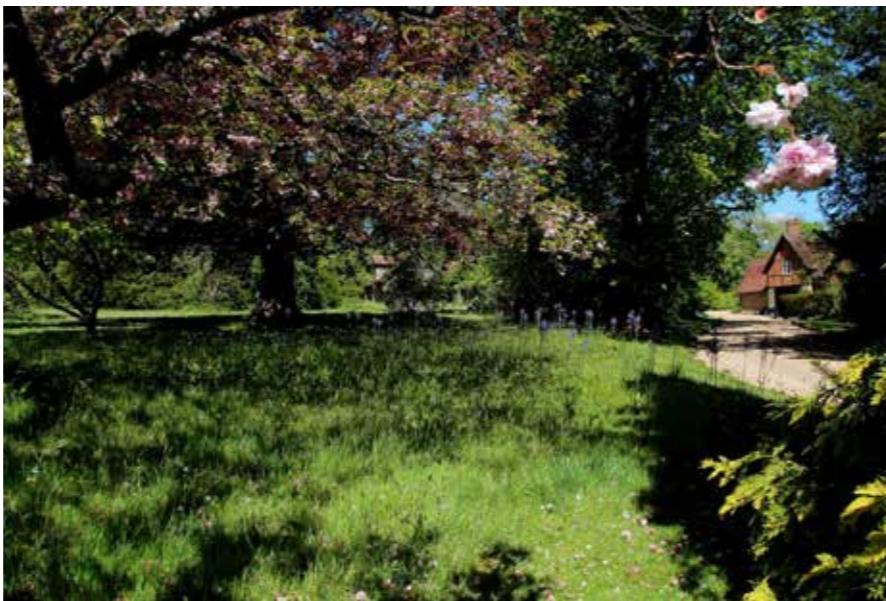
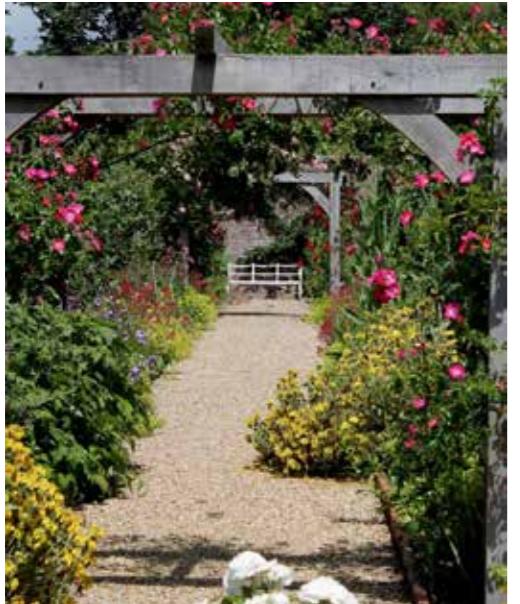
The function venue’s principal commercial use will be as a wedding venue and its design and management is focused upon this use accordingly. The wedding venue business model in rural locations utilising redundant farm buildings, such as barns, is ‘tried and tested’ and has been shown in many instances to generate sufficient income. Falconhurst Estate has held garden marquee weddings for the past 8 years (increasingly so in the past 3) and is confident of the high demand for a venue of this nature in this location.

Ideally the venue would be able to accommodate a number of wedding guests in line with competing rural barn wedding venues. This application, however, follows a series of pre-application discussions with officers of Sevenoaks District Council, during which the scale and extent of the venue has been substantially reduced and various design options have been reviewed and agreed in principle. The number of wedding guests that the proposal is seeking permission for is only 80.

Given the reduced scale of the offering the proposed business model has to be as flexible as possible to accommodate the demands of prospective clients. This includes, but is not limited to:

- To accommodate 80 guests for civil ceremonies and wedding receptions all year round
- To allow exclusive use of the venue for the day
- To allow for a choice of the location for the ceremony at the venue
- To provide on-site accommodation for the wedding couple and close family and friends

This business model is a design driver and dictates the space arrangements and areas required for the venue to be successful.



Management (under principal use as a wedding venue)

The venue is accessed from Cowden Pound Road north of the site.

The car parking is located to the south of the function building accommodating a collection of mature red cedar trees creating a more natural car park setting commensurate with the rural nature of the wider environment. Signage will guide people to its location. The main bridal party can be dropped off either to the east of the function building or on a newly landscaped terrace immediately to its south. Disabled parking is also available to the east of the function building.

The majority of the guests upon arrival to the car park will be guided onto the site via a path leading them beside the pond and through the landscaped lawns towards the terrace. This route will not only allow them to appreciate the pond in its setting but also access the function building using a traffic free route. The siting of the terrace allows for the key components of the venue (function building, pond, groom's house, bride's house and farmhouse) to be appreciated within the same context whilst being in close proximity to the function building.

Given the substantially reduced scale of the venue it is crucial that the offering is as flexible as possible to accommodate the demands of prospective clients in both fair and poor weather conditions. Importantly the design and management of the venue must allow for it to operate effectively in poor weather conditions when outside spaces will be unusable. Below we illustrate the sort of flexibility of choice that is needed for a typical wedding ceremony and reception.

The flexibility starts from the guests' arrival and where they choose to mingle ahead of a wedding ceremony:

- Fair weather: just to the east of the pond, just to the west of the function building and/or on the terraces to the south of the function building
- Poor weather: no mingling outside – straight into the chosen inside ceremony space (see below)

The guests are called, if necessary, to the chosen ceremony space. The flexibility continues here with a choice of ceremony spaces each with a different style that will appeal to the tastes of different clients:

- Fair weather: gazebo beside the pond, new barn section of the function building or old barn section of the function building
- Poor weather: either the new or old barn sections of the function building

Once the ceremony is over guests will enjoy drinks and canapes whilst photographs are taken. The focus of these drinks and canapes will depend upon where they are served. Again a choice is available:

- Fair weather: just to the east of the pond, just to the west of the function building and/or on the terraces to the south of the function building
- Poor weather: middle barn and space between new and old barn sections of the function building

After drinks the guests are called to the chosen wedding breakfast/dining space. It is vital that this space is different from the ceremony space for the smooth operation of the venue. It allows the spaces to remain set up for a particular purpose avoiding the need to rearrange large numbers of chairs and tables after each activity. It also allows clients, should they wish, to assist with the dressing of these spaces (chairs, tables, etc.) ahead of the start of the ceremony. As dining will always be located inside the choice is independent of weather conditions and is either in the new barn or old barn sections of the function building.

Following the meal the evening reception traditionally commences with a first dance. Importantly this will always be located inside to reduce noise escaping from the site. Also it will take place in the inside section of the function building not being used for dining to allow for the smooth operation of the venue. It allows the DJ or band to set up without disturbing the meal and for a seamless transition from dining to dancing.

Venue accommodation

The provision of wedding accommodation on site is a valuable selling point for a venue and is an important factor in its economic success.

The bride's house, groom's house and farmhouse are all in close proximity to the function building and of a positive architectural character making it ideally suited for use as wedding accommodation. The bride's house will also offer a bridal changing suite for use in the morning by the main bridal party. Another important design and management decision made to ensure the success of the venue.

Conclusion

This is a carefully considered and well planned venture which will provide employment for the applicants, their children and local people. The development involves considerable financial investment from the applicants who are fully committed to pursuing this venture as a means to maintaining the family estate that has been handed down over 5 generations to date.

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Annex B:

Falconhurst Barn Presentation to Neighbours:
16th October 2015

Falconhurst barn drinks Friday 16th of October 6-8pm



We invite you to celebrate the end of one chapter for the barns and the start of another

We would like to share our plans for the future of Falconhurst Barn and hope that you can join us to view and hear about them

Drinks and delicious nibbles

6-8pm

RSVP Nicola@falconhurst.co.uk

If you are unable to come at this time, or would like to come back for another look, the barn will also be open on Saturday 17th of October 10am-4pm

- Invitations were sent to 80 of the closest neighbours to Falconhurst and also members of Hever & Cowden Parish Councils and the local Rector (Appendix 1)
- 59 people attended (names and addresses available on request)
- Falconhurst Barn was decorated, well lit and heated for the presentation, and prosecco and canapes (wedding style) were served to guests by Elm Green Catering.
- Boards showing the proposed plans and ‘before and after’ shots were clearly displayed in different parts of the barn.
- Reports from Corylus Ecology, Vanguardia Consulting (acoustics) and Rowland Bilsland Traffic Planning were available to read together with a draft Planning Statement and a full set of proposed plans.
- Guests were greeted by Charles & Nicola Talbot. Nicola Talbot gave an introductory talk about the reasons why the estate would like to renovate the barn (Appendix 2)
- Susanna Miller presented the plans to the party. Questions were encouraged to be directed to either herself, Charles or Nicola.
- Positive feedback included: delight at the revitalisation of the barns and enthusiasm for new, exciting projects for the village; the pub would be seen to benefit; the church would be seen to benefit; local employment for young people in the service industry; local employment for local florists (Pam Paige & Clare Denison-Pender); local catering companies (Elm Green Catering);
- Most comments of concern were regarding the noise that the venue might generate. An assurance of 11.30pm finish time; sound lobby to contain sound from music; double glazing; sound system gave assurance. Other concern was traffic. Assurance was made by pointing out that The Small House would be used for accommodation; encouragement by venue to use shared transport/taxis/minibuses
- Guests were encouraged to take a leaflet away for further information.
- Two guests offered to write letters of support.
- There have been no further enquiries.



BARN PRESENTATION - speech

Thank you for coming here this evening to this rather strange party at this rather strange venue! We decided that the best way of showing as many people our plans for this project was to bring you all here together here in the very barns that we want to renovate and rejuvenate. These buildings, or the best part of them, have been here now longer than Falconhurst itself. Like the house, each generation has added, pulled down or changed them to suit whatever the needs were at the time. They are now in a sad, dilapidated state and as you can see need some serious attention (don't lean on posts or walls – they may not be safe!). But these are a really lovely set of buildings, typical Victorian High Weald farm buildings that we cannot allow to fall down.

There's the granary store with its high doors to allow carts easy access with two pens to the right for young animals, a pig sty on the outer wall; the stable for the carthorse down there and the newish 1950s dairy where we are now. The buildings over there were probably used as feed stores and under cover areas for animals and then there's the small shelter in the area below that we can only assume was for rearing calves. There were other buildings too, but these have long since disappeared.

So, what now? Well, we did once have planning permission to pull down quite a lot of the buildings to make a nice house... but... somehow that didn't feel right. We can't afford to just renovate the buildings. We could renovate the buildings and let them to small businesses... but... that doesn't feel right either. Small dairy units are unlikely to make a comeback in the next few years no matter how organic or niche.

So... as you know, since 2007 we have been offering Falconhurst gardens as a wedding venue and for the last couple of years have had 8 each year with an average 150 guests in marquees with live music. We have found that this is something we are actually quite good at (and enjoy) and probably more importantly people love it here.

This building, given a bit of a facelift, could make a delightful space for people to celebrate their weddings. I'm being flippant here! It will take a massive facelift and a lot of persuasive figures to the bank in order for it to happen but Susanna Miller and her team have done an incredible job over the past two years helping us create a credible set of plans to take this building forward. In a minute Susanna will briefly take us through the boards on the wall so do take time to look at these. There's some leaflets as well that describe all the help we have had from all the other experts involved. Please do ask us if you have questions. Charles, Hugo or me. Susanna or Dan from Miller Architects. And please enjoy yourselves. My hope is that this is the first of many happy parties in this building.

Finally, I would like to bring one small person to your attention – she's had a bit of a tough time lately but is quite well now and it's her birthday today so perhaps we can all sing Happy Birthday to Elsie!

Over to Susanna ...



Structure
Bellamy Wallace Partnership are specialist Structural Engineers. The existing structure and foundations have been assessed by BWP have confirmed the buildings are sound and are capable of refurbishment as proposed.

Traffic and Parking
Rowland Bolland Ltd Traffic Engineers have assessed the travel arrangements for the previous weddings that Falconhurst have hosted and have drawn up a Travel Management Plan. Given the site's limited access to public transport, arrangements have been made to minimise the effect on traffic. This will include dedicated parking space for 20 cars on site, which is screened and landscaped, with five additional car spaces by the barn and guest accommodation, including a disabled parking bay. Ten bicycle parking spaces will be provided. This provision has been demonstrated to be sufficient based on previous weddings at similar guest numbers. The provision of accommodation on site allows the spreading of event traffic across a longer time frame and decreases its amenity impact.

Ecology
Corylus Ecology have been monitoring the existing buildings and site since 2013. Pipistrelle Bats and Long Eared Bats have been discovered roosting in the Victorian barns with some evidence of a Long Eared Bat nursery. Alternative accommodation (bat loft, tree mounted bat boxes and bat tiles) will be provided during the works and within the finished building to prevent undue disturbance to the bats. Building work and work timing will be controlled by an EPS Licence from Natural England and closely monitored by licensed ecologists. No evidence of Barn Owls was found during the monitoring period. Swifts build their own nests, and this would not be discouraged. Sparrow nesting terrace boxes on the north and east elevation have been recommended. The landscaping has been specifically developed to support the feeding of bats and other wildlife.

Proposed Site Plan

If you have any questions about the proposal please contact
Nicola Talbot | 01342 850 526 | nicola@falconhurst.co.uk
Susanna Miller RIBA | 01342 850 932 | info@miller-architects.co.uk

Falconhurst Estate MARKBEECH, KENT



Proposed Wedding Venue



www.falconhurst.co.uk

The barns at Falconhurst probably pre-date the house itself and have been used in a variety of ways since their inception, ranging from the farm buildings for Falconhurst Farm with its wagon shed and dairy, to the more recent estate workshop and stores. The buildings are now deteriorating and in need of serious repair including re-roofing.

Falconhurst Estate has held holiday cottages, jazz and weddings in the last decades since 1980. The weddings have proved an enormous success. They have provided revenue not only to maintain the grounds at Falconhurst but also help support Holy Trinity Church in Markbeech and local businesses such as The Kentish Horse, bed & breakfast, photographers, florists etc.

One of the main income streams of the Falconhurst Estate is a tenanted dairy farm. There is, however, a very difficult dairy market in the UK creating an urgent need for diversification on the Estate. Utilising the existing barns as a venue will create a business in an area the Estate has experience in, and will enable the Estate to diversify.

The proposed use of the barns allows the Estates to effectively manage parking, noise and any amenity impact on immediate neighbours in Markbeech village.

The venue will be for 80 guests with separate ancillary residential accommodation for the wedding party and some of their guests.

The current proposals have been developed over two years of careful consultation with Sevenoaks Planning Department in a series of formal Pre Application submissions.

Mrs Nicola Talbot



Architecture
The site is on the Falconhurst Estate, a large family owned Estate of pasture and woodland in the High Weald. Falconhurst Estate is part of the Metropolitan Green Belt and part of a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The barns are part of a collection of nineteenth century farm buildings on a drive leading to the main house. The buildings are not listed or in a Conservation Area but are of architectural interest in their own right. Much of the site, and buildings, is hidden from public view from Cowden Pound Road by established vegetation. The barns and stables are charming examples of their type with local Wealden Sandstone foundations, red brick floors, timber frame with oak weather boarding, some Flemish bond red brick walls and red clay tile roofs. The barns and associated buildings have evolved over time and have been redundant in the 1960s. At various times the buildings have been added to or amended on an ad hoc basis.

Miller Architects are specialist Conservation Architects and RIBA Chartered Practice. The design is a blend of traditional and modern elements. The design has been developed with Sevenoaks Planning Department. Great importance has been given to preserving and complementing the architectural quality of the existing Victorian buildings whilst removing some of the less attractive post war modifications. Careful attention has been given to keeping within the existing building footprint. Where an extension is proposed to the rear, it is kept to a minimum size (approx 17% increase in floor space), single story, against the tree line, and is designed to blend in to the existing buildings using the existing palette of materials. The Venue is designed to be accessible to people with disabilities, including wheel chair users. The Wedding Venue including the Bride, Groom and guest accommodation are all wheelchair accessible.

Acoustics

Vanguardia are specialist entertainment and music venue Acousticians. Sound monitoring equipment has been set up on site to assess the background noise levels. All amplified music would be confined to the buildings, none played externally. The buildings have been designed from the beginning with a sound lobby to prevent noise breakout during an event. There will be an in-house bespoke sound system, carefully calibrated to prevent noise levels going above precise levels and giving reliability and predictability to the predicted noise levels for all event users. We have used the sound system produced by Vanguardia to analyse and off a 100m² room. Vanguardia predict that with a full scale event taking place with an indoor noise level of 58 dB, the sound at the nearest affected property will be 21dB. This is a very low level a broadcasting studio has noise levels of 15-20 dB and the limit of normal human hearing is 10dB. The venue will be naturally ventilated and cooled using acoustically baffled venting systems minimising the requirement for plant and mechanical (noisy) vents.

Energy

Boom Collective are specialist environmental and energy management consultants. They have assessed the energy requirements of the venue and ancillary buildings as a whole. The client has very high sustainability aspirations and as such the Wedding Venue will be Carbon Neutral and the buildings themselves will achieve BREEAM 'Excellent' with an aim to achieve 'Outstanding'. Only 1% of all buildings in the UK have achieved 'Outstanding', and the planning minimum is 'Very Good'.

Heating will be provided by a ground source heat pump with wood burning stoves; cooling will be by natural ventilation and earth tubes; toilet ventilation will be though natural ventilation displacement systems and hot water will be provided by solar thermal panels.

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Annex C:
Landscaping

Falconhurst Barn Landscaping Notes

Historic

Falconhurst Barn started its days as a waggon shed and store for the Home Farm of Falconhurst. The original drive for Falconhurst came in from Falconhurst Lodge across the park and was used up until the 1960s when the house was re-formed. The Home Farm had a separate entrance, using the driveway used today for the main house.

The gardens at Falconhurst have been an important feature since the house was built in the mid 19th century. The main garden was surrounded by a high wall with a separate walled garden, originally used for growing fruit and the bulk of the garden to the east of the house was divided into four squares for growing vegetables for the household. Hahas were built to protect the south and east sides of the garden. The surrounding land was planted with an interesting selection of handsome trees including weeping limes, weeping beeches, copper beeches, turkey oaks, birches, cherries, magnolias, acers and ornamental shrubs.

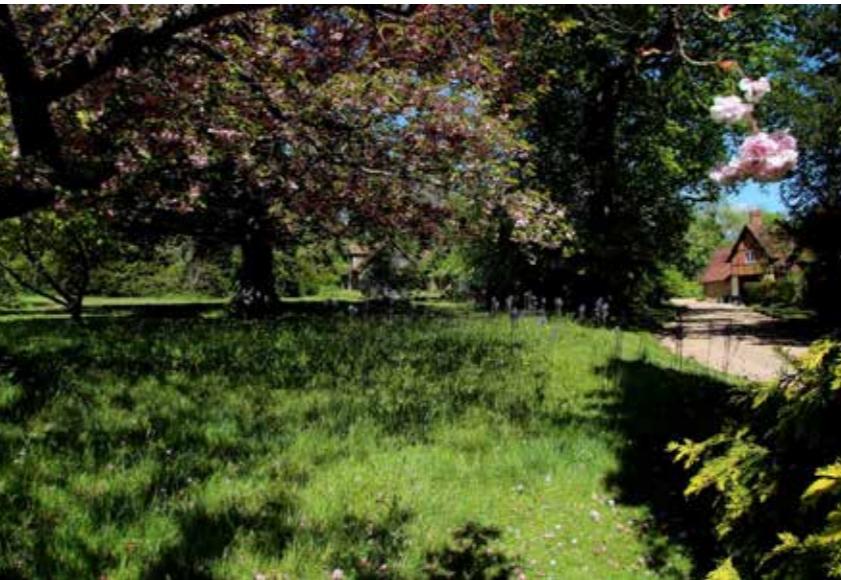
The layout of the garden has remained the same since its conception and is defined by a series of wide gravelled paths with generous stone steps and flagstone terraces. Each generation has made their mark and this has been done with care and affection for the landscape in which the house stands.

Current

Today there is still a large vegetable garden, orchards and avenues of fruit trees, many of which were planted over 100 years ago, fruit cages and areas to house chickens, pigs and sheep: all produce for the house. We believe in being as green as possible: eating our own produce, including game from the estate and composting our waste. The borders in the garden are cultivated in a sensitive way especially following the successional planting principles laid down by Christopher Lloyd of Great Dixter. There are wide herbaceous beds housing an enormous variety of bee loving shrubs, perennial and annual plants. We are careful not cut hedges until September when all chance of birds nesting will be over and do not remove the seed heads of our plants until the following spring to provide food for overwintering birds and animals.

Large swathes of the grass in the grounds is kept as wild planting and a careful programme of grass cutting and meadow development is adhered to, encouraging natural wild flowers to grow. We have plentiful patches of common orchids, teasels, scabious, yellow rattle, moon daisies, trefoils, clover, foxgloves, knapweed and more.

The way the garden is managed is enjoyed and appreciated by a wide audience of people. We open the garden for the National Garden Scheme and also for a limited number of marquee weddings. The comments we receive are hugely favourable and encouraging.



Future

Following encouragement by the National Garden Scheme, the garden is opening for an increased number of openings in 2016 for charity. We are planning new areas of prairie type planting using grasses and perennials grown from seed, and enhancements of the wildflower meadow areas.

The Barn landscaping

It is planned that the landscaping and planting of Falconhurst Barn will follow the same principles as those used in the main garden with the ecology managed in a sensitive and sustainable way.

Car parking places will be placed discreetly amongst the trees and shrubs (many planted in the 19th century) with views towards the ruin of the original house and beyond to Ashdown Forest. Wildflower areas will continue to be encouraged in the long grass to the south of the car parking area. Groups of miscanthus grass, cornus and viburnum will be planted on a mound with a long succession of bulbs will be planted providing tonal contrast in winter and protecting the view to the main house. Paths between parking spaces laid on tamped hoggin with attention to drainage and camber with an overlay of gravel will take guests to the venue entrance and terraces.

The hard landscaping will include terraces of reclaimed materials including York stone, brick and pebbles. Edges of paths and terraces are planned to be broken, not straight, filtering into the grass and linking to stepping stones where necessary. Planting spaces will be designated in the terraces allowing bee loving plants such as erigeron, alchemilla and papaver cambricum to infiltrate.

The grass area to the west of the barn will be contoured, avoiding tree root zones, creating more intimate, directional and varied spaces emphasizing the direction and view to the pond. A jetty will be set into the land approximately 1.5m into the pond. An arbor of reclaimed timbers or green oak will be created as an outdoor ceremony space. This structure will be wreathed in native woodbine together with scented china roses. Marginal planting around the pond will include typha, zantedeschia etc to allow protection for breeding creatures. Part of the area will be designated as a bog garden to ensure moisture is retained during high summer and a breeding ground is established.

There will be a lightly mown path to the pond perimeter between the marginal planting and light woodland. Damson and bullace will be planted at selected areas to the edge of the woodland. The latter with bird boxes at strategic points. Trunks on selected trees will be cleared of overgrowth, other selected ones left with ivy as cover for small nesting birds. Stacks of timber will be left in the surrounding woodland to provide protection for insect and small mammals. Specific lines of cultivated blackberry encouraged towards the western clearances and pale lacecap and species hydrangeas reflected in the water to the western side of the pond.

There will be an emphasis on wildflower areas, repeat flowering scented roses (such as Graham Thomas, Mary Rose, Benjamin Britten), herbaceous plants in sympathy with a group of country buildings that encourage bees, butterflies and birdlife and that complement the planting at Falconhurst.

The garden will be managed by the same gardening team as Falconhurst applying the same principles of sustainability and care of the ecology.

Nicola Talbot