

Statement of Historic Significance.

Provision of Amenity facilities in field approved for Camping and Touring Caravans

Richwill Farm
Oakley Road
Wix
CO11 2SF

The Property

Richwill Farm is a site with a total area of 5.6 hectares which includes a three-bedroom two storey house and a range of outbuildings including a large timber framed barn, two single storey workshops and a cart lodge. Planning consent was granted in January 2018 for the use of the barn for wedding, conferences and events and the workshop building for conversion to holiday accommodation. A further application for provision of additional holiday accommodation was approved in 2019 and approval for the site for camping and caravanning was approved in February 2021 ref 20/01613/FUL. Approval was granted for agricultural barns adjacent to the site in July 2021, ref 21/00024/FUL.

Background

This statement supports an application for a variation to the approved scheme for the change of use of an existing field within the curtilage of Richwill Farm from agricultural to use for camping and touring caravans.

Richwill Farm is now an established Wedding and Events Centre that was granted planning consent 2018 (ref 17/01780/FUL) having previously been granted consent for a training centre and workshop. Consent for holiday accommodation to support the venue was granted in December 2019 (ref 19/01472/FUL)

The proposal for the site has been developed to provide sufficient space to accommodate up to 30 No camping pitches and 30 No pitches for touring caravans. This will directly support the existing facilities and will also support the continuity of the business.

Proposal

The granting of the Planning Approval in 2016, the restoration of the main barn and the subsequent planning consent in 2017 to amend the use to be a wedding venue has allowed the applicants to create a business that is in much demand and the site is becoming a popular venue for weddings, celebration, and other events.

As noted above the approval is to provide accommodation for up to 30 pitches for tents and a further 30 pitches for touring caravans. These will be sited on an area of 1 hectare of land

that forms part of a field to the north west of the existing buildings to the south side of Oakley Road.

The density of pitches on this basis will be 24 pitches per acre which is slightly less than the 30 pitches per acre maximum usually required by licencing authorities.

A landscape scheme was approved by the council under 21/00749/DISCON in June 2021 and these works have commenced.

The existing buildings will be able to provide accommodation for any events linked to the camping site and has existing bar and lounge facilities available.

This proposed variation is to allow the provision of amenity facilities for the users of the camping and caravan site and to include toilet and shower facilities. The sizes indicated are considered to be the minimum requirement and equate to those required for the site licence.

The facilities are proposed to be within converted steel containers, and these will be founded on concrete paving slabs. This allow the buildings to be removed at a later date, as required with minimal impact to the site. Two containers are proposed in part to reduce the overall bulk of what would need to be a much larger structure.

Context

The site is situated in open countryside roughly equidistant between Wix and Great Oakley about 1.5 km from the centre of Wix 1.3 km from Great Oakley.

The area is agricultural, and the farmhouse possibly dates from the C17 with C19 additions. The main barn probably dates from around this later date indicating agricultural use on the site for a considerable period of time. The landscape around the application site is typical of the Tendring Peninsular being fairly level with mostly arable fields enclosed by established trees and hedgerow.



Farm in context

The Buildings and Site

The buildings are grouped together towards the southern boundary of the site. The house stands apart to the west with its own garden and is separated from the agricultural buildings by a substantial pond to the north east of the house. The house is two storey and Grade II Listed and is described in more detail below. No work is proposed to the house or curtilage buildings under this application.

The large barn has a floor area of around 250 m² and is 4 metres to the eaves with the main range aligned North West / South East. It is of timber frame construction probably dating from the late C18 or C19 with the main frame mostly intact. At ground level the bottom 1.2 metres of the wall is brickwork with a sole plate on top, most likely due to the failure of the original sole plate. Almost all the roof structure has been replaced at some time as has much of the infill studwork. Externally the barn is mostly timber clad with an asbestos cement sheet roof finish. The barn has been refurbished and extended in accordance with the previously approved schemes.

The single storey workshops have a combined floor area of 130 m² and comprise two wings, one timber framed of some antiquity where the timber cladding has been rendered over and the other wing is a much later block-built addition with a more modern roof structure. This wing is also rendered, and both have asbestos cement roof sheeting as a roof finish. Part of the building has been converted.

Between the buildings there is now a landscaped courtyard. To the north of the main barn is an area of consolidated ground for parking with an access from Oakley Road. The area of the buildings, access driveways, garden to the house and pond is defined by established hedgerow to the north, east and part of the south boundaries with open fields beyond.

Listed Farmhouse



Side elevation



Main Elevation

The development proposals are sited within the curtilage of a Grade II listed building (Parkers Farmhouse). Historic England listing states.

House C17 or earlier with C19 front range and later additions and alterations. Double range with rear range. Front range of brick with red plain tiled roof and end chimney stacks. Rear range, timber framed, plastered to Oakley Road return. 2 storeys with later single storey rear range. The timber framed range has moulded bridging joists and jowled storey posts to

ground floor. Viewing was not permitted at the time of the re-survey. The interior was previously seen by J. Davey ECC Historic Buildings Officer.

Curtilage Buildings

There is no reference to the barn or workshop in this assessment so it can be assumed that they are considered to be of limited historic importance individually or as part of the group.

In assessing the individual buildings within the curtilage no works are proposed to or within the immediate vicinity of the listed house and no works are proposed to the other buildings

The Main Barn

The main barn is a typical timber framed six bay barn with two midstreys and a lean-to extension to the north east side.



Original Interior of barn

Timber barns in Essex are considered as important buildings in their own right and it has been argued that the barn as a building type is the most impressive and important agricultural building that England has ever produced and that it fulfils a fundamental role in the

architectural heritage of the landscape both in terms of its intrinsic value and its contribution as a dominant building in the rural landscape.

The barn on this site is of simple construction with tie beam and collars with bracing between posts, without jowls, and tie beams provided by knees rather than arch braces. This tends to indicate a construction date during late C18 early C19. There has been a reasonable amount of historic repair work carried out in softwood timber sympathetically to the structure, except for the later brick structure on the south west elevation. The barn has now been repaired and restored.

The current use of the barn as a venue is sympathetic to the historic use of the building retaining the open spaces which are suitable for a range of uses. The repair and re-cladding of the building has preserved the building retaining it as an important part of the landscape.

The Workshop

The workshop consists of two distinct parts. A timber framed wing constructed in a similar manner to the main barn but on a smaller scale. The timbers used in the construction are of a similar size that might suggest a similar construction date to the main barn but the fixing and bracing of the main member is achieved using wrought iron straps a method that became more common in C19 so suggesting that the workshop is slightly later than the barn's construction.



Original Interior of workshop

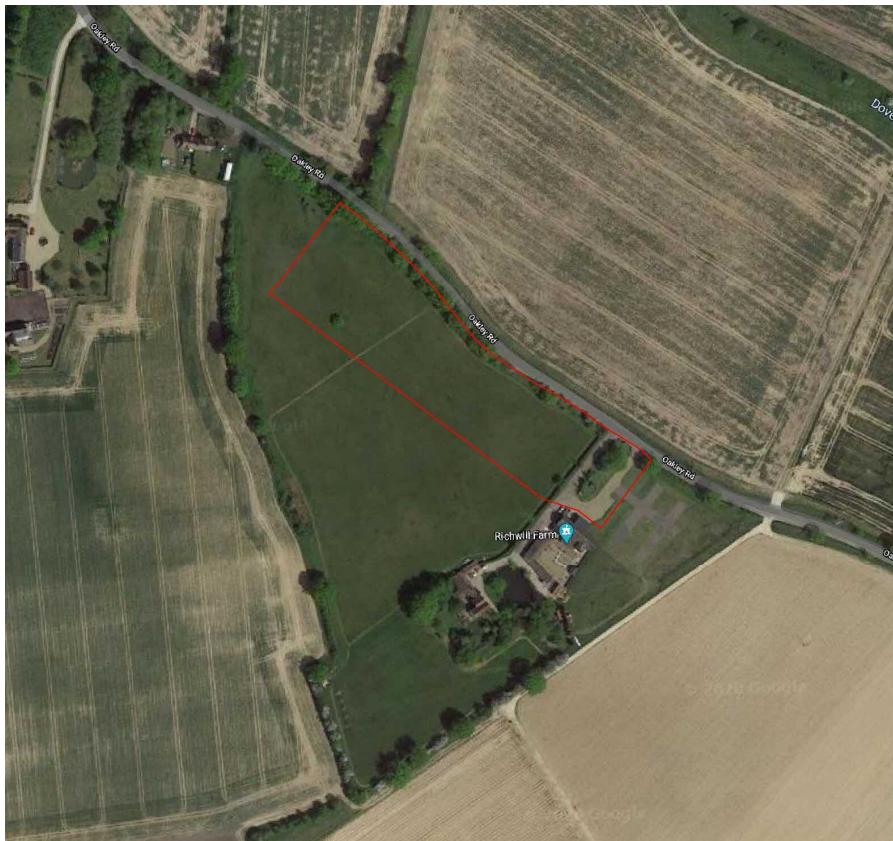
The construction of the other wing is much more contemporary being carried out in concrete blockwork construction with modern roof construction using TDA type trusses and probably dating from the 1960's.



Interior of later wing

Impact of Proposal on Heritage Assets

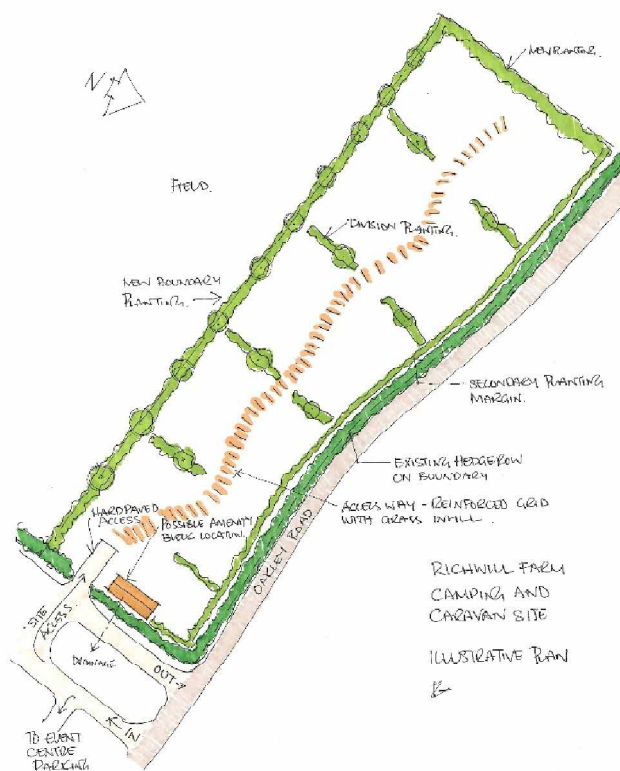
The setting of the farmhouse and its associated buildings is within a countryside location surrounded by farmland. The domestic use of the farmhouse has been retained while the farm buildings have been repurposed for alternative use as a wedding and events venue. The construction of additional buildings associated with the group has also been approved.



Application site in context

Changing patterns of farming and agriculture have altered how farms are used and building are finding alternative uses. The use of the site as a wedding and events venue means that the site is not in full use for all the time. The careful refurbishment and landscaping already carried out means that for much of the time the site appears much as it has done for many years.

The proposal to use part of the land for caravans and tents is also a use that has peak periods, mostly centred around the holiday periods with the caravans and tents staying for quite brief periods. The tents and caravans themselves are of low impact visually and environmentally, being relatively small and spaced apart on site in accordance with licencing regulations. There are limited works necessary to enable the site to carry out this role, and the proposed facilities are designed to be of a temporary, easily moved nature, meaning that should the proposed use cease, the site can simply return to its current use. The balance of the land remains in agricultural use currently for growing hay.



There are limited views of the heritage assets from Oakley Road with established planting all along the southern side of the road. The farmhouse is around 120 metres from the road at its nearest point, slightly elevated and with the rear elevation towards the road.

The proposed siting of the amenities within camping field together with established and additional landscaping, the amenity structures will hardly be seen from outside of the camping field. They will not significantly change the setting of the heritage assets and any change in how they might be viewed will be of limited duration with the benefit of supporting the business and the local economy.

Summary

The existing relationship between the buildings on the wider site is unchanged by this proposal.

The loss of the agricultural use to camping is a symptom of the change in agricultural practices and the unsuitability of old building to be adapted to these practices. This is acknowledged in the Councils Local Plan Policies ER11 and emerging policies that deal with the re-use of rural buildings for business use.

The historic link between the farmhouse and the agricultural building is retained as the applicants live in the farmhouse and use the outbuildings and associated land for their business.

The camping and caravan site and the proposed amenity buildings that are essential to the operation of the campsite will have no material impact on the listed farmhouse or the curtilage buildings and does not significantly alter the setting of the heritage assets.

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