Agricultural Statement

Client: The Sompting Estate – Sompting Settlement

Re: New agricultural storage building and hard surface

Date: October 2025

Strutt and Parker has been instructed by The Sompting Estate to submit a prior approval application for a new agricultural storage building and permeable hard surface at Fen Farm, Land to South of Test Road, Test Road, Sompting, BN15 0EW. This statement sets out the agricultural justification for the proposed development and should be read in conjunction with the information submitted with the application.

The Sompting Settlement's Titch Hill Farm including Fen Farm

The Sompting Settlement is a family trust within Sompting Estate, just east of Worthing. The Estate's vision is to be *"a place where people and nature thrive"*. The Estate's managing trustee worked with tenant farmers since the 1980s to restore and enhance biodiversity habitats on the land, leading to the designation of a SSSI and 3 other Local Wildlife Sites. The trust eventually took all its farmland back in hand on retirement of a tenant in 2022, aiming to produce food in a regenerative system that works with nature across the whole landscape, and also, through the Fen Farm, to provide the local community with opportunities to grow, prepare and enjoy food together in a supported environment.

A total holding of c.311 hectares (SBI: 122238674) is now farmed in hand. This is known as Titch Hill Farm, mostly within but also bordering the South Downs National Park to the south side, and this is where the Fen Farm is located as a specialist community farm unit within Titch Hill Farm. The Fen Farm also provides conservation grazing and volunteer conservation management and litter picking to the Beggars Bush downland flower meadow off the Steyning Bostal road (a project developed in collaboration with SDNPA). The Fen Farm has a mixed flock of 13 sheep, Portland and Romney breeds (plus lambs to come in the spring).

Two half-time employees in the Titch Hill farm team manage the Fen Farm. The Fen Farm's production and processing includes vegetables, fruits, chillis, and produce made from them, and will include nuts as well as top fruits from the 9-acre community orchard site as well as honey from the Fen Farm's hives. The Fen Farm currently has 5 beehives which were on site, though they are currently offsite pending the prior approval of the proposed development to give a safe-to-access hard surface beneath and around them. The area is currently hazardous to access due to nettles brambles etc.

The permeable hard surface is preferred to herbicide for environmental reasons and for lasting safe operation where otherwise trip hazards and holes will inevitably recur. The steel container is required as a vermin (wax moth and rodent) proof seasonal storage for beehive supers and wax (top boxes). The wax-filled supers are flammable and given the history of arson on the site (including destruction of a yurt), the supers must be in a secure and fireproof environment.

The container will also be used for storing collected honey, bee suits and apiary equipment. Beekeepers and trainees (volunteers) will change into and out of suits in the container, and in showery or hot weather it may also be used as a refuge for volunteers from the rain or heat.

Conclusion

The proposed storage building and permeable hard surface are reasonably necessary for the purposes of agriculture on the holding and the proposal is designed appropriately for its intended purpose.