



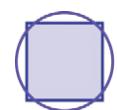
October 2025

The Fen Farm

Sompting Community Farm

Planning Application

Design, Planning & Access
Statement

 NICOLAS POPLE
ARCHITECTS LTD

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INTRODUCTION

This planning statement is submitted in support of a hybrid planning application for; the retention of existing facilities and the phased construction of new buildings at The Fen Farm, a community farm site in Sompting, West Sussex.

This project is a partnership between Sustainable Sussex and Sompting Estate and led by local volunteers with aims to provide inclusive opportunities for growing food, promoting healthy lifestyles, supporting wellbeing, and engaging disadvantaged members of the community. It is a project with high social and community values.

The application seeks:

- The permanent retention of the existing temporary structures (shipping containers and compost loo).
- The phased construction of three new buildings to support the long-term growth and sustainability of the community farm
- Outline planning permission (all matters reserved) for an animal barn, an additional polytunnel and Nature Trail.



01

Produce from the Fen Farm Polytunnel

SUSTAINABLE SUSSEX

Keith Colin established Sustainable Sussex in 2014 and was joined by his partner, Liane Webb, in 2016. Keith and Liane aim to create opportunities for healthy and inclusive, social, educational, ecological and environmental engagement by delivering hands on sustainable projects. These projects take place at various locations with a mix of indoor and outdoor activities for those who may, for one reason or another, be unable to achieve paid employment. Volunteer opportunities are aimed at mixed groups including those with learning disabilities and physical and mental health difficulties. Their aim is to equip volunteers with meaningful experience and personal resources to improve their wellbeing and resilience.

They work to provide supported employment and volunteer opportunities to various needs groups with an emphasis on the environment and community connectedness. Their approach is organic and nurturing, providing space to reflect and to try new things without the judgement of others. Their ethos supports the fact that it is crucial that people are allowed to develop long term meaningful relationships to allow their mental health to thrive. Working in this way the organisation aims to raise aspirations and enable groups and individuals to feel socially and globally integrated and enriched in their life experiences.

written by Sustainable Sussex



02

Volunteers harvesting 20kg of fresh produce



03

All hands on deck to lay wood chip for the poly tunnel

At the Fen Farm, working outdoors provides a variety of tasks and is heavily evidenced to be beneficial to physical and mental health. It provides a connection with nature and an understanding of the diversity of nature and people as well as embedding patterns. Another core theme is the importance of intention and how this impacts on outcomes. They aim to help others and treat people with compassion and kindness.

All experiences are free to attend and so far, have been funded personally by Keith and Liane together with the support and generosity of partners such as South Downs Leisure, Worth from Waste, Sompting Estate

and Pixel by Pixel who provide the Sustainable Sussex website and designed the Sussex Chilli Farm logo. Some funding included West Sussex County Council Community Initiative Fund and Worthing Community Chest

Sustainable Sussex's Social Enterprise is where hundreds of chilli plants are grown to make value added products and offer work experience to their beneficiaries.



04 *Volunteers building bee hives*



05 *Ram lamb with one of the volunteers*

The creation of The Fen Farm, Nature trail and Community Orchard in partnership with Sompting Estate – demonstrates how together, a community can create amazing spaces, great connections, the best quality value added products, healthy and tasty food experiences that so many do not experience. They care for people and planet while engaging and supporting those who may be marginalised through diverse circumstances – from mental or physical health, to age, trauma or loneliness and exclusion.

The food production capacity allows Sustainable Sussex to reach out into the community – supplying fresh fruit, vegetables and herbs to local food banks, charities and their charity beneficiaries, many of who have poor diets and low incomes. In 2022 they donated 350 Kg of produce and hope to increase this considerably in the coming seasons.



06

Field row crops at the Fen Farm



07

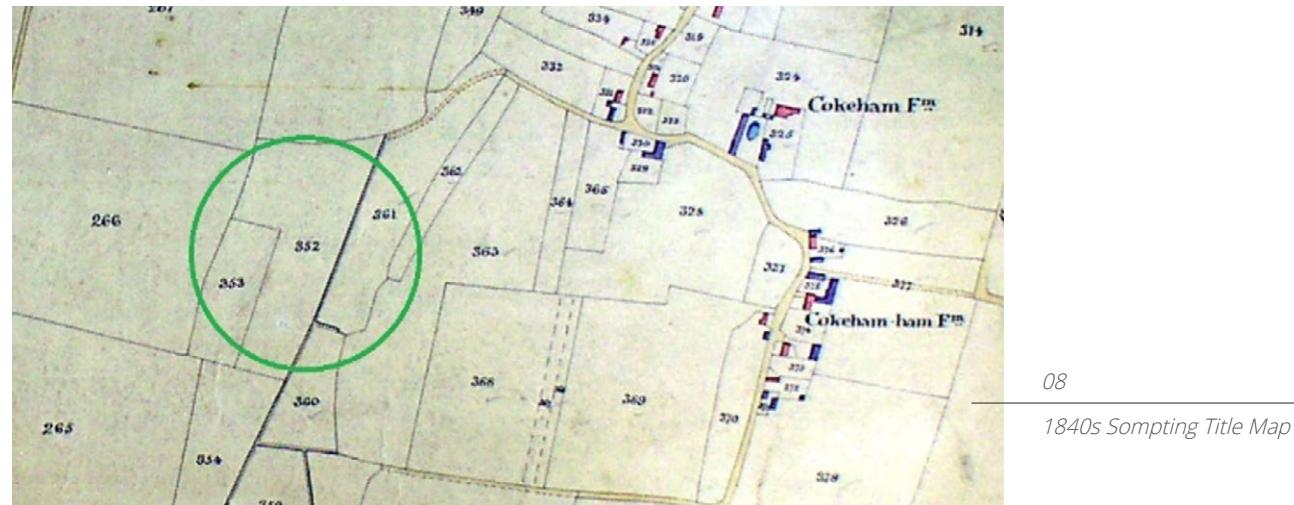
Produce from Sussex Chilli Farm at the Fen Farm

LOCATION & SITE HISTORY

The Fen Farm in the C18th had field names including 'West Mead', suggesting pasture, and 'The Lots', suggesting small plots of land provided to the poor for food cultivation following the Enclosure acts, or, allotment gardens. The 1840s Sompting Tithe Map (right) shows some farm intensification, with straightening of field boundaries and watercourses.

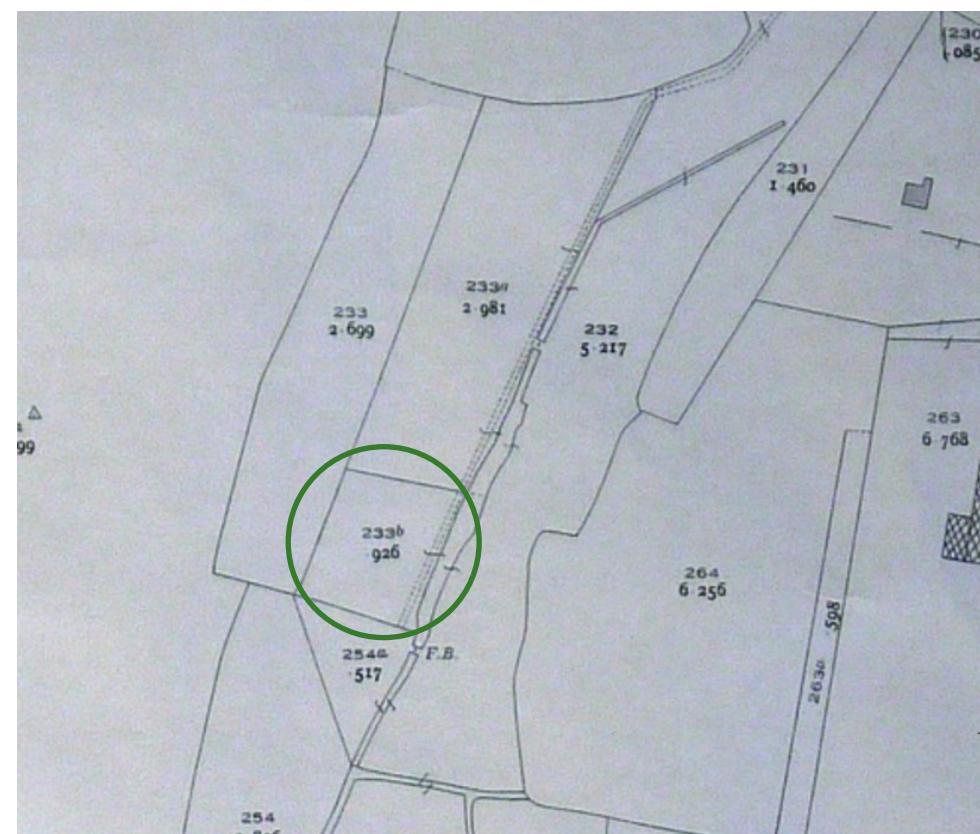
By 1879 (figure 09), the watercress beds on the south side of Fen Farm had been created, and numerous orchards were planted to the north and east. Fig and plum orchards were traditional, this was diversifying to more fruit varieties and eventually glasshouses growing tomatoes, grapes and other protected fruit.

written by Mike Tristam
(Sustainable Sussex & Sompting Estate)



The outlines of the Fen Farm fields settle broadly to their present form in these maps dated c1905 (top left) and 1913 (top right). Further diversification of the St John's Farm and other Lower Cokeham holdings to the east of Fen Farm, into orchard fruits, can be seen.

In the 1932 map (below), the beginnings can be seen of rapid increase in the area of glasshouses growing soft and top fruit and flowers, to the east of Fen Farm. Later this industry moved westward to the Barnham and Chichester areas, and the Worthing Growers Association became the West Sussex Growers Association. The watercress growing beds were the small square field above a triangular field in this map.

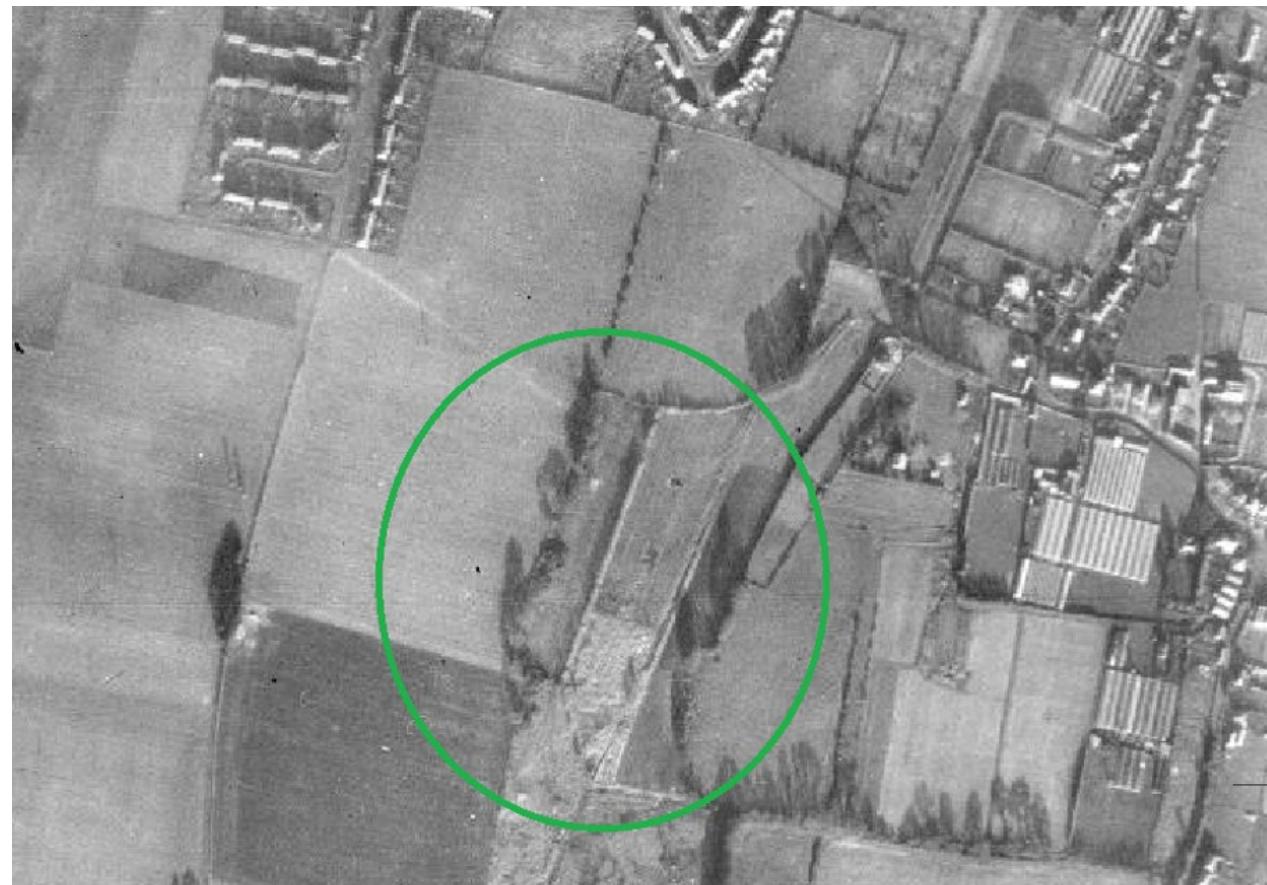


1932 map with watercress
growing beds circled

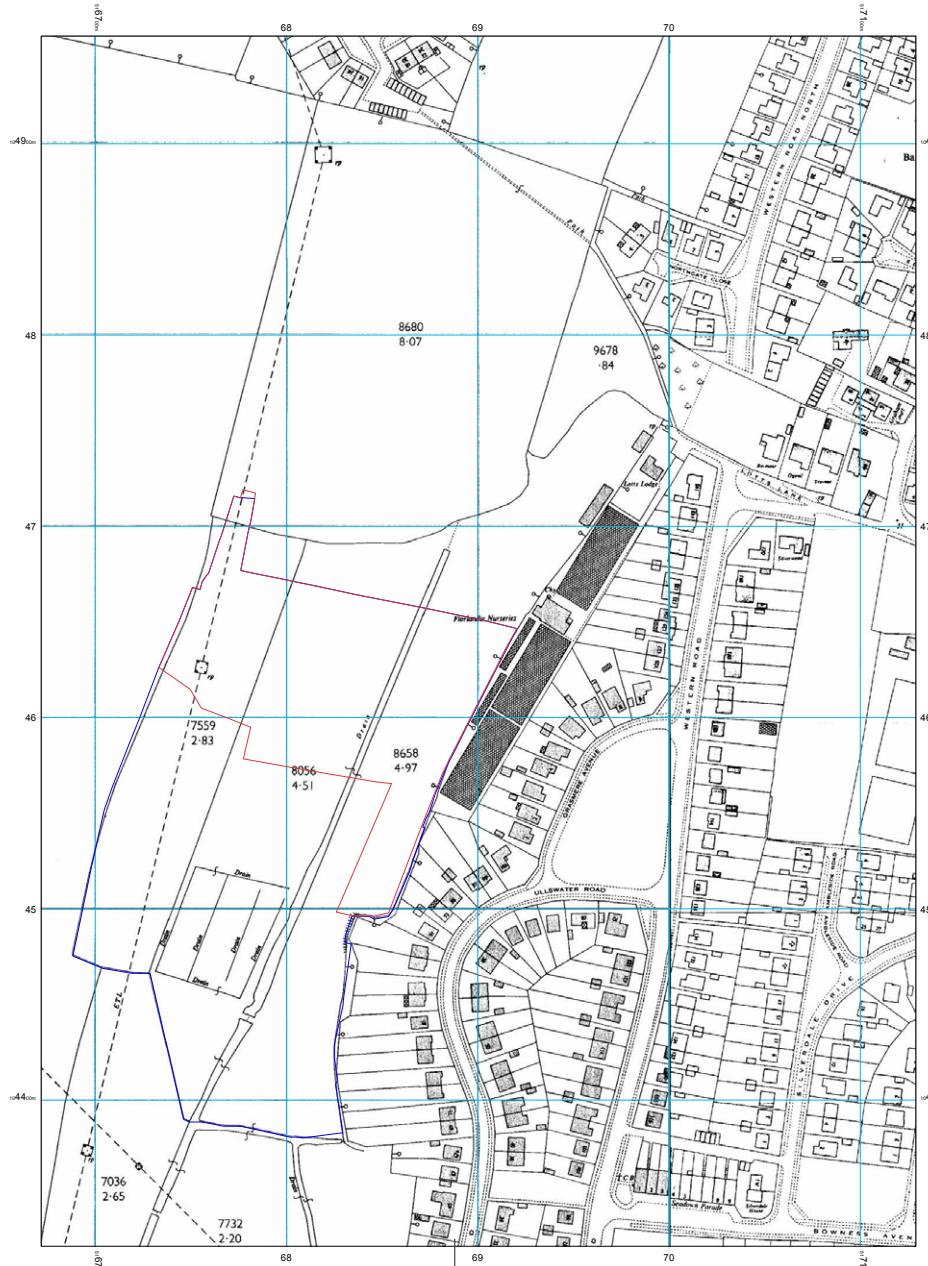
The 1956 aerial photo (figure 13) shows some of the glasshouse nurseries to the east and north of Fen Farm.

There were many other nurseries in Sompting then: Rooks, Long Dole, Stocks, Bennetts, Linfields, Grovers, Sharps, Wrapsons and others.

Growing all kinds of food and flowers, outdoors or under glass, selling some locally and sending some – including tomatoes branded as 'love apples', and grapes – up to London by train.



In the map on the right it can be seen that by 1966, some of those nurseries had been replaced by houses; but a new nursery, 'Florlandia Nursery', had been built next to the Fen Farm site on the east side.



15

1975 aerial photograph



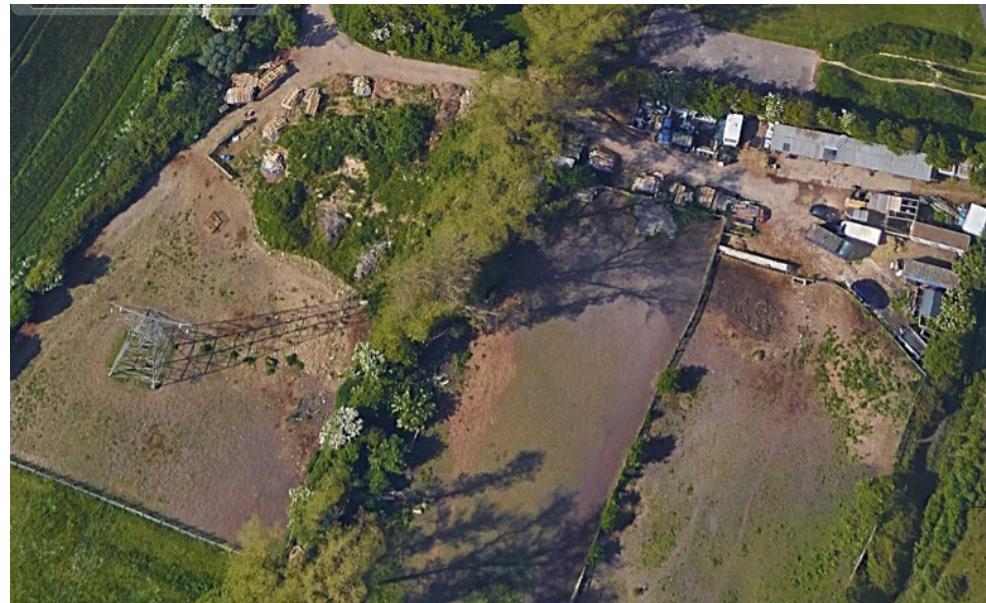
By 1975 (top left) much of the Fen Farm site appeared scarcely to be managed by the tenant farmer; not long after this it was sublet to a horse-keeper.

The 1981 photograph (top right) shows overgrazing by horses in the central part of Fen Farm, and large bramble clumps developing on the east side; only the west side is being managed by the farm rather than the horse tenant.

From about 2005 - 2017 (below) the horse tenant's landscaper husband mismanaged the site, grossly overgrazing it, raising the west side and track and central north area with soil and rubble from building sites, tipping rubbish and derelict vehicles.

16

1913



17

Aerial view 2005-2017

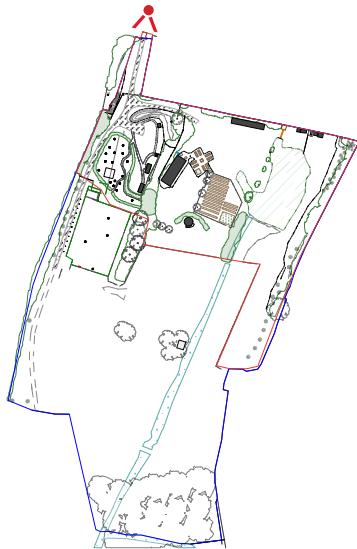
Now, Sompting Estate working with Sustainable Sussex have removed many tons of rubbish to decontaminate the site and have begun to make it a microcosm of the great diversity of farming and growing that used to be integral to the Sompting community's way of life.

The site already has many different field vegetables, orchard trees, soft fruits, protected cropping including tomatoes and chillies, herbs, forest gardens, bee honey hives, and sheep – together with wildlife ponds and a mindfulness in nature area.

In the heyday of Sompting nurseries, each nursery and farm had its sheds for storage, for food processing and preserving, its farmhouse kitchen for the workers to rest and eat. Working together on the land both fed and sustained the community.

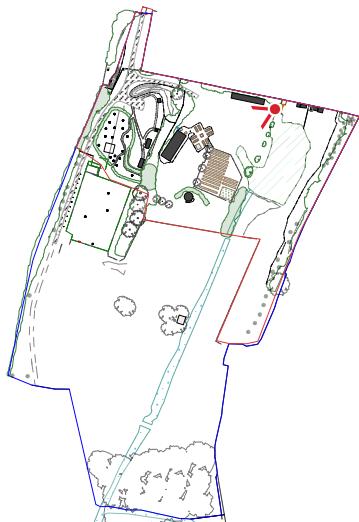
Sustainable Sussex, through the proposed buildings at The Fen Farm, aims to return to the local community this experience of living connected with sustainable food, growing and nature.



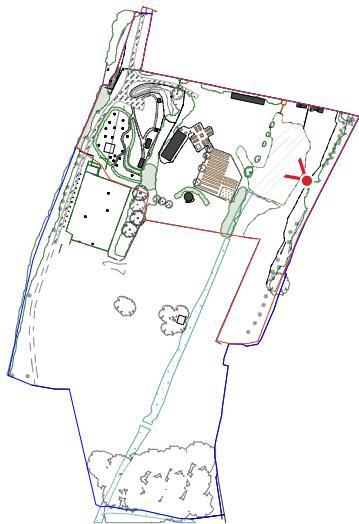


19

Entrance gate to The Fen Farm, with new hedging planted

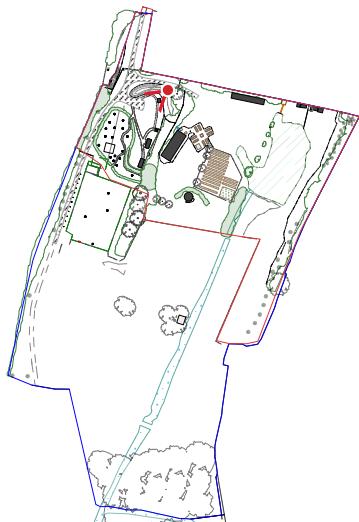


20 *Proposed site of project*



21

View from the east boundary of the site looking west.



22 *Existing car and bicycle parking*