

Chailey (St George's) Conservation Area Appraisal



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is a Conservation Area?

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 defines a conservation area as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.' Designation is the principal means by which local authorities apply conservation policies to a particular area. It introduces a general control over the demolition of unlisted buildings and provides the basis for policies designed to preserve and enhance all the aspects of character or appearance that define the special interest of an area.

Section 71 of the Act requires the local planning authority to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas within the District. Section 72 requires that in considering applications for development in a Conservation Area, attention shall be paid to the desirability of conserving or enhancing the character of that area.

1.2 The purpose of this Conservation Area Appraisal

Conservation Area Appraisals are an important part of the process of enhancing and conserving the character and appearance of designated areas. They also play a role in making informed and sustainable decisions about the future of the area. This appraisal offers the opportunity to reassess the designated area and to evaluate and record its special interest. It has been carried out in accordance with guidelines set out in the English Heritage publication, *Guidance on conservation area appraisals (2006)*.

2. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

The Adopted Lewes District Council Local Plan (2003) contains detailed policies relating to Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas. In particular, the policies detailed in Chapter 8 'The Historic Environment' are applied to development in or affecting conservation areas and planning decisions will be determined with consideration given to them. For this reason, anyone considering making an application for consent within a conservation area should consult these policies. The Local Plan is available from Lewes District Council offices or online at www.lewes.gov.uk. Pre-application advice can also be sought from Development Control and Design & Conservation Officers.

The Local Plan is currently under review and will be replaced with a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF will consist of a portfolio of local development documents that set out the spatial planning strategy for the District Council area. Until this is in place, the Local Plan remains the statutory planning document.

In addition, broad policies relating to the consideration of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are detailed in the Adopted East Sussex and Brighton and Hove Structure Plan (1999). National planning policy guidance also covers these areas. In particular, Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15) – Planning and the Historic Environment, should be consulted.

3. SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

The key features which make a positive contribution to the special interest of the area are as follows:

- the isolated and formal setting of the buildings within the landscape of Red House Common
- the quality of the buildings, particularly the windmill and St George's
- the socio-historical interest of the St George's building
- the landmark quality of the windmill and its historical interest

4. ASSESSING SPECIAL INTEREST

4.1 Location and Setting

4.1.1 Location and context

The Chailey (St George's) Conservation Area is located nine miles north of Lewes, to the north west of North Chailey. The site lies within Red House Common, which is part of Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve. Chailey Common, one of the largest heathland commons in southern England, is also a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), due to its heathland plants and diverse insect and bird species.

4.1.2 General character and plan form

Approached via a long driveway, the conservation area has a rather formal character. Not a large area, it incorporates a small number of buildings within its boundary. It is set apart from the village of North Chailey by nature of its position slightly outside the main village and this separation is further enhanced by the hedged boundary enclosing the conservation area. Public footpaths run around the outside of the site.

At the centre of the conservation area stands the St George's building. There is an open playing field area to the west of it, and garaging to the north. The other buildings lie in the south east corner of the area.

4.1.3 Landscape setting

St George's is sited on top of a ridge from which there are views across both the South and the North Downs. From within the conservation area itself views out of the site are fairly restricted due to the hedges and trees of its boundary, which adds to the sense of it being a formalised area within an otherwise more open rural landscape.

The St George's building and the nearby windmill dominate the conservation area. The windmill in particular is a highly visible landmark, which can be easily seen from immediately outside the conservation area and from points further away such as Ditchling Beacon.

4.2 Historic Development and Archaeology

4.2.1 The origins and historic development of the area

The landscape of the conservation area was for many years open heathland and it is only in the past hundred years that the area has become enclosed in its current form.

Chailey Common was recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 and was used over a long period of time for grazing livestock and cutting wood and bracken for fuel. The area belonged to the manor of Balneath, once part of the estates of St Pancras' Priory, Lewes. The manor was granted to Thomas Cromwell at the Dissolution in 1537, and then passed to Anne of Cleves and subsequently Sir William Goring, with whose descendents it remained until c.1900.

A windmill has stood in the area for several hundred years. An early reference to a windmill on the site is in a court roll for the Manor of Balneath dated 1590. It refers to a 'ventimolum voc[at] a wynde myll' held by Richard Houlden. A house associated with the windmill is referred to in documents as early as c.1670 in a List of Tenants of Balneath Manor: 'Tennants of the said mannor who pay unto the Lord of the said mannor uppon death...the best beast as a herriott for every tenement copyhold...Widdow Comber for a cottage and windmill in Chayley...'

Early Ordnance Survey maps show little more than a windmill and its associated Mill House and outbuildings. The area retained this open heath land feel until the site was used by the Chailey Heritage Crafts School in the early 20th century. This organisation grew out of the Guild of the Brave Poor Things, which was founded in London in 1894 and organised meetings for people with physical disabilities of all ages. The Heritage Crafts School was founded in 1903 at Chailey Old Workhouse and the first pupils were seven boys who were members of the Guild. In 1917 the Kitchener Huts, built by boys at the school to allow their residential accommodation to be given over to soldiers wounded in the First World War, were constructed at the St George's site. In time, the Huts were felt to be in poor state of repair and of a temporary character; irregular in plan due to their piecemeal construction, and not particularly practical. The Huts were finally replaced with the building of a new residential block at St George's, which was opened in 1932 – this is the main St George's building we see today. The area was also enclosed by its boundary at this time.

The building remained in use by the Heritage Crafts School until the 1990s when it was sold and converted into residential properties. At this time the sunken garaging to the north of St George's was constructed to provide parking for residents.

4.2.2 Archaeology, including scheduled monuments

There are no known areas of archaeological interest or scheduled ancient monuments within the conservation area.

4.3 Spatial Analysis

4.3.1 *Character and interrelationship of spaces within the area*

There are two main areas of open space within the conservation area. The playing field to the west of the site is a reminder of the time when the area was used as part of the Chailey Heritage Crafts School, and is also important to the setting of the St George's building, particularly when viewed from the footpath to the west of the conservation area boundary. This area is enclosed to the south, west and north by the site boundary and to the east it is defined by a landscaped bank leading up to the St George's building.

There is also an open area with a number of trees in the north east corner of the site. This area provides a rural feel within the more formal landscape of the conservation area.

Public and private space within the conservation area is designated in a variety of ways. The whole site is enclosed by a definite boundary, and the brickwork gates at the entrance to the site discourage the public from entering, with a "residents only" sign immediately before them. The residential properties within the St George's building have their own garden areas but generally these are not enclosed and are designated by the use of planters and seating areas. St George's itself is separated from the surrounding area by gravel paths.

The eastern side of the site is more rural in character than the formal St George's building. The windmill, Mill House, Barn and small outbuildings are all evidence of the agricultural use of the area in the past. The Mill House is fairly well-screened from the central and western areas of the conservation area by hedging and trees enclosing the building within its garden area. The Barn is more visible, and it and its garden area are defined from the rest of the conservation area by walling. From the footpath running immediately to the east of the conservation area, the barn is prominent, being immediately on the boundary, and the Mill House is also more visible. The main site boundary here is defined by a wall and hedges.

4.3.2 *Key views and vistas*

As already discussed, the area has a fairly enclosed feel and views outside of it are limited. The spire of St Martin's Chapel, designed for the Chailey Heritage Craft School by Sir Ninian and J.B.S. Comper, can be seen to the southwest.

The windmill and the St George's building are both prominent within the conservation area and are highly visible from several points outside. Whilst the windmill can be seen from viewpoints at a distance from the conservation area, the St George's building is much less visible. It is only at a closer range, along the footpaths surrounding the site, that the building can be seen in varying degrees. Glimpses of the building are afforded particularly along the western and northern footpaths around the site. From the eastern footpath, north of the Barn, there are clear views of St George's. The central tower of the building is particularly prominent. In addition, glimpses of the sweeps of the windmill can be seen at regular intervals from the footpaths around the site.



St George's and the Windmill, viewed from the footpath to the west

4.4 Character Analysis

4.4.1 Definition of character areas or zones

The conservation area is now wholly used for residential purposes. It can be divided into two main zones: the first is the formal St George's building and its landscaped area and the second focuses on the windmill, Mill House and Barn with their rural associations. These are also distinct in terms of date: the 'rural' buildings being earlier than the St George's building.

4.4.2 Activity and prevailing or former uses and their influence on the plan form and buildings

The two zones as they are today are both a product of their former uses. The St George's building, in its landscaped setting with its associated playing field, and the site boundary within which the conservation area lies are all related to St George's function as part of the Chailey Heritage Crafts School, for which it was purpose-built.

The windmill and Mill House are evidence of the role this area played in a rural economy in the past. The Windmill also once belonged to the Heritage Crafts School, hence the rather unusual presence of St George's alongside this older, agricultural building.

4.4.3 The qualities of the buildings and their contribution to the area

Although there has been a windmill in the North Common area for hundreds of years, the present mill dates from the 19th century. The mill and the yew tree close by traditionally marked the central point in Sussex.



The windmill and yew tree

The mill is Grade II Listed and is the only listed building in the conservation area. This white smock mill was built in 1830 as Hammingden Mill at Philpott Farm, in Highbrook, near Horsted Keynes, West Sussex. It was sold in 1840 to the Bollen family. Mr Joe Bollen is recorded as having built a mill in Newhaven in 1744, which burnt down in 1843 and was replaced with the mill from Philpott Farm. By 1855 the mill and land had passed to Stone & Towner who owned a brewery and steam mill. The Bollen mill was no longer required and was sold in the 1860s. It was moved to Chailey, erected next to an existing post mill and given different sweeps. The post mill was destroyed shortly after in a gale. The new mill suffered serious damage during a storm in January 1928 but was restored in 1933 and reopened by HRH Princess Alice, Countess of Athlone, in October of that year.

The mill is clad with white weatherboarding above a base of tarred brick. Its sweeps are still in position but are not shuttered. Above the door is a panel which reads 'The Founder's Mill' – this probably refers to its associations with the Heritage Crafts School and the founder of the organisation, Dame Grace Kimmins.

A plaque on the door refers to support from the Heritage Lottery Fund. This reflects the grant awarded in February 1998 to Chailey Parish Council for the mill's renovation.

4.4.4 Unlisted buildings

The St George's building is not listed, but is of great character and significance within the conservation area. The building makes an impact when entering the site as you move from the rugged landscape of the common into the more formal grounds of the site. However, the mellow materials used in its construction lend softness to the building which allows it to sit harmoniously in its surroundings.

In her 1948 account of the history of the Heritage Crafts School, Dame Grace Kimmins stated that it was built in 'the traditional English brick style...a style which is seen perhaps at best in what is known as the Tudor period...the adoption of this style lies in the desire to give the young inhabitants of this building an "historic" environment, a better realisation of the continuity of history and at least an attempt to recapture something of our forefathers' sense of beauty and fitness of design, which exercises a subconscious effect on the mind'.

According to the programme for the official opening of the site by the Prince of Wales in 1932, the building was designed to reflect 'scholastic buildings such as those at Winchester, Eton and the Oxford and Cambridge Colleges', where there is 'no great distinction between the domestic and ecclesiastical types'. This domestic element is reflected in the dormer windows, while the central tower and the chapel-like windows of the central southern projection have an ecclesiastical feel.

St George's was built to the design of the architect J.B.S Comper (1891-1971), the son of the ecclesiastical architect Sir John Ninian Comper. Designs by Comper can be seen particularly in London and the South East. Much of his work was with church buildings, but he also designed a number of buildings for the Chailey Heritage Craft School.

St George's is constructed in red brick with dressed sandstone detail on the eastern and central southern wing; both locally sourced materials. It is particularly well-proportioned and is triple cross in plan, the east-west axis of the building being crossed by three north-south wings. The south elevation of the building is characterised particularly by the dormer windows of the southeast and southwest projections and the arched windows with sandstone tracery of the central projection. In particular the large south-facing window has considerable impact by nature of its size and design. The southern views of the building are designed to be impressive and to have impact when approaching the buildings from the driveway to the southeast. The windows in the southern elevation of the eastern projection have sandstone surrounds and mullions. Other windows are framed in weathered oak. This projection once housed the main entrance, through a now blocked archway. There is an interesting sandstone apple tree motif and two sandstone shields above the archway.

Further openings at the ends of the east and west southern projections were blocked during the residential conversion. These are noticeable by the slight difference in brick, which is lighter in colour.

The central tower stands higher than the rest of the building and is covered by oak shingles. On top of the tower is a fixing for a weather vane – in a photograph taken shortly

after the official opening of the building the weathervane is visible and appears to have been in the design of a ship.

A request was made to the Department of the Environment in the mid 1990s to consider adding St George's to the statutory list, but English Heritage considered that the building is not of sufficient architectural or historic interest to qualify for inclusion. However, St George's may merit being included on Lewes District Council's list of Buildings of Local Interest due to its prominence, attractive architecture, interesting details and its social historical associations.



South elevation of St Georges

The Mill House is set quite low down into the site, towards the eastern boundary. The building is of timber frame construction with brick and tile-hung elevations. Internally, the timber frame looks to be of an early date but although there is historical evidence to suggest that a house associated with the mill has stood on the site for many years, there is also documentary evidence that a new house was built in the early 19th century. As the timbers appear to be earlier than 19th century, there is a possibility that the house may have re-used timbers from an earlier timber frame. The Mill House may merit statutory or local listing due to the survival of its timber frame and its historical associations with the listed mill.



The Mill House

The Barn is built in random coursed sandstone with brick quoins and window surrounds. There is a brick stringcourse at eaves level on the west elevation of the building. The roof is half-hipped and tiled.



The Barn

4.4.5 Local details

A distinctive detail in the southern elevation of the eastern projection of St George's is the sandstone apple tree motif above the former entrance archway. This motif has particular relevance to the history of the building and the site. It is a reference to the Golden Apple Tree appeal which raised the £38,000 needed for the construction of the building, in which £50 donations were represented as apples made by the children of the school, and were

hung on a tree outside the school chapel. This provides a sense of the building's history and origins. To either side of the apple tree detail there are two sandstone shields. Originally these were decorated with the shields of the See of Chichester and the See of London, representing the two Dioceses mainly connected with the school.



Sandstone apple tree motif above the former entrance archway

4.4.6 Prevalent and traditional building materials and the public realm

The conservation area displays a wide range of building materials: red brick, dressed sandstone, oak shingles, white painted weatherboard, tarred brick, random coursed sandstone, and peg tiles.

There are no surfaces in the public realm which are of any special interest. These are modern materials: gravel paths, tarmac and concrete.

4.4.7 The contribution made to the character of the area by green spaces; and its biodiversity value.

The site has a number of trees under Tree Protection Orders. In the northeast corner of the site these are predominantly horse chestnuts; there are also limes, maples,

sycamores, oaks, and a holly and poplar. On the western boundary there is an ash and a horse chestnut, whilst along the southern boundary there is a further ash. In the vicinity of the mill there are several yew trees and two oaks. Of particular note is the yew between the two small outbuildings to the south of the mill. This is of considerable size and therefore of some age; it has further interest as it is the 'pointed' yew which is mentioned in association with the mill in Dame Grace Kimmins' 1948 account of the foundation of Chailey Heritage. The mill and yew tree were traditionally considered to mark the centre of the county of Sussex.

The vegetative boundary is of importance to the setting of the conservation area and consists of privet, oak, beech, ash, hawthorn, blackthorn and sycamore. It probably dates to the time the St Georges building was constructed.

As previously mentioned, the site lies within the Chailey Common Local Nature Reserve. The heather and gorse of the Nature Reserve provide a habitat for many birds and butterflies. There are also unusual plants such as the Heath Spotted Orchid and Bog Asphodel, which depend on the heathland soil. A decline in use of the common has led to bracken, birch and gorse threatening the heathland and the Nature Reserve is now managed through scrub clearance and grazing. Clearly the conservation area lies within a landscape of considerable value in terms of the wildlife and ecosystems it supports.

4.4.8 The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)

Parking is obviously a problem at this site. Provision is made for residents in the garaging area, but guest parking is served by an untidy tarmac area in the northeast corner. This is out of place with the otherwise well maintained appearance of the area and could benefit from improvements.

Additionally, there are many signs around the site, prohibiting parking, stating "residents only", "keep out", "private property" and so on. These are quite intrusive and are not uniform in style or design. As the windmill is open to the public from April to September, this may be off-putting to potential visitors.

There is a small sub station in the south east corner of the site, just inside the entrance. This is quite visible from several areas within the site as screening is poor, in the form of cement posts and a wire netting fence. Obviously, warning signs have to be put in place for safety reasons and the sub station has to be secure, but improved screening, perhaps with beech hedging, as has been successfully employed elsewhere in the site, may help improve the look of this part of the conservation area.

There is also an area north west of the garaging site and close to the playing field which is used for washing lines. This is conspicuous from the playing field and the western stretch of the footpath outside the site, and may also benefit from hedged screening.

Further improvements which could be made to the area include: if practical, removal or reduction of the number of signs, or at least a more unobtrusive, uniform signage system; and improvements to the north east corner of the site, such as finishing the planting of the beech hedge, improving the look of tarmac, removing rubbish, improving the boundary fencing, and encouraging more positive use of this area. In this conservation area it is

important to gain a balance between necessities of daily life and the aesthetic appearance of the area.

4.4.9 The existence of any neutral areas

The two outbuildings south of the windmill, with their simple appearance, neither detract from, nor enhance the character of the conservation area.

4.4.10 General condition

Aside from the small number of issues previously discussed, the conservation area is generally neat, tidy and well-cared for. The buildings appear to be well-maintained and in good condition.

4.4.11 Problems, pressures and the capacity for change

There is general concern among residents of St George's that the north east corner of the site may come under pressure for housing development. This area is one of the two open spaces within the boundary of the conservation area and its rural feel is important in terms of both the context of the area and in contrast with the more formal areas of the site. Residential development here would be inappropriate.

As residents appear keen to keep the area private, there may be future pressures for gates to the entrance, which would be inappropriate and detrimental to the character of the conservation area, making it even more enclosed and limiting access to the windmill.

Unlisted buildings make a significant contribution to the special interest and character of the area. Additional control, in the form of an Article 4 Direction, which would further restrict permitted development in the conservation area, would offer increased protection against undesirable change. For example, it would prevent the replacement of original windows with inappropriate modern versions.

5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The appraisal was undertaken in consultation with St George's Management Company and local residents, Chailey Commons Management Committee, Chailey Commons Society, Friends of Chailey Windmill, and with District and Parish Councillors. The draft appraisal was made available for public consultation and following evaluation of the feedback any necessary alterations were made to the document before final publication.

6. SUGGESTED BOUNDARY REVISIONS

The current boundary of the conservation area does not include the hedge/tree boundary surrounding the site. Chailey Parish Council and Chailey Commons Society suggest that this is protected as part of the Local Nature Reserve. To offer it further protection the boundary of the conservation area could be extended outwards by two metres. It is an important part of the character of the conservation area and also relates to the landscaping of the area when St George's was built.

7. LOCAL GENERIC GUIDANCE

Advice for owners of properties in conservation areas on the relevant planning legislation which affects them can be found in the leaflet Planning Controls in Conservation Areas, available online at <http://www.lewes.gov.uk/planning/15660.asp>

Further information on Listed Buildings can be found in the leaflet Listed Buildings: An owner's guide to alteration and repairs, available online at: <http://www.lewes.gov.uk/planning/1087.asp>

Both leaflets are also available from the Planning and Environmental Services Department of Lewes District Council.

8. SUMMARY OF ISSUES

In light of its architecture and historical associations, it is recommended that the St George's building is added to the Lewes District Council list of Buildings of Local Interest.

Due to the age of its timber frame and its historical associations with the windmill, the Mill House may be eligible for statutory listing. However, as documentary evidence suggests that the Mill House was rebuilt in the early 19th century, possibly using an earlier timber frame, adding the building to the list of Buildings of Local Interest may be a more viable option.

In order to protect the hedges and trees of the boundary, which play such an important role in its setting, it is recommended that the conservation area boundary be extended outwards by two metres to incorporate this.

The implementation of an Article 4 Direction would offer further control over alterations to unlisted buildings.

9. USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

For further advice and information, please contact the Design and Conservation department at:

Planning and Environmental Services
Southover House
Southover Road
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1AB
Tel: 01273 471600

This is one of a series of leaflets about the 35 Conservation Areas in the Lewes District. A full list can be obtained by contacting the above officers, or by visiting the Council's website (www.lewes.gov.uk).

Historic records and Ordnance Survey maps of the area can be viewed at:

East Sussex Records Office
The Maltings
Castle Precincts
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1YT
Tel: 01273 482349

10. FURTHER READING

Guidance on conservation area appraisals, English Heritage, 2006.

Chailey through the Centuries, Eddie Matthias, 2003.

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Cover photograph: Chailey Windmill