

## East Blatchington Conservation Area Appraisal



**Date of Designation 1976**

**Extended 1988**

**Reviewed 2005**

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<b>1.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>		

## **1.1 What is a Conservation Area?**

A Conservation Area is designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990) and is defined as "an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance." The quality and interest of the area as a whole rather, than individual buildings, is the main consideration when designating such areas.

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 considered by English Heritage to be vital to the conservation of these special areas. The content of this statement is based on the recommended approach set out in English Heritage's publication *Understanding Place: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals (2005)*.

The Council has a duty to pay special attention to preserving and enhancing the character and appearance of Conservation Areas in exercising its planning powers. This statement will therefore provide a consistent and sound basis upon which to determine planning applications. It will also help in defending appeals against refusals of planning applications, which could have a detrimental impact on the Conservation Area. This statement also identifies features which contribute towards the character of the area and those features that detract from it. This provides a useful base upon which to develop proposals for preservation and enhancement through development if the opportunity should arise through the planning system.

The preparation of the statement also enables local residents to participate in the identification of features which are important to the special character of the area in which they live. Visitors to the area also may find this statement provides interesting information about special and interesting local features.

## **2. ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **2.1 Location and setting**

East Blatchington Conservation Area lies less than a mile to the North West of Seaford town on a steep swell of the South Downs. It is approximately 12 miles east of Brighton and about a mile from the coast.

Due to its setting on a hill and the low lying surrounding topography, a distant view of the sea can be gained from the upper end of Blatchington Hill. This refreshing vista connects the community with its coastal links and is a reminder of the proximity of the sea, despite the inland, semi-rural character of the neighbourhood itself. Views across the heavily developed areas of Seaford town and its environs are also glimpsed; incongruous reminders that the

quiet, verdant quality of East Blatchington belies its position, hemmed in on all sides by suburban Seaford.

The area is exclusively residential, with the majority of houses large, detached and set in generous grounds behind flint walls and dense tree belts. Although it was once a separate settlement from Seaford town, it has been swallowed up on all sides by development, and is now essentially a suburb of Seaford. Despite this, it retains a distinct character which distinguishes it from the surrounding area. It is made up of two streets, Blatchington Hill and Firle Road, bisected approximately halfway up by Belgrave Road. Various minor lanes, vestiges of historic downland tracks and modern cul-de-sacs lead off from the main road.

## **2.2 Spatial analysis**

The Conservation Area is essentially linear, encompassing the buildings and spaces around Firle Road and Blatchington Hill. As a result, and as it is a residential area, there are only a limited number of public spaces which contribute to its character. One important area of open space is the pond at the bottom of Blatchington Hill. This is backed by a mature belt of trees and forms a pleasant open area which is similar in character to a village pond. This green, sunny space marks a transition from the modern developments on the outskirts of Seaford town and is an attractive contrast both to the heavily developed areas nearby, and the shaded, private character of Blatchington Hill which leads up from it. There is a clear sense of this change of character as one enters the Conservation Area, and this special quality is defined largely by the dense foliage, the distinct absence of urban paraphernalia, and glimpses of large, established, detached residences, some set behind high walls.

The church yard around the Parish Church of St. Peter is a quiet well-tended space which contributes to the overall character of the Conservation Area, in addition to providing the setting for the important listed building. This secluded area on the junction of Blatchington Hill and Belgrave Road, marks a division between the upper and lower parts of the Conservation Area, and is a welcome relief after the unbroken stretch of road leading up from the pond.

Although in private ownership, the substantial grounds of Blatchington House contribute to this spacious, undeveloped quality at the crossroads of Firle Road and the busy Belgrave Road. The thick belt of mature trees obscures the buildings behind and creates an almost protective feeling, shielding the Conservation Area from the traffic and development pressures of Belgrave Road.

The imposing formal entrance and forecourt to Alces Place are readily visible from the road and enhance the setting of the cottages. This group of originally modest buildings dates from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century but was altered and 'improved' in 1913 in the then prevailing Arts and Crafts style. The charmingly contrived quaintness of this group of buildings and their setting exemplifies the character of this part of the Conservation Area.

Walls and dwellings in the Firle Road stretch of the Conservation Area are frequently set back from the lane beyond grass verges. These are often banked, and form a distinctive feature of the area by emphasising the prevalence of rough greenery and wild flowers along the lane, and by setting buildings at a distance from the road which accentuates the rural character of

the lane. There are several groups of large modern houses, such as The Barn House and Oakdene, set out in planned clusters around communal spaces, but separated from the road by private drives or gates. This exclusivity is a feature of this part of the Conservation Area, which exudes an intensely private, secluded air, many of the large residences only glimpsed from the road, although most of the listed buildings, which formed the original hamlet, are clustered more closely together and have an altogether more accessible feel.

Further up Firle Road, the road levels out where the Conservation Area borders the large Area of Established Character, the uncultivated vegetation gives way to a more developed setting, large mature trees remaining a feature, but the houses are laid out in more regular plots and, whilst mostly thoughtfully designed, lacking the originality and character of many of the earlier buildings. It is important that the character of the Conservation Area itself is not eroded by infill of a mediocre nature.

The Firle Road element of the Conservation Area has a particularly rural feel due to the width of the road and verges, the lack of formal road markings or footways and the mature trees flanking the lane. There has been a degree of infill development; however, with some exceptions, due to the flint wall and tree screens, this has little impact on the character of the Conservation Area in the view from the road.

The southern end of Blatchington Hill has again been subject to more recent development, however the presence of strong tree belts along the roadside help to screen many of these buildings and to add to the character of the surroundings. The focus of the most southern end of the area is the village pond, set in a small green with a backdrop of dense, mature trees.

### **2.3 Historic development and archaeology**

The area around the parish church of St. Peter is listed as a possible Romano - British cemetery, and accordingly is an archaeological trigger site. This is a non-statutory designation identified by the County Council. As a result, should the area be affected by development proposals a watching brief should be set up and rescue archaeology implemented in order to record details of the site.

As can be seen on early 19<sup>th</sup> century Tithe maps and First Edition OS maps, East Blatchington was once entirely separate from Seaford town, a small downland estate consisting of a mansion house (adjacent to the church on Belgrave Road, now demolished) and associated farming and estate buildings.

The earliest part of the original hamlet is located around the parish church of St. Peter, characterised by the narrow road and concentration of Listed Buildings. This area has a special quality as a result.

During the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, local architects built large, carefully designed and detailed houses in the Arts and Crafts style. Ideally suited to the bucolic setting, these buildings contribute a special architectural quality and are now integral to the character of the area. They should not be removed or impinged upon by further development.

## 2.4 Character Analysis

### 2.4.1 Buildings

A main focal point of the Conservation Area is the Parish church of St. Peter, the distinctive flint walls of which are listed in addition to the church itself. The church appears to have evolved and been added to over time, with the thickness of part of the nave suggesting Norman origin, the round-headed priest's doorway dating from c.1200 and the shingled broad spire dating from slightly later in the thirteenth century.

On the opposite side of Blatchington Hill the church is a pair of listed early nineteenth century buildings at right angles to one another. These are a dwelling known as The Gables with its adjoining stable block. The Gables is a knapped flint, two-storey building with red brick dressings and red and black brick quoins and a clay tiled roof. The adjoining stable building (now used for ancillary domestic purposes) also dates from the early nineteenth century and is built of alternate bands of red and vitrified brick. The roof is tiled and the building features a modillion eaves cornice and a rounded arch doorway.



*The Gables, Rectory Cottage and Drew Cottage on Blatchington Hill*

Further to the south down Blatchington Hill a pair of listed dwellings front the street. These are numbers 26 and 28, and are known as Rectory Cottage and Glebe Cottage. These are of eighteenth century origin and of knapped flint construction with red brick dressings and quoins. The cottages have red tile roofs, with gables facing the road.



*Buildings near the church are clustered more closely together and nearer to the road than elsewhere in the conservation area*

Immediately to the south of the church is a large three storey dwelling called The Old Rectory, and previously known as Monks Orchard. This is believed to date from 1744, and has stuccoed walls and a gabled, tiled roof. To the side there is an iron veranda at first floor level and a modern 'Tudor' doorway has been added.

On the opposite side of Belgrave Road is Field Cottage. This is bounded by flint walls which are listed features in addition to the cottage itself. The cottage dates back to the seventeenth century and is a long, low building with dormers in a red tile roof. The walls are of knapped flint and there is brick rustication around the windows. There are two buttresses to the house and the side wall of the dwelling is tile hung.

On the corner of Homefield Road and Blatchington Hill is a large elongated dwelling known as the Star House, dating from 1730, although parts of the house may be earlier. This building has been altered and enlarged and is a predominantly two storey dwelling with several gables which is set in a prominent corner location. The building incorporates flintwork, render and weatherboarding with red brick dressings and quoins in its construction, and has a clay tiled roof. The building has a panelled door dating from the eighteenth century, and was previously The Star Inn. Its setting is enhanced by mature planting along its western boundary.

There are a number of unlisted properties which also contribute to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Principal amongst these is Alces Place, a U-shaped terrace of cottages with a formally laid out garden and drive in the front courtyard. The core of this building is Medieval although it was substantially rebuilt in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The cottages are tile roofed with brick and weatherboarded walls, and there is a formal front wall and gates at the entrance to the grounds.



*Alces Place (left) and Pound*

To the south of Alces Place is Blatchington House which is used for institutional purposes. This is an imposing double-ridged building set in spacious grounds. The roof of the building is slate, and the walls are white painted render.

Almost opposite Blatchington House is a dwelling called 'Pound' which is located alongside the road. This features herringbone brickwork, tile hanging, weatherboarding and stone dressings around the windows, and makes a considerable contribution to the character of the area.

On the western side of Blatchington Hill is an old two storey dwelling known as The Sanctuary. This is built of tile, tile hanging and render and features good detailing, particularly in the joinery work. The visual contribution made by this dwelling is enhanced due to its position amongst undistinguished modern housing.

On the western side of Firle Road are two old outbuildings located hard up to the roadside. This position is unusual, and the buildings are of some age and character. The buildings have tile roofs, one gabled and one hipped, and walls of flint, brick and weatherboarding. These outbuildings next to the lane add to the rural feel of the tree-lined Firle Road.



*Norlington*

The southernmost building in the Conservation Area is located in a triangular plot. This is called Norlington, and is a distinctive flint property with a gabled tile roof. The building is detailed with stone window surrounds, brick soldier courses and leaded light fenestration.

#### **2.4.2 Building materials**

The majority of the older buildings in the Conservation Area are built of flint, with stone or brick detailing. The roofs of the older buildings are predominantly covered with clay tiles, although some incorporate slates. Some original flint walls have also been rendered over time.

Tile hanging was used in a very small number of the older buildings in the Conservation Area, but is widely used in more recent development where a wide range of brick and tile types have also been used. There are some examples of traditional timberwork in buildings such as The Sanctuary and Pound.

#### **2.4.3 Natural elements**

The Conservation Area has three parts which have distinctive characteristics. These are mainly influenced by the presence, or otherwise, of mature vegetation and the setting of the buildings.

The Firle Road part of the Conservation Area has intense tree and hedge cover along most of its length, which gives it the feel of a rural lane. The northern part of Blatchington Hill is the original heart of the settlement, and as such has a denser layout with few major tree belts bordering the road. From Blatchington Lane southwards the area is much more tree-lined, which creates a pleasant street scene and screens much of the modern development.

The extent and the variety of the tree cover in East Blatchington is integral to its character, however there are a number of areas with particular trees which are worthy of note. There is a belt of Sycamore, Elm and Holm Oak behind the pond, which frame the space and screen the development behind. At this junction, dense belts of Sycamore, Elm and Beech provide a natural portal to the Conservation Area up Blatchington Hill. These trees are well established and give a first impression of a wooded area, despite the development behind them.

The mature trees around The Gate House emphasise the secluded nature of the dwelling and contribute to the leafy character of the roadside. There are mature trees in the Churchyard, and many other individual trees of note in the large private gardens, a considerable number of which are protected by TPOs. In addition to these there is a row of Holm Oaks along the side of the road at the northern edge of the present Conservation Area boundary. These screen the modern development behind them, and are of note within the street scene.



*View down Firle Road*

#### **2.4.4 Relationship between built form and natural environment**

When approached from the north down Firle Road, the views into the Conservation Area are that of a rural lane due to the tree-lined and informal nature of the road. Indeed from one point all that is visible is trees and the two rustic outbuildings on the road edge. Views northwards up Firle Road are similar in character.

The Conservation Area is bisected by the main Belgrave/Upper Belgrave Road which is very different in character from the quieter roads which form the length of the Conservation Area. This road has a mini-roundabout, formal road markings and a proliferation of signage, and east/west views along this road are suburban in character.

At the northern end of Blatchington Hill views south are of a closely-knit historic group of buildings, although from Blatchington Lane south views are of a road bounded by trees and flint walls, with development set back from the road. The focal point of views at the very southern end of the Conservation Area is the pond and its surroundings.

#### **2.4.5 Prevailing or former uses**

The settlement was originally a downland hamlet, centred on the church of the parish of St. Peter and the adjacent Mansion House. The rectory and several other dwellings were built in close proximity to the church and its yard, focused around what is now the crossroads of Blatchington Hill and Belgrave Road. The presence of substantial lengths of flint walls to the north along Firle Road, and to the south down Blatchington Hill, with interspersed older buildings indicate that over time development spread along these two axes before this area was subsumed into the spread of Seaford.

### **3. DEFINITION OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST**

The special interest of East Blatchington Conservation Area derives not only from the individual buildings and spaces but from a combination of physical features, layout, natural elements and intangible qualities such as sounds and smells, views into and out of the area and the activities which take place in the area.

Key features which contribute to the character of the Conservation Area are:

- The 'village pond' area at the bottom of Blatchington Hill
- High flint boundary walls
- Dense tree belts and individual large mature trees, shrubs and wild flowers
- Large, individually designed detached houses set in spacious grounds
- Use of traditional local materials within a variety of building styles
- Prevalence of heavy screening of houses from the road
- Rough grass verges, general absence of formal road markings, kerbs, pavements and other urban road details
- Absence of street lighting and street furniture
- The exclusive, protective impression gained from the high level of enclosure and restricted views out of the Conservation Area.
- View of the sea from the top of Blatchington Hill.

### **4. POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The Conservation Area contains many examples of modern infill development (for instance around Blatchington Lodge, The Barn House and Arlington House). However much of this is built in a style and of materials which respect the surroundings or are substantially screened by flint walls or tree belts. Nevertheless, there are some examples of inappropriate development which are readily visible from the road, and detract from the character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

On the approach to the Conservation Area from Avondale Road in the south one of the first things seen is an electricity sub station at the side of the road. This comprises a collection of boxes surrounded by a chain link fence, and whilst there are hedges and bushes near to the sub station, additional screening would be beneficial in reducing the visual impact of this development.

An infill development has been undertaken in the grounds of The Sanctuary on the west side of Blatchington Hill. Much of the development on this side of the road is fairly modern; however a long bungalow has been erected on one of the infill plots. This building is not screened from the road, and is of a massing and design which is out of keeping with most of the surrounding buildings. Should opportunities arise through the development control process, it would be desirable to enhance the appearance of this building or to provide additional screening.

On the prominent corner site at the junction of Blatchington Hill and Upper Belgrave Road, a flat-roofed double garage fronts the main road. This site includes a dwelling, flint walls,

mature vegetation and an old lychgate, therefore the flat-roofed garage structure close to the road is an unfortunate intrusion of modern development into this site. Any opportunities to replace or screen the building would benefit the appearance of the Conservation Area. Lamb Cottage, close to Arlington House, is a flint, brick and tile property of some age. However, the front elevation which is close to Firle Road has been altered using mock stone dressings. These alterations so close to the road detract from the character of this dwelling to the detriment of the Conservation Area. Any opportunities which arise to redress these works or to screen them and hence reduce their impact on the surroundings should be taken.

## **5. SUGGESTED BOUNDARY REVISIONS**

Just outside the Conservation Area to the north is the site of the old East Blatchington mill. A small group of three large detached houses now sit here (Rosecroft, Firle Cottage and the Tile House), built just prior to the First World War by the local architect Rowland Hawke Halls. These houses are built in an 'arts and crafts' style, individually designed and showing a varied use of fenestration and form, incorporating loggias, balconies, mullioned windows and use of local materials such as oak and clay tiles. Similarly designed houses by the same architect within the Conservation Area are The Gate House on Blatchington Hill, Hill Cottage (no. 40) Kilmeny (no. 12) and possibly Uplands (no.10), all of which make a significant contribution to the area. Rosecroft, Firle Cottage and the Tile House are set in spacious grounds with mature trees, and as a group provide a surviving snapshot of the character of East Blatchington at the beginning of the last century. It is recommended the boundary be extended to include these buildings, which are of local significance.

The Conservation Area was extended in 1988, principally in order to take into it two unlisted buildings of some character. The first of these was Barclay House, located on the corner of Upper Belgrave Road and St. Peters Road, an imposing red brick and tile building built as a school house by the architect Rowland Halls. This was sadly demolished in 1997, and replaced with a group of singularly bland low rise buildings housing a residential care home. These detract from the character of the area but are well screened from the main road. The fine brick wall which forms the boundary of the site and the mature trees within merit protection however and should be retained.

## **6. SUGGESTED MANAGEMENT ACTION**

The main issue which threatens the special character of East Blatchington is development pressure arising from the large plots of valuable land occupied by single, large dwellings. Alterations to existing buildings can also erode the character of the area.

The following actions are suggested to protect the special character of the area:

- Demolition of buildings should be refused consent unless the existing building detracts from the character of the area.
- The generously spaced and low density character of the area should be protected from infill development.
- An Article 4 Direction to cover changes to roof covering, replacement of windows and alterations to the front of buildings.
- An Audit of Street Clutter and removal of unnecessary items, in line with English Heritage's 'Streets for All' campaign and ESCC Public Realm Initiative.

## 7. THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The **Adopted East Sussex and Brighton & Hove Structure Plan** [1991] contains broad policies which require the impact of proposed development on Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings to be given due consideration. This plan can be viewed at County Hall, St Anne's Crescent, Lewes.

Switchboard number: (01273) 481000.

Website: [www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk)

These policies are reflected in more specific detail in the **Adopted Lewes District Local Plan** [2003]. Chapter Eight of the plan specifically covers 'The Historic Environment' and these planning policies clearly outline the criteria that will be applied to development in, or affecting, a Conservation Area and the approval or refusal of any planning or Conservation Area application will be determined against them.

Anyone thinking of applying for consent within a Conservation Area is therefore strongly advised to consider these policies first. The Local Plan can be viewed at the District Council offices in Lewes or on the website at [www.lewes.gov.uk/coun/planning/index.html](http://www.lewes.gov.uk/coun/planning/index.html). Pre-application advice can also be obtained from Development Control Officers or the Conservation Officers.

The existing policies are currently being reviewed as part of the new planning system, the **Local Development Framework**. Consultation will be taking place to determine where policy changes need to be made to improve the protection and enhancement of the district's heritage. As part of the new planning system Structure Plans will be phased out and the Regional Spatial Strategy (South East Plan) and the LDF will take their place. Over time the two adopted plans which you should presently refer to for conservation policies will be replaced by these two documents.

## 8. USEFUL INFORMATION & CONTACT DETAILS

**For further information on this leaflet, please contact:**

Design & Conservation Team  
Planning and Environmental Services  
Lewes District Council  
Southover House  
Southover Road  
Lewes  
BN7 1AB  
(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 Councils web site ([www.lewes.gov.uk/environment](http://www.lewes.gov.uk/environment)), or from Lewes Tourist Information Centre.

- Visitors can find out about Walks and facilities in the area from Lewes Tourist Information Centre.
- Historic maps and records can be consulted at the East Sussex Record Office in Lewes.
- The Seaford Museum at the Martello Tower in Seaford has extensive records on the history and development of the area.

## 9. FURTHER READING

*Understanding Place: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals*, English Heritage, 2005

*Conservation Area Practice: English Heritage Guidance on the Management of Conservation Areas*, English Heritage, 1995

*Street Improvements in Historic Areas*. English Heritage, 1993