

Conservation Area Appraisal

Newhaven



Conservation Area Appraisal

Name of Conservation Area : Church Hill, Newhaven

Date of Designation : 25/10/1989

What is a Conservation Area?

A Conservation Area is defined as “an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.” Such areas therefore represent a key part of the district’s cultural heritage.

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 preferred approach set out in English Heritage’s publication *Conservation Area Appraisals – Defining the Special Architecture or Historic Interest of Conservation Areas*, English Heritage 1997.

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 what contributes towards the character of the area and any negative features. This provides a useful base upon which to develop proposals for preservation and enhancement 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.

Objectives in Conservation Areas

There are tighter controls over cutting back or felling trees, demolition and alterations or building works in Conservation Areas. These are outlined in more detail in the leaflet “*Planning Controls in Conservation Areas*”. In Conservation Areas the District Council has various objectives such as seeking to preserve buildings that are historically important, securing design and use of materials that are sympathetic to the area and protecting important vegetation and spaces.



Introduction

This is a compact Conservation Area, which has a very distinct character and appearance in comparison to surrounding denser and more recent development. The church and churchyard are the dominant built features, which occupy a prominent hillside setting. The area is characterised by mature tree groups and vegetation, which gives relief to the surrounding townscape, provide a backdrop for the church and create a very intimate and secluded character within the area.

The church sits on the hill overlooking the town of Newhaven and the estuary of the River Ouse. The hilltop spire, set amongst trees, is an important landmark in views of Newhaven from the east. The church was built for the village of Meeching, which was renamed as Newhaven when the port was created in the late nineteenth century by the formation of a new link for the River Ouse to the sea, replacing the old harbour at Seaford.



Origins and pattern of development

The church was built on the hill as a protection against both the sea and the French. It would have been the first building on this area of land and would have been the focal point for the surrounding area in terms of social activity and built form.

Archaeological Interest

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments or Archaeological Sites within or adjoining the Conservation Area.

Buildings

The Conservation Area comprises three main buildings. The buildings are detached structures set within spacious separate contained areas.

Parish Church of St Michael and All Angel's Church

Standing on a grassy embankment is the Parish Church of St. Michael and All Angel's Church which is listed Grade II. The church was the original Parish Church of the village of Meeching. It is the dominant building of the group, by virtue of its function, position, scale and appearance. It has a Norman tower and apse with a broached spire added subsequently. The building has been subject to several small alterations and additions, most recently in 1961, when the church was restored and the modern west porch was linked to the modern timber clad church rooms adjacent to the south. The building is constructed with knapped flint with stone dressings with some cement render to nineteenth century window openings. The roof is tiled and the spire features wooden shingles.

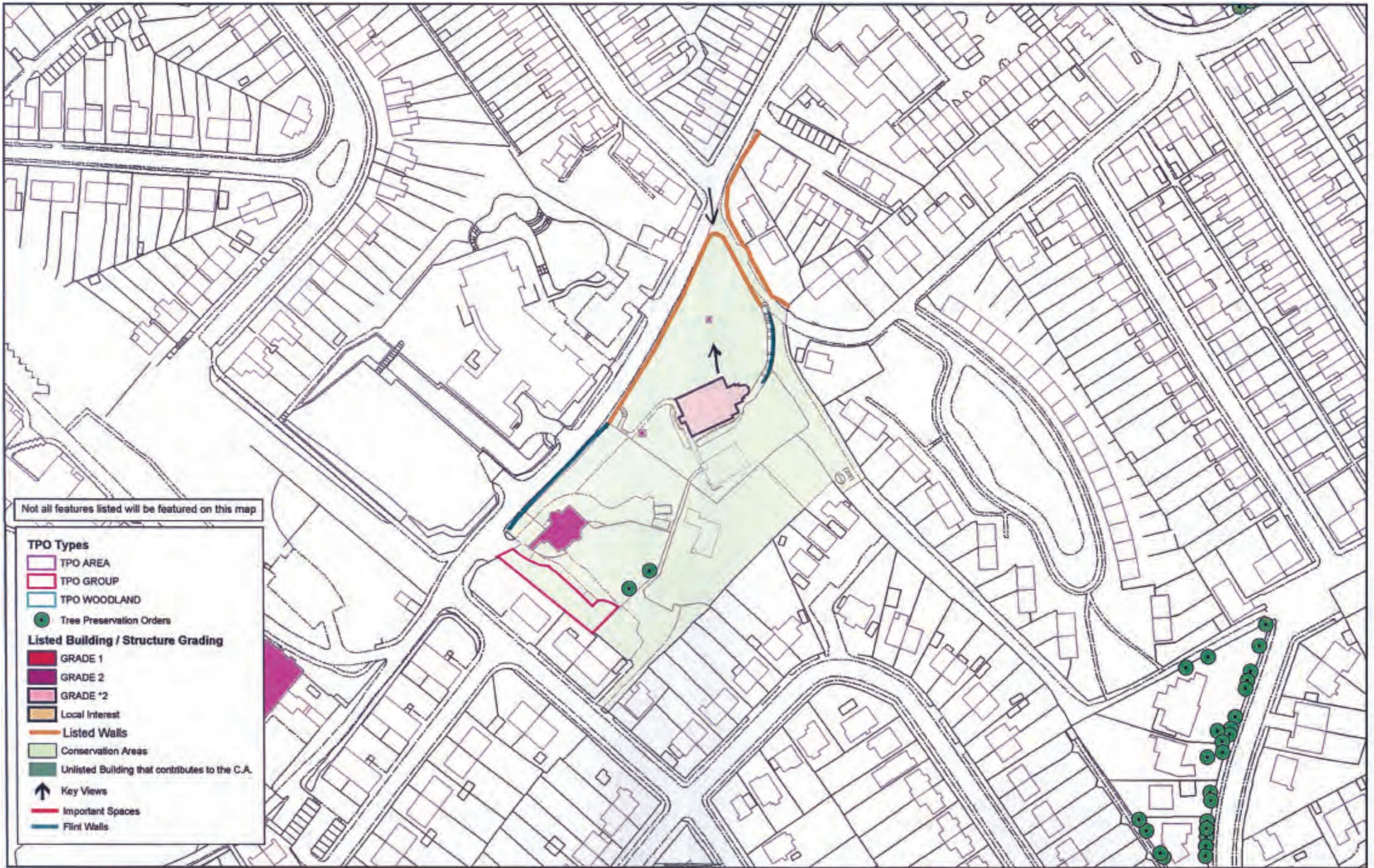
Old Rectory

This is the other listed building within the Conservation Area, which is now two separate houses hidden behind extensive vegetation. Built circa 1800 the main building is stucco and painted brick, with tile hung south east elevation. The service wing to the rear is painted unknapped flint. The original service wing is now St. Michaels Cottage.

The other major building within the Conservation Area is the new rectory to the rear (south) of the Church and (east) Old Rectory. This is an undistinguished contemporary building of domestic scale clad in brick and with a shallow pitched tiled roof. The building does not make a positive contribution to the character of the area. It is however very well screened and secluded and as such does not detract from the character of the area or the setting of the other buildings.

Listed Walls

The walls surrounding the churchyard are listed Grade II. They were built in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of brick with unknapped flint. The lych gate on Meeching Rise was built in 1952 and although relatively attractive, is not of special interest. The enclosing effect of the wall is of paramount importance to the character of the conservation area.



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Church Hill Conservation Area





Old Rectory and St Michael's

Listed Structures

There are two listed structures within the churchyard. In the north eastern corner of the churchyard stands an obelisk memorial, surrounded by railings, dated 1800, which is listed Grade II. About 2 metres high, the ashlar stone obelisk stands on a plinth decorated with seaweed, shells and dolphin motifs. The memorial was erected by friends of Captain James Hansom who sailed round the world with Captain Cancover in 1791-1794. The memorial stands in memory of the Captain, officers and 103 members of HMS Brazen's crew, which was wrecked beneath the cliffs of Newhaven on the 20th January 1800, with only one survivor.

To the west of the church stands a monument in memory of the Brewer Thomas Tipper, which is dated 1785. The ashlar stone has a shaped head and has a poem and picture of Newhaven bridge inscribed upon it. The bridge was erected two years before Tipper's death and linked Newhaven to Denton, it was subsequently demolished in 1865-6. The poem on the stone talks of Tipper's fine ales and good qualities.

Important Spaces

The main area of open space is the churchyard. The area is on a significantly higher level than Church Lane and Meeching Rise. The level of the churchyard continues to rise towards the rear of the site. The position of the Church towards the top of this slope gives the building added prominence when viewed from the north.

Other spaces within the area are less formal and public, comprising the gardens to the three dwelling houses. However, the very spacious nature of development and setting of the two residential buildings in mature established wooded setting is a very important characteristic of the area.

Attractive linear spaces within the Conservation Area are the two paths. One leads north-south through the middle of the Conservation Area from the lych gate at Meeching Rise through the Churchyard, and between the old and new rectories, to Second Avenue. The other is Nun's Walk, running along the foot of a wooded bank which forms the north eastern edge of the Conservation Area.

A feature of this Conservation Area is that it is a loose group of separate buildings in spacious setting. The spaces within the Conservation Area and the edges are formed by tree groups, and to a lesser extent the topography.

Building materials

The predominant building material in the Conservation Area is flint, which is abundant in the local downland. The church is faced with knapped flint, the surrounding walls are constructed with rougher flints. The two other major buildings incorporate a wider variety of materials, however it is the flint faced church and walls, which dominate the area.

Natural elements

Combined with the hilltop setting of the Church and churchyard, it is the abundance of mature tree belts within and around the area which is of crucial value to the character and appearance of the area, both within the Conservation Area and in longer distance views. The mature tree cover contrasts with the surrounding densely developed townscape, accentuating the sylvan character of the site. The low spire amidst a significant tree cluster is a significant landmark of the town in long distance views from the east.

The belt of trees along the south western edge of the Conservation area adjacent to St. Michael's Cottage comprising 15 Sycamores, one Ash and a Lime are protected by a Tree Preservation Order (no. 168).

Other tree belts which make a particularly valuable contribution to the character of the area are along the front of the Old Rectory on the south eastern side of Church Hill and also along the north western boundary of the churchyard. Both groups work as definite edges to the Conservation Area and enclose the space within.

Relationship between conservation area and its surroundings

There is a very strong link between the built form and natural environment. The hill top setting accentuates the prominent setting of the Church amidst the trees.

Expansive panoramic views over the Ouse valley and downland to the north and Denton to the east can be enjoyed from the churchyard. The village of Piddinghoe, Piddinghoe Pond and the skyline of Lewes are notable features in these views.

Streets of more than local importance

The "Streets of more than local importance" document, published by the District Council in 1996, identifies the paved area in front of the lych gate as an area where the existing traditional paving should be retained.

Potential Enhancements

There is a modern timber clad felt roofed ancillary building to the south east of the Church. It is of utilitarian appearance and certainly does not make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area or the setting of the Listed Building, however given its unobtrusive location it is not visible in important views and as such does not seriously detract from the character of the area. The flat roofed covered walkway which steps down the bank from the modern building and joins on to the west porch of the church however is totally unsympathetic and detracts from the integrity of the Listed Building and the character of the Conservation Area.

Planning Policies

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

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 offices at the below address or on the website at : www.lewes.gov.uk/coun/planning/index.html

Pre-application advice can also be obtained, free of charge, from Development Control Officers or the Conservation Officer.

Further Information

For further information on this leaflet, please contact:

Policy and Projects Team

Department of Planning and Environmental Services
Lewes District Council
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(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 web site (www.lewes.gov.uk), or from Lewes Tourist Information Centre (TIC) High Street, Lewes and Seaford Tourist Information Centre (TIC) Clinton Place, Seaford.

Visitors can find out about walks and facilities in the area from Lewes and Seaford TIC's.

Lindsay Frost

Director of Planning & Environmental Services

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