



# RODMELL CONSERVATION AREA



## CHARACTER APPRAISAL

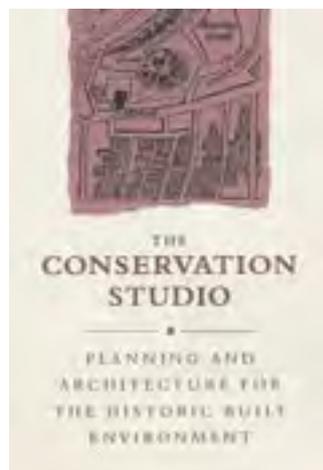
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In May 2007 Lewes District Council approved this document as planning guidance and therefore it will be a material consideration in the determination of relevant planning applications.

## **Acknowledgements**

With thanks to John Harvey, of Rodmell Parish Council, who kindly showed me round the village.



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## I SUMMARY

### I.1 KEY POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

This Character Appraisal concludes that the key *positive* characteristics of the Rodmell Conservation Area are:

- Small linear village based on a winding country lane, with a variety of historic buildings, most notably St Peter's Church;
- Attractive location on the lower slopes of the South Downs, with the River Ouse valley to the east;
- Just five kilometres away from Lewes, the county town of East Sussex;
- Informal layout of the houses, cottages, barns and other outbuildings mainly associated with agriculture;
- Spacious plots often defined by flint walls, which are an important characteristic feature of the village;
- Grass verges are also significant;
- Use of thatch, red clay roof tiles, red brick, flint and painted weather-boarding;
- Stunning views of the South Downs and beyond;
- 1960s and later housing development has been integrated into the historic layout with mixed success.



*View along the village street*

### I.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This Character Appraisal makes the following recommendations (summary):

- Protect the conservation area from inappropriate new development;
- Ensure the use of traditional materials and details for any new buildings;
- Control new garages very carefully;
- Protect the rural character of the conservation area;
- Seek improvements to the Abergavenny Arms;
- Protect existing boundaries and resist the further loss of front gardens for car parking;
- Consider ways of improving the junction of the village street with the C7;
- Amend the conservation area boundary slightly:
  - Add the whole of the garden to Bankside;
  - Add a small piece of land off Mill Lane;
  - Add the whole garden of Parkfield and Barns Croft.



*Protect the rural character of the conservation area*



## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 THE RODMELL CONSERVATION AREA

Rodmell is a small downland village located some five kilometres to the south of Lewes. The conservation area, which was designated in 1972, covers almost the entire settlement, including a section of the C7, the secondary route between Lewes and Newhaven, and a meandering country lane, ending in a loop at the eastern edge of the village. The boundary includes a variety of timber-framed, brick and flint cottages and houses, many of them listed, and the mid-12<sup>th</sup> century church of St Peter's. Of interest to followers of the Bloomsbury Set is Monks House, now owned by the National Trust and for many years the home of Virginia and Leonard Woolf. The location at the foot of the steep scarp slope (part of the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) which leads up to summit of the Downs provides stunning views in many directions.

### 2.2 THE PURPOSE OF A CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. 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*”.

Section 71 of the same Act requires local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of these conservation areas. Section 72 also specifies that, in making a decision on an application for development within a conservation area, special attention must be paid to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

In response to these statutory requirements, this document defines and records the special architectural and historic interest of the Rodmell Conservation Area and identifies opportunities for enhancement. It is in conformity with English Heritage guidance as set out in “*Guidance on conservation area appraisals*” (August 2005). Additional government guidance regarding the management of historic buildings and conservation areas is set out within “*Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment*” (PPG15). Government advice on archaeology, which is

relevant to the Rodmell Conservation Area, is set out in “*Planning Policy Guidance Note 16: Archaeology*” (PPG16).

This document therefore seeks to:

- Define the special interest of the Rodmell Conservation Area by analysing its historical development, landscape setting, spaces, buildings and activities;
- Identify negative features and provide a list of improvements and actions, most of which will be the responsibility of Lewes District Council;
- Carry out a review of the existing conservation area boundary and make recommendations for change as appropriate.

English Heritage recommends that once a character appraisal is completed, a further document, the Management Proposals, is drawn up, ideally with the help and co-operation of the local community. This would provide more detailed guidelines to prevent harm and achieve enhancement, based on the various issues identified in the character appraisal. It is hoped that the District will be able to fund this more detailed work at some stage in the future.

Survey work for this document was carried out in October 2006 by The Conservation Studio, when a full photographic record was also taken of the area and its buildings. Unlisted buildings which make a positive contribution, trees, water courses, views and areas and buildings for enhancement were noted amongst other matters and recorded on a Townscape Appraisal Map. The omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

Additionally the existing boundary of the conservation area was carefully surveyed and additions and deletions considered. These are detailed in Chapter 8 *Recommendations*.

### 2.3 THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

This document therefore provides a firm basis on which applications for future development within the Rodmell Conservation Area can be assessed. It should be read in conjunction with the wider development plan policy framework as set out in the East Sussex Structure Plan 1991-2011, the Brighton and Hove Structure Plan 1991-2011, and

in Lewes District Council's Local Plan, adopted in March 2003.

In the Local Plan, there are no site specific policies, but Inset Map No. 18 confirms that the following general policies apply to the whole settlement of Rodmell, including the conservation area:

- A Planning Boundary defines the extent of allowable development around Rodmell. This encompasses the built-up part of the conservation area, and is tightly drawn around the backs of many of the existing properties, preventing development in back gardens. It specifically excludes the following sites from future development:
  - Back gardens behind the properties fronting the village street on the north-west side of the village;
  - The fields and open land on the south-east side of the village, immediately to the north-east of the 1930s cottages facing the C7;
  - A field to the north of St Peter's Church;
  - Properties to the south-east of Mill Lane.
- Countryside Policies (which limit development) apply to the land beyond the Planning Boundary;
- The South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) covers Rodmell and the surrounding countryside.

Other policies in the Local Plan, which relate to listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeology and new development are included at Appendix 2.

The 2003 Local Plan will shortly be replaced by a new *Local Development Framework*. This new planning system was established by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, which abolishes Structure and Local Plans and replaces them with *Local Development Documents*. More information about this important change to the planning system can be found on the District Council's website: [www.lewes.gov.uk](http://www.lewes.gov.uk).

## 2.4 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This document was initially drafted following a meeting with representatives from Rodmell Parish Council and local historians on 14<sup>th</sup> September 2006. A walkabout with one of these representatives was held on the 14<sup>th</sup> October 2006, when

the extent of the conservation area boundary was discussed, along with some of the main problems and issues which face the community. Following this meeting, a first draft was agreed with the District Council and the document was then put on the District Council's website from mid-December 2006 for six weeks. After the completion of this period of public consultation, the final draft was produced and the document illustrated and printed.



St Peter's Church



Mill Lane



View into the conservation area from the surrounding countryside

### 3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

#### 3.1 LOCATION AND ACTIVITIES

Rodmell is located within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), six kilometres to the south of Lewes, the county town of East Sussex, on the C7 Lewes-Newhaven Road. The conservation area is centred to the north of the C7 on a meandering country lane which ends in a loop. A small further section of designated area lies along the beginning of Mill Lane, which leads in a south-westerly direction up the South Downs.

Rodmell is primarily a residential village and the only working farm was closed in the 1990s and the site and buildings developed for housing. There are two commercial properties, the Abergavenny Arms, a popular pub on the C7, and, on the opposite side of the C7, the village forge. The former village shop was located in Bibles Cottages, next to Bybles. Monks House and some adjoining land is owned by the National Trust and is tenanted, although open to the public for two afternoons a week in the season. This brings an influx of cars and visitors into the village and during the summer months some of the local residents provide cream teas and other refreshments. The Village Hall in Martens

Field, behind the Old Rectory, is well used, as is the village Primary School, which still operates from the original Victorian brick and flint building next to the church.

#### 3.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Rodmell lies in the lower part of the scarp slope which forms a north-eastern edge to the South Downs. The village street is situated on a slight ridge with the land falling off gently to the north, east and south-east, towards the valley of the River Ouse. Most of the conservation area is located above the ten metre contour, putting it safely above the floodplain of the river. This provides good views in every direction, but most notably towards the Downs which form a dominant feature overlooking the village.

The village is located on loamy clay and marl soils which provide suitable conditions for a variety of arable crops. Nearby, the South Downs are mainly composed of chalk and flint so it is not surprising that flint is the dominant material in the village. To the north-east lie the brooklands of the river Ouse, with their alluvial soils and lush water meadows.



*The former village forge*

### 3.3 RELATIONSHIP OF THE CONSERVATION AREA TO ITS SURROUNDINGS

Rodmell is one of a group of ancient settlements which developed along the spring line which forms the edge of the valley of the river Ouse between Lewes and the sea. The South Downs overlook the village and a footpath connects directly up Mill Lane to Mill Hill, which overlooks the village. Slightly further away is the Breaky Bottom vineyard, and a few kilometres beyond, but in no way visible from Rodmell, the coastal towns of Peacehaven and Saltdean. Another footpath connects the northern edge of the conservation area to the river, with views over the valley to Mount Caburn and the white chalk cliffs of Lewes.



*Flint is the dominant building material in the village*

### 3.4 BIODIVERSITY

The whole of Rodmell lies within the South Downs AONB, a landscape of national significance with policies in both Structure and Local Plans for its protection. The rearing of livestock is the main farming activity. Some of this downland is notable for the wide variety of chalk downland plants which flower there in the spring and summer, including rare orchids. Arable crops are grown in rotation on the flatter fields.



*The centre of the village*



*Glimpses of the surrounding countryside can be obtained from the main street (Mill Lane)*

## 4 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

### 4.1 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT

Early Saxon settlements appear to have been established in the area following the retreat of the Romans in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. At this time the Ouse valley would have been a tidal estuary with areas of easily worked fertile soil on its edges, and the Saxons seem to have created a number of farms at intervals along the river now partly represented by the established villages of Kingston, Swanborough, Iford (comprising Norton and Sutton), Northease, Rodmell, Southease, and Piddinghoe.

St Peter's Church may be on the site of an earlier Saxon church as a church is noted on the Domesday Survey, when Rodmell is referred to as *Redmelle* or *Ramelle*. At this time the village had a population of 130. Between 1091 and 1095 William de Warenne granted the church to St Pancras Priory in Lewes, but the present building dates to the early to mid 12<sup>th</sup> century (nave and chancel) with a late 12<sup>th</sup> century tower, baptistry and side aisle. Of note is the 12<sup>th</sup> century font which still remains. The building of the church was probably paid for by the monks, who in 1253 gave the church and its incomes to the Bishop of Chichester. The monks appear to have developed Northease Manor as their principal farm in the area, located just half a kilometre along the road towards Lewes.

The manor of Rodmell was held by King Harold before the Norman Conquest and handed over to William de Warenne by a grateful William the Conqueror in return for his support during the Norman invasion. By 1439 the manor had descended (along with Iford) to Elizabeth, wife of Sir Edward Nevill, Lord Bergavenny. In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century some of the land and properties were let out to Sir George Goring, later Earl of Norwich, who also acquired Northease Manor and part of Iford. However Rodmell manor remained in the ownership of the Abergavennys until 1919 when the whole estate was sold.

Notable residents include a staunch Catholic landowner, John Leedes, who lived at Hall Place and sold it to John de la Chambre in about 1586. The de la Chambre family continued to be connected with Rodmell until at least the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Hall Place was finally demolished in 1838 and all that is left now is the 18<sup>th</sup> century ice house, recently listed. The name Charnes Cottages refers to the



*Place House and former stables*



*Rodmell School*



*Former agricultural labourers' cottages on the C7*



*New housing in Martens Field*

de la Chambres and the building is located on the front of the former manor house site. After the demolition of Hall Place, Place House, an 18<sup>th</sup> century building on the other side of the street, became the principal house in the village and was occupied throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century by the Saxby family whose crest, with a date plaque of 1825, adorns the adjacent stables. The adjoining coat of arms, for the De la Chambre family, was removed from Hall Place prior to demolition. Another significant house, The Old Rectory, was remodelled by the Reverend Pierre de Putron, who rebuilt the original Queen Anne farmhouse in the 1860s when he was also restoring the church. His diary, extracts of which are recorded in *Victorian Rodmell*, confirm that on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1856 he applied to Queen Anne's Bounty (presumably a bank) for a loan to enable him to repair, rebuild and improve the Rectory House and its outbuildings.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century Rodmell had become well known for its Southdown sheep and cattle, reared on the downland and the lush water meadows of the Ouse. A mill had been built higher up along Mill Lane and the mill keeper's house still remains just within the conservation area. In 1810 a parish poorhouse was built close to the church, now divided into three cottages (Freshfields, Croft View Cottage and The Old Poor House). In 1856 the Earl of Abergavenny gave land and £50 towards the cost of building a church school. The school, which is located next to St Peter's Church, opened later that year and cost a total of £150, most of the remaining money being donated by Jonas Saxby of Place House.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rodmell gradually became less dependent upon agriculture and the village became a favoured retreat from the hustle and bustle of London. Leonard and Virginia Woolf bought Monk's House in 1919 as a weekend cottage, moving from Asham House on the other side of the valley which they had shared with

Virginia's sister Vanessa Bell and her family. At the beginning of World War II Leonard and Virginia started living at Monks House on a permanent basis but after a long struggle with depression Virginia drowned herself in the River Ouse in 1941. The house and some of the surrounding land is now owned by The National Trust and open two afternoons a week in the season.

The map of 1908 shows little change from 1839, apart from the loss of Hall Place and the village pond, which was located at the junction of the village lane and the C7. However, between 1908 and 1929 cottages were built along the C7, presumably to house agricultural workers on the nearby farms – South Farm was still operating in the village until the 1990s.

From the 1960s onwards, there was a certain amount of infilling around the village, fortunately mostly unobtrusive. The conversion of South Farmhouse and its barns into separate units, and the creation of five new detached houses in the former farmyard, took place in the 1990s, when the farm ceased operations. In the last few years, some much-needed affordable housing has been provided in Martens Field. The village forge and farriers still operates although the petrol pumps which once formed a picturesque touch in front of the building no longer function. Today the village retains a strong sense of community, helped by the survival of the village school and the well supported church and village hall activities. The National Trust public car park at the eastern end of the conservation area serves a useful purpose and usually prevents visitors' cars from clogging up the main street.

## 4.2 ARCHAEOLOGY

Neolithic man inhabited the South Downs and there are remains of tumuli on the tops of the Downs overlooking the village. There are no Scheduled Monuments within the conservation area.

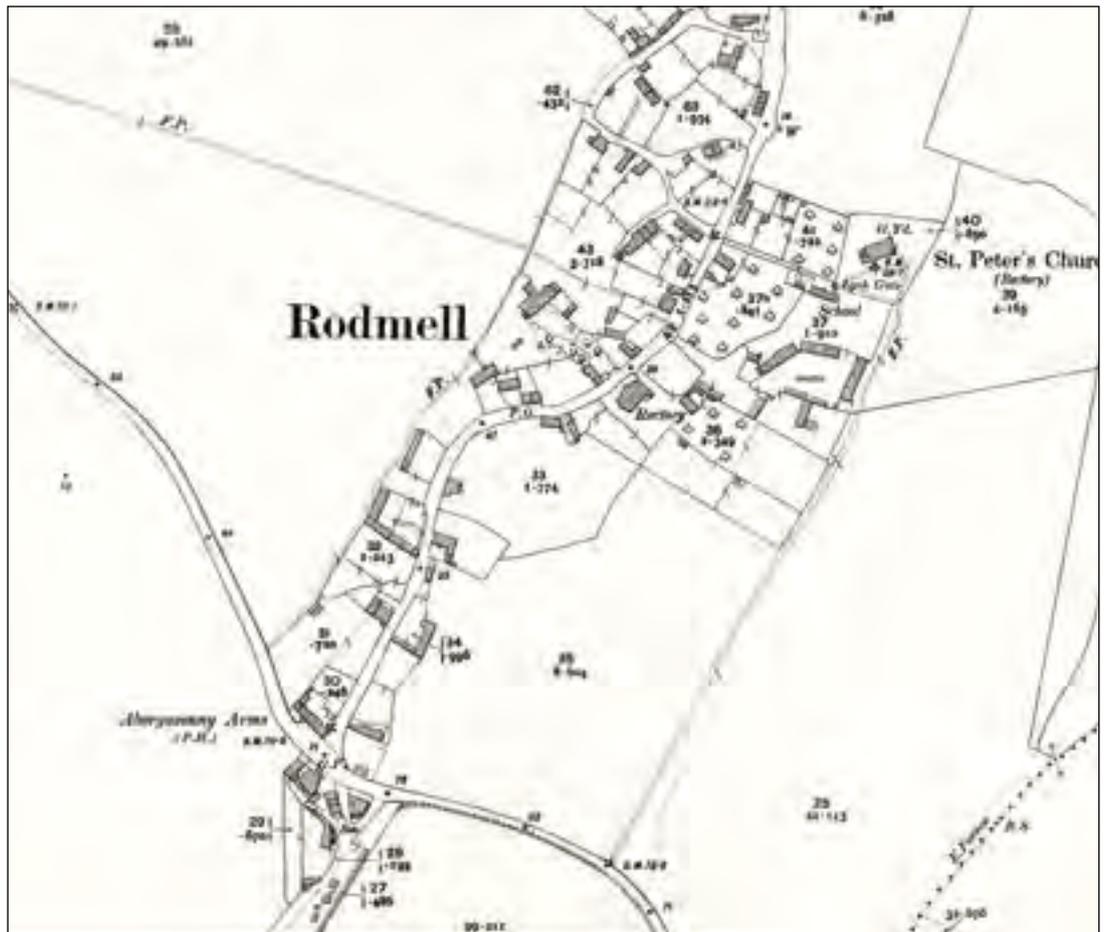




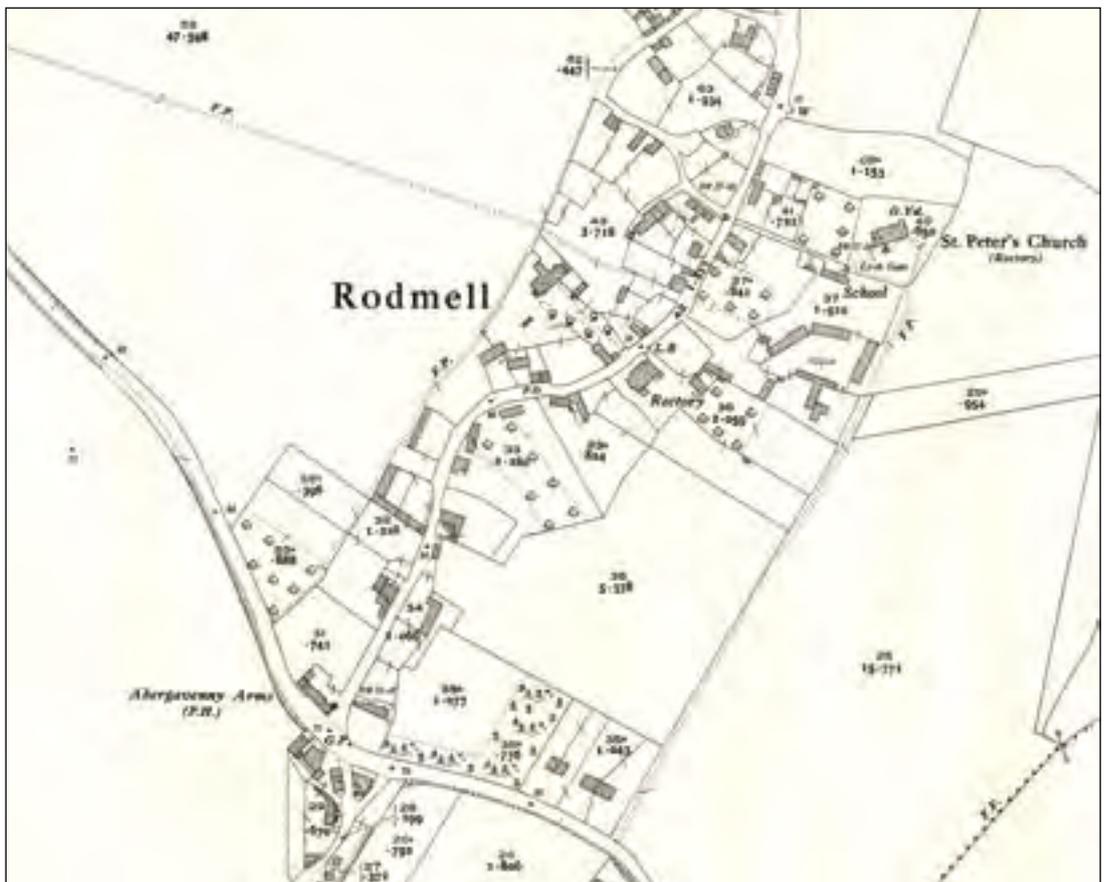
1839



1873 Ordnance Survey



1908 Ordnance Survey



1929 Ordnance Survey

## 5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

### 5.1 PLAN FORM, SITE LAYOUT AND BOUNDARIES

The Rodmell Conservation Area is notable for its linear form, with informal groups of houses, cottages and former agricultural buildings, mostly listed. The main street ends on a loop, created sometime between 1839 and 1873. In places, modern residential development has taken place, although these buildings usually sit well back from the lane behind flint walls or planting and this helps to reduce their impact. The lane twists and undulates, providing glimpses which are framed by the flint walls and planting. Some of the historic buildings, such as Drummond House and Old Farm House, sit on the back of the street boundary (there are no pavements), constraining views, whilst others, such as Place House, sit well back from the road.

The gardens are varied in size and form, although there is a strong line created by the back boundaries on either side of the main street. These run at right angles to the C7, and are marked as footpaths on the 1873 map, suggesting a very early property layout. On the north-west side of the street, this boundary has been extended (possibly in the 1960s) so that the houses have much larger gardens than shown on the historic maps, although the line of the footpath can still be traced across the middle of some of these plots. Some of the gardens are therefore very large, but are not fully appreciated from the public viewpoint in the lane. Monks House has a particularly large garden, with a large vegetable garden which is partly divided into allotments, and well loved by both visitors and residents. The Old Rectory is another house with a large garden which stretches southwards to the footpath which forms the southern boundary of the conservation area. Fortunately, most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century properties have reasonably sized plots, the exception being the gardens to the South Farm development which appear rather pinched in relation to the size and bulk of the new houses.

Boundaries throughout the conservation area are made up from flint walls, with some hedging and trees either as separate elements or in conjunction with the walling. There are also a variety of modern timber fences, none of them of any special merit or obtrusiveness. The use of traditional post-and rail timber fencing is appropriate in



*Old Farm House*



*The Old Rectory has a very large garden, visible from the public footpath*



*The road through the village bends gently*



*St Peter's Church*

places. Modern metal railings and gates outside Monreepos are not in keeping with the rural character of the conservation area. The village street is also notable for the changes of level between the road and the adjoining properties, with several houses being hidden behind raised verges or banks, topped by a flint wall and hedging.

## 5.2 LANDMARKS, FOCAL POINTS AND VIEWS

The conservation area provides a number of well detailed, attractive historic buildings which together form a cohesive whole. There are no particularly prestigious landmark buildings, although St Peter's Church is important in views from the south of the conservation area looking in. However, some of the buildings within the conservation area do close vistas and act as low key landmarks. These are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Because of the closely built up village centre, there are limited opportunities for views out of the village, but sometimes glimpses of the surrounding fields, South Downs and Mount Caburn can be seen between the buildings. However, the principal views in Rodmell are along the village

street and it is worth walking the street in both directions to fully appreciate the way in which the lane twists and turns and the various buildings frame the vistas. Because the village is surrounded by public footpaths there are also attractive views into the more built-up area, often focusing on the varied flint and brick cottages. The most notable views are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

## 5.3 OPEN SPACES, TREES AND LANDSCAPE

There are no public open spaces within the conservation area, the only community space being the playing field with its pavilion located to the north-east of St Peter's Church, outside the boundary of the conservation area. A playground is attached to the village school, next to the church.

Unsurprisingly for a rural conservation area, trees are very important within the village, the most important being located in and around Deep Thatch Cottage, Monks House and Briar Cottage. Some of these were elms which were sadly lost to Dutch Elm Disease or the ravages of the 1987 hurricane. Many of these trees are specifically protected by Tree Preservation Orders.



*View out of Rodmell (on a very misty day)*

All around Rodmell is stunning landscape which forms part of the South Downs AONB. Footpaths connect Rodmell to the South Downs, Northease and across the valley to the river Ouse. All of these provide ample opportunity of enjoying the views across the valley towards Lewes, Cliffe and Mount Caburn, particularly from the top of Mill Hill above Rodmell.

#### 5.4 PUBLIC REALM

There are hardly any pavements in Rodmell, as befits a rural conservation area, apart from the ones along sections of the C7 which are covered in black tarmacadam with small (100 x 300 mm) granite setts forming the kerb, and in the village outside The Old Rectory, where a narrow pavement is defined by long (700 mm) stone kerbs. Grass verges of varying widths occur in many locations, adding to the countryside character. There are some timber telegraph poles along the main road, but generally the overhead cables are not particularly obtrusive and in the village proper they appear to have been put underground. A traditional white finger post with black lettering marks the junction with the village street and the C7. Close by there is a bus stop with a pitched roof shelter, adjoining a modern telephone kiosk. A village post box is located in the flint wall in front of The Old Rectory, along with a village display board and a traditional wooden bench.



*Traditional finger post on the C7*



*The church spire provides an important focal point*

## 6 THE BUILDINGS OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

### 6.1 BUILDING TYPES

The village is mainly residential so historic buildings types are mainly confined to larger detached houses (e.g. Place House, Monk's House) and more modest houses and cottages (e.g. Step Cottage, Stile Cottages, Briar Cottage). Additionally, there are several former agricultural buildings which have been converted into houses, such as Barn House, Flint Barn (part of South Farm), and South Downs House. Apart from these residential properties, St Peter's Church is the only religious building; the nearby village school the only educational building; The Abergavenny Arms the only Public House; and The Forge the only other commercial building. None of the buildings appear to be in active agricultural use any more, but there are several farmhouses or other buildings with obvious links to the former agricultural use: Drummond House, originally called Hill Farm House; Mill House in Mill Lane; and the former South Farmhouse, now divided into two units.

### 6.2 LISTED BUILDINGS

There are 35 listed buildings or entries in the conservation area, all of them listed grade II apart from St Peter's Church which is listed grade I. This retains much 12<sup>th</sup> century fabric and is notable for its flint elevations and short, stumpy spire covered in shingles. It was heavily restored in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The other listed buildings vary in use from former farm houses to a wide variety of smaller houses and cottages, mostly built from flint with red brick dressings, but some timber-framed and weather-boarded. Slightly unusual is Rodmell House, a tall and rather austere red brick building, dated 1859, which was built as a granary and was subsequently converted into flats; The Forge next door, with its many workshop windows and painted weatherboarding; Barn House, a substantial former barn much altered and extended in the 1930s; and The Old Rectory, a late medieval building which was refronted in c.1860. This is the only example in the conservation area of an imposing, symmetrical composition. Its front boundary wall, built from matching knapped flint, is also listed.

### 6.3 POSITIVE BUILDINGS

There are 21 unlisted historic buildings in the Rodmell Conservation Area which make a *positive* contribution to the character and appearance of



*Flint Barn, formerly part of South Farm*



*Mill House, Mill Lane*



*Rodmell House*



*Barn House*



Nos. 1, 2, 3 Stocks Cottages



Johns



The Old Rectory



Midease

the conservation area. These buildings have been identified during the survey process and, as recommended in PPG15, are recorded on the Townscape Appraisal Map. There is a general presumption that positive buildings within the conservation area will be protected from demolition and the District Council will be especially vigilant when considering applications for alteration or extension.

Positive buildings vary, but generally they are 19<sup>th</sup> century cottages and agricultural buildings which retain their original form, details and materials. Of note is Old Farm House with its red clay tile-hung elevations above an old red brick wall with stone plinth, possibly a rebuild of c.1910; nos. 1, 2 and 3 Stocks Cottages, 19<sup>th</sup> century and built from flints with red brick dressings; Johns, an unusual (for Rodmell) two storey cottage built from cream and red brick, dating to about 1880; and the former South Farmhouse.

#### 6.4 BUILDING STYLES, MATERIALS AND COLOURS

The historic buildings in Rodmell have a variety of styles, according to date, but they are basically very simple, vernacular buildings as befits their rural location. There are therefore only two examples of more “polite” buildings, where the frontages have been deliberately designed to impress. The first example is Place House, an 18<sup>th</sup> century building with a five bay almost symmetrical frontage and steeply pitched tiled roof. The stables are dated 1825 and the plaque also records the initials “C S”, referring to a member of the Saxby family who lived there at the time. The adjoining coat of arms, for the De la Chambre family, was removed from Hall Place prior to demolition. The only other example is The Old Rectory, renovated by the Reverend Pierre de Putron, who remodelled the original much earlier building in the 1860s when he was also restoring the church. He added a knapped flint front elevation and stone mullioned windows, in the Tudor Gothic style which was then fashionable.

Other than this, the buildings of the conservation area were generally built to house farm workers and the occasional farm owner or tenant in a slightly more prestigious building. They include 16<sup>th</sup> or 17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed cottages with thatched roofs, such as Thatched Cottage, a 16<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed house with plaster infilling; Midease (the only example of exposed timber-framing in the conservation area); and Deep

Thatch Cottage, with painted weather-boarding. There are also several examples of early buildings of a similar age (judging by their roof shape and general form) which were encased in flint and brick in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Drummond House, Briar Cottage, Step Cottage, Old Barn Cottage). Drummond House retains a jettied front bay overlooking the village street, now clad in red clay tiles but clearly part of the original timber-framed building. Steeply pitched roofs, sometimes with half hips, substantial central brick stacks, and low eaves characterise these buildings. For the earliest buildings, such as Step Cottage, small gablets in the hips suggest a pre-1550 date (when chimneys replaced open hearths) and the possible existence of a double height hall.

Other buildings are more varied - Monks House was also built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century from timber with white painted weather-boarded elevations and sash windows; there is slate hanging on Pear Tree Cottage, an 18<sup>th</sup> century building with casement windows and a painted, rendered front elevation; and Charnes Cottage has been refronted with red and grey bricks creating a chequer-board pattern.

The Forge is the only “industrial” building in the conservation area and retains its original windows



*Step Cottage*



*Drummond House*



*Monks House*

made from small sheets of very thin glass, and it forms a group with the adjoining Mill Owners House (notable for its double external staircase) and Rodmell House, a converted former granary built from red brick with simple four pane sash windows.

Roofs are either thatch, handmade clay tile (providing a pleasingly uneven surface), or slate. Large red brick stacks are common. Walls are mainly field flints, roughly bound together with lime mortar, with red bricks being used to create the window and door openings. Red clay tiles are also used to clad buildings, possibly also to hide an earlier timber frame (as at Drummond House and the former Mill House). Windows tend to be timber sashes on the higher status houses, and side opening timber casements on the cottages. They are usually painted white and have slim glazing bars. Rose Cottage has a pleasing variety of small windows including examples of horizontally-sliding windows, sometimes called Yorkshire sashes. The village school, dating to 1856, has diamond-shaped leaded lights, as has The Old Rectory. Some of the front doors are panelled but generally they are traditional ledged and braced boarded timber doors.



*Rose Cottage has a variety of windows and a modern but traditional ledged and braced front door*



*Window to The Forge*

## 7 ISSUES

### 7.1 KEY POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

This character appraisal concludes that the key *positive* characteristics of the Rodmell Conservation Area are:

- Small linear village based on a winding country lane, with a variety of historic buildings, most notably St Peter's Church;
- Attractive location on the lower slopes of the South Downs, with the River Ouse valley to the east;
- Just five kilometres away from Lewes, the county town of East Sussex;
- Informal layout of the houses, cottages, barns and other outbuildings mainly associated with agriculture;
- Spacious plots often defined by flint walls, which are an important characteristic feature of the village;
- Grass verges are also significant;
- Use of thatch, red clay roof tiles, red brick, flint and painted weather-boarding;
- Stunning views of the South Downs and beyond;
- 1960s and later housing development has been integrated into the historic layout with mixed success.



Briar Cottage



View along the main street to the C7

### 7.2 KEY NEGATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

This character appraisal concludes that the key *negative* characteristics of the Rodmell Conservation Area are:

*Mill Lane and C7:*

- Busy traffic along the C7 (despite 30 mph limit);
- Overhead wiring.



Traffic is very busy along the C7

*Village street:*

- Use of modern materials and details generally;
- Unsympathetic alterations to unlisted buildings e.g. Nos. 1 and 2 Sunnyside – modern windows;
- Concrete roof tiles on outbuilding to Old Farm House;
- Timber fence on boundary to Deep Thatch Cottage;
- Car parking can be obtrusive and occasionally traffic can be dangerous,



Concrete roof tiles on out-building to Old Farm House

particularly in the summer months when Monks House is open;

- Modern metal railings and gates outside Monreepos;
- Dominant side extension to Appletree Cottage, a listed building;
- UPVC windows in no. 1 Vine Cottages;
- Some loss of front boundaries and gardens to car parking e.g. outside Tamblin House and Holly House;
- Abergavenny Arms – extract vents, bins, recycling bins, signage, poor condition of building.



*Improvements are needed to the Abergavenny Arms*

### 7.3 ISSUES

The Rodmell Conservation Area encompasses an attractive rural settlement with few obvious threats to its character although incremental change could adversely affect the quality of the environment if not controlled properly. The buildings are generally in good condition and generally the area is clearly a desirable location in which to live. However, there are a number of issues (which the District Council is mainly responsible for) which will need to be resolved if the conservation area is to be protected from unsympathetic change. These are:

#### 1 The quality of new development

The conservation area has already been subject to a large amount of infill development, mainly in the 1960s and 1970s, but some more recent. Further development would erode the character of the area by reducing open space, changing the historic form of development, and generating more traffic. The development of South Farm in the 1990s was generally achieved without detrimental effect, although the overall scale and massing of the new houses, and their relatively small plots, does contrast with the historic form of development in the village, which is on a smaller scale, with larger, more spacious gardens.

#### 2 Protecting the rural character of the conservation area

The conservation area once supported several farms and the survival of a variety of agricultural buildings, all of them now in residential uses, helps to maintain that rural quality. The close proximity of the surrounding fields, the many footpaths which connect across them, and the dominant presence of the South Downs, also provide a



*Existing gardens in the conservation area should be protected from inappropriate development*



*Protect the rural setting of the conservation area*



*Car parking on the main street can be dangerous for pedestrians and other road users*

suitably rural setting. Any further development of the open fields around or within the Rodmell Conservation Area should be resisted, as is indeed specified by the Planning Boundary in the Lewes District Local Plan.

### 3 Site specific issues

There are a few sites within the conservation area which require improvement of which the following are the most urgent:

- The area round The Forge;
- The Abergavenny Arms, including signage and kitchen extraction.

### 4 Boundaries

The flint walls in the conservation area make a major contribution to the special character of the area and must be protected from demolition or neglect. Non-traditional boundaries, such as the metal gates and fencing to Monreepos, should be discouraged. The new brick wall to the back of Bankside (currently outside the conservation area) is rather heavily detailed with a dominant brick coping.



*The use of local materials, such as flint, should be encouraged*

### 5 Traffic management and car parking

Traffic can be heavy along the C7 and despite a 30 mph limit and an elevated mirror the junction with the village street and the C7 is extremely dangerous. This is especially noticeable in the summer months when Monks House is open and visitors flock to the village. Car parking along the village street can be both visually dominant and also dangerous for pedestrians and other road users.

### 6 Conservation Area boundary review

As part of the appraisal process, the conservation area boundary was reviewed. It was considered that a few amendments could be made, as detailed in Chapter 8 *Recommendations*.

## 8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various *Issues* identified in the preceding chapter, the following recommendations are made:

### 8.1 THE QUALITY OF NEW DEVELOPMENT

- The District Council should ensure that all new development in the conservation area adheres to Local Plan policies and to the spirit of advice contained in PPG15 about conservation area management. Generally, there should be a presumption in favour of retaining existing gardens and green open spaces, particularly those which contribute positively to the character of the conservation area and are noted as such on the Townscape Appraisal Map;
- The District Council should ensure that all new buildings and extensions include traditional materials, particularly flint, brick and handmade clay tiles, and traditional details;
- Applications for new garages should only be allowed where the new building does not impinge on the existing street scene or adversely affect the setting of existing historic buildings.

### 8.2 PROTECTING THE RURAL CHARACTER OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- The District Council should resist applications for development outside the Planning Boundary, to ensure that the rural setting of the conservation area is preserved and the overall character of the South Downs AONB is not adversely affected.

### 8.3 SITE SPECIFIC ISSUES

- The District Council could encourage the owners of the The Forge and the adjoining area, and the Abergavenny Arms, to improve their property, including (in the case of the public house) implementing some of the enhancements which have already received planning permission and listed building consent. Of particular concern is the need for general repairs and the removal of excess signage and prominent rubbish bins. However, it is understood that improvements are imminent (April 2007).

### 8.4 BOUNDARIES

- More off-street parking would be helpful but this should not be achieved at the expense of the loss of front boundaries or gardens;
- The District Council should therefore resist applications to demolish even small sections of existing flint walls and should ensure that where they would have an adverse effect on the character of the conservation area, no further off-street car parking areas are approved.

### 8.5 TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT

- The District Council and East Sussex County Council could consider measures to improve the safety of the junction of the village street with the C7;
- Traffic in the village is particularly heavy in the morning and early afternoon due to the school run – this needs to be monitored.

### 8.6 CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARY REVIEW

- As part of the appraisal process, the conservation area boundary was reviewed and the following changes, which will ensure that the boundary follows existing legal property boundaries, are recommended:
  - Add the whole of the garden to Bankside;
  - Add a small piece of land off Mill Lane;
  - Add the whole garden of Parkfield and Barns Croft.

## THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE OUSE VALLEY

The development of the parishes of Kingston, Iford, Rodmell, Southease, Piddinghoe and Newhaven is intimately linked to the topography of the region, to the River Ouse and, especially in the case of the more northern parishes, to the economic and social magnetism of Lewes, the county town.

The early economic history of the area is exemplified by Southease, which was given to Hyde Abbey in Winchester by King Edgar in 996. The grant included Telscombe, which descended with South-east until 1546. This larger estate best illustrates many of the features which can be discerned from the later sources for the parishes in the valley. These linear estates, on an east-west alignment, enjoyed the widest possible range of the resources offered by the available topography: fish and water-transport from the river (and, in the case of Southease-Telscombe, the sea); grazing and hay-meadows on the low-lying riverside pastures or, in the local vernacular, brookland; rich arable at the foot of the Downs; and sheep-pasture and road transport on the high and well-drained chalk hills or Downs. What these territories lacked was woodland and clay, so these resources, which were essential for the exploitation of the rest, were obtained from the Weald to the north.

The Domesday record of 1086 provides a snapshot of these estates in a time of transition. Before the Conquest, much of the valley had been held as part of the enormous royal manors of Iford and Rodmell. With the creation of Rapes, large territorial divisions which also served as feudal baronies, the overlordship of the entire valley passed to the Warenne lords of the Barony of Lewes. It also removed most of the long-distance economic links of the southern parishes, and instead strengthened their connections with Lewes, the chief town of the barony, where many of the manors had houses. The Normans also began the process of sub-division of the larger Saxon estates, which were fragmented in the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, partly as a result of pious grants to Lewes Priory by the Wwarennes and their tenants.

Domesday records churches at Iford, Rodmell and Southease; Kingston had a church, possibly built by Lewes Priory, by 1095, and the fabric of the church at Piddinghoe suggests a date early

in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Parish formation in the Ouse Valley was somewhat haphazard, and the medieval chapels recorded at Northease could easily have developed into independent ecclesiastical parishes under different tenurial circumstances. Although the pattern of early settlement is unclear, it seems that by the end of the medieval period most of the Ouse Valley villages were nucleated on sites lying on the 50-foot contour; that at Kingston seems to be planned, whereas the other settlements cluster around their churches in a more irregular manner.

The fully-fledged system of sheep-corn husbandry was described in detail by John Rowe, a lawyer-antiquary who acted as steward of one of the lords of the barony, in 1634. The system was still carried on through the means of common fields, called 'laines', divided into furlongs, which were themselves further sub-divided into strips. Although the strips were individually owned, each proprietor (or his farmer) accepted a common timetable of ploughing, sowing and harvesting, and a common rotation of crops. After the harvest, the arable was thrown open to the common sheep flock, which at other times grazed on the 'tenantry down', usually under the care of a shepherd employed in common by the tenants. It was folded by rotation on the tenantry arable, enriching the fields with manure, the flock acting as the 'moving dunghill' described by Arthur Young. Towards the river, the brookland was also held in common, each parcel being re-assigned every year by lot.

Although in the early medieval period the lands owned outright by manorial lords - the demesne lands - would have been interspersed with those held by their tenants, by 1500 such demesnes had been concentrated in blocks. Descending the valley, Kingston was held in Tenantry, Swanborough (a former Lewes Priory holding) in demesne, the northern half of Iford in Tenantry and the southern portion (with Northease) in demesne. Rodmell was largely held in Tenantry, and by 1808 most of Piddinghoe had been amalgamated into two large farms. The tendency of lords to purchase the interests of their manorial tenants, and of the larger tenants to acquire the property of their smaller neighbours, meant that by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century many of the open-field strips had been amalgamated into larger enclosures; but

a sizeable acreage remained. In 1810 690 acres were enclosed at Telscombe, 2527 acres at Kingston and Iford in 1830 and 758 acres at Southease in 1836.

The same process of engrossment tended to threaten the survival of the larger farmhouses, and to encourage both the conurbation of landless cottages and depopulation. By 1615 only one man remained at Iford who was deemed able to execute the office of constable, 'all the other inhabitants of any reasonable ability having removed to Kingston, where then dwelt at the least a dozen fit for that service'. In 1634 there were already 15 cottages in Rodmell and five in Iford. In 1676 the approximate population of the parishes of Kingston, Iford, Rodmell, Southease, Telscombe and Piddinghoe was 661, which had risen to 911 by 1801. After a mid-century peak of 1233 in 1841, by 1901 the total population had declined to 955, just below its level in 1811. By 1961 this figure had risen to 4742, but that figure is inflated by the inhabitants of Peacehaven within the boundaries of Telscombe; the figure without Telscombe is 1241, of which over 400 lived in the newly-expanded Kingston.

The economic importance of the River Ouse is clear from Domesday Book: the manor of Southease owed a rent of 38,500 herrings and £4 in respect of porpoises, Iford 16,000 herrings and Rodmell 3000 herrings. In the Roman period the river entered the sea at its present mouth, but by the early Middle Ages the growth of a shingle bar had driven it westwards to Seaford Head and created Seaford as the out port for Lewes. That harbour too was gradually affected by silting, and by the 1530s the meadows along the estuary, and indeed as far upstream as Sheffield Bridge, lay under water almost all the year. Even the two large islands of gault clay rising above the flood level close to Iford, were almost valueless because of their inaccessibility, and merely supported the rabbit-warrens of Lewes Priory. In the 1530s Prior Crowham of Lewes sailed to Flanders at his own expense and returned with two drainage experts. In 1537, when it was reported that levels 'lay in a marsh all the summer long', a water-rate was levied on lands in the level, which funded the cutting of a channel through the accumulated shingle below Castle Hill at Meeching. One of the earliest canalisations in England, it created Newhaven, which became the out port for Lewes and dealt a further blow to the miserable port of Seaford. At a stroke the flooding dispersed and water

carriage along the estuary also improved. In 1556 Sir John Gage at Firlie owned a barge of three tons and there was a barge-house at the Lord's Place in Southover. The new cut was perfectly timed to allow Lewes merchants to take advantage of the development of the iron industry, much of whose product was floated downriver from the Weald to Newhaven and shipped to London and abroad. By the 17<sup>th</sup> century the harbour mouth at Newhaven was again impeded and, after half a century of inaction and ineffective solutions, a new harbour entrance was developed between 1733 and 1735. In 1766 John Smeaton produced plans for improvements to the Ouse, and by 1793 river barges could reach 23 miles up from the sea, and 29 miles by 1812. Nine barges and four boats working chiefly on the Ouse were based at Newhaven and three boats at Piddinghoe in 1804. Although described in 1823 as 'little better than a ditch', Newhaven Harbour was again improved in 1825, when the first steam-packet service was introduced. Until the creation of the modern A27 east of Lewes in 1817 and the turnpiking of the Newhaven to Brighton route in 1824, the only way north from Newhaven lay along the west side of the Ouse Valley through Southease, Rodmell and Iford.

## SOURCES

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## APPENDIX 2

### LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

The relevant document is the *Lewes District Local Plan* adopted in March 2003.

Policies relating to conservation areas and listed buildings are included in *Chapter 8 The Historic Environment*.

The relevant policies are:

- Stewardship of the Historic Environment – Policy H1
- Listed buildings – Policy H2
- Buildings of Local, Visual or Historic Interest – Policy H3
- Conservation Area Designation, Review and Enhancement – Policy H4
- Development within or affecting Conservation Areas – Policy H5
- Commercial Activities and Conservation – Policy H6
- Traffic in Conservation Areas – Policy H7
- Archaeological Sites – Policies H9, H10 and H11
- Areas of Established Character – Policy H12
- Parks and Gardens of Special Interest – Policy H13
- Parks and Gardens of Local Interest – Policy H14



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