

**DRAFT CONSERVATION
AREA APPRAISAL**

**WESTMESTON
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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is a Conservation Area?

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

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

1.2 The purpose of this Conservation Area Appraisal

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

Features such as listed buildings, unlisted buildings which make a positive contribution, trees and important views have been recorded and indicated on a Townscape Appraisal Map. It should be noted that the omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance.

2. PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

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

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

In addition, broad policies relating to the consideration of Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas are detailed national planning policy guidance. In particular, Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment (PPS5), should be consulted.

3. SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST

3.1 Key Positive Characteristics

- The historic and traditional buildings, both listed and unlisted, which both individually and as a group contribute to the attractive nature of the conservation area

- The historic layout of the conservation area, which is largely preserved
- The setting of the conservation area within an attractive rural landscape at the foot of the South Downs
- A wide range of local, traditional materials, which adds interest and variety

3.2 Recommendations

That the quality of new development, particularly residential alterations and extensions, be better controlled through the planning process. It is suggested that an Article 4 Direction, removing permitted development rights, would allow the Local Planning Authority to have greater control over minor development.

That the boundary of the conservation area is extended to include:

- Old Middleton
- Middleton Lodge
- The Old School and School House

4. ASSESSING SPECIAL INTEREST

4.1 Location and Setting

Location and context

Westmeston Conservation Area is located approximately 6 miles north west of the County Town of Lewes, East Sussex, and approximately 1½ miles south east of the village of Ditchling. It is situated on the B2116, Lewes Road and Offham Road which runs along the foot of the South Downs between Ditchling and the A275 road which runs north-south between Lewes and Chailey.

General character and plan form

The conservation area is set within a rural landscape and covers an area of 7.99 hectares. It is irregular in form, following the bend of the road and encompassing buildings to either side of it.

Landscape setting

Westmeston occupies a rural location at the foot of the South Downs and is within the South Downs National Park. National Parks are areas of protected countryside that everyone can visit and enjoy. They are not owned by the Nation or managed only for their wildlife. They are mostly farmed landscapes where people live, work and shape the landscape.

The Environment Act of 1995 defined the purposes of National Parks as:

- conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage
- promoting opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of their special qualities

The South Downs rise dramatically just south of the village, and views of the Downs can be afforded in several locations, providing a stunning backdrop to the conservation area.

4.2 Historic Development and Archaeology

The origins and historic development of the area

A settlement was in existence at Westmeston by the 11th century, and is recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Westmestun. The Victoria County History of 1940 notes that it was named as Westmaestun in an 8th century source, suggesting its history goes back much further. The name Westmeston comes from the Old English for 'most westerly farmstead': *westmest*, 'westernmost' and *tūn*, 'farmstead'.

Old maps are of interest in charting the development of the village.

Yeakell & Gardner's map of 1778-1783 shows 'Westmiston' and clearly shows the present road layout, the Church, Westmeston Place and its outbuildings, buildings either side of the main Lewes road and to the south either side of The Street. A cluster of buildings can also be seen on the site of Old Middleton to the east (outside the conservation area).

Early Ordnance Survey maps demonstrate that the plan form of the conservation area is largely preserved since the OS map of 1879. The map shows the village set within the rural landscape and with the absence of development along Underhill Lane to the west. The Old Rectory was at this time identified as The Rectory – still in use; it ceased to be a Rectory in 1909 when the church was united with Streat church, and the Rector was required to live at Streat.

Most modern development has occurred outside the conservation area along Underhill Lane and the historic layout is therefore largely preserved.

Archaeology, including scheduled monuments

The majority of the conservation area lies within an Area of Archaeological Interest (AAI), as a medieval and post-medieval village, providing further evidence for the long history of the settlement. Close by, to the east of the conservation area, but situated outside it, is another AAI, relating to a medieval and post medieval hamlet at Old Middleton.

There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments within the conservation area.

4.3 Spatial Analysis

Character and interrelationship of spaces within the area

The general spatial character of the area is public space, i.e. roadway and verges with footpaths, flanked by enclosed private spaces. North of the Church, along Lewes Road, several properties are in an elevated position overlooking the road, and are largely screened from view by trees and hedging. To the south, at the junction of The Street and Underhill Lane, the buildings are much more visible and are situated closer to the road. Here, small front gardens enhance the character of the conservation area where well-maintained.

The churchyard provides a significant green space at the heart of the conservation area.

Key views and vistas (both out of and into the area; view points)

There are a number of key views which are significant to the character of the conservation area; these are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Those out of the area look towards the stunning rural landscape in which the village is set, dominated by the steep slopes of the Downs to the south.

Significant views back into the conservation area can be afforded from the footpaths surrounding it, in particular looking into the conservation area from the east, where there are attractive views of Westmeston Place and the Old Rectory.

Within the conservation area, the Church tower is key landmark. From the churchyard itself, there are also significant views afforded of the Old Rectory to the north east.

4.4 Character Analysis

Activity and prevailing or former uses and their influence on plan forms and buildings

The barns at Michelbornes to the north of the conservation area, and at Westmeston Farm at the junction of Lewes and Offham Roads and The Street, are now converted to residential use, but their character as historic farmsteads is preserved.

Other buildings are connected with the agricultural history of the village. The cottages either side of the Street were built for the workers at Westmeston Farm.

The qualities of the buildings and their contribution to the area

There are five listed buildings within the conservation area. They are all listed Grade II, except St Martin's Church, which is listed Grade II*.

St Martin's Church is a focal building. Set within an attractive churchyard, the earliest part of the church is the nave, which dates to the 12th century. The church is constructed from flint with sandstone dressings; the roof is covered with traditional handmade clay roof tiles on the north elevation and part clay tiles, part Horsham stone slates on the south. The roof has a prominent bell-turret which is clad in timber shingles. The entrance on the north elevation is housed in a timber framed porch, parts of which may date to the 14th century.

The Old Rectory is an imposing mid 19th century gothic style building, set back from the main thoroughfare and only visible in glimpse views from the churchyard, or from the footpath running east from the conservation area. It is faced with knapped flints, with elaborate sandstone window surrounds. It has a clay tiled roof, and several prominent chimneys.

April Cottage, listed as Culpepper and April Cottage, is a timber framed building of 17th century date or earlier. Some of its timber framing, with

rendered infill panels, is visible, but otherwise the building is faced with clay hanging tiles with scalloped detailing and red brick, with a clay tiled roof.

Michelbornes was listed fairly recently, in 2005. It is a large late 16th century timber framed barn, mainly faced with flintwork but with some brick, weatherboarding and tile hanging. The roof is clad with traditional handmade clay tiles. The variety of roof forms of the barn and its adjoining buildings forms a characterful group. It is now converted to residential use.

Westmeston Place is situated in the north of the conservation area. It probably dates to the early 16th century. It is a large building; timber framed and predominantly clad externally with handmade clay tiles, but also with some areas of render, and exposed flintwork with sandstone dressings. It has a variety of prominent chimneys and a clay tiled roof. The building displays some attractive detailing including scalloped tile hanging, a gabled flint porch and stone window surrounds.

Unlisted buildings (including any recommendations for locally listed buildings)

A number of unlisted buildings also contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area, by virtue of their architecture and use of traditional materials. These have been identified on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Local details

The conservation area displays a number of interesting details, including:

- The stone mounting block outside Westmeston Place
- The small barn located alongside the road, south of Westmeston Place is faced with flints on its roadside elevation, and displays galleting:

small slivers of flint pressed into the mortar of the flintwork, to decorative effect.

- Date stones, e.g. 1-6 The Street, Church Cottage
- A small wall plaque below the post box, which notes the inclusion of the village in Domesday Book, and was put up in 1986 to mark the 900th anniversary of the book
- The site of Westmeston village well
- Westmeston Millennium Sarsen, placed to mark the year 2000

Prevalent local and traditional building materials and the public realm

The conservation area displays a wide range of local and traditional building materials.

Flint is a very significant material, being particularly prevalent in its use on both buildings and boundary walls throughout the conservation area. Flint is a local material associated with chalk downland. It can be seen laid both randomly, and coursed (e.g. Lilybank) and is predominantly in the form of natural field flints, although occasionally knapped flints are also seen (e.g the Old Rectory).

The only buildings to utilise dressed stone are Westmeston Place, the Old Rectory, and the Church. Stone is a prestigious building material and therefore more commonly used for high status buildings.

Handmade clay hanging tiles are mostly found in a warm orange-red colour but sometimes a darker brown. Tile hanging can also be decorative; for example, scalloped tiles as seen at April Cottage, Westmeston Place and Church Cottage.

Weatherboarding is a traditional vernacular material, but it is not particularly prevalent in the conservation area. It can be seen on the barn situated on the west side of the Lewes road, just south of Westmeston Place.

Buildings which are timber framed are often clad with hanging tiles or have been refaced, so that the timber framing is hidden, but exposed timber framing and render infill panels can be seen at April Cottage.

There are various uses of brick, most commonly a traditional handmade brick in a warm red colour, sometimes used with blue/grey glazed headers. Red brick is often found as detailing on flint buildings, for example as window surrounds or quoins. Brick coping stones in various shapes are used for the top of walls; for example, the half round coping bricks at Westmeston Place and the churchyard wall, and the triangular 'saddleback' coping bricks on the boundary wall at Church Cottages.

Roofs are mostly covered with handmade clay tiles. Slate is present but far less common (e.g. Lilybank). As well as clay tiles, part of the Church roof is covered with Horsham stone slates.

In terms of the public realm, there is a general absence of formal pavements alongside the main road, and the tarmac is edged with concrete kerbs. Much of the road is flanked by grassy and wooded banks and verges as befits the rural setting. Along Lewes Road, north of the church, some of the banks are quite steep and unmade footpaths run along the top of these, at height, looking down over the road; quite an unusual arrangement but much safer for pedestrians than the road which is busy with fast-moving traffic. East along Lewes Road, there is an unmade path on the grass verge to the south side of the road.

More formal surfacing is found within the churchyard, where the path and the steps up through the church lych gate are constructed from traditional red brick paviers.

The conservation area is largely free from street clutter, and those items that are present are traditional: a small post box set into a wall, a traditional telephone box, and a traditional timber fingerpost sign, all situated at the

junction of Lewes Road with Underhill Lane and The Street. A bus shelter immediately south east of the churchyard is constructed in traditional materials: flint with stock brick detailing. It is flat-roofed but otherwise in keeping with the overall character of the area due to these materials.

One other notable feature is the requirement for traffic signs to encourage drivers to reduce speed and be aware of pedestrians crossing the road, due to the amount and speed of traffic passing through the village. There are also a number of bollards at the roadside presumably for safety reasons.

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

St Martin's Churchyard is identified as a Site of Nature Conservation Importance. Parts of the churchyard are being managed as part of the Church & Conservation Project in conjunction with English Nature which began in 1989. Wild flowers and grasses are being encouraged in areas where they had previously been suppressed by close mowing, in order to create an environment suitable for wildlife such as insects, birds and small mammals.

There are a number of prominent yew trees in the churchyard. Yew trees are traditionally associated with churches and such trees are often of great age.

Large tree groups make a major contribution to the character of the conservation area, in particular along the roadside, where trees give an enclosed feel and are a dominant presence. Significant tree groups are marked on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

All trees within the conservation area are protected, and prior to the commencement of any tree work the District Council's Tree and Landscape Officer needs to be notified.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)

The road which runs through the conservation area is a busy route between the A275 and Ditchling and the traffic can detract from the tranquillity and ambience of the area. The conservation area is residential and quiet in terms of activity, and the peaceful character is enhanced at times when traffic is absent. Traffic passes through the village frequently and at high speeds, and the bends in the roads and lack of pavements at the road side are hazardous for pedestrians. Fortunately, the conservation area benefits from a number of footpaths through the surrounding fields, which enable walkers and horse-riders to travel around the area safely. This includes parts of the Jubilee Pathway, which has been set up in sections since 2002 specifically for this purpose.

Although there are few examples of uPVC windows, where they exist they detract from the appearance of the conservation area, as they are not a traditional material and cannot accurately replicate a historic window. Cumulatively, the loss of historic windows and their replacement with uPVC could have a greater impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

There are a small number of solar panels, which, where visible from public views such as from the churchyard, can form obtrusive features which detract from the appearance of the conservation area. It would benefit the character and appearance of the conservation area if such items could be located sensitively and unobtrusively.

Some of the footpaths running alongside the main road are overgrown and would benefit from being cleared.

The existence of any neutral areas

There is a general lack of parking for those visiting the church. An area on the opposite side of the road is used for this purpose, and the grass of the

verge has been eroded. This area is, however, currently roped off for improvement works.

General condition (of the area and built fabric, identification of buildings at risk)

Westmeston is clearly a desirable place in which to live and generally the buildings of the conservation area and their surroundings are in a good state of repair.

No buildings appear to be at risk.

Problems, pressures and the capacity for change

The speed and intensity of traffic may lead to pressure for traffic-calming measures in the future. Any additional signs or road markings should be carefully considered in terms of their impact on the appearance of the conservation area.

As energy-saving measures, such as double-glazing and microgeneration equipment such as solar panels, increase in popularity, there may be pressure on the conservation area from alterations and additions. There are a few examples of unsuitable replacement windows, and solar panels sited in prominent locations. Any changes to make properties more energy efficient should be given very careful consideration so as to minimise their visual impact on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

An Article 4 Direction, removing permitted development rights, would allow the Local Planning Authority to have greater control over this type of development.

Westmeston is situated outside the planning boundary, and consequently there is a presumption against development. This is particularly important for a conservation area like Westmeston where much of its historic layout is preserved, and where its rural setting makes a contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

This initial draft of the Westmeston Conservation Area Appraisal was produced following a meeting in May 2010 with the area's District and Parish Councillors. The draft will be posted on the Council's website and a press release sent to local newspapers to publicise the appraisal. Copies will also be provided to the relevant District Councillors, and Westmeston Parish Council. A consultation period of two months will be given in order for comments on the draft to be submitted. All comments received will then be considered and any necessary alterations made in preparation for adoption of the document.

6. SUGGESTED BOUNDARY REVISIONS

One of the purposes of a conservation area appraisal is to examine the boundary of the conservation area and make recommendations for revisions to the boundary, if appropriate. It is important to note that this is a recommendation only, and that any recommendation made by the appraisal document does not alter the boundary of the conservation area. Any future proposal to extend the boundary of the conservation area would be subject to full public consultation being carried out.

Old Middleton and Middleton Lodge are situated a short distance east of the conservation area. Both buildings are on the Council's list of Buildings of Local, Visual or Historic Interest. The list comprises building which, although

not eligible for the statutory list, are considered to be of local importance and, therefore, worthy of protection.

Old Middleton is a 17th century building, which was refaced in the 18th century. It is a large property, faced in red brick at the front and flint at the rear, and its sliding sash windows have recently been reinstated. It also retains its former stables as well as an attractive barn.

Middleton Lodge dates from 1859 and is situated at the entrance of the driveway to Middleton Manor. It is an Italianate building, faced with knapped flints with red brick dressings, quoins and stringcourse, a slate roof, sash windows and an attractive porch of three round-headed brick arches. It has a date stone above the porch. The rear of the property has been much altered with the addition of extensions; however, the unaltered elevations of the building retain its character.

Whilst the status of these properties as locally listed buildings would need to be given due consideration in any planning application, extending the boundary to include these buildings would give them strengthened protection from conservation area status. Extending the boundary to include these properties would also have the benefit of including further sections of the Jubilee pathway, which is an important feature of the village.

The former village School House is located north of the conservation area. Built in 1851, it is marked on the 1879 OS map as 'National School (Boys, Girls & Infants)', and became a church hall after closing in 1927. It is now converted to two residential properties. The building is faced with flint with stone quoins and window surrounds and steeply pitched gabled and tiled roof. It has been altered; for example, the addition of modern uPVC windows and a conservatory, but does retain much of its character, and it is of historic interest to the village in terms of its former function.

The recommendations for extending the boundary of the conservation area are illustrated on the townscape appraisal map.

7. LOCAL GENERIC GUIDANCE

Advice for owners of properties in conservation areas on the relevant planning legislation which affects them can be found in the leaflet *Planning Controls in Conservation Areas*.

Further information on Listed Buildings can be found in the leaflet *Listed Buildings: An owner's guide to alteration and repairs*.

These two leaflets, and further information on trees in conservation areas can be found on the Council's website (www.lewes.gov.uk), or by contacting the Planning and Environmental Services Department of Lewes District Council.

8. USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

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

Planning and Environmental Services
PO Box 166
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 9EY
Tel: 01273 471600

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

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

East Sussex Records Office

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

9. FURTHER READING/BIBLIOGRAPHY

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10. TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL MAP