

# Conservation Area Appraisal

## Wivelsfield



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# Conservation Area Appraisal

**Name of Conservation Area :** Wivelsfield

**Date of Designation :** 16.6.76

## 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

The small hamlet of Wivelsfield, at Church Lane, is located in open rolling farmland between Haywards Heath and Burgess Hill. Located on a no-through road, which culminates at Lunces Hall, the area retains, as a result, an isolated and remote rural character despite its proximity to larger towns.

The conservation area comprises a small tightly knit cluster of houses on either side of a narrow lane, based around the parish church and school. The informal nature of the lane, irregular and tightly knit layout of the houses and the wide range of styles and broad palette of building materials give the area a very rural and intimate character. The older part of the hamlet, clustered around the church is of particular historic value.

The walled churchyard and the grounds of the Old Vicarage, which form the southern part of the conservation area are very important open spaces which provide relief to the contained character of Church Lane and provide a transitional area between the countryside to the south with expansive views. The mature trees within the churchyard make a very valuable contribution to the attractive character of these spaces.

## Origins and pattern of development

The name Wivelsfield is of Saxon origin, from the word Wifelsfelda with ‘feld’ meaning open area. The buildings within the hamlet were developed on land belonging to the Otehall Estate. Otehall itself is situated to the south west of the conservation area.

The area was a small rural community of farms and had flourishing ancillary trades with many local craftsmen, builders, carpenters, blacksmiths and harness makers.

The introduction of the railway had a significant effect on the population of Burgess Hill and Wivelsfield. The population of both areas increased dramatically, but Wivelsfield remained isolated, population growth took place at nearby Wivelsfield Green.

## Archaeological Interest

With an ancient Parish Church that has been there since Saxon times all the surrounding area is likely to be archaeologically sensitive. Archery practice was mandatory in medieval times and a field near the church would have been used. Finds indicating a Tudor Market in the field between the Church and More House have been detected. Other artefacts ranging from Roman to Victorian have been recovered in an adjacent to the Conservation Area.

## Listed Buildings

Built development comprises houses of varied ages and styles compactly clustered around the parish church of St. Peter and St. John the Baptist Church, the Old Vicarage, and the village school.

### Parish Church of St. Peter and St John the Baptist

The church is the focal building in the hamlet. It is a grade II\* listed building built of wealden sandstone with a horsham slab roof. The building contains traces of all periods from Saxon to English gothic perpendicular, but is mainly 13th century. The tower is at the west end of the south aisle. The north aisle was added in 1869 with the Saxon Doorway rebuilt into its north wall. A more recent extension was added to the front in the early 1990s.

*St Peter and St John the Baptist Church tower*



The small yard to the front of the church is closely contained on both sides by adjacent cottages. There are several mature trees in the front yard including an ancient and imposing yew, these create a feeling of enclosure and intimacy. By contrast the graveyard opens up to the rear of the Church and is much more open and formal in its planning with red brick paviour pathways, individual ornamental trees, surrounding brick walls and fine views over rolling countryside beyond to the south. This provides relief from the closely knit group of buildings around the Church and associated traffic, and creates a very tranquil space. The end of the graveyard forms the boundary for the Conservation Area.



*View of open graveyard looking southwards towards Great Otehall Wood*

### Vergers Cottage No. 4 Church Lane

This a 16th century two storey timber framed cottage with painted brick infilling mostly resurfaced with red brick, tile hanging and weatherboarding. A particularly prominent feature from the road is the large chimney breast on the northern elevation. This property was formally the post office and later the Verger resided in the property.

### Tapestry Cottage and Wren Cottage

These buildings are faced with red brick on the ground floor with tile hanging above. There is a crow stepped chimney breast on the north elevation. The buildings were built on part of the old Otehall estate.

### Glebe Cottage

Positioned within the north western corner of the Churchyard hard against the edge of the carriageway is Glebe Cottage. The cottage is set at right angles to the road and has the effect of narrowing the perceived width of Church Lane and creating a visual pinch-point in views along the Lane from both directions. Originally a 17th century timber framed building it has been refaced with red brick and orange and brown banded and decorative tile hanging above. There is a large chimney breast on the northern (street) elevation.



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## Wivelsfield Conservation Area



## Windham Cottage.

Close to the west of Glebe Cottage, also positioned end on to the road and on the edge of the carriageway, is Windham Cottage. This is a two-storey 17th century cottage with red brick at ground floor and tile hanging above. A cat-slide roof slopes down to ground floor level on the western elevation and the building has a large chimney breast on the northern end.

## Unlisted Buildings

There are several buildings, which although not listed undoubtedly make a valuable contribution to the character of the area.

On the northern side of the road opposite Glebe Cottage, on top of a low grass bank, is the Church Hall. This is a single storey brick faced hall with a clay tile roof with central louvred vent tower with pyramidal roof. To the west is the school cottage, a small simple cottage faced with red brick and grey headers, which was originally part of the parish workhouse. Adjacent to this is the village school, a single storey building with a projecting wing at either end. The left of these is gabled, the right has a small barn hip. It is faced with multi-stock bricks with red brick detailing.

Beyond the school a gate marks the beginning of a private road leading to Lunces Hall. Immediately inside the gate on the northern side of the driveway is a pair of semi-detached lodge cottages. Although of no significant architectural or historic value, and substantially altered they are appropriate to the character and appearance of the area in terms of scale, form and facing materials.

Immediately before the gateway, a narrow tree lined driveway leads northwards to the Old Vicarage. This is a large detached house set in spacious maturely landscaped grounds to the rear of a couple of modern houses fronting onto Church Lane. These houses are of an undistinguished modern appearance incorporating features such as asymmetrical roofs and vertical dark stained timber cladding on the prominent gables. The left hand one of the two has a low, stained



*Old Vicarage and view of surrounding countryside*

timber picket fence, which is without precedent in the area and rather discordant feature. The grounds of the Old Vicarage connect with the graveyard to the rear of the Church behind the historic development which fronts onto the south side of the Lane, reflecting the original relationship between this house and the church.

The building group is completed by a small group of semi-detached cottages and the new Vicarage on the northern side of Church Lane as one enters the hamlet from the east. All have been constructed during the 20th century, and although not of any great value in themselves are inoffensive as part of the overall group by reason of modest scale and sympathetic facing materials. Arguably, the Vicarage is an exception due to its unusual asymmetric form, which sits rather uneasily in the streetscene.

## Important Spaces

The major open spaces within the Conservation Area are Church Lane itself and the Churchyard. The grounds to the Old Vicarage form the southern edge of the Conservation Area and although inaccessible to the public this space also makes a contribution to the character of the area.

Church Lane is a narrow rural lane which joins the B2112 some 300 metres to the east. It is a dead end road serving only this hamlet and Lunces Hall. The narrow width of the carriageway, lack of footways, boundary walls and buildings on the southern side and grass bank on the north lend it a very informal and rural character. This remote character is only compromised by the congestion caused by parents dropping off or collecting children from the school, with the necessary parking, turning and passing of vehicles. The construction of a car park at the eastern end of the hamlet does not appear to have made a significant difference to this problem.

The Churchyard is bounded all around by red brick walls with a saddleback brick coping. The area in front of the Church is tightly contained by buildings and there is a mature tree group to the western side of the Church giving the area a very enclosed and intimate feel. The graveyard to the rear of the Church provides a very pleasant, and surprising contrast, as the width of the yard increases to the rear of the development fronting onto Church Lane. The large, rectangular area is more formally laid out with single mature trees and red brick paviour pathways. The land falls away slightly to the south giving expansive and attractive views over open countryside. Overall, this space has a very tranquil and spacious character.

Wivelsfield County Primary School with cars parked outside



## Building materials

There is a wide range of materials used in the Conservation Area reflecting the various styles and ages of the buildings as the hamlet developed. The Church is made of rough stone with smooth stone quoins and dressings. The cluster of the oldest houses around the Church are timber framed, most of which have subsequently been refaced with a variety of materials, mostly red brick at ground floor level with tile hanging, brick or weatherboarding above. The diversity of materials in this small group makes a significant contribution to the varied, informal character of the buildings. Most of the newer buildings, some more successfully than others, try to pick up their cue from the older buildings using mostly stock brick with red dressings and tile roofs.

Boundaries along the southern edge of the road, when not formed by the walls of houses themselves, are fronted with a red brick wall of the type which surrounds the Churchyard. Boundaries on the northern side of Church Lane are more varied including painted brick and hedges which are compatible with the rural nature of the Lane.

## Natural elements

Although none of the trees within the Conservation Area are subject to a Tree Preservation Order, many of them make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the area.

The trees within the Churchyard are of indisputable value to the character of this space and the surrounding hamlet. The belt of Yew trees to the western side of the Church building and in particular the ancient Yew tree which dominates the view into the Churchyard enclose the space creating a very intimate, and secluded space. The trees which are more sparsely scattered around the boundaries of the graveyard to the rear of the Church help to define the edges of this space whilst still allowing views out of the Conservation Area to the surrounding countryside. The individual feature trees help to break up the space and provide variety within the open space.

The small group of mature trees between the Church Hall and the School Cottage form part of the northern edge of the Conservation Area and introduce a soft, natural element into the streetscene on the northern side of the Lane. They also reinforce the enclosed nature of the Lane.

The belt of trees along the western side of the driveway to the Old Vicarage provides a very important edge to the Conservation Area screening unsympathetic ribbon development to the west as well as creating an attractive tree lined approach to the Old Vicarage. This tree belt helps to close off the view westwards along Church Lane.

The major former use within the Conservation Area was obviously the religious focus of the parish at the Church and subsequently the educational activity centred around the National School in 1874 and the present school building opened in 1876 as a Board School. The Churchyard dominates the village making up a significant area of the

Conservation Area, particularly when considered in conjunction with the Old Rectory to which it would originally have been linked. The cluster of Listed Buildings form a tight-knit group around the Church. The school would later have been built at the western end of the hamlet, and over the years the area around filled in with a limited amount of residential development along the line of the Lane.

## Relationship between Conservation Area and surroundings

The Conservation Area is situated on a low ridge within the western low weald between the larger settlements of Burgess Hill and Haywards Heath. The area is very well treed and screens the hamlet in views into the area although one can catch glimpses of the Church tower amidst the tree cover. Views within the Conservation Area are restricted due to the closely-knit pattern of development and the contained nature of Church Lane, although the changing views as one moves along the lane, and the buildings which contain it, are very attractive.

Fine expansive views of rolling farmland with mature tree belts to the south can be enjoyed when one gets behind the development which forms the southern edge of Church Lane, e.g. from the Churchyard. A long distance view of the southern edge of Haywards Heath, and most notably the 19th century landmark former St. Francis's Hospital can be seen from the westernmost edge of the Conservation Area.

## Potential Enhancements

The otherwise attractive view westwards along Church Lane is spoiled by the visual clutter of a mass of overhead lines crossing and re-crossing over the road. The undergrounding of these wires would result in a significant enhancement to the appearance of the area.

Spring Cottage and Lease Cottage are modern houses at the western end of Church Lane. They suggest a more open plan style of setting which is out of keeping with the prevailing character of Church Lane. There is scope for enhancing the front boundaries of these properties by, for example, the erection of a low red brick wall to match that used elsewhere in the village, thus continuing the common feature of containment and introducing materials used throughout this hamlet.

The tranquil character of the hamlet can be spoiled by traffic congestion generated by school related traffic. This congestion is exacerbated by the narrow width of road available for passing, parking and turning. There is no obvious solution to this problem however, save encouraging users of the school to make more use of the car park some 80 metres to the east of the school.

# 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.eastsussex.gov.uk](http://www.eastsussex.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](http://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

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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](http://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.

A book entitled 'Walks Around Historic Wivelsfield' is published by Wivelsfield History Study Group price £3.95 obtainable from the village post office, local books shops or 01444 412901. It contains 12 circular walks with points of historic interest along the way.

### Lindsay Frost

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