

Conservation Area Appraisal

Falmer



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Name of Conservation Area : Falmer

Date of Designation : 16.06.76

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

Falmer is located within the Sussex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, approximately 1 km beyond the eastern edge of Brighton and 4 km west of Lewes Town. The historic village of Falmer provides a sense of early settlements typical of the South Downs. It is a small and contained downland village that retains its attractive rural character despite being bisected by the A27 dual carriageway.

The two parts of the village have their own distinctive characters, Falmer (south) is a group of buildings located around the edge of a large pond and includes the impressive neo-Norman parish church of St Lawrence. The settlement is enclosed with several groups of trees and hedgerows with a gap to the enclosed feeling to the south exposing views to the downs. Falmer (north) is much more loosely-knit with large open garden areas at its core.

Origins and pattern of development

Falmer is recorded in the Domesday Book as ‘Falemere’ a name of Saxon origin with two possible derivations. One is Fala’s Mere, a lake or pond belonging to Fala who may have been a local Saxon Chieftain as Fala is masculine, or it means Fallows Mere, a dark pool or lake. Both of these possible meanings could confirm that Falmer pond was in existence in Saxon times.

The village grew as a quiet and isolated farming settlement surrounded by the rolling open downland sheep pastures, with its farm buildings, church, houses and cottages scattered around a pond.

It became part of the Stanmer estate and even today some former estate cottages are still numbered as part of the estate focussed on the Earls of Pelham Stanmer House, which is situated in nearby Stanmer Park.

In the early 1950’s the College of Education for Training Teachers was developed on a site to the west of Falmer village and this was then followed by the University of Sussex in 1961. However, a buffer of mature trees, and the orientation of the buildings, protect the separate identity of the northern part of the village. An area of open downland protects the separate identity of the southern part and provides an important buffer between the village and the edge of Brighton.

In 1978 the volume of traffic travelling between Brighton and Lewes resulted in the substantial widening of the Middle Street route as part of the A27 and the subsequent loss of a listed cottage and several other houses and buildings to provide a four lane A road. Only a footbridge



Views of village across the pond, looking north



now directly links the two separated parts of the village and the road and its noise-attenuating vegetation screens are a significant wedge between the two parts of Falmer. There is now little sense of them once having been joined in the view of traffic passing in the A27 cutting. The Conservation Area includes virtually all of the remaining village, which is still set within its open downland setting and a number of historic ancient tracks radiate out from the village into the surrounding countryside.

Archaeological Interest

Falmer is within a designated Area of Archaeological Interest. It includes the medieval parish church, the gravel pond or fal-mere from which the village takes its name and the Court Farm which was the administrative centre of the medieval manorial holding that included Falmer. This area was seen as the centre of the village from at least Saxon times and has high archaeological potential.

Buildings

Falmer (south) *Listed Buildings*



St Lawrence Church

The Parish Church of St Lawrence

This rare Neo-Norman church has a distinctive square, turreted tower that also serves as a porch. The grade II* listed church is constructed of flint and stone with slab roofing and was rebuilt in 1817 and again in 1865, with the exception of the north wall of the nave.

The visual importance of the church in the Conservation Area is lessened by its location set back from the pond and by its screening from views to the north

by the thick tree belts in the grounds of Court Farm.

Court Farmhouse

Court Farmhouse is a grade II listed eighteenth century building which is also screened from views by the same group of trees, though its roof is visible from some viewpoints and serves as a counterpoint to the main church building. Court Farm is also home to a large flint grade II* listed long barn to the east of Court Farmhouse which is similarly remote from public views from within the Conservation Area. The barn dates from the 13th century and was built by monks for storing sheaves of corn and has recently been refurbished and re-thatched. The barn is reputed to be one of the largest in Sussex measuring 74 metres long and 25 metres wide. It is faced with flints and has a hipped thatched roof.

Victoria Cottages (Nos 58, 59, 60 South Street)

This is a group of three cottages occupying a prominent position abutting the open area around the pond. The cottages are faced with flints set in galleting with red brick dressings and quoins. The tall flint gable is a distinctive feature in the Conservation Area and it incorporates an inscription reading '1897' though this is believed to be the date the building was refurbished as it appears to date from the 1700s.

The cottages are single storey with four small dormers in the long tiled roof. The garden area is enclosed by an attractive flint wall, which forms part of a near-continuous length of flint wall around the north, east and southern edges of the pond.

Falmer Schoolhouse

This long and prominent building at a focal location within the village faces the pond and is now divided into cottages and the village hall. This grade II listed building dates from 1837 when it was built as the village's schoolhouse. It was altered later in the nineteenth century to add a gabled addition at the eastern end and similarly at the western end to provide the schoolmaster's two storey house.

The building bears the coat of arms of the Pelham family of Stanmer Park and the original building is one storey with gabled dormers in the tiled roof. The schoolhouse is faced with stucco or render and the original school playing fields to the rear have been developed with 'The Courtyard' housing scheme.

The Old Rectory

The Old rectory is screened in views from much of the Conservation Area by thick tree cover in the grounds, though the impressive front elevation is visible down the driveway and this contributes to the variety and character of views in the Conservation Area.

The Rectory is a large dwelling in Manor house style using stucco on front elevations and incorporating a large porch. The house is set in substantial grounds and is built on a much larger scale than many of cottages in the Conservation Area, making it distinct from many other dwellings in the village.

61 and 62 West Street

These buildings serve to enclose the north eastern corner of the pond and green and act as a gateway to the remaining southern section of Park Street which comprises mostly listed buildings and is a snapshot of how the village would have once looked.

65 and 67 Park Street

There is a sign that states that this was an old village post office, though it is now used for domestic purposes. The cottages are similar in style to many of the buildings within Falmer and numbers 65 and 67 have flint and stone construction and front flint walls which run the length of Park Street from the point where it meets South Street.



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Falmer Conservation Area



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68 and 69 West Street

These properties include distinctive diamond shape panes in casement windows. These are the last pair of cottages in the southern part of Park Street, though Park Street once linked to the northern part of Falmer and there was another pair of listed cottages to the north of these which were demolished to make way for the A27.

Unlisted buildings that contribute towards character of Conservation Area:

57 East Street

Also known as just '57 Falmer' as this was the old estate number. It sits in a prominent location at the north western corner of pond and green and forms a part of an impressive group of buildings that bound the northern edge of the green.

Rose Cottage

Rose Cottage is a building of local interest located at end of East Street. It is a significant building with a tall flint gable end faced with knapped flints with red brick dressings and quoins. The building was formerly listed, but was it was de-listed due to the addition of modern dormers.

Falmer (North) Listed Buildings:

74 Park Street and 75 Park Street

This 'L' shaped building was originally a public house and is faced with flints with red brick dressings and slate roof.

Barn to north west of the Swan Inn, Park Street

The barn is a grade II listed building faced with flints with red brick dressings and quoins and a hipped slate roof. It is set well back from Park Street and this building is a reference back to the agricultural heritage of the area.

77 and 78 Mill Street

This building is a grade II listed and built mid 18th century. It is faced with flints with red brick dressing and quoins and has a hipped tiled roof.

Pelham Cottages, Mill Street

These cottages are Grade II listed and were formally Knights Almshouses, dated 1869. The buildings were erected in the memory of Mary Chichester, the wife of Henry Thomas Pelham, the third Earl of Chichester. The semi-detached buildings are

single storey, have random flint-work and leaded windows with diamond paned glass. Above a porch which serves both of the houses is a carved stone tablet, which bears the arms of the Pelham family. Over the windows on the front elevation are two further stone tablets which bear the Countess's initials MC and the date 1869.

Mill House, Mill Street

This is an early 19th Century building and is of a style uncharacteristic of the area. The building is rendered with cement, has an eaves bracket cornice and the windows have venetian shutters and glazing bars. It has an attractive porch with a projecting cornice and round headed archway with keystone. The Mill associated with this building was pulled down in 1864 and in the 1960s Mill House was the home of the writer Godfrey Winn who had a regular column in a national newspaper.

43 to 47 Middle Street

This is an attractive run of five terraced properties fronting Middle Road. They are Grade II listed and faced with flints, with red brick dressings and quoins and has a clay tiled roof. The open quality of the area is typified by the large open field to the east of these buildings.

The Swan Inn, Middle Street

This is a Grade II listed building located on the corner of Middle Street and Park Street. The building has two parallel ranges, the eastern range was built on the 18th century and the western range was built in the 19th century. The Swan Inn has a hipped slate roof and is faced with flints and has red brick dressings and quoins. The building has had an unsympathetic flat roof single storey extension on the western elevation.



Barn to the north of The Swan Inn



Pelham Cottages



Mill House



43 to 47 Mill Street

Important Spaces

The main space in Falmer (south) is the pond and green which form the focus of the hamlet and are a popular spot for picnics. This area is more formal along its grassed northern edge with benches and an old water pump, whereas the southern and western edges are more informal and tree covered. There is a narrow bank along the eastern edge as the pond forms a foreground to the parish church.

The graveyard of the parish church of St Lawrence is also an attractive space, it is sparsely littered with gravestones and becoming more overgrown towards its eastern edge. It is a traditional English churchyard setting which affords impressive views across the pond.

Another graveyard associated with the church is situated slightly remote from the church itself and to the south of the pond. It is surrounded by thick tree belts which afford little scope for views in or out and it is therefore a small and private space within the Conservation Area.

Building Materials

Falmer features buildings using flint and stone as a building material, South Street, East Street and Park Street feature flint walls flush to the road frontage and most of the buildings in the settlement are faced with flint, these features give the area a distinctive character.

The majority of the buildings in the villages feature slate or clay tiled roofs and have red brick dressings and quoins.

Natural elements

The settlement is well-contained and screened by thick tree belts to the east (around Court Farm), to the west (in the grounds of the Old Rectory) and tree planting has taken place along the northern edge as a noise attenuation measure. The only area that it is relatively open to views of the Downs is to the south between Orchard Cottages and the well-screened graveyard.

Within the Conservation Area there are several important areas of trees and hedges, most noticeably around the pond and on the island in its centre as these obscure parts of the village from view which are then revealed as the Conservation Area is traversed. To the south west corner of the pond and associated parkland there are significant tree groups and sheltered landscaped areas giving the hamlet a leafy parkland feel when entering the southern section of Falmer by road. The parkland feel is reflected throughout the southern part of the settlement with many significant trees, open areas and hedgerows. The pond, island and associated trees also provide habitats for a variety of animals.

Relationship Between Conservation Area and Surroundings

Falmer (south) is very self contained and screened by trees. There is a gap in the tree cover for a short length along the southern boundary of the Conservation Area and only in this vista are the undulating Downs visible and the interrelation between the village and the surrounding countryside apparent.

There are several important vistas within the Conservation Area itself. These are principally because the pond forms such an important and central foreground in views. In Falmer (South) looking from the northern part of the settlement towards the pond there are important views to the Downs with the pond in the foreground. The eastern end of Falmer features mainly trees and gives a parkland feel. Looking north from the southern end of the settlement the view includes the row of listed buildings and the pond in the foreground. However, the most important view within the Conservation Area is looking across the pond from the west, wherein the parish church of St Lawrence is seen.

The village is set within open downland countryside, which is an important and contrasting setting for the mature trees and historic buildings that comprise the village. This contrast provides a sense of the typical historic settlements of the downland, few of which now remain without more modern encroachment.

Potential Enhancements

The obvious negative feature is that of the A27 which has significantly affected the original form of the village, separating it into two distinct areas. The southern part of Falmer feels like the main part of the village due to the closer proximity of the buildings and the focal point of the pond, the northern part is less closely knit and generally feels more rural in character.

The University of Sussex is also located adjacent to Falmer and the associated traffic generated with the university is a negative feature more so in the northern part of Falmer due to the closer proximity and the fact that some dwellings overlook the road. This feature however does not significantly effect the southern part of Falmer due to the enclosed nature of the village. Within the village the traffic and buildings associated with the university does not have a significant impact. There is however significant parking associated with the university within the village, which detracts from the general rural feel of the settlement.

Planning Policies

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

Switchboard number: (01273) 481000.

Website : www.eastsussexcc.gov.uk

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

Anyone thinking of applying for consent within a conservation area is therefore strongly advised to consider these policies first. The Local Plan can be viewed at the offices at the below address or on the website at: www.lewes.gov.uk/coun/planning/index.html

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

Further Information

For further information on this leaflet, please contact:

Policy and Projects Team

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

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

Lindsay Frost

Director of Planning & Environmental Services

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