

**DRAFT
CONSERVATION AREA
APPRAISAL**

FIRLE

DESIGNATED 15.10.75

DRAFT FIRLE CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Key Positive Characteristics**
- 1.2 Recommendations**

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Firle Conservation Area**
- 2.2 The Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal**
- 2.3 Community Involvement**
- 2.4 The Planning Policy Context**

3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

- 3.1 Location and Activities**
- 3.2 Topography and Geology**
- 3.3 Relationship of Conservation Area to its Surroundings**
- 3.4 Biodiversity**

4 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

- 4.1 Summary of Historic Development**
- 4.2 Historical Personalities**
- 4.3 Archaeology**

5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

- 5.1 Plan Form, Site Layout and Boundaries**
- 5.2 Focal Points, Views and Vistas**
- 5.3 Open Spaces, Trees and Landscape**
- 5.4 Public Realm**

6 DEFINITION OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST

- 6.1 Building Types**
- 6.2 Listed Buildings**
- 6.3 Positive Buildings**
- 6.4 Building Styles, Materials and Colours**

7 ISSUES

- 7.1 The Quality of New Development**
- 7.2 Protecting the Rural Character of the Conservation Area**
- 7.3 Traffic Management and the Public Realm**
- 7.4 Conservation Area Boundary Review**

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 The Quality of New Development**
- 8.2 Protecting the Rural Character of the Conservation Area**
- 8.3 Traffic Management and the Public Realm**
- 8.4 Conservation Area Boundary Review**

**MAP OF FIRLE CONSERVATION AREA
LOCAL GENERIC GUIDANCE
USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS
FURTHER READING**

1 SUMMARY

1.1 Key Positive Characteristics

- Small, almost linear village, primarily focused on The Street and The Dock, with mainly Georgian and Georgianised houses and vernacular farm buildings. The most notable historic buildings are Firle Place and St. Peter's Church.
- Completeness of groups of Georgian houses and the use of vernacular and more unusual materials, with very few poor quality infill buildings.
- The contrast of the more formal layout of the Georgian houses and informal layout of the vernacular farm buildings.
- The small front gardens of many of the properties and prominence of field flint boundary walls.
- The spacious plots of the larger historic houses.
- The timeless quality of the village.
- The retention of the village amenities which include a primary school, village hall, cricket club, public house, general stores and post office, the forge, the carpenters and other small businesses.
- The attractive manor house, Firle Place and its gardens, which are open to the public.
- Attractive rural setting within the South Downs, on the northern escarpment of Fire Beacon.
- The tree coverage within the village, be these woodlands, tree groups or individual trees.
- The simplicity of the public highway.
- Just 4 miles away from Lewes, the county town of East Sussex.

1.2 Recommendations

This conservation area appraisal makes the following recommendations that (in summary):

- When new development is proposed it is of a high quality.
- Consideration is given to the designation of an Article 4 Direction to reduce permitted development rights and allow the Local Planning Authority greater control over minor development.
- The rural character of the conservation area is protected.
- That public consultation takes place to revise the conservation area boundary.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 The Firle Conservation Area

The Firle Conservation Area was first designated by Lewes District Council on October 1975 and its boundary has remained unaltered or extended since this

time. The boundaries of the Firle Conservation Area have been drawn to include The Street, The Dock and Firle Place and part of its gardens, see Townscape Appraisal Map.

2.2 The Purpose of a Conservation Area Appraisal

This document seeks to record and define the special architectural and historic interest of the Firle Conservation Area, to help ensure that the conservation area is both preserved and enhanced, not only for people today, but also for future generations to enjoy. The content of this appraisal is based on best practice as advised in English Heritage's publication "Understanding Place: Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals" (2005).

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 where 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". It is the quality and interest of a whole area and not just individual buildings which are important considerations when designating conservation areas.

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

This appraisal will help satisfy the requirements of the Act by defining the special character and appearance of the Firle Conservation Area and by setting out a number of recommendations for its preservation and enhancement. It therefore provides a consistent and sound basis on which to determine applications for development within, or that affect the setting of, the Firle Conservation Area.

2.3 Community Involvement

This is the first draft of the Firle Conservation Area Appraisal. It has been drafted following a meeting on 19th March 2009 with the area's District and Parish Councillors. Copies of this draft appraisal and maps will be provided for consultation purposes to District Councillors, Firle Parish Council, the Firle Estate, relevant amenity groups, East Sussex County Council and English Heritage. A copy has been posted onto the Council's website and a press release will be sent to local papers. Two months will be allowed for comments to be submitted, after which any comments will be taken into consideration and the draft will be amended where necessary in preparation for its final adoption.

2.4 The Planning Policy Context

The policies which seek to preserve and enhance conservation areas and other relevant planning policies are set out in the Lewes District Local Plan (adopted March 2003). This Conservation Area Appraisal needs to be read in conjunction with Lewes District Local Plan. The Local Plan is available from Lewes District Council offices or online at www.lewes.gov.uk.

The Council is currently drawing up revised policies as part of its Local Development Framework (LDF), which will ultimately replace the Local Plan. This appraisal will form part of the evidence base for the LDF and will be supplemented in due course by a further document, the Firle Conservation Area Management Plan, which will set out a programme for improvements and monitoring.

This document should also be read in conjunction the East Sussex Structure Plan and national Planning Policy Guidance and Planning Policy Statements, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) – Planning and the Historic Environment or any documents superseding these.

3 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

3.1 Location and Activities

The Firle Conservation Area is located within the village of West Firle, more commonly referred to as Firle, just off the A27. It is approximately a mile and a half south-east from Glynde, 4 miles south-east of the county town of Lewes, 14 miles north-east of Brighton, 13 miles north-west of Eastbourne and 60 miles south of London.

The only notable main road in the area is the A27. This road does not run through the Firle Conservation Area itself but it is located to the north of the village running east-west. Other than the A27 the roads surrounding the area are distinctly rural in character, typically with no pavements and surrounded either side by hedges. There is no railway in Firle itself, the nearest station being nearby in Glynde. Firle's location at the bottom of the northern escarpment of the South Downs makes it an attractive stopping place for walkers and cyclists and there are many public footpaths which link the village to the surrounding countryside to take advantage of.

Land uses in the conservation area are varied but primarily residential. The areas residential use is comprised of a variety of types of properties from larger houses, including Firle Place, a manor house which is Georgian in appearance but parts of which date much earlier, to humbler detached, semi-detached and terraced houses mainly from the Georgian period but also including a number of 17th century, Victorian and early to mid-twentieth century.

The land surrounding the Firle Conservation Area is in agricultural use and vernacular farm buildings are a notable feature of the locality, including within the conservation area. Some of the farm buildings within the conservation area are still in agricultural use, while others have been converted to either residential or business uses. The agricultural uses are crucial to the rural ambiance of Firle.

Firle has a few local amenities, although it lacks sufficient population to support a wider range. There is a primary school, village hall, cricket club, a popular public house The Ram, the Firle Stores which contains the Post Office, the forge and carpenters shop and Firle Place and its gardens, which are a visitor attraction open to the public. There are also a number of other small businesses based in the village such as those at Shire House, a converted vernacular barn typical of the area. Lewes is the nearest, well serviced neighbouring town.



3.2 Topography and Geology

The village is located along wide contours between 35 metres and 25 metres, falling from south to north. A prominent landscape feature of the village is it lies at the foot of the northern escarpment of the South Downs. Sitting above the village to the south-east is Firle Beacon which, at 217 metres high, is one of the highest peaks in the South Downs. Also notable is Blackcap Hill to the south at 134 metres high, Beddingham Hill to the south-west at 185 metres high and Mount Caburn to the north-west at 145 metres high.

Geologically Firle is located at the bottom of the chalk downs but the village itself sits on greensand and geult.

3.3 Relationship of Conservation Area to its Surroundings

Firle has a rural setting being surrounded by open countryside and lying within the South Downs. There are a number attractive views and vistas out to the surrounding countryside from various vantage points.

However, despite being within the open countryside, the conservation area, particularly the village centre along The Street and The Dock, has a sense of enclosure due to the closeness of the detached, semi-detached and terraces houses, the high flint and brick boundary walls, trees and woodlands. Occasionally this is relieved by many glimpsed views of the open countryside from spaces between dwellings and over rooflines.

Field boundaries in the surrounding area typically have high hedges which not only enclose the fields but also the adjacent roads. There are however attractive views of the open countryside through field gates and over the top of lower hedges.



The busiest road in the area is the nearby A27, it is the main access road to Firle. However, it is far enough away not to impose upon the rural setting of the village. The other roads in the area are quiet rural lanes with little traffic. The village and its setting has tranquil rural quality which must be preserved.

3.4 Biodiversity

There are a number of statutory designations that relate to the natural environment within the conservation area.

The Firle conservation area lies within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the forthcoming South Downs National Park (at the time of writing). The Firle Escarpment, adjacent to the conservation area, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest which extends into the neighbouring parish of Glynde and Beddingham.

The Firle Conservation Area is also identified in the Lewes District Local Plan as being within the countryside, outside the Planning Boundary. New development within this area is therefore very strictly controlled. Policy CT1 of the Lewes District Local Plan (Adopted March 2003) or any subsequent replacement should be referred to.

Firle Place is designated a Historic Park and Garden, part of which is within the conservation area. There is an Ancient Woodland, the Firle Plantation, known locally as the Pleasure Gardens (?), to the immediate south of the village, the 500 meter buffer of which is close to the boundary of the conservation area. There is also a number of rare species including bats and a lichen that grows on a sycamore tree by St. Peter's Church.

4 HISTORIC DEVELOPMENT AND ARCHAEOLOGY

4.1 Summary of Historic Development

The name Firle is thought to derive from the Anglo-Saxon "fiere" or "fierol" meaning overgrown with oak. The village is mentioned in the Domesday Book as Ferla.

Firle Place and St. Peter's Church are the most architecturally significant buildings in Firle. However the presence of these buildings within the conservation area is understated because neither visually dominates the village.

Firle Place was originally built for Sir John Gage in the early 16th century but was extensively remodelled by the first Viscount Gage between 1744 and 1754 and extended again by the second Viscount Gage between 1754 and 1783. It is set away from the village to the south-east. While the manor house itself is not visible from the public realm its presence is notable from its entrances in the village. The formal entrance is found at Crossways, the junction of The Street and Wick Street where The Lodge of Firle Place can be seen. The tradesman's entrance can be seen off the southern end of The Street, it runs between the southern side boundary of St. Peter's Church and the northern side boundary of the Carpenter's Workshop and Church House, the rear elevation of the Stables of Firle Place can be seen to the north. Another service entrance, off the eastern side of The Dock, leads to Firle Place's gardens.

St. Peter's Church forms a more a visible feature of the village. However it can still only be glimpsed from certain vantage points as it is set back from The Street and there is woodland to the west and a line of trees along the tradesman's entrance to Firle Place which diminishes clear views of it. St. Peter's is the oldest standing building in Firle. The Chancel is 13th century, while the Gage chapel, nave, aisles, south porch and west tower are 14th century.



St. Peter's Church

The earliest surviving domestic buildings in the village are 4 and 5 The Street, found at the junction of The Street and The Dock and 8 & 9 and 11 & 12 The Dock. These are thought to be 17th century or earlier, although they have been refronted and altered.

The most densely developed part of the village lies between The Ram and the area around the Firle Stores along The Street where, primarily, residential and vernacular farm buildings from the Georgian are found. Historic maps show that the village grew slightly in the Victorian period with the building of several residential properties and a school, expanding again in the 20th century when it gained a village hall and further residential properties.

There are very few modern properties within the village. The most notable are the bungalows on Bostal Road and two new houses on The Street, Beacon View and Trosley House which are the most recent additions to the village. The bungalows are not of any architectural merit, although fortunately they are well hidden behind the school and do not form a visible part of the conservation area.

Beacon View and Trosley House are two modern attempts at integrating houses into the village using vernacular materials and modern detailing. Trosley House fails to do this while Beacon View is the more successful.

Interestingly Firle Beacon, as the name implies was one of the beacon fires that were lit in 1588 to warn of the Spanish Armada. Also along the ridge there are remains of more than fifty Bronze Age bowl barrows.

Today Viscount Gage is lord of the manor and owner of much of the land and buildings within the village, managed by the Firle Estate.

4.2 Historical Personalities

The Gage family began their long association with Firle in the 14th century, a relationship that continues today. There are several historically notable members of the family. Sir John Gage (b.1479 – d.1556) accompanied Henry VIII on the expedition to France of Jun-Nov 1513. He was appointed Vice-Chamberlain to the King and was Constable of the Tower of London. Sir John is notable for building Firle Place, although it has been much altered since. Sir John's son Edward (b.? – d.1567) became the Sheriff of Sussex and in 1556 supervised the burning at the stake of the Lewes martyrs. Sir William Gage, 7th Baronet, 1st Viscount (1695 - 1744) is responsible much of the remodeling of Firle Place. The greengage is named after Sir William who is credited with introducing it to Great Britain around 1724/25 when he obtained a supply from France. Another well known Gage was General Sir Thomas Gage (b.? – d.1787) who was the commander in chief of the British forces in North America. During the American War of Independence he lost Bunkers Hill to the Americans.

The village has close links with the Bloomsbury Group. The writer Virginia Woolf rented a house in Firle from January 1911 to January 1912. She had renamed this house Little Talland House after Talland House, the Cornish house in St. Ives she stayed in when on holiday as a child. Pointz Hall, the fictional manor from her novel *Between the Acts*, is thought to be inspired by Firle Place. Woolf's sister, painter and interior designer Vanessa Bell, moved to Firle in 1916 taking residence in the nearby Charleston Farmhouse with the painter Duncan Grant. The farmhouse became a regular haunt of the Bloomsbury Group. Notably Vanessa Bell, her son Quentin Bell, and Duncan Grant are all buried in the churchyard of St Peter's Church.



Little Talland House

The economist John Maynard Keynes lived at Tilton Farmhouse, a neighbour of Charleston Farmhouse, from 1925 and died there in 1946. Writer Katherine Mansfield, who had close ties with the Bloomsbury Group, also briefly lived in Firle. Her landlord was John Maynard Keynes.

4.3 Archaeology

There are no scheduled ancient monuments however much of the conservation area has been designated an area of archaeological interest because of its significance as a medieval and post medieval village.

5 SPATIAL ANALYSIS

5.1 Plan Form, Site Layout and Boundaries

The boundary of the conservation area encompasses much of the village. The main road that runs into the village is The Street, which is off the A27. The most northerly part of The Street is bounded either side by fields enclosed with high hedges until you come to Crossways. At Crossways there is a cluster of houses and the main entrance to Firle Place where you will find The Lodge. Moving south along The Street from here there are buildings running along the western side, while the eastern side is woodland. There is then an almost 90 degree bend in The Street on the corner of which can be found Firle Church of England Primary School. Heading further south the pattern of houses on one side with woodland on the other changes when you reach The Ram Inn from where buildings are found on both sides of the road. The Street stops at its southern end at Belmont Cottage Stables where access for vehicles is prohibited and the road becomes a gravel track that is a public right of way leading to Firle Beacon. There are a number of roads that lead off The Street, the most notable being The Dock.

The residential properties in the conservation area are typically comprised of terraces, semi-detached and more modest detached residential properties. Commonly these properties have their front elevations facing onto the street, with small front gardens, little planting and low field flint wall front boundaries, usually less than 1 metre high with larger rear gardens. Examples include the humbler front gardens of properties such as the terraced house at The Crescent, 45 - 48 (consecutive) Polecat and 25 - 28 The Street and the slightly more generous front gardens of detached and semi-detached properties such as 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, Scayes and Little Talland, The Street and 11, 12, 14, 15 and 16, The Dock.



25 - 28 The Street with their front elevations facing the street, small front gardens and low field flint front boundary walls

The larger detached houses generally face onto the street, the exception being The Cottage which sits at an angle to The Street. These houses typically have more generous garden space most notably within the conservation area around their front gardens.

A notable feature of the larger houses in the village is that they tend to have higher field flint boundary walls, typically over 1½ metres. Examples of this larger house type can be seen at The Old Vicarage, The Cottage, West Place House and Black Tile House.

Vernacular farm buildings have a distinctly different plan form and site layout to the more planned layout of the residential properties. The farm buildings are generally grouped together into a farmstead, often with buildings that directly abut the public highway, resulting in high flint walls facing onto The Street.

The farmsteads also have wide openings into them allowing vistas into farm yards. Examples of vernacular farmsteads can be seen at Place Farm and Belmont and the farm buildings associated with it.



Shire House with its field flint walls abutting The Street

The result of the garden boundary walls of the residential properties and the farm buildings is the conservation area has many imposing field flint walls facing onto the public highway, particularly along the southern part of The Street.

The northern end of The Street around the school differs in that there are few flint walls, the boundary treatments of properties typically having hedges, mixed vegetation and trees. The ground floor level of many of the buildings along this area is higher than road. The vegetation on the boundaries and raised ground level result in the road having a sunken and enclosed character. The raised ground level would normally give buildings a more imposing impact on a street however the planting on the boundaries obscures this potential affect.



Firle Primary School, The Street is raised from the public highway with an iron fence and vegetation on its boundary

Specific mention needs to be made of The Dock. It is notable because the south eastern side of the road has an almost continuous 4 metre high brick wall, or buildings that are built into the brick wall, running almost its whole length. The north-western side of the road has a number of detached and semi-detached houses which, as is typical of the village, have small front gardens and low field flint boundary walls. While these gardens are attractively planted there are few significant trees or large plants, giving this side of the road a more open character, in contrast to the imposing wall and buildings opposite.

Field boundaries in the conservation area are defined by hedges some of which are low and afford attractive views, while others taller and obscure potential views and result in a more enclosed feeling. Notable too are the woodlands which also contribute to this enclosure. For example there is a woodland that runs from The Lodge all the way to the car park next to The Ram. This acts as a buffer between the properties along the northern part of The Street and the grounds of Firle Place and significantly contributes to the sense of enclosure in this area.

5.2 Focal Points, Views and Vistas

Listed below are some of the key focal points, views and vistas. These are indicated in more detail in Townscape Appraisal Map however it should be noted that this is not meant as comprehensive record of all important focal points, views and vistas.

The conservation area has a number of attractive historic buildings which together form a cohesive whole. There are no particularly prestigious buildings that are very visible within the conservation area that act as focal points, St. Peter's Church and Firle Place being located so that their impact on the conservation area is subdued. The other buildings within the conservation area that are focal points include The Ram Inn, the Memorial Hall, Firle Stores, the War Memorial and Firle Church of England Primary School.

Views and vistas are constrained by tightly knit historic buildings, tall flint walls, trees, mixed vegetation and hedges but sometimes glimpsed views of the surrounding countryside and in particular Firle Beacon and Mount Caburn, can be seen between gaps in the generally enclosed character of the village. However there is much that is pleasing about village itself, with a bend in the road or the contrast of natural and built forms or the composition of buildings resulting in many attractive vistas. These are highlighted on the Townscape Appraisal Map however it should be noted that this is not a complete record of all views and vistas of interest. It is important these views are retained.



View of Firle Beacon

The conservation area also has a number of public foot paths running through and around it where there are attractive views and vistas of the village and the surrounding countryside. It should be noted that these have not been recorded on the Townscape Appraisal Map because they all have interest. It is important these views are retained.

5.3 Open Spaces, Trees and Landscape

Within the conservation area there are a number of open spaces, some of which are not open to the public. The largest open space is the grounds of Firle Place which has several public foot paths crossing through it. The grounds of Firle Place are also often open to the public as a paid visitor attraction.

There is little in the way of open space in the centre of the village other than the cricket ground, located to the east of the car park by The Ram and the area within the church yard, to the west of the church itself. The area outside the front of The Ram Inn, called The Beach, is also notable, it is mainly used for car parking and as a pleasant beer garden.



The Ram public house and The Beach

There are many trees and groups of trees that make an important contribution to the verdant character of the conservation area. Groups of trees also give the conservation area a sense of enclosure.

The most notable trees are; the trees in the grounds of Firle Place (note these do not feature on the Townscape Appraisal Map due to their number), the woodland that runs along the eastern side of the Street from the Lodge all the way to the car park next to The Ram, the row of trees that are located to the south of St. Peter's Church, the small woodland that is located to the west of St. Peter's Church, the trees behind the flint front boundary wall of The Cottage opposite The Ram and the two trees in the front gardens of 15 and 16 The Dock. These, along with other individual trees and groups of trees are indicated on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Trees within the conservation area are protected. Important trees and tree groups have been identified in the Townscape Appraisal Map. However this should not be read as a comprehensive identification of all the trees of importance. Prior to the commencement of any tree works the Local Planning Authority Tree and Landscape Officer needs to be notified.

All around Firle is a stunning landscape which forms part of the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There are numerous public footpaths that connect Firle to the South Downs, all of which provide an opportunity to enjoy these spectacular views.

5.4 Public Realm

There are few pavements in Firle, which befits a rural conservation area. Grass verges of varying widths occur in many locations. There is a pavement along The Street from the area around The Ram up to the area opposite the

War Memorial. The pavement along The Street is tarmac, edged with square granite kerbstones, modern in origin.

There is no pavement on the eastern side of the road, where the boundary walls of properties directly abut the road. There is another pavement that runs down the north-western side of The Dock. The pavement along The Dock is surfaced with concrete pavours.

Road surfaces are typically tarmac however The Dock and a number of other private roads and driveways that are compacted earth and flint with small, loose flints on their surface.

There is no street lighting, telegraph poles with their associated unsightly wires and minimal street signs in the conservation area, which results in the public realm having an attractive, uncluttered appearance.

There are a number of traditional finger posts, timber painted white with black lettering, in the conservation area. Also notable is the timber bus stop, probably modern, at Crossways, the junction of The Street and The Wick.



Traditional finger post

Vehicle parking in the village has been managed through the provision of a visitor car park next to The Ram on The Street. While this helps to reduce the number of vehicles parked on roads many of the properties in the village do not have off street parking and vehicles park on the road.

6 DEFINITION OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST

6.1 Building Types

Building types in Firle are mostly various historic residential dwellings including detached, semi-detached and terraced houses. There are a number of larger detached houses, the most impressive being Firle Place. However it is the modest detached, semi-detached and terraced houses that are commonest building type in Firle.

Also notable are the numerous vernacular farm buildings, many still within farmsteads. Some of the farms continue to be in agricultural use and the farm buildings still used, while others have been converted to either residential or business uses.



A vernacular farm building converted to a residential use

The Ram Inn is the only remaining one of the village's four (?) original public houses, which previously acted as resting stops on the Lewes to Alfriston coach road. The Ram used to also be the village court room where the rents for tenants farmers were collected and set. It has an attached stable building.

Firle Church of England School was built, as the date stone above the door indicates, in 1845 on land given to the vicar of Firle by Lord Gage. Originally, the head teacher lived in The School House attached to the school.

Other notable building types include the village hall built in the early 20th century in an arts and crafts style and the village forge to the east of the Ram, which has been converted and is now used as the Firle Estate Office.



Forge converted into the Firle Estate Office

6.2 Listed Buildings

A number of the buildings in the conservation area are on the Council's local list or have been statutory listed as being of special architectural or historic interest. There are many listed buildings within the conservation area with many associated curtilage listed buildings and structures. Of the statutory listed buildings all are grade II listed with the exception of the stables at Firle Place which are grade II* listed and Firle Place and St. Peter's Church which are both grade I listed.

The stables at Firle Place were built in the late 18th or early 19th century, it has a number of attractive architectural details and is mainly constructed from a white brick, unusual for the area. The exterior of Firle Place is 18th century however the western half of the mansion is 16th century but largely Georgianised, with parts of the building possibly dating from the 15th century. St. Peter's Church has a 13th century chancel with the remainder 14th century. It also includes the Gage Chapel which contains brasses and monuments to the members of the Gage family of Firle Place.

It should be noted that it is a criminal offence to execute, or cause to be executed, without first obtaining listed building consent any works for the demolition, in whole or part, of a listed building or any works of alteration or extension which would affect its special interest, or to fail to comply with the terms of any condition attached to a consent. This includes the theft of architectural fixtures. It is advisable to seek advice from the Council's Design and Conservation Officer.

6.3 Positive Buildings

In addition to the conservation area's locally listed and statutory listed buildings, a number of unlisted buildings have been noted as being positive buildings, i.e. buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. These buildings have been identified during the survey process and, as recommended by PPG15, are recorded in the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Buildings identified as making positive contribution to the conservation area vary but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provide the conservation area with architectural and/or historic interest.

As stated in Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 there is a presumption that positive buildings within the conservation area will be protected from demolition and the Council will only grant consent for applications for alterations or extensions to these buildings where they preserve or enhance their character and appearance.

6.4 Building Styles, Materials and Colours

Houses are typically two storeys high, with a variety of roof forms including hipped, pitched, half-hipped and cat-slide, with dormers and rooflights a rare intrusion into the front roof slopes. Brick chimneys also feature prominently on residential properties. All the houses have a limited palate of materials and architectural detailing which give a cohesive appearance to the settlement.

Special note needs to be made of the Georgian and earlier Georgianised houses, which feature prominently within the conservation area. Several of the Georgian houses are wide, generally face the street, have a central doorway, sometimes with a modest, open sided porch, and sash or casement windows either side, which on the first floor meet the shallow eaves of the roof. This creates a symmetrical frontage, typical of the classical style houses of this period.

Although houses like this feature in the conservation area it should be noted that there are a number of more naive Georgian and Georgianised houses that are not quite as 'polite', lacking some of these features.



Houses on with polite classical Georgian details

Historic settlements are traditionally constructed from locally available materials. Firle has a number of these materials but also more unusual materials imported into the village from further field.

Field flints (i.e. flints literally picked up from nearby fields) are one of the defining materials of the conservation area. It is the most common material, featuring heavily in both high and low status buildings and in buildings with different uses including many residential properties and agricultural buildings. Field flints are usually paired with red hand made clay bricks which feature in the detailing of these structures. It is also likely that those buildings that have render or stucco finish are constructed of these flints.

Boundary walls are also typically constructed of field flints. This is particularly noticeable along the varying height front boundary walls on The Street south-east from The Ram, into the more densely developed centre of the village and The Dock. Boundary walls typically have rounded or triangular red handmade brick copings, although other copings are in evidence. Also notable are bungaroosh walls. Bungaroosh, a local term, refers to a mixture of flint, brick and general rubble, roughly bound together by lime mortar. This type of construction can also be covered with render.



Example of a bungaroosh wall

Stone, other than flint, is not a common material in the conservation area, although the church is constructed of flint with quoins, window and door surrounds and buttresses of Wealden sandstone, a material imported to distinguish the church from the vernacular buildings to give it prestige.

Another uncommon stone is found at The Lodge, Wick Street and some of the roof of Firle Place which both use Horsham stone slates, a sandstone from West Sussex.

Red handmade clay bricks are a characteristic material within the conservation area. The red brick is used as the main material in the walls of buildings, for example at 14 The Dock and 29 & 29A The Street and the tall boundary walls that run along the south-eastern side of The Dock.

The red bricks also feature in the detailing of buildings and can be found used as quoins, window and door surrounds and string courses in buildings and walls with a field flint construction. This warm coloured material is used throughout the conservation area providing a pleasantly uneven surface and contrasting attractively with the white, grey and black of the field flint.



Wall constructed of field flints with contrasting half round red brick coping

There are also a number of buildings and boundary walls where vitrified headers have been used. These glazed bricks were fashionable in the Georgian period.



Example of wall constructed of vitrified headers with red stretchers

White bricks are an unusual material that features in The Lodge and the stables at Firle Place. It's likely that these bricks were imported from elsewhere in the country as they are not typical of bricks in the area. These buildings have been deliberately made distinct from the rest of Firle and used as a status symbol.



The Lodge with its white brick and Horsham stone slates

Red plain handmade clay tiles are very common as a roofing material and hanging tile from the walls of buildings. For example these can be seen at 11 & 12 The Dock which is fully tiled and 4 & 5 The Street and 45 to 28 (consecutive), which are tiled on the first floor. Red fish scale handmade hanging tiles also feature on a small number several the Victorian properties, being popular in this period. Examples include 54 and 55 Wick Street, a semi-detached pair where they feature within a larger area of red plain handmade clay tiles. Another example where fish scale tiles feature heavily is at Apple Trees, The Street where their use is prevalent and a decorative diamond shape has been created in the gable from plain tiles.



Hand made red tiled first floor and roof, field flint ground floor with red brick detail around windows at 4 and 5 The Street

While plain red clay tiles are common, slate also features prominently. From about 1810 cheap Welsh slate was brought by sea up the River Ouse to Lewes, with an importing business being established in 1818. It became the preferred roof material in the area. Slate features prominently on many roofs in the conservation area, for example 23 and 24 The Street and the terraced houses in The Crescent, The Street.

Mathematical tiles, invented in the 18th century to replicate brickwork and fashionable at the time in places like Lewes and Brighton, are not common in Firl, although there is one example at Black Tile House, where the shiny, black glazed version of the mathematical tile has been used.



Example of black mathematical tiles

Several of the houses in the village have a render or stucco finish. This was used to replicate the appearance of stone to give an ostentatious, 'polite' frontage to houses, distinguishing them from the vernacular buildings. Examples include Firlie Place, the Old Vicarage, 20, 21 and 22 The Street.



Render finish to 20 and 21 The Street

Another notable building material in Firlie is timber. Timber is used as weatherboarding on some agricultural and residential buildings, although it is not a dominant material. Windows and doors are typically made of timber with sash and casement both being common. Regrettably, a small number of properties in the conservation area have had their timber windows replaced with UPVC windows. This is an alien material and considered unsympathetic to the conservation area.

Interestingly it is common for front doors, front gates, gutters and down pipes to be painted by the Firlie Estate (?) in dark green.

7 ISSUES

The Firlie Conservation Area encompasses an attractive 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 the area is clearly a desirable location in which to live. However, there are a number of issues which will need to be resolved if the conservation area is to be protected from unsympathetic changes. These are:

7.1 The Quality of New Development

Fortunately, the conservation area has been spared any significant infill development. However more modern dwellings such as Trosley Lodge and

The Street and 1 - 4 School Bungalows, Bostal Road have attempted to reflect the vernacular character but have not been successful. They do not contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

While the village is generally well managed by the Firle Estate, inappropriate alterations to dwellings are one of the most significant concerns in the conservation area. There are several buildings in the conservation area that have been subject to changes that harm the character and appearance of the conservation area. The conservation area has been affected by the use of non-traditional materials and architectural detailing, for example the use of UPVC windows being used to replace the traditional timber windows.

Maintenance is also an issue. The field flint walls which make a significant contribution to the character of the area are in need of repointing or risk eventual collapse.

7.2 Protecting the Rural Character of the Conservation Area

The conservation area and surrounding area still supports several farms. These uses provide a continuous link to the agricultural past of the settlement and should be protected.

The historic farm buildings at Place Farm appear to no longer be in use and are starting to deteriorate. Sympathetic uses need to be found for these buildings before they become more significantly at risk.

The lanes within the conservation area contrite to the rural ambiance of the area. The introduction of street furniture, road signs and road markings, pavements etc would undermine this character.

7.3 Conservation Area Boundary Review

A review of the historic and architectural interest of the existing conservation area and the area immediately outside the conservation area was carried out to establish whether the existing boundary defines the areas special interest. The boundary review is detailed in section 8.4 Conservation Area Boundary Review.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the various issues identified in the Chapter 7, the following recommendations are made:

8.1 The Quality of New Development

The Local Planning Authority needs to ensure that all new development in the conservation area adheres to Local Plan policies and to the advice contained in PPG15 and any subsequent guidance.

Applications for extensions to residential properties, garages, other outbuildings and new dwellings will only be allowed where the proposal preserves or enhances the character and appearance of conservation area.

The Local Planning Authority will ensure that all new buildings and extensions include traditional materials and architectural detailing or materials and architectural details that of a high quality.

Consideration should be given to the designation of an Article 4 Direction to reduce permitted development rights and allow the Local Planning Authority greater control over minor development, such as the replacement of windows, to ensure that the character and appearance of the conservation area is preserved or enhanced.

8.2 Protecting the Rural Character of the Conservation Area

The Local Planning Authority will seek to retain the agricultural buildings in and around the conservation area in their original uses, and should resist further planning applications for change that does not reinforce agricultural uses. Where a change of use is necessary for the long term survival of the building they will need to be sympathetic to the character and appearance of the farm building.

The Local Planning Authority will encourage the relevant landowners to repoint their flint walls which need to be protected from demolition or neglect.

The introduction of works to the public realm that do not preserve or enhance the conservation areas character will be resisted.

8.4 Conservation Area Boundary Review

As part of the appraisal process, the conservation area boundary was reviewed and the following alterations, shown in the Townscape Appraisal Map, are recommended;

Redraw boundary so that the modern bungalows within a cul-de-sac, 1 - 4 School Bungalows, Bostal Road, are removed from the conservation area.

TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL MAP

Please see associated attachment.

DRAFT

LOCAL GENERIC GUIDANCE

Advice for owners of properties in conservation areas and listed buildings on the relevant planning legislation which affects them can be found in the leaflet *Planning Controls in Conservation Areas*, available online at: www.lewes.gov.uk.

Both leaflets are also available from the Planning and Environmental Services Department of Lewes District Council.

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
Southover House
Southover Road
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 1AB

Tel: (01273) 471600

This document is one of a series of conservation area appraisals carried out on the District's 35 Conservation Areas. A full list can be obtained by contacting the above office, 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

FURTHER READING

Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15

Understanding Place: Guidance on conservation area appraisals, English Heritage, 2005.

DRAFT