

**DRAFT CONSERVATION  
AREA APPRAISAL**

**HAMSEY (OFFHAM)  
DESIGNATED: 10.02.1976  
REVIEWED: 2009**

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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](http://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 in the South East Plan (2009). National planning policy guidance also covers these areas. In particular, Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG15) – Planning and the Historic Environment, should be consulted.

## **3. SUMMARY OF SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **3.1 Key Positive Characteristics**

The key features which contribute to the special interest of the area are as follows:

- The setting of the conservation area within a stunning rural landscape
- The historic layout of the conservation area, which is largely preserved
- 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
- A wide range of local materials, which adds interest and variety, with flintwork being particularly prevalent

### **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

## **4. ASSESSING SPECIAL INTEREST**

### **4.1 Location and Setting**

#### **Location and context**

The Hamsey (Offham) Conservation Area is located within the South Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a short distance north of the county town of Lewes, East Sussex. Offham village is predominantly residential; however, other uses include a forge, a public house and holiday let accommodation. There is also agricultural use of the surrounding land, such as sheep grazing.

### **General character and plan form**

The conservation area is irregular in form and covers an area of 12.79 hectares. It focuses mainly on irregularly spaced development lining The Street, a stretch of the busy A275 road between Lewes and North Chailey. At the southern end of the conservation area there is a prominent junction with The Drove, leading to Offham's Church of St Peter, and on towards Hamsey village and parish church, also dedicated to St Peter. The numerous views out of the village towards the open fields and Downs reinforce its rural setting.

The southern half of the conservation area is more densely developed, with properties being prominent and close to the road; while moving north buildings are situated further back and screened from the road, sometimes in more spacious plots, such as Offham House and Aylwins. The Drove, leading towards Hamsey, has the feel of transition towards the rural landscape, as does the western half of the conservation area, along the private road towards Coombe Place, surrounded by open fields and the rural landscape.



*The Drove, leading towards Hamsey,  
marks the transition to the open countryside*

## Landscape setting

Offham is set within an undulating landscape at the foot of the South Downs. The setting is particularly dramatic at the southern end of the conservation area, where the ground rises steeply up to the chalk escarpment of the Downs. To the northern end of the conservation area, views out to the open countryside show the landscape flattens out in contrast to the steep slopes of the Downs to the south. The conservation area is set on slightly higher ground than the landscape to the east, and within the conservation area itself there is variance in topography, with some properties to the west of the main street being set on rising ground above the road. The frequent views out to the surrounding landscape make a significant contribution to the atmosphere of the settlement.



*The conservation area is set within a stunning rural landscape  
(looking towards the chalk escarpment)*

## **4.2 Historic Development and Archaeology**

### **The origins and historic development of the area**

The village of Offham was first recorded in 1092 as *Wocham*, meaning 'the crooked water meadow', a reference to its location in a bend of the River Ouse.

The Yeakell & Gardner map of 1778-1783 shows that the pattern of the settlement was well established by the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, with buildings clustering around the junction of the main Lewes to Chailey road and The Drove. Coombe Place (outside the conservation area) and Offham House can be seen set within large grounds.

The 1840 Tithe Map clearly shows many of the buildings of the conservation area. A notable absence is the parish church, which was not constructed until 1859, as the village used the church at nearby Hamsey. The map also shows the road to Coombe Place ran between Offham House and Woodcock Cottage, rather than as it does today to the south of the Blacksmith's Arms.

Early Ordnance Survey maps show the addition of the Church, and a National School for boys and girls (now a residential property). This was the local school until Hamsey Primary School was built in Cooksbridge in 1907 to replace it.

Development in more recent years has generally been of a minor nature, and therefore the historic development of the layout remains largely preserved.

### **Archaeology, including scheduled monuments**

Much of the conservation area is an area of archaeological interest, which is the site of a medieval and post medieval village. There are no scheduled

ancient monuments within the village, although a causewayed enclosure and three barrows lie close by to the south west.

### **4.3 Spatial Analysis**

#### **Character and interrelationship of spaces within the area**

The general spatial character of the area is that of public space, i.e. roadway and pavements, flanked by enclosed private spaces. Many properties to the south of the conservation area are situated close to the road, but small spaces are used for planting/window boxes or small gardens, often enclosed by simple picket fences, which provide attractive private spaces which enhance the character of the conservation area.

To the north of the conservation area, where properties are set back further from the road, private spaces are largely screened from view, often by hedging. Offham House is screened by a tall flint wall to the north, an indication of its status.

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

There are a number of important views both out of and into the conservation area, and within the village itself. 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, and also indicate its position on higher ground, yet still dominated by the steep slopes of the Downs to the south.

From outside the conservation area, key views of the village and the prominent church tower can be seen from Hamsey looking west.

Within the conservation area itself, there are views looking to the core of the village which are significant. The church tower is a key landmark which can also be regularly viewed from points within the village.



*The church tower is a key landmark*

#### **4.4 Character Analysis**

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

The southern part of the conservation area is dominated by residential buildings, vernacular in style and scale. Here, there is also a forge building, historically used as a smithy and still in active use. Further north, larger properties in the form of Offham House, and Aylwins, represent residential development on a grander scale.

##### **The qualities of the buildings and their contribution to the area**

There are nine entries on the statutory list ('listed' buildings) within the conservation area. Of these, eight are listed Grade II, and one, Offham House, is listed Grade II\*. There are also two buildings of local interest (see next section).

Aylwins has two parallel ranges, that to the rear being older. The front range, which is most visible from the road, has a fairly formal feel, being faced in red mathematical tiles, with timber sash windows with glazing bars and a timber bracketed cornice at the eaves. The side gable to the north is decorative with bands of red brick and flint cobbles. It is interesting that a formal façade such as this is lacking an entrance door. A photograph from the 1960s shows that this façade has been altered in recent times, previously having a central panelled door with timber surround and hood over, and much plainer sash windows with a single central glazing bar. Mathematical tiles are an unusual material for a rural village, being more typical of nearby Lewes and may indicate the status of the building when it was enlarged.



*A glimpse of Offham House from The Street*

Offham House is an imposing building faced with knapped and squared flints. The symmetrical façade dates to the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, but a date of 1676 on the sundial on the front of the building suggests earlier origins, probably incorporated within the present building. The sundial also has the initials NR,

for Nizell Rivers. Windows are timber sashes with glazing bars, set within painted stuccoed architraves. The doorway is prominent, the stuccoed surround being rusticated with a curved pediment over. From the public realm the building's slate roof and dormers can be glimpsed and form a notable feature of the conservation area.

Woodcock Cottage (listed as Garden Cottage) is a timber framed building, faced with brick, of 17<sup>th</sup> century date or earlier. It is set back from the road and the catslide roof of its south east elevation, clad in handmade clay tiles, and its large brick chimney, are the most visible elements.

17-21 Bank Cottages form a small terrace of flint faced cottages with red brick quoins and window and door surrounds. They are set up on higher ground overlooking the road. Attached to the south and set slightly lower than the terrace is Turnpike Cottage, similar in appearance but with more prominent red brick window surrounds at ground floor level and a brick string course.



*7-10 The Street; vernacular cottages typical of the conservation area*

7-10 The Street is a small terrace of cottages (originally a pair) close to the main road and prominent in the street scene. It is also faced with flints with brick quoins and window surrounds, and a brick modillion cornice at eaves level. The terrace has a tiled roof and crittall casement windows. Two doors to the front elevation are set in a gabled brick porch, and a simpler door with a flat hood over. There are also two blind windows at first floor level; an interesting feature, which may represent the avoidance of window tax.

2-4 The Street is of likely 18<sup>th</sup> century date, tile hung with a tiled roof and timber casement windows. It is set end on to the road, and the southern catslide roof and western gable, which has tile hanging above brick, are prominent features, bearing right on to the pavement.

11 The Street is also known as the Old Post House. This is noted on a sign above the small shop window and canopy on the street elevation. The building is faced with grey headers with red quoins and dressings. The roof is tiled and the gable and extension to the south are tile hung. The list description identifies that the building has horizontally sliding sash windows; however, these have been replaced with modern metal framed windows with top-opening lights, an inappropriate detail.

The Church of St Peter is one of two churches in Hamsey parish, and is known as the 'new church'. The 'old church' of St Peter at Hamsey dates back to the early medieval period. The church at Offham was built in 1859 and consecrated in 1860 to replace the church at Hamsey, as Hamsey village itself had dwindled in size and Offham had become the main centre for the population. Hamsey church had fallen into a state of disrepair and rather than repair it, it was decided to construct a new church at Offham.

The church was designed by the architect Ewan Christian in the Gothic Early Decorated style and is faced with flints arranged 'randomly', with sandstone windows and dressings. The church has a prominent tower, the roof of which is covered with oak shingles. The fine oak-framed porch on the north side is

covered with clay tiles, with bands of scalloped tiles providing a decorative feature.



*St Peter's Church*

### **Unlisted buildings (including any recommendations for locally listed buildings)**

Two buildings are included on the Lewes District Council list of buildings of local, visual or historic interest. These buildings are not statutorily listed, but special consideration must be given to them should planning applications be made at these properties.

Toll Cottage is situated at the entrance to the village from the south, and is included on the list for sociological reasons. It is a very simple, single storey, early 19<sup>th</sup> century building, constructed in painted brick with casement windows, a slate roof, gables and slate-clad chimney. The building has an unusually large chimney and prominent chimney pot.

Mill Laine Farmhouse is set away from the main public realm of the conservation area, along a private road. It is a timber framed building, restored and enlarged in more recent times.

A number of other buildings contribute to the character and appearance of the conservation area, which are neither on the statutory or local lists. These are identified on the Townscape Appraisal Map.

Of particular note, Coombe Place Lodge makes an interesting contribution to the area. The lodge house to Coombe Place, a listed building just outside the conservation area, it utilises traditional materials decoratively, and has very prominent tall brick chimneys. Its presence is appropriate for a lodge at the entrance road to a high status building.



*Coombe Place Lodge*

One of the outbuildings to Offham House is particularly prominent in the conservation area, by virtue of its position, abutting the main road, and its

height, due to the varying levels in this part of the conservation area. It is constructed in traditional materials, faced with brick and clad with natural timber weatherboarding. It makes an attractive and rather unusual feature.

Whilst the Old Granary is a historic building constructed in traditional materials, the large dormers to its roof, and large front windows are a rather dominating feature. Historic photographs show the building formerly had two smaller dormers, and gothic style windows to the front elevation.

### **Local details**

Flint walls with shaped red brick coping, often built to curve around boundaries, are a particular feature of the conservation area, contributing to its character, and should be preserved.

St Peter's Church has two stone war memorial plaques, below the window of the west elevation, commemorating those from the parish who lost their lives in the First and Second World Wars.

The bus shelter at the centre of the village is built in quality traditional materials, with an attractive wooden bench inside. It makes a pleasing feature. Adjacent to it is a traditional small red post box.

The sundial to Offham House, marked with the date 1676, is an interesting feature.

### **Prevalent local and traditional building materials and the public realm**

The buildings of the conservation area display a variety of materials, mostly local. Flint, often in the form of field flints, randomly laid (the best example being the church), but sometimes knapped, or a mix of the two, predominates, and is subtle and muted in colour. Offham House is faced with flints which are knapped and also squared, which reflects its status as a more polite building

within the village. Other stone is only seen on the church, which has sandstone dressings, befitting its status as a prominent public building.



*Randomly laid field flints at St Peter's Church*

Brick is also used, although it is rarely the principle construction material, being more commonly used for detailing, such as quoins at the corners of buildings, window or door surrounds, or horizontal stringcourses. The brick used for detailing is a warm, textured, red brick, typical of the locality. Grey brick headers are also used, for detailing, such as creating a chequered pattern as seen on the Forge, or as the principle facing material, e.g. The Old Post House.

An unusual material for the conservation area is red mathematical tiles, seen on Aylwins, which were invented in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to replicate brickwork. They are not often seen in rural locations, being a more typical feature of the town of Lewes.

Weatherboarding is not a common material, but an example is the tall outbuilding to Offham House, which faces directly onto the road, and has unpainted oak weatherboarding above a brick plinth.

Tile hanging, using warm red handmade clay tiles, is present on a few of the buildings. Handmade clay tiles are also the typical roof covering throughout the conservation area, apart from a few incidences of slate roofs, (e.g. Toll House, which also has slate hanging, and Swallow Cottage), and the church tower, which is covered with oak shingles. Clay tiles are also used decoratively, such as the bands of diamond shaped tiles to the rear of 2-4 The Street, and scalloped tiles on the roof of Coombe Place Lodge.

Boundaries are defined in a variety of ways. Picket fences are typical, both white painted and unpainted. Flint walls with curved brick coping are also a common feature throughout the conservation area. An attractive feature is iron railings, especially those to Coombe Place Lodge, which are decorative and add an air of formality befitting the entrance road to Coombe Place, which contrasts with the more vernacular appearance of the village. The entrance also has some unusual cast iron gate columns.

Pavements are typically tarmac, edged with either small granite setts or modern concrete setts, the former being more attractive. Towards the north of the conservation area, the pavement narrows and is found on the eastern side only, the unmade verge on the opposite side being much more rural in character and marking the exit out of the village. There is a lack of pavements around the church also, which fits with the transition out of the village towards the open countryside and Hamsey.



*The conservation area displays a wide range of local materials.*

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

A very small part of the conservation area, at its southern end, forms part of the extensive Clayton to Offham Escarpment Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the majority of which is located immediately to the south of the conservation area, and stretches along the chalk escarpment and dip slope of the South Downs, from Offham all the way to Clayton in the west.

Trees make a major contribution to the character and appearance of the area. In particular, the tree-lined routes in and out of the area contribute to its rural character and setting.

There are no trees or tree groups under specific tree protection orders (TPOs) within the conservation area; however, 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 of damage (negative factors)**

The original windows of the Blacksmith's Arms have been replaced with uPVC windows. UPVC is an unsuitable material for a conservation area and its use here is regrettable.



*The Blacksmith's Arms – the building contributes to the conservation area but its UPVC windows detract somewhat from its appearance*

There have been poor alterations to the entrance gate to the church, with the flint wall not made good, which illustrates the importance of sensitive repairs.

On The Drove there are a number of bollards on the verge opposite the church. These are of non-traditional materials and are a rather obtrusive addition.

A post and rail fence with wire mesh forms an atypical boundary, to the east of 17-20 The Street.

### **General condition (of the area and built fabric, identification of buildings at risk – BARs)**

Offham village 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. The flint and brick retaining wall of the gardens of 17-20 The Street, which runs along the verge by the main road, has in places collapsed, and has partly been repaired to its northern end. In its current state it detracts from the general appearance of this part of the conservation area, which its repair and reinstatement would help enhance.

Repairs are required to the weatherboarding and roof of the prominent outbuilding within the curtilage of Offham House, adjacent to and very visible from the road (work now in progress).

No buildings appear to be at risk.

### **Problems, pressures and the capacity for change**

A major issue is the busy traffic which passes through along the main road between Lewes and Chailey and detracts from the ambience and atmosphere of the conservation area. Despite speed restrictions the traffic often passes through at high speeds. This may in time lead to pressure for additional signs or speed control methods. There is already an illuminated speed limit sign towards the northern boundary of the conservation area. It will be important that any future methods are mindful of the potential effects on the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Many of the buildings within the conservation area are listed and therefore have a high degree of protection from detrimental alterations. Damage to the appearance of traditional unlisted buildings, i.e unsympathetic window replacements, is not currently a major issue in this conservation area. Therefore, owners are encouraged to consider repair of historic windows and doors rather than their replacement, or if beyond repair, sympathetic replacement in timber. It should be noted that UPVC is not an appropriate material for a conservation area. Items such as satellite dishes should be positioned sensitively in discreet locations.

Additional control, in the form of an Article 4 direction, which would further restrict permitted development in the conservation area, would offer increased protection against undesirable minor alterations and further erosion of the area's special interest. This would be particularly effective in controlling alterations to buildings which are not listed. For example, it would prevent the replacement of original windows with inappropriate modern versions in non-listed buildings.

As some of the properties are set within large plots, there may be pressure for backland development within building curtilages. There is however no planning boundary within the conservation area and therefore there is a presumption against residential development (see Local Plan policy RES 6).

The setting of the village and the existing largely historic layout are intrinsic to its character therefore it is important this is protected.

## **5. COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT**

This initial draft of the Hamsey (Offham) Conservation Area Appraisal was produced following a meeting in March 2009 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 Hamsey 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**

None.

## **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, available online at:

<http://www.lewes.gov.uk/environment/708.asp>

Further information on Listed Buildings can be found in the leaflet Listed Buildings: An owner's guide to alteration and repairs, available online at <http://www.lewes.gov.uk/environment/935.asp>

Further information on trees in conservation areas can be found online at:

<http://www.lewes.gov.uk/environment/5925.asp>

The above information is also available from 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](http://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**

The Barcombe and Hamsey Project runs a website which provides information on historic maps, census, historic photographs, archaeology and buildings. [www.bandhpast.co.uk](http://www.bandhpast.co.uk)

*Guidance on conservation area appraisals*, English Heritage, 2006.

## **10. TOWNSCAPE APPRAISAL MAP**