



LEWES CONSERVATION AREA



CHARACTER APPRAISAL

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Lewes is one of best preserved small market towns in England, and the county town of East Sussex. Famous for its Downland setting and for its location on a steep hill overlooking the valley of the River Ouse, the town has an undulating topography with notable views from higher points towards Newhaven and the sea to the south, Mount Caburn and beyond to the east, and the High Weald to the north. The town retains a high number of listed buildings, curving and undulating historic streets, and notable open spaces. It is famous for the quality of its architecture, for the way in which it is adapting to 21st century pressures for change, and for the enthusiasm of its inhabitants for its preservation and protection.

Unfortunately the relative prosperity of the town has also

brought with it the threat from new development which is not in keeping with the character of the conservation area, and this threat is the most significant issue to emerge from the assessment of Lewes undertaken as part of this appraisal.



Castle Gate

Lewes consists of three historic settlements, each of which preserves its own identity. Lewes High Street, from the prison to Cliffe Bridge, was the domain of the secular lord of the borough. Southover grew up around the Cluniac Priory founded at the end of the 11th century, and its high street was the first to rival that of Lewes. Not to be left out, the Archbishop of Canterbury developed a third trading centre, Cliffe High Street, on marshy ground belonging to his great manor of South Malling, probably towards the end of the 12th century. The administration of these three components to the town were only brought together in 1881, and it is impossible to understand the present-day morphology of Lewes without an understanding of their distinct origins and historical development.



Market Street

The best known building is the Norman castle, centrally positioned on an artificial mound, and below it a collection of houses and a former maltings grouped around a bowling green. Below the castle, the long High Street acts as a central spine to the conservation area, linking the western edges of the town, by Lewes Prison, to Cliffe, on the eastern side of the river. This High Street is lined with listed buildings, many built as houses and now converted into shops or offices. Early churches (St Anne's and St Michael's), prestigious 19th century municipal buildings (the Crown Court and the Town Hall) and a variety of commercial buildings including the former Star Brewery all add variety and interest. To the north, The Wallands is a late 19th century suburb which provides well detailed red brick houses in spacious gardens, contrasting with the more artisan housing of The Pells area. To the south, the ancient parish of Southover contains the remains of the Benedictine priory established by William de Warenne in the 11th century, Anne of Cleves Museum, a 16th century hall house, and St John the Baptist Church, parts of which date back to the 12th century. Over the river, the once slightly separate settlement of Cliffe is notable for its 13th century church, dedicated to St Thomas a Becket, and for Harveys Brewery, a substantial late-19th century building which dominates the views northwards from Cliffe Bridge.

Almost surrounding the town to the north and west are the treeless, sheep-grazed chalk hills of the eastern Downs with the flat valley of the curving River Ouse and its water meadows below providing a complete contrast. Over the river, at Cliffe, the downs rise steeply again and are partially wooded, with the scars of historic chalk pits marking the edge of the conservation area.



Harveys Brewery

This Conservation Area Character Appraisal follows the recent guidelines which have been published by English Heritage, the government's advisor on the historic built environment. Chapter 1 sets out why conservation area appraisals are necessary, how the community have been involved in the drafting of this document, and the planning policy background.



Lewes Castle across New Road

Chapter 2 provides a summary of the conservation area's special interest, and the reasons for designation. Chapter 3 briefly considers Lewes's historical development (a detailed historical development is included at Appendix 1) and the effect that this had on the layout of the town which we see today, and Chapter 4 details the area's location, its geology, its topography and landscape setting. Chapter 5 analyses Lewes' many open spaces, its landscape, and the most important views into and out of the town. Chapter 6 provides an overview of the whole conservation area, considering current activities and uses, shopfronts and advertising, the public realm (paving, street furniture, lighting) and historical associations. The buildings of the conservation area, both listed and unlisted, are described and details of prevalent building materials and architectural styles provided. Chapter 7 identifies the seven different 'Character Areas' within the Lewes Conservation Area and provides a very detailed description and analysis of all seven. Chapter 8 brings together the various issues raised in the preceding chapters and Chapter 9 provides some recommendations for future action.

Following the adoption of this appraisal for development control purposes, and as recommended by English Heritage, it is the Council's intention to produce further, more detailed 'Management Proposals'. These will build on the Issues and Recommendations within this appraisal and provide an agreed plan for the long term management and enhancement of the conservation area.

A detailed history of Lewes is provided at Appendix 1, and a bibliography at Appendix 2. A list of useful contacts is included at Appendix 3, and Appendix 4 contains guidance on how new development in the Lewes Conservation Area should be approached, including advice on building form and materials. The Townscape Appraisal Maps are included at Appendix 5.



Cliffe High Street

1.1 PURPOSE OF THIS APPRAISAL

This 'Conservation Area Appraisal' seeks to record and define the special architectural and historic interest of the Lewes Conservation Area, as a way of ensuring that the conservation area is both preserved and enhanced (as required by the legislation) for future generations.

Conservation areas are designated under the provisions of Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990. 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, rather than that of individual buildings, which is the prime consideration in identifying a conservation area.

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 therefore satisfies the requirements of the legislation by defining the special character and appearance of the Lewes Conservation Area, and by setting out a number of recommendations for its preservation and enhancement. It therefore provides an interim basis on which all new applications for development within, or on the edge of, the Lewes Conservation Area can be assessed until the more detailed Management Proposals are produced and implemented.

The survey work for this Character Appraisal was undertaken in the spring 2004, and is therefore based on information gathered at that time. The omission of any particular feature does not imply that it is of no significance. Photographs were taken in 2004 and spring 2007.



Prince Edwards Road in the Wallands

1.2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In the summer of 2005, following the approval of a first draft by Lewes District Council, copies of this appraisal and the accompanying maps were provided for local amenity groups, East Sussex County Council, and English Heritage. A copy was posted onto the Council's website and a press release sent to local papers. Comments were submitted in 2005 and the beginning of 2006, and following further consultation and amendment, the final version was submitted to Lewes District Council for approval in October 2006. The document was illustrated and final maps produced in December 2006, and the final document approved for development control purposes by Lewes District Council on December 2007.

1.3 THE PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

Policies which seek the preservation and enhancement of conservation areas are set out in the Lewes District Local Plan which was adopted in March 2003 (Policies H4-H8). The Council is currently drawing up revised policies as part of its Local Development Framework (LDF), which will ultimately replace Local Plans. This appraisal will form part of the LDF and will be supplemented in due course by a further document (Lewes Conservation Area Management Proposals) 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, particularly Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 (PPG 15) – Planning and the Historic Environment.

2 SUMMARY OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST

2.1 KEY CHARACTERISTICS

The special character of the Lewes Conservation Area derives from the following features.

- Setting in a gap of the South Downs;
- Location on the River Ouse;
- Undulating topography providing stunning views in almost every direction;
- Roman, Saxon and Norman influence on town layout;
- Remains of Lewes castle and medieval priory;
- Nationally important collection of buildings in the town centre, Southover and Cliffe;
- Notably intact streetscape, featuring long rows of varied listed buildings;
- Domestic, small scale buildings for most of conservation area;
- Varied roof heights in principal streets with gables, parapets, and pitched roofs facing the street;
- Wide variety of building materials: flint (cobbles or knapped), clunch (chalk blocks), regional sandstone, imported limestone, timber-framing, timber boarding, render (often over 'bungaroosh'), brick (red, grey, and yellow), mathematical tiles (black glazed, yellow or red), handmade clay roof and wall tiles, Horsham stone slate, and Welsh slate;
- Well preserved Victorian and Edwardian suburbs;
- Brick pavements often with granite or traditional stone kerbs;
- Cast iron drain covers, kerb plates, coal hole covers, and bollards usually made by the Phoenix Ironworks and marked 'Every's';
- Thriving town centre and a strong sense of community;
- Activity provided by local government offices, the various Courts, offices of the police and various quangoes, and a number of schools and colleges;
- Local specialist shops, such as antiques, books, clothes and gifts;
- Association with historical events and famous people;
- The smell of hops from Harvey's Brewery;
- The traditions of Bonfire.



Listed buildings in Albion Street



Malling Street in Cliffe

2.2 JUSTIFICATION FOR DESIGNATION

Lewes is a well preserved, County town, with rows of listed buildings lining the main streets. Its plan form reflects its Saxon, Norman and medieval history, with Lewes Castle providing an important focal point to the town. Its undulating topography and location on a gap in the South Downs, over-looking the river Ouse, adds to its many attractions. It is a thriving community, with a strong commercial core, surrounded by well preserved 19th century residential suburbs. Its many fine listed churches, one of them pre-Norman, are another worthy feature.

2.3 BOUNDARIES AND EXTENT OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

The Lewes Conservation Area is centred on Lewes castle and the old Saxon town which surrounds it, and covers the whole length of the High Street as it passes through Cliffe in the east to the top of the hill outside Lewes Prison in the west. To the south is Southover, with the remains of Lewes Priory; to the north, the Victorian and Edwardian suburbs of The Wallands and The Pells; and, over the river to the east, the separate settlement of Cliffe. Whilst most of the conservation area is distinctly urban, with rows of varied

terraced houses, there are some notable open spaces – the Priory grounds, Southover Grange gardens, The Paddock, and the Pells ponds and water meadows. This area also boasts the Pells open-air swimming pool, the first such public amenity in Britain.

This appraisal includes a recommendation, detailed in Chapter 9 para. 9.3, for the addition of an area to the west of St Pancras Road into the conservation area.



Southover Grange gardens looking up to Lewes Castle

3 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF LEWES

3.1 SUMMARY OF PRINCIPAL HISTORIC FEATURES

- Iron Age or Roman burial mounds (Lewes Castle and Brack Mount);
- Roman roads (Juggs Road, Rotten Row);
- Roman crossing below Cliffe Bridge;
- Saxon street plan (spinal thoroughfare and twittens) and town boundaries (Westgate, Keere Street);
- Saxon High Street leading down to crossing at Cliffe;
- Saxon settlement at Chapel Hill;
- 11th century Norman keep and 14th century barbican;
- Brack Mount and The Mount, possible Norman watchtowers;
- Remains of Lewes Priory;
- Medieval street layout based in part on Saxon town boundaries;
- Cliffe causeway and evidence for medieval drainage ditches;
- Examples of 14th-17th century timber-framed houses;
- Good examples of prestigious 18th and early 19th century town houses;
- Good examples of churches and chapels dating to between the 12th and 19th centuries;
- Good examples of various municipal and governmental buildings of the 18th and 19th centuries;
- Well detailed Victorian and Edwardian suburbs.



Saxon pathways lead southwards from the High Street



Pipe Passage, off West Gate

Appendix I *The historical development of Lewes* contains a thorough assessment of the historical development of the town, including copies of the relevant historic maps.

3.2 HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES

One of the 18th century's most important and influential residents in Lewes was the philosopher Thomas Paine, who took lodgings in Bull House in the High Street in 1768 and married his landlord's daughter, afterwards spending the next few years hotly debating politics. These debates mainly took place at the Headstrong Club which met at the White Hart Hotel and remains active. In 1774 he moved to America, where he wrote *Rights of Man*, a classic defence of democratic freedom.



Bull House, High Street

Other famous residents included Dr. John Tabor, known for his antiquarian as well as his medical skills; Dr. Richard Russell, who was partly responsible for making Brighton a popular sea-bathing resort; and Dr. Gideon Mantell, the physician and geologist, who lived at nos. 165-167 High Street from 1819 onwards. These buildings were remodelled by the famous architect Amon Wilds, who used his trademark ammonite capitals. Wilds also designed several of the more prestigious terraces in Brighton and Hove. Another local builder was Thomas Kemp, who went to develop eastern Brighton (Kemp Town). Lewes was also noted for the many Quakers who lived in the town, particularly the Rickman family, who were merchants and lived at Dial House in the High Street.

In the 20th century Lewes had strong connections with the Bloomsbury Group with Virginia Woolf briefly owning the former windmill in Pipe Passage, before moving to Rodmell. Her sister, the artist and writer Vanessa Bell, had a country house at Charleston near Fittlehampton, which has recently become a popular visitor centre. Vanessa's daughter-in-law, and two of her grandchildren, still live in the area.

3.3 ARCHAEOLOGY

There are six Scheduled Monuments in the Lewes Conservation Area, marked on the Townscape Analysis maps. These are:

- Lewes Castle, including the Bowling Green;
- Brack Mount;
- Lewes Priory site including the former nursery to the north of the railway line;
- The Mount, off Mountfield Road;
- Chapel of St James's Hospital in Southover Road.

Just outside the Lewes Conservation Area (part straddles the boundary)

- Saxon cemetery, between Juggs Road and Southover High Street.



Brack Mount



Former Chapel of St James's Hospital

4 LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE SETTING



View from the Mount towards Mount Caburn

4.1 GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION

Lewes is located some 12 kilometres from the Channel coast where the valley of the river Ouse creates a break in the long sweep of the South Downs, which join Eastbourne in the east to Winchester in the far west. The town lies along the ridge of the Downs as they drop down to the river, creating the attractive hilly topography for which Lewes is rightly famous. To the north lies the raised clay and sandstone ridges of the Weald, with Ashdown Forest just 10 kilometres away. The large metropolis of Brighton and Hove is reached in minutes along the coastal dual carriageway, the A27, which connects to London via the A23. Lewes lies on the main railway line from London to Eastbourne, with a separate direct connection to Brighton. Newhaven, located at the mouth of the River Ouse, provides a convenient ferry link to the continent.

4.2 TOPOGRAPHY AND LANDSCAPE SETTING

Lewes is notable for its location on a steep, east and south-facing slope of the South Downs, leading down to the flat River Ouse valley, and rising again towards Mount Caburn. The principal part of the historic town is located along a ridge of the Downs, on an east-west orientation, with the High Street leading from the Castle down a steep slope (School Hill) to the site of the original, probably Roman, ford at Cliffe Bridge. On either side of the High Street the land falls sharply to Southover, located on a slight ridge above the flood plain of the Winterbourne stream, and similarly northwards, to the Edwardian suburbs beyond The Paddock. To the west, the High Street continues to rise from the Castle past St Anne's Church, to the top of the hill adjacent to Lewes Prison, from where it falls gently towards the outskirts of the town and the road to Brighton.