

## 6 DEFINITION OF THE SPECIAL INTEREST



*Shops and business in High Street*

### 6.1 CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND USES

The Ditchling Conservation Area is primarily residential with a small number of shops and businesses located close to the crossroads and along the High Street. There is no manufacturing or industry within the area and, with the notable exception of traffic, the area is quiet. East End Lane has a much more tranquil atmosphere than the two main routes through the village.

Shops include two 'corner shop' newsagents, a general food shop, a bakery and Post Office, a pharmacy, saddlery, estate agent, tea room, beauty and hair salon, antiques and craft and picture galleries. There are two pubs, The Bull and The White Horse; a third pub, The Sandrock, has recently closed and been converted to apartments.

The village has an active Anglican church together with a Quaker Meeting House, Emmanuel Chapel and Unitarian Chapel (The Old Meeting House) located within the conservation area. The village hall, primary school, local health centre and a car showroom are just outside. Immediately east of the conservation area is a recreation ground and the village supports a number of sporting and leisure societies.

A mini-roundabout controls traffic at the intersection of the two minor roads. This, combined with parked cars restricting the width of the already narrow streets, can lead to traffic congestion, to the detriment of the otherwise tranquil atmosphere of the village.

The village is an important visitor attraction. Its historic buildings, artistic links and picturesque setting make it a popular tourist destination. There is free parking behind the village hall and a limited amount of on-street parking. Buildings are in a generally good state of repair.



*Looking South down North Street*

## 6.2 ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORIC CHARACTER

The conservation area has a memorable historic character and appearance deriving from a varied collection of old buildings built in a rich mix of domestic architectural style and local building materials dating from the medieval period onwards.

There are 49 listed buildings in the Ditchling Conservation Area. The oldest is St Margaret's Church (grade I). Wing's Place is grade I and Cotterlings in West Street is grade II\*. The rest are grade II.

There is no definable architectural unity within the conservation area. Although one can almost define an 18th century appearance to a large number of buildings, especially along the High Street, the area's early timber-frame buildings are often hidden behind later facades of brick or render.

Most of the conservation area's buildings are dwellings though some, of course, were originally built to carry out a particular business or trade with accommodation behind or above the workspace. Other building types include St Margaret's Church, The Old Meeting House in The Twitten and a Quaker Meeting House in the former slaughterhouse in East Gardens. There is a

former school, now the Museum, two grade II listed inns (The Bull and The White Horse) and an unusual triangular gazebo with a pyramidal roof in the garden of Pardons in East End Lane.

Some houses, like The Limes and Sopers in the High Street are prestigious houses with some architectural pretension; others, like Walnut Tree Cottage in East End Lane or The Old Vicarage in West Street, were originally cottages but have grown in size with the changing times.

Apart from St Margaret's Church, the medieval period is represented by timber-framed hall houses of a type commonly found in Sussex. Examples are Tudor Close, Lewes Road and Cherry Tree Cottage, East End Lane. Despite the prevalence of timber-framed buildings, only a few such as Wing's Place (West Street), Crossways (South Street) and Bank House (High Street) display their timber frames externally – many others have been re-fronted in the 17th and 18th century.

Eighteenth century buildings include Rowlescroft in North End and Chichester House, no. 11 High Street. The late 18th century/early 19th century is well represented but there are few 19th century buildings in the core of the area. The most notable are The Chestnuts and White Lodge in North End, The White Horse in West Street and



*Eighteenth century buildings in West Street*

The Sandrock in High Street. Later 19th century building took place on the approaches to the village, outside the conservation area. Sunnyside (Nos. 19-25 Lewes Road) is a good example of a late 19th century terrace.

Of interest from the 20th century is Barnfield Gardens, off East End Lane. This is a typical 1930s estate of six dwellings in a mock Tudor style encircling a small communal green – an asset to the area's range of architecture.

### 6.3 BUILDING MATERIALS AND LOCAL DETAILS

Historic villages are traditionally constructed from locally available building materials and Ditchling's most distinctive building material is red clay tile and clay brick manufactured locally at Ditchling Common. This warm-coloured material is present throughout the area on roofs, on walls and even underfoot.

Variation in colour and shape of tiles is used to decorative effect on roofs and walls. Twitten Cottage has alternate bands of plain and fishscale tiles; nos.63/65 East End Lane displays diadems of fishscale tiles in a façade of plain tiles.

Cotterlings in West Street is a timber-framed building behind an early 18th century façade of black mathematical tiles. Mathematical tiles are clay facing tiles with one face moulded to look like a brick header or stretcher, most often hung on laths applied to timber-framed walls to give the appearance of brick. They can also be found on the south gable of Sopers in the High Street.

The second most typical building material in Ditchling is timber from the Wealden forests which was used for the carefully jointed timber frames of the area's medieval buildings as well as for later roof construction and internal joinery.

The use of stone is rare. Apart from the church there is no building in the area prestigious enough to warrant the cost of transport of a material not found nearby. St Margaret's Church walls have sandstone dressings as well as stone from Caen in Normandy, with local chalkstone internally. A small section of the roof is covered with Horsham stone tiles but the greater part of the roof is covered with the ubiquitous clay tile. The church's main walling material is flint but



*Ditchling's characteristic building materials: clay brick and tile*

elsewhere flint is more frequently used in boundary walls and is not common in house construction although no. 12 North End is a good example of a vernacular cottage constructed of flint with red brick dressings to windows and doors. An outbuilding to the rear of The Bull is similar in construction but with a greater proportion of flint.

After the beginning of the 18th century manufacturing processes improved, making brick a more affordable material. High quality brickwork can be seen at no. 23 High Street and at Sopers, two 18th century buildings constructed in red brick laid in Flemish bond with carefully raked thin mortar joints. Brick is also commonly used in chimney stacks and for dressings around window and door openings in the area's few buildings where flint is the main walling material.

Roofs in the area are most commonly covered with hand-made red clay tiles. After the coming of the railways in the 1840s, Welsh slate became more available and can be seen on 19th century buildings such as The Old Vicarage, West Street and Little Rowlescroft, North End, but red clay tile roofs are one of the most distinctive features of the area – even The Sandrock, dating from the late 19th century, is roofed with clay tile.

Windows vary in shape, size and style according to the age of the building but historic windows are invariably timber. Windows in the refronted timber-framed buildings are not standardised and only the conservation area's Georgian and Victorian buildings possess any uniformity in style, generally vertically sliding sashes. Nos. 2 to 4 Church Walk and no. 37 North End have unusual horizontal sliding casement windows.

#### 6.4 POSITIVE BUILDINGS

In addition to the conservation area's 49 listed buildings and a further five contained in the Council's 'local list', a number of unlisted buildings have been noted on the Villagescape Appraisal map as being 'positive buildings' i.e. buildings that make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.

Buildings identified as 'positive' will vary, but commonly they will be good examples of relatively unaltered historic buildings where their style, detailing and building materials provides the streetscape with interest and variety. Most importantly, they make a positive contribution to the special interest of the conservation area. Where a building has been heavily altered, and restoration would be impracticable, they are excluded.



No. 69, East End Lane, a 'positive' building

With listed and locally listed buildings, 'positive buildings' help create the village's distinctive and interesting historic villagescape. As recommended in Planning Policy Guidance 15: Planning and the Historic Environment, the general presumption should be in favour of retaining buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a conservation area.

#### 6.5 HISTORIC SHOPFRONTS AND ADVERTISING

The number of shops in the village is diminishing and there are a number of vacant shop windows,



Historic shopfront at no. 6 West Street

including some in former shops that have now become dwellings. Shopfronts are constructed in timber and most are modern.

The most notable historic shopfront is an 18th century curved bow window at no. 8 West Street and a less ornate early 19th century shopfront next door at no. 6 West Street.

Commercial advertising and signage in the village avoids garish colours. Glossy materials and fascias are illuminated, if at all, by external light fittings. Both The Bull and The White Horse display hanging baskets. Hand-painted lettering on the south gable of the Bull enhances an otherwise blank plain wall.

## 6.6 PUBLIC REALM: FLOORSCAPE AND STREET FURNITURE

Pavements of red brick are one of the most notable aspects of Ditchling's floorscape. Brick paviors are present in the footways of all four streets that converge on the crossroads and are a feature of particular local distinction. They are laid parallel to, and sometimes at right angles to, the highway and are marked on the Villagescape Appraisal Map. It has been suggested that some of the older bricks came as ballast from Holland in ships coming to buy wool in about 1660. Some



Area of distinctive local floorscape

lengths are wholly modern; the difficulty of finding a modern source of a suitably matching brick pavior that meets current standards for public safety was resolved in the late 1990s.

There is a raised footway of brick beside Church Lane with a Sarsen stone to mark the corner. Where the High Street widens, north of the crossroads, flints in the pavement indicate land in private ownership – as opposed to the public footway marked by red paviors.

## 6.7 HISTORICAL ASSOCIATIONS

Wings Place in West Street has been known as *Anne of Cleves' House*. The house and its estates were supposedly given as part of the divorce settlement by King Henry VIII to his fourth wife, Anne of Cleves. There is no evidence that she lived there.

The village is noted for its associations with early 20th century artists and craftsmen who came to live in Ditchling inspired by its Downland setting and rural way of life. These include Eric Gill, artist and sculptor, who lived at Sopers, High Street from 1907-1913 and the painter Sir Frank Brangwyn who lived at The Jointure, South Street from 1918-1956. Other artists and craftsmen



Eric Gill, sculptor, lived at Sopers, High Street 1907-1913



*Historic iron railings*

were Ethel Mairet who revived the craft of handloom weaving; Edward Johnson, calligrapher and designer of the London Transport typeface and logo; Amy Sawyer, artist and writer; and Hilary Pepler, who founded St. Dominic's Press.

## 6.8 DISTINCTIVE LOCAL FEATURES

Within the conservation area are a number of local features that give the area a distinct identity. These features, which may relate to the area's history or locality, give the area its unique sense of place. The following features, though small, make a significant contribution to the area's special interest:

On the south side of the churchyard is a large block of Sarsen stone built into the flint retaining wall. Within the same section of wall there is a stone which bears the date of 1648. The two arches set into this wall are the vestigial remains of a 17th century forge.

The area contains three letter boxes: a 'GR' box in the wall beside Barber's Bank, Lewes Road; a red letter box distinctive in not having a royal monogram at The Old Post Office, 2 East End Lane, and a freestanding 'ER' letter box at the end of East End Lane. The red K6 telephone kiosk at the crossroads is a grade II listed building.

There is a disused water pump in St Margaret's churchyard and three tall drain vents in the village (one in The Twitten beside Sunnyside) – all are reminders of everyday life in 19th century

Ditchling. An iron ring in the wall outside Little Rowlescroft, North End remains from the days when the building was a saddler's and harness-maker's workshop.

Throughout the area are a number of old street lighting columns adapted for modern use. These white fluted columns are in scale with their surroundings and sensitively combine a historic feature with modern standards of street lighting.

The simple column of the War Memorial was designed by Eric Gill and letter-cut by Joseph Cribb, the first pupil of Eric Gill. It is a tangible link with the period when Ditchling was home to early 20th century artists and craftsmen.

Boundary walls and iron railings are a feature of the area especially in East End Lane. Flint and brick, in a variety of designs, is common with a coping of brick. Iron railings are also present, outside Sunnyside, Lewes Road for example or beside The Twitten.



*Old street lighting column adapted for modern use*

## 7 IDENTIFICATION OF CHARACTER AREAS

### 7.0 INTRODUCTION

Though small in area, the villagescape of Ditchling Conservation Area varies: the close-packed, almost terraced appearance of the central cruciform of streets contrasts markedly with the spacious character of the Village Green and pond east of the church; East End Lane is a long, sinuous rural village lane whereas North End is wider, shorter and carries through traffic.

Taking into account age, topographical location and usage, the conservation area may be divided into the following four distinct and definable character areas.

#### THE FOUR CHARACTER AREAS ARE:

- Area 1: The village centre (High Street, West Street, South Street, Lewes Road)
- Area 2: East End Lane and The Twitten;
- Area 3: Lodge Hill Lane, Boddingtons Lane, Village Green and pond;
- Area 4: North End.

HIGH STREET, WEST STREET, SOUTH STREET, LEWES ROAD

PRINCIPAL FEATURES

- Convergence of four streets at the crossroads in the centre of the village;
- Historic form and layout of High Street and West Street;
- The special historic interest of West Street;
- Views of the South Downs and St Margaret's Church;
- Architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings;
- Notable historic shopfronts;
- Trees and hedgerows at the southern end of South Street;
- Attractive private gardens to the rear of residential properties;
- Two roadside trees in front of The Limes;
- The former homes of Eric Gill and Sir Frank Brangwyn;
- Lively and varied roofscape in which red brick and red clay tiles prevail;
- Red brick paviers which unify the floorscape of the four main streets;
- Old street lighting columns adapted for modern use;
- Open space behind The Bull Hotel.

VILLAGESCAPE

High Street was the commercial hub of Ditchling but is now mainly residential. There are few gaps between buildings and the street has a close-packed urban form broken only by Church Lane to the west and three vehicular accesses to the east: one to the back of The Bull, another to the

garages at the rear of no. 22 and a third to the back of The Sandrock. Two-storey is usual but no. 7 stands out, being a three-storey timber frame-building with an attic. Brick and tile prevail and the highway rises gently from the crossroads between pavements of red brick paviers. There are good views southwards to the Downs.



The Bull, a listed building in High Street

High Street is not uniform in width, narrowing after the crossroads before opening out between Church Lane and The Sandrock, narrowing again and becoming wider once more in front of The Limes. The effect of this is to give prominence to the gable end of two buildings, Sopers and The Bull. Two lime trees beside the pavement and a weeping birch in the front garden of no. 34 give the area a special distinction. Proceeding north, a bend in the road prevents northward views out of the village and it is beyond this point that the hedgerows and greenery of North End begin.

A high proportion of the buildings are listed and the street has an 18th century appearance. The Sandrock, with its Victorian detailing and style, seems at odds with the tenor of the rest of High Street but adds to the area's varied villagescape.

South Street falls away from the crossroads with historic character diminishing as one proceeds southwards. The west side of the street contains some fine historic buildings, the most notable being The Jointure, a 16th century timber framed house with an 18th century façade. The east side contains some unremarkable buildings from the end of the 19th century and later. No 2 South Street, dating from c.1880, is not a building of great architectural merit but holds an important corner location, especially viewed from High Street, because the crossroads is not precisely aligned.

West Street rises slightly from the crossroads, enclosed on both sides at first but opening out to the north at the churchyard where trees stand high above the road. The road is narrow; barely two cars' width at the junction and traffic can become congested. All the buildings on the south side are listed. This is an area of major historic villagescape overlooked by the fine parish church.

Only a short length of Lewes Road is included within the conservation area. No. 2 is one of the oldest buildings in the village, being a 15th century timber-framed hall house refronted with brick and tile-hanging.

On the opposite side of the road is the car park of The Bull Hotel with outdoor seating area behind a low brick wall. This area was the site of a square of old houses, demolished c. 1880, but a large two storey vernacular flint outbuilding remains.



*Narrow entrance to The Twitten from Lewes Road*

Demolition of these historic buildings behind The Bull and demolition of the building on the Lewes Road/South Street corner has eroded the historic character of the road which is now uniform in width, lacking the historic appearance of West Street. Looking west, there is a good view of St Margaret's Church above an interesting roofscape, slightly marred by overhead wires and traffic signs.

#### ISSUES

- Traffic congestion at the crossroads;
- Telephone control boxes in High Street and South Street are in need of painting;
- Insensitive re-instatement of the characteristic red paviors with red coloured cement;
- Use of concrete slabs and/or inappropriate brick paviors to the detriment of historic floorscape;
- Overhead wires intrude upon attractive views or vistas.

## EAST END LANE AND THE TWITTEN



*Greenery in East End Lane*

### PRINCIPAL FEATURES

- Historic winding thoroughfare;
- Generally tranquil village atmosphere of East End Lane;
- Open space and graveyard in front of the The Old Meeting House;
- Views of the South Downs from the southern end of East End Lane;
- Architectural and historic interest of the area's buildings, both listed and unlisted;
- Trees and other vegetation including well tended roadside gardens;
- The Twitten;
- The variety of construction and building materials used for boundary walls, notably brick and flint;
- Open space in front of Pardons and East End House where Fieldway crosses East End Lane;
- Old street lighting columns adapted for modern use;
- Red brick paviers in East End Lane;
- Barnfield Gardens, a small 1930s estate around a planned central green.

### VILLAGESCAPE

East End Lane was an old road leading east from the main north-south thoroughfare, apparently used by the Priory monks to cart their produce

from Court Gardens Farm back to Lewes. Being a historic lane, it is not straight and varies in width. The lane's slight and frequent curves, which would be absent from a modern road, mean that views along the lane are frequently changing as buildings

or, more commonly, trees and high hedges obscure the onward view. The lane is a series of small, discreet and varied environments and its length is not immediately apparent.

From the formality of the High Street where old buildings sit close to the back of the pavement, the character of the lane changes to a more open informality as East End Lane approaches its junction with Lewes Road. Here grass verges have replaced pavements and modern dwellings sit concealed behind garden hedges. Finally there are views of the Downs. Pavements, which are intermittent or absent, are kerbed with natural stone.

Although there is a high proportion of late 20th century infill and modern accretions such as overhead wires, historic character and appearance is reinforced by the presence of ten listed buildings and a number of unlisted 19th century buildings and old roadside brick and flint boundary walls. The lane contains many mature garden trees.

The front gardens of Pardons and East End House, which face a widening in the road and inviting footpaths to Fieldway (westwards) and Farm Lane (eastwards), give rise to an unexpected open space that provides a spacious setting to the two fine historic buildings. This area has a distinct character quite different to the rest of East End Lane.

Barnfield Gardens is a typical 1930s estate of six mock-Tudor dwellings with steeply pitched tile roofs and tall chimney stacks encircling a small communal green.

The Twitten is a narrow pedestrian footpath that links East End Lane and Lewes Road. The footpath, barely more than a metre wide in places, is bounded on either side by a low wall of flint and brick or old iron railings. Though both entrances to The Twitten are narrow and enclosed, the footpath soon leads to one of Ditchling's most attractive open spaces in front of The Old Meeting House. From here there is a view of the Downs.

Nos. 9-21 is a short, tall terrace with tile-hung dormers and brick chimneys. Between these cottages and the listed Twitten Cottage is an area of grass and tombstones and east of this an open space with flat roofed garages and car parking/turning space. This area, not included in the conservation area, dilutes the special sense of enclosure and historic ambience that characterises the rest of The Twitten.

#### ISSUES

- Some modern developments, especially garages, are roofed in machine-made clay tiles or red coloured concrete tiles which do not have the distinctive colour or shape of hand-made clay tiles;
- The area of parking and garaging behind no. 42 East End Lane mars the special character of The Twitten;
- The Twitten is in need of re-surfacing or maintenance and repair.



*Variety of building materials in East End Lane*