



[SALEHURST AND ROBERTSBRIDGE CHARACTER APPRAISAL]

**Salehurst and Robertsbridge Neighbourhood Development Plan
June 2016**

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Introduction

The parish of Salehurst and Robertsbridge is a diverse, vibrant and unique place with an extensive history dating back 1000 years. Like many other rural parishes in the country Salehurst and Robertsbridge is required to accommodate much-needed growth. In order to ensure that this growth is properly planned, the local community are preparing a neighbourhood plan. This plan will not only focus on development of both housing and employment opportunities, but also consider other issues pertinent to the parish such as flooding, heritage, design, and highways.

In order to successfully plan for the future growth and development of the parish it is imperative that there is a clear understanding of its character and what makes it unique. As a consequence, a character appraisal has been prepared for both Salehurst and Robertsbridge.

This document has been prepared by Moles Consultancy in conjunction with the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Please note that this version of the appraisal is for discussion and review.

What is a Character Appraisal?

A character appraisal is an assessment of the special interest, character and appearance of a particular place. It can be undertaken at any level of detail and cover a variety of localities. These can range from a residential estate, to a conservation area through to an entire village.

The Appraisal itself is a factual and objective analysis, which seeks to enable an understanding of the wider qualities of distinctiveness of place by defining those physical elements that contribute to its special characteristics. Essentially it identifies those qualities that help to define and make the place unique: such as open space, materials, property type, maintenance, age of the structures.

In this instance, the study will define the character of the parish's settlements as a series of character areas. Each area is described against a series of common physical characteristics.

Whilst this appraisal seeks to assess the area's special interest as comprehensively as possible, it cannot cover the minutiae of all issues. Consequently, any omission of a particular building, feature or space should not be taken to imply that it has no value or interest. The appraisal is the starting point; any development proposals should fully consider the appraisal, having regard to national and local policies. Such proposals should be informed by an individual assessment commensurate with the scale of the project proposed.

The information within the appraisal will comprise descriptive text supported by photographs, maps and other graphical material. It will also identify opportunities for future enhancement if considered necessary.

Purpose of the Study

The study has been produced for a number of reasons, but most importantly to inform the preparation of the emerging Neighbourhood Plan. Identification of important issues will help shape the content and direction of that plan.

In addition to the above, it could also be used as a development management tool to secure better quality development appropriate to its surroundings. Such a document can be used by residents and developers when preparing a planning application, or for anyone wishing to comment on a current planning application.

The Planning Policy Context

National and Local Planning Policy and Guidance

This appraisal should be read in conjunction with the wider national and local planning policy and guidance

National Policy Guidance

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was adopted by the Government in March 2012. All the policies in the NPPF constitute the Government's view of what sustainable development in England means in practice. One of the key dimensions of sustainability is that of design. This is supplemented by a second dimension of protecting and enhancing our historic environment. Development that fails to adhere to both the design and the historic environment policies is therefore not considered sustainable development.

The NPPF sets out how the Government intends to deliver sustainable development through the planning process. It expressly states that sustainable development is about achieving positive growth, balancing economic, environmental and social considerations. There is little doubt that the NPPF is pro-development, with a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development. However, the framework also recognises the finite nature and value of our built heritage and the natural environment, especially since the parish is wholly within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the need for this to be properly assessed and where appropriate protected in a manner commensurate with the sensitivity of the heritage asset and the natural environment. Conservation areas are termed designated heritage assets in the Framework. Consequently their importance is elevated by this designation.

Sections 7 and 12 of the NPPF set out the main policies in respect to the historic environment and achieving high quality design. The key messages are:

- Local planning authorities should set out in the Local Plan a positive strategy for the conservation and enjoyment of the historic environment
- The value of the historic environment in creating sustainable and viable communities, including the benefits to the local economy

- When considering the designation of conservation areas, the area's special architectural or historic interest should justify designation, otherwise the concept is de-valued
- When considering the impact of proposals on a designated heritage asset great weight should be given to the asset's conservation. Substantial harm should be exceptional, whilst less than substantial harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the development
- In conservation areas and within their setting, there are opportunities for new development to enhance or better reveal their significance (such as by replacing inappropriate development or enhancing key spaces and views)
- Not all parts of the conservation area will necessarily contribute to its significance. However, loss of a building or structure that contributes to the significance of the conservation area will amount to substantial or less than substantial harm, taking into account the impact upon significance of the conservation area as a whole
- Design mediocrity has reduced confidence in new development
- Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development and is indivisible from good planning
- Securing high quality and inclusive design goes beyond aesthetic considerations
- Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities presented by a site
- Where a degree of special protection to protect amenity is required then an Area of Special Control Order may be approved (there is a requirement to consult with local trade and amenity organisations)
- Planning policies and decisions should not seek to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative, but it is appropriate to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness
- Poorly placed advertisements can have a negative impact on the appearance of the built and natural environment

The Localism Act 2011 introduces the right for communities to shape their local areas by creating their own Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP).

Local Level

Local Plan (2011-2028)

Local Plans provide the basis for delivering the spatial planning strategy of the district and guide future development and change. These are prepared by District Councils except that documents relating to waste and minerals matters continue to be prepared by the County Council.

The individual documents that will comprise and support the Local Plan (2011-2028) include:

- The Core Strategy sets out the Council's long-term spatial vision and policies to deliver that vision. It identifies broad locations for development where development

will be accommodated but does not specify actual sites. It also includes strategically important development management policies.

- The Development and Site Allocations Plan will allocate specific areas of land for development, review development boundaries, and will include more detailed development management policies.

It is noted that certain policies of the Local Plan adopted in 2006 have been 'saved', including a site specific policy (VL7) relating to Grove Farm, and they remain part of the statutory 'development plan'. Hence, they continue to be applied for the purposes of development management until rescinded as and when relevant policies in the new Local Plan (2011-2028) are adopted.

The survey Area

The survey area covers the entire parish, but focuses on the two communities of Salehurst and Robertsbridge.

It was noted that there is a conservation area within the parish. This conservation area has already had a Conservation Area Character Appraisal prepared by the District Council. Please note that this study is not designed to replace or be a substitute for the existing Conservation Area Character Appraisal.

Date of survey:

The area was initially surveyed and assessed in November 2015

Structure of the document

The document is divided up into two parts as follows:

- Part 1, the character appraisal, identifies and assesses those characteristics and features that give the area its special architectural character. It also considers the current issues that threaten its unique quality.
- Part 2 of the document consists of all of the appendices along with a glossary.

Assessing Special Interest

Location and Context

The parish of Salehurst and Robertsbridge is located in East Sussex some 12 miles north of Bexhill and 11 miles north-west of Hastings.

It is set amongst the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty surrounded by a wholly rural landscape, at the divide of what is generally considered to be the landscape character areas of the Lower Rother valley and the Upper Rother Valley.

The original settlement is positioned on the gently sloping valley side and descends to the valley floor of the River Rother. Like many settlements, it developed at a point of convergence of the river and a number of streams; the Darwell stream flows through Robertsbridge dividing the original settlement from the twentieth century developments and the railway to the west. It should be noted that the River Rother was navigable to this point until the mid 14th Century. The surrounding landscape is dominated by the broad valley of the River Rother and its tributaries. It is at this point in the valley that the predominantly wooded area of the Upper Valley gives way to a more open landscape dominated by pasture and arable land.

Robertsbridge, the larger of the two settlements by far, lies to the south west of Salehurst which contains the parish church. Whereas Robertsbridge is more of a linear settlement, Salehurst is essentially a nucleated development.

The village lies on the route of the Hastings to London railway, with a busy station. A bypass forming part of the A21 trunk road lies to the east of Robertsbridge. This diverts the majority of traffic around the village centre and as a consequence protects the Village Centre from excessive congestion/pollution issues.

There are two principal routes into and out of the settlement; one of them runs north-south, whilst the other runs more west-east.

Landscape Setting

The original settlement of Robertsbridge is located on a valley side with its northern extremities on the valley floor. This has resulted in a village set against a backdrop of a river landscape, with some of the village having a direct relationship with the tributary that flows into the river.

This low-lying expanse of green fields, pasture and playing fields is a key part of the setting of Robertsbridge village, as well as providing a clear distinction between that settlement and that of Northbridge Street and the Mill site.

The village presents a largely 'introverted' character, with much of the built fabric hidden from view until entrance into the settlement.

General Character and Plan Form

Robertsbridge (including Northbridge Street) is a large historic village in the parish of Salehurst & Robertsbridge. The historic High Street runs north/south and forms the heart of the village, comprising a mix of commercial and residential properties. Off the High Street runs a staggered crossroads; to the east extends Fair Lane, a historic lane predominantly residential in use, and now a no through road for vehicles. Meanwhile to the west runs Station Road, with a mixture of leisure, commercial and residential uses nearer the village core, becoming more residential in character. The existing designated Conservation Area comprises the area covered by the settlement, as it existed by the late 15th Century, plus the more relatively recently developed area around Station Road (the whole area totalling some 6.6 hectares).

Salehurst, on the other hand, is a very small compact settlement with very little development. The main focus of attention is the parish church which is surrounded by a handful of attractive properties. Uses include a public house and a farm shop.

Heritage designations

Heritage is an important issue within the parish. At the time of writing this appraisal, there are only statutorily designated assets consisting of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. Rother District Council at the time of writing this report has not identified any local Heritage assets.

Conservation Areas in the Parish

A Conservation Area is defined as: an area of architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

There is currently one conservation area separated into two parts within the parish: Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street (figure 2). Further information regarding the Conservation Area, including a Map and a Conservation Area Character Appraisal can be found on the District Council's website.

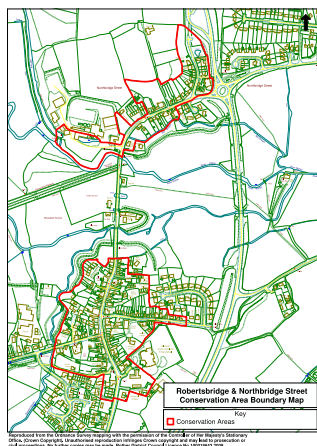


Figure 2: the Conservation Area

Listed Buildings

There are currently 105 statutorily designated Listed Buildings within the Parish.

Historic Development

Robertsbridge has formed the principal community within the Salehurst & Robertsbridge Parish from at least the 14th century.

Originating as a planned settlement by Robertsbridge Abbey, the township appears to have been founded in 1210 when the Cistercian Abbey in Sussex moved to its new location at Elham, further down the valley, leaving a chapel on the original site where the war memorial now stands. A church existed at the settlement of Salehurst at the time of Domesday but Robertsbridge was not mentioned at this time.

What is known, is that a new bridge was built over the river at the area now known as The Clappers, following which areas of habitation grew up on its southern and northern sides of the river, the northern part being the settlement we know today as Northbridge Street, and the southern part being Robertsbridge.

Early Robertsbridge appears to have experienced three significant periods of growth and one of recession. The most significant and probably the earliest period of growth took place in the 13th century to the west of the High Street and bounded on its western boundary by a stream. These were long, narrow 'burgage' plots with a developed frontage onto the high street and agricultural land to the rear.

The next phase took place in the early 14th century on the eastern side of the High Street and along the northern side of Fair Lane. These plots were shorter than the earlier ones. Fair Lane (previously known as East Street) is a historic lane to the east of the High Street, which originally gave access to the Abbey prior to its dissolution. It is so named due to the annual fair that was held in an adjacent field from the mid 13th Century until the middle of the 20th Century, and which, together with tenant documentation from this period, indicates Robertsbridge status as a prosperous early medieval township, and a flourishing manufacturing and trading centre.

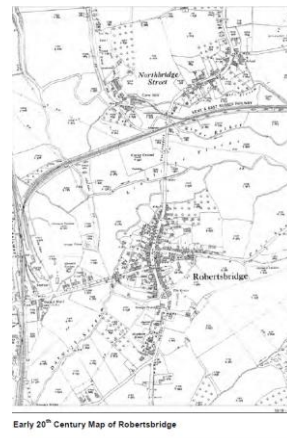
A series of plots having large frontages at the northern expansion of the town mark the third period of early expansion. In this area there is only one existing building of pre 1500 date, Rosebank, a late 14th century house set well back from the road. It originally formed the dwelling of a farmstead but in the late 15th century the farm became swamped by the northward growth of the settlement. The quality of the surviving medieval buildings in Northbridge Street, and tithe records, suggest that commercial activity and prosperity here was equal to that of Robertsbridge.

In the early mid 17th century five houses were demolished at the southern end of the settlement on the eastern side of George Hill to provide land for the farmstead 'The Grove'. Today it is open fields and no visible evidence remains of the former habitation of this part of the village, although aerial photography suggests that the land is concealing some evidence of its former use by the way in which vegetation grows upon the soil currently.

From the 18th century onwards, Robertsbridge, like many other towns and villages in

England faced a large increase in population. At this time many of the existing buildings were sub-divided, and more simple terraces inserted into intervening spaces. As time went on cottages and terraces were erected within the bounds of the 17th century town up until the end of the 19th century. It was the 18th and 19th century infilling that created the tightly packed street scene that we see in the High Street today.

Later, in 1851, the Southern Railway opened the Hastings to London railway at Robertsbridge. Later at the end of the 19th Century the Kent and East Sussex Railway provided access into Kent. This had an influence in increasing the population of the village and prompted the gradual development of land to the west of the original settlement, and this has continued to the present day.



Historic Maps of Robertsbridge and Salehurst

Historic Development Section Source: Rother District Council Conservation Appraisal

Spatial Analysis

The character and interrelationship of (open) spaces within the area

There are three distinct areas within the study area: Robertsbridge, Northbridge Street and Salehurst. A network of roads and open spaces, both of which inform the character of the area, links these three settlements.

Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street are separated by a functional floodplain and linked by bridges. This functional floodplain introduces a rural, natural element, into the village while providing open space for recreation and a buffer to new development.

Salehurst is separated from Robertsbridge and Northbridge Street by the A21 and is much smaller in size than the other two areas.

In addition to the open countryside surrounding the three areas, there are formal open spaces. These form a network of open spaces distributed across the parish (see figure 3).

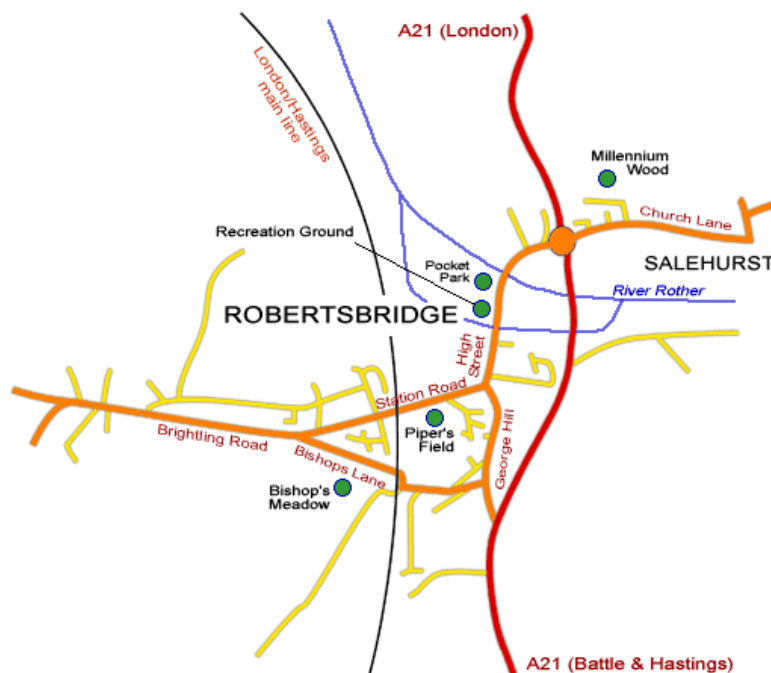


Figure 3: The network of green spaces across the district.

Key views and vistas

Views

The primarily linear form of Robertsbridge village means that there are two major approaches to the village; from the north and from the south. This is supplemented by the approach from Station Road, from the west.

Approaching the settlement from the north, over the causeway that rests on the floodplain, and the series of bridges known as 'the Clappers', the village takes on the characteristic of an island rising out of the landscape. Trees and shrubs frame an almost 'gated' beginning of the High Street where a shortened view is presented due to the bend in the road. The urban form here is mainly tightly packed and abutting the pavement giving a strong sense of arrival into the core of the village. To the west, the electricity sub-station represents a discordant element on the low-lying landscape here.

Approaching the village from the south, from George Hill, the elevation of the land at this point gives the perspective of the village being hidden from view and sheltered by the surrounding ridges. One such ridge, running east to west, provides a dramatic and defining backdrop to the settlement. The land falls steeply away here, down into the High Street proper.

On the Station Road approach, from the west, the flood plain provides a green edge to the historic core of the village and the 'pinched' highway as it rises over the stream, creates a gate effect suggesting a strong sense of arrival at the historic core of the settlement. The eye is drawn up the straight road past the relatively urban villas to the white painted weather boarded buildings of the High Street here, which gives strong visual termination but also a sense of the architectural character ahead.

Entrance points

Entrance points are those features/buildings which provide an entrance to a specific area. There are some examples present in the village, the most obvious being located in George Hill.

The rear elevation of The George public house, protruding into the sight-line, is striking, with its mixture of bricks, tiles and roofscapes giving a sense of arrival into the historic core of the settlement.

Uses

The parish comprises a number of different uses including:

- Retail/ Village Centre – this use is mostly located on the High Street in the historic core of Robertsbridge
- Employment – this use is located within specific locations across the village
- Residential – this is the most common use, and is widely distributed around the village
- Religious – there are two religious buildings left in public use; the Parish Church in Salehurst and the Mission Room in Fair Lane in Robertsbridge
- Transportation – this consists of a railway station and its associated car park, three bus stops, one public car park (plus one associated with the Recreation Ground).

Character Analysis

Definition of Character Areas or Zones

The character of the built form varies from one part to another. Therefore, for the purposes of this assessment, it has been divided up into six different character areas. Each character area has its own characteristics and features unique to it. Character areas are identified by issues such as layout, materials, design, age of the properties and the uses. For this analysis, the areas have been named as follows:

Character Area 1 – Conservation area
Character Area 2 – Fayre Meadow
Character Area 3 – Heathfield Gardens
Character Area 4 – Langham Road
Character Area 5 – Rotherview
Character Area 6 – Salehurst

The character area boundaries in a complex and layered area such as this are inevitably subjective in places, and based not just on architectural or historical characteristics, but on a dynamic experience of the area; how it is perceived when walking or driving through it, and when boundaries of experience are crossed. This includes sensations such as awareness of enclosure or openness, and degrees of noise or activity, which provide edges to areas just as much as map boundaries, or changes of use. The boundaries to the areas are therefore not exact, in fact they may overlap or have blurred edges.

Each of the character areas will be analysed and discussed in the chapters that follow.

The information derived from the character areas will then be drawn together in order to consider the quality, significance and condition of the area overall.

Character Area 1 – Conservation Area

Introduction

The character area is located within the heart of the village and focuses on the High Street, Northbridge Street, George Hill and Fair Lane. This character area focuses on the historic part of Robertsbridge which consists largely of the extent of the village as it existed by the mid-16th century, and forms the current conservation area.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

This character area consists of the historic part of Robertsbridge village. The southern section consists of the bulk of the High Street, and as a result, the commercial heart of the settlement. As of 2016, there are still some shops as well as visual evidence of former retail units.

The densely-packed High Street has a strong building line, composed of a large number of distinct, individual buildings, which have developed and evolved over time, to create the tightly-knit built form present today. There are many surviving medieval buildings, as well as property boundaries and street layouts, all clearly legible in the present village.

The built form along with the commercial and vehicular activity creates an almost urban character to the place.

The remainder of the area consists of residential use. Remnants of other uses remain in the form of former religious buildings.

Of particular note is the historic mill site which is currently vacant and has the potential to be sensitively redeveloped, whilst allowing new development in the locality.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

The density, together with the compact and harmonious grouping of the historic buildings in the Conservation Area, and their antiquity, are important elements in the overall character of the area. Little has been done to dilute the historic integrity of many of the buildings and therefore the historic character of the street scene remains relatively intact. In addition there are many individual buildings of architectural and historic value which give a special richness to the overall street scene in particular to the whole length of the High Street and Fair Lane.

A significant number of the properties in this location front directly onto either the pavement or the carriageway. This, along with the higher density of development helps to create a more urban character to this part of the village.

External elevations:

These appear to reflect the local vernacular. One of the striking features of Robertsbridge is that it has a number of medieval 'Wealden' Hall Houses. These properties are fine timber framed structures, typical of the age in which they were constructed.

Materials

Many of the historic buildings in Robertsbridge are timber framed. The building materials are generally homogenous in character, they consist of locally sourced materials creating a palette of tile hanging, weatherboarding, exposed timber framing, painted brickwork at ground or first floor level with the majority of roofing being steep slopes covered with handmade clay tiles, though occasional areas of slate roofing are found in outbuildings or later Victorian buildings and terraces.

A few historic buildings are more formal in character and as a consequence their materials and detailing reflect this. They are constructed with render and ashlar elevations, moulded door cases and window pediments, and sliding sash timber windows.

Roofs and chimneys

There is attractive assortment of historic roofscapes. Roofs are steep and punctuated with chimney stacks. Roofing material consists predominantly of handmade clay tiles.

Dormer windows exist in some of the roof spaces but they are in the minority, and as a consequence, the majority of the steep, tiled roofs are visible in their full, uninterrupted glory.

Many of these have warped over time adding to the 'organic' character of the buildings.

Chimney stacks protrude from many roof slopes which give definition to the skyline and a pleasing rhythm in the street-scene.

Joinery

Just as there are a variety of building materials and designs reflecting the period that buildings were constructed, so there are a variety of window and door types throughout. Almost all of them are timber construction, but a few historic metal windows remain, and casement windows are more common than sashes, again reflecting the age and style of the buildings and should be retained.

Shop fronts and Advertisements

The centre of Robertsbridge has a number of commercial and retail premises, though fewer than before the by-pass was opened. Shop fronts are an important feature of the street scene, concentrated, in the main, in the middle and lower High Street. Shop fronts, whether actively used or not, positively contribute to the character of the area and should be retained.

It is considered that the majority of those advertisements that are present are such that they do not clutter historic elevations, or detract from their architectural fabric and character.

However, there is an exception to this; a convenience food shop in the centre of the High Street has a modern shop front with the majority of the frontage glazed and an electronic door. Additionally, its large lettering, which is illuminated, is in stark contrast to the surroundings. Occupying a prominent position, the eye is drawn to it as a discordant feature in the street scene.

This is an area for enhancement – at such time as a new shop front is required, the council should work with the owner to ensure more appropriate development is selected.

Boundary Treatment

In much of the High Street, almost all of the buildings are positioned tight against the pavement and so there are few opportunities for private boundary treatments. However, at Tudor House a dense yew hedge provides a significant stretch of green. At the southern end

of the High Street, where the buildings become set back and have an opportunity to personalise space, there is a mixture of small cottage gardens bounded by low brick walls and railings, while the green area around the War Memorial serves to merge the distinction between public and private space at those properties on the western side of the High Street here. The car park to The George Inn is bounded by modern and simple post and chain which is unobtrusive and ensures uninterrupted long views of this imposing building from the north. However, tall, modern close-boarded fence panels that bound a development west of the public house present an obstructive and suburban element in this part of the village, closing off views beyond.

In Fair Lane, the distinction between pavement and property is softened by private planting. Here too, a variety of materials are used on low boundary edges such as railing and brick, but all are domestic and rural in scale and allow good visual appreciation of the buildings beyond. Meanwhile in Northbridge Street there are again low garden walls, fences and railings, though one high close-boarded fence to the east of No.30 is an unusually and unfortunate blank face to the street.

The public realm

An important feature of the character area is the paving. The majority of the pavement in the High Street is laid with good, historic red-brick paving with stone kerbs. The overall effect is of a characterful historic pavement, somewhat urban in feel, and which contributes positively to the distinct local identity of the core of the village. The raised pavement on the east side of the High Street is a significant feature.

An additional significant feature is the presence of stepped accesses up to front doors, largely a function of the topography of the village. Many of these have no hand railing, though others have successfully incorporated unobtrusive traditional rails.

The absence of significant street-lighting in Fair Lane helps to reinforce the rural character here, while elsewhere in the village the limited lighting is uncoordinated in style, and, together with the modern highway signage and telephone box, serves to cumulatively appear as clutter, disrupting the integrity of the historic street scene. The mixture of kerbstone materials in Station Road particularly, adds to a lack of cohesion in the public realm and the street-scene.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

Whilst the character area is generally in an excellent condition, there are a limited number of empty properties and parking is an issue that needs to be addressed. In addition, a number of properties require some maintenance work. For instance, the paintwork on some properties is in poor condition.

The existence of any neutral areas

There are a number of areas that are considered to be neutral; that is to say they maintain the established character of the area.

Character Area 2: Fayre Meadow

Introduction

The character area is a small development located off Fair Lane, adjoining part of the historic core of the village. Whilst it is accessed off Fair Lane, it is of a significantly different character to warrant its own character area for the purposes of this study.

The Road within the character area is Fayre Meadow.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

The current use is residential consisting of detached, modern bungalows. The layout of the area is in the form of a cul-de-sac.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

All of the properties are single story bungalows constructed in the post-war period, most likely during the 1960's. They are regularly laid out to take advantage of the area available, and there is a regular building line and space between properties. Plots appear to be of an average size.



Part of Fayre Meadow

External elevations:

The majority of the properties are of a similar appearance with very little personalisation. The focus of attention is that of the horizontal, i.e. the fenestration draws the eye across the properties.

Elevations mostly consist of brick walling with window openings. Some of the gables are clad with hanging tiles, but this is the only architectural decoration.

Materials

There is a very simple pallet of materials: machine made brick and tiles. Front gables are either tile hanging or brick like the remainder of the properties. A limited number of the properties also appear to now have UPVC cladding on the gables.

Roofs and chimneys

Roofs are of a standard pitch with no dormer windows to the front of the properties. This creates a uniform approach that should be maintained.

Properties have chimneys that add some visual character to them.



An example of the properties within the character area

Joinery

Windows and doors appear to be mostly modern replacements in UPVC.

Boundary Treatment

Front garden areas are laid open to the street, and as a consequence there is no real boundary treatment. The exception to this being some low walling which appears to be present to act as a retaining wall to accommodate the change in topography. This creates a pleasant, open spacious character. Vegetation is present in the area, but this is considered to contribute towards the established character of the area.

The public realm

The public realm consists of one single tarmac carriageway with a tarmac pavement along both sides of the road. The road forms a small cul-de-sac.

There is provision for car parking in both private residential curtilages for residents and their visitors.

A verge is present either side of the carriageway which, along with the relatively open plan front garden areas, adds to the green, spacious nature of the area.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

None – it is considered that there are none.

The existence of any neutral areas

The majority of the development is considered to have a neutral characteristic; that is to say that it is neither positive, nor negative.

Character Area 3: Heathfield Gardens

Introduction

The character area is a development adjoining the southern part of the historic core of the village. It contains modern, post war properties constructed in two distinct phases. Properties have been laid out according to topography.

Roads in the character area include Bishops Lane and Heathfield Gardens.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

The use is residential.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

A large number of the properties are either terraced or semi-detached, and include blocks of two storey flats. Buildings in the first phase are formed in staggered units which creates the impression of a clear building line. The properties constructed in the second phase are not constructed to such a strict linear approach; the layout appears to be designed to maximise the density of the site.

External elevations:

There are two types of property, which are designed according to the initial phase of construction. Essentially, the properties are simple, brick buildings with little architectural detail. Tile hanging is present in a limited number of the phase 2 properties, whilst alternative brick colours highlight openings.

Materials

A simple pallet of material has been used; machine made brick and concrete tile. Two colours of brick are present in phase two.

Roofs and chimneys

Roofs are pitched with gables at either end. Chimneys and dormers feature in certain properties and have a rhythm and flow to their presence.



Properties with dormers and chimneys

Joinery

All joinery is reflective of the type/age of the property; casement windows with top hung vents. Windows are predominantly UPVC.

Boundary Treatment

There is limited boundary treatment to the fronts of the properties. Front boundaries are sometimes demarked by the presence of hedging on Bishops Lane.

The public realm

The public realm consists of one single tarmac carriageway with a tarmac pavement along both sides of the road.

Front gardens are mostly open plan with some hedging breaking up the open space. There are very few examples of front gardens being lost to additional car parking.

Car parking is predominantly located within the carriageway or parking bays within the first phase, or within private driveways and the carriageway in the second.



The Public Realm in phase one

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

The dominance of car parking in parts, particularly the grassed areas at the entrance from George Hill, is considered to be negative.

The existence of any neutral areas

The majority of the character area is considered to be neutral, that is to say that it neither makes a positive contribution to the local area, nor detracts from it.

Character Area 4: Langham Road

Introduction

This is a substantial character area that amounts to a large proportion of the Robertsbridge village as a whole. It consists of development west of the railway line and includes one of the main roads into the village. However, the area conveys some similar characteristics that unite it.

Roads in the character area include Brightling Road, Langham Road and Mill Rise.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

The predominant current use is residential. Other uses include educational, and transport in the form of the railway station.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

Whilst property development has occurred at various times, according to different design principles, they are mostly detached, two storey units, set amongst spacious grounds.

There are a number of roads within the character area; some cul-de-sacs, whilst others are 'through roads'. However, these roads all have a residential character that is important to preserve.

External elevations:

Whilst properties vary across the area, key components include simple elevations, with a limited pallet of materials and architectural details. One such example is the use of brick for the ground floor and tile hanging on the first. It is the simplicity of the detail that is the essential character to preserve.

Materials

Properties consist of a mixture of materials. This includes brick, render, tile hanging and tile, which are either constructed from concrete or machine made clay tiles, slate.

Roofs and chimneys

Likewise, roofs consist of a mixture of gabled and hipped structures. Chimneys are present in the character area, and where present, contribute towards the character of the area. Such features should be preserved.

Joinery

Joinery is predominantly casement, constructed from a mixture of wood and UPVC.

Boundary Treatment

There is limited boundary treatment to the frontage of the properties. Boundaries are sometimes demarked by the presence of hedging or fencing.

The public realm

The public realm generally consists of one single tarmac carriageway. There is an absence of paving along some stretches of Langham and Brightling roads, but is limited in others, some of which is used for commuter parking.

There is provision for car parking in private residential curtilages for occupants and their visitors. On street parking provision varies, but is limited in parts.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

The area is not very pedestrian friendly, due to speeding cars and lack of pavements.

The existence of any neutral areas

The majority of the character area is considered to be neutral, that is to say that it neither makes a positive contribution to the local area, nor detracts from it.

Character Area 5: Rotherview

Introduction

The character area, like others, is relatively small but distinct from the neighbouring development (character area 1), and therefore worthy of separate identification.

Roads in the character area include Rotherview.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

The predominant use is residential and as a result the area is rather quiet, especially during the working week.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

There is a mixture of detached, semi-detached and terraced properties. Whilst there is no one, simple development line, there are, however, a number of staggered building lines, which inform the character of the area.

Properties are set within average sized grounds.

External elevations:

There are two type of property in the character area; those located in Andrews Close, and Rother View. Properties are generally very simple.

There are a few property types in terms of elevations. These appear throughout the area.

Properties on Andrews close have garages visible from the public domain.

Materials

The pallet of materials is very simple; it consists of machine made tiles for both roofs and first floor tile hanging, along with rendered walls and brick.



Example of the materials in the character area

Roofs and chimneys

There is a mixture of roof types; gabled and hipped. Chimneys are present on the properties and make a positive contribution to the street-scene.

Joinery

Windows are predominantly UPVC, whilst doors are a mixture of UPVC and wood.

Boundary Treatment

A mixture of boundary types is present in the character area. The most dominant appears to be hedging. This is present across the majority of the area and helps to 'green' it and foster a semi-rural characteristic.

Modern developments such as Andrews Close have been designed to be 'open plan' which means that there is no means of enclosure to the front area of the properties. As a consequence, the area feels more open and spacious than it actually is.

However, the layout of the development means that some boundary treatment is visible. Where this happens it can be dominant. One example is that of hedging.

The public realm

The public realm consists of one single tarmac carriageway with pavements constructed using the same material.

There is provision for car parking in private residential curtilages for occupants and their visitors.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

There is none of significance.

The existence of any neutral areas

The majority of the character area is considered to be neutral, that is to say that it neither makes a positive contribution to the local area, nor detracts from it.

Character Area 6: Salehurst

Introduction

The character area forms the village of Salehurst. The focus of attention is that of the parish church. Unlike character area 1, Salehurst has a limited number of properties.

Roads in the character area include Church Lane and Beech House Lane.

Activity and Uses and their Influence on the Plan Form and Buildings

There is a mixture of land uses within the character area; residential, a public house, a church and a butchers/farm shop.

The Qualities of the Buildings and their Contribution to the Area

The majority of the properties are traditional in character and appearance, being reflective of the period in which they were constructed.

External elevations:

Elevations are predominantly simple, residential in nature, although some decoration is present in a few properties in the form of decorative barge boards.

Materials

Materials focus on the traditional, with local vernacular references. Walls are a mixture of brick, or brick on the ground floor with tile hanging on the first, whilst roofs are a mixture of either clay or slate tiles.

Roofs and chimneys

The dominant roof form is that of gables. The terraced properties and the public house have decorative bargeboards. Chimneys are present on the majority of the properties.



Attractive building within the character area

Joinery

Windows and doors are constructed from wood and consist of sash and casement windows. There appear to be more casement windows than sash.

Boundary Treatment

Boundary treatment is predominantly traditional in nature consisting of a mixture of stone walling, picket fencing and hedging.



Historic boundary treatment in Salehurst

The public realm

The public realm consists of one single tarmac carriageway with no pavement provision. As a result pedestrians are required to walk within the public carriageway.

There is limited provision for car parking in front of the church for visitors.

The extent of intrusion or damage (negative factors)/ Areas for Enhancement

The only negative characteristic present is the lack of on/off-street parking and the quality of the carriageway around the church. This is definitely an area for enhancement

The existence of any neutral areas

Any areas not identified as either positive or negative are considered to be neutral for the purposes of this assessment.

General Condition of the Village - Problems, Pressures and Capacity for Change

GENERAL: The parish is in very good condition, and appears to be highly thought of by its residents.

- **AREA 1:** Conservation area - Two properties are currently vacant, due to the closure of the United Reformed Church and the NatWest Bank.

Parking and traffic issues are problems associated with the character area. This is a result of George Hill being the main access point to the village centre. This is accentuated by the fact that it contains a number of local businesses, which generate the need for people to park their cars in the public realm.

- **AREA 2:** Fayre Meadow - There do not appear to be any problems or pressures for change in this particular character area. There are no real opportunities for any further new development apart from redevelopment of existing buildings. There is low chance of this occurring.

There are no properties that appear to be at risk either from lack of maintenance / repair or through inappropriate redevelopment.

- **AREA 3:** Heathfield Gardens – Properties appear to be maintained to an acceptable condition.
- **AREA 4:** Langham Road - the area is substantial, and like the majority of the village, is in a good condition.
- **AREA 5:** Rotherview - Properties appear to be maintained to an acceptable condition.
- **AREA 6:** Salehurst - The area is very attractive and in need of additional protection. This could be achieved through its identification as a Conservation Area.

Appendix 1 - A Short Glossary of Terms

Appraisals	Conservation Area appraisals identify what is special and needs protecting, and help in the area's management. They can, and should ideally, be carried out with the involvement of the local community, so that the appraisal is owned by the whole Council and the community who live and work in the area. There are various ways to carry out appraisals, depending on the size and scale of the area. An appraisal needs to combine historic records and maps with a visual analysis of the present state of the area. Further guidance is given in English Heritage's Guidance on Conservation Area appraisals.
Character Area	A character area is a small area within the parish, that has its own characteristics and features unique to it. Character areas are identified by issues such as layout, materials, design, age of the properties and the uses that have historically taken place.
Conservation Area	Defined by English Heritage as ' <i>areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance</i> '. Some permitted development rights are removed for owners of buildings in a Conservation Area and special planning controls may apply.
Development Management	Development management is the process through which decisions are made on applications for permissions such as planning permission or Listed Building Consent.
Heritage Asset	A building, monument, site, place, area or landscape identified as having a degree of significance meriting consideration in planning decisions, because of its heritage interest. Heritage asset includes designated heritage assets and assets identified by the local planning authority (including local listing).
Listed Building	<p>A Listed Building is one that has been identified by the Secretary of State as being of 'special architectural or historic interest'. As such it is worthy of special protection. The listing process is not restricted to buildings and as a result can include any structure of interest, for example bridges, walls, telephone kiosks and even gravestones. Listed Buildings are graded according to their relative importance.</p> <p>Despite this grading it should be noted that the statutory controls are the same to all grades of listed buildings.</p>
Local Plan	The Local Plan is the principal development plan document and sets out the long term spatial vision for the Rother District.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	The government's policy with respect to planning.

Permitted Development -	Under planning legislation (General Permitted Development Order 1995 as amended in 2008) owners of single dwelling houses have the right to alter them in certain ways without needing planning permission from the Council. For example, a house can have its windows, front door or roof covering changed, its front garden paved over or its front elevation painted in a striking colour without the need for consent. In Conservation Areas, such alterations can be very harmful to the character and appearance of the area.
Planning (Listed Building & Conservation Area) Act 1990	Primary Legislation for the historic environment.
Public Open Space	All open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity.
Public realm	Public realm is the term used for the spaces between and within buildings/built up areas that are publicly accessible, including streets, alleys, squares, forecourts, parks and open spaces.