

Hassocks Village Townscape Appraisal

Purpose of the study.

Housing within the parish of Hassocks varies considerably. It encompasses the scattered settlement of Georgian farmsteads and manor houses, ribbon settlement along approach roads, the springline downland village of Clayton, with 17th century houses and Norman church, and the 18th century village of Keymer, within a Conservation Area. It includes 25 listed buildings, a windmill dwelling and an inhabited portal of a railway tunnel. These fine buildings are well known. The purpose of this study, however, is to assess the village of Hassocks within the built form boundary, to determine a baseline for future. The study goes on to assess the local distinctiveness of the village, helping to determine characteristics to be appreciated and strengthened when more development takes place.

Methodology

The appraisal breaks the village into 14 Local Townscape Character Areas. Each way surveyed to determine its particular and discernible sense of place. The findings are mapped on figure 1.

Overall Appraisal

The overall finding is that the village of Hassocks has a particular character derived from its location, views, topography, spatial qualities and historical development which makes it distinctive. It does not have the homogenous quality of its medieval neighbours, due to its continuous development in the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. However the variety to be found enlivens the village. Furthermore, it gives a spacious village centre, compared with the much older villages on either side.

Most of Hassocks has a Mid-Twentieth century character; it has an open, verdant arcadian charm and domestic scale. The subtlety of the period charm of the village is easily eroded by any lack of cohesion of materials and form, however. This makes it particularly vulnerable to insensitive change.

Key Townscape Characteristics

- Hassocks has a subtle Mid-Twentieth century character, with many fine Victorian buildings in its historic centre. Its character is somewhat undermined by some late 20th century additions
- The use of local materials, especially local soft-coloured red brick with plain, soft brown, clay roof and red wall tiles give the built form cohesion and local distinctiveness.
- Mid-Twentieth Century form and detailing, from the idealistic Model Village movement and often Arts and Crafts inspired, is so characteristic of Hassocks. It can be seen on large detached villas and modest cottages alike, and is at its best on some early 20th century social housing.
- Small-scale housing with generous front gardens and wide grass verges, often planted with cherries, give the spacious feel that is typical across the major part of the village.
- The main East-West through-route along the Greensand ridge has gentle bends, and broken sightlines, giving natural traffic calming, and helping to define spaces along the road. These elements, and the slopes to the Herring stream give an important sense of arrival to village centre.
- There is good traffic flow within the spacious centre, with free parking.
- Both the simple layout of the centre and the many fine views to the Downs enable residents and visitors to easily orient themselves, ie it has "good legibility".
- Fine buildings, such as the corner buildings of B2116/Grand Avenue, give period charm and a sense of place.
- Beautiful mature tree groups, especially old pines, are characteristic of this ridge top settlement, and add enormously to the streetscape, working to frame views, dwarf the buildings and landmarking segments of the Keymer Road.

Local Townscape Character Areas of Hassocks

1. Stonepound
2. South Bank
3. London Road
4. Priory
5. Shepherds Walk
6. Home Estate
7. Butchers Wood
8. Dale
9. Clayton Mills
10. Adastra
11. Church Mead
12. Keymer
13. Hurst Road
14. Village Centre

Area 1 Stonepound

Description

Hassocks originated where the railway crossed the Hurst/Ditchling road on the ridge, now the B2116. This character area, centred on Stonepound Crossroads, encompasses the North Bank of the Keymer Road where it cuts into the ridge beneath the railway, Station Approach West and Stanford Avenue. The area relates to and includes the Station.

Spatial Qualities

The large houses in the area have generous gardens and well planted verges. The steep banks are well wooded with shaws of oak and ash, The slopes and trees serve to hide the large houses from view, and give an enclosed feel, rural feel. Stonepound Crossroads is the main gateway to the village, and it is softened by a splendid group of old pine trees in the surrounding front gardens. They are a distinctive feature and characteristic of this part of the Greensand Ridge. Victorians tourists were encouraged to visit Hassocks by rail, for its beneficial pine-scented airs. Now the same trees are valuable for the sense of place they give to the area.

Built Form

Large Victorian houses are characteristic in the area. Imposing detached villas and large semi-detached houses are typical, particularly those in Stanford Avenue, with highly decorative wooden detailing and stained glass door surrounds. There has been some late 20th century infill where large villas have been demolished.

The station was been rebuilt in 2013 to a contemporary design, yet sympathetically brick-built, the brick colour matched to the existing nearby railway cottages.

Detractors

The crossroads suffer from heavy traffic and lines of slowly moving cars stretching back along approach roads. Stonepound Crossroads was designated an [Air Quality Management Area](#) (AQMA) with Defra in March 2012 due to the measured levels of nitrogen dioxide present.

Anecdotal evidence indicates commuters using the railway station utilise on-street parking for cars in roads in this area, especially in Stanford Avenue.

Area 2 South Bank

Description

South Bank is a small area, separated from the rest of the village by the railway and by the landform. It features large detached houses of the South Bank road, a recently built close, and the tennis courts.

Spatial Qualities

The houses are built on a steep, south facing slope, with woodland to the South enclosing the area. The front gardens are short and there are no verges, so the area, with the often high walls and lush planting, has a secretive intimate feel.

Built Form

Victorian villas and fine large later period homes have varied form, but most are of locally distinctive material. The new close, has fine red brick and red wall tiles to the upper elevations, making them highly locally distinctive

Detractors

None

Area 3 London Road

Description

This area consists mainly of ribbon development, built as social housing in the 1920's, along the A273. In the late 20th century the Belmont Estate was added, and in 2012, Reed Close was built at the North end. These three groups of houses form a spatially contrasting group but share built form quality.

Spatial Qualities.

The ribbon development, almost all on the west side of the road, sits low in a dip between the fields it backs onto and the wide A road. The housing is well back behind long front gardens. The Belmont area has dense housing, of terraces and three storey flats with small or no front gardens and no verges.

The Reed Close estate has extremely dense housing of three and four storeys high. The very narrow roads, little footway and absent front gardens create a sense of enclosed streetscape.

Built Form

The houses along London Road were built between 1922 and 1926, the design of the ribbon development council housing was inspired by the work and the beliefs of Arts and Crafts architects such as Voysey, who thought 'Housing of the Working Classes' should be 'good honest building', well-crafted to ensure a visually attractive quality.

They are cohesive with large, often hipped, brown plain tiled roofs, brick and render elevations with fine Arts and Crafts tile detailing.

The Belmont housing, built more than half a century later, is of brown brick, with large plain tiled hipped brown roofs and tiled upper elevations. They are high quality and of local character.

The Reed Close housing has a strong Sussex design in form and materials. They have red brick with tiled elevations and plain tiles roofs, and characterful details such as wooden porches and dormer windows. They have varied form coupled with cohesive local materials, reinforcing strong local distinctiveness.

Detractors

In London Road, traffic approaching Stonepound Crossroads is slowly moving, causing queues back to Belmont Close twice a day this creates a very cluttered streetscape.

On street parking in Reed Close contributes to the narrow appearance of the streets.

The appearance of the car dealership and petrol filling station with its associated commercial paraphernalia weakens the semi-rural character of this residential road.

Area 4 Priory

Description

An enclosed area of housing to the East of London Road, rising southwards to Stanford Avenue.

Spatial Qualities

The two-storey semis and bungalows are small-scale medium-density housing. There are small walled front gardens, and grass verges beside narrow roads.

Built Form

The age and the quality of the housing varies somewhat, but the area is best exemplified by the former council housing in the older part of the area, to the North, around Friars Oak Road. The houses were built to a very high standard in 1946 using very local materials: Keymer red bricks and clay tiles. They have large, brown, plain, clay-tiled hipped roofs, small portrait windows and fine detailing. The low garden walls are constructed of the same materials. They are typical Sussex vernacular architecture, having varied form and cohesive materials, re-inforcing a clear character and strong sense of place.

Detractors

The overground electric cabling is visually intrusive. The area has a significant level of on street parking parking.

Area 5 Shepherds Walk

Description

Between the A273 and the railway, the estate borders open countryside to the north.

Spatial Qualities

The medium/low density housing has wide verges and large front garden, which gives a soft, open feel to the estate. There is abundant open green space provision within the estate. There are views of the willow, ash and alder trees along the riverbank, and far-reaching views of the farmland to the North. The feel of the area is verdant, open and rural.

Built Form

The late 20th century housing stock is somewhat boxy in character, with pastiche cladding, landscape picture windows, and pantiled roofs. This form is weak in local distinctiveness.

Detractors

Garage blocks are visual detractor

Area 6 Home Estate

Description

This, the largest of the character areas, stretches from the railway in the West to Ockley lane. Alongside the railway stretches the two and three storey Victorian villas that were built with the coming with the railway along Woodfield Road. From there to Ockley Road is Hassocks Home Estate proper... Grand Avenue, Mackie Avenue, Queen's Road and King's Road. This housing estate was built in the 1930s as an idealised combination of life in town and countryside. It has features of Ebenezer Howard's Garden Cities, on a village scale. Set in abundant greenery, the small scale housing boasted spacious Modern living, electric kitchens and garages.

Spatial Qualities

In the Home Estate the wide avenues, wide grass verges, and large gardens give a spacious feel. The wide roads are well-planted with avenues of trees. The width of the verges allows large tree planting, such as the old cherry trees from the original estate planting. This layout gives much of Hassocks its open spacious character. From the south of the area, there are long views out across the clay vale to the Downs. The group of very old pines at the southern end of Queens Drive, by the infants school, make a very important contribution, serving as a landmark and framing views of the village centre from the estate.

The Victorian Woodfield Road villas have a contrasting, enclosed feel.

Built Form

Next to the railway, along Woodland Road, is the oldest housing, large Victorian terraces and villas. Further east, two storey houses and bungalows have large, hipped often plain-tiled roofs with rendered upper elevations and bay windows. Matching low brick walls border long front gardens, and garages and drives remove parking from the roads.

Mackie Avenue has particularly attractive, cohesive housing.

Detractors

The wide roads encourage speeding*. Overhead powerlines are visually dominant. Most of the original metal windows have been replaced a long time ago, the various replacement glazing design lacking cohesion.

*** Influence of geometry on speed**

Research carried out in the preparation of *Manual for Streets* **Department for Transport** considered the influence of geometry on vehicle speed and casualties in 20 residential and mixed-use areas in the UK. Two highway geometric factors stand out as influencing driving speed, all other things being equal.

They are: 1) forward visibility; and 2) carriageway width.

Improved visibility and/or increased carriageway width were found to correlate with increased vehicle speeds. Increased width for a given visibility, or vice versa, were found to increase speed.

Area 7 Butchers Wood

Description

One of the most visually homogenous areas, this is bounded by the railway, Keymer Road and Butchers Wood.

Spatial Qualities

It is an enclosed vale that rises to the South to give huge views to the East along the Downland scarp to Ditchling Beacon. The housing is built at a low density, especially the oldest part, the Northern end, Clayton Avenue. The large two-storey houses have large well planted back gardens which, coupled with the views out to surrounding woodland give a lush, enclosed feel. Further South, the land rises and the roof heights fall. Spacious roads, wide verges and the huge views give a wonderful expansive feel.

Built Form

In the northern part, the large detached houses are individually designed but cohesive in style. In the southern part, the soft red brick, plain tiled bungalows with large hipped roofs are typical.

Detractors

None.

Area 8 Dale

Description

Dale Avenue, like Mackie Avenue, exemplifies the subtle character of Hassocks. Together with the Victorian terraces of Parklands Road, and the late twentieth century housing to the south, it makes up the Dale local character area.

Spatial Qualities

Built in the 1950's, in the same style as the Hassocks Home Estate, Dale Avenue, Highlands Close and Windmill Avenue are wide, with wide verges and low-walled generous four metre front gardens. The roads sweep down to the east, and has views south east of the Downs. With mature street trees, including cherry, the area has a lush, spacious feel. A notable tree group, outside the Downlands school, consists of two silver birch and an Atlantic cedar, they serve as a landmark and enhance the avenue.

Ockley Road forms the eastern edge of Dale, and is open to fields to the east. Verges here are very wide indeed, and there is mature planting of birches and cherry trees. It has a spacious, arcadian feel.

By contrast, Parklands Road has Victorian terraced housing, with very small front gardens behind waist-high brick walls. There are no verges and no space for any tree planting. There are no garages, so the residents park along both sides of the very narrow road, creating visual clutter and a dense, urban streetscape.

Further South along Parklands Road was built in the late 20th Century. Here three-storey flats dominate the street, with some grassy communal areas., but some verges have been paved to offer more parking. Woodland shields the urban edge from the Downs, but this results in no views out, and an enclosed feel.

Built Form

The major part of this area consists of the 1930's estate, with its bungalows and larger houses in the east. The large soft brown roofs over red or golden brick walls and matching low garden walls give the area a cohesive feel, and a sense of place.

The Victorian houses of Parklands Road, are typical and characterful terraces, with sash bays and gold brick with red brick details. Further to the south are the three storey flats, built of beige or brown bricks, and having concrete window surrounds. They lack local vernacular form and materials.

Detractors

Lack of garaging results in high levels of on-street parking, undermining the streetscape of Parklands Road, lessening the narrow space. Areas around the schools have high levels of parking when parents pick up and drop off children.

Area 9 Clayton Mills

Description

Finished in 2012, this cohesive estate is densely built terraces, semis and detached properties. It sits on a flattish area on the North boundary of Hassock. It has been well built with details and materials which give it local character.

Spatial Qualities

Two and three storey buildings with very small front gardens face each other across narrow roads. Verges are narrow or absent, giving an enclosed, hard streetscape and few opportunities for planting. Communal areas are attractive, open and well planted. There are views out to the Downland Scarp, especially in winter, from Chestnut Drive.

Built Form

Clayton Mills is built of light red and golden brick, with darker red details. The houses feature red tile hung upper elevations, or cream painted upper elevations and small, portrait windows. The small upper storey windows tuck right up against the large

roofs, some of which have dormer windows. All these details are typical of the local area and give the estate cohesion and a strong sense of place.

A high proportion of the houses have red roof tiles.

Detractors

The red roof tiles are visible in views from the South. They make the area stand out in views of Hassocks from the South Downs National Park, detracting from the panorama of the low weald countryside.

There is on-street parking in the narrow roads.

Area 10 Adastra

Description

This area contains The Villa Adastra, Adastra Park and the Parish Council Offices. Where once large Victorian villas and mansions, surrounded by their grounds, lined the Keymer Road, many have been replaced over the decades by small, secluded housing developments, and individual detached houses. Some of the original properties are still to be found, set back from the road behind thick vegetation and walls. The infill housing developments have occurred during the latter half of the twentieth century and their architecture reflects this. The area contains some of the best views out to the Downs from the village.

Spatial Qualities

In spatial terms, the developments in this area are quite varied. The Minnells and Kymer Gardens are fairly dense, giving a feeling of enclosure. Clerks Acre, Wilmington Close and Fir Tree Gardens have more spacious layouts with front gardens and wide verges. Stafford Way has an open feel, with six metre long front gardens, wide verges and a lack of front boundary walls. This layout, coupled with the sweep downhill south and the huge views of the Downland scarp give a very expansive feel.

Built Form

The area has a rich palette of flint, stucco and brick housing. Kymer Gardens, built before 1970, and the Minnells, built in the 1990's are of Sussex character, with appropriately small portrait windows, tiled elevations, and plain tiled roofs. The colours of the materials are of a restricted palette of browns and reds.

The shapes and colours of some of the infill housing of the 1960s and 1970s lack local distinctiveness. Stafford Way contains examples of green wall tiles and beige or black bricks, with the plain forms of an international Modern style. Clerks Acre has rather unusual Georgian details with a Post Modern twist.

Detractors

While the late twentieth century architecture to be found in this area is attractive, some of it is at odds with the wider local distinctiveness of Hassocks.

Area 11 Church Mead

Description

Broadly contemporary with the Hassocks Home Estate, this small estate is to the north of Keymer village, and relates to Keymer more than Hassocks.

Spatial Qualities

With low housing, low-walled front gardens, verges, and glimpses though to views across fields to Ditchling to the East, this estate is moderately spacious with a quiet, harmonious, rural feel.

Built Form

The houses, mostly bungalows of this area have red brick and rendered elevations under large brown tiled roofs, giving the area a cohesive, locally distinctive character.

Detractors

None

Area 12 Keymer

Description

Keymer contains the Keymer Village Conservation Area, which surrounds the old parish church of St Cosmas and St Damien. The church was rebuilt in flint on the site of the original church 1866, in its original Saxon style.

To help conserve the 'historic core' of Keymer the MSDC designated this as a Conservation Area in January 1989. The area contains seven listed buildings.

Spatial Qualities

Much of Keymer has an enfolded, well-planted, enclosed character. Entering Keymer from the east, large houses lie behind hedges, and flint and brick walls. The Crescent is very narrow, with high hedges and large often Victorian housing in a very secluded setting. The church appears on elevated ground behind a flint wall the North side, and further on cottages with tiny front gardens and brick walls face The Greyhound pub and a line of three-storey cottages to the south side, some opening directly onto the narrow footway. This little street, over a hundred years old, gives the core of Keymer a strong sense of place. The road turns abruptly right and left giving character and enclosing this historic area.

Houses along Lodge Lane and Park Avenue have longer front gardens, and a more rural character.

Built Form

Keymer has characterful Victorian terraces and large villas, some listed medieval houses, and a good proportion of fine 20th century detached houses. Flint walling is a feature of this historic area.

Detractors

The parade of shops is late 20th century. In contrast to most of Keymer, this has no local characteristic or detailing. Traffic often moves at high speed along Lodge Lane.

Area 13 Hurst Road

Description

Stretching from the Stonepound Crossroads to the western parish boundary at Belmont Lane, ribbon development housing was built along the ridge-top road to Hurstpierpoint. From this elevated position there are views over the farmland to the North or to the Downs to the South.

Spatial Qualities

Between Belmont Lane and Ham Farm, the road has wide grass verges on the South side, and the two and three storey houses have deep, wide front gardens, with many mature trees and hedges. There are green spaces on both sides of the road, with a small playing field and woods behind to the South, and Ham Farm to the North. This part of Hurst Road has a verdant, secluded feel.

Travelling east from Ham Farm, the housing is nearer to the road, and more often only two storey, and often behind hedges. Near the crossroads the road is sunken, leaving the houses behind steep, often well-planted banks with many large trees.

Built form

The housing along this road is detached and individually designed. There are large and imposing Victorian villas to the west. Nearer the crossroads, there is early 20th century detached houses, some designed by architect J. L. Denman, in the Arts and Crafts style. On the South side are more contemporary houses, with stuccoed facias and slate tiled roofs.

Detractors

There are high levels of queuing traffic at Stonepound Crossroads

Area 14 Village Centre

Key Characteristics of the centre

- The main East-West through-route along the Greensand ridge has gentle bends, and broken sightlines, giving natural traffic calming, and helping to define spaces along the road. These elements and the slopes to the pinch point at Herring stream give an important sense of arrival to village centre.
- There is good traffic flow, and a spacious centre with free parking.
- Both the simple layout of the centre and the views to the Downs enable residents and visitors to easily orient themselves, i.e. it has "good legibility".
- Fine buildings such as the corner buildings of B2116/Grand Avenue give period charm and a sense of place.
- Beautiful mature tree groups, especially old pines, are characteristic of this ridge top settlement, and add enormously to the streetscape, working to frame views, dwarf the buildings and landmarking segments of the Keymer Road.

Introduction

The centre has fine buildings of Mid-Twentieth century character and wonderful Victorian terraces. It has a spacious, yet domestic scale. As in the rest of Hassocks, the subtlety of the period charm of the village centre is easily eroded by any lack of cohesion of materials and form. This makes it particularly vulnerable to insensitive change.

The layout of the village centre divides into three spaces:

- West, from the western mini-roundabout to the Herring Stream;
- Mid, from there to Wilmington Close; and
- East, the area around Budgens and down Dale Avenue.

Lack of continuous frontages, and lack of visual cohesion and therefore sense of place in some areas, is likely to dissuade footfall between these spaces. This is exacerbated by the walking distance from one end of the village to the other, and the gradient to the West. More continuous active frontages between these spaces would provide better footfall and a livelier streetscape.

Western Village Centre

Travelling from Stonepound Crossroads to Chancellors Park, there is the first sense of arrival at the village centre at the mini-roundabout, where the Keymer Road meets Station Approach and the road bends right to start the descent into the village. Three-storey, late 20th century buildings, with ground floor shops on the north side are rather plain in form. However they and Victorian gabled frontages on the south side give a sense of enclosure and arrival into the village.

The beautiful, mature Scots pines by the infant's school frame and some fine established plane trees in the pavement on the north side of the road soften and enclose this space.

From Chancellors Park to the Herring Stream, the Postal Depot building on the southern side is a long blank facade which detracts from an active frontage, and sense of place. The Hassocks Infants School on the right is a very attractive and characterful red brick building, but does not present shopping opportunities or an enclosing mass to the road. Beyond it, the church building lacks local distinctiveness.

East of the postal depot on the south side, is the 21st century terrace with ground floor shops. Although contemporary, this building is detailed to sit with the local Victorian built form, in the rhythm of the fenestration, dormer windows in the pitched plain tiled roofs, and the colour of materials. It is attractive, and strengthens the character of the centre.

Where the Keymer Road crosses the Herring Stream, the bridge, the Victorian terrace of shops and the surrounding mature trees form a pinch point. Here the road bends slightly right again and the space opens up again.

Mid Village Centre

The three-storey Victorian terrace of shops to the south, with their bayed upper windows and the wonderful 1930's three storey terraces facing them, define and enclose the streetscape.

The corner buildings of Grand Avenue give character to the centre of the village. The wide 'birdmouth' ie large turning radii at the road junction of Grand Avenue/Keymer Road deflects pedestrians desire line and increases vehicle speed. This is a busy centre with the post office, coffee shop, chemist and pet shop.

Further east, a deep bank of mature trees beside Wilmington Close and trees in planters in front of the terrace of shops close the view, provides greater separation of pedestrians and road users and a clothed human-scale streetscape.

Opposite Wilmington Close is the National Tyres garage. This does not positively contribute to a sense of place and its character, scale, form, colour and facing materials all undermine local distinctiveness. Its forecourt undermines the rhythm of the shop facades.

East Village Centre

The late-20th century three-storey blocks of shops and flats at the corner of Dale Avenue do not positively contribute to local character, either in form or materials, but they present good massing to the roads, and provide busy local shops in a small area close to car parking. However, they are at a distance and visually cut off from the rest of the village as there is no shopping opportunity opposite either Budgens or the parade along Dale Avenue.