

Forest Row

(Inset Map No.17 - Mapsheet)

Introduction

19.12.1 Forest Row, one of the largest settlements in the District, lies on the northern edge of Ashdown Forest some three miles south-east of East Grinstead on the A22 London to Eastbourne road. The village serves as an established residential area, as a local employment centre providing jobs in the retail, office and service sectors, and as an important local shopping centre for its residents and surrounding rural area. The current population is estimated at 3750 people.

19.12.2 It is the Council's aim for Forest Row to maintain and enhance its residential character and its role as a local employment and service centre whilst protecting its historic core, the surrounding countryside, Ashdown Forest and rural fringe areas from new development that would be detrimental to its character.

19.12.3 The Forest Row Village Appraisal, completed in 1989, highlighted a number of local concerns, including inadequate public transport, inadequate off-street parking, badly maintained roads and pavements, a need for improved recreational facilities and a lack of affordable housing. In terms of future development, the preference was in favour of a mixed residential and working community, with new development restricted to within the built-up area.

Environment

19.12.4 Forest Row lies on the northern edge of the Ashdown Forest within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. To the south of the village, the Forest descends steeply to the Medway Valley and is an area of high scenic quality which has been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

19.12.5 To the south-east of the village lies Kidbrooke Park, a landscaped garden and park dating from the 17th century. English Heritage's non-statutory list of gardens of special historic interest registers the park as being of Grade II importance and it is now used in connection with the adjoining school. Weirwood Reservoir to the east is an important recreational facility and is also a designated site of Special Scientific Interest and Local Nature Reserve.

19.12.6 Much of the residential area has a particularly fine character which the Council, through its policies, will seek to maintain and enhance. The Rystwood Road and Park Road areas have a distinctive parkland character created mainly by detached properties in

extensive curtilages, with mature tree cover and landscaping, to which a specific policy applies.

19.12.7 Within the historic core of the village, several buildings, including the Holy Trinity Church and Village Hall, are listed as being of special architectural and historic importance and the environmental quality has been recognised through the designation of a Conservation Area within which the Council will promote a scheme of environmental improvements.

Development Boundary

19.12.8 A key aspect of the conservation of the environment at Forest Row is the restriction of further outward growth into the countryside which is recognised as having an outstanding quality through national designations. The development boundary, described below, reflects this aim and in a number of cases deliberately leaves peripheral housing areas outside the boundary in order to recognise and protect their scattered and more rural character.

19.12.9 The scattered form of development on the southern edge of Forest Row is more rural in character and it is considered important to resist any intensification of development in this sensitive location. The development boundary therefore delineates the change between the dense development in Highgate Road and the more loose knit and scattered development along the roads and tracks extending further south into Ashdown Forest. Similarly, the boundary excludes development south of Primrose Lane, where the detached residential properties set back in large gardens form an important transition between the golf course and the more densely built-up parts of Forest Row.

19.12.10 The Rystwood Road area is characterised by low density development of large residential properties set well back into spacious grounds with extensive landscaping and mature tree cover, including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland. Situated on the eastern approach to Forest Row, it represents a transitional area of a more rural character adjacent to the SSSI. Although recent housing development has taken place at the northern end of Rystwood Road, elsewhere in the area development proposals which would be detrimental to its character have been resisted by the Council. In order to protect its high environmental quality and distinctive character, the area has been excluded from the development boundary. Further development in this area would be intrusive on the landscape, which is visible from the B2110 road and from Ashdown Forest. Furthermore, to the south of Rystwood Road there are few dwellings and the

significant gaps between them afford long distance views over open countryside and Ashdown Forest. Any further development would be intrusive in the landscape and an undesirable encroachment into the countryside.

19.12.11 Along Hartfield Road, the development boundary includes existing development, together with new housing under construction whereas the more open land to the north has been excluded in view of its countryside character and the fact that it lies within the flood plain of the River Medway. The village greens and children's play areas along Hartfield Road have also been excluded from the development boundary in view of their important amenity and recreational use. Along Station Road the development boundary includes a number of commercial uses, including the Pilstye site but further outward development into the adjoining water meadow, countryside areas and the flood plain of the River Medway is to be resisted.

19.12.12 On the western edge of the village, the development boundary includes new housing development to the rear of The Swan Public House but excludes land further west in order to resist any outward expansion of the village into the countryside which would be intrusive in the landscape. The development boundary excludes ribbon development along Priory Road to prevent further intensification. Development in the attractive valley between this area and the Freshfield Bank estate would be intrusive in this sensitive landscape, and further development in a southerly direction along Lewes Road would be an encroachment into the countryside. On this basis, the development boundary includes the Freshfield Bank estate but excludes land to the south and west.

19.12.13 It is considered essential to resist future encroachment of development into the open meadow area which provides a significant 'green gap' separating Forest Row from the ribbon settlement of Wallhill north of the railway, and for this reason the area has been excluded from the development boundary. The flood plain imposes additional constraints on development extending north along London Road beyond the existing village limits. In order to protect the landscape and prevent the coalescence of Forest Row and Ashurstwood, as recognised in the County Structure Plan, a specific policy is contained in Chapter 4.

19.12.14 The character of development within the defined development boundary provides opportunities for housing development by infilling, by redevelopment of existing sites and by conversion of buildings to residential use.

Park Road

19.12.15 In the eastern part of the village, the high quality environment around Park Road is characterised

by mainly large detached residential properties within spacious grounds, together with mature tree cover, hedgerows and other planting. In recent years a number of these curtilages have been granted consent for subdivision to provide additional dwellings. It is considered particularly important that the arcadian character of development in the area is maintained and an appropriate policy is put forward for the area.

VB12.1 Within the Park Road housing policy area, as defined on the Proposals Map, the established character will be protected and proposals which adversely affect its character will not be permitted. Planning applications for new residential development on sites within the policy area will be determined with reference to the following criteria:

(1) the form, scale, site coverage and siting of the proposed development should reflect the character of the adjoining buildings and the spaces around them, and where appropriate, existing building lines and characteristic frontage widths;

(2) the proposed development should not result in the loss of trees, shrubs, hedges or other features which contribute to the special character of the area;

(3) landscaping should remain a dominant element of any scheme in accordance with the character of the area;

(4) the proposed development should not have an adverse visual impact on the adjoining countryside.

Employment

19.12.16 The village is an important local employment centre in the northern part of the District providing jobs mainly in the retail, office and service sectors. The main business area is situated at Station Road. A large number of jobs are also available in shops and other services within the village centre. Further employment opportunities are available nearby at East Grinstead and in the Crawley/Gatwick area.

Land at Pilstye

19.12.17 At the north-eastern end of Station Road, a development opportunity exists at Pilstye, a detached house in extensive grounds. The existing house is listed as being of special architectural and historic importance. It is considered important to protect both the character and appearance of the listed building and the visual amenities of this prominent site on the rural fringe of the village.

19.12.18 It is considered that the listed building should be retained in its present form. In addition, it is important that new buildings on the site reflect the character of Pilstye and respect its setting on the rural fringe of the village. There is prominent tree cover within the site and particularly along the banks of the River Medway which is covered by a Tree Preservation Order. A scheme of highway improvements will be required at the junction of Station Road and Hartfield Road. The development of small units is considered important to meet local employment needs.

VB12.2 Within the Pilstye business policy area, as defined on the Proposals Map, development for business purposes within Class B1 will be acceptable in principle. Proposals for development will only be permitted where the following criteria are met:

- (1) the existing listed building, Pilstye, is to be retained and converted;**
- (2) the scale, design and detail of any new buildings reflects the domestic composition, scale and massing of Pilstye;**
- (3) all trees subject to a Tree Preservation Order are to be retained;**
- (4) a landscaping and management scheme for the site is prepared and implemented, which should include provision for the strengthening of the existing tree screen along the bank of the River Medway;**
- (5) a scheme of highway improvements at the junction of Station Road and Hartfield Road is to be implemented to the Council's and Highway Authority's requirements before the initial occupation of any of the buildings;**
- (6) the proposed development meets the requirements of the National Rivers Authority concerning development in the flood plain of the River Medway;**
- (7) a scheme of foul and surface water drainage works, including any necessary off-site provision, will be implemented to the Council's requirements;**
- (8) any new buildings are designed and built as groups of small self-contained units.**

19.12.19 Outline planning permission was granted for B1 uses in line with the policy in 1995. However, the allocation remains appropriate at the base date of the Plan, as well as to guide development proposals for the site.

Traffic

19.12.20 The heavy volume of traffic using the A22 through the village and the consequent congestion that occurs has an adverse effect on the environment of the village centre and on an appreciation of its architectural and historic character. Although the County Council has no proposals for a bypass, it intends to carry out traffic calming measures in the village itself. It has already provided a mini-roundabout at the A22/Hartfield Road junction. However, the District Council also urges improvements to the A22/Priory Road junction.