

# **MARKBEECH**

## **Conservation Area Appraisal**



**SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE**



**December 2003**

# Markbeech

## Conservation Area Appraisal

**The historic environment is a social asset of immense value and one of the keys to the continuing prosperity of Sevenoaks District. Conservation Area Appraisals are part of the process of ensuring that we make the best use of our historic environment. They are tools for the positive management of change, not a means of preventing development. Conservation is focused on the entire historic environment, not just listed buildings. Trees, open spaces, buildings, uses, roads and streets all contribute to the character and local distinctiveness of the District's conservation areas.**

**The man-made environment of our conservation areas has used energy and materials moulded by people both past and present. The District Council will creatively manage the fabric of these areas in a sustainable way as a legacy for future generations.**

**It is intended that this appraisal will inform the activities of the Council, the public and other bodies where these impact on the conservation area. The appraisal was approved by the District Council in December 2003 and adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.**

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## **1.00 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Definition and Purpose of Conservation Areas**

Conservation Areas first came into being as a result of the Civic Amenities Act of 1967 and are intended to identify any valuable visual or historic characteristics in a locality that may warrant special measures in order to protect and preserve them.

The Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990 recognises that there are particular areas of 'architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance' and charges planning authorities with a duty to designate any such locations within their jurisdiction as Conservation Areas. This designation then empowers the local authority to pay particular attention to planning considerations and development within them and gives greater control over such matters as demolitions, landscaping and trees, and the display of advertisements.

Designation also raises the awareness of local residents and businesses to the quality of their surroundings and is intended to encourage an active interest in the care and maintenance of their properties and surrounding land, thereby fostering a sense of communal pride.

It has been recognised that designation, because of the responsibilities and obligations it places on both owners and the local authority, should only be imposed on areas that are demonstrably suitable. Where the criteria have been met, the area should then benefit from the additional control and protection that designation confers, and from official recognition of the special architectural and historic character of the locality.

The management of our national cultural and historic inheritance is of paramount importance and Conservation Areas are a vital 'grass roots' starting point from which to safeguard the continuing care of our environment.

## **1.2 Purpose of Appraisals**

As their number grows, it has become even more important for local authorities to include a well-defined and considered policy for their designated Conservation Areas in their Local Plans.

Planning pressures are such that any designation is likely to be subjected to detailed scrutiny and must be readily and demonstrably defensible against adverse criticism. The criteria for designation should be kept as uniform as possible and the public should be kept fully aware of the reasons for any proposed changes in their area.

The 1990 Act charges local authorities with the responsibility of undertaking a review of their Conservation Areas from time to time, both to consider the possibility of revising their extent, and to identify any past changes or future pressures which may affect the original reasons for their designation.

English Heritage published an advisory leaflet on the subject in March 1997, which outlines the preferred approach to these appraisals and gives examples of the type of content that it would be useful to include.

The appraisals should define the key elements that together give the area its character, and objectively analyse how they interact to enhance their individual impact.

They can then provide suggestions for future policies and improvements based on a clear understanding of the special architectural and historic qualities that highlight the area and give it its local distinctiveness.

These appraisals can also be used as a valuable means by which the impact of planning policies and the implementation of enhancement measures can be assessed.

### **1.3 Local Conservation Area Policies**

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan (adopted March 2000) lists the following policies which relate to conservation areas:

- EN21 In the designation and review of Conservation Areas the Local Planning Authority will assess all the following matters:**
- 1) The special architectural or historic interest of the area.**
  - 2) The cohesive character and integrity of the area including spaces round buildings their settings and trees.**
  - 3) The desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area.**
  - 4) The pressures for change which may encourage piecemeal development which would threaten the character of the area.**
  - 5) The need to promote economic prosperity, through schemes of environmental enhancement, to overcome vacancy, neglect, decay or dereliction.**
- EN22 Proposals to demolish buildings which contribute to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area will not be permitted in the absence of overriding justification. Preference will be given to conversion and/or refurbishment as opposed to outright demolition of a building. Proposals to demolish extensions to original buildings or outbuildings will be judged on their contribution to the overall character of the area.**
- EN23 Proposals for development or redevelopment within or affecting Conservation Areas should be of positive architectural benefit by paying special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the area and of its setting. The design of new buildings and alterations to existing buildings should respect local character, whilst the treatment of external spaces including hard and soft landscaping, boundary walls, street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area.**

Buildings which make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of the conservation area are identified on the character appraisal plan at the end of this document . English Heritage national guidance on conservation areas sets out the criteria used to identify these buildings.

The Sevenoaks District Local Plan also states that the Local Planning Authority will undertake detailed assessments of designated Conservation Areas and will prepare proposals for their preservation. Development proposals will be judged against their overall contribution to the enhancement of the character and appearance of the area as set out in any scheme which may have been prepared. This assessment and the detailed analysis of the area contained in the report are intended to fulfil this commitment and provide the background for enhancement schemes.

## **1.4 Other Local Plan Policies**

The Local Plan also identifies specific policies designed to protect the natural environment and historic buildings.

Policy EN6 places restrictions on development within the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and EN7 gives priority to the enhancement of natural beauty, landscape, open space, geographical features and wildlife over other planning considerations within the North Downs and Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Areas. Other Areas of Local Landscape Importance where development may be restricted are noted in policy EN8.

Landscape features and wildlife habitats beyond the confines of the urban areas, towns and villages are also protected by policy EN11.

Important areas of greenspace within the built confines are safeguarded under policy EN9 and EN10 protects important areas of urban fringe.

Listed building policy is defined in sections EN18 and EN19 and the reuse rather than the demolition of unlisted buildings of local interest is promoted by policy EN20.

Trees over a certain size are automatically protected within Conservation Areas, with any proposed work to them having to be notified to the local authority in writing six weeks in advance.

Transport strategy for the District is summarised by the following section.

### **T1. A co-ordinated transport strategy will be implemented including:**

- 1) Encouragement of the provision of appropriate public transport services and facilities.**
- 2) Use of traffic management to achieve a safer and more efficient use of existing roads.**
- 3) An integrated car parking strategy involving residents' parking, local enforcement and consideration of the need for park and ride facilities.**
- 4) New highway construction and improvements to the existing network.**
- 5) Encouragement of walking and cycling.**

## **2.00 DESCRIPTION OF CONSERVATION AREA**

### **2.1 General Description**

Markbeech Conservation Area covers some 7.3 hectares and contains 2 listed buildings. It was designated in 1991 and has not been extended since then. It includes Holy Trinity Church, the Kentish Horse public house and residential properties adjacent to the crossroads in the centre of the village.

The conservation area lies entirely within the Metropolitan Green Belt the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and a Special Landscape Area.

The village is surrounded by substantial outlying properties set in generous grounds amidst wooded scenery and has a population of about 300.

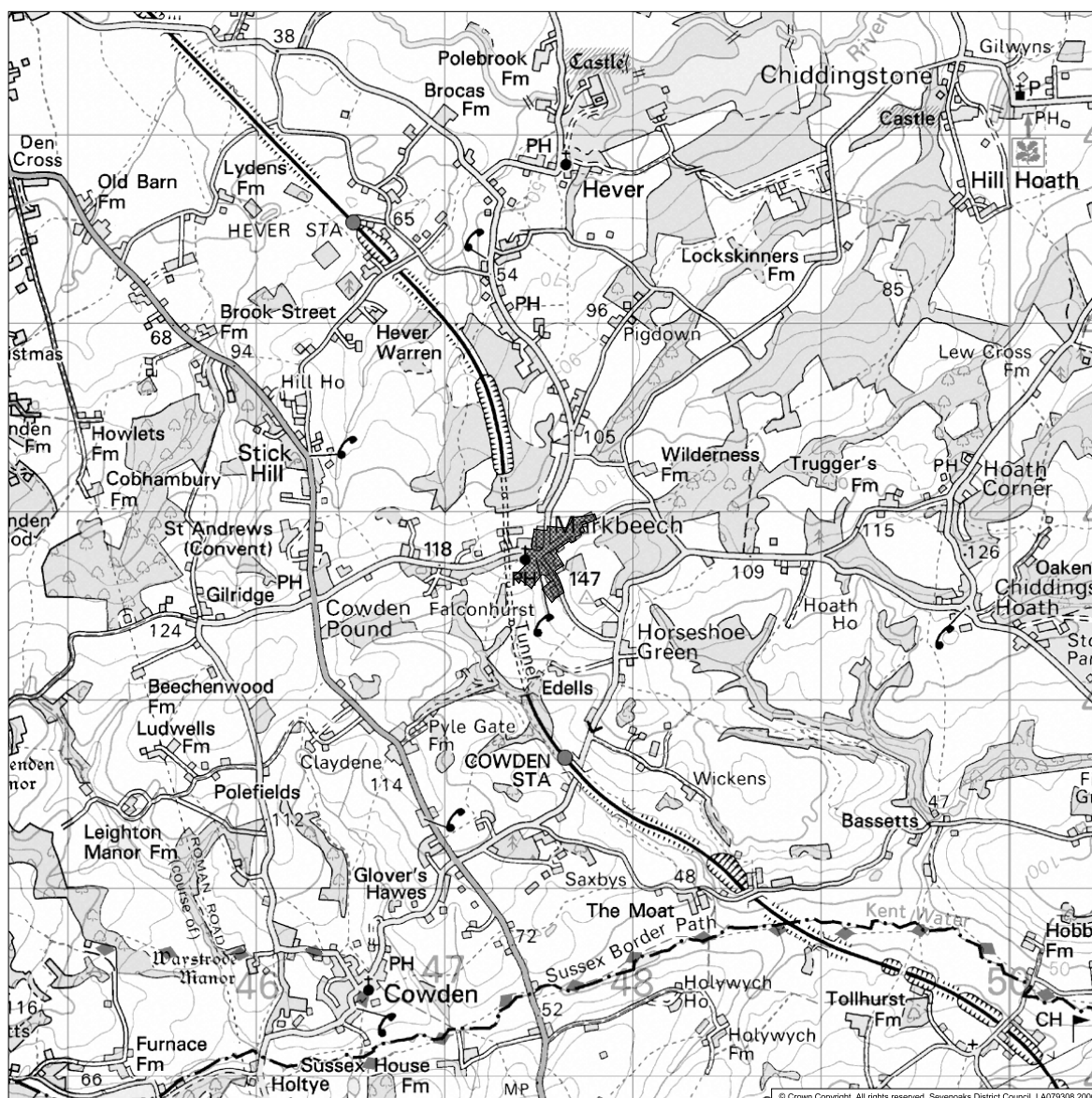


## 2.2 Location and Geographical Context

Markbeech is situated on the northern edge of the High Weald and is the highest point between the Chart Hills and Ashdown Forest. It is six miles west of East Grinstead and about three miles south-east of Edenbridge.

The nearest station is at Cowden which is situated mid way between the two villages. A railway tunnel runs below the land in the west of the village

Markbeech stands at the junction of the roads between Chiddingstone Hoath and Cowden Pound, in the west and east respectively and Edenbridge to the north-east. The surrounding countryside is mainly woodland with some open agricultural land to the east and west.



Map 1 Geographical Location of Markbeech

## **2.3 Historical Development**

There has probably been a small settlement at Markbeech since at least the Iron Age, and there is evidence of a fort dating from this time, two miles away at Dry Hill. Iron workings around Markbeech Hill date from Roman times, and for many centuries were the most important industry in this part of the Kent and Sussex Weald. Markbeech was included within the Manor of Cowden Lewisham from the 10<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the centre of the village few houses survive from before the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the hamlet did not have a Church until 1852. This was built by local benefactor John Chetwyn Talbot, a noted London barrister who bought the Edells Estate in 1850. He employed the architect David Brandon to build him a house at Falconhurst, and Edells became the vicarage.

There are a number of substantial properties located on the outskirts of the hamlet that have older origins. These are the sites of original farmsteads and are not close enough to the heart of the village to affect its character.

Markbeech has changed little since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and retains much of its old fashioned charm.

## 2.4 Architectural Description

The Conservation Area contains examples of many of the vernacular features that are typically found in traditional Kentish buildings.



**Figure 1 Markbeech Cottages**

Roofs are either slated, with lead hip and ridge rolls, or covered with clay tiles hung on pegs or nibs. The use of full or half hips to one side of the roof with a gable end on the other is common. Chimney stacks are often tall and decorative.



**Figure 2 The Old Farm**

Gables may have deep decoratively carved bargeboards. Dormer windows are often inserted into the roof slopes, giving light to attic spaces that can then be used as additional accommodation. The pitches of tiled roofs tend to be steep, whilst those that are slated are shallower, and the contrasting heights of the ridge lines often lend variety and interest to the street scene. 'Cat slide' roofs, which sweep down from the ridge to ground floor ceiling level, have long been a popular way of covering a single storey extension to the side or rear of a building.

Although most of the buildings in the Conservation Area date from the 19th Century, there are some examples of older timber-framed buildings that survived from the era before brickwork became a popular and affordable alternative construction material.



**Figure 3** 1 - 2 Cow Lane and Markbeech Cottages

Otherwise brick is the most popular building material and the local red stock bricks can be seen in many buildings, together with decorative arches above doors and windows. Patterns formed by the inclusion of blue headers or bands of a different colour brick are common.



**Figure 4** The Old School

The use of local stone either on its own or combined with brickwork, adds another colour and texture to the built environment, and there are examples of painted render which serve the same purpose.

Windows are predominantly timber casements and leaded lights can be found in buildings of many ages, some using coloured glass. The detailing of the joinery to the Edwardian and Victorian properties tends to be more robust than in the earlier buildings.

### 3.00 CHARACTER APPRAISAL

#### 3.1 Setting of the Area and Spatial Relationships

The heart of the village of Markbeech is the crossroads where the Church of the Holy Trinity, the Kentish Horse Public House and the buildings that were formerly the School are located. The setting of this little group has changed little since they were built, although some individual buildings themselves have been subject to alteration and modification.



**Figure 5 The centre of the village from Uckfield Lane**

Approaching Markbeech from any direction, it is the Church that dominates the scene and gives a focus to the area. The Church and School were built in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century and subsequent development along Cow Lane and Uckfield Lane increased the size and importance of the original hamlet.



**Figure 6 Holy Trinity Church**

Markbeech still retains the qualities of tranquility and open space that would have been familiar to earlier residents. There are a number of sizeable properties around the village, many of some age and historic importance, but they are so widely spaced that it is only those closest to the village centre that relate directly to each other.





**Figure 7 Old School Cottage, School House and The Old School**

The little group of houses that includes Markbeech Cottages, Old School Cottages and Post Office Row are an intimate cluster opposite the public house. Beyond them the hedges of Cow Lane lead up the hill to where some more interesting properties are situated.



**Figure 8 Outbuildings in front of the Old Farm**

The Old Farm, a tiny 17<sup>th</sup> Century timber-framed listed cottage, is hidden by newer outbuildings from the north but can be glimpsed from the road, as can the much more substantial Old Vicarage adjacent to it.



**Figure 9 The Old Vicarage**

Adjoining the Vicarage are some smaller cottages set on the lane and having far reaching views behind them to the west.



**Figure 10 Rose Cottage and the view beyond**

Travelling east from the village centre, the road leads past some traditional style cottages to Buckhurst Cottage and High Buckhurst. The pair form an attractive entrance to the village from the west and are set in mature gardens.



**Figure 11 Buckhurst Cottage**

The presence of a good number of mature trees gives Markbeech a leafy enclosed feel to the village centre, which contrasts with the expansive views out of the village to the south-west.



**Figure 12 View to the south-west from the Conservation Area**

### 3.2 The Impact of Individual Elements/Features/Groups of Building

The Church gives the village its focal point. It is a pretty, compact country Church where Victorian detailing sets the tone for so much of the village.



**Figure 13 The Kentish Horse PH**

The Kentish Horse has older origins than many buildings in the village but has been much altered over the years. It has been extended to the side and there is a new extension to the rear. It has also lost some of its original timber-framed structure. It is still an attractive building, although commercial pressures in recent years have led to the provision of a car park and play area to the rear.



**Figure 14 Rear extension to the Kentish Horse**

The converted School is a pretty little stone building that, grouped with the cottages next door with their dramatically tall chimney, balance the opposite side of the road.

Similar chimneys are found on High Buckhurst, where the influence of architect George Devey can be clearly seen. The bold detailing typical of the Arts and Crafts movement, and the prominent position of the house next to the road, have a significant impact on the architectural character of the village.





**Figure 15 High Buckhurst**

The cluster of cottages between High Buckhurst and the village centre are a good little group of Kentish vernacular cottages.



**Figure 16 Lower Buckhurst**

Markbeech Cottages and Post Office Row again have traditional details and form a pleasant enclave in the heart of the village, although they require some maintenance.



**Figure 17 Post Office Row Cottages**

On Uckfield Lane, Roughitts and Rookery Cottage are modern houses which do not make a significant architectural contribution to the area.



**Figure 18 Roughitts and roadside stall**



**Figure 19 Rookery Cottage**

## **4.00 FUTURE TRENDS**

### **4.1 Current and Future Pressures on the Area**

As in many areas of the south east the main pressure on the Markbeech Conservation Area is that exerted by the search for suitable sites for new residential development. The need to find residential development sites in this popular region within easy reach of London puts any village in the spotlight in the search for suitable building land, particularly one as picturesque as Markbeech. Whilst new development within a Conservation Area is not necessarily unwelcome, the impact that this can have on the traditional form of the village has to be carefully considered before consent is granted.

### **4.2 Potential for Enhancement and Future Policy Recommendations**

Telegraph poles can mar the views across the Conservation Area, and it is to be hoped that service providers can be encouraged to run cables underground in the future. The modern telephone box adjacent to the Church is a jarring element in the street scene and would be better replaced with a less obtrusive model.

The garage beside the road at the Old Farm is falling into disrepair and repair or replacement would enhance the area.

There are many properties in the village that are not listed and therefore have no protection against having replacement windows inserted. As there are still a significant number of cottages that are vulnerable to this type of alteration an Article 4 direction on this subject, to cover the properties within the Conservation Area, might prove a valuable safeguard.

The boundaries of the Conservation Area might well be extended to include the gardens to Buckhurst Cottage and Lower Buckhurst, and also the area to the south east of Ashtrees that includes the pond.

**Acknowledgements:**

The draft document was prepared by Donald Insall Associates Ltd.

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MAP 2  
Mark Beech  
Conservation Area

Designations

Scale	1:2500
Drawn By	SNM
Date	March 2003



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