

Burwash Parish Neighbourhood Plan

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Character Appraisal

Introduction

The parish of Burwash is an historic and vibrant rural community with a record of occupation going back over 1,000 years. The parish – made up of the three small villages of Burwash, Burwash Common and Burwash Weald and the surrounding area of open countryside – is located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, with its main settlements straddling a high ridge running through the High Weald of Sussex and Kent. Beyond the villages, the landscape is an exquisite patchwork of woods and fields, pasture and country pathways, dotted with houses and farms. Many properties enjoy wide vistas or extensive views, some as far as the South Downs National Park to the south. Scores of houses in the area date from medieval times and many are listed. The population is about 2,500. The parish is widely regarded as one of the prettiest in East Sussex.



Pelham Hall Guest House, Burwash village High Street

This character appraisal of the parish is designed to support the Burwash Parish Neighbourhood Plan, a vision for how the area can best support much-needed growth. The plan will focus on housing development and employment opportunities, as well as issues such as heritage, amenities, infrastructure, communications, traffic management and transport.

What is a Character Appraisal?

Planning future growth and development for the parish requires a broad understanding of its characteristics and appearance. The appraisal is factual and objective and should include analysis of the elements which make an area distinctive, such as historic properties, open space, building materials, property type and state of maintenance.

The appraisal aims to be comprehensive but cannot cover the minutiae of all issues. Any development proposals should fully consider the appraisal, having regard to national and local policies.

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 and sets out its view of what sustainable development in England means in practice. It states that sustainable development is about achieving positive growth, balancing economic, environmental and social considerations. The NPPF is characterised by a strong presumption in favour of sustainable development with an emphasis on good design. It also recognises the finite nature and value of our built and natural environment and the need for this to be assessed and protected in the context of the Neighbourhood Plan.

Local Level

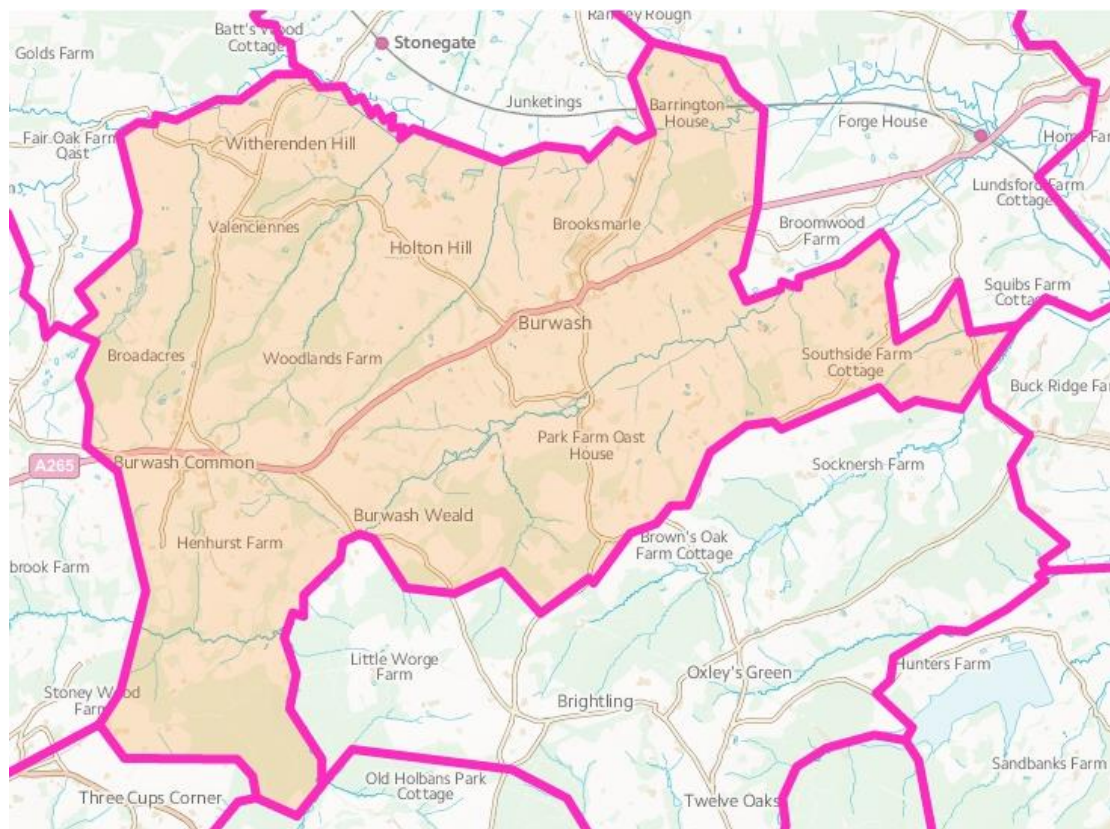
Local Plan (2011-2028)

Local Plans set out the spatial planning strategy of the district and guide future development and change. These are prepared by District Councils. The individual documents that 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 where development will be accommodated but does not specify actual sites.
- 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.

The survey Area

The survey area covers the entire parish, but focuses on the three villages of Burwash, Burwash Common and Burwash Weald.



Burwash Parish

Structure of the document

The Character Appraisal begins with a brief history of the parish. It then describes amenities and services in the area, as well as the distinctive features and special characteristics of various parts of the parish.

Burwash Parish – location, history and context

Introduction

The parish of Burwash is at the heart of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, about 10 miles south west of Tunbridge Wells and some 15 miles north east of the southern coastal town of Hastings.



The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

It is made up of three villages - Burwash, Burwash Common and Burwash Weald – which are surrounded by a wholly rural landscape.

Housing is largely confined to the main A265 trunk road which tops a high ridge running east to west across the High Weald. In Burwash, there is also development along and off Shrub Lane, a road running northwards from a junction with the High Street at the east end of the village. School Hill, the southerly entry point into the village, is the other main area of development in Burwash. The A265 is flanked to the north and south by the valleys of the Rivers Rother and Dudwell respectively and is ringed with age-old woodland, pasture, arable land and ancient hedges.

Early Development

People have probably lived in this area for over 1,000 years. Local historians believe a wooden Saxon church may have stood on the site of the current St Bartholomew's church in Burwash village. By Roman times, the current parish was on Route IV from Hurst Green to Heathfield, and there is evidence of iron works nearby. The oldest building in Burwash village is St Bartholomew's church and parts of the Norman original (1090) can be seen today. The current appearance of Burwash High Street dates to the 18th Century when the rows of 15th and 16th Century cottages were upgraded and tile hung by the prosperous Georgians. Some larger houses were also built at this time including Rampyndene, Mount House, Burghurst and Denes House.



Burghurst, Burwash High Street



Rampyndene, Burwash High Street

The oldest house in the village is the Pelham Hall Guest House (1375). The hammer beams and wattle and daub walls from its earliest days are still visible but in most of the High Street the old buildings are hidden behind the Georgian tiles.

Around 300 men from Burwash fought in the Great War of 1914-18, with 56 being killed. In the 1939-45 war a further 29 men died. All of them are commemorated on the war memorial near St Bartholomew's church. The memorial is a Grade 2* listed building and a key landmark at the historic centre of the village.



St Bartholomew's Church and Burwash War Memorial

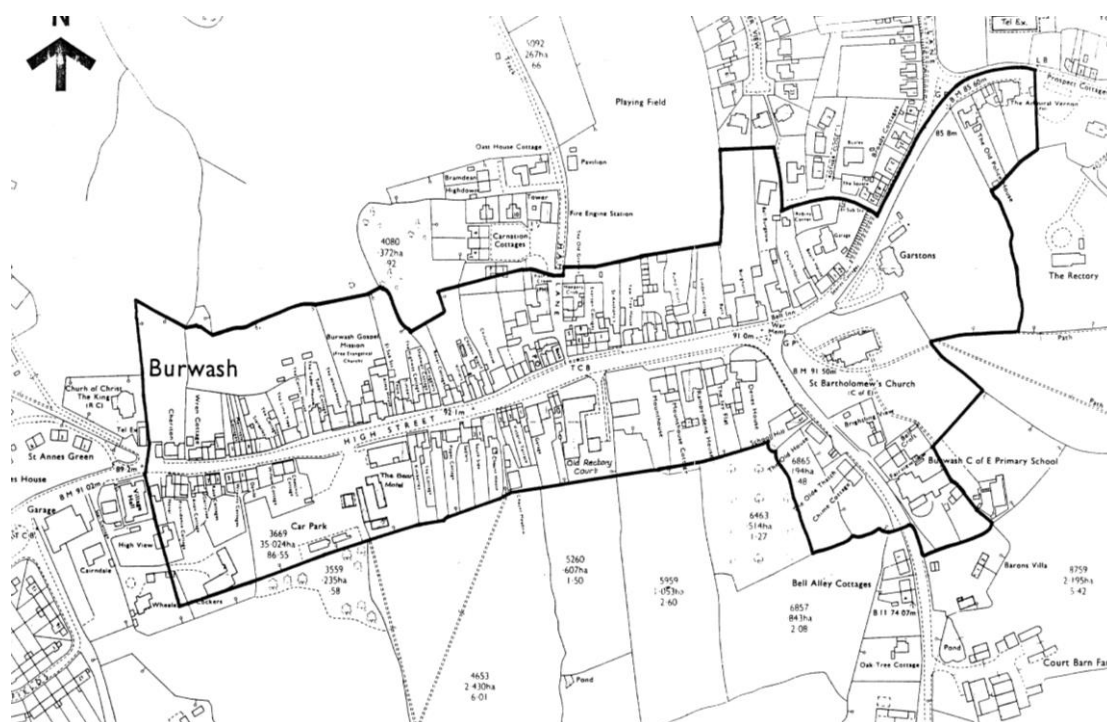
The greatest change to the parish in recent times has been the occupations of its inhabitants. The local economy was entirely based on agriculture and local crafts serving the villages and hamlets around. Very few people travelled out of the area. With the growth of the markets in the 14th Century travellers came to the village and over the next 500 years the range of traders and shops increased. But even in Victorian times virtually the whole population worked locally. With the arrival of the railway in Etchingham in 1851 and improved road transport, the population travelled more and commuted to work. Most villagers now work outside the parish or are retired.



Burwash High Street

Key characteristics

Burwash village High Street makes up most of the parish Conservation Area. Its Medieval and Georgian homes and frontages – mixing hung tiles finishes, white weatherboarding, wooden sash windows and tall chimneys - have earned Burwash its reputation as one of the prettiest villages in East Sussex and give it its distinctive character. Nearly 150 buildings within Burwash parish are listed, including many on the High Street. Almost all homes within the parish enjoy a backdrop of gently rolling fields and woodlands characteristic of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.



Burwash village Conservation Area

Other housing across the three villages is generally solid, well-designed and built to a high standard. In Burwash Common and Burwash Weald – predominantly linear settlements along the A265 trunk road - many houses sit on individual plots with generous gardens and within mature hedges and fences. There is an attractive mixture of traditional Georgian and Victorian cottages and farmhouses, complemented by homes of a more modern style, often imitating the local traditional building vernacular. Over the years, houses have mostly been added singly or in small clusters.

But in Burwash, five post-war “estate” developments – Highfields, Rother View, Rosemary Gardens, Strand Meadow and The Old Orchard at either end of the village – brought significant additions to the housing stock of the area.



Highfields, Burwash

Highfields, at the west end of the village, is a development of 26 homes dating from the late 1940s, when design quality was sometimes sacrificed to the need for rapid post-war reconstruction.

The Rother View cul de sac, to the east, was constructed in 1961, offering the kind of plain, brick-fronted bungalows which were popular at the time but which had little of the appeal of the ancient high street.



Bungalow in Rother View

The building of Strand Meadow began in 1966 to replace prefabs erected after the Second World War. About **140 (check)** homes now occupy the site, with just under 30 percent rented as social housing, according to the 2011 census. Rosemary Gardens – built mainly for owner occupation - was added at the turn of the century. Old Orchard – consisting of eight houses and eight affordable apartments at the west end of the village – was built in recent years.

However there remains a clear shortage of affordable homes for younger individuals and families thwarted in their hopes of home ownership by high prices and lack of supply.



The Old Orchard, Burwash

Rectory Court is a sheltered housing development for older residents in Burwash village High Street owned by Optivo Housing association. It has been empty for some three years pending demolition and redevelopment by Optivo to provide 17 one-bedroom flats and four shared-equity homes. The current absence of provision compounds the lack of affordable housing options for older people.

In Burwash Common and Burwash village, the Burwash and District Housing Association for the Elderly provides 13 one-bedroom units at affordable rents for older residents with a Burwash connection. There is currently a waiting list for properties.



Burwash and District Housing Association units, Cobblers Field, Burwash Common

Retail and Amenities

Burwash village, the largest of the three communities in the parish, offers a range of services for local residents – a petrol station with a shop and car wash, a butcher, a general store and post office, a florist, an estate agent, an antique shop, a hairdresser, a picture framer and an undertaker.

Burwash has two busy working public houses with dining and accommodation facilities – The Rose and Crown and The Bear. A third and increasingly dilapidated premises in Burwash, The Bell, has been non-operational for several years and is for sale. The Wheel public house and restaurant in Burwash Weald is also popular with locals. All the working pubs in the parish provide a limited number of jobs for local people.

The car park off the High Street in the centre of Burwash village is a key amenity for the village. It is heavily used by local residents, patients using the adjacent surgery and dispensary and commuters. It is also popular with visitors drawn to Burwash by its medieval heritage, pleasant country walks and the nearby Bateman's, a Jacobean house once the home of the poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling and now owned by the National Trust. Another small public car park at the east end of Burwash village accommodates about 14 cars but is invariably full. The strain on the car parks reflects the lack of off-street parking space in many parts of the village, especially the High Street and Shrub Lane.

On the northern edge of the central car park are low-level wooden buildings used by Burwash Parish Council, Burwash Community Internet Café as well as local Scout, Guide, Cubs, Brownies and Beavers groups.

The Church of England Primary School in School Hill has continuously provided education to the parish for nearly 300 years. Village children travel to Robertsbridge, Wadhurst, Heathfield, Tunbridge Wells or further afield for secondary education.



Burwash Church of England Primary School, School Hill, Burwash

Burwash Village Hall in Burwash High Street is over 100 years old and showing its age but is a key venue for many local organisations such as painting clubs, quilting groups, dance and youth theatre, snooker and short mat bowls clubs, ladies' groups and exercise classes.

Burwash Pavilion sits alongside Burwash playing field and playground, which is managed by a local volunteer group since being acquired with local fundraising in 1962. This popular open space is used by local residents as well as village footballers and cricketers. It hosts the annual fete and the yearly Bonfire Night celebrations. The all-weather tennis courts on the northern perimeter are popular all year.



Burwash Pavilion and Playing Fields

At the west end of the parish, the Pavilion at Burwash Weald and Common Playing Field is popular for quiz nights, musical evenings, functions, exercise classes and is also the home of Burwash Weald cricket team.

Burwash Community Fire Station serves the surrounding area with a modern pumping appliance crewed by local Retained Firefighters.

Religious services are offered at St Bartholomew's Church, Burwash, and St Philip's, Burwash Weald (Church of England) as well as at the Church of Christ The King (Roman Catholic) in Burwash.

The three villages sit on the A265 which links the A21 trunk road at Hurst Green with Heathfield, about six miles to the west. Local road journeys by residents are mostly undertaken by car and motorbike. The A265 is also heavily used large freight lorries travelling inland from the Channel ports, an unwelcome aspect of traffic congestion on the relatively narrow road through Burwash village.

An infrequent local bus service links the parish with Etchingham station – on the main Southeastern Trains line – and Uckfield. A few cyclists risk the high-speed section of the A265 to travel from Burwash to Etchingham station but more might be tempted to make the journey by the provision of a dedicated cycle track. Southeastern Trains operates regular commuter services to London, Hastings and other local towns.

Two local taxi companies serve the Burwash area.

Employment

Job opportunities are limited within the villages and most working residents travel outside the area for employment. Many Burwash residents use nearby Etchingham station, about three miles from Burwash, to commute to London and elsewhere.

Retailers and pubs in the villages as well as the National Trust provide some jobs while Higher Nature, a manufacturer and seller of nutritional products in Burwash Weald, employs some 15 local people.

An auto repair and service garage on a prime site in Burwash village closed recently. At the time of writing, it is unclear to what use the premises may be put in the future.

Other local employers include local farmers and building companies, the Dudwell St Mary Care Home, Frogheath Landscape Gardeners and Sarah Raven garden centre. Dozens of sole traders and self-employed tradesmen also live in the parish.

Character Appraisal by area

Burwash village – historic centre

Burwash village High Street and School Hill – both within the Conservation Area – make up the historic nucleus of the parish. Both feature distinctive housing – some dating back to the 14th century – alongside sympathetic and more recently built properties. The High Street is characterised by its red brick pavements and is lined with lime trees.



Burwash High Street

The diversity in building styles contributes greatly to the character of Burwash and it is important that this diversity is retained when new development is planned. Future building should respect the distinctive height, scale, spacing, layout, orientation, design and materials of the area in which it is located.

School Hill is a pretty, meandering lane running south from the War Memorial towards the Dudwell valley. Its mixture of traditional cottages and sympathetically-designed newer homes – all backed by open fields – makes it one of the most distinctive areas of the parish.



School Hill, Burwash

The High Street features several Medieval hall houses which have been subdivided into smaller properties over the centuries. The warped roof lines and eccentric wall angles testify to their age and appeal.



The Bear public house, Burwash

Brick pavements along both sides of the High Street are an intrinsic element of the aesthetic of the built environment, adding to the appeal of the village.



Burwash Village High Street

Burwash Village – later additions

Shrub Lane, a narrow road running north from the High Street opposite The Old Police House, to the valley of the River Rother, is an eclectic mixture of solid, attractive Edwardian semi-detached homes, modern bungalows, ancient listed properties, farmhouses and 20th century individually designed detached properties. All enjoy views across open fields or farmland.



Shrub Lane, Burwash

Strand Meadow, Beechwood Close and Hornbeam – which together form the estate known locally as Strand Meadow – are all accessed from Shrub Lane. The houses were built to provide a more affordable option for would-be homebuyers in the 1960s. The development lacks the distinctive appeal of the older part of the village and features uniform brick frontages but it occupies a rural setting with easy access to country paths and open fields to the west. Growing car ownership has resulted in severe competition for parking and there are concerns locally about the ease of access for emergency vehicles.



Hornbeam, Burwash



Strand Meadow, Burwash

Burwash Common

Burwash Common and Burwash Weald are small linked villages adjacent to the busy A265 trunk road about 2 miles west of Burwash.

Most of the houses in Burwash Common are found in largely linear developments along Vicarage Road – which runs parallel to the A265 - Vicarage Lane and Westdown Lane, which are set back from the trunk road. The area is small and relatively densely developed but it is quiet and retains a very rural feel, backed by the open fields and woodland of the Dudwell valley. The uneven lanes are characterised by mature hedges and trees. Many of the homes enjoy wide panoramas to the north over the High Weald. The Burwash Common Pavilion and the Burwash Weald and Common Memorial Fund Playing Field to the north is home to a thriving cricket club.

Building styles range from a former Georgian vicarage and Victorian cottages with slate roofs or weatherboarded fronts to converted oast houses, 1970s bungalows and modern chalet-style refurbishments. Building materials vary but previous developers have avoided any jarring intrusions into the neighbourhood.



The Old Vicarage, Burwash Common



Home refurbishment on Vicarage Road, Burwash Common



Dormer bungalow in Vicarage Road, Burwash Common



Modern bungalow, Burwash Common

Burwash Weald

Burwash Weald is a predominantly linear settlement along the A265 characterised by a mixture of housing styles. Historically, housing was clustered close to The Wheel public house, which was built around 1760 and is situated on the A265 opposite the junction with Willingford Lane. There is a scattering of early and late Victorian cottages and houses, some with old English bond brickwork and traditional Kent tile roofs. Along the main road west from The Wheel, most of the development is along the north side of the road and comprises old weatherboarded cottages, modern infill bungalows and some recent new builds mimicking traditional styles. Burwash Weald is a compact settlement which boasts no public open space like Burwash and Burwash Common but is surrounded by open farmland and woods criss-crossed with ancient pathways. Many houses have views to the south towards Brightling Beacon, Bateman's and Forestry Commission plantations.



St. Phillip's Church, Burwash Weald, built 1867



View towards Burwash Weald from Burwash Common and Weald Playing Field



Larger detached house, Burwash Weald



New development, Burwash Weald