

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

XVII HIGHDOWN

Location and Topography

Highdown is a south-facing hill-top site. It lies on the western edge of the Borough on the north side of the Littlehampton Road (A259). The designated area encompassed the house and gardens then stretches down the hill to include the quarter of a mile long drive and the two entrance lodges beside the A259. The surrounding area is undeveloped, allowing uninterrupted views in and out.

Origins and Development

Highdown Hill is the site of a prehistoric hill-fort and Saxon cemetery; these lie north-west of the conservation area, on higher ground. The house, "Highdown", is believed to have been built circa 1820, with the Lodge Houses added in 1860. Sir Frederick and Lady Stern lived in the house from 1909 and worked for 50 years to construct Britain's first large-scale chalk garden on the land north and west of the house. Sir Frederick was an amateur scientist and botanist and the garden was designed with the help of Sir Arthur Hill, sometime director of Kew Gardens.

Building Materials

Highdown is built of irregularly shaped, 50-100 mm wide, knapped flint with yellowish brown stone dressings (the northern extension imitates the stone using cement render over brick). The chimney stacks and the south elevation of the south tower are unpainted pebble-dash. The windows have stone (or stone-effect) mullions with black-painted metal framing in small (100 mm approx.) squares. The doors are modern, both metal and timber. The roofs are of grey slate. The tearoom and the building behind it are built of smaller, more regularly-shaped, flint pebbles in even courses. Their dressings are a mixture of red brick, brown render and orange-brown stone. The tearoom's roof is slate, the other is plain red clay tile.

Architectural and Landscape Qualities

The house has several wings, each with a slightly different roof height (between two and three storeys). Except for the roof of the tower, which is crenellated, all the roofs are gabled and there are flint-gabled dormers. At one and a half storeys the tearoom and the building behind it to the west, have roofs that echo the gabling of the main building. The variation in roof height and shape and the asymmetrically disposed chimneys give the buildings a fascinating roofscape.

The modern flat-roofed extension to the south-east has been fairly well integrated and the building maintains its attractive massing. From the Littlehampton Road, the most visible feature is the south tower which, curiously, presents the only pebble-dashed elevation.

Roads and Surfaces

The drive and the car park around the house are surfaced with tarmac. The surface is extremely patchy in the car park and road markings in worn yellow and white paint. The area in front of the tearooms is paved with modern bricks.

Greenery and Open Space

The garden is registered (II*) in the national Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest. As such it is recognised as being of national importance and is considered by English Heritage to be outstanding. Mature trees, both in the garden and around the edge of the car park, provide dappled shade and screen the house from most angles. On approach, the house is not visible until the top of the drive is reached and from the A259 and Titnore Lane, the house can only be glimpsed through the trees. In spring, thick drifts of daffodils line both sides of the drive.

Enhancement Opportunities

The House

- Screen with creepers the blocked windows of Mansion Houses north-facing canted bay and replace the PVCu windows below with traditional fenestration.
- Paint the bare metal doors on the south side of the building.
- Clear the ivy from the gutters and rationalise the rainwater goods, particularly on the northern elevation.
- Clear some of the ivy from the western elevation to check for damage to pointing. Full-scale removal may be necessary. Window openings should be freed of encroaching creepers.
- Repair the spalling mullions of the ground floor window of the south elevation of the south tower, Attend to the other windows before they start to break up.
- Repair the cement render which has flaked off to reveal the stock brick dressings of the southern extension's south elevation.
- Rationalise the lighting arrangements. There is an unsightly cluster of lights and security cameras at the south west corner of the building and there are no fewer than 5 lights attached to the east end of the north elevation, with substantial quantities of wiring visible.
- Resite the television aerials so that they do not interrupt the skyline.

Tearooms

- Repaint the door and windows

Car Park, Drive etc

- Remove the last traces of the white lines in the car park; if lines really are necessary, mark them out in a dark colour (eg green or red-brown). The KEEP CLEAR AT ALL TIMES road-marking to the north of the house could, perhaps be replaced with a discreet physical barrier.
- Replace the bare metal subway barriers to the east of Mansion House with wooden barriers or paint them (eg green) and screen them with plants.
- Remove the overhead lines to the north of Mansion House
- Replace the non-members' entrance to the night-club with a specially designed structure, or screen the existing concrete and canvas tunnel with shrubs. Also, screen the area which contains the waste service bin and used crates.
- Sow fresh grass over the bare area of the southern verge that stretches from night-club entrance to the house. Position flower tubs or shrubbery in front of grass to deter further wear.
- Replace the concrete bollards along the road with wooden stakes of the type used lower down the slope of black bollards of the type used higher up.
- Paint or remove the height restriction bar at the exit of the east car park.
- Provide pooper and litter bins of special design. Remove existing red bins.
- Complete the wooden screen so that it completely surrounds the air-conditioning unit.
- Replace the signs on the Littlehampton Road with specially designed name plates. The empty swing-sign beside East Lodge should be filled or removed.
- Clean the graffiti from the south elevation for West Lodge.



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