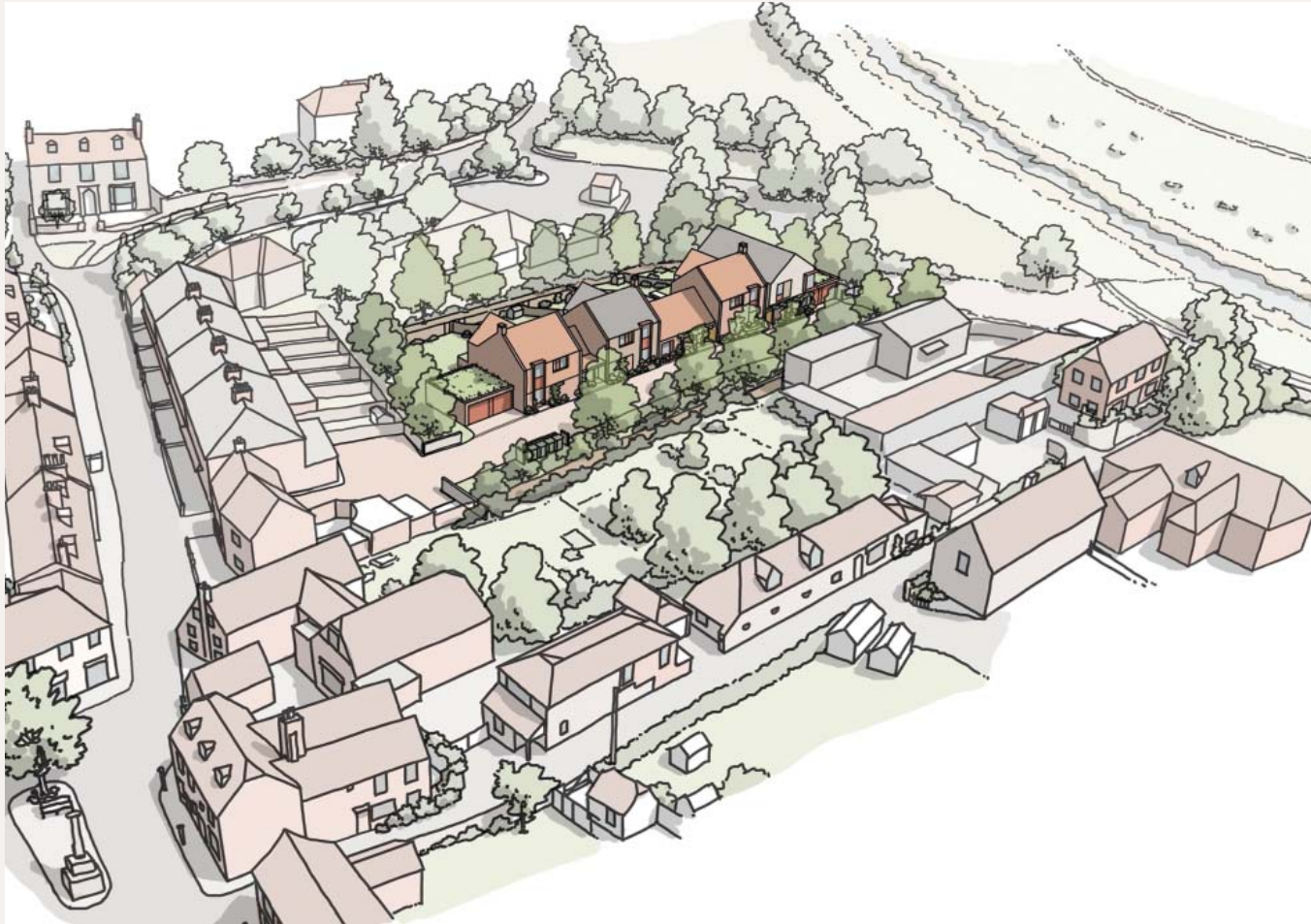


Former Allotments

NORTH STREET · ALFRISTON · EAST SUSSEX · BN25 5UF



IAN WIGHTMAN
HISTORIC BUILDING CONSULTANTS

Heritage and Setting Assessment

Client: Domusea Developments

Project: development of 4 no. 3-bed
houses and 1 no. 1-bed house.

Date: May 2024

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1 INTRODUCTION

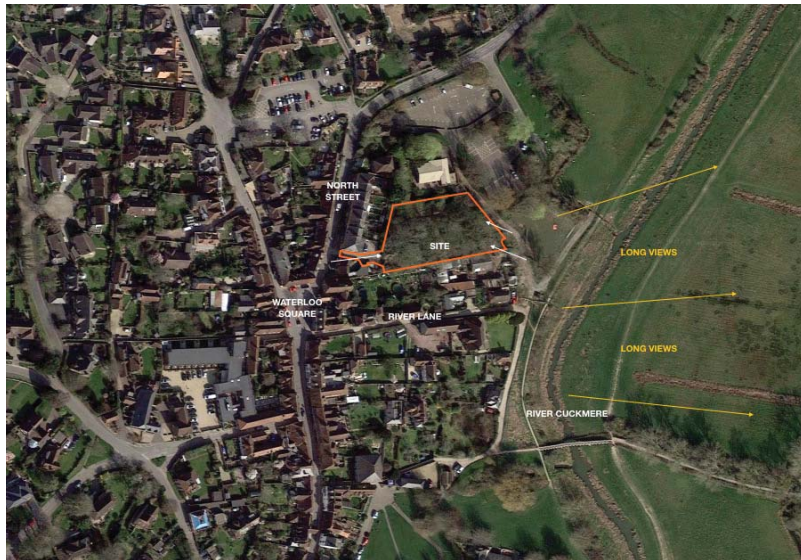
- 1.1 This Heritage Statement has been prepared to inform a planning application submitted to the South Downs National Park Authority on behalf of Domusea Developments.
- 1.2 The proposals seek to develop a former allotment site to provide 5 no dwellings within the heart of Alfriston village. The site was allocated through the South Downs Local Plan allocation policy SD58. The policy restricts the development to 10 dwellings, however only 5 are being proposed.
- 1.3 An initial scheme was proposed through a pre-application enquiry (SDNP/23/04349/PRE) with helpful advice being provided by the park's design and conservation officers. These comments, and others, have been incorporated into the design approach to make sure that the scheme is landscape led and sympathetic with the local character of the village.
- 1.4 The site is within Alfriston Conservation Area and the South Downs National Park.



Aerial view of Alfriston village with the location of the site highlighted. ©Google

2 DESCRIPTION OF THE SITE AND ITS SETTING

- 2.1 Alfriston is a medieval village situated within the Cuckmere valley in East Sussex where the River Cuckmere flows south into the English Channel. The Downland rises steeply to the east and west of the village.
- 2.2 The historic village is oriented north to south with a triangular core known as Waterloo Square, which was the former ancient marketplace. This is accessed via two roads from the north with the right of these, North Street, leading to the river crossing-point at Longbridge and the Weald. To the south of the Square is the High Street and to the west, West Street, which once provided the historic route to Lewes. The Square remains the commercial centre of the village.
- 2.3 The River Cuckmere is situated on the village's eastern side and winds its way south along the valley towards the coast.



- 2.4 The historic streets are lined by a fine grain of historic buildings that are largely two storey, though also includes 2.5 and 3 storey structures. These are all a similar scale with some of the older timber-framed buildings tending to form focal points due to their construction and size. The historic character of the village centre is very strong with a high retention of buildings mainly from the 15th to the 19th centuries, though with some earlier.
- 2.5 These buildings provide an excellent sample of local building styles and materials which includes render, weatherboarding, hanging tile, timber frame, flintwork and brickwork in various designs and styles.



Views of the village from Waterloo Square, the site of the former medieval marketplace.

- 2.6 The tight grain of buildings creates narrow streets and lanes, but also confined views with lots of visual interest in the form of different building characters. This contrasts strongly with long views to the east which open up at the end of River Lane and along the river path which leads towards the church in the south.
- 2.7 The proposed development site occupies a green space within the centre of the village and abuts some dilapidated farm buildings situated to the south behind River Lane. This is located to the east of the old market area and North Street where it backs on to a terrace of Edwardian cottages. The site is visible from a gap in North Street as well as from the public footpath (mentioned above) which runs north to south along the east flank of the site and has long views eastwards over the river to the downs.



Edwardian cottages along North Street and view through to the site from North Street.

- 2.8 River Lane runs east-west from the old commercial centre down to the river. This consists of a tight grain of buildings of various (but limited) height and design, constructed predominantly in brick and flint, though also exhibiting hanging tile and weatherboarding. Openings provide some permeability between the buildings and offers some glimpses of the site from the south.
- 2.9 Overall, the site has a strong feeling of being within a back land setting which functions as a verdant buffer between the tight grain of the village centre and the open fields beyond to the east. This is important visually but also maintains the legibility of both the village core and the rural area beyond.
- 2.10 The area is currently overgrown with small trees and vegetation which has reduced any visual permeability through the site.





Views of River Lane from the west and east.



Views into the site which are currently hampered by over-grown vegetation.

3 HISTORIC CONTEXT

- 3.1 The name *Alfriston* is believed to originate from ‘Aelfric’ and ‘Tun’ which in Old English meant Aelfric’s Farm. The term *Tun* is common in Sussex and is understood to have contributed to at least 66 parish names.¹
- 3.2 The village of Alfriston is recorded within the Domesday Book where two entries tell us that the settlement had a population of only nine households in 1086. This placed it in the bottom 40% of settlements in Sussex with two villagers and seven smallholders.
- 3.3 Despite its modest origins, the village grew with the Abbots of Battle being influential in the acquisition of land and farming in the area and the subsequent development of the village. At least five weavers are recorded in the 13th century and in the 14th century the construction of the church and the Clergy House; a Wealden house originally constructed as a farmhouse and the first building bought by the National Trust in 1896. Both are situated on *the Tye*; the village green, which sits to the west of the River Cuckmere. The Star Inn located within the village was originally constructed to house monks and pilgrims in the mid 14th century, though became an Inn in the 16th century.
- 3.4 The village’s prominence as a market town is evidenced in 1406 by the grant of a weekly market and two annual fairs. At this time the population of circa 200 lived in approximately 40 tenements around the market cross and included weavers, bakers, brewers, butchers, tanners, glove makers and by 1450 shoemakers and 1470, ‘tawyers’ – makers of white leather.²
- 3.5 There is evidence that clothmaking was a significant industry in Alfriston in the 16th century though had declined by the end of the century. By the mid-17th century a malthouse of some size was constructed adjacent to the Tye to increase brewing, whilst the local Inns were making their trade as a stopover between the towns of Lewes and Eastbourne. By the mid-18th century brewing had become a significant industry with five maltings and a brewhouse.³
- 3.6 As well as the Star Inn, two other inns located to the south of Waterloo Square, the George Inn and the Ship Inn date from the 15th century, with the latter being described by Pevsner as *one of the best timber-framed buildings in East Sussex*.
- 3.7 According to the *Extensive Urban Survey of Alfriston* (2008) the population had risen from c.118 in 1524 to 185 by 1676, 239 in 1724 and 576 by 1801, though these figures are approximate due to their varied scope and sources. The population increased to 694 in 1831 though declined by 1901; the rise being attributed to the wars against France in the late 18th and early 19th centuries which saw many troops being brought into the area. This proved of great benefit to both the leather and brewing industries in the town.⁴
- 3.8 The decline occurred following the battle of Waterloo with the brickworks, brewery and tannery all closing by 1843. The village at this time however retained many smaller traders such as carpenters, bricklayers, shoemakers, glovers, a straw-hat maker and a milliner.⁵

1 Harris, B., *Alfriston: Historic Character Assessment Report, Sussex Extensive Urban Survey* (2008), p.12

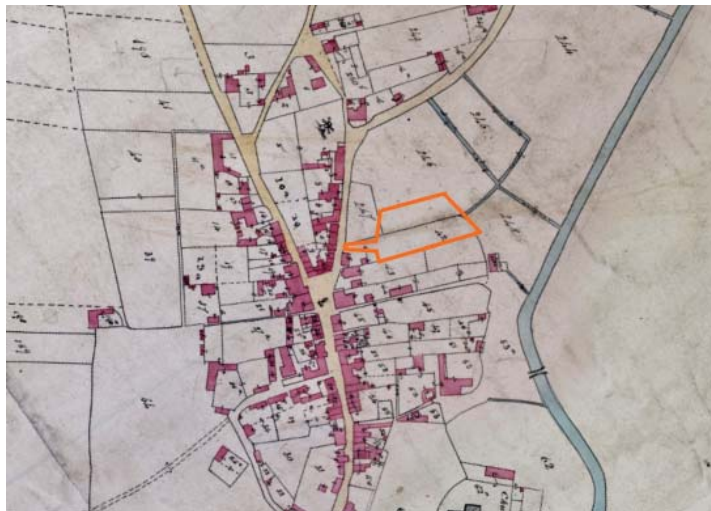
2 Ibid.; p.13.

3 Ibid.; p.13/14.

4 Ibid.; p.14.

5 Ibid., p.15.

- 3.9 The date of 1843 also coincides with the production of the Tithe map for Alfriston. Tithe maps capture what we would consider today to be the historic core of a settlement and are often used as the basis for conservation area designation.
- 3.10 As can be seen on the map above, development broadly aligns with the main road and lanes with the proposed site area (highlighted) made up of fields. Field 42 was arable and owned and worked by George Woodham whilst field 246 to the north, known as *Captain's Field*, was meadow and owned by Thomas Sharn Carter and leased to a Peter Pagden.
- 3.11 By the time of the First Edition OS map of 1878 which was surveyed in 1874, the fields were no longer in agricultural use and had become gardens, or 'allotments'. As shown above this is denoted by the diagonal hatching and covers all the area to the east of North Street.



- 3.12 Allotments as we know them today, originated from the need to provide the labouring poor with the means to grow their own produce. This started in the early to mid-19th century during the period of industrialisation when many people were moving to the towns and cities for work and populations such as those in Alfriston, were in decline.
- 3.13 By 1908 the area adjacent to North Street had been redeveloped with a new terrace now aligning the road. The remaining land continued as allotments with the only other significant development occurring at the north of the site.
- 3.14 In the early 20th century housing was developed to the west of the village with subsequent building resulting in dense suburbs that are quite different in character to the historic core. Any potential for development to the east was hugely limited by the river and flood plain.
- 3.15 In recent years the former allotment site has become overgrown with small trees and shrubs.



Left: The Tithe Map of Alfriston of 1843 with the site highlighted. (ESRO)

Right: The OS map of 1878 now showing the land use as gardens with the proposed site highlighted. Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

4 CONSERVATION AREA

- 4.1 Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 stipulates that local planning authorities have a duty to ‘*determine which parts of their area are areas of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance*’.⁶
- 4.2 Alfriston Conservation Area was designated by East Sussex County Council in 1969 and was reviewed by Wealden District Council in 1999. Following the creation of the South Downs National Park in April 2011, the conservation was appraised in 2013 and the *Alfriston Conservation Area Appraisal* published in March 2014.
- 4.3 As mentioned above, the conservation area is founded on the area as described at the time of the Tithe Map in 1843. This excludes the modern development to the west with the historic core seeing limited change.
- 4.4 The 2014 appraisal also borrows from research undertaken in 2008 for the *Extensive Urban Survey* (EUS). This concurs with the five character areas defined by the EUS and includes:
- The Market Square
 - High Street
 - The Tye
 - Sloe Lane
 - The riverside
- 4.5 The Market Square includes a small area to the north of the square and burgage plots to the east and west of the square

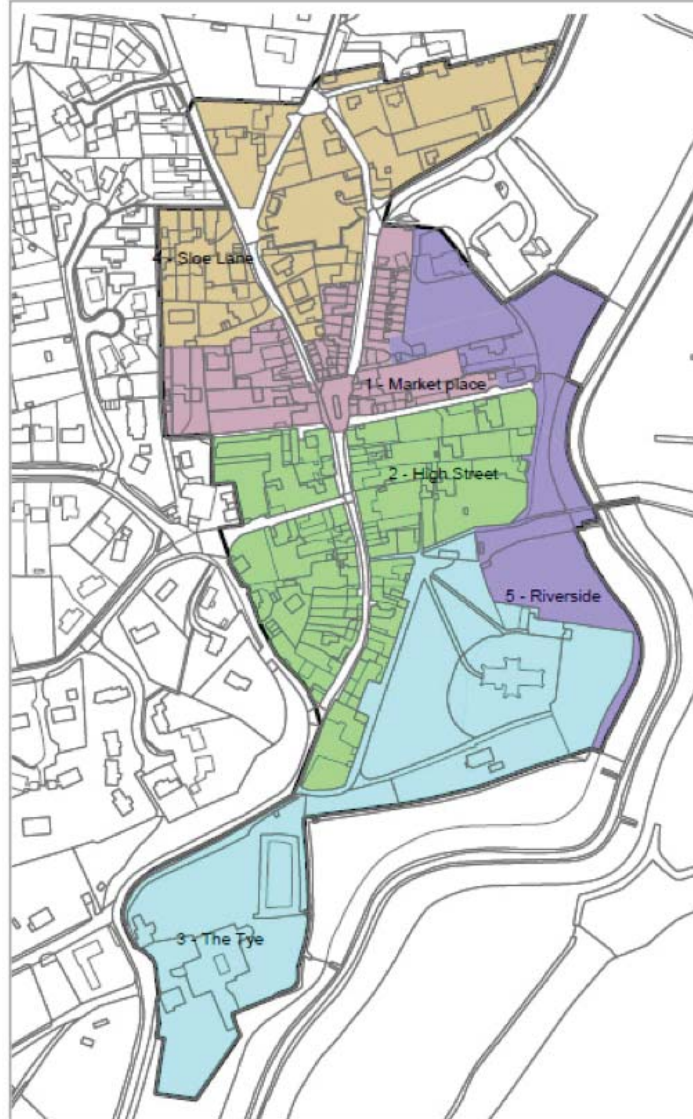
⁶ Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990; < <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/9/section/69> > [accessed 14 January 2021].

believed to have developed in the period 1350–1499, with additions to the north and west arising in the 17th and 18th centuries. The development here is tightly grained with narrow inward-looking streets.

- 4.6 The High Street also includes burgage plots created either side of the street and dating to the late 14th century, with later irregular development to the south. The High Street maintains a tight grain however also includes the Inns which are generally larger.
- 4.7 The Tye character area largely reflects the open space to the southeast of the village which includes the church, the Old Clergy House and Deans Place Hotel. Unlike the previous character areas, the built environment here is seen against longer views and the context of the Downs.
- 4.8 The Sloe Lane character area represents development from the 18th century onwards and includes larger irregular plots with a looser grain as you leave the historic core.
- 4.9 The Riverside character area denotes the area to the east of the town and includes the wharf and corresponding industrial space which developed from the 18th century. This area goes as far as the former school which was built immediately to the north of the church. The allotments and proposed site are located within this character area to the north.
- 4.10 As the appraisal highlights, Alfriston Conservation Area is of high quality and ‘performing well’ with its buildings generally well-maintained. The historic core has not experienced any major change and the constraints imposed by existing historic development and the immediate landscape to the east, have helped the village to maintain its historic setting.



Alfriston Conservation Area with listed buildings in red and positive buildings in blue. Yellow lines denote historic boundaries and green areas important open spaces. © SDNPA



Character Areas established by the *Extensive Urban Survey* and employed by the SDNPA to define Alfriston Conservation Area. © EUS research and mapping: Harris (2008).

4.11 As mentioned, the conservation area also benefits from many examples of different building types and styles with a strong sense of the vernacular running through them. This contributes to the village's architectural interest but also grounds it in local distinctiveness and character.



The Clergy House, a fine example of a Wealden Hall House.

4.12 There are also many fine examples of different building methods. In timber frame there is the Clergy House which is a Wealden House and the Star and George Inns, all of which use close timber studding.



The church is the most prominent building to use flint, of which there are many examples.



4.13 Flintwork is found throughout the village and especially in its boundary walls and of course the church. Brick also predominates and there are many examples from different periods, including red and grey bricks laid in Flemish bond. Brick is also used with flint in elevations to create dressings around windows and quoining, but also mixed with flint.



4.14 There are also examples of render, painted brickwork, weatherboarding and hanging clay tile which add to the village's variety of materials and character. Pebbles are also found in walls and cobbled paths reminding us of its proximity to the coast.



Examples of brick buildings which range from polite dwellings to the distinctly vernacular.





Examples of brick and flint including cobbles and brick used in pathways.



4.15 The conservation area appraisal does not appear to have identified negative built features as such, perhaps because there are very few, or perhaps too few to make a material difference. One negative feature which is a key consideration is traffic management with the roads being very tight with pinch points that can result in damage to buildings and of course risk to health.

4.16 It also has not identified important views of which there would be many along principal streets and across open spaces towards the church and clergy House for example. Within the village these would be generally enclosed and inward looking with roads and lanes acting as narrow corridors. The exception being the market square.

4.17 The appraisal does however have a 'Management Plan', amongst which is advice on *change*. Of relevance here is paragraph 6.3 which states that:

All works should be conceived with specific regard to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Any intervention should echo and reinforce those characteristics of the buildings, townscape and public realm of Alfriston which make a positive contribution to the village and its local distinctiveness.

5 SIGNIFICANCE

5.1 Within heritage protection, *significance* is a term applied to heritage assets that describes a structure or feature's special interest. *The National Planning Policy Framework* describes significance as:

'The value of a heritage asset to this and future generations because of its heritage interest. The interest may be archaeological, architectural, artistic or historic. Significance derives not only from a heritage asset's physical presence, but also from its setting.'

5.2 Historic England's Advice Note 12 – 'Statements of Heritage Significance: Analysing Significance in Heritage Assets' (2019), describes these different interests as follows:

5.3 **Archaeological interest:** *There will be archaeological interest in a heritage asset if it holds, or potentially holds, evidence of past human activity worthy of expert investigation at some point.*

5.4 **Architectural and artistic interest:** *These are interests in the design and general aesthetics of a place. They can arise from conscious design or fortuitously from the way the heritage asset has evolved. More specifically, architectural interest is an interest in the art or science of the design, construction, craftsmanship and decoration of buildings and structures of all types. Artistic interest is an interest in other human creative skills, like sculpture.*

5.5 **Historic interest:** *An interest in past lives and events (including pre-historic). Heritage assets can illustrate or be associated with them. Heritage assets with historic interest not only provide a material record of our nation's history, but can also provide meaning for communities derived from their collective experience of a place and can symbolise wider values such as faith and cultural identity.*

ASSESSMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 5.6 The site is within a former allotment which as we have seen above, became a garden by the late 19th century, having previously been fields. The site itself is not a heritage asset, however is within the conservation area and thus has the potential to impact its character and special interest.
- 5.7 *The Alfriston Conservation Area Character Appraisal* does not identify the area as being of special importance which is

reserved for the open space around the church, however does suggest that green spaces 'should normally be retained'.

- 5.8 *The Extensive Urban Survey* has sought to apply 'Historic Environment Value' to the five character areas and applies a traffic light system with the High Street character area being considered of the highest value (red). The Riverside character area which includes the proposed site is the lowest (green).



Alfriston with listed buildings, the conservation area and proposed site highlighted.
© Google

SOUTH DOWNS NATIONAL PARK

- 5.9 The site is within Alfriston Conservation Area and within the South Downs National Park. The first purpose of the South Downs National Park is ‘to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area.’
- 5.10 The principle of developing the site has been established through the South Downs Local Plan allocation policy SD58. Policy SD58 allocates the site for development of between 5 and 10 residential dwellings (Class C3 Use). One of the key requirements is that the proposal conserves and enhances the form and fabric of the Alfriston Conservation Area and preserves the setting of local heritage assets.

NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY

- 5.11 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government’s policy for the Historic Environment. It states that any harm to, or loss of the significance of a designated heritage asset (from its alteration or destruction or from development within its setting), should require clear and convincing justification (para 206).
- 5.12 In assessing applications, the NPPF also stipulates that great weight should be given to the asset’s conservation (and the more important the asset the greater the weight should be) (para 205).
- 5.13 It goes onto to state that where a proposed development will result in ‘substantial harm’ to a designated heritage asset, local planning authorities should refuse consent (para 207) and where the harm will lead to ‘less than substantial harm’ to the significance of a designated heritage asset, this harm should be weighed against the public benefits of the proposal including where appropriate, securing its optimum viable use.
- 5.14 The vast majority of harmful impacts to designated heritage assets constitute ‘less than substantial harm’ and are often subject to a further grading which seeks to identify the extent of harm within a spectrum of ‘high to low’ with justification applied accordingly.
- 5.15 Where proposals may affect a *non-designated heritage asset*, paragraph 209 of the Framework states that ‘a balanced judgement will be required having regard to the scale of any harm or loss and the significance of the heritage asset.’

6 PROPOSED SCHEME AND IMPACTS

PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE

6.1 The site has been subject to pre-application advice (SDNP/23/04349/PRE) from officers of the South Downs National Park Authority. The key outcomes relating to heritage issues are as follows:

- The principle of a terrace is supported on the basis of River Lane
- The new lane should be narrow to correspond with the existing street pattern
- The building line should be closer to the lane as per historic precedents
- Traditional and contemporary architectural approaches are supported
- Architecture must be rooted in its context and positively contribute to the CA
- The scale and mass of building is acceptable however ridgelines should be broken
- Buildings need to be modest and display a variety of form
- Choice of materials is key to rooting the development in the place
- Car access and parking is potentially problematic

6.2 The current proposal has sought to respond positively to these requirements.



The tithe map on which Alfriston Conservation is based, with the new lane shown against the existing road pattern of the time.

CURRENT PROPOSAL

- 6.3 Following on from the pre-application enquiry, the proposal maintains the idea of a new lane which links North Street to the footpath and river to the east of the site. This corresponds with the pattern of historic development which is captured on the tithe map and provides the basis of the conservation area.
- 6.4 The development itself employs a *broken* terrace to avoid continuous ridge lines and formality with buildings lined tight up along the new lane. This reflects the character and nature of River Lane which acts as a guide to this approach.
- 6.5 The design includes small, double and single storey buildings of varying forms and materials that maintain visual interest as well as reflect local distinctiveness. These are brought together in a contemporary idiom that ties the various influences and references together.
- 6.6 The scheme is thus an architectural response which juxtaposes form and materials in a manner that reminds us of the more ad-hoc approach often found in agricultural and garden buildings. This includes the mixed use of brick, timber and metal.
- 6.7 Brick is the predominant material as it is within the village and underpins the fabric of the place. In the same way that different bonds can be found, such as Flemish and English bond, so the brickwork here is varied to continue and expand on the area's brick traditions. This is achieved by creating perforated and textured finishes which reference Flemish precedents, as well as vertical bonds that highlight the versatility of the material.



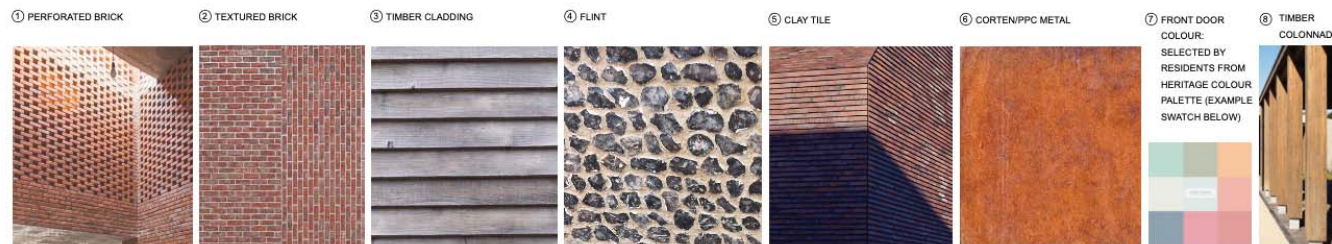
- 6.8 Timber weatherboarding is employed in a more conventional manner that helps to soften the development but also references fabric found in a number of buildings in Alfriston and the surrounding area.
- 6.9 Flint is the other main construction material which in the village is on a par with brick and is found in numerous buildings and boundary walls. This will be constructed using the traditional manner to provide the best quality finish.

Plan of the development with buildings set tightly against the lane.



Proposed front elevations which will be revealed as you walk along the lane.

KEY

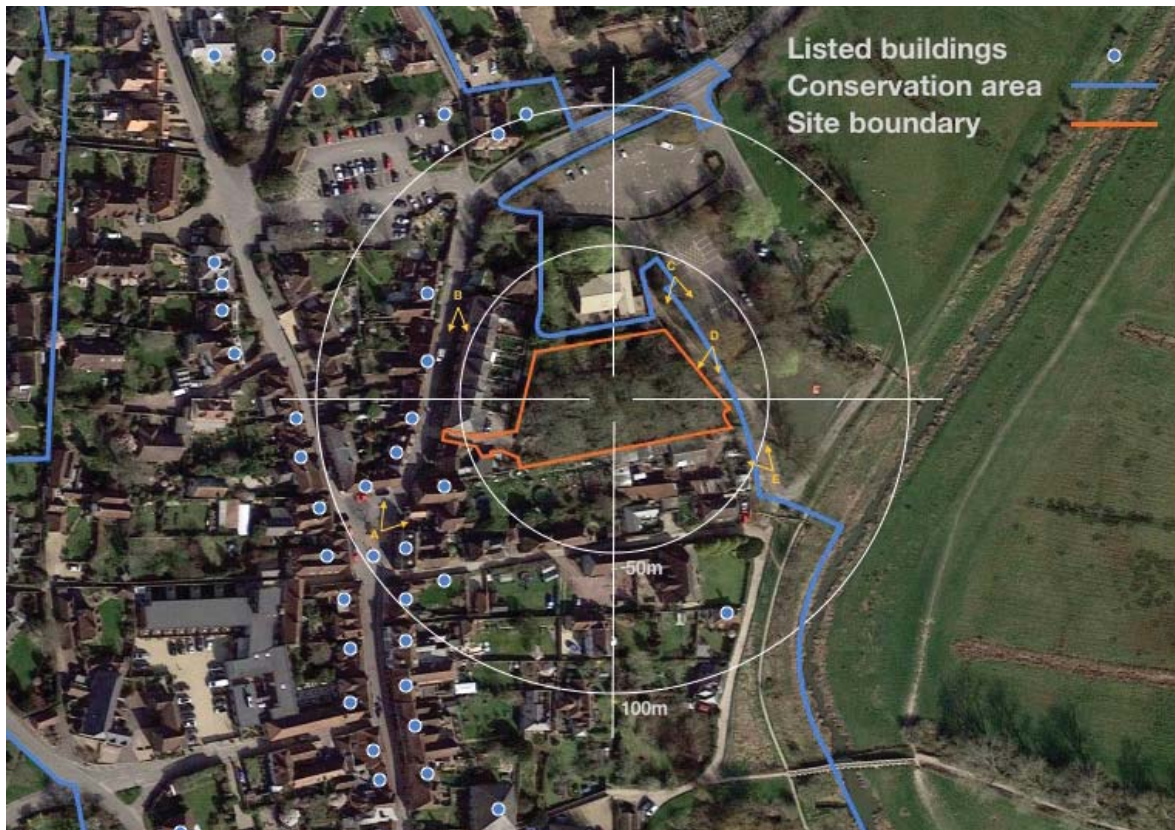


- 6.10 The vernacular wall finishes will be complemented by a conventional clay tile roofing as one would inspect in this location, though one building will employ slate to help break up the scheme and maintain visual interest. The flat roofs of the garages will help the scheme to remain low level and reduce bulk and massing.
- 6.11 Whilst the brick finishes and manner in which the various materials are brought together will be contemporary in its approach, the fenestration using glass and corten steel will underpin the design approach creating large apertures within the building envelope without requiring large amounts of glass which would alter the character of the scheme as well as contribute to unnecessary light spill within the Dark Sky Reserve.

- 6.12 The use of metal references the agricultural aesthetic but is also symbolic of the broader National Park which employs corten steel in its own signage to remind us of the importance of the former iron industry in the region.
- 6.13 The enclosed spatial quality of the lane created by the closeness of the building frontages makes for a more intimate appreciation of the buildings, their colours and textures, which will reveal themselves as you move through the lane.
- 6.14 This close appreciation of the building's fabric is carried into the floor surfaces where brick and tiles are used to maintain the brick and terracotta palette which informs much of the village. This will include an enhancement of the existing passage from North Street into the site.

6.15 **Impacts:** the proposed scheme is located in an area which has, as far as we know, always been a green space. Firstly, as fields and then allotment gardens from the mid-late 19th century. In more recent years the land has become overgrown with vegetation and trees which has maintained the verdant nature of the site and provided a green background to buildings in North Street, River Lane and views from the river back towards the village.

- 6.16 Due to the tight grain of buildings within the village core the proposed scheme only will be visible through gaps, such as the access from North Street, though these will be limited and will be mitigated with new planting.
- 6.17 The design however will not reflect the more formal arrangement of buildings on the main roads and thus will remain subservient to them. The Edwardian terrace on North Street which represents a more urban approach, will largely conceal the development to the west which is located behind it.



The site within the conservation area with the viewpoints shown in yellow.

© Google

- 6.18 Viewed from the footpath to the east, the scheme will be more visible, though raised with new trees providing cover and helping to maintain a sense of green space. New tree planting will continue around the site boundary and soften what are primarily private views from the north.
- 6.19 A full setting assessment has not been undertaken here, however the contained nature of the site is shown in the assessment below. This shows five views at various locations around the proposed site and provides a sense of its concealment.



View A from Waterloo Square looking north towards the site entrance.



View B looking south down North Street with the site concealed behind the (left) terrace.



View C looking south from the visitor's car park to the north east of the site.



View D looking towards the site from the pedestrian entrance of the car park.



View E looking north towards the site from the footpath at the end of River Lane.

7 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The former allotment site in Alfriston was undeveloped prior to the late 19th century when it was formerly fields and then allotment gardens. The terrace facing onto North Street was the first encroachment with the remaining land left undeveloped until the present day.
- 7.2 The allocation of this area for development by the SDNPA will result in part of the site to the south being developed for housing, though the remaining space will be garden with new planting on its boundaries to help maintain the verdant quality of this area.
- 7.3 The site is hugely sensitive, being located in a village which exhibits a wealth and variety of building types and styles over several hundred years. The historic village and conservation area appear to be well looked after, though its attractiveness as a place, does present its own problems in terms of traffic movement.
- 7.4 As discussed above, the site is relatively well concealed, though more visible from the east. Where the design can be viewed however, it seeks to reflect the nature of the place both in design and materials and add a 21st century layer to Alfriston's rich building heritage.
- 7.5 The fragmented nature of the scheme, both in material and form, provides an architectural approach that reflects the informality of the site as a 'back land' location and thus corresponds strongly with its sense of place.
- 7.6 The materials have been carefully chosen to ground the development in the local landscape character, to give it a sense of belonging. Brick and flint will underpin this approach in the same way it forms the basis of the village. The quality of this work will be one of the keys to its success, as it will be viewed closely from the lane. The buildings will thus reveal themselves along the lane rather than being viewed as a whole group.
- 7.7 The use of flint is important as a vernacular building material, but also vital to support traditional building crafts so that historic structures in the South Downs can be maintained with the appropriate skills.
- 7.8 Whilst there are many listed buildings nearby, the intervisibility of these with the site is extremely limited as viewed from the village core. The terrace and houses to the west are a major screen in this respect as are the historic buildings which address Waterloo Square. The only potential way they are intervisible is immediately from the access in North Street.
- 7.9 The development of the allotment site does however represent a degree of harm to the conservation area as most of the area here has remained undeveloped and is considered a green space. The conservation area character appraisal recommends retention of such spaces.
- 7.10 The allocation of the site by the SDNPA, has no doubt accepted this change in its decision making and recognises the potential for harm. The insistence that the development should be landscape-led and best reflects the qualities of the conservation area thus has greater weight in these circumstances as the approach also offers a form of mitigation to the loss of the green space.

- 7.11 Where harm is perceived, the level of this is likely to be considered *less than substantial harm* in accordance with the NPPF. Following the pre-application enquiry and corresponding design amendments, we feel that the level of harm is considered to be lower within the spectrum and it is against this level that the public benefit test should be made.
- 7.12 This aside, the scheme does have the potential to provide a new and positive layer to Alfriston's built heritage, that will complement the existing historic environment but also contribute to the conservation area and the South Downs National Park. We certainly believe that the proposal will *'echo and reinforce those characteristics of the buildings, townscape and public realm of Alfriston which make a positive contribution to the village and its local distinctiveness.'*