

Conservation Area Character Appraisal
and Management Plan

Highdown

May 2020



Summary of Significance

The designation of Highdown as a Conservation Area was a formal recognition that the area has a special architectural or historic interest, which should be retained and improved.

The gardens are the main source of that significance. They have been described by Historic England as “an early to mid C20 plantsman’s garden, created and developed in and around a former chalk pit by Sir Frederick and Lady Sybil Stern” and appear as a Grade II* entry on the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens.

The garden is designated as a National Plant Collection, in this instance of the Plant Introductions of Sir Frederick Stern, and is one of, if not the, foremost chalk gardens.

Although none of the few buildings within the Conservation Area are listed, they do make their own contribution to the special architectural or interest of the Conservation Area.

The Sterns' House is the most important building within the Conservation Area. It is a Free Tudor house with a squat stuccoed central tower and lower flint wings. Its origins lie in the first half of the 19th century but has seen a number of extensions and alterations over the years.

During the Sterns' residence, the house was a meeting place for high society and the world of horticulture and plantsmanship.

Other buildings include the two lodges and the butler's and carriage house.

Introduction

1.1 Conservation Areas are defined as “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance” (Section 69 (1) (a) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990).

1.2 The South Downs National Park Authority has a duty to determine which parts of the Park have that special architectural or historic interest, to designate those parts as Conservation Areas, and to keep the Conservation Area under review.

1.3 Highdown was first designated as a Conservation Area by Worthing Borough Council in 1984. With the creation of the South Downs National Park in April 2011, the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) became the Local Planning Authority for the Conservation Area..

1.4 This Appraisal seeks to set out what the Local Planning Authority considers are the most significant elements which define the character of the Conservation Area. It has an important role in making informed and sustainable decisions about the future of the area. Whilst comprehensiveness may be sought, however, the omission of any particular feature should not be taken as meaning that it is of no significance.

1.5 It sits within a wider policy context comprising:

- The Purposes and Duty of the South Downs National Park.
- The National Planning Policy Framework.
- The South Downs National Park Local Plan.
- English National Parks and the Broads. UK Government Vision and Circular 2010.

1.6 In looking at the area, issues which pose a threat to the quality of the area and any possibilities for improvement and enhancement have also been identified.

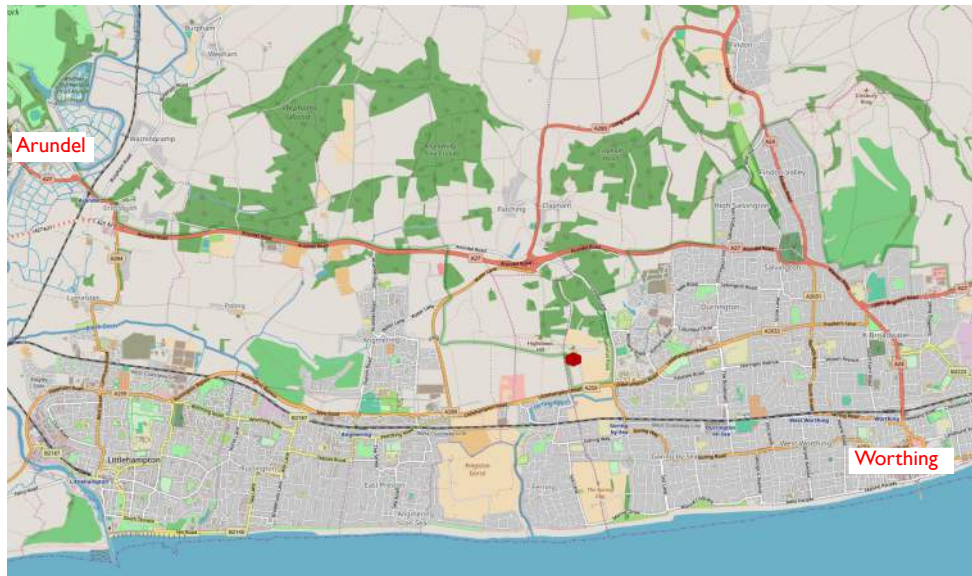
1.7 A consultation period of six weeks ran from 17 February 2020 to 30

March 2020, with the document posted on the National Park Authority's website. Consultations were also sent directly to residents of the Conservation Area, Worthing Borough Council, West Sussex County Council, The Worthing Society, and the Sussex Gardens Trust.

1.8 All comments received were considered and the draft document amended as appropriate. It was adopted for the purposes of development management and to inform the SDNPA's other activities on 26 May 2020.

Landscape Setting

2.1 Highdown Conservation Area is located just to the north of the A259 between Angmering and Worthing on the southern, dip slope of the South Downs, at about 150 feet above sea level. The red polygon on the map below shows its location in relation to Worthing and Arundel.



2.2 The designated area encompasses the house and gardens, then stretches down the hill to include the quarter of a mile long drive and two entrance lodges. The boundaries of the Conservation Area are shown on Figure I below. The surrounding area is predominantly undeveloped.

2.3 A significant number of public rights of way criss-cross the open countryside, particularly to the north and west of the Conservation Area. The easy access to the Downs facilitated by a public car park and the attraction that is Highdown Gardens means this is a focal area for recreation and visitors, both local and from further afield.

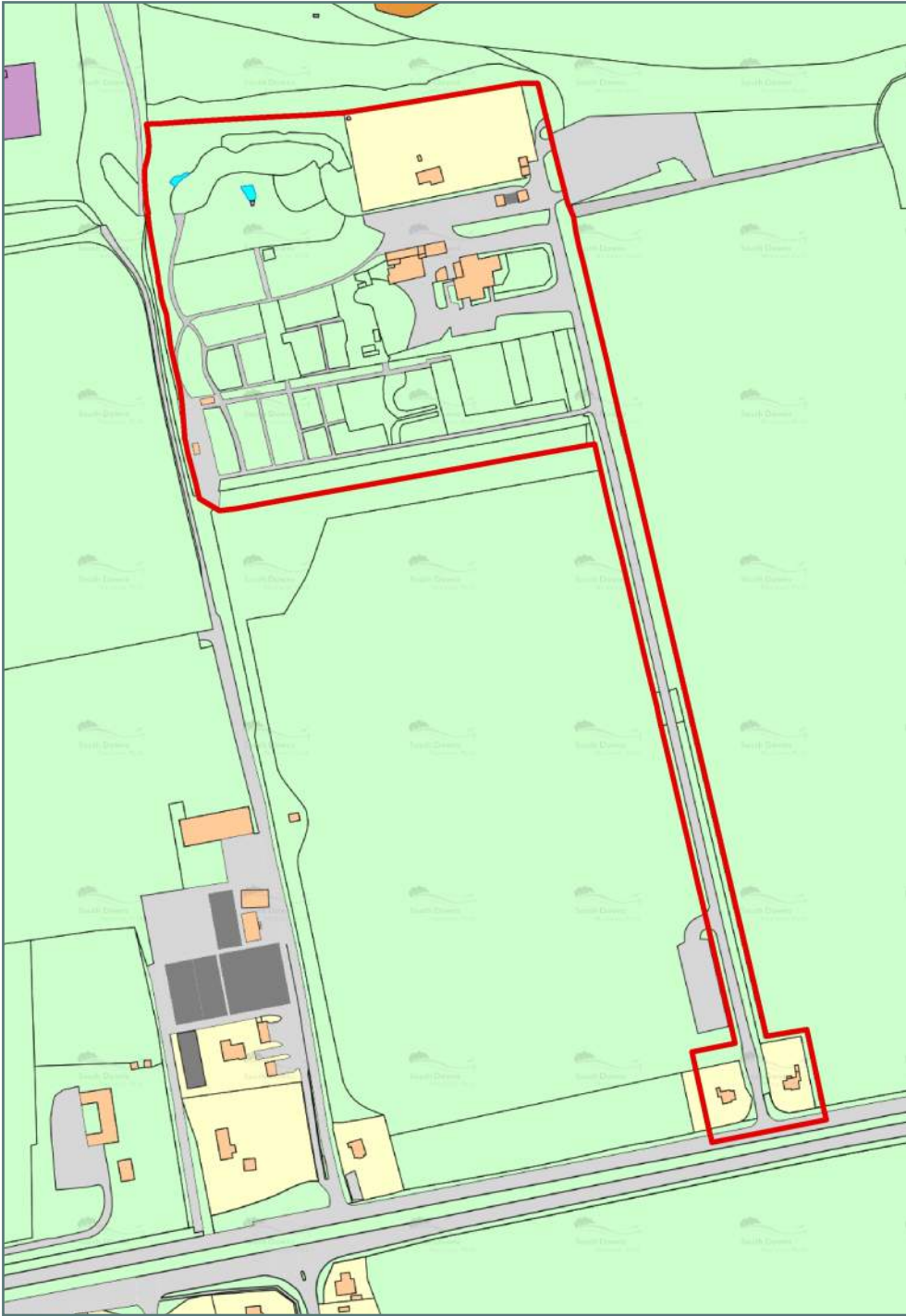


Figure 1: Boundary of the Conservation Area (in red).

Historical Background

3.1 Highdown Hill is a place of great antiquity, including the site of a prehistoric hill-fort and Saxon cemetery, but it was in the 19th and 20th centuries that the heritage assets encompassed within the Conservation Area were created.

3.2 In most accounts the house, 'Highdown', is said to have been built circa 1820, with the Lodge Houses added in 1860. It is thought that the house was originally occupied by a gentleman farmer John Golds with his his wife and eight children. It later became home to a family of evangelical Christians and preachers and then a civil servant. The house sat on the edge of an old chalk pit cut into the dip slope of the Downs.

3.3 Recent research undertaken by Worthing Borough Council has, however, shed some doubt on this dating. The 1841 Census describes a "folly" on the site and the 1851 Census describes a 'house being built' near to the Miller's Cottage which for years stood nearby Highdown.

3.4 Sir Frederick Stern was born into a wealthy banking family in 1884. He leased the house and land in 1909, before eventually buying it for £19,896 in 1928. It is reported that his experiences in the First World War deeply affected him, causing him to re-evaluate his life. After a brief involvement in politics, he then turned his attention to horticulture and worked for fifty years developing Britain's first large-scale chalk garden on the land north and west of the house.

3.5 The gardens originated from a desire to turn the base of an old chalk pit to the west of Highdown Tower into a tennis court. However, a way was needed to shield the players from the glare of the bare chalk cliff. Sir Frederick sought advice and ultimately worked closely with eminent plantsmen such as Sir Arthur Hill to find the right species. Stern ultimately abandoned the tennis court plans in favour of creating a garden now recognised as being of national importance and forming the National Plant Collection of the Plant Introductions of Sir Frederick Stern

3.6 Stern collected plants between 1900 and 1910, working with Reginald Farrer, Frank Ludlow, Joseph Rock, and George Sherriff. In 1914 he participated financially in a plant collecting expedition by Farrer and William Purdom to Yunnan

and Kansu in China and cultivated some of the novelties collected there in his garden at Highdown.

3.7 Other plant hunters sent new plants to Stern, and he acquired an extensive collection of plants from Veitch & Son in 1912. Over the years, Stern introduced many new plants to the garden and created new hybrids of berberis, eremurus, hellebore, lily, magnolia, rose and snowdrop, among which were *Magnolia* 'Highdownensis', rambler roses 'Coral', 'Weddingday', and *Rosa* highdownensis. He is also the author that first described the snowdrop *Galanthus* rizehensis. Herbarium specimens of some of the plants from Highdown Gardens are kept at the Natural History Museum, London.

3.8 The significance of Stern's work was well recognised in his lifetime and he was awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour by the Royal Horticultural Society in 1941. He was chairman of the John Innes Horticultural Institute from 1947 to 1961, vice-president of the Royal Horticultural Society in 1962 and vice-president and treasurer of the Linnean Society from 1941 to 1958. Finally, Stern was knighted in 1956 for his services to horticulture.

3.9 In what must surely be the ultimate accolade for a horticulturalist, several plants species have been named in his honour, including *Buddleja sterniana*, *Cotoneaster sternianus*, *Helleborus* × *sternii* and *Paeonia sterniana*.

3.10 Notwithstanding the honours that came his way, Sir Frederick was not working alone in creating the garden and was greatly assisted by his wife and a dedicated team of gardeners; the latter included James Buckman, who was Head Gardener from 1912 until forced to retire in 1948 after losing his leg in an accident; John Bassindale, who took over from James and remained head gardener for another 30 years; and Florence Holden, who spent her entire working life as a gardener at Highdown.

3.11 The House was also a centre for high society and in the 1920s and 30s saw many of society's elite visit the Sterns. The visitor's book for Highdown Tower includes entries from the royal families of Britain, Sweden and Romania, as well as other eminent gardeners and horticulturalists, including Sir Arthur Hill (Director of the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Lionel de Rothschilds (of Exbury Gardens in the New Forest), Roger Fielding Notcutt (of the Notcutts Nursery dynasty), and Henry McLaren, 2nd Baron Aberconway (who undertook extensive development in 1956 at Bodnant Garden in Conwy).

3.12 In the early 1970s, following the death of Sir Frederick, his wife, Lady Sybil, gifted the house and gardens to Worthing Borough Council which has since then managed the gardens to Sterns' original design.

3.13 In 1977, faced with a repair bill estimated at a minimum of £50,000, Worthing Borough Council sold the house. Since its sale, it has been occupied by The Institute of Choreology and a Language School before being converted into a private members' club and discotheque known as Sterns Club. The building was then sold to The Chapman Group and converted to a hotel. It remains in that use but has changed hands several times.

3.14 Most recently it has been acquired by Dominion Hospitality 2018, operating under the Relax Innz brand. There currently exists a large pub and restaurant with room for events and conferencing, a hotel and tea rooms.

3.15 Figure 2 shows the shows the form and extent of the buildings in the early twentieth century. It survives in much the same form today. However, the gardens now extend into land to the immediate north and west of Highdown Tower and a car park has been located further east still (outside of the Conservation Area). It can be seen from the map that the house itself was set within gardens, which now do not on the whole exist.

More Information

3.16 Highdown Gardens are open to the public and are well worth a visit and Worthing Borough Council produces a range of literature to help you enjoy a visit. This literature will be updated as part of the wider enhancement project currently underway.

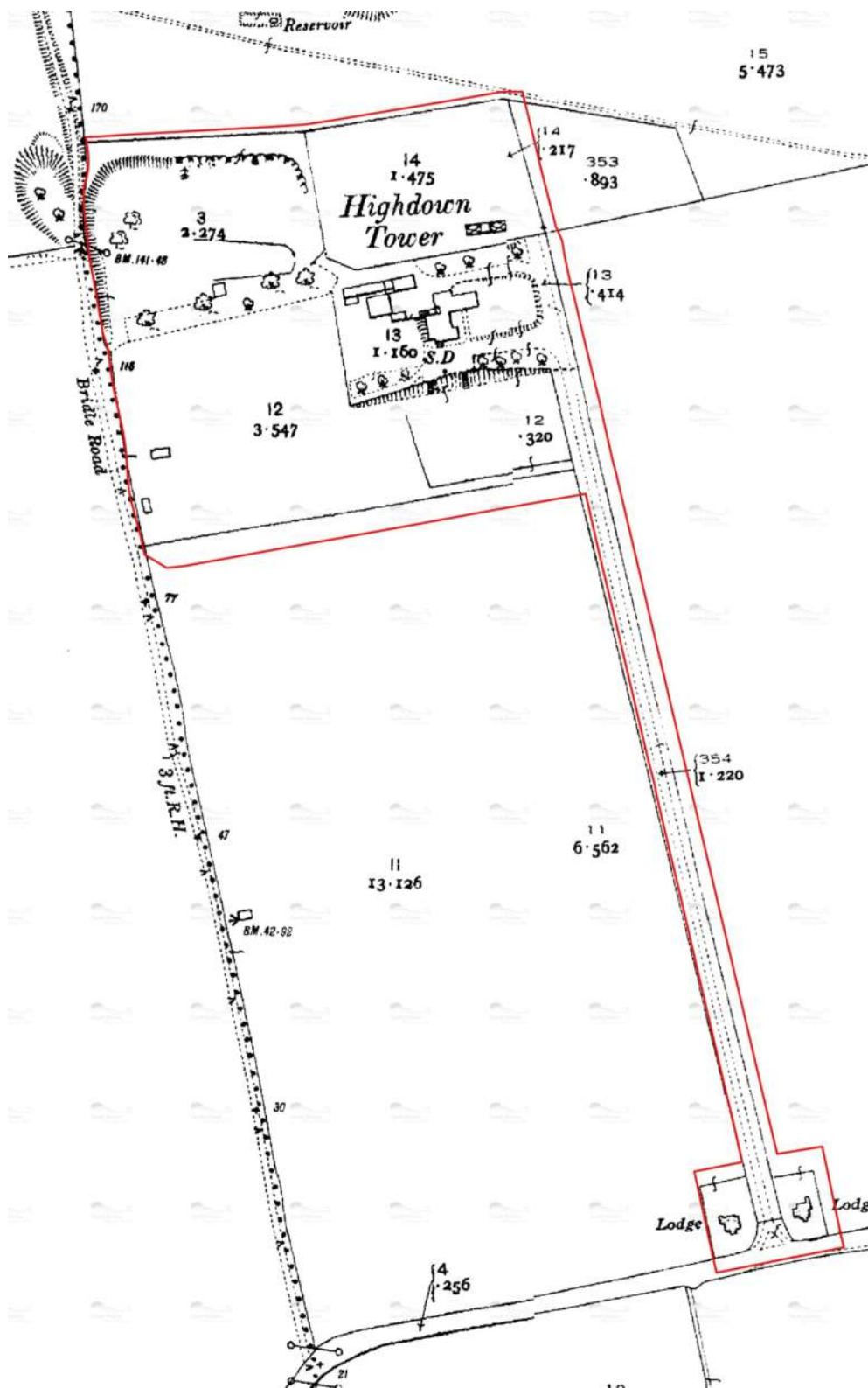


Figure 2: The fourth edition OS mapping shows the layout at Highdown in 1932. The boundaries of the Conservation Area are superimposed in red.

Character Analysis

4.1 The elements that make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area are mapped on Figure 16 and which can be found on the back page of this document.

4.2 The site is accessed from the A259 to the south entering between two lodges built in 1860 (Figure 5). A 0.4km surfaced drive leads directly from the lodges up the hill to the eastern side of the house and a short distance beyond to the public car park (Figure 4).

4.3 The boundaries of the Conservation Area are drawn tightly around the lodges, access road, Highdown Tower itself and the former quarry with garden. The precise and regular boundaries illustrate that the site is in many ways an artificial imposition upon the natural landscape rather than something that grows from it. This disconnection is very real from many parts of the Conservation Area, with no view into and out from the Conservation Area.

4.4 The exception to this are the views from the top of the drive looking south towards the coast (Figure 6). From here, large parts of Worthing and Angmering can be seen, as well as the narrow strip of open land that separates them.

4.5 Pine trees frame parts of the driveway at the top and in the spring it is lined by two cultivars of daffodils - Emperor and Empress, two of the first triploid daffodils raised in 1869 by William Backhouse. On approach the house is not visible until the top of the drive is reached.

4.6 The Conservation Area can be divided into three main elements:

- The Lodges and Access Road;
- Highdown Tower and its immediate environs; and
- The Quarry Garden.

and the character and qualities of each will be considered in turn.

Lodges and Access Drive

4.7 The lodges flanking either side of the access at the point where it joins

the A259 were originally built in the 1860s.

4.8 The lodges are both of the same design, comprising gabled two-storey buildings with clay tiled roofs. The eastern lodge is occupied as a private residence whilst the western lodge functions as changing rooms for the adjoining sports field (Figure 5).

4.9 The access road itself lead straight up the hill. It is lined with clipped holly hedges and the verges are planted with daffodils. As such it forms an attractive way into the main part of the Conservation Area.

Highdown Tower & Immediate Environs

4.10 The exact origins of Highdown Tower itself are unclear but it has certainly been extended a number of times. It sits on a levelled terrace in the east-centre of the Conservation Area (Figures 7).

4.11 The L-shaped, predominantly two-storey house is faced in dressed flint with yellow-brown stone dressings and mullions. The more modern extensions imitate the stone using cement render. The property contains a multitude of roofs at different heights. With the exception of the tower and an extension on the eastern frontage of the property, the roofs are pitched and covered in slate tiles. The flat roofed tower on the southern side of the property is pebbled-dashed on its southern most elevation and is an unusual and notable feature of this property.

4.12 The windows have stone or stone-effect mullions with painted metal framing in small approx. 100mm squares. The doors are modern and of mixed materials including wood, metal and glass.

4.13 To the immediate north-west of the house is a flint- and cement-faced stable range and a two-storey butler's and carriage house, now used as a tea room (Figure 8). It is generally two-storey in height and again faced in flint. The dressings are a mixture of red brick, brown render and yellow-brown stone, and the windows are mostly wooden frame, painted white with multiple small panes. The modern extension to the rear is dressed in flint or render with red brick dressings again with small multi-paned white framed windows.

4.14 East of the house is a large, semi-submerged cellar or basement. The top is grassed over and now functions as a terrace for the hotel with picnic benches and other paraphernalia (Figure 9). The exact origins or function of this bunker-like structure remain unclear although it is known that it was used as a disco in the mid to late 1980s. The southern entrance is an unattractive feature that detracts from the Conservation Area (Figure 11).

4.15 Other than the grassed terrace, the buildings forming Highdown Hotel are almost entirely surrounded by car parking, hard surfacing and a plethora of servicing areas, bins stores etc. These occupy part of the original gardens close to the house. (Figure 10) In front of the Tea Rooms is a seating area for visitors.

4.16 Only limited visual, and no physical, links with the Highdown Gardens now exist. Mature trees both within the immediate grounds of the house and along the edge of the car park screen the house from most angles. Many are covered by Tree Preservation Orders (Figure 3 below) and include magnolias, sycamores, oak, strawberry trees, bay and pine.



Figure 3: Existing Tree Orders within the Conservation Area.

Quarry Gardens

4.17 The gardens at Highdown surround the house on the north, west and south sides but are almost completely screened from it and the surrounding rectangle of surfaced car parks (formerly laid out as garden) by belts of mature trees along the west and south sides and by a high hedge and ornamental trees along the north side.

4.18 The garden appears on the National Heritage Register as a Grade II* entry and the description provided as part of that entry provides a good description of the garden, though not one that is necessarily true to more recent understanding of the garden. Nevertheless, the original can be seen at: <https://www.historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1001212> and it is reproduced with only minor alterations below.

4.19 The public gate to the garden leads on to a path which leads westward towards the chalk-pit. On its southern side is a linear range comprising a tile roofed shelter (built in the 1980s), an early 20th century glasshouse, and outbuildings. The path is lined with Tibetan cherries planted by Sir Frederick in 1938 (Figure 12). *(Unfortunately, most of these trees were diseased and are being removed as part of the current renovations of the garden).*

4.20 At its west end (100m from the entrance gate), the path leads northwards down a slope flanked by mixed shrub and herbaceous beds into the bowl of the chalk pit, the almost vertical face of which rises c 21m on the north side (Figure 13). A limestone rockery, built by Sir Frederick in 1910 and planted with low-growing rock plants and shrubs, stretches along the foot of the cliff with, at its western end, a small cement-lined pond, its large clumps of bamboo planted in 1910.

4.21 Above the pool and rockery, shrubs including immense spreading junipers, cotoneasters and Himalayan musk roses grow in abundance in pockets and on the lower slopes of the chalk cliff, some surviving from the original experimental planting in the early C20.

4.22 The floor of the pit is laid to an informal lawn with, on its south side, a further oval lily pool, surrounded by paving laid in the 1970s and backed by a cave framed by a high wall of Horsham stone, a feature created by Sir Frederick from a

former lime kiln. The pool is flanked by a Horsham stone rockery, laid out in 1910 with advice from the nurseryman Clarence Elliot (Figure 14).

4.23 Southwards, paved paths lead up the southern edge of the pit through the rockery into the rose garden which is laid out on an east to west axis with cultivated roses in parallel oval beds set in lawn and enclosed along the south side by a clipped hedge of holm oak. Its western end is enclosed by a semicircular, timber, rose-covered pergola from the west side of which steps lead down onto a lawn set with island beds containing species roses and specimen trees. *(In fact, the upper rose garden is being redeveloped into the sensory garden as part of the current renovations).*

4.24 Westwards beyond the lawn the bank around the perimeter of the garden is planted with massed hellebores.

4.25 South of the rose garden, a grass path on the axis between the cave and the southern boundary descends by two flights of stone steps through a small beech wood, shown as an established belt in 1889 (OS 2nd edition) and largely replanted in 1987 after severe storm damage.

4.26 Along the south side of the beech wood a broad shrub border, lined by an east to west grass walk, overlooks the Middle Garden Island Beds, laid out as large ovals on the gently south-sloping lawns. These Beds, altered in the 1970s from their original rectangular forms separated by narrow grass paths, are planted with shrubs including tree peonies, lilacs, philadelphus and buddleja grown in the early 20th century, and with a wealth of spring-flowering bulbs.

4.27 At the far east end of the Middle Garden is a small area of raised beds growing acid-loving plants. South of the Middle Garden and divided from it by a pittosporum hedge and a further east to west grass walk, are the Lower Garden Island Beds, similarly modified from their original rectangular form and planted with flowering shrubs and a wide range of the herbaceous peonies, including iris grown by Sir Frederick.

4.28 East of the Lower Garden, and separated from it by a broad border of trees and shrubs, open lawns, which formed the principal area of garden before 1909, extend southwards from a steep bank below the south front of the house. The two flights of steps connecting the lawns to the house, a sundial above the bank on the south forecourt and two rose beds on the lawns are now gone but appear in photographs in *Country Life* in 1937. The garden is enclosed along its entire southern edge by a rose-covered timber trellis backed by a shelter belt of fallen cypress and a replanted belt of mixed deciduous hardwoods, pine and holm oak.

Issues and Opportunities

5.1 In recent years, the Conservation Area had been in something of a decline but 2019 saw two particular developments which have already delivered improvements or will do so in the fairly near future.

5.2 The first of these was the change in ownership of the hotel, with the new owners making some much needed investment in the building. At the same time, Worthing Borough Council has secured Heritage Lottery Funding to further develop the garden and the various benefits that flow from it. The fruits of both will be examined in this section.

Lodges and Access Drive

5.3 From external examination only, both lodges seem to be in good fairly good order.

5.4 The road surface was until recently in a poor condition (see Figures 6 - before and after) but it has been resurfaced recently and this has improved its contribution to the wider Conservation Area

5.5 There were two main issues with the buildings which now forms the hotel. The first was the condition of the building itself and the second was the rather ad-hoc and untidy way in which various bollards and other bits of street furniture had been placed around it, giving a cluttered, incoherent and tired setting for the main building .

5.6 The house was showing signs of poor condition in many areas, including loose render, missing pointing, cracked mullions and missing window panes. A comprehensive repair and refurbishment of the building was needed and, at the same time, there was an opportunity to remove redundant wiring, signage and other redundant services which clutter up the building.

5.7 The setting of the hotel was similarly degraded by the presence of poor quality ephemera. This started on the eastern frontage where a variety of garden furniture had been used on the main lawn. Metal railings surrounded the grass,

but are in places were lacking in any purpose, fencing had been erected in parts, again often unnecessarily, and a plethora of signs (temporary and permanent) had been erected. A decking area, albeit replacing a very unsightly fence, had further added to the cacophony of different materials and structures. Bollards were broken and two entrances to the underground former 'nightclub' area were alien in style and unattractive, in places collecting litter. Figures 7 & 9 shows the area at this time

5.8 The new owners have made great efforts to improve this area, making it a rather better setting for the hotel and a better asset to the business, and Figure 9 shows the results, with a much less cluttered and more ordered space, forming an attractive seating area when the weather is good.

5.9 To the west is a collection of bins, extractor fans, staff entrances, servicing areas etc which are unattractive and clearly visible from the further hotel accommodation in the converted stable block . Whilst these remain, they have now been enclosed behind a more consistent and tidier fence. The opportunity has also been taken to remove redundant pipework from this elevation. Figure 10 shows the situation before and after the work was undertaken.

5.10 Whilst the hotel and the area around it have certainly seen improvements, there is still more that could be done. In particular, the buildings sit within large areas of car parking which wrap themselves around it and cut it off from its gardens beyond. The car parking is clearly a necessity, but its layout is poor and the use of planting and permeable surfacing materials could greatly add to the look and feel of the house, as well as provide some visual clues to the gardens beyond even if physical links are not possible. This remains the case and it is desirable that this aspect of the hotel's setting will be considered in the future.

5.11 It is also apparent that there are still some repairs needed to the buildings themselves. This includes the repair of some windows.

5.12 A number of trees are the subject of Tree Preservation Orders around the old stable block and provide an attractive foreground to the building from this western part of the site. However, any linkages between the buildings and the gardens as well as the surrounding downland are no longer apparent. This is an area where significant enhancements could still bring multiple benefits.

Quarry Garden

5.13 Since the death of Lady Sybil, the gardens have remained in the care of Worthing Borough Council and the Council has done an excellent job in maintaining standards. With the ever increasing constraints on Local Government budgets, this cannot have been easy.

5.14 General day-to-day management and maintenance of the gardens is covered by Worthing Borough Council's Highdowns Gardens Site Management Plan 2018 - 2022 and this Conservation Appraisal document recognises it as the principal mechanism guiding management of the garden.

5.15 As a result, the gardens are one of the gems, both of the Borough and the wider National Park, and they present opportunities to make them more widely known and attract more visitors. The Borough Council, with some assistance from partners including the SDNPA, Plant Heritage, Worthing Museum and West Sussex Records Office, has secured Heritage Lottery Funding which will see over one million pounds invested in the garden.

5.16 The garden closed temporarily on 21 December 2019 to allow work to start, with completion planned for late summer this year (2020). The project includes the building of new greenhouses to help the propagation and preservation of extremely rare plants from around the world; the provision of a new visitors' centre to improve visitor understanding and appreciation of the garden; the exploration and digitisation of the archives; the creation of new accessible walkways; and the development of a sensory garden. In addition, the public toilet block will be upgraded.

Setting of the Conservation Area

5.17 The Gardens are served by a public car park immediately to their north east. This car park is also extensively used by walkers, and in particular dog walkers, going on to the Downs. The car park is not a historic feature and is not, therefore, within the Conservation Area. Nevertheless, it is very important for public access, affects the setting of the Conservation Area, and is an important entry point to the Gardens and the wider National Park.

5.18 Entry to the car park is under a brightly-painted metal beam supported by equally garish metal stanchions. Whilst the need to prevent misuse of the car park is obvious, it would be beneficial if a more attractive method of doing so could be found.

Photographic Survey



Figure 4: Views along the access road; looking southwards towards the lodges (above) and up the dip slope towards the house and gardens (below).





Figure 5: West Lodge, front (above) and rear(below) elevations, which now functions as changing rooms for the neighbouring sports field. For many years, West Lodge was the home of Florence Holden who spent her entire working life as a gardener at Highdown.





Figure 6: Views out from the Conservation Area to the surrounding landscape are few but the main exceptions is this view from the top of the drive. The poor condition of the road surface can be seen in the 'before' shot above and the improved surface in the 'after' photograph below.





Figure 7: Highdown Tower from the south-east before (above) and below (after) the recent works. The removal of the green canopy and the painting of the railings have both improved the appearance and setting of the hotel





Figure 8: The Stables and Butler's and Carriage House, before the recent works (above) and after (below). In this case little has changed beyond the painting of the tea room window and the sign.





Figure 9: The grassed area to the east of the hotel.

As shown above, this area was formerly very cluttered in a way that degraded the setting of the hotel and the wider Conservation Area. Since the new owners have taken on the property, the area has been much tidied and rationalised and now forms both an attractive setting to the hotel and a positive asset to the business.





Figure 10: The area to the west of the hotel accommodates various facilities, including bin stores, which are essential to the functioning of the hotel. However, as can be seen by comparing the before and after photographs, the enclosing fence has been tidied up and redundant pipework removed from the building, both of which help to improve the Conservation Area.

However, this area remains part of the car park, which is unattractive and which would be much improved with a landscape scheme comprising planting and the use of better surface materials.





Figure 11: Other elements which detract from the Conservation Area and setting of the house include the entrance to the 'bunker' (above) and the electricity transformer (below)

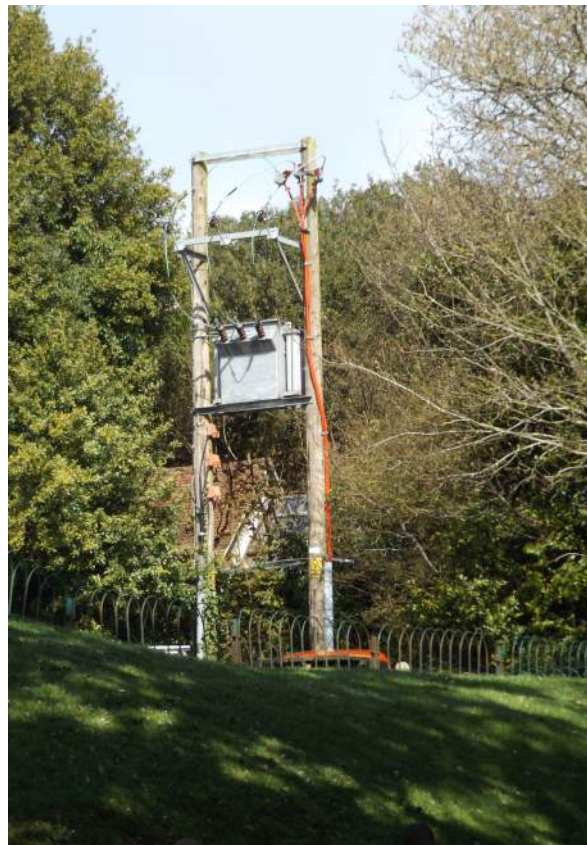




Figure 12: Path leading into the garden from the public entrance, flanked on the south side by flowering cherries planted by Sir Frederick Stern in 1938.



Figure 13: Informal lawn laid out on the floor of the chalk pit.

Figure 14 (below and over page): Paving and steps laid out in the 1970s and a cave with pool, created by Stern using an old lime kiln. The rockery flanking the pool was laid out in 1910.

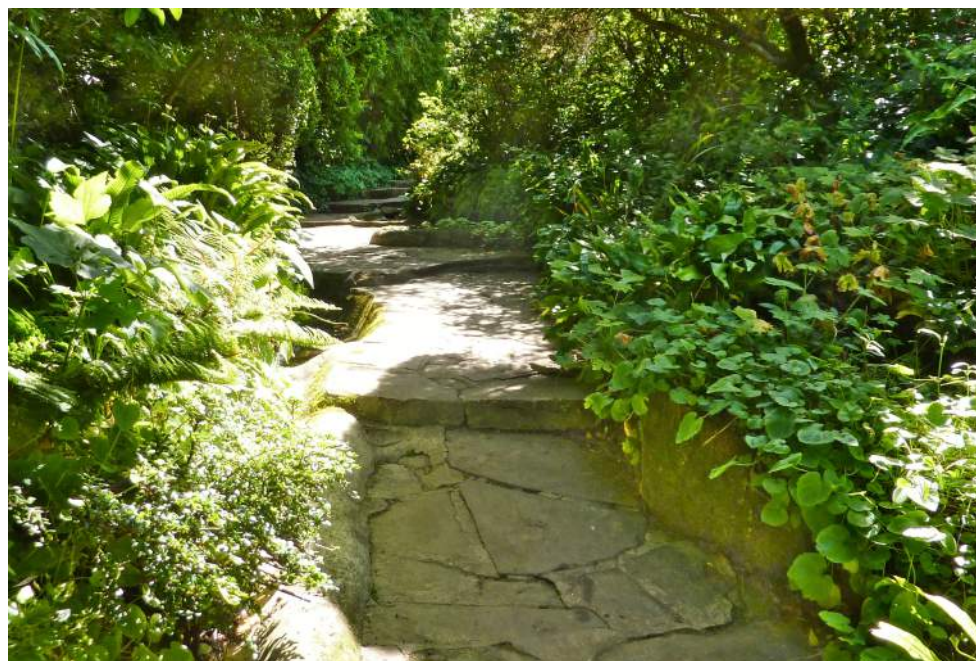




Figure 14 continued.

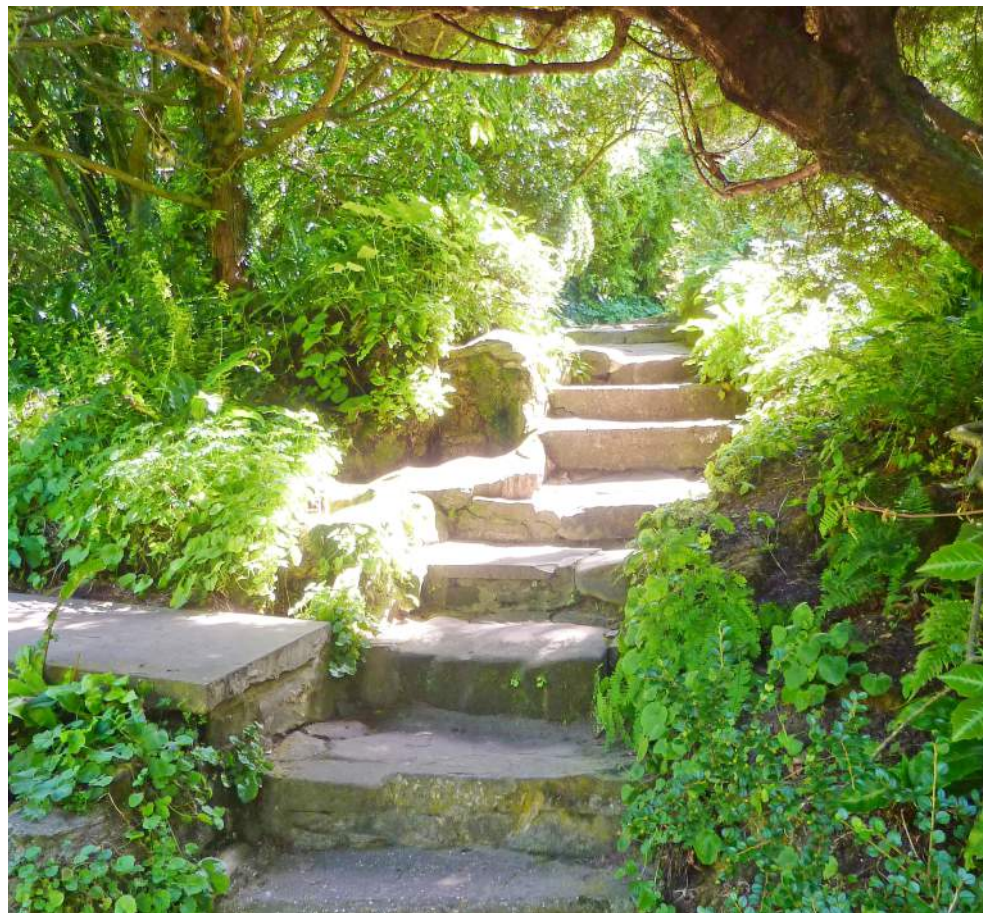




Figure 15: Bungalow within the garden built for James Buckman and formerly used as an office and mess room by the the gardening team. As part of the the Borough Council's project to enhance the garden, this will be extended and converted to form a new visitor centre.



Management Plan

6.1 At the beginning of this document the legal definition of a Conservation Areas as “areas of special architectural or historic interest, the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance” was acknowledged.

6.2 Taking this definition as a starting point, it follows that the proper management of a Conservation Area will have as its objective both the protection of its existing qualities and its enhancement in ways that build upon its special interest. Four broad aims can be defined:

- To ensure that the Heritage Assets (the Conservation Area and its constituent buildings and other historic features) are properly and effectively designated;
- To ensure that the Heritage Assets are in good condition;
- To secure the conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the Heritage Assets;
- To secure the enhancement of the spaces within and around the Heritage Assets

Proper Designation of the Conservation Asset

6.3 In addressing this objective, it is necessary to consider whether:

- There are any areas outside the Conservation Area boundary which should be brought into it.
- There are any areas within the current Conservation Area boundary that have seen inappropriate changes erode their quality to the extent that they should be removed from the Conservation Area.
- There are any buildings which should be added to the Statutory List of Buildings of special architectural or historic interest.
- There are any buildings which should be added to a Local Heritage List

6.4 In undertaking this review of the Conservation Area, no extensions or areas for removal were identified and the boundaries were found to be still fit for purpose.

6.5 Highdown Tower currently appears on Worthing Borough Council's Local Heritage List. The National Park Authority will be developing its own Local Heritage List and the building will be assessed for inclusion against the adopted criteria. In the meantime, however, it will be regarded as a non-designated heritage asset for planning purposes.

ACTION 1 – that Highdown Tower be considered for inclusion on the National Park Authority's Local Heritage List once that list is in place.

Condition of the Heritage Asset.

6.6 There are a few buildings within this small Conservation Area and, of these, it was Highdown Hotel that was most in need of repair and restoration. Its poor condition was harming the building itself, its setting and the wider Conservation Area.

6.7 Recent Repair and renovation of the buildings has gone a long way to addressing that need and has already produced a significant enhancement of the Conservation Area and a more attractive visitor destination for the owners. There is still more to be done though

ACTION 2 – that the National Park Authority works with the owners of Highdown Tower and other partners to secure on-going repair and maintenance of the buildings and further enhancements.

Conservation and enhancement of the character and appearance of the Heritage Asset.

6.8 Protection of existing quality will be achieved through careful application of the planning system in general and the Development Management process in particular. One way in which this can be facilitated is by the provision of pre-application advice to householders, designers, and developers to achieve a high quality of design. The National Park Authority has a system for the provision of such advice, which is explained on its website.

ADVICE – that anyone considering development of any form which affects Highdown Conservation Area or its setting should seek pre-application advice from the National Park Authority before starting any design work or submitting a planning application, and that opportunities to secure improvements to the buildings and their setting during that process are maximised.

6.9 Once an application has been received, it will be assessed against a range of national and local planning policies. At present these include the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the National Planning Policy Framework, the Purposes and Duty of the National Park, the South Downs National Park Local Plan, and conservation best practice (including this document).

6.10 Whilst discussing proposals with applicants, both at pre-application stage and in the course of determination, opportunities may arise to achieve improvements both to the proposal itself and its contribution to the wider character of the Conservation Area. These may not originally form part of the proposal. The Local Planning Authority will seek to maximise these opportunities as far as possible.

ACTION 3 – that planning applications be determined in accordance with all relevant legislation and guidance, with any opportunities to secure improvements during that process being secured as far as possible.

6.11 Although not, of course, heritage assets themselves (at least not in the sense that the term is used in this document), trees often make a very important contribution to the character of a Conservation Area. In some cases, the trees will be protected by a specific Tree Preservation Order (TPO) and there are currently a number of such orders within Highdown.

6.12 Trees within Conservation Areas that are not covered by specific TPOs still have a degree of protection. Anyone who is planning to do works to such a tree is required to give the Local Planning Authority six week's notice of their intention to do those works. This is to allow the Local Planning Authority to make a TPO on the tree if deemed appropriate.

6.13 The role of the trees at the top of the drive has already been noted earlier in this document and this significance may be sufficient to justify protection with a TPO.

ACTION 4 – that the possibility of applying a TPO to the pines that arch over the driveway be investigated and a TPO created if the trees are found to have the required amenity value.

ACTION 5 – request that Worthing Borough Council explores the possibility of replacing the existing barriers at the entrance to the public car park to ones that better reflect their location on the edge of the Conservation Area.

Enhancement of the spaces within the Heritage Asset

6.14 The poor quality of the immediate environment around the Hotel detracts from the building, its setting and the wider Conservation Area.

6.15 A programme intended to better manage the impact of car parking and hard surfacing and to de-clutter the outdoor space and provide a sense of uniformity in terms of furniture and fixtures & fittings on the buildings would produce a significant enhancement of the Conservation Area and a more attractive visitor destination for the owners.

ACTION 6 – that the National Park Authority works with the owners of Highdown Tower and other partners to secure further improvement of the spaces around the Hotel to enhance its setting and the wider Conservation Area.

Responsible Conservation is a Partnership!

6.16 This document has been prepared by the National Park Authority as the Local Planning Authority for Highdown. However, it is very important to stress, and for other parties to understand, that effective management of any Conservation Area is the responsibility of all organisations and all parties who undertake works which affect the character of the area.

6.17 Section 11A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 sets out a wide range of bodies to which the National Park duties apply. At a local level, this is predominantly the owners of Highdown Hotel and Worthing Borough Council as owners of the Gardens.



Figure 16: Elements which make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, including the garden (light green), the road verges (dark green), and buildings (blue). Areas for potential enhancement are shown in light blue.