

# Single Storey, Twentieth Century Dwellings in the High Weald



*A preliminary investigation based on the eastern High Weald*

*Furthering understanding of one of England's Finest Landscapes*



**Produced by Dr Brendan Chester-Kadwell of Oldakre Associates**  
**November 2011**

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee provides guidance to local authorities and other bodies on implementing the statutory AONB Management Plan and on how local and government policy objectives can be accommodated without damaging the outstanding character of this nationally important landscape.

# The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's Research Programme

*Furthering understanding of one of England's Finest Landscapes*

The High Weald Joint Advisory Committee's management aims and priorities for the AONB are firmly based on an understanding of the fundamental and defining character of the whole area – that is, those components of natural beauty that have made the High Weald a recognizably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years and that will continue to define it in the future. It develops its understanding through undertaking work itself, through its specialist team, the AONB Unit, or by commissioning independent reports from others.

The primary purpose of its research programme is to better understand the components of natural beauty. The key components are:

- **Geology, landform, water systems and climate:** deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east-west and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers. Wide river valleys dominate the eastern part of the AONB. The landform and water systems are subject to and influence, a local variant of the British sub-oceanic climate.
- **Settlement:** dispersed historic settlements of farmsteads, hamlets and late medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- **Routeways:** ancient routeways (now roads and Rights of Way) in the form of ridge-top roads and a dense system of radiating droveways. The droveways are often narrow, deeply sunken and edged with trees, hedges, wildflower-rich verges and boundary banks.
- **Woodland:** a great extent of ancient woods, gills and shaws in small holdings, the value of which is inextricably linked to long-term management.
- **Field and heath:** small, irregularly shaped and productive fields, often bounded by (and forming a mosaic with) hedgerows and small woodlands and typically used for livestock grazing. Small holdings and a non-dominant agriculture. Distinctive zones of heaths and inner river valleys.

By researching the key components – their history, development, distribution, special qualities, deterioration, damage and loss – we can develop an evidence base for the AONB Management Plan and other AONB policy and guidance.

The JAC's secondary purpose is to better understand how the High Weald landscape can contribute to society – food, energy, water provision, flood protection, recreation, biodiversity and fisheries – without damage to its natural beauty.

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# **SINGLE-STOREY, TWENTIETH-CENTURY DWELLINGS IN THE HIGH WEALD:**

**A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION BASED ON THE EASTERN HIGH WEALD.**

Prepared for

High Weald AONB Unit



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## **PREFACE**

Single-storey<sup>1</sup> dwellings were a feature of the landscape in previous times, from country cottages to grander examples such as the entrance lodges of great estates. However, the history of contemporary housing throughout the twentieth century reveals a manifest growth in popularity for what are essentially single-storey dwellings, despite the predominance and omnipresence of two-storey houses that have come to define our modern habitation landscapes. One type of single-storey dwelling in particular, the *bungalow*, although having a long and exotic history, is essentially a twentieth-century phenomenon in terms of its popularity and distribution. Other single-storey dwellings of the period under study, whilst also being significant, have different origins and reflect other socio-economic contexts.

Although, collectively, and historically, there are not a very large number of single-storey dwellings in the High Weald, many of those that are there do have historic significance. In an area such as the High Weald, which has such an extensive collection of historic buildings from the late Middle Ages to the nineteenth century, it is easy to overlook the significance of more recent additions and forget that they too are fast becoming historically important buildings in their own right. Sadly, many single-storey buildings (and in particular the bungalow) are currently under-rated and, consequently, are vulnerable to unsuitable modifications or (more seriously) actual demolition for redevelopment. The fact that single-storey dwellings are often small, but on large plots, make them even more susceptible to loss by owners who wish to replace them with larger, multi-storey modern dwellings.

## **THE BRIEF**

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Unit at Flimwell has commissioned this paper to help its officers to address their concerns arising from the development of sites involving twentieth-century single-storey dwellings.

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<sup>1</sup> In practice this includes many one-and-a-half storey dwellings, which for convenience are referred to henceforth as 'single-storey' buildings.

This paper is a preliminary investigation into the historical significance of such single-storey dwellings; primarily concentrating on those constructed in the first half of the century.

## **PARAMETERS OF THE STUDY**

It was agreed that this research could be no more than an overview of this important topic because the resources available for the study were limited and the subject matter extensive. For this reason the investigation concentrates on over-viewing a number of parishes in the eastern High Weald, either side of the Kent and East Sussex boundary<sup>2</sup>. The aim was to identify a range of examples of the types of single-storey dwellings to be found there, locating them within their historical context and the general housing policy for the period. Needless to say, not every example of the single-storey building in those parishes has been identified — a delightful task for another day.

### ***The Historical Periods***

There are a number of historical periods in terms of housing policy and the socio-economic issues influencing the construction of building types during the course of the twentieth century. *The period up to the First World War (WWI)* saw a continuation of the housing issues experienced in the nineteenth century: there was a growing realisation that housing for the rural labouring classes was both lacking in quality and quantity and that special measures would need to be taken to remedy this.

As might be expected, wartime was a period of little action but there was much consideration of what might follow the peace. *The years between 1918 and 1939* (when war again interrupted civil life) were, perhaps, the most exciting and seminal in terms of housing policy. Real efforts were made to remedy the deficiencies in general housing conditions through government subsidy distributed through the mechanism of a council house building initiative on a truly national scale. Private sector building was also

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<sup>2</sup> The parishes concerned are Benenden, Newenden, Rolvenden, Sandhurst (Kent); Bodiam, Etchingham, Hurst Green, Northiam, Salehurst (East Sussex).

important: this was speculative<sup>3</sup> and mainly aimed at those fortunate enough to be able to buy their own home.

*Following the Second World War (WWII)* there was, for a time, a resumption of a public sector-led housing recovery: although this was also a time of increased private sector speculative building. From the late 1950s the private sector started to become the main engine for fulfilling housing need and eventually came to totally dominate house building nationally.

This research broadly follows these periods, concentrating on the first two. There is less attention given to the latter part of the twentieth century: this is because it is too difficult to establish the historical significance of many of the single-storey buildings so recently erected.

### ***Methodology***

The research used a combination of fieldwork (including reports from local residents and examination of Street Scene on Google Maps), the comparison of large-scale Ordnance Survey maps, the Heritage Environmental Record for Kent and East Sussex (including the record of listed buildings), and published literature to help identify relevant building types. The research also included a review of literature specifically relevant to twentieth-century housing policy and related issues.

Field research has been restricted to what can be viewed from the highway or other rights of way; for this reason the identification of individual buildings in the parishes surveyed could only be partial. Furthermore, the issue of precise dating proved to be problematical; more work needs to be done for many of the relevant buildings identified and until this is accomplished dating is often only approximate.

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<sup>3</sup> *Speculative* building is that which is commissioned (usually by a private developer) in the hope of finding a private purchaser once it is completed. On the other hand, a *purpose* built dwelling is one which the future owner has commissioned.

The methodology has attempted to balance how places are actually experienced *from ground level* with how places are presented in plan view by maps and aerial photography.

### ***Style and Structure of the Report***

The style adopted for the report is a narrative one and it is not presented as an academic paper. Consequently, footnotes and references in the text have been kept to a minimum. The material consulted is listed at the end of the report.

Part 1 discusses twentieth-century housing policy, establishing the context within which single-storey buildings in the High Weald developed.

Part 2 considers how single-storey dwellings may be defined, identifies the types to be found in the High Weald, suggests their period of construction, and their distribution throughout the parishes surveyed.

Part 3 identifies key issues arising from the research, considers some of the implications of the findings in terms of the planning regime, and suggests further action.

## **PART 1 TWENTIETH-CENTURY HOUSING POLICY AND HOUSE BUILDING – THE HIGH WEALD IN CONTEXT**

This section reviews how housing policy has attempted to address housing need during the course of the periods identified above. This is a national story, but also a local one, and a short account of how Wealden settlement form has developed historically is included at the end of the section.

### **HOUSING NEED 1900 TO 1914**

The most pressing influence on housing provision in the early years of the twentieth century was, as elsewhere, the deplorable state of general housing conditions for the rural labouring classes. Whilst the scale of the problem was greater in the industrial conurbations, deprivation within rural areas such as the High Weald was arguably more acute. The problems created for British agriculture by cheap food imports from the 1870s onwards is well documented. Lack of resources within the sector exacerbated already poor housing conditions. Some landlords did attempt to address housing issues on their estates, but rural housing remained in a poor state. By the opening years of the twentieth century it was widely recognised that the problems of housing conditions for the labouring classes in general (and for the rural labourers in particular) could not be remedied by relying solely on either private sector speculative building, or the philanthropy of landowners.

### **RESPONDING TO HOUSING NEED DURING THE INTER-WAR YEARS (1918-1939)**

Resolving the housing crisis was shelved until after World War I (WWI), but the experience of the war ensured that the issue became of heightened importance. Creating a land 'fit for heroes' also meant providing 'homes for heroes'. Post-war conditions created the political will for government subsidies for working class housing, which ushered in the era of housing schemes to be provided by local councils.

Few Wealden parishes failed to attract some form of publicly financed housing for the labouring classes. Perhaps the majority of these were for two storey dwellings, but the significance of this movement was as much about raising the standard and quality of this type of housing provision, as it was about the quantity of dwellings being provided.



The High Weald (as elsewhere) saw others, besides local authorities, building new dwellings in response to need. Some of these dwellings were provided by farmers for their agricultural workers, driven by the extra need for housing created by market forces within the agricultural sector; for example, the redistribution of land upon the break-up of some of the larger estates, or the failure of smaller farmers. Additionally, individuals were also building dwellings for themselves, amongst which the first true bungalow-style dwellings were popular. Many Wealden settlements have examples of inter-war private sector housing, usually built piecemeal on the outskirts of more established places. Ironically, it is the private sector that was more likely to go in for single-storey buildings, which were often conceived as low cost alternatives to less affordable two-storey dwellings. However, the overall numbers seem to have remained small for the period up to WWII. Within the High Weald there were fewer opportunities for the extensive estates of affordable bungalows that are found elsewhere (at, for example, Peacehaven along the south coast or on the Isle of Thanet in north Kent) because it was not an area regarded as offering fashionable recreation or a convenient retirement.

## **POST WWII HOUSING DYNAMICS**

Following WWII the building dynamic changed once again. This was partly in response to the government policy of nominating certain key rural settlements as growth points, which restricted where future expansion would be permitted. Housing for rent was still perceived as principally the responsibility of local councils, with continued government subsidy. The growing private (speculative) building programme continued to cater for owner-occupation. In the early post-war years the government maintained the balance between the two sectors, because it was responsible for rationing building materials whilst they remained in short supply. Generally speaking, in the rural areas of the High Weald the greatest need was for houses for rent (basically, council housing) and not much private sector speculative building took place in the eastern parishes, at least.

### ***House Building Post-1960***

During the 1960s and 1970s, housing policy retreated from the ideal of public sector house building and national housing standards as witnessed during the inter-war years and throughout the 1950s. Private sector-led construction was now favoured, with a

greater emphasis on market forces determining the sizes and types of dwellings. By the 1980s council house building had been curtailed and the golden age of council house estates was brought to an end with the introduction of the 'right to buy' for tenants, and the transfer of housing stock to housing associations. Thus post-war public housing-led development gave way to speculative private sector-led development, which is now the norm<sup>4</sup>.

## **THE CONTEMPORARY SCENE**

During the course of the latter part of the twentieth century housing needs have been altered by demographic changes: within a rising population household sizes have fallen, feeding the demand for yet more housing over and above that which would have been required by an increase in population alone. The increased urbanisation of society and the economy has further helped to create a rising demand for homes within many rural settlements, and space has needed to be found for new development unconnected to an agriculturally economy. As a consequence, many more homes are being built in rural areas, often modelled on suburban designs popularised on the fringes of larger towns and cities.

## **HOW SETTLEMENT FORM HAS DEVELOPED IN THE HIGH WEALD**

Settlement form in this part of the High Weald is typified by the growth of historic settlements in a piecemeal fashion over many centuries. A highly dispersed pattern of settlement, principally comprising of isolated (or loosely grouped) farmsteads and homesteads had evolved to establish a number of hamlets by the seventeenth century, often but not always situated in the vicinity of Wealden churches. The rapid increase in rural population from about the seventeenth century saw further colonisation of a number of Wealden greens by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These included Iden Green, Sandhurst Green and Hawkhurst Moor; settlements that are still typified by their predominantly timber-framed white weather-boarded dwellings from this period. In the first half of the twentieth century a resumption of this process also saw

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<sup>4</sup> There is currently some suggestion that the government may support a renewal of council house provision to stimulate house building.

the growth of low-density ribbon development leading out from older settlement centres. Although these later developments are comprised of dwellings of a more contemporary construction with more varied use of materials, this is all part of a continuation of the same historic process of accretion.

In the last forty years, however, more recent development has significantly altered the characteristic form of many host settlements. Speculative building since the 1970s has tended to be concentrated in the larger Wealden settlements: in towns such as Battle and Tenterden, in the few true villages<sup>5</sup> (places such as Robertsbridge, Goudhurst and Sedlescombe) as well as the post-WWII 'growth' settlements like Rolvenden, Sandhurst, and Northiam. Small residential estates have been built that fill in the spaces between the lanes around these older settlements.

Bungalows and chalet bungalows often form an important part of the housing mix on these often quite high-density developments, either grouped together on small estates or as part of a mixed development that might also include houses and flats. Architecturally these dwellings are commonly in the national vernacular, with sometimes an allusion of the local vernacular in decorative cladding — but not always.

Contemporary development, therefore, is of a different order to the slow, piecemeal accretion of dwellings that has previously typified Wealden settlement form. The effect of these modern developments on settlement character should be a matter for examination and discussion.

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<sup>5</sup> Although the Weald was not a landscape of villages, such as is found elsewhere, there were a number of comparable settlements dating from the Middle Ages – frequently established by religious houses.

## PART 2 — TWENTIETH-CENTURY SINGLE-STOREY DWELLINGS IN THE HIGH WEALD

In this section, single-storey buildings are explored from two perspectives. The first demonstrates different classes of buildings from their period of origin. The second shows how these buildings are represented and distributed within individual parishes. Before that, however, it is useful to consider how these dwellings are defined in more general terms.

### DEFINING TWENTIETH-CENTURY SINGLE-STOREY DWELLINGS

Twentieth-century single-storey dwellings is an extensive area of study in its national context, but in the regional context of the High Weald has a more restricted scope, although covering a similar range of building types. These include dwellings built in local vernacular styles using traditional materials and building techniques<sup>6</sup>. Also, there are those dwellings based on 'national' designs that use materials and construction techniques alien to local vernacular traditions. By far the most iconic of the latter dwelling is the *bungalow*.

#### ***Definition of the Bungalow***

Bungalows are typically single-storey buildings<sup>7</sup> of brick construction (occasionally rendered) with roofing materials made from clay tiles, Welsh slate, or asbestos tiles (a common material for earlier examples). Bungalows usually have a central entrance leading to a spacious hallway off which the various rooms are accessed. A popular version found in many areas, especially within speculative estates, display an internal porch and a high-pitched roof, often pyramidal in shape to accommodate the depth of the building. However, this design is less commonly found in this part of the High Weald where the design is often plainer, without the internal porch, and where the roof tends to be of lower pitch with less depth to the structure. At one time bungalows were always

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<sup>6</sup> There may also be examples of buildings that reflect 'polite' architectural concepts rather than the vernacular: elsewhere, for example, there are twentieth-century estate buildings such as entrance lodges, although no specific examples were identified within the study area adopted for this paper.

<sup>7</sup> Bewilderingly, in other cultures the bungalow is defined by its purpose and style and may have more than one storey.

detached buildings within their own plots (often the attraction for purchasers of older examples): from about 1920, however, semi-detached bungalows are also found.

Although this description fits what most people would identify as a bungalow, historically there has not been one constant and agreed definition of what a bungalow is — either in this country, or in the numerous others all over the globe where the term is used. The use of the term bungalow is often applied to all single-storey dwellings, but this is clearly not a useful diagnostic. Most people would not consider, say, a simple single-storey eighteenth or nineteenth-century country cottage as a bungalow; any more than they would fail to instantly recognise the kind of dwelling mentioned above as anything but a bungalow. Even where someone has inserted a further 'storey' in the form of an upstairs room in the loft, it remains a bungalow (although this might be thought of as a chalet bungalow). It is also true, however, that the bungalow cannot be defined merely by its physical appearance: it has acquired very strong cultural connotations. For example, in the first half of the twentieth century those seeking a retreat or a place of fashionable enjoyment viewed it as a dwelling of desire. By the second half of the twentieth-century it became for many an object of ridicule, associated with suburbia, despised inter-war ribbon development, the elderly, and the lower classes — definitely not *chic*.

### ***Defining other Single-Storey Dwellings as a Type***

Failing the establishment of a genuinely agreed definition of the term 'bungalow' (now unlikely) it is probably a matter of commonsense and judgement as to what should and should not be included in the term; preferably restricting its use to the specific type of dwelling described as a bungalow-type in the preceding paragraphs. This means that there are many single-storey buildings that do not belong to the 'bungalow' type, so what building type are they if they clearly are not bungalows? It is unlikely that an easily usable collective noun can be found to describe them, since from observation they may well need to be regarded as distinctly novel, unique, one-offs, especially if they are of local origin, following a local building need and tradition and have not come from a national palette or a nationally imposed building programme.

## **BUILDING TYPES AND THEIR PERIOD OF CONSTRUCTION**

Despite the difficulties of finding an agreed definition that can be applied to all single-storey dwellings that are not bungalows, a number of distinct building types have been identified within the sample of parishes selected for this report. Although buildings may be classified by the type of construction employed and materials used in that construction, their *purpose* (for example, who the dwellings were constructed for and why) also has a bearing on understanding the significance of individual dwellings and their relationship to settlement form.

Many of the single and one-and-a-half storey dwellings extant in the High Weald originate from the period 1900 to the early 1950s. Over that particular period new dwellings typically related to aspects of the local economy, in particular agriculture and local industry. In contrast, subsequent residential development more often relates to an urbanised economy — people living in rural areas but economically dependent upon a non-rural economy. This suggests that many of the differences between building types and development approaches that emerged during the course of the twentieth century relate to changes in socio-economic conditions over the period<sup>8</sup>.

### ***Building Types pre-1950***

A review of piecemeal twentieth-century development pre-1950 in the parishes studied reveals that many similar single-storey dwellings exist in most of them. Some are part of an existing Wealden tradition of timber buildings, where dating is often difficult from observation alone. Others are obviously post-industrial, although also within the timber-frame tradition. Yet others follow the 'national vernacular' of the age, amongst which is included the bungalow.

Dwellings constructed prior to 1939 were often built to house the local workforce and their families. Local councils built the greatest number for this purpose, where single-

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<sup>8</sup> A rise in the number of elderly people within the context of the Welfare State committed to improving the lot of the potentially more vulnerable in society has led to a greater emphasis on the provision of purpose-built housing for them. This has greatly affected the type of homes being provided and has helped to increase the number of single-storey dwellings, throughout the country.

storey dwellings were the exception. However, dwellings provided by private employers were more likely to be single-storey; a more economical form of construction, especially after 1918 when standard designs and prefabricated options were more widely available. These dwellings tended to have larger plots to allow the occupier space for an allotment.

1. An example of a single-storey tied cottage for an agricultural labouring family can be found in Rolvenden parish. Now known as 'Border View', situated on Hope House Lane, it was built by a local farming family for an agricultural worker's family. It is of timber-frame construction and clad in weatherboarding with an asbestos tile roof. It is as yet unknown whether this was a bespoke design, or prefabricated. This is not a particularly common type of dwelling, but other examples are known in Rolvenden and Newenden.



2. An example of a group of single-storey dwellings built for industrial workers is also found at Rolvenden. They are called 'The Bungalows', but known locally as 'Tin Town'. The group is composed of a number of single-storey dwellings originally built for railway workers by the directors of the Kent and East Sussex Railway. Their exact date of construction has not been verified, but it is likely that they were built in the opening years of the twentieth century (although a late nineteenth-century date is also possible). They are of a brick and timber-frame construction, with wood cladding. Their corrugated iron roofs gave the settlement its name (although some of the survivors now have slate or tile roofs). Given the circumstances of their construction, it is likely that they were imported as prefabricated units from a manufacturer such as Boulton & Paul of Norwich.



An example of one of the two basic designs employed in this development. The original colour of the corrugated iron roof is unknown. This one is now painted green.



Another example of a similar type to the one above, but in a dilapidated state, the future of which is uncertain.



An example of the second design employed on the site, with a black iron roof, which may have been the original colour.



3. There are a number of examples of bungalows built for local families, usually of brick construction with either clay tile, Welsh slate or asbestos tile roofs. This rather superior example, along the Bodiam Road in Sandhurst, dates from the 1920s or 1930s. Constructed of brick with a clay tile roof, it has gables in the 'Tudor Style', fashionable at the time. Its semicircular porch entrance was a common feature for earlier bungalows. Outside of the towns, most bungalows of this age appear to be isolated examples that have been purpose built, rather than as speculations. This fits in well with the low growth model of housing development for the period.



*Google Street Scene*

### ***Post-1950s Development***

Development in the High Weald has been greater in volume since WWII than it was in the first half of the twentieth century. There has been a wider range of types of dwelling constructed, and if anything single-storey dwellings have become of more importance as an element in the building stock. This is as true of public housing provision, as it is of that provided by the private sector.

Council house building became more varied in type over this period to allow for a wider range of potential tenant: no longer focussed primarily on family accommodation for the labouring classes, more provision was made for smaller households of which the elderly were a major beneficiary. However, since the 1980s 'social housing' has been provided either by housing associations or by an element of 'affordable' housing included within private sector developments. For certain categories of provision (especially for the elderly) single-storey dwellings have been favoured and modern bungalow designs have appeared within many private developments in the area.

There are some isolated examples of purpose built dwellings, privately built, to house agricultural workers and other local people (similar in purpose to those constructed prior to WWII). There are also a significant number of other single-storey dwellings created out of redundant agricultural buildings. However, the most numerous class of single-storey dwellings are the bungalows and chalet bungalows built in the post-1970s estates in most of the larger Wealden settlements.

1. An example of a group of single-storey dwellings for the elderly exists at Monypenny, Rolvenden. Built in the 1960s on the site of a Victorian vicarage (demolished for the purpose – oh, brave new world!). Constructed out of plain brick with clay tile roofs, the dwellings are laid out in estate fashion, as attached pairs.



*Google Street Scene*

2. An example of a privately built dwelling for a local worker, this Colt House was constructed for the Farm Manager of Great Wigsell Farm, Salehurst in the late 1950s or early 1960s. Although not a common form of construction, these prefabricated cedar wood dwellings have enjoyed a degree of popularity and are now considered very environmentally sustainable.



*Google Street Scene*

3. An example of a single-storey converted agricultural building, this 'barn conversion' at Bodiam is typical of how some older buildings are being found re-uses. The author can remember when a local agricultural contractor, who also owned or rented a smallholding, used this group of single-storey sheds. The original buildings were of local brick with clay tile roof: the former cart entrances have been filled in with screens of wood and glass. These sorts of conversions became very popular in the 1980s and 1990s, but there has been something of a backlash more recently. There is now a feeling that it is better to find a non-residential use for these buildings, more in keeping with their origins.



*Google Street Scene*

4. An example of a contemporary estate bungalow at Fayre Meadow, Robertsbridge. Built of brick with a clay tile roof, this bungalow could have been built anywhere. The tile hung gable end is a nod to local vernacular style, but nothing in the design is 'Wealden'. Similar examples can be found in most of the larger Wealden settlements.



*Google Street Scene*

## **SIGNIFICANCE AND OCCURRENCE OF SINGLE-STOREY DWELLINGS IN HIGH WEALD SETTLEMENTS**

The historical significance of single-storey dwellings is not only to be measured by their architectural character and socio-economic purpose, important as these factors are. As with all buildings, their relationship to settlement *form*<sup>9</sup> also has significance – not least because settlement form itself is an important component of landscape character.

The contribution of single-storey buildings to settlement form in many of the High Weald parishes explored in this study was significant, whilst in others it was negligible. In general terms, single-storey dwellings were widely dispersed in most parishes, and few had no examples from any era. Twentieth-century examples prior to 1950 follow this trend. Post-1950, as more homes were required, more single-storey dwellings were provided most of which can be identified as bungalows. In some places whole roads of them appeared, although developments were nowhere extensive enough to classify as *urban* estates. It is also the case that whereas pre-1950 most were built as family homes, after WWII it also became more common to build smaller single-storey homes specifically for the elderly.

Ideally, in order to fully explain the place of single-storey dwellings, a detailed settlement characterisation is needed. This is not attempted here, as it is beyond the scope of a study of this sort. However, an overview of the occurrence of twentieth-century single-storey dwellings and how they are situated in each of the civil parishes surveyed is more feasible. What follows is an overview of the situation in each parish grouped by county, with Kent first.

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<sup>9</sup> The term *form* is used in this analysis to denote a settlements structure or *morphology*.



## ***Benenden***

Within the parish of Benenden there are some scattered examples of single-storey dwellings pre-1900 around the main centres of population at Benenden Green and Iden Green, but none were positively identified for the first half of the twentieth century. A more detailed survey may discover some scattered examples.

Post WWII, more have been built, but they still remain few in number — Benenden was not considered a major growth point settlement. For example, a small development of post-1950s bungalow-type homes are to be found at both Iden Green and Benenden Green, typical of dwellings built for the elderly.



Example at Iden Green. *Google Street Scene*



Example at Benenden Green. *Google Street Scene*

Comparatively few modern bungalows were identified and most examples were individual examples rather than in an estate context. However, generally the impact of single-storey dwellings on settlement form in this parish has been negligible.



Bungalow, Cranbrook Road,  
Benenden.  
*Google Street Scene*

### ***Newenden***

Newenden is a small parish and its main settlement is still little more than a hamlet. There are a few single-storey dwellings dating from before 1900, with at least one example of a single-storey dwelling, dating from about 1920 (as far as can be ascertained at present). This is situated along Lossenham Lane, the last cottage east of the settlement centre. It is very similar to a type found in Rolvenden associated with agricultural labour, and is probably of the same provenance. Constructed of timber with weatherboard cladding and a slate roof, it sits on a large plot.



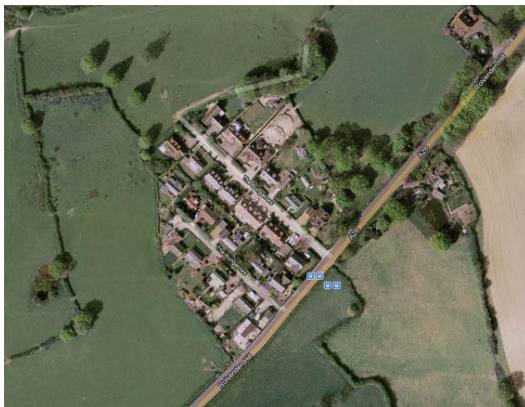
### ***Rolvenden***

Rolvenden has at least two examples of early twentieth-century agricultural dwellings constructed of timber. Orchard Cottage on Regents Street, and Border View situated along Hope House Lane — both standing in open country. As previously mentioned, the latter is known to have been built by a local farmer for the family of one of his workers, and the former was also most probably erected for a similar reason.



Orchard Cottage, Regents Street, Rolvenden. sits on a large plot for its size.

Also as previously mentioned, Rolvenden has what is probable a unique group of single-storey dwellings for the High Weald, built for the railway workers of the Kent and East Sussex Railway. It consists of two parallel roads built off Rolvenden Hill, now known as the 'Bungalows' they were either constructed in the 1890s or the early 1900s. Regrettably, a number have been demolished and replaced by larger modern dwellings, usually with less character. Others have been extended, often in such a way that their origin is obscured. Urgent action is needed if the future of the survivors is to be secured.



Aerial view of 'Tin Town', Rolvenden, showing its layout. *Google maps*

Post-WWII developments of mixed dwellings have examples of later twentieth-century bungalows (for example, Gybbon Road), and there is a small development of single-storey dwellings for the elderly at Monypenny (previously illustrated).



Aerial view of Monypenny, Rolvenden showing its layout. The field to the right of Monypenny, Glebe Field, has since been developed by a housing association. *Google maps*

Single-storey homes are a more prominent form of dwelling in Rolvenden than in many parishes, despite the fact that collectively there are not a huge number of them. It is, however, their occurrence from every period and type that has created an important collection of such dwellings in a single parish.



## ***Sandhurst***

This parish was not looked at in great detail, but the approach road to Sandhurst Green from the west was explored. This is a classic stretch of ribbon development, with buildings from every age. By its very nature, this kind of development tends to favour detached dwellings set well back from the highway, often with large gardens. There are a number of bungalows, some built between 1920 and 1939, with quite a number being post WWII. Most belong more to the national rather than the local vernacular; some may be purpose built but could as easily be speculative.

At Sandhurst there are some more recent developments of suburban type dwellings, not dissimilar to others found in neighbouring Wealden settlements.



Aerial view of Sandhurst showing different stages of development. To the north of the road is the earlier mainly inter-war ribbon development, to the south recent higher-density suburban-type development.

*Google maps*



## ***Bodiam***

Bodiam is another small parish, which until about 1950 had an extremely dispersed settlement pattern of a few farmsteads and two small hamlets — the settlement pattern had changed little since the time of the tithe survey. Following WWII, the principal landowner, Guinness Hop Farms, required more housing for their workers. Young single men were accommodated in single-storey accommodation at Terrace Wood (since redeveloped into a speculative housing estate), and workers displaced from Eastern Europe following WWII were housed in a small development of single-storey dwellings, also since redeveloped with houses. The largest development, however, was Levett's Lane, which is a small estate in Bodiam built by Guinness Hop Farms and Battle Rural District Council. The whole estate consists of one-and-a-half-storey semi-detached dwellings built around a green. In the 1980s (the probable date) Levett's Lane was extended by the construction of speculative dwellings of one-and-a-half storey. More tied cottages (of two storeys) were also built at Northlands by Guinness Hop Farms.



Aerial view of Levett's Lane, Bodiam. The post-1980s' development is to the right, north of the stand of trees. The 1950s' development is to the left around the open green.  
*Google maps*



Levett's Lane, Bodiam. Three of the semi-detached pairs of one-and-a-half storey dwellings.  
*Google Street Scene*

Levett's Lane, Bodiam. Three of the semi-detached pairs of one-and-a-half storey dwellings.

*Google maps*

The activities of Guinness Hop Farms changed the shape of the parish. At a time single-storey dwellings became a dominant building type within Bodiam. These have in some cases given way to later two-storey developments and although many of these developments are very discrete, it has changed the distribution pattern within the parish to a marked degree.

In Bodiam there were also other building types erected in the 1950s and 1960s by private individuals working in the area: one example is of a brick bungalow constructed for the owner of a local service station, who was also at the time the publican of the Junction Inn (now the Curlew).



*Google Street Scene*

### ***Etchingham***

Etchingham is another parish with a history of a very dispersed settlement form<sup>10</sup>. Surprisingly, an initial assessment of the modern parish failed to find any single-storey dwellings prior to 1900, other than the lodge house at Haremere Hall (further field

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<sup>10</sup> Part of the historic parish was detached to form Hurst Green Parish in 1953.

research will, no doubt discover others). As at Newenden, there has been little twentieth-century residential development in Etchingham, and this has mostly been later in the century and in the form of houses.

### ***Hurst green***

Hurst Green was established as a separate civil parish in the 1950s, having previously been divided between Salehurst and Etchingham (the old boundary passing through the hamlet of Hurst Green itself). There were few if any single-storey dwellings in the area now covered by the parish prior to 1900, which fits in with the situation in Etchingham and is similar to that in Salehurst. Within about the last forty years there has been considerable residential development in Hurst Green, and many of these dwellings are single-storey, most of the classic bungalow type. The newer parts of Hurst Green are rather suburban in feel. The parish settlement form has become more nucleated with the modern developments, which is accentuated by its relatively small area.



Aerial view of Hurst Green. The A21 runs north to south centre-right of the picture, the road from Etchingham to Hurst Green runs from the bottom left-hand corner — the older development lies adjacent to these two roads. The additional development north of the Etchingham Road and west of the A21 is modern  
*Google maps*





## ***Northiam***

Northiam is the principal place in a large parish to which it gives its name. Northiam's historic settlement form is complex, but demonstrates many of the characteristics found in other High Weald settlements.

The result of a steady (if not continuous) rise in population over the last few hundred years has resulted in a slow accretion of habitation, first within the area around the parish church, and then followed by a form of ribbon development along its roads and lanes. This resulted in the formation of a relatively low density, but extended pattern of development that contains dwellings reflecting the architectural styles of the periods when development took place.

Although there are some pre-1900 single-storey buildings in the heart of the settlement, many more were erected along its approach roads from the 1920s onwards. Later examples show typical mid-twentieth-century (and later) bungalow characteristics, national vernacular styles for the most part constructed mainly from brick and tile.



Example of bungalows at Northiam set back well back from the road on large plots.

*Google Street Scene*

More recent residential development (typically post 1970), usually of a somewhat higher density, has filled in the 'backlands' lying between the complex layout of lanes that feed into the principal roads through the settlement. Many of these dwellings are single-storey or one-and-a-half storey dwellings of repetitive bungalow or chalet bungalow design.



Aerial view of Northiam. The oldest part of the settlement is in the vicinity of the flag marked A on the view. Subsequent development spilled out along the roads and lanes from there. The infilling shown on this shot is all late twentieth-century development.

*Google maps*

### ***Salehurst and Robertsbridge***

Robertsbridge, the largest settlement in the historic parish of Salehurst (and now sharing its name with the modern civil parish) was a planned township established in the thirteenth century — thus it is one of the few true villages in this part of the High Weald. The parish overall has some single-storey dwellings pre-1900, but not in abundance. During the course of the twentieth century, up until about 1960, a number of single-storey dwellings were erected associated with farms, many of which had devolved from the Iridge or New Iridge Estate into the hands of independent farmers. This particularly affected a number of small farms situated along, or near to the Bodiam Road. Examples can be found at Springhill Farm (the existing single-storey dwelling is of uncertain date, there was a dwelling on this site about 1900), Climsett's Farm (pair of semi-detached bungalows about 1950s), and the farm manager's house for Great Wigsell Farm (Colt house construction, about 1960 — previously mentioned).



Farmer's house, Springhill Farm, Salehurst.  
*Google street scene*



Agricultural, semi-detached bungalows, circa 1950, Climpsett's Farm, Salehurst.  
*Google street scene*



More recent residential development (from the 1970s onwards) has seen the construction of a substantial number of modern bungalows and chalet bungalows on higher density estates in the environs of Robertsbridge village — a familiar pattern.



Aerial view of Robertsbridge. The medieval settlement (with later additions) lies to the east of the railway line, which runs north to south in the centre of the view. The built-up area to the west of the railway line is predominantly twentieth-century.  
*Google Maps*

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

What the survey established was that the frequency of single-storey dwellings before 1960 varied considerably between parishes. From parishes like Etchingham where they were almost completely absent, to those like Rolvenden and Salehurst where they played a more positive part in the evolution of settlement form. It is likely that these variations reflect differences in their tenurial structure and history. This is too large a topic to explore further here, but recent research has recorded differences in tenure in these parishes and further clarification could be pursued at another time.



## PART 3 — KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given contemporary development pressures it is likely that early twentieth-century single-storey buildings will continue to be under threat and if they are lost now there will be a serious gap in the record of Wealden buildings of this type in the future.

This section, therefore, describes key issues in relation to the identification, assessment and protection of single-storey dwellings within the broader context of development within High Weald settlement, and makes recommendations for further consideration.

### **1      *Understanding Settlement Form and Character***

Single buildings and groups of buildings contribute to settlement form in two ways. First in terms of their spatial relationship, which can be understood by exploring the physical association of the different elements of a settlement to each other. For example, the positioning of the principal buildings, the spatial relationship between where people live, work and trade. Furthermore, the different elements within a settlement may be analysed by describing physical attributes such as how close together buildings lie to each other, their closeness to the road system, the size of the plots upon which they sit (often described as *grain* and *plot* analysis).

Secondly, settlement form may be described in terms of its visual quality. For example, the materials it is built from, their colour, texture and the effects of the juxtaposition of the different types of materials. Additionally, the proximity of buildings to each other, whether they sit directly on the highway, or back from it (the effects of grain and plot analysis), their scale and mass, all affect a settlement's visual quality — how it is perceived by an observer. The visual impact of settlement form together with the less tangible elements such as 'atmosphere' all contribute to how 'sense of place' is perceived — the phenomenological experience of place. *Settlement characterisation* of this kind not only aids better assessment of historical significance but also supports better development design generally. A thorough and detailed characterisation of settlement form for key parishes, at least, would seem desirable in the face of continued (and growing) development pressures.

## **2      *Using the Planning System to Protect Historically Significant Buildings and Groups of Buildings***

The main purpose within the planning regime of establishing the historical significance of heritage assets is to ensure the sustainability of future development and to support the management of historically sensitive areas, particularly high status ones like the High Weald AONB.

Two important national planning guidance documents set out the requirements for establishing the historic significance of heritage assets within the planning process. They are: *Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment* (PPS5) and to some extent *Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas* (PPS7). Within these guidelines it is clear that in order to ensure that the best decisions are made all new development proposals should be open to scrutiny from the perspective of historical significance.

## **3      *Assessing the Historical Environment***

For an effective assessment of historical significance to take place, it is essential that assessments are available for establishing the significance of *all elements* of the historical environment in general: not just those heritage assets which have formal statements of significance (for example, buildings on the National List, Scheduled Monuments, assets on the Parks and Gardens Register, conservation areas etc). Clearly established criteria for how heritage assessments should be conducted would also be beneficial. Issuing guidance on how heritage assessments are made and what they should contain would greatly enhance protection for the historical environment in the High Weald.

## **4      *Listing Important Buildings***

It is also important that formal protection regimes are up to date. That is to say, listed buildings on the National List should be reviewed to ensure that twentieth-century buildings of importance are included — this research indicates that a whole class of buildings (single and one-and-a-half-storey) are presently lacking this level of protection in the parishes studied in the eastern High Weald.

Of particular note are the timber-framed examples built for agricultural workers in the first half of the century. Orchard Cottage, Border View, and the Newenden example along Lossenham Lane are all twentieth-century examples of Wealden timber-framed buildings. These in their own way reflect the continuation of a time honoured tradition that many may have considered had ceased much earlier. It is possible that some, if not all, were wholly or partly prefabricated — but that should not rule them out from being listed — it merely demonstrates a development in the history of timber-framed construction.

More urgent is the plight of the remaining single-storey dwellings at ‘Tin Town’ in Rolvenden parish. This must be considered, as a group, to be of national importance for a number of reasons. First, their provenance is probably unique for the High Weald and unusual nationally. Secondly, their construction method is an example of a class of building whose survival is now rarely found — if they also turn out to be pre-fabricated examples of products sold by an international supplier like Boulton & Paul, their significance is even greater. These buildings should be the subjects of immediate spot listing so that they can be protected whilst further investigations are carried out.

## **5      *Maintaining Up-to-date Conservation Area Management Plans***

It would also help if local planning authorities could ensure that each conservation area has an updated management plan in place. Furthermore, it would be helpful if more *local lists* of significant buildings were to be maintained.

## **6      *Involving the Community***

Increased community involvement in the process of local settlement characterisation (such as is happening in Rolvenden at present) would help to empower local communities as well as providing a welcome resource for enabling characterisation to be achieved. This would best be carried out on a parish-by-parish basis because of the dispersed nature of Wealden settlement patterns. This work could contribute to the review of local conservation areas, the establishment of management plans for them, as well as providing the necessary research for parish design statements and identifying buildings for protection and potential listing.

## **7      *Maintaining a Varied Housing Stock***

In the past single-storey buildings may not have been especially numerous, but they are historically significant. More than that, they also often have a continued socio-economic benefit in terms of contemporary housing need. Because many are quite small they are suitable for smaller households and people looking for less expensive homes of the kind that is often in short supply. Discouraging the demolition or over extending such buildings would be beneficial, both in terms of protecting the local heritage, but also in maintaining a suitable number of smaller dwellings.

## **8      *Producing a Gazetteer of Single-storey and One-and-a-half-Storey Buildings in the High Weald***

If further in-depth research could be carried out at parish level, then in time it would be possible to establish a full gazetteer of all the relevant buildings within the area of the High Weald.

## **9      *Planning Future Development in the High Weald***

Arguably, there is a need for a public debate about the character of rural settlement in the High Weald, and how more residential development might be accommodated in the future, if that is what is needed.

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