

Preston Village Conservation Area Character Statement



Designated: 24 September 1970
Extended: 6 January 1977 and
31 November 1980

Split from Preston Park: 28 June 1980

Area: 32.58 Hectares/ 80.51 Acres

Article 4 Direction controlling
permitted development made
11 January 2001

Character Statement adopted
20 October 2005

Introduction:

The purpose of this document is to describe the history and character of this conservation area in order to provide a context for policies contained in the Development Plan, which will guide future development and enhancements in the area. Policies and design guidance are given in other documents, a list of which is included at the end of this statement.

General Description:

The Preston Village Conservation Area is situated about 1.5 miles north-north-west of Brighton, and includes the original settlement of Preston village, the medieval manor house, now called Preston Manor and listed grade II*, St. Peter's Church (also II*), and the public park and sports grounds which once formed the private gardens and agricultural land to the south of the manor. To the north and east is the Preston Park Conservation Area, composed almost entirely of late 19th century houses built after the then owners of Preston Manor, the Stanford family, began to dispose of land for new development towards the end of the 19th century.

Historical Development of the Area:

The two Preston conservation areas (Preston Village and Preston Park) both lie within land which once formed part of the medieval estate of the Manor of Preston. At the time of the Domesday Survey, the manor was held by the Bishop of Chichester, and a church and windmill are also recorded. The name is Anglo-Saxon, meaning a "priest's farmstead" and the village was often called "Preston Episcopi" to distinguish it from similarly named settlements. From 1531 to 1628 the manor was Crown property, after which it was leased to the Shirley family and in 1705 it passed to the Western family. In 1794 they sold it to William Stanford and the manor remained in the ownership of this family until the death of Sir Charles and then his wife, Lady Ellen Thomas-Stanford in 1932, and who bequeathed the building (called Preston Place) and its immediate gardens to Brighton Corporation.

The 1876 Ordnance Survey map of Preston shows a very much smaller settlement than present. The 1841 railway line cuts into the hillside from north to south and running parallel to it along the valley floor, lies the main London-Brighton road. To the east of the road lies Preston Manor and St. Peter's Church, with completely open fields further to the east and to the south. Next to the church is the "International Gun and Polo Club Grounds" but otherwise the land is clearly still in agricultural use with Preston Dairy Farm being shown to the south-west of the main road to Brighton.

Between the main road and the railway line, and immediately south of South Road, is Preston Farm. The former farmhouse, now divided into Little Barn, Mulberry Cottage and Old Cottage, in South Road is all that remains of these buildings, and the former farmyard is now a petrol filling station. Between South Road and Middle Road, much of the land is taken up with a large brewery, and there are small cottages along Middle Road and North Road, forming the old village of Preston, with a police station in Middle Road.

The 1876 map also shows that to the north, the Clermont estate is largely complete, served by the railway station at the end of Clermont Road, with detached or semi-detached villas along London Road and on the north side of Harrington Road, which otherwise remains undeveloped. To the north of Clermont Road, and on the west side of the railway line, the public pleasure grounds, called the Tivoli Gardens are clearly marked, with open fields beyond. Of note is the former drovers' road which is shown on the map as a wide track leading from east to west along what is now The Drove, Middle Road and Preston Drove.

Between 1875 and the 1900s, the Bennett-Stanfords sold off further manorial land, including in 1883 some 63 acres which lay to the south of house and which became Brighton Corporation's first public park. This was paid for by a bequest in 1879 of £70,000 from a local bookmaker, William Davies. Additionally, a large tract of land to the east of the new park was developed by the Bennett-Stanfords between what is now Preston Drove and Springfield Road with a mixture of semi-detached villas and terraced houses. The controlled way in which the estate was developed ensured a high quality of design and individual details such as carved bargeboards and decorative plasterwork, which has resulted in a pleasantly cohesive and attractive townscape which is still evident today.

By the time of the date of the Second Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1898 much of the Preston Park area had been developed with new housing, although the land to the north of Preston Drove was still mainly fields and allotments. Paired villas had been built along the London Road and along Preston Park Avenue, to take advantage of views over the park. In the park itself, softly-curving paths are shown, with some public buildings having been built, namely the "Refreshment Rooms" in the centre, and the "Clock Tower". A drinking fountain is also shown on the current site of the bowling greens. The former polo field to the east of Preston Manor is shown as a cricket ground, without any buildings.

By the time of the 1911 map the first bowling green had appeared in the park close to the junction with Stanford Avenue and a large "Police and Fire Engine" station was shown filling much of a large site between South Road and Middle Road in Preston Village. Manor Farm still existed but had disappeared by the time of the 1931 map, the land having been converted into more bowling greens and tennis courts, although the farmhouse in South Road still remains. However, the basic layout of the park has hardly altered since it was first created in 1883, and it has been included on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens in England. In the village of Preston change has also been slow with the police station being converted to flats in the 1980s and the remaining farmyard buildings from Manor Farm being demolished and replaced by a brash modern garage.

Definition of the Special Character of the Area:

The Preston Village Conservation Area is composed of three discrete elements - the old village centred on South Road, Middle Road and North Road, which is made up of a mixture of small cottages and shops; Preston Manor and St. Peter's Church, historic buildings of national importance open to the public; and Preston Park itself, a public open space with sporting and leisure facilities much loved and frequented by the local population. Through these different areas runs the very busy Preston Road, the main London-Brighton route, and forming the western boundary of part of the conservation area, the main London-Brighton railway line.

The quieter residential streets in Preston Village contrast with the much busier main roads, and the park itself is relatively quiet during the working week but very busy at weekends and during the summer months when the training circuit, bowling greens, tennis courts and football pitches are well used by sporting enthusiasts.

Spaces and Vistas:

The Preston Village Conservation Area lies mainly on a fairly flat valley floor. To the west is a steep scarp slope rising to Dyke Road and Hove, and to the east, a less obvious hill which leads up Preston Drove and Stanford Avenue to Five Ways and Ditchling Road. The public park area is mainly grassed with avenues of trees marking the boundaries creating an informal "Romantic" parkland, reflecting its late 19th century date. Of note is the impact of the two "core" buildings, Preston Manor and St. Peter's Church which sit prominently on the corner of Preston Drove and Preston Road. Although surrounded by gardens and flint walls, they are clearly visible from the main road. Views across the park, and up the scarp slope through the Rookery gardens on the west side of Preston Road, are important.

The enclosed nature of the village, and the small-scale residential cottages which line its streets, offers a contrast to the larger buildings, most of which are in a commercial use, along Preston Road.

In 2001 the first stage of the Preston Park restoration project was completed with the opening of the walled gardens around the Manor. Further phases concentrating on the southern end of the park are due to start in the autumn of 2004, with the restoration of the pool and fountain and improved accessibility.

Materials:

Within Preston village the 18th and 19th century buildings are all cobbled or dressed flint with handmade tiles for the roofs (e.g. nos. 19-21 North Road) although red or brown brick was used for window and door reveals (e.g. nos. 25 and 27 North Road). After about 1850 brown brick or painted render was used then red brick which became fashionable after about 1880. Welsh slate was common for roofing after the railway arrived in 1841 although concrete tiles have replaced many of the original roofs. Edwardian buildings favoured gables often with fake half-timbering and there are examples of this style in South Road and along Preston Road. However it is the earlier flint buildings, all of them listed, which are most impressive in this part of Preston, including some fine examples of coursed, square flint at Acacia House, no. 199 Preston Road.

Description of the Buildings:

The Preston Village Conservation Area divides into three areas, firstly the village itself; secondly, Preston Manor, and St. Peter's Church; and finally, the public park and Lovers Walk.

(1) Preston Village

Preston Village fronts Preston Road and includes three side streets, of which South Road is a relatively wide, busy route connecting Preston Park to Hove, and Middle Road and North Road are much narrower residential streets, lined with small cottages past which can be seen the tree-covered railway embankment.

South Road leads up to the tunnel beneath the railway line. A modern garage, on the corner with Preston Road, is included within the conservation area and it is to be hoped that in the future a more sympathetic building will replace it. On the south side of South Road is a fine collection of grade II listed buildings, of which nos. 7, 9 and 11 were built in 1907 at least in part as the Stanford Estate Offices by Charles Stanley Peach. The two storey building is three bays wide, stuccoed, with the entablature decorated with paterae and oakleaf festoons below a dentil cornice. On each corner are giant angle pilasters with acanthus-leaf capitals. Each bay has a "Georgian" shopfront with multi-paned windows and doors. The cast iron balconies which stretch across each bay at first floor level are of note. This prominent building is a complete anomaly within the conservation area but makes a valuable contribution to the streetscape, although part of it is currently empty and the whole building appears rather neglected. Next to it, but set back from the street with small front gardens contained by low flint walls, are three further listed buildings, once Preston Manor farm.

On one side, Little Barn and Mulberry Cottage form a single storey range, built of flint with a tiled mansarded roof and two large brick stacks. Next, the two storey farmhouse is dated 1636 on the front but appears more 18th century in style with tripartite sashes to the first and ground floors and an elegant Doric columned-porch to the front door. It is also built from flint with red brick dressing to the door and window reveals.

On the north side of the road, modern housing has been built on the site of a builders yard, and before that a brewery. Its rather fussy detailing and shallow-pitched roofs are inappropriate but the buildings do follow the historic building line and are roughly the same height and bulk of the adjoining late 19th century houses. These five houses are two storeys high, with gables over canted bays and very small front gardens. Closer to the railway tunnel, a small group of mid-19th century cottages, built of brown brick, flat-fronted and with simple slate roofs facing the street, completes the street. Within the last few years, modern housing has been inserted on a site to the south of the road, close to the railway embankment. This development cuts across the existing boundary to the conservation area and consideration should be given to reviewing this boundary.

Middle Road is dominated by the other side of the modern housing development which is set at an angle to the street, creating parking bays and rather awkward, left-over spaces. On the north side is a row of terraced cottages, starting with three late 19th century red brick two storey houses, with canted bays and sash windows, and then further towards the west, changing to simple, flat-fronted mid-19th century cottages, mostly painted, with slated roofs and small front gardens. In the middle of this group is one double-fronted house of c.1880, formerly a Police Station, built from brown brick, with lighter brick dressings to the doors, windows and corners.

North Road is a narrow, twisting street with cottages and small houses, some of which are listed. The use of flint for buildings and for boundaries, and the way in which the street curves along its length, are important features. Along the south side, a converted school with Gothic detailing sits close to the junction with Preston Road. This used to be Preston Church of England Infants' School and changed to residential use in 1985. Adjacent are nos. 11-15, three early 19th century cottages, two storeys high and painted white, with another pair of slightly larger scale cottages, also one window wide, to the west. Nos.19, 21 and 23 are two storey and listed grade II. Of note are the cobbled walls and multi-paned sash windows. Afterwards are three 19th century white-painted cottages and turning the corner south-west into Home Road is a housing scheme of c.1965 with the buildings sitting at an angle to the street.

Whilst they merge reasonably well into the street scene, their oriel windows are discordant and the general relationship of building to street line is not satisfactory. On the north side of the street, close to Home Road, is an attractive group of white-painted two storey houses with canted bays and bracketed eaves. The loss of original windows to this group is regrettable. Next to these is the Old Forge, a single storey brick and flint building rather clumsily converted into a garage with modern casement windows inserted into the front elevation. Set well back from the road, with attractive cottage gardens, are two listed buildings. Garden Cottage, said to date from 1670 but with an 18th century façade, is built from squared and knapped flint with red brick dressings to the doors and windows. A fine Doric porch with a Gothic fanlight enlivens the front elevation. Next door, no. 28, Preston Cottage, has a cobbled front. Both buildings have handmade tiles to their roofs. Beyond these listed buildings, a block of two storeys plus mansard has been built on part of a former builder's yard. This modern building, with its very small ground floor windows, is not in character with the street. The road terminates with the rear car park to the public house in Preston Road, with white bollards marking the boundary.

Along **Preston Road** is a motley assortment of late 19th century and modern buildings, with only one listed building, Acacia House (no.199), set back from the road with a small front garden and built from very finely-squared and coursed knapped flints. This 18th century building is five-windows-wide although unfortunately two of them on the ground floor have been replaced with modern top-hung and fixed light windows. On either side of the listed buildings are Edwardian buildings of definite character.

The two storey building to the south has a wide gable facing the road, half-timbered, with fake timber-framing to the first floor and painted render beneath.

The curved "wind braces" are great fun and are complemented by the carved barge board to the gable and the centrally-positioned sash windows. On the north side of no. 199, is a pair of three storey buildings, conveniently dated 1903. The gable to the street is decorated with what appear to be giant cockerels which sit over the first floor sashed oriel windows.

The ground floor shops provide liveliness to the street, and there is another shop to the end building, next to Middle Road, with a flat-fronted first floor and hipped tiled roof. Between Middle Road and North Road are two white-painted two storey buildings (now the Preston Park Chemists and an estate agents), both mid-19th century with hipped roofs facing Preston Road. Between North Road and Lauriston Road is the Crown and Anchor public house, of c.1860, two storeys high with a shallow tiled roof and sash windows with modern shutters. Following this is a group of three Edwardian shops (nos. 215 - 219), with the central building having a tall timber gable facing the street, and beyond these, nos. 221 - 225, two storey with first floor oriel windows and ground floor shopfronts. No. 225, which sits on the corner of Lauriston Road, has a second floor Dutch gable facing the main road.

(2) Preston Manor and St. Peter's Church

These grade II* listed buildings now accessed from Preston Drove, were originally approached from Preston Road. They sit quite close to the junction of Preston Road with South Road, a relationship in accord with the historical connections between the village, the manorial farm (now gone), the manor house, and the medieval church. Surrounded by high flint walls and many mature trees and planting, the glimpses of the house and the impact of the short, stumpy church tower, are particularly important.

Preston Manor is largely 18th and 19th century but there are two 13th century rooms in the cellar and two 16th century rooms above. Built as a manor house, in 1738 Thomas Western had the house rebuilt above the main floor of the medieval house and small pavilions erected to flank the main block. In 1905 Charles Stanley Peach was commissioned to enlarge the house and he added a dining room and a servants wing, widened the entrance hall and built a verandah across the north front. The house was opened to the public in 1933 and internally has been restored to its appearance at the end of the 19th century. The building is two storeys high, stuccoed, five-windows-wide, with single storey pavilions with steeply pitched roofs on either side, and an additional wing on the west side. The main building's roof is largely concealed behind a parapet. It sits in close proximity to St. Peter's Church, dating to the 13th century but heavily restored in 1872 by James Woodman and in 1878 by Ewan Christian. It is no longer a place of worship, and is maintained by the Churches Conservation Trust.

A disastrous fire in 1905 led to further "restoration" of the nave by P M Johnston. The simple building is faced in flint with the 13th century square tower, with its shallow tiled roof, being the most prominent feature. Four table tombs in the old churchyard to the side of the church are also listed grade II, as is a cast iron lamp post just past the entrance to the churchyard. A croquet lawn to the park side of the house stands adjacent to the walled garden, dating to the 18th century with a pets' cemetery in one corner. To the east of the house stands an old well-house in knapped flint which dates to the 1730s.

(3) Preston Park

The 63-acre park was informally opened in 1883, although a year of intense activity followed with new paths, trees, landscaped gardens, bowling greens and tennis courts being laid out and the whole reopened with a grand ceremony in 1884. More tennis courts and bowling greens were added in the 1930s, but essentially the park retains its Victorian character with many fine trees, particularly along Preston Road and Preston Park Avenue. It is on the Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest.

To the immediate south of Preston Manor is the Coronation Garden for the Blind which was laid out in 1953 as a scented garden. To the east, are four tennis courts and the former cricket ground, which is now a sports ground with a modern pavilion overlooking the cycle track. The centre of the park is open, grassed, with softly curving paths connecting across to the café in the centre, and with trees creating a natural boundary to the east and west. The long avenue of trees beside The Ride, which runs parallel to Preston Park Avenue, is an attractive feature.

To the south, the park is busier with five tennis courts and five bowling greens, linked by more informally-laid out paths and playgrounds. At the southern entrance to the park, close to the junction with Stanford Avenue, is a walled rose garden containing a fountain and ornamental stepping stones.

The park also contains several buildings and features of note. Along Preston Road is the 1930s entrance of balustraded walls and decorative dolphins, the symbol of Brighton Corporation. Close by, sitting in the middle of the largest expanse of green, is the chalet café which opened in 1887 and housed the park police in the upper rooms. This is built from red brick in a typically-Edwardian style, replicating a Swiss chalet, with patterned fake timbering and wide verandahs around each side. Closer to Preston Park Avenue is the most prominent building within the park, the clock tower of 1891. This grade II listed building was designed by the borough surveyor Francis May and was paid for by Edward White. It is about four storeys tall and decorated with four broken pediments supported by Corinthian columns and dolphin motifs bearing the initials "EW". Further south is a small gardener's store, with faience panels and more timbering under a tiled roof, grade II listed. Close to the rose garden is the Rotunda Café which was purchased in 1924 from the Wembley Exhibition, with the 1930s clubhouse serving the bowling greens. To the east is a strange neo-Georgian orangery which conceals sheds and other nondescript buildings. Special features include the 1987 statue of the athlete Steve Ovett and an entrance pylon on the south edge of the park which commemorates the Roman villa which was found nearby.

Lying on the west side of Preston Road are the Rookery Gardens, purchased from the Stanford estate in 1883 but unaltered until 1935 when the rockery was laid out using 1,350 tons of Cheddar stone. In the middle of the garden is a pretty flint pavilion, in the "cottage orne" style. Views from these gardens, across to Preston Park and to the old manor house and church, are particularly pleasant. Regrettably, most of the semi-detached villas shown on the 1898 map have been replaced with modern flats (and therefore excluded from the conservation area) although their sites still contain some good trees which contribute to the views along the main road. Surviving such redevelopment, Lovers Walk is the only group of historic buildings along this stretch of Preston Road. There are 12 properties, ranging from small cottages to a detached house and all of these were built between 1875 and 1898 on a site to the north of Preston Dairy Farm. Regrettably a large office block has been built in the garden of no.169 Preston Road, a two storey rendered villa. Nos. 3, 4 and 5 Lovers Walk are also rendered and two storeys high and sit in an elevated position above the narrow lane, enclosed by planting and flint walls. Nos. 1 and 2 are a semi-detached pair built from undressed flint with brown brick dressings to the windows and doors and having pretty canted bay windows and original dormers with carved barge boards. At the end of the lane is a group (nos. 1-6 Lovers Walk Cottages) also built from flint with brown brick and simple two-over-two sash windows. None of the buildings are listed but together they form an important and attractive group. Of note are the high flint walls (including the wall to the south-east side of the road), the trees and other shrubs, and the surviving late 19th century cast iron street lights.

Article 4 Directions

In order to halt the erosion of features such as sliding sash windows and traditional materials that was threatening to harm the special character of this conservation area, an additional planning control known as an Article 4 Direction was brought in. This requires owners to apply for planning permission to carry out works that were previously 'permitted development'.

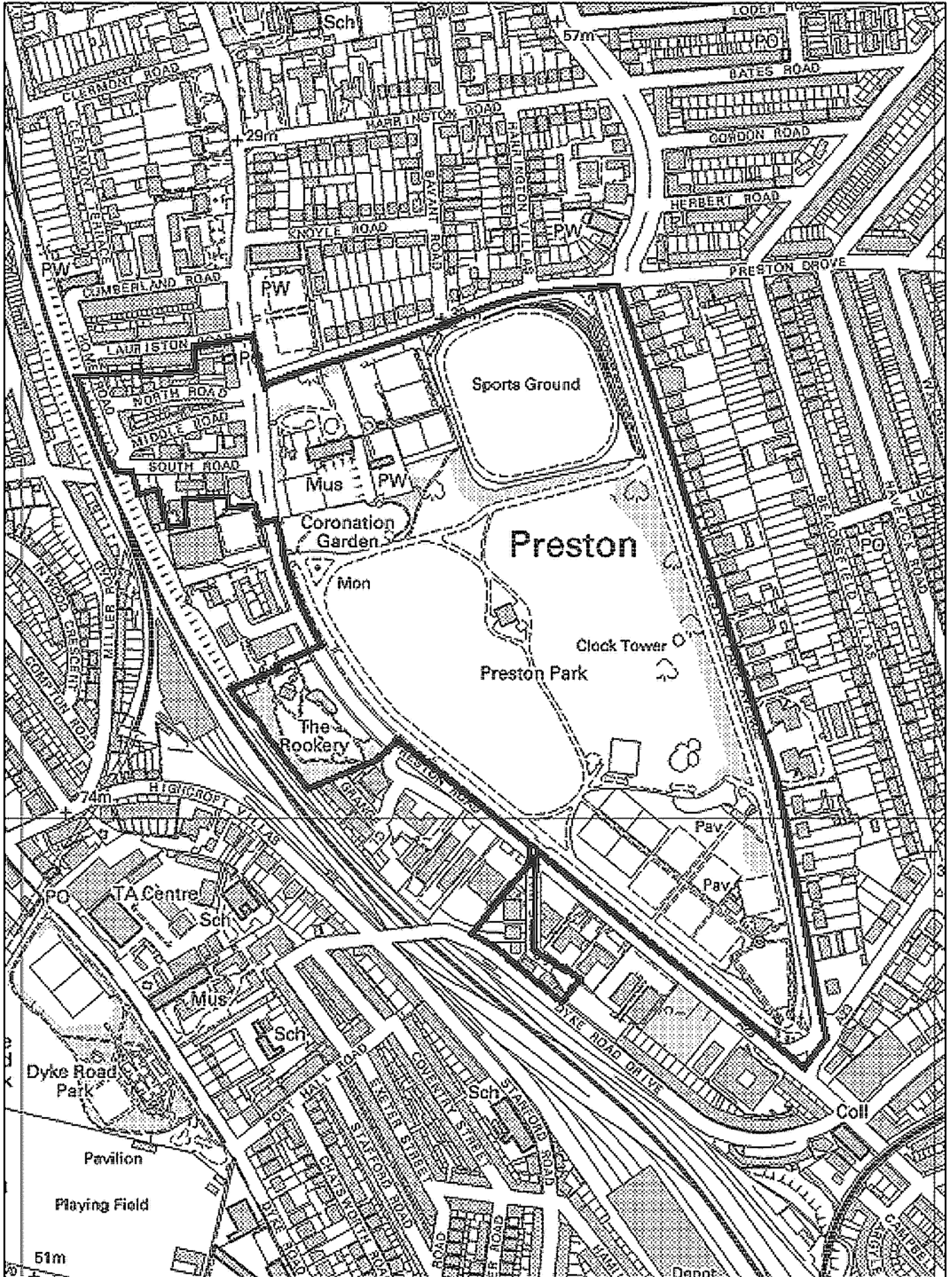
This means that the alteration or replacement of all windows, doors, or roofs fronting a highway or open space, changes to front boundaries and the demolition or alteration of chimneys all need planning permission.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

The following conservation related documents may be relevant and should be consulted during the preparation of plans for development in this area:

- SPGBH1 Roof alterations and extensions
- SPGBH2 External paint finishes and colours
- SPGBH7 Satellite dishes
- SPGBH11 Listed building interiors
- SPGBH13 Listed buildings - general advice
- SPGBH19 Fire precaution works to historic building
- Conservation Areas in Brighton & Hove - A Resident's Guide

Preston Village



Scaled to view.

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