

Round Hill Conservation Area

Character Statement



Designated: 6 January 1977

Area: 12.05 Hectares/ 29.78 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 Round Hill Conservation Area is situated on a south-eastern facing slope of the Downs in a residential area to the north of Brighton town centre. The area is bounded by the Upper Lewes Road to the south-east, a modern estate of flats to the south, the Ditchling Road to the west, and the railway line and industrial estate to the north. The mainly late 19th century buildings are terraced with continuous frontages of which the buildings in Round Hill Crescent, some of which are listed, are the most important architecturally.

Historical Development of the Area:

Until the 1860s the Round Hill area was still farmland, owned by several landowners including Thomas Read Kemp and William Stanford whose family had bought their land as tenants from the Western family. They paid £17,600 for land in Preston and Hove in 1794 and continued farming until the coming of the railway connection to London in 1841 led to increased demand for new housing. Unusually the Stanfords became developers themselves and in the early 1860s the development of the Round Hill area was begun, similar to others in Hanover Crescent and Powis Square. At this point the area was largely fields although to the south-east, a group of paired villas had been built earlier in the 19th century along the Ditchling Road (nos. 68-82) and terraced housing had been constructed on the south-east side of the Upper Lewes Road.

The first houses to be built were in 1865 in Round Hill Crescent and Richmond Road, but development must have been slow for the 1878 Ordnance Survey map, surveyed in 1875, shows only a terrace (nos. 1-19) and a single pair of houses (nos. 69-71) in an otherwise empty Round Hill Crescent. In Richmond Road, five pairs of semi-detached villas are shown (nos. 5-23) in a group, then an empty site and another pair, since demolished, on the corner of Mayo Road. Otherwise, the remaining area is devoid of any buildings apart from a windmill (for flour) marked on a site to the west of Crescent Road, Prince's Villa at the top of Crescent Road, and a single pair of houses on a site opposite (nos. 55-57 Prince's Road). Round Hill Street, Round Hill Road, and Belton Road were not laid out at this date and development of these smaller properties did not begin until the 1880s.

Most of the other buildings in the conservation area were built in the 1880s although in Prince's Road there is a group of Edwardian terraced houses (nos. 69-81) which date to c. 1900. On the corner of Mayo Road and Richmond Road is a block of flats dating from the 1980s, but otherwise the street elevations are remarkably intact and devoid of 20th century redevelopment, probably because the terraced form of the historic buildings and the tight urban form did not provide any opportunities for new buildings.

Definition of the Special Character of the Area:

The Round Hill Conservation Area is largely in residential use, with many of the larger houses in Round Hill Crescent and Richmond Road converted into flats, and individual family houses in the smaller terraced houses in the other roads. There are two public houses; The New Vic, on the corner of Mayo Road and Richmond Road which is a neo-Tudor building of the 1920s and the Round Hill public house in Ditchling Road. Apart from this there are some commercial properties along the Ditchling Road including some small local shops.

The two main roads which lie to either side of the conservation area, Ditchling Road and the Upper Lewes Road, are both busy with traffic although within the conservation area the roads are relatively peaceful without through traffic following calming measures in 2003, except between 5pm and 6pm, with workers returning home. Vehicular activity through the day is therefore largely confined to Ditchling Road which is especially busy when the local schools close at the end of the afternoon. Parked cars however dominate the residential streets within the conservation area.

Spaces and Vistas:

The Round Hill Conservation Area is notable for its hilly siting with long terraces of houses framing distant views of the sea to the south and of the downs to the east. The summit of the hill is at the middle of Prince's Road near the junction with Crescent Road, beyond which is the steep cutting of the railway line and slightly further to the north, the land drops abruptly to Hughes Road (formerly a railway goods yard and rail line to Kemp Town), outside the conservation area and mainly occupied by large commercial factories, shops and offices. Views of the conservation area can therefore be found from other parts of Brighton, particularly from Bear Road to the east and Race Hill to the south-east the curves and contours of streets like Round Hill Crescent are especially attractive. Equally important to the shape of Round Hill is the stepped terrace and building line along the north side of Princes Road. This is softened by the lines of trees which mark the junction of the former Kemp Town branch railway line. The surviving railway line is Round Hill's green corridor. There are further green ribbons of land not visible from the street, which also define the unaltered Victorian street plan of the conservation area from a distance. The more southerly of these ribbons include some unusually large gardens which extend across the steep escarpment between the south side of Richmond Road and the north side of Round Hill Crescent. It is in the long views of the conservation area that its greenness can be appreciated - a characteristic not evident from the streets within the area. There are no public open spaces and the only visibly accessible gardens are glimpses into private land from the stepped footway (known locally as a catcreep) which cuts steeply down the hill from the side of no. 2 Richmond Road to Round Hill Crescent. The green ribbons provided by private gardens and the railway remain valuable habitats for wildlife. Many of these linear green lungs originated as the breezy drying fields associated with Victorian laundries (away from the smoky town below), and the land attached to nurseries and small-holdings. These private back gardens contribute visual amenities to residents in this area, who do not benefit from the availability of communal parks or play areas nearby.

Of note are the vistas down Crescent Road and along Wakefield Road towards the centre of Brighton. There are few visible trees, as most of the houses have no front gardens and the private gardens behind are largely screened from close public view. However there are some notable trees on the land just outside the conservation area at the north-east end of Richmond Road, and similarly, within the grounds of the modern blocks of flats between Wakefield Road and Prince's Crescent. Some of the houses in Prince's Road have slightly larger front gardens and these have small trees and shrubbery which soften the views northwards towards Mayo Road. The front gardens to nos. 68-82 Ditchling Road also contain trees and by the junction with Prince's Crescent are three important mature trees which, with other street trees along Ditchling Road, provide a more sylvan setting for the Victorian buildings.

Materials:

Before the mid-19th century, brick was not used for vernacular buildings in the area because it had to be imported and was therefore expensive. The indigenous material was flint, but construction was time consuming and the invention in the mid-19th century of harder cements, and the fashion for replica stone, made render (or stucco for the architectural embellishments) the popular choice. Most of the buildings in the Round Hill Conservation Area were therefore originally rendered with timber sash windows and Welsh slate roofs, although in many streets most of the roofs have unfortunately been replaced with concrete tiles.

Ditchling Road is an exception to this, still retaining 50% of its slate roofs. Boundaries are usually low walls, some of them brick with recessed flint panels (e.g. Wakefield Road, Richmond Road and Ditchling Road) or alternatively brick plinth walls with cast iron railings.

Many of the pavements in the conservation area were originally covered with stone flags and the gutters were marked out with granite and limestone setts, with the kerbs made from large pieces of dressed granite and diorite. Many of these kerbs and gutters remain, as well as several brick and limestone pavement crossings, although the stone flags have been replaced with concrete or tarmac. However in Mayo Road there are some dark blue brick paviors, dating to the end of the 19th century, covering a large part of the pavement. The conservation area also contains some examples of late Victorian cast iron street lamps which are still in use.

Description of the Buildings:

The conservation area divides conveniently into four slightly discrete areas depending on the date of development. Quite different and separate from the main conservation area are the semi-detached villas along the Ditchling Road which stylistically date to c.1850. These were followed in 1865 by the relatively grand terraced properties of three or four storeys in Round Hill Crescent (all now listed), with spacious semi-detached houses with large gardens in Richmond Road. Later development in the 1870s and 1880s along Prince's Crescent, Prince's Road and Crescent Road was mainly two storey but generously planned, with a fourth phase of development of smaller artisan cottages of the late 1880s in Belton Road, Round Hill Road and Round Hill Street. This is a visually cohesive neighbourhood which retains the uniform heights of these 19th century terraces and villas.

(1) Ditchling Road

A busy thoroughfare, Ditchling Road leads north out of the town centre with trees on either side of the road and impressive views southwards to the sea. Within the Round Hill Conservation Area are two groups of buildings of different ages and styles. Nos. 68-82 Ditchling Road consist of four pairs of villas of c.1850, on two floors with sash windows and shallow pitched roofs sitting on bracketed eaves. Most of them have their original verandas with elegant curved roofs facing the road. The houses are set back from the road, with a variety of front boundaries in flint, brick or render, and have attractive front gardens containing many trees. Further along the road are later terraced houses some of which are in commercial use. Nos. 84, 86 and 88 date to the 1870s and form a terrace with rendered fronts which continue the building line of the villas adjacent and therefore also have pleasant front gardens and some flint walling. At the end of Prince's Crescent, where it joins Ditchling Road, are two further groups of terraced houses, mostly in residential use but with a few ground floor shops including a hairdressers, a pub, and an antique shop. These buildings are two or three storeys high, rendered and painted, some with canted bays to the ground or ground and first floors. Regrettably, many of the windows have been altered, and some shops are empty.

(2) Round Hill Crescent, Wakefield Road and Richmond Road

Round Hill Crescent is notable for the way in which it both curves and changes height dramatically along its length with continuous terraces of houses on either side. The south-western end rises steeply up the hill, curving around to the right as it changes levels, then drops steeply away again towards the north-eastern end and the junction with the Upper Lewes Road. The buildings are nearly all rendered and have a strong vertical emphasis with the later houses having canted bays to the front and moulded string courses. The buildings on the north/west side are three storeys plus a basement tall, with the buildings on the (lower) south/east side being only two storeys high plus a basement.

The presence of basements on the downhill side has meant that many of the houses have retained their attractive cast iron railings with spear heads but all of these buildings sit right on the pavement with no garden space to any of them. Of note are the simple sash windows which have either one or two panes in each sash. The Crescent also contains the only listed buildings in the conservation area, nos. 1-21 (odd), nos. 19 and 21, and nos. 23-37 (odd) on the west side and nos 69 and 71, and 101-113 odd on the north west side of the road, all of which date to c.1865. These buildings are stuccoed, lined out to represent ashlar, and each house has a highly decorative cast iron balcony on the first floor. Between the listed buildings are further terraced houses of the late 1870s and 1880s, of a similar height and bulk although their roofs have bracketed eaves rather than a parapet to the street. On the south/east side of the road, the houses are smaller and more varied in their detailing, with some original dormers set in pitched roofs facing the street, sometimes ending in a gable. There are two 19th century cast iron street lamps, outside no. 62 and at the bottom of the twitten from Wakefield Road. Negative features include the many slated roofs recovered in concrete tiles, the insertion of unsympathetic dormers and other modern windows, and the replacement of traditional panelled doors with off-the-shelf modern reproductions; alterations carried out under 'permitted development' rights prior to the introduction of the Round Hill Article 4 Direction and its more restrictive planning controls in the year 2000. Wakefield Road and Richmond Road run almost parallel to Round Hill Crescent and in a similar way they curve as they rise up the hill. On the eastern side of Wakefield Road is a continuous terrace of two and three storey rendered houses with canted bays and pitched roofs facing the street. Of note are the views down the street towards Brighton city centre, the flint wall which forms the boundary on the west side (with some mature trees and modern blocks of flats beyond), and the slight curve in the end of the road, with more flint walling, at the junction with the Upper Lewes Road.

Richmond Road is on a steeper curve which dips down towards the junction with D'Aubigny Road and contains five examples of the cast iron street lamps found elsewhere in the conservation area. There are just two types of house, semi-detached villas and terraced, of which the most notable are nos. 5-23, arranged in pairs along the west side of the road and dating to the 1860s. These painted four storey buildings have now all been converted to flats and have suffered from a consequent loss of architectural detail including the insertion of uPVC windows and reroofing in concrete tiles. However they do sit back slightly from the road, sometimes behind flint and brick walls, and this provides some garden space in the centre of the conservation area. On the other, eastern side of Richmond Road is a long terrace (nos. 2-94) of two storied houses with basements protected by cast iron railings. They have painted rendered fronts with attractive canted bays which largely retain their original sash windows. Some of them have decorated pediments over their front doors, picked out in scrolled patterns. Beyond the New Vic public house the Edwardian houses on the west side cascade down the hill towards the north with views to the houses on the other side of the valley. Opposite these the houses are without basements. Negative features include the many roofs which are covered in concrete tiles and some replacement front doors and windows, although there are fewer examples of such changes than in Round Hill Crescent. Between Round Hill Crescent and Richmond Road are two roads, **Ashdown Road** and **D'Aubigny Road**, which both have short terraces of 1880s terraced housing of two or three storeys, similar to the terraced housing in Richmond Road apart from no. 5 D'Aubigny Road, an unusual buff coloured double fronted house with a red brick string course to the first floor and red brick arches to the windows and recessed front porch. Negative features in the street include the dominant telephone wires and some of the replacement front doors, such as those at nos. 11, 13 15 and 17.

Linking Richmond Road to Prince's Road is **Mayo Road**, a short street with unusual dark blue brick paviers. These complement the colour of the blue-grey granite kerbs and granite gutter sets which can be found in Mayo Road and in other locations in the conservation area. The buildings on the east side of Mayo Road are terraced, of three storeys with two storey canted bays and on the west, there is a short terrace of two storey houses again with canted bays. On the corner with Richmond Road is a block of modern flats, Mayo Court, which although constructed from brick has at least some details (canted bays, sash windows and pitched roofs) which help to merge the new development into the existing streetscape.

(3) Prince's Crescent, Crescent Road and Prince's Road

These three roads lie on slightly higher ground to Richmond Road with the highest point in the whole conservation area being at the junction of Crescent Road with Prince's Road. Of special note are the impressive views down Crescent Road towards the sea and the continuity of the street frontages, made up principally of terraced housing from the 1880s.

Prince's Road is the continuation of Mayo Road and turning a sharp corner at the junction at the north-eastern end there are views through trees to the industrial estate below and up the hill towards the summit of "Round Hill". Nos. 38-76, which lie between Mayo Road and Crescent Road, form an almost continuous terrace of paired houses on the south-east side, of two storeys with canted bays and bracketed eaves. Again, many of the roofs have been covered in concrete tiles and most of the houses have replacement windows. All of these houses have small front gardens with shrubs and planting which softens the outline of the buildings and the front boundary walls. These properties would appear to date from the 1880s although one house, no. 50 is clearly different. This was built slightly earlier than the rest, in 1875, and sits back slightly from the building line of the rest of the terrace. It is built from flint with red brick quoins to the windows and corners and some original leaded lights. The two storey building has carved barge boards and two gables facing the street. The other flint house, number 48, was added in 1890 as a purpose built laundry. Beside no. 50 an access drive leads to three modern houses with garages which cannot be seen from Princes Road. Of note is the cast iron street lamp outside no. 76.

On the other side of Prince's Road, beyond no 81, is a thin strip of open ground beside the road, which drops steeply towards the railway line and which contains some mature trees that provide valuable screening from the industrial estates to the north, and includes a prominent horse chestnut that is protected by a Tree Preservation Order. Nos. 69-81 Prince's Road have gables to the street and are clearly more Edwardian in character with casement windows and slated roofs with terracotta ridges.

Between Crescent Road and the junction with the Ditchling Road are continuous terraces of two storey painted houses with canted bays and bracketed eaves of the 1880s. On the corner with Crescent Road is a detached house which is shown on the 1878 map when it was called "Prince's Villa". This is surrounded by a prominent high flint wall and hedging but the house has been very altered and it has lost much of its historic character. Next to it, a gabled building which may once have been stables is now in commercial use.

Crescent Road runs steeply down the hill from north to south with continuous late 19th century terraced houses on either side. Most of the houses have shallow canted bays with sash windows and small front gardens with steep steps to the buildings on the west side. Also on this side is a group of houses with two front doors and a canted bay to each house which were clearly built as flats with one flat on each of the two floors. One of these, next to nos. 30 and 32, still has its painted sign saying "Primrose Laundry". Between numbers 28 and 30 timber doors lead to a commercial unit behind.

Prince's Crescent forms a steeply curved road which runs along the contour from east to west. To the south, and outside the conservation area, are the blocks of modern flats, the Sylvan Hall Estate, named after the group of large detached mansions they replaced, which contribute to the setting of the conservation area because of their trees. To the north, and up steps with small front gardens, are two storied terraced houses with slightly more ornamentation than some of the other houses within the conservation area of a similar date including channelled stucco to the ground floor and paired brackets to the eaves. Opposite the end of Wakefield Road is one three storied pair, with two storied canted bay and flat porches with corbels. Many of these houses have modern rooflights, concrete roof tiles, and replacement windows and doors.

(4) Belton Road, Round Hill Road and Round Hill Street

These three relatively narrow streets sit back off the Ditchling Road and comprise terraces of two storey late 19th century houses and a small number of commercial properties. Mostly rendered and painted, in Belton Road nos. 36-46 are built from red brick with red tiled hanging to the bays. A new development known as Belton Close is accessed from Belton Road consisting of 5 rendered houses with their own parking area. Of note is the crossover in Round Hill Road which is made from limestone and red brick, and the three examples of the cast iron street lights which match others within the area. Less attractive are the many overhead wires which seem to drape themselves across every view along the street.

Article 4 Direction

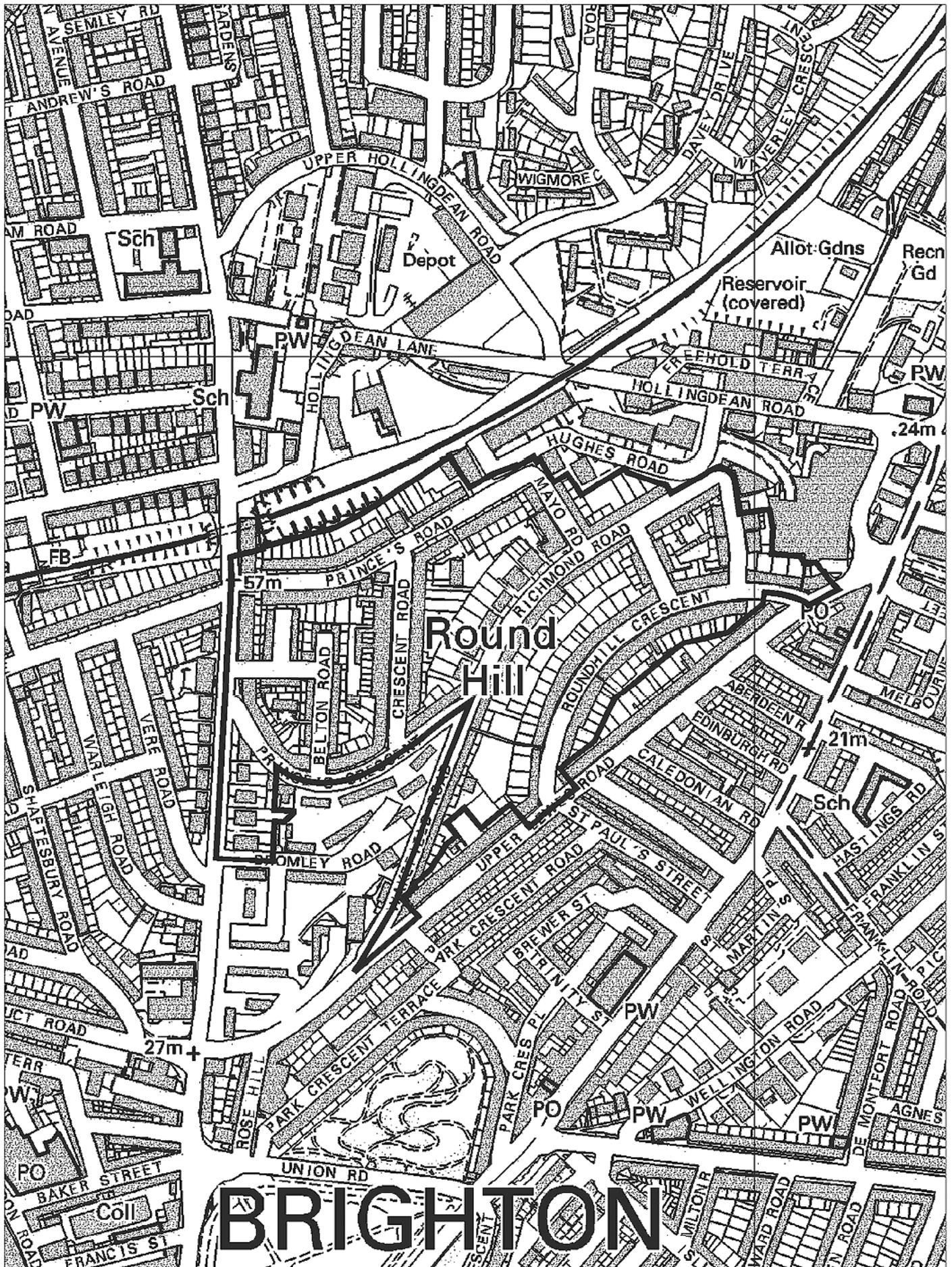
In order to halt the erosion of features such as sliding sash windows and traditional materials that was threatening to harm the special character of this conservation area, an additional planning control known as an Article 4 Direction was brought in. This requires owners to apply for planning permission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

Round Hill



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City Council**

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