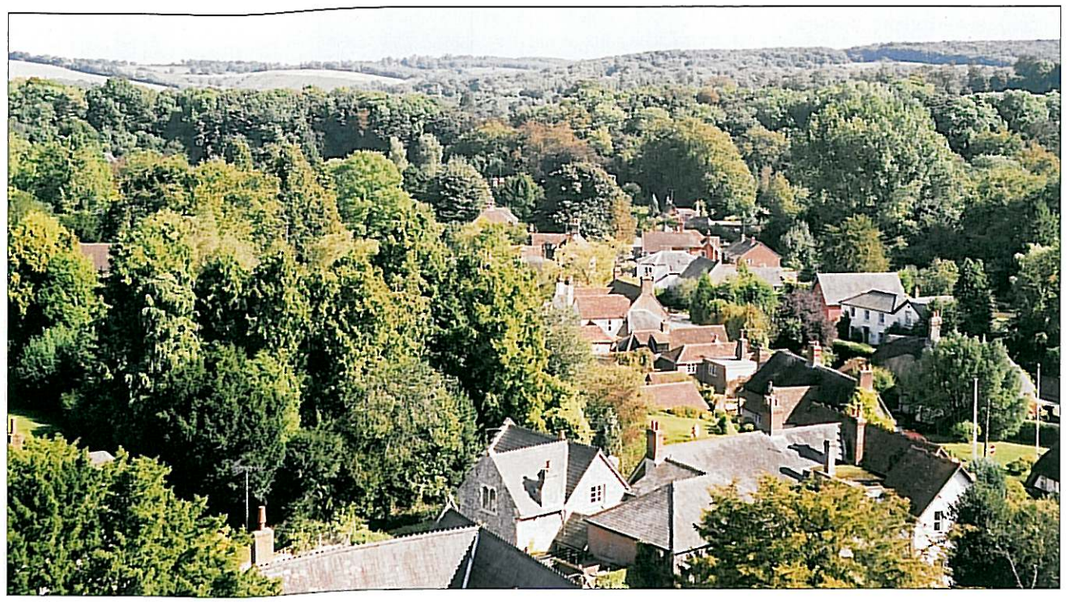
Settlement pattern and content



Centre of West Meon from church tower

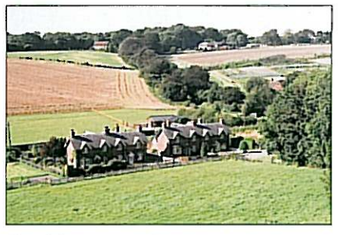
Landscape setting

The major part of the parish of West Meon lies within the East Hampshire Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and comprises rolling chalk downland around 100 metres above sea level, rising to 200 metres, much of which has been ploughed up. Most of the total area of 1,527 hectares is farmland, roughly half arable and half pasture, with only a little over 40 hectares of woodland scattered in small pockets throughout the parish. The village itself remains compact, almost hidden from view within the valley on any approach (see map on pages 14–15). The many mature trees around the centre of the village lead to an almost enclosed atmosphere, and the settlement makes little visual impact on the surrounding countryside. The River Meon divides the parish neatly in two with the land rising steeply on both sides of the valley. It flows in a westerly direction from East Meon towards the village and in the village itself turns southwards.

Growth of the settlement

The village of West Meon grew up not only because of its site at an angle of the River Meon, but also because it is the point where the valley road meets the main road from the north. The original nucleus of the village lies astride this junction and has followed the route of the river, lying on the slightly higher ground on both banks, but extending in the north-west on the route to the church (see map on pages 8–9).

There are isolated small areas of development at Woodlands and Lippen, to the north and west of the main village, and at Sheepbridge to the south, plus a linear spread of settlement eastwards along the valley road, which is separated from the village centre by the disused railway embankment.



Floud Cottages

Generally speaking, until the 20th century, houses were built individually or in small groups to meet the specific needs of local people (for example, Floud Cottages, built to house estate workers).

View of Long Priors from the north

The mix of adjacent housing types and sizes within a small area of the village centre reflects this.

Towards the middle of the last century, local authority housing estates at Meonwara Crescent, Headon View and Long Priors were added on the periphery of the then built-up area. Unlike traditional housing along the village thoroughfares, these estates were built around a cul-de-sac and introduced a more uniform element to housing style. It is significant that these early estates were built on good-sized plots so that they have tended to sit quite well in the landscape, particularly as gardens have matured. This is in contrast to the two major speculative estates (Knapps Hard and The Drill Hall Site) built in the 1960s/70s, which comprise sizeable detached houses on small plots.

Further small blocks of social housing were added towards the end of the 20th century at Long Priors and Doctors Lane to meet specific local needs for the elderly, single people and families – a more sympathetic approach to the environment is evident in the design of these estates.

Conversion of existing farm buildings, subdivision of plots and some infilling within the policy boundary has also added to the housing stock during the second half of the 20th century.

Recent development in Doctors Lane

Development has been restricted by water meadows to the east and the south-west of the village, and this has been reinforced by the severe flooding in the winter of 2000–2001, now documented by the Environment Agency's flood plain map (see page 11). It has also been limited by rising land to the south and north, a large block of which, the recreation ground, is protected open space.

Pressure for residential development has so far been resisted along the A32 south of the village, and over the centuries West Meon has remained a settlement with a distinct core and naturally defined boundaries.

Court Farm Barns

Design guidelines

- Development should be contained within the settlement boundary in order to maintain the enclosed nature of the village.
- Care should be taken to conserve the area of countryside between West Meon and Warnford so that it remains a physical and visible gap, protecting the separate identity of both villages.
- Infilling between existing pockets of development should be controlled carefully to conserve the important open views and spaces in the village, as described in the Open spaces section (and see viewpoint map on pages 14–15).
- Infilling of sites within the existing tightly-drawn village envelope, as defined in the Winchester Local Plan is acceptable, subject to the use of appropriate materials, control of design, massing, scale and density and maintenance of the privacy of existing adjoining dwellings.
- In any future development, a mixture of housing sizes and types should be encouraged in order to reflect the historic settlement pattern and to avoid a uniform result.

Historical Settlement Pattern

Key

- Medieval
- 16th/17th
- 18th
- 19th
- Change of use to residential
- 20th

1990s
1960s
1976/7
1950
1946
50s
1971
904
1990s
1938

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The River Meon and the water meadows

The River Meon

The River Meon rises at over 123 metres above sea level a mile south of East Meon and is the highest flowing chalk stream in southern England. Between East Meon and West Meon the river is perched: a marl alluvium acts as a seal along the river floor, allowing the river to flow above the water table in dry periods when neighbouring chalk valleys at the same altitude are dry.

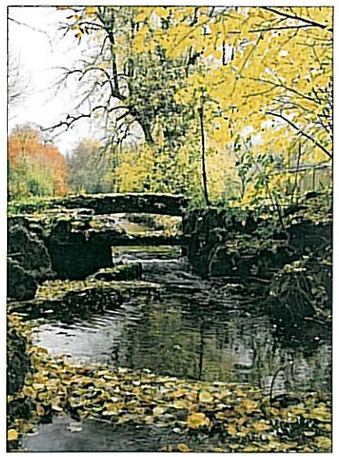
The river was originally the principal source of power in the village, and water mills were built along the riverbank. However, it now meanders through the village, largely unseen because of development that has taken place along its banks. Nevertheless, the community of West Meon takes pride in knowing that the river is there, and it provides a sense of tranquillity in the heart of the village.

In addition to the abundance of plants that flourish in and alongside it, the river is home to a variety of insects and water fowl, including herons, moorhens, kingfishers and little egrets.

The water meadows

The interest and value of the River Meon are much enhanced by the water meadows which lie alongside it at the eastern and south-western reaches of the village. From November until early spring, the flooding of these meadows was a regular feature of valley farming in the 17th and 18th centuries. The principle was simple but effective: every autumn the heavier rains would be channelled by specially designed carriers to the farthest reaches of the fields that lay parallel to the river. This allowed water to travel for hundreds of metres, often up a slight incline, and special sluices enabled the movement of the water to be controlled and directed to different parts of the field. Once the water had reached the end of the carrier, it was allowed to percolate into the soil and across the ridges and troughs. Excess water would eventually return to the river. The water promoted the early growth of grass roots, resulting in higher quality grass and hay in the summer.

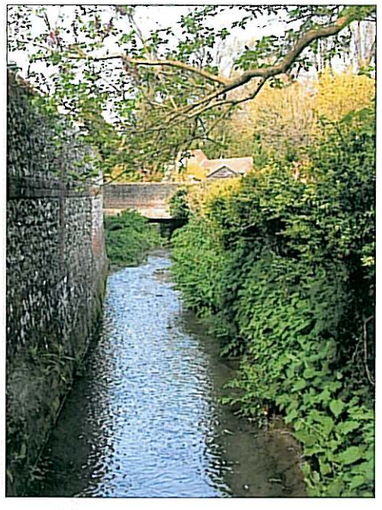
Today the water meadows form an attractive green boundary, providing



The River Meon

a vital element of rural conservation by defining the limits of the village. They are also an important part of the setting of various historical and listed buildings, such as Court House and the adjacent barns.

The severe flooding of the River Meon during the winter of 2000–2001 has emphasised the importance of the role of the water meadows in absorbing excess water during periods of heavy rain. In order to prevent the reoccurrence of the flooding to several properties which took place during this period, it is essential that the Environment Agency clear the build up of weeds and silt annually, to ensure a free flow of water.



The river from Church Path

Weir at Mill House

Design guidelines

- Building on the undeveloped flood plain should be prevented. Not only have recent events shown this to be unwise, but it is important to preserve the setting of a number of listed properties of historical importance: Hall Place (Grade II*), West Meon House (Grade II), Court House (Grade II).

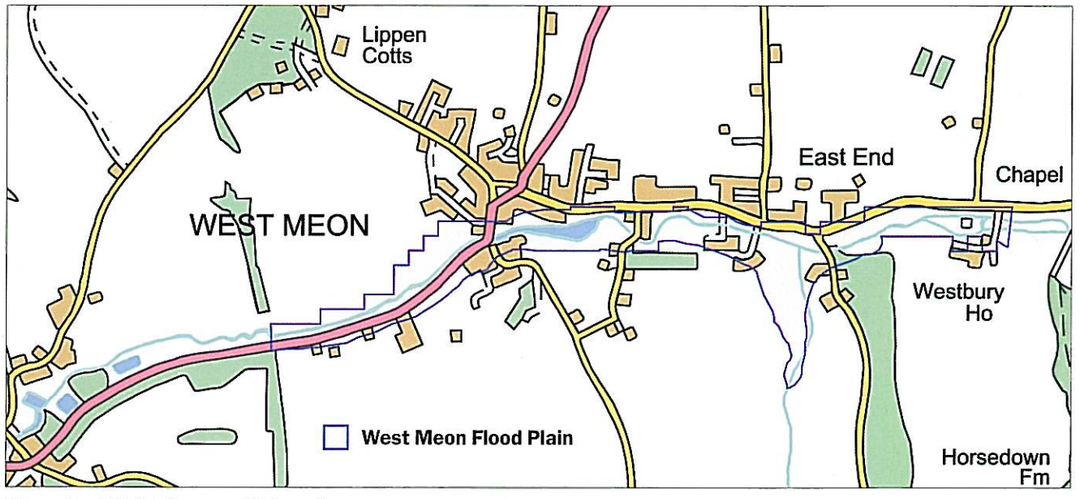
Recommendations

- The water meadows should be accorded special environmental protection.
- The Environment Agency should be pressed to clear weed and silt from the river annually.
- Original drainage ditches bordering the roads should be reinstated and cleared annually.

Water meadows south of the village

'Pooh Bridge', November 2000

Flooding at East End, January 2001



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