



## History of West St Leonards

### Appendix to the Application for designation as a Neighbourhood Forum

#### History of the Area

There is a substantial history of human activity in the area from pre-history in Combe Valley. It was the site of a race course, which was moved to Filsham Valley because of flooding and then before World War 2 an airfield was built, which was used during the war but then became a dump for waste. In the 1920s Bulverhythe Recreation Ground was created. It is now a Countryside Park and the main tip area has been turned into a hill and is being landscaped and returned to nature with recreation grounds to the south.

The history of waste disposal is continued with a recycling centre as well as a water purification centre for Southern Water, all within the Countryside Park, but within Rother District.

Filsham Valley was used as a racecourse, then in part as a golf course and later as playing fields for West St Leonards Primary School and the local community centre, for council housing in Edinburgh Road and housing in Fieldway, further waste dumping, more school building and a medical centre. Neglected playing fields and a wildlife site remain to the south, with the local community centre and a new medical centre on the corner of Filsham Road.

What is now Bexhill Road (the A259) was built along a shingle bank on the coastal plain, branching off up West Hill Road to reach St Leonards. Harley Shute Road follows a spur between Combe Haven and Filsham Valley to reach higher ground to the north. A coastal railway was built as far as the former West Marina station and later extended when a tunnel was created through West Hill. A second railway line running north west to south east along Filsham Valley was built to join this line and use the tunnel. A tramway, later replaced by buses, ran alongside Bexhill Road from Bexhill to Hastings, crossing Glyne Gap Marshes along what is now Lewis Avenue, which has two businesses at the Bexhill end, Blackbrooks garden centre and Skinners Sheds. Lewis Avenue is now a bridleway across Glyne Gap Marsh with steps up to Bexleigh Avenue.

By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century there was a small settlement around St Mary's Church and the Bull Inn, both of which have their origins in the 13<sup>th</sup> century at the western end. Further east there were a few other buildings including Filsham Farmhouse on Harley Shute Road and the Bo Peep pub on what is now Grosvenor Crescent. These expanded with the coming of the railways and development of local industries, eg the gas works, brick works and laundry.

Nowadays there are seven recognisable housing clusters:

- the "original" Bulverhythe round St Mary's Church;
- Bulverhythe Road;
- St Saviours Road;
- Seaside Road and Grosvenor Crescent;
- Edinburgh Road and the east side Harley Shute Road
- Fieldway and Reedswood with the west side of Harley Shute Road;
- Darwell Close and the surrounding area, which will include the development

currently taking place on the old Grove School Site.

At the end of the 19th century a station, warehouse, hotel and shops clustered around the railway terminus and yard at West Marina. Burtons' St Leonards was extended westwards to this area and housing and hotels were built on Grosvenor Crescent and Gardens looking on to West Marina Gardens.

In the 1930s an Olympic-sized swimming pool was built on the seafront and West Marina became a major visitor centre served by West St Leonards stations. West Marina Station was closed soon after the opening of the tunnel to Warrior Square and Hastings. The pool was later demolished. However, the seafront and Gardens continue to be well used by local residents and visitors.

Through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> C the area west of the railway bridge to the junction of Filsham Road with Bexhill Road along to Harley Shute Road became the centre of the expanding local community with local businesses and industrial workshops. The West Saint Leonards School, St Ethelburga's church<sup>1</sup> and chapel were erected at the foot of Filsham Valley around South Saxons field.

West Saint Leonards School was relocated to St Leonards Church of England Academy located off Collinswood Drive.

Tram sheds for the network of tramways in Hastings and Bexhill were erected and larger railway sheds, other industrial premises and associated housing were built further west along Bexhill Road. By the 1930s housing extended as far as St Mary's Church the "original" Bulverhythe and council housing was built in Edinburgh Road. Fieldway with Reedswood Road as well as Darwell Close are more recent housing developments.

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1 <https://www.stethelburga.org.uk/>