

CONSERVATION AREAS IN EAST DORSET

STURMINSTER MARSHALL



East Dorset District Council Policy Planning Division
Supplementary Planning Guidance No.13 April 2006



Foreword

This document is based upon work carried out in 1994 to define the special qualities of the Conservation Area that was subsequently published as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the East Dorset Local Plan (see paragraphs 6.118 to 6.131 and accompanying policies BUCON 1 to 4 of the East Dorset Local Plan adopted 11 January 2002).

The text and illustrations of the original publication have been revised and updated to reflect any significant changes that have taken place in that time since the original survey and appraisal of the area were undertaken.

The appraisal provides guidance to those elements and characteristics that should be taken into account when considering proposed developments and other works requiring consent. The information contained in the appraisal will be treated as a material consideration by the Local Planning Authority when considering planning applications.

The revision does not extend to reviewing the boundaries of the designated area. This work will be undertaken between 2006 and 2010 in parallel with the Local Development Framework process, as currently programmed.

The maps used in the document are based upon the Ordnance Survey mapping currently available to the Council.

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Introduction

Sturminster Marshall is situated on a wide river terrace on the south side of the Stour. The river meanders round the northern part of the village. The River Winterbourne, coinciding with the western edge of the village, flows into the Stour at Millmoor Farm. To the south-east of the village are a series of submerged gravel pits.

A flood alleviation scheme was implemented in the early 1990's to protect the northern half of the village. Two sections of this lie within the Conservation Area, one to the north in the vicinity of Walnut Tree Field, St Mary's Churchyard and Church Farm; the other to the south within the cartilage of Cottmans. A dyke follows just to the west of the western boundary between Cottmans and Walnut Tree Field.

The surrounding fields adjacent to the Conservation Area are used for stock grazing. They remained unenclosed until as late as 1845.

The name of the village indicates an early minster church but no evidence exists to validate this. However, there are traces of heath stone in walls of some old buildings around the village which may have been re-used from the early church.

Boundaries

The Conservation Area, which was designated in 1987, includes that part of Sturminster Marshall that contains the highest proportion of older buildings. This area includes the northern part of the village that includes the village greens and the Church, together with parts of Kings Street as far south as Stour Lodge and Cottmans.

Market Place at the junction of King's Street and Back Lane



The Conservation Area identifies those parts of Sturminster Marshall which, by virtue of its buildings, trees and spaces and other features, are considered to have special character. Within the boundaries are a number of modern houses which in themselves do not contribute towards this character. In such cases, they tend to have at best a neutral effect or are effectively screened by hedging or other greenery. A few modern houses have been included which have an adverse effect on the special character of the Conservation area. This decision was taken to prevent 'islands' of non-Conservation Area occurring within the designated area.

The Church of St Mary The Virgin, a Grade II listed building*



Despite the number of modern houses, which have tended to disrupt the grain and character of the Conservation Area, the area still retains a strong sense of place. There remain a substantial proportion of older buildings of character and the area has preserved its historic street pattern.

The boundaries follow natural features and property curtilages to scribe a carefully defined area having special environmental quality. Being situated on the northern extremity of Sturminster Marshall the northern boundary is relatively straightforward, following the line of rear garden boundaries to Walnut Tree Field, and thence along the river to Church Farm. The only irregularities along this boundary are caused by three modern dwellings whose inclusion was considered inappropriate.

The north-eastern boundaries follow convenient boundaries between the village and the surrounding countryside. In common with the Conservation Area, the line has been drawn quite closely around the village, generally excluding modern development. The open sites,

opposite and to the south of Meadow Cottages, are included because of their importance to the setting of, and approach to, the Conservation Area. The wider area is protected by Green Belt policies.

The southern boundary has been drawn to isolate the Conservation Area from the incoherent modern housing area that typifies so much of the village. The boundary excludes all properties on the south side of King Street, except for Stour House and the adjacent simple and unpretentious bungalow.

Setting

Much of the boundary of the Conservation Area adjoins the open countryside of the Stour valley. The profile of the surrounding land is essentially flat, which makes the flood alleviation bunds on the outskirts of the village appear quite conspicuous.

Gaps in the street building line allow views of the surrounding landscape: between Forge Cottage and Juniper Cottage in Kings Street, at Walnut Tree Field in Back Lane and opposite Meadow Cottages near Church Farm. Elsewhere the village tends to be introspective on account of the buildings and trees that enclose the village streets.

Approaches

The approach to the village from the north first passes over the picturesque 16th century White Mill Bridge before crossing the flood plain. On approaching the edge of the village, the lane then takes a sharp bend to the right, affording views of the surrounding meadows and two comparatively recent thatched cottage developments that form the northern edge of the settlement.

White Mill Bridge, a Grade I listed building



From the south-west, the approach along Newtown Lane is less remarkable, as the outer suburbs of the village have first to be passed through. The edge of the Conservation Area is clearly defined by mature treescape and by a bend in the road which forms a visual pinch-point. The distinctive 19th century buildings of Cottmans on the north side and Stour House on the south side, both set in generous grounds that contain these trees, give this area a refined character not encountered elsewhere in the village. Beyond these properties the Conservation Area is held together by a succession of vernacular thatched cottages to the centre of the village.

Cottage attached to Cottmans



The approach from the south via High Street is the least remarkable, as this passes through the main built-up area of Sturminster Marshall. Again, it is the character created by mature trees, garden walls and well-constructed 19th century buildings that signal the edge of the Conservation Area. Just beyond this point, the Market Place and Maypole comes into view, symbolically the centre of the village.

High Street, looking south



The Wareham Forest Way passes through the Conservation Area.

Form

The Church of St Mary, dating from the C12th, lies at the extreme northern end of the village close to the river. Only the recent farm buildings of Church Farm encroach closer. From this point the village has developed south and south-westwards, fed by two local distributor roads from the main A350. The 1890 Ordnance Survey shows the village as a concentration of buildings scattered along High Street and Kings Street converging at the Market Place.

The Conservation Area forms part of the northern tip of this triangular settlement pattern, centered almost entirely on one road. It begins as Church Street, then branches off into Front Lane and Back Lane respectively before joining again further to the south west at Market Place, where it continues southwards as Kings Street.

Flanking Front Lane is a second Market Place containing the village maypole. These linked triangular greens form the single most distinctive feature of the village. The flat, grassy spaces are enhanced by some huge oaks and chestnuts. Each has its own identity, formed by some interesting old buildings that overlook them.

The Maypole in Market Place



Most of the buildings that contribute towards the character of the Conservation Area are sited

adjacent to, and facing onto, the road or very close to it. This feature, together with the dominance of front boundary hedges and the absence of formal pavements, reinforce the historic street-pattern and strengthen the rural character of the village.

Enclosure within the Conservation Area is reinforced by curves and bends in the narrow village streets, the effect of which is to close views and create an introspective character. At the eastern and western ends of both Front Lane and Back Lane the roadways are very narrow and enclosed, causing pinch-points that enhance townscape quality. Other pinch-points occur on the sharp bend opposite Church Farm at the northern end of Church Street, and between the two Market Places.

View along Church Street to Church Farm



Modern housing tends to be sited behind front gardens, often screened by hedging. Whilst this differs from the historic pattern of development, the garden spaces and screening effect of the vegetation introduce a softer character to the Conservation Area.

Buildings

Three phases of building can be clearly identified in the Conservation Area: cottages, mostly thatched, dating from the seventeenth-century; Victorian brick and slate villas, which stem from the opening of the railway; and post-war housing, mostly since 1960.

The predominant building materials found in the traditional buildings comprise soft orange-red brick or render under slate or thatched roofs. Plain clay tiles are less common, but where they do occur they do not appear out of place. There are also isolated examples of Bridgewater tiles, black weather-boarding and heath-stone.

The old thatched cottages feature narrow building spans, low ridges and low eaves. Some have walls of brick and some are of cob construction. 'Walden Cottage' in Back Lane, a single-storey with attics cottage dating from the 17th century, still retains its timber frame on the front elevation.

'Maypole Cottage' in Front Lane also dates from the 17th century and features beautifully-weathered walls of ironstone rubble under a tiled roof.

'Trafalgar Cottage', overlooking a triangular green at the Back Lane, Church Street junction is much later, being one of the very few nineteenth-century houses to be thatched. This two-storey cottage has whitewashed brickwork with render on the front elevation. It is thatched in combed wheat having a traditional smooth, sheared down ridge.

Trafalgar Cottage, A Grade II listed Building



'Riverside House' in Back Lane has brick gables and a rendered front which may conceal a cob structure within. It has a corrugated iron roof, which on the basis of the remnant flashings on the chimney probably replaced a thatched roof. The modern windows also belie its age.

Riverside House



'Church Cottages', abutting the highway opposite the Church, is a row of seven whitewashed cottages built of cob under a common thatched roof. Although dating from the 17th century, they were severely damaged by fire in 1967.

Church Cottages, Grade II listed buildings



A modern row of 'vernacular' cottages, known as 'Meadow Cottages', replaces a 1930's bungalow that stood between the bends at the entrance to the village. Constructed in 1988, this sensitively-designed scheme that features curving rendered walls under a thatched roof, forms one of the first neo-vernacular housing schemes that now characterizes many Dorset villages.

Meadow Cottages



Nineteenth-century houses are generally taller and mostly feature a gabled ridge with chimneystacks at each end and often with a wing at the rear. 'Church Farm', 'The Red Lion' PH, the former village school, the Methodist Church and a number of houses, including Magnolia House (Market Place) and Rose Cottage (Church Street), make a positive contribution to the character of the Conservation Area.

'Church Farm' is a robust, early Victorian range of two storey buildings sited adjacent to the road at the northern end of the village. They are uniformly constructed of good quality brick under Welsh slate roofs and feature tall, well-proportioned chimney stacks. The buildings are well preserved, retaining the original windows. A creeper softens the front elevation.

Church Farm



The walls of the Red Lion P.H. are more extensively covered in creeper, which together with its colourwashed walls give a lively appearance, enhanced by the profusion of summer flowers. The adjacent hall, formerly Mackrell's Charity School (1832), has good face brickwork and has retained its original Victorian windows and chimney stack on the rear (south) elevation.

Church Street looking north with The Red Lion in the foreground



The row of cottages that flank the north side of the 'Maypole' Market Place are of high townscape value. Magnolia House, a two-storey brick house built of brick under a slate roof and with formal sliding sash windows has a particularly elegant character. Similar materials are used in the Victorian Methodist chapel on the north side.

Cherry Cottage & Magnolia House



A newly-constructed house on a plot south of Forge Cottage in Kings Street adopts a similar design code but using render and slate.

New house south west of Forge Cottage



A number of other Victorian houses feature shallow pitched hipped roofs, such as 'Toliva' (Market Place); 'Stour House' and 'Cottmans' (Kings Street).

'Toliva' is an attractive symmetrical brick-built villa that stamps a special identity on the adjacent green.

Toliva, Back Lane



'Stour House' has white-washed stuccoed walls. This is a substantial house having classical Georgian proportions and is of considerable architectural quality, though not statutorily Listed. Within its grounds at the rear are attractive brick and slate stables. The property is bounded by high hedges and its entrance features period timber gates.

Stour House



'Cottmans' comprises a series of buildings linked together to form two dwellings. An unusual feature of the building is the main front elevation with its six, large, symmetrically placed windows.

Cottmans



'The Red House', set back from the road in High Street displays a similar refined air. Approached by a gravel drive, this stoutly-constructed 'rectory' type house of brick and slate has distinctive whitened window reveals which subtly enlivens the front facade. The house forms one of a small group of 19th century buildings that includes the Old Barn, now converted into residential use, and a traditional two-storey workshop to be similarly converted.

The Church of St Mary forms the focal point of the village, despite its location at its northern extremity. It forms part of a highly distinctive building group that also includes the long thatched row comprising 'Church Cottages' and the public house. The Grade II* listed Church has a mock medieval tower built in 1805 after the original collapsed. Parts of the Church date from the 12th century but the building was heavily restored in 1859. The Church is spectacular when illuminated after nightfall.



The dark cedars and yews that flank the church emphasize the vitality of its stone walls. The building sits in a churchyard bounded by a roadside heath-stone wall, built in the 17th century and which is also Listed. The wall is capped by a distinctive limestone capping having a roll moulding above sloping sides. The churchyard contains two 14th century listed crosses and a table tomb, also listed, together with an Arts and Crafts period lych-gate.

The only farm buildings within the Conservation Area are sited adjacent to the Church on the outside of the bend in the road. Though partially concealed by the traditional farm house next door, the modern asbestos portal frame buildings can be clearly seen when approached from either direction in the road. Their unified materials, close grouping and absence of really large structures, however, help to relate the farm with the village. Indeed, it plays a positive role in reinforcing rural character.

Open Spaces

The two triangular greens, both inaptly known as Market Place are very pleasant spaces, in scale with the diminutive older buildings that face onto them, and shaded by huge oaks and chestnut trees. A large oak that overhangs the highway between the triangles creates a pinch-point in the street and helps to articulate them.

Market Place (east) contains the Maypole with a circular iron bar seat at its base. Market Place (west) contains the village stocks (new) and a K6 telephone kiosk, together with additional public seating.

Market Place (east)



Added character is provided by the evergreen Magnolia against 'Magnolia Cottage' in the former Market Place and the garland of evergreen planting around the front door of 'Toliva' in the latter.

Both greens are well maintained, having short cut grass protected by timber posts around the edges. Their soft verges reinforce their informality and rural character.

In Church Street there is a further green space, created when the row of detached houses (just outside the Conservation Area) were built in the early 1980's. Though of similar size to the other greens, this has none of their special qualities. This now comprises a wide grassy verge adjacent to the street, with tall, mature shrubberies behind. The planting effectively screens the modern houses and creates a green and leafy edge to the space.



The War Memorial is sited in a very small open space at the corner of Market Place and High Street. It comprises a stone cross on a plinth set in gravel under the shade of a large oak. The corner is enclosed on the other two sides by hedges.

Walnut Field is both a valuable public open space for the village and an important archaeological site. Its archaeological interest was unearthed as late as 1991 at the time of the flood alleviation works. The site contains artifacts from the Stone Age and remnants of the mediaeval settlement. The informal park, serviced by a single pedestrian access from Back Lane, extends to the river. The willows that line the riverbank, whilst enclosing the open space, cuts off views of the surrounding countryside. Waterside vegetation deters access to the river itself.

Walnut Tree Field



A single Walnut tree stands in the middle of the field. Many of its limbs are missing - it was badly damaged during the storm of 1987 - and its girth suggests that it is very old. From this point there is a fine view of the Church amidst the churchyard cedars and yews and set off by its foreground of grass.

View to the Church from Walnut Tree Field



Between 'Maypole Cottage' and the Methodist Church is a small, informal garden with a frontage onto Front Lane. A public footpath, edged with fencing and hedges, forms its northern boundary. This green space, containing old fruit trees, makes a valuable contribution to the character of the Conservation Area, acting as a foil to the surrounding buildings and allows a clear view of the old stone side wall of Maypole Cottage.

At the junction between Back Lane and Church Street is a small triangular green overlooked by 'Trafalgar Cottage'. It contains a finger post, a seat and timber posts around the soft verges.



At the rear of the Red Lion P.H. is a small, enclosed grassy paddock used as a beer garden and play space for the pub.

Opposite 'Meadow Cottages' is flat, low-lying grassland containing a flood alleviation dyke, which is also grassed. This space forms the setting for, and the approach to, the village and should remain undeveloped.

Between 'Forge Cottage' and 'Juniper Cottage' in Kings Street, there is a gap in the frontage development which allows open views across the valley landscape. In an otherwise introspective

settlement, this gap offers a welcome open vista and reinforces the village-countryside link.

At the south-western extremity of the Conservation Area, 'Cottmans' enjoys the amenities of a large garden and paddock, giving a degree of exclusiveness to this property. The site contains many mature plane, chestnuts, ash and sycamore. On the north side of the house there is an attractive orchard. This feature, together with the informal character of its gardens and backdrop of tall trees, make a significant impact on the amenities of the Conservation Area.

Orchard adjacent to Cottmans



Treescape

Many of the fine trees within the Conservation Area have been noted in association with other elements of the Appraisal: the contrasting forms of English and Irish Yew and the cedars in the Churchyard; the spreading oak which overhangs the War Memorial in Church Street; the willows along the riverbank in Walnut Tree Field; parkland trees and copse around Cottmans; and the fine specimen oaks and chestnuts in both Market Places.

Church Street looking south west



Other trees of individual or group value include an oak tree, opposite Trafalgar Cottage on the

triangular verge, which forms a focal point when viewed from the direction of the Church and marks the divergence of the street into Front and Back Lane; a large purple beech in the grounds of The Red House; and a good group of beech, purple beech and chestnut trees around Stour House.

More recent planting around the new green in Church Street are making an impact, such as the Acacia tree in the garden of 'Farthings' and a weeping Willow on the frontage of No.156.

Telegraph poles and overhead wirescape extend throughout the Conservation Area, but are most noticeable near 'Heron's Mead' in Back Lane, outside Church Farm and near 'Forge Cottage' in Kings Street.

Concrete kerbing in localized parts of Church Street weaken rural character and introduces a more suburban appearance. Most of the Conservation Area is still characterized by narrow lanes and soft verges, of hedges and old buildings sited close against the highway.

Hedges

Hedges are extremely important in the Conservation Area, not because they are of special quality in themselves, but because of their dual role of unifying the lane frontages and screening/softening the impact of modern development. The hedges (together with the soft verges) contribute to the informal character of the village.

Kings Street looking south west



Hedges are very important as a soft means of enclosure around the various green spaces within the Conservation Area. They close views at eye level and act as green walls. Hedges are particularly important around the two Market Places, the War Memorial corner, Back Lane/Church Street triangular green and at the rear of the Red Lion car park.

Streetscape

Interest is concentrated in the vicinity of both Market Places: the stocks, public seating and red telephone kiosk, whilst the maypole forms a focal point. The war memorial cross in Church Street forms an attractive incident in the street scene.

Planning Policy in Conservation Areas

East Dorset has many attractive villages of special architectural or historic interest.

In order to protect their character and appearance, the best of these, including the historic centre of Wimborne Minster, have been designated as Conservation Areas by the District Council under Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Under this legislation additional planning controls are exercised by the Council within designated Conservation Areas in order to preserve and enhance those aspects of character and appearance that define an area's special character.

These include controls over the demolition of most unlisted buildings. An application for Conservation Area Consent is needed for the demolition of an unlisted building in a Conservation Area.

The Council encourage the retention of buildings that make a positive contribution to the character or appearance of a Conservation Area. Any proposals which involve demolition of existing buildings will be carefully assessed for their impact upon the character of the area. The local planning authority will also need full details about what is proposed for the site after demolition.

Certain types of development, which elsewhere are normally classified as permitted development (such as the insertion of dormer windows in roof slopes, the erection of satellite dishes on walls, roofs or chimneys fronting a highway) will require planning permission.

Guidance and application forms can be obtained from the Planning and Building Control Division.

Trees

Trees are an invaluable visual asset to the character and setting of many Conservation Areas.

Trees in Conservation Areas may already be protected by a Tree Preservation Order and the Courts can impose heavy fines for unauthorised felling or lopping.

In addition to these controls, and in recognition of the contribution that trees can make to the character and appearance of a Conservation Area special provisions apply to the lopping or felling of other trees which are not otherwise protected. Anyone wishing to fell or lop such trees needs to notify the Council in writing six weeks before carrying out any work.

Householders are also encouraged to seek advice from the Department on the management of their trees. By taking the correct action now mature trees can be made safer and their lives extended.

New Development

When contemplating alterations to existing buildings or the construction of new buildings within a Conservation Area it is advisable to obtain the views of your local Planning Officer at an early stage. The Department is glad to help and the advice is totally impartial and free of charge.

When considering applications for new development, the Council as Local Planning Authority takes particular care to ensure that it fits in satisfactorily with the established character and appearance of the Conservation Area.

Positioning, massing, design and choice of materials are of particular importance, as well as the visual impact of 'building over' an area of hitherto open land.

The special character of these areas stem not only from the age, disposition and architectural interest of the buildings, but also from the treatment of the spaces in between.

The presence of gardens, paddocks, soft verges, hedges and old boundary walls contribute greatly to the individual sense of place.

Applications for new development must demonstrate that the proposal will harmonise with the Conservation Area i.e. that it will preserve or enhance its character. Potential applicants are strongly advised to seek proper professional advice.

Therefore when considering such applications the local planning authority will pay particular attention to the following elements of the design:

1. the positioning of the building and its relationship with adjoining buildings, existing trees or other features;

2. the proposed building materials, particularly the walls and roof, and their suitability to the area and in relation to neighbouring buildings;
3. the proportions, mass and scale of the proposal and their relationship with the area in general and adjoining buildings in particular.
4. whether the proposed development might adversely affect existing trees, hedges or other natural features of the site.

In some cases it may be necessary to reproduce an historic style of architecture in order to match existing buildings. Generally, however, the Council encourages new construction to be designed in a modern idiom provided the criteria listed above are applied. Poor copies or imitations of architectural styles detract from the genuine older buildings and are normally discouraged.

Full details of any proposed development must be submitted, showing existing site conditions with the proposals clearly marked. Details of the elevational treatment, including windows and doors, will normally be required. In many instances the planning authority will expect details of hard and soft landscaping including a specification of all the proposed materials.

Conservation Area analysis

The District Council has carried out and published detailed studies of the Conservation Areas to identify those elements which contribute towards the unique character of each area. Any proposal which has an adverse effect on these features will not be permitted. Proposals that can be seen to enhance the Conservation Area will be encouraged.

Grants

Grants may be available from the District Council towards the alleviation of eyesores, or measures that improve the street scene, such as tree-planting, hedging or other boundary treatments. Grants or loans may also be available towards the repair of Listed Buildings, particularly where such repairs make an impact on the Conservation Area.

Design and Conservation Services in East Dorset

Conserving the best features of our environment, our historic towns, villages and countryside, is one of the most important of our planning functions.

Historic Buildings

Our buildings are a record of our architectural and social history. As a society, we hold them in trust for future generations to cherish and enjoy. Investment in our architectural heritage assists local and regional social and economic development

The supply of buildings of the eighteenth century and earlier is finite; once demolished they are lost forever. Others suffer almost the same fate from alterations made without regard to their original design and character.

Historic buildings require special care if their character, which relies upon traditional building materials and practices peculiar to each region, is not to be spoilt by insensitive alterations or inappropriate methods of repair.

Owners of Listed Buildings contemplating altering or extending their building are advised to obtain Guidance Notes obtainable free from the Department.

An important function of the Design and Conservation Section is to advise owners of historic buildings and assist in achieving solutions which preserves their intrinsic interest.

The Section can help seek out the right materials for the job and advise on the correct method of repair.

It can also provide advice on both the law relating to listed buildings and sources of financial assistance.

Conservation Areas

Conservation Areas are groups of buildings, villages or areas of towns having special architectural and townscape interest, the character of which should be preserved and enhanced.

East Dorset has 17 Conservation Areas, which range in size and nature from small villages such as Almer to the historic town centre of Wimborne Minster.

The siting, design and materials of new development, or alterations to existing buildings, are scrutinised by the Department to ensure that the character of such areas are protected.

Since 1980 the Council has invested in a programme of environmental improvements within the centre of Wimborne Minster. The effect of these measures has been to create an attractive place for residents and visitors to shop and to enjoy.

Designated Conservation Areas in East Dorset



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Advice

For advice on any aspect of the Council's building conservation work, the availability of financial assistance or to discuss your individual building, please contact our Design and Conservation Leader Ray Bird, or his assistant Alan Turner on 01202 886201 or e-mail: planning@eastdorset.gov.uk.