

Chestnut Street, Borden conservation area character appraisal

(Extract from report to Development Committee 11 August 1999 Agenda item no. 6B, Annex A)

Location

1. Chestnut Street lies immediately to the south west of Sittingbourne. It is a loosely knit roadside settlement close to, but still clearly outside, the built-up area of the town. It is comprised of development fronting onto the old Sittingbourne to Maidstone road which here passes through the Stockbury Valley.

2. The settlement is now by-passed by the dual carriageway A249; the road shaves past its north-western edge at the end of the rear gardens to properties in Chestnut Street. However, the road is in a cutting at this point so that visually the traffic is hidden and rather less intrusive than would otherwise be the case.

History

3. Chestnut Street is recorded in the Patent Rolls of 1256 as The Chastynners, meaning "the place where chestnuts grow". Hasted, writing at the end of the 18th century, referred to a large tract of chestnut woods which then stretched from the hamlet of Oad Street to the Detling Road. These woods have now largely disappeared.

4. Old Ordnance Survey maps record the site of old lime kilns in the chalk pit at Hooks Hole; a large area to the south of Chestnut Street has been disturbed by former mineral workings. Standing or buried remains of lime works are considered to be of high industrial archaeological potential.

Buildings

5. The outstanding feature of Chestnut Street is a group of four mediaeval timber-framed houses, which stand on the eastern side of the road. They epitomise Kentish vernacular building of the period.

6. Hook's Hole is on the classic wealden pattern, being a hall house dating from the 15th century. The exposed timber frame is infilled with white painted plaster and brick. The upper floor of both wings is jettied and the hipped roof is carried across the recessed central hall bay on braces and the eaves here are coved.

7. Immediately to the south is Olde Houses, a somewhat later building dating from the 16th century, also now painted black and white and occupied as two dwellings. The building has a rather appealing 'unimproved' look to it, which character is enhanced by the simple grassed front garden with stepping stones leading across it.

8. Next door again is a third timber-framed building now divided into two and known as Tudor Rose Cottage and Dumbles. This also dates from the 1500s and is characterised by its steep, peg tiled roof and plaster infilled timber frame.

9. The fourth house in the group is Oldestede, now two dwellings. The oldest section dates from the 15th century, once again with exposed timber framing and a catslide roof over an outshot. The newer section, dating from the 17th century, comprises a close studded and jettied cross wing, and bears the date 1613.

10. These buildings are all set within their own separate plots, they are all set back from the road and they are also all set down slightly below the level of the present

day carriageway. Trees and shrubs are an important feature within each curtilage, so that from the road the buildings are partially screened from view.

11. Development on the opposite side of the road is all much later in date. Indeed, the rebuilding and infilling of recent years means that most of these properties are now modern. It is these buildings, rather than the enclave of historic buildings, which in some ways are the more prominent in the street scene and which in consequence more obviously define the form of the street. The new houses are generally traditional in character; others within the group are late 19th century in date and fairly modest in appearance.

12. School Lane which strikes off to the east alongside Hooks Hole, is a narrow country lane rising gently up the side of the valley. It is defined by roadside hedgerows and field boundaries, the main exception being a single storey barn, set sideways onto the road with a gable wall close to the edge of the carriageway.

Landscape

13. Chestnut Street is set at the northern end of the Stockbury valley. This setting is now somewhat affected by the presence of the nearby dual carriageway, which has created a hard edge to the settlement and carved sharply into the chalk valley side. The chalk scar of the embankment to the cutting is still prominent, but tree planting may soften it in time. The new road has, however, allowed most of the through traffic to be removed from the old A249, which in turn has allowed some of the original character of this road to re-emerge.

14. To the south of the cluster of historic buildings lies an attractive area of grazing land, formerly the site of mineral workings which have resulted in the landscape having an attractive, undulating (and in places rather sculpted) appearance, which is further enhanced by a pattern of hawthorn. An old chalk pit, with regenerated vegetation around its margins, marks the southern edge of this area. Importantly this land appears as part of the wider countryside beyond which rises to a ridge to the south and forms an attractive visual feature. Also, it separates the cluster of Chestnut Street's older buildings from other residential development, and consequently helps to maintain the integrity of the historic area.

15. All the older properties are surrounded by plantings of trees and shrubs. Whilst there are some native species present, it is the evergreen planting which is a striking (and sometimes discordant) feature.

Summary

16. The four timber framed buildings are the focus of this conservation area. Whilst the setting of Chestnut Street has been, to some degree, affected by the new A249 the grouping of these mediaeval buildings remains unusual and of special architectural and historic interest. Historic interest is further supplemented by the site of old mineral workings, which have now become attractively integrated into the adjoining countryside.