

Dargate conservation area character appraisal

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Location

1. Dargate is situated some four miles to the east of Faversham, in the parish of Hernhill. It lies just south of the A299 (Thanet Way) and immediately north of the extensive Blean Wood.
2. The village is situated on gently rising land in the open landscape of the North Kent fruit belt. It lies partly on the Oldhaven Beds and partly on deposits of brickearth which overlay London Clay. These freely draining, fertile soils have given rise to a rich pattern of orchards, and it is within an intensively managed landscape of fruit trees that Dargate is situated.
3. To the north there are extensive views across to the marshlands of the North Kent coast, but to the south the horizon is curtailed by rising land which is covered with the deciduous trees of Blean Wood.

Settlement development

4. Dargate is a small settlement of scattered properties centred around the junction of two country roads: Plumpudding Lane (and a short length of Dargate Common Road) and Butlers Hill which strikes off south west towards Hernhill.
5. The loosely-knit pattern of development is much interspersed with orchards and other farmland. Whilst a majority of the properties in the hamlet date from the second half of the nineteenth century and later, there are also some much older buildings (one group dates from the 1500s). A number of properties built in and around Dargate between 1840 and 1910 are understood to have been associated with smallholdings, perhaps attracted to the area by the productive soils.

Historic interest

6. The name Dargate is said to originate from the Old English meaning wild animal gate. The name is, therefore, possibly a reference to a gate leading to a woodland. The writer William Hasted commented that the manor of Dargate could be traced back to the early 1400s, when it was the property of the Martyn family living at Graveney Court. Present day buildings in the hamlet are, however, generally of much more recent origin with a small number of exceptions.

Buildings

7. The centre of Dargate is clearly defined by The Dove public house, a late 19th century red brick building which sits squarely on the junction of Plumpudding Lane with the road to Butlers Hill. This building provides the hamlet with an attractive and traditional focal point, and it is therefore of key importance in establishing the identity of the place. Yew Tree House, a substantial dwelling similarly built in red brick and with a slate roof, stands on the opposite corner and helps to strengthen this central location, despite being rather obscured by trees and shrubs.
8. Plumpudding Lane forms the north west arm of the hamlet for a distance of some 300 metres. It is a pleasant winding rural road, fronted by a scatter of houses interspersed with orchards, which are all linked together with hedgerows and trees. The buildings are for the most part modest in character with a number dating from

the late 1800s. However, the northern edge of the hamlet is defined by a group of much older houses. The Old Post Office and no. 2 Post Office Cottages were built in the 1500s and are characteristically Kentish in appearance, being timber-framed with red brick on the front elevation, and with steeply pitched roofs covered in mellow clay tiles. Meadow Cottages on the opposite side of the road, are later in date and important for their rural and unaltered simplicity (red brickwork with blue headers, wooden casement windows and boarded front doors).

9. The road to Butlers Hill leading south from the hamlet has a similarly loose scatter of frontage development, again interspersed with orchards and fields. Elm Tree Cottage occupies a crucial position on the turn in the road; it is an attractive white painted weatherboarded house built in the early 1800s, and is also characteristically Kentish in appearance. The building has remained reasonably unaltered, and the setting is uncluttered in appearance. Immediately to the south west lies Bushey Whilds, an early 17th century red brick house with a clay tiled roof, although now with a modern extension at the rear.

10. Other properties along this road generally date from the second half of the 19th century and are built in yellow stock bricks with red dressings, and roofs are covered with slates. These properties represent an important period of building activity in the hamlet.

11. Post war building in the hamlet has for the most part been modest in scale; there is just one modern house, built in the 1970s on the site of former cottages in Plumpudding Lane. More recently the 19th century red brick Methodist Chapel has been converted to a dwelling and extensions have been added to Honeysuckle and Redbrick Cottages. These changes have been absorbed into the hamlet without a major impact on its character, although the extensions to Redbrick and Honeysuckle Cottages have had some effect on the original rural simplicity of the cottages.

Landscape

12. The countryside is ever present in Dargate. Orchards, fields and hedgerows are an important feature of the place, and there are frequent views out over the surrounding countryside, particularly towards the open landscape of the North Kent Marshes and The Swale.

13. The surrounding agricultural landscape is for the most part dominated by commercial orchards, set in smallish fields screened by lines of poplar and alder trees. These orchards penetrate into the hamlet and are a significant feature, although they do lack some of the appeal of older Kentish orchards.

14. Hedgerows particularly, and trees, are an important feature of Plumpudding Lane as they create a fairly strong sense of enclosure. The road towards Butlers Hill has a rather more open appearance with narrow grass verges to the highway; extensive views are again a feature as the road starts to climb. Road frontages throughout the settlement are, therefore, for the most part green in appearance and are marked with well-managed hedges, shrubs and trees.

15. Footways are generally absent, as are street lights; the simplicity of the public highways contributes significantly to the rural character of the place.

The physical fabric

16. The most unattractive and intrusive building is the large agricultural store at the northern end of the hamlet. Whilst it lies outside the conservation area boundary its

height and bulk looms over the cottages on the west side of Plumpudding Lane to the detriment of the street scene at the northern 'entry' into Dargate.

17. Generally, buildings in Dargate have retained much of their original character. However, many of these buildings are individually quite modest in character; any significant alterations or loss of original materials will have a major impact of this fragile character. In certain instances replacement windows are already affecting the authentic building character.

18. The treatment of the public highways is generally very simple and therefore sympathetic, but overhead wires are intrusive in places.

Concluding comments

19. Dargate is a modest and unassuming place. This modest, but fragile, character accounts in large part for the charm and identity of the hamlet. Key features are (a) the scattered and open form of development, with generous spaces around the individual buildings; (b) the rural simplicity of the buildings, as exemplified by Elm Tree and Meadow Cottages; (c) the presence of agricultural land within the hamlet, especially orchards; and (d) the limited range of traditional building materials which are present and which provides continuity in building character.