

Hartlip conservation area: character appraisal

(Extract from report to Development Committee 7 April 1999 Agenda item no. 7G Annex A.)

Setting

1. Hartlip village is situated some five miles west of Sittingbourne. It lies between the A2 London-Dover road, and the M2 motorway.

2. The village is set on a narrow ridge which runs roughly north-south. This elevated position provides Hartlip with a distinctive setting, and with extensive views from the village in most directions over the surrounding countryside. Agricultural land in the vicinity is of high quality deriving from the deep, well-drained loams of brickearth and Thanet sands. Much of the village is surrounded by orchards, which continue to be characterised by a relatively small-scale field pattern. To the south, however, agriculture is more arable with larger field sizes which give a more open character to the countryside.

Settlement development

3. Hartlip is a linear village, comprised almost entirely of frontage development, stretching for some 500m. along both sides of The Street. The exception to this pattern is Dane Close, a cul-de-sac built in the 1960s at the northern end of the village.

4. This linearity has been accentuated in the last forty to fifty years by extensive frontage infilling, the effect of which has been to extend and consolidate the village and to bring a number of once isolated properties within the expanded village confines.

5. The development pattern consists almost entirely of detached properties and buildings which are for the most part spaced well apart in generously sized plots and set well back from the road. Consequently, most of the village has a fairly loosely-knit development character. However, in the vicinity of the church the buildings cluster together much more noticeably and are sited closer to the highway, thereby creating the feel of more tightly-knit development.

6. Archaeological evidence shows that the area around Hartlip was occupied by the Romans; the remains of a large Roman villa complex have been excavated at a site approximately a mile to the south west.

7. Hartlip village itself dates from mediaeval times, and no doubt grew to accommodate the increasing numbers of people associated with the manors which were prospering in the area. The name 'Hartlip' is thought to derive from the Old English 'heoret hlipe', meaning a leaping place for harts or stags.

8. The oldest surviving building in the village is the church, parts of which date from the 13th and 14th centuries although the present day appearance owes much to extensive restoration undertaken in 1865. The nearby Popes Hall dates from the 15th century, although it now has later extensions.

9. The village school has interesting historic origins being founded in 1678 with a bequest from a local family. However, the present building dates only from 1855. The

Methodist chapel at the southern end of The Street is one of the oldest in Kent, having been built in 1820.

10. Hartlip is now almost exclusively a residential village, with shops and traditional village employment now absent. The post office and village shop have both closed in recent years, leaving the primary school, two churches, the village hall and the public house on the Lower Hartlip Road as the main exceptions to the otherwise residential character of the village.

Buildings

11. The church is the most substantial building in the village and effectively marks the centre. It is built of flint with stone dressings, with steeply pitched and colourful, clay tiled roofs and is set within a small churchyard. Other old buildings are loosely grouped around the church, and mark this vicinity as the historic core of the village.

12. Other key buildings hereabouts include Popes Hall, Thatch Cottage, Wisteria Cottage and Hartlip House. Together with the church these buildings, with others, are important to the architectural and historic character of the village core. They are physically and visually linked by boundary walls, iron railings, timber paling fences and hedgerows, the effect of which is to create a strong and attractive sense of structure and unity.

13. The oldest part of Popes Hall dates from the fifteenth century; with more recent extensions it is now a sizeable timber framed building, with plaster infill and a plain clay tiled roof. A large barn stands alongside with weatherboarded sides and a steeply pitched clay tiled roof, which complements the house. To the south lies Wisteria Cottage built in the 1600s, and now clad in white-painted weatherboarding (and at one time a public house). Thatch Cottage, dating from the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, has red brick walls with plaster render above and a prominent thatched roof. Hartlip House, built in the early nineteenth century, is of brick which is now painted. Thatch is now rather exceptional for the area, but in general the building materials used here are strongly linked to local sources.

14. In more recent times infill development has taken place to both the north and south of the original village core, which has embraced a number of other buildings of special architectural/historic interest fronting onto The Street. Stepp House for example, occupying a slightly elevated position above the highway, is a timber-framed building with painted plaster and red brick infill. Yew Tree Cottage and Barrows Cottages are also both timber framed and are now clad with brick. These buildings continue the Kentish vernacular theme into the southern part of the village, together with a number of other more modest properties built with local materials such as weatherboarding, yellow stock brick (most notably the primary school) and flint. Locally derived materials are further present in lengths of boundary walls, including red and yellow stock bricks and flint.

15. Post-war development in the village is quite extensive and typically consists of fairly large detached houses and bungalows. Individually many of these are rather undistinguished in design, but they are generally traditional in form and style. Genuinely local materials are, however, markedly less evident in these buildings. But crucially, many of these newer properties stand in generously sized plots so that the generally loosely-knit development form of the village has been successfully maintained. The genuinely rural character of the place consequently remains in place, and is an important feature.

16. Somewhat set apart from the village proper are Hartlip Place, Place Farm and Sweepstakes Farm. These nevertheless have a clear physical relationship with the village framework and in instances are linked by areas of parkland. Hartlip Place, lying to the south west of the village, was built around 1812 and has an attractive elevation looking south over a small park. The adjoining Place Farm comprises an important complex of buildings, which includes a sixteenth century timber framed farmhouse, and a barn, dovecot and farm storage building all dating from the seventeenth century. Sweepstakes Farm, circa 1700, is a brick built house, which stands slightly separated from the village to the south east and adjoins an area of attractive parkland.

Landscape

17. Striking features of Hartlip village are the green appearance of most of the frontage to The Street, and the extensive private greenspace which is present around many of the properties. This green framework results collectively from a sequence of generously-sized gardens and substantial boundaries comprised of trees, hedgerows and shrubs. The native plant composition, particularly holly, yew and hawthorn, brings a strong feeling of the surrounding countryside into the village and emphasises the local ecology.

18. This green framework links old and new development, bringing together individual plots into a single coherent entity. It also helps to create a strong sense of visual cohesion and enclosure along the entire length of the village. The generous space between, and around, the buildings is itself a crucial feature of the village,

19. The external treatment of individual plots is, for the most part, fairly free of urban/suburban characteristics. Garaging and parking, for example, are for the most part unobtrusive, driveways are often surfaced in gravel and shingle rather than hard paved, and boundary treatments link sensitively with buildings. Gardens are also characterised, in many instances, by a strong planting framework of native trees and shrubs.

20. The generous plot sizes result in considerable gaps between the buildings, which provide for frequent views out from The Street through to the countryside beyond. This is an attractive feature of the village which reinforces the links with the rural surroundings. The landscaped park to the south east of The Parsonage is an important feature, presenting an attractive sloping foreground to the southern part of the village. Now owned by the Parish Council it is an informal public space.

21. The road through Hartlip, The Street, is essentially rural in character; it winds through the village and in sections is bordered by substantial hedgerows and trees growing close to the carriageway edge. Footways are present only in sections, and for the most part are narrow. Street lighting is absent. This all results in a simple and uncluttered appearance to the highway which contributes positively to the rural character of the place. Sight-lines at the junction of Dane Close with The Street do, however, interrupt the continuity of the roadside hedgerow at the northern end of the village.

The physical fabric

22. The physical fabric of the village is for the most part carefully maintained and well presented. Gardens and planting areas around the buildings are similarly cared for. Discordant features and problem sites are generally absent. The highway through the village retains a pleasant rural simplicity, and has remained free from engineering works to upgrade and improve. In places the edges to the highway are being worn by increasing amounts of road traffic, and the extensive on-street parking

associated with the primary school causes particular pressures at key times in the day.

Summary

23. Hartlip is a neatly presented and prosperous looking residential village. The old village core remains clearly identifiable, although it is now a part of a larger village development which itself has embraced a number of older buildings. The green framework of native planting along The Street is a crucial feature of the village character, and helps to maintain a strong physical relationship with the surrounding countryside at a time at a time when other links with it have weakened. The generous plot size is a special feature of the village character and is crucial to the well-being of the green framework. The village character depends heavily on these green areas, and the gaps are, therefore, of key importance; the spaces around the buildings are in some instances as important as the buildings themselves.

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Sources

Hartlip Village Appraisal 1994

The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent by Edward Hasted.

The Place Names of Kent by J Glover, first published 1976.