

Hearts Delight conservation area character appraisal

(Extract from report to Development Committee 26 January 2000 (Agenda item no. 7))

Location

1. Hearts Delight comprises a small scatter of houses situated to the south west of Sittingbourne and a little under a mile south east of Borden village. It is set between the recently developed housing areas of Borden to the north and a ribbon of undistinguished, mainly inter war, frontage development to the south.

Physical setting

2. The hamlet is set along a shallow dry valley feature which runs roughly north-south on the lower dip slope of the North Downs. It comprises a handful of buildings scattered along the line of the valley, interspersed with hedgerows and grazing fields. This pattern has enabled the remnants of a traditional rural landscape character to survive, which contrasts with the rather open, arable landscape of large fields beyond the valley itself.

Historic interest

3. The Borden area, including Hearts Delight, has a long history of settlement. An extensive Iron Age and Romano British site has been recorded some 600 metres to the north west of Hillyfields. Gold coins from the period have been found in Hearts Delight itself.

4. The oldest of the surviving buildings here now is Filmer House, the earliest part of which dates from the 15th century.

Buildings

5. The key feature of Hearts Delight is the three timber framed buildings and the way in which they are set slightly into the valley which itself links them all together.

6. Sharps House, which lies at the northern end of the scatter of buildings, is a 17th century timber framed building with brick infill on the ground floor and plaster infill on the first floor. The exposed timber framing and the large thatched roof are attractive features, but rather unusually the house is almost completely hidden from the road by a tall wall of yew hedge which sits on top of a brick and flint retaining wall. This hedge is now a major architectural feature in its own right; an inviting mouse-hole entrance has been formed through it with an attractive flight of brick steps leading up to the front door.

7. To the south, and on the opposite side of the road, is Filmer House. This is an L-shaped, timber framed building set slightly into the valley side. The house is comprised of three separate builds, the original building being 15th century in origin. A gabled wing to the rear climbs the valley side so that it appears to sit slightly higher than the original house.

8. Hearts Delight House is also timber framed and occupies a prominent position on the corner of Hearts Delight Road and Wrens Road. The oldest part of the building dates from the 1500s, and is now clad with red brick and tile hanging. A 16th century brick wall encloses a courtyard, and links together the main house with a small flint walled barn, to create a significant feature on the corner.

9. Around the corner to the east is a separate small group of outbuildings comprising a brick built garage building and a low, single storey weatherboarded store building, which are linked together with brick walls to form a pleasant group.

Landscape

10. The road through Hearts Delight itself has a fairly enclosed feel to it, by virtue of the valley form and the roadside banks, hedgerows, trees and pockets of grazing meadow. This traditional, small scale character contrasts with the openness of the landscape beyond. Until recently the surrounding landscape was dominated by orchards, but now it is characterised by large arable fields which pattern is relieved only by rather sparse hedgerows.

11. The elevated position provides for extensive views across farmland to the north across to the Swale Marshes and Isle of Sheppey.

12. The timber-framed houses are truly a product of the locality with local materials such as timber, brick and flint much in evidence. These close ties with the area, plus the close relationship of buildings with the landscape feature, are crucial features. A small area of grazing pasture sweeps attractively around Filmers House, whilst Hearts Delight House is set onto the valley side propped up on colourful red brickwork. By contrast, 'Lenwood' (of more recent date) is sited with less subtlety on the top of valley slope, and so fails to achieve quite the same close association with the landscape.

Summary

13. The key feature here is the relationship of the buildings with the landscape: at their best these have the appearance of being comfortably settled into the landscape, and with locally derived materials such as timber, flint and clay being prominent they record a very close affinity with the landscape.