

Lynsted conservation area character appraisal

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

Location

1. Lynsted village is situated just under five kilometres south east of Sittingbourne, approximately mid-way between the A2 London-Dover road and the M2 motorway. It is sited on the northern edge of the North Downs dip slope within the North Kent agricultural belt and much of the countryside around the village is characterised by fruit growing.

Historical perspective

2. The name 'Lynsted' is believed to derive from the Old English, meaning a place marked by a lime tree. Historically, the farms in Lynsted parish enjoyed considerable prosperity and the evidence of this lies in the large number of fine houses, dating from before 1650, which are present in the parish. The buildings within the village, however, are individually less remarkable, although Lynsted Court (formerly known as Swards) is of special note, with evidence of 14th century work in the hall. Parts of the parish church, especially the tower, have also been dated to the early 14th century.

3. Aymers is also of particular interest being a country house built in the second half of the 19th century. It was later to be the home of Aymer Vallenge, an important national figure in conservation who was a close associate of William Morris, and who was also the restorer of Stoneacre at Otham and the editor of *Archaeologia Cantiana*.

Buildings

4. The old village nucleus of Lynsted is focused on the church, on rising ground at the junction of The Street (the main road running north-south through the village) with Ludgate Lane. From here the village has spread north along the main road, with a small post-war housing scheme now filling the gap between the village core and another small group of historic properties which includes a public house and the vicarage. Further to the north again are the village school and mill buildings, all built in the mid 1800s, and which are now physically linked to the rest of the village by a small number of modern infill houses.

5. Two large houses mark the southern end of the village. Lynsted Court dates from the 1400s and lies on the west side of The Street. Aymers lies on the east side of the road and is a much later Victorian country house completed in 1869 and set within a small park (although this is now considerably smaller than it originally was).

6. Visually, the church and the cluster of timber-framed houses around it continue to define the centre of the village. St Peters and St Pauls church is prominent in the landscape, partly because of its size and partly because of its elevated position on rising ground. It is situated within a small graveyard and is set 'end on' to the road so that the three in-line gables of its eastern elevation are a prominent feature in The Street. The building is constructed largely of flint, a local material derived from the clay deposits which overlay the chalk of the North Downs, whilst the main roof is covered with Kent peg tiles. The top stage of the tower, which is weatherboarded, is finished with shingles on a pyramidal spire.

7. The church flintwork is carried through into a substantial retaining wall around the graveyard, which is itself an important feature in the street scene as it here forms the edge of the main carriageway through the village and stands immediately opposite a substantial brick wall on the other side of the road. Together these walls have the effect of narrowing the street scene significantly and creating a strong sense of enclosure; they are an important feature in the village.

8. To the south east of the church a cluster of old buildings front onto The Street as it drops down the hill. Newman (in Buildings of England) describes 'how the best part of the village is a row of cottages tumbling incoherently down a gentle slope south east of the churchyard', and these buildings are undoubtedly a defining group in Lynsted. Dating mainly from the 1600s and 1700s the cottages are constructed from a mix of timber-framing and brick, and all the roofs are covered with Kent peg tiles, which continuity of materials helps to tie them together visually into an attractive group set along the back edge of the footway.

9. On the opposite side of the road are the old Post Office and Anchor House. The substantial, close-studded Anchor House dates from the 16th century, but was partially rebuilt following war damage. The old Post Office is a timber-framed building, strongly Kentish in appearance; it lies in the hollow below the church and occupies a key position in the street scene where it defines the southern edge of the village core. A red, cast iron telephone kiosk stands on the adjoining footway.

10. Ludgate Lane, which joins The Street from the west, is lined on both sides by picturesque old houses for a distance of some 100 metres or so. These buildings are grouped informally along the edge of the road and are, in many instances, timber-framed. They present an attractive mix of elevations and although there is much white-painted infill plaster a variety of other materials is present including brick and weatherboarding, again all linked together by clay tiled roofs. The result is a very attractive village street scene, distinctive for its small scale and Kentish character, and with an informality which is reinforced by domestic planting spilling out over the footway and carriageway. The view along the road is closed in both directions, and a real sense of traditional village environment is achieved here.

11. To the north east of the village core lies St Peters Place, a post-war housing development comprised of four matching pairs of semi-detached houses spaced regularly along the road and around a small public green. The simple uniformity of both the house designs and the layout is a key feature, but there are signs now of piecemeal individualisation of windows and doors. This development fills the gap between the village core and another smaller group of old buildings to the north.

12. The Black Lion public house is the largest building in this second group and stands prominently on the edge of the carriageway. This traditional commercial/social use is of special importance in the village environment. Parts of the building are timber-framed and date from the 17th century, although this age is not especially apparent from the outside. The steeply pitched roofs are covered in clay tiles. Beyond again, on the opposite side of the road, is Vicarage Farmhouse, distinctly Kentish in appearance with close-studded timber framing, chequered red and blue brick at one end, and peg tiles on the roof. The adjoining Vicarage Cottage is a pleasant looking single-storey rendered house with paired, round-headed windows. To the north of this group the character changes markedly, with the street scene suddenly being dominated by dark, overhanging trees growing within the burial ground and the grounds of The Vicarage. Orchards are also present here along the western side of The Street with a single line of windbreak trees fronting the road. In consequence, a strong sense of enclosure is maintained within The Street. The

Vicarage itself is set well back within its plot and is substantially hidden from the road; the original part of the building dates from the 16th century, but it is the white painted 19th century wings on either side which are more prominent.

13. To the north again the road forks with the main arm striking off to the north east. On the north side of the road is Berkeley House, a 17th century building subsequently re-fronted in the 19th century. A white painted, weatherboarded mill building stands alongside which once housed steam operated milling machinery; adjoining is an attractive coachhouse. A black painted windmill base stands to the rear. A short distance to the east is the village school which stands on the opposite side of the road; this is an attractive complex of buildings dating from the mid 1800s and built from local yellow stock bricks with polychromatic detailing. The steeply pitched tiled roofs, with a series of gables presented to the road, are notable features which reinforce the traditional character of the school building. Recent development along this part of the road has infilled the remaining gaps with a small number of houses, and whilst The Hollies has been carefully integrated into this local environment other houses are less successful.

14. The southern limits of the village are marked by two substantial houses: Aymers and Lynsted Court. Aymers is a country house built in the 1860s of red brick with stone detailing which includes stone mullioned windows. This Victorian house is approached through gates, past a lodge house, and along a curving drive. Whilst still rather screened from view with planting, its clustered red brick chimneys can be seen above the enclosing trees.

15. The setting of this house has, however, been much altered by modern development, as the south-western half of the surrounding park has been developed with a series of detached houses set along a winding cul-de-sac. This development bears little relationship with the rest of the village form but fortunately has limited impact on the village environment. The park, always quite modest in size, has therefore been reduced in extent but a section still survives sloping northwards down to a public footpath. An arm of the park also extends out to The Street, where there is an attractive duck pond with trees and greensward around and which is bounded along the road frontage by an estate railing. The pond is truly picturesque, and a key feature of the village environment.

16. Lynsted Court is a lavish, close-studded timber-framed hall house with jettied cross wings, and also a jettied two-storeyed porch, which dates from the 16th century but partially re-used a 14th century hall. The building was extensively restored in the late 1990s at which time the adjoining 17th century timber framed barns were converted to two dwellings. This impressive black and white building is an outstanding example of Kentish vernacular architecture. Once set amidst orchards, it is now separated from the village by grazing fields, although to the south-east the land is being planted as a garden.

Landscape

17. Lynsted is located on the southern edge of the North Kent fruit belt, and orchards continue to be a major feature of the landscape around much of the village, although to the south agriculture is somewhat more mixed with arable and grazing also.

18. From the northern edge of the village there are extensive views away to the north as far as the Isle of Sheppey, whereas the landscape elsewhere around the village is more enclosed in character. The dry valley which runs north-south along the eastern edge of the village is an attractive local landscape feature.

19. Within the village the development form achieves for the most part a fairly strong sense of enclosure, so that views out over the surrounding countryside are not such a significant feature. Trees make important contributions to the street scene at a number of locations, including around the pond where there are pines and willows, around the church where yew trees predominate, in the vicinity of The Vicarage, and at the entrance to the village from the north where a line of mature trees, including horse chestnut and beech, mark the edge of the road. Trees, boundary walls and hedges along the north side of Lynsted Lane (opposite the school) link together especially well to create a coherent frontage treatment, although the footway and concrete kerb give the road here a somewhat more formal appearance. Elsewhere in the village soft verges and incomplete lengths of footway are more usual.

20. The road to the south of Lynsted becomes tunnel-like with overhanging trees and hedgerows of mixed species including hawthorn, ash and holly on the banks above the road.

Other comments

21. Buildings and land within the village are generally maintained with care and sensitivity, and the street scene is free, for the most part, from seriously detrimental features. Overhead wires and on-street parking in Ludgate Road do tend to intrude, however, into a particularly attractive section of the village scene.

22. The most recently completed development in the village comprises three houses adjoining Ivy Cottage, and being set back behind frontage buildings the impact on the street scene is minimal. Nevertheless, the views from The Street into the development suggest a rather bland character which seems to lack the texture, sensitivity of detailing and greenery of the village scene elsewhere in Lynsted.

23. The greatest cause for concern is the extensive area of unattractive looking industrial/ commercial activity on the eastern side of the village. Fortunately, this is mostly hidden from view from within the public areas of the village and so the impact on the 'public face' of the village environment is not a significant issue, although the frontage at Stedlyn Retreat is not particularly attractive. Nevertheless, this area and its uses are prominent in the landscape when viewed from outside the village confines to the east where they clearly detract from the setting of the village.

24. In summary, Lynsted is one of the Borough's most attractive villages. It is linear in form being arranged for the most part along the main road through the village. Parts of the village development are rather open in character but the overall combination of buildings, topography and trees results in a fairly enclosed village environment. The village core has a nicely clustered and picturesque quality, characterised by Kentish vernacular architecture and local materials. Other historic buildings, also Kentish in character, have been brought within the village confines by later development. The northern end of Lynsted has a number of good nineteenth century buildings which are now linked firmly with the rest of the village. The transition from village to countryside at the southern end of Lynsted, with the presence of two large houses, is particularly noteworthy.

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