



Kirby-le-Soken Conservation Area



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This Conservation Area Character Appraisal has been produced by the District Council but is based on earlier work by consultants Smith Stuart Reynolds in 2001. These earlier documents contain the views of the consultant and did not necessarily reflect the Council's Officer's views. Although these documents have existed for some time they had no formal, planning status.

The Council subsequently agreed in 2005 to prepare Conservation Area Character Appraisals for each of its Conservation Areas and as a forerunner to updating the above consultant's documents a consultation exercise took place in late 2005 / early 2006. This involved town and parish councils and certain local amenity bodies. The results of the consultation exercise were reported to the Council's Planning Portfolio Holder when the document was formally considered for adoption as Council planning policy. As a result of this consultation the Appraisal documents have been amended and updated in the light of the comments received from consultees and as a result of certain changes which have taken place since 2001. Much of the descriptive material used in the original SSR documents has been retained.

Proposals originally put forward by the Consultant involving suggested changes to Conservation Area boundaries, enhancement works or proposed Article 4 Directions have been retained in these latest documents. However, it is recognised that town or parish councils do not support some of these suggestions and this is referred to in the appropriate document. Their inclusion in the documents as suggestions only does not indicate that the District Council supports such proposals at this time. They will be subject to further consideration by the Council in due course. Indeed all such proposals for boundary changes, and any new Article 4 Directions will be required to go through quite separate, statutory processes which will also be carried out with further public consultation.

This document has been formally adopted by the Council as part of its planning policies for this conservation area under the provisions of Section 71 of the Planning [Listed Buildings & Conservation Areas] Act 1990. It will therefore be an important material consideration in relation to the assessment and determination of planning and related applications in the Conservation Area.

SUMMARY

The special character of Kirby-Le-Soken Conservation Area rests in the sinuous layout of The Street and the relationships between the wide variety of buildings associated with it, from the parish church and larger houses to smaller cottages and cabins.

The boundaries of the Area have been assessed and a small addition is recommended.

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LOCATION

Kirby-le-Soken is situated in a shallow trough of ground between Walton Backwater and a ridge of high ground running from north west to south east and connecting Thorpe-le-Soken and Frinton. While the ground remains relatively level towards Walton to the south east, it rises gently to the north east to a low ridge which separates the older part of the village from the sea. The landscape rises gently but consistently to Kirby Cross to the south, and falls to a small brook to the west.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

Kirby is recorded in the Domesday Book along with Thorpe and Walton as part of a manorial holding owned by St Paul's Cathedral. The suffix "Le-Soken" reflects Viking influence and denoted special privileges which were granted in 1509, the first year in the reign of Henry VIII. Although the land was mainly copyhold, the villagers affected had additional rights and freedoms over various aspects of their holdings so that their tenure was almost as good as freehold. Kirby was the most important of the three Le Sokens (Kirby, Thorpe and Walton), holding a Court Leet of the Liberty in July each year when all property transactions were recorded.

The village proper lies astride the Lower Street, now The Street (B1034), from Thorpe to Walton. Chapman and André's county map of 1777 shows a sporadic linear settlement either side of what is now Halstead Road, with the church and The Hall set back to the south west. Kirby Cross was a hamlet on the Upper Street (B1033), 1.3km (0.8 miles) to the south. The population was 664 in 1801 (presumably both settlements taken together), as opposed to the 300 living in Great Holland, the 221 in Walton and the 31 in Frinton.

This area, like the rest of the district, would have been a rural backwater until the opening of the railway line to Walton with a station at Kirby Cross operating from July 1866. Given the additional accessibility from rail and motor borne traffic, Kirby Cross is now a part of the continuous built-up area of Frinton and Walton. The original village of Kirby-Le-Soken has developed strongly to the east over the last century or so, but has retained its separation from the coastal settlement, unlike Kirby Cross.

Kirby Quay on Walton Backwater regularly handled coal and grain until the coming of the railway. The quay was used for commercial traffic until the 1920's, when the granary was converted to a private dwelling.

The Conservation Area covers the older part of the village centred around St Michael's Church at the western end of the village.

CONSERVATION AREA BOUNDARIES

The boundary firstly includes the church, and the two significant houses, The Old Vicarage and Kirby Hall, with their extensive curtilages bounded by mature trees on the south side of The Street. It includes the scatter of cottages and domestic gardens on both sides of The Street at the western entrance to the village, and the various buildings on its north side opposite the Churchyard and the grounds of the former Vicarage. East of the church the Conservation Area boundary excludes modern developments on Malting Lane northwards to Marsh House and on the south side of The Street. It includes the houses on the north side and the green areas including the War Memorial.

REPLACEMENT LOCAL PLAN POLICY CONTEXT

The Development Boundary is centred on the later developments to the east of the Conservation Area, and are drawn only around built development either side of The Street east of the church, and the more concentrated development in the Conservation Area north of the churchyard and the grounds to the former Vicarage. North of this latter group is an area designated as protected open space.

The outer boundaries of the churchyard and the adjacent extensive curtilages are protected by the local green gap policy defining Frinton, Walton and Kirby Cross.

The area to the north of the Development Boundary including parts of the Conservation Area is part of the Coastal Protection Belt.

AREA APPRAISAL

General

The Conservation Area is essentially the older part of the village lining The Street. Though strongly linear, there is a sense of identity and enclosure in the village. This is the product firstly of the restriction of views out of the village by virtue of mature tree planting to the south and topography to the north and south. Secondly, there is a significant bend in The Street at its most important point where the churchyard entrance lies opposite the Red Lion. The latter with attractive older properties on either side lie on the outside of the bend, are important in views in either direction and effectively define the heart of the Conservation Area. The existence of forecourts in front of these properties also contributes to the sense of place, as does the relative activity associated with Oxborrow Engineering. The church has a substantial tower, but this is more obvious in longer views from the west and is comparatively reticent within the village. It is however another factor underlining this central location, as are the numbers of mature trees within the churchyard and otherwise enclosing the central part of the Area. The old Vicarage and the Hall are also far less prominent than their grounds in any assessment of the Area.

The west end of the village

From the west, Kirby, like so many of its neighbours, is identified by the church tower rising from stands of mature trees. Beyond the turn to Beaumont, the road rises gradually until the edge of the village is announced by a strong pair of rough-rendered cottages with open-fronted curtilages on the right. These lead to a group of cottages lying on both sides of the road and creating a strong pinch point with mature hedges tightly defining the narrow carriageway. While the cottages on the north side of the road have generally been greatly extended, those on the south side still have much of their "cabin" quality and form, with the counterpoint of the telegraph poles, a familiar East Anglian scene. Facing materials are brick, timber cladding and render under roofs of plain tiles and pantiles. Properties have been extended outwards rather than upwards and the general effect is still informal. Only Haroldene on the south side has little visual value. A footpath immediately to the west of this cottage offers a glimpse of wider countryside.

Beyond this dense traditional grouping, the road opens out on both sides with hedgerows important in maintaining definition. They lead past Norton's Barn, listed as dating from the 18th century, and renovated with immaculate outbuildings and grounds. Some visually significant hedging makes another small gateway with Patches opposite, its prominent gambrel gable and chimney on the carriageway edge. Immediately beyond Patches is another strong group in which the two rendered gables of Rustic Lodge are most visible. The group is completed by Oak Tree Cottage, set a little back from the road and with brick elevations making a contrast with its neighbour.

From a track giving extensive views northwards, a footpath now begins on the north side of the road, and leads past a succession of cottages, mostly of one and a half storeys, and all with roofs parallel to the road and forming an interesting sequence full of character. Weatherboarding and thatch were common at the turn of the last century, with front boundary walls of brick or in the form of simple picket fences. Today the facades of these cottages are all rendered, with roofs of clay or concrete tiles or natural slate. Front boundaries are provided by more ornamental picket fences or by hedges. The rendered gable ends and the simply-detailed chimneys of those cottages closest to the road are the most prominent items in the street scene at this point. Sunnyside is particularly obvious on the inside of the slight bend in the street, originally two weatherboarded cottages and now with profiled concrete tiles on its gambrel roof. Even more significant in townscape are nos 46 and 48 and Lyne Cottage, a short terrace of three cottages rising from the highway edge, also originally weatherboarded but now with a pebbledashed front elevation framed by prominent gable ends various painted white to the west and black to the east.

The centre of the village

This group helps to enclose the front gardens of Red House and White House, a pretty listed pairing dating from the 16th century with a significant and complex roofscape. The enclosure is completed to the east by Little House, a tiny single storey dwelling with its gable end on the highway edge. Originally this cottage was even

smaller, with a chimney on its prominent gable. Beyond two more modern dwellings, the old centre of Kirby opposite the church and the Old Vicarage is given additional significance by larger properties set back from the road edge. To the west, and in a more prominent position parallel to the road and only slightly set back from it, is Waterloo House. This is a two-storey double-pile house, its facade rather unsettled at the time of writing by the rendered ground floor treatment as part of what appears to be a long-term renovation project. The interesting central door hood does not appear to be original. A small pantiled brick shed to one side houses a joiner's workshop. More significant in historic importance and use is the Red Lion, a listed building dating back at least to the 16th century, timber framed with facades of plastered brick, painted pink. Its frontage is open to the road in a rather indeterminate manner, though mature trees help to retain an enclosure and reinforce the sense of place. The pub's car park has a similarly accidental relationship with the lane to the east, though visual interest is provided by a small rendered cottage beside the pub, and by the buildings and activity associated with the yard of Oxborrow Engineering.

These individual houses and the cottages to the west face the churchyard and the grounds associated with the Hall and the Old Vicarage. The first in sequence is the most reticent, as the Hall is set well back at the end of an attractive drive framed by ornamental planting. At the entrance to the drive is an important and rare view out over open fields to the south west. The Hall itself is a very understated, well-proportioned house dating back at least to around 1700, with sash windows and a beautiful pedimented timber doorcase set in a brick facade with dentilled brick eaves. A substantial brick wall with piers and dentilled brick details skirts a pond and leads past an interesting group of farm buildings to a listed barn, timber framed and weatherboarded and dating from the 18th century.

The Old Vicarage itself is more in evidence, glimpsed between mature trees from The Street and the churchyard. It dates from the second quarter of the 19th century, and is of plain late Georgian design in yellow-grey gault bricks with a hipped slate roof. A later side extension has Gothic details. The informal hedgerow boundary to The Street enclosing pasture and trees is an important element in the character of the village.

The churchyard is more heavily treed, so that only the church porch is visible from the street along a gravelled approach with mixed planting and incidental car parking to one side. The entrance is to the side of the Village Hall, a pleasant though unexceptional building. Closer to, the contrast can be appreciated between the tall 15th century tower with its chequered flushwork parapet, and the Victorian body of the church in Geometric Decorated style, with flint walls and unusual stone details. The slight angle of the church to the approach leads the eye naturally past the tower to an important oblique view of the Old Vicarage. The remainder of the churchyard is informally managed within a perimeter screen of mature trees.

The east end of the village

East of the churchyard, an attractive and prominent terrace of cottages relates to the building lines set up by the Red Lion and therefore continues to help accentuate the relative importance of the old part of the village. The character of the space created is different from that in front of the Red Lion and Waterloo House because of a sequence of formal green areas which eventually contain the War Memorial. There is a certain amount of planting next to the Red Lion, so that only the end house and gable of Maltings Cottages is visible from the west. The end property (Two Maltings House) is double-fronted and quite substantial: most of the remainder are workers cottages of painted or pebbledashed brick under a slate roof. Original features such as small-paned sashes and rubbed brick window heads are evident. Adjoining this terrace is Post Office House, a listed timber framed cottage of 16th or 17th century date if not earlier, with rough-rendered and painted facades and an old plain tiled roof. The adjacent Edwardian shop has been converted very successfully into offices. In front, a seat, pillar box and telephone box have been attractively grouped here, an excellent example of what could be achieved with a co-ordinated approach to street furniture.

Further east again, the formal space is more open to the main road and is the most significant single item defining the character of this end of the Conservation Area. A small group of houses of varied style and date with generally well-defined front boundaries form a pleasant backdrop to this open space. The most interesting in historic terms are no 12, and Penkevian, though the latter has lost much of its interest with the changes in facing materials over the years and the construction of a prominent garage. Modern houses across The Street and outside the Area represent the infilling of some smaller houses dating from the early years of the 20th century.

APPRAISAL PLAN

The above analysis has been used to generate the Conservation Area Appraisal Plan. This includes negative and neutral factors, as follows:

Negative factors

- Norton's Barn has been renovated to the highest standards and its outbuildings form an impressive grouping reinterpreting the character of traditional agricultural buildings in an interesting way. However, the road frontage lacks the informal sense of enclosure of its neighbours, while the paved courtyard brings a large area of red tarmac – a visually alien material, to the Area.
- At the other end of the village, the large garage to Penkevis and its access of patchy tarmac is out-of-scale with its surroundings and the only serious breach in the residential frontages lining the formal green spaces containing the War Memorial.
- Behind Sunnyside is a group of double garages, which in its location, scale and glancing relationship with The Street fails to reflect the character of the rest of this linear village.

Neutral factors

- Modern dwellings west of The Red Lion are out-of-character with the Area because they have been located without reflecting the siting of their neighbours or having a positive relationship with The Street itself. They are generally discreet, however, and are therefore only neutral as concerns the character and appearance of the Area.

SUGGESTED ENHANCEMENTS: BUILDINGS

General

Profiled concrete tiles have a texture and scale which look uncomfortable on the smaller cottage property common in this particular Area. Eventual replacement with Welsh or artificial slates would be a visual improvement.

Penkevis

The flat roofed garage in front of Penkevis, The Street, is excessively bulky and prominent. Supplying a pitched roof with the lowest possible eaves would improve the street scene and relate the building more closely to Penkevis itself, even in its altered state. The large area of tarmac in front is also unattractive given the smaller scale and quality of hard surfacing in the immediate vicinity.

Waterloo House

Waterloo House (no 34) is a prominent and historic structure. Its structural and decorative condition could be improved and made more consistent with great benefit to the character and appearance of the Area.

SUGGESTED ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

The central area

More considered treatment is suggested of the whole frontage area associated with the Red Lion, the grassed and planted areas around Malting Lane and Oxborrow's Yard, and the frontage of Waterloo House. This is too comprehensive an area to be considered under individual curtilages. The contrast between the formal engineered surface of the main road and the areas noted tends to emphasise the linearity of the space to its detriment. There are also some areas which are not functioning properly which should be reconsidered, given the success of the small area of street furniture items outside Maltings Cottages.

ADDITIONAL CONTROLS

The character of Kirby-Le-Soken is derived from the varied character of its constituent buildings and the sequence of spaces they enclose. There are no largely unaltered set pieces or formal layouts which might benefit from additional controls to retain or promote consistency. The current dispositions of brick, white render or coloured render in facades, for example, is not considered to be a suitable subject for an Article 4 Direction. No additional controls are therefore suggested.



1. The centre of the old part of the village –an of the Conservation Area – is indicated by the forecourts of the Red Lion and of Waterloo House leading to an apparent broadening of the street. The surface treatment of the forecourts could be made more consistent and hard-wearing as a visual improvement.



2. Also central to the village are the densely-planted surroundings of St Michael's Church, the Old Vicarage and Kirby Hall. The approach to the church also provides informal parking successfully integrated with a pleasant avenue.



3 Maltings Lane runs northwards from The Street, giving access to Oxberrow's yard, suggested for inclusion in the Conservation Area because of its long-established nature, the additional activity it generates and the visual significance of its buildings. This view demonstrates the "gateway" function to the Conservation Area.



4. Kirby Hall has less significance in immediate visual terms than most buildings in the Conservation Area but is an essential part of the more spacious character on the south side of The Street. Apparently painted white at the turn of the last century, the Hall displays many attractive features, in particular its fine front door and doorcase.



5. The western entrance to the Area is characterised by an informal group of small cottages with some dense frontage planting. Those cottages on the south side of the road have mostly retained something of their original scale.



6. Oak Tree Cottage and Rustic Lodge make an attractive and unusual pairing. The two halves appear to have little in common with the important exception that their design, facing materials and details are generally drawn from the vernacular traditions of the locality.



7. Another development form of great significance is exemplified by this group of cottages with varied relationships with the main road. They gain consistency from the limited range of facing materials, though the variety of garden frontage styles is a modern phenomenon. Gable treatments become extremely important visually.



8. The Street west of the churchyard has an informal air derived from the varied arrangement of buildings on the north side and the pleasant rural character of the hedgerows of the Old Vicarage on the south. Particularly pleasant is the contrast in scale and colour between the two prominent gables in the street scene.



9. Maltings Cottages are a visually significant group in view in either direction along The Street. Their relative sophistication in design terms is reinforced by the access lane in front, and by the careful placing of elements of street furniture which are so often randomly and opportunistically sited.



10. The eastern entrance to the Area is dominated by formal grassed areas surrounding the War Memorial. Much of the character derives from the attractive trees in this location.



11. The entrance to Maltings Lane is visually confusing given the access lane to Maltings Cottages, the side access to the forecourt of the Red Lion, and the parking area and rough verge opposite Oxberrow's yard. This important part of the Area could be better-designed and provided with more interesting hard surfacing.



12. Garages are substantial assets for domestic properties but their scale and the need for accessibility may tend to make them over-prominent in the street scene. In this context, the size of the garage doors, the starkness of the garage itself and the poor quality of hard surfacing are all regrettable in this Conservation Area context.