

SHERIFFHALES CONSERVATION AREA STATEMENT

This statement was approved by Bridgnorth District Council's Planning Committee on 24th July 1995.

SHERIFFHALES CONSERVATION AREA

The Sheriffhales Conservation Area was designated on 26 October 1994. Sheriffhales is a village in the parish of the same name 3 miles east of Telford and 5 miles south of Newport. The Conservation Area comprises Sheriffhales Manor and land to the north and east including part of Sheriffhales Drive; Sheriffhales and Manor Lodges; the parish church and Church Lane up to and including Sheene House; Sheriffhales County Primary School and part of Sheriffhales Drive to the west; The Rock and properties to the north and south, and 40 and 41 Sheriffhales.

Landscape



Sheriffhales lies in pleasant rolling agricultural countryside. Within the Conservation Area this can best be seen from the road adjacent to Sheriffhales Manor. The meadow below road level, between the Manor and Sheriffhales Drive, is an important landscape feature. Beyond Sheriffhales Drive the land rises to the north and east. The Rock climbs gently eastwards, but the ground on either side rises much more steeply, making it a very attractive sunken, narrow country lane.

The rise to the north and east sets the churchyard some way above the road, which runs between banks and retaining walls, giving it the effect of being in a cutting almost immediately below the church. The slope of Church Lane to the north and its bend to the east effectively shuts out views of 20th century development outside the Conservation Area.

Trees are a dominant element of the Conservation Area's landscape and character. Much of it is enclosed by woodland and belts of trees, separating the historic core of the village from the surrounding countryside. Sections of the avenue of lime trees running along Sheriffhales Drive form parts of the Conservation Area boundary on the western side; the southern section is covered by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO). A large part of the eastern boundary is formed by a dense belt of trees (also covered by a TPO).

Within the Conservation Area trees have an enormous visual impact. The churchyard is very largely bounded by mature trees, principally yews. Those along its southern boundary and on the



opposite side of the road meet overhead, creating a tunnel effect. The area south of the road is heavily wooded, hiding the graveyard, the village hall and the school from view. Along The Rock the banks are lined with mature trees, emphasising its enclosed, sunken character. South of The Rock, on the edge of the Conservation Area, Sutherland House has spacious grounds with many fine trees.

History

The name Sheriffhales derives from *halh*, meaning pasture by the waterside, and the Sheriff of Shropshire, who was lord of the manor when it was recorded in Domesday Book. At that time the parish was in Staffordshire. Within a few years part of it was transferred to Shropshire, but the rest remained in Staffordshire until 1895. The parish is closely linked with the Lilleshall estate owned successively by the Leveson and Leveson-Gower families, whose titles included Marquis of Stafford and Duke of Sutherland.

Pattern of Development

Housing development since the mid 20th century has expanded Sheriffhales substantially, but this has been concentrated entirely to the north of the historic core of the village, outside the Conservation Area. The historic pattern of development remains intact. The focal point is the church, sited at the junction of Church Lane, The Rock and the lane to Sheriffhales Manor. Other buildings are generally detached, sited at random along or off these narrow lanes, widely spaced, and set in large gardens or grounds.

Sheriffhales and Manor Lodges, however, are rather different in that they were elements of a formal, planned scheme for the approach to a grand country house (Lilleshall Hall) rather than part of the gradual development of the village. Most houses are relatively small, but Sutherland House and Sheriffhales Manor are large buildings set apart from the rest of the village.

Buildings

The principal building, in terms of its historic, architectural and visual importance, is the parish church of St. Mary. This is a 12th and 14th century building which was extensively altered in the 17th and 18th centuries and restored in 1884. It is listed Grade II*. In the churchyard is a group of monuments of considerable architectural and historic interest. Among them are three early 19th century chest tombs, two pedestal memorials, and a medieval and 18th century cross base and sundial which are all listed Grade II in their own right, as well as numerous headstones.



To the west of the church, Sheriffhales Lodge and Sheriffhales Manor are also Grade II listed buildings. They have superficial similarities: both are very decorative "timber-framed" buildings, but most of the timbers are planted on the surface rather than exposed structure. The Lodge is a 19th century building in the picturesque half-timbered style used for most of the lodges on the Duke of Sutherland's Lilleshall Hall

estate. Sheriffhales Manor, however, is a late 16th and 17th century house, originally timber-framed but with very extensive 19th and 20th century additions and alterations.



Several other houses are also of 16th or 17th century origin. The Old House in The Rock is probably of about 1500 but altered about 1600, and with considerable 19th and 20th century additions and alterations. Sheene House in Church Lane is late 16th century with 19th century refacing. Fallows (No. 46 Church Lane) is a 17th century cottage with 18th century alterations and 20th century additions. All three buildings are listed Grade II.

These listed buildings are a vital part of Sheriffhales' historic and visual character, but other buildings also make a vital contribution. Most of them are 19th century, and many are connected with the Lilleshall Hall estate. Glebe Cottage in The Rock and Walnut Tree Cottage, Church Lane are examples of the distinctive "Duke of Sutherland"-type cottages with gabled half-dormers. No. 40 is similar but possibly earlier. Sutherland House is in a similar vein but on a much grander scale. Sheriffhales School and schoolhouse is a plain building with the steep roofs and tall windows typical of many Victorian village schools. The smithy building survives beside the road in The Rock.

Structures such as boundary and retaining walls and gate piers are important elements of the Conservation Area's appearance and character. The lane beside the churchyard



is enclosed with stone retaining walls, similar walls run along The Rock, and there are others around the gardens of some properties. Sheene House and Glebe Cottage have old brick garden walls. At the junction of The Rock and Church Lane is a good pair of mid 19th century stone gate piers and iron gate, and Sutherland House has an impressive set of iron railings set in quadrant curves at the entrance.

Materials

Traditional local building materials are an essential characteristic of the Conservation Area. Roofs throughout are of clay tiles. The church is largely of sandstone, with fine quality ashlar on the south side and squared coursed stone elsewhere, but there is also some brick and render. The monuments are of ashlar. The numerous retaining walls are also of sandstone, irregularly coursed and squared. Many other buildings, such as Glebe Cottage and Nos. 40 and 41 are of brick with lime mortar; others such as Walnut Tree Cottage and the smithy now have their brickwork obscured by 20th century paint. The School is largely brick, but is also partly rendered.

Sheene House is faced with white-washed brick but is largely timber framed, while No. 46 Church Lane and The Old House are a mixture of exposed timber framing and painted brick. Sheriffhales Manor and Sheriffhales Lodge are elaborately half-timbered, but most of the visible "framing" is in fact render and pieces of timber planted on the

surface.

Architectural Details

Varied detailing is an important part of the visual and historic interest of the Conservation Area. The church has a range of Gothic details (many of them heavily restored or renewed) including traceried windows, mouldings and carvings. In contrast the listed monuments have restrained classical detailing. The church also has the rather more unusual feature of an 18th century brick dentil cornice to the north aisle. Simple brick cornices can also be seen on other buildings such as Nos. 40 and 41.



Both Sheriffhales Manor and Sheriffhales Lodge have elaborate patterning in timber contrasting with plain rectangular panels and prominent chimney stacks. The Lodge has continuous bands of concave lozenges, fretted curvilinear bargeboards and moulded finials. The Manor has more limited ornamentation with lozenges to the porch and some panels of balusters, moulded bargeboards and openwork finials. The exposed structural framing of The Old House and 46

Church Lane is very plain in comparison.

Some features are common to most buildings. Roofs are generally gabled, often with timber bargeboards. Gabled dormers or half-dormers are a characteristic detail, especially of "Duke of Sutherland" cottages. Prominent chimneys with oversailing tops, whether ridge, end or external, are also widespread. Most brick buildings have segmental-arched openings, although No. 40 has painted brick flat arches. Treatment of entrances varies from the elaborate two-storey porches of Sheriffhales Manor and Lodge and the fluted and pedimented timber doorcase of the schoolhouse to the simple gabled hood of Sheene House and the plain doorway of Glebe Cottage.

Doors are vertically boarded or panelled, painted or stained. Most windows are 19th or 20th century timber casements, generally with horizontal glazing bars; the cross windows of Sheene House and the School and schoolhouse are a variation on this. Sheriffhales Manor and the Old House have 20th century leaded windows; the Manor also retains a few 17th or 18th century leaded casements.

The Character of the Conservation Area

Sheriffhales has a very strong rural and historic character. Narrow lanes without footpaths, lined with hedges or trees, scattered historic buildings set in large gardens or grounds, and extensive tree cover are its major elements. The focal point is the church.

This is very much a traditional village church, of ancient origins added to and altered over many generations. It is set in an unspoilt rural churchyard with many historic monuments, enhanced by a large number of yews, lime trees and Scots pines.

The church can only be glimpsed through a dense belt of yews along the southern edge of the churchyard, which is raised high above the lane on top of an earth bank with a



sandstone retaining wall. There is a similar wall, bank and trees on the south side of the lane, so that it appears to run through a dark "tunnel" or cutting with yews meeting overhead. This very distinctive effect is marred only by the concrete slab path to a flight of old stone steps up to the churchyard, and concrete and brick steps with tubular handrail to the timber hut on the south side. Breaks in the sandstone wall give access to the school, village hall and grave yard. From the road they are hidden by the dense coverage of mature trees which surround them, giving the effect of being set in clearings within a wood.

The "cutting" gives way to the painted picket fence and garden and the elaborately patterned front of Sheriffhales Lodge. Beyond is the avenue of lime trees along Sheriffhales Drive forming a major landscape feature. The northern section has a decorative timber gate, unfortunately in poor condition, and more picket fencing to the roadside. Bounded by hedges, it forms a very definite line between the fields on either side. The southern part is less distinct, merging into woodland.

To the west of the avenue a sunken meadow bounded by hedges forms an attractive setting for Sheriffhales Manor. Behind its 19th century battlemented boundary walls the picturesque black and white front of the house stands in spacious grounds with topiary and fine specimen trees. From this point there are views north across the meadow and south over traditional iron railings out into open countryside. Looking east the church, Sheriffhales Lodge and the "tunnel" of yews can just be made out, while the mass of trees along Sheriffhales Drive hide the rest of the village from sight. As a result the Manor has the character of an isolated country house rather than appearing as part of the village.



South east of the church the lane broadens out a little at the junction with The Rock and Church Lane, forming another focal point of the Conservation Area. The southern side is overshadowed by the dense tree cover, but the north eastern side is much more open, with a low stone retaining wall to the large garden of The Old House. The long principal elevation of the building dominates the view in this direction.

Northwards the view along Church Lane is closed by the hedge and trees at the bend in the road. The wide grass verge alongside the churchyard is an important element of the lane's rural appearance.



Walnut Tree Cottage retains some of its original character despite 20th century alterations, but the stone retaining wall along the lane has been unsympathetically repointed. Approaching the bend, the bank and retaining wall, high holly hedge and trees screening No. 46 are dominant features. Ahead, nondescript 20th century housing outside the Conservation Area comes into sight, but looking back there is a much more pleasant view dominated by trees. Another attractive holly hedge fronting the garden of Sheene House gives way to old brick boundary walls and simple 19th century iron gate piers and gates complementing the simple front of the building.

The Rock rises gradually to the east. Dense belts of trees and shrubs enclose it, emphasising the effect of a cutting created by the steep banks. On the south side is a good pair of mid 19th century stone gate piers with the original iron gate and similar railings. On both sides of the road stone retaining walls stretch as far as The Old Smithy, where there is an area of exposed sandstone. The former smithy, alongside the road, is a simple building but its traditional construction and detailing make it an important element of the rural character of the lane. The 20th century bungalow above is much less sympathetic to its setting. Opposite The Old Smithy a pair of whitewashed stone gatepiers make a break in the frontage, and a little further on walls give way to rising earth banks.



Glebe Cottage is an unaltered Sutherland cottage which together with its original brick boundary walls and gardens rising up the bank makes an important contribution to the attractive rural appearance and character of The Rock. The area around the junction with the main road is heavily wooded, and looking back down The Rock is a very pleasant view with the gable end of Glebe Cottage in the middle distance. On the main road Nos. 40 and 41 form a good roadside group of traditional buildings, though No. 41 is marred by inappropriate late 20th century replacement windows. West from its entrance railings there is a good view of Sutherland House across its extensive grounds which form the southern edge of the Conservation Area.

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