

HIGHLEY CONSERVATION AREAS APPRAISAL

Highley is situated on a ridge (that runs in a north/south direction) more than 60 metres above the western bank of the River Severn some seven miles south of Bridgnorth.

From the late 19th century the village developed to support the Highley/Alveley Colliery. Areas of small terraced houses along Barke Street, Orchard Street, Coronation Street and Silverdale Terrace were developed. Subsequently, the village spread northwards with further areas of housing developed to serve the colliery.

In the last 40 years there has been substantial residential development in Highley and today the village spreads for over a mile either side of the B4555 road. The principal source of employment is the Highley Pens Factory with over 100 employees. This lies just south of the village. There are also a range of small industrial units, shops and office space within the village but the majority of people work outside the village in Bridgnorth, Bewdley, Kidderminster or further afield. The Severn Valley Railway runs close to the village and Highley Station is one of its showpiece stations. The former colliery site close to the village on either side of the River Severn has been reclaimed as a country park and is now an important visitor attraction.

Highley has two conservation areas, both first designated on 9th March 1981 and the Highley Ward has a population of 3,300. This appraisal acknowledges changes to the boundary following a review undertaken in December 2002. This confirmed that the original conservation areas for Highley were extensive and included large areas where conservation area designation is not considered to be beneficial or effective. Consequently, most of the Garden Village Conservation Area is revoked, although Clee View Terrace is retained.

Clee View is typical of late 19th century colliery development in Highley. Built of red/orange brick under a clay tiled roof with 2 over 2 light vertically sliding sash windows, stone cills and lintels and robust brick chimneys. It is unusual insofar as it is little altered, retaining original materials, joinery and finishes for most of the properties. The terrace is prominently situated on the Bridgnorth Road, a short distance north of the principal conservation area.



Clee View Terrace

Highley Conservation Area

The Origins and Development of the Village, Topographic Framework and the Historic and Archaeological Significance of the Conservation Area.

'Highley' is probably Anglo-Saxon reputed to mean 'the clearing of Huga.' The village would have started as a clearing in the Wyre Forest and developed around the site of the church towards the southern end of the present settlement. Highley would have served an agricultural community until the end of the 18th century when attempts were made to establish coal mining. Towards the end of the 19th century a more successful mine was opened by the Highley Mining Company and by the First World War the village had been transformed into a typical colliery village with new terraced housing, shops and places of worship for the growing community.

Although the village is recorded in the Domesday Book, substantial growth occurred with the opening of coal mines in the village and in areas nearby towards the end of the nineteenth century. Most of the miners working in the Highley mines (and the later mine opened at Alveley) lived in Highley village. The mines became the major local employer (over 1000 men were employed) and the mines contributed to the development of social and recreational facilities in the village.

Before 1870, when the Highley Mine Company sank two shafts at Highley, the area was mainly agricultural. Industry was confined to quarrying of building stone and small scale coal mining. The river, however, was already a major trade route between Ironbridge and Bristol. A wide towpath was used to pull boats upstream, usually by manpower. The riverside quarries produced huge blocks of sandstone. These were taken on the river boats or "trows" to Worcester or Gloucester where they were cut up by stone masons. Stone from Alveley quarries is said to have been used in building Worcester Cathedral.

From 1870, with the success of the mine and the sinking of new mines at Kinlet and Billingsley, Highley became a mining community. The Severn Valley Railway was now the main method used to carry the coal to the towns. An inclined railway (the track of which can still be seen on the Country Park) ran from the pit head to the sidings near Highley Station.

By the early 1930s the coal on the western side of the river began to run out. Therefore a new shaft was sunk across the river at Alveley in 1936. A new bridge allowed the miners to cross the river and the coal to return to new sidings and washeries on the Highley side. The new workings moved deeper and deeper to the east and were joined with the old Highley mine under the river. For many years the mine produced over 2000 tons of coal per week, production peaking in the late 1950s. In the sixties the workings followed the Brooch Seam and a new roadway opened up the area east of the Romsley Fault. It was planned to work the coal as far as the Baggeridge and Shatterford workings near Dudley and Kidderminster. However, geological and economic problems forced the closure of the pit in 1969, with drastic effects on the local economy.

Architectural and Historic Interest, Influences on Plan Form, Use of Distinctive Materials and Detailing

There are several distinct areas within Highley which are described in more detail below.

Church Road

The churchyard and garden to Church House define the southern boundary of the conservation area and provide a reminder of the villages character prior to the discovery of coal. This includes the area around the Church and several timber framed buildings including Oak Cottage on Smoke Alley and The Manor House on Main Road. The church dates from the 12th century and is of buff sandstone.



Church of St Mary

Although much altered and extended, it incorporates a Norman nave and chancel. It occupies high ground to the south of the village centre, the churchyard falling away to the south and east. The historic context is reinforced by the neighbouring property, Church House, a picturesque 16th century close studded timber frame building.



Church House

The Churchyard is bound by a rubble stone wall adjacent to the road which leads round to the east past Church House culminating with Springfield House, a large late 19th house facing open countryside to the south west of the village.

Towards the junction with High Street are Rock Villas, a short terrace of two storey brick and tile cottages built by the “squire”, John Bradley Beddard in 1898. Opposite Rock Villas and occupying an elevated corner plot is the Old School built in 1863. This imposing stone building has been refurbished as the parish hall.

Smoke Alley

Also part of the more informal southern end of the village is Smoke Alley. Buildings of interest include Oak Cottage, a grade II listed 17th century timber framed property that although extended retains its character as a small single bay structure.



Oak Cottage

Opposite Oak Cottage is Rose Cottage, built of brick and a former wheelwright's house. Smoke Alley joins High Street at a junction with Church Road. The character of this part of High Street is informal with a residential properties to the east side of the road. Although most of this is

20th century development, a Grade II listed timber framed farmhouse (The Manor House) dating from the mid/late 16th century is situated now rather incongruously in this ribbon development to the southern edge of the village.



The Manor House

Church Street

Church Street is a straight planned road leading off Church Road to the north west. Houses to the east side of the road were built in 1912-13 and consist of semi detached red brick houses, each pair subtly different. Church Street was built by a series of private individuals after the land was sold in building plots. Some of the houses were let to rent but others were sold to the more prosperous tradesmen and colliery workers in the village. This gave the village some of its first owner-occupiers. The street was at first known colloquially as “Monkey Park”.

Silverdale Terrace

Church Road turns east into Silverdale Terrace, another planned street and the first terrace to be constructed in Highley for the miners at Highley Colliery. Originally called Providence Terrace it and the corner shop were erected in 1885 by John Webb, a builder from the Stoke area (where the partners in the Highley Mining Company were also based). Opposite Silverdale Terrace is a large open area of allotments.

High Street

In contrast to Church Street which marked the centre of the village up to the 19th Century, the High Street largely dates to the turn of the century, and was laid out in response to the expansion of the mines. The Bache Arms (formerly the New Inn) dates from 1839 and marks the northern boundary of the revised conservation area. The public house predates all the High Street development to the south by over 40 years.



The Bache Arms

On the west side of the street, date stones mark the construction of the Co-op (1905) and the Methodist Church (1913). High Street follows a sinuous route, sloping gently down from north to south through the village. Many have shop units at the ground floor providing a range of services. A number of these are in poor condition and some are unoccupied.



High Street

As a village, the centre is urban in character. Most buildings are constructed at the back edge of the footpath and there are few green spaces that contribute positively to the character of the area.

A late 20th century focal point in the High Street is The Highley Clock, erected in 1999. This sculptural feature is part of a wider sculpture trail and commemorates the historic association with coal mining in the village.



The Highley Clock

The Streets

On the east of the High Street the Highley Land and Building Company (and partners) built three streets of terraced houses in 1900-1902. The Highley Land and Building Company was effectively an off-shoot of the Highley Mining Company. Known locally as The Streets, Barke Street, Orchard Street and Coronation Street clearly demonstrate the ubiquitous character of 19th century workers housing. There are no front gardens, small rear yards divided by narrow access roads, a consistency in materials and little in the way of architectural embellishment. The context is planned, formal and urban rather than the informal organic character of other villages in the District and provides a stark contrast with the historic core of the village around the church. As with Clee View, the houses in The Streets are little altered and retain their historic character and detailing, possibly a testament to many years of single ownership, most recently the District Council.

The prevailing or former uses of buildings in the area, and the influence of this on the plan form and building types.

The development of Highley at the end of the 19th century had a profound affect on the plan form and building types in the village. The informal mediaeval core of the village around the church was extended with a new village centre to the north This has a formal and planned character. With straight streets and high density housing. There is little in the way of architectural embellishment and both housing and commercial properties are functional in character. Similar building materials – a hard red brick and clay plain tiles gives the village centre a unified appearance.

The extent of loss, intrusion, or damage sustained by the area, and sites where change would be encouraged

There has been significant post war development in Highley much of it adjacent to the revised conservation area boundary.

New development to the east of High Street, around the old school and to the west of Church Street (adjacent to the conservation area) has compromised the historic context of the village. Many of the original shopfronts have been replaced and the same is beginning to happen with original windows and doors.

Notwithstanding this the overall character and built form is clearly evident and a programme of repair and enhancement focusing on the reinstatement of missing architectural features could do much to strengthen the historic context of the village.

There is a strong sense of community in Highley and local groups such as the Parish Council and The Highley Initiative have done much to promote and enhance the village with publications, a web site and other projects such as the sculpture trail and guides on local walks.

The use of distinctive and traditional building materials

Although there are examples of timber frame (Church House and Oak House) and stone construction (the church and former school) a hard red brick and clay plain tiles give the village centre a unified appearance, which in the context of this part of rural Shropshire is both unusual and distinctive.

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