

CHELMARSH CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

This statement was approved by Bridgnorth District Council's Planning Committee on 21st August 1995.

The Chelmarsh Conservation Area was designated on 9th March 1981. A small extension was designated on 25th October 1995. Chelmarsh is a small village approximately five miles south of Bridgnorth. The Conservation Area comprises the land, buildings and lanes to the north and west of the B4555 road including Hill Farm, the Old Post Office and the Vicarage, Manor Farm and land to the south; the field bounded on all sides by lanes to the east of the road; the Church of St. Peter, Chelmarsh Hall and the field to the east; and Hall Farm and Ashwick Cottage on the southern edge.

History

The name Chelmarsh appears to be of Saxon origin, from *celes meres* meaning chilly marsh. It is recorded in Domesday Book as Celemeres. At that time the manor was held by Radulf de Mortimer, and it descended in the Mortimer family until the early 15th century. The church was held by the Abbey of Wigmore in Herefordshire.

Landscape

Chelmarsh lies on the B4555 to the west of the River Severn, on the higher ground above the Severn valley and Chelmarsh Reservoir. There are distant views eastwards across the rolling countryside on both sides of the valley, and westwards towards the Cleve Hills. The landscape is predominantly agricultural, and within the Conservation Area are several irregularly shaped small fields.



Fields are bounded by hedges and tree belts of native species. Tracks and paths, mostly running east west between the lanes, are enclosed by dense belts. There are also many individual large trees, notably the Scots Pines and cedars in the churchyard and limes and horse chestnuts in the grounds of Hall Farm, as well as smaller ornamental trees and a number of orchards. This extensive tree cover is one of the most distinctive characteristics of the Conservation Area, and is particularly striking in distant views.

Pattern of Settlement

The Conservation Area forms the northern part of the fragmented village of Chelmarsh. There is no distinct village centre, the buildings being widely scattered around the network of lanes, tracks and footpaths. Two quite separate areas of settlement are divided by fields and the long curve of the main road,

To the southeast is the historic focus of the village. The mediaeval parish church and its graveyard are prominently sited at a bend in the road, with Chelmarsh Hall and its farm buildings in a more secluded position between a lane and track off the main road, and there a few houses and cottages to the north and south. To the northwest the dominant elements are the farmhouses and buildings of Hill and Manor Farms just off the main road, with a few dwellings off Astbury Lane and the track running roughly parallel to it.



The only substantial groups of buildings are the farmsteads. Houses and cottages are detached and set well apart, generally back from the road, lane or track, within walled or hedged gardens; Church Cottage is unusual in fronting almost directly onto the lane. Most are sited parallel to the highway but some, including The Smithy, the Old Post Office and Ashwick Cottage, are set at right angles to it.

Buildings

By far the most important building, both from an architectural and historic point of view, is the Grade I listed parish church of St. Peter. Although of 12th century origin this is principally a fine 14th century building in the Decorated style, with a tower rebuilt in brick about 1720. The east end with its fine 5-light window is made more imposing by its position at the top of a slope, and the great sweep of roof from the nave down over the north aisle is particularly impressive.

The many-gabled Chelmarsh Hall is listed Grade II and is also of mediaeval origin, probably late 13th century. However, it was largely altered and rebuilt in the 19th century, and now appears to be a Victorian Gothic Revival house. Associated with it is a group of outbuildings of various dates, including a ruined 17th or 18th century barn to the north. To the south is a range of 17th/18th century stone and timber framed farm buildings of significant architectural and historic interest but in poor condition; these have planning permission for conversion to a dwelling.



The traditional agricultural buildings of Hill and Manor Farms also make an important contribution to the character and appearance of the Conservation Area. Both have farmhouses which although differing in details are of a type common to many parts of Shropshire in the 18th and early 19th centuries: plain but dignified symmetrical 3-storey 3-bay fronts with lower irregular ranges to the rear. Hill Farm has a group of buildings fronting the main road and Astbury Lane. Some of them, such as the timber framed sections, probably re-date the late 18th century house, others are 19th century. Manor Farm has an attractive group of 19th century buildings.

Hall Farm is a good quality Victorian house in a restrained Gothic style. The former Vicarage appears to be late 18th or early 19th century, with a Tudor-style wing of about 1850, but it is disfigured by a top-heavy attic storey and other additions of about 1900, and by a 20th century glazed verandah across the front.

In contrast to these large houses, small, detached cottages ranging in date from the 17th to the early 19th century are scattered throughout the Conservation Area. Hillside Cottage in Astbury Lane is a 17th century timber-framed single storey and attic cottage partly rebuilt and altered in the 19th century. The Old Post Office is a good unaltered example of the 18th and early 19th century cottages of the district, of one storey and attic and two or three bays, with small dormers and casements. Church Cottages is a similar type but much altered.



The Smithy is another distinctive early 19th century cottage type, of two storeys and two bays, with the former smithy building attached and recent additions in keeping. Ashwick Cottage is a variation on this type which retains some original features but has been altered and enlarged.

Building Materials

Traditional local building materials are a vital component of the Conservation Area's special character. The principal materials are sandstone or brick with clay tile roofs. The church is of ashlar to the west and south and squared coursed stone to the north, with dressings, tracery and mouldings in finely worked stone throughout. The porch and lychgate have ashlar plinths with carved oak above. Chelmarsh Hall and Hall Farm are of similar construction to the church, although Hall Farm is of a rather more strongly coloured red stone.

Boundary and retaining walls to the churchyard, Hall and other areas are of the rather more randomly shaped and coursed stone which is also used for the Old Post Office and the farm buildings south of the Hall and at Hill Farm. Both groups of buildings have stone combined with timber framing and weatherboarding. Hillside Cottage is the only timber framed cottage, with infill panels and rebuilding in painted brick. It is also exceptional in having a roof of timber shingles rather than tiles.

Stone and brick are also used together. The most prominent example is the Flemish bond red brick of the church tower. Ashwick Cottage has a front of red brick, but the rest of the building and the retaining wall to the garden are of red stone. The former Vicarage was originally largely of ashlar stone, but the extensions to the rear and the attic storey are of red brick with "timber framing" to the front.

Manor Farm has some stone and brick buildings, but the Farmhouse and buildings such as the cart shed and granary are of an attractive plum-coloured brick. A number of other buildings are also of brick alone. Church Cottage and The Smithy are red brick, while Hill Farmhouse is brick but now painted.

Architectural Details

The traditional but varied detailing of buildings is an important element of Chelmarsh's visual and historic interest. Not surprisingly the most elaborate detailing is to be found on the church. It has the stone traceried



windows in chamfered reveals with hood moulds and a moulded sill course, chamfered plinth, ornamented buttresses and moulded eaves characteristic of the Decorated style. The typically early Georgian detailing of the tower, with chamfered quoins to the corners, string courses, round-arched windows and balustrade with Gothic panels makes an unusual and attractive contrast.

The lychgate, built in 1905, has simple Gothic detail in carved oak. The Victorian Gothic Revival exterior of Chelmarsh Hall has, like the church, steeply-pitched roofs with coped gable parapets, stone mullioned and traceried windows with some leaded lights, hood moulds and other Gothic ornamental features, and prominent decorative brick chimneys with elaborately shaped shafts and cornices. Hall Farm House is in a slightly simpler version of the style with sash windows as well as pointed arches and stone mullions.

Some features are common to most buildings. Roofs are generally gabled with plain verges, with a pitch of about 45 degrees and of moderate height and bulk; deep-plan buildings such as Ashwick House or the Vicarage have double-span roofs. Some, such as Hill and Manor Farmhouses and The Smithy, have simple brick dentil eaves cornices. Chimneys, whether ridge or end, plain or ornamented, are an important feature of the roofscape.

Openings are generally vertically proportioned, many with brick segmental arches, as at Church Cottage. Ashwick Cottage is unusual in having painted stone lintels, while the Old Post Office has timber lintels. Doors and windows are mostly recessed within the openings. Original doors are of several types: boarded Gothic designs, of exposed timber or painted, such as those of the church or Vicarage; panelled, in painted timber with a hood on brackets, as at Manor and Hill Farmhouses, or plain painted board doors such as those of Hillside Cottage and the Old Post Office. Some buildings have inappropriate 20th century replacement doors.

Few buildings retain their old windows. Those that do survive are of various types, generally of painted timber. Sashes and casements with a variety of glazing bar patterns are used at the Vicarage. The Old Post Office and Hillside Cottage have 2-light casements with a horizontal glazing bar and some iron opening lights. Most houses have 20th century replacement windows. Some, such as the UPVC casements of Ashwick House or the metal windows of Manor Farmhouse, are unsympathetic to the character of the building in materials or design. Others, notably the timber casements with horizontal glazing bars of the Smithy, are much more appropriate.

The Character of the Conservation Area

Chelmarsh has a strong and largely unspoilt rural character. The part within the Conservation Area has the appearance of a scattered hamlet rather than a village. Land uses are agricultural or domestic: there are no shops, public houses or other commercial buildings, and the only public building is the church. Its character and appearance are shaped by its location on a sloping site in rolling countryside; extensive tree cover; a network of narrow lanes, tracks and paths; and a variety of historic buildings, including three farmsteads, scattered amongst gardens, orchards and small fields enclosed by hedges. It is small scale and intimate in feeling, partly because only a small part of the area can be seen from any one point.

From the northeast the B4555 climbs steeply to enter the Conservation Area between banks and hedges a little below Hill Farm. The tall principal front of Hill Farmhouse can be glimpsed to the right, with trees against the skyline behind it, but a large and intrusive modern building at right angles to the road dominates the view. Ahead is a grass bank topped with railings, as the road bends out of sight. Close to the bend a group of traditional stone buildings comes into view, set on a bank above the road with the remains of a sandstone retaining wall. Concrete kerbs, speed restriction signs and overhead wires unfortunately mar the rural appearance.

Between the buildings and boundary wall and a tall hedge bank is the narrow entrance to Astbury Lane. Almost opposite is another narrow lane, but the junction has been opened out to a visibility splay, damaging its enclosed rural character. There are views of Hill Farm and eastwards out into the countryside. The road continues south between lines of young trees, with a glimpse of Manor Farm buildings ahead.



Astbury Lane bends sharply to the left, secluding it from the B4555. This northern part of the Conservation Area has its own distinct character. The quiet narrow lane, parallel track and linking paths contrast with the wider and much busier main road used by through traffic. Views are limited, mostly confined to within the Conservation Area itself, though there is an intriguing glimpse through the yard of Hill Farm out into the countryside beyond.

At the bend a low brick retaining wall, post and rail fence and a large and intrusive modern farm building are unsympathetic features, but from the footpath running north



there is a pleasant view of the gable end of Hillside Cottage, trees and countryside. The densely planted mature trees of the Vicarage grounds form a visual barrier to the west. A footpath running westwards is hidden beneath them. The lane turns sharply to the north, and ahead the view is closed at another bend by the front of The Smithy. The frequent changes of direction, stopping off views, increase the sense of enclosure.

North of The Smithy an orchard is an important feature. Hillside Cottage, behind a privet hedge, and the Old Post Office retain much of their historic character and appearance, having largely escaped 20th century alteration or over-restoration. The Old Post Office is the last house, and immediately behind it a belt of trees running alongside the road begins. There are views eastwards of the countryside outside the Conservation Area, and of Hill Farm, with the picturesque roofs of Chelmarsh Hall in the distance.

A sunken footpath at the foot of a dense holly and hazel hedge along the bottom edge of a field runs westwards. It joins a track running parallel to Astbury Lane but much straighter, and less enclosed and varied. To the west is another orchard, but directly onto the east are the rather unattractive side elevation of the Vicarage and a large

outbuilding with inappropriate late 20th century windows and asbestos roof. There are glimpses across the large grounds which retain some of their 19th century character.

Beyond The Cedars, an unobtrusive 20th century bungalow, the view southwest is terminated by the trees along the main road and the irregular rear ranges of Manor Farmhouse. Although set back at an angle the tall Farmhouse is prominent from the main road., With its attractive stone garden walls and large groups of both traditional and modern buildings it is the dominant element of this part of the Conservation Area.

The B4555 winds southwards from Manor Farm. The west side is open, with railings to the roadside, a few trees, and views to the Clee Hills and back to Manor Farm. To the east the road is tightly hemmed in by a dense belt of semi-mature trees. Together with the bends in the road they conceal the southern part of the Conservation Area as far as the junction with Church Lane. At the junction two mid 20th century houses are of standard non-traditional designs inappropriate to the Conservation Area but are well screened by trees and a holly hedge.



The churchyard comes into full view on the bend. It is open to the road behind a wide verge but enclosed to the north by a bank and stone walling. The church is the most important single element of the Conservation Area's historic character. Views of it, surrounded by a mixture of old and modern memorials, shrubs and fine trees including yews, cedar and Scots Pine, are among the most attractive features of Chelmarsh.

Ashwick House, a building of about 1900 partly screened by sycamores and traditional timber palings to the road, is unremarkable in its own right but is significant as part of the small group of houses with large gardens and fine trees which form the southernmost part of the Conservation Area. Ashwick Cottage has its garden raised above the road on a sandstone retaining wall, regrettably disfigured by ribbon pointing. Hall Farm House is almost hidden from view by an impressive row of lime behind the railings to its road frontage and horse chestnuts along its southern boundary. With the belt of younger trees to Ashwick Cottage they make a particularly attractive green "wall" at the entrance to the Conservation Area. There are good views out to Chelmarsh Reservoir.



To the east of the B4555 is another quiet and undisturbed area. Between the trees north of Hall Farm House is an unobtrusive entrance to a track sloping eastwards. Tightly enclosed by trees and vegetation on both sides, this has a strong rural character. Part way down the former farm buildings line one side. Beyond this point the track runs down into a "tunnel" of stone walls and earth banks and trees meeting overhead.

On the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area another track runs north. From it there are intriguing glimpses between trees upwards across a rough meadow dotted

with fruit trees to the triple gables and picturesque skyline of Chelmarsh Hall. It leads to another tunnel-like bridleway running east west which runs alongside a derelict stone barn and boundary wall to emerge at the junction of Church Lane and the lane to the north. From this point there are fine views out into rolling and wooded countryside.

To the south a narrow road runs down past the rear of Chelmarsh Hall. The house is clearly visible from the junction, and a big copper beech close by it is particularly prominent. This area has very much the character of a Victorian country house with its associated buildings and grounds. To the east is the derelict barn and overgrown yard behind a stone and brick boundary wall. The drive to the Hall branches off along a stone wall to run past the former stable block. The gardens to the house are largely hidden from view, but the large numbers of trees within them are important in the landscape as a whole.

On the west side is a stone retaining wall and raised garden and orchard with shrubs, and a good group of trees at the junction. It is bounded on its south side by a path to the churchyard which has a particularly strong 19th century feeling. The entrance is between brick piers, and it is lined with laurels and hollies and a row of large Scots Pines which are visible from many points in the southern part of the Conservation Area. Beyond it is an overgrown area, meadow and former pond.

Church Lane is enclosed to the south by the raised garden and the churchyard bank and trees. The lychgate is a prominent feature. The north side is hedged and has a few trees overhanging the lane. Church Cottage, raised above the lane is much altered but has a good stone boundary wall. The bank opposite has been unsympathetically cut back, with artificial stone slabs retaining it and a fence top. West of Church Cottage both side of the lane are obviously cultivated and tidy, but the eastern end has a more “natural” character.



The hedge becomes wilder and more bushy, and forms the field boundary along the lane running northwest on the edge of the Conservation Area. From this there are views across the field, hidden from the main road by the belt of trees, which separates the northern and southern parts of the Conservation Area. On the northern edge of the field a dense belt of trees makes a strong visual break; it contains another of the tunnel-like path which are a particular feature of Chelmarsh.

Shropshire Council
Historic Environment Team
Shirehall
Abbey Foregate
Shrewsbury
Shropshire
SY2 6ND

01743 252586

historic.environment@shropshire.gov.uk