Shepway District Council

CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL

ELHAM

CONSERVATION
ARCHITECTURE
& PLANNING
Wey House Standford La.
Headley Hants. GU35 8RH
tel 01420 472830 fax 01420 477346
email: cap@capstudios.co.uk

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors of this Study are:

Conservation Architecture & Planning

Jack Warshaw **RIBA, MRTPI, IHBC, FRSA**	Project Director
David Garrard BA (HONS) MSC	Appraiser
Liz Cartell **BA (HONS) HIDIP ADMIN**	Coordinator / Production
Sue Beech **BARCH (HONS) MSC IHBC**	Mapping

The authors gratefully acknowledge the contributions and assistance of the following individuals and organisations:

Shepway District Council

John Gabbé	Planning and Environment
Lisette Patching	Planning and Environment
Chris Beech	GIS Technician

The Heritage Conservation Group at Kent County Council Archives

All stakeholders who contributed feedback for this appraisal

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1 A Conservation Area (CA) is, by law, an area of special architectural and historic interest. The purpose of this appraisal is to help us understand why Elham is special and provide a framework for keeping it that way. Its character, or specialness, needs to be defined. What is happening to it needs to be documented and analysed. What should happen in the future needs to be celebrated, guided and well managed.

2 This appraisal forms one of a series of 14 such appraisals, commissioned by Shepway District Council. The original designation came into effect on 13th November 1970.

3 This review of the CA has been undertaken using the methodology of the English Heritage consultative '*Guidance on conservation area appraisals',* 2005. Annual reviews and 5 yearly updating are recommended. A companion guide, '*Guidance on the management of conservation areas',* recommends a procedure to follow the appraisal.

PLANNING POLICY FRAMEWORK

4 The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 sets out the process of assessment, definition or revision of boundaries and formulation of proposals for CA's as well as the identification and protection of listed buildings. Authorities are required to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of a CA, or in the case of listed buildings, to have special regard for their preservation in the exercise of their powers under the Planning Acts.

5 Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) Note 15, for local and other public authorities, property owners, developers, amenity bodies and the public, sets out Government policies for the identification and protection of historic buildings, CA's and other elements of the historic environment. Shepway Council's District Plan includes its statutory policies for implementing the Acts and applying the PPG. This Appraisal should be taken into account when considering, applying for or determining planning or listed building applications within the CA.

6 The underlying objective of the relevant legislation and guidance is the preservation or enhancement of the character or appearance of CA's. Any proposed development which conflicts with that objective should normally expect to be refused. PPG15 and local policy support a presumption in favour of preservation of any building or object which is considered to make a positive contribution to the character of a CA. At the same time, the need to accommodate change which respects or reinforces the character of the area in order to maintain its vitality is recognised. Regard must also be had to the requirements of other national guidance, including PPG16 covering archaeology and PPS 1, which includes policies on sustainable development and urban design.

7 Many local planning policies, not just those relating to design and conservation, can affect what happens in a CA. For example, policies on sustainable development, meeting housing needs, affordable housing, landscape, biodiversity, energy efficiency, transport, people with disabilities, employment, town centres and many others can all influence development and the quality of the environment in CA's. However, policies concerned with design quality and character generally take on greater importance in CA's. The adopted District Plan's chapter on Built Environment covers conservation and design matters. The key policies of this chapter state:

POLICY BE3

8 When considering new CA's or reviewing existing CA's the following criteria will be taken into account:

The area is:

a. of special architectural or historic interest, the character of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance;
b. includes sufficient buildings of historic and/or architectural interest, listed or unlisted, to give a strong character;
c. includes sufficient good quality hard and/or soft landscape;
d. shows strong relationships between buildings, and buildings and open spaces that create a sense of place;
e. one which either illustrates local architectural development or an area of one architectural period which remains largely in its original condition.

POLICY BE4

9 The District Planning Authority will:

a. refuse CA Consent for the demolition of buildings which contribute to the character or appearance of a CA;
b. refuse proposals for infill or backland development which would adversely affect the character of a CA;
c. require the height, scale, form and materials of new development, including alterations or extensions to existing buildings, to respect the character of CA's;
d. seek to retain materials, features and details of unlisted buildings or structures which preserve or enhance the character or appearance of CA's;
e. seek to retain the historic patterns, plot boundaries, building lines, open spaces, footways, footpaths and kerblines which are essential to the character or appearance of CA's;
f. protect trees and hedgerows which enhance both the setting and character of CA's.

10 Other policies dealing with historic or built environment matters are BE 1, 2 and 5-19.

DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

11 Greater restrictions on "permitted development" apply in CA's than elsewhere. In CA's any Article 4 Direction in force further restricts householder development without planning permission as well as the erection of gates, fences, walls or other means of enclosure. Anyone contemplating alterations, extensions or new building should familiarise themselves with the policies set out above and consult the Council's Planning Department for advice on how to apply for permission and whether the proposal is likely to be acceptable.

BOUNDARIES

12 From its northern extremity at the top of the High Street just beyond the cottage known as Hunter's Moon, the CA boundary zigzags down the eastern side of the village, between the older properties facing the street and the newer houses along Cherry Gardens. After crossing Cock Lane it cuts east to take in the old farmhouse and row of cottages at Water Farm; it then skirts the churchyard and follows the eastern side of Vicarage Lane before turning back west, enclosing the school playing fields and the triangular green between the Old and New Roads. Turning north, it follows a curving line along the Old Road and Cullens Hill as far as Sunny Lodge, then runs along the property boundary at the back of The Row, returning to its starting point just north of the road junction.

SUMMARY of SPECIAL INTEREST

13 For much of its history, Elham was a small market town; although its status has declined to that of a large village, this has tended to preserve rather than to erode its character, and it retains many of the fine buildings of its late medieval and Tudor heyday, including the large Transitional church of St Mary and a number of fine timber-framed houses of the C15th, C16th and C17th. Its layout also preserves a touch of its former urbanity, notably in the two closely built-up former market places at the bottom of the High Street and in the (surprisingly formal) Square. There are some 43 listed buildings within the village (52 counting the nine listed C18th grave-markers), making it one of the most historically interesting – and picturesque – villages in east Kent.

Location & setting

14 Elham is in the heart of the Kent Downs, roughly halfway along the winding valley which bears its name. Canterbury lies some eight miles to the north, and Folkestone about five miles south-east. The 'top' of the village, as one approaches along the valley road from Barham on the Canterbury side, sits across the western slope of the valley, from whence the High Street runs diagonally downhill to the centre of the village in the valley bottom. Several smaller roads converge here, coming over the steep hillsides from Rhodes Minnis, Acrise, Denton and other outlying settlements and farms to form a dense knot of streets converging on the village square; but the main road continues its south-westerly course along the valley towards Lyminge and (eventually) Hythe.

15 Elham's setting is wholly shaped by the downland landscape that surrounds it: from the top of the village, the long tree-fringed chalk ridges stretch away on every side; from the centre, views between the houses or along the lanes are apt to end in a wall of green. The Nail Bourne, the seasonal stream which runs through the valley, passes just east of the village and is not much in evidence save for occasional – sometimes disastrous – flash floods.

Elham from Cullens Hill

Historic development & archaeology

16 Although Roman coins and pottery fragments have been found within the village, Watling Street and Stone Street, the two Roman roads that traverse east Kent joining Canterbury to the coastal forts at Dover and Lympne, stick to the high ground on either side of the valley, and there is no reason to believe that the colonists were ever more than a transient presence in Elham itself. There is archaeological evidence that even the prehistoric settlers preferred the hills to the valley, and the lower ground may only have been colonised during the Jutish and Saxon invasions that followed the end of Roman rule. (A Jutish cemetery was unearthed at Lyminge during the 1950s.)

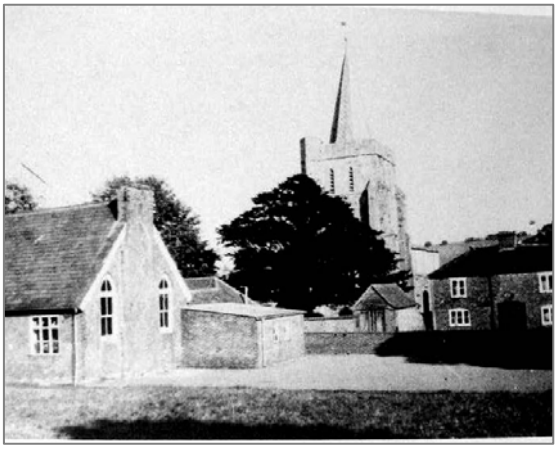
17 From the late Saxon period onwards there are increasingly numerous documentary references, mainly in the form of charters marking the passing of the estate from one land-owner to another. It is referred to variously as Uleham, Aelham, Alham and Eleham, the last giving the correct pronunciation; the name is a composite of the Anglo-Saxon *ham*, a settlement, and a prefix which is variously interpreted as referring to a temple, a hill, or to the eels which used to abound in the Nail ('eel') Bourne.

18 By the time of the Conquest, Elham was substantial enough to have its own church; this was probably on the site of the present one which dates from the late C12th. William I granted the estate to his half-brother Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, who is recorded in Domesday as holding 'land for 24 ploughs…41 villagers with 8 smallholders…8 slaves; 2 mills at 6s; meadow, 28 acres; woodland, 100 pigs.' From Odo it passed through a complex series of owners to John, Earl of Eu, who reputedly had his palace at Elham: this may have been the large stone building whose foundations were discovered on the site of the church hall. Later, it reverted to the Crown, and was granted market rights in 1251 by the future Edward I, confirming its status as a small town rather than a mere village.

19 The Square, which hosted the market until it finally died out in the early C19th, probably began to develop around this time, with the market booths on the southern side nearest the church, and more substantial houses including the church ale house (now the King's Head) on the north. This sequence of houses continues up Culling's Hill, culminating in the big 14th century Manor House at the top of the road. St Mary's Road and Cullings Hill may in fact have been the original axis: until the C19th the main road through the valley, which today runs along the High Street, used to pass north of the village along Old Road and The Row.

20 The weekly market, along with the various official and unofficial fairs that punctuated the town's economic calendar, made Elham the main centre of trade in the area between the city of Canterbury and the port of Hythe. This tract of hills and forest can never have been rich agriculturally, but livestock – especially horses – and leather were important commodities. Such was its commercial success that a second market-place was established at the foot of the High Street, still evident today in the widening of the road at this point; major horse-fairs might stretch all the way up to the top of the hill, stimulating development along the road in this direction. Several inns – the King's Head, the Crown, the Rose and Crown, the Smithies' Arms (now the Abbot's Fireside), the New Inn and the Black Duck – have from time to time existed to serve the market trade.

21 Later, Elham also began to develop industries of its own, including iron-smelting, rope-making and flour-milling – two windmills once stood on the hillside behind what is now Mill Cottage. The local clay, which exists in pockets amid the chalk, was increasingly used to make bricks: from the late C17th many old timber-framed houses were rebuilt or refaced in brick, and in the C19th a substantial brickworks was established just outside the village at the end of Cock Lane.



Left: one of the windmills c.1885. Right: the old National Schools

22 By this time, great changes were afoot in Elham. Formerly, the little town had largely run its own affairs, and had indeed exercised a certain dominance in economic and legal matters over the surrounding settlements. Now its star began to wane as those of other towns, notably the burgeoning seaside resort of Folkestone, rose, while national policies in such areas as education and social welfare began to supplant local institutions. The tiny charity school in the Square, endowed by Sir John Williams in 1723, was merged in 1844 with the new National School on Vicarage Lane, and the almshouses known as Poor's House were superseded in 1835 by a rather less compassionate institution, the Elham Union Workhouse at Etchinghill.

23 Religious observance diversified, as first the Methodist Church on the High Street, and then the Bible Christian Chapel on the Row, were built to accommodate Nonconformist worship; the Established church responded with the construction of the Institute (now the Church Hall). 1887 saw the arrival of the Elham Valley Railway, a branch of the main London-Dover line; the station was at the bottom of Duck Street, adjoining which was a small goods yard where valley produce was loaded up to be shipped to Canterbury or Folkestone. At around this period the New Road was built, putting the High Street on the main route through the valley for the first time.

Early 20th century postcard view with railway station in the foreground

24 The first half of the C20th saw comparatively little change in what was now emphatically the village, rather than the town, of Elham. Houses continued to spread slowly along the road to the north and south, a continuation of many centuries of ribbon development. Motor transport began to make its presence felt with the establishment of a garage, which operated from the tile-hung mock-Tudor building now occupied by the Post Office. East Kent saw the worst of the fighting during the Battle of Britain: so many German aeroplanes were shot down over the valley that a scrapyard was set up on the open land behind the Row. During the war, the railway line was requisitioned by the government (it was used, among other things, as a mobile artillery platform for heavy Howitzer guns mounted on railway trucks), and it never reopened to passenger traffic.