

Appendix K: Village Design Statement

Lympstone Village Design Statement

1. The Village Design Statement

Village Design Statements were established by the Countryside Commission, with the encouragement of the Government. Their purpose is to describe the distinctive character of the village and surrounding countryside, and to draw up design principles based on this local character.

As the title suggests, they are concerned with design, with the visual appearance of villages. Their remit does not include social policy, which is the province of Village Plans.

They work in partnership with the local planning authority, in the context of existing planning policy. If this Statement is adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance, the Planning Officer will have to consult it whenever there is a planning application for Lympstone.

It also exists to be consulted by the Parish Council, and any individuals or developers who intend to erect new buildings or make alterations to existing ones.

The Village Design Statement does not discuss whether development should take place: that is the subject of the EDDC local plan. This Statement seeks to establish guidelines about how planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the local environment.

- This document is a collaborative enterprise, developed, researched and written by local people over a two year period.
- The Village Design Statement has sought to consult the views of the people of Lympstone in various ways:

By inviting villagers to photograph the features of Lympstone that they most care about.

By mounting an exhibition, attended by 170 people, which demonstrated the issues of design which the Village Design Statement is concerned with.

By publishing and making available the First and Second Draft of the Village Design Statement.

By taking into account more than 80 written submissions, and many more verbal contributions. All the views that were expressed were carefully considered, and the Statement has changed and developed significantly over the course of its three drafts as a result.

- At the end of the full consultation period, the Village Design Statement will be presented to East Devon District Council, who may adopt it as Supplementary Planning Guidance.
- The Statement will be published, and made publicly available. It exists to be consulted by all individuals or developers who are planning to build in Lympstone.
- The process has been aided by a grant from Lympstone Parish Council.

2. Lympstone

Lympstone is a village of exceptional character, whose intricate and varied scale of development retains the distinctive atmosphere of a fishing village.

It is a strip parish, winding its way down from the heights of Lympstone Common to the Exe estuary. The main part of the settlement lies on the north side of a valley, and the axis of the village is a long village street, originally laid down in Saxon times. It emerges between two cliffs of red breccia, a gravelly rock laid down by floods some 250 million years ago, with a thin sandstone strata within them.

Farms and agricultural land have covered the upper reaches of the parish with their sandy and clay soils. Meadows and orchards lie beside the Wotton Brook, which together with Lympstone creek form an outlet to the sea. This outlet, with its surrounding red cliffs, formed the site for shipbuilding and fishing. Now it provides a shelter for leisure boats.

The railway line from Exeter to Exmouth runs on an embankment through the lower part of the village, parallel to the estuary. One of its three bridges acts like a mediaeval gateway to the square and the fishing village.

Few of the houses look directly on to the estuary. Mostly they face each other across the main village street as it winds its way inland. Of recent years, some *cul-de-sacs* of undistinguished estate houses have been created leading off this street.

The architectural character of Lower Lympstone is determined by the fire of 1833, when 58 cottages were burned down. Cob and thatch gave way to brick and slate roofs. There are older cottages around the church, the agricultural end. Larger houses were mainly built up Burgmann's Hill, away from the water, or further inland. The mill, which had existed since at least the 13th century, functioned until the 1950s. On the other side of the valley from the settlement was the manor of Sowden, which is now part of the parish.

The church was originally Norman. The tower was built in 1409, but the rest of the building was rebuilt in Victorian times. The Primitive Methodist Chapel, of stone with lancet windows, is dated 1883, and next to it is a charming brick-built schoolhouse. These are tucked away behind the main village street, adjacent to a terrace of three-storey Regency houses, and a Queen Anne house. The open space onto which they looked has of recent years been filled in with bungalows and small-scale housing.

The railway, which cuts through Lower Lympstone, makes its presence felt architecturally with three brick bridges. The station, hidden away up a hill, has lost its Victorian buildings, replaced with a glass and metal shelter.

The landmark building of Lympstone is Peter's Tower, a brick Italianate memorial clock tower of 1885.

Although Lympstone is a richly varied village, its unity and appeal comes from the use of natural materials and traditional forms. There is always room for imaginative new designs which can contribute something new to the mix, if they respect the use of natural materials and complement the existing building forms. Stock housing should have no place in Lympstone.

3. The Conservation Area*

The Lympstone Conservation Area was first designated in 1974, and within the boundary are 59 individually listed buildings. It comprises the early settlement connected with the port, mainly west of the railway, with most development either fronting or in short terraces running towards The Strand. Further inland is a more open pattern of settlement comprising Church, School, the Mill and Lympstone House, with a large proportion of open space and some fine specimen trees. Much intrinsic character survives, although there have been some large and incongruous post-1945 extensions to otherwise small dwellings. Also in some instances extensive loss of original frontage and roof materials has occurred, especially in the case of buildings fronting the estuary.

The Village Design Statement would support the recommendation by East Devon District Council's Conservation Area Appraisal that "consideration be given to extensions to the existing conservation area or to designation of additional conservation areas incorporating significant early development to the north and east of the current designation".

**Taken from the East Devon Conservation Appraisal of Lympstone, prepared by John Fisher, 1999*

4. Building forms

Lympstone is characterised by the number of small groups of mainly domestic buildings, clustered mainly down the long main street that winds its way down to the estuary. In short and irregular terraces, they front directly onto the road, resulting in a village of high density development, although privacy is retained to a remarkable degree. There are many individual buildings of character, often in unusual juxtaposition, small-scale and intimate. The three principal building materials are cob, stone and brick. Cob dates from the middle ages and was characteristic of Devon. Local sandstone and red breccia were used initially from local quarries, until better transport meant that limestone could be brought in from other parts of Devon. Brick was not used until the late 17th century, when it became widespread after the growth of nearby brickworks. It is of these materials that the venacular cottages were built, as well as the grander houses. In many of the buildings the underlying material is obscured by painted smooth or rough cast render in white or pale pastel shades. There are some distinctive red brick houses, but many from the late 18th and early 19th centuries are stuccoed. There are some classical features, such as Georgian bow windows and pedimented doorways and fine fanlights. Few mediaeval buildings remain, although there are many from the Elizabethan era. Georgian and Victorian villas are found within the street line and on Burgmann's Hill. 20th century building has tended to come in the form of housing estates, mainly of bungalows, although recent developments have seen the introduction of "Executive" housing. Two recent large houses have been architect-designed.

The old village sits at ease with its landscape, showing a transition of building form from farming to a fishing village. Intimacy is the key style. The buildings huddle together, and generally attach to an adjoining property. The successful unattached houses have walls or high hedging that maintain an enclosed and continuous street scene. This is being damaged by the increasing use of front gardens as parking spaces, and the proliferation of up-and-over garage doors facing the road.

- Listed buildings and structures should be retained.
- The Planning Authority should act to preserve the Conservation Area and to insist on the use of traditional materials within it.
- New development should not break through the existing street line.

- New buildings should be of individual design that respects local character. There is room for imaginative new design, so long as it relates to the traditional buildings of Lympstone.
- Any new group of buildings should not be of just one house type – Lympstone is characterised by variety. There should be no room here for any further standardised estates.
- Natural traditional materials should be used for alterations, extensions & for new buildings.

5. Industry & commerce

Lympstone has grown up around three major industries, farming fishing and boatbuilding, and the evidence can be seen in the buildings. There are still working farms in the village. Although no commercial fishing boats now sail from Lympstone, the old fishing village is still identifiable, as are the sheds and boat shelter that serviced it. A boatbuilding shed is now used as a joiner's workshop. Identifiable sail lofts survive, now used for other purposes. And the old net-drying poles are an evocative reminder, though it is clothes that hang from them now.

The former limekilns and the Mill, with its leat and pond and wheel, are evidence of a different kind of industry.

Lympstone had a large number of retail outlets. Only forty years ago there were at least 17 shops in Lympstone, and in many cases the shop fronts are still in place. There remain open the post office, the shop, the hairdresser and the nursery. The village is serviced by four pubs.

Most of the inhabitants today earn their living outside the village, but there is still a surprising amount of commercial activity within it: the nursery, a joinery, bed & breakfast, artists' studios, stabling, catering, music teaching, The Language School, the Dairy, and others. This activity fits happily and unobtrusively into Lympstone. It is the kind of small industry which can help a modern village to thrive, and there is no reason why it should not be successfully situated in adapted existing buildings or in appropriate purpose-built ones.

With many architectural styles represented in the village, design guidance should arise from observing and noting the accidental but key elements that are present.

6. Doors & windows

"God is in the detail," said Mies van der Rohe; and so, it seems, is the Devil. Doors and windows are the details which give a building a human face; they allow us to enter and exit, to look in and look out. They are the principal accents that bring character to our houses. They are also the features that can be most easily altered, and all over England good buildings are being wrecked by insensitive alteration. Lympstone, alas, is not immune.

The unifying factor is the use of natural materials.

Doors

Cottages in the village have modest wooden doorways. Grander 18th and 19th century houses sometimes have pedimented doorways, usually with decorated fanlights. So far so appropriate. Unfortunately, there is an increasing tendency to 'Georgianize' doors, not from an 18th century pattern book, but from Homebase or B & Q, whose 'Period' doors contain imitation fanlights, not above the door but within it.

This bastardisation makes a mockery of the genuine fanlights in the village, and is compounded when the doors are made of plastic. The integrity of the materials used is critical in a village context, and wooden doors and window frames are essential to the visual unity and character of Lympstone.

The increasing number of up-and-over garage doors, usually of metal, facing directly onto the street, is proving greatly detrimental to the appearance of the village.

Windows

Windows in Lympstone are richly varied: there are casement, sash and bay windows, with a variety of glazing patterns, including the local tripartite windows found in the three brick Regency houses in Underhill, in the Redwing Inn, at Sowden House, and at one time in the upper storey of the Post Office. There are also surviving examples of the older 'Yorkshire' windows, which open by sliding sideways. Shallow bow-window frontages are a particular feature, and some appear to have originated as early shopfronts. Other traditional shopfronts have been retained.

The increasing prevalence of uPvc windows is alarming. Apart from their incongruous appearance in old buildings, they are rarely of the same proportions as the windows they replace, and where they make an effort to imitate the glazing bars of sash windows, they wreck the façade by opening outwards instead of up and down.

- Original doors & windows should be retained.
- New & replacement doors and windows in old buildings should be made of wood, not uPVC, particularly within the Conservation Area. Their size and style should match those of the original, including the glazing bars.
- Fake 'Georgian' doorways should be avoided
- Where they face the street, garage doors should be made of wood and be hinged at the side. Up-and-over doors are not an appropriate part of the street scene.

7. Roofs

There are various views to be had of the Lympstone roofscape: from the train, from Sowden Hill, from the path up to Cliff Field, for instance. It is an attractive jumble of pitch roofs in a variety of traditional materials, tiles, slates, thatch, pantiles, and even the occasional corrugated iron, which provides a splash of colour when it is corroding. Although varied, it takes its homogeneity from the fact that the materials are natural and sympathetic. The only false notes occur with the occasional artificial slate tiles, which don't weather like real slate.

Thatch, of course, is the oldest roof covering for cottages, and is strongly associated with Devon, mainly because of the widespread use of cob as a building material. Combed wheat reed is a speciality of the County and is known here as 'Devon reed'. There is not much thatch left in Lympstone, partly as a result of the great fire of 1833, but what there is contributes greatly to the roofscape.

The existence of pantiles is of particular interest. They are mainly to be found in the East of England, where they were initially imported, but they were also used in a few places in the South West that traded with Holland, and these included Topsham and Lympstone. Old Lympstone pantiles were probably made at Bridgewater, which from the end of the 18th century was one of the principal centres of production in this country.

Lympstone houses have retained their old chimney pots, many of which are still in use, and this adds to the gaiety of the scene. Seaside settlements tend to have a greater variety of pots, as so many are blown down and have to be replaced. Pots themselves were first introduced in the reign of George III, and became popular when long pots could replace lofty brick-built stacks. Lympstone still has long stacks as well as pots – there was a need to take the chimney as far as possible above thatched roofs in particular. Chimneys built in the 17th & 18th centuries use old, smaller Dutch bricks, probably imported into Topsham as ballast for ships from Holland.

There are some well-placed examples of Victorian barge-boards.

The increasing use of velux window lights is putting the roofscape at risk. Preferable architecturally are proper small dormer windows, made of wood.

The Lympstone roofscape is one of the most attractive features of the village, as well as reflecting its history, and it should be rigorously protected.

- Thatch for roofs should be preserved.
- New roofs should conform to traditional roof pitches.
- Natural, traditional roofing materials are appropriate to Lympstone. Clay tiles or natural slates are preferable to concrete tiles or artificial 'slate'.
- Where roof light is wanted, dormer windows are usually preferable to velux, and are a traditional Lympstone solution.
- Chimney stacks & pots are a notable feature, and their retention should to be encouraged.

8. Street furniture

There are some good examples of street furniture in the village, including the red K6 phone box outside the Swan, wall post boxes of different periods, the old hand water pump, patterned drain covers, and old lettering. On the surface of the streets, there are several excellent examples of cobbled or other natural stone ground surfaces, and some old limestone kerbs.

Sign posts are a muddle, and often inappropriately large. An ugly railing in front of the seat by the slipway near the Green is carefully placed to block the view of the Haldon Hills of anybody who sits there. The greatest blot is the proliferation of overhead wires, which seem to string the village together.

- Good examples of street furniture should be preserved, including old iron railings.
- Sign posts should be discreet, of natural material & simple lettering.
- Some ugly tubular railings should be replaced.
- Overhead wires should be buried, although some of the wooden telegraph poles could be preserved, so that they can continue their invaluable function as poster sites. To this end, a dialogue should be opened with the relevant authorities.
- Street lighting should be white, & directed downwards to avoid light pollution.
- Use of tarmac should be restricted on splays, driveways & footpaths.
- Cobble pavements & old limestone kerbstones should be retained.
- The repair of roads and pathways after they have been dug up should be done with care and sensitivity. Cobble areas should be properly replaced, and tarmac fully reinstated, not patched.
- The introduction of wheelie bins would not be suitable in Lympstone, as in many cases householders would have no option but to leave them outside their front doors.

9. Boundaries

Two of the entries into Lympstone are lined by impressive boundary walls, the castellated stone wall of Courtlands, and the unending brick wall, buttressed in places, of Nutwell Court. These are the two building materials of the majority of Lympstone boundary walls. Cob (the material of many of the houses) barely features. Stone is particularly prominent, and it is mostly hard pre-carboniferous Devon limestone, in various shades from pink through grey to almost pure white.

The most important boundary of Lympstone, the cliffs facing the estuary, is of the most distinctive and pleasing of all Devon stone, red Permian sandstone. Red sandstone has been used in the most striking man-made Lympstone boundary wall, that of Southerleigh garden facing onto Church Road. This wall, like several others in the village, has a topping of bricks on the stone base. In some cases, as in the high walls that line Sheppard's Lane, the bricks have been added at a later date to increase the height, but this often creates a pleasing patchwork effect.

There are walls of brickwork dating from the 18th and 19th centuries. The majority of these are in Flemish bond or Flemish wall bond. The Nutwell Court wall is a mixture of the two, with some local variation. There are one or two examples of English bond, for example the boundary wall to The Firs, facing Church Hill. A piece of curved wall to The Manor House shows a charming example of the rarely-used header bond.

Coping is mainly created by header bricks laid on their edges on brick walls. Bricks are sometimes used as coping on stone walls, and sometimes concrete. More often, there is no coping. There are no examples of Devon thatch or tile coping.

On the whole walls have usually been repaired with appropriate bricks or stonework, although there are examples of inappropriate mortar being used. The recent repair of the stone walling at the bottom of Strawberry Hill is a good example of the kind of restoration work that should be carried out to Lympstone boundaries.

Walls of natural material can also form a vertical garden, and the lichen and wild flowers, such as wall daisies, that grow on Lympstone walls are not only a delight in themselves, but evidence of the purity of Lympstone air.

Lympstone is fortunate in having escaped from much mass-produced wooden fencing as public boundaries. Not many iron railings remain. Surprisingly few boundary walls have been rendered.

There are one or two examples of Devon banking used as a boundary within the building line of the village. One is in Underhill, and part of that has recently been carefully planted with appropriate hawthorn bushes. For more Devon banks you have to look to Sowden, or to the other side of the A376, in Wotton Lane and Summer Lane.

- The boundary walls of Lympstone are a major feature of the village, and deserve careful protection.
- Boundaries should be of hedge, stone or brick. Hedges should be of native plants, and in the Devon tradition.
- Repairs should be sympathetic to the existing walls, & an effort should be made to match the colour of the existing brick or stone.

- Mortar should not be raised, & should be of natural colour – ideally lime mortar should be used.

10. Estuaryside

The estuary elevation of the village nestles comfortably between distinctive red stone cliffs on the East side of the River Exe. The frontage offers pleasing variations to the eye, and is predominantly residential behind stone flood defences.

Posts and lines on the shoreline, originally for drying fishing nets, are in use as domestic washing lines. The boat shelter and its wall beside Wotton Brook are attractive functional features.

At low tide the retaining flood defence wall complements the settlement with its variations in material mix, height and apparent mass. At high tide there remains a strong presence of stone in the two limekilns which rise to the level of adjacent properties.

Peters' Memorial Tower and the adjacent Victorian Harefield Cottages are of warm brick, and feature superb chimney stacks and pots, forming a significant homogeneous feature, balanced at the south by the fishing cottages and larger properties crowded round Quay Lane, which are mainly rendered and painted white.

The estuary frontage takes a clean line between these two, but is punctuated at frequent intervals by access points originally used for drawing up fishing boats and tenders. There are three wider slipways for the same purpose. There is some public utility lighting on the paths, but essentially the character at night is created by the diversity of interior domestic lighting only.

Variation in the building line, style and height of the housing offers pleasing variety. The resulting effect is one of gradual stepping up of height and mass from the estuary, with occasional glimpses of the village behind.

Building materials vary, but slate roofs predominate, and dormer windows of traditional scale are an attractive feature, although there is some use of velux. Window openings are still mainly of traditional scale for what is a very exposed elevation in winter, but with more modern and less appropriate intrusions.

- Mass or intrusive detail should be avoided at the water's edge.
- Windows should be of traditional scale & material.
- The dominance of the cliffs at each end of the settlement & Peters' Memorial Tower must not be compromised by excessive elevations or mass.
- Any infill development such as on limekilns, in gardens, etc is inappropriate.
- Improvement to flood defences must remain unobtrusive.

11. Footpaths

There are many designated footpaths/bridlepaths in Lympstone, covering 3.8 miles. These small secret paths and lanes are a feature of Lympstone, and help to unite it. They are well used and, on the whole, well kept without being sterile. More wild flowers along the hedgerows would be desirable, and less ivy

(especially on the paths from Hayes Raleigh to the river, and from Burgmann's Hill to Cliff Field). No doubt with increased sensitivity to environmental matters this will improve.

A few paths have been covered with tarmac, such as the right-of-way leading from Aggies Orchard to the Mill and part of the path alongside Southerleigh up through Church Path.

The path from Tedstone Lane to Harefield Lane runs alongside farmland with a good stile and exit.

The path by the railway from Sowden Lane to Exmouth is part of the East Devon Way, and is quite well maintained, but could suffer from erosion. The section of between Clay Lane and Sowden Lane needs considerable attention.

The path running by Wotton Bank from the Mill to Underhill is very popular with children, and is well observed by residents whose property reaches down to the stream. The continuation of this path goes along Underhill and through the car park, crossing the brook by a safe but insensitively designed metal/wire bridge, and branches out into two attractive small paths passing by the old cottages into the Strand.

The footpaths creating a network around the harbour are a distinct feature of Lympstone and its former fishing and boatbuilding industries, and should be cherished as such. Quay Lane was re-cobbled by Devon County Council a few years ago.

The County Council has overall responsibility for the footpaths, and has recently signed up to a Public Service Agreement connected with Public Rights of Way. Their commitment is to ensure that all footpaths reach a high standard by 2005. This does not mean putting in unsympathetic furniture, but ensuring the restoration and preservation of a footpath's character. They accept that the direction signs for paths in the village centre should be replaced by others far less obtrusive.

The footpaths are a crucial part of Lympstone, giving us a variety of paths where children and pedestrians can walk safely, away from traffic. They should be jealously guarded.

- Footpaths must be preserved & made accessible.
- There should be no more use of tarmac on footpaths.

12. Views & open spaces

There is no natural centre to this linear village. Economic activity faced in different directions: fishing and boating towards the estuary, farming to the fields and the hinterland.

The lanes leading into the village have hedges and banks, and give you the feeling of wanting to explore. Coming down Nutwell Lane, you catch an inviting glimpse of the estuary.

There is high-density housing in the part of the village near the estuary, and narrow roads and lanes. Many houses have no garden to speak of. Maintenance of open spaces, including planting, trees and hedges, is vital to the life of the village, as well as to its attractiveness. They also provide a necessary balance to the buildings, the water and the cliffs.

There is no traditional village green, where mothers and children, the elderly and the general community can gather to talk and relax. There are some good open spaces, such as Candy's Field, which makes a good playing field for children, but it is at the top of a hill. The other fields open to the public are Cliff Field and

Avenue Field, owned by the National Trust, which have views over the estuary and are much used by dog walkers and the football team.

The meadows on the flood plain bordering the brook are most attractive, and vital to the flood defences – they act as sponges. There are public footpaths across and around them. The ford is a play area for children.

The allotments are valuable open space, and should be kept at all costs. They enable people who do not have gardens to grow their own vegetables.

Although traffic has increased noticeably in the past few years, Lympstone still benefits from not being a through village, and children still feel confident to play out in the street.

- Development should respect existing views from public areas & rights of way.
- There should be no building on the flood plain meadow.
- The allotments should be preserved.
- Building should not interrupt the skyline.

13. Trees & Hedges

Lympstone has both a rural and estuary backdrop to the village, and with access to Lympstone and Woodbury Commons. However, great trees within the village itself are important landmarks, as well as defining areas of the village and being vital for wildlife.

The impressive trees round about the church are defining features of Lympstone, and the recent loss of a major and ancient cedar in the churchyard itself has diminished the landscape.

There is a variety of large trees – Scots pines and holm oaks on the cliff tops, well-developed chestnuts on Candy's Field, handsome oaks in pasture, one remaining cedar in the churchyard, and many excellent ornamental trees in domestic gardens.

There are some fine garden hedges, containing mixed shrubs including escallonia, fuschia and roses. There are a number of rather neglected privet hedges, and sadly some leylandii hedges planted in recent years.

Hedgerows and banks bordering agricultural land contain wild flowers, as well as the usual trees. Many of these hedges have been well layered, but some show urgent need of renewal.

East Devon District Council offers a free sapling service, and applications can be made annually to the tree warden appointed by the Parish Council. A good example of this scheme is the planting of deciduous trees such as oak and field maple by the brook in Frog's Meadow.

- All major trees in Lympstone should have Preservation Orders.
- Major trees should be examined by arboriculturalists before a decision is taken to fell.
- The natural hedgerows of Lympstone should be preserved.
- Garden hedges should be planted with native species.

Conclusion

The intention of this Village Design Statement is not to recommend that no further development take place in Lympstone, nor to suggest that any future building should be in a pastiche style. The status quo is not an option.

However, if Lympstone is to remain a special place, alterations and new building should respect its particular character. In the case of old buildings, this means that the existing proportions and materials should be observed. Lympstone derives its character from individuality and variety, and new building in the 21st century should continue this tradition. Stock housing estates by developers are not appropriate, and nor are architectural details from chain stores that sell the same bland design all over the country.

There are many examples of the ways in which modern buildings can respect the character of older ones, without resorting to feeble imitation. In Exeter, the Shilhay estate, a large housing development of the 1970s, was a refreshing departure from earlier public housing stereotypes. It is clearly modern, and yet it suggests the character of the nearby Quay, with its use of grey slate and red brick, the variety of its grouping, with staggered terraces broken by narrow alleys and well landscaped garage courts, and the different heights and pitches of its roof line. More recently, the housing grouped around the new Maritime Museum in Falmouth bears a similar sympathetic relationship to its dockside surroundings, with imaginative use of wooden weather-boarding and slate-hung surfaces.

Lympstone would benefit enormously from an equally imaginative response from developers to the character of the existing village.

It is not within the remit of this report to make recommendations about social policy. Only a Village Plan, which would have to be an initiative by the Parish Council, could do that. But it is worth saying that the obvious and often-suggested need for affordable housing within Lympstone could fit appropriately into a village-scape of high density cottages of varying sizes.

The many people who have contributed to and commented on this survey of Lympstone all agree that it is a special place. All of them, whether born and bred in the village, long-time residents or even the sometimes derided newcomers, share a common interest in making sure that its character is not lost, at a time when there is great pressure for development.