

# **Lympstone Conservation Area Appraisal**

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*Waterfront views with Peter's tower a prominent feature and former limekilns adjoining. Poles were originally for drying nets.*

## 1 HISTORIC AND TOPOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

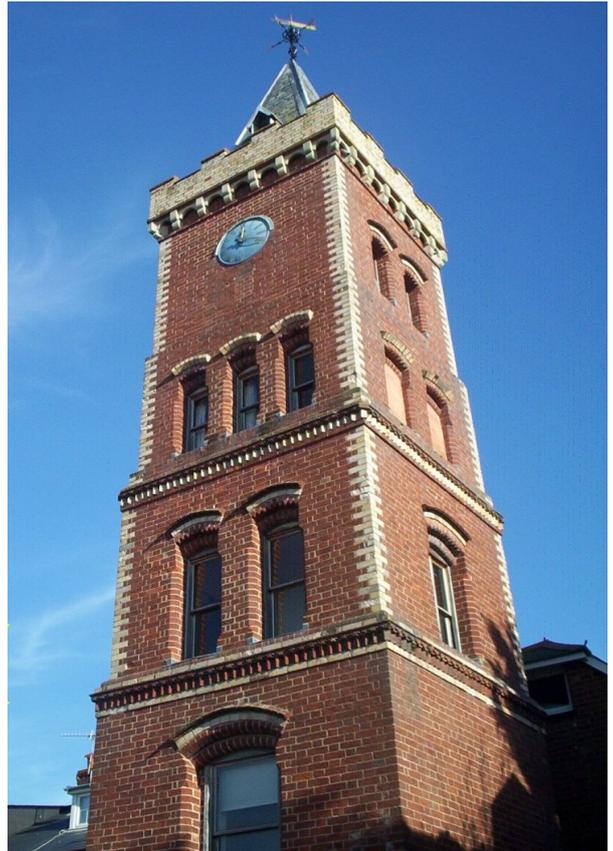
- 1.1 Situated just over two miles north of Exmouth between two low sandstone cliffs on the eastern shore of the Exe estuary. The main part of the village straggles inland along the Watton Brook. The coastal railway divides the harbour and former fishing cottages along the shore from the church and rest of the village. These are white-painted with narrow alleys and jetties which lead from the Strand to where the boats and nets are stored behind.
- 1.2 Shipbuilding was an important industry until the 18th century, but competition from the Topsham Yards led to the closure of those at Lympstone in about 1815. The main subsequent occupation, especially during the 19th century, was fishing for oysters and mussels, many being sent to London markets. Herring and mackerel were mainly for local consumption, and seafood remains a speciality at several local inns.
- 1.3 At the old lime kilns near the harbour, lime was produced to be spread on local clay soils. Overlooking the harbour is the brick clock tower with its spire, built in 1885, by W.H.Peters of nearby Harefield House in memory of his wife to commemorate her assistance to the poor of the village. In 1833 a disastrous fire destroyed over 50 houses and much of the village had to be rebuilt.
- 1.4 East of the railway are a number of Georgian brick houses fronting the winding street which leads to the partly 15th century church of St Mary. The tower, chancel arch and north arcading are all that remains of a newly built church consecrated in 1409. Extensive rebuilding in 1864 and extension to the chancel in 1928 have resulted in a somewhat disappointing interior.

## 2 SETTING OF THE CONSERVATION AREA

- 2.1 The present Lympstone Conservation Area comprises the early settlement connected with the port, mainly west of the railway with most development either fronting or in short terraces or alleys 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.
- 2.2 The conservation area was first designated prior to the establishment of the District Council in 1974, and within the boundary are 59 individually listed buildings, giving 41 separate list entries. These are shown on Map 1.



*Views across the estuary from Lympstone harbour*



*Peter's Tower dominates the village and waterfront.*

- 2.3 A large part of the character of the older settlement is due to the intricate and varied street scale with rapidly changing views, even when on foot. In spite of the high density of development, privacy is retained to a remarkable degree. West of the railway in particular there remains a friendly atmosphere, yet independent and self-contained. This strong sense of community which appears quite peculiar to small West Country harbours and fishing villages of this type, is not entirely submerged by numerous summer visitors arriving by road, rail or sea.
- 2.4 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 detail and roof materials has



*Narrow cobbled lanes linking The Strand and river beach.*

occurred, especially in the case of buildings fronting the estuary.

### 3 THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

3.1 Lympstone is a large, mainly linear, village, but with the ambience of a small harbour town, especially near the waterfront. The size of Lympstone is emphasised by the pattern of early settlement which extends to the north and east, well beyond the present conservation area. To the north especially are a number of large and important buildings closely linked to its historical development.

3.2 The village conservation area can be further identified by four separate character areas which are as follows:

#### The Harbour and Old Fishing Village

3.3 Situated mainly west of the railway, this earliest part of the settlement is very compact and of considerable density and intricacy. Penetration by traffic is necessarily difficult or even impossible along the considerable network of narrow alleyways and access courts, particularly in the southernmost part of the old village. This character is continued to the east of the railway along The Strand as far as the junction with Burgmann's Hill.



*The Strand west of the railway where the intimate scale and sense of enclosure continues.*

#### The Strand (east) and Church Road (west)

3.4 Relatively early settlement continues east, but is almost entirely linear with 18th - 19th century houses in small

groups mostly directly fronting the carriageway.

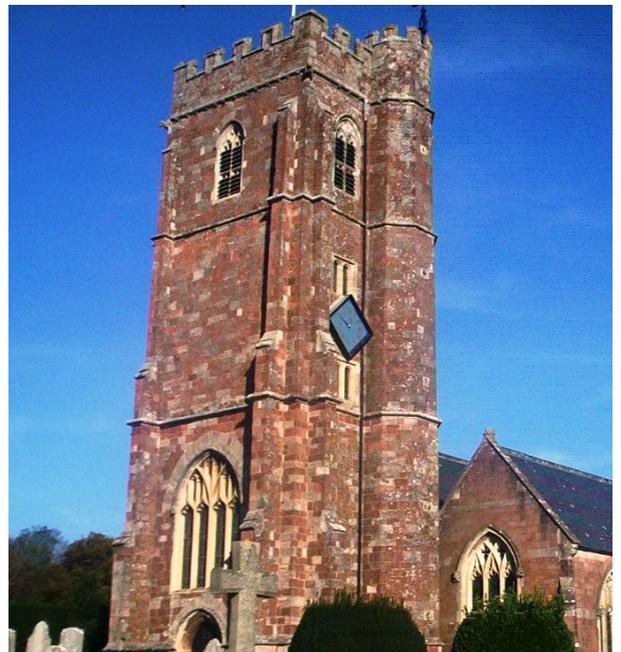


*Groups of bay-fronted cottages in The Strand and Church Road.*

### **Parish Church and Lympstone House area**

3.5 As Church Road continues east the Parish Church comes into view with the 15th century tower a dominant feature. This is an area of low density of

development. Apart from the church are several large houses in landscaped grounds and several further scattered cottage groups.



*The 15th century sandstone tower of St Mary's church dominates the skyline in the eastern part of Lympstone.*



*Lympstone House, one of a handful of substantial properties in the eastern part of the village.*

## The Former Mill and Associated Landscape

- 3.6 This part of the conservation area, apart from the former mill buildings and a commercial nursery, consists entirely of open pasture, hedgerows and tree groups either side of Wotton Brook.



*Wotton Brook from the bridge crossing to the mill in Stone Lane.*

The area surrounding the church and the meadows north of the mill are closely linked visually in spite of each having a distinct character. The latter is, in effect, still largely unspoilt countryside.

## 4 LANDSCAPE AND TREES

- 4.1 Most of the main landscape components of Lympstone and its setting are in fact beyond the limits of the present conservation area. These mainly comprise:

- a very prominent group of trees; mostly pine and evergreen oak, extending to the

cliff edge immediately to the south of the conservation area.

- the harbour, prominent red sandstone cliffs and foreshore, and associated shrubs and small tree groups, immediately to the north and east of the conservation area.

- further tree groups and shrubs in landscaped gardens, mainly to the west of the approach road to the village from the south.

- specimen trees within the curtilage of dwellings in Burgmann's Hill which itself forms the approach to the extensive historic landscape of Nutwell Park.



*Mature specimen trees in the garden of Highcliffe dominating the view south across the harbour.*

- 4.2 These wider landscape features raise a strong argument for considering carefully the special relationship between the present Lympstone conservation area and its broader landscape setting which

is important in visual terms west of the railway, and historic terms elsewhere.

- 4.3 Within the conservation area itself, there are mainly individual specimen trees in the larger gardens east of the railway; sycamore, copper beech and oak are typical species represented. The churchyard and large houses further east contain good evergreen specimens, their dominance emphasised by rising ground. There are also numerous shrubs virtually obscuring buildings north of Church Road. To the south is a largely natural landscape, still rural in character, with fields, hedgerows and tree groups with many oaks (including Lucombe oak) and young elms. These almost completely obscure the former mill.

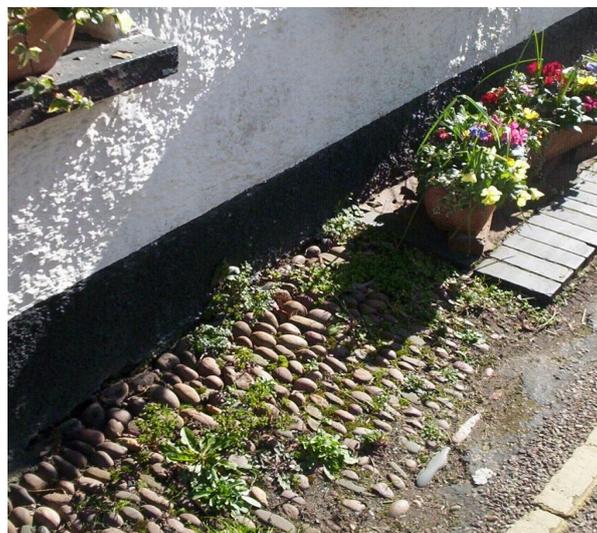


*Many larger gardens within the conservation area contain good specimen trees that contribute to its semi rural character in parts.*

## 5 HARD SURFACES

- 5.1 Lympstone is especially fortunate in having quite extensive areas of natural surface textures. In addition to the sand and shingle beach which abuts, even virtually surrounds some buildings facing the estuary, there are a number of pedestrian only access ways

where waterworn boulders are used as cobbles which relate well to essentially natural surfaces elsewhere. There are also surfaces of loose chippings which are combined unsatisfactorily with concrete patching but more satisfactorily with brick pavoids.



*There are many areas of cobbled verges and paths within the conservation area. Unfortunately these are offered little statutory protection and therefore their retention and repair should be actively encouraged.*

- 5.2 These varied surface textures add to the delightful informality especially where combined with planted areas, including tubs and boxes, along frontages.

## 6 BUILDING MATERIALS AND ORNAMENT



*Contrast between 18th century houses faced in Flemish-bonded brick and stucco.*

6.1 In much early building, the underlying materials are largely obscured by painted smooth or rough cast render in white or pale pastel shades. Cob and rubblestone are most likely to be found. Much late 18th to mid 19th century housing is stuccoed, and there are some classical features, for example Georgian bow windows and pedimented doorways or Regency windows with ornate glazing bars. Use of brick is also quite widespread and there are good 18th/early 19th century examples which are sometimes painted over.

6.2 The stone most widely found locally is a variety of Devonian New Red Sandstone, used for example in the Parish Church. Erosion of this soft stone can be severe. The effects of road salt or sea salt can be particularly damaging, as can the use of cement mortar, not only through adverse

chemical reaction, but also greater retention of moisture. The limekilns on the seafront are a reminder of the former availability of quicklime which gave the ability to readily make lime mortar which is much more suited to most forms of masonry than the current widespread use of cement.



*Indigenous red sandstone is often used as boundary walls but inappropriate cement mortars can accelerate erosion.*



*Prominence of slate roofs in the conservation area. Artificial slates although widely found do not have same character as natural slate.*

6.3 Slate is used almost universally as a roofing material although there has been much replacement with artificial

substitutes, especially on the more exposed roofs close to the shore. Dormer windows of modest proportions are found at second floor level in some instances. Velux windows in abundance can compromise character and tend to reflect sunlight. Some relatively recent large flat-roof extensions are incongruous and visually intrusive.



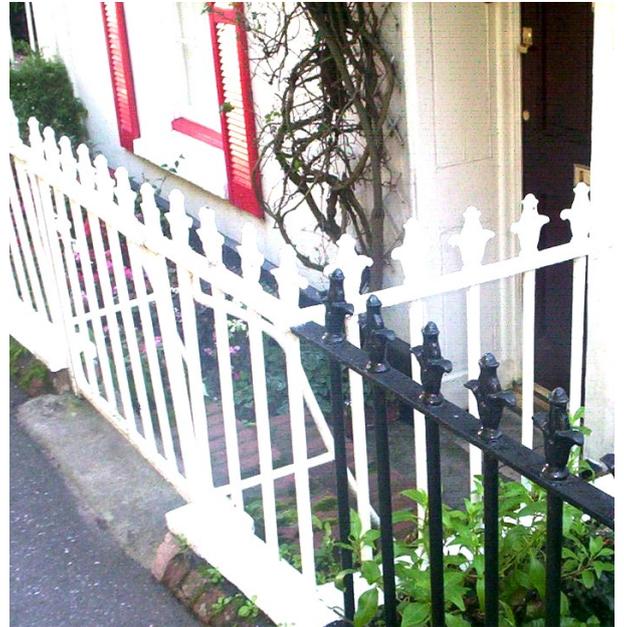
*Dormers are generally only found on larger houses where the roof was commonly converted as servants accommodation.*



*Chimney stacks are prominent on the skyline of the conservation area from every aspect.*

6.4 Chimneys can be, and in Lympstone are, an important feature of the skyline, and a considerable number of 19th century pale terracotta examples remain. Nevertheless there is a growing second-hand market for these which are often

put to an alternative use which tends to suggest legislation may soon be necessary to halt their further removal.



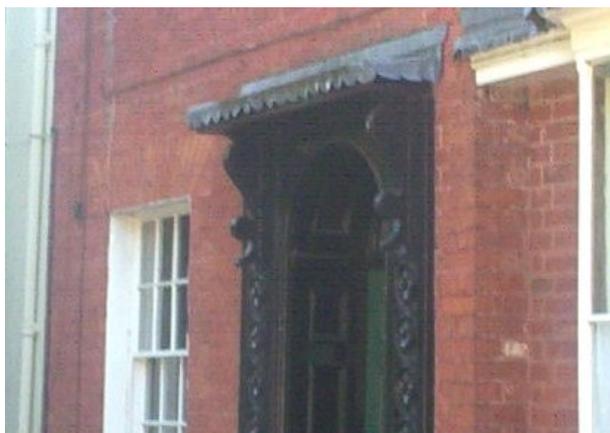
*Lympstone has some fine architectural detail with bowed sashes being a defining feature of Regency buildings.*

6.5 With regard to decoration there are some wrought iron railings and gates, and cast iron and glass verandas; the latter to be

seen fronting a short terrace on the north 7 side of Church Road. One of the most distinctive features are the number of shallow bow-windowed houses and cottages; those on the ground floor only are probably former shopfronts. Fenestration within the village generally especially away from the harbour is well-preserved. There are some fine late 18th to early 19th century doorcases with plain and decorative fanlights and carved wood surrounds (e.g."Shepherds"). Several ornamental bargeboards decorate gable ends.



*Horizontal sliding sashes are peculiar to Lympstone and are not found as widespread anywhere else in East Devon.*



*Decorative doorcases are common throughout the conservation area and reinforce the gentrified character of the village.*

## STREET FURNITURE AND SPECIAL FEATURES



*There are many brick boundary walls that contribute quite significantly to Lympstone's character, particularly away from the village centre.*

7.1 A large part of the character of the village is due to the particular relationship between walls, plants and other surfaces, and the close and informal juxtaposition of buildings. Street-lighting is limited yet unobtrusive. Any updating would need very careful consideration.

7.2 Specific remarkable items of street furniture are few; the most unusual being an old hand water pump, clearly once intended for communal use, and retaining the following notice:

St. Thomas Rural District Council

### **WARNING**

The water from this well must not be used for drinking unless boiled

7.3 Freestanding and retaining boundary walls are an important feature both within the conservation area and well beyond. These are of a variety of materials, sometimes in combination, and in Lympstone are mainly of brick, red sandstone or grey limestone. They often

lack suitable maintenance and become unsightly and even structurally unsound. The sandstone example previously referred to is one instance, another is the brick wall opposite the Parish Church where capping has been removed and courses are gradually disappearing. A further example is the retaining boundary wall at Lympstone House which is leaning sharply towards the road in places. Patching is sometimes carried out, but appropriate matching needs care where new machine made bricks do not combine happily with 18th century handmade bricks.

## 8 SYNOPSIS OF LISTED BUILDINGS

8.1 The majority of listed buildings are concentrated within the old port area, west of the railway and adjoining the main road into the village west of the parish church. There is a further group on higher ground to the north, but not included within the existing conservation area.



*Groups of listed cottages next to St Mary's Church in Church Road*

8.2 The intricate scale of the old centre south of the small harbour with many cottages in the local vernacular style facing out to sea or towards one another, sometimes across a narrow path is in complete contrast to some early Georgian building of considerable grandeur, especially on the slopes above.

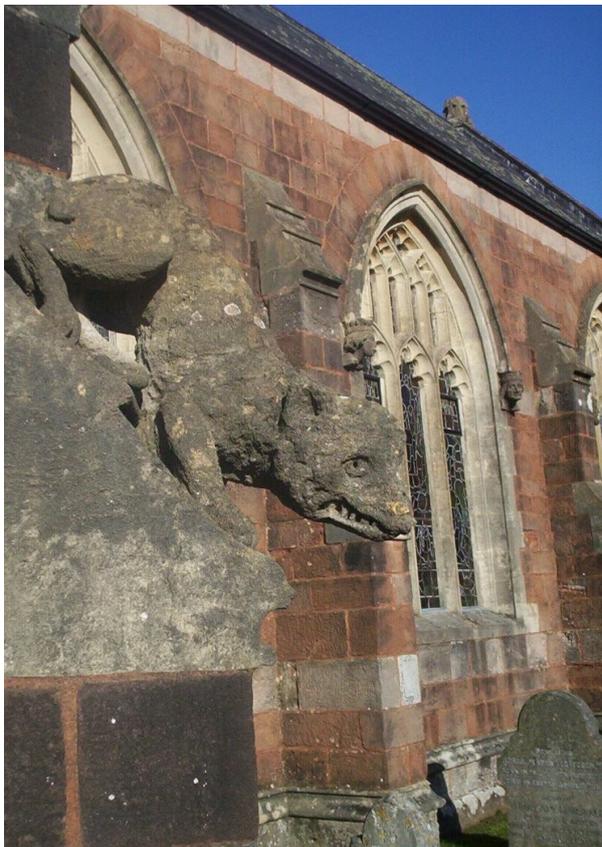


*Bridgethorpe House, a fine example of Lympstone's Georgian architecture.*

8.3 The village is much more extensive than the early settlement by the estuary, and continues well inland with several separate enclaves of other earlier development, not all of which are included within the present conservation area.

8.4 St.Mary's Parish Church has a medieval tower of red sandstone, not unlike that at Woodbury. The body of the church was extensively restored in the 19th century

by Edward Ashworth with further additions of vestry, organ chamber and raising of the chancel roof by R.M.Fulford in 1889. The chancel was lengthened and a south chapel was added in 1928 by H.C.King.



*The southern side of St Mary's Church showing typical Victorian restoration.*

8.5 Peters' Tower is a prominent landmark above the beach built in 1885 by W.H.Peters in memory of his wife. Its face to the sea was intended to display tide times to fishermen. Ajoining are two large stone-built limekilns their hearths now blocked or used for storage.

8.6 In The Strand are several good cottages with Georgian embellishments. Bridgethorpe has two full height canted bays. Queen Anne House is a fine 5 bay brick symmetrically fronted house dating from 1702 but refenestrated and

refurbished c.1840.  
8.7 1-3 Bridge Cottages was once an early 18th century house of 6 bays. In Underhill are three Regency houses in brick and with tripartite windows; the taller two have pediments and fanlights.

### Significant Building Groups

8.8 Lympstone is characterised by the number of small groups of mainly domestic buildings with some evidence of early shopfronts no longer in use. These normally form short and irregular terraces, either fronting directly onto the carriageway or in narrow access ways feeding onto it. This feature accounts for the high density of development in places with little external space surrounding dwellings. Although picturesque in appearance, inevitable access difficulties result, as does making provision for extensions.



*Many properties in The Strand retain former shopfronts, most now in domestic use. This is a significant aspect of Lympstone's character and should be preserved with careful maintenance and repair. Replacement shopfronts should be seen as a last resort and should be carried out on a like-for-like basis.*

**Important Buildings Outside the Conservation Area.**

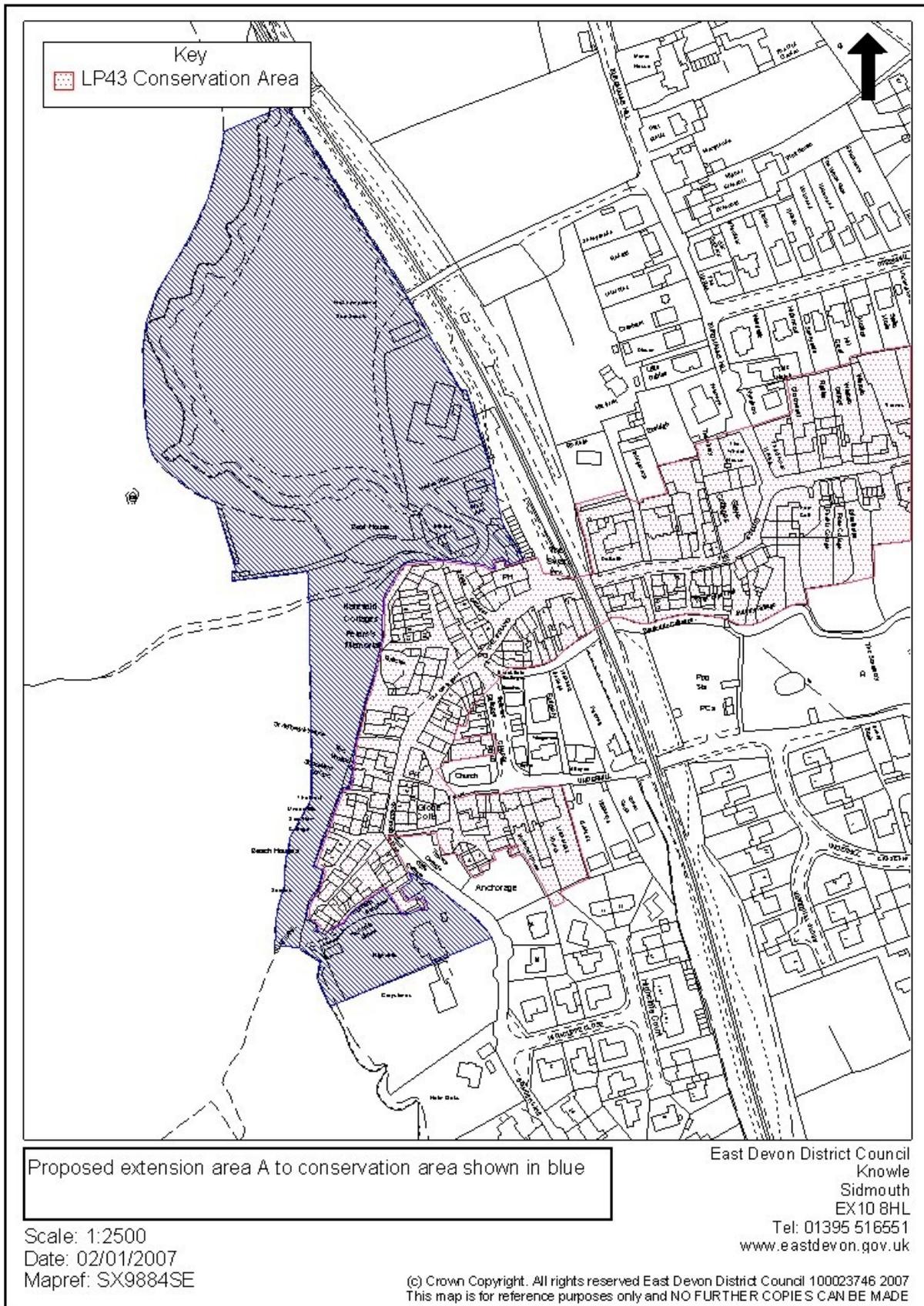
- 8.9 In Burgman's Hill are several notable Georgian houses. Greenhill is three-storey brick with a battlemented parapet; Manor House also brick, has a five window front. Belvedere the Dower House to Nutwell Court is stuccoed and castellated with a 3-storey Italianate tower and a canted bay at one end. Nearby is a one-storey Lodge with a castle-shaped terracotta pot. This building group is isolated from the existing conservation area by mid twentieth century residential development and cannot be easily included within an extension to the existing conservation area.
- 8.10 Nutwell Court was transformed from an earlier brick house (previously remodelled c.1699 and 1754) into a precise neo-classical mansion of 1802 for the second Lord Heathfield by S.P.Cockerell. The south, north and west walls also use grey mathematical tiles. The entrance is to the north; 5 bays, 2 storeys above a basement and with a balustraded parapet. The south east wing is older with a stone first floor chapel having a perpendicular window and projecting corner pinnacles. This is very likely mainly 19th century, but is probably on the site of a chapel known to have been licensed here in 1371.
- 8.11 The Stables and Servants Quarters form a long two-storey range east of the house and are in English bond brick and castellated with some diagonally set chimneys. This work is probably late 18th century picturesque in its present form but possibly incorporates earlier work. The Riding School near Nutwell Home Farm is c.1800 of brick with pedimented gable-ends with lunettes.

8.12 St.Peter's School (formerly Harefield House) is by William Burgess of Exeter, built c.1830 with stucco finish in a neo-Grecian style. Lower Harefield Lodge is one-storey with good cast-iron piers and railings.

**9 PROPOSED EXTENSIONS TO THE CONSERVATION AREA**

9.1 There is a requirement under Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 of all local authorities to review their conservation areas and publish proposals for their preservation and enhancement. This has now been formalised with a three-part heritage Best Value Performance Indicator. Proposals for enhancement will be published separately in the Conservation Area Management Plan while the review of the conservation area has identified two significant areas that meet the criteria for inclusion within the conservation area:

9.2 **Proposed extension A; Harbour, headland to the north and estuary beach (indicated on map A).** The waterfront areas of Lympstone are not only attractive and contribute aesthetically to the setting of the village but are also of great historic significance. The very existence of the settlement evolved around its shipbuilding and fishing industries. The estuary beach with its surviving poles for drying nets is testament to Lympstone's heritage and identity. The headland to the north of the harbour now owned by the National Trust provides visual enclosure to the harbour and is prominent within the setting of the conservation area despite the area being open playing fields. To the south the red sandstone cliffs create a backdrop to the dense cluster of cottages on the beach and Highcliffe



House above is a fine example of the Victorian villa tradition with several specimen trees prominent on the skyline above the village. These prominent areas with the village contain very few buildings but are intrinsic to the character and appearance of the area. It is clearly desirable to preserve and enhance these aspects of Lympstone and it is therefore proposed that they are included within the revised conservation area boundary.



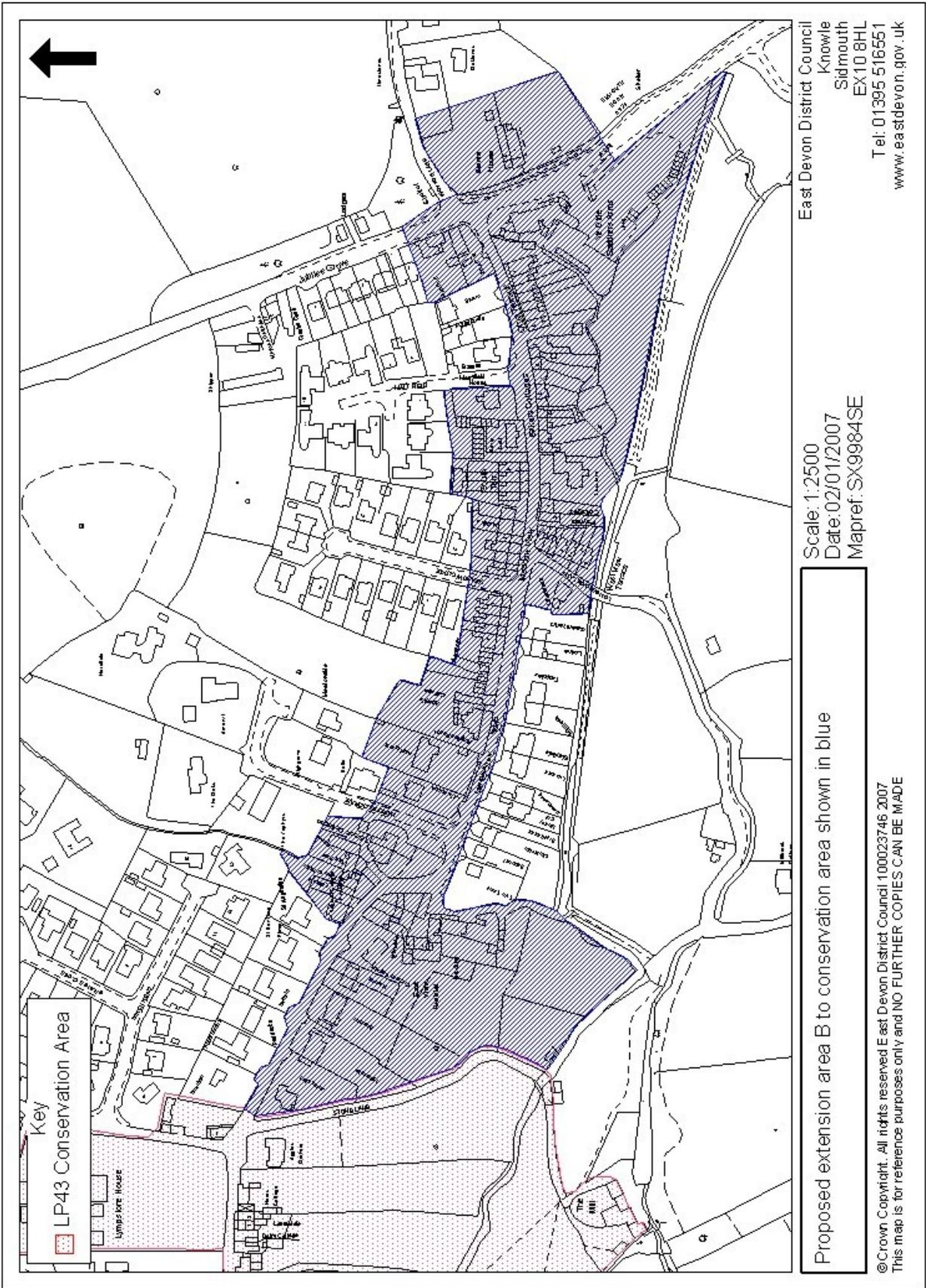
*The estuary beach at low tide with the trees in the garden of Highcliffe House creating an impressive backdrop.*

**9.3 Proposed extension B; Longmeadow Road.** The area between the eastern boundary of the existing conservation area and the junction of Longmeadow Road with Exmouth Road consists of a diverse mix of late medieval cottages and Victorian Terraces. While many of these properties are listed there are many that are not and yet have been thoughtfully preserved. Many of the simple nineteenth

century terraces retain their original sash windows and their good quality brickwork contrasts with the roughcast render of the older thatched cottages creating a very characterful village scene.



*The cluster of Elmside, Bass's Orchard, Lavender Cottage (all early C16) and the later Ventnor and Endsleigh Cottage create an important space within the village.*



At the western end of the proposed extension there is a significant village green space framed by two contrasting terraces of cottages. Despite later twentieth century development further to the east this part of Lympstone retains much of its distinctiveness.

Modern Lympstone is very much a linear settlement and its character is derived by the way in which it has evolved from the waters edge inland. The medieval pockets of development further inland have been enveloped by later Victorian terraces forming a continuous ribbon of building stretching over a kilometre inland from the harbour. The variety of architectural forms, details and materials contained within the extended village are aspects which should be acknowledged and inclusion into the conservation area would provide a level of control over future development in this area.



*Relatively unaltered C19 terraced cottages in Longmeadow Road.*

## 10 FEATURES OF SPECIAL IMPORTANCE

The elements in Lympstone conservation area considered most worthy of retention in terms of their character are as follows:

- 10.1 A settlement of great individuality derived from its origins as an important and long established fishing village. It is particularly characterised by narrow footpath access only streets, some with cobbled surfaces, and with intriguing narrow gaps between buildings giving unexpected glimpses of the foreshore.



*View from the slipway behind Strand House.*

- 10.2 Many individual buildings of character, often in unusual juxtaposition, small-scale and intimate. This helps to provide a multiplicity of viewpoints, short vistas and widely varied enclosed spaces, in contrast to the expansive estuarine views occasionally glimpsed from within the village.

10.3 A wide variety of building materials, mainly rendered stone or cob, and roofs predominantly of slate, but occasionally of thatch or Bridgwater tiles. There are good examples of early brick which is also used in the grander houses not all of which are within the conservation area (e.g. Manor House and Merrylands).

10.4 Shallow bow-window frontages are a particular feature and some appear to have originated as early shopfronts. Other traditional shopfronts have also been retained though are often no longer in use.

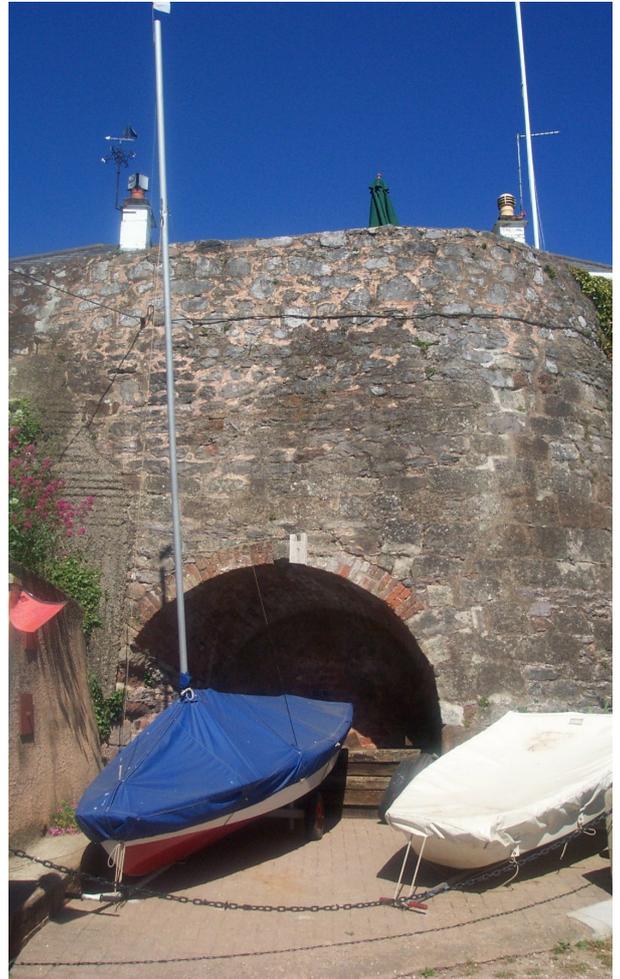


*Cottages with bay front windows, many of which may have originally been shopfronts.*

10.5 Several excellent examples of cobbled or other natural stone ground surfaces.

10.6 Extensive walls, both boundary and retaining in a wide variety of materials, including brick, grey limestone, red sandstone or brick on stone footings (some lie beyond the perimeter of the present conservation area).

10.7 Individual features of interest (e.g. the surviving village pump, the lime kilns, Peters' Tower, net drying lines on the beach, metal railings and overthrow at the Parish Church).



*Nineteenth century limekilns by the harbour. Together with the limekilns by Peter's Tower these make a significant contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area.*

10.8 A number of fine specimen trees. (Many of these are just beyond the conservation area; for example the prominent evergreen oaks and pines on the bluff immediately to the south of the old fishing settlement).

10.9 The Parish Church with its fine tower which is an important landmark towards the eastern limit of the conservation area.

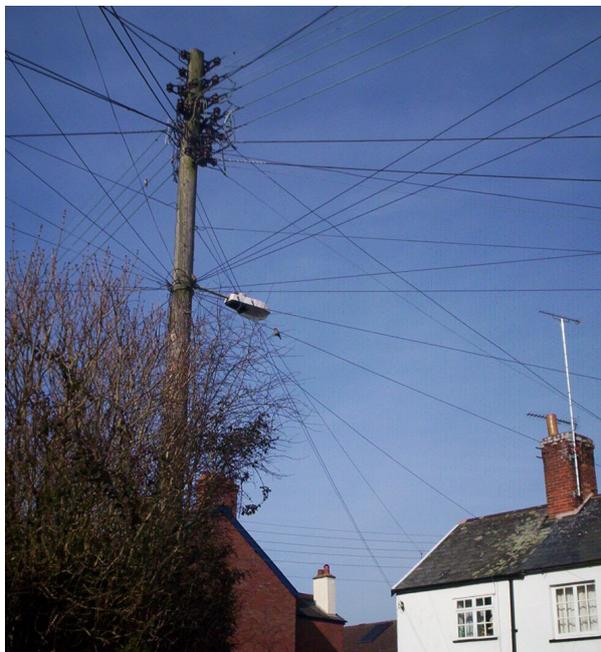
10.10 An important open landscape, again including several fine specimen trees, between the parish church and Wotton Brook and to the north of the Mill.

10.11 Examples of industrial archaeology, former limekilns on or close to the shore, the former Mill and Mill Pond and part of the leat.

## 11 LOSS OF CHARACTER AND INTRUSION

The main elements within the Lympstone conservation area which are considered to be resulting in a deterioration of character are as follows:

11.1 Very prominent and intrusive overhead power lines in several parts of the village.



*A plethora of overhead power lines in Longmeadow Road.*

11.2 Severe traffic congestion, especially during the summer holiday season.

11.3 Considerable deterioration of the fabric and structural stability of walls (e.g. sandstone wall and brick wall in Church Road; limestone retaining wall at Lympstone House).

11.4 Considerable loss of original window and door detail, especially close to the shoreline.

11.5 Poor quality roof replacement/repair with very few instances of replacement using original materials (e.g. natural slate).

11.6 Several instances of insensitive and prominent extensions (e.g.flat roofs, and first floors on stanchions) especially as later additions to buildings overlooking the estuary.

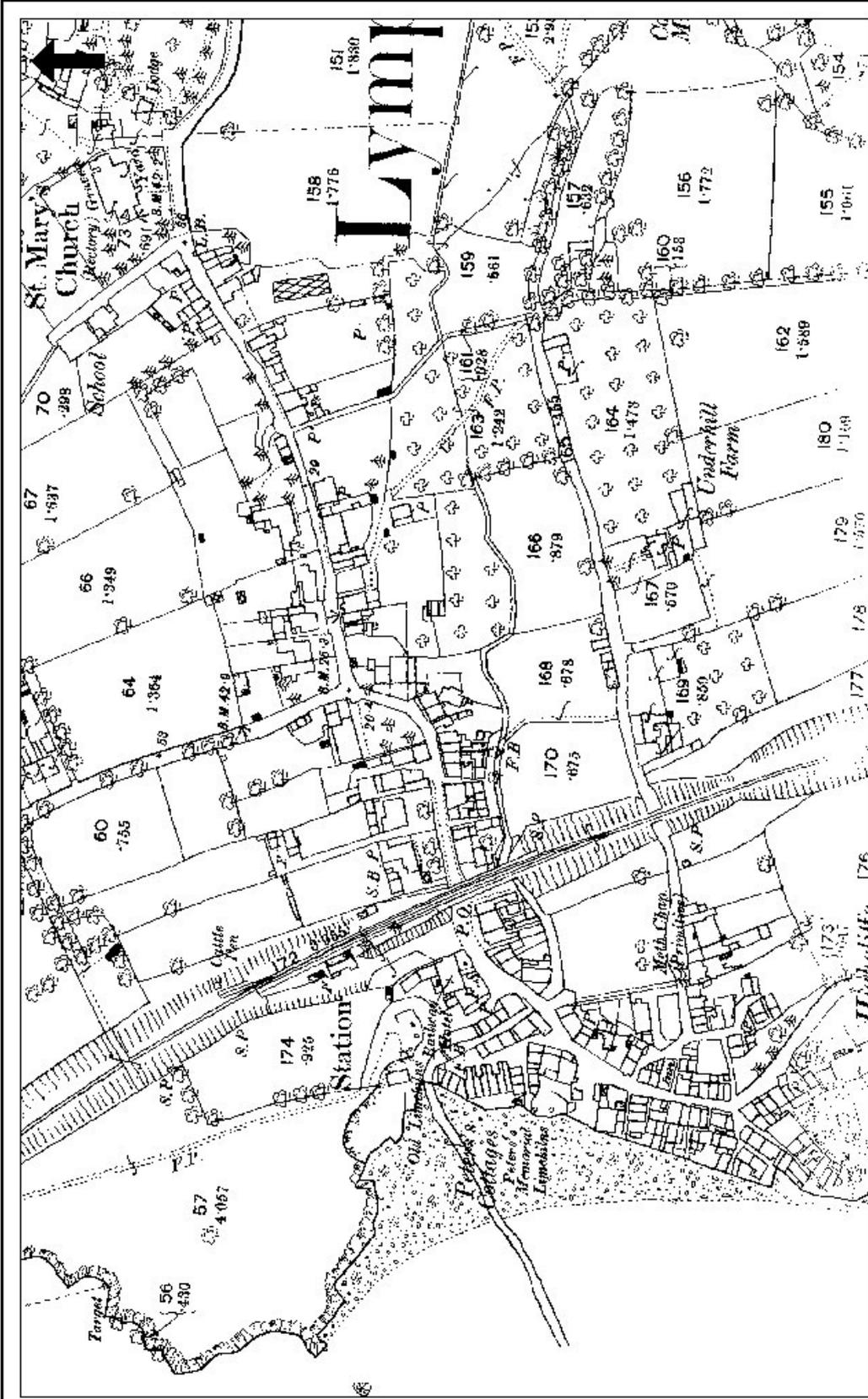


*Some prominent additions to waterfront properties have been less than sympathetic to the character of conservation area.*

## 12 SUMMARY

- 12.1 Lympstone is a village of exceptional character readily accessible by train or motor vehicle, even by boat. The very intricate and varied scale of development at great density whilst retaining privacy conveys the distinctive atmosphere of a fishing village of a quality rarely found in Devon.
- 11.2 As vehicles are not easily accommodated there is considerable congestion in peak holiday periods. This has had an adverse affect on the conservation area. Having regard to its special quality, Lympstone is considered to be particularly deserving of a more detailed assessment that would include proposals for enhancement and have regard to traffic circualtion and car parking proposals.
- 11.3 The landscape setting and wider historic context of the village are sufficiently important for some consideration to 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.





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Lympstone 1890 O.S Map

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