

Ilminster Conservation Area Appraisal - Draft Jan 2016

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Introduction

Conservation areas are areas of 'special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 imposes a duty on local authorities to identify appropriate parts of their areas, to designate them as conservation areas and to keep them under review. Historic areas are now extensively recognised for the contribution they make to our cultural inheritance, economic well-being and quality of life. Public support for the conservation and enhancement of areas of architectural and historic interest is well established. By suggesting continuity and stability, such areas provide points of reference in

confluence of the Isle and Shudrick stream corridors, and convenient for access to the major road network.

Historic development

Ilminster sits along a ridge which drops down to the fertile Isle Valley. The town's growth pattern has been dominated by the topography, and its economy by the availability of both fast flowing streams and level meadowland. The area is geologically complex, with marl, limestones, sandstones and chalk strata available for quarrying.

There is some evidence of both prehistoric and Roman activity in the area, in the shape of isolated artefact finds. Unfortunately, these are not well provenanced and it is difficult to be certain whether the site of Ilminster itself was occupied in these periods. As it lies astride a ridgeway and, in the Roman period, was only a few miles from the Fosse Way, occupation cannot be ruled out.

There is documentary evidence of a Saxon minster and settlement at Ilminster (Ile Mynister - the minster on the River Isle). The earliest certain reference to the site is King Ethelred's Confirmation of 995, which returned the estates to the Benedictine Muchelney Abbey after a time of disturbance. The wording of this document implies an earlier origin for Ilminster, and a charter of 693 may record the original estate grant. However, the 725 "Charter of King Ine" is now thought to be a later forgery, perhaps medieval, or perhaps 10th century and part of the dispute which led to the issue of Ethelred's Confirmation (Bond, c1990). The early estate centred on Ilminster was extensive: the parish of Ilminster was the most important in the Hundred of Abdick and Bulstone in the late Saxon period. The place names of the surrounding area - Ilton, Dillington, Whitelackington, Dinnington, for example - suggest that a network of estates and estate settlements existed: of these, Dillington was certainly part of the abbey's estates and allied to Ilminster.

After the Conquest, attempted rebellion brought serious consequences for some of Ilminster's neighbours, including Donyatt, Dowlish and Whitelackington. But the town itself, being a church possession, was largely spared. Domesday records an affluent estate, with a good deal of woodland (some of which may have been attached to Neroche Forest to the west), and the beginnings of a town in the shape of a market rated at twenty shillings a year. Muchelney remained in possession of the manorial rights, rents, the tithes and the church itself until the Dissolution of the Monasteries, and presided over the growth of the medieval town. In 1201, a deal struck between Muchelney and Wells inaugurated the 'golden age' of Ilminster (Street, 1904): the abbots of Muchelney gained status as prebends, Wells gained the rectory and much of the revenues, and both institutions protected and encouraged the town - though they never allowed a free borough to be established.

Ilminster was extremely prosperous by the later medieval period, and the 15th century parish church and Grammar School bear witness to this. The town's prosperity was largely based on the textile industry, but it was also an important local market centre.

Between the late 15th and the late 17th centuries Ilminster suffered a series of setbacks. The first of these was a major fire in 1491, which seems to have damaged the town's economy. According to Collinson (1791), Ilminster was never completely rebuilt after this catastrophe. Only a few decades later, the Dissolution of the Monasteries disrupted the running of the town. The abbots' rights were split up into the Lordship of the Manor, the rectorial tithes and the advowson of the vicarage, and the 16th and 17th centuries saw a series of absentee Lords of the Manor. As well as the disruption of the Civil War, in 1661 there was another major fire, this one being followed by appeals read up and down the country.

churchyard is not known: it is possible that burials underlie areas later encroached upon and developed commercially. The character and extent of associated buildings is also unclear: they may, however, have included high status timber or stone buildings.

The precise location and extent of the Saxon settlement at Ilminster has not been established.

It may be that the main focus of activity was around the present market area at the crossroads, but this remains to be archaeologically established. Any surviving archaeology of this period is likely to be ephemeral in character, consisting principally of the remains of timber buildings. Since the suggested settlement areas underlie the centre of the medieval and later town, much may already have been lost.

The market is probably of Saxon origin, though its original extent is unclear. By its nature, the early market would have been largely open. However, there are likely to have been small structures associated with commercial activity. Certainly, in the post-medieval period, the market was bisected by shambles stretching nearly 100m eastward up the centre. These are shown on the 18th century map and were still in existence when Collinson described the town in 1791. They were demolished in the 19th century, during refurbishment of the market place: the present market house also dates from the early 19th century, but probably incorporates an earlier structure.

Landscape setting

The immediate landscape setting of the town is defined by three hills; Beacon Hill to the north, and Herne and Pretwood Hills to the southwest and southeast respectively, all of which rise to a little above 100 metres, and broadly contain the spread of the town and its immediate rural edge onto the valley of the Shudrick stream on the south side. To the west, the setting is less defined, with the town extending toward the open land of the River Isle valley while southwards urban development spreads up the saddle between the hills towards Dowlish Ford.

The setting of the conservation area

The conservation area is broadly linear in form running E-W along the southern side of Beacon Hill and extending down to the west where Station Road drops towards the Isle valley and also southwards into the Shudrick Valley centred on Ditton Street. The hills mentioned above define the extent of the setting to the south where it can be regarded as following the skyline of Pretwood, Listers and Herne Hills. To the north where the town is bounded by lands of the Dillington Estate and the high point of Beacon Hill the skyline forms the limit of setting. The strong visual containment of the urban area and the Shudrick valley, the frequent prospects of whose landscape is a special feature of the town, are provided by the hills north and south. Containment does not extend to the west where the lower ground opens out. The setting of the CA is formed here by the urban fringe of the town and can be taken no further than the Canal Way junction with Station Road. Eastwards the narrowing of the Shudrick valley at Knott Oak provides a limit in this direction. Map at shows the limit of setting.

Spatial analysis

General character and plan form

The conservation area is the core of the historic settlement and takes form from the topography on the southern slope of Beacon Hill and the historic road pattern, a crossing of N-S and E-W routes. The evolution of the street layout is not certain but it may be that

1. The central area - Court Barton, Silver Street, High Street and West Street
2. Market Place, Cornhill, East and North Streets
3. Station Road
4. The Butts, Bay Hill, Townsend and Knott Oak
5. Ditton Street proposed extension area
6. New Road proposed extension area

1. CENTRAL AREA - COURT BARTON, SILVER STREET, HIGH STREET AND WEST STREET

Form and character

The ancient core of the town: at its centre, an intimate, intricate network of narrow streets, spaces and venerable buildings set around the imposing Church of St Mary which sits in its tight urban churchyard, elevated above Silver St and dominating the area. The tower is a reference point from many aspects both within this area and across the wider conservation area. Silver Street passing its south side, one of the best streets of historic buildings in the district, is narrow and enclosed at the Market Place end, opens out at the railing-fronted churchyard and continuous frontage again beyond by the Dolphin Inn, set back a little from the street, a high walled garden to 24 before turning north towards High St. Court Barton runs north beside the churchyard to the Chantry and a small green; a quiet enclave, with an intricate form of a winding street and path connections, Church Walk, around the church yard and Church Lane leading back to Market Place

High St is the east-west through route for vehicles avoiding the Market Square, it is a busy thoroughfare with raised pavement on the N side containing a long terrace of houses, many quite small and of mixed dates and styles, including C20. At the junction with West St a wider space and then westwards, some larger buildings still to back of footways, dominated by the strong elevation and elegant spire of the former Methodist Church behind low railings.

Streetscape analysis, scale, height and building line

Silver Street strong built frontage to back of pavements and emphatic 3 storey group both sides at Market Place end. Scale reduces to 2 storey westwards with no.39 the exception. Scale however is variable from intimate vernacular (33, 35) to 37, a fine 1830s ashlar-fronted house with shop inserted (Bonners). The continuity of building frontage is broken by the elevated church yard wall and a few gaps as the street winds up to West Street at a lower scale. Good shopfronts at 1-3, Harriman's the bakery, 11 with iron cresting (Bilby's), 33 again with iron cresting and Dyers, 21. Upper end rebuilt with pleasant C20 cottages in brick or render with Minster Stone windows.

Court Barton a mixture of intimate cottages and larger ancient buildings. Building line set back generally along Court Barton with small walled front gardens facing the green and public realm along with some high-walled enclosures. Berryman's Lane leads up to High St with similar closed, intimate character of stone cottages and enclosing walls north of the imposing gable of Abbots Court.

High Street continuous built frontage hard on back of footway, largely 2 storey but c.1.5m high raised footway to north side increases sense of the scale of the relatively small terrace houses here.

West Street consistent building lines in a street of good quality buildings also with a low raised footway continuing from High St. Scale generally 2 storey but 3 storeys at corner of Brewery Lane (33 & 35, early C19 ashlar with good surviving details) and larger scale at the Methodist Church beyond.

Brewery Lane a lane off West St narrowing to a footpath leading south.

2. MARKET PLACE, CORNHILL, EAST AND NORTH STREETS

Form and character

Market Place and Cornhill is at the core of this character area. As a space it is a widened crossroads roughly triangular, widest on the west side where North Street arrives and tapering away up into East Street. On a gradient, the space is strongly enclosed by surrounding buildings and made distinctive by the open colonnaded Market House which rises above the trafficked street on its south side. Good modern Yorkstone repaving around the Market House and on the footways. A busy and often congested area of people and vehicles which have to funnel out around the Market House and through the narrow portals of Silver Street (west) and Ditton Street (south).

Excellent buildings on all sides, finest on west side; The George Hotel range, Retreat Brasserie and Lloyds Bank, all three storey in Ham stone ashlar with stone shaft of a drinking fountain in front.

North Street climbs and curves out of the Market Place northwards. It has a quieter character and buildings are lower.

East Street, east of the Market, tapers gradually from a wide, busy space closed by the trees of the Arts Centre, into a narrow, more intimate character of smaller houses and cottages further up.

The form of the area is made by these main streets; there are few secondary streets, partly because of the steep topography: Church Lane, a path between walls linking Cornhill to the churchyard; on the south side of East Street are Love Lane and Frog Lane and its extension alleyway connecting back to East Street are the only examples in this area.

Streetscape analysis, scale, height and building line

The streets have well-defined building lines with largely continuous frontages with few gaps. **Market Square and Cornhill** and its exits at Ditton and Silver Streets are contained by mostly 3 storey buildings tight to the footways.

In **East Street** this scale reduces progressively although the building lines remain tight to footways with 2 storey houses of modest scale containing the street, some terraced, mostly stone near Cornhill, light-coloured render further up and stone again nearer Bay Hill. Some houses with elevated front gardens facing the street with a retaining wall (33,35). The Arts Centre creates a wider space, its wall still maintaining a strong frontage.

North Street is also well-contained but by trees and walls as well as buildings but has a lower scale beyond The George which gives a more open character to the upper street, due in part to the open view southwards.

Significant listed buildings and groups

The Market House, Cornhill

The George Hotel and the whole high quality townscape of the group around the central market; a consistently listed frontage of 2 and 3 storey scale.

Further up a group of Natwest Bank (once Stuckey's bank c.1875), eclectic, 3 storey ashlar with Barclays Bank next door, symmetrical stucco front with fine railings and opposite, 11 and 13 in smooth Ham ashlar also with railings.

The Meeting House Arts Centre, East Street - former large Unitarian chapel with walled burial ground.

Good early C19 houses in East Street some elevated above street level 32-34 and 33-35.

57 East Street - Brick Dutch gable to front.

Good historic shopfronts at 28, 33 and especially 8, East Street.

North Street House and the attached range to the north with thatched no.19.

Former North Street School, walls and railings.

Scale height and building line

Two storey buildings some with attics generally set back from the street behind front gardens of varying depth, enclosed by walls/railings. Topography results in some buildings elevated well above the street on the north side and consequent sense of greater scale.

Significant listed buildings and groups

Summerods, 7 Station Road

A series of fine larger houses on the south side –

No.25, The Ridge, with low front wall and railings and double-curved side bays

No 29, The Hermitage, C17 mullions on west gable wall and C18 front

31, 33, 37 all grade 2.

Key unlisted buildings

Shrubbery Hotel - rebuilt for the Shepherds of Dowlish Ford Mills, c. 1900.

Three pairs of late C19 semi-detached villas on north side 10 -20 even numbers, two brick, one stone, upstanding above the street; a well detailed group.

Trees and green spaces

Green spaces are private garden areas, some extensive with substantial trees, typically behind the southern side houses. Significant trees that contribute to the street at corner of Summerlands Park Drive, Shrubbery Hotel, The Hermitage 29, larger trees between 31 and 33, and around Hazelwell House,36; prominent dark cypressus to side of 37.

Local features

Dutch type gabled side wings to front elevations of Regency houses.

Railings along road frontage.

Brick chimneys.

Typical details and Materials

Painted render (white/light colour) with stone window surrounds and details, Ham stone ashlar and near ashlar walling, window and door surrounds. Moolham and Ham rubble walling, red brick villas, slate and clay tile roofs, without dormers, white painted windows; metal railings

Key colour characteristics

Orange/browns of stone, light painted surfaces and red brick.

Views

The elevated land provides a series of views out to the southwest towards Herne Hill from gaps between the buildings and from the rear garden areas on the south side, rear of Shrubbery Hotel and from Summerlands Park Drive.

4. BUTTS, BAY HILL and TOWNSEND

Form and character

The eastern extremity of the Conservation Area. The Butts was enlarged to function as a link between Bay Hill and High Street for the route of the Exeter Road avoiding the Market Square in the mid C20 and much building to the north and south has taken place.

The north side of the street is characterised by steeply rising ground, high stone retaining walls and trees significantly placed high on the edge of the Conservation Area. The only building group is Butts Castle which forms a part square of 2 and 3 storey terrace houses set back high above road level behind retaining walls and gardens. On the south side an almost continuous frontage of C18,C19 and C20 houses. The gaps between them reveal far-reaching views to Pretwood Hill.

The 1970s Isle Court development was built within the Conservation Area, but is of insufficient quality to remain included.

Key colour characteristics

Orange/brown of stone, light painted surfaces, red brick.

Views

From many of the buildings and from the streets between buildings on south side, extensive views across Shudrick valley to Pretwood Hill
Defined view southwards to Shudrick valley from the Dillington Park drive between lodges.

5. DITTON STREET

Form and character

Immediately south of Market Place, Ditton Street forms a tight linear space with 3 storey buildings each side before scale reduces with smaller houses and the range of a former textile mill on the west side. This area extends no further than Ditton Lea at the junction with Shudrick Lane where the close urban character is lost.

The (proposed) detached area further south is also a less intensely urban street scene with the larger houses, gardens, the library and old school in an open lawn area and a short uniform terrace.

Buildings – Scale, height and building line

Ditton Street northern section is a tight space strongly enclosed by buildings arranged hard to the footways, variously 1, 2 and 3 storey with higher buildings nearer Cornhill. The (proposed) southern section is 2 storey scale with well-defined front boundaries following the line of the street, with short gardens to the buildings on the west side and the larger houses set well back on the other.

Significant listed buildings and groups

Vine Flats - 3 storey 5 bay Georgian painted brick with broken pediment doorcase.

Ditton Lea grade 2 – imposing late Georgian with double curve wings, walled front garden with railings.

In the (proposed) detached part of the C area a distinct group of good quality buildings including;

Olcote C19 stucco front gardens and railings.

Ditton House Regency grade 2 stone behind deep front garden with laurels, walls, railings, gates and gate piers.

The former reading room now library, school and school house with open walled lawn area and uniform terrace of houses on west side.

Key unlisted buildings

Frampton House, red brick and stone, former 3 storey collar works and single storey factory adjacent with saw-tooth roof 1930s.

Library - former Reading Room of 1889, by *James Hine* of Plymouth. Given by Shepherds of Dowlish Ford Mills. Single storey Ham with Bath? stone dressings, carving in gable to front, complete with piers, gates, wall and railing surround.

Victorian Board School and School House, Ham stone, tiled roof with chimneys, gables and half-hips. Grassed surround to enclosing wall and railing – a nice set piece.

43 Ditton Street – Ham ashlar, quoins and architraved windows. Railings to front garden area.

34-39 Ditton Street - C19 terrace of good architectural unity in stone with red brick, pent roof bays, ornate gables, front walls with railings.

Trees and green spaces

Gardens to Ditton Lea and in the proposed extension area, set back on east side and the lawned area of old school.

Local features

War memorial in the former school grounds.

Boundary walls with railings are a feature.

Trees and green spaces

Substantial tree cover is a feature at the top of New Road and in the grounds of Uplands forming a skyline feature and contributing the setting of the house and wider area below defensive.

Local features

Post Office Box set into stone wall adjacent to gate piers of Uplands.

Typical details and Materials

Moolham stone, red brick, cream brick as dressings, white render, clay tile and slate roofs brick chimney stacks.

Ornate crested ridge tiles, gables with carved detail or timbering effect.

Key colour characteristics

Orange/brown of stone, creams, white and brick red

Views

Glimpses southwards to countryside and southern hills

Vistas up stepping terraces of New Road and distinctive curving terrace of Hill View.

Suggested boundary changes

Several changes are recommended:-

1. Addition of area at New Road see description in Area 6 above
2. Addition of area in Ditton Street see Area 5 above
3. Exclusion of late C20 development at Isle Court
4. Addition of an area of trees, gardens and historic houses, including the listed former Toll house and 13 Bay Hill, at extreme east of the existing Conservation Area between Townsend and Bay Hill, included in Area 4
5. Addition of a length of the Dillington driveway and its prominent boundary tree belts included in Area 4.
6. Minor boundary adjustments to take account of changes made by recent development defensive

Maps Weaver's map 1780

1798 map ref EUS

1821

Tithe map 1838

Iminster Conservation Area

Key to proposed amendments Map 4

Key to map

1. Exclude 37A, Station Road - Modern house not of historic interest
2. Amendments to boundary of Conservation Area to follow physical boundary features
3. Add Uplands House – Good Victorian house in grounds. Substantial tree cover is a feature on New Road contributing to the setting of the house and area
4. Add Victorian terraces at New Road and Hill View Terrace – fine terraced houses with much original detail surviving forming a significant group.
5. Add Speke Court and Coachmans – C19th buildings of quality and local interest. Converted stables court and coachman's house formerly associated with now demolished Hazelwell House, Station Road.
6. Add three pairs of well-detailed late C19th semi-detached villas at 10 - 20 Station Road adding to the character of the street.
7. Add Edwardian villas at 7, 12 and 14 New Road, all good quality buildings retaining historic details and adding to the character of the street.
8. Amendments to boundary of Conservation Area to follow physical boundary features
9. Add length of former driveway to Dillington House of historic interest and contributing to setting of the listed lodges and gates. Also features substantial trees that form a part of the skyline behind the conservation area and remains of WW2 defences of historic interest.
10. Add area to include 2 listed houses 12 & 13 Bay Hill and unlisted thatched houses at 17 & 18 Townsend together with significant treescape at entrance to the town on A30 road.
11. Amendments to boundary of Conservation Area to follow physical boundary features
12. Exclude area of recent development Frog Lane
13. Exclude area of 1970s development at Isle Court not of historic or architectural interest
14. Add range of historic mill and other buildings and a high quality listed house, Ditton Lea, Ditton Street.
15. Add area at Ditton Street to include the library of 1889, listed Olcote House and Ditton House, the former school and teacher's house of 1877, terrace 34 - 40 and houses 41-43 Ditton Street
16. Amendments to boundary of Conservation Area to follow physical boundary features
17. Amendments to boundary of Conservation Area to follow physical boundary features