

CLEY CONSERVATION AREA: (Designated 6/12/74)
FORM AND CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

- 1.0** Cley-next-the-Sea lies on the north coast of the District in a position almost central to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty which covers virtually the whole north coast of Norfolk. The village is some 5 kilometres north-west of Holt and 10k west of Sheringham. The A149 coast road follows a tortuous route through the centre of the village before turning west towards Blakeney along the so called New Road. At this junction the High Street joins the Holt Road to complete a rough semi-circle on which the linear form of the village is based. The Conservation Area takes in almost all of the built-up parts of the village plus an area of land on the west side extending to the east bank of the River Glaven which meanders from north to south. To the north of the village a vast expanse of freshwater marshland lies between the coast road and the sea. Much of this land is owned by the Norfolk Wildlife Trust and is a world famous bird sanctuary.
- 1.1** To an unusual extent the form and character of the village is a consequence of its quite amazing history. Now largely dependent on tourism for its survival, it was once one of the most flourishing and prosperous ports in the country. From the 13th to the 18th century the then wide and tidal River Glaven enabled large ships from all over the world to discharge their cargoes here. However, natural accretion, combined with the erection of embankments by landowners, resulted in the gradual silting up of the Glaven estuary until any significant entry by ships was impossible. The Church which now seems remote was in fact once at the centre of the village, or town as it could then be more properly described. At this point roads from Holt, the largest inland settlement, and from Wiveton and Blakeney, which were also ports, converge and from here the view to the west, at present a peaceful stretch of grazing land with a narrow meandering stream, was dominated by wharves and warehouses with large ships discharging their cargoes. As the estuary silted up, so the centre of activity moved north towards the sea and in the latter part of Cley's life as a port, trade was conducted from the quay adjoining the windmill in the present village centre.
- 1.2** Approaching Cley from the east the first sighting of the village is a ribbon of houses on the inland side of the coast road overlooking the marshes. These are two storey houses with occasional dormers affording even more distant views out over the marshes and the sea beyond. The buildings are mixed both in age and style but achieve an overall vernacular effect with cobbles and brick, colourwash, and pantiles predominant. The houses are set well back from the edge of the road which allows an unmade access track to run along the top of the grass verge for much of its length. Unfortunately, part of the frontage at the eastern end, where the houses have substantial front gardens, is lined with lapped timber fencing panels which, when backed by coniferous shrubs, give an almost suburban feel.
- 1.3** Connecting up to the gable of the most westerly house is the massive cobbled frontage wall to Cley Old Hall which extends some 100 metres before the Hall itself is reached. Constructed in flint with red brick dressings and red pantiles the Old Hall is listed Grade II and dates from the late 16th/early 17th century. A short distance beyond the building the frontage wall returns into a wide entrance which gives access to an imposing range of barns and cowsheds set on either side of a wide track. These

two sets of farm buildings are listed Grade II and have been successfully converted to domestic use. Built in the early 18th century they are in flint with brick dressings and red clay pantiles. The access track between them continues eastwards to a newly built garage court and then connects up with an unmade lane which runs roughly parallel with the coast road. This lane, which ultimately joins the coast road, gives access to more cottages and larger houses which, set on the rising ground behind the coastal strip, often have panoramic views of the marshes and the sea over the top of the houses on the coast road itself. Dwellings in this group date from late Victorian to the present day but virtually all are in vernacular style and materials.

- 1.4** The High Street begins quite suddenly when approached from the east with the renowned windmill visible at once behind the houses on the seaward side. The street is narrow with buildings huddled close on either side. The houses are often high, up to three storeys with 2^{1/2} storeys commonplace, and frequently set hard up to the edge of the road. This gives an almost canyon-like effect with only narrow and intermittent footpaths almost all of which are in ancient cobbles. Progress through the street is hazardous both for vehicles and pedestrians with footpaths seeming to disappear at the most critical points. This is of course an intrinsic part of the charm and character of a street still resonant with its illustrious and colourful past. Building types are many and varied providing a veritable exhibition of vernacular architectural styles and details. Some of the houses are set back from the edge of the road but the strong enclosure of the frontage is maintained by waist high cobbled walls or by urban-style dwarf walls with cast iron railings. As well as the building types the materials cover almost the entire spectrum of the vernacular. Cobbles and red brick are predominant but mainly white colourwash on brick and cobbles or on flat render is also widely used. Some gault bricks are in evidence, notably on the old chapel, the superimposed front of Starr House and shop at the south end of the High Street and to Zetland House on the north-east edge. However the one universally used material is the pantile in red or black clay, reaffirming Cley's earlier close ties with the continent. Another all but universal feature is the vertical sliding sash window in Georgian and later styles. These, and the frequent narrow alleyways which punctuate the frontages, contribute to the strong feeling of verticality that pervades the street. The only open space, on the outside of the main bend, is used by the George & Dragon as a beer garden. However any views beyond the street are obscured by a screen hedge and other planting.
- 1.5** As its historical background would suggest, the village is rich in Listed Buildings which are broadly divisible into two groups. In the northern part of the High Street the first group includes the late 15th century Long House, and, on the opposite side, the 18th century White House, both rendered and colourwashed. Next door but one is The Custom House, a 17th century 3 storey building in red brickwork with a frontal parapet concealing the roof; the brick piers and iron railings to the frontage are listed separately. To the west two Listed Buildings adjoin each other, Mill Leet and The Gables, both 17th century. The latter was probably a warehouse converted to a house in the late 18th century. On the south side is the Manor House, formerly the Parsonage, built in the early 17th century rendered and colourwashed with black pantiles. Behind the frontage at this point is London House, another 17th century house in brick and flint. All the foregoing are listed Grade II but behind them on the seaward side fronting the all but deserted Quay is the Grade II* 18th century Cley Mill. Meticulously restored it now offers five storeys of holiday accommodation.

- 1.6** Turning to the group of listed buildings in the north-south part of the High Street, Flanders, earlier Glaven House, built in the late 18th century is on the west side and is in colourwashed brick and pantiles. Opposite is a terrace of three cottages also built in the late 18th century; known as Bank Cottages these are in colourwashed render and pantiles with gable parapets. Next door, to the south is Sunbeams, formerly the Fishmongers Arms, built in the early 18th century, it is in whitewashed brickwork and black glazed pantiles and has an imposing single storey front porch with a parapet and moulded cornice. Moving south, on the other side of the Chapel is Rocket House, a mid 18th century building, in brick colourwashed pink and black glazed pantiles. Joined on to Rocket House is Whalebone House formerly the Post Office. Built in the 18th century, its most distinctive feature is the inclusion of a pattern of vertebrae bones in its narrow facade which is otherwise in knapped flints with stone and brick dressings. Last in this group, still on the east side, is Starr House built at right angles to the street with an attached shop. The shop is 18th century but the house is a century older. The street elevation is in gault bricks and the shopfront is imposing with fluted pilasters and entablature. The facade is extended by having two descending horse-neck parapets. Buildings in this group are all listed Grade II as is the type K6 telephone kiosk by the Chapel.
- 1.7** A few sites in the High Street have been redeveloped over recent years and these have successfully maintained the character of the village. A pair of houses on the south side approaching the bend from the east have adopted the safe option of virtually replicating the houses adjoining them including a brickwork version of the ancient stone archway that gives access to the rear. However the overall effect is somewhat marred by the use of inappropriate front doors. Back towards the east, the old garage site has recently been redeveloped with housing. Sensitively designed and with much attention to detail this is a major enhancement.
- 1.8** Moving now to the south side of the junction with New Road, Holt Road picks up the linear pattern of the High Street and the character is maintained for a short distance on the west side though with smaller scale buildings. These terraces and single houses have been built tight up to each other with rear access through rather than between the buildings. Vertical sash windows and eaves varying in height are again distinctive features.
- 1.9** After almost 100 metres the buildings give way to a rather bedraggled hedgerow and grass verge with intermittent views of open grazing land beyond. On the other side of the road, which now has comparatively wide asphalt footpaths, there is a marked change in character with houses set well back from the road in a loose-knit almost suburban style. These houses vary in age but virtually all were built in the 20th century, however substantial sections of an historic cobbled wall are still in evidence along the frontage although wide vehicular accesses have shown it little respect. Town Yard, leading up to The Fairstead, reinstates some historic character with high cobbled flanking walls and buildings including a converted barn on the corner. Of the three remaining houses, two are probably late Victorian while on the south side is The Pightle, a Grade II listed building dating back to 1800 with an even earlier interior.

- 1.10** Development on the east side of the road continues southwards in an even more loose-knit fashion with most buildings set well back from the cobbled frontage wall. Durrant's Row is set at right angles to the road and includes some restored and extended 19th century 1^{1/2} storey vernacular cottages in cobble and brick. Much of the rest is post-war and includes a row of Council houses inevitably set back behind a frontal service road. There follows what appears to be a green gap of almost 100 metres, however more than half of this is the site of a large bungalow set so far back as not to register as part of the developed frontage. On the southern edge is a barn converted to a 1^{1/2} storey cottage followed by a restored early 18th century cottage set with its gable almost up the road edge. This is part of a group comprising Green Farm whose main impact is created by a massive cobbled wall. Listed Grade II this wall extends along three boundaries of the farmhouse site and is three metres high rising to four metres where it abuts the gable of a frontage barn. This wall is attached to the farmhouse which dates back to the 17th century and is in coursed cobbles with red brick dressings. The farmhouse faces north and overlooks a farmyard which is enclosed by barns, one, to the east, is listed Grade II and is of similar age to the farmhouse. On the northern side the barns have been carefully converted to domestic use.
- 1.11** The centre of the old village overlooks the large triangular Cley Green and across grazing land to Wiveton. It is now comprised of the Three Swallows public house and some adjoining houses, all possibly early 19th century variously in cobbles, brick and colourwash. Set on higher ground immediately behind this group is the magnificent Church. Clearly visible from Wiveton and beyond the Church of St Margaret is listed Grade I. Its ornate clerestory and ruined transepts are indicative of the period of high prosperity when it was built in the 14th and 15th centuries.
- 1.12** The Conservation Area extends to the south side of the Green where it takes in a group of historic vernacular buildings with cobbled walls. Unfortunately this group has been marred by the insertion of two incongruous post-war bungalows. Immediately south of the Church there is a grassed open space for recreational purposes incorporating a garden of remembrance. From this point the Holt Road continues eastwards up the hill with a ribbon of mainly historic buildings on the north side and some modern additions at either end. This area is known as Newgate and its principal constituent is Newgate Farm whose house and barns flank the road for almost half of its built-up length. Newgate Farm House with its gable hard up to the edge of the highway is listed Grade II and dates from 1685. It is in coursed flint and brick dressing with a rendered and colourwashed front. Barns are also hard up to the road edge to give an almost continuous cobbled frontage following on from the frontage wall of the house. At one point an opening between barns gives access to the farmyard at the rear of which is another 18th century barn listed Grade II. These barns are at present deserted and are fast becoming derelict. Various cottages, perhaps early 19th century, complete the vernacular frontage including a fine house, possibly once of listable quality, whose facade has been disastrously altered. The Holt Road at this point is quite narrow with a fluctuating grass verge on the north side and a steep grass bank and hedgerow to the south.
- 1.13** The Fairstead runs parallel with the north to south sections of the High Street and the Holt Road and is approached from Town Yard or from Church Lane. It is at higher

level than the High Street and, as there is no vehicular way through, it is largely free from traffic. The road is roughly surfaced for most of its length and has grass verges or margins of varying widths. Several alleyways or lokes lead down from the Fairstead to give pedestrian access to the High Street and Holt Road. Although extremely narrow they also give access to a number of cottages sited close up to their sides. They are mainly surfaced with patterned blue paving bricks and frequently have high cobbled walls on either side. Cobbled walls are also a feature of the Fairstead itself particularly at the east end where in places they are up to three metres high. Unfortunately these have been treated in cavalier fashion in the past and sections have been demolished and lowered to provide access to new houses. However the Fairstead retains an atmosphere of tranquillity and repose and many of the buildings have much historic charm and character. At its southern end, which begins with a quite recent vernacular style Village Hall, it is at its most attractive with two listed buildings, the Cottage and Fairstead House, both 18th century, set around a small triangular island of grass. In summer this is an area of delightful leafy seclusion. On the east side towards its northern end is the entrance to Cley Hall; invisible behind head high cobbled walls and dense trees it is listed Grade II and was built in 1770 in red brick and black pantiles. Further to the north the track surface changes to gravel and divides into passageways which become almost labyrinthine before emerging at various points on the High Street. The Victorian County Primary School, which is completely concealed from view from elsewhere, is also accessible from here.

- 1.14** Church Lane is a continuation of the Fairstead running from the Village Hall down to the Holt Road. The northern section is built up in a loose-knit way and at one point has a ribbon of post-war development on either side of the lane. The southern section has a far more rural feel with allotments and open countryside to the east. On the west is The Knoll, a Grade II listed building dating from about 1800 it is in cobbles, gault bricks and has a slate roof. From this point a very low cobbled wall continues down to the junction giving open views of the Churchyard and the recreation area fronting the Holt Road.
- 1.15** The only trees making a significant contribution to the setting of Cley are found on the higher ground behind the coastal strip. Here dense trees behind the houses on the coast road and in the grounds of Cley Hall and the Fairstead provide a most important green backdrop to the village, particularly when viewed from the seaward side.

(Approved by Development and Conservation Committee 21/5/98)