

CROMER CONSERVATION AREA: (Designated 17/1/75 Revised 11/2/93)
FORM AND CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1** Cromer is a seaside town located midway along the North Norfolk coast on cliffs overlooking the North Sea. It is some 25 miles north of Norwich on the A140, and some 10 miles north-west of North Walsham on the A149. The main area of development focuses on the seafront but a wide belt of development stretches away to the south-east towards Overstrand. As Cromer has developed as a town it has become a popular summer holiday resort with tourism now being the town's main industry.
- 1.2** The original Conservation Area (CA) was designated in January 1975 and was drawn tightly round the historic centre and the late Georgian houses overlooking the Esplanade. This central block, bounded by Prince of Wales Road to the west, The Gangway to the east and Loudon Road to the south, stretched south-west to include the wedge of late 19th Century residential development between Cadogan Road and Meadow Road. It also included the area of open space known as The Meadow terminated at the most southerly point by the belt of trees that are part of East Wood and the grounds of Cromer Hall; and the adjacent residential area around Colne House and The Croft.
- 1.3** The revised CA was designated in February 1993 and included the areas of tight knit Victorian housing to the south-east as well as the well spaced development along Norwich Road and Cliff Avenue. The Victorian terracing to the north-east was also included with the boundary being drawn along MacDonald Road. Cromer Station, the area surrounding it and the Police station were also included in this revision.
- 1.4** The revised CA consists of a number of smaller identity areas, each with its own distinctive form and character. The sense of place associated with each area is derived from the relationship between buildings and other elements in the street scene such as boundary walls, railings and trees. Together they create a series of spaces within which certain characteristic activities take place.
- 1.5** The most general distinctions are between the tightly knit town centre, the open cliff tops on either side and the two large areas of late Victorian housing to the west and the south-east, separated by The Meadow.

2.0 HISTORICAL GROWTH.

2:1 Medieval.

The original fishing village, established by Danish settlers in the 9th century, was called Shipden, a name probably derived from the sheep grazing on the surrounding hills of the Cromer Ridge. It grew up at a point where a stream cut through the receding cliff line giving access to the shore (where The Gangway today slopes down to the beach). This represented the only opportunity for ships to embark from Blakeney round to Yarmouth.

- 2.2 Although there was no mention of Cromer in the Domesday Book, the name gradually became associated with the place in various medieval documents as 'Cromer alias Shipden. Trade with the Baltic and the Icelandic whaling industry brought increased prosperity in return for agricultural products so that in 1285 Shipden was granted the right to hold a weekly market and an annual fair.
- 2.3 Taxes were raised to build the first of a series of wooden jetties, remains of which can still be seen at low tide near the pier. They not only provided a safe haven for ships but by acting as a groyne they afforded a measure of protection against erosion. As sea defences these jetties were however only partially successful in reducing the rate of erosion. and by the end of the 15th century the church of Shipden-Juxta-Mare together with nearby cottages, had already toppled over the cliff.
- 2.4 The settlement gradually regrouped inland around the remaining church of Shipden-Juxta-Felbrigg. Rebuilt on a grand scale in the Perpendicular style it remains today the centrepiece of the town with the tallest medieval tower in the County. Despite the continued threat of erosion and several disastrous fires, Cromer continued to consolidate its position so that by 1565 no less than 117 dwellings were recorded as part of a survey of Norfolk Ports.
- 2.5 Before Cromer's transformation into a fashionable late Georgian resort, most of the fishermen's cottages that huddled around the church or clung to the cliff were built with flint cobbles from the beach and locally made orange clay pantiles. The town's character owed much to the widespread use of these two materials, a character much like that of Wells today, with cottages, outbuildings and boundary walls all built of rounded cobbles.
- 2.6 **Georgian.**
During the late 18th century the fashion among the gentry for health cures, including the drinking of mineral water at inland spa towns, was replaced by the restorative effects of a dip in the ocean. With the added impetus of royal patronage at Brighton, sea bathing soon became popular and places like Cromer began to exploit their natural advantage.
- 2.7 The first tourist guide, Bartell's "Cromer Considered as a Watering Place" was published in 1800. At the time Cromer was still little more than a fishing village with a few streets around its large, decaying church, but local families took the opportunity to supplement their income from fishing by providing lodgings or hiring out bathing machines, and the transformation of Cromer into elegant resort began to gather momentum.
- 2.8 Humble brick and cobble cottages were either rebuilt or acquired a smart new stucco facade. The New Inn was rebuilt as a large new coaching establishment by George Tucker in the street that still bears his name. By the early 19th century the town's population had doubled to 1200. There were at least 70 lodgings, boarding houses and hotels to cater for the influx of visitors. Many cliff top sites were developed with private residents including Hastings House for Lord Hastings of Melton Constable Hall and Marine Villa for Lord Suffield of Gunton Hall overlooking the jetty, that soon after became the first Hotel de Paris. The Crescent on East Cliff went up in 1823 and Brunswick House still survives unaltered as a beautiful example of late Georgian architectural taste.
- 2.9 Yellow brick was chosen as a more distinctive material for a few of the more imposing late Georgian houses; the two in Tucker Street and most impressively The Crescent on East

Cliff being prime examples. Red brick facades are equally uncommon but survive on some smaller cottages and town houses in less prominent positions.

2.10 Victorian.

Following several damaging storms the first sea wall was constructed by Act of Parliament in 1845 which, together with a new wooden jetty, provided an attractive promenade for Victorian gentfolk. New hotels continued to extend along the clifftop in the late 19th century but it was not until the arrival of the railway from North Walsham in 1877 that the town experienced its most dramatic and wide-reaching transformation.

2.11 Until then Cromer had been accessible only to a relatively small group of wealthy people who could afford to travel by the Norwich coach, but with the construction of Cromer High Station as the terminus for the East Norfolk Railway, large numbers of visitors were able to take excursions from London via Norwich. Situated on the western outskirts, the station enabled Lord Suffield to release large parcels of land for development. Ten years later a 'loop' was extended to Cromer Beach station with a link through to Sheringham that opened the town up to summer visitors from the Midlands.

2.12 From 1890 the growth in passenger traffic and accommodation went hand in hand. The first big sale of land offered 72 plots on a grid iron layout of residential streets to the west of the town. The other main direction of growth was to the south east with more regular streets of terraced houses and detached villas along Cliff Avenue.

2.13 Following a series of disastrous storms, the present cast iron pier was commissioned in 1900 complete with domed kiosks at the entrance and the Pavilion at the far end. This bold move strengthened Cromer's position as an Edwardian seaside resort and with the development of the golf course and the Links Hotel to the east of the town, Cromer's continuing success as a fashionable resort was secure. For the first time there was sufficient wealth available to finance extensive repairs to the parish church. The tower and nave were restored in 1885 and the chancel rebuilt soon after.

2.14 The changing character of Cromer did not meet with universal approval. One critic described the town at the turn of the century thus:

"Cromer, when you get into it, wears the red brick badge of modern seaside prosperity. Not only on the (West) Cliff and on the surrounding hillsides, but throughout the town, you come upon the well meant mistakes of modern architecture...Altogether the evidence of Cromer's wealth and good fortune is almost aggressive."

2.15 The dramatic growth of Cromer in the late 19th century was due entirely to the coming of the railway. Not only was the town suddenly accessible to large numbers of visitors but cheap, mass produced materials could be brought in from London and the Midlands to supply the massive building boom. The historic core with its attractive mixture of traditional materials became encroached upon and surrounded by whole new streets of terraced houses. The cliff tops became lined with large ostentatious hotels. The town soon took on a red brick uniformity enlivened during the Edwardian period by an increasing use of mock Tudor timbering, compounded by a roofscape of machine cut pantiles, corrugated pantiles or slate.

- 2.16** Cromer has acquired an increasingly diverse mixture of architectural styles and building materials as it has grown from fishing village into popular resort. Many flint cottages acquired smart new stucco facades. This was not only an expression of the latest architectural fashion. Indeed amongst the narrow streets, particularly Jetty Street, High Street and Chapel Street, the bright smooth surfaces help to reflect the natural light.
- 2.17** Due to the combined effect of stucco and Victorian redevelopment, the distribution of cobble construction is today much less evident, restricted to the few surviving fishermen's cottages near the church and in Surrey Street, occasional outbuildings, and the gable ends of refronted cottages in Loudon Road. Flint continued to be used by the Victorians but in new forms to achieve distinctive effects, notably the closely packed pebble surfaces of North Lodge in conjunction with yellow brick dressings and the more elaborate facade of No. 8 Church Street which has grey brick dressings. The late 19th century cobble faced retaining walk below Jetty Cliff and The Gangway represent a return to a more functional use of the material.
- 2.18** Black glazed pantiles and yellow brick were still preferred on a few of the larger commercial buildings, notably the Red Lion Hotel in Tucker Street, but local builders and architects strove to produce increasingly elaborate designs using a wide range of moulded brick details, terracotta panels and an assortment of non-local materials.
- 2.19** Roof materials, being less visible, have always been used in a less decorative way and with a more restrictive range available. Builders continued to use orange clay pantiles throughout the 19th century on vernacular flint cottages and new stucco houses alike. The few exceptions are again on some of the more prominent late Georgian buildings where more expensive and more fashionable black glazed pantiles were first used, occasionally in association with flint or yellow brick (Peels House in Tucker Street) but more often on stucco buildings (The Wellington Public House at the corner of New St. and Garden St. and Victoria House on the cliff top at the end of Jetty St.) Before Cromer became connected by rail to Norwich, Welsh slate proved expensive to transport overland or by sea and its use was restricted to the most prestigious buildings, notably The Crescent in combination with yellow brick, and North Lodge.

3.0 FORM AND CHARACTER.

LANDSCAPE AREAS

3.1 West Cliff.

From the pier the skyline is still dominated by the bold outlines of The Cliftonville and the old Metropole, a mixture of French chateau and Scottish baronial styles. But the redevelopment of Skipper's Grand Hotel and several other key sites with austere blocks of flats have reduced the once impressive range of late Victorian hotels to a ragged mixture of old and new. The familiar sequence of boating lake, putting green and bowls green above the esplanade and the view downhill to Cromer's church tower beyond a garage at the corner of Prince of Wales Road are further reminders of the town's adjustment to the role of popular resort in the late 20th century.

3.2 North Lodge Park.

Separated from East Cliff by a deep gully known as The Gangway, this scatter of late Georgian villas still retains much of its character even though they are no longer exclusively residential. This is due largely to the way in which the pressure for new infill development has been successfully resisted (Watch House and North Lodge are both listed), and the way the bowls and putting greens sit comfortably within the flint walls and Beech hedges of the original garden layout.

3.3 From North Lodge the views are dramatic across to the elegant Georgian terraces perched on the top of East Cliff and beyond to the tall, perpendicular tower of the parish church; or above the cluster of fishing boats drawn up on the beach to the pavilion at the end of Cromer's Edwardian pier.

3.4 **The Meadow.**

From Felbrigg the lane plunges down through the wooded slopes of the Cromer Ridge and the Cromer Hall estate. This is the best way to approach the town. Emerging from East Wood with a lodge cottage hard against the road, the view opens out across The Meadow to embrace the red pantile rooftops of the town centre and a skyline dominated by the church tower. This gently shelving open space narrows northwards and becomes a car park overlooked on one side by Edwardian houses along Meadow Road and on the other by a pair of attractive early 19th century cottages. This important wedge of open space coming to the very edge of the town centre has had the effect of deflecting residential development either side. The row of houses in The Croft break the skyline along the eastern edge of The Meadow.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

3.5 **To the West.**

This large area of late Victorian housing was laid out on a grid iron pattern with short straight roads running back from the sea front and intersected at right angles by longer spine roads. At the western end the development ends abruptly in MacDonald Road where terraces give way to inter-war houses. Along the southern edge of the CA a long row of railway workers' cottages in Central Road now overlook a new supermarket.

3.6 Elsewhere the terraces are predominantly 3 and 4 storey; small hotels, guest houses and private residences abound in a mixture of styles, some exuberant, culminating in baronial towers and some with spires on several street corners. Others compose sombre red brick rows of properties with heavy bay windows, with the streets unrelieved by any planting.

3.7 The best place to appreciate this area is in Cabbell Road where Cadogan Road runs away downhill towards the town centre. From here there is an impressive view of the church tower. Cabbell Road remains the most complete residential street with rows of elaborately detailed 'neo-Tudor-cum-Bavarian style' houses displaying a range of brightly painted wooden features such as first floor balconies slung between bay windows and carried on shaped columns, rising to elaborately half-timbered upper stories and finishing with a series of flat-roofed dormers. Further along the style changes to heavily ornate Jacobean in harsh red brick, enlivened by decorative terracotta panels and terminated at the sea front by a grander, white painted building, its heavy portico approached up a short flight of steps.

- 3.8** The overall character of this area is derived not only from the few repeated styles of domestic architecture but from the slight changes in slope and road alignment. Canada Road assumes a curving alignment as it slopes downhill towards the town centre and Holt Road runs diagonally in from the south west.
- 3.9** The redevelopment of several corner sites with large, single span warehouse buildings, crude flat roofed blocks of flats and public car parks, notably along Beach Road, is encroaching on the character of this Victorian residential area and does not contribute positively to the seafront at this location.
- 3.10 To the South.**
The area divides quite simply along the line of the main A149 approach road into two distinct residential areas. Along the main road and Cliff Avenue which runs parallel with it, the character is discreetly Edwardian. Substantial detached houses in their own mature gardens line either side of Cliff Avenue, a mixture of the most exclusive guest houses, small hotels and nursing homes as well as private residences. The style here is distinctively garden suburb with large gabled plain tile roofs and white rendered facades with a range of decorative features such as balconies, bay windows and belvederes, designed to take full advantage of the sea views. The southern entrance to Cliff Avenue is marked on either side by identical Skipper designs each with an octagonal tower and steep conical spire, whereas Cliff Avenue remains a quiet Edwardian Street. Some of the character of the main road, particularly on the east side, has been spoilt by later infill development which pays little respect to the quality of the Victorian and Edwardian villas to be found along this road.
- 3.11** To the west of the A149 a large block of late Victorian housing stretches south from Mount Street to St Mary's Road. The residential character and mixture of architectural styles here has much in common with the area to the west of the town centre although there are fewer guest houses. Large brightly painted bay windows overhang the pavements in Mount Street with short streets running off at right angles down to the church or in the opposite direction alongside the group of Board Schools (1895 and now empty) to where there are rather more working class Victorian terraces in Cross Street.
- 3.12 Colne House.**
Climbing gently uphill from Loudon Road and hidden behind the 1960's telephone exchange, is some of the best new residential development in Cromer. Much of the area was originally part of the grounds of Colne House, a large late Georgian building with later extensions and an impressive cobbled garden wall running along The Loke. It remains the focal point of the development but is now overshadowed by Richmond Court Gardens, an expensive development of apartments and retirement flats which fails to blend with the scale of the development around it. The new design like Home Colne House at the corner of Loudon Road and The Loke, is a successful interpretation of Cromer's late Victorian hotel architecture in terms of scale, massing and materials.
- 3.13** At the same time a number of smaller, new houses have been set down in the gardens behind Croft Cottage. The attention to detail (one has a well proportioned Dutch gable), the use of traditional materials, retention of mature trees and intelligent siting, demonstrate how infill development can be achieved in a sensitive location without overcrowding. This loose knit and informal residential area has been enhanced by a variety of good new designs, a successful blend of old and new, large and small scale, held together by a mature mix of Beech, Sycamore and Evergreen Oak trees.

THE TOWN CENTRE.

3.14 Bounded by The Gangway, Church Street and Garden Street, the character of Cromer's historic town centre changes abruptly from a network of wide parallel streets lined with Victorian brick terraces to a more irregular pattern of narrow medieval lanes converging on the cliff top and defined by a mixture of colourwashed Georgian buildings and taller Victorian hotels. But even here more recent commercial redevelopment has encroached upon the immediate setting of the church, exiling what is left of the old town's character to a few streets and lanes immediately behind the Hotel de Paris and Red Lion Hotel.

3.15 The Church.

Cromer's grand medieval church with its rows of tall, perpendicular nave windows, occupies the very heart of the town centre. Its high, buttressed and pinnacled tower soaring above the roof tops, is visible for miles around and is a huge presence terminating views in every direction along the main approach roads. The building itself is faced in knapped flint. The headstones clustered around the slender stone column of the war memorial in the south east corner of the churchyard form an attractive group, but elsewhere they have been cleared away leaving a few tombstones among grass edged flower beds. With its network of tarmac paths and low boundary wall, the churchyard wears a municipal face, a face reflecting the character of buildings opposite it. A row of fishermen's cottages along the eastern boundary fails to create a sense of enclosure.

3.16 The best approach to the church is along Church Street from the east, tightly defined by tall Victorian buildings on one side, smaller Georgian shops and the terracotta Chapel on the other side. The view ahead opens out dramatically to the Church tower. From the other direction the street is lined on both sides by some 1960's shops, and, opposite the church, more uniform Victorian buildings interspersed with modern shop fronts. Two late Georgian buildings gutted on the ground floor to accommodate a supermarket appear on the High Street. The bank at the corner of Tucker Street and Jetty Street is the one surviving traditional building left overlooking the church. Immediately beyond is the black glazed pantiled roof of De Vere Court.

3.17 Jetty Cliff.

From the churchyard the space narrows dramatically, squeezed as it is either side of a tall, bow fronted corner building. The domes of the Hotel de Paris rise behind it. Jetty Street is straight and narrow, overhung with bay windows and with a view out to sea, while High Street curves passed a beautiful late Georgian shopfront and the King's Head's staggered building line. The junction with Garden Street and New Street is marked by domed corner towers and the half timbered facade of the Wellington Hotel. New Street itself is severe, with the tall rear ends of hotels lining West Cliff on one side and amusement arcades on the other. Views along it are again dominated by the Hotel de Paris's eccentric roofline.

3.18 Turning the corner, Skipper's extravagant brick and terracotta design dominates Jetty Cliff commanding an unrivalled view out over the pier complete with rebuilt kiosks and terminated by the low slung dome of its pavilion theatre. These two unique buildings dramatically juxtaposed, remain symbolic of Cromer's rise to elegant Victorian resort.

3.19 East Cliff.

Between the churchyard and the Gangway is a second area of narrow streets lined by a mixture of tall, Victorian/Edwardian hotels and small cobble cottages. On arrival at the seafront there are breathtaking views of the sea, the Pier, and back towards the stately terraces of late Georgian houses which face the sea. Tucker Street ends abruptly in front of the Red Lion Hotel and from here the cliff top path follows round in front of The Crescent, its white balcony projecting out from yellow brick work as it turns the corner in a gentle curve, suspended as it is above The Gangway and in front of an alternating rhythm of angular Victorian and elliptical Georgian bow fronted facades.

3.20 The Esplanade.

The esplanade and the approaches to it have a character of their own. There are panoramic views and a combination of distinctive surface finish and Victorian street furniture which emphasise the 19th Century aura of the location. From Church Street the Gangway slopes steeply downhill, its original Victorian surface of granite setts and kerb stones complemented by cast iron street lamps and repro railings. From the foreshore the esplanade runs along the foot of the Cliffs, a spacious walkway elevated above the beach and contained by a rim of concrete sea wall. The bold semi-circular projections at intervals along the Esplanade and buttressing of the pier entrance have a smooth, sculptural shape unintentionally repeating the curved domes of the kiosks and hotels above. A series of paths zig zagging down the cobble faced Jetty Cliff, complete with cast iron railings, give access to the pier. Below the Red Lion Hotel the steps are still finished with their original Staffordshire blue pavers.

4.0 LISTED BUILDINGS.

4.1 There are two main concentrations, a cluster of late Georgian houses and hotels around George Skipper's Hotel de Paris and the group between East Cliff and the church. Elsewhere there is a scattering along Overstrand Road, Holt Road and in Chapel Street. Notable examples of late Georgian architecture include Brunswick House and The Crescent on East Cliff together with Home House in the High Street. The most impressive survivals of late Victorian design, in addition to the Hotel de Paris include the Town Hall (also by Skipper) and the pier.

4.2 Although there are significantly fewer listed buildings in Cromer than towns such as Fakenham or North Walsham (c. 100 each) this reflects the fact that Cromer was never an important market town and only grew significantly as a resort in the late 19th century. Apart from the church there are no buildings earlier than c. 1800 and many more Victorian/Edwardian buildings that are not of listable quality.

5.0 CONCLUSION.

5.1 The original boundary of the CA was drawn tightly around this core seemingly to provide recognition of the diverse nature of the architecture and materials, but in the 1993 this area was expanded to include examples of the late 19th Century growth boom architecture, as

well as some important open spaces such as The Meadow. The enlarged Conservation Area illustrates the different identity areas that are contained within this area, each with its own form and character. This in turn demonstrates the evolution of Cromer from fishing village to the form and character which is evident today.

- 5.2** In the Historic core of Cromer, its dominating church, originating as it does from the medieval fishing village, provided the perfect focal point for the growth of Cromer as a Victorian coastal resort. This growth is illustrated by the period terraces radiating away to the south-east and north-west. The recently renovated station house leaves a reminder that the railway was the catalyst behind this boom. The town seems almost to have a uniform feel to it due to the rapid growth in the late 18th Century and early 19th Century when cheaper mass produced materials from London and the Midlands became available thereby creating a red brick uniformity. Cromer contains some impressive vistas, particularly along the seafront, where the richness of Cromer's Victorian and Edwardian architectural heritage can be fully appreciated. Here the church, Hotel de Paris and Red Lion Hotel jostle for attention amidst the period terraces, although the church tower invariably prevails, as it does from most directions.

(Approved by Development and Conservation Committee 5/11/98)