

**STIFFKEY CONSERVATION AREA:**  
**FORM AND CHARACTER DESCRIPTION**

**(Designated 17/1/75)**

- 1.0** Stiffkey lies in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty on the north coast of the District roughly 4 1/2 kilometres east of Wells-next-the-Sea. The village straddles the coast road and is set behind the coastal strip here comprised of Stiffkey salt Marshes and Stiffkey Greens. The main street, or Church Street, runs roughly parallel with the River Stiffkey and has been cut into the northern slope of the river valley. The river at this point flows from west to east before turning north towards the sea approximately 1 1/2 kilometres east of the village. Stiffkey is a linear settlement although Bridge Street, which joins Church Street from the south roughly half way along its length, makes a strong contribution to the form and character of the village.
- 1.1** The Conservation Area embraces all of the old village stopping short of the more recent development on its eastern edge but taking in a considerable swathe of land to the north, where it includes the grounds of the Old Rectory and Warborough House, and to the south where it takes in Stiffkey Old Hall, Bridge Street and land on the southern slope of the river valley which although invisible from much of Church Street, provides an idyllic setting for the Conservation Area.
- 1.2** When approached from the east the village begins inauspiciously with Camping Hill Council estate on the north side of the road and some relatively modern housing to the south. The Conservation Area begins with Stiffkey Old Rectory to the north and the School House to the south. The former is listed Grade II\* dating back to the early 18th century. It is in cobbles with gault brick dressings and has recently been meticulously restored together with its barns, outbuildings and walls but the head high cobbled frontage wall almost hides it from view. The school was built in 1912 in vernacular style with cobbled walls and red brick dressings and decorative diaper work. In front of the school is a small grassed island on which the village sign and a wooden seat is located. Access on either side of the island leads down to the Church which is set on lower ground some way back from the road. The Church of St John the Baptist is in mainly perpendicular style and dates from the late 13th or early 14th century. Set behind the Church and further down the side of the river valley is Stiffkey Old Hall. Listed Grade II\* it was built in 1576 in flint with brick and stone dressings and has quite recently been restored. Also listed in their own right are walls and terraces in the gardens.
- 1.3** As Church Street swings round and down towards the centre of the village it becomes narrower and the frontage walls to the Old Rectory become higher behind a banked grass verge. With the boundary wall to the Old Hall opposite this sets the pattern for the rest of the street - a narrow carriageway almost entirely without footpaths flanked by cobbled walls or buildings set up to its edge. Difficult to negotiate by pedestrians as well as vehicles, it is at once the bane of the Highway Authority and the delight of the conservationist.
- 1.4** Continuing west along Church Street the serpentine nature of the road allows only comparatively short vistas. Opposite the entrance to the Old Hall with its shoulder high frontage wall are the first cottages in the street. A terrace of four in vernacular style built early this century is set back from the edge of the road to allow short front gardens, but because of the rapid rise in ground level the gardens are supported by a head high brick and flint wall. This wall continues along the frontage to the village hall which was built quite recently, unfortunately in colourwashed blockwork and concrete pantiles, however the

overall effect is not intrusive. Adjoining the village hall on the north side is the war memorial from which point the enclosure of the street is maintained by a dense hedge set on a steep bank. Beyond this the frontage has been opened up to allow easy access to an attractive pair of mid 19th century cottages, now in one ownership, set gable on to the road and to a workshop of similar date.

- 1.5** West of the Old Hall entrance on the south side are cottages presenting almost blank cobbled facades hard up to the edge of the road and linked by a head high cobbled walls. One of these linking walls is listed Grade II and joins up with a short terrace of listed cottages. These have a colourwashed brick front with Yorkshire casements to the first floor. Adjoining these, and also listed Grade II, is a short row of single storey buildings. Originally shops, these are now in single domestic ownership. At this point Bridge Street joins Church Street from the south. Immediately opposite the junction, on the north side of Church Street is a prominent 18th century cottage, listed Grade II\*, with a western element dating from the 17th century. It is built in cobbles with brick dressings, some of which indicate blocked door openings on the facade. The building is so sited that its corner projects making this the narrowest point in the entire street. Attached to the western gable of the cottage is the frontage wall to the grounds of Warborough House. Having gault brick piers and coping with pebble infill this wall is listed Grade II and continues for approximately 100 metres.
- 1.6** Opposite the Warborough House frontage wall, and set well back from the road, is Great Yard House, a Grade II listed building dating from the 16th Century. Attached to its east gable is a comparatively modern cottage in vernacular style but with an attractive non-vernacular porch. The frontage wall to Great Yard House maintains the enclosure of the street before connecting up to the gable of an outbuilding on the highway edge. This in turn connects up with another listed building, an 18th century barn in brick and flint with a steeply pitched red pantile roof and gable parapets. This is followed by an access to an impressive group of barns, one of which at the rear of the group, is listed Grade II and another, on the frontage, has been converted for use as a village store and Post Office, whilst still maintaining a blank cobbled elevation to the street. Beyond this point the street, although still clearly defined, suffers a partial loss of its tight sense of enclosure. Several vehicular accesses have been formed resulting in sections of frontage walls being demolished or lowered. The frontage next to the Post Office is probably the worst affected. Here the wall has been almost completely demolished and replaced by some quite inappropriate railings; this exposes to view rather unsightly garages but also an attractively modernised cottage. This is known as Warborough Yard. Immediately adjoining this to the west is a pair of 18th century listed cottages set gable on to the road and stepped down the slope towards the river. Facing these across a yard is another listed house in whitewashed render and red pantiles. Here too the frontage wall has been modified and reduced in height giving a full view of the buildings including a more recent house further down the slope.
- 1.7** Returning to the north side of the street, the listed frontage wall reaches the splayed entrance to Warborough House opposite Warborough Yard. Warborough House is set back 80 metres or so from the road and is listed Grade II. It was built in the early 19th century in neo-classical style using gault facing bricks and a slate roof. At the end of the wall, set on rising ground, are more listed cottages. Built in the early 18th century they are gable on to the road in flint and red brick. They have some unusually wide monopitch dormers and gabled wooden porches. To the west the Victorian Chapel is in red brick with a slate roof and is now being used for the sale of antiques. Adjoining the chapel an unsurfaced track

leads off to the north on the corner of which is an historic red telephone kiosk. Beyond this point on the north side the character of the street changes briefly with three sizeable houses set back from the road behind a high hedge. The first of these to the east is an attractive historic house, though unlisted, part of which is now an antique shop. This is largely concealed from view by various trees and shrubs and its cobbled frontage wall has been realigned to allow a narrow footpath for the length of the frontage. The other two houses are comparatively modern but are well screened and unobtrusive. Moving further west on the north side the street reverts momentarily to its earlier tight enclosure with a 19th century house in brick and cobbles set with its front hard up to the edge of the highway. Continuing west, there is a considerable gap fronted by a medium height cobbled wall affording views of the gardens of a terrace of houses, again set gable on to the road. The houses, although built in vernacular materials, have high eaves and small panels of flintwork which make for a somewhat alien appearance. Beyond the terrace is an even wider gap with a rather dilapidated medium height wall fronting part of some grazing land to the north. Following this gap, and again gable on to the road, is an historic cottage with a second cottage forming an L-shape to the rear. Unfortunately the first cottage has been somewhat marred by the addition of two dormers; one of these is vastly over-sized and both have gables in contrast to what appears to be an original monopitch dormer. To the west the frontage again suffers from a widened vehicular access but the line is maintained by the gable and wing walls to an outbuilding before the Public House is reached. The Red Lion has recently been restored successfully retaining all of its original rural character. Whitewashed with a tarred plinth it has three simple monopitch dormers with vertical sliding sash windows to the ground floor. Beyond the pub and its access to a rear car park is a recent terrace of cottages. Set back behind a low cobbled frontage wall they are a good example of vernacular proportions and detailing. The only remaining building within the conservation area boundary on the north side of the road is a small single storey cottage in brick and flint but with a corrugated iron roof. It is set on high ground supported by a shoulder high frontage wall.

**1.8** Returning to the south side of the street at a point opposite the antique shop, two bungalows, built approximately twenty years ago, are sited in L-shaped form with the first having its gable hard up to the frontage and the second having a paved forecourt. Low walls define the frontage until the next building to the west is reached. This is a long narrow historic cottage in whitewashed cobbles with a very low eaves line fronting the road. Next, lining a gentle bend in the road, are some more recent one and a half and single storey dwellings. These are grouped around two forecourts with low frontage walls. The over large dormers and low eaves to the one and a half storey buildings combined with the paved forecourts and footpath to the frontage prevent this development from fully reflecting the character of Stiffkey. The final building on the south side of the street is a tiny cottage of considerable charm and character set slightly back from the street and at a lower level. A narrow strip of land on the bank of the river provides a public open space as the Conservation Area ends.

**1.9** Bridge Street is initially much wider than Church Street and on the east side the old wall, rather more than a metre high, has been tarred for a short distance before giving way to a new wall in matching height and style which has been built to flank the access into a yard. Behind the wall is a quite recent vernacular style one and a half storey cottage which fits admirably into its setting and relates well to buildings on both Bridge Street and Church Street. On the south side of the yard a terrace of three listed cottages in brick and flint date back to the 16th century. On the opposite side of the street a single storey building, originally relating to Great Yard House, provides a cobbled frontage wall almost as far as the bridge. On the east side, the frontage is maintained by a house which appears to have

been raised up from a much older single storey cottage. The bridge itself has parapets in ancient brickwork with heavy stone copings and is narrow in width, but the road immediately reverts to its original width on the south side. Moving further south there follows a whole series of listed buildings on the east side. First a pair of cottages in brick and flint with a hipped pantile roof and lean-tos at either end followed, in contrast, by a Georgian house with a rendered and colourwashed front. Next, end on to the road is an 18th century cottage in brick and flint dressings with vertical sash windows. These three buildings are all listed Grade II and have a footpath along their frontages. Two mid-19th century cottages in terraced form are next, each listed Grade II, they are set at an angle at the junction of a track giving access to Old Hall Farm which is a substantial group of buildings opposite the Old Hall itself on the other side of the river. The cottages are faced in beach pebbles with red brick dressings and vertical sash windows. Planting and raised paving has been formed in front of the second of these to keep surface water at bay. At the rear and alongside the track a barn has been attractively converted to domestic use. On the opposite corner of the track entrance, set behind a shoulder high cobbled wall, is Lodge Farm or Manor House as it is now called. Listed Grade II it is a fine late 16th century house in flintwork with red brick dressings and pantiles. The house at present has vertical sash windows but there is evidence of former openings with brick mullions. The frontage wall to Manor House continues south behind a narrow grass verge before connecting up with the cobbled elevation of a long low agricultural building partly converted to domestic use. The road narrows at this point where two further cottages project into the street. The last of these is Hill House, a whitewashed and tarred plinth cottage possibly raised up off earlier cobbled work and recently extended in unpainted cobbles and matching pantiles. This is the last cottage on the east side of the street and the Conservation Area ends here.

- 1.10** Reverting to the west side of Bridge Street, almost opposite the entrance to the track leading to Old Hall Farm is Vale Farmhouse. Between this and the bridge the frontage is flanked by the cobbled gables to farm buildings and the theme is taken up by an excellent head height cobbled wall that continues along the street for approximately 50 metres; this includes gate piers which are included in the Grade II listing of the house itself. The house was built in the 16th century and is in flint with red brick dressings and pantiles contained within gable parapets. The two storey element on the frontage is much later however and is not included in the listing. The street continues up the side of the valley and the next buildings are two more Grade II listed cottages. Unlike most of the village these are set back 10 metres or so from the road but the line of the frontage is maintained by cobbled walls of varying height. The first of the cottages dates from the 18th century and is in classic one and a half storey North Norfolk style with monopitch dormers set half way up the roof slope. The second is in two detached elements, one set back and the other gable on to the road. These are again 18th century and both are colourwashed, the rearmost is rendered and painted a very pale green, the other element is in whitewashed cobbles. South of these listed cottages is a third, similar in basic form and possibly of similar age, but it has been much altered and 'modernised' with inappropriate windows. The final building in the street is a house with its gable set hard up to the edge of the road but with a substantial forecourt resulting in a considerable gap in the frontage. This is no doubt a legacy from its former life as a Public House as the empty signpost and bracket confirms. Ancient cobbles and quoins up to first floor level suggest that a much older building has had a new first floor superimposed upon it. Modern windows and a porch have also been added and the whole facade has been whitewashed.

- 1.11** There are no really dominant individual trees in the Conservation Area but trees collectively play an important part. Those in the grounds of the Old Rectory, the Church, the Old Hall and Warborough House in particular provide a vital green backdrop to the buildings and walls in the east end of Church Street and, similarly, those in the grounds of Vale Farmhouse make an important contribution to Bridge Street. Trees and shrubs generally have a marked softening effect on the dominant frontage walls and buildings which impart such strong feelings of enclosure in the whole of the Conservation Area.
- 1.12** Red brick, beach cobbles and pebbles and red clay pantiles are the dominant materials in Stiffkey, however some relief is provided by colourwashed rendering, or more usually, whitewashed cobbles and brickwork. Tarred plinths are also in evidence, particularly in Bridge Street.

(Approved by Development and Conservation Committee 11/9/97)