

Diseworth Village Design Statement

What villagers like most about Diseworth

When asked what they value most about Diseworth as a place in which to live, villagers highlighted the following:

- The intimate scale of the village
- The relaxing environment
- The survival of the village as a working agricultural community
- Rural proximity - ease of access to open countryside
- The countryside setting viewed from surrounding hills
- The survival of many old buildings which emphasise the variety of vernacular architecture in the village

What villagers like least about Diseworth

- Through traffic
- Encroachment on open land
- Landscape urbanisation - e.g. garden design with non-indigenous trees
- Noise from outside the village
- Pollution of various kinds, for instance of the brook, and from road and air traffic
- New houses which are out of scale with the older properties - so-called "executive" houses rather than "cottages"
- Large garages which are obtrusive (that is, in front of the houses they serve)

Preface

This design statement tries to address these positive and negative features from a planning perspective. Planning matters can be addressed at three levels. Firstly, there will be matters to be addressed through local, regional or even national planning and design statements. Diseworth is by no means the only village which faces the tensions caused by increases in traffic of all kinds; by the demand for large increases in housing in rural areas; or by the effects of economic changes, whereby agriculture requires a tiny workforce compared with the past, but still to a large extent determines the quality of the environment in which such villages are set.

Secondly, such national and regional issues are set against the everyday requirement to make sound planning decisions which respect and reflect the architectural and environmental traditions of the area in general, and of Diseworth (in this instance) in particular. These are the responsibilities of our elected Councillors in the County and District Councils, and their respective officers.

Thirdly there are expectations of villagers, to do with local feelings and influence. It is very hard, indeed probably quite inappropriate, for neighbours to approach a particular householder to criticise his or her choice of trees and shrubs to grow in the garden. Not everyone can be an expert on indigenous planting schemes, indeed so-

called experts can themselves differ! But there are ways in which a culture of good practice can be established. The Local History Society, a Gardening Club. Open Garden events, displays and exhibitions, can all help people to be more aware of good practice, just as good Conservation exercises can help people to maintain and improve their existing buildings in a more appropriate and sympathetic way.

The people of Diseworth feel that there are detailed considerations that are particular to the character, needs and setting of their village, which have not been (indeed could not be) addressed in the District Council's Local Plan, or in the County Structure Plan, or in regional and national planning policy documents. Thus numbers of residents have put considerable time and energy into the production of this Statement, with the active support and assistance of Officers from the District Council's Planning Department.

The statement has been endorsed by Long Whatton and Diseworth Parish Council.

The purpose of the Village Design Statement (VDS) is to inform planning proposals and decisions so as to ensure the effective and successful management of change on whatever scale, and as such it sets out to provide guidance for those individuals and organisations seeking to initiate change and development in and around the village, by identifying good quality in both traditional and modern developments. It is intended to supplement with local detail both the local and county Structure Plans, and has been adopted by the local planning authority (North West Leicestershire District Council) as Supplementary Planning Guidance at a meeting of its Executive Board on 3 April 2000.

What is a village design statement?

To this end the Statement sets out to explain the present village in terms of its long history, and to articulate those features of the village that are seen by its residents as most attractive and distinctive, which deserve to be retained, and which together help to determine what is distinctive about Diseworth.

The Statement is addressed to:

developers, architects, designers, and builders, to inform them of local views on design, materials and location of new and adapted buildings;
residents and landlords, to offer guidance on sympathetic approaches to maintenance, alterations and extensions within the village;
the local planning authority, providing local information and views to inform planning decisions which affect the village;
the Parish Council, to inform the comments it makes on planning applications;
the local highways authority, (Leicestershire County Council), to offer them local evidence and views which will inform their planning.

The importance of Village Design Statements

A recent article in the Times (18 June 1999) told of the successes of some 20 Design Statements which have already been produced around the country. Stratford on Avon District Council received Countryside Commission funding to promote such work. They appointed a design statement officer, and seven statements have been produced in that District alone. One has already been used successfully in a planning appeal, and the involvement of local people is seen as valuable support for the voice

of the Parish Council in the planning process. Although planning policy says that the Planning Authority must respect the character of local surroundings when taking planning decisions, the hierarchical nature of the planning process can now be balanced by the increase in public involvement. One planning consultant said: "too often parish councils are ignored in the planning process", and the existence of a sound, well researched Village Design Statement is seen as an aid to improving the quality of planning decisions by, for example, Henry Oliver of the Council for the Protection of Rural England. As a small farming village, close to a major airport, trunk survived with relatively little change, particularly in recent years. There is however increasing pressure on both roads, and three major conurbations, Diseworth is fortunate to have the built-up area of the village and, even more so, on its green field setting which is such an important feature. This statement is the result of the work of a large number of Diseworth residents over a period of several months. The results have been shared with as many village groups, organisations and Individuals as possible, and their views taken into account. It also builds on the relevant findings of the Village Appraisal published in January 1998.

The context for Diseworth

(i) The historical context

While the Statement is about Diseworth as it is now, it is important to know how the village got here. Rural settlements have a logical setting concerned with trade and economy, security, geography and often religion. Diseworth is no different. Its origins can be traced to Saxon times, its location close to a Roman road, astride a brook, and on a gentle south-facing slope. Ownership has been vested in a variety of landowners in the past, including Langley Priory and Christ's College Cambridge, and two of its five working farms are still owned by the heirs to the Langley Priory estate. The pattern of employment has changed little since the Enclosures Act two hundred years ago - small farms with a mixture of arable, sheep, dairy and cattle breeding, and even the survival of smallholdings. The pattern of the village and its surrounding landscape has also changed little in those two hundred years. Although the number of houses has increased, particularly in the last thirty years, the shape of the settlement remains much as it was, and the landscape is also little altered, with a majority of hedgerows surviving, and the pattern of fields, established then, still often apparent. The village itself, seen from the brows of its surrounding slopes, nestles comfortably in its little valley, displaying a charming and distinctive mixture of brick and stone, tiles and slate, trees and other greenery.

The stone was quarried locally for many years and may have been a primary reason for the site of the settlement. There is considerable evidence that a mediaeval manor house stood at the end of Hall Gate, not least the existence of high quality dressed stone in a number of walls around the village! There have also been three brickworks in the village until fairly recently and their warm red, if somewhat soft, products, survive in many cottages and farm buildings. Earlier buildings provide some fine examples of vernacular domestic architecture, in the timber frames, including several cruck beams; the thatched roofs; the stone plinths to many houses; and the detail of brickwork, doorways and windows exemplified later.

The settlement pattern, around what is known as the Cross, where the four principal streets, or Gates, meet, has long since lost its main purpose. Grimes Gate formerly led over what is now the Airport towards Castle Donington and Derby; Clements Gate led to Long Holden and towards Long Whatton, now divided by the embankment to the M1 motorway, while Lady Gate leads to Longmere Lane, now a track carried on a bridge over the A42. The fourth street, Hall Gate, led possibly to

the old Hall, and certainly to a ford which in living memory was used as a sheep-wash; thence it joins the Belton Road, built along the line of the Roman road.

A fifth road of some age skirts the southern side of the village, known for no obvious reason as The Green - there is no village green extant. It does however provide a clear boundary to the built-up area on that side of the village to which there are very few exceptions.

Within the village is also a network of footpaths of historic significance, and mostly still well used today. They indicate for example patterns of employment - taking labourers to the mill, or to a farm. Recent road and housing developments have utilised these paths to link, for example, Page Lane and the Woodcroft to the older roads.

With a population of about 650 the village supports a range of organisations and activities. Principal among these is the Primary School, with about 60 pupils, of Church of England foundation, sited on the original location of the 1862 building. The church itself, with remains which have been dated back to Saxon times, is largely of the 17th century. There are also two chapels of contrasting architectural styles - a modest Baptist chapel on Lady Gate, and a more highly decorated Methodist Church dating from 1887. The Village Hall was built by local voluntary labour after the Second World War, and sits on about half a hectare of land. Within and beyond these buildings the village supports a surprisingly wide variety of clubs, societies and less formal organisations for all ages.

There are also two public houses in buildings of some historic and architectural importance, although neither has survived completely unscathed the internal modernisation so beloved of brewers.

(ii) The modern context

It would be hard to exaggerate the threat felt by Diseworth residents from their neighbours. The three large conurbations of Nottingham, Leicester and Derby provide employment for many, and ensure that shops and services such as hospitals and entertainment are easily available in both quantity and quality. The down side of this is that they need servicing by transport routes of all kinds, and the network that has grown up and continues to develop attracts commercial, industrial and housing developers looking for potential sites convenient for these conurbations and their communications networks. The history and traditions of a village such as Diseworth in such a search may not often merit any special consideration from such developers or their agents. Structure plans and ancillary documents only provide guidance; they need telling and specific arguments to help planners ensure that change and development is appropriate in both scale and design.

Where large scale developments do take place within both sight and sound of the village, then protective measures which largely exist already - for example in the County Structure plan and the District Council's Local Plan deposit Draft - should be applied firmly and consistently. Otherwise developers, keen to build adjacent to the Airport or to the major road network which almost surrounds the village, will swamp Diseworth.

Village residents particularly value the countryside in which their village is set. The views from surrounding slopes display a village of working farms set in a traditional agricultural setting. Green spaces, whether farmland, smallholdings, playing fields or gardens, reach into the village and contribute to an exciting variety of colour and

layout throughout the village. The network of footpaths which extend from the village into this countryside is well used by both residents and visitors. A good mixture of indigenous trees, including fruit trees, also contributes to the landscape although there is only one tree preservation order extant within the Conservation area. In specific places there are notable features: Hall Field, for example, provides evidence of the likely site of a mediaeval manor house, while there and elsewhere ridge and furrow has survived. This is a fine and largely well preserved example of a post-enclosure agricultural settlement.

Recommendations

Development should not be permitted that could adversely affect the setting of a listed building (Local Plan Policy E17)

Existing countryside surrounding Diseworth, which adds such value to its particular setting, should be protected against new development.

The structure of the community

Although the population of the village has varied widely, it is now no greater than it has been at several periods in the past. Smaller households, and several examples of two or three cottages being combined as one house, have been balanced by the building of many new houses this century - more than a third of the houses in the village have been built in the last thirty years or so. A mixture of good fortune and good planning has ensured that the shape of the village has remained largely unaltered, and most development has taken place on former pasture, smallholdings and orchards. A small amount of development can be characterised as in-filling - in gardens, or on the sites of former farm buildings - but in general a pleasant mix of buildings and open spaces has survived. In two or three places, farmland reaches close to the centre of the village: behind the church, for example, and to the north of Hall Gate. Both within and beyond the village's designated Conservation Area, a good number and variety of mature indigenous trees survive. Views within the village rarely include straight lines - the only largely straight road is Page Lane - so the characteristic style of many older buildings abutting on to the street never appears rigid or formal. The curve of Clements Gate is a good example.

Most buildings in the village are on a modest scale; exceptions include the Church, which is a striking feature of many village views with its distinctive spire. There are also two fine farmhouses at Old Hall and Cross farms. Several rows of cottages have been converted into single houses of some size, but since they are built with their gable ends to the road, they do not appear out of scale.

A number of houses were built on sizeable plots of land - smallholdings, or orchards, for example. Several have now lost much of that land to infilling development, but a number retain most of their plots. Several houses on Clements Gate have extensive land running down to Diseworth Brook, while 50 Hall Gate has at present both a sizeable garden and a field beside it - a most welcome green space in the centre of the village. Such properties contribute significantly to the open nature of the village settlement, and to its distinctive character.

Recommendations

The development of groups of houses should include a variety of sizes in order to sustain the characteristically mixed pattern that exists.

Village amenities such as Churches, shop, Village hall, School and Public Houses,

should be retained and where possible enhanced.

Public open space should be better maintained and utilised.

The open character of the settlement should be maintained as far as is reasonable and practicable, for example when plans for infilling or other development on greenfield sites within the village are being considered.

The character of the landscape setting

Clustered around the modest broach spire of the church, the village presents charming views which are gradually disclosed to those approaching from any direction. Gentle ridges to the north and south, and to an extent the rising ground to east and west, help at least partly to hide both the sight and the sound of traffic both from the roads and from the airport.

The farmland surrounding the village is much as it was following the Enclosures Act of 1794. Few hedgerows have been lost since that time, and until recently, pasture land predominated, although some ridge and furrow has been lost to the recent growth in arable farming. There has been however considerable loss of woodland.

Diseworth Brook and its small tributaries are a characteristic feature of the village. Several farms were built beside them in the past. Nowadays many houses benefit from the brook skirting, or sometimes crossing, their garden. Elsewhere many houses relied until recently on spring-fed wells, and a number of these springs pass under Clements Gate, for example, and thence into Diseworth Brook.

Fields, including playing fields and smallholdings, continue to provide significant green spaces within the village; some gardens incorporate former farmland or smallholdings and extend to around a hectare, and many houses benefit from views over open countryside. This close relationship between housing and green spaces represents an important and striking feature of Diseworth.

The mixes of building materials, of architectural styles and of layouts, together also form a distinctive feature of the village. Prominent among the clusters are the farm buildings, particularly at Old Hall Farm, which provide an impressive introduction to the northern approach from Mill Hill, and at Cross Farm, next to the church. The mixture of local stone and brick is paralleled by the mix of pantiles, Staffordshire tiles and slate, often more than one material per house. The remaining thatched roofs, as on Lilly's Cottage at the Cross, add to the mix.

Recommendations

New houses should continue to offer a variety of size and style, rather than offering uniform groups of houses. They should also reflect as far as possible the range of materials seen in the village.

New development should as far as possible not diminish the balance between buildings and green space, particularly within the Conservation Area.

The brook and its feeder streams need to be seen as a safe and distinctive feature of the village environment.

Buildings and spaces within the village

Twenty two buildings are listed as being of historical or architectural. Two of these

are listed as grade 2*. These are the Anglican Church, and Lilly's Cottage. The others include several farm buildings - for example three of the farm buildings at Old Hall Farm as well as the farmhouse. Two timber-framed buildings of some age are currently in a state of serious disrepair - one in Lady Gate and one in Hall Gate, although the latter is currently the subject of restoration.

Buildings in Diseworth are generally modest in scale, and are historically characterised by their use of local materials. Their variety reflects both their age and their purposeful design: until recently every building was designed to support village life and work. This is most apparent in the farms, a number of which continue to function. The other trades in the village are also often still apparent in the surviving buildings. Much employment in the years following enclosure was connected with the hosiery trade, and some cottages had an extra, third storey for use as a workshop. Several buildings have functioned at some time as shops, or as the village bakery. There were for some time three brickworks in the village, and evidence of two survives. Other buildings offer evidence of the usual village trades - the builder, the joiner, the blacksmith, the carter.

A few buildings are elaborately constructed. Lilly's cottage displays more sophisticated joinery than most of that found in the village; Old Hall farmhouse uses what is for Diseworth an unusual mix of stone and elaborately patterned brickwork; the gabling at Cross farmhouse is most distinctive, while the corbelled brickwork on many gable ends is also characteristic.

Most houses in the village are more modest in both size and construction. Several have been enlarged by knocking two or three cottages together. Many older houses present their gable ends to the street, and this pattern helps to create an intimate atmosphere, enhanced by the relatively narrow roadways, mostly with footpaths on one side only. This pattern is not repeated in the newer roads such as Brookside and The Woodcroft, where houses are set back in their gardens.

Good examples survive of the different periods of vernacular architecture. The cruck beam used in mediaeval building can be seen in several houses, such as Hallstead, Lilly's Cottage and the Old Forge, as well as in farm buildings at Old Hall Farm. These certainly include examples dating back to the fourteenth century. Many later houses using box frame construction survive, such as 50 Hall Gate, which has a plaque dated 1692, but this probably commemorates the date of renovation, not of the original building. Such timber framing continued after 1700, first with brick infill, and later with brick cladding, until well into the nineteenth century when brick became the principal structural material.

Throughout these periods most buildings used stone for a plinth, sometimes good quality dressed stone, but more often undressed. This was usually the local marl from seams on which the village is built.

Roofing materials were originally of mainly local material - thatch of course, of which some good examples survive; slate, Staffordshire tiles, and clay pantiles of which some were made locally and some imported from Holland. A number of buildings display an interesting mix of these materials. Window openings in brick are frequently characterised by shallow segmented arches, a feature which a number of modern houses have pleasingly adopted. Other attempts in newer buildings to adopt traditional design features such as timber framing and stone plinths are less successful since they are not structural, nor can the proportions of new houses be the same - for instance, regulations govern the height of ceilings, or the size of window openings. In general the houses built in the last thirty years or so have used

sympathetic materials on walls and roofs, and avoided the flamboyance of many recent housing developments elsewhere.

Of the listed buildings in the village, a few are in disrepair, but many have been sympathetically and carefully maintained and restored.

Recommendations

New buildings should be in keeping with the older ones in the village:

- they should be appropriate in scale
- they should be constructed from appropriate materials, to harmonize with traditional materials; the use of reclaimed materials should be encouraged only if they are appropriate to the vernacular style of the village
- where groups of houses are being built there should as far as possible be variety in both the size and the style of houses within the group
- garages should not be the most prominent feature of a property when viewed from the road

Disclosed views between buildings are a feature of the village, and should be preserved and encouraged. Good examples of this include the view across the Hall Field, and that across the Village Hall field. There are also examples in Clements Gate, for example through the gateway of Kiln House, and on the both sides of Grimes Gate, for example opposite the School

Design details - such as windows, doorways, roofline and pitches - should wherever possible reflect sympathetically that on the traditional buildings of the village. It is recognised that modern building requirements such as Building Regulations help to determine, for example, ceiling heights and window sizes, but there are a number of modern houses in the village which have shown that this does not prevent development being sympathetic in both scale and detail.

Highways and traffic

Originally a farming village, with farms both in the village itself and in outlying parts of the Parish, its character has changed little until very recently, and it remains essentially agricultural. Much housing now provides accommodation for those working in nearby conurbations, and at the airport, but little economic activity has been introduced within the village. The pattern of roads has thus changed little in the parish and still reflects its agricultural origins. Roadways connect the village to its farmland and to the nearby market towns. Some roads have not been metalled, but remain substantial tracks which show their earlier importance: Hyams Lane, Green Lane and Long Holden are examples.

Of course, on the Parish boundaries there are three major trunk roads, and the airport has obliterated the original route to Castle Donington. The M1 and A42 are sources of noise and impair certain views from the village, but it is the A453 and the airport which generate traffic whose routes and volume conflict with the local use of more minor roads. Although there are both speed restrictions and weight limits on the roads though the village, residents are concerned that their enforcement is infrequent, and would urge the highway authority to consider appropriate traffic calming measures. In addition a degree of support from local firms is needed to ensure that the roads are not having excessive demands made upon them.

Certain key points are of particular concern: on Grimes Gate outside the school and further down at the Cross, where visibility is restricted; on The Green, where the speed limit is too often broken; and where The Bowley meets Hall Gate, particularly when buses of considerable length appear.

The roads, in their scale and layout, reflect the history of the village, and would be very difficult to upgrade (if that were believed to be an option) because of the proximity of so many buildings to the road.

Recommendations

Thus there should be more constructive efforts made to ensure that traffic is only that appropriate to the roads as they are.

It is a village with five working farms in or near its centre and their needs should be given some priority.

Traffic calming measures should be introduced as early as possible, particularly on Lady Gate and Crimes Gate, where through traffic to and from the Airport is increasing rapidly, particularly of light freight vehicles. In the Village Appraisal survey, road markings were the most popular form of traffic calming, and there was some concern that some other measures might create difficulties for farm vehicles, but it is clear that systems that require enforcement in order to be effective (such as the present speed limits) will not be successful given the present level of policing available.

References

Data for this report has been gathered from the two draft planning documents for the area - those for the county and the district.

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