

Stoke Fleming Conservation Area Appraisal



Conservation Areas are usually located in the older parts of our towns and villages. They are places whose surviving historic, architectural and locally distinctive features make them special. Conservation area designation highlights the need to preserve and reinforce these qualities.

The policies followed by the District Council when assessing proposals affecting conservation areas are set out in the South Hams Local Plan, while the Supplementary planning document 'New Work in Conservation Areas' explains how to achieve compliance with them. This is essential because the Council has a statutory duty to approve proposals only if they "preserve or enhance the character or appearance" of the conservation area.

The purpose of this appraisal is to set out what makes the Stoke Fleming Conservation Area special, what needs to be conserved and what needs to be improved.



Summary of Special Interest

The spectacular coastal scenery around Stoke Fleming has been appreciated for centuries. From the C18 the magnificent location attracted wealthy residents who built some large houses around a nucleus of earlier farming buildings.

The Church of St. Peter sits at the top of the village in an elevated position: its tall Ashburton-type tower has been a landmark for sailors for centuries. From the top of the church tower one can see the aesthetic value the garden spaces have at Stoke Fleming. The large gardens around Stoke House and Sanders provide trees and green areas north and south of the village, but an additional green area has been created by a fortunate cluster of smaller gardens around the Chapel.

From the more open westerly section of the village and looking down Church Road, the scene is of two and three storey houses, mostly rendered, and built front-on to the road. Once in the village centre, the houses and high stone walls visible up Dartmouth Road entice one up the hill to investigate the lanes that appear to radiate from the main road and lead to other areas of interest in the conservation area.

One of these is Chapel Lane. It is narrow; the walls are high and again the houses are built front on to the lane. The ubiquitous local stone and slate have been utilised but some houses have been painted. The effect is one of enclosure and is delightful. The narrow lane carries on around a corner and winds down the slope concealing private garden spaces and terminating with a view over trees and Start Bay.

Further up Dartmouth Road, another lane leads to Stoke House. The house has been enlarged and converted to

multiple residential use, but the original boundary stone walls and some of the garden have been retained and are part of the conservation area.

A view of Start Bay may not always be visible from the conservation area, but there are many interesting features and reminders of former times: a plaque commemorating George Bidder (1); a Tudor type doorway in the wall surrounding The Old House (2); a mounting block outside the Green Dragon (3), all provide variation and colour.

The impact the A379 has on the area is considerable but fortunately the traffic seems to come in waves and between these the village immediately reverts to being a tranquil and attractive rural village.



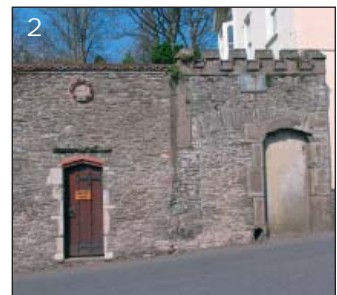
View from south west approach to village



Important gardens areas in village centre



Garden at Stoke House



Below: Dartmouth Road



Below: Chapel Lane



Location and Setting

Stoke Fleming is situated on sloping ground around the 300m contour, dropping away to 200m on the cliffs nearby. Grid Reference: SX862484. The population is about 900. Dartmouth is nearly three miles to the north-east and the village lies in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and is surrounded by a Coastal Preservation Area.

The village was designated a conservation area in September 1976 and extended in February 1994. The amendment added the house and grounds of Sanders to the south of the church and The Old House in the north.

Visitors approaching from the north will immediately perceive the essence of Stoke Fleming. Houses and high stone walls line both sides of the narrow road which winds down the hill to the village centre. From the village nucleus, there are views up Church Road and along the A379 where the outlook becomes much more open with fine views of Start Bay.

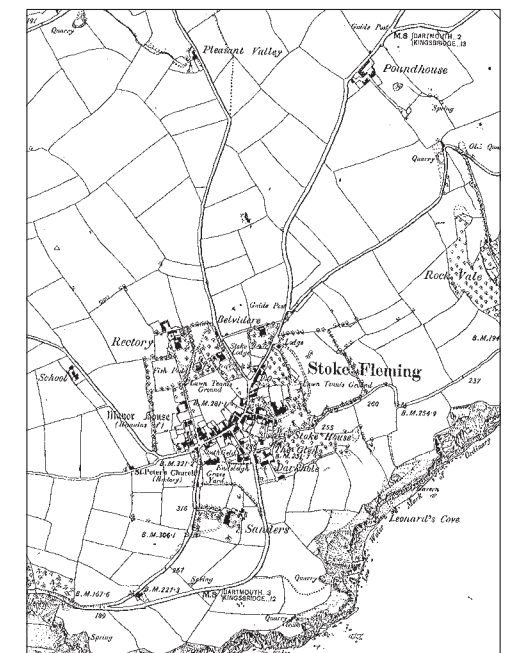
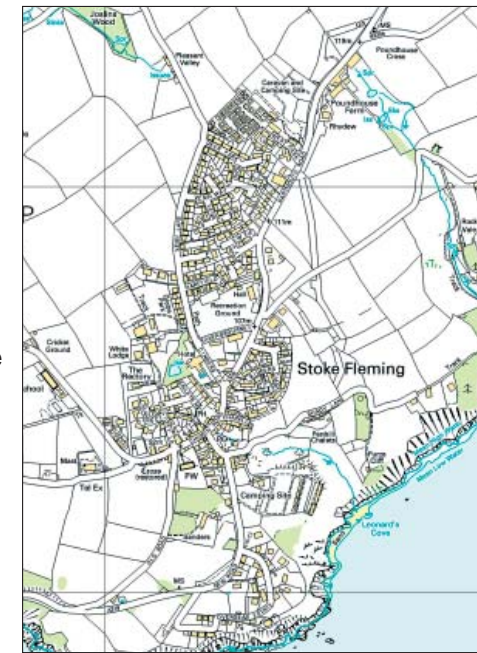
Walkers will be delighted by narrow lanes with high stone walls interspersed with rubble cottages and houses. There are good views into the village and over attractive coastal scenery - there are glimpses of courtyards and attractive gardens.

Historic Development and Townscape

Stoke Fleming existed before the Norman Conquest as a small rural village centred around a manor. At this time grazing rights were often established tacitly by natural boundaries and this was so at Stoke Fleming. The northern boundary stretched as far as the deep inlet at Old Mill Creek near Dartmouth, as well as in all the valleys running up from Blackpool Beach. It seems probable that the land immediately around Stoke Fleming itself was farmed communally. There are references to remains of a chapel and oratory in the C18, the site of which has become a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

From the mid C18 the attractive location of Stoke Fleming had been recognised and large houses such as Sanders and Stoke House were built. The effect of this was that the village became virtually surrounded by substantial grounds and gardens while the centre became built up with terraces of houses built straight onto the streets. Comparison between a modern map and the Tithe map shows that the conservation area is surprisingly unaltered from 1886.

There has been some modern development outside the conservation area to the north and a caravan park is established close to the conservation area in the south.



Trees

There are two areas of group Tree Preservation Orders in this conservation area: in the south the grounds around Sanders fall within the conservation area boundary; in the north at The Old House, part of a group listing comes into the conservation area.

The four prominent Monterey Pines (*Pinus radiata*) near the church, though not in the conservation area or officially protected, are important to the setting of the Conservation Area. This is discussed in the Management Plan.



There is a noticeable contrast between the open area around the church and the more enclosed centre with its high walls, narrow streets and closely spaced buildings. However generally within the village it is apparent that agriculture was once important and a legacy has been left at Manor Court, Tappers and some altered farm buildings in Chapel Lane.



There are nine Listed Buildings and one Ancient Scheduled Monument within the conservation area. The proposed boundary extension would mean that Dark Hole Farmhouse (Leonard's Cove Farmhouse) would be included in the conservation area.

The Church of St. Peter (1) is grade II* and is probably C13. Pevsner refers to the fine Perpendicular west tower that has been an historic landmark for ships.

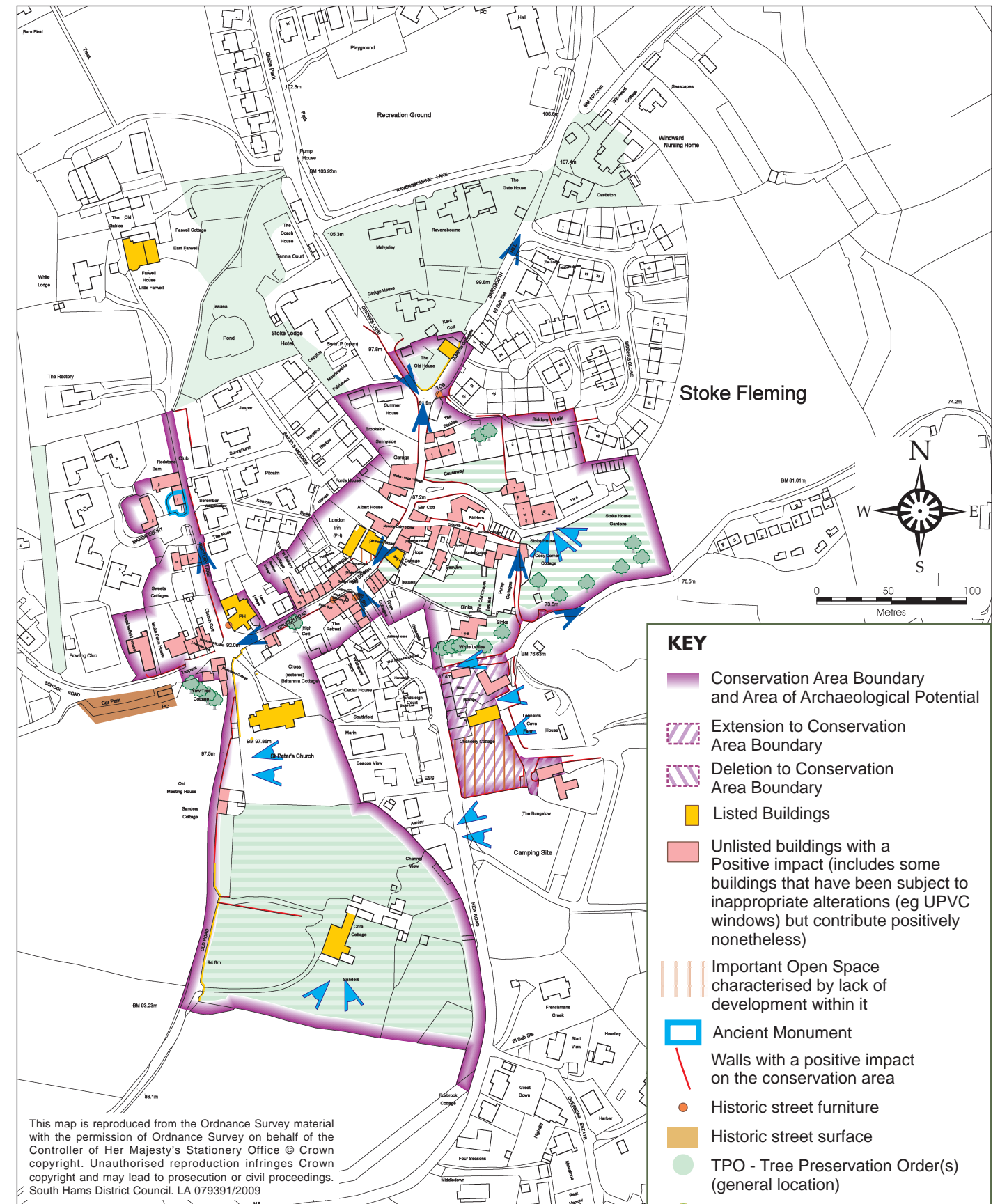
The War Memorial (2) is well placed near the north-west gateway and there is a monument to mathematician **George Bidder (3)** south of the tower. The Scheduled Ancient Monument, **The Site of Chapel at Manor Farm (4)** is marked by a section of column in a wall near Manor Close. **The Green Dragon (5)** still retains some original features and **Sanders (6)** commands an enviable position overlooking Start Bay.

In the north of the conservation area **The Old House (7)** is prominent above enclosing stone walls that are also listed. Further down the hill in Dartmouth Road **Bay House (8)**, **London Inn (9)**, **Old Pound House** and **The Stables (10)** form an interesting group in the centre of the village.

Dark Hole Farmhouse (11) (Leonards Cove Farmhouse) is the oldest house in the village. Although much altered, the house and outbuildings would contribute to the character of the conservation area. Possible inclusion is discussed in the Management Plan which accompanies this appraisal.



Key Conservation Components Map - Stoke Fleming



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Community Involvement

This appraisal has been produced with the involvement of the community from the earliest stages. Views were sought from the children of the Primary School and the households of the village. Once the draft appraisal was complete, residents were invited to comment at a public exhibition. Many of the findings are shown in the Management Plan that accompanies this appraisal.

Areas with Archaeological Potential

The archaeological background set out below is based on information currently held in Devon County Council's Historic Environment Record (HER) to date. This knowledge is likely to evolve and be revised over time.

Stoke Fleming is a medieval or earlier settlement that lies within an area of prehistoric activity and contains one Scheduled Monument and numerous listed buildings.

Prehistoric and Roman Stoke Fleming

While there is no recorded evidence of prehistoric or Roman sites within the conservation area of Stoke Fleming, the village lies within an area of prehistoric activity. Five prehistoric ditched enclosures are located between 1.5 and 2.5km from the village centre. Also, an Iron Age univallate hillfort called Woodbury Camp is located approximately 3km to the north-west of the village centre.

Medieval Stoke Fleming

Antiquarian and early records refer to the remains of an earlier manor. They state that there was a round column (a broken scalloped capital standing about 2.4m high) of red sandstone with an ornamental top that was built into the wall of a later farm building located between the church and the rectory. The column was thought to form part of the aisle arcade of a Norman church or chapel probably associated with a manor, or an aisled hall.

The most recent archaeological assessments (in 1986 and 1996) found no other traces of a column or capital within the existing fabric of the standing barns or any of the farm buildings around the site. Although documentary references are confused, it seems beyond doubt that a large high status building of presumably Norman date once existed on this site but whether ecclesiastical or secular, is unclear.

Sites with Statutory Protection

The site of the medieval manor is a Scheduled Monument, which the Schedule refers to as "Site of Chapel at Manor Farm".

Historic Landscape

Most of the area around Stoke Fleming are 'Barton Fields'; large, regular enclosures likely to have been laid out between the 15th and the 18th century.

Planning Implications

Any development within or adjacent to the historic core of Stoke Fleming will be subject to either predetermination archaeological investigation, or PPG16 planning condition. The level of archaeological mitigation will depend upon the nature, extent and location of the development as well as previous disturbance to the site.

The above represents an appraisal of the current Historic Environment Records as of the date below and does not include a definite consideration of the listed buildings within this area.

Historic Environment Service, Devon County Council,
27 March 2007



Cautionary Note

The formal designation of conservation areas, Listed Buildings, Tree Preservation Orders and Scheduled Ancient Monuments is a continuous process so if you need to be certain that the designations shown on the Map are still correct, please check with the Environment and Development Services Group at the District Council.

Other Buildings and Structures of Special Interest



Former meeting Room



Pump Cottage



Locally made grate

There are several unlisted buildings which are of interest at Stoke Fleming.

Around the church, Tappers, the row of cottages opposite and the ubiquitous stone walls, contribute to the character of the conservation area, and are redolent of a farming era. The Meeting Room nearby is also reminiscent of earlier times when diverse religious sects were more common and influential.

In Chapel Lane, Pump Cottage and the former Chapel are prominent from many angles within the village. They are good examples of buildings in local materials that provided

education and religious instruction to residents and their children who were much more numerous 100 years ago.

Many other interesting features are constantly adding to the character of the conservation area: for example a drainage grate made locally and an unusual door leading to a basement flat in Chapel Lane.



Tappers and adjoining cottages



Former Chapel



Unusual door

Former Activities and Current Uses

The first inhabitants were farmers who gathered together around a stable water source. The village grew after St. Peter's was built in the thirteenth century but remained a village of farmers and fishermen who made use of abundant fishing at nearby Blackpool Sands.

In the eighteenth century Stoke Fleming evolved from a purely agricultural parish to one that had a large number of non-farming residents. People chose to move here from towns such as Dartmouth. Large houses in substantial grounds were built. Sanders and Stoke House are two examples of these and they have had a major influence on the development of the village and have become an important part of the conservation area.



© N. Teage

Today Stoke Fleming has expanded to the north and generally provides residential accommodation for commuters to nearby Dartmouth, Kingsbridge and more distant Paignton and Torquay. There is also a high number of retired people and second home owners.

The village is greatly affected by the A379 which goes straight through the conservation area and sometimes becomes congested in the summer. Although visitors to the village help to sustain the Post Office/shop and the Green Dragon, Stoke Fleming is fundamentally a quiet South Hams coastal village with residents who actively support many communal schemes.



© N. Teage
Milking at Sanders



© N. Teage

Above and below: The built environment has not changed greatly



Building Material Assessment

Local South Devon slate is the predominant walling material in the conservation area. The building style can be divided in three groups.

The western group at the top of the village along Rectory Lane, feels quite rural and the rubble walls of the houses and cottages have mostly remained unrendered



Bitumen coating in Rectory Lane

although some are painted. The predominant roofing material is slate but some turnerisation has been carried out where slate is starting to fail.



Manor Court

Sanders, at the south end of Rectory Road, is imposing and is built of rendered stone rubble. The converted outbuildings at Manor Court are unrendered stone.



Bay House

The second group around the Post Office has two and three storey houses with smooth rendering which are built front-on to the street. Roofs are predominantly slate with minimal eaves and slate hanging on gable ends occurs. Some UPVC windows are visible but one house has recently re-introduced traditional wooden sash windows and further similar re-instatement would be encouraged by the council.



Minimal eaves

The third section around Chapel Lane has mostly two storey cottages and houses with unrendered stone rubble walls, which are sometimes painted. Roofs are usually of slate.



Chapel Lane

One of the most striking characteristics of the built environment are the high stone walls which border several lanes. They create an enclosed atmosphere which is both attractive and provides residents with a high degree of seclusion.



Chapel Lane walls

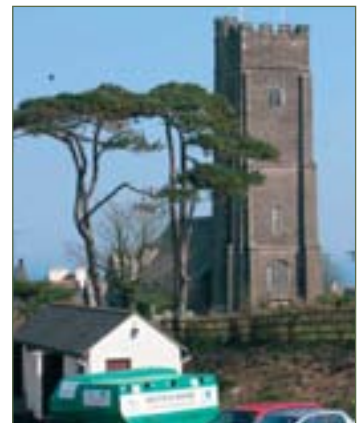
Areas with Potential for Improvement

Some buildings have lost some of their original detail with UPVC windows, doors and plastic down-pipes having been introduced. The degree of introduction has however not been excessive in comparison with other areas and further encroachment might be curtailed if an Article 4.2 direction was imposed. Further discussion and explanation of Article 4.2 status is set out in the Management Plan which accompanies this appraisal.

Large numbers of cars pass through Stoke Fleming on the A379 and the traffic problems in this village seem insoluble. Ancient passing places in between pinch-points help traffic to flow. Some buildings have been demolished in order to enlarge narrow sections and it is reported that 20 mph road markings have slowed traffic. Every effort has been made to find a solution and new approaches are constantly examined.

Local enterprises need visitor support in order to thrive but visitors have difficulty parking their cars. Car parking at Stoke Fleming is inadequate, but plans have been submitted for an extension to the small existing car park.

This should also help many residents with no parking at their properties. It is hoped that the new facility will be discrete and provide a less obtrusive place for re-cycling skips and some protection for the four Monterey Pines (*Pinus radiata*) that contribute so positively to the landscape setting of the church.



Top: Unightly facilities

Right: Some UPVC windows have been introduced

