

# **Langley Abbey Conservation Area Appraisal.**

## ***Introduction***

### *Why have Conservation Areas?*

A review of policies relating to the historic environment carried out by English heritage on behalf of the Secretary of States for Culture Media and Sport and the Environment Transport and the Regions was published in December 2000 under the heading 'Power of Place'.

The Report which reflected views now held generally by the population at large, confirmed 5 main messages

- i Most people place a high value on the historic environment and think it right there should be public funding to preserve it.
- ii Because people care about their environment they want to be involved in decisions affecting it.
- iii The historic environment is seen by most people as a totality. They care about the whole of their environment.
- iv Everyone has a part to play caring for the historic environment. More will be achieved if we work together.
- v Everything rests in sound knowledge and understanding and takes account of the values people place on their surroundings.

In summary we must balance the need to care for the historic environment with the need for change. We need to understand the character of places and the significance people ascribe to them.

The concept of conservation areas was first introduced in the Civic Amenities Act 1967, in which local planning authorities were encouraged to determine which parts of their area could be defined as "Areas of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance".

The importance of the 1967 Act was for the first time recognition was given to the architectural or historic interest, not only of individual buildings but also to groups of buildings: the relationship of one building to another and the quality and the character of the spaces between them.

The duty of local planning authorities to designate conservation areas was embodied in the Town and Country Planning Act 1971, Section 277. Since then further legislation has sought to strengthen and protect these areas by reinforcing already established measures of planning control which is now consolidated in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

Unlike listed buildings, which are selected on national standards, the designation of Conservation Areas in the main is carried out at District level based upon criteria of local distinctiveness and the historic interest of an area as a whole. However, in the past, the criteria adopted by different local authorities in determining what constitutes a special area have tended to vary widely. For example, although public opinion seems to be overwhelmingly in favour of conserving and enhancing the familiar and cherished local scene, what is familiar to many, may only be cherished by some.

Over the last 30 years this approach has changed significantly. Much greater emphasis is now placed on involving the local community in evaluating 'what makes an area special', whether it should be designated and where boundaries should be drawn.

It is now recognised that the historical combination of local architectural style and the use of indigenous materials within the wider local landscape creates what has been termed 'local distinctiveness'. Distinctiveness varies within the relatively restricted confines of individual counties, which in turn are distinct in terms of the country as a whole.

Conservation Area designation for settlements and wider areas which embody this local distinctiveness may afford them protection against development which bears no relation to the locality either in terms of the buildings within it or landscape surrounding it.

The historical development of such settlements and their surrounding landscape are the 'journals' through which the social and economic development of the locality can be traced. The pattern of agricultural and industrial progress of settlements (their social history) is by definition expressed in the architecture and landscape of any area.

It is not intended (nor would it be desirable) to use Conservation Area designation as a way of preventing or restricting development, the expansion of a settlement or preventing contemporary innovative design. Logically in the future new development should add to, rather than detract from the character of an area and will in turn help to chart historical development. However, all development should seek to preserve and enhance the character and appearance of the area.

### ***Aims and objectives***

The conservation area at Langley Abbey was originally designated in 1994. This re-appraisal examines the historic settlement and special character of Langley, reviews the boundaries of the conservation area and suggests areas for change.

If adopted, the appraisal will provide a sound basis for development management and encourage development initiatives which endeavour to improve and protect the conservation area as well as stimulating local interest and awareness of both problems and opportunities.

### ***Planning policy context***

Although the settlement is within South Norfolk District Council area, the majority of the land and buildings (east of the main street) in the conservation area are within the Broads Authority area, as indicated on the map. The Broads Authority is responsible for all Planning related matters in this eastern area, South Norfolk Council for the remainder i.e. to the west of the Langley Green and Langley Street.

There are a range of policies which affect Conservation Areas both within the Broads Authority and South Norfolk Council areas, originating from both national and local sources. The latest national documents in respect of historic buildings and conservation areas are The Government's Statement on the Historic Environment for England 2010. The National Planning Policy Framework published March 2012 Planning for the Historic Environment: Historic Environment Planning Practice Guide March 2010. The Broads Authority endorses the contents of these documents and decisions made will reflect the various provisions contained in them.

Locally, South Norfolk is part of the Greater Norwich Development Partnership which has adopted its Joint Core Strategy. South Norfolk is also progressing their Development Management and Sites Specifics DPDs as well as two Area Action Plans for the towns of Long Stratton and Wymondham. The Broads Authority has an adopted Core Strategy (2007) and Development Management Policies DPD (2011) and is progressing its Sites Specifics DPD. Both South Norfolk and the Broads Authority have some saved Local Plan (2003 and 1997 respectively) Policies in place. In line with government policy, the Broads Authority and South Norfolk Council are currently reviewing and revising local policies which will be published in the respective Local Plans (formerly Local Development Framework (LDF)).

To support these policies, the Broads Authority and South Norfolk Council provide further advice and details in a series of leaflets, which are currently being reviewed and expanded as part of the Local Plan process. A list of those currently available is attached in Appendix 2.

### ***Summary of special interest***

Langley village is a typical farming community made up of small clusters of development based around agriculture and farms. It is situated on the southern edge of the flood plain of the River Yare, with the gently rolling valley side dropping towards it from the south-west. Its siting is important to its function and form with historically the marshes used for grazing of livestock and the valley sides for general agricultural use for the farming community. The pattern of land ownership has been a crucial factor in how the land has been given its present day form. The conservation area is based around Langley Abbey, a scheduled ancient monument and an important religious site in the Middle Ages which was supported by a substantial secular community.

### ***Location and context***

The Langley Abbey Conservation Area is situated at the north western end of the village of Langley, which is approximately 11 miles from Norwich to the north-west and approximately 10 miles from Great Yarmouth to the east. The village is on the edge of marshland on a minor road, which roughly follows the route of the River Yare as it flows from Norwich and out to the sea at Great Yarmouth. This minor road eventually connects to the main Norwich to Lowestoft road (A146) to the west, via a network of other minor roads and byways. The nearest town is Loddon, approximately 2.5 miles to the south, which is located on a tributary of the River Yare, the River Chet; the two join about 2 miles to the west of Langley.

### ***General character and plan form***

Langley village typifies the general pattern of development in the area, in that it is a linear settlement of small clusters of development based around agriculture and farms. These small settlements along a minor road mark the last line of development on the south bank of the River Yare, before the large areas of Broads marshes to the north. The road follows ground that is slightly higher than the marshland to the north, east and west, the latter traditionally used for the grazing of animals. The farmsteads are linked to the marshes via a series of tracks at right angles to the river. Historically, dykes and staithes provided access from the river for trade and communication, typified by Langley Dyke which is within the conservation area boundary.

Langley, and Hardley, the nearby settlement to the west, have long been linked together and are still administered by one Parish Council known as Langley with Hardley.

### ***Geological background***

Many millions of years ago the area now occupied by Norfolk lay beneath the sea. Deposits laid down on the sea bed formed Cretaceous Chalk which underlies the whole of Norfolk. It is the oldest rock type to be found in East Anglia, with an approximate age of 100 million years, and because it was subjected to smoothing glacial action, it provides a much more subdued topography than in other areas of Britain. The chalk deposits were subsequently overlain in Pleistocene times by a series of sand, muds and gravels, and these shelly sand deposits are known as 'Crags'. They bore the first brunt of the Ice Age as large glaciers moved into East Anglia from the north; the action of the ice moving over the loose deposits contorted the underlying material into complex thrust-type folds, known as 'contorted drift'. During the Ice Ages, rivers carved out wide but shallow valleys, which as they flowed down towards the lower levels, formed large loops or meanders with wide flood plains as can be seen on the River Yare in the area of Langley. Thus the 'marshes' of the Broads were formed

resulting in the lush grazing meadows adjacent to the river at Langley and the fertile agricultural land on the very slightly higher valley sides.

Nowadays, the area is part of the level southern valley floor of the River Yare floodplain, and is a mixture of silty clays closest to the river grading into peats towards the upland and along the river valley.

## Historical Development

The settlements of Langley and Hardley are recorded as 'Langale' and 'Hardale' in the Domesday Book of 1086. The names derive from Old English; the 'le' with which both names end derives from 'leah' meaning a natural open space, or a deliberate clearing in woodland, later used for a tract of meadow. Thus, the respective meanings would probably be 'long' and 'hard' clearing.

### *Archaeology*

The Norfolk Historic Environment Service compiles records of known archaeological activity, sites, finds, cropmarks, earthworks, industrial remains, defensive structures and historic buildings in the county. These records are known as the Norfolk Historic Environment Record (NHER), and an abridged version can be accessed through the Norfolk Heritage Explorer website at [www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk](http://www.heritage.norfolk.gov.uk). Although there are significant archaeological remains above and below ground at the site of the former Langley Priory, the majority of the records for Langley are outside the conservation area boundary and to the south of the road there is much evidence of what is assumed to be a lost Medieval village and later settlement. *Early development*

Langley has been a desirable place for settlement throughout the ages, due to its fertile soil and proximity to the Yare river highway. Although records suggest that the settlements at Langley and Hardley were formed during the Saxon period, the archaeology of the parish reveals much earlier activity. The earliest recorded archaeological finds in the area date from the Palaeolithic and Neolithic periods to the west of Langley Green, where evidence of early organised agricultural activity can be seen on aerial photographs, in complex cropmarks of a Bronze Age landscape, including field systems, barrows and a possible Bronze Age or Neolithic henge. Although no Roman monuments have been recorded, Roman coins found in the parish suggest that there was activity here during this period. Several early Saxon brooches and a buckle were found in the parish, but otherwise little evidence of the Saxon period. The round tower and west wall of the nave of St Margaret's Church, Hardley (outside the conservation area) date to the Saxo-Norman period, but most of the rest of the structure was built in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. The church also contains some wonderful medieval wall paintings. St Michael's Langley, the other church in the parish, was built in 1310, and incorporates a Norman stoop.

There is little documentary evidence of the settlement before the Domesday Book, although it is known that land at Hardley was held by Anand under King Edward before 1066. After 1066 Bishop William held the manor.

Whilst the agricultural potential of the area must have been attractive to the early hunter gatherer, this was also recognised by the early monastic orders and their settlements, based as they were on exploiting water transport and livestock grazing facilities. The best example of this in Norfolk is perhaps St Benets Abbey on the River Bure to the north.

The conservation area at Langley is centred on Langley Abbey, a house of Premonstratensian Canons was founded for an Abbot and 16 canons in 1198 by Roger Fitz Roger of Clavering, a rich and powerful local magnate. The order emanated from France and Langley was the 15<sup>th</sup> house established in the country, and was colonised by the Ainwick Priory in Northumberland whose Abbot became Abbot of Langley. Parts of the Abbey were constructed using Caen stone delivered by boat from France. At one time the Abbey controlled and benefitted from the revenue of more than 80

parishes, with manors and lands in Norfolk and both Suffolk and Kent making it very wealthy and influential. The Abbey buildings would have been a prominent landmark, being the largest structures for miles around, demonstrating that the surrounding land was controlled by the church. The complex was an economic centre where people traded and paid their taxes and it provided work and sustenance for a large number of local people who supported the religious occupants with food and the essentials of everyday life.

Following the demise of the Abbey in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the buildings deteriorated, some disappearing altogether, and for many centuries the remainder were utilised as farm buildings. The site is enclosed by a moat and parts of the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> century cloisters, church, chapter house and infirmary survive. The nearby Abbey Farmhouse, dating to around 1800, replaced an earlier farmhouse which was destroyed by fire.

At the time of the dissolution of the monasteries there were only 6 canons left and after the dissolution of the Abbey in 1537, its reserves and land were passed to John Berney Esq. a squire of the bed chamber to Henry VIII. The Berney family, held the post of local landowner and magnate for the next few centuries, owning all the farms in the area which were rented out to tenants who in turn employed local labour to help work the land. The Hall was built by Richard Berney in 1737, but he was forced to sell the estate two years later to repay his debts.

In 1739, Langley Hall in its landscaped park of 800 acres and the associated estate, which included Langley Village, was purchased by a wealthy London merchant, George Proctor, who engaged Matthew Brettingham (designer of Holkham Hall) to remodel the hall in the Palladian style. Several other well known designers are associated with the Hall including Anthony Salvin, Sir John Soane and 'Capability' Brown, who all executed work on the estate. In 1745, the family took the name of 'Beauchamp Proctor' as an inheritance requirement, and fulfilled the local landowner role until 1946 when the hall became a private school, which is its current use.

As the principle landowners the influence of the Proctor-Beauchamp family (as they were later to be known) is evident in the history of the area and its current landscape. All the farms were tenanted and the Hall provided much local employment. The current field, track and road system was generated by these ownership patterns, and an 'Estate' architectural style can be seen from the remaining properties of the area, some of which are in the conservation area. A public house on the River to the West of the village towards Claxton the Beauchamp Arms bears the family name.

The drainage of the marshes surrounding the village has always been important to their continued agricultural use. The marshland was still mapped as common land in the 17<sup>th</sup> century although the doles to the east of Langley Dyke are earlier. The main organised drainage is likely to date from the 18<sup>th</sup> century; the Beauchamp-Proctor/Proctor-Beauchamp estate had certainly introduced drainage mills by the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century (amongst the earliest) and the Langley Estate was also one of the earliest to introduce steam drainage in the Broads.

White's History, Gazetteer and Directory of Norfolk 1854, records that the parish of Langley comprised of '312 souls, 59 houses and about 2,400 acres of land of which 1,000 acres are in low marshes'. Most of the working population at this time was engaged in local agricultural work and associated trades, such as the blacksmith, wheelwright, carpenter and seed merchant or as domestic servants to the occupants of the Hall and better off tenant farmers.

### *Later development*

The current pattern of land and building ownership in Langley reflects the changes that have taken place in our society in recent decades. The landscape was drained during the medieval period and post medieval periods; several 19<sup>th</sup> century drainage pumps are evident in the landscape surrounding

the village. The large estate has been divided up into smaller units of land with their associated buildings. The farms are now in private ownership, and many buildings are no longer in agricultural use, not all owned by those local to the area. Similarly, changes in farming practices have affected the pattern of employment; the move away from cattle rearing to arable crops, increased mechanisation and fewer people needed to work the land, means that the local population has to travel further to find work.

The sugar beet factory at Cantley, on the opposite bank of the River Yare, but visible from the conservation area, has generated employment for over a century. The original building, completed in 1911, was constructed by Dutch workers to exploit the farming of the vegetable which thrives in the local soil conditions. Many villagers found work here in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, using ferries across the River Yare to travel to the factory. Nowadays, the production is of an industrialised scale, requiring fewer people to be employed at the factory, and most villagers commute by road to Norwich or further afield for employment.

Langley parish was joined with Hardley in 1928 to form Langley-with-Hardley, and although a degree of separation is still maintained, the two are administered by one Parish Council known as Langley with Hardley.

The village is still largely based around farming, but the pattern of agriculture has changed dramatically over recent years. There were around 22 dairy herds in the 1950s, but much of the marshland grazing is now used for fattening cattle and sheep. This decline in the use of the land for cattle grazing and improved drainage methods have meant that some of the marsh land is now used for growing cereal crops.

The river valley of the River Yare lies within the Broads Authority executive area giving it protection at a national level as an important landscape, in recognition of the fragility and importance of the grazing marshland. Thus the majority of the Langley conservation area lies within the Broads Authority boundaries, (all the land to the east of Langley Street, and Langley Green) with a narrow strip to the west in the South Norfolk Council area. The Parish Council administers all the land in the area at a local level.

The pattern of built development has changed little over the last century, as what little new building has taken place is within the earlier built envelope of the village. In this respect, the greatest change has been in the way existing buildings are used, with many that were formerly in agricultural use being converted to owner occupied residences, and in the case of the Langley Abbey buildings and grounds, the change to a leisure use. In addition, a number of small cottages previously occupied by agricultural or estate workers have been improved and extended to suit the lifestyles of new occupants, most of who commute to work outside the village. Although outside the conservation area, the construction of the sugar beet factory at Cantley has had the greatest impact on the character of the surrounding area, in both visual and cultural terms.

In landscape terms, changes in agricultural practices have affected the appearance of the area. Documents from the 17<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century show rectilinear grazing marsh on Langley Marshes; this pattern is now obscured through the loss of historic boundaries to make larger fields. Faden's 1797 map shows a wooded landscape of alder carrs, and although much of this has been lost, remnants remain near the water's edge. The map also shows the existence of historic Staithe, and Langley Staithe still remains. The sinuous dyke pattern shown on 19<sup>th</sup> century maps was generally removed in the late 1800s and replaced with the rectilinear dyke pattern visible today.

The current population of Langley with Hardley, at approximately 350 is little changed from that in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### ***Spatial analysis.***

### *Landscape character*

Much of the character of the conservation area is derived from the topography and its relationship to the river. This part of Norfolk typifies the distinctiveness of the Broads landscape – a winding waterway, wide open skies, openness and a level of visibility within the wide valley. Despite the proximity of the scattered valley settlements, the landscape has a remote and wild quality, but with a strong feeling of tranquillity. Within this large scale landscape, and despite the draining of the marshes in earlier centuries, there is still a strong dyke pattern enclosing rectangles of marshland and evidence of parallel doles.

Within the conservation area boundary, although still open in character, there are areas enclosed by blocks of carr woodland, for example to the north west of Langley Dyke and Stone Lane, and the tracks to Monks Plantation and Langley Staithe, which fringed with trees reinforce the rectilinear pattern in the landscape. At a lower level, rushes and reed beds provide texture and contrast. To the west of the road through the conservation area, the arable fields are larger in scale.

The Cantley Sugar Beet Factory across the river is a dominant feature in views out of the conservation area to the east. Compared to other development in the area, the factory complex is a large scale and prominent vertical feature in an otherwise open, low lying landscape, which dominates the eastern skyline. The northern valley edge and skyline is formed by a low, partly wooded ridge which delineates the hinterland to the settlements of Cantley and Limpenhoe. The southern skyline is defined by predominantly arable farmland on the valley sides, rising gently up to the wooded crest on which Langley School and parklands are located.

The surrounding area is visible from the conservation area with views from and to the north and south across the river valley, to Buckenham and Cantley marshes and carrs and to Cantley and Reedham. Further to the east, the part wooded ridge within Broadland District Council's area is prominent and forms the backdrop to the Sugar Beet Factory and Cantley village, whilst the area from Reedham to Thorpe Marshes forms the visual middle ground. To the west, there are views to and from the parkland ridge and gently undulating slopes in the South Norfolk District area.

### *Over view of streets and development*

Langley conservation area is based around the historic site of Langley Abbey and the development along the low road that marks the edge of the floodplain. This lies in a section of land between Langley Green to the north and Langley Street to the south. The development is generally linear, following the minor roads.

### *Monks Plantation*

Monks Plantation, a track running east from Langley Street marks northern boundary of the conservation area. This track, un-metalled and fringed with trees leads eventually to the River Yare (outside the conservation area). It is essentially rural in character with views to the north restricted by a line of trees, and glimpses of Langley Abbey to the south east. To the east of the track is Monks Plantation, and a small group of buildings backed by the trees, comprising of a pair of former farm workers cottages (Monks Cottages) with red pantiled roofs; one retains its brick facing and the original decorative timber barge boards of the 'estate' design, the other now rendered with plain bargeboards. Adjacent is an attractive group of former agricultural farm buildings, once part of Abbey Farm which has been sympathetically converted for holiday accommodation. From here, there are open views to the Abbey across the former Abbey grounds.

### *Langley Green.*

At the north western edge of the conservation area, the boundary excludes a pair of cottages, which although much altered, are in a similar style and form to another pair of 'estate' cottages within the conservation area. It is suggested that the boundary is amended to include this pair of cottages.

Running southward, the road intersects with another track, Stone Lane, a well made straight track, part of which is public highway. It is lined with trees and appears to form part of the earlier communications network to the south and west. At the corner is what appears to have been a pair of cottages or small farmhouse. Opposite the end of Stone Lane, another site houses a number of sheds and parked vehicles. Adjacent, 30 - 33 Langley Green to the north west of Abbey Farm is an attractive row of Victorian cottages, built of knapped flint with gault brick chimneys and dressings under a French pantile roof. They have the decorative bargeboards in the Langley Estate style and are in an unusually ornamental style for the area. These cottages have been converted from what was the former Village School and likely accounts for its differing Architectural style.

Going southwards along Langley Green, the road is contained by hedges behind narrow verges with large scale arable fields to gently rising ground to the west and the grounds of Langley Abbey to the east. Little impinges on the rural feel of this stretch of the road. In the grounds of Langley Abbey a ménage has recently been constructed and even though the surface is below the level of the road, sympathetic landscaping could soften this recent development.

On the western side, a pair of former estate cottages dated 1871 have been extended and altered in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but still retain their basic three dimensional form, chimneys and pantiled roof. Opposite, a group of mature trees obscures views of Langley Abbey and the former farm buildings to the east which then come into view across an open meadow as the road travels south. A line of trees on the western verge of the road is a prominent feature. This finishes at the junction with Staithe Road and Langley Street with a triangle containing the war memorial in the form of a stone and flint obelisk. This is an interesting feature of the conservation area and is in good condition, neatly surrounded by gravel and a low post and chain fence.

### *Langley Street*

Development along the first part of Langley Street is restricted to the west side. The former Wherry Inn is constructed in three ranges, the tallest being to the north. It is built of local buff-red brick and a pantile roof with brick hood mouldings that are also found in other buildings in the 'estate' style. The new house to the south is built of a similar brick and in a traditional style which is sympathetic to the street scene. A double garage between the two is constructed of stained timber boarding under a steeply pitched pantile roof. Completing this group of buildings, Staithe Farmhouse, set back from the road behind a garden with a low fence and brick wall, it is a double pile building with colour washed brick walls and pantile roofs of differing ages. The outbuildings are in the more traditional Norfolk red brick with Norfolk pantiles as is the listed thatched barn to the south which is built hard up against the road, enclosing the view to the south.

Opposite the former Wherry Inn, the east side of Langley Street has a distinctly rural feel, with hedges and mature trees, particularly around the entrance to The Staithe, which is an unmade track leading to Langley Dyke. The Staithe is well kept with a seat, interpretation board and quay heading providing mooring facilities for tourist boats, although the waste and recycling facilities could be better screened. Cantley sugar beet factory is a prominent feature on the skyline in this part of the conservation area.

Moving southwards, on the west side, the next pair of cottages are in red brickwork with pantiled roofs and are parallel to the road. Although altered in recent times, they have the distinctive form and bargeboards of other estate cottages in the area. Langley Cottage is gable end on to the road and built of colour washed brickwork and a pantile roof.



On the east side of the road is a single house, consisting of two ranges, the lower being to the south, a distinctive building form for this area, indicating that it could have been a small farmhouse at one time. Adjacent is the last pair of cottages in the conservation area. Both are in the Langley Estate style with red brick, red pantile roofs and decorative bargeboards. The northern one was the former Post Office; the one to the south has been extended and has a detached garage and the garden of this property marks the southern extent of the conservation area, beyond which the road continues with hedges and open fields either side.

*Conservation area boundary* - The conservation area is an irregular shape, based on the area thought to have been occupied by the former Langley Abbey, the boundary largely following the area scheduled as an ancient monument but extends to include the adjoining settlements. Langley Abbey occupies a site that stretches from the road (Langley Street) eastwards to the River Yare, north westwards to Monks Plantation and south east to Langley Dyke and its junction with the River Yare. The Conservation Area extends to the south to include the clusters of houses to the north and south of Langley Green and Langley Street including the roadside verges, hedges and tree line between the two which give the Conservation Area its setting and essential character.

*Street pattern* - The street pattern is largely determined by the minor road joining Langley Street and Langley Green running roughly parallel to the River Yare in approximately an east/west direction. This forms the main communication route between scattered village settlements which are in turn connected by a network of minor roads to the main Norwich to Lowestoft road (A146) to the south west of Langley Conservation Area. Minor roads and tracks lead off at right angles to Langley Street/Langley Green; to the west Staithe Road is an adopted road that joins to the network of roads leading to the A146 and Stone Lane is a partly adopted track giving access to agricultural land. To the east, a track leads to Monks Plantation and on to the river; Langley Dyke also gives access to the river. The alignment of Langley Dyke and Staithe Road is significant as the river was an important element of communication between settlements in the past.

In summary therefore, the area is still an agricultural community in a river valley setting, the form of the development a direct result of the interaction over time of the topography and land ownership.

#### *Architectural styles and materials.*

Six buildings within the conservation area boundary are included in the Secretary of State's list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest. These are listed in Appendix 3. There are also a number of buildings which are considered to make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area and these are noted in Appendix 4. Part of the Langley Abbey site is scheduled as an ancient monument. The Abbey site was first scheduled in 1934, and the area extended to the west after site was re-assessed by English Heritage in 2012.

The village has grown up slowly and this is reflected in the variety of building designs, closely related to use (for example, the monastic buildings at Langley Abbey, the former agricultural buildings at Staithe Farm and the domestic dwellings along Langley Street).

Although there is no prevalent architectural style, as would be found for example in planned suburban areas, there are the unifying factors of the scale of the buildings (generally two storey with steeply pitched roofs), the use of traditional materials of red brick and red or black pantiles and the way in which the buildings relate to the highway (usually, but not always, parallel to it). In addition the cottages built by the Langley Estate in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to house agricultural workers, reinforce a sense of unity. For example; two pairs of semi-detached cottages designed in an 'estate' style, presumably originally fair-faced brickwork (but now rendered), extended and altered in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, none-the-less retain their original form, their robust gable chimneys and red pantile roofs and a date stone of 1871. In contrast, the former school now a row of four cottages at Langley Green illustrates an alternative form of 'estate' style, using very different materials of dressed flint with gault brick dressings at the corners and around openings and suggests a wealthy benefactor. The red 'French' pantiles on the roof and the white painted, decorative projecting bargeboards are two

distinctive features on these cottages that appear in other buildings in the conservation area, such as the former post office, presumably originally built by Langley Estate.

Within the limited range of building types is found in the Conservation Area, the most prominent group of buildings is that around the remains of Langley Abbey (now Langley Polo Club). As this was until recently used as a farm, the majority of these buildings have been adapted for agricultural use, and are a mixture of flint, stone, brick and pantile (blue/black and orange) which are all typical vernacular building materials for this area. Most of the remains of the original Abbey buildings are of flint and stone, although the former stable block is constructed of brick on the ground floor with timber framing and wattle and daub at the upper floor under a thatched roof. The buildings illustrate that there has been a considerable re-use of materials over the centuries, supplementing original fabric with that obtained from demolition of earlier constructions. The later Georgian farmhouse, built of red brick with black glazed pantiles, stands slightly apart from the earlier buildings and is prominently seen from the road.

To the south of the Conservation Area, the road gently curves to contain a series of paired cottages, three of which are parallel to the road and one at right angles to it. These appear to be the former dwellings of agricultural workers as the building details reflect an 'Estate' style.

The Victorian former school now cottages to the north west of Langley Abbey do stand out due to their design and use of materials. *Ground surface materials, street furniture and the public realm*

It is notable that there are no formal pavements beside the roads or any street lighting in the village, the lack of which is an essential part of the informal rural character of the area. The roads are fringed with grass verges and in places hedgerows are located immediately on the roadside. Any proposals to diminish this character by introducing kerbs, footpaths and modern materials should be carefully considered. Road finishes are generally tarmac, although the majority of the lanes and lokes, including Stone Lane and the access to The Staithe, have no formal surface material which reinforces the rural character of the area. In the main, the forecourts to buildings are sympathetic to the character of the location, gravel or shingle being the most commonly used finish.

The War Memorial is a striking feature in the settlement. A flint and stone obelisk on a square stone base it is a prominent element in the landscape, positioned on a triangle of land at the junction of Staithe Road and Langley Street, bounded by chains on low white posts in a gravelled area and all well maintained. Nearby, a brilliant red post box on a black post is a bright spot of colour amongst the earthy tones of the surrounding landscape. There are some overhead telephone wires supported on timber poles, but these are not unduly intrusive in the streetscape.

An unobtrusive timber fence and gates mark the entrance to Langley Dyke, although the side, personal gate seems to be unused and superfluous and the track used for access. At Langley Staithe, the timber seat, interpretation board, timber quay heading and gravelled walkway are restrained, although the area containing the waste and recycling bins could be more sympathetically screened.

The street nameplates and signpost are traditional in design and add to the rural charm of the area. The black and yellow chevron sign warning of the left hand bend at the end of Staithe Road is not so attractive but fulfils a practical purpose.

Two fixed signs on Langley Green announcing the presence of the Norfolk Polo Club are and appear as relatively recent additions.

#### *Trees, hedges and significant open spaces*

The Conservation Area, centred on the old Abbey is essentially one of an historical landscape with buildings either side of the 'Street'. Trees, hedges and open spaces are vital elements in the quality of the Conservation Area, the most prominent of which are;

- The mature treed landscape around the Abbey buildings with grazing meadow in the foreground
- The tree lined 'avenue' on the road adjacent to the former Abbey
- The heavily wooded copse to the north east of the Abbey stretching right up to the River Yare
- The enclosing hedgerows with grass verges lining the 'Street'
- The gaps in the hedgerows which give dramatic views to the north across the grazing marshes of the Yare Valley. Although the Cantley Sugar Beet factory is rarely out of site, these views characterise the 'large skies' of the Norfolk landscape
- The grazing meadows and marshland themselves with the intricate arrangement of drainage ditches and the raised banks of the River Yare in the distance
- The gently rolling arable farmland to the south which forms the southern valley of the river, dramatic in itself even though destruction of the hedgerow system has contributed to a prairie feel
- The special landscape of Langley Dyke containing the view to the west (heavily wooded) and contrasting with the dramatic open views to the east over the grazing meadows, and to the north of the northern valley slopes of the River Yare
- A more intimate space around the War Memorial
- The grassed meadows to the north of the Abbey (Monks Plantation) which contain important ground evidence of the previous Abbey grounds (mounds forming ponds and moats). These are equally dramatic when viewed from Monks Plantation itself.

### ***Issues, pressures and threats and opportunities for improvements***

#### *The built environment.*

Generally the buildings and gardens in the conservation area are well maintained and there do not appear to be any structures that would qualify to be on the Buildings at Risk Register.

However, the special character of conservation areas can easily be eroded by seemingly minor, and well intentioned, home improvements such as the insertion of replacement windows and doors with ones of an inappropriate design or material, (for example hinged opening lights in lieu of sash windows and UPVC instead of painted timber). This can be a particular issue with unlisted buildings that have been identified as contributing to the character of the conservation area. In line with current legislation, all complete window replacements are required to achieve minimum insulation values, but recognising the affect that inappropriate replacements can have, Local Authorities can relax that requirement when considering the restoration or conversion of certain buildings within conservation areas, and advice should be sought from the Local Authority at an early stage.

Other pressures on the character of the conservation area are the addition of flat roofed extensions, unsympathetic stand alone structures such as garages and the over development of the sites on which the original buildings stand.

#### *Landscape.*

The pressure of modern farming methods are sometimes in direct contradiction to the desire to retain the intimate quality and delicate balance of the grazing marshland areas.

#### *Traffic.*

Due to the configuration of the minor roads, the area does not attract a great deal of through traffic, although at certain times of the year the roadways are under pressure from visitors to the Polo Club and care should be taken about future proposals which could exacerbate the situation through an intensification of the uses on the Langley Abbey site,. The relatively straight road encourages an

increase in the speed of traffic despite speed limits being in place. Whilst most houses have off-street parking there is some localised damage to verges outside dwellings.

#### *Tourism.*

Tourism by boat has increased in popularity, principally around Langley and Hardley Dykes and whilst this is not necessarily a negative element in itself, the closure of the Wherry Public House has meant that the village has few facilities for visitors apart from those at the Polo Club and the Staithe.

#### *Developments*

A new house between the former Wherry Inn and Staithe Farm is the only completely new dwelling in the Conservation Area in recent years and the use of a traditional form and materials have enabled this to blend successfully into the conservation area. The only other major development is at the Polo Club on Langley Green. A major repair and renovation project on the former Abbey Farm listed buildings was carried out in 2010, originally planned as an interpretation and visitor centre for the former Abbey. The subsequent change of use to a Polo Club has in the main been achieved without affecting the character of the main group of buildings, but the construction of a boarded all-weather arena or *ménage* adjacent to the road remains visible even though partly below ground level. Its visual impact could be softened with a sympathetic landscaping scheme. Any future proposals to intensify the use at Langley Abbey should be carefully considered with regard to their effect on the scheduled monument and character of the conservation area.

During the work to create a visitor centre at the Abbey, thorough research formed the basis for an exhibition to inform visitors about the history and development of the site. At the time of writing unfortunately this is no longer freely accessible. Given the importance of the site, consideration should be given to some form of interpretation of the Abbey, visible from the public highway.

Other recent developments have largely been concerned with the extension of existing dwellings or the gradual adaptation and conversion of existing buildings as they have passed from the Langley Estate into private ownership. Proposals for extending or altering existing properties should be carried out with due regard to the effect on the character of the conservation area. In terms of new buildings, it is difficult to see how much further development could be acceptable in the conservation area without upsetting the delicate balance of its character.

The approaches to the village are so important that development outside the village envelope should be resisted. Proposals for extending or altering existing properties should be carried out with due regard to the effect on the character of the area.

In terms of landscape character, the changes in the patterns of land ownership and agricultural practices have had an effect on the area that has changed. The Yare Valley is particularly vulnerable to change as the grazing meadows have been drained to grow arable crops and accommodate more machine orientated farming methods hence the historic sinuous pattern of dykes changed to a more rectilinear configuration to provide more efficient drainage.

#### ***Recommendations for suggested improvements***

- Consider display of interpretation the history and development of Langley Abbey on the periphery of the site

#### **Langley Green, Polo Club**

- Consider additional planting to soften the impact of the boarded arena/*ménage*
- Consider the design and siting of any additional signage at the entrance to the Polo Club

## Langley Green

- Informal storage on the sites either side of Langley Green at its junction with Stone Lane.

## Langley Staithe

- Consider better screening to the waste and recycling facilities

### ***The conservation area boundary***

The conservation area is an irregular shape, based on the area thought to have been occupied by the former Langley Abbey, the boundary largely following the area scheduled as an ancient monument but extends to include the adjoining settlements. It should be noted however, that the conservation area boundary to the north-east does not accord with that of the scheduled area. This is because the conservation area boundary at this point follows the line of a hedge and ditch whereas the scheduled area, which was extended following its re-assessment in 2012, does not follow a feature discernible on the ground.

Langley Abbey occupies a site that stretches from the road (Langley Street) eastwards to the River Yare, north westwards to Monks Plantation and south east to Langley Dyke and its junction with the River Yare. The Conservation Area extends to the south to include the clusters of houses to the north and south of Langley Green and Langley Street including the roadside verges, hedges and tree line between the two which give the Conservation Area its setting and essential character.

### ***Suggested amendment to the conservation area boundary***

- Extend the boundary to the north-west to include the pair of former estate cottages, 36 and 37 Langley Green. Although altered and extended in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they retain the general form, prominent chimneys and pantiled roof of other 'estate' cottages in the conservation area.

### ***Public consultation***

Consultation with interested parties and organisations was undertaken in accordance with the Broads Authority 'Statement of Community Involvement'. A joint consultation exercise was undertaken with South Norfolk Council as the proposed conservation area boundaries include land in both planning authority areas as defined on the maps included in the character appraisals. A letter and leaflet were delivered to all residents living within the conservation area boundary, and copies of the appraisal documents were made available both online and in hard copy format in the Broads Authority offices and through the Parish Council. The leaflet included a comments section and consultees were also able to comment on line.

A public exhibition was held in the Langley Village Hall on Saturday 23 November 2013, which was attended by officers from the Planning Team of the Broads Authority and by 4 members of the public to ask questions, propose or suggest minor amendments to the re-appraisal or boundary and raise issues of concern. Support was expressed for the designation, considering that it would benefit the village and the local community. In addition, the Authority received 1 written response, which related to the scale and appropriateness of the use at Langley Abbey and the effects on the scheduled monument and the character of the conservation area. Existing comments in the conservation area re-appraisal text have been amended to reflect this.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Policies**

Locally, South Norfolk is part of the Greater Norwich Development Partnership which has adopted its Joint Core Strategy. South Norfolk is also progressing their Development Management and Sites Specifics DPDs as well as two Area Action Plans for the towns of Long Stratton and Wymondham. The Broads Authority has an adopted Core Strategy (2007) and Development Management Policies DPD (2011) and is progressing its Sites Specifics DPD. Both South Norfolk and the Broads Authority have some saved Local Plan (2003 and 1997 respectively) Policies in place. In line with government policy, the Broads Authority and South Norfolk Council are currently reviewing and revising local policies which will be published in the respective Local Plans (formerly Local Development Framework (LDF)).

To support these policies, the Broads Authority and South Norfolk Council provide further advice and details in a series of leaflets, which are currently being reviewed and expanded as part of the Local Plan process. A list of those currently available is attached in Appendix 2.

## **Appendix 2**

### **Guidance leaflets**

#### **Broads Authority**

- Keeping the Broads Special
- Do I need Planning Permission?
- How do I apply for Planning Permission?
- Building at the Waterside – A guide to design of waterside buildings in the Broads Authority area
- Environment and Landscape – How do I plan and manage trees and scrub alongside rivers?
- Development and Flood Risk in the Broads
- Riverbank Protection Works – A guide for riparian landowners
- Sustainability Guide – Sustainable development in the Broads

#### **South Norfolk Council**

- The South Norfolk Place-Making Guide

## **Appendix 3**

### **Listed buildings within the conservation area**

The following buildings are included in the list of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic interest compiled by the Secretary of State:

Abbey Farmhouse	Grade II
Stable block to Langley Abbey	Grade II* & Scheduled Ancient Monument
Former western range to Langley Abbey	Grade I & Scheduled Ancient Monument
Langley Abbey remains	Grade I & Scheduled Ancient Monument

Staithe Farmhouse	Grade II
Staithe Barn	Grade II

#### **Appendix 4**

##### ***Unlisted buildings that make a positive contribution to the character of the conservation area.***

Whilst the following buildings, boundary walls and railings within the present conservation area and the proposed extensions to it do not merit full statutory protection, they are considered to be of local architectural or historic interest, and every effort should be made to maintain their contribution to the character of the conservation area.

Langley Green, 30 – 33 (inclusive) – flint and brick cottages  
 Monks Plantation Cottages and adjacent converted outbuildings  
 Cottages by Stone Lane  
 Former Wherry Inn  
 The Street, 25 & 26  
 Former Post Office  
 The Street, Broadacres  
 Staithe Road, War Memorial  
 Langley Staithe and Dyke including quay heading and footpath

#### **Appendix 5**

##### ***Sources and references***

The Norfolk We Live In, Blake Bull Cartwright and Fitch  
 The Buildings of England, Norfolk 2: West and South, Nicholas Pevsner and Bill Wilson  
 Broads Landscape Character Assessment – Local character area 13. Yare Valley – Claxton to Hardley Marshes  
 The Norfolk Broads, A Landscape History. Tom Williamson  
 Heritage Environment Record, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology, Gressenhall  
 East Anglia, A Geographia Guide  
 Whites Gazetteer of Norfolk 1845 & 1854  
 English Heritage: Guidance on conservation area appraisals, 2006  
 English Heritage: Guidance on the management of conservation areas, 2006  
 A Popular Guide to Norfolk Place names, James Rye, The Larks Press, 1991  
 Faden's Map of Norfolk 1797

#### **Appendix 6**

##### ***Contact details and further information.***

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