



Howe

Draft Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Management Guidelines

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Introduction



St Mary's Church

Howe Conservation Area is one of the smaller conservation areas in South Norfolk and was designated in 1975. Howe's character is that of a hamlet with its western half set around a large historic green with groups of trees and ponds, all set in open arable landscape. The eastern half of the conservation is more enclosed and centred around the church.

There has been little change apparent in the conservation area since the 19th century; any 20th century buildings being unobtrusive with the large grassland area of the green retaining its natural character. The different spaces within the conservation area are defined with trees and hedgerows rather than with built form, so buildings tend to stand as markers around both the green and the church

Under the terms of Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, the Local Planning Authority is required to identify areas of special architectural or historic interest whose character or appearance it is desirable to preserve or enhance, and to designate them as a Conservation Area. The 1990 Act also requires local authorities to prepare management guidance and proposals for Conservation Areas. The Howe Conservation area was originally designated in 1975. This document should be read in conjunction with the adopted Local Plan, the National Planning Policy Framework and Planning Practice Guidance

Key Characteristics

- Strong natural character
- Enclosed by mature trees and hedgerows
- Eastern half centred around the more enclosed setting around the church
- Western half centred around the open grassland of the green
- Dwellings largely set back from the road
- Former estate land

Historical Development

The hamlet of Howe is referred to in Domesday book as "Hou or Howa", the name itself being an Old Scandinavian word for hill or barrow. It is possible that the area was occupied in Roman times as Roman tiles appear to have been re-used in the construction of the church tower. It may be that the origin of the sand pit beside the Green also dates from the Roman period.

The parish church of St Mary is of Anglo-Norman date with a round tower, dated by Pevsner to the tenth century. It is thought that at least three houses in the conservation area date from the mediaeval period. Most of the buildings in the conservation area date from the 18th century or earlier with only two built in the last fifty years. The two key buildings are the church to the east side and Howe Hall to the west.

Since the land formed an outlier of the Brooke Hall estate until the early 20th century, the building of houses was restricted to those engaged in working this part of the estate. This small but ancient parish has therefore had a strong connection with Brooke, although surprisingly the rectory was combined with Poringland.

Character Assessment

Howe and its setting

The whole settlement of Howe is within the conservation area boundary, which as previously mentioned has two distinct parts: development centred around the large green to the south-west side and the centre around the church site to the north-east. The site of Howe Hall, a large 17th century house, dominates the south-west corner of the conservation area close to the green. At the north-east end of the conservation area, the church, which is particularly attractive due to its pleasing proportions and round tower, is imposing in views from the street. The narrow corridor westward along the road from the church site is largely enclosed by trees until views open out across the grassland of the green. Much of the general character of the settlement is defined by mature vegetation enclosing properties which are set back from the road, more so around the green, allowing the natural character to dominate.

On approaching the settlement from the north-east side trees start to enclose the road going westward from Howe Lane giving no hint of the church until the street opens out to the north side where the church and its boundary wall dominate views. This enclosed space around the church contrasts with the larger open views of the main green.



Looking East from the Green



Looking West from the Green

Beyond the boundary of the conservation there are large areas of open rural landscape on all sides. There is less dense vegetation at the south boundary of the conservation area, which allows for longer views of the countryside beyond the settlement.

Conservation Area Boundary

The conservation area boundary extends east from the small triangular green near to the church on the Brooke Road. From here it follows the northern edge of the highway then sets off west to a point north of The Old Rectory. The boundary then runs due south, flanking the old rectory grounds and then follows the northern boundary of its former orchard. At a point north of the pond on the north east corner of Howe Green, it turns north and then runs in a zigzag course west until reaching the Shotesham Road where it goes southward across fields at the rear of Howe Hall. South-west of the Hall, it turns once again south east to cross Backwood Lane before going north-east following the southern edge of Howe Green as far as the single house at its eastern end. Here it makes two small offsets to the south and then runs due east to Church Farm. From Church Farm the boundary zigzags north skirting the eastern edge of the farm buildings and the large pond to its north until reaching the small green at Howe Lane.

Street Patterns and Historic grain

The main road through Howe and the conservation area is The Green. This runs from Howe Lane to the north-east, then past the church and along an almost tunnel section with trees either side before opening out along the north side of the large area of grassland of the green. It then continues westward into Shotesham Lane and southward into Backwood Lane.

Looking at the historic pattern of development at the far southwest corner of Howe Green there are three main groups of buildings: Howe Hall and its several outbuildings at the far south-west corner, a second 'looser' group of houses north and east of the green, which are more or less in the centre of the conservation area, and lastly the development around the church to the east side of the conservation area, which includes the rectory with its outbuildings and Church Farm on the opposite side of the road. There are later dwellings erected inbetween these three main areas of the settlement.

Perambulation

Backwood Lane

This south western end of the conservation area is marked by Howe Hall, a grade II listed building that originally dates from the 17th century. Its garden boundary brick wall encloses the site. The Hall itself is partly screened from the lane by Yew trees, which may perhaps be remnants of an 18th century garden design. The front wall is heavily buttressed to the north and becomes taller at the south boundary, copped with shaped bricks. The wall separates the house from the open farm yard area, which is largely dominated by relatively modern agricultural buildings.

The south-west corner of Howe Green is marked by a grove of mature poplars. Further north along the lane at the junction with Shotesham Lane is a large pond surrounded by mature trees, which helps to enclose the green. Shotesham Lane is the west entrance to Howe Green and is a narrow lane enclosed by mature vegetation either side.



House north of Howe Hall



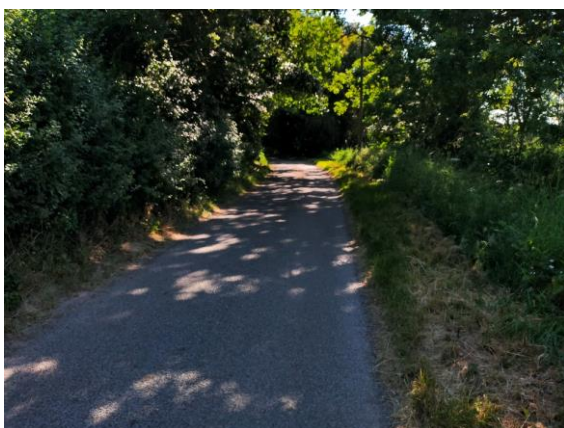
Front wall of Howe Hall

Howe Green

Howe Green is the large open meadow in the western half of the conservation area. The road which runs through the settlement east to west is also known as Howe Green. The southern boundary of the green is marked by only a few individual trees so the open countryside beyond is more visible here. A large 18th century red brick two storey house marks the end of the green at the east side and is a focal point in views looking east. This simple but substantial and dignified building adds much to the character of the green. From here the road going east is enclosed by mature vegetation and does not really open out again until it reaches the church.

Pearle Cottage, a grade II listed thatched dwelling, is clearly visible from the green looking north. Mature trees either side of its driveway help to draw the eye towards attractive views of the cottage. East of this and a little closer to the green is The Gables, another thatched building with mature trees that enclose it's site. This cottage has a single offset central stack and a single eyebrow eaves dormer window at attic level.

One or two individual standalone trees are important features of the open landscape of the green. The most important marker tree stands appropriately at the centre of the space. Marking the entrance to the green at the east side is the red telephone box, which as a relatively small structure certainly adds interest to views, being a focal point without detracting from the rural character.



South west approach to the conservation area



View towards the Green from Howe Hall



Pearle Cottage



The Gables

Along The Green from The Old Byre to the Church

Moving eastward from The Old Byre the roads starts to become more enclosed by mature hedgerows and trees either side. There is an attractive old brick wall fronting the road running along the boundaries of The Byre and Oak Barn. This stands out as the only solid boundary structure until the historic front wall of the churchyard is reached some distance away to the east. A tree-arched road leads to the church and its associated buildings.

On the approach to the church there is an historic iron railing at the north side of the road and a timber post and rail fence to the south. The railing runs on to the churchyard site as part of its front boundary as far as the entrance gate. These boundary treatments sit comfortably as part of a traditional rural streetscape.

East side around St Mary's Church

Mature trees and The Old Rectory site enclose the churchyard helping to emphasise St Mary's Church and its boundary wall, which are the oldest structures in the conservation area dominating views from the road. The flint construction of the church and its boundary wall sit particularly well with the natural character of the setting. The flint finish, round tower, simple form and pleasing proportions of the church building make it particularly attractive in the street scene. Opposite the church to the south is Church Farm, but its farmhouse is largely secluded from the street by a single storey former outbuilding and mature vegetation at its front boundary.

Moving towards the road junction at the far eastern end of the conservation area, there is School Cottage at the south side of the street. This is a thatched dwelling that is not listed. A smaller Victorian former school building in brick is within its grounds, its architectural style being very much typical of the period. Since the last conservation area review the former school building has been restored and linked to the main house as part of its accommodation. The decorative thatched roof of the house with its large domer and the large external stack of the former school building both add architectural interest to this part of the conservation area. Finally, a former single storey outbuilding of the Old Rectory fronts the small green at the junction with Howe Lane and has been converted to residential use. The building sits comfortably within landscape views and, despite its conversion to a dwelling, retains much of its original character in views from the road.



The Old Byre



Rectory Cottage

Architectural details and Traditional Materials

Buildings in the conservation area are nearly all of the Norfolk vernacular, with traditional clay tile gable end roofs, render or red brick finishes and traditional casement windows. The church is the exception to this, its doors and tracery windows being in the medieval Gothic style. Its flint construction and round tower are however very much characteristic of the Norfolk style of churches from the medieval period. The windows on The Old Rectory are of note with their Gothic arched lights.

Many of the buildings in the conservation area are red brick with the most having orangey red clay pantile roofs. A number of properties have what were originally 19th century outbuildings, all of which are constructed in brick with clay pantile roofs. Rendered finishes can be seen at one of the houses north of Howe Hall and also on the dwellings north of the green and on The Old Rectory. The rectory has an attractive early 19th century wrought iron hooped gate. There are five buildings in the conservation area that have thatched roofs, including The Gables and Pearle Cottage, the latter being a listed building. The church roof has a plain clay tile finish and the Old Rectory a slate roof.

The church is built of flint, with some Roman tiles and ironbound conglomerate, and has stone and brick dressings. Its front boundary wall is also constructed in flint. Both the church and its boundary wall stand out as the oldest built structures in the conservation area.

Howe Hall is red brick encasing a timber frame. Included in the same listing is its boundary wall, also in brick with decorative clay coping. The house is covered with both pantile and plain tiled roofs. The facade to the south is in mid 18th century brick. The large barn on the site is grade II listed in its own right and is constructed in brick with a clay pantile roof. It is of 17th and 18th century brick construction and has a pantile roof, parapet gables with brick kneelers and tumbling-in.

A less historic feature of note is the pre-second world war black painted Dutch barn with iron segmental corrugated roof which is worthy of retention.



Victorian postbox in churchyard wall



Iron railings and gate at church

Boundary treatments

There are two key sites with more significant historic walls. The first of these is the churchyard wall, which is an ancient structure. The wall is not continuous for the full frontage of the churchyard but curves round the church to the north east following the road and is an attractive prominent feature in the street scene. It is built of wide flint panels divided by narrow brickwork, all capped with a half-round brick coping. The wall has a fine patina of age and adds much to the historic character of the street scene. Most attractively the western end of the wall has inset within it a fine postbox in traditional red cast iron. Beyond this the churchyard boundary is marked with historic iron post and rail fencing and front gates. This fencing continues along the front boundary of The Old Rectory.

The second more significant boundary is the brick wall around the garden of Howe Hall, which marks the entrance to the conservation area from the southwest side. The wall is buttressed with trees growing adjacent to it inside the enclosure. The lower section of the wall is buttress with a less traditional coping of a brick soldier course. The taller section has a more traditional duo-pitched brick coping.

Of less significance but an attractive feature within the dominant natural character of the street scene is the red brick wall at the front boundary of Oak Barn, which, as with the wall at Howe Hall also has a traditional half round brick coping.

Natural Character and open spaces

A number of ponds survive around the edge of the green to the west and north sides. There are also two ponds at the east side of the road on leaving the conservation area to the north-east along Howe Green and these may suggest possible origins for the settlement. As referred to earlier, to the west of the green there is a large pond at the junction of Shotesham Road and Backwood Lane. The green looks well maintained: the grass being regularly cut back although it could be argued that left relatively wild provides a more pleasing natural setting to the buildings around it. There is a small green at the road junction which forms the north-east corner of the conservation area. South of this is a large pond but this is more or less completely hidden from view by a mature hedgerow. Mature trees are prominent in much of the conservation area largely closing off longer views of the open countryside beyond, the exception here being the more open south boundary of the green.

Street furniture

Fortunately, there is very little street furniture in the conservation area. The Victorian post box in the churchyard wall and 1950s road sign at the junction with Backwood Lane are the only two worth mentioning, both adding interest.

Conservation Management Guidelines

Upgrading windows and doors

Only one or two properties have plastic windows or doors that are noticeable from along the road and the green.

If external doors or windows need to be replaced then this should be done using sympathetic materials to an appropriate design, particularly on pre-20th century buildings. Where less traditional materials are used then the new units should still match the original design.

Boundaries

The majority of boundaries are defined by mature hedgerows and trees with a small percentage having traditional post and rail or metal railings.

Any new boundary treatment should keep to the existing types of boundary treatment which are sympathetic to the rural character of the conservation area.

Ground surfacing

All road surfacing is tarmac between natural grass verges with driveways having a natural gravel finish.

The use of more modern surface materials such as paviors on driveways should be avoided as this will only have a detrimental impact on the character of the conservation area.

Highways/street furniture

There is one 1950s directional highway sign at the junction of Backwood Lane and High Green but otherwise there are no highways signs in the conservation area. Roads have natural grass verges which are very much part of the rural character of the area. Other than the road sign and the Victorian post box in the churchyard wall, there is no other street furniture in the conservation area.

The lack of highways signage helps to retain the traditional rural character of the conservation area and therefore the lack of signage should be retained. Only signage that is absolutely necessary should be installed within the conservation area and where possible it should be positioned and designed so as not to detract from existing views. The use of kerbs at grass verges should also be avoided as these will only detract from the rural character. If there is a desire to have a pathway for pedestrian safety for example, this should be designed sensitively to maintain informal character e.g. a trod path rather than tarmac.

Appendix 1

(i) Listed Buildings

Church of St Mary (Grade II*)
Howe Hall and forecourt garden walls to south
Barn at Howe Hall
Pearle Cottage, Howe Green

(ii) Unlisted Buildings of Townscape and Local Significance

The Gables
Rectory Cottage
15 & 16 Backwood Lane
9 & 10 immediately east of the green
School House with its attached former school building
Converted outbuildings at the junction of Howe Green with Howe Lane
Keepers o Cottage.

Appendix 2

Policy background

In recent years, the approach to conservation area designation has changed considerably. It is now recognised that development plan policies, development control decisions, and proposals for the preservation or enhancement and the management of conservation areas, can best be achieved when there is a sound understanding of the special interest of the conservation area.

This position is reinforced as follows:

The Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 in section 66(1) makes it a duty of local authorities when considering applications to have special regard to the desirability of preserving a listed building or its setting or any features of special architectural or historic interest.

Under section 72 of the same Act, it is a duty with respect to any buildings or land in a conservation area, to pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of that area.

Department for Communities and Local Government. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 Paragraphs 184 to 202 cover “Conserving and enhancing the historic environment”.

Joint Core Strategy- Policy 2 : Promoting Good design South Norfolk Local Plan

The South Norfolk Local Plan Development Management Policies Document was adopted in 2015 and policy 4.10 covers Heritage Assets.

Public Consultation

This section to report the outcome of the public consultation which is to be undertaken during 4th December 2023 – 15th January 2024

Howe Conservation Area

This map illustrates the Howe Conservation Area, which is outlined in red. The area includes several buildings, some of which are highlighted in brown, including the Rectory, Church, and various cottages. Roads shown include Sheep Lane, Wash Lane, and Backwood Lane. Other features include a pond, a path, and a meadow. The map is oriented with North at the top, as indicated by the north arrow in the top left corner. The scale is 1:3,500, and the map is based on OS 100019483 data from 2023.