

Long Ashton

Village Design Statement



"The Smyth family...
became principal
landowners in the parish..."

INTRODUCTION

The Village Design Statement is intended to be used to influence decisions affecting design and development in the village, and should serve to respect, retain and enhance the attractive and distinctive character of Long Ashton.

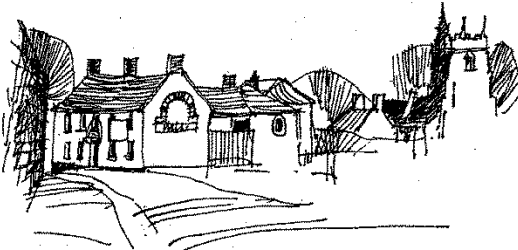
As a result of a local initiative, a public meeting indicated support to prepare a Village Design Statement. A core group was set up to steer the project and carried out an extensive programme of consultation in order to involve as broad a cross section of the community as possible. This included two library exhibitions and a workshop day which were publicised to every household. These resulted in a consensus as to which features are important in contributing to the character of the Village.

The recommendations, shown in bold type, supplement the policies and proposals of the North Somerset Local Plan, in particular policies CON/1 'Design of New Development', CON/7 'Environmental Improvements', HOU/2 'Housing within Settlement Boundaries' and CON/13 'Development in Conservation Areas'. Many of these recommendations are long term community aspirations and would require new resources to be made available.

This document was adopted by North Somerset Council in April 2000 as Supplementary Planning Guidance to relevant policies in the North Somerset Local Plan.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

There is evidence of development in the area before and during the Roman occupation, although settlement did not become established until Saxon times. Later, hamlets such as Keedwell, Lampton, Wycke, Birdwell, Providence, Gatcombe, Yanley and Kencot began to appear along the hillside and in the valley, eventually merging into what became known as Long Ashton.



"...built the parish church ... and the original Church House..."

The village had long been dominated by the Lords of the Manor of Ashton Lyons, who built the parish church in the 14th century and the original Church House (which was later also the village inn). The Smyth family acquired the Estate in 1545, and became the principal landowners in the parish, holding sway over village life for the next four centuries.

In the early 1900's the Smyths built the current Church House, contributed towards the cost of the school at Northleaze and built the almshouses and Working Mens' Club, (now the Royal British Legion Club). They were also responsible for a number of other buildings which still exist, including many houses for the Estate's employees.

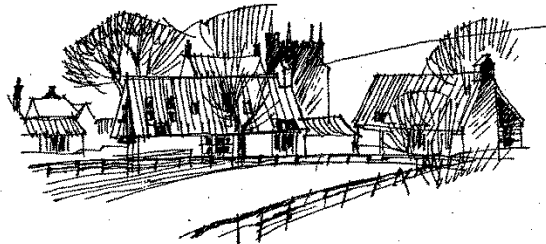
The Smyths were involved with the foundation of the National Fruit & Cider Institute in 1903 (now the Research Station) at the west end of the village. This led to employees' houses being built on the main road, west of Lampton Road.

When the Ashton Court Estate was sold off after 1946, much of the remaining land and property was bought by existing tenants. The mansion and park were acquired by the City of Bristol in 1959.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, coal seams worked by the Bedminster and Nailsea mines provided local employment. Other minerals such as iron-ore and lead-ore have been mined in the vicinity since at least Roman times.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, employment was provided by the growth of horticulture giving rise to large market gardens on the south facing slopes along the main road. These had a significant effect on the physical layout of the village, emphasising its linear nature.

Ashton Vale has long been the logical route for travel between Bristol and the South West. The road through the village became the Yatton Turnpike in the 18th century and three milestones still exist. In the mid 19th century the Bristol to Exeter railway came through the valley and in 1968 the A370 Long Ashton Bypass was constructed to relieve worsening traffic congestion.



"...design based on traditional lines..."

SIZE AND SETTING

Long Ashton is a linear village of approximately 4000 inhabitants, stretching for two miles east to west along the original Weston-super-Mare road. Development has taken place both north and south of the road and generally remains well below the ridgeline, rarely extending to the valley bottom.

A south facing hillside setting gives attractive views from many parts of the village across this narrow section of Ashton Vale towards Bedminster Down and beyond to Dundry Hill and the church tower. Immediately to the north lies the Failand Ridge, part of the Severn Ridge, which extends from the Avon Gorge towards the estuary.

The nature of the surrounding landscape, comprising extensive fields to the south and west, and woodland to the north, gives the village a considerable degree of visual cohesion. This makes for a most attractive rural setting, particularly from southern viewpoints such as the A370 and railway, and is quite remarkable given its proximity to Bristol.

The only significant alterations to the surrounding landscape have been the continuing expansion of the quarry to the immediate north of (but not visible from) the village, and the landfill site in the valley to the east of Yanley Lane. This latter activity has altered the valley landscape when viewed from many parts of central and eastern areas of the village.

The most picturesque and historic part of the village is at the eastern end, separated from Bristol by the River Avon, Ashton Court Estate and green fields. Since the 1950s, the land all around Long Ashton has also been designated as part of the Bristol and Bath Green Belt. This was intended to protect and preserve the openness of the narrow strip of land between Long Ashton and Bristol.

- development should remain well below the ridgeline in order to preserve the attractive wooded backdrop to the village
- the rural setting of Ashton Brook and its tributaries should be conserved and opportunities sought to create a linear walkway alongside
- development should respect existing views from public areas and rights of way
- the open space between Bristol and Long Ashton is important to the setting of the eastern end of the village
- the open and undeveloped nature of the valley to the south of the village is important to its setting and should be conserved

STRUCTURE

Until World War I, only limited development had been allowed but in the 1920s and '30s, the pace of growth quickened, with Ridgeway and Ravens Cross Road appearing and Glebe Road expanding further. The dispersal of the Smyth Estate together with the continuing growth of employment opportunities in Bristol, led to the village expanding rapidly to the west, with large estates such as Fenswood and Keedwell appearing in the late '40s & early '50s, Birdwell in the late '50s & early '60s (all at the western end of the village) and Ashton Theynes in the late '70s and early '80s.



...locally quarried stone was used as the basic material for walls...

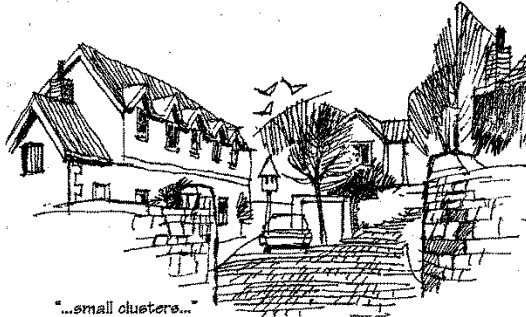
Smaller developments such as Glebe Road extension and Parsonage Road appeared in the '50s and '60s along with the Highlands estate above Ridgeway. Between 1947 and 1994, the numbers of houses in Long Ashton grew by more than two and a half times.

Parts of the large post war estates of Birdwell and Ashton Theynes have now been softened where there is existing and maturing vegetation. A number of smaller developments have also taken place during the 1980s and '90s, each of less than half a dozen dwellings, mainly of executive homes, in small plots along Ridgeway Road, Long Ashton Road and off Follleigh Lane above Ridgeway.

3

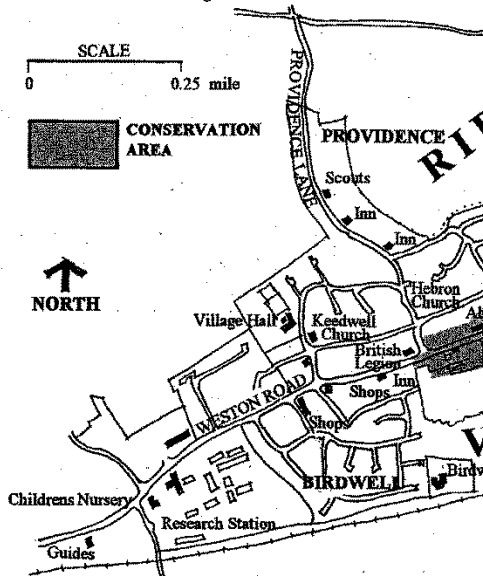
Since the war, there has been a general shift of focus of social and retail activity from east to west with the result that the western end of the village has become the effective centre with the shops, library, village hall complex and recreation ground, Keedwell Church, doctors' surgery and dentists all located there. Church House, one of the primary schools and a shop are located halfway along the main road.

The eastern end of the village, meanwhile, still retains the air of a medieval village. It is dominated by the Parish Church and its extensive churchyard together with a group of buildings including an inn, farm, old school house and some fine trees. In 1980 this was designated a Conservation Area. Two more areas (Westleaze and Wycke), were designated in 1988 covering the hamlet of Yanley and the area along the main road from Follleigh Lane to Providence Lane.



"...small clusters..."

- If substantial areas of land are identified for development in the future, consideration should be given to the inclusion of some social housing, particularly low-cost housing for the young (Local Plan policy HOU/11)
- Existing features such as topography, mature vegetation, footpaths and artefacts should be identified and retained within the landscape infrastructure of future developments
- the scale of any new development should be broken down into small clusters, separated by a strong landscape infrastructure using both hard and soft elements, reflecting the tradition of the eastern end of the village



4

BUILDINGS

Besides the medieval Church and inn, there are a number of notable old buildings in the village, including Parsonage Farm, which has a medieval core, and Lower Court Farm which incorporates a listed medieval chapel.

The appearance of a number of large dwellings along the main road in the 18th and early 19th centuries reflected the popularity of the village amongst the wealthy merchants of Bristol who could afford large distinctive homes like Ashover and travelled to their workplace by horse & trap. Such houses remain a key feature of the village character.

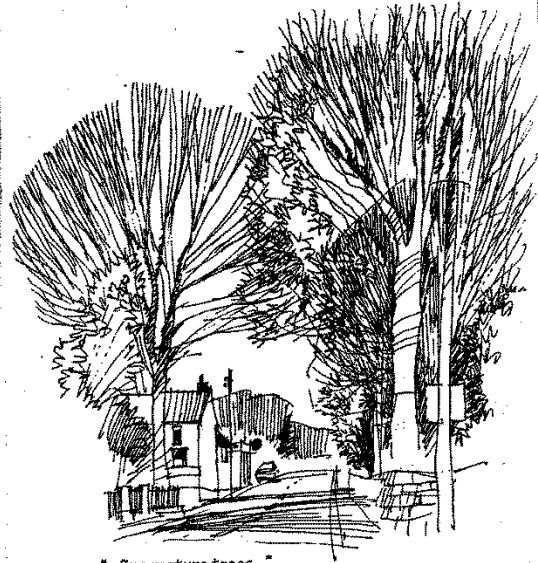
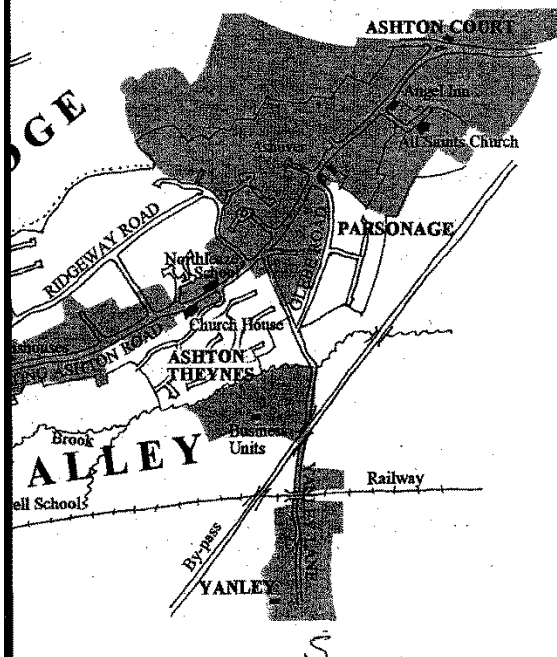
In contrast, a terrace of cottages in Birdwell, off the main road, was built around the turn of the century for villagers working locally.

The village owes much of its character to its historical association with Ashton Court, one of the most distinctive features being the stone boundary walls, some quite old, running almost the complete length of the village. The Barberis hedges in Ridgeway and Chestnut Roads are further evidence of the Smyth influence.

Over 70 properties in the parish are listed as being of special architectural or historic interest including Ashton Court (Grade I), All Saints Church and several churchyard monuments, Gatcombe Court and Lower Court Farm Chapel (all Grade II*). The remainder, including the Angel Inn, Northleaze School and a number of houses and cottages throughout the village, are listed Grade II.

A variety of mainly domestic buildings have been developed over a long period, some of which are medieval in origin. At that time locally quarried stone was used as the basic material for walls with clay tiles for roofs. This continued for some 300 years. These two materials make up much of the character of older parts of the village together with render to walls and use of clay brickwork for chimneys and flues.

The stone is roughly shaped and used in random sizes, with a predominantly warm light brown colour incorporating pink and grey hues. Brickwork is a varied red/orange mottled with kiln burn markings and tiles are red/orange but weathered to almost black.



"...fine mature trees..."

A feature contributing to village character in older buildings is the use of white painted wood framed windows, both casement and sliding sash. Where larger houses have been built, smaller scale elements are added: - bays, gables, dormers and porches, with large windows subdivided.

Use of materials within these traditional parameters has helped to fit new buildings into the village setting. The use of reconstructed materials often fails to reproduce the appearance of local stone, bricks and tiles.

The cohesiveness of small scale domestic development is a traditional feature of the village, with a wide variety of frontages, heights and architectural styles demonstrated in older parts. Some variation in orientation also contributes to a diversity of intimate external spaces which add character and human scale to the public face of the village.

- Domestic buildings should, as appropriate, be constructed in natural stone, rustic clay brickwork and render to reflect the village tradition of materials and scale
- Clay tiles or natural slates for roofs should be used in preference to concrete tiles and artificial 'slates' and conform to traditional roof pitches
- Chimney stacks and pots are a notable feature and should be retained and incorporated in new buildings
- New or replacement windows should reflect traditional character and materials, particularly in conservation areas
- Overall design should be based on traditional lines, avoiding standard house types with bolt-on features and superficial variations, and considering the relationship of void and mass, while not ruling out innovative styles using traditional materials
- The juxtaposition of buildings and related open spaces in future housing development should reflect the traditional groupings typical of the eastern end of the village
- Boundaries should be defined using natural stone and/or hedges

STREETS, SPACES & VEHICLES

While Long Ashton does not have a traditional village green, there are a number of open spaces within the village boundary, both public and private, which create an attractive open character. These include the Recreation Ground at the west end of the village, some very substantial gardens in the centre of the village above Ridgeway Road, and the playing fields adjacent to Ashton Brook. Many of these spaces provide views across open countryside.

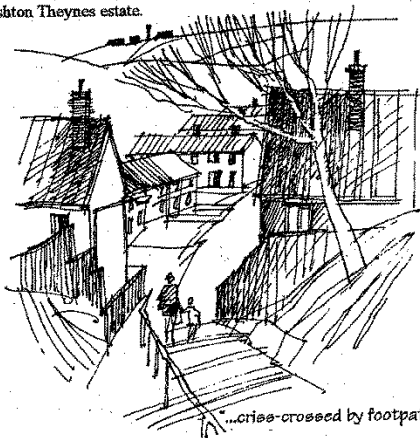
There are also attractive open spaces on the margins of the village which are used for informal public recreation. These range from the footpaths across the golf course above the village, offering fine views, to the low lying Dawson Walk through an area of attractive fields, woods and a stream. Both these areas also provide excellent habitats for birds, mammals & plants.

Existing sodium lighting tends to urbanise the area and creates "light pollution" which, together with inappropriate light fittings, detracts from the rural character of the village.

Overhead services in the older parts of the village are an eyesore, and together with the mixed style and quality of street furniture and paving throughout the village (e.g. bus shelters, seats, litter bins, bollards and signage), add to the visual confusion of the streetscape.

The main road suffers congestion from parked cars at several points such as outside The Angel Inn, Northleaze School, Church House and the shops at the west end of the village.

Congestion outside Northleaze School causes further problems in relation to the Theynes Croft junction which is the only access to the Ashton Theynes estate.



Some residential streets, such as those on the Birdwell estate, suffer from on-street parking which obstructs the movement of cars and service vehicles. This is due to the absence of adequate off-street parking and the current high levels of car ownership.

The speed of traffic through the village is perceived as a problem, particularly by pedestrians and cyclists.

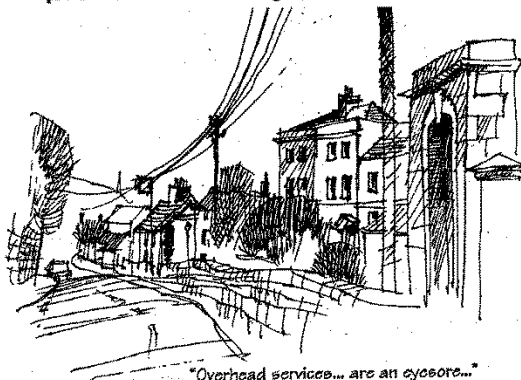
The village main road is criss-crossed by several north/south public footpaths which provide a convenient short cut to shops and facilities from residential areas and also link into the surrounding countryside.

Community buildings and some shops at the west end of the village, together with their immediate surroundings, are generally of mediocre design and leave considerable scope for enhancement.

Long Ashton is blessed with some fine mature trees which add to the visual attractiveness of the streetscape.

7

- attractive open spaces on the margins of the village are important for their contribution to its setting and should be retained for their landscape, ecological and recreational value
- existing views across open spaces to the surrounding countryside should be preserved
- street furniture and paving should be of a high quality and well located; opportunities should be sought to upgrade existing items where possible
- opportunities should be sought to upgrade the environment of the shops and community buildings at the west end of the village and the area around Church House (Local Plan policy CON/7) by improving paving, street furniture and planting
- a landscaped car park with open space and seating should be provided on the waste ground adjacent to Church House (Local Plan policy CON/7)
- the setting of mature trees should be conserved and the planting of new trees encouraged, where appropriate, to enhance the streetscape
- latest technology should be used to minimise light spillage from street lighting and fittings should be in keeping with the rural setting wherever possible
- opportunities should be sought to underground existing overhead services wherever possible (Local Plan policy CON/8)
- traffic calming measures and, where appropriate, pedestrian crossings would be beneficial throughout the village and should be designed as sensitive additions to the streetscape
- any new development should provide for parking and access in a way that minimises vehicular impact on the village character.
- In new developments, pedestrian and cycle access both within the village and outwards into the countryside should be provided and their use encouraged



SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Other documents containing information relating to village character:-

- Long Ashton Village Appraisal
- A Case for Conservation (SCALA)
- Long Ashton and Leigh Woods (The Archive Photographs Series)
- SCALA Village Trails Nos.1(Revised) and No.2

For further information contact the Clerk, Long Ashton Parish Council.

8