














SOUTHAM

MILLENNIUM DESIGN STATEMENT



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1. Background to the Project



Now, as never before, communities have to move forward and develop, otherwise they will stagnate.

The Countryside Agency pioneered Village Design Statements to encourage better rural design so that new development responds to, and takes account of, local distinctiveness.

Since 1997, Stratford on Avon District Council has agreed to promote Village Design Statements in its area. In the light of possible new commercial developments in and around the town, it was suggested that Southam should carry out a pioneering Town (Centre) Design Statement project.

The town centre is not easily separated from the rest of Southam, so it was decided that the project should cover the whole of the town. The industrial estate and the new housing beyond the bypass were not examined in depth but nevertheless the conclusions of the project are relevant to them.

As many of the town's residents as possible have participated in this project by identifying for themselves the aspects of character, natural and man-made, which in their opinion make Southam distinctive. Thus it is hoped that the community will feel that they have a real influence on the design of future development in their home town and that development will protect and enhance the town's special nature, not detract from it.

A questionnaire was sent to every household in the town inviting everyone to express an opinion on the character and facilities available in the town. Southam people then participated in a Saturday workshop, going out around the town, making notes and taking photographs. These photographs provide a wonderful record of our town as it was on April 8th 2000 and this led to the document being named the "Millennium Design Statement."

There are four schools in Southam, all of which contributed to the project, and their findings have also been incorporated into the Design Statement. Their participation was particularly valued as these young people will be the future residents of the town and will benefit most from the outcome of the project.

The findings from all these sources were amalgamated into a draft Design Statement during June 2000 and further comments were invited from the people of Southam over a three day exhibition in the Library. As many people as possible were encouraged to become involved in the project and all the views were taken into account when the final document was submitted as supplementary planning guidance for approval by the Stratford on Avon Planning Committee in September 2000.

2. Location



Southam is a small market town in Warwickshire situated where the A423 (Coventry to Banbury road) converges with the A426 from Rugby and crosses the A425 (Daventry to Leamington Spa road). Smaller roads from Priors Marston, Deppers Bridge and Bascote Heath also lead into the town. Although railways and canals pass nearby, Southam was never included in either network and is served only by roads.

Southam's topography has been moulded largely by the Rivers Stowe and Itchen. The Stowe rises to the east of Southam and flows westwards to join the Itchen, approximately two thirds of a mile to the west of the town.

From Brown's Bridge on the Banbury Road, 253 feet above sea level, the land rises by approximately 100 feet to a small plateau north of the town. To the south, the land rises by less than 20 feet.

The town is entirely surrounded by agricultural land except where there is a working limestone quarry on the northern perimeter.

The town centre has been designated as a conservation area whereby developments and changes of use should respect the special qualities and historic context of the area in terms of design and materials. The valley of the River Stowe from the town centre to the Holy Well has been designated as an area of restraint which confirms its value as open space within the natural environment.



Map of Southam and conservation area boundary

Reproduced from the 1990's 1:5000 Ordnance Survey land line map by permission of Ordnance Survey on behalf of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright MC 100015184

Leamington Spa is the nearest large town approximately 8 miles away and so Southam serves as a local centre for the villages around it, including Long Itchington, Stockton, Napton, Ladbroke, Bishops Itchington, Harbury and Ufton.

Southam has its own Town Council which is able to make observations on, or objections to, proposed developments within its area. However, planning matters for Southam are administered by the Dassett Area Planning Committee of Stratford on Avon District Council. The Planning Committee must also consider the more general planning policies of Stratford on Avon District Council, Warwickshire County Council and national government when looking at issues relating to Southam.

3. History



Southam - SUHAM - in the Domesday Book, developed on high ground rising from the Stowe Valley. Roman coins have been found in the area, but the Manor of Southam was first mentioned in 998 when King Ethelred granted it, together with the “Haliwell”, to the Priory of Coventry. Thus until the Reformation Southam had a strong connection with Coventry.

The “Haliwell”, now known as the Holy Well, is the oldest surviving structure in Southam, situated near the river about half a mile west of the town.

The main reasons for Southam’s development were its location on the east-west drovers’ road and the north-south Coventry to Oxford road, and its ownership by the Priory. The small medieval settlement to the east of the church was soon enlarged by development north-south.



The Holy Well

In 1227 the Prior obtained a statute allowing Southam a weekly market, thereby giving it town status. Later, permission was also granted for a monthly market and four fairs which increased the size of the community with inns and trades connected with livestock. Southam became an important stagecoach stop with many hostleries catering for this trade, and a tannery existed until 1821.

The town was encompassed by 13,000 troops in 1642 when Royalist and Parliamentary forces skirmished in the area. Later, King Charles I stayed in the Manor House (now the Chemist shop).

Owing to its market town status, the Magistrates Court for the area, and also the Union Workhouse, were located in Southam.

Much of medieval Southam was destroyed in four disastrous fires in the 1740s when 30 houses were burnt. These were replaced by small cottages and several three-storey Georgian houses.

In 1818 Mr Lilley-Smith, a local surgeon, founded the Eye and Ear Infirmary, now the Stoneythorpe Hotel. In 1823 he also founded the country’s first free dispensary nearby. Philanthropy also inspired some German Sisters to found a Roman Catholic orphanage and

school in 1876 - the latter is still one of the town's three primary schools. The secondary school (Southam College) was built in 1957.

Southam's first gas supply (unreliable) came in 1853, and electricity was supplied in 1924. Later in the 1960s natural gas arrived. The Holy Well and other springs were used for water until mains water supplies were connected in the 1920s.

St James' thirteenth century church was pre-dated by a Saxon one, possibly a wooden structure. During the nineteenth century, an independent chapel was built in Pendicke Street, and also the Congregational church in Wood Street. The Catholic church existing today was built in 1925.

With the development of canals and railways in the mid-eighteenth century, Southam's importance as a market town declined, but there is still a varied range of small shops, including a hardware shop and pharmacy. The small cottage industries disappeared, to be replaced in recent years by light industrial units on the edge of town.



Market Hill, Southam

Many private estates and social housing now surround the old town centre with the population increasing from 170 in 1086 to almost 7,000 in the year 2000, but Southam still retains its market town ambience.



4. Landmarks

The town centre and conservation area has, by its very nature, many landmarks in the form of listed buildings such as the Manor House, The Olde Mint and St James' Church. In addition, there are other features important to the identity of the area:-



St. James' Churchyard

Mature trees, for example in the grounds of the Library, The Grange, St James' Church and in gardens along Warwick Road.



The Olde Mint

Open spaces and public areas such as Market Hill, the Library gardens, the Peace Garden, St James' Churchyard and Park Lane Recreation Ground. In addition to their visual importance these areas provide venues for community activities such as the Mop Fair, May Day Fair, open air services and celebrations and the annual Carnival.



Open area around Library



The River Stowe at Brown's Bridge

The River Stowe and its accompanying green corridor, often enhanced by willows, brings accessible countryside into the heart of the town.

Not all landmarks have visual or aesthetic appeal: Southam College with its tall, flat roofed profile, complete with aerials, is nonetheless instantly recognisable and dominates the skyline from western approaches. Its starkness is, however, partially redeemed by its landscaped grounds and extensive playing fields, merging seamlessly into surrounding farmland.



Southam College

Another more recent landmark on the eastern boundary is St Mary's R C Primary School with its modern, low level and sympathetic design.

“Monuments and landmarks, historic buildings, greens, streets and squares, trees, hedges, gardens and other open spaces in many cases cannot be replaced without significant loss of character.”

Stratford on Avon District Design Guide – Consultation Draft 2000.

5. Settlement Patterns



The linear nature of development north - south and east - west has resulted in a cohesive mix of domestic and business premises interspersed with public buildings strung along the main roads within the town centre. The newer parts of the town are made up of an integration of individual and estate development both council-built and private.

The older estates are predominantly linear in design, semi-detached and detached, mainly 3 bedroomed houses and bungalows set in good sized plots. The most recent developments show more imaginative layout and varied building design, often set in cul-de-sacs with open plan front gardens.

On the western edges of the town, farmland comes right up to town boundaries providing a direct connection with the countryside and reinforcing Southam's historic base as a rural market town. On the eastern edges, the bypass, whilst removing traffic from the town centre, has created a concrete boundary. The large new housing development isolated beyond the bypass is effectively cut off from the town and has blurred the edges and removed rural views.



Southam landscape

The focal points are:

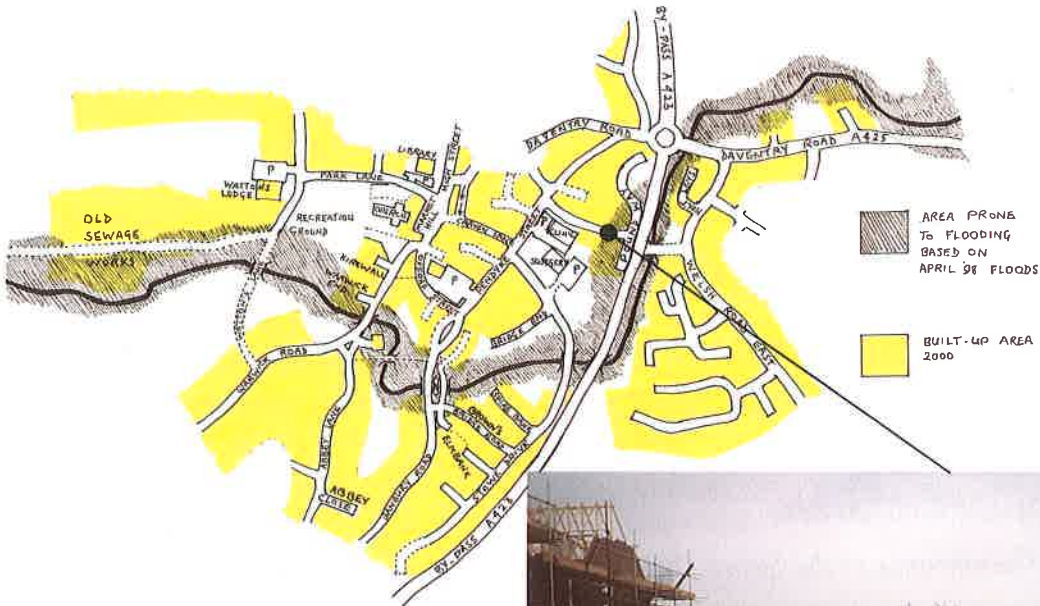
- St James' Church, whose spire is visible throughout the town and from every approach.
- The Library grounds, with their spacious green area and mature trees, giving a distinctive open feel to the town centre.
- Market Hill with its "square", raised pavements and small independent business premises.
- Views of the surrounding countryside, pleasing to the eye and giving the town clear boundaries.

Away from the town centre, other important focal points are generous green areas and playing fields surrounding Southam Primary School, the Graham Adams Centre, St James' Primary School, Southam College, The Grange, St James' Churchyard, and Park Lane Recreation Ground.

Recommendations

Future development should:-

- i. Avoid obscuring the present views of focal points within and outside the town.
- ii. Take place away from the river and its necessary flood plain. (This was graphically illustrated during Easter 1998 when Southam experienced quite extensive flooding of buildings near the river.)



The Southam flood plain



The Southam floods April 1998

- iii. Respect the importance of the open spaces, grassy areas and trees which contribute to the character and attraction of the town as well as providing recreational space and community areas.
- iv. Maintain the present mix of domestic and business premises within the town centre by sensitive building, as in The Cloisters and Budgens.
- v. Avoid building on green field sites, particularly the western edges and the river corridor.
- vi. Encourage a sense of community with linked group and cul-de-sac developments, which are visually and socially preferable, as in The Furrows where traffic is contained within the cul-de-sac but pedestrians can use footpaths linking up with other areas. Also in Pound Way, where there is no through traffic, the development is focused around an attractive green space with large trees.



6. Footpaths and Open Spaces

There are many footpaths and pedestrian links between different areas of the town helping to integrate the community and creating safe traffic-free “roads” which particularly benefit children and elderly people.



The entrance to the Stowe Valley

Public footpaths and rights of way from the town directly into the surrounding countryside are an important and valued feature for the community. The premier right of way must be the route leading westward from St James’ Church across the Recreation Ground to the bottom of Wattons Lane and onward along the River Stowe past the Holy Well, and accessing the extensive acreage of the Stoneythorpe Estate.

Unfortunately on the town’s eastern edge, two important footpaths have been bisected by the bypass which creates a hazardous obstacle to countryside access.

Recommendations

- i. Priority should be given to preserving and enhancing existing footpaths and rights of way. A notable example is the creation of linked footpaths making up the Blue Lias Rings.
- ii. “Unofficial” paths such as those shadowing the bypass and the river could be adopted as permissive paths to provide further pedestrian and cycle links.



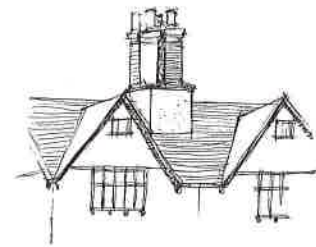
7. Buildings

Southam comprises a mixture of architectural styles, reflecting the eras in which they were built.

The older buildings which are characteristic of the town centre are mainly terraced, predominantly two storeyed in height, flat fronted and opening directly on to the pavement. Many are listed buildings and the town centre as a whole is a conservation area.

Characteristic features include:

- The use of local brick, blue and white lias limestone
- Low pitched roofs of tile or slate
- Small paned windows, often sash, with many Georgian style front doors
- Archways within or between buildings and courtyards beyond, acting as a reminder of Southam's history as a coaching town with numerous inns and hostelries.



Coventry Road, Southam town centre

Apart from the town centre and conservation area, very little building on a large scale took place until after World War II. Most of the estates to the west of the town centre were built by the local authority and these houses are characterised by the following features:

- Two storey, 3 bedroomed, semi-detached
- Shallow pitched roofs with chimneys
- Red brick, flat fronted with small windows
- Minimal provision for garages and off road parking
- Well spaced with large gardens front and rear

The most significant building development to take place in the 1960s and 70s, was of a speculative nature, with estates centred around Tollgate Road and Stowe Drive. Features of these include:

- Variation in elevational treatment
- Variation in decorative finishes, including rendering, tile hanging and timber cladding
- Picture windows
- Garages and parking spaces

Cherry Tree Walk, Southam



The 1980s saw greater variety in property types with more detached houses being built, including for the first time, a proportion of four bedroomed dwellings. Chimneys tended to disappear and brick became darker, for example Sycamore Grove.

Moving into the 1990s, we can see a great individuality of design, site layout and more variety in plot size, including a return to smaller two bedroomed starter homes. The traditional materials of brick and tile remain but show a greater attention to detail, for example Pound Way.

Pound Way, Southam



Not all new building has to echo the past - the new clinic in Pendicke Street and the Surgery in Stowe Drive are two examples of modern architecture which are strikingly contemporary yet have been designed to blend sympathetically with the surrounding area.

Buildings that do not harmonise are those built in unnaturally light materials, those that have long unbroken roof lines, flat roofs and structures that protrude above the natural skyline or are out of proportion with their neighbours. Some new developments show a disappointing disregard for position and design.

Southam Surgery



Recommendations

Any future building within the town centre and conservation area should complement the existing blend of domestic and business premises, whilst in the town as a whole, steps should be taken to:-

- i. Use similar building materials and architectural styles, eg modern housing in Daventry Road and St Wulstan Way where brick detail of traditional housing is reflected.
- ii. Maintain the continuity between scales of older and new buildings, as in the cottages in Pendicke Street and terraced housing in Pound Way.
- iii. Sympathetically develop characteristic features such as courtyards, as in Craven Court and The Cloisters.
- iv. Be sensitive to the impact of housing on the edges of town, eg chalet bungalows in the developments off Welsh Road West which soften the link with the countryside, and encourage landscaping around new buildings.
- v. Encourage shops and business premises to use sensitivity when erecting external signs and frontages, eg the tasteful and complementary signage of commercial premises in Daventry Street as opposed to the garish and crude signs of takeaway establishments which make a mockery of the conservation area. The Stratford on Avon District Design Guide supports this by stating that shopfronts should “remain subservient to the building and appear as a component part of it.”



Shops in Daventry Street



Shops in High Street

8. Highways



The current characteristics of the highways within the town centre are:-

- Wide main streets with raised pavements
- Verges (originally grassed) between the road and pavement with specimen trees
- The large “market square” in Market Hill reflecting the history of Southam as a market town and providing a break from the linear pattern
- Side alleys - jitties - leading the eye away from the centre
- Manageable parking both on- and off - road
- Welcome relief from through traffic due to the existence of the bypass



High Street, Southam

Residential streets away from the centre are wide and tarmacadamed, with concrete kerbstones. Pavements often have grass verges, and road junctions are softened by green areas frequently enhanced by trees, flowers and benches.



Verges in Banbury Road

Recommendations

- Preserve the present dimensions of the road layout and discourage development which would dramatically increase traffic on the major routes into and through the town, thereby destroying the benefits enjoyed since the building of the bypass
- Encourage tree planting and landscaping, particularly on approaches to the town, where bulbs have been planted on Warwick Road, Banbury Road and Coventry Road roundabout.
- Improve lighting, signage and street furniture by employing a more imaginative and sympathetic attention to detail, as in Chickabiddy Lane
- Replace unsightly iron railings at kerbside
- Provide appropriately styled bus shelters and seating to encourage the use of public transport

9. The Community & Local Economy

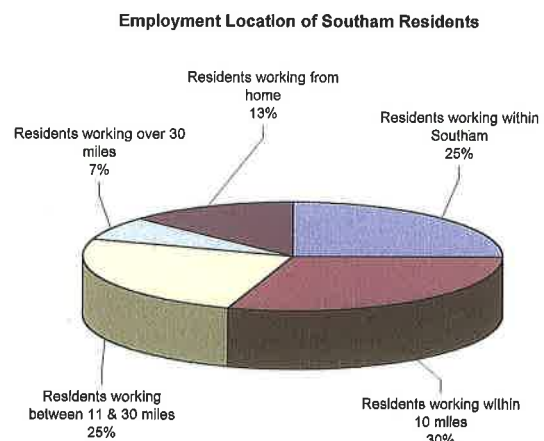


Southam, as a market town, has been closely related in the past to the agriculture of the surrounding area. This has steadily decreased during the twentieth century with the improvement of communications and transport which has increased employment and entertainment opportunities in larger towns nearby.

There is a strongly cohesive community in the town and this is, to a great extent, the result of the development of the town with a central open market area situated at a meeting point between routes from other major towns.

Southam has expanded rapidly in size particularly in the last twenty years but retains a well balanced range of age groups within its population. Facilities for elderly people in the town include three sheltered accommodation complexes and one nursing home. A wide variety of clubs and organisations meet in the town to offer activities for the many age groups and social interests represented here. Excellent education facilities range from pre-school through to a technology college and adult education centre.

According to the Town Appraisal of 1998, the employment of the majority of working inhabitants is in the larger industrial towns of Coventry, Rugby, Banbury and especially Leamington Spa and Warwick. The location of Southam close to several motorways, allows for employment further afield. The Appraisal showed 58% of the population in employment of which 25% were employed in Southam, 30% within 10 miles, 25% within 11-30 miles, and 7% over 30 miles. A further 13% of working people worked from home.



However, within the town itself there are good employment opportunities in a wide range of commercial and manufacturing enterprises, many situated on the large Kineton Road Industrial Estate, some on the smaller Warwick House Industrial Estate on Banbury Road and other thriving businesses in individual premises around the town.



A market is held in the town every Tuesday on part of Wood Street Car Park. This brings a large number of customers into Southam from the surrounding villages, but creates a problem by reducing the number of parking spaces available on that day.

Wood Street Market

The town's two hotels and other bed and breakfast establishments, together with the Olde Retreat House (R C Church), the Southam Diocesan Centre (C of E Church) and the Graham Adams Centre (Congregational Church) offer overnight accommodation to visitors who in turn bring trade to the town's shops and services.

There are three supermarkets in the town centre, and a substantial range of smaller shops (fruiterer, butcher, bread shop, giftshops, carpet shop, ironmonger, off licences, newsagents, saddlery, charity shops, etc). There is also a full range of services from midwifery to undertaking (library, doctor, dentist, health clinic, optician, chiropodist, chemist, vet, banks, post office, police and fire stations).



The Chemist (Manor House) & The Bull Pub

In answer to the questionnaire, many residents expressed a desire to see an even wider variety of small shops in the town centre, including a shoe shop, a children's clothing shop and a daytime cafe. Some also expressed a desire for a larger supermarket for the town, offering a better range of groceries, although there were very mixed opinions as to whether this should be in the town centre or on the outskirts. However, it was a widely held opinion that the green open space around the library should be conserved, and that the level of traffic in the town centre should be reduced rather than increased.

Recommendations

- i. Future development in the town centre should respect the openness of the historic market area as a natural focus for the community
- ii. The balanced mix of domestic, business and public buildings in the town centre should continue to be encouraged
- iii. The wide range of small retailers in the town centre is valued and should continue to be encouraged
- iv. The design of commercial premises in the town centre should reflect the traditional brickbuilt styles with low pitched tile or slate roofs and small paned windows
- v. Archways and courtyards in town centre commercial buildings should be encouraged
- vi. Where business premises are in residential areas, they should blend sympathetically with the design of surrounding buildings
- vii. Existing trees and hedges should be preserved, and the use of complementary planting should be encouraged in all new developments
- viii. All new commercial, residential and industrial premises should provide their own adequate off-street parking

10. Management of Change



If changes are to take place in the town centre, it must be recognised that they will have a great impact on a large number of people in Southam, and the process itself will cause disruption in many ways over an extended period. Any change to the design of the town could affect people's concept of their community. Building works will be intrusive, and the results will upset familiar ways of looking at things.

The management of these changes is important if they are to be accepted in the community.

Recommendations:

- i. Information about proposed new developments must be clear, simple, well in advance of action, and widely circulated. It should be regularly updated
- ii. Those who are "stakeholders" (in this case town centre residents, traders, and users, among others) must be identified, consulted regularly and given a clear sense of ownership of the change
- iii. The same stakeholders should be consulted about all aspects of the development large or small
- iv. Any future development should contribute positively to the existing character of the town as described in this document which reflects the views of local people

11. Conclusion



Southam Millennium Design Statement offers local design guidance as supplementary planning guidance to help manage future change so that the existing identity of the town is integral in new design development.

The Design Statement also provides the basis for working in partnership. Some of the recommendations may be the starting point for future enhancement projects where there are opportunities to revitalise local character. Such projects might be worked up by the local community and Southam Town Council in partnership with other organisations and agencies. The Design Statement will also be useful, alongside other guidance, as a basis for working up Design Briefs with the local community for key sites.



Southam residents involved in the Design Statement research day



12. A -Z of Main Recommendations

- a) Avoid obscuring views
- b) Develop well away from the river and its flood plain
- c) Respect open spaces, grassy areas and trees
- d) Maintain the mix of domestic and business premises
- e) Avoid building on green field sites
- f) Encourage linked group and cul-de-sac development
- g) Preserve and enhance footpaths
- h) Provide further pedestrian and cycle links
- i) Reflect traditional materials and styles
- j) Maintain the continuity between older and new buildings
- k) Incorporate characteristic features such as courtyards
- l) Soften the link with the countryside
- m) Use sensitivity in external signs and frontages
- n) Preserve the present dimensions of the roads
- o) Discourage development which would dramatically increase traffic
- p) Encourage tree planting and landscaping
- q) Improve lighting, signage and street furniture
- r) Replace unsightly railings
- s) Provide appropriately styled bus shelters and seating to encourage the use of public transport
- t) Encourage a wider range of small retailers
- u) New premises should blend sympathetically with the design of surrounding buildings
- v) Preserve trees and hedges and use complementary planting in new developments
- w) Provide off-street parking
- x) Identify stakeholders with an interest in new developments and consult them regularly
- y) Provide clear information for the local community about all aspects of new developments
- z) New developments should contribute positively to the existing character of the town

Appendix



References

It is recommended that the following documents are read in conjunction with the Southam Millennium Design Statement:

Warwickshire Landscape Guidelines

Warwickshire County Council/Countryside Commission 1993

“The Landscape Guidelines are a comprehensive assessment of Warwickshire landscapes and describe the character and special features of different landscape types. Based upon the descriptions, a series of management strategies and landscape guidelines have been developed to show how and where landscape character needs to be conserved, restored or enhanced. General development guidelines are included. The document is useful in guiding landscape design related aspects of new development.”

Character and Design in the Stratford District - A Countryside Design Summary (CDS)

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Stratford on Avon District Council 1998

“The CDS is a very broad summary of the character of the South Warwickshire countryside at three distinct levels, describing the relationship between the landscape, settlement patterns and buildings. It identifies different character sub-areas as well as distinct settlement types (eg hilltop, valley bottom, hillside, etc). It also provides a concise set of generic design principles and design considerations for new development within the countryside. The CDS is adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and integrates with the more detailed character assessment and design guidance within Village Design Statements.”

Stratford on Avon District Design Guide

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Stratford on Avon District Council (Consultation Draft April 2000)

“The objective of this guidance is to help to secure designs that are local, sustainable and equitable. To achieve those objectives, the focus of the guide is the distinctive, local qualities of the district. The guidance works on the basis that new development should share some of the characteristics that define the area in which it is located. The document is meant to be used alongside Village Design Statements.”

Southam Conservation Area Review

Consultants Report 1994

“This formed the basis for the Conservation Area boundary review for Southam and is being used for the publishing of a Conservation Area document by Stratford District Council.”

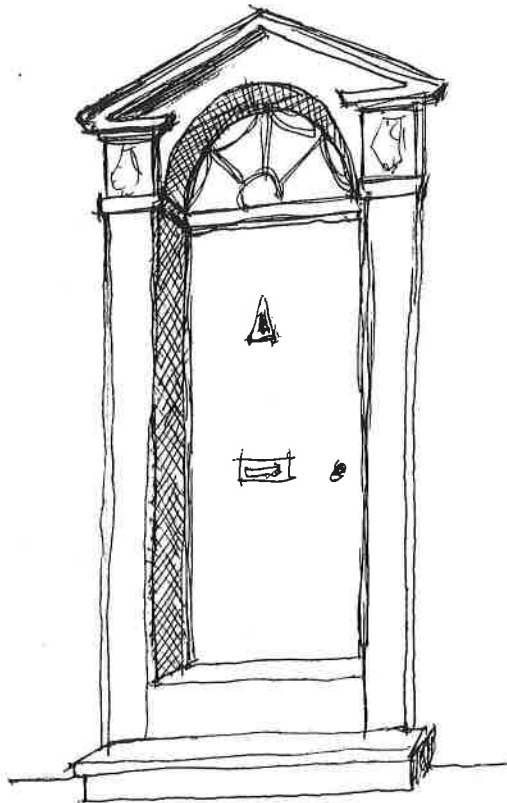
Stratford on Avon District Local Plan

“The Local Plan sets out the planning policies and overall strategy for land use and development in the District. The Local Plan is influenced by national, regional and county planning policy. The review of the current Local Plan started during Summer 2000.”

“From Strength to Strength” Appendices

Heart of England Tourist Board Development Division - 1998

The Design Statement has been written, researched and designed, entirely by the voluntary efforts of Southam residents who care greatly about their town and its future. Everyone's contribution, whether large or small has been of value and is hereby acknowledged with thanks.



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