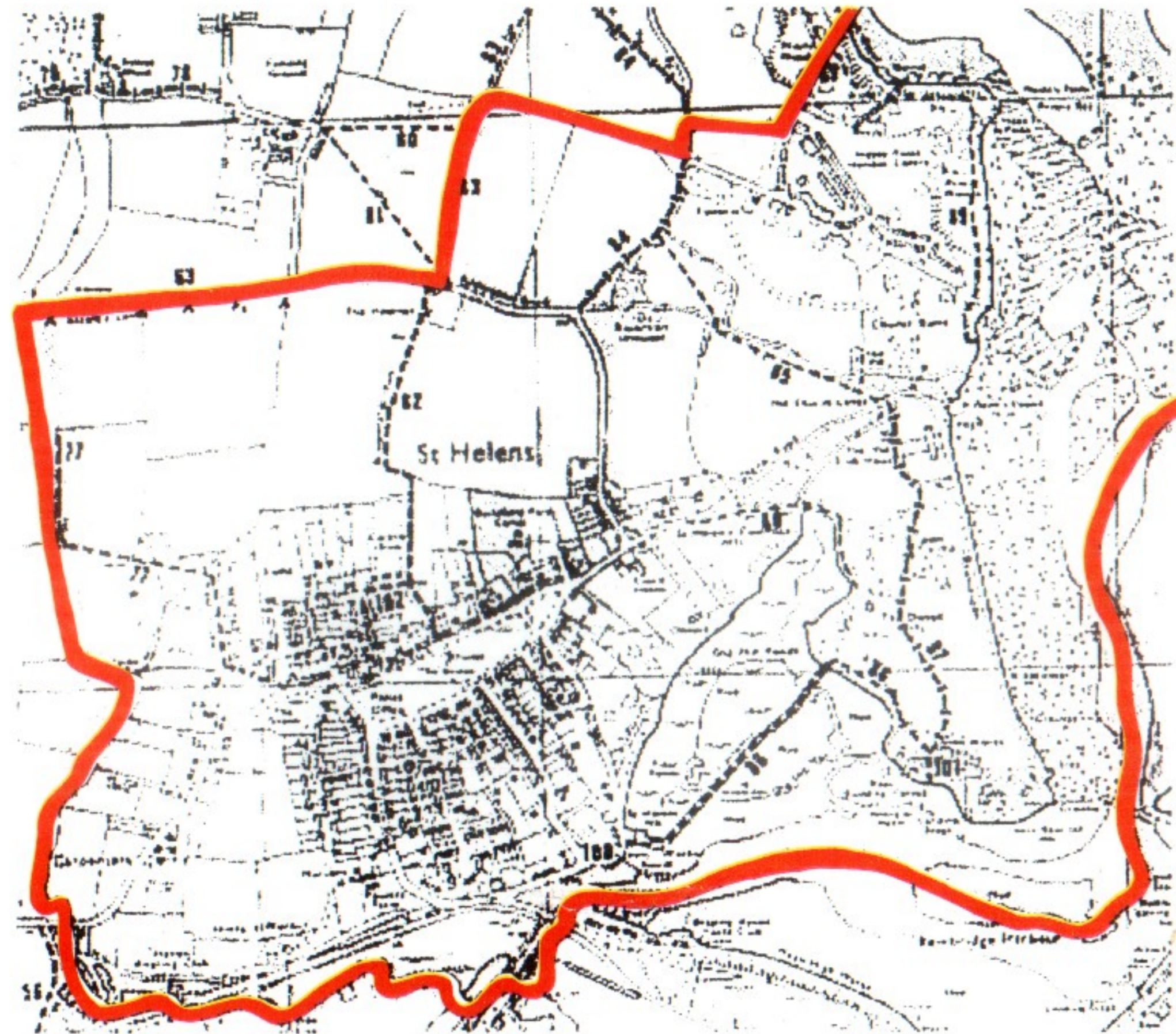


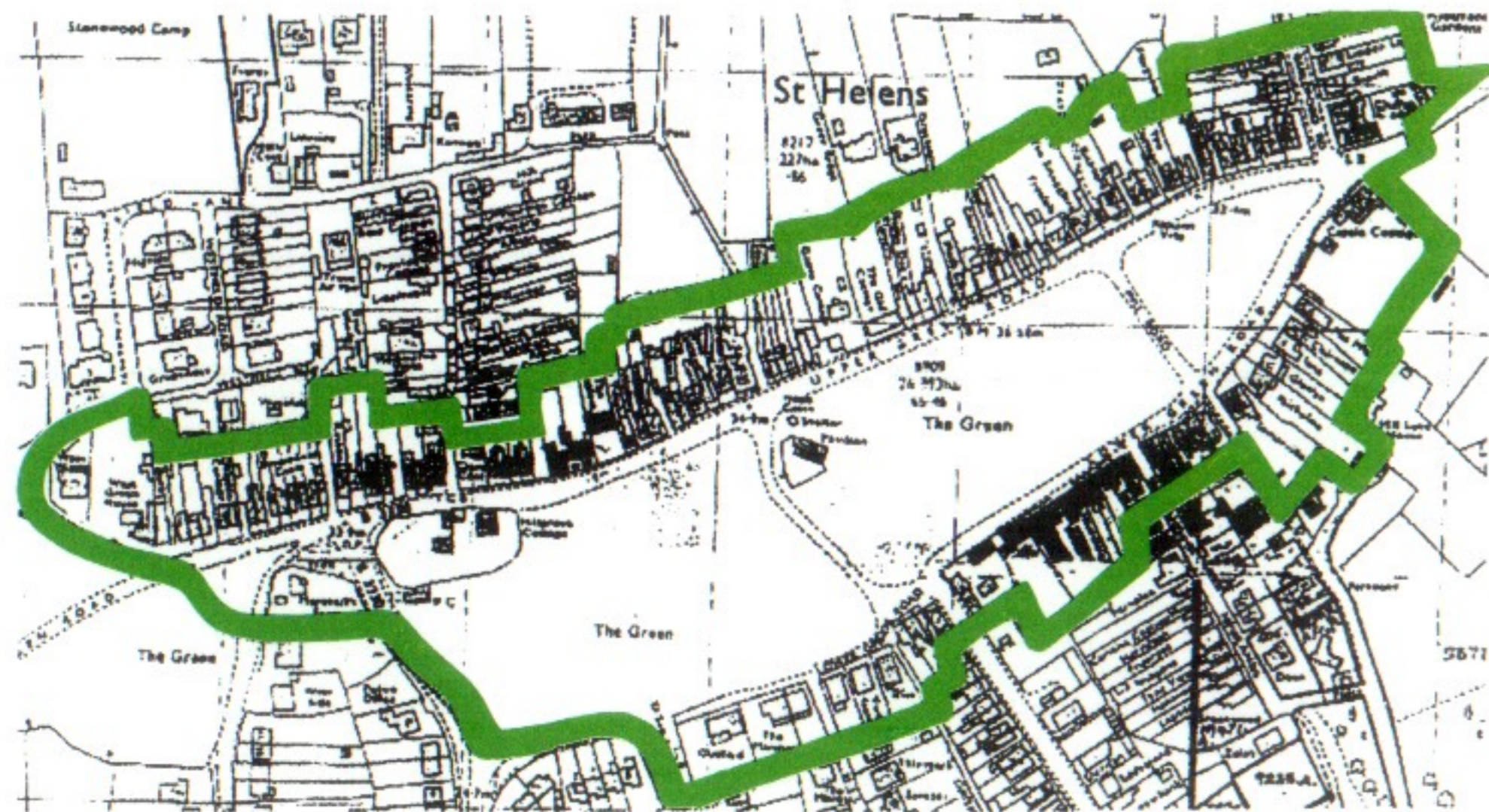
ST. HELENS
Isle of Wight
VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT
1999



Written by the St. Helens Village Design Group
Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance
by the Isle of Wight Council
Funded by the Countryside Commission



Map showing Parish Boundaries



Map showing Conservation Area

INTRODUCTION

This booklet has been written and designed by residents, so that their views and ideas can contribute to the future of the whole village.

St. Helens is a special village. With the second largest village green in Great Britain, surrounded as it is on two sides by open countryside and downland, and with sweeping panoramic views down to the sea in two other directions, St. Helens is unique.

It enjoys complete self containment with no ribbon development to any neighbouring area. From its centre you can walk to open country, chalk downs, marshland, or to old mill ponds, the harbour and the sea and enjoy lovely views over the Eastern Solent.

This village design statement is an attempt to define the very special characteristics of the village and proposes a set of recommendations to safeguard the key features for the future, with special reference to open spaces, the landscape, buildings, architectural features, highways and street furniture, and to act as a practical tool for influencing decisions affecting new planning applications in the village and its surrounding area.

The overall objective is to protect and enhance this unique blend of qualities for posterity.



Cricket on the village green

HISTORY

St. Helens was known to the Romans in 43 BC. In 520 AD the Saxons came and in 686 AD they were all compelled to adopt Christianity.

In 704 AD a priest Hildila, was responsible for building the first Church on the Duver which was served by Cluniac monks. The monks rebuilt the Church in the early eleven hundreds, but in stone rather than wood as previously. Eventually this succumbed to the gradual advance of the sea and today only the tower remains as a distinctive seamark. The stones from the Church were used for "holystoning" the wooden decks of ships of the line, the larger blocks being known as "Bibles".

The present Church was built further inland, about a quarter of a mile from the village centre, between 1717 and 1719. It was rebuilt in the 1820s with the addition of the chancel in 1862.

Until the early part of the twentieth century, St. Helens was the best known village in the East Wight, as St. Helens Roads were constantly used as an anchorage by the Royal Navy. There are many famous stories of mutinies, press gangs, smugglers and crews coming ashore to collect water, which was so pure that it would stay fresh for months at sea. Several wells still exist around the Green which are presently capped.

The harbour and local waters were famous for the variety of fish and the quality of the winkles and oysters. The oyster beds became disused after the railway was built in 1870.



Upper Green



Old Church Lodge



The Parish Church of St. Helen



St. Helens Quay & Fishing Boats



Woodnutts Boatyard



Upper Green late Victorian Houses

There are still many members of local families living in the village that go back for generations.

The village, once one of the largest in the area, is lucky enough to retain its distinctive character despite modern trends. Its landscape, settlement patterns and buildings show the mark of more than a thousand years of history.

The rural character of the village has changed as agricultural land and orchards have been slowly replaced by housing. These changes have brought with them different economic and social benefits and disadvantages, and there is now very little room left for development. The main area of commercial activity is on the Duver, where there are boat yards and Hovercraft servicing facilities. Villagers are very conscious of holiday caravan and chalet parks and the impact that such developments can have on the area.



The Poplars

COMMUNITY

The village community is sufficiently large to support many thriving voluntary groups, and has a Community Centre, Sports Pavilion and Medical Centre. Cricket and football are played regularly on the Green. There is a very good Pre-School Group and an excellent Primary School and a children's play area on the green.

Community Guidelines

Architects, developers and planners should consult the Village Design Statement, which reflects the views of the community.

- It is important that the village community facilities are retained and increased to maintain vitality and provide for new residents.
- Health, sporting and cultural facilities must be protected, together with informal meeting places for different age groups.



Community Centre & St. Catherine's Chapel

ECONOMY

In early days prosperity was based mainly on the sea and mixed farming.

In the last 75 years local agriculture has given way to development, but luckily the village still has a good connection with the sea, boatyards, the fishing industry and Hovercraft operations.

Individuals with great and varied talents still work in the village.

The prosperity of the village will depend on encouraging the normal process of economic growth and development which complements the scale and character of St. Helens. The current drift towards holiday parks and retirement homes needs to be kept under review if the village is to retain its charm and unique individuality.

Economic Guidelines

It is important to retain and develop the character of St. Helens as a working village. Efforts to stop the decline of shop premises should be encouraged.

Only small scale enterprises will be welcomed within the village.

Commercial developments or conversions should be designed to high architectural standards and should harmonise with the predominantly residential setting.



Lower Green

COUNTRYSIDE

The importance of open spaces, trees, hedges and landscape.

St. Helens, which is situated on a southern facing slope, still remains a distinct village, with open countryside separating it from neighbouring villages.

The approach roads to the village wind through open countryside and farmland, and are bordered by natural hedgerows and many old oak trees.

The open fields between Nodes Point and the village present a view of pasture, trees and sea. **Any future development of this area should be aimed at enhancing the landscape character of this environmentally sensitive area.**



View from Eddington Road



View from Embankment Road

In many fields surrounding the village small stable blocks have been erected. These can lead to further small buildings and then to permanent structures. **This type of development must be closely monitored and kept under strict control.**

The public footpaths around the village provide splendid vistas of sea and countryside. This is a popular walking area, but in several places indiscriminate tree planting threatens to block these views. Of course tree planting in general should be applauded. However, it should not be undertaken without discussion and professional advice, and views that have been enjoyed for many years should not be obstructed.

To protect the unique environment of this part of the Island scene, the relatively unspoilt views from both land and sea enjoyed by St. Helens, should remain unaltered.

Within the village the landscape is varied and appealing. Most properties have small front gardens where shrubs and flowers add charm to the overall effect. Rear gardens are generally large and secluded. **Gaps between houses allow glimpses of the sea and countryside and these views form an integral part of the character of the area.**

Wildlife

There is considerable wildlife in and around the village and this should be further encouraged by the preservation of existing hedgerows, especially around fields together with replanting schemes.

The Mill Pond and the Duver provide a unique area of particular interest to the village. A large variety of migratory birds and waterfowl add to the indigenous flora and fauna. Apart from being an area of outstanding natural beauty it has also been declared an area of Special Scientific Interest.

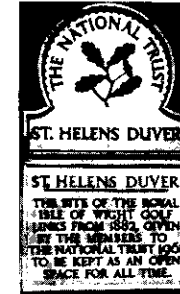
Wildlife requirements

Developers, landowners and householders can protect existing wildlife environments and help create new habitats in the form of copses, hedgerows, ditches and ponds and open spaces of rough grassland. Advice is available from the local wildlife trust and from the Isle of Wight Council's countryside section.

The National Trust is responsible for the Duver and the wood known as the "Gaggen Hedge" as they were given to them to be preserved and managed for the village. The Trust does an excellent job in looking after this area, and is in regular contact with the Parish Council to discuss future projects and restoration schemes.

The condition of the beach is of general concern. The disappearance of the sand possibly due to excessive dredging in the area leaves behind a poor quality beach. This could be prevented. The situation is not helped by the continual problem of bait-diggers destabilising the beach.

In and around the village are several attractive and mature trees. These should be catalogued and made the subject of preservation orders.



Guidelines

Every effort should be made to preserve existing views together with all open spaces. **The village Green must be preserved.** Further erosion of the grass surfaced area of the green by vehicles could be prevented by kerbing. Local allotments are also an integral part of the area's character.

Screening of mobile homes (holiday caravans) on the Duver should be encouraged.

Any further development on the Duver and Mill Pond areas should be resisted, as should be extensions of existing camp sites.

If funding becomes available, certain historic areas of the village such as part of the mill wall and the old seawall at Attrill's point, could be restored.



THE VILLAGE GREEN & SURROUNDING AREA

PHOTOGRAPHED ON 11th NOVEMBER 1997

BUILDINGS

Within the village there are a wide variety of types of building.

These fall into distinct categories. The Old Church tower on the Duver dates from the 12th century and is a listed monument. It should be preserved and maintained accordingly.

Apart from a few earlier buildings, 18th century cottages cluster around the Green, interspersed with Victorian villas, Edwardian residences and other substantial houses which were added between the wars. Very few modern properties are encompassed within the conservation area, which was designated in March 1998. This seeks to protect the unique character of the Green by demanding a higher standard of design and limiting inappropriate alterations.



Nineteenth Century Villas

The village is served by a Post Office/General Stores, a Newsagent, a Public House, Restaurants and other small businesses, all of which are important to the continuing life of the village.

Although only small pockets of land remain for new buildings in the heart of the village, alterations and additions will inevitably occur and these should reflect the scale and style of surrounding properties.

Radiating from the Green are several roads containing houses of varying styles built mostly over the past century and including the extensive Downsvie and St. Michael's developments dating from the 1960's.



Hope Terrace and Newsagents

*There are three well established Holiday Parks featuring caravan accommodation. Two are on the northern perimeter and are well screened, the third being on the southern side bordering Bembridge Harbour. There is also a major holiday complex to the north east of the village. **Further development of these sites should be critically examined with regard to the visual impact on the area if the uniqueness of St. Helens is to be preserved.***

Residential buildings on and around the quays and the marina are comparatively new, having been built since the 1970's. These do not conform with the older part of the village architecturally.

On the Duver there is a certain amount of light industrial activity located in suitable buildings alongside some residential premises.



Vine Inn and Sailors

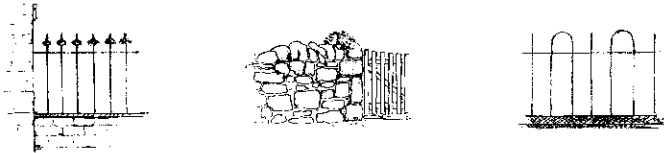
Roofs and Chimneys

There are some lovely examples of slate and tile roofs. It is important not to spoil these with solar panels, satellite dishes, skylights or other additions. Interesting chimney stacks must be preserved.



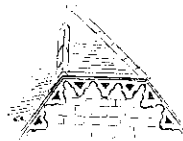
Walls - Railings - Fences

Original walls, whether of stone or brick should be retained and left unpainted and any extensions should be in keeping with the original. It would be preferable if walls, railings or fences were not to be opened up for car parking as roads then tend to lose their definition.



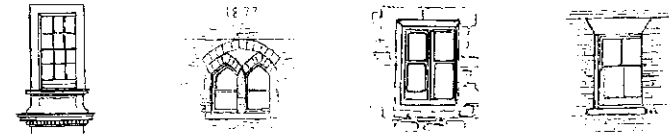
Facias - Finials

There are some good examples of facias and barge boards which contribute towards the character of older style houses. These should be retained and preserved whenever possible.



Windows

It would be preferable for replacement windows to be in the style and proportion of the originals, particularly with regard to pairs of houses. It is recommended that any replacements should echo the period of the building.

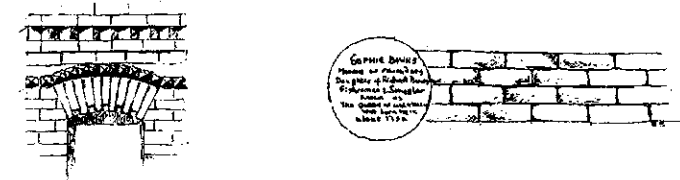


Porches - Doors

These should preferably reflect the character of the building rather than follow modern fashionable trends.



Generally, original walls and houses with decorative brickwork are an attractive feature of the village that require preservation. Windows, doors and porches with their attractive variations, should remain in character with the period of the building.



Much of the charm of the village derives from the diverse character of its older buildings, and every care should be taken to ensure that this traditional character is preserved for posterity.

Building Guidelines

New building and developments should acknowledge the St. Helens context and avoid pattern book designs.

Such developments should:-

- a) maintain and strengthen the visual cohesion of the village and help renew the specific architectural traditions of St. Helens;
- b) respect local characteristics and the context of the particular site and use good quality materials appropriate to St. Helens;
- c) refer to locally distinctive detail, accurately matching these to the chosen building form;
- d) avoid mixing styles or historical references in the buildings; and
- e) respond to typical settings and garden forms and avoid large areas of hard surfacing.

The street scene is of paramount importance and its integrity should be maintained and promoted.

Where car parking areas are proposed on house frontages the impact of these should be carefully considered.



Upper Green Cottages and Restaurant



The Castle



Freefolk



Old Church Tower and Church Butts field from Spithead Hotel site



View from Duver Road of Holiday Camp Site

ROADS

Access is gained to the centre of the village by narrow rural roads.

The village road network is a system of narrow roads and lanes interconnected by footpaths. The traffic within and through the village will increase, especially during holiday periods as the roads serve as important arterial routes to other villages. .

Guidelines

Consideration should be given to weight restrictions on minor roads other than for access.

Consideration should be given to reducing the speed of vehicles through the village. Calming measures need serious consideration. These must not detract from the character of the village.

Pavements

More pavements should be made suitable for push-chairs and or wheel chairs and they should be kept clear of all encroachments and obstructions.

Paving slabs should be used instead of tarmac or concrete, including dropped kerbs and pimple strips where appropriate.

Existing paths and lanes should continue to be well maintained and appropriately signposted.

Street Furniture

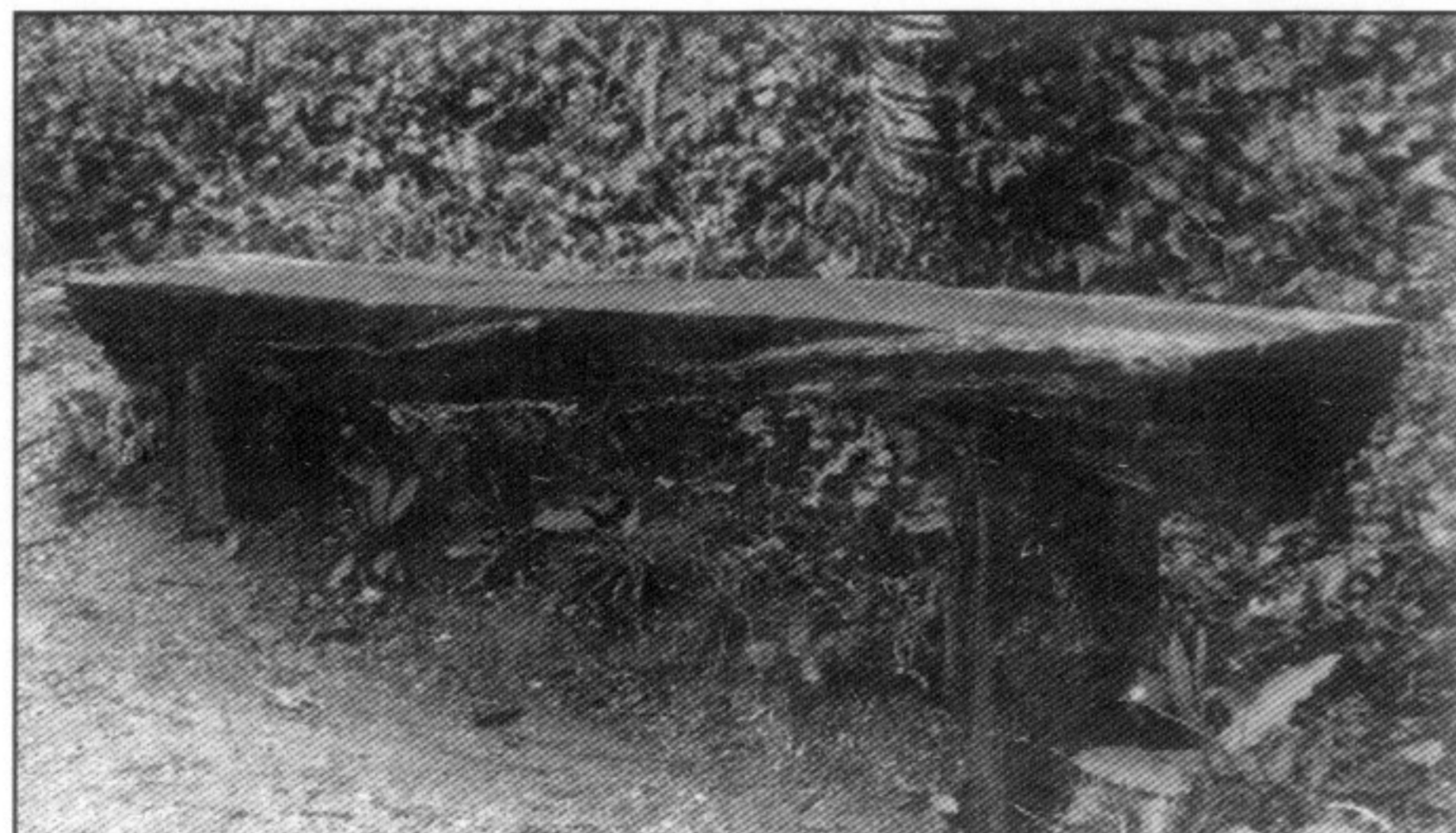
Information signs around the village, of which there are too many, could be more attractively and effectively sited. Illuminated signs are not generally considered acceptable.

If possible all future overhead service wires should be put underground. This also applies to existing wires that create an ugly feature in the village.

Generally, all street furniture should be appropriate to the traditional character of the village and unnecessary signs and clutter should be resisted.

Seats and Benches

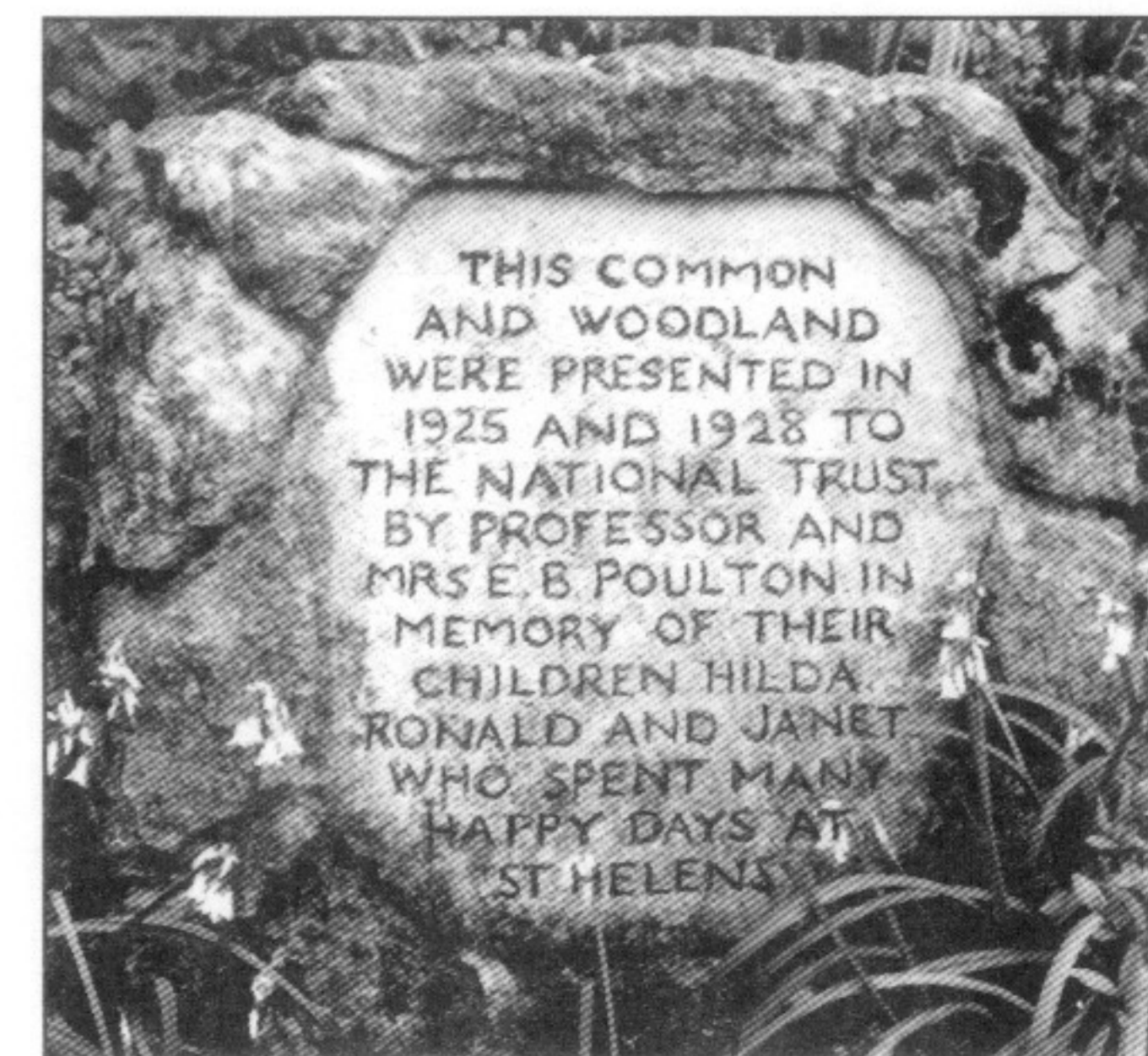
The various designs of seats and benches in the area are generally in keeping with their surroundings, and some careful thought needs to be given to the future siting of additional seats.



Woodland bench near to Memorial Stone



View from Gaggen Hedge



Memorial Stone in Woodland

PREPARE YOUR OWN DESIGN STATEMENT

If you are considering altering the exterior of your property, changing any external details of the building, its paintwork, signs, garden or surrounds then :

1. Look at its frontage from some distance. Note down the most distinctive features and separately, those that seem to be more recent and out of character with the building and surrounding properties; perhaps take some photographs.
2. Now stand right in front of the property and do the same; but this time study the details of the windows, doors, eaves and so forth.
3. Repeat these processes for each elevation or aspect of the property after studying the guidance given in this Design Statement.
4. Now think about the changes you have in mind. Consider whether they could prejudice the distinctive characteristics and details which you have noted down. If so, examine other ways of meeting your requirements - but which will conserve this irreplaceable heritage.
5. Next check whether the changes you now envisage will assist in removing any of the uncharacteristic features and details you have noted.
6. Finally go to your builder or architect and ask whether they agree with your Conservation Assessment or can suggest any improvements to it.

Thank you for helping to conserve the heritage of St. Helens.

This Design Statement is intended to be used as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the Unitary Development Plan and as such will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed.



Sporting Activities on the Village Green



This booklet was produced by the St. Helens Village Design Group in consultation with the villagers of St. Helens, September 1997 to April 1998, supported by the Countryside Commission, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Isle of Wight Association of Parish and Town Councils.



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The Village Design collection of photographs, maps, line drawings and other documents has been donated as archive material to the St. Helens Historical Society and will be kept in the Community Centre.

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