

EAST
TEAM

Cherington and Stour

Village Design Statement

Written by the Cherington and Stourton
Village Design Group

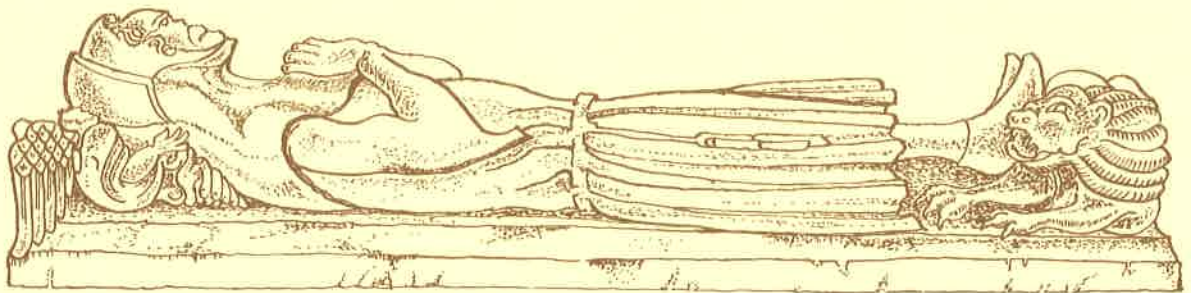
Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance
by Stratford-on-Avon District Council
1999



Cherington and Stourton Village Design Statement

The Villages and their History

Cherington and Stourton are a pair of South Warwickshire villages, lying side by side, and mainly along the south bank of the River Stour, a few miles to the west of its source on Swalcliffe Common. The oldest building is Cherington Church, much of it built in the 13th century. It has a fine tomb of a franklin (a country gentleman). The first record of Cherington was in 1199. In the 14th century the manor came into the hands of the Lucy family of Charlecote. The two warring armies had a devastating effect on local people during the Civil War of the 1640s. In the 17th century the Dickins family began its important connection with the village, and alongside there was the influence of Weston Park. These two estates were the main local employers.



Stourton's first mention was in 1206. It does not have a church although there was a chapel until the Reformation. The Wesleyan Chapel flourished but it is now a private house. Stourton people went to Whichford Church until the transfer to Cherington parish in 1910. The land in Stourton has had a variety of owners.

In both parishes the imposition of the Enclosure Acts seems to have been done fairly and perhaps with some relief as properties were rearranged sensibly. The houses and the surrounding land reflect some 800 years of midland shire history, and particularly the importance of farming, with farmland reaching right into the heart of the settlement. Cherington and Little Cherington were brought together by the post-war development down Featherbed Lane along with St John's Road and Close. This also brought Cherington and Stourton together.





Status

The two villages form one administrative unit, Cherington and Stourton having become one ecclesiastical parish in 1910, and now with a joint Parish Council. The centre of the villages is classed as a Conservation Area. Cherington Conservation Area was originally designated in 1969 and Stourton in 1982: the boundaries of the Conservation Areas have been reviewed in the last five years. Both villages are now defined as Category Four settlements in the Stratford-on-Avon Local Plan which means there are constrained opportunities for development; the villages are in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty; and Cherington has a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It should be recorded that 74 of the houses are either listed or regarded as being of architectural merit, some 46% – a very high proportion.

The Villages Today

Agriculture was the mainstay of the local economy and it is still very important with five working farms and a few smallholdings: some of the land is farmed from estates and farms outside the parish. While nationally there has been a massive reduction in the number of people working on the land, at least ten households in the parish are still dependent on agriculture. In addition, there is a metal workshop and a firm of builders.

Cherington and Stourton follow the national trend in being a base for people who work at a distance as well as locally. There is also a growing number of professional people who work at home. Like many another village, there is a fair proportion of retired people but by no means are these all recent incomers. The villages have a justified reputation for being a caring community as well as a thriving one. The church, public house, village hall and playing field all see a fair amount of activity. The village flower show and music hall are long established, flourishing and well supported. The Senior Citizens, Tuesday Circle and Youth Club meet regularly. Sadly we have, like many places our size, lost our school and our shop but there are buses to Shipston, Stratford and Banbury. Our schoolchildren go mainly to Brailes, Shipston, Kineton and Stratford.

Within the constraints of the Local Plan, we have to try to encourage young local people to stay in the villages so that they and their children can enjoy, and enhance, our village life. Reasonably priced housing is vital to sustain the community. The villages are attractive, so house prices tend to be on the high side. Apart from barn conversions, new building can only be achieved by way of an exceptions site planning decision. However, good quality and thoughtfully designed buildings which reflect local character need not be costly, and there are examples where the appropriate choice of brick can work well in combination with stone and other materials.





The Villages and their Setting

The villages have Cotswold influences but limestone and local brick blend well together. The countryside is well, but not intensively farmed: arable, milking herds, cattle and sheep rather than pigs, poultry and market gardening.

The villages lie in a valley with hills north and south and the Stour flowing through the middle. Three approach roads come from higher ground with good views into the villages while the fourth, and main road, is parallel to the river. Unlike so many places none of the approaches are through ribbon development, but are lined with trees. The northern two roads cross bridges by mills which were vital to the economy in the past.

The villages fit well and naturally into the landscape and surrounding farm land. The highest points within the parish area of 1,850 acres are Cherington Hill (500ft) and Margett's Hill (640ft). The village centre is about 300 ft above sea level. The combined population (1991 census) is 376. There is a working farm in the middle of Cherington and others on the fringes of both villages: fields run right into the centre. There are fine views of Cherington, Brailes, Mine, Green and Margett's Hills from many places in the villages. The river is small, except in flood time, but it is the thread which connects the two villages, and connects us with our neighbouring parishes. The river, with its mills and bridges, was the original reason for the two settlements. The floods at Easter 1998 showed it is impractical to consider building in the water meadows, and in the field opposite Dickins Dairy. There are some good examples of ridge-and-furrow, notably the glebe field to the north of the church.

The Cotswolds designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

The parishes are within the Edge Hill zone of the Cotswolds AONB, the largest AONB in the country. It was designated in 1966 by the National Parks Commission, which gave the area protection as a heritage landscape of national importance. Specific key issues relating to its protection laid down for the Edge Hill zone are:

- Maintaining the woodland landscape of the scarp;
- Conservation of improved pasture;
- Maintaining and enhancing field boundaries;
- Protecting the cultural heritage;
- Maintaining the remote character of the area.





The Village Pattern

The pattern of the villages is something like a capital H with four crossbars. This grid pattern leads to an unusual layout, far from the normal development of a village on crossroads, with older houses at the centre and newer ones as the four roads radiate outwards.

There is some through traffic but this is not much of a problem. One expects heavy vehicles connected with agriculture and the large tractors used on local farms. The roads through the village are winding so, on the whole, speeding is not a big problem. Cherington has five no-through lanes leading to groups of houses, and sometimes to footpaths and views: these are Steels, Wood and Berrills Hill Lanes, and St John's Road and Close. These give a depth to the village (and quiet places for children to play). Stourton has two short lanes giving rear access to houses.

The villages have two registered village greens and some green spaces which should not be reduced in number nor in size; and there are good verges and pavements. These greens should not go into private ownership. They give width to the roads with some very attractive sweeping vistas. This green spaciousness is vital to the character of the villages.

Within the village limits there are small fields often grazed by cows, horses, ponies and sheep. This feeling of the countryside within the village is increased by a good number of trees, orchards and well-tended gardens: owls and foxes can be heard in the village centre. It is important that this openness and country feeling is maintained and not eroded. The villages do not want to lose their open spaces, village greens and country feeling.

A very important strength of the relative position of houses is that some are close to roads; some at right angles; some at a distance: Steels Lane is a good example. This tradition of diversity should continue.





Flora and Fauna

The parishes contain many and varied habitats: woodland, the river and its banks, hedges and field edges, roadside verges and gardens. Such a diversity of habitat encourages an equally diverse flora and fauna. There is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in Cherington, containing a variety of uncommon plants.

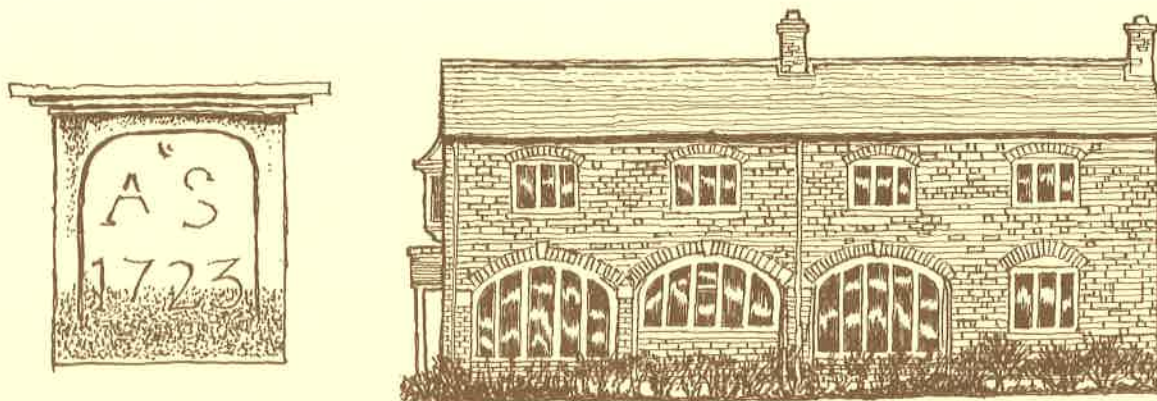
Well over 350 plant species have been recorded for the area including a variety of trees and shrubs such as ash, oak, field maple, willows, beech, pines, gorse and blackthorn. Bluebells abound in the woods on the northern side. Reflecting the diversity of flora, there are over forty species of butterflies. Among those to be commonly observed are yellow brimstone, red admiral, peacock, comma, meadow brown and gatekeeper.

Larger mammals like muntjac, fallow and roe deer are often seen and, in March, hares display in the fields. Foxes are commonly seen and heard. Several species of bat have been recorded in the area. A wide variety of small and larger birds (about seventy) can be observed, including warblers, tits and all three species of woodpecker. Three species of owl are frequently seen, including the increasingly uncommon barn owl. Buzzards have taken up residence on both sides of the valley, ravens have been seen soaring over this side of the parishes and herons are common. Trout can be seen in the river.

Buildings

The high quality of many of the houses is remarkable, as has been officially recognised. There are some 17th century houses, notably Dickins Dairy, The Anchorage and The Old Bakery; a fair number from the 18th century including Cherington House; and more than a few good ones from last century, including some well-built in brick. Some houses have date stones where the top single initial is for the surname, and the lower two are the initials for the Christian names of the husband and wife.





The fine houses are distributed throughout the village area. There are some rows of cottages and farmhouses which have been carefully converted. Among the successes are Wheelwright Cottage, Berrills Lane House and the barns that became Home Farm 1-3. (There is a case for dormers and chimneys on barn conversions when they are near other houses.) More recent conversions have sometimes failed to harmonise with the sound traditions established by our predecessors.

There has been good, bad and indifferent infilling this century. The Vine Orchard houses are a good example of mixing old and new, using stone from a barn that stood there. The Stourton bungalows along Pinfold Lane are typical of the 50s and 60s modernist stereotypes of the period. The local authority building recently has been out of keeping, but it tells its own story in the nation's social history. The six 1920s houses in Church Row were more successful.

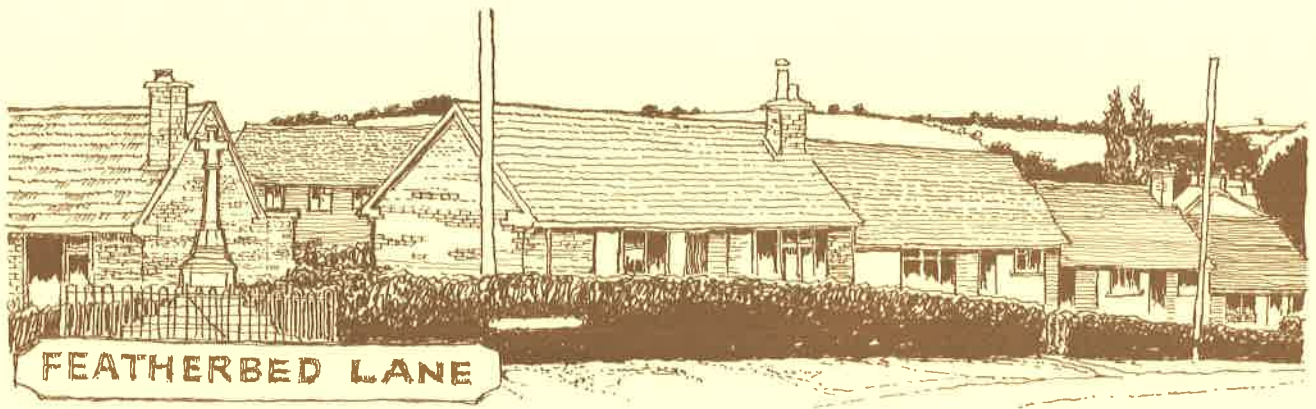
The villages have not been developed with any density and this must be respected. Heights and roof pitches vary pleasantly. Houses differ in size, shape, number of storeys and in their relative positions one to another. There is much excellent linking of properties by stone or brick walls, and some railings. There are hedges of various styles. Gardens are an important part of the scene. There used to be allotments but there has been no expressed need for this tradition to be revived.

Materials and Details

The original 17th – 19th century building has been so successful and admired because excesses were avoided, and much can be learned from following earlier standards. These standards were controlled by local skills and materials. Any new building should be preceded by building a test panel for local inspection. Re-usable material should be used whenever possible.

Stone The older houses were built in local stone: much of this was from Margett's Hill. As local quarries were worked out, so stone that is more yellow has been brought in, from the higher Gloucestershire quarries for instance. This will tone down eventually. Some work has been done, admirably, in used stone. A greater effort should be made to use the right coloured stone for houses: Swell Wold and Sarsden quarries are among the best.





Brick There is a great tradition, well shown in the villages, for local brick. Originally some of this will have come from the Brailes and Weston Park brickworks. There is some excellent brickwork detail, notably in Stourton. Dull-red bricks, which are not sand-faced, are appropriate. If the good local detailing is followed, this should be done modestly and not to excess.

Reconstructed Stone There are few, if any, successful examples of its use. However, these materials are improving.

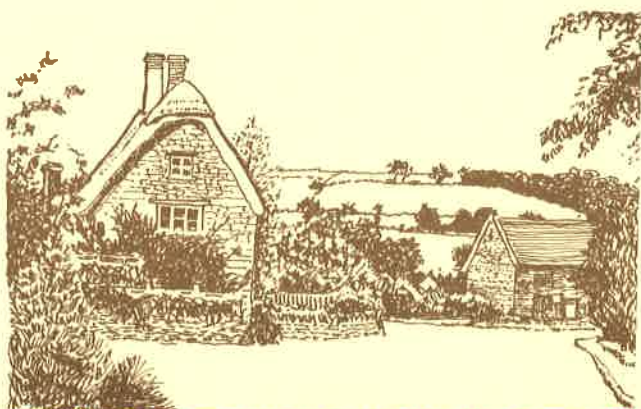
Tiles and Slates Stonesfield, or equivalent, Cotswold slates have been used locally but are expensive. Artificial stone-coloured or grey tiles, but not red, are recommended for stone houses. The combination of local brick and Welsh slate came into use last century.

Windows There is a widespread wish to avoid the use of brown paint, or worse, stain. The traditional practice is to paint windows, preferably in white, off-white or a light grey possibly. Diamond leaded-lights can be inappropriate. Timber frames are preferable, particularly in new buildings.

Dormers and Skylights There is a good, sensible tradition in the village for dormers. Some straight-roofed houses originally had dormers. Given the opportunity and the wish, these should be reinstated. There is a good Cotswold tradition for dormers being at gutter level. Skylights should only be used with discretion, whether in houses or barn conversions.

Chimneys There are precedents for both stone chimneys and for red brick ones. It would sometimes make more visual common-sense on a barn conversion to allow a real chimney rather than shiny little pipes.

Thatch Three houses are thatched: at one time it was a common practice. If there was the will, it would be good to see this tradition revived.





Other Buildings Garages and outbuildings should be in keeping with the main building.

Walls There are many good walls, stone and brick, built in a variety of good styles, and this tradition should continue. The height of walls should be in keeping with the surroundings.

Fuel Tanks These should be sited with discretion and screened, but perhaps not by fast-growing leylandii.

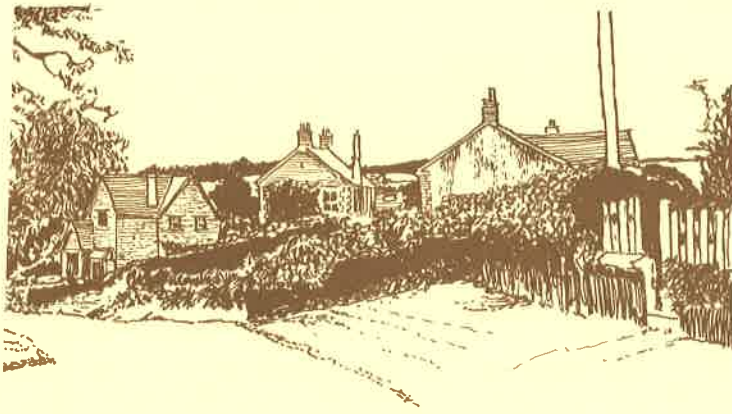
Planting If there is to be development, then there must be space for native trees. Gardens of a reasonable size are vital, and hedges considered for boundaries.

Roof Pitches and Heights New buildings should reflect the heights of existing buildings and rooflines to help maintain cohesiveness. However, they should not over-dominate smaller neighbouring buildings.

Highways and Traffic This was partially covered under the Village Pattern. If there is to be development, then it must be hoped that any new group of houses will have one access to the main road. This is safer, avoids the ribbon development tendency and would follow the existing cul-de-sac tradition.

Setts are preferable to kerb stones. There is a good pattern of well-used footpaths and bridleways: this must be respected. The limited and low level of street lighting should be maintained: it is adequate, and the fittings seemly. The existing road signs are appalling. Street parking is only a problem in Featherbed Lane, because the need was not anticipated. Elsewhere, whether with private or local authority housing, there is adequate space for parking off the main roads. This must continue, not just with one garage per house. In the country, the car is fundamental. An ordinary household may need several so the appropriate amount of space must be provided, as it has in the past.



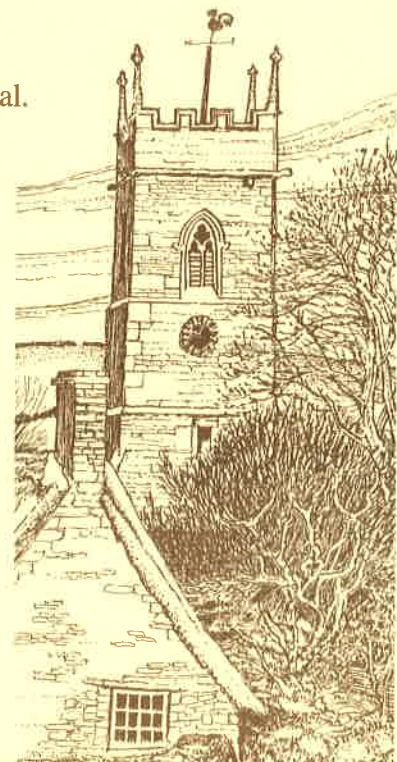
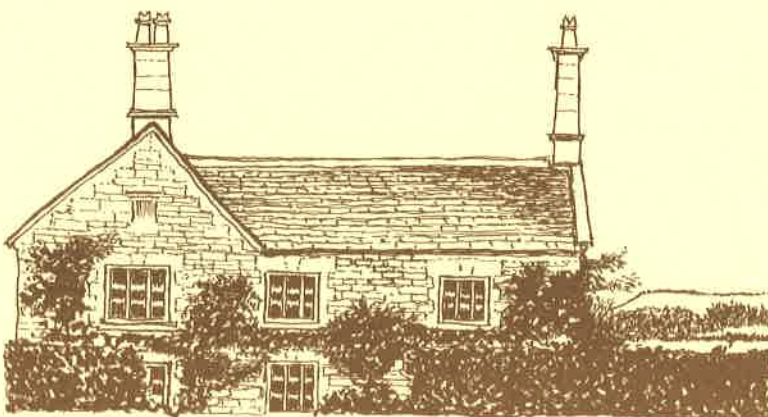


General

The diversity of habitat, flora and fauna, must be maintained. The quiet and relatively remote nature of the parishes, within the Cotswolds AONB, should be protected strongly. This community is opposed to all forms of suburbanisation. Any future group of houses placed in these villages should maintain a country context. Design, of its nature, evolves. Good design maintains a fitness for purpose and can be an innovative expression of its age. We need good traditions of the new as those of the past.

Summary of Main Recommendations

- Grassy areas, orchards, gardens, trees and hedges are very important.
- Views out of the villages, to the hills, and into the villages, must be kept.
- Farming right into the village centres to be maintained.
- Diverse juxtaposition of houses to be continued.
- Cotswold stone to be used, matching the local style and colour, whenever possible.
- Artificial stone-coloured, and grey, tiles do harmonise.
- Reconstructed stone should only be permitted when the colour and building style are sympathetic. Re-use materials when possible.
- Dull-red brick, not sand-faced, is appropriate.
- Test panels for stone and brick, and samples of roofing materials to be available for local inspection.
- Window frames look better when painted. Local design of frames and glazing should be respected. Timber frames are preferable.
- Dormer windows are often preferable to skylights.
- Outbuildings and walls to be handled sympathetically.
- Adequate off-street parking space for each house is vital.
- Fuel tanks should be well sited and screened.
- A variety of housing is needed.





This Statement

This was produced through the initiative of the Parish Council following on from the policy of the Stratford-on-Avon District Council. A well-attended public meeting was held in June 1998 which led to a committee of six being formed to see the project through. Questionnaires were sent to all the 158 houses in the two villages and there was a good response. Two more public meetings were held in October 1998. The first led to six teams photographing houses, details and views: the second showed the photographs to the public for their comments. Again, both sessions were well attended. Members of the committee have met with the Tuesday Circle and the Senior Citizens. The Statement has been written based on all the information and views that have been collected: and it has been circulated in draft before this final production.

This Statement is a democratic attempt to record the views of local people and those things which they consider important on the siting, layout, arrangements, construction, materials and whole being of Cherington and Stourton. It has been produced in the hope and trust that these views will be respected and followed by those concerned in local government, planners, architects, developers and builders whenever plans and designs are considered for local building; and when building is carried out, along with the other statutory documents affecting local planning.

Acknowledgements

We are very grateful to the parishioners of the two villages for their contributions, co-operation and patience.

Andrew Wharton, Stratford-on-Avon District Council and Linda Ridgley, Warwickshire Rural Action for the Environment, have been more than helpful.

Guy Redmayne, a member of the Group, has designed this Statement, for which the rest of us are very grateful.

Useful References

Cherington Conservation Area Review 1994

Stourton Conservation Area Review 1997

Character Map of Stratford-on-Avon District and Character & Design in Stratford-on-Avon District 1998

Warwickshire Landscapes Guidelines 1993

Cotswolds AONB Management Strategy 1996 (p.116)





CHERINGTON

STOURTON

The Old Chapel

Stourton Farm

Tachbrook House

Wheelwright Cottage

The Old School House

Stourton Mill House

Stourton Green

Featherbed Lane

St John the Baptist

Church Row

Vine Orchard

Home Farm, Steels Lane, Dickens House, The House on the Green

Cherington House