

**SHERBORNE
A GREAT
PLACE TO LIVE**



**WONDERFUL
COUNTRYSIDE
NEARBY . . .**

**. . . BUT
NOT QUITE
PERFECT**



A SHERBORNE CPRE CRITICAL REVIEW

A CRITICAL REVIEW OF SHERBORNE'S BUILDINGS AND TOWNSCAPE

Introduction: This Sherborne CPRE publication supplements well known information about the great wealth of historic buildings in our town, and seeks to look beyond them at some of the eyesores and missed opportunities. It is intended to be a modest stimulant to those who are either decision makers or opinion formers within the local community (and indeed all residents) not to be in any way complacent about the place where we live.

In such a very attractive and ancient place it can be all too easy to become complacent about the aspects of the town that merit action or offer opportunities.

Although some residential buildings have been very well restored in recent years there still remains a need to avoid any deterioration of the town's appearance through inappropriate development and neglect.

Sherborne CPRE has no bias whatsoever against new buildings. Instead it seeks to encourage high quality of design, optimum siting, and where appropriate incorporation of vernacular features. Sadly that has not always been the case in the last few years.

Some years ago West Dorset District Council commissioned a "Conservation Area Appraisal" of Sherborne. This review does not seek to audit exactly which of the "proposed actions" were implemented. However, if in relation to Barton Farm the "thorough historical site analysis and design brief" prior to a "masterplan for the site" ever occurred it is very difficult to reconcile it with most of the end result.

Our review recognises the constraints in terms of both funding and enforcement powers which apply to such public bodies, but strongly recommends Sherborne Town Council to think more strategically about the long term future of the town. It also urges Dorset Council to take a more proactive role on both planning and enforcement action than has been the case in recent years.

Sherborne CPRE is slightly unusual in that it merged many years ago with the Sherborne & District Society. As such it has a role in safeguarding not only the surrounding countryside, but also the town's architectural heritage. It covers the postal area of DT9. **If you found this review of interest please give us your thoughts, and consider joining Sherborne CPRE (see details on last page).** The group welcomes new members and their input to its policy-making and debate.

FIRST VIEW OF SHERBORNE:



As one drives from the north into Sherborne— a town with a rich heritage of historic buildings – this is the view that confronts one at the first set of traffic lights. Not a great row of shops at the best of time, but even less so when in early 2020 two of them are so obviously unoccupied.

Surely some constructive and collaborative thinking about how to improve this first impression of the town for many visitors is not too difficult for the owners and occupiers ? An initiative by the Town Council or Dorset Council (or both) seems appropriate.

NEWELL:



Newell House is listed as Grade 2 and the western end of the building is recorded by Historic England as dating from the C17. It was a school before it became a private house – since when it gives every sign of suffering considerable neglect. Its condition cannot have been helped by its extreme proximity to the A30. Recently

the unsympathetic way in which the highway authority re-configured the junction in 2019 seems to have missed the opportunity to try and improve the setting of this historic building in relation to both the road and the associated signage.

Despite its prominence within the townscape Sherborne CPRE has not been aware of any efforts being made by the Town Council, West Dorset Council (as it was until recently) or Historic England to engage with the owner about the condition of the building, or to seek ways in which it can fulfil its potential as one of the town's more historic buildings. The present state of the building qualifies it as one of the town's more obvious "missed opportunities"



Opposite Newell House is an interesting old doorway into a wall that abuts the A30. Despite renovation of much of the land behind the wall, and improved access to that land, the other side of the doorway has been blocked off and allowed to fall into disrepair (see photo below) – so missing the chance to incorporate the doorway as an interesting and historic feature.

View of the reverse side of the doorway off the A30 – a clear case of failure to imagine how a vernacular feature could



have been incorporated into the re-design of the area. Did any of the relevant authorities express a view about this – if that occurred CPRE is not aware of it happening.



Nearby a path goes up to the recent housing development. To the north is the wreck of what appears to be a former agricultural building – only visible through the fencing erected to prevent access. Does anyone know what is due to happen here ?

WEST MILL: Most Sherborne residents will have gone down West Mill lane to make a delivery to the municipal tip, but how many have turned left on leaving the tip entrance and gone further down the lane ? If so they are rewarded by the sight of a



delightful old mill – see photos. Despite the water wheel looking in fairly good condition the overall impression is of neglect.

In an age when renewable energy is crucial surely the mill can be brought back in to action as a source of electricity generation ? The stream has a good flow of water, the building (patched up at the back with concrete blocks) looks in reasonable repair, and does not appear to be in any alternative use. Sherborne can all too easily lose such interesting and historic buildings by lack of alternative thinking about their future use.

Just because a building is tucked away it seems to Sherborne CPRE no reason why it should not get the care and attention that its historic merit deserves. This mill is a good example of industrial archaeology failing to attract the attention that it should get.

It does not look in bad repair, but will inevitable deteriorate if no action is taken to restore the mill wheel and the machinery.

It might be a good voluntary project for those with the appropriate skills, and could become a local attraction.



QUARR NATURE RESERVE:



Sherborne is fortunate to have this nature reserve within an easy walk from the centre of the town. Despite the rather formidable (but understandable) set of notices at the entrance (see photo) it offers a very pleasant stroll. It is sad therefore that when a Sherborne CPRE member recently visited the adjacent car park it had a pile of unsightly



material (seemingly fly-tipped) in one corner.

There was every indication that this had all been there for some time, but whoever is responsible for maintenance of the area had not arranged for it to be cleared away.



It may well be that this task is nobly undertaken by volunteers without the resources to transport it to the tip, but in that case surely it would not be unreasonable for the Town Council to act ?

NETHERCOMBE FARM: This late 14th century farm building is located -somewhat awkwardly for anyone seeking to view its exterior - on the lane leading out of Sherborne to Sandford Orcas. There is no pavement to speak of beside the building which makes it extremely difficult to read the interesting plaque that records the vesting of the farm to the Dorset Building Preservation Trust. The plaque refers those interested in accessing the building to the Vivat Trust. But in



August 2015 the Vivat Trust is recorded as going into liquidation owing £1.3 million. So what is happening to Nethercombe Farm now . . . and why does the present plaque remain with its misleading text five years after the Vivat Trust seems to have gone out of business ?

GRAFFITI: In mid-February 2019 the very unattractive building that houses Royal Mail was daubed with graffiti (see photo below). For many weeks no action was taken until a CPRE member alerted Sherborne Town Council in late May. The Council were apparently “unaware of this” (despite it being within a two minute walk of their offices). However they agreed to contact Royal Mail. By mid-June it had still not been removed. Eventually it was painted over. Getting rid of graffiti promptly is generally regarded as the best way of deterring it. Sherborne has some lessons to learn on this.



Later that year extensive graffiti was sprayed on to a wall at the end of East Mill Lane where the railway fence adjoins



the road bridge (see next photo). It took many weeks before the wall panel was eventually painted over. Sometimes there seems to be a lack of proactivity in the way we address such matters – even when the action needed does not require any Herculean effort.

SIGNAGE: Sherborne has a charming Victorian railway station – an enormous asset for the town. On emerging from the main entrance visitors face a well maintained and very attractive small park. However looking to their left they will see a plethora



of signs (see photo) that do nothing for the appearance of the area, and are so jumbled up that only a person who has the time and energy to stop and read them from top to bottom will benefit from them.

Sherborne Police Station: Open from 10.00 am to 3.30 pm on Tuesdays and Thursdays Sherborne police station can hardly be said to play much of a role in the town. However it does occupy a very large and central site – not only in terms of the low rise building, but also in the vast parking spaces.



It may be that the site remains as an expression of faith in the remote possibility



that a local police presence will return to the town. Meanwhile it seems an amazing waste of a site that offers many alternative possibilities.

GRAVEL PITS LANE:

Corrugated iron buildings are not likely to last for centuries, but they do represent a certain type of architecture prevalent in the Victorian and Edwardian period with some far later examples. In Gravel Pits Lane the building shown here is mouldering away despite its visual merit being identified in the WDC Conservation Area Appraisal .



A RAILWAY RELIC ? Tucked into a corner of the yard where Bradfords used to have their timber depot is this small well designed building overshadowed by a larger shed. It now looks in a rather sorry state, but seems to be structurally sound. Does anyone know its original purpose . . . and does it have a future ? It deserves one.



CEMETERY MAUSOLEUM:

Sherborne cemetery is very well maintained. Sadly there is one badly neglected structure there – the Wingfield Digby Mausoleum a Grade 2 listed building. It was recorded in 2002 as “At risk . . . repairs still urgently needed”. Windows are now broken, vegetation is growing out of the roof and walls, the guttering is very deficient, and as such rainwater has stained the outer stonework – what has gone wrong here ?



MODERN BUILDINGS OF MERIT: Sherborne and its surrounding villages have some good examples of modern residential architecture that blend in well with the overall character of the town, and often enhance it. Just a few of those are shown here:



All of these buildings (in St Antony's Square understood to be designed by Anthony Jaggard – centre right and bottom left) integrate to some extent with the architectural character of Sherborne town. They contrast with the Persimmon site to the northwest of the town which makes few concessions to such integration – mainly reproducing the firm's standard designs as used across the rest of the country. It is also alleged that the quality of some construction has been poor.

... and finally some slightly lesser known Sherborne visual pleasures:



The Wingfield-Digby private graveyard : sits behind Castleton church – surrounded by iron railings. In spring time it has a splendid show of snowdrops and good views down the valley. It compares very favourably with the sad condition of their mausoleum in the town cemetery.

The Deer Park Lodge: Anyone walking the footpath from the main gate of the castle up the scarp and then out to the deer park will see this delightful thatched lodge. It gives every appearance of being designed as somewhere that a shooting party might use for their lunch, and gives splendid views down the valley back to the castle.



The cemetery: This may seem a curious aspect of Sherborne to include, but it is characterised by attractive Victorian buildings and some very splendid mature trees. It is a tranquil place, and the town should be proud of its quiet quality.

Sherborne School tree

planting: Within the large area of the school's estate there is a very broad spectrum of building and green space. Some of the buildings add enormously to the character of the town whilst others contribute little to it. However in relatively recent years there has been a commendable effort to intersperse the more modern buildings with tree planting. The effect as shown here can be delightful.



Sherborne CPRE welcomes your thoughts on this publication:

Is this report unfair to the Town Council and Dorset Council ?

How could conservation of our architectural heritage be better achieved ?

What are your own priorities for the buildings in Sherborne ?

Should Historic England be doing more ?

What roles are there for volunteers to improve the townscape ?

If the Paddock Project Art Centre does not progress how might the old derelict tennis courts at the back of the Paddock Garden be used ?

How might the design of new buildings (especially large scale developments like Barton Farm) in the Sherborne area be made very much better?

Do you think that sustained improvements to the townscape may have a benefit to the town's economy (in terms of tourism)?

Which modern buildings do you like best ?

What would you be prepared to do to address some of the issues raised in this Sherborne CPRE report ? Responses by email to: info@dorset-cpre.org.uk or by post to: Dorset CPRE, PO Box 9018, Dorchester,DT19GY

Not already a Dorset CPRE member?

Joining is the single most effective way to stand up for Sherborne and the local countryside. You can join online via our website www.dorset-cpre.org.uk or contact our office on 0333 577 0360 or email info@dorset-cpre.org.uk to receive a copy of our membership form. Members receive our county magazine 'The Dorset Review', National CPRE Countryside Voice magazine, and enjoy discounted entry to houses, gardens and other attractions around England. The charity number is 211974

The views expressed in this report - which is intended to stimulate discussion within Sherborne and the DT9 postal area - are not purporting to represent the opinions of either Dorset CPRE or CPRE nationally. As such they only reflect the personal views of those individual members who have been involved in compiling the report