



# **LOWER LYDBROOK CONSERVATION AREA**

## **CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

**FOREST OF DEAN DISTRICT COUNCIL. J. A. STEWART BA, MCD, MRTPI. DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND LEISURE SERVICES. JULY 1995**



### **Introduction**

Lydbrook is a large village set in the valley of the Grethough Brook which is a tributary of the River Wye. The Lydbrook Valley is narrow and steep sided with the result that Lydbrook itself has a strong linear form, and is tightly constrained. Though the whole village is known as Lydbrook, the settlement is divided into three parts, known as Upper, Central and Lower Lydbrook.

The development of Lydbrook, and its form and character, owes much to the industrial history of the area. Coal, timber and metal ores were all important elements in the early development of the settlement, followed later by metal industries, particularly tinplate, and the construction of railways, including the Severn and Wye line. The buildings on the valley floor still reflect this later period of industrial development. This industrial character is especially noticeable in Lower Lydbrook where the bridge parapets of the old Severn and Wye line can still be seen, and also workers cottages which served the former tinplate works are still in existence.

### **What is a Conservation Area?**

A Conservation Area is defined in statute as "an area of special architectural or historic interest the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance"

Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 states:

"It is the quality and interest of areas, rather than that of individual buildings, which should be the prime consideration in identifying Conservation Areas. There has been increasing recognition in recent years that our experience of a historic area depends on much more than the quality of individual buildings - on the historic layout of properties and thoroughfares; on a particular 'mix' of uses; on characteristic materials; on appropriate scaling and detailing of contemporary buildings; on the quality of .....street furniture and hard and soft surfaces; on vistas along streets and between buildings; and on the extent to which traffic intrudes and limits the pedestrian use of spaces between buildings. Conservation Area designation should be seen as the means of recognising the importance of all these factors and ensuring that conservation policy addresses the quality of townscape in its broadest sense as well as the protection of

individual buildings."

Section 71 of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990 places a duty on local planning authorities to formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas. Clear assessment and definition of an area's special interest and the action needed to protect it will help to generate awareness and encourage local property owners to take the right sort of action for themselves.

### **The implications of Designation**

The designation of a Conservation Area imposes specific duties on the Local Planning Authority. The Authority must formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the Conservation Area, and submit them to public consultation.

In addition, in exercising their planning powers, the Local Planning Authority must pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing the character or appearance of the Conservation Areas.

### **The implications for the Local Authority**

It is essential that all departments of both the District and County Councils understand the significance of the Conservation Area, and act in coordination, in order that public works, such as street works, do not damage the historic fabric or appearance of the area. Other agencies, such as the water supplier or telecommunication companies must also be aware and give respect to the special architectural and historic character of the area.

### **Implications for Owners and Residents**

In normal circumstances, householders have certain "Permitted Development" rights to carry out minor works to their properties, such as small extensions and the erection of garden buildings. However, in many places such as within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty or a Conservation Area, these rights are reduced. In the case of householders within the proposed Lower Lydbrook Conservation Area, "Permitted Development" rights are already reduced because it lies within the Wye Valley AONB, and therefore there will be few implications for residents. However, some works would require the consent of the Local

Planning Authority after Conservation Area designation and these include the demolition of buildings and works to trees. In addition, any new development including extensions would be expected to be of good design, appropriate to the special character of the area. As with all development proposals it is advisable to seek advice from the planning department at an early stage.

Conservation Area designation can also benefit property owners and occupiers. There may be added status to a property being located within a Conservation Area. Also the development controls aimed at maintaining and enhancing the appearance of the Conservation Area may sustain or enhance the appearance of properties within it.

### The setting and topography of the

#### Conservation Area

The Lower Lydbrook Conservation Area lies within the valley of the Greathough Brook which is a tributary of the River Wye (See Map 1). The Greathough Brook, like many other tributaries of the Wye has a dramatic relief of steep valley sides with little level land at the valley floor. The Conservation Area is located within the Wye Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and the River Wye is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest along its entire course.

The steep hillsides to the east and west of the Greathough Brook with many fine individual and groups of trees, contribute much to the character of the Lower Lydbrook Conservation Area. At the southern end of the Conservation Area there is little level land on the valley floor, though the valley gradually opens out as the Greathough Brook approaches its confluence with the River Wye. Most of the housing occurs in a linear form on the flatter land on the valley floor and lower valley slopes. However the valley does continue to fall in level towards the River Wye. Hence from some points within

and outside the Conservation Area, the roofscape and layout of buildings become particularly important to the character and appearance of the area. Such views could have an effect on the need for privacy of rear gardens and this could be one of the reasons for the widespread use of coniferous hedges and specimen trees which are otherwise alien to the natural flora of the area. The valley can be viewed from the valley sides and ridge where public footpaths allow access. In these circumstances the roofscape, walls and landscaping are particularly important in maintaining the character and appearance of Lower Lydbrook.

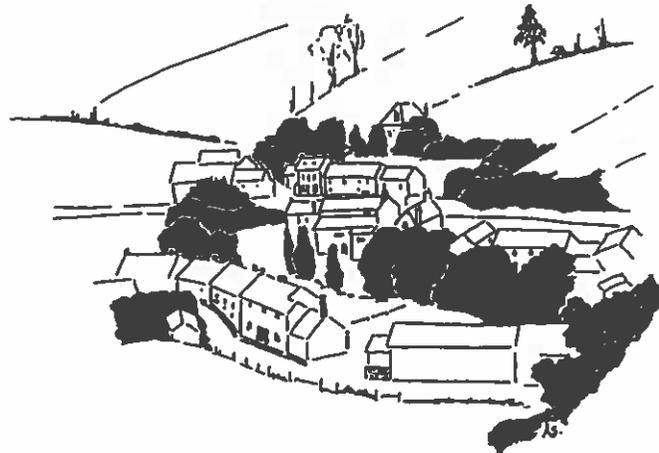


Fig 1 Views into the valley show terraces with interesting roofscape

Part of the eastern boundary of the Conservation Area is formed by the dismantled railway. This is sited high up the valley sides and affords extensive views of the settlement below.

#### The Historic Evolution of the Area

The Greathough Brook rises from the watershed around Mirey Stock. On this brook there were three private forges, known as Upper, Middle and Lower Forges, the latter being established around 1610. The Lower Forge stood within 200 metres of the River Wye close to the site of the Forge Hammer Inn. In the late Eighteenth Century works were established at Lower Forge and Middle Forge for the purposes of making tin plate. Many of the cottages in the vicinity of the Lower Forge date from this time. Towards the end of the nineteenth century the economic fortunes of the tin plate works began to decline with many stoppages due to 'breakages', accidents and the recession in the tinplate market following the introduction of the McKinley Tariff, which limited trade with the United States. The start of the Twentieth Century saw no great improvement in trade, and after several more

stoppages, the works at Lower Forge closed for good in 1925. After 1930 the buildings fell into disrepair and the works chimney was demolished in 1938.

An important feature in the history of Lower Lydbrook was the development and evolution of the Severn and Wye Railway. A three span viaduct was designed by George Keeling to carry the railway across the Lydbrook Valley. This structure was made up of three arches on the eastern end, two arches at the western end, and two intermediate masonry piers to support the girder deck for the railway. The viaduct was completed in 1874 and was opened for passenger traffic in 1875. The majority of the viaduct was demolished in 1966 with only the base of the bridge piers and the bridge parapets remaining.

In addition to the tinplate industry and the evolution of the railway, historical investigation indicates that a small amount of boat building took place at the wharf at Lower Lydbrook, and it is believed that the boat 'Eliza' was built there in 1807.

### Listed buildings within the Conservation Area

There are 4 listed buildings within the Conservation Area. They are:

**Lydbrook House** was built in the early Nineteenth Century and is a 3 storey brick built imposing house with a hipped slate roof, and 16 pane sash windows. Little is known about the reason for such a grand house being built in this location.



Fig 2 Lydbrook House - railings and gateway add to the character of the Conservation Area

**The Malthouse** is adjacent to Lydbrook House and was built at the same time of coursed rubble stone with hipped slate roof. It was the village malthouse.

**Viaduct House** was built in the early Nineteenth Century of brick, and is a 3 storey house with 16 pane sash windows.

**The Priory** is a late C15/C16 house incorporated into a C17 house. It is timber framed with close studding and has complex slate roofs with a central stone stack. The interesting interior is mentioned in the listing.

The Courtfield Arms is not a Listed Building but it is of historical interest. It was built in 1759 as a Mansion House for the Vaughan Family and is an imposing two and three storey building facing the River Wye across the former B4228.

### Land Uses within and around the area

Land uses within Lower Lydbrook Conservation Area are primarily residential, with all the previous industrial uses having disappeared. (Immediately to the south of the Conservation Area boundary is an engineering works) There are two Public Houses - the Courtfield Arms and The Forge Hammer, and public toilets. There is also an area of public open space by the river.

### **Colours within the area**

The predominating colours within the Conservation Area are green and brown, as the vegetation of the valley sides and the trees are so prominent. Colours are generally subdued with a mellow yellow/green stone being used in the construction of many properties, and dark grey slate on the majority of roofs. There is also the rich red of the bricks used in the building of Lydbrook and Viaduct Houses.

### **Micro-climate**

The steep sided valley faces north and therefore receives little sunlight in the depths of winter, making it sometimes, a gloomy place.

The River Wye floods regularly which causes flooding to many of the lower lying properties and to the road near the river.

### **Tree Cover in and Around the Area**

Individual and groups of trees are an important visual feature in the Lower Lydbrook Conservation area (see Map 2). The main groups of trees are located on the hill slopes outside the Conservation Area, but these form an important backdrop to the built

development. In and around Lydbrook House are a number of fine single specimen trees which will be protected by Conservation Area designation.

### **Patterns of Movement**

The main road through the settlement carries a significant amount of traffic, including heavy goods vehicles which serve the industrial sites further up the valley. There are narrow lanes and accesses off this main road. The former B4228 road from English Bicknor to Kerne Bridge forms a strong barrier to pedestrians which tends to isolate the River Wye and the riverside park from the settlement.

### **Views**

Views out of the settlement are particularly important (See Map 3). Views are mainly down the valley across the rooftops, between the houses and down the roads giving views across the river meadows. Interestingly, the River Wye is not an important visual feature when viewed from the majority of the Conservation Area because it is substantially screened by banks.

Views upwards to the steeply sloping valley

sides, with the predominance of trees and the remains of the old railway and tram roads form an important backdrop. From the opposite bank of the River Wye, along which there is a Public Right of Way, part of the Wye Valley Walk (a Regional Route), there are extensive views of most of the Lower Lydbrook Conservation Area. There are no public roads on this side of the river, and very few buildings, but the views into the Conservation Area across the river are still significant.

### **Pattern of Building**

The settlement is mainly linear in form with development following the contours, and constrained to the narrow strip of level land along side of the Brook and the road. Development though, has taken place at differing angles to the road and stream giving a staggered, and slightly haphazard feel. Many properties have been built on sites 'cut' into the steep valley sides, resulting in very small rear gardens many of which are visible, and in some cases prominent front gardens.

### Density of Buildings

The settlement is squeezed by the valley sides yet in many places, because of the undeveloped hillsides and open gardens and spaces between the houses, there is a rather 'open' character. Around Mill Row and the Forge Hammer, properties sit "cheek by jowl", with many small cottages in a compact area, giving a certain intimacy and closeness to this part of the Conservation Area.

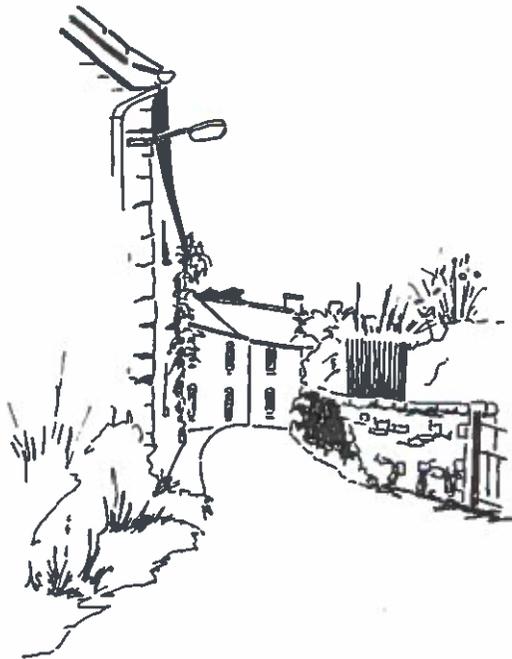


Fig 3 Mill Row

### Type of Buildings

Buildings within the Conservation Area are generally domestic dwellings, with none of the industrial buildings remaining. Many of the houses though, reflect the industrial past, particularly those at Mill Row which were workers cottages serving the old tinsplate works. Properties range from these small workers cottages to more 'grand' houses such as Lydbrook House and Viaduct House close to the river. The dwellings are generally two storey, though some of the 'grander' properties mentioned above have three storeys. There are also 2 public houses, the Courtfield Arms Hotel and the Forge Hammer Inn.

### Style of Buildings

The local vernacular style is evident in many of the properties with functional dwelling houses, of rectangular shape and two storeys in height. Terraced and single units predominate. Properties such as those at Mill Row show little ornamentation and provided for the most basic needs of workers at the tinsplate works. Lydbrook and Viaduct House were constructed early in the Nineteenth Century and are particularly imposing three storey red brick

properties.

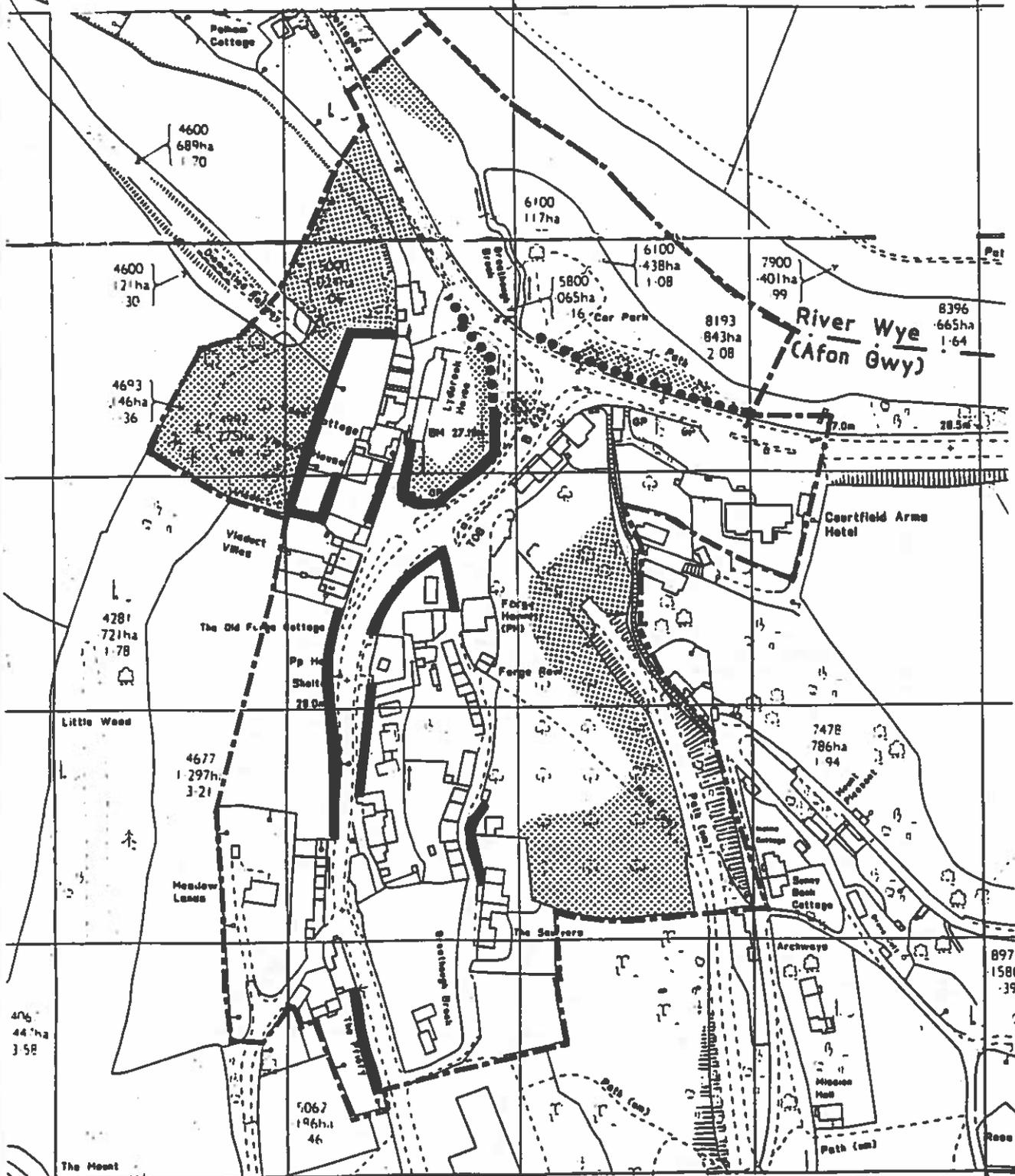
Most commonly, properties have been constructed with plain ridge roofs, but there are also a significant number with hipped roofs, notably Lydbrook House and Viaduct Villas. It is believed that Viaduct Villas formed part of the Lydbrook House Estate but were sold off separately at a later date.



Fig 4 Terraced houses typical of the Conservation Area

Viaduct Cottage has an unusual extension which shows a rustic influence, constructed in a 'cottage ornee' style. This building is also unusual, as the internal floors and the windows and doors have been raised to alleviate the problems caused by flooding.

# MAP 2 TREES, WALLS AND RAILINGS



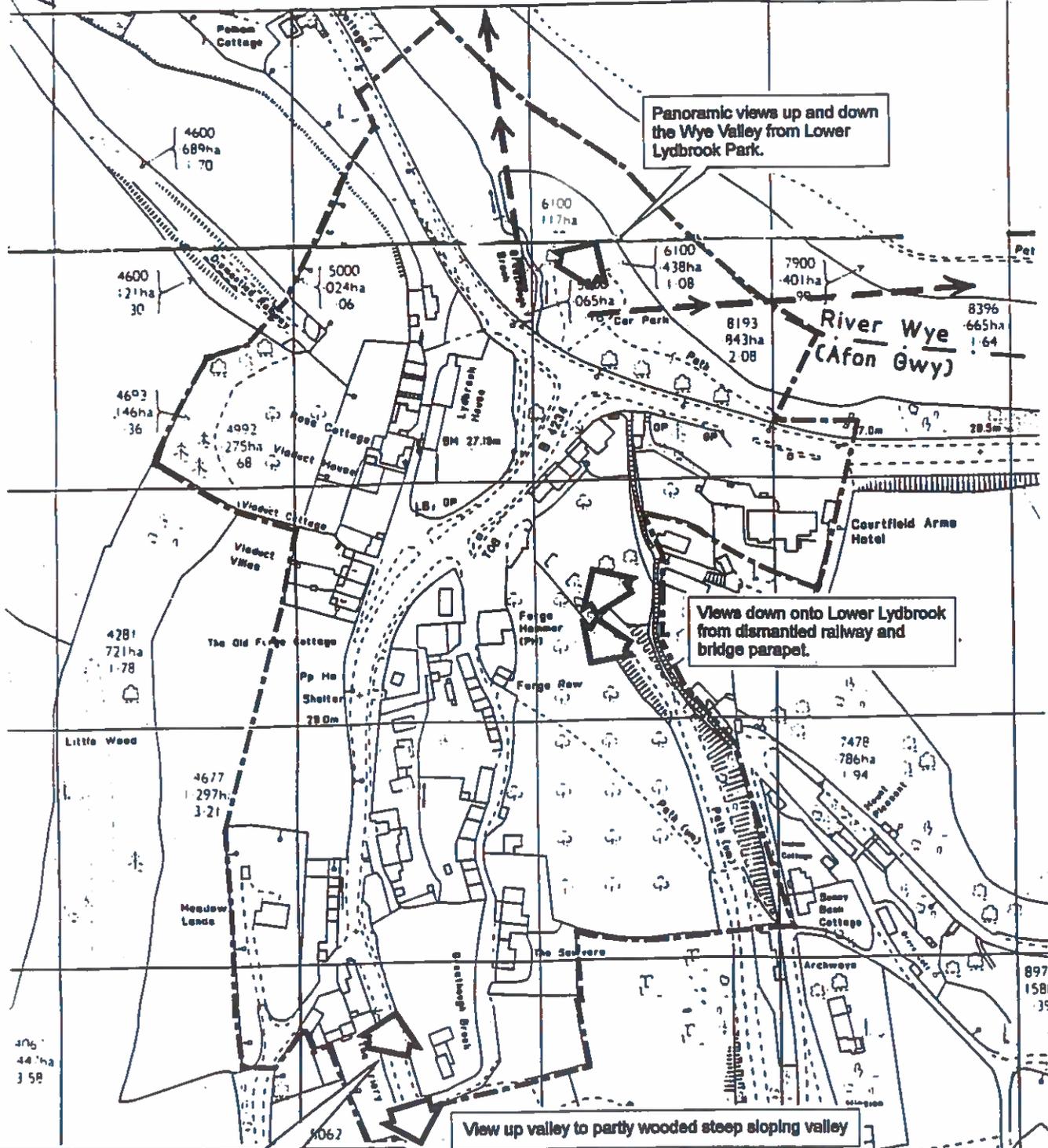
**KEY**

- STONE WALLS
- IMPORTANT TREES AND GROUPS
- RAILINGS

**SCALE 1:2500**

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# MAP 3 VIEWS IN AND OUT OF THE SETTLEMENT



### NOTE

Throughout Lower Lydbrook there are views out of the settlement. As the valley sides rise steeply, they are a strong visual feature from most parts of the Conservation Area.

### KEY



Main views in and out of the settlement

Scale 1:2500

### The Morphology of the area

The area is characterised by differing heights and angles. The linear form of the settlement has not restricted development to straight lines of properties fronting the road, but a more interesting form has appeared with frontages at varying angles, located close to the road or away from the road, close to the stream or away from the stream. The underlying topography with the slope down to the river, has ensured development at different heights, also the differing styles of properties ranging from small cottages to larger houses means that the 'roofscape' is not only very visible, but also very interesting.

The area is also characterised by local stone walls fronting onto the main road and lanes. Old photographs indicate that here were more prominent in years gone by, and that some have been removed or have fallen into disrepair. In addition, trees have seeded adjacent to some of the walls reducing their prominence.

### Building Materials and Construction

Stone is the main construction material, though brick has been used on Lydbrook and Viaduct

House and some stone properties have been rendered over. The stone is generally green/yellow. New properties built adjacent to Mill Row have been constructed in a red/grey reconstituted stone which, with hindsight was not particularly appropriate as it does not match the stone in this locality. Other new properties have been constructed with smooth painted render and small stone quoins which is not characteristic of the local building and appears out of place. Slate has been used almost exclusively as a roofing material though there is evidence that clay tiles were used in the village. There has been extensive use of profiled concrete roof tiles in the construction of the newer properties, and the re-roofing of many older properties. Whilst these tiles have weathered, the use of natural alternatives would have been preferable.

### The survival of Building Features

There is still evidence of the stone piers to the viaduct on the valley floor, and the stone bridge parapets high above the valley floor.

Adjoining Viaduct House are the brick walls of the old kitchen garden, which are particularly visible because of the steeply sloping land.

### Disfiguring Features

The public toilets and surrounding area detract from the appearance of the Conservation Area. The toilets are constructed of concrete blockwork with a flat roof, and their appearance has no respect to the style, design and colour of other buildings in the area (See Map 4).



Fig 5 Area with possibilities for enhancement

### Sites which could enhance the area

Enhancement/redesign of the exterior of the public toilets would be of great benefit to the visual appearance of the Conservation Area. In addition, the area surrounding the toilets, possibly including the Public House should be incorporated into any enhancement scheme.

The riverside park is a pleasant and popular area for parking and informal recreation. The park is managed by a Committee of local people, and it may be worthwhile joining forces to ensure that the riverside park continues to make a positive contribution to the Conservation Area and the AONB.

#### **Landmarks, Focal Points and Special Features**

The remains of the bridge piers and parapets are a historic landmark feature. In addition the walls and railings within the Conservation Area are special features of note (See Map 4).

#### **Open Spaces within and around the Area**

Between the former B4228 and the River Wye, is a riverside park known as the Tump; the land was donated by the Vaughan family to the village of Lydbrook. The area consists of two tarmacked parking areas, benches, canoe launch and informal picnic area. ornamental trees have been planted. From this area, which overlooks small rapids on the River Wye, there are good views up and down the Wye Valley.

### Concluding Analysis

Lower Lydbrook is a place of architectural and historic importance which it is desirable to preserve and enhance. The topography of the area and the local availability of raw materials led to a strong industrial presence in this valley. This industrial history is still very visible in and around Lower Lydbrook and is the main factor which influences its present character.

These remains in most places are well preserved, and also there has been little new development to obliterate or dilute the industrial character. At every turn within the settlement there are clear clues to the industrial past, from the names of properties like Viaduct Villas to the physical evidence of industrial uses like workers cottages and bridge parapets. There is also a variety in the scale of the buildings from small workers dwellings to grand houses set in large gardens overlooking the River Wye. In many other places in the District the industrial past has been removed or obscured by new development, but in Lower Lydbrook it is clearly visible and gives the settlement a special character.



Fig 6 Viaduct Villas are a reminder of the industrial past and an attractive feature today.

Around the site of the Lower Forge were a number of industrial buildings, a mill pond and many dwellings. The tinsplate works and the mill pond have disappeared, along with some of the dwellings, but many still remain. The most prominent of these are the cottages at Mill Row which were workers houses serving the former tin plate works at the Lower Forge. They were built in a curved terrace and were very small cottages which provided for the basic needs of the workers. They have been renovated and modernised with individual cottages knocked together to make larger

properties, but their appearance reflect their links with the areas industrial past.

The Severn and Wye Railway Line was a major feature in Lower Lydbrook with its viaduct towering above the settlement. Old photographs indicate that the viaduct was a major piece of civil engineering, which dominated completely the northern end of the Lydbrook Valley. The main spans of the viaduct were removed in 1966 and the bridge piers and parapets demolished. The stone bridge parapets are visible high up on the east and west sides of the valley, and the stone base of one of the supporting piers can be seen behind Lydbrook House. The steep flight of steps remain leading down from the former Lower Lydbrook station to the road near to the Courtfield Arms.

In addition to the special character resulting from the industrial heritage of Lower Lydbrook, there are other factors brought out in this assessment which give a special character to the area.

The location and setting of the buildings in the Conservation Area within a deeply incised tributary of the River Wye creates much of the character of Lower Lydbrook. The steeply sloping hillsides form a backdrop to the entire settlement, and also shape the settlement pattern. Views upwards and outwards are significant throughout and give an 'open' feel even where the buildings are crowded together.

The stone walls that front the highway in many places are an attractive feature which focus the eye, they link properties together and maintain a sense of enclosure. These walls are an important feature in the appearance of Lower Lydbrook and it is desirable that wherever possible they are preserved and enhanced (See Map 4).

Lower Lydbrook has developed in a linear form with properties fronting on to the roads and the stream, but at varying angles. The differing building styles and form of the dwellings, combined with the fall in levels down the valley has produced a roofscape that is not only noticeable but very interesting. It is a feature

that contributes much to the special character of the Conservation Area, and particular care needs to be taken in the future with roofing materials and the form and pitch of new roofs and extensions.



