

# EASBY

## CONSERVATION AREA APPRAISAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN



Adopted as supplementary planning  
guidance 22.11.07



# **Easby Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan**

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## INTRODUCTION

A Conservation Area is an “area of special architectural or historic interest the character and appearance of which it is desirable to preserve and enhance” (Section 69 of the Planning (Listed Building and Conservation Areas) Act 1990). Easby was designated a Conservation Area in 1995.

Local Planning Authorities are required to ‘formulate and publish proposals for the preservation and enhancement of any parts of their area, which are Conservation Areas’ (Section 71 of the Act). This Character Appraisal and Management Plan fulfils this duty.

In making a decision on an application for development in a Conservation Area, “special attention shall be paid to the desirability of preserving and enhancing the character or appearance of that area” (Section 72 of the Act). While this should ensure that harmful change is not allowed, some changes, not normally requiring planning permission (known as permitted development) could still damage the special qualities of the area. Local Authorities have special powers to issue directions removing certain permitted development rights from properties if it can be shown that it is necessary.

This appraisal and management plan should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Richmondshire Local Plan;
- The emerging Local Development Framework;
- North Yorkshire Structure Plan;
- The emerging Regional Spatial Strategy;
- National Planning Policy Guidance especially Planning Policy; Guidance 15 (PPG15) – Planning and the Historic Environment;
- National Planning Policy Statements.

### Location and Setting

The village of Easby is located to the south east of Richmond, approximately two miles from the town centre, on the banks of the river Swale. It can be reached by foot along either side of the river. The path on the south side of the river uses the former railway track and bridge from the former Station (photo 1) whilst on the north side of the river the route is initially a dead end

Photo 1



road and then a riverside path. Both routes are well wooded with the north side finishing across open pasture fields. By road, Easby is accessed from the B6271 (Richmond to Brompton-on-Swale) along a single track road.

The topography of the site has been central to the development of the settlement over the centuries. The gentle curve of the tree clad slope along the north bank of the Swale creates a natural amphitheatre for the abbey (Photo 2), invoking both a strong sense of enclosure, and an air of peace and tranquillity. The most important natural feature, however, was the river (photo 3). The oldest buildings were built on



Photo 2



Photo 3

the low ground to take full advantage of the riverside location. The original road to Richmond followed the riverside but gradual erosion from the river over centuries resulted in a new road being formed at the higher level. Easby thus developed into two quite distinct areas, with a second group of buildings appearing on the elevated ridge to the north east along the access road. Between these two distinct building groups are a series of open fields, providing both an immediate and wider setting to the abbey ruins, and the overall form of the settlement. The Conservation Area also incorporates a substantial area of the surrounding landscape, in recognition of the role played by 'setting' in the overall character of Easby (photo 4). Equally important to the setting is the open landscape outside the Conservation Area boundary and



Photo 4

particularly to the south of the river (photo 5).

Photo 5



### **Historic Development and Archaeology**

Easby Conservation Area has a long history. The existence of the Easby Cross, estimated to date from the late 8<sup>th</sup> century, shows that this was an important site from earliest times. This ancient prayer cross, whose presence was discovered during renovations to the Church of St Agatha, indicates that the land served as a holy place even before the church and the abbey existed.

Ecclesiastical buildings were the first to appear on the beautiful Swale riverbanks, and the settlement of Easby gradually grew up around them. The oldest building in the Conservation Area is the Church of Saint Agatha. Originally built in the early twelfth century, the church has undergone several phases of alteration and remodelling.

The construction of Easby Abbey followed shortly after the building of St. Agatha's Church. Roald, Constable of Richmond Castle, founded the abbey in 1152 for the Canons Regular of the Premonstratensian Order. The Premonstratensians were a strict ascetic order founded in France, and the order appeared in England around 1147. Their white habits gave them the name the "White Canons". Canons Regular were men who lived in communities like monks, but went out into the secular world preaching and connecting with the community. This inclusion of the outside world helped make their monasteries centres of local activity. Industry, economic development and ecclesiastical services were supported on the property of the canons, bringing people to mingle among the brothers.

Through the thirteenth century, several bequeathals of land surrounding the abbey

widened its holdings. Eventually, the abbey had expansive lands under its control, including the immediate village and the more remote farmlands where Kiplin Hall currently stands. The Canons worked the land, and utilized the river to operate a mill and provide water within the abbey grounds. They constructed a gatehouse and barn in the early fourteenth century. The only other building constructed during the time of the White Canons was the monastic barn, which was remodelled into the present-day Abbey House.

The Abbey Mill was built in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century northwest of the abbey ruins near the River Swale, but it is probable that it replaced a much earlier mill building on this site.

The Dissolution saw the destruction of the Abbey of St. Agatha in 1536. The lands in the area of Easby were to change hands many times over the following two hundred years. For roughly a century, no new buildings were constructed within the boundaries of the Conservation Area. The ruined abbey sat empty and nature reclaimed it. Throughout the years, locals salvaged the core stones and ashlar dressing of the abbey for building work.

It was not until the late seventeenth century that the sounds of construction began again, when the Easby Mullions were constructed. However, one hundred years had changed the settlement pattern and the abbey was no longer the centre of activity. The erosion of the old road alongside the riverside meant that the Mullions was built on the ridge by the new road that served as a connection to Richmond and other North Yorkshire towns.

Reverend William Smith, the rector of Melsonby, purchased the lands of Easby in 1729, and built Easby Hall, a grand Georgian mansion, the following year. He owned the Easby property until 1734. Built on the ridge, the Hall has the double benefit of being conveniently located near a road and having the romantic ruins of Easby Abbey and the River Swale as its backyard view. More recently one of the wings of the home was converted into two flats now known as Easby Court One and Two. Smith also constructed the Almshouses, known sometimes as Smith's Hospital. Built in September of 1732, the purpose of the Almshouses was as housing for four poor persons. Smith left directions for his descendents to utilize two of the rooms for a schoolmaster. The almshouses were constructed on the ridge alongside the Mullions near the road, rather than in the valley, perhaps to allow easier access into the nearby towns.

Nineteenth century additions to the Conservation Area include the boundary stone near the town of Richmond in the far north of the area, along with the railway and the Vicarage.

In 1846 the Eryholme - Richmond branch line was completed by the York and Newcastle Railway Company terminating at Richmond Station. The line is now disused but the route has been retained for leisure purposes. Although outside the Conservation Area, it runs along the south bank of the river Swale and many pleasant views of the Conservation Area can be enjoyed looking north. The crossing of the river Swale is adjacent to the southern tip of the Conservation Area, via a functional looking bridge which affords views upstream towards the Abbey.

The next buildings did not appear until 1868 when the Vicarage was built nestled into the hillside above the Abbey ruins. This is a large Jacobethan structure with connecting coach house and screen wall. The Vicarage is not directly on the main

road as is Easby Hall, the Mullions and the Mews. It is situated north of the Abbey towards Richmond, accessible by a footpath.

The final buildings to appear in the landscape of Easby Conservation Area were the twentieth century additions. "White Canons," a house named aptly after the original residents of the valley, was constructed after the 1940s and now sits in a mature garden. A small residential building called the "Custodian's Cottage" sits very near to the Abbey grounds and also appears to be a twentieth century addition. A recent plain rectangular wooden structure building sits on the mead in between the Abbey and the rising hillside.

## Archaeology

Easby is an area of immense archaeological importance, which to some degree is recognised through the extensive scheduled area centred on the Abbey ruins. The potential interest extends well beyond the existing standing remains, and archaeology is likely to be a key issue whenever ground disturbance occurs within the Conservation Area.

Easby Abbey is a Scheduled Monument and includes monastic precinct, cultivation terraces, water management features and ancillary buildings.

## Architecture and Building Materials

Although Easby is a small settlement, its long history has left a considerable cross-section of building types, size and styles. Even more remarkable is the fact that many of these remain relatively unaltered. The unifying feature tends to be the consistent use of local materials, predominantly stone for walling and roofs, a trend that continued until the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Photo 6



Photo 7

The Church of St Agatha was founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (photos 6 & 7), although only a small amount of fabric survives from the original structure. The church underwent alterations at various stages throughout its history, most notably during the 13<sup>th</sup> and late 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. For example, the entrance porch was added in the



Photo 8



Photo 9

late 14<sup>th</sup> century (photo 8). The most major renovations to the building were completed in 1868 by Sir G.G. Scott, and created the structure we see today. The gateway to the church grounds was provided as part of this renovation scheme (photo 9). The church is built of the local vernacular materials, which are rubble walling with stone slate roofing. Lead and artificial slates have also been used, although these are not prominent from public view.

The Abbey was also founded in the 12<sup>th</sup> century (1152 -1537), and is today a consolidated, roofless ruin privately owned but under the guardianship of English Heritage (photo 10). The Abbey enclosure abuts the grounds of the church, and



Photo 10





Photo 11

was obliged to fit around the church in order to make the most of the riverside location. A further concession was made to the local topography, in that the west range is not of standard monastic plan, due to the steep fall of the land.

Nearest to the church stands the Refectory. At the east end is a large pointed window, whose beautiful tracery remains intact (photo 11). The Abbey remains are extensive, despite plunder for stone and deterioration caused by exposure to the elements. The fabric that is left demonstrates a structure of status and fine craftsmanship.

The 14<sup>th</sup> century was a time of wider building activity in Easby. For example, the development of the Abbey gatehouse and the monastic barn (now Abbey House) (photos 12 & 13) took place during this era. The gatehouse (photo 14) is a two



Photo 12



Photo 13

storey structure of sandstone rubble with ashlar dressings, and had external steps giving access to the first floor chamber. It is considered to be the best preserved monastic gatehouse in Yorkshire. The monastic barn is now part of the structure converted into a house and part stands as ruins. The building is rubble sandstone with a stone slate roof. The corn watermill and mill house have now also been converted to a residence (photo 15). The two storey building is of coursed rubble with a stone slate roof.



Photo 14



Photo 15

Although the existing building dates from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 19<sup>th</sup> century, it rests on much older foundations, and it seems reasonable to assume that the earlier mill would have been contemporary with the monastic barn.

Photo 16



The buildings on the ridge developed later in the history of Easby. The oldest building amongst this cluster is Easby Mullions, and this is the clearest example of the typical vernacular style that had developed in the area (photo 16). The existing structure dates from the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, and is of rubble with quoins. The roof would originally have been of

stone slate, but has now been replaced with artificial roofing material. This façade would previously have been symmetrical, and is fairly plain in character. The board door shows that this was a building of lesser status. The chamfered and mullioned windows would have been typical of the local vernacular style.



Easby Hall is a fine 18<sup>th</sup> century country house (photo 17), built of coursed rubble and brick, with ashlar dressings, lead and Westmorland slate roofs. The central block is three storeys with five bays, and the wings are both two storey with two wings. Easby Hall dominates the core of the village, and, at three storeys high, is the tallest

Photo 17

building in the immediate locality. The house has two public facades, indicating the wealth and status of its owner, Rev William Smith. Facing the road, the principal façade is of coursed rubble with ashlar dressings. Finely proportioned and symmetrical, Easby Hall marks the arrival of the polite architecture of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The stone façade in particular shows attempts to keep up with developing fashions, for example, with the introduction of new windows, a porch and a date stone in 1900.



Photo 18

The most notable departure from the prevailing materials in the Conservation Area is the striking brick frontage of Easby Hall (photo18), which faces south-west across the garden towards the river. This is the only incidence of brick in the Conservation Area, and is located where the façade will be publicly visible for quite some distance.



Photo 19

The Almshouses (photo 19) were also built for Rev William Smith, their prominent location in the village demonstrating his benevolence alongside his personal wealth. Now a single dwelling, the Almshouses were originally built as a series of four single cells. The principle façade is symmetrical and ordered, and the overall effect is one of modest refinement. Elements such as the cavetto cornice show attention to detail, and demonstrate that, although far from ostentatious, the building was not cheaply constructed.



Photo 20 The Easby Mews (photo 20), which are now private housing, was a C19 stable block .

White Canons is an unremarkable 1940's building, but it nonetheless contributes positively to the form and character of the village core.

The building which bucks the established development pattern in Easby is the

Vicarage, built c.1868 with associated coach-house (photo 21). The Vicarage is built of rubble with ashlar dressings, and a Welsh slate roof.



Photo 21

## **Character**

### **Functions and Uses**

Today, Easby is a quiet residential village, and is a pleasant destination for those walking from Richmond along the River Swale. However, in the past, it was a much more populous place. In its day, Easby Abbey would have been both a settlement and an industry in its own right. A self-sufficient community, the Abbey relied on the river for power to drive the cornmill, for irrigation, and other necessities. Similarly, Easby Hall would have functioned to some extent as a self-sufficient unit, with its many ancillary buildings. Most of the working buildings in the Conservation Area, e.g. the barns, stables, mill buildings, have been converted to private residences.

In contrast to the fate of the abbey, the Church of St Agatha is one of the few buildings in the Conservation Area that has retained its original use over the centuries. To a large extent, the ecclesiastical *raison d'être* remains. Easby has not become a market town or centre of commerce, for example, and so has remained very much unchanged. Its proximity to Richmond has perhaps not allowed it to assume such a role.

The Abbey, however, has acquired a new function, attracting visitors into the village to learn about this nationally important structure, and enjoy its tranquil and picturesque setting.

### **The Approaches**

Easby can be approached by road along the short loop from the B6271, or by the public footpaths from Richmond along the riversides. The path from the opposite riverbank allows a fine view, across open fields, of Easby Hall and the Vicarage in the background, and the ruins of the abbey in the foreground. Despite the separation of these buildings by many centuries, they form a harmonious composition in the landscape.

The approaches to Easby by road are very different in character to those gained on

foot. The village is approached by narrow country roads, enclosed by trees, hedges, and fences (Photo 22). The village occupies a natural dip in the land, so that the road drops down a little from each side as it comes into the settlement .



Photo 22

### Open Landscapes and Spaces

A considerable proportion of the Conservation Area is landscape and open space. (photo 23, 24, 25 and 26) The buildings are relatively few in number, and are generally positioned close together. The only exception to this pattern, as already



Photo 23



Photo 24



Photo 25



Photo 26

discussed, is the Vicarage, which is secluded amongst trees, and cannot readily be seen from within the Conservation Area. The two building groups are separated by fields which have the character of parkland, with mature trees dotted around. It is a very pastoral setting.

The whole area has an informal feeling with the only defined spaces being the church yard which is bound by stone walls and the car park are defined by cobbles and planting (photo 27 & 28).



Photo 27



Photo 28

## The Core Areas

### Roadside Cluster of Buildings

Easby Hall, Easby Mullions and Almshouses form the nucleus of the village, whose form has changed very little over the years. The buildings here are surrounded by mature landscape foliage and trees which enforce a feeling of enclosure (photo 29). The avenue of trees along the road side is particularly fine and draws the eye through the village (photo 30).



Photo 29



Photo 30

In Easby there is a clear division between what is public and what is private. For example, Easby Hall is has two facades of equal importance but contrasting architectural treatments, with the brick façade looking out over the Abbey and the river, and the stone façade stamping its status and authority in the small village cluster. However, the functional areas and ancillary buildings associated with the Hall are behind high walls, and so not visible to the public (photo 31 & 32). The main façade of Easby Hall is set back from the road creating an open private space



Photo 31



Photo 32

around the entrance. An area of grass separates the private driveway from the public road with the change being denoted by a different surface material.

The Almshouses/Mullions is a calm, ordered, symmetrical facade, sober yet attractive. It is set back from the road behind private gardens. Post & chains demarcate the private gardens in front of these buildings (photo 33 & 34).



Photo 33



Photo 34

Easby Mews is very close to the back of these frontage properties and hardly visible from public view.

### **Riverside Cluster of Buildings**

The group of buildings by the riverside has no dominant architectural style – each building is an individual, and mostly from different periods in Easby’s long history.

The buildings are spaced well apart and the residential buildings are surrounded by fairly mature gardens, that conceal the majority of the facades from the public vantage points (photo 35 & 36).



Photo 35



Photo 36

The dominant buildings are the church, the Abbey, and the gatehouse. The interesting details of these buildings and their position set in the open, tend to focus the eye's attention (photo 36 & 37).



Photo 36



Photo 37

### **Buildings Set Apart**

The former Vicarage is designed to be seen from a distance. It is very private and can hardly be seen from any vantage point within the Conservation Area. The building sits on its own above the remains of the Abbey, but at a distance from the village core. When viewed from across the river, the Vicarage appears to stand at the same height as Easby Hall, and complements the older buildings in terms of the visual composition they present.



## **Unique Acoustics**

The topography of the area has created a unique acoustic phenomenon where a softly spoken conversation on the higher ground can be heard hundreds of meters away on the lower area. The echo stone adjacent to the entrance drive to the Vicarage is a welcome local feature.

## **Summary of Special Interest**

- Extant historic fabric dates from the 8<sup>th</sup> century to the 20th century – a very wide date range.
- Topography and rural setting is key to character and appearance of Easby.
- Two main groups of buildings, those by the river, and those on the higher level along the road.
- Ecclesiastical influences have been key in the formation and development of the settlement.
- Although functions and land uses have undoubtedly changed within the settlement, the changes have been low-key, and have not had a significant impact on the character of the settlement.

## **Conclusion**

Easby is a Conservation Area with a wealth of history, a blend of landscape and buildings which span centuries of activity. This has produced a highly attractive area with a variety of architectural styles, using predominantly local materials and in a traditional form, relating to the period in which they were built.

## **MANAGEMENT PLAN**

### **Preservation and Enhancement**

It is the aim of the District Council that the existing character and appearance of Easby Conservation Area should be preserved and enhanced.

### **Listed Buildings**

Some historic buildings are 'listed' by the Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport on the recommendation of English Heritage because of their exceptional interest. Listed Building Consent is required for any work to the interior or exterior of the building that would affect its special interest. More information about listed buildings is available from the Council.

The majority of buildings in Easby Conservation Area are listed and thus merit the tightest controls over any changes to them. Whilst the aim of listed building legislation is not to preserve them for their own sake, any changes affecting them

should also be considered in terms of their effect on the Conservation Area, and with reference to the relevant design guidance.

### **Buildings at Risk**

There are no buildings at risk, listed or unlisted.

### **Preservation**

Preservation will be achieved by refusing permission for the demolition of any building or structure if it would damage the character or appearance of the area.

The open spaces and trees have been identified as being crucial to the character of the village, and should be preserved.

### **Design Guidance**

The designation of a Conservation Area is not intended to prevent change, especially that which would enhance the character of the area, and ensure its viability as a settlement. Generally speaking, any work requiring planning permission should preserve or enhance the character of the Conservation Area. In particular, the proposed design and materials should accord with those traditionally used.

### **Enhancement Opportunities**

The woodland, individual trees and open spaces are very important to the character of the Conservation Area. Trees are dynamic and many are mature, therefore a management scheme for the woodland, trees and open spaces is recommended to ensure landscape is maintained for years to come.

Some trees that have been introduced are not indigenous species and look out of place in the landscape blocking important distant views. These trees should be removed. Where they form boundaries or screens a more traditional approach such as stone walls should be considered.

The car-park outside the churchyard is looking a little 'tired' and could perhaps benefit from an enhancement scheme. Any works of this kind should be low-key, in order to keep in with the rural character of the settlement.

The Abbey is the central feature of the area and the boundary is currently marked with a metal post and wire fence topped with barbed wire. This is more akin to an industrial/business estate than a tranquil rural location. It would be of visual benefit to the area for this to be replaced.

Generally in Easby, along with the other Conservation Areas of Richmondshire, a budget for enhancement and repair of the historic features would be of benefit.

## Development

Easby is a fairly static place, in terms of development pressure, and there seem to be few other pressures for change. However as with most buildings minor works are constantly undertaken for repair, maintenance and improvement which may be outside the planning system. In a sensitive area such as Easby any ground disturbance could have archaeological implications and care needs to be taken.

## Sustainability

The increasing high profile of achieving a sustainable environment and life style are likely to present further challenges on the historic environment. The use of alternative energy in the form of solar panels, wind turbines, ground heat pumps, local refuse and recycling collections may all have the potential to detrimentally effect the historic environment. As proposals come forward, each case will have to be considered on its merits but consideration should be given to the environmental benefits gained from each.

## Action Points

The character appraisal should be taken into account when considering applications through the planning process.

- *Preservation will be achieved by refusing permission for the **demolition** of any building or structure if it would damage the character or appearance of the area.*
- *The **open spaces and trees** have been identified as being crucial to the character of the area and should be preserved. Encouragement will be given to develop management plans.*
- *Care and special attention needs to be given to proposals with sustainable credentials to ensure the character of the Conservation Area is not detrimentally affected.*
- *Investigations should be undertaken to secure the replacement/ improvement of the fencing around the Abbey.*
- *Explore the opportunities to develop an enhancement /repair budget for heritage assets in Conservation Areas.*

## Community Involvement

A representative from the Parish Meeting was contacted to invite participation in the production of a draft document. It was felt that circulating via the Parish meeting, a draft document produced by Richmondshire District Council for comments was the best way forward.

A summary document of the draft appraisal will be circulated in Easby and to the

various interested bodies, English Heritage, North Yorkshire County Council etc. A conservation character discussion open day was held. Comments received were considered and a final Conservation Area Appraisal produced. The Appraisal was reported to a Environment Committee of the District Council and adopted.

## **Useful Information, Appendices and Contact Details**

Easby Conservation Area character map

Scheduled Monuments

Tree Preservation Orders

Key unlisted Buildings

Listed Buildings

## **Designations**

There is one Scheduled Monument in Easby.

Easby Abbey Premonstratensian monastery: monastic precinct, cultivation terraces, water - management features and ancillary buildings.

There are three Tree Preservation Orders within the Conservation Area.

- TPO 1986 No 4 covering an area of woodland on the eastern side of the access road from Richmond north of Easby Mullions.
- TPO 1962 No 17 covering all the trees within an area on the west side of the access road from Richmond and north of the access road to the Abbey between the Vicarage and Easby Mullions. A group consisting of cedar, ash, thorn, oak, beech, horse chestnut, elm and sycamores on the west side of the access track to the Vicarage.
- TPO 1995 No 4 covering an area on the east side of the River Swale north of the former railway bridge.

## Listed Buildings

Address	Grade
Boundary stone approximately 1 metre east of Scots Dyke	II
Abbey Mill	II
Ruins of Abbey of St Agatha	I
Abbey House and ruins of monastic barn	II
Church of St Agatha	I
Monument to Thomas Wilkin approx 20 metres south-east corner of south aisle of Church of St Agatha	II
Monument to Robert Carter approx 22 metres south of priest's door of Church of St Agatha	II
Monument to Margaret Carter approx 21 metres south of priest's door of church of St Agatha	II
Abbey Gatehouse	I
Gateway to Church of St Agatha, approx 25 metres north-east of church	II
Easby Hall and Nos 1 and 2 Easby Court	II*
Easby Mullions	II
Almshouse	II
The Vicarage	II
Coach-house and screen wall to north-west of The Vicarage	II