Leigh-on-Mendip

village design statement

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Leigh-on-Mendip (or Leigh-upon-Mendip), pronounced "Lie", is a working East Mendip village which has the distinct character of being a linear settlement. This Village Design Statement describes the village in 1998 and highlights the local character of its buildings and layout in order that sympathetic development can take place within the village.

This design statement has been developed in consultation with the entire village through a series of exhibitions and questionnaires to ensure that all views, local knowledge and ideas are brought together for the benefit of the village as a whole. If we all understand the character of the village then we all can play our part in helping to preserve, protect and develop it in the most effective way.

The aims of this Design Statement

The steering group has attempted in this statement to define the local character of the village. In so doing, it has been able to draw up guidelines, not only for building developments, but also for home improvements. These guidelines enable the village's character to be maintained for the benefit of us all.

Please note that the guidelines recommended in this statement are highlighted in bold green text and also summarised on the back page. Adopted by Mendip District Council as supplementary planning guidance, this Design Statement's recommendations will also be taken into account when local planning applications are assessed.

A 1980s OS map of the village reproduced by permission of Ordnance Survey.


LEIGH-ON-MENDIP
COLEFORD

Above: *A map of Somerset dated 1630 clearly shows Leigh as part of the Kilmersden Hundred.*

Below: *A view of Great House Farm today. The large oval arch is the remaining carved doorway to a grand Tudor building, now almost gone.*

the historical perspective

Although there is local evidence of human activity dating back to pre-Roman times, it is limited to remains of flint working in the area now occupied by Halecombe Quarry to the east of Leigh. Pottery shards have also been found in this area, which are considered to be evidence of Roman occupation.

The earliest documentary evidence we have is dated 942AD. In that year a charter was given by King Edmund to Glastonbury Abbey which details the boundaries of the lands given to the Abbey. Leigh was included in that land and remained under the Abbey's ownership until the 1530s. During this time the Abbey grew, becoming the most powerful religious institution in Britain, and Mendip agriculture also changed, gradually shifting from arable farming to sheep and, particularly, wool production. This was accompanied by a gradual deforestation of the area, which still had a relatively small human population. Certainly from the middle of the 16th century, and most likely before, the processing of wool was the most important industry in the village. In 1909 a headless statue of St Catherine, the patron saint of weavers, was discovered in the church.

After Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s, the land encompassing Leigh (which was later known as the Mells estate) was bought from the King for just under £1,802 by Thomas and John Horner whose descendants owned the estate well into the twentieth century. For this princely sum they received "the manors of Melles, Lye and Nonney, Somerset, which belonged to Glastonbury monastery, the advowsons of Melles Rectory, Lye chapel and Nonney rectory."

The church of Leigh is dedicated to St. Giles, patron saint of cripples and mendicants and dates from Norman times, although much of the building, including the tower, dates from the 15th century. St. Giles seems an appropriate saint since it has been suggested that some houses in medieval Leigh served to lodge pilgrims on their way to Glastonbury. This theory was supported by one of the village's vicars, the Rev. John Fisher, who wrote in the 1970s that the cottages either side of the church were 'pilgrim cottages' housing a 'holy water stoup'.

A view of Leigh Street taken in the 1860s. The houses to the right have Georgian 12-pane windows and are thatched.

Reproduced from a photograph belonging to Mrs L Yelland, resident in the house to the left.

geography

Leigh-on-Mendip is a small linear settlement running east/west, set at 180m above sea level on a plateau of hard carboniferous limestone known as the Mendip Plateau, which also runs east/west. The core of the village is in fact built on an outcrop of stone, raising it, in part, above the surrounding landscape and seems to have originally grown up around the church.

Seen from the ridge (formed of sandstone) of the Old Wells Road the first impression of Leigh suggests an obvious line of houses and cottages, dominated by the tall, decorated tower of St. Giles Church, which is a clear marker in the surrounding landscape and which can be seen from approaching roads and some neighbouring villages.

Leigh-on-Mendip has five woodland areas around it which range from ancient deciduous woodland to managed plantation, all of which are criss-crossed by numerous tracks and public footpaths. To the south the land rises slowly to a high belt of sandstone, the Mendip ridge, on which Cranmore Tower and woods feature on the sky line. Asham Woods also lie to the south, recognised as a nationally valuable ancient woodland which now contains a nature conservation area. The land to the north dips sharply down Whitehole Hill to the Mells stream. Beyond, the landscape rolls and undulates, forming ridges. The landmarks of Ammerdown and Terry Hill are the furthest visible points and both of these can be viewed from the stretch of the Old Wells Road between Knap Hill and Tadhill. To the west and south, typically Mendip rolling pasture fields are boundaried with mature hedges that continue occasionally to be laid in the traditional, rough way, typical to the region. Because many of these fields have mainly remained as pasture since medieval times, they have not suffered from over-use of chemicals and so support a very wide variety of flora and fauna, including wild primroses, several species of owl and bat, many small mammals and reptiles, even lizards. The hedgerows are interspersed with many native trees such as ash, oak and alder, although the English elms of the area were wiped out by Dutch Elm disease in the 1960s. Sadly, in 1996 a local farmer removed a large quantity of ancient hedgerow immediately to the south of Leigh Street.

All around the village lie limestone quarries. Those to the north (and a few to the south) such as Barns Close are now disused and are beginning to be vigorously reclaimed by nature as important habitats for wildlife such as Peregrine falcons. Halecombe, a working quarry to the east, is surrounded by a massive man-made bank, or bund, which has been sensitively planted. Although very close to the village, the quarry's activities seem reasonably discreet, mainly due to the fact that lorry traffic is not permitted through the village. However, the presence of light pollution, dust and noise from the quarry does not go unnoticed in the village and future quarry activity should be kept below the bund height to minimise its environmental impact.

Importantly, almost all dwellings in Leigh have unrestricted views of the countryside, since they abut fields. It is also interesting that the rooflines of the village follow the geographical contour suggesting a close visual relationship between village and landscape. Viewed from the adjacent countryside the buildings seem obscured by, or blend into, the landscape due to the presence of trees and hedgerows.

Hedgerows and trees are part of the context of the village, especially since nearly every house enjoys rural views. Existing hedgerows and trees should always be retained for their diversity and maturity, and the rural view of existing buildings should not be compromised.

The impact of new development should be modified and softened by including indigenous, mature planting and landscaping, as a buffer between buildings and countryside.

The central farms provide a clear architectural and economic focus for Leigh. Their presence should be respected and their buildings considered as a valuable commodity.

LEIGH-UPON-MENDIP is a village and parish in Frome union, containing, by the census of 1861, 534, and in 1871, 512 inhabitants, and 1425 acres; in the deanery of Frome, archdeaconry of Wells, diocese of Bath and Wells, hundred of Mells and Leigh, East Somerset; 5¼ miles west from Frome, 6 north-east from Shepton Mallet, and 120 from London. The vicarage, with the perpetual curacy of Vobster annexed, in the incumbency of the Rev. George Augustus Mahon, M.A., is valued at £200 per annum, and is in the patronage of the Rector of Mells. The church is an ancient edifice, dedicated to St. Giles, consisting of nave, chancel, north and south aisles, porch, and a handsome tower containing six bells and a clock; the tower is of the period of Henry VII., and is surmounted by twenty pinnacles, and about half-way up there are also two at each angle; there is a pierced parapet round the roof, which is well worthy of notice. The Primitive Methodists and Wesleyans have places of worship here. The Rev. John S. Horner, rector of Mells, is lord of the manor and chief owner of the soil. The parish is situated on a hill, 884 feet above the level of the sea.

Clergy and Gentry.

Mahon Rev. George Augustus, M.A., vicar
Wilcox Mr. Samuel

Trades and Professions.

Abraham Edmund, farmer, Sparks farm
Ashman James, grocer
ASHMAN MARK AND SON, spade, rake, and pike handle manufacturers, and saw mill proprietors
Ashman Matthew, sub-postmaster
Ashman Thomas, "Bell" inn
ASHMAN THOMAS AND SONS, builders, timber and hoop merchants, and saw mill proprietors
Ashman William, parish clerk
Banting George Henry, National schoolmaster
Britten Charles, farmer
Cosh Henry, farmer, Grove Shute farm
Cosh John, farmer, Tweed farm
Davis Alfred W., farmer, Rookery
Earl Alfred, shopkeeper
Ellery Mrs. Sarah, farmer
Fowler William, farmer
Green Emanuel, carrier
Green Mrs. Martha, farmer, Whitehall farm
Harding George, farmer, Manor farm
Lane Francis J., shoemaker
Lane Mrs. Hester, shopkeeper
Lewis John, farmer, Knap Hill farm
Millward John, farmer, Soho farm
Moore Simeon, butcher
Oborneshaw John, farmer, Great House farm
Rossiter Thomas, spade and rake handle maker
Season William Henry, harness maker and grocer
Selway Henry, baker and beer retailer
Speare Alfred, shoemaker
Walwin George, carpenter and rake maker
West William, butcher
Wilcox James, mason
Wilcox John, stonemason

Post Office—Matthew Ashman, sub-postmaster. Letters from Frome delivered at 9.15 a.m.; dispatched at 5 p.m. on week-days only. The nearest money order office is at Coleford

National School—George Banting, master; Mrs. Emily Banting, mistress

Carrier—Emmanuel Green, to Bath, Mon and Thurs; Frome, Wed; Shepton Mallet, Fri; and Radstock, Sat

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Part of the entry for Leigh on Mendip, from Morris's Directory of Somerset & Bristol, 1872, listing the diversity of tradesmen, farmers and gentry resident and at work in the village.

the economy: then and now

The magnificent medieval church of St Giles (described by Arthur Mee in his famous series of books, The King's England, as "the jewel of the Mendips") was for centuries the focus of life in the village, one which was almost entirely agricultural. Medieval arable farming developed into sheep farming and, in particular, wool production which by the mid 16th century was the most important industry in the village. Philip Cottington of Leigh (grandfather to Francis, Lord Cottington, Chancellor to Charles I) left in his will of 1558 4d each "to every one of my weavers". It is suggested that many of the cottages in Leigh street were built as, or developed into, weavers' cottages and this arrangement was complemented by the presence of several large early farms within several hundred yards, including Manor Farm, Great House Farm and Sparks Farm. These still form significant historical landmarks today and provide the village with a strong 'working' identity.

Leigh has developed other light industries alongside agriculture; remarkable given its size. In 1791 James Fussell, an "edged tool maker", set up an iron forge in the nearby village of Mells and it grew to such a size that a sawmill was set up in Leigh-on-Mendip to produce wooden handles for use on the tools. This sawmill closed only recently and was demolished to make way for housing, but it too has left its traces; two stone chimneys as another reminder of the village's working history.

Although there has been mineral extraction from the Leigh area since pre-Roman times, it has been in very limited quantities, since the stone was mainly used locally for building walls and houses. But in the mid 20th century, the post second world war boom in building and road construction led to a massive expansion in mineral extraction, which has grown to become the largest single employer in the village. However, to put the quarry's role into perspective, it only employs a minority of inhabitants; the majority of employed people in Leigh commute to work outside the village.

Today, farming (dairy, arable and stock rearing) still plays an important economic and social role within the village. And in its unique way, Leigh remains home to other, varied industries. There are two automobile repair workshops, two stone masons, a village shop and post office, a thriving inn, school and three manufacturing companies, employing between them between 40 and 50 people. All in a community of 400 or so residents.

the settlement pattern of Leigh

Because of the mainly linear plan of Leigh there is no focal point for the village in the sense of a village green or duck pond. However, the strong presence of only one thoroughfare, Leigh Street, provides sufficiently strong focus. On it are situated all the main social and architectural features of the village: the Church, inn, shop, school, Manor Farm, Sparks Farm, playing field and the Memorial Hall. As stated already, an important feature of the linear nature of Leigh is that almost all properties are afforded direct views of open countryside. Although there has been some in-fill along the main street there are still substantial stretches alongside the street that are directly open to the fields. These spaces allow important glimpses of the surrounding countryside throughout the length of the village settlement pattern. It is worth mentioning in particular Sparks Farm field, found at the centre of the village, the protection of which roused enormous local support in 1997 and led to the movement to publish this Design Statement.

Older developments in the village conform to the pattern of the linear settlement and comprise some striking examples of cottages, chapels and farm houses, many dating from the 16th century. A good number of buildings within the village are essentially indicative of the agricultural and allied light industrial past of Leigh's working activities, and this past has determined the size of the village. Interestingly, the size of the current settlement is smaller than at times in the 19th century. Although there are close quarrying ties, there are virtually no identifiable direct links between quarrying activity and the settlement pattern. Thus the changes in the local economy, developing to incorporate light industry, and since the 1940s, quarrying, have not materially changed the size or shape of the settlement over the years.

However, some significant development has taken place. Park Hayes, Bellfield and the Sawmills, have been laid out as self-contained areas, closes or spurs that can be accessed from Leigh Street by one or two points only. Because they run parallel to Leigh Street, these developments have widened the settlement pattern without deviating from the essentially East/West axis.

A fabric collage village map produced by the children of the school in 1997.

The linear plan is a strong defining characteristic of the village and it is essential that it is maintained. Development must not detract from existing rural views and the architectural integrity of Leigh Street.

roads & traffic

All the roads in Leigh-on-Mendip are minor, and are established in a distinct rural setting. Those leading in and out of the village are predominantly bordered by hedgerows and ditches or stone walling. The nearest 'A' class roads form a triangle, within a five mile radius, around the village.

Leigh Street is approximately half a mile long and is the main thoroughfare through the village, with a few other roads within the village leading off it. Although the south side of the street is given over mainly to residential housing, the north side is bordered by farmland, residential housing, the recreation field, village hall, school and the parish church. Traffic through Leigh on Mendip consists chiefly of private cars and some agricultural equipment, while quarry traffic has a minimal effect in Leigh, since the quarry companies have imposed their own traffic restriction, banning lorries from the village out of goodwill. Off-street parking is minimal along the entire street, although provision is made in the major post-war developments. Residents throughout Leigh, however, consider parking to be a major planning issue, because of the congestion in Leigh Street. Ironically, the density of parked cars does provide a traffic calming effect.

Leigh has pavements along both sides of the main street which have no special, local character, bar the area in front of the church which is laid with pennant flagstones, and an interesting area to the east of it where the tarmac pavement is supported not with kerbs as elsewhere, but with up-ended fingers of blue lias stone. This appears to be a distinctive local feature and should be retained and emulated wherever possible. Street lighting is in place along the main street through the village with additional street lighting in place in some of the surrounding hamlets. One distinctive, but not desirable street feature is the profusion of telegraph and electricity poles through Leigh, present because of the perceived difficulty in excavating the hard rock underlying the village. Their presence severely detracts from the streetscape.

However, other street furniture does not have the same negative impact. Leigh does not suffer from an unnecessary clutter of posters and signs, most businesses having discreet signs which blend into their surroundings. The road signs in general are traditional cast iron finger posts. The village also boasts traditional post boxes and a red telephone box which should be retained.

Established footpaths must be maintained and protected. *There is a profusion of footpaths around Leigh, (some of which were probably also once main rights of way), and these seem to indicate the historical importance of the community as a trading and agricultural village. These public footpaths are well established, signposted and maintained, and a new footpath around the top of the quarry bund has been opened by its owners, Tarmac, as a substitute for the public rights of way lost in the early 1990's when the quarry expanded.*

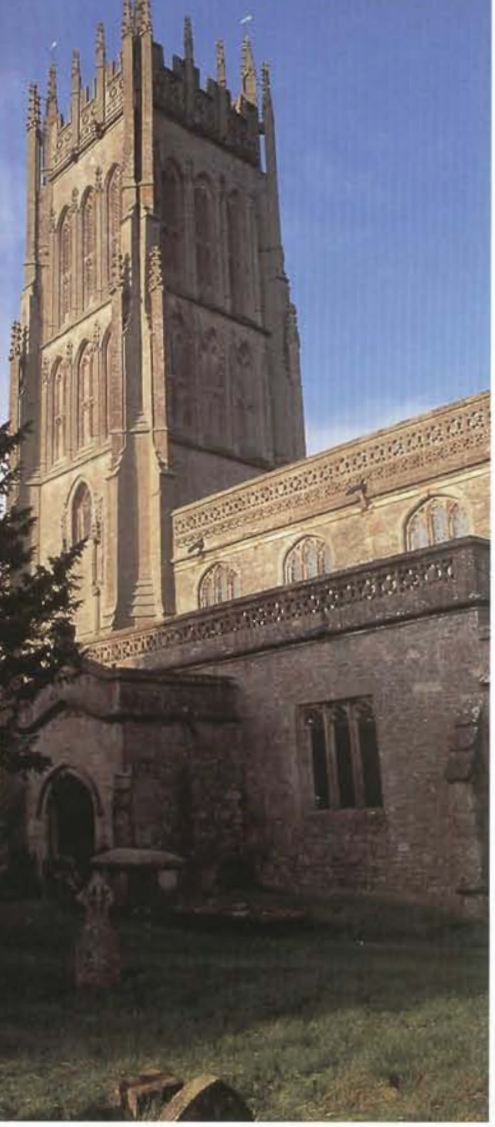
The current voluntary ban on quarry traffic from the village makes a valuable contribution to the quality of life in Leigh and should be maintained and encouraged.

(top left) Sympathetic pavements (not concrete slabs) should be included in any developments in the village and discreet off-street parking should always be provided. 'Built-in' garages, however, are not a local feature.

(top right) Ideally, developers and utility companies should conceal future installations underground to tidy cables and wires away and unclutter the streetscape. Domestic meter boxes should also be hidden.

(bottom left) The early red telephone box and postboxes are attractive features and should be retained.

(bottom right) Commercial and domestic signs should be designed to blend in with their surroundings. In particular, signposts and street name plates should be in keeping with existing street furniture, following the pattern of the traditional cast-iron signs. Road safety signs should be of modest and unobtrusive design.



In future, developments should not detract from the magnificence of the Church nor obstruct views of it.

Leigh's building patterns

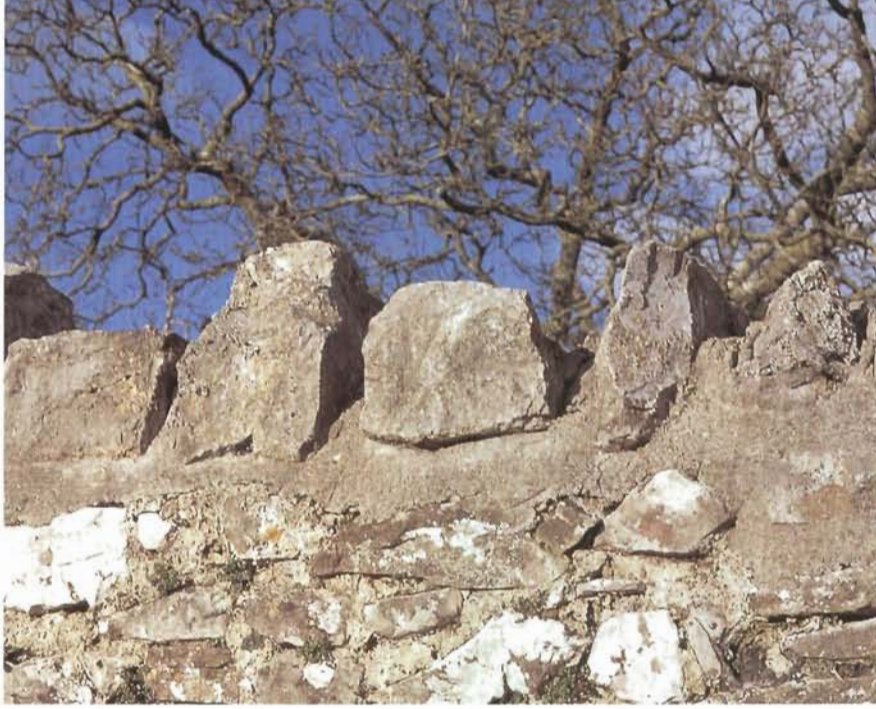
The village seems to have originated as a series of small terraces of agricultural workers' and weavers' cottages most of which still exist. These are two storey, stone built dwellings, (some of which have been rendered), with roof ridges running parallel to Leigh street. These simply designed, flat-fronted terraces are generally grouped around the Church and around the farms in the village, such as Townsend, Manor and Sparks Farms. The terraces are punctuated with occasional double fronted larger cottages, which boast front gardens and stone boundary walls. All the cottages have rear gardens leading to open countryside and rural views. Leigh Street also has a number of footpaths running off it leading to other villages and settlements. Some of these footpaths are via alleyways between houses.

The majority of the cottages in Leigh Street are a minimum of 100 years old, but there are many that are much older, some dating from the 16th century. A map drawn in 1779 for Thomas Horner shows the entire length of the street built up on both sides from the Old Vicarage as far as Sparks' Farm. Although many details of the buildings' facades have been changed, mainly this last half-century, it is still possible to claim that the old cottages of Leigh have the single biggest effect in determining the character of the village's architecture.

The most imposing building in the whole village is of course the Church, its dominating tower juxtaposed against a short nave and aisles. It is visible from almost anywhere in the village and is mentioned in every serious guide to Britain's architecture. Sir Compton Mackenzie said "I am tempted to proclaim the tower of Leigh-on-Mendip the most beautiful in England". The village manor burnt down and was subsequently demolished towards the end of the last century, and the Great House, an early building situated to the north of Great House Farm, disappeared much earlier. Consequently, the buildings next in importance to the Church, are the farms. These are still part of the village and possess many of their original features i.e. random rubble walls, dressed stone features, clay tiled roofs, mullioned windows and traditional stone and tiled outbuildings in their yards. Importantly, because they have such a strong presence, the church and the farms actually help to break up the pattern of the terraced cottages and provide rhythm and variety to the village layout.

Detail of Leigh on Mendip from a map drawn in 1779 for Thomas Horner of Mells. The manor, then called the Parsonage, is clearly visible next to the Church, as is another large building, almost certainly the Great House, next to Great House Farm.

Courtesy Frome Society for Local Study



Local natural stone should be used for boundary walls. *This shows a typical 'cow and calf' arrangement for capping a boundary wall.*

The row of cottages either side of the church were probably built as Tudor weavers' dwellings

Listed buildings in Leigh on Mendip

Sparks Farmhouse, The Old Rectory (renamed Leigh House), Prescot, Honeysuckle Cottage, Rookery Farmhouse (in Halecombe Quarry), Oak Cottage, Tadhill Farmhouse and Cottage, Foxhollow, Lantern Cottage, Manor Farmhouse, The Bell Inn, Cowslip Cottage, Cottage Garden, St Giles Church, the Wilcox chest tomb in the churchyard, St. Giles gate piers, lamp overthrow and flanking churchyard walls, Great House Farmhouse including dairy and attached wall (remains of the Great House).

20thC developments

Leigh has seen a number of housing developments since the war, which have substantially enlarged the village. Three of the four are specific enclosures, and all have 20th century general, national styles and features which reflect the design ethics of their time. These styles are seldom in keeping with the traditional layout or architectural character of the village.

PARK HAYES

is a development of 35 houses situated at the western end of the village, on a spur leading one block back from Leigh Street. It was built in 1948 as a small council estate occupied by tenants, but now the vast majority of properties are owner-occupied. It has two entrances to Leigh Street, is broadly rectangular in plan, and consists of a mixture of two storey semi-detached houses, terraced houses and flats. Bungalows and a garage block have been subsequently added.

BELLFIELD

consists of 20 properties built in the 1970s. They are mainly two storey semi-detached houses, with one terrace of four houses in the centre. The estate was built solely for owner -occupier purchase and is sited behind the village hall on a spur road from Leigh Street. Gardens are decently sized but not as generous as those in Park Hayes. Boundaries are predominantly low artificial 'dressed' stone walls, although mature planting has now softened some walls. Off-street parking is provided in the form of driveways, garages and a lay-by.

THE SAWMILLS

is a small 1980s development comprising 6 detached and semi-detached two storey houses. It occupies the site of the former sawmills and tool-handle works at the eastern end of the village, and is partly set in a cul-de-sac opposite the school. A much more compact development than earlier ones in Leigh, it places several dwellings on a relatively small plot. As a result, their gardens are smaller and more cramped, and their front boundaries are not defined by walls or fences, as is the case with other developments within the village. It also attempts to mimic Mendip materials in the use of artificial stone concrete blockwork and concrete roof tiles to imitate the local clay versions. These imitations are not effective.

THE HEDGEROW

is a misnomer, since the first act in building this 1990s development was to remove the very hedge that was to give it its name! Situated at the western end of the village, towards Manor Farm, the Hedgerow continues the settlement pattern of Leigh in that it follows the linear style of the village. However, the materials used in its construction and its ranch-type railings are not in keeping with those traditionally used in Leigh Street. The result is a development which does not blend in well with the character of its surroundings.

Suggested aesthetic improvements to these developments might be;

the use of local colours for paintwork and walls, especially in Park Hayes where the render and masonry are predominantly white;

similarly, large, modern elements such as garage doors might also be painted in muted local colours such as stone colour;

the planting of hedges, orchard trees and other native local species around and among the buildings;

the building of boundary walls in natural local stone.

building styles & materials

The village comprises a great mix of buildings of differing styles, so much so that it is probably fair to say that there is no single overall style of house within the village. However, a humble or vernacular type predominates, and it is certainly possible to point to local building materials and to a local architectural language rooted in this type of house.

A detailed survey of each house in the village confirms that all of the housing built before 1800, (and a good deal built since), was constructed from carboniferous limestone local to the area, random rubble being the most common material. Occasional red sandstone stones from the adjacant ridge are also incorporated into walls. Some grander houses were embellished with paler, yellowish Doulting stone quoins and dressings, although Doulting stone mullioned windows seemed common even on lowly buildings. These dwellings were nearly all restricted to two storeys. The roof lines are thus fairly constant, and are not cluttered with dormer or attic windows. Furthermore, the pitches are mainly of a simple front and back design, set at 40-45^{O}, sometimes steeper covered in plain clay tiles, slates or double roman clay tiles. Chimneys appear on all but the most modern of houses and are mostly brick, stone or rendered.. Although many of the local features in the older buildings have been obscured and altered over the years, it is still possible to see the rooflines, tiles and stone that have characterised Leigh over the last four centuries. It is these features that need to be preserved in the modernisation of existing houses and emulated in new development within the village.

Existing building lines should not be altered without consideration of the resulting visual effect.

A typical house is likely to be a two-storey, rubble stone-built dwelling, possibly with render. The steeply pitched roof may be of double roman or plain terracotta tiles and the house may be semi-detached, or much more probably, terraced.

Windows are likely to be traditional timber casements or occasionally a Georgian or Victorian sash arrangement. There are numerous examples of glazing set into a three-bay stone mullion frame - many now contain casement infills.

windows

LEIGH STREET

Stone mullions were traditional in Leigh, and a full range of stone reveals and mullion types are evident. However, many now have timber or PVCu frames inserted to hold modern single or double glazing. The original feature of glazing set into the stone mullion is now scarce. There are still several examples of 19th century style double hung sash windows but many houses now have replacement timber or PVCu windows fitted.

PARK HAYES

Originally the estate probably had steel-framed windows fitted as standard, and several examples remain. Over the years, however, these windows have been mostly replaced with white PVCu double-glazed units.

BELLFIELD

Generally in PVCu although some examples in timber, steel, and aluminium exist.

SAWMILLS

Windows are in brown stained timber.

roofs

LEIGH STREET

Largely interlocking, terracotta coloured tiles of double roman pattern although there are quite a few examples of clay double romans (made by the Bridgwater Tile Company). Plain clay tiles are present as are examples of blue/grey slate and more rarely, clay pan tiles.

A remarkable number of houses have parapets but the most common verge is cement pointing in the tile joints. Painted barge boards are also present.

PARK HAYES

The original covering was double roman clay tiles from the Bridgwater Tile Company but over the years some of the roofs have been replaced with interlocking concrete double roman tiles. In some instances, where extensions have been added, owners have attempted to match old pattern tiles with modern i.e. clay double romans on the main roof of the house and interlocking concrete double roman tiles on the extension.

BELLFIELD

Coverings are of red interlocking concrete double roman tiles. Gutter boards are of painted timber. Gable ends are cement pointed at the verges.

SAWMILLS

Coverings are of red interlocking concrete tiles.

guttering and pipes

Although some houses have remnants of the original black painted cast iron systems the majority of houses now have modern black or brown PVC systems.

Bellfield is fitted with grey PVC systems.

doorways

LEIGH STREET

Doors are mainly planked timber and protected with a stone lintel and hood. Most houses now possess porches which are built in a variety of styles and materials. Several highly ornamented Victorian porches survive, decorated with shaped bargeboards.

The size, style and materials used for doors and windows should match those of the original building and/or adjacent buildings thus retaining the local characteristics of the particular site.

boundaries

LEIGH STREET

Generally speaking, the further away from the Inn the larger the front garden. The terraces in the centre of the village are positioned either at the pavement line or a metre or so back. The resulting strips of land to the front are either concreted over or are gardens contained by a low wall.

Of the more conventional gardens almost all have a stone surrounding wall, often topped with a 'cow and calf' (or 'cock and hen') arrangement of stones as weatherproofing. They contain gates and openings for paths and driveways, for which limestone chippings and gravel are usually preferred to tarmacadam.

Few hedges are used as front garden boundaries.

PARK HAYES

Gardens are generous and almost all have concrete post, chain link fencing and hedges as their boundaries. Where driveways exist the surface is of tarmacadam or concrete.

BELLFIELD

Gardens are of good size but not as generous as those in Park Hayes.

Boundaries are predominantly low artificial stone walls with some hedging.

SAWMILLS

House walls are of artificial stone. Gardens are small and boundaries are not defined by walls or fences.

mortars & pointing

Above: Walls in Leigh pointed with Portland cement mortar turn black with time, obliterating the colour and charm of the building stone.

Below: Walls pointed with lime mortar retain their original colouring and variegated surface.

If every stone-built building in Leigh were to be re-pointed with lime mortar (as they almost certainly were) the perceived colour and 'texture' of the village would change over a number of years and be distinctly enhanced.

As regards new buildings, although houses might need to be constructed using conventional Portland cements and mortars, white cement/lime mixes, coloured with sand to a cream or buff colour should be used for pointing.

As a building material in mortars and plasters, lime (a calcium compound) has been in use for thousands of years, right up to this century when grey Portland cement replaced it. This happened chiefly because Portland cement is quicker setting, making buildings quicker to make and therefore cheaper. But lime is superior in every other respect: it 'breathes', allowing rising damp out, flexes, and it also looks better. It is used by the National Trust and English Heritage in their buildings and is now making a comeback because of its suitability for old buildings.

All the buildings in Leigh put up before the late 19th century would have been built of stone with lime mortar, plastered with lime-based plasters inside, and occasionally lime washed or 'colour washed' on the outside. Every community had its own lime pits where the 'putty' was left to mature or 'slake' in water having been burned in a lime kiln. Leigh had at least one pit, situated behind the houses opposite the Bell Inn.

Having conducted a survey of local dwellings and farm buildings it seems clear that the vast majority of them have been re-pointed or rendered with Portland cement-based mortars in the past 50 years. These hard mortars appear to have had a curious effect on the stone used for the walls. A large quantity of black algous deposits, perhaps mixed with soot have grown up on these walls. The result is that the stones appear black, giving Leigh what we suppose to be its characteristic 'grey' appearance. However, on the lime-pointed walls, of which a considerable number survive, there is no such phenomenon, even where it is estimated that pointing took place several decades ago. The stones have retained their colour and interest, providing a more interesting and naturally variegated range of brown tones.

There are several plausible theories to explain this phenomenon and a variety of practical solutions can be applied to old and new buildings alike. Lime pointing and lime-rich portland cement pointings have been recently developed to be quick and easy to use and can today find some place in the construction and repair of any building. In this area they have traditionally been mixed with Mendip dust, a fine carboniferous limestone aggregate, together with sand and occasionally local industrial by-products such as clinker, coke and crushed tiles, producing cream or buff coloured mortars.

A detailed version of these remarks on the use of lime are available from the clerk to the Parish Council, together with a list of suppliers and useful addresses. Also included are a variety of recipes for lime-based mortars and plasters including mixtures of lime plus white Portland Cement for use in areas where the aesthetic advantages of lime are desired together with the practicality of cement. In particular, recipes are given for cream and buff coloured mortars local to the area. Many local builders are experienced in using lime.

local colours

One of the easiest ways in which communities can assert their local architectural identity is with colour. All across Europe, villages and towns have researched the local traditions of using paint colour on the outside of their buildings, partly as a reaction against the growing use of exterior woodstains which are neither traditional nor indicative of any local character. Ilfracombe and Norwich are two examples in this country.

The VDS group has researched some traditional use of paint colour local to this area, taking into account the range of locally derived pigments based on clay that have historically been mined in the immediate vicinity. The result is the selection of paint colours shown on the right. They are not exhaustive and, like everything else in this document, are not mandatory. They simply represent a guideline for voluntary usage.

The colours are to be found in oil paint and limewash on the outside of buildings, often by scraping away other paint layers. A variety of 'stone' colours have been used to paint mullions and windows through the centuries and traces of yellow, cream and earthy-pink limewashes have been found, corresponding to supplies of yellow clay (at Stoke St. Michael) and pink and brown clays (visible in the limestone at Halecombe quarry) that were used as colourants.

A clear comparison is the village of Croscombe, west of Shepton Mallet, underneath the Mendips, where a significant number of houses are still lime washed with either white or yellow-tinted lime washes. Lime wash (watered-down lime putty) is remarkably durable when applied properly and can be painted onto virtually any existing wall. It offers a slightly translucent, sparkling surface, that creates a movement of colour over the surface, complementing the render or stonework beneath. On the other hand, modern coatings can often make the building look as though it has been sprayed with plastic. The VDS group recommends that, wherever possible, buildings are painted with limewash, or with a substitute that retains the appearance of lime wash, such as Keim's silicate paint (available to the trade nationally).

Developers and residents are encouraged to consider the 'local palette' of colours when painting woodwork, walls and render and to consider paint in favour of exterior woodstains.

some paint colours for walls and render

These colours are derived from paint traces on buildings, and show a reliance on local clay colours, which are nevertheless nationally available as yellow ochre, red ochre, umber and sienna pigments.

some paint colours for woodwork

White

Doulting stone colour, produced with a mixture of ochres, umber and white

Cool, pale cream. A paler version of Doulting stone

This colour, off-white, appears as a 'soft' white when applied outside

Red ochre or oxide, a popular traditional colour much used on the farms

Brunswick green and white, a popular local choice for windows. The green also appears on gutter boards in Leigh

The VDS group has put together a range of local colour paint swatches that is lodged with the Clerk to the Parish Council together with a list of commercially available equivalent paint colours. Most of the paint swatch colours were made with clay pigment dug out of the Hale brook, just south of Leigh.

The Leigh-on-Mendip VDS Group would like to thank the following for their contribution to this statement:

The residents of Leigh-on-Mendip
Leigh on Mendip Parish Council
Tarmac
Mendip District Council
Mercer Associates
The Community Council for Somerset
The Bell Inn

The publication of this statement has been made possible with the support of the

COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

Printed by the PDQ Group 01749 830066

Digital Origination by Radstock Reproductions 01761 418234

summary of guidelines

1. Existing hedgerows and trees should be retained. (Page 3)

2. New development should include indigenous mature planting and landscaping. (Page 3)

3. Developments should not diminish the important focus provided by the farms which are central to the village. (Page 4)

4. It is essential that the linear pattern of the village is maintained. Development must not detract from existing rural views and the architectural integrity of Leigh Street. (Page 5)

5. Established footpaths must be maintained and protected. (Page 6)

6. The current voluntary ban on quarry traffic from the village makes a valuable contribution to the quality of life in Leigh and should be maintained and encouraged. (Page 6)

7. Off street parking for future developments is to be encouraged, although built-in garages are not a local feature. (Page 7)

8. Developers and utility companies should conceal future installations underground. Domestic meter boxes should also be hidden. (Page 7)

9. The traditional postboxes and early red telephone box are attractive features and should be retained. (Page 7)

10. Signposts and street names should be in keeping with existing street furniture. Road safety signs should be of modest and unobtrusive design. (Page 7)

11. Future development should not detract from the magnificence of the church nor obstruct views of it. (Page 10)

12. Local natural stone should be used for boundary walls. (Page 11)

13. Existing building lines should not be altered without consideration of the resulting visual effect. (Page 13)

14. A typical building style of new developments should be of rural design, two storey, rubble stone faced, and have a steeply pitched roof of double roman or plain terracotta tiles. Artificial or reconstituted stone should not be used. (Page 13)

15. The size, style and materials used for doors and windows should match those of the original building and/or adjacent buildings, thus retaining the local characteristics of the particular site. (Page 15)

16. New buildings at least should be pointed with cream-coloured and lime-rich mortars. Residents are encouraged to consider lime when repointing and rebuilding older buildings. (Page 16)

17. Developers and residents are encouraged to consider the 'local palette' of colours when painting woodwork, walls and render and to consider paint in favour of exterior woodstains. (Inside back cover)