

East Harptree Village Character Assessment Summary

Parish Name: East Harptree

This summary is a condensed version of the Village Character Assessment that can be found on *The EH Parish Council website* (www.eastharptreeparish.org) under the 'East Harptree Landscape and Character Assessment (EHLCA)'. The purpose of this summary is to inform the reader of the principal features and appropriate guidelines for future development. The intention being to maintain such character as the settlement evolves over time. It represents the discussions, consultation and opinions gathered from the people of East Harptree between January 2014 to December 2015.

Landform: (Refer to EHLCA : Sections A-G with images)

The combination of geographical, topographical, geological, ecological and historical factors form the current character of East Harptree village.

Geography and Topography:

East Harptree is an ancient settlement situated at the base of the Mendip Hills and is bounded by Smitham Hil (south) , the flat plain leading to South Widcombe (North) , Coley (East) and Harptree Combe (West). The village includes the small settlements at Eastwood and those at Townsend, Shrowle and Coley, north of the B3114 and in the flat Chew Valley.

The village nestles at the base of the northern side of Mendip, and is within the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The core of the village is south of the B3114; the High Street leads uphill south -west, and splits into three parallel, partly sunken, narrow lanes, which join again at Proud Cross to rise steeply up Smitham Hill, a rise of 165 metres overall.

Geology:

Harptree Combe is a deep Triassic valley, containing deposits of Dolomitic Conglomerate, and this attractive, warm coloured stone has been used for centuries as the main building stone in East Harptree. Stone possibly taken from Richmonte Castle has been found in at least 3 existing houses during an English Heritage survey around 2006. Around 50 buildings shown on the 1839 tithe map still exist, now converted into modern homes, but almost all built of the local stone.

Ecology:

The core of the village nestles between the wooded combe, the wooded parkland of Harptree Court, and the remnants of other ancient woodlands (from which many of the hedgerows have been cut) to the east of the village. The combination of the surrounding woods, caves in the combe, livestock farming, and green spaces and large gardens within the village, have made it a very attractive area for wildlife, in particular rare and protected bats. The village is within the buffer zone around the Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation. More than 10 species of bats were found feeding in a field between Middle & Water Street in a 2014 survey"

Development history:

The East Harptree settlement evolved in the 11th Century when Richmonte Castle was developed and local farming, hunting and woodlands were generated to serve the castle and the local labour that settled close by.

The settlement buildings developed within the village mainly on or close to the narrow, sunken parallel lanes and this remained the principal pattern until the 20th Century. Infill on the high ground between the lanes did not start until circa 1950, with the need for social housing at that time. However the height of infill dwellings constructed between 1960 & 1990 was subsequently limited by planning rules so that newer houses did not dominate the much older buildings.

Views In: *(Refer to EHLCA: Section I with Images)*

Due to the setting of the village and the wider parish, there are restricted views into the centre as these are obscured by mature trees and the undulating topography in which the village is set. However given the elevated nature of the village on the side of the Mendip escarpment, it is prominent when viewed from the north and east.

Views Out: *(Refer to EHLCA: Section H with Images)*

Local agricultural land use permeates the village settlement and thus connects the inner village space with the surrounding, rural countryside.

The north and eastern fringes of the parish are very open with long sweeping views of open countryside, including views of Chew Valley lake.

The northern and eastern aspects have far reaching views over open countryside. Views are more prominent from the southern end of the village. Where there are gaps between buildings, these glimpsed views are long and of great value.

Views of the night sky, relatively unpolluted by street lighting, are an important aspect of the village.

Natural Features in and around the parish boundary: *(Refer to EHLCA: Section H with Images)*

1. The Beech trees (Smitham Hill)
2. Harptree Court Park
3. Garrow Bottom
4. Smithams Chimney and Frances Plantation to South
5. Two natural watercourses down Water Street and Harptree Coombe

List of Important Local Green Spaces:

The green spaces within the village have many fine mature trees, hedges and bushes within. Most fields are enclosed by hedgerows in keeping with the rural character of the parish.

1. Townsend Playing Fields & Childrens Playground
2. Parkers Mead
3. Home Farm Orchard
4. Harptree Combe

Built Heritage in the parish: *(Refer to EHLCA: Section G with Images)***History:**

The medieval core of East Harptree was focused on the church of St Lawrence and the High Street, and this is now a conservation area, as is the area around Proud Cross, at the southern end of the village. The entrance to the only major castle earthwork on West Mendip, Richmond Castle, is reached from Proud Cross; the castle dates from the 11th century and is on a prominent spur within the ancient woodland of Harptree Combe, a SSSI. This has resulted in a settlement in a rural area surrounded by, small and irregular-shaped fields on the edge of the Mendip Hills escarpment that overlooks the Chew Valley lake.

The village pattern is linear with three medieval parallel north-south roads in the core joining at the northern and southern ends to form single-track entry and exit routes, generally without any pavements.

At the north this route crosses the B3114 which forms a clear distinction between the Mendip Hill slopes to the south and the flat plain areas to the north. The formal structure of the roads helps to define the centre of the village.

The houses and cottages are generally close to the road with narrow plots and stone walls. There is Harptree Court in the centre of the village consisting of the house and buildings with walled gardens and its park that dominate the central part of the village. The Church, school and village hall also contribute to the visible built environment with older dwellings bordering the narrow lanes, usually in the form of terraces. Infill development has taken place with more modern dwellings built in cul de sacs that lead off from the ancient lanes.

There are many listed buildings within the parish (*refer to EHVCA Web Site : Reference section : Listings and Section G with Images*) as well as Richmonte Castle earthworks, the Victorian Aqueduct, Smitham Chimney and other ancient structures.

Other important features: (*Refer to EHLCA: location maps and Section J*)
Landmarks:

1. Harptree Court
2. Eastwood Manor
3. Eastwood Manor Farm Steading
4. Harptree Combe – which also contains the remains of Richmonte Castle
5. Village Clock Tower
6. St. Laurence Church and Tower – with adjacent stone keyhole stiles
7. Victorian village water pumps
8. Victorian School Building
9. Village Theatre / Village Hall
10. Smitham Chimney and Frances Plantation – including a lead mine and smelting works

Footpaths: 33 miles of footpaths within the parish intermingle with the settlement and connect with adjoining parishes thus enabling people to visit Harptree Combe and the Richmonte Castle ruins, as well as walking through the surrounding fields that are largely used for grazing livestock.

Victorian Aqueduct: and the ancient aquifer that accompanies the footpath in Harptree Combe offers a unique feature.

Ancient stone stiles: (squeeze type) and stone Mendip slab stiles still remain around the edge of the village with other old wooden stiles in the village replaced by kissing gates.

Two large Conservation Areas

East Harptree Assets of Community Value:

1. St Lawrence Church
2. Village Primary School
3. Theatre & Social Club
4. Community Run Village Shop
5. The Clock Tower
6. The Waldegrave Arms, Public House
7. Townsend Playing Fields, Childrens Playground & Pavilion
8. K6 Telephone Kiosk

Summary and conclusion:

East Harptree settlement has evolved to what it is today since the first recorded settlement in the 11th Century (associated with Richmond Castle). The following key factors will help to sustain its character as it continues to evolve:

Statutory controls:

1. Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty
2. Site of Special Scientific Interest
3. Core Conservation Area & Proud Cross Conservation Area
4. Regionally Important Geographical Site (Richmond Castle)
5. Site of Nature Conservation Interest (Harptree Combe)
6. Environment Act 1995
7. Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
8. Town and Country Planning Act 1990
9. Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
10. Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960

The following are guidelines generated by consultation with the people of East Harptree and considered to be the key features for future developments, based upon careful analysis of the Village Character Assessment.

1. **Car parking:** the sunken medieval lanes create a challenge to the modern demands for private car parking : therefore it is recommended that each new dwelling should provide 1 car space per bedroom off street in order to restrict the amount of on street parking.
2. **Scale of buildings:** the pattern of housing has, until recently, nestled alongside the sunken lanes thus disguising their actual height: future development is likely to take place on higher ground with the prospect for more visually prominent facades and rooflines. Therefore it is recommended that a maximum of two storeys (or restricted to 1.5 storeys in prominent locations) is followed in order to maintain the low ridge heights that are prevalent within the village.
3. **Building materials:** the village has derived its character from the frequent use of locally sourced materials such as the natural local stone (Triassic Dolomitic conglomerate) usually random coursed. Therefore it is recommended that this type of stone and clay tiles / slates and natural timber are employed as opposed to unnatural materials such as UPVC / aluminium and steel based products as these may detract from the visual character of the traditional buildings.
4. **Climate Change:** The introduction of alternative energy generating devices is to be encouraged but it is recommended that careful consideration be given to their appearance and siting to avoid detracting from the historic and rural character of the village and the surrounding land.
5. **Flooding** - being on the North slope of the Mendips the village is prone to significant surface water flows following high rainfall periods. Recognition and maintenance of surface water escape routes and sufficient soak-aways in any future development is very important so that these are not compromised.
6. **Maintain spaces** to provide habitats for local fauna & flora and that visually link the village to the surrounding rural areas and maintain a permeable relationship between the buildings and the rural spaces.
7. **List and protect important trees** and hedgerows so that these are maintained and not replaced by hard landscaping / fences.
8. **External lighting** to be dark sky friendly in particular with reference to the indigenous bat habitat in Harptree Combe.

