

Topic paper: Landscape character and quality

Landscape character and quality considerations

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND QUALITY

The dramatic and distinctive rural landscape of Saddleworth provides many great benefits. These include its:-

- scenic value,
- aesthetic function as a backdrop for the local villages,
- contribution to local and distant views,
- providing a setting for recreation and tourism.
- creating a sense of personal well being, and
- economic, cultural and artistic value.

The landscape of Saddleworth is a huge asset, not only for the community of the Parish but for the whole of Oldham, Greater Manchester and beyond.

Approximately 40% of Saddleworth is in the Peak District National Park. This area makes a tremendous contribution to the local landscape with all the benefits that this entails. However, because it is in the Park it is not covered by this Neighbourhood Plan.

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (paragraph 176) refers to National Parks and states that *“development within their setting should be sensitively located and designed to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the designated areas”*.

Saddleworth clearly contributes to the setting of the National Park. This issue is therefore addressed by Policy XY below

A high percentage of the rural area of Saddleworth outside the National Park is in the Green Belt. This can protect the landscape against urban and suburban encroachment but is no guarantee against other unwelcome landscape changes. These changes can have many causes. They can result from inappropriate development, from unsympathetic land management, direct damage, and from the impacts of climate change, such as land erosion and invasion by non native flora.

Many parts of the Saddleworth countryside have been greatly enhanced over recent decades. Tree planting and derelict land reclamation has had a transformational impact, particularly along the valley bottoms. The Huddersfield Narrow Canal has been restored to use. Disused rail lines have become tree lined recreation routes. New countryside leisure areas have been created and the network of footpaths, cycleways and bridleways has been enhanced.

Nonetheless many parts of the Saddleshworth landscape are fragile. The stretches of countryside between and around the Saddleshworth villages are narrow. They are under great pressure from various types of development even though much of the land is within the Green Belt. The open slopes on the valley sides are highly visible. Any landscape change on these hillsides has a great impact on local and distant views. It would be very easy for all the great benefits provided by the Saddleshworth landscapes to be eroded /?/ squandered.

There is certainly a concern that the distinctive character and quality of the Saddleshworth countryside is being endangered. This has been expressed by (***Respondents to public surveys / vllage associations / environmental volunteers / schools / walking organisations /***). ***Photographic surveys provide evidence of instances of landscape damage.***

The setting of the Peak District National Park

The extensive upland areas of Saddleshworth within the Peak District National Park are not subject to this Neighbourhood Plan. However, the Plan should have regard to the NPPF requirement in respect of the setting of the National Park. Saddleshworth's rural landscapes adjoin a long section of the boundary of the northernmost part of the National Park. Along most of this length the landscapes on each side of the boundary are not separated or distinguished by any strongly marked geographical feature or character differences. *The Peak District National Park Authority wishes to see the requirements of the NPPF reflected in this Neighbourhood Plan. (Check wording with PDNPA)*

The geographic extent of a "setting" is difficult to define. A large development or one which would involve a very significant change in the landscape might have a very significant impact on the National Park even though it is located at some distance from the boundary.

Map A shows the rural areas which can be described as " directly adjoining the National Park". Proposed developments within this area would be assessed against Policy XY. However, this does not exclude the possibility that proposed developments which are located at a greater distance from the National Park may be considered to adversely affect the Park by reason of being in its setting.

Policy XY

Development must respect the setting of the Peak District National Park by being sensitively located and designed so as to avoid or minimise adverse impacts on the National Park.

This policy will only affect a part of the Saddleworth and its purpose as set out in the NPPF is to protect the National Park, not the landscapes within the setting of the Park. A separate policy approach is needed to protect the Saddleworth landscapes themselves. Some Neighbourhood Plans have defined Landscape Character Areas and then included policies to ensure that the particular character of these zones is not harmed (and, so far as possible enhanced) , by any new development

Planning policies to protect Landscape Character Areas across Saddleworth

It is currently envisaged that higher level Plans (i.e. at Greater Manchester and /or Oldham borough level) will define Landscape Character Areas which will form the basis for planning policies. This approach would cover the whole of the Saddleworth countryside. At this stage it is not clear whether this means that there will be no need for additional work on this issue as a part of the Neighbourhood Plan process.

It is possible that this approach can be made even more effective by further refining the Landscape Character Area in some of the city region's localities (by, for instance, giving them a finer grained geography, adding more detailed landscape descriptions, and capturing more fully the specific characteristics and qualities that contribute to local distinctiveness). Neighbourhood Planning could play an important role in "localising" the approach, especially in areas where the landscapes are both fragile and of high environmental, economic, social and cultural importance.

Protection of important views.

(Some NPs have included a policy about this – albeit for much smaller and simpler areas with just a handful of views. It usually covers views from a village towards a local feature such as a hilltop or a river.

It might be mind- bogglingly difficult to do this in Saddleworth.

Could we invite each village to nominate two or three publicly enjoyed views that are felt to be under threat from being blocked by development?)

What are the possible impacts of climate change on the landscapes of Saddleworth?

1 Increasing tree cover across different types of landscape

In the early decades of the twentieth century the countryside areas of Saddleworth had very little tree cover.

From the 1970s onwards major efforts were made to promote tree planting. This was primarily in the valley bottoms and lower hillsides. It was initially mainly a publicly funded programme, designed to enhance the environment, and was based on the reintroduction of native species. This has prompted natural seeding and has transformed the appearance and biodiversity of the river valleys in a relatively short time.

There are also areas of commercial forestry at Dovestone including non native tree types.

A warmer climate is now allowing the creation of a more wooded landscape on higher hillsides which have for generations had an open farmland character. Tree cover has been extending upwards on these slopes sides due to planting and natural seeding.

Very recently there is evidence of self seeded tree growth on the moorland plateaux at over 400 metres elevation. This is currently very dispersed, small in height, and mainly coniferous species, such as Sitka Spruce. The spread of tree cover on the moorland tops could accelerate quickly. The open moors have been a characteristic ingredient in the Saddleworth landscape for generations. They are celebrated in Saddleworth culture (e.g. the literature of Ammon Wrigley and local landscape painting and photography.). The blanket bogs on the moorland plateaux are important both for the habitats they provide and as a carbon sink.

Would people welcome or regret this type of landscape change? In some parts of the Peak Park voluntary groups are working to prevent the incursion of non native trees onto the high plateaux. The Parish Council will, in conjunction with the Peak District National Park and Oldham Council, monitor this issue. If any intervention is needed this is unlikely to be one which is within the scope of the planning system. It would instead be a proposal within Appendix ? of the Neighbourhood Plan.

2 Increasing erosion and flooding.

Incidents of extremely heavy rainfall against a background of generally wetter ground conditions have led to increased flood damage and erosion in recent years. This can damage the landscape; but the landscape can also play a role in slowing the speed of run off. Surface water run off can be slowed by protecting and enhancing the boglands on the high plateaux, increasing tree cover, a reduction in close cropped or cut grassland and the creation of water holding features. Hard surfacing of the ground and straightening, channelling and culverting of watercourses exacerbates the problem. The issue of flooding is covered in more detail in Section ?

Possible consequences of new farming practices post Common Agricultural Policy, and under new trading conditions.

What will be the impact of new UK Government farming and countryside policies? And changing market conditions.

The possibilities include:-

- reduced sheep farming in upland areas?
- increased grant support for “wilding”?
- continued support for conservation of upland bird habitats?
- focus on flood reduction measures?
- rewilding schemes.

Ideas to promote closer partnership working with local farmers are outlined in Appendix ?

Enhancing Saddleworth's landscapes.

Yet to be drafted

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Sources for Evidence and Opinions

Oldham Council; PDNPA: RSPB; landowners; farmers; wildlife experts (eg Ken Gartside)

Greater Manchester Landscape Character and Sensitivity Assessment for the Open Moorlands and Enclosed Upland Fringes (Dark Peak)

Possible causes of landscape damage

A subjective subject – but potential causes of damage could include

- Tipping on or reshaping of land
- Dressing of access tracks with builders' waste materials such as broken tiles, glass and plastics
- Culverting of watercourses, rerouting of watercourses (also leading to increased bank erosion)
- Redundant farm machinery left to decay
- Collapse and theft of drystone walls
- Barn conversions in open countryside; especially where garden "clutter" is uncontrolled, e.g. sheds, greenhouses, inappropriate boundary structures, etc
- Barns built to create the opportunity for converting to new houses
- Ecohouses/underground houses in open countryside – and again the garden "clutter" issue.
- Individual wind turbines
- "Horsiculture", stables, jumps, manege areas.

Is Green Belt policy intended and designed to protect the landscape against such "threats"?

No.

The purpose of the Green Belt.

The NPPF sets out the 5 purposes of Green Belt:

1. *to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;*
2. *to prevent neighbouring town merging into one another;*
3. *to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;*
4. *to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and*
5. *to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.*

Thus designation as Green Belt does not provide the means of ensuring that the particular character or quality of a rural landscape is protected, conserved or enhanced – only that, in general terms, it remains free of urban or suburban development.

Paragraph 141 of the NPPF says *“Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.”*

Are there occasions when Green Belt policy interpretation is impacting on landscapes?

There have, nationally, been instances recently where a liberal interpretation of the term “infill” has been contentious – a recent appeal decision in Woodford, for example. Are there any examples in Saddleworth?

- like. Would people’s concept of the Saddleworth landscape evolve again as the hill tops become more wooded?
- The increased rate of erosion of land by rivers and streams.

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Ownership and Usage

There is probably no comprehensive record of the ownership/usage of Saddleworth's rural areas but types would include

- Land owned privately, mainly farmed under grazing, some set aside for wildlife conservation. In some places the land is the subject of public access requirements.
- Land owned by water utilities and under the same mix of uses
- Local authority owned land, often formerly derelict before reclamation for the purpose of landscape enhancement, recreation and biodiversity.
- Land owned by private individuals and managed for its landscape or biodiversity value. One or two small examples exist, but generally uncommon in Saddleworth
- Land owned or managed by voluntary/charitable organisations for landscape, biodiversity or recreation purposes. RSPB at Dovestones. Not aware of a "Saddleworth Wildlife Trust with this remit?"

HOW WOULD WE DEFINE OUR OVERALL OBJECTIVE?

A first stab.....

To work together with (<>) to ensure/promote/encourage the stewardship/conservation of a beautiful and locally distinctive rural landscape in a period of changing climatic and economic conditions.

PLANNING POLICY CHANGES

Do we need any new policies? Or any tightening of existing Local Plan policies?

Designation of Local Green Spaces – would this provide protection against the erosion of landscape character and quality?

Can the barn "loophole" be removed where the barn itself, or the home into which it is likely to be converted, would be detrimental to the landscape?

Is the main need not for new policies but for:-

- better scrutiny of applications against existing policies
- better conditioning of approvals
- wider and more rigorous use of planning enforcement powers.

Could/should community volunteers play a role as the local eyes of the enforcement service?

OTHER POSSIBLE ACTIONS BY THE PARISH COUNCIL (which could be Appended to the Neighbourhood Plan)

Promoting community based environmental improvement and wilding schemes via village action groups and interest groups (a Saddleworth Wildlife Trust?).

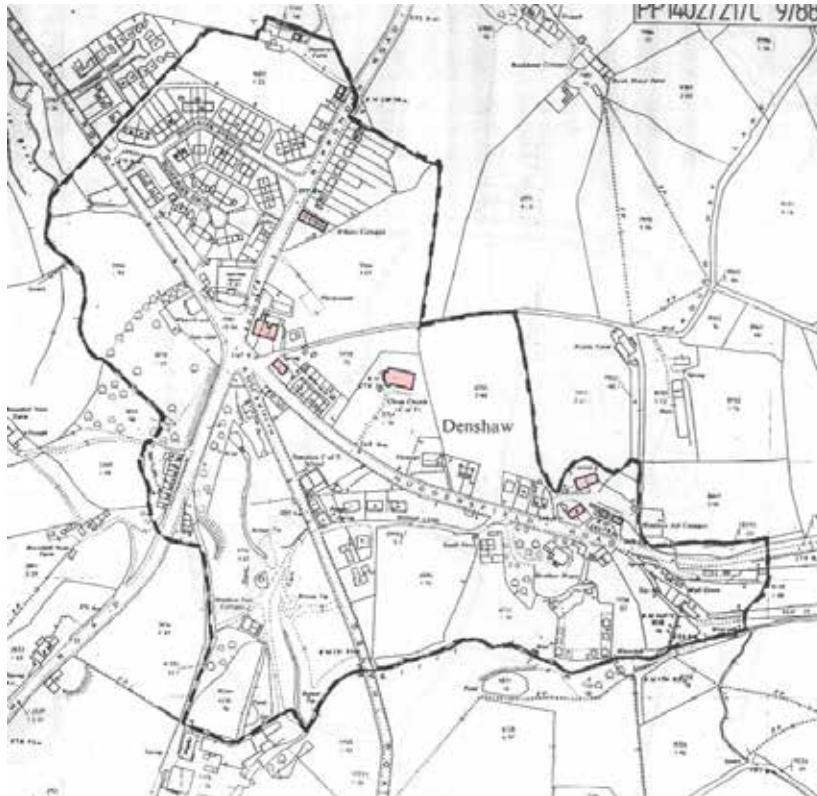
Promoting a “Responsible Farming Scheme” with a local Young Farmers Group? We could link this to a scheme “Choose Saddleworth Farm Produce” (*premium food produced by responsible farmers*); and a Saddleworth Farm Visits programme for local school groups.

Promoting a Saddleworth Farmer of the Year award?

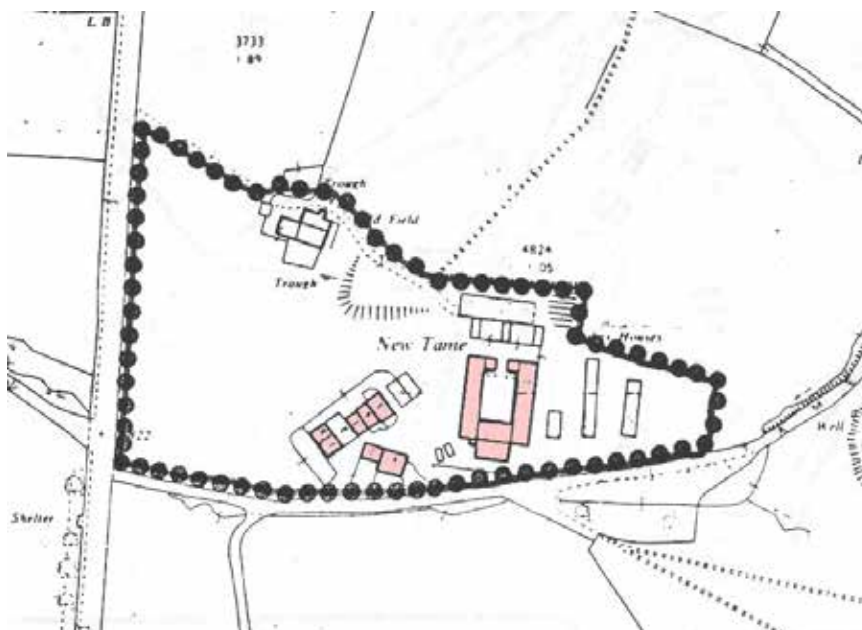
SADDLEWORTH CONSERVATION AREAS

(Source of Information: <http://www.civitrust.saddleworth.net/Conservation%20Areas.htm>)

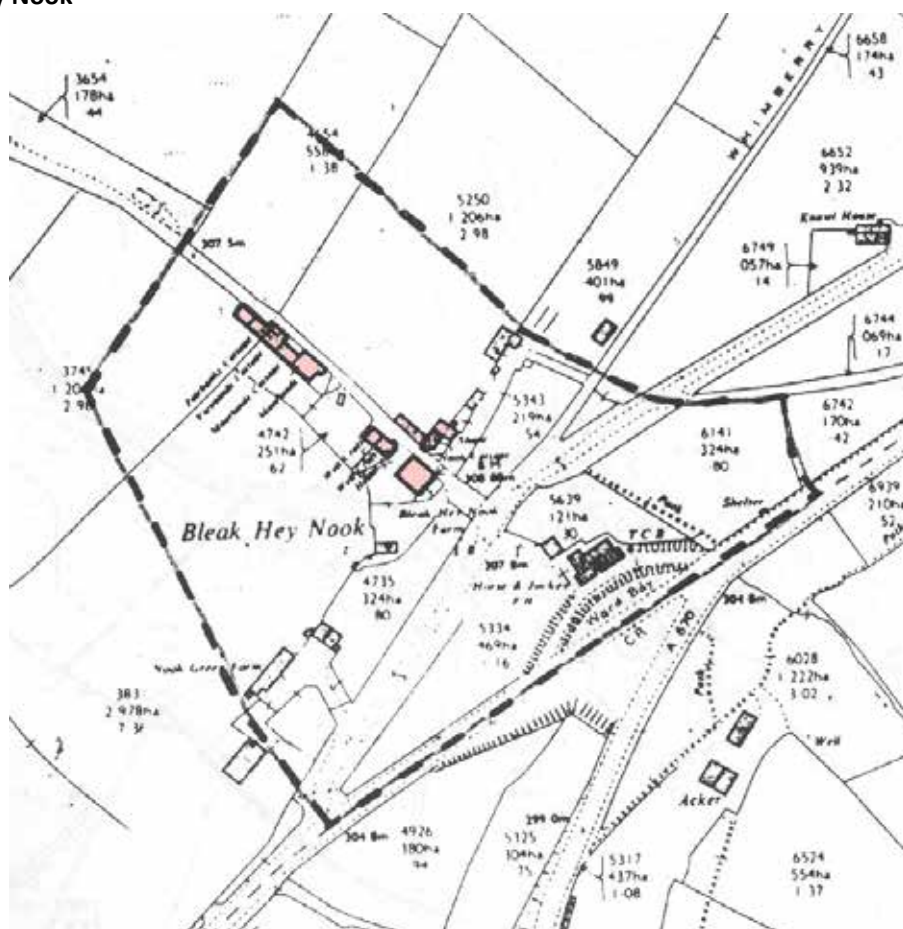
Denshaw



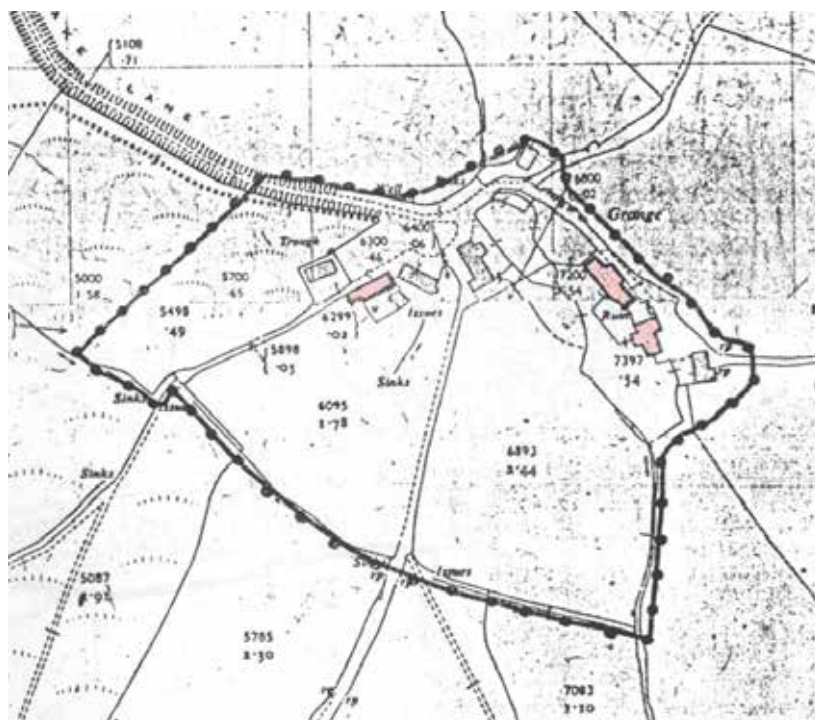
New Tame



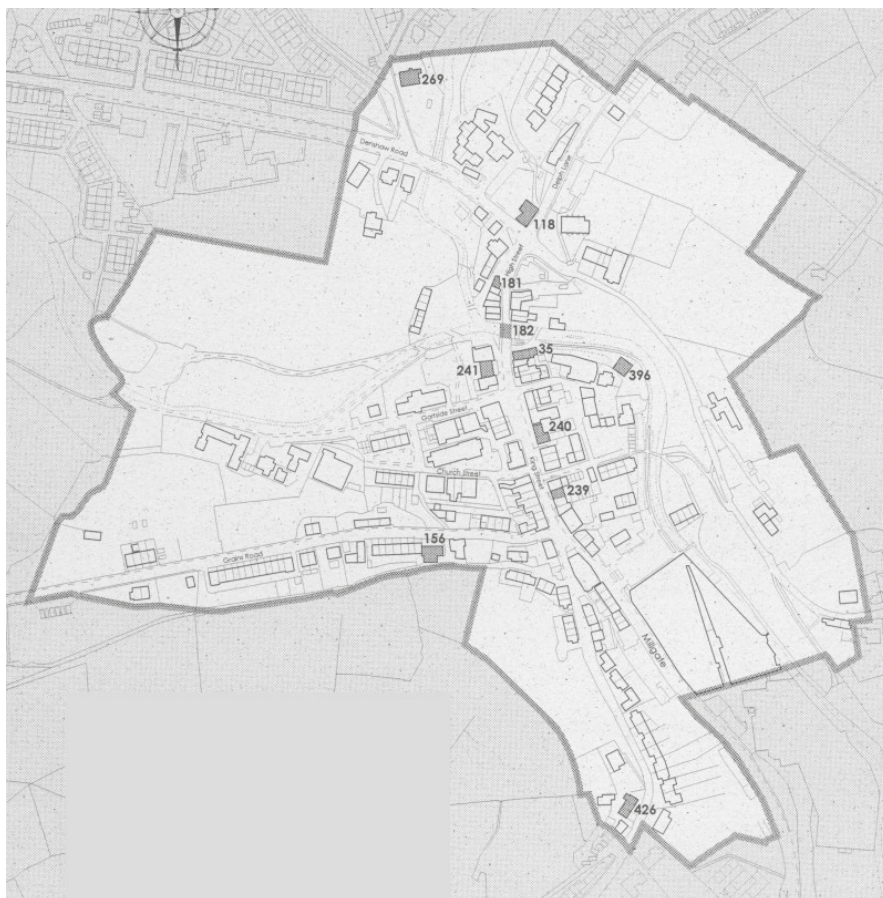
Bleak Hey Nook



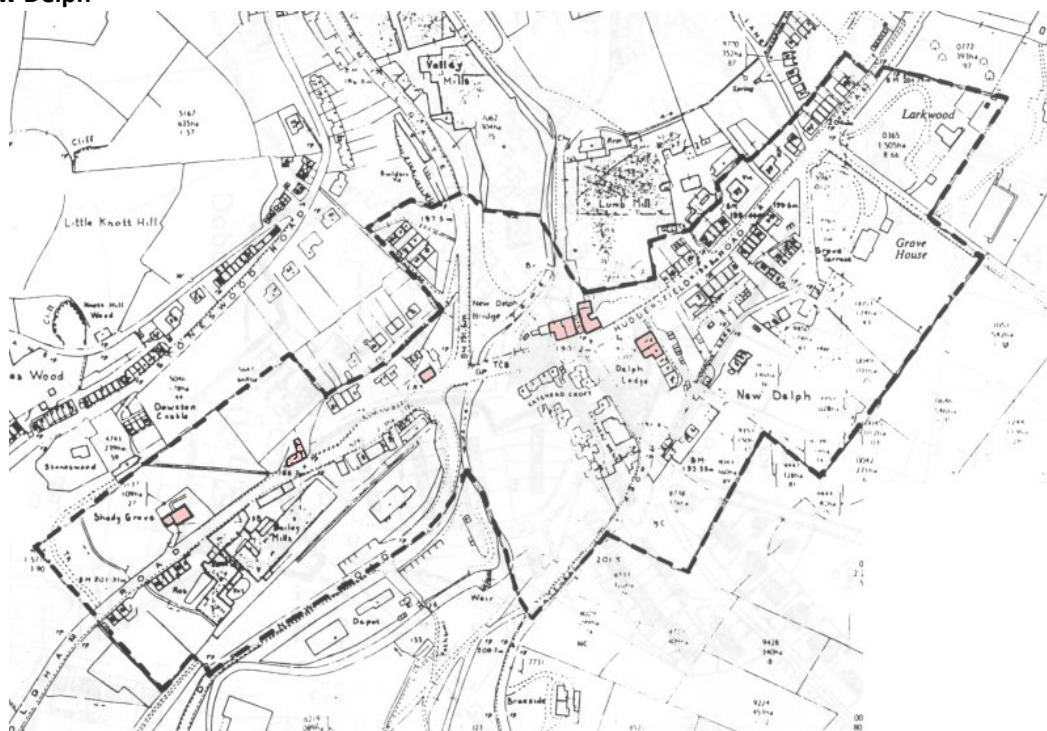
Grange



Delph



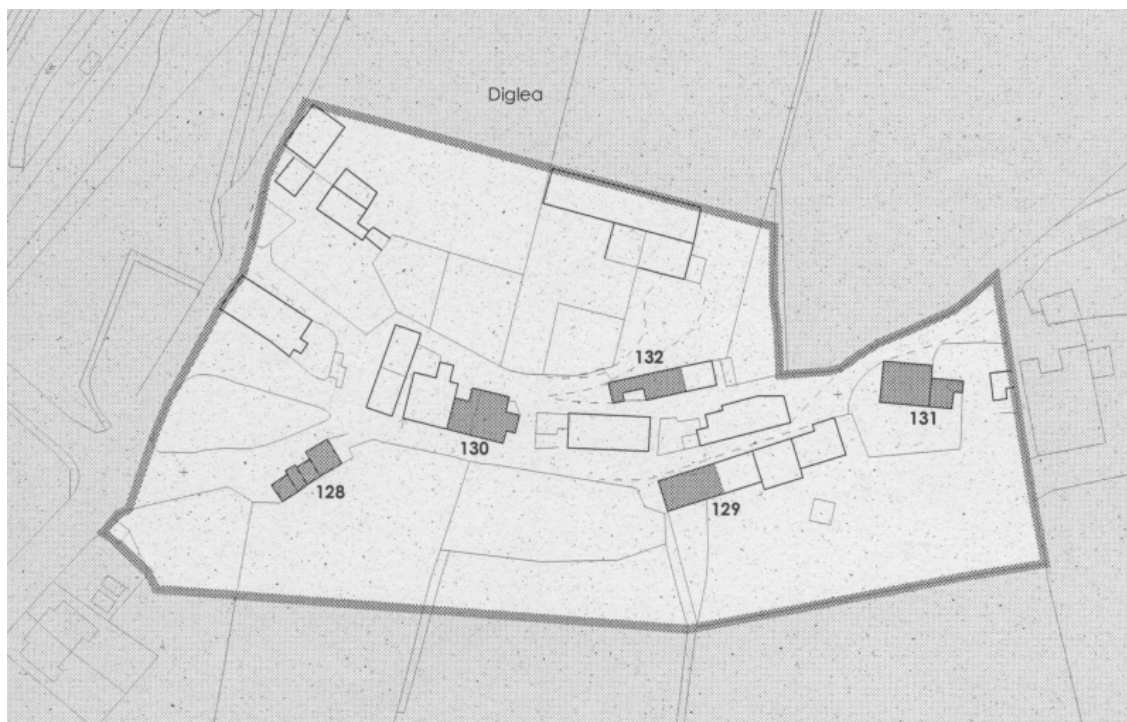
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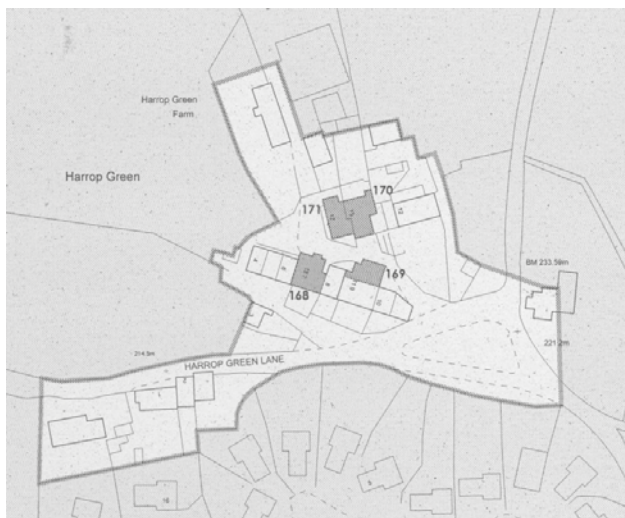
Dobcross



Diglea



Harrop Green



Uppermill



Grasscroft



Scouthead



Areas with no maps

- TAME WATER

- HOLLY GROVE
- ST CHAD'S CHURCH
- BOARSHURST
- LADHILL LANE, GREENFIELD
- HEY TOP, GREENFIELD
- ROYAL GEORGE MILLS, GREENFIELD
- LYDGATE
- STONEBREAKS