

Character Assessment – Oldcroft and Viney Hill

Overview

The two hamlets of Oldcroft and Viney Hill both sit astride a high ridge the flows from the edge of the Forest of Dean. From the edges of the settlements long reaching views over the Severn towards the Cotswolds can be enjoyed.



Oldcroft from the west



From Neds Top Farm looking SE

Today the two settlements are still separated by woodland but linked with minor access lanes. Both are a mix of old encroachments interspersed with 20C infill housing. “The settlements are open in form and the older buildings are laid out in a haphazard manner often in large plots served by a network of paths and tracks...” (FOD District Council Housing Allocations Plan 2017)

The open ground between the 18c encroachments now being known as ‘Forest Waste’. In the case of Oldcroft, the cricket ground and in Viney Hill the football ground together with the Parish Church all of which are bordered by woodland provides an amenity which helps give the distinctive character of the two settlements.

Geographic Location

The settlement of Oldcroft is split into two parts forming a ‘V’, running in a SSE/NE direction along the top and western side of distinct spur. Oldcroft and Upper Oldcroft are separated by woodland (Oldcroft Plantation). Viney Hill is clearly separated from Oldcroft and occupies the top and end of the same spur as it turns west with far reaching views up the Severn Valley and across to the Cotswold Escarpment in the distance.



From the end of the spur at Viney Hill

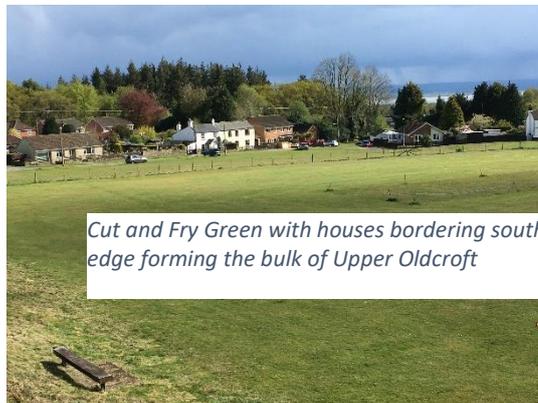
Surroundings

To the north-east both settlements are bordered by ancient woodland whilst to the south and west there is open farmland, mainly given over to dairy farming. This farmland is crossed by several footpaths leading to the valley floor and towards Pillowell.

Structure . “The settlements are open in form and the older buildings are laid out in a haphazard manner often in large plots served by a network of paths and tracks. Within Viney Hill settlement boundary there is a more intensively built-up area which forms a focus. Similarly, within Oldcroft a more concentrated form is evident within the defined area. Areas of land once used as quarries for building stone are a feature of both with past coal extraction leaving surface formations in open ground around Oldcroft.” (FOD District Council Housing Allocations Plan 2017)

The housing of Viney Hill is mainly to the south of the ‘main’ road with more modern houses on the rising land between the road and the top of the spur, with older housing on the top of the ridge.

Similarly within Oldcroft a more concentrated form is evident within the defined area bordered by Cut and Fry and the Aisne Road loop.



Links Oldcroft is served by a minor road branching of the main access route leading from Parkend to the A48. Further minor roads link the two parts of the Oldcroft settlement and onwards into Viney Hill.

Transport from both villages is mainly by private car and a daily bus service links the settlements to Lydney and Coleford and onto Gloucester and Monmouth.

Approaches – Approaching Oldcroft from the edge of Yorkley the minor road falls away and shows the linear development along St Swithin’s Road with open farm land across the valley of Plummers Brook. Some scattered houses and small groupings of houses are found in between Upper Oldcroft the Oldcroft .



Approach to Oldcroft from North



Holly Place, Oldcroft

This minor road continues eventually linking up to the main approach to Lydney.



*Exiting Oldcroft towards
Lydney along Neds Top*



*Link road between Oldcroft
and Upper Oldcroft*

The Parkend-A48 route bypasses Oldcroft to the North and forms the main and most used approach to Viney Hill. The social amenities (Cut and Fry Cricket Ground, Viney Hill Football and Social Club, the Church and the New Inn) are found either side of this road.



Leaving Viney Hill on the main link back towards Yorkley. Note the Church outside the settlement boundary

Built environment In 1787 the Oldcroft area was described in a survey as *'for the most part covered in thorns, and hollys, with a few scrubby oaks and beech'*. The settlements of Oldcroft and Viney originally grew up through encroachments on Crown Land in the late 18th century and in the mid 19th Century, when many of the old cottages were built by families engaged in working in the pits or charcoal burning industries.

Building types :

The settlements were formed in a haphazard way with stone cottages sitting in large plots. With small windows and slate roofs often with stone outbuildings. Boundaries were mostly of drystone walls and examples of these are still evident in many places but wooden fencing is the norm now.



Stone boundary walls

In the 20th century more defined areas of housing were developed. A mix of bungalows and two storey houses in both settlements has given a more intensive feel. These buildings are mainly of brick with tile or slate roofs and modern types of window. There are also many such houses built as 'infill' between the older properties.



Nearly all the older buildings have been modernised and often extended. In several of the older houses stable blocks have been built in the large gardens.



Modernised cottage



*Note stable block in garden
(Church Walk, Oldcroft)*

There are established farms bordering the boundaries along Neds Top.



With a heavy reliance on private cars if houses do not have space within their curtilage parking is becoming prevalent on Forest Waste.

Active transport : There is a network of recognised footpaths linking Oldcroft to the Severn Valley.



Custom and Use Path, Oldcroft



Viney Hill.

Link path Oldcroft-Viney Hill

Key Features

The open nature of the land to one side and the ancient woodland to the other give both settlements a distinctive character. The settings of the cricket pitch on Cut and Fry green, the football field carved out of the woodland at Viney Hill



Cut and Fry Cricket Green



Viney Hill Football pitch and Social Club

and the isolation of the church all go towards this distinctiveness, which is prized by those living there.

All three of these amenities, sitting as they do in their setting form a framework for both settlements. Although

the chapel and school are no longer active these have been converted to alternative use and thus preserved.



Now a predominantly residential area, there are few businesses or commercial properties. Those so far identified are:

Commercial: garage, pub, Activity Centre and a Physiotherapy Centre, some holiday lets and an architectural design business. In the area there are several small businesses run from home.

Socially: there is a Sports and Social Club linked with the football team, one pub and a Church of England Church which is linked to the Parkend Parish. A cricket team (Yorkley Star) sometimes play on the Cut and Fry pitch.

Buildings and Historic items of note, the evidence of an historic past linked to Forest culture, include:



The Parish Church of All Saints, Viney Hill. (This is now paired with the Parish of St Paul's, Parkend



Hayes Manor (dating back to Tudor times) on the southern edge of the Viney Hill boundary



The New Inn, Viney Hill. The sole surviving pub where once there were many!



The Bethesda Chapel, Oldcroft. Methodism was a major force. (now used as a storage facility)



Viney Hill School building (A mix of residential and business premises)



Boundary Stone (one of several in the area) marking the edge of the Statutory Forest



The Cricket Pavilion, Cut and Fry Green

Positives

The quiet communities set away from passing traffic

The views out of the villages

The woodland aspects

Access to woodland for recreation



Negatives:

Unsympathetic



fencing

Off road parking damaging forest waste through erosion

Poor bus services

Patchy internet connections

