Chapter 9

In search of the identity of Kirby Hill

Introduction

The village of Kirby Hill lies about a mile north of the North Yorkshire market town of Boroughbridge. It sits on a shallow eminence surrounded by agricultural land and enjoys long-range views across attractive rural landscape, particularly north to the Hambleton Hills. Historically the location occupied by the village is quite significant. There has apparently been an established community there from before Saxon times and parts of the village’s All Saints church can be traced back to this period. The main road through the village, now Leeming Lane, was once the route of the Great North Road from London to Scotland but now the bulk of traffic flow is carried past the village on the A1(M) about half a mile to the west. Once a mainly agricultural village characterised by a clustering of several farms, only one now remains and the past 30 years has seen a succession of residential developments that have transformed Kirby Hill’s appearance and expanded its population to about 390. Apart from a pub, church, farm and primary school Kirby Hill is entirely residential, although there is a population of homeworkers, and since there are no shops in the village, people are dependent, locally, on provision available in Boroughbridge or larger towns such as Ripon and Harrogate. The relationship between Kirby Hill and Boroughbridge in particular, but also the closer settlements of Langthorpe and Milby, is in fact a complex local issue and part of the reason for carrying out the work that will be described in this chapter. There is a powerful territorial streak at the heart of Kirby Hill’s community and they value greatly their sense of physical independence from neighbouring settlements. The agricultural buffer that surrounds the village’s built core appears to contribute significantly to the feeling that Kirby Hill is a village in its own right. There is a strong desire to maintain this physical independence against probably well founded fears that Boroughbridge might eventually expand further north, threatening to bridge the rural divide. This is considered thoroughly undesirable because villagers worry that it will compromise the identity and individuality of Kirby Hill and lead to its subjugation as a mere satellite to the larger Boroughbridge.

Walking around the village, looking at the objects and features that contribute to its visual character, relatively little seems evident to distinguish Kirby Hill’s identity as an independent village, apart from being surrounded by fields. At first sight Kirby Hill would prima facie appear to be a rather unremarkable place, much of it having a fairly suburban appearance. A number of residents interviewed during the project highlighted that although they thought of Kirby Hill as a
village. It actually had very few physical features that they associated with typical North Yorkshire villages. It has no clearly defined village core, for example, no explicit village green, no village shops, nowhere for the kids to play, and has perhaps suffered a loss of any significant sense of vernacular. Modern day Kirby Hill has evolved to become a collection of residential developments, most of them cul-de-sacs with their backs to the village, contributing little to its visual quality or sense of cohesion. In 30 years the original agricultural village character has been overwhelmed to such an extent that what remains of Kirby Hill’s proud historical character and its vernacular is now dispersed and manifest in a few older cottages, houses, the church and farm buildings within a background of suburban-like residential development engendering little obvious sense of place.

So, exactly what identity does Kirby Hill have that its residents feel the need to protect so voraciously? The need to explore this question has gradually evolved in the collective consciousness of the village in recent years as a consequence of threatened development, not in Boroughbridge, but in fact to the north of Kirby Hill alongside the A1(M) motorway. In 1996, a planning application was presented to Harrogate Borough Council for a motorway service station just north of the Ripon Road junction. The anticipated impact of this proposal galvanised local opinion to such an extent that at one protest event numbers turned out that exceeded the entire village population. This brought into sharp focus the need for the Parish Council to consider very carefully the options available that would help it respond effectively to any future development plans it deemed to be undesirable.

In consultation with Harrogate Borough Council Planning Department, members of the Parish Council decided to produce a Village Design Statement (VDS). This is a document that gives voice to local opinion about what is valuable and important about the village so that this can be taken into account when assessing the suitability of planning applications that would affect the village. Developing a VDS requires the collecting and collating of information about the special and unique qualities of the village. It usually involves drawing out details of the settlement pattern, the character of its landscape setting, building styles, open spaces and wildlife. The general idea is to present information as seen through the eyes of the village community so that it gives a picture of what is important about the village from their perspective. A lot of emphasis was given to the village’s historical significance and to the objects and buildings still in existence that evidence this. Kirby Hill’s landscape setting, its agricultural context and the distant views across the countryside, along with the contribution of some green spaces, street trees and fields to wildlife diversity all make very positive contributions to the village.

There were more challenging issues however. Among these included a significant lack of clarity about exactly where Kirby Hill started and finished. Looking at a map of the village Kirby Hill appears as a clearly defined, loosely “L” shaped settlement surrounded by fields. However, historical meandering of the political boundaries between Kirby Hill and Langthorpe in particular, seems to have generated a diversity of local views about which buildings to the west of Leeming Lane are perceived in Kirby Hill and which are not. This, coupled with variations in opinion about whether the surrounding fields are “in” the village or “out”, makes understanding where the village boundaries are far from straightforward. It appeared that the content of the village was more a matter of individual perception than physical evidence. Another potentially problematic aspect was what to make of the predominant and eclectic mix of relatively recent residential development. It was apparent to the VDS Steering Committee that Kirby Hill’s identity and character would be difficult to define. Furthermore, without being able to do this, identifying the way to sensitively protect the village would be potentially problematic as for 30 years it had been ravaged by development that contributed little to the visual appeal of the village and at the same time weakened what visual coherence Kirby Hill might have once had.

But if Kirby Hill’s identity and character is hard to express positively in terms of clear boundaries and distinguished architecture, it is
much easier to do through the strong sense of
community and social cohesion evident in much
of the resident population. Most experience
village life positively and although, with some
notable exceptions, this is not generally manifest
in tangible physical “village-ness”, Kirby Hill is
nonetheless much loved and treasured by its
inhabitants. This form of village identity resides
in the individual and collective lives and habits
of its people. It is a hidden dimension of village
order that cannot necessarily be visualised in
physical form, but is nevertheless valuable and
highly sensitive to change. Another challenge is
then to find ways to articulate this in a form that
might help development control mechanisms
avoid damaging the community and possibly,
more positively, take decisions that might actu­
ally nurture and enhance it.

The role of experiential landscape

The mapping techniques developed in experien­
tial landscape seemed ideally suited to help make
explicit some of the less tangible, but crucially
important, aspects of routine village life that
seemed to be contributing so much to the sense of
Kirby Hill’s hidden identity and uniqueness. In
particular, by being able to give a spatial expres­
sion to the villagers’ subliminal experiences of the
streets and other outdoor places of Kirby Hill, we
expected to be able to shed some light on the
confusion apparent in establishing where people
felt the village boundaries actually were and, in
relation to this, what triggered the sense of arrival
at and departure from Kirby Hill. We were also
interested to see if we could uncover something
about the spatial structure of perceived different
neighbourhoods within the village and whether
there might be any consensus about significant or
meaningful places. In this latter respect it was
already clear that some locations of historical
significance may justifiably be highlighted. But it
seemed probable that other outdoor locations
might be equally important in the lives of inhabi­tants and without the prominence and visibility
of, say, the church or war memorial, these might
be overlooked. A brief was conceived that
perceptions, organised around themes that would
focus on, for example: what was special and
important about the village and what its distinc­
tive identity was; where there were neighbour­
hoods in the village and what were its significant
places; and, where the village started and finished
(Figure 9.1).

The overarching purpose of revealing Kirby
Hill’s experiential landscape was essentially
twofold. First was to explore patterns of routine
experience implicit in the way village inhabitants
used and felt about the outdoor environment and,
crucially, reveal their spatial configuration and
characteristics. The second was to give voice to
aspects of village life that contributed to the
apparently strong sense of community and social
cohesion, and to do this in such a way as to be
able to identify components of the village’s physi­
cal and spatial fabric that sustained it. Achieving
this would require extensive public consultation
to build up layers of individual place perception
into a collective view. Practically inevitably
played a role in the number and demographic of
villagers that eventually participated in the
process and clearly the conclusions drawn from
the analysis must be approached with due caution
as a consequence. For example, few children and
no teenagers were involved and so the place
perceptions that made up the collective view
produced reflect that of mainly the adult popula­
tion. Possibly equally significant is that, for
reasons of convenience and time, invitations for
participants were made via existing community
groups and structures, such as at Parish Council
meetings, church and school events and by word
of mouth from the members of the Village Design
Statement Steering Group. In the end 40 people
participated, about 10% of the resident popula­
tion, nearly all of them, though, either involved in
or at least accessible through one of a number of
community related groups. In other words the
analysis may well bias in favour of the active and
interested and may be insufficiently representa­
tive of inhabitants not involved with or reachable
through these groups. This potential skew of
participants was identified at an early stage and
attempts were made for an inclusive approach
through attention to the demographic and loca­
PROJECT: Kirby Hill Village Design Statement
DRAWING TITLE: Village Settlement - Base Plan
DATE: 28/2/2005
RESEARCHER: IMS
SCALE: 1:2500
+ SCALE: Public/Social

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consideration of socio-economic variables and length of residence, for example. But, inevitably, as a consequence of the voluntary nature of participation, only those who positively consented became involved, despite others being sought. Although the circumstances of the project meant that this was more or less unavoidable, it is a potentially significant limitation and indeed the findings do imply the possibility of an over-privileged of certain places in the village that may reflect particular interest groups.

The research team phase
The project was carried out in two phases, the first of which involved the production of an experiential landscape map of the village recording the place perceptions of the research team. This involved a tour of the village during which a voice-recorded commentary was made. This was subsequently transcribed and evaluated to identify the distribution of CDTA around the village according to the observations made by the team. The resulting map helped provisionally identify the range and distribution of distinguishable areas in the village: those places that had some kind of localised thematic continuity that stood out against the general village background. This would provide the opportunity to explore the concept of neighbourhood within the village in relation to the team's observations about the spatial sensation of area. Findings from the research team map were also used to inform the way in which the semi-structured interview themes would be defined and configured. A very provisional picture of some of the experiential characteristics of Kirby Hill, according to the research team's reading of its spatial structure, gradually began to come into view (Plate 10).

This emergent picture of the experiential characteristics of Kirby Hill revealed a linear sequence of six Dobson Clusters. The first of these shows a mainly directional and transitional sequence that seems to mark the southern boundary of the village signalling the beginning of a general sense of entry into the village without yet arriving at its core. South of this location feels outside of the village. The second cluster shows the potential to be strongly centred and marks the first significant location within the village boundary. Also it is from here that visual contact is made with the location occupied by the Blue Bell Inn which feels like the point of arrival, the potential core of the village, although at present this sensation is very weak. Just before this to the south another cluster contributes a further set of transitional and directional experiences that intensifies the sense of either arrival (from the south) or begins the sensation of departure (from the north). Further clusters appear evident along Church Lane and the first of these suggests the possibility of a secondary and more semi-public village core. The final cluster seems problematic in that, although it provides potential as an element of discovery in the village, it seems too detached from the rest of the sequence and feels like an isolated part of the village. In terms of the overall themes the project focused on, this initial phase did not reveal any significant or special qualities of the village taken as a whole from the research team's reading of its spatial structure. Kirby Hill's identity seemed to rest on little more than its existence as a collection of generally unrelated and largely suburban style residential developments contributing little in terms of visual coordination. A number of potentially significant places were clearly apparent although most spoke of unfulfilled potential, and linkage between them seemed to be weak, diminishing their impact on the character of the overall village. It also seemed clear that the sense of where Kirby Hill's boundaries are is complex and, to the south in particular, related in part to the incremental nature of the sense of arrival. This evaluation of the research team's view formed the foundation upon which the next phase of the project was built.

The resident participant phase
The next stage of the project involved interviewing residents so that similar experiential landscape maps could be made for each of them. The interviews followed after participants completed informed consent forms and were carried out in two teams of two: one of whom would lead the dialogue in a conversational style leaving the other to make written and graphical notes that would help with subsequent interpretation. The procedure adopted first involved the development of semi-structured interview themes...
so that the dialogue with participants would cover all the relevant topics and to ensure as much consistency as possible across the three teams. A timetable for the interviews was established and participants attended at the allocated time to one of three venues. Each interview lasted about twenty minutes to half an hour depending partly on the personality of the participant and partly on the amount of information imparted in response to each of the interview themes. As well as the tape recording equipment, other tools used in the interviews were maps of the village at various scales and model houses. Starting the session by locating their house provided a useful way to orientate participants in relation to the village plan.

The initial impression from evaluating the partial transcriptions of the interviews and playing them all back, was that the responses were unusually rich and detailed, sometimes quite emotionally charged, and full of personal anecdote. It was clear that this material brought a colourful and sometimes highly personal dimension, reminiscent of a more anthropological survey, which required careful consideration during the interpretation. It seemed as though much of the identity and character of Kirby Hill was implicit in the psyche of its residents and, although this had clear spatial implications that the interview structure was able to reveal, this was often so elusive and refined that it challenged the experiential landscape conceptual framework to make it sufficiently explicit. Combining the graphical symbols on the experiential landscape maps with text from the interviews made much of this refined and personal detail more clearly visible. When all the maps were layered together to form a composite this helped to interpret more clearly the significance of certain clusters of symbols. Some places became more pronounced in the collective perception of villagers because of the accumulating effect of individual associations and meanings projected onto that place. What follows is an account of the principal findings from the resident participation phase summarising findings from the composite experiential landscape map. This gives a picture of the experiential characteristics of Kirby Hill as a whole and identifies key locations in the village. Finally we will draw out the main implications for the village in terms of the original brief.

Area
The picture of the village presented by the area map resembles in some ways an abstract cubist painting with its many facets representing clear blocks that are distinguishable from one another. Some areas are well defined, particularly those to the west and north of the village and also the rough "L" shape that corresponds with St John's Walk, suggesting a strong level of consensus that much of the village appears as a mosaic of discrete blocks set side-by-side, each with characteristics that set it apart from its neighbouring block and from the wider village as a whole. It is interesting, and potentially significant however, that there appears to be less clarity evident in the boundaries of areas identified within the main body of the village, broadly extending from the Blue Bell down and to the south side of Church Lane as far as the church grounds. This indicates a lower level of consensus among participants about the configuration of distinguishable places in this region of the village, suggesting perhaps that there may be fuzzier boundaries between places here in comparison to elsewhere in the village (Plate 11).

Centre
Two main conclusions were drawn from reading the distribution of recorded centres. First is that there are places beyond the main body of the village that are important to resolving a picture of what is significant about the village as a whole. It is as though some of the routine experiences of its inhabitants project meaning and association on these places to such an extent that a kind of psychological gravity holds them as components in a full definition of what the village means. Examples of this include, at the extreme, the Hambleton Hills visible in the distance to the north, and closer in, but actually physically in the neighbouring village of Milby, the Coronation Hall. It is also notable that there are places beyond the main body of the village that are embraced as part of Kirby Hill's capacity to deliver restorative experiences. The plan shows these as arms extending out from the village indicating that these are primarily related to short walks that
people might take locally. The second is the strong emergence of the vicinity of Church Lane and to a lesser extent, St John’s Walk, as the psychological core of the village. This is particularly powerful because it holds associations of different kinds, represented by the three types of centre, and at different levels of scale that are nested together. At the first level, because of the continuity and linkage evident in the distribution of symbols, this region can be regarded as a whole: a kind of super-centre, although there are weaknesses in continuity between the war memorial and church entrance. Within this there are component parts that have a more localised significance, but still at a relatively large scale, such as the Blue Bell, the space at the mouth of the drive-way to the old Vicarage, the school, the church and the triangle. Centres are evident at yet smaller scales within these, demonstrating that the larger centres are in fact nested and made up of smaller component parts, each of which hold their own significance in various ways (Plate 12).

Direction

Findings from the spatial sensation of direction tend to add further weight to conclusions highlighted above. Both categories (movement and view) reveal the significance of experiences that are well beyond the built structure of the village, and sensory tends to support that Church Lane has a special significance in the experiential potential of the village. In terms of kinetic, Kirby Hill appears to be experienced largely in terms of two adjoining triangles. The smaller one corresponds with the “triangle” walk around the Church. The larger is formed by connecting Leeming Lane, Church Lane and Dishforth Road. To some extent this is fairly predictable in that these are the main traffic-carrying roads into and around Kirby Hill, but their routine use links together Kirby Hill with the neighbouring settlements of Milby and Langthorpe in the experience of movement associated with village life. Also revealed is the significance of a roughly defined diagonal route that joins a point on Church Lane close to the entrance to St John’s Walk. That this appears quite prominently highlights the significance of the open space across fields to the immediate south-east of the village to the directional experiences of village life. The experience of view again reveals that places and objects well beyond the village area play a crucial role in the experiential character of Kirby Hill. This is especially notable to the north and north-east indicating again how important are the distant views across open fields towards the Hambleton Hills. That these distant views are possible is partly due to the topography which has Kirby Hill situated slightly proud of its surroundings suggesting that this modestly elevated position could be an important component to village identity, as well as its historical relevance as a settlement. The sensory map also appears to reveal a focus in the region of Church Lane. Partly this is from where many of the notable view sensations are located but also where most of the view focal points within the village are as well, with a particularly interesting clustering around where the war memorial is located. This suggests that there is a predominance of visually notable features in the vicinity of Church Lane as compared to the rest of the village. Another very interesting observation is the intensity of sensory experience that seems to focus from a relatively short stretch of Church Lane, beginning more or less at the mouth of Glebe Close and intensifying at Keepers Cottage. This appears to be a feature that may be associated with the gradient of the road, the way it changes direction and the sudden break in the built form which dramatises the distant view (Plate 13).

Transition

The configuration of transitional experiences highlights that these spatial sensations seem quite characteristic of Kirby Hill, suggesting a village character that is quite linear in nature composed of a sequence of corridor-like spaces, often with quite well defined “gateways” between them. All the transitional experiences recorded are associated with Leeming Lane and Church Lane only. To the north, the roundabout to the east side of the A1 appears strongly as a transitional experience and, although there are other points along the road approaching the village, the next strongest sensation is where the built form begins. Following that, the location defined by the mouth of Church Lane and the Blue Bell is a very significant thresh-
old experience. Leeming Lane to the north of the village can be defined more or less in terms of three segments. One between the mouth of Church Lane and the end of the village's built structure; the second and longest up to the A1; the last beyond the A1 to the west. Leeming Lane to the south is more complex although again three main segments can be identified, broadly defined by the location of strong thresholds. The configuration of threshold experiences to the south side of the village contributes further evidence for the incremental nature of the sense of village boundary here. The structure of this sequence, and its impact on the incremental nature of the approach into Kirby Hill, appears to be the result of a combination of subtle changes in road gradient, direction, spatial containment, and the gradual visual resolution of the Blue Bell as a focus. The main body of Church Lane appears broadly defined as two segments identified by strong threshold experiences, first at the mouth of the Lane, second at the location of the war memorial and finally at a point between Church Close and the entrance to the primary school. The second of these thresholds appears particularly strong and appears to be so because of a range of physical triggers, including: changes in the direction and gradient of the road; two large trees that arch the road at this point; the presence of the war memorial; and an expansion of space here immediately before a pinch point between buildings on either side of the road. Especially along Leeming Lane, the sequencing and character of these corridors and the threshold experiences that link them influence the way the village boundaries are understood, and the experience of arrival and departure. It also demonstrates, particularly when considered in the light of other findings, that the mouth of Church Lane is of pivotal significance to the spatial structure of the village for many reasons. Not least of which is that it defines the western pole of what appears to be the main experiential core of the village (Plate 14).

The experiential landscape of Kirby Hill

With some notable exceptions in certain places, Kirby Hill does not represent a typical picture-postcard view of a pretty North Yorkshire village. It could justifiably be considered unremarkable, however in revealing Kirby Hill’s experiential landscape nothing could be further from the truth. Kirby Hill has, hidden within it, a character and identity of tremendous complexity. This resides in the relationship between its inhabitants’ routine experience of village life and the ordinary places that sustain these experiences. Kirby Hill’s experiential landscape is multi-layered and rich in character beyond what its visual appearance might suggest. Furthermore, it appears to emanate from a clearly identifiable village core into the surrounding area like a magnetic field reaching out to embrace distant locations, including them also in its sense of identity. Kirby Hill’s core lies broadly along Church Lane and within this “magnetic field” has two poles: the Blue Bell forming the western pole and All Saints’ Church the eastern. There is much that could be done to realise the full potential of this part of the village as its defining core, but nevertheless, as it is, it is quite clear that currently it is Kirby Hill’s richest source of experiential potential. Emanating from this core are waves of village essence. The further away you go the weaker is the sense of Kirby Hill as a discrete independent place. It is as though, beyond certain points, Kirby Hill’s essence, or sense of place, gradually begins to blend with the surroundings. The closer in, the more intensely is the sense of Kirby Hill felt. From an experiential perspective Kirby Hill cannot be thought of as having boundaries, like a castle, inside of which it is and outside of which it is not. Instead, its sense of place seems to stretch out, embracing the surrounding fields, elements of the neighbouring settlements, and even the distant Hambleton Hills (Plate 15).

The sense of Kirby Hill projects for some participants out as far as the A1 to the west, over the fields and as far as Hambleton Hills to the north, and beyond Dishforth Road to embrace places along the tracks that run to the east. The southernmost point at which a sense of the village remains detectable is at the bridge over the river at Boroughbridge. These locations, even though quite distant from the main body of Kirby Hill, feature as experiences that some inhabitants interviewed associate with aspects of their village life.
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and in this sense mark the experiential boundaries of Kirby Hill, at some points overlapping with neighbouring places. For example, the bridge over the river at Boroughbridge was revealed as a small part of the identity of Kirby Hill, because it represents for at least one participant the point at which Kirby Hill finally finishes and becomes somewhere else. But, physically it much more obviously makes a contribution to the sense of place that is Boroughbridge. A more significant example is Coronation Hall, technically in Milby. Although this is relatively distant from the main body of Kirby Hill, its influence on the village's sense of place appears disproportionately large. This seems to be because of the significance that it holds as a symbol of Kirby Hill's community cohesion, along with the church and the school. It seems apparent from the interviews that, for many participants, these are not regarded as three separate places but are viewed much more as three parts of the same whole, with their physical separation being almost incidental in this respect.

The increasing strength of Kirby Hill's identity can be experienced particularly by travelling north along Leeming Lane. There is a case to be made for Kirby Hill beginning at the Leeming Lane, Skelton Road junction, developing in strength at the southern boundary of East View and continuing to intensify at Broadacres, eventually culminating in a sense of arrival at the mouth of Church Lane. Travelling north, most people experience an abrupt change at this point from arrival to the beginning of a sense of departure. The village sense of place is generally stronger beginning at East View which locates its southern boundary, includes all the built development to the west side of Leeming Lane, and up to the pond just past The Grange to define the northern boundary. The eastern boundary is the Dishforth Road. This probably corresponds with what most people would intuitively think of as constituting the village of Kirby Hill since it includes all its built elements and its landscape setting of immediately adjacent fields. It is clear from the analysis however, that this does not constitute the strongest sense of village identity in its entirety and here are some examples why. To start with, there is a significant perception among the inhabitants interviewed, although by no means a consensus, that the developments of Hill View and East View, clearly physically attached to Kirby Hill's main body of built form, do not in fact form a part of Kirby Hill. Some even go so far as to jettison nearly everything to the west side of Leeming Lane, apart from the Blue Bell, from their perception of what constitutes Kirby Hill. To some extent this is encouraged by the counterintuitive position of the political boundary between Langthorpe and Kirby Hill and the location of village name signs. But, along with other evidence from the evaluation, this seems indicative of a feeling that the "real" Kirby Hill actually lies to the east of Leeming Lane. Examination of the historical record tends to lend weight to this point of view. As well as the influence of the settlement boundaries, this may also have something to do with the bisecting effect of Leeming Lane and a certain ambiguity in the character of the location formed by the Blue Bell and the mouth of Church Lane. This place emerges as a pivotal location in the village, particularly from the south and is strongly perceived as the location signalling arrival at the village. But once there, partly because of the influence of the road, there is little that sustains the sense of arriving at somewhere. Instead it appears to be a location that marks the outpost of somewhere more interesting and inviting, and that somewhere happens to be to the east.

The essence of Kirby Hill seems to intensify still further at a closer level of scale. This includes the Blue Bell and the neighbouring Grange Farm as a western outpost. The northern boundary appears marked by the buildings and other physical features that enclose Church Lane at the north side, and to the east the triangle of Church Closes. The southern boundary is effectively given by the Church Banks field boundaries and includes the area known as Willow Garth. It is interesting to note that the majority of the village defined in this way is constituted from green open space on the south and east sides of a relatively small residential settlement currently configured in such a way as to almost entirely turn its back on this open space (Plate 16).

The experiential landscape of Kirby Hill shows clearly though that this is not the whole picture. There is another level of detail revealing that the routine experiences of its inhabitants,
their feelings about places in the village and the meanings and associations they hold, collectively define a distinct village core. This is where the experiential character of Kirby Hill's village life comes to focus and is where the strongest essence of what Kirby Hill is appears to reside. Its most westerly point is at the mouth of Church Lane and includes the Blue Bell Inn, its surrounding grounds, and the neighbouring Grange Farm buildings. This works as a beacon signalling where the village core appears to be on its approach. It is far less successful though in delivering a sense of arriving at somewhere distinctive and significant once there. This seems related to a range of factors including weak spatial definition on the Church Lane side, the bisecting impact of Leeming Lane and the surfacing treatment of the Blue Bell car park which continues the tarmac of the main road compromising the pub's sense of definition as a separate place. Further down Church Lane a distinctive corridor-like quality begins to develop, given partly by the rows of pollarded trees, and culminates with an implicit sense of arrival at an expansion in the open space afforded by the road swinging a little to the north. This is quite a complex place, partly because the spatial containment makes it one of the few open spaces in the village that does not have a distinct linear emphasis and partly because of features that give a very strong sense of transition out from it. That two of the buildings front directly onto this space seems to lend a sense of a traditional village green that has, in other places along Church Lane, been lost as a consequence of insensitive private development. The fact that Church Lane changes both direction and gradient at this point, coupled with the presence, either side of the road, of two large trees creating an archway gives a very strong sense of a gateway out from this space and into the next. Unfortunately, there seems to be a break in continuity of experiential intensity at this point and this does not pick up again until the entrance to the school. This has the effect of breaking the sense of a village core into two distinct parts.

The next component of the village core begins broadly at the school entrance and includes the grass area in front of the church Lych Gate and the church grounds together. Again this is an experientially important and complex location. Partly this appears to do with the social opportunities generated by the presence of the school and the church, and the wide range of associations that the church holds for people in the village. It seems also related to the strong sense of transition which marks the boundary of the main residential body of the village. It is here also that strong and dramatic views are available across the landscape to the north and east, and where the church as a visual and symbolic landmark becomes clearly apparent. In fact the strong sense of location that appears to be apparent here probably has a lot to do with a sensation of discovery, both of view and of church, afforded by the particular way the road bends and by the abrupt break in the building massing. This aspect of the village core includes the triangle routeway around the Church Closes which appears as one of the most treasured aspects of the village in terms of leisure activity and relaxation. It also appears at the junction with the Dishforth Road to be a crucial part of the sense of arrival at the village from the east and for many represents the first signal that home is close at hand. It also includes the relationship that is clearly apparent between the church, school and Coronation Hall. Although all obviously have independent functions, it is clear from some of the resident interviews that, at a very fundamental level, they are thought of as more or less interchangeable with respect to the social and community identity of the village. They are clearly more than mere buildings within which social activities, functions and meetings are held, but seem to represent three parts of the same whole that collectively symbolises Kirby Hill as a close knit and active community. The church and school are spatially proximate and this is one thing that contributes to the experiential strength of that part of the village, but Coronation Hall is in fact in Milby, virtually a mile away and yet it is very clear that this location is just as much a part of the identity of Kirby Hill as the other two (Plate 17).

The identity of Kirby Hill

Next we turn to consider how revealing the experiential landscape of Kirby Hill has helped inform the aspects of the Village Design Statement by
drawing out some issues in relation to the require-
ments of the original brief.

**What is special and important about Kirby Hill?**

Because of the over-riding impression presented by the village's physical structure as a collection of independently designed residential developments, largely devoid of any reference to village vernacular, it is not immediately apparent what special and important qualities Kirby Hill has. The region around the church as well as a scattering of other older buildings and elements of open space are without doubt special, but their presence in the village as a whole seems overwhelmed by the impact of the newer development. Visually it has overall coordination only in the sense that it has a collective of built form distinguishable against a wider rural setting. Interviews carried out with village residents reveal this to be a misleading impression. There is an emphatic sense from virtually all participants interviewed of a village defined as primarily a social entity and that the sense of, and desire to sustain and further develop, social cohesion in Kirby Hill overrides the physical structure of the village as its most important characteristic. It is nevertheless clearly evident that there is a spatial and physical expression to this sense of social and community identity. This seems best understood in terms of a gradation of intensity emanating from and with its strongest expression at what we have defined as the village core. Strong and valued though this is we detect an undercurrent of regret or frustration that the green spaces here do not entirely deliver what people would wish. This seems partly to do with their erosion in recent decades as a consequence of development pressure, lack of places within it for respite and relaxation, and some conflict of interests over its use. There are opportunities present to improve on this situation through judicious integration of parts of the large square of land to the west of the junction of Church Lane and St John's Walk. It seems however that this may have been missed as infill residential development continues to remove this from the public realm. Other special and important aspects are that Kirby Hill is surrounded by open fields and thereby retains a sense of physical inde-

dependence from surrounding settlements. This seems in part to be associated with reports of a rarefied quality to the air in Kirby Hill that is somehow different and superior to that of Boroughbridge. This perception is attributed to the relatively elevated location of Kirby Hill and introduces a topographical dimension to the sense of physical independence that for some seems significant. The openness and views to Hambleton Hills and "The White Horse" are very important and in part explain the attraction to walk the "triangle" a particular way round.

**Where is the neighbourhood?**

The team's initial survey anticipated a multiplicity of neighbourhoods largely because of the prevalence of block-like, inward looking residential developments. Whilst this was confirmed by the interviews to some extent the experiential reality is predictably more subtle. By far the most prominent impression to emerge from the interviews is that, as with the wider village, people seem to think of the concept of neighbourhood in a social and community sense, rather than in terms of physical or visual coherence. There are exceptions, but many seem to feel that the entire village constitutes their neighbourhood and the reasons for this seem predominantly to do with feelings of safety, fellowship and shared community interests, rather than a consequence of spatial or physical factors. Again though the experiential landscape analysis reveals that this conception of neighbourhood does have a spatial expression, although this manifests as a very elastic structure depending on what individuals wish to include as part of their realm. As detailed earlier, for some this can be quite expansive, extending way beyond where the village boundaries might intuitively be considered to exist, while others have a more compressed perception of neighbourhood.

**What is the distinct identity of the village?**

There is a strong sense of village identity in a social and community sense and this over-rides its physical structure. At one level this appears to have the effect of weaving together the Church, School and Coronation Hall into a unified social institution and, because the latter is not actually in Kirby Hill at all, seems to generate for some, the
feeling that Milby features in some sense as part of the identity of Kirby Hill. In a strictly social sense this also appears to extend to Langthorpe as well. This appears to be because of the galvanising effect that the making of the Coronation Hall has had on residents in the three communities. It seems very clear that the Hall is much more than a convenient shared facility, a receptacle for meetings and social events. It also seems to have an important symbolic meaning representing the collective effort put in by those that participated in bringing it about. This seems to have had a curious effect. On the one hand it seems very clear that there is a desire for the built mass of Kirby Hill to remain physically separate, but that in a social and community sense, Milby and Langthorpe are embraced into the definition of Kirby Hill as a village community. This feeling of social cohesion appears to be strengthened by bonds of association relating to the school catchment area and the fact that people from all three places worship at the same Church. This appears to suggest two things that may be significant: first is that the sense of community is slightly at odds with the village’s physical configuration; second is that Coronation Hall appears as an example of how community cohesion can be strengthened by new development projects as long as they are seen to be in the collective good, are generated by local initiative, and are amenable to local participation in decision-making processes.

**Where does the village start and finish?**

Possibly because of factors to do with the relationship between the village’s sense of identity as a community and its physical and spatial structure, defining where it begins and ends seems exceptionally complex. Two principle themes emerge though which help to illuminate the situation. First are issues relating to the village boundaries, and second are issues relating to the sense of arrival and departure from the village. Both have an incremental nature in that there appears not to be specific locations that mark where the village begins and ends, or where one feels a conclusive sense of arrival and departure.

Village boundaries: broadly these appear to extend beyond the line of the built settlement to include the surrounding fields. Most people inter-viewed seem to regard the A1 to mark the western boundary, although Back Lane to the eastern boundary of Cover Beggar Field seems to mark a significant edge for some. It seems clear that all built form to the east of Leeming Lane is certainly Kirby Hill, but there is substantial ambiguity about the extent to which the buildings to the west of Leeming Lane are included within perceptions of Kirby Hill’s boundaries. This seems to be due in part by the impact of Leeming Lane as a boundary, and also to the presence of road signs indicating where Kirby Hill and Langthorpe are. These road signs seem to be providing information about the village boundaries that runs counter intuitive to many people’s perceptions and this generates a significant lack of clarity about what is in and out along this western edge. Northern boundaries appear to be marked by the roundabout at the road junction at the A1 and the T junction on the Dishforth Road to the north-east of the village. The significance of the roundabout as a village edge seems to have been heightened by it being the location of a recent village protest against the proposed motorway service station, and to this extent, rather like Coronation Hall, provides another example of a physical structure that has acquired a symbolic significance as a consequence of cohesive community action. The village’s eastern boundary seems clearly to be the Dishforth Road. The southern boundary is much more difficult to define, but seems to extend down as far as Milby, and for some includes Milby, to the eastern side of Leeming Lane. To the west side of Leeming Lane, the gap in continuity of buildings at the southern edge of East View represents an obvious boundary, although some seem to regard Hill View and East View to fall outside the village boundary. This sensation seems strengthened by the effect of the poultry farm as presenting an undesirable feature that many would prefer to be associated with somewhere that is not Kirby Hill. There is some evidence that, for some, Kirby Hill actually really finishes at the roundabout by the canal before turning into Boroughbridge.

Arrival and departure: there is a build up to the sense of arrival and departure, rather than a single “gateway” type experience at each point of entry. The clearest to define is at the eastern point
of entry. Most people identify the cross roads on the Dishforth Road as the point at which they feel a sense of arrival at the village, and this seems driven by the sensation of change in direction towards the village and sight of the church as a landmark. From the north-west, the A1 roundabout seems to provide the first gateway point into the wider village environment. The location at the lay-by and pond provides a second significant point of arrival and then at the point where the road enters between The Grange and Manor Drive. The mouth of Church Lane seems to be the point at which most feel they have arrived at the village core, possibly heightened by the presence of the Blue Bell. From the south there seems to be a more complex incremental sense of arrival and departure that has much to do with a sequential combination of corridors, gateways and focal points acting together. Significant elements include the strong "corridor" effect at intervals along Leeming Lane, given by property and road boundary treatments; "horizon effects" due to the topography of the road including subtle change in direction; the visual impact of a brick building opposite the entrance to St John’s Walk, and the visual draw of the Blue Bell gable end which seems to signal the point of arrival.

**Significant places**

Three themes appear to characterise the attachment of significance to places in the village. These are: because they have historical connotations and provide links to the past; because they are socially meaningful; and because they are reminiscent of past enjoyments no longer available. Most of these are concentrated within the location we have defined as the village core and seem to contribute in various ways to an implicit sense of a village green. The strongest perception of a village green is the collective of linear grass verges, trees and open spaces either side of Church Lane and seems to extend from the mouth of Church Lane including the Blue Bell as its western boundary, down to the war memorial. There is however, a sense in which for some the totality of the village green extends beyond this to include the verges along the approach road from the A1, and further to the east to include the grass area in front of the church. There is a strong feeling that the integrity of the village green has been eroded over the years as a consequence of development pressure and there are signs of this continuing. In many ways this idea of a village green has the potential to act as a unifying green spine for the village core, linking together features and places along it that have emerged from the analysis as significant. These include the war memorial and its setting, the post box, and larger open space features like the triangle around Church Closes. This has emerged as a highly significant and complex social and restorative experience shared by many residents and is an extremely important component of the physical and social identity of Kirby Hill.

The church building and its landscape setting, perhaps unsurprisingly, has emerged from the analysis to be at the heart of the village, from which, as one participant put it, “all else radiates”. The significance of the church does not appear to lie only in its spiritual significance, although this is clearly important, but more in what it represents as a symbol of Kirby Hill’s community and social identity. This seems strengthened by its historic, landscape and architectural value as a village focal point and landmark. It is equally apparent that the church is regarded as one, although possibly the most significant, component in a wider social and community entity that includes the school and Coronation Hall as an integrated whole. Many seem to regard these buildings and what they provide and represent socially, as a collective entity beyond what might be expected by their spatial separation. Importantly, there remains the essence of a view that the Blue Bell should also be included as part of this “community whole”, but that recent developments have diminished its value and appeal as a local village pub. There is a general sense of loss apparent in this respect. This sensation can also be detected in respect of the Willow Garth and its nearby hedgerows, and the pond to the north-west of Kirby Hill. These are associated with pleasures past, relating to wildlife observation, relaxation and contact with nature that are no longer available probably largely owing to changes in agricultural practice. They remain though an important part of the way people see the totality of village life.
Conclusions

The analysis carried out at Kirby Hill has helped reveal and illuminate in some detail dimensions to village life, crucially relevant to the sense of village identity, that transcend its superficial visual appearance. These dimensions emanate from the way in which inhabitants experience village life, often subconsciously, through the places they come into contact with routinely and the meanings and associations they hold both at the scale of the whole village and in relation to places within and around it that have particular significance. Revealing Kirby Hill’s experiential landscape has given this a spatial expression through revealing patterns of open space experience. These help to explain the complex and elastic nature of the village boundaries, where the essence of Kirby Hill is felt most intensely, and that the village core is a composite of several distinguishable components working together to form its heart. It shows how the habits and emotions of individuals become embedded into the village landscape and how these aggregate into a picture of Kirby Hill’s collective social identity and how this is expressed through its buildings and open spaces. It provides a benchmark from which to examine Kirby Hill’s strengths and weaknesses in terms of how its spatial organisation might sustain the future evolution of its community. In this respect a number of themes can be identified.

Underpinning all of them is the universal consensus that the social cohesion and community identity of Kirby Hill must be sustained. It is widely appreciated that for this to happen it is necessary to realise that the community of Kirby Hill is a living and dynamic entity and that its continuation relies on periodic revitalisation that has two principal and related implications. The first of these is a collective desire to find ways to encourage greater participation in village life. This seems particularly important for people who do not currently share in the elements of social and community life focused on the church, school and Coronation Hall. The second lies in the generally inclusive attitude to welcome and embrace newcomers, particularly young families, to diversify and sustain life in the village but providing they make a positive contribution to community life. What this actually means in practical terms is hard to define, but it reflects a growing concern in the village that something of its identity as a community may be gradually eroded by an increase in the number of inhabitants that reside there but do not otherwise engage with village life. The really interesting question here then is if social sustainability is as central to the identity of Kirby Hill as it appears to be then in what ways might any future development pressure on the village either help of hinder it? The experiential landscape analysis offers food for thought in this respect as follows.

The most obvious thing not to do is allow any further residential development of the sort that has brought Kirby Hill to its present state. Specifically this means the sort of small self-contained housing developments that ignore village vernacular or are arranged to look inwards on themselves and turn their backs to the wider village. This should apply to development proposals both at the extremities of the village and within its existing main body of built form. The reasons for this are primarily to avoid a spread of anonymous suburban style mediocrity that contributes nothing to the visual identity or appeal of the village. It is also to reflect that internally orientated cul-de-sac type spatial layout is extremely unlikely to be conducive to the sort of social interactions necessary to meet the village’s aspirations. What is required instead is development that encourages greater permeability in the village because the more people can walk about, the more they will meet each other and the more they will gradually develop a sense of attachment to locations in the village they come across. This is graphically illustrated by the collective experiential landscape map which records such an intensity of experience focused on Church Lane and, albeit to a lesser extent, St John’s Walk. It is no coincidence at all that these two streets are literally the only ones in the whole of Kirby Hill where you can go in at one end and come out at another. Every other street in the village is a cul-de-sac of one kind or another and the only reason to use these streets is if you live there or if you are visiting. This might offer certain attractions but at the same time this sort of spatial organisation ster-
ilises diversity of social activity and interaction to such an extent that the build up of experiential intensity so evident along Church Lane, and so central to its role as the core of the village, will never be generated.

It is very clear, for many reasons and in many ways, that the inhabitants of Kirby Hill see themselves as distinct from Boroughbridge in particular. Even though there are peculiarities with respect to their perceived relations to Milby and Langthorpe, Boroughbridge is different: it even has different air! It is a matter important to village identity that a respectable gap be maintained to preserve Kirby Hill's sense of physical independence from Boroughbridge. There are also implications for perceptions of Kirby Hill's boundaries and the sense of arrival and departure to and from the village. The analysis reveals that Kirby Hill's inhabitants hold a diversity of views about where the boundaries are and as a result we concluded, from an experiential perspective, that where the village starts and finishes is fairly fluid. Perhaps more importantly though is the existence of quite a strong feeling that approaching and leaving the village is incremental. This contributes to a sequential experience which begins at or culminates at the Blue Bell, depending which way one is going. It seems possible that the sensation of arrival at Kirby Hill could be further improved by appropriate enhancement of the spatial sensations that contribute to this rather than through attention to boundaries. The location at the Blue Bell is extremely important because it also signals the beginning of what we have identified as the village core, and this dual role could be strengthened considerably to the benefit of village identity.

During the course of the project there began to emerge a strong feeling that Kirby Hill did not really have a core or centre, at least not in the way this is normally understood in relation to North Yorkshire villages. Nevertheless, many residents mentioned a village green, although where this actually was varied just about as much in local perception as did the village boundaries. It appeared important though that the village should have a clear and distinguishable village green but that somehow the possible candidates were insufficient in this respect. The analysis suggested this might be because many of the green spaces in the village had become so compressed and disjointed as a result of development pressure that a clear sense of the village green had diminished in the collective psyche. During the analysis however, it began to clarify that the largely linear green open space either side of Church Lane was most often identified as village green-like, particularly the wider open space where the war memorial stands. There was also an expression about the desirability of the grass area in front of the church as a potential village green and the experiential landscape map clearly shows this area in particular to be pivotal in the village. It is a pity in some ways that there is an unfortunate break in the sense of continuity between these two locations as together they are obviously important elements in the core of the village. Nevertheless it raises the interesting prospect that, rather than having one single central green open space as might be typical of many traditional villages, Kirby Hill might strike out for independence and be distinguishable by having a sequence of small linked green spaces each associated with, and giving specific identity to, a particular part of the village. It is in fact possible to see in the current village layout that potential for this might once have existed as there are open spaces that could have contributed had they been available. All of these are however, already in private ownership, or are in the process of being built on. In addition to being related to issues of village identity, the lack of socially relevant open space, particularly in relation to provision for children and to reduce conflicts in use of current open spaces, appeared as a recurrent theme from the analysis. This is a very problematic matter for the village because the combination of past and continuing development pressure within the village is reducing ever faster the potential to respond effectively. It is clear though that there are valued and used open spaces, particularly within the fields immediately to the south-east of the village that already feature strongly in the village identity.