

# Collaboration to Enhance Culture and Arts on Pulau Ketam Malaysia as a Strengthening of Socio-Cultural Identity

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#### Abstract

Every region has areas that are far from the centre of government or the centre of community activity. Geographical conditions and social differences are the cause of the difficulty of a region to keep up with the times. This has an impact on the lagging of the community in various aspects ranging from the economy, cultural advancement, health, education, and so on. PulauKetam is a disadvantaged area located in Malaysia. The area is a coastal region that has limited access to be improved in all fields. There needs to be an effort to encourage the promotion of the community to maintain the socio-culture in the area. international community service activities are one solution that can be done. The method used in this community service activity is to identify problems in the field. The data found is then analysed to find solutions in community service activities. Activities related to art that are applied as an approach to the community and make a contribution are carried out in the form of collaboration. Fine art is partof a visual product that can be a medium to enter the community on Ketam Island. Repainting facilities and infrastructure using attractive images, holding open exhibitions, and art workshops are examples of means to maintain the community, especially related to the socio-cultural field. This is done to encourage the openness of the community to continue to improve progress from various fields that can become potential.

Keywords: Pulau Ketam, International Service Community, Malaysia, Art, Socio-Cultural

#### Introduction

*Pulau Ketam*, a quaint island off the coast of Klang, Malaysia, is renowned for its unique blend of Chinese heritage, traditional fishing culture, and vibrant local arts. However, as with many small, culturally rich communities, modern influences and global trends pose challenges to preserving and promoting these unique traditions (Abdulaali et al., 2022). Recognizing the need for cultural preservation, various stakeholders have joined hands in community service initiatives to enhance the island's arts and culture, fortifying its socio-cultural identity. These efforts are not just about safeguarding traditions but fostering a dynamic space for cultural expression that resonates with both locals and visitors (Jaffar & Harun, 2019).

*Pulau Ketam* is known for its vibrant and distinct culture, which blends Chinese heritage with a traditional fishing lifestyle. Globalization has introduced modern influences that increasingly threaten the preservation of this unique cultural identity. Younger generations are becoming more detached from local customs, prioritizing global trends over traditional practices (Chung CY, Liew TS, 2015). The rapid spread of technology, modern media, and changing values has diluted the significance of local arts and crafts, leading to a gradual erosion of *Pulau Ketam*'s socio-cultural fabric. Without intervention, these trends could lead to the loss of intangible heritage elements such as traditional music, dance, storytelling, and craftsmanship (Afzal & Hussain, 2020). Targeted community service activities focusing on arts and culture are needed to safeguard and promote these traditions (Choo, 2018).



For cultural preservation efforts to be successful, active community involvement is essential. However, on *Pulau Ketam*, there is a need for more coordinated efforts to involve the local population in cultural initiatives. Many residents feel disconnected from formal cultural preservation programs, either because they are unaware of them or because they do not see how they can participatemeaningfully. Additionally, existing programs may not fully reflect the needs and aspirations of the local population, leading to low engagement levels (YONG, 2013). Community service activities that emphasize collaboration with local stakeholders, ensuring that residents have a voice in shaping culturalinitiatives, are necessary to create a sense of ownership and pride in the island's cultural identity. Empowering the community to lead and participate in cultural preservation projects will strengthen social cohesion and the collective effort to protect the island's heritage. These challenges underscore the critical need for well-coordinated community service activities that focus on arts and culture, helping*Pulau Ketam* protect, promote, and evolve its socio-cultural identity while addressing economic, environmental, and generational issues (Evans, 1918).

Collaborative projects spearheaded by local authorities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and art collectives have been instrumental in this cultural revival. These initiatives often involve artists from across Malaysia and beyond, who engage with the local population in workshops, art festivals, and cultural exhibitions (Lim et al., 2010). By fostering collaboration between external experts and local artisans, these programs provide opportunities for skills development, while promoting *Pulau Ketam*'s distinctive identity. The emphasis is on creating a sustainable cultural economy where local arts and crafts gain visibility, both within Malaysia and internationally. A significant aspect of these community service activities is the role of educational outreach. Schools and youth groups on *Pulau Ketam* have been actively involved in cultural workshops and heritage preservation projects. This hands-on engagement aims to inspire the younger generation to take pride in their cultural roots while learning new skills in traditional crafts, dance, and music. These programsinstill a sense of ownership in the island's future leaders, encouraging them to carry forward the legacy of *Pulau Ketam*'s rich socio-cultural heritage (Ngai Weng & Weng, 2009).

These initiatives address the island's growing tourism potential by integrating culture and arts into the visitor experience. Tourism has become a vital industry for *Pulau Ketam*, and enhancing cultural offerings ensures that visitors gain a deeper understanding of the island's identity. Guided cultural tours, art installations, and traditional performances have been incorporated into tourist itineraries, making culture a central aspect of the local economy (Kholis, 2024). Community service activities in this domain also provide economic benefits, allowing local artisans and performers to thrive in a rapidly changing environment (Fikri et al., 2020).

Another important component of the community service efforts is environmental sustainability, intertwined with cultural preservation. The traditional fishing lifestyle of *Pulau Ketam*, for instance, isdeeply connected to the surrounding mangroves and marine ecosystem (ROZALI, 2018). Initiatives that raise awareness about environmental conservation, such as eco-friendly art projects using recycled materials, ensure that the island's natural resources are preserved alongside its cultural traditions. This holistic approach helps integrate the island's cultural and environmental identity into a coherent vision for the future (A, 2018). The involvement of local residents has been crucial in ensuring the success andsustainability of these cultural initiatives. By collaborating with external partners, the community retains a sense of control and direction over how their cultural heritage is represented and shared. Thiscooperative approach has strengthened community bonds and empowered the island's residents to actively participate in shaping their cultural narrative, rather than passively watching it evolve due to



external influences (Zakaria & Yusof, 2024).

# Methods

To address the challenges facing *Pulau Ketam*'s cultural heritage, a multi-faceted community service initiative focused on arts and culture is essential. This initiative would involve collaboration between local residents, government bodies, NGOs, and external artists, aiming to revitalize and preserve the island's socio-cultural identity (Timok Youth Center, 2017). The first step is to establish cultural education programs that engage youth through workshops in traditional crafts, music, and dance. By integrating modern techniques with heritage art forms, these programs would make cultural preservation relevant to the younger generation, inspiring them to take ownership of their roots while gaining practical skills (Asiva Noor Rachmayani, 2015).

The second component is the creation of sustainable economic opportunities for local artisans. By organizing regular cultural festivals and exhibitions, both on the island and in mainland Malaysia, artisans would have a platform to showcase their work to a broader audience. Collaborating with tourism operators to integrate local arts into tourist experiences would further provide income streams for these artisans (Asiva Noor Rachmayani, 2015). Programs offering training in marketing and e- commerce would enable artists to sell their crafts online, expanding their market reach while preserving traditional techniques. The project should include infrastructure development, such as building community art spaces and performance venues where cultural activities can thrive (Ismawan et al., 2022). These spaces would serve as hubs for artistic collaboration, where local and external artists canwork together on creative projects that highlight the island's heritage (Sunan, n.d.). By promoting eco-friendly art practices, such as using recycled materials in crafts and performances, these spaces can also emphasize environmental sustainability, protecting the natural surroundings that are integral to *Pulau Ketam*'s cultural identity (Ummah, 2019).

An integral part of the solution is the incorporation of cultural tourism. Guided cultural tours, traditional performances, and hands-on craft experiences would be offered to visitors, allowing them toconnect with *Pulau Ketam*'s unique cultural landscape. This would not only attract more visitors but also foster a deeper understanding of the island's history and customs. Involving the local community in these tourism efforts ensures that the benefits of tourism are shared among residents while strengthening their connection to their cultural heritage (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021). The initiative would emphasize collaboration and community empowerment. Local residents would have anactive role in decision-making processes, ensuring that the direction of cultural projects aligns with their needs and aspirations. Through inclusive partnerships, this initiative would foster social cohesion and pride in *Pulau Ketam*'s cultural identity, ensuring that cultural preservation efforts are sustainable and community-driven. This comprehensive approach would ultimately strengthen the island's socio- cultural identity and create a vibrant, resilient future for its arts and culture (Rusli et al., 2024).

# **Results and Discussion**

*Pulau Ketam* village was established in the year 1865. It is located in the district of Petaling Jaya, Selangor state. The main attractions in *Pulau Ketam* are its beautiful scenery, delicious food, multiracialculture, and festivals. Its main economic activities are fishing and export of seafood. These are also themain sources of income of the villagers. *Pulau Ketam* is an island which was originally covered by mangrove swamp. This island is given by the name *Pulau Ketam* (Crab Island) because of the many crabs in this area. However, in the past, the island was called as Pulau

Ke Tong (directly translated from Chinese – 吉洞岛). After independence of Malaya, this island was

renamed *Pulau Ketam* (translatedfrom Malay to Chinese – 吉胆岛). This island has a history of about 150 years.

*Pulau Ketam* village is a village that is located at *Pulau Ketam* in Klang district, Selangor. There are several islands which can be found around *Pulau Ketam*. For instance, Pulau Klang which is about4km east from *Pulau Ketam*, Pulau Tengah which is 0.5km south from *Pulau Ketam*, and Pulau Selat Kering, Pulau Pintu Gedong, Pulau Che Mat Zin which are about 7.5km south from Pulau Klang. These islands are uninhabited. Klang is the only city that is close to these islands – approximately 40km east from *Pulau Ketam*. The rivers flowing through the village allow the fishermen easy access from the seafor loading and unloading of goods. Tourists often visit the local fish farms, mangrove swamps, templesand well-known seafood restaurants. In addition, tourists enjoy bicycle tours and travel around *Pulau Ketam*, experience the living of a simple life in the village. In the year 2015, *Pulau Ketam*'s populationis about 9,000 only. According to the village Head, this village was founded in 1865 with a very smallpopulation of Chinese villagers from the shing community flourished. However, just before the start of the 21st century, *Pulau Ketam*'s population declined steadily.

Before this village was established in 1865, there were 3 Hainanese fishermen from Port Klang who used to venture out to the mangrove swamps of *Pulau Ketam* to catch crabs and prawns. Over time, they found that they were limited in the amount of sea food they could transport to Port Klang with theirboats. They then decide to build small huts and a loading bay on the island. The bountiful harvest of seafood in this area attracted more and more people to settle on the island. 3 During World War II, Malaya came under Japanese rule. Many people fled to *Pulau Ketam* to avoid the harsh treatment of the Japanese. This led to a further increase in the island's population. *Pulau Ketam*'s history records two major fires which destroyed many homes. In 1967, the fire gutted about 200 houses while the 1972fire destroyed about 80 shops and restaurants. The possible cause of the fire is the burning of incense and other prayer paraphernalia during festivals. Fortunately, there was no casualty in both fires.

Young people nowadays are eager to live at other places instead of *Pulau Ketam* and this makesthe population drop drastically", said the village Head, Mr. Cha Keng Lee. Mr Cha laments that the village will disappear if this trend continues. The village's current population of 8,000 is in sharp contrast to its peak of 20,000 people in the last century. In recent decades, many youths prefer to migrate urban areas in search of better employment opportunities. *Pulau Ketam* village's population is 93% Chinese with a small group of Malay, Indian and Orang Asli villagers. Religions practised in this villageincluded Taoism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism and Christianity. Although Taoists and Buddhists form the vast majority of villagers, we see temples as well as a mosque and a church in the village. This multi-ethnic society lives in harmony. It is to be noted that, beside *Pulau Ketam* village, there is anothervillage named Sungai Lima Sweet (population 1,000+) on the same island. This village is populated byChinese residents from the Hokkien dialect group.

Before the fires in 1967 and 1972, all buildings in *Pulau Ketam* were made of wood and this made it easy for the fire to spread through the village. New houses and shops have since been built. In 2015, the government built 8 new houses for the original settlers of the village. Through their initiativeand cooperation with each other, residents have built the remaining 1,300+ houses in the village. The only access to this village is by boat. It takes at least 45 minutes to travel from *Pulau Ketam* to Port Klang. There are 8 ferries operating each day and each ferry can carry up to 80 passengers. On weekdays, each ferries makes about 14 trips daily whereas 22 trips are available

during weekends and public holidays. The increased number of trips on weekends and public holidays is to cater to the manytourists. The price for one-way adult ticket is RM7.00 and RM3.50 for children below 12 years old. Around 500 local tourists and 50 foreign tourists on average visit the village every month. Concrete bridges are found in the village with the exception of the boat loading bay area where wooden bridges are built. Villagers normally either walk by foot or bicycle around the village. There are also many villagers who ride motorcycles. For the benefit of tourists, there are also ferries at Port Klang which goas far as Tanjung Balai, Indonesia. In addition, there is a Star Cruise terminal 10km from Port Klang at an island called Pulau Indah. Tourists can purchase cruise packages to Penang, Langkawi or Phuket from this terminal.

Since the village is located on an island, it is not surprising that the main economic activity is fishing and the export of seafood. In the past, the fishermen's boats were not motorized. When engine-powered boats were introduced, the fishermen's catch increased multi-fold. Most fishermen sell their catch to middlemen who then transport the seafood to towns and cities in West Malaysia. Although the fishermen can earn more by selling directly to consumers and retailers, many do not do so because theyare not familiar with the market price or do not have the means to transport the seafood.

Besides fishing in the open sea, many villagers are new engaged in the rearing if fish, such as grouper and giant perch, and crabs. There are currently 11 aquaculture farms at *Pulau Ketam* and the seafood from these farms are sold to local restaurants and nearby hotels or transported to the cities. Some aquaculture farms have home-stay packages which attract tourists who wish to know more aboutfish farming and to experience life on a fish farm. Besides fishing and aquaculture, villagers are also engaged in boat making, seafood restaurants, retailer shops, souvenir shops and other small business in Pulau Ketam. Pulau Ketam is especially well known for its seafood restaurants which are a major touristattraction. There are several tour agencies on the island and they conduct tours of the island which cover the fish farms, Taoist and Buddist temples and shipbuilding yards. Visitors often pick up souvenirs fromvillage shops which sell pencils, badges, key chains and other momentos of the island.



Figure 1. **Documentation of Community Service Team with other General Members** 

**Source:** Personal Documentation (2022)



There are three primary schools and a secondary school in *Pulau Ketam*: SJK (C) Hwa Lien, SJK(C) Keng Chee, SJK (C) Sin Bin, and SMK *Pulau Ketam* respectively. All the primary schools also provide kindergarten education. Among the primary schools, SJK (C) Hwa Lien has the longest historyas it is formed from the merger of former Hwa Nan School and Lien Keong School. SJK (C) Hwa Lien was founded in the 1930's with the help of villagers in *Pulau Ketam*. Originally, there were two schoolsname HWAN NAN and LIEN HWA KIANG. During World War II (1942-1945), these schools were closed. As a consequence, there are many elderly people on the island who are illiterate. In 1945/1946, the schools were reopened. To address financial issues, senior management of the 2 schools agreed ona merger and named the new school LIEN HWA in 1950. In 1952, the school moved to its present address which was originally a cinema. The cinema building was brought by the Tiong Hwa Dealers Association of *Pulau Ketam* and later donated to the school. From 1968 to 1977, funds from the schoolcommittee and the government were used to build 9 classrooms. In 1980, the basketball court was rebuilt. Currently, the school has four buildings including a two storeys block and a new hall which werecompleted in 1996.



Figure 2 Interaction with the Local Community on Ketam Island

Source: Personal Documentation (2022)

Figure 3 Community Service Activities by Painting the School's Wooden Walls wit<u>h the Commun</u>ity Service Team



Source: Personal Documentation (2022)



**School Wall Painting Results** 

Figure 4

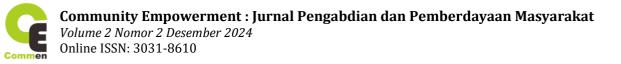
Source: Personal Documentation (2022

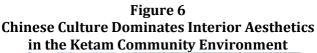
Besides great teachers, the school has a range of equipment and facilities, e.g. a computer room, a library, music room, science room and living skills room. In the great hall, there are 3 badminton courts and spacious stage to carry out all extra-curricular activities of the school. From time to time, the government and private organizations have donated generously for the school's expansion – the construction of more classrooms and upgrade of existing facilities. SJK (C) Keng Chee was built in 1946. The school is located in Bagan Teochew, which is 3km from *Pulau Ketam* village. The school was initially established with the help of donations from local leaders. Subsidies from government were approved in 1958. The school building includes the administrative office, headmaster's office, sport equipment store and classrooms. Currently, there are 6 classrooms and five specials rooms, including APD room, an ABM room, a music room, a science room, and a Life Skills room. In 1987, resource centers and school canteens were constructed. 11 Although there schools in *Pulau Ketam* have existed for many decades, the villagers do not seem to place adequate emphasis on education. As a result, the dropout rate for the SMK Pulau Ketam is one of the highest in Selangor state. Many youths look for better work opportunities on the mainland and many of those who remain on the island take over their family business. Unfortunately, there is little effort to improve the mode of operation of these family businesses and this limits future growth of the local economy.

Figure 5 Sea Atmosphere on Ketam Island and the Local Community's Stilt Houses



**Source:** Personal Documentation (2022)







**Source:** Personal Documentation (2022)

About 93% of the islanders are Chinese, followed by 5% of Malays and 2% of Indians and others. Most Malays and Indians are not originally from *Pulau Ketam* but are transferred by government departments work here as teachers and policemen. On the other hand, the majority of Chinese are involved in fishing, fish farming and small businesses. The main language used in *Pulau Ketam* is Mandarin. However, most villagers know other languages such as Bahasa Malaysia and English as wellin order to communicate with other races and foreigners. The Chinese dialects spoken in *Pulau Ketam*include Hainanese, Hokkien and Teochew. There are many chinese temples in *Pulau* Ketam. A Chinese Taoist temple, generally called "Gong", "Guan", or "Miao" in Chinese, is the place of worship where Taoists perform their religious ceremonies. These temples blend Taoist beliefs and ideas on construction with traditional Chinese thought and methods of construction. The significant symbols used in a Taoisttemple are dragons, phoenixes, rock tigers, celestial beings and animals. Taoist temples of different sizes are scattered all over *Pulau Ketam*. Generally, they can be divided into three kinds: palace-like, ordinary temples, simple huts or caves. All temples nevertheless serve the same function. Normally, villagers pray to the temple deities for a fruitful, long and smooth sailing life. The islanders do not worship one universal God. Instead, they believe in a pantheon of local, modest deities who perform various functions to assist people in their daily lives. For example, there are religious ceremonies for the sea gods to bless those who go out to sea.

Figure 7 Implementation of an Artwork Exhibition by the Community Service Team tha<u>t can be Witnessed</u> by Local Residents



**Source:** Personal Documentation (2022)



A residential house has been converted into the village church. According to the village Head, the church is normally open on weekends. Christian weddings, baptisms, Christmas activities as well as weekly prayers are held here. There is also a mosque for Muslims in *Pulau Ketam*. This is where Muslim prayers and festivals are held. There are also clan associations or societies in *Pulau* Ketam which are of historical significance and have helped in dealing with social issues. In the past, most islanders were single males and the clan association was actually the place where they lived. As time goes by, these fishermen married and moved out from the association. The clan associations 14 buildingthen became empty and the villagers decided to turn these places into social gathering points. Over time, more and more associations and societies with different purposes were established, including Hainan, Cheah, Chua, Tan and Buddhist associations. When the village fishermen are not out at sea, they spend time mending their nets and repairing their boats. During monsoon season, all fishermen areforced to stay on the island, many spend their time preserving or processing their catch, e.g. making salted fish and dried squids. They also socialize and exchange information on fishing techniques. The culture of *Pulau Ketam* is different from the mainland: the main mode of transport for weddings is decorated boats; the funeral ceremony is often called "fish porridge"; and all ethnic groups on the islandcelebrate religious festivals together. Furthermore, tourists travel to the island during these festivals to experience the festive and harmonious atmosphere with islanders.

Waste management at *Pulau Ketam* is not effective. Garbage is collected by Majlis Perbandaran Klang (MPK) trucks on alternate days but this is not adequate. Garbage is piled up at many spots aroundthe village, and this is a health hazard and a source of pollution. In addition, there are stray animal andpests which feed on this garbage. All in all, the piles of garbage are an eyesore for locals and for tourists. This situation is further worsened during festive season. Garbage is sometimes thrown into the sea andthis is a threat to marine life. Second, there is a shortage of manpower and a declining population. Manyfrom the younger generation are not keen to work as fishermen or in the fish farms and have out migrated to urban areas. As a result, local businesses stagnate and this in turn diminishes the attractiveness of *Pulau Ketam* as a place for new investment.

There is only one market on the island. This causes inconvenience to those villagers who stay far away from the market. The poor road condition makes travel to the market even more challenging, especially for the elderly. "It is time wasting and tiring that I need to travel far from my houses to the market to buy vegetables and meat." said a lady who lives on the island. She proposed that the market should operate at different places instead of one fixed place. Fourthly, there is shortage of land for plantations or for villagers to grow crops. This limits the sources of income of villagers. Fifth, there is neither a dental clinic nor a hospital in *Pulau Ketam*. Most villagers have to travel to Port Klang for medical care. The boats and ferries which transport villagers to the mainland have to deal with the tideand water level, and this means that the time they can operate is uncertain. When the waves are too high, it is dangerous to travel by boat. However, when the tide is low boats could be entangled in seaweed, causing damage to the boat's engine. Unfortunately, there is no access to the island other thanby boat or ferry.

The main attraction for tourists is the seafood at *Pulau Ketam*. During weekends and public holidays many tourists visit the island for the food as well as the village scenery and ambience – houseson stilts, right by the sea. Besides having seafood meals, there are also snacks like la la kuih, oyster omelets, and fried ice-cream. There are tour companies in *Pulau Ketam* which provide boat tours to themangrove forests and fish farms. The mangrove swamps have their unique population of flora and fauna. The fish farms in the sea boast of better qualities fish which do not have the smell of mud, an attribute of fish which are bred in fresh water. A popular activity for tourists is to ride bicycles round the village. Bicycles are available for rent at RM5 per day. Tourists also shop



for salt fish, belacan (fermented shrimps paste), anchovies, dried small shrimps and other preserved seafood.

Temples are important tourist attractions at *Pulau Ketam*. Buddhist and Taoist visitors often takethe opportunity to pray at these temples. Tourists take pictures of the temples which have beautiful design and architectural features. There are 4 main temples at *Pulau Ketam* and these places are crowdedwith worshippers and tourists especially during religious festivals. Some tour leaders bring tourists to visit the local shipyards where fishing boats are repaired or made. The maintenance and manufacture of fishing boats locally is important for *Pulau Ketam*'s fishermen.

In the past, seafood from *Pulau Ketam* was sold locally and in neighbouring areas. Today, the seafood is sold in cities like Kuala Lumpur and exported to Singapore. There are many business opportunities in the fishing industry as well as in the preservation and processing of seafood. It is to be noted that *Pulau Ketam*'s belacan is very fragrant and delicious. Homestay programmes provide small-business opportunities for villagers. Besides opening their doors to tourists, villagers may also organize visit to tourist attraction on the island. It is important that such programmes are well publicized to attractmore visitors

# Conclussion

The collaboration to enhance culture and arts on *Pulau Ketam* exemplifies how community service activities can strengthen socio-cultural identity. Through partnerships between local residents, artists, NGOs, and governmental bodies, the island's heritage is preserved, its cultural economy is revitalized, and its younger generation is empowered. These efforts showcase *Pulau Ketam* not just as a tourist destination, but as a living, breathing cultural ecosystem that thrives on its rich history and collaborative spirit.

The City Council of Klang should arrange for garbage collection on a daily basis. This is to prevent accumulation of garbage on the island. Besides that, large disposal bins are necessary at a fewlocations on the island. Villagers must learn to properly dispose their rubbish instead of throwing themanywhere. For the immediate future, foreign workers may have to be brought in to deal with the shortage of labour in the fishing and fish farming industry. In the longer term, the government should look into providing incentives which could motivate village youths to continue working in the village. Villagersneed better access to a market or markets which sell vegetables, fruit and meat. Perhaps a new market could be built or the location of the market could change on different days of the week. Staffing and facilities at the local government clinic needs to be improved. Measures should be taken to ensure that there is at least one doctor on call every day. Perhaps leaders of the village could highlight these demands to the relevant health authorities. On the island, the only vehicle that is most widely used is the bicycle. This is all because the roads on the island are so narrow. Fortunately, most pathways nowadays are made of concrete instead of wood which was used in the past. While motorcycles are alsofound on the island, bicycles remain the more popular mode of transport. It is recommended that a smallpetrol station be set up on the island for the convenience of motorcyclists and, where possible, roads/pathways should be broadened for the safety and convenience of villagers and visitors.

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