3. Design and the Built Environment

Objective

New dwellings should be of good quality construction, using local materials and designed to be sympathetic to the character of existing landscape and buildings, with scale, form and density to be of similar proportions to the existing; the principal aim is to protect and enhance the beauty of the Parish.

Introduction

The overall purpose of the Neighbourhood Plan Design Group is to provide a Design Guide for prospective developers of new housing, required through Government directive, to support Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) in achieving their housing quota to be constructed by the year 2033. Benenden is located in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and as such, any new development in this area must be designed so that it sits sensitively within its surroundings. It is current TWBC policy that any significant new developments are restricted to expanding the existing limits of built development (LBD) and not built as individual settlements within the countryside. To this end, our Design Group has studied the three main settlements in the Benenden Parish, i.e. Benenden Village, Iden Green and East End, in order to assess the predominant characteristics of the existing housing in each area. It is anticipated that any prospective developer will access these assessments and can begin to understand why we as parishioners want to live here and why we want to ensure that any new development is sympathetically designed. The main characteristics of every house in these settlements is noted in Appendices XX to this document and a percentage given for each characteristic in our policy documentation. We believe that by having an understanding of the weighting that each characteristic holds, the designer can begin to formulate their designs to have similar characteristics to the adjacent settlement. We have drafted our design policies to complement those of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 and the Tunbridge Wells current Local Plan.

Policy Justification

The Neighbourhood Plan area lies in the north-east of the High Weald, in Kent, a stretch of important landscape character that has been designated an Area of Oustanding Natural Beauty (AONB). This is a medieval landscape of wooded, rolling hills, studded with sandstone outcrops; small, irregular-shaped fields; scattered farmsteads; and ancient routeways. It is this landscape character that the High Weald AONB Management Plan seeks to preserve and this Neighbourhood Development Plan contains planning policies and objectives that are complementary to this work.

With this landscape context in mind, all new development proposals should have regard to the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Landscape Character Assessment, 2017.

All housing development proposals should also have regard to the Policies set out in the Benenden Neighbourhood Development Plan.

Any new development, both residential and non-residential, should be shaped and influenced by the traditional character and style of the existing settlements within the parish. All new developments should reference the local context and demonstrate the use of high quality materials and styles appropriate to the location. Development around the edges of the settlements should be sensitive to the rural and historic context by reflecting the character of buildings in proximity to adjacent countryside.

The aim for all new developments should be for them to leave a positive architectural legacy, to be sensitive to their local context and environment and enhance the character of the Benenden Parish.

Process

In order to understand the key characteristics of dwellings in the Benenden Parish, the Housing Design Group carried out a comprehensive building survey in the three main Character Areas – Benenden village, Iden Green and East End. This survey noted the material composition of all dwellings within the parish and identified individual building features. The surveys show that each of the areas has their own distinct individual building characteristics; for example, Iden Green has predominantly white weatherboarding whilst Benenden village is mainly tile-hung and East End has mainly brick-built structures. Common to all the main Character Areas is their remoteness and rural setting. Reference should be made to the Conservation Areas Appraisal (2005) as reviewed by the Neighbourhood Plan Design Group in 2018 (Benenden and Iden Green Conservation Areas Appraisal 2018) (supporting document).

Captions for following pages:
Top: A T-shaped building designed to look like a house but in fact containing 4 1 or 2 bed flats.
Centre: A detached 4-bedroom house with tile-hung upper façade, clay tile roof, mottled brick lower facade with dentil brick course running just below the hanging tiles. A substantial canopy over the front door is mirrored over each of the main upper floor windows. The front garden is laid to lawn with hedging planted at the boundary.
Bottom: Detached 2-bedrrom flat over a double brick-built car bay and bin storage. Upper faced finished in pre-finished fibre cement weatherboarding, a more realistic wood alternative to PVC.

Design

New housing developments must be designed in accordance with this Neighbourhood Plan's Housing Design Policies HD1-9 inclusive.

Design and built environment

Policies

Proposals for all forms of new development must plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive built and landscaping design, at the same time demonstrating they have sought to conserve local distinctiveness and the aesthetic qualities of traditional rural settlements and buildings found in the Kent High Weald AONB.

The Design and Access Statement, at planning application stage, should incorporate an assessment reflecting the following policies

Policy HD1 General Appearance
Any new development should conserve the distinct character of the local existing built environment, should respect the density, footprint, separation and features of the surrounding area and the scale and bulk of new buildings should be in keeping with the local area [1].
a) The height of buildings which should be in keeping with the heights of building in the local area [3].
b) Styles and materials that relate to the existing built environment for the local area will be encouraged including roof construction materials [2].
c) New developments should generally maintain the traditional appearance and layout of the built environment [1] but we would consider innovative, high quality, exceptional modern design which would significantly enhance its setting and be sensitive to the defining characteristics of the surrounding area
d) Materials and styles similar to those incorporated in buildings in the more historic parts of the parish will be encouraged [4].
e) Developers are, however, encouraged to adopt new materials and technologies to achieve sustainable, low-carbon, energy saving designs.
Any chimney, which is constructed, should be a working chimney

Attention should be paid to our Character Assessment for each Character Area. It is considered that developers should preserve and reflect the character of the particular location. The design should incorporate the sensitive use of colour and materials to be cohesive with the local surroundings. Developers are encouraged to use the High Weald AONB Unit's colour study (ref xx).

Policy HD2 Boundaries
Plot boundaries should be designed to have a green appearance, such as native hedging, with no solid fencing [5] and green spaces should be included within the development as amenity areas and private gardens adjacent to the properties [6]. In pursuance of policies G7 and G8 (pp xx) sufficient landscaping will be required to reflect the existing built environment adjacent to the development. Existing mature trees should be retained to provide open spaces within the proposed development and are considered essential to maintain the rural nature of the area[7] as well as to provide adequate amenity space for each dwelling.

Attention should be paid to our Character Assessment for each Character Area. Any design should include open green spaces of appropriate scale and quality in order to promote health and wellbeing. A mix of indigenous tree planting should be incorporated to give an aesthetically pleasing street view and reflect the rural locality and to minimise the impact on the AONB

Policy HD3 Dark Skies

In order to maintain the Benenden dark skies policy [9] street and security lighting is discouraged. Any private floodlighting should be proportionate to the particular location and to be on short timing devices.

There is minimal artificial lighting in the Parish. New developments should not introduce inappropriately bright lighting at night over pathways or other areas within the site. Artificial lighting at night creates light pollution and is detrimental to wildlife and to the rural nature of the Parish. 'Smart' or lighting on short timing devices would be more environmentally friendly also be more efficient (climate change see AONB MR). Sites on top of the ridges or very open sites would be particularly impactful and low lighting levels would be expected to be used.

Attention should be paid to the Character Assessment for each Character Area. The Parish has repeatedly stressed a wish to preserve Benenden's dark skies.
See Guidance notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light, the Institution of Lighting Engineers, 2005

Policy HD4 Footpaths

All footways/footpaths in a new development should be on one side of the road only, to reflect the rural character of the local area [6]. Materials used for the footway to be sensitive to the rural setting

This is to reflect existing local custom in the layout of footpaths in Benenden, East End and Iden Green and to reduce the amount of hard surfacing.

Policy HD5

The street scene should incorporate variations in form and detail; the positioning of dwellings in relation to the road should be varied to create a stepped/staggered streetscene [10] and to reflect the existing street layout in the existing settlements.

To conform with existing street layout.

Policy HD6 Parking

Sufficient off-road parking and garages, where provided, should be incorporated in all new developments. In addition there should be space for storage, refuse and recycling and bicycle parking to ensure a high quality well managed streetscape. Off-street parking should be screened from the road and driveways should have fully permeable surfaces. On-road parking needs to be accommodated carefully to prevent endangering traffic or pedestrians or the blocking of access roads. Access roads should to be of sufficient width to allow parking on one side of the road [11].

Attention should be paid to our Character Assessment for each Character Area. Garages or car barns would be acceptable with a design appropriate to match the adjacent buildings. We would expect an increase in the number of parking spaces provided by developers over and above the average parking guidance set out in the Kent Design Guide and TWBC draft Local Plan. As a rule of thumb 1 space per bedroom plus additional spaces for visitors.

Policy HD7 Materials and technology

All new dwellings should be constructed to the highest manufacturing standards to be sustainable with the inclusion of measures to help conserve water, including the re-use of grey water, and energy.
The use of renewable energy technologies will be supported.
The re-use and recycling of building materials will be encouraged as will the use of locally sourced materials [12].
The inclusion of single storey dwellings to cater for an ageing population or designed with disabled people in mind will be encouraged as will other accessible dwellings [13].

Attention should be paid to the requirements of the NPPF regarding Climate Change.
Reference should be made to the Benenden Housing Needs Survey (2005)

Policy HD8 (taken from Environment)
Add sound proofing insulation to Housing Design make a privacy and protection of amenity policy in Housing Design.

To avoid sound 'pollution' and encourage tranquillity particularly where a siginficant number of houses are built relatively close together.

In additional to insulation up to the highest environmental standards, the design of new developments should incorporate materials to reduce the transference of air-born sound to help minimise the transmission of noise outside private areas.

Policy HD9 Additional Layout requirements

a) Developers will be encouraged to ensure site permeability (? MT) via road or footways to allow integration of the proposed development into existing areas of built development.
b) Informal spaces could be provided to control traffic speeds with the use of benches and bollards to delineate parking areas
c) Housing should be positioned to minimise the overlooking of adjacent properties

d) Dwellings should be grouped, in respect of their material construction, in numbers greater than eight, to prevent a scatter of different material finishes throughout the development
e) A generally linear layout of housing is preferred rather than meandering roads through a development which do not reflect local character and design.

Kent Design Guide para 2.3 Designing for Movement. 'Developments must be easy to move through in all directions'.
Kent Design Guide Para 2.3 Designing for movement. Page 130 Reference 'Lane' applicable to rural sites next to village centres or within small village centres where these are not built up.