



The High Weald AONB

An outstandingly beautiful Medieval landscape



High Weald Housing Design Guide

Building better, building beautiful in the AONB

NOVEMBER 2019

High Weald Housing Design Guide

Published by the High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee (JAC), a partnership established in 1989 of 15 local authorities, Defra, Natural England and organisations representing rural interests. The JAC is responsible for publishing and monitoring the statutory AONB Management Plan. The JAC is supported by the High Weald AONB Unit which provides advice on how to conserve and enhance the AONB. The advice provided by the AONB Unit assists public bodies and statutory undertakers to meet their duty as set out in Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 to have regard to the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of AONBs in making decisions that affect it.

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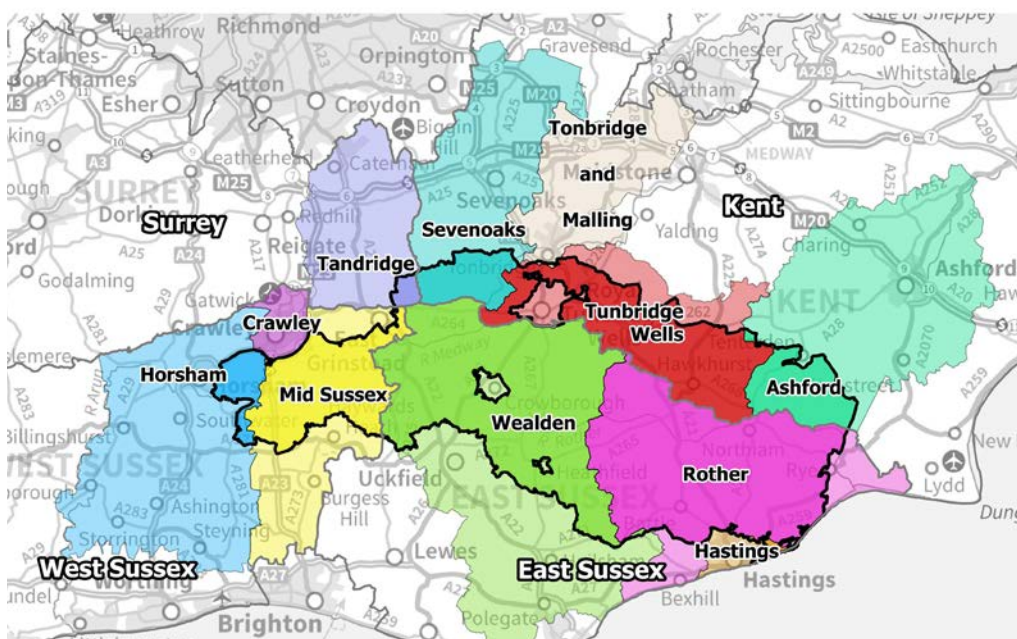


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Foreword

BY MERRICK DENTON-THOMPSON OBE FLI

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is a nationally treasured landscape afforded the highest status, exemplifying the very best of distinctive and beautiful places in England. It is also of international importance because it is one of the best preserved medieval landscapes in North West Europe. Its distinct character is a byproduct of the way we have chosen to settle on the land and the way we have chosen to farm it. However the High Weald is under huge pressure because of its close proximity to London. It can never be seen as a growth area but it does have to be allowed to grow to meet the needs of its communities and to sustain its outstanding countryside.

The High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee, including the Local Planning Authorities, has taken the bold step to jointly produce this guidance for new homes. The guidance sets out very clearly how to ensure that new development conserves the strong sense of place that defines the High Weald. The guidance is a vital tool to help everyone involved with change and development including developers, regulators and local communities. It has taken a topic so often judged subjectively, and through careful analysis, provides an objective approach to securing the future character of the High Weald. This landscape-led approach will help streamline the process of change and will produce places that are valued by existing communities. It will help provide new homes for future generations that sustains health and wellbeing, supports strong economic performance and creates beautiful places for everyone.



Merrick is the immediate past President of the Landscape Institute, formally a Board Member of Natural England and the Director of the Rural Pathfinder for the South East of England.

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INTRODUCTION

The High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is a special place. Designated in 1983, and benefitting from strong legislative and policy protection to conserve and enhance its natural beauty,¹ it is an exceptionally beautiful medieval landscape covering over 500 square miles across the counties of East and West Sussex, Kent and Surrey.

Its scattered settlements, ancient routeways, abundant ancient woodland, extensive open heaths, and small, irregular shaped fields, all draped over rolling hills of clay and sandstone, together create a unique landscape distinct from other parts of Britain.² The area’s natural beauty arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment; its main features were established by the fourteenth century and it is considered one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in north west Europe. Further detail on the special character of the High Weald is in the [High Weald AONB Management Plan](#).

The Management Plan includes specific objectives (S2 and S3) that seek to protect the historic pattern of development and enhance the architectural quality of the High Weald.

Meanwhile Objective G3 seeks to help secure climatic conditions and rates of change which support continued conservation and enhancement of the High Weald’s valued landscape and habitats.

1. For more details see Legislation and Planning Policy in the High Weald AONB
2. For more details, see National Character Area profile: 122: High Weald (Natural England)



Why a High Weald design guide?

THE DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE

The scale of housebuilding in the High Weald AONB is currently at an unprecedented level; the High Weald is experiencing the highest level of housing growth of any AONB in England, from an average of 186 units per year 2001–2011; to 895 units per year 2015–2017.³

Delivering appropriate new housing development within the AONB, and on land that affects its setting, is a key part of local planning policy for the local authorities covering the High Weald and for qualifying bodies producing neighbourhood plans. Housing development within the High Weald is necessary and desirable in creating a thriving and successful place, but it is also a responsibility and privilege to make long-lasting interventions in such a special and protected landscape. This includes challenges presented by climate change and biodiversity loss, and the opportunities for the design of new development to affect the rate of climate change and plan to cope with its affects. **It presents an exciting opportunity for developers and designers to be part of the High Weald's future**, ensuring its success in the centuries to come.

Past development has shown how this special opportunity has often been squandered on generic housing developments failing to capitalise on the true character of the place, often referencing local distinctiveness merely in superficial detailing or vernacular 'styling' of individual buildings, but without understanding or deploying deeper, locally characteristic design or place-making elements in layout, grain and massing for example.

This Guide has been written to change that, to help in balancing housing delivery with the statutory duty on local authorities to conserve and enhance the AONB, and setting the standards expected of new housing development in the High Weald.

3. An Independent Review of Housing in England's Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty 2012–2017 NAAONB and CPRE.

THE AIM OF THE GUIDE

This Guide is aimed at all those involved in managing the built environment within the High Weald AONB, from designers, developers and highways engineers, through to planning decision makers. It aims to help development meet the requirements of the National Planning Policy Framework with regard to achieving well-designed places and the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

It gives clear, succinct, practical and consistent advice to set clear urban design⁴ expectations for all new housing development within the High Weald AONB, whether large or small, affordable or market homes. **This will help to ensure higher quality and landscape-led design that reflects intrinsic High Weald character, and is embedded with a true sense of place, without stifling innovation and creativity.**

The Guide will help to give the certainty needed to support and speed up the design and development process. **High quality urban design and place-making doesn't necessarily cost more money, and can even add value to schemes.**

The Guide is broadly based on 'Building For Life 12', a widely accepted national industry standard, and takes into account the design guidance in the **National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance** and the **National Design Guide 2019**. This Guide explains how these design principles should be applied in the specific context and distinctive character of the High Weald AONB, and in the context of the Management Plan objectives. General urban design principles in these documents that apply across the country – such as sustainable design and ensuring developments are accessible – are not repeated and will only be referenced where the specific character of the High Weald may affect how these principles are implemented.

Included within this Guide are questions and design prompts to help ensure new developments capture the essential character of the High Weald at every scale of design, from the way new streets are set out, to the grain and massing of development, the treatment of the public realm, green space and natural features, and the character and appearance of buildings themselves.

4. In this context, the term 'urban design' is taken to mean the multi-disciplinary design of places, groups of buildings, streets, spaces and landscapes, whether that be in a rural or urban context.



CHAPTER 2

Understanding the High Weald

WHAT MAKES THIS PLACE SPECIAL?

The special and distinctive character of the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is set out in the Management Plan's Statement of Significance:

The High Weald is one of the best preserved Medieval landscapes in North West Europe. Despite its large size (1,500km sq.) and proximity to London, its landscape has remained relatively unchanged since the 14th century, surviving major historical events and social and technological changes. Its outstanding beauty stems from its essentially rural and human scale character, with a high proportion of natural surfaces and the story of its past visible throughout. The extensive survival of woodland and traditional mixed farming supports an exceptionally well-connected green and blue infrastructure with a high proportion of semi-natural habitat in a structurally diverse, permeable and complex mosaic supporting a rich diversity of wildlife.



THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF THE HIGH WEALD COMPRISES

- **Five defining components of character** that have made the High Weald a recognisably distinct and homogenous area for at least the last 700 years:
 1. **Geology, landform and water systems** – a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with numerous gill streams
 2. **Settlement** – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads and late Medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries
 3. **Routeways** – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths)
 4. **Woodland** – abundance of ancient woodland, highly interconnected and in smallholdings
 5. **Field and Heath** – small, irregular and productive fields, bounded by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths, and inned river valleys.
- **Land-based economy and related rural life** bound up with, and underpinning, the observable character of the landscape with roots extending deep into history. An increasingly broad-based economy but with a significant land-based sector and related community life focused on mixed farming (particularly family farms and smallholdings), woodland management and rural crafts.
- **Other qualities** and features that are connected to the interaction between the landscape and people and which enrich character components. Such qualities and features enhance health and wellbeing, and foster enjoyment and appreciation of the beauty of nature. These include locally-distinctive features which enrich the character components such as historic parks and gardens, orchards, hop gardens, veteran trees, along with their rich and varied biodiversity, and a wide range of appealing and locally distinctive historic buildings including oast houses, farm buildings, Wealden Hall houses and their associated features such as clay-tile catslide roofs. People value the wonderful views and scenic beauty of the High Weald with its relative tranquillity. They appreciate the area's ancientness and sense of history, its intrinsically dark landscape with the opportunity to see our own galaxy – the Milky Way – and the ability to get close to nature through the myriad public rights of way.

SETTLEMENTS IN THE HIGH WEALD : BRIEF HISTORY OF THE FORMATION OF THEIR CHARACTER

Landscape-led design requires a robust understanding of the landscape context of a site. Landscape is defined by the European Landscape Convention as “an area as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors”. In other words, it is not just the ‘green bits’ but includes the man-made and changed elements of an area. The built character of the High Weald, in terms of settlement form and structure, siting in the landscape, the relationships of buildings to streets, and building form and massing, is highly important to the natural beauty of the High Weald.

For new development to reinforce the settlement character of the area, it is important that designers understand its history and the processes that formed the High Weald. At first glance, it may appear that the settlements within the High Weald typify the villages and hamlets found across rural England. In fact, the High Weald is quite different.

The High Weald landscape was created by historic and locally distinctive agricultural practices. Clearings created by early farmers (assarting) for mixed pastoral farming created a complex patchwork of small, irregularly shaped fields amongst the area’s abundant woodland. Such woodland and dense, mature hedgerows still demarcate these fields today. Centuries of moving livestock into and around the High Weald gave rise to an extensive network of routeways, often deeply sunken, linking grazing areas, or ‘dens’ to settlements outside the Weald and to each other. The original droving routes are still visible today in the numerous lanes, paths and tracks that criss-cross the area.

This has led to the High Weald having a high concentration of dispersed settlements. Numerous small, scattered farmsteads and hamlets interspersed amongst the small, irregular fields, heaths and ancient woodland were followed by larger hamlets and villages. Those villages and towns of later medieval origin were typically located at historic focal points, along ridge top roads, or close to navigable rivers, and were usually centred around open areas used for meeting places and trade. ‘Markets’ were granted for Burwash, Frant, Robertsbridge, Salehurst, Wadhurst, and Cranbrook in the 13th century, and for Ticehurst, Lamberhurst, Heathfield, Rotherfield and Hawkhurst in the early 14th century.

The design of development within or adjacent to settlements in the High Weald needs to be based on a thorough understanding of this landscape context and settlement pattern. Towns and villages outside but adjacent to the AONB often share many of the origins and landscape components described above and development adjacent to them would also benefit from the landscape-led approach.



Typical settlement following the ridgeline



14th century market settlement



Characteristic tight-knit settlement in the High Weald

This type of settlement form is highly characteristic of High Weald villages, with clusters of buildings punctuated by a myriad of routeways, and built form facing onto lanes and greens of varying scale.

The core of the village is characterised by tight-knit linear built frontage, common to the many settlements within the High Weald which follow the ridgetops. More modern development tend to 'spill' down the slopes, contrary to this historic settlement pattern within the landscape.

In common with other 'dual' centre settlements within the High Weald, the continued separation between these two settlements is an intrinsic part of its character and is crucial to being able to 'read' its historic settlement pattern, and how the settlement relates to its immediate landscape context.

 Epoch 1 (1863-1894)
 Epoch 3 (1909-1912)
 OS (modern)



CHAPTER 3

Design Guide

OVERVIEW OF THE DESIGN GUIDE SECTIONS

This chapter contains guidance relating to the most common design issues, with a particular emphasis on tailoring design approaches and decisions to support the overall character and identity of the High Weald.

The Guide is broadly based on Building for Life 12, along with the design guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework and Guidance and the National Design Guide, adapted to be locally specific to the High Weald. The table below shows how the sections in this Guide here relate back to the Building for Life 'questions'. Topics which apply to all development anywhere are only covered where the High Weald landscape might require a different solution, but that doesn't mean such general principles are not important. In particular; good design should reflect the emphasis in the NPPF on 'early, proactive and effective engagement with the community' and the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide 2019.

Housing designers should use the checklists in this Guide to help structure the design process, so that:

- the setting of the High Weald is dealt with first,
- placemaking principles next, and
- detailed design built in towards the end.

By this approach, the longest lasting design decisions will be embedded into the site, ensuring that the housing developments are truly 'of the place', a genuine and integrated part of the existing settlement, rather than a generic 'added on' estate, and that schemes conserve and enhance the High Weald character into the future. Planning applications should demonstrate how schemes have had regard to this Guidance, particularly in their Design and Access Statements.

Step 1 : Response to Setting		BfL references
DG1	Response to Site & Landscape Context	(6a) (6b) (6c)
DG2	Connecting beyond the Site	(1a) (1b) (1c) (1d) (2d) (8a) (8b) (8c)
Step 2 : Making a Place		BfL references
DG3	Layout & Structuring the Site	(1c) (5a) (5b) (6a) (6b) (6c) (8a) (8c) (9b) (11a)
DG4	Using Buildings to Define Streets & Spaces	(5a) (5b) (7a) (7b) (7c)
DG5	The Right Built Form	(5a) (5b) (4c) (8a)
DG6	Parking Strategies	(5a) (5b) (4c) (8a)
Step 3 : The Right Details		BfL references
DG7	Building Appearance, Local Details & Sustainable Design	(5a) (5b)
DG8	Ancillary & Storage	(12a)
DG9	Detailing the Street	(5b) (9a) (9b)
DG10	Reinforcing Local Planting Character & Habitats	(5a) (11c)

Responding to Site & Landscape Context

UNDERSTANDING THE SITE

The relationship of new housing development to its 'parent' community, in terms of siting, scale, and response to setting, is very important if it is to feel genuinely integrated into that village or town, rather than simply an imported, 'bolted-on' housing estate.

For development to reflect and enhance the character of the High Weald it must be designed to integrate into its setting. This means more than reflecting merely the visual appearance of the current setting, but includes understanding how the landscape and its settlements have evolved and why the area is the way it is today.

Rather than being a constraint, context offers opportunities to retain and embed the character of the High Weald into a genuinely landscape-led design. This will include landscape features such as field patterns and boundaries, ponds, gill streams and ditches, and on-site mature trees, and embracing the 'natural capital' assets of the area, in particular the rich and diverse ecology of the High Weald, which are key elements of the components of natural beauty set out in the Management Plan, and which should inform site selection and layout. Seeking to avoid harm to existing biodiversity assets in the earliest site layout decisions will help meet the 'mitigation hierarchy' set out in the NPPF. Meanwhile, how the scheme design manages topography and watercourses will be important to how successful the development is at mitigating and dealing with the effects of climate change.

Context will also include the heritage assets of a site, which may be designated assets such as Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings, or non-designated assets such as historic buildings, banks, ditches, field systems and routeways.

New housing development schemes must be influenced by a detailed understanding of the character and function of the landscape of the site and surrounding area, and the contribution features make to natural beauty and natural capital. This needs to be established in the earliest stage of site feasibility to inform the evolution of the site layout.

A multidisciplinary approach (urban design, landscape and ecological strategy, highways engineering and heritage management) needs to be engaged throughout the design process to ensure that potential conflict is avoided.

This process should be evidenced in a robust Design & Access Statement, which should be a working document used as a design tool throughout the design development process, and not 'retro-fitted' merely to accompany a formal application.



Landscape-led design means using landscape as a framework to understand the site and formulate a design response. Applying a landscape-led design approach requires analysing the context, character, qualities and socio-ecological functioning of the proposed site within its wider landscape setting, and using this understanding to inform site layout, design, and capacity



Site analysis diagram examining potential of site with regard to topography, watercourses, woodland and hedgerow, access, routes and adjacent street patterns and building grain

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Analysed not just the site, but its wider landscape and topographical setting, and its relationship to existing woods, fields, built settlement and routeways, to ensure robust understanding of the essential character of the area?
- ✓ Identified existing views into and through the site that need to be maintained and incorporated into the layout?
- ✓ Studied historic maps to understand the evolution of the site/area and identify key historic features and considered if opportunities exist to reinstate historic features, hedges and routeways to reinforce 'sense of place'?
- ✓ Identified existing site features, such as species-rich grassland, water features or field boundaries, and taken the opportunity to retain, proactively incorporate and enhance these in the scheme?

SITING DEVELOPMENT IN THE LANDSCAPE

New development should be designed in a way that is sensitive to existing historic settlement patterns; obscuring the historic pattern of existing settlements does irreparable harm to the area's character. Coalescence between settlements is to be avoided. Historic patterns of growth offer the best precedent for adding new development that is in character.

Historic settlements in the High Weald are a key part of its character because of how well they are integrated with the landscape when viewed from afar. New developments in the High Weald must also be similarly well-integrated in the landscape. A primary design consideration, long before site layouts and capacity drawings are prepared, is how the site could accommodate three-dimensional forms in relation to its wider landscape context. However, new development should be good enough to be seen, not justified on the basis that existing or proposed planting will screen it from view

How development sits in relation to long views in the area needs to be carefully considered, as does how development appears when looking onto it from afar.

A Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) at the beginning of the design process can help inform early choices and the design development, and should not merely be used to justify an already designed proposal. Sites should be arranged to allow views through and out to the wider landscape rather than placing buildings where they block the view.

The response to existing built context is also important; the scale of the new scheme should not dominate that of the 'parent' settlement, nor should it subsume important existing built forms on the edge of settlements that presently have a clear historic or functional relationship with adjacent countryside, such as farmsteads surrounded by their farmlands. The features and purpose of adjacent historic buildings should remain legible in the landscape.



Settlements integrated into their landscape setting with edges softened by trees



Historic farmstead and its surrounding fields on the edge of a settlement

UNDERSTANDING TOPOGRAPHY

Landforms and water systems are key landscape components of the High Weald identified in the Management Plan (objectives G1–G3) which identifies that the area is characterised by “a deeply incised, ridged and faulted landform of clays and sandstone. The ridges tend east–west, and from them spring numerous gill streams that form the headwaters of rivers.

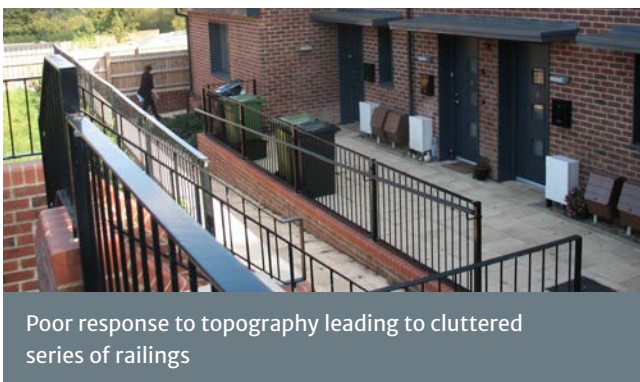
Local topography should be a key influence on the design of a site, particularly the arrangement and orientation of any new streets. Schemes need to work in harmony with the landscape, working with existing site levels where possible and minimising cut and fill. ‘Extreme’ engineering solutions will alter the intrinsic character of the area and will not be acceptable.

Some sites in the High Weald, usually found on or near exposed ridges, will simply be too steeply sloping to be able to accommodate any built development without harming the character of the area, because of the resultant large slab elevations of development being prominent in near and long views. On all sites with significant topography, the location and scale of buildings needs to be carefully considered in terms of their exposure and prominence from lower views. Terraced gardens should be considered where appropriate.

Layout should minimise the need for retaining structures, and any that are proposed should be placed within the plot rather than be visible from the street, since they could create bleak vertical edges to the public realm. Impact of levels on the accessibility of the development for future users will also be a key consideration.



Buildings stepping up a slope



Poor response to topography leading to cluttered series of railings

WATERCOURSES

The High Weald has the headwaters of several water catchments and the management of existing ditches and watercourses should be considered not only within the development site but also understanding where that water will flow and its links with adjacent fields and woodland. The design of development should ensure that there is no deterioration to water courses ecologically, chemically or physically. Gills⁵ and gill woodland are a particular feature of the High Weald and their rare ecology is fragile and vulnerable to changes in water flow and quality. There should also be a significant buffer from watercourses to ensure the stream corridor is kept dark, and disturbance does not significantly increase. Opportunities in schemes to enable removal of any existing discharges or pollution risks to gill woodland by alternative, less polluting solutions, should be taken.

Designers should discuss proposals for surface water management with Local Lead Flood Authorities at an early stage in the design process.

Storm water management should follow sustainable drainage principles using a ‘treatment train’ (i.e. directing water through a succession of techniques such as permeable paving, green roofs, swales, and ponds) and source control as a first principle.⁶

Should new retention features be needed, surface level ditches and ponds should be used, and would normally be located at the lowest point of the site. These should be shallow sided to appear natural, create valuable habitats and avoid the need for fencing.

5. Gills are streams within steep valleys surrounded by woodland.
6. Guide to Sustainable Drainage Systems in East Sussex <https://www.eastsussex.gov.uk/environment/flooding/sustainabledrainagesystems>



Poorly located street network in relation to SuDS in this scheme has necessitated incongruous heavy engineering barriers – this approach is not suitable in the High Weald

USING EXISTING SITE FEATURES IN SCHEME DESIGN AND REINSTATEMENT OF LOST FEATURES

The High Weald landscape and heritage features within and adjacent to sites are highly important assets. They offer great opportunities to help embed a genuine local sense of place in the scheme and to create positive green spaces within the scheme, around which the development can be structured. Such features, which will have been identified in the site and landscape analysis, and in the LVIA, should be used as a starting point in the design process, to influence the layout and place-making character of the development.

The High Weald is, in particular, characterised by its medieval field patterns. These fields are often small and irregular in shape, carved into the woodland as ‘assart’ fields. Maintaining this network of woods, fields and hedgerow systems is critical to the identity of the High Weald. Species-rich grassland is an important landscape component, and opportunities should be taken to retain and improve the species diversity of grassland on the site and link to unimproved or semi-improved grassland in the area.

Existing field boundaries should be respected and retained. New gaps in existing hedgerows should be minimised so that they can act as ecological corridors. Opportunities should be taken to link existing hedgerows, woodlands and meadows with new native planting, and to restore historic ones.

Field ponds, gill streams and ditches are a characteristic feature of the High Weald, and those existing within a site should be retained and incorporated into the design and responded to positively.

On-site mature trees and woodland should be retained and used as key placemaking in the scheme.

Development also offers scope to reinstate or restore historic landscape and heritage features that have been lost or degraded over time, for instance existing and lost routeways (paths, tracks and lanes) and field boundaries. Studying historic maps,⁷ aerial photographs, conservation area appraisals and local history publications allows design teams to identify historic features, which it may be appropriate to then reference in the design.

7. Reference the County Historic Environment Records (HER) and High Weald AONB Unit resources.



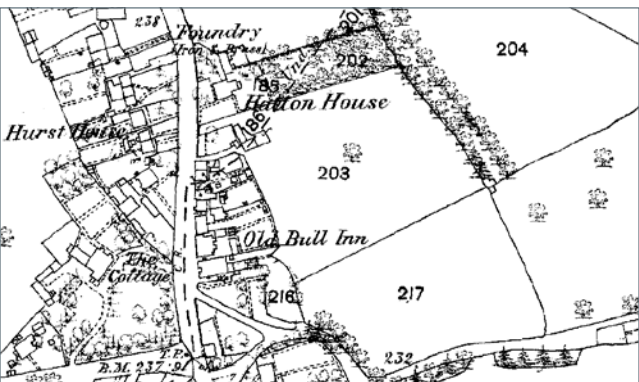
Medieval field systems



High Weald gill stream



Retaining existing ponds as focal point in the design and layout and as sustainable drainage systems



Historic map

CONNECTED STREETS, LANES & ROUTEWAYS

The extensive network of routeways is a key characteristic of the High Weald. These features form an interconnected radiating pattern of routeways linking the High Weald with the lands on and around the North and South Downs. Many of these exist today in the form of roads, tracks and paths. Settlement form grew out of the existing routeway pattern, and new development needs to be integrated into this established and important network so that it reflects this characteristic close relationship between routeways and settlement pattern.

As part of the site analysis, designers should identify existing and historic routes in the area and opportunities to connect to these routeways should be maximised. Existing routeways across the site, and their associated features such as banks and ditches, should be kept on their historic alignment and lost routeways reinstated (see Management Plan objective R1). Routeways often also function as part of the ecological network, particularly verges and boundary hedgerows/trees. The importance of retaining and enhancing the connectivity of habitats is addressed in DG10 (see Management Plan objective R2).

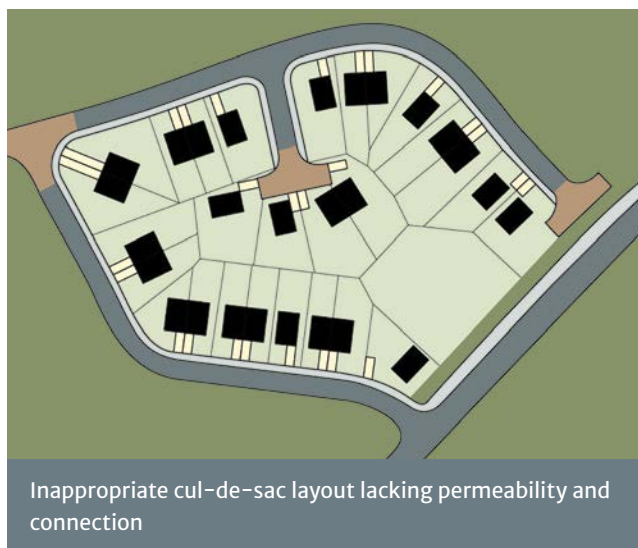
DESIGNING FOR WALKING, CYCLING & ACTIVE LIFESTYLES

Walking, cycling and horseriding within the High Weald is extremely important to local residents and provides opportunities for more active lifestyles and reduced use of motor vehicles. Often, the most direct routes between existing settlements are via footpaths and bridleways rather than via public roads. Designs should maximise opportunities for walking, cycling and equestrian connections to these routes, designed to be safe, welcoming, well maintained, accessible, durable and clearly signposted, as advocated in **Sport England's Active Design Guidance**.

PERMEABILITY

Settlements in the High Weald are also typically highly permeable in layout, linking in to this routeway network, and criss-crossed by routes for vehicles and pedestrians. To maintain this characteristic, it is important for new development to sit successfully as an integrated piece of the village that people can walk and travel through, rather than a separate 'estate' that they travel into. This also helps encourage interaction between existing and new residents.

Dead-ends are uncommon and not in keeping with the historic character. Dead-ends/cul-de-sac arrangements are therefore to be avoided in the design of new developments. Where new internal streets cannot connect to another existing street, they should connect to a pedestrian route to adjacent settlement, and where possible to the countryside beyond.



Definition of routeway: Any route between places, including roads, lanes, tracks and paths, including existing public rights of way and lost routes with no current public access

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Identified existing routes in the area, and maximised opportunities to connect to these, and explored opportunities to reinstate lost route and add new routes across the site to improve accessibility in the wider area?
- ✓ Created a permeable and interconnected layout and avoided dead-end or cul-de-sac street patterns?
- ✓ Addressed the site edges appropriately, either through creating soft transitions or through presenting active edges to public spaces?
- ✓ Created a positive relationship with the site surroundings and wider landscape, avoiding the need for screening?

WAYFINDING & VIEWS

Visual connectivity should also be provided, with open vistas to both the countryside and existing settlement beyond.

A well-designed street network supports wayfinding. Maintaining views out of the site helps people orient themselves within the local area, such as by framing existing built or landscape landmarks, which can give instant maturity to a new development. Long sight lines within streets help people understand where they connect to.



Views to the countryside retained at the end of the road



New development focussed around mature trees

FORMING SITE EDGES & TRANSITIONS

How the edges of sites are designed needs to be carefully managed. Many existing settlements in the High Weald landscape are viewed in the context of their green infrastructure, softening the impact of built development even in ridgetop locations. Where sites form a new edge to the countryside, transitions need to be soft so that development sits appropriately in the landscape. New edges should be defined by existing or new green infrastructure consistent with the local landscape character.

Generally, transitions should be made using native planting to the boundaries presenting a soft edge to the countryside, rather than by presenting hard building fronts, streets and infrastructure which are highly visible from long views.

However, active frontages (building elevations with front doors and windows) should be employed to help define green spaces and routeways, so that the space or route is well overlooked.

Trees and hedgerows can help to blend a development in to the landscape in long views, but structural landscaping should not be used to screen or disguise inappropriately-sited or poorly-designed development, but instead to add to the quality and local character and place-making of a scheme, helping it relate more meaningfully to its High Weald context.



Rear garden boundaries with close boarded fences as a new settlement edge should be avoided

PRINCIPLES OF SITE STRUCTURE

In devising a layout strategy for the site, designers will need to consider how street layout and the location of open spaces responds to and reinforces the local High Weald character, and creates a pleasant place in its own right. Streets and lanes characteristically have a clear relationship with the underlying topography, and this is reinforced by how plots relate to the street.

High Weald settlements are characteristically very 'green' places, with substantial soft landscaping; grass verges, lush hedgerows and full tree canopies breaking up the built form in all but the tightest-knit built core of villages and towns.

Sufficient space must be incorporated at the earliest stages of site layout and plot disposition to accommodate such green infrastructure, and to allow large scale and replacement trees the space to grow, in order to enable the development to maintain this important characteristic impression of greenness in new housing developments.

Meanwhile mitigating and adapting to climate change is a key requirement that needs to be considered at the earliest stages of site structure. The layout of new development should:

- maximise carbon storage through the protection of soils and the retention and provision of grassland and trees;
- provide for sustainable drainage that helps to restore the natural function of water courses and water bodies, mitigates flood risk and provides important wetland habitat;
- minimise the area of soil permanently replaced by artificial surfaces and maximise ability of soils on site to store carbon;
- incorporate facilities within the layout to enable recycling of waste and other resources; and
- utilise small-scale renewable and low or zero carbon energy sources.

STREET LAYOUT

Street placement and form should be linked to topography, existing field patterns and existing routes, and how movement is organised across the site.

Streets should be laid out to create a pattern of development appropriate to the character of the High Weald. **Manual for Streets** principles and approach should be adopted, and streets should be designed around convenient and pleasant walking and cycling experiences rather than simply around car access.

Early engagement in scheme design with the local highway authority and the local planning authority is encouraged in order to develop an appropriate and acceptable highways approach.

Streets and lanes in settlements in the High Weald are generally formed of straight or gently curved segments, and where they do change direction, these changes are pronounced, as a response to topography, landscape features or built form. Overly 'wavy' streets that do not respond to natural contours should be avoided; they are not in character, and can create layout problems with regard to plot definition and capacity for on-street parking. Other layout features, such as placement of buildings, tree planting, and street surfacing can instead be used to calm traffic.

Roundabouts are uncharacteristic of street patterns within High Weald settlements and should not be used in new housing schemes in the area.



CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Used local topography to influence the street alignment so that streets relate to existing landforms?
- ✓ Used a range of street types arranged into a logical hierarchy that reflects their roles and that supports local character and reinforces wayfinding?
- ✓ Designed junctions to be pedestrian friendly and in accordance with Manual for Streets, and to respond to local character and context, and the scale of development?
- ✓ Arranged multi-functional public spaces of good size and shape so that they are easy to access and form part of the structure of the site?

STREET HIERARCHIES

New streets should be arranged to form a clear hierarchy. The hierarchy of streets should follow the historic tradition of being determined by their movement function, to create integrity in the development and so that people can understand the role of the street they are on.

- 1 Streets that connect beyond the site, i.e. main access routes, have the highest movement function.** This function should be expressed at all scales; they should feel public in character, with the longest sight lines, and whilst they should be the widest in the scheme, they should not be too wide in relation to the existing street network. They may include street trees where appropriate
- 2 Side streets are next in the hierarchy.** These should have a noticeable reduction in scale, and may often not contain separate pavements
- 3 The lowest order streets will be side and back lanes.** These offer only very local access and thus should be designed to be narrower, quieter, and more intimate. They would not normally contain separate pavements. Instead they would have simple grass verges, and may lead on to courts.

In all but the smallest of housing schemes, a variety of these street hierarchies should be deployed; a homogenous approach across the development will not be appropriate.

Responding to and supporting the street hierarchy in three dimensions is critical. The scale of subsequent plots, buildings and trees, and the degree of building enclosure and street width to building height ratio, all should respond to the type of street.



STREET CHARACTER

The character of the streets and lanes in the High Weald are integral to the wider character of the area. They are often historic and have a distinctive range of forms, designed around pedestrian rather than car movement, derived from their routeway origins. Many have wooded or hedge-lined banks, and are sunken.

As such, **modern or generic approaches to highways design are especially harmful to the High Weald's character and identity**, and care should be taken to design new streets in housing schemes so they reinforce the identity of the area, and appear as rural streets and lanes, not urban or suburban housing estate roads.

Soft edges to streets, such as banks, verges or swales, are typical of the High Weald, and have both visual and ecological value – these should be incorporated into the scheme to 'green' the development.

Footpaths, footways and cyclepaths through the development can aid permeability, that is, the extent to which the development is an integrated part of the existing settlement, that people can walk and travel through, rather than a separate 'estate' that they travel into. These routes do not necessarily need to be adjacent to roadways, or even follow the roadway route; paths can be separated from roads by wide grass verges in more formal streets, or can form characteristic 'twitten' links, faced by buildings or open green space. Stretches of high-kerbed, tarmacked pavements alongside roads should be limited to junctions with existing heavily trafficked roads.

ACCESSING GARDENS

Accessing back gardens particularly for terrace properties can be problematic, and requires consideration at the early stages of site layout, plot configuration and building placement.

If garden access for terraced dwellings is required, then this should be via cut-throughs or 'twitten' style lanes between the buildings, characteristic in the High Weald, or by generous pathways off parking courts. Long narrow alleys between high back and side close-board fences are unpleasant to use, and should be avoided. Likewise, making people access gardens through their homes is undesirable.



Typical High Weald grass verge detail in residential 'lane'; no pavement or kerb



New housing development dominated by excessive and unnecessary pavements and hard-surfacing – not appropriate in the High Weald



Accessible pathway through development creating connectivity for all users



These images show the characteristic ‘twittens’ or lanes within High Weald villages and towns; including such features adds richness and a sense of place to a new housing scheme. The new development above is accessed by such a lane off a main High Street

STREET GEOMETRY & JUNCTIONS

Junctions should be designed in accordance with the advice in Manual for Streets (MfS). Corner radii should be minimised and pedestrians should have priority across the mouth of the junction, to maintain a more intimate, human scale and character.

The character of the junctions off the main road should reflect that of the locality and the scale of development; in villages, access to smaller schemes should be designed as lanes, using materials to minimise the distinction of pavements and road markings.

In a well-connected street layout, turning heads should not often be necessary, but where they are, they should be sized and shaped not only to perform their vehicle movement function, but to be a meaningful piece of public realm that relates to, and helps define, the spatial character of the place.



These two road junctions access similar numbers of houses. However, the top image shows a clearly subservient road, reflecting its hierarchy, with tight radii, no white lines, a simple pavement picked out by a small kerb, and traditional materials. In contrast, the image below shows a visually engineering-heavy approach, contrary to MfS and inappropriate for this scale of development in a rural context in the High Weald

LOCATING MEANINGFUL PUBLIC REALM

The design of public open spaces should not only reinforce local landscape character and sense of place, but also enhance habitats and wildlife. Well-designed public spaces add value to new housing, offer a valuable amenity to the community and help to encourage active and healthy lifestyles, supporting people's health and wellbeing. The land-take for artificial surfaces should be minimised enabling significant areas of natural surface and avoiding the sterilising of soil, a fundamental component of the High Weald landscape.

Green public spaces are characteristic of High Weald settlements, and these are often triangular because they have been created by intersecting historic routeways, and arise at key junctions. Open green spaces in new developments should be similarly located to be prominent and accessible within the scheme. Triangular spaces also allow all parts of the space to be viewed from all other parts of the space, making them feel safe.

Public open spaces, be they hard-surfaced informal squares or courtyards, or soft landscaped greens, are typically well-overlooked in High Weald settlements. **Lining green spaces with lanes and addressing them with building fronts is important,** reinforcing the local characteristic and helping connect the green space and the built environment.

The location of public green spaces may be determined by existing site landscape features, and are best placed at the heart of the scheme, as it allows them to work as community gathering points. Designs should avoid pushing public spaces to the back edges of the site, as this makes them remote and hard to access and misses an opportunity to connect into the existing community.

Streets and squares are also public spaces in their own right, and should offer opportunities for socialising and neighbourly interaction. Slow traffic speeds and wide green verges to the street are useful in supporting the use of streets as public spaces as well as reinforcing local character. Street furniture, detailed to reflect local character, materials and crafts, and public art can encourage social interaction if carefully designed into spaces and located at focal points.



Existing High Weald settlement around a green



New development around greens



New development around greens



A more formal square which incorporates mature trees

MULTI-FUNCTIONAL GREEN SPACES

Green spaces in the public realm should be designed to be multi-functional. Separate spaces for planting, water management and play are wasteful and miss opportunities for a rich experience. Instead, open spaces should be designed to offer high quality amenity whilst also providing for surface water management, wildlife habitats and corridors, planting and structural landscaping, and improved connectivity for walking/cycling/riding. The wildlife of the High Weald is embedded in the landscape character and so proposals for habitat creation and enhancements or biodiversity net gain should also be able to make positive contributions to landscape character. Decent sized spaces offer the opportunity to add large trees to the site and create wildflower meadows, which help to support the character of the High Weald and can contribute to biodiversity net gain.

Opportunities for formal (if required), informal/natural play or incidental play should be created across the site, using locally-sourced elements and features. Providing space for orchards or allotments can help reinforce local plant species and habitats, whilst being a valuable community resource.

On-site landscape, spaces and water should be used to form a meaningful interlinking system for wildlife and landscape character. This maximises the ecological value of what is being provided. Designers must look beyond their site and make links into the wider network to maximise the value of provision and take into account the likely effects of climate change. Swales and ponds must be designed to offer an ecological as well as an amenity value. Retained and new water features are best placed in the public realm so that they can be managed efficiently by the site's management company and retained in perpetuity.

During the construction process, existing mature trees and hedges should be protected from damage in new developments in accordance with BS 5837:2012, Trees in Relation to Design, Demolition and Construction. Ditches, embankments and other landscape features should also be protected. Areas of existing and proposed open space including spaces for street trees and verges should also be protected as compaction from machinery, storage areas and relocation can damage soil health and prejudice the future ecological value of the ecological assets.⁸ Poorer soils including subsoils can be useful for wildflower establishment.

8. www.cpre.org.uk/resources/farming-and-food/farming/item/5013-back-to-the-land-rethinking-our-approach-to-soil



Traditional High Weald species rich grassland



Multi-functional greenspace



Incorporating sustainable drainage systems within green space

Using Buildings to Define Streets & Spaces

RELATING BUILDINGS TO THE STREET

How buildings relate to streets and spaces is a distinct way in which the underlying landscape character of the High Weald is expressed through its built form.

Buildings are typically disposed to create a strong and positive frontage aligned with the carriageway reflecting the function and status of routeways, solar orientation, and topography, or sometimes arranged to form the edges of courtyards accessed off the street, referencing historic farmsteads in the area.

New buildings should similarly be positioned to define and reinforce the street layout. However, this doesn't mean that continuous, solid built frontage is required; permeable frontage is characteristic of the High Weald, with twittens and pathways leading from the street through to parking courts and other development and to footpaths and the countryside beyond.

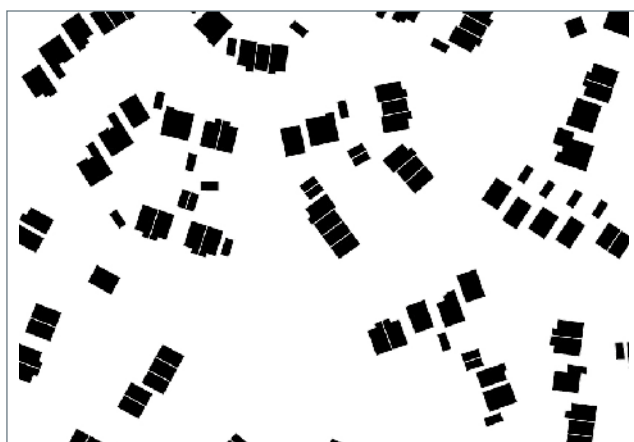


Characteristic strong street-frontages in HW villages

The placement of buildings within a plot is important; a good test of how well building disposition actually defines the street pattern is a figure-ground diagram – this will quickly highlight an unsuccessful 'scattered' layout from one which clearly shows where streets and routeways are within the development.



Figure-ground diagram of traditional High Weald settlement – built form clearly defines the street pattern



By contrast, the figure-ground of this modern housing estate shows how the scattered and disconnected built form lacks spatial definition and gives no clear indication of routes, streets, or fronts and backs

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Placed buildings so that they have a clear and purposeful relationship with the street, including providing front doors to create an active and attractive edge?
- ✓ Used plot disposition and building placement to support the street hierarchy at all scales, and to minimise left over space?
- ✓ Formed a consistent building line so that the street scene is cohesive?
- ✓ Clearly delineated the boundary between public and private space, including front garden enclosure?
- ✓ Made sure that publicly-accessible open space is lined with active edges and well overlooked?



The buildings in this new development have been well arranged to define the street and to turn subtle corners, and to lead the eye down the street as a strong response to site topography and contours.

The placement of buildings here well defines the street, and clearly distinguishes public and private realm.



By contrast, despite these buildings being carefully detailed they have not been successfully placed to define either a street or a meaningful public space; instead they sit skewed to a turning head and ill-defined forecourt parking area, with unenclosed 'front gardens'. This arrangement is alien to the local historic settlement pattern as the buildings do not successfully define the spaces between them.

STREET DEFINITION

Discernible building lines should be established in new housing schemes, so that there is a relatively consistent level of setback visible in each street scene.

Buildings in the High Weald typically have one of three relationships with the street, described below, and new housing development should use a variety of these types of siting of buildings to reinforce street character and hierarchy, and tie the new development to the local character.



1 Sitting tight on the back edge of the street or footway



2 Sitting with a small defined front curtilage between building and street



3 Sitting back behind a longer, enclosed front garden

BOUNDARIES & FRONT GARDENS

Where there is private front curtilage, however small, within the High Weald it is typically enclosed, either by hedgerows, low walls, wooden picket fences or occasionally metal railings. This is a key feature of the streetscene – the hedgerows often adding to the ‘green-ness’ of the place, as well as being good urban design practice in terms of clearly defining public and private space.

New developments should follow this local characteristic; undefined and unenclosed front curtilages will not be appropriate within the High Weald, nor will low level ornamental planting provide sufficient vertical boundary enclosure in the streetscene.

Close board fences are not an appropriate boundary treatment to define either the fronts or sides of plots from the public realm. They are uncharacteristic of vernacular treatments, and contribute little to visual quality or placemaking.



New housing development successfully delineating and enclosing private front curtilage



Lack of defined, enclosed front curtilages in new development, creating poor street definition uncharacteristic in the High Weald

ADDRESSING PUBLIC SPACE

The basic urban design tenet of ‘public fronts and private backs’ applies well in the High Weald, and streets without building frontage should be avoided. **Public open spaces in new developments must similarly be addressed by active building fronts.** Front doors and windows to building fronts are required to animate the space to make it feel connected, safe and welcoming, as well as of the High Weald character. Blank building edges or sides of buildings facing public space should be avoided.

TURNING CORNERS

Corner buildings should have their entrances placed on the highest order street. The return frontage of corner buildings should be animated with windows. Blank sides should be avoided. Small verges or enclosed private space should be provided between the street and the building side.



‘LEFT OVER SPACE’

Whilst ditches and roadside verges are characteristic of the High Weald and recommended, lots of small ‘left-over’ or ambiguous spaces around plots within housing schemes are neither characteristic nor good urban design practice.

Such small ‘left-over’ spaces should be avoided in plot shape, disposition and layout and in building placement.

They are ill-defined as neither private curtilage nor meaningful public realm, they serve no visual, amenity or ecological purpose, and are difficult to manage.

By following local streetscape characteristics of well-defined streets with strong built frontage and well-located open green spaces, a good layout should be able to avoid these incongruous leftover areas.

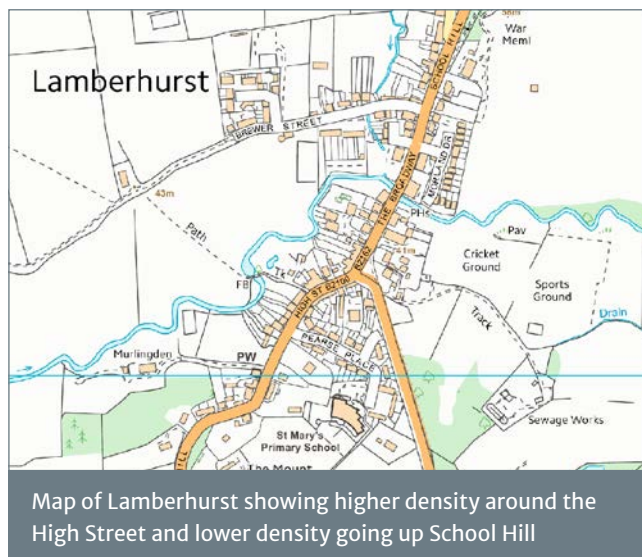


GRAIN & DENSITY OF DEVELOPMENT

Whilst the High Weald exhibits a range of building styles, how they are arranged and combined in a site is a key component to the built character of the area.

New development should reflect the historic density and grain of the area in which it is being proposed, so that the distribution of buildings supports the existing pattern of the settlement. Grain and density should closely relate to the street pattern so that the way buildings are distributed relates to movement.

A variation of density across the site, in all but the smallest of schemes, will help the character and place-making of the development, avoiding generic homogeneity. New development should be denser and more tight-knit around key junctions, green spaces or towards the centre of the neighbouring settlement. Lower densities should be used to help make the transition to the edge of the site away from the core area.



SCALE, FORM & MASSING OF BUILDINGS

The scale, massing and grouping of buildings within High Weald settlements varies considerably depending on location, but exhibits a reliable pattern; a hierarchical grouping with a few larger buildings included in the centre of settlements (former Manor houses, farmhouses or merchants' houses) surrounded by terrace cottages usually arranged in small groups or rows, moving out to clusters of smaller scale detached cottages and terraces. Development around greens has its own distinctive pattern, often small scale reflecting the way artisan cottages were built ad-hoc on the edge of roads and commons.

This typical character and form within towns and villages should be reflected in new housing schemes.

Standard developer house-types might be able to be used to create this character, what is critical is how they are combined/attached/adapted to create the High Weald characteristic built form composition, which may require bespoke, place-specific solutions as to how those built forms sit together. Long streetscene elevations are a useful design tool to test spacing, grouping and massing of buildings in a street context.

Clusters of large, detached buildings of similar scale, massing, footprint and spacing are uncharacteristic of the High Weald and should be avoided in new developments. Semi-detached buildings are usually associated with the Victorian period and later, and should be used sparingly, interspersed with the more prevalent built forms. A larger dwelling might also be found as a farmhouse on the edge of a settlement.

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Analysed the local grain and pattern of development and used this to help set out the site?
- ✓ Used the arrangement of buildings to support the street pattern and character?
- ✓ Used a mix of building sizes, arranged into distinct hierarchical groups of built scale, with common elements such as build lines, ridge heights or roof treatments?
- ✓ Demonstrated in long street scene elevations how buildings are massed and spaced to reflect and reinforce High Weald character?
- ✓ Avoided homogeneity of building spacing and form across the site?

The prevailing High Weald built character is very much 'variations on a theme' – a basic principle of scale and massing loosely repeated within a local context. In this regard:

- **Domestic buildings in the High Weald are typically 2 storeys in height**, sometimes with attic storey accommodation within steeply pitched roofs. Very tall buildings are not appropriate in residential development in the High Weald. Some single storey buildings – mostly small footprint and often timber framed and boarded – are locally characteristic
- **Buildings should have a reasonably consistent building line** and vary only within a narrow range of heights and widths so that there is a clear rhythm to the street scene
- **The roofscape within the High Weald is particularly distinctive.** Hipped or half-hipped roofs are commonplace, as are catslide roofs, varying roof orientation, eaves height and angle can add to character
- **Front doors should be placed on the front elevations of buildings**, to help animate the streetscene and reinforce local character.

However, too much variation within the design and distribution of buildings should be avoided, since this 'catalogue selection box' approach will lack meaningful character and sense of place.

Similarly, repetitious use of a similar unit type in scale, mass and form, stamped over the site with no reference to context or character creation, should be avoided, since it will generally result in a contrived, artificial built form which will feel alien in the wider settlement context.

Contemporary architecture, well executed, can create innovative interpretations of vernacular buildings, tying them into the High Weald sense of place by referencing local patterns of development and building forms.



This streetscene in a High Weald village shows the characteristic grouping of a mixture of terraces, detached cottage, and semi-detached dwellings, each different in detail, but with common scale, building line, fenestration pattern, roof orientation and articulation with chimneystacks



This contemporary styled housing development has successfully used steep roof pitches, stepped terraces responding to the site's topography, a strong building line and a variety of unit frontage widths



Repetitious use of a similar unit type with different materials is uncharacteristic of the High Weald

CASE STUDIES

EXAMPLE BUILDING TYPOLOGY - TERRACES

Terraces are common throughout the High Weald, but of a particular built form.

To reflect the local characteristic, they should sit as part of a strong streetscene of regular rhythm, a series of attached houses, rather than a ‘stand-alone’ symmetrical building with a central feature.



Historic terrace forms in the High Weald



Though later Victorian workers cottages are typically narrower modules, terraces don't have to be narrow units; the above new development is very typical of High Weald built typologies and characteristics; it successfully uses terraces of double-fronted attached dwellings to create strong street frontage and elevational rhythm. The shallow plan suits the orientation of the plots, and the dwellings also present good connections to the street



By contrast, the example above shows a locally inappropriate style of a broadly symmetrical unit, effectively one building defined by a half-hipped roof, building to a central crescendo of gable feature. The issues are compounded by the placement of the building on the plot remote from the street, and the forecourt parking to the external space

DETAILING AND MATERIALS ARE ALSO IMPORTANT

The modern terrace on the left successfully displays a combination of traditional proportions, detailing (porches, eaves, chimney stacks), materials and front curtilage treatment, while the modern terrace on the right is a poor imitation in these regards and not suitable within the High Weald.



EXAMPLE BUILDING TYPOLOGY – APARTMENTS

Apartments are often a feature of new housing schemes, but the ubiquitous detached ‘apartment block’ often sitting somewhat unanchored in its own grounds is an incongruous built form within most High Weald settlements.

Instead, within the High Weald, apartments need to be designed to remain domestic in scale and massing, to reflect the local grain of other residential development, and to form an integral part of a meaningful streetscene.

They should present an active edge to the street with multiple independent entrances, such that they read effectively as terraces in the streetscene.

The massing of the block should suit that of the local context, and in village schemes will typically be only 2 storeys high. Deep plan buildings should be avoided since they create large, inappropriate roof volumes.



Despite having individual front entrances, these apartment blocks represent an incongruous approach within the High Weald, failing to respond to characteristic built forms, scale and massing



By contrast, these apartments fit well with the built character, scale, form and massing of the adjacent houses, have active frontages to two faces, and a mixture of individual and communal entrances



These apartments have been designed to appear as terrace houses in the street scene, with each front door serving two apartments

INTEGRATING PARKING INTO THE DESIGN

Well-designed car-parking is a critical part of good design, and a challenge in the design process. There are a range of parking solutions that work well in the High Weald, and some that are not appropriate. The quality of the streets and lanes in the area are harmed when parked cars are allowed to dominate, but that doesn't mean they cannot be part of the street scene. Properly integrated on-street parking is convenient, slows traffic, and helps avoid nuisance parking. Charging points for electric vehicles should also be provided that are available and convenient for residents to use.

To be effective, car-parking needs to be:

- **Adequate** – as a rural area, car dependency in the High Weald is high, particularly in more remote areas less served by public transport. Provision should also be made for commercial vehicles of land-based workers
- **Conveniently located** – as near to front doors as possible, or in pleasant small courtyards, to encourage use and avoid 'anti-social' parking in public areas. Visitor parking should be properly distributed around the site.



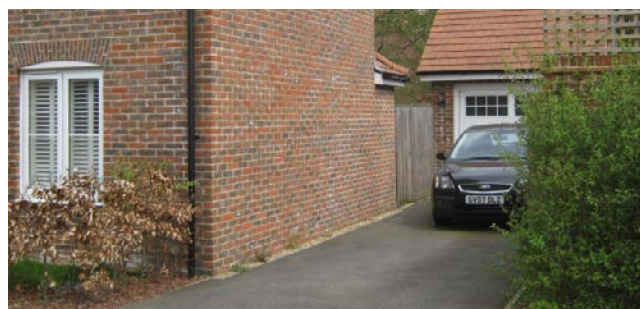
On-street parking in an existing settlement

PARKING SOLUTIONS

On-street parking, arranged parallel to the street edge can be acceptable, and typical of the existing situation in many High Weald settlements, but should be broken up to allow crossing of the street, including by those with disabilities.

On-plot parking – If this is to be used, it should usually be to the sides of buildings. Parking in between buildings, set well back behind the building line, softens the impact of parking when looking along the street.

Double drive-ways serving adjacent dwellings should be avoided since they introduce wide expanses of hardstanding into the streetscene. Instead, plots/ driveways should be separated by hedges to help green the street. A proliferation of small, single detached garage buildings are untypical and should be avoided.



Garage and driveway space set well back from building line



Occasional on-plot parking can be created without compromising the broader enclosure of the plot in the streetscene

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Ensured that parking is adequate and close to the homes it serves, so that it is convenient and likely to be used?
- ✓ Placed parking in a way that maintains the character of the street scene, so that cars and hard-standings do not dominate?
- ✓ Designed parking courts to be easy and attractive to use, defined by active edges of buildings and car barns?

Stretches of end-on, front-of-plot parking should be avoided as it clutters the street scene with both cars and hardstandings, and loses the closely defined street enclosure. Forecourt parking in front of terraces is not typical of the character of the High Weald AONB, and will not be suitable. A wider fronted terrace building module allows some on-street parallel parking instead.

Flats over Garages (FOGs) can be useful design tools to provide shared access through the undercroft to small parking courts beyond, allowing for more continuous street frontage. A single FOG at the back of a parking court can be a rather soulless prospect, and should be avoided, though a group of them can be used to create a mews-style courtyard.

Parking courtyards can be effective to serve terraces or mews, but must be small-scale, usually serving no more than five dwellings, and well overlooked. Where possible, these areas should be defined by buildings bordering the space, arranged to animate the courtyard, or bounded by appropriate planting, rather than enclosed by bleak runs of close-board fences to back gardens.

Car barns within courtyards can be well used and offer protection from the elements, and can reference courtyard typologies in the High Weald, which often feature open-fronted timber framed cattle sheds.

Courtyards should be accessed from the principle street via 'twitchen' style lanes between buildings. Courtyards open to the street should be avoided. There should not be excessive distance between parking courts and the front doors of the properties they serve; they should be accessible by a clear and convenient route.

- 1 Avoid front of plot parking that dominates the streetscene
- 2 Edge of parking court softened by native planting
- 3 Vernacular style car barn within parking court
- 4 Successful small parking court accessed between dwellings in new housing development – entrance kept narrow, and bound by side of buildings, garages built into the court, and brick walls.



Building Appearance, Local Details and Sustainable Design

The landscape of the High Weald can be seen clearly in how the built environment of the area is constructed and detailed. The prevailing colours and materials in the area are all a product of the underlying geology and the way the High Weald has been shaped by human industry and help to create local distinctiveness in the built character of towns and villages.

This distinctiveness began to be eroded in the mid-19th century with the advent of the railways enabling the use of imported materials such as slate. This dilution of local distinctiveness is harmful to the character of the High Weald and should not be exacerbated by the widespread use of such non-local materials in new developments.

Use of the right local materials and details is a key factor in creating High Weald housing developments that are genuinely 'of the place'. The exact application can either be through a well-executed and detailed version of the local vernacular, or a contemporary interpretation, drawing out key elements.

Designers are encouraged to find innovative ways of reinterpreting the local vernacular; contemporary interpretations of local designs, if done well, can be an exciting way to enhance character without merely copying what already exists. Meanwhile using local crafts and skills can help in embedding the High Weald character into the design. Contemporary designs can also provide more scope for flexible and accessible accommodation to meet future needs.

However, the ubiquitous late twentieth century 'housing estate' version of vernacular architecture is often a poor imitation of what makes the High Weald special, and will not be acceptable; the following specific advice will help schemes address this.

Meanwhile, to help meet Management Plan objective G3, a responsible approach to sustainability in building design and detailing will be expected within the High Weald to meet the challenges of climate change.



Characteristic High Weald detailing in traditional and contemporary interpretations



Poor quality modern versions of these details and materials

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓

Understood how materials and detailing have traditionally been used in the High Weald to create locally distinctive character, and referenced this successfully in the design?
- ✓

Included and arranged building elements and details in ways that reference the best of the locality, so that new buildings complement and reinforce existing High Weald character?
- ✓

Used the High Weald Colour Study to develop a colour palette?
- ✓

Developed a roofscape that references that of the locality, including pitch, covering materials and eaves?
- ✓

Incorporated sustainable design principles to contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation and reduce ecological footprint?

BUILT DETAILS

The built form characteristic of the High Weald is informed by the cumulative composition of a number of details, which can be successfully translated into both traditional and contemporary designs.

- Roof pitches in clay tiled roofs are reasonably steep; occasionally 42.5° never lower, but more usually 47.5–50°
- Open eaves are characteristic, not bulky boxed upvc soffits
- Porches are typically simple canopies, either flat or open gables, occasionally monopitches
- Window heads in brick elevations are typically arched; curved or flat brick arch. Straight soldier course brick lintels will look inappropriate in the High Weald
- Tall chimneystacks are also to be found throughout the area, and articulate the individual building and the wider streetscape. They can also accommodate wood burners which are often highly valued within new homes – the use of timber for fuel also offers an opportunity to use local materials and support local industry, supporting High Weald Management Plan initiatives. In contemporary designs, metal flues can provide the same function.



Existing traditional porch canopy and similar in new build



Brick arch over window and inappropriate soldier course



Chimneystacks articulating roofscapes



COLOUR

The use of colour is a good way to reference local landscape qualities in new development. **The High Weald Colour Study** offers a palette of colours based on a careful study of the built and natural environment, and designers are expected to use this to help shape their proposals.

Developed palette		RENDER, WOODEN PAINT, WEATHER BOARDING		TIMBER, FIBRE CEMENT		STONE		BRICK, TILE		STEEL	
How to read this palette	INTEGRATION	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
	NEUTRAL	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T
	CONTRAST	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD
ACCENT	A	AE	AF	AG	AH	AI	AJ	AK	AL	AM	AN
	B	AO	AP	AQ	AR	AS	AT	AU	AV	AW	AX
	C	AY	AZ	BA	BB	BC	BD	BE	BF	BG	BH

MATERIALS

The roofscape of settlements in the High Weald is one of the key defining built characteristics, and in order to embed a sense-of-place in new housing developments it is critical for new roofscapes to reflect and contribute to this.

Clay tile roofs and tile hanging is common to most of the High Weald, but importantly this is of locally sourced clay, that weathers naturally, in rich hues of burnt orange, rust and russet. Concrete substitutes, which do not weather in the same way, nor possess the natural depth of hue, are unsuitable for use within the High Weald, as are clay tiles in the bluer-purple hue of the spectrum, or manufacturers' 'mixes' of colours, which give a contrived, dotted appearance.

New developments should use small module clay tiles, with natural camber, available from a number of national producers, which give the characteristic undulations of roofs and elevations. Large module, or interlinked tiles, in clay or concrete, will not give the same visual characteristics to the important roofscape and are not appropriate within the High Weald.

Local stone features in some parts of the High Weald, and development in those areas should maximise opportunities to reference this in their construction, though imported stone should be avoided.

Bricks within the High Weald vary in colour due to subtle changes in the underlying soils. Whilst the clays are predominantly rich hues of reds and orange, burnt headers are also characteristic, and there is also gault clay within certain parts of the High Weald. New development using brick should use a hue that is specific to their part of the area.

Full height brick buildings in the High Weald are not common; prior to their use in late twentieth century building, they are typically found only in isolated historic manor houses, or Victorian/Edwardian architecture. Full height brick often results in an incongruous character in new housing schemes in the High Weald, and should be used very sparingly, if at all, in new developments.

Far more typical and characteristic of the areas is a brick ground floor with a first floor clad in weather-boarding or tile-hanging. The cladding material must continue all the way around the first floor of a building.



These two images show poor examples of cladding which does not continue around the first floor – uncharacteristic and inappropriate in the High Weald

Timber for frames and cladding is ubiquitous throughout the High Weald – the area has one of the highest concentrations of surviving early timber framed buildings in Europe. This should be referenced by new development but only in a ‘genuine’ way, e.g. for the structural framing of a new building – ‘stuck-on’ timber framing to a façade lacks integrity and should not be used in the AONB.

Timber weatherboard cladding, either for the upper floors or the whole building elevation, is highly characteristic of the High Weald, reflecting the historic abundance of the material in the area. Weatherboarding is characteristically painted white in some High Weald settlements, its appearance contributing heavily to the local distinctiveness of a settlement, though there are many localised pockets of black-painted (or tarred) weatherboarding. Attention should be paid to the prevailing local style to help new development feel ‘of the place’. High quality timber weatherboarding can often be successfully left natural and oiled as part of a contemporary architectural approach.



SUSTAINABLE BUILDING DESIGN

Efficient use of natural resources during construction, operation and maintenance of new homes will contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation, and reduce their ecological footprint within the protected landscape of the AONB.

Sunlight and energy efficiency should be considered as an integral part of the layout through passive solar design and natural ventilation systems.

Developments should also consider whole-life performance and costs and take a ‘fabric first’ approach – that is maximising the performance of the components and materials that make up the building fabric itself before considering the use of artificial heating and cooling systems or ‘add-on’ equipment that may impact adversely on the appearance of buildings, particularly in long landscape views.

Locally sourced timber weather boarding is a good way to use local materials and reference aspects of local design and can also support the AONB by encouraging the sustainable management of woodlands (see Management Plan objective W4), as can the use of local timber products for boundary treatments, including riven post and rail fencing, chestnut paling and hazel hurdles.



Local timber should be used for boundaries



Avoid ‘add-on’ equipment on the elevations and roofs of new development

Sustainable building design should:

- ✓ minimise the need for energy and water consumption;
- ✓ support water efficiency including through rainwater harvesting and grey water recycling;
- ✓ utilise sustainable construction methods that minimise waste;
- ✓ use materials from renewable resources such as locally grown and produced wood to support the sustainable management of woodland and reduce transport costs;
- ✓ minimise lighting and glare from windows to protect dark skies and reduce energy use.

MAINTAINING THE STREETSCENE

Well-designed storage helps to preserve the character of streets and spaces, keeping them uncluttered and visually appealing.

Dedicated waste and recycling storage or set down spaces can help reduce street clutter and encourage people to store their bins neatly. The use of locally sourced timber offers scope for designing storage solutions in ways that support local character and sustain the productive landscape.

Storage for waste and recycling is poorly used if it is hard to access. In all but the largest of back gardens, a simple set down area in a back garden is often not an appropriate solution. Instead, space should be made to the side or front of the plot for waste and recycling.

A simple area in front of the home but screened by a boundary hedge or fence allows bins to be stored close to where they need to be without being an eyesore.

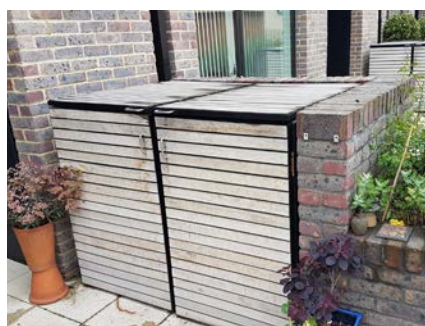
For apartments, waste stores and cycles stores should be integrated into the building. Should this not be possible, dedicated stores in timber, arranged as an outbuilding to the rear of the building, should be provided.

CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Understood the storage requirements of each home?
- ✓ Created space to store waste and recycling containers in a way that does not detract from the street scene?



Clever small inset into the front boundary fencing creates a discreet, unobtrusive place for bins to sit



Contemporary neat structures to accommodate bins designed as part of the architecture of the building



Conversely, the strong building detailing of this scheme is undermined by the forecourt clutter of bins and stores creating a poor streetscene

SURFACES & MATERIALS

The materials palette for streets should be simple, and help avoid suburbanisation of the locality. Large areas of black-top, for instance in parking areas or footways, will not be appropriate. Limited use of grey asphalt, coloured chips in HRA, imprinted materials, stone setts, or resin bound gravel may be suitable in some areas depending on the hierarchy and role of the street. Where blocks are used, herringbone patterns are not typical of the High Weald and should not be used.

Parking areas should be surfaced with permeable paving to prevent flooding and excessive water run-off. Surfaces should be accessible to those of limited mobility and assist those with disabilities to sense when moving from a safe space to one where they might encounter bicycles or vehicular traffic.

Where pavements are provided, they should generally be in a material that matches the highway surface. However, other footpaths, such as those through green spaces, should be in a softer material such as self-bind hoggins or resin bound gravel. Kerbs should be avoided in most situations, but if needed the demarcation should be minimal. Soft roadside verges can often be designed to accommodate services.

Many smaller streets and lanes in High Weald settlements don't have many road markings, using instead their scale, or surfacing changes to indicate priorities. Painted lines on road surfaces should only be used where absolutely necessary for highway safety requirements.



CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Referenced local street types rather than used standard approaches to street design in the scheme?
- ✓ Used a simple palette of materials and designed the street to be free of clutter?
- ✓ Avoided unnecessary light pollution?

SIGNAGE & LIGHTING

Streets should be designed to be uncluttered, with minimal signage. Where signage is included, it should be co-located or placed on buildings, and should be designed so as not to suburbanise village context and character.

The High Weald is an intrinsically dark landscape characterised by dark skies at night, so standard street lighting is often not appropriate and would cause unacceptable light pollution to the AONB. Street lighting should only be used where it is absolutely necessary, and should conform to the Institute of Lighting Standards for AONBs and be capable of night time switch-off. Site-specific solutions should be created that minimise light pollution and glare.

Where lighting is needed, the suburban impact of street 'clutter' of a proliferation of lighting columns, uncharacteristic in many of the villages in the High Weald, can be minimised through a more place-sensitive product selection; a combination of Passive Infrared lights (PIRs) on building access points (e.g. porch lights), low level bollard lighting on key public routes, and wall-mounted lighting within parking courts.

Reinforcing Local Planting Character & Habitats

PLANTING

Plant species, along with sizes and locations, within new housing schemes in the High Weald are critical to support the rich biodiversity and landscape character of the local area. A detailed planting guide⁹ has been produced to assist developers and landowners with selecting appropriate plants for the High Weald.

A multi-layered planting strategy is required across the site; trees, hedgerow boundaries, open spaces, gardens, and grassland verges, to allow for a range of vegetation heights and habitats across the development informed by published and site specific landscape character assessments.

- Native hedging plants and shrubs which can be coppiced, such as hazel, hawthorn, guelder rose, dogwood, and field maple.
- orchard type trees such as apples, crab apples, and cherries
- 'structural' hedgerow and specimen trees such as oak, hornbeam, field maple, and birch, including new mature trees.

Front garden hedges adjacent to footways can be successfully created from a mixture of hornbeam, beech and hazel for example, to maintain a locally distinctive, semi-rural character in village developments.

9. Responsible planting in the High Weald AONB



High Weald-native wildflowers are an integral part of the area's ecosystems, and should be included in landscaping schemes to also embed a sense of place and local character in a new development, for example; English bluebells and wood anemones under trees and in grass verges at the base of hedgerows, and wildflower mixes in open spaces, sourced from suppliers using products of local provenance. Wild flora mixes need to be selected according to the ecology of the site, informed by ecological surveys of the site and surrounding area.

Areas of the ubiquitous, 'estate' planting of ornamental ground-cover shrubs (such as Berberis, Pyracantha, Photinia and Mahonia) are not appropriate in developments within the High Weald.

Locally non-native or invasive species such as laurel, leylandii, buddleia, European bluebells, rhododendron and cotoneaster should also be avoided, as should imported topsoil and other mechanisms which could **introduce pests and diseases.**



CHECKLIST: Has the design?

- ✓ Incorporated attractive, locally-appropriate native planting schemes in the public realm and as boundaries to dwellings?
- ✓ Developed management plans for public green spaces that use traditional land management skills and support local industry?
- ✓ Maximised opportunities to support characteristic wildlife and retain/provide habitats?

WILDLIFE

The rich diversity of wildlife supported by the diverse habitat mosaic of the High Weald is highlighted in the Management Plan Statement of Significance, and it is vital that new housing developments play a role in supporting that wildlife, working with and adding to existing habitats.

Within existing and proposed buildings, green spaces and landscape features, opportunities for wildlife should be maximised. This should include planting of native plants and the creation of safe places and/or nesting opportunities supplemented by nest and roost boxes with a focus on urban species such as pipistrelle and long eared bats, swifts, swallows, house sparrows and starlings.

Opportunities should be taken to strengthen and improve habitat corridors. Barriers to connectivity such as roads and paths should be avoided and where necessary mitigated through the use of aerial connections (touching tree canopies) and wildlife culverts. Further advice can be found in the Wildlife Trusts' 'Homes, People and Wildlife'.



MANAGEMENT OF GREEN SPACES

Green spaces within sites bring with them opportunities to enhance the locality through their management, drawing on local land management skills and supporting local industry. Such spaces should be managed functionally, through traditional productive means such as coppicing.

Ongoing management proposals for the open space and habitats should be included up front as part of the planning application as part of a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan. This should include as much community ownership and stewardship as possible.



CHAPTER 4

Appendices

CREATING A MEANINGFUL DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT (DAS)

ROLE AND PURPOSE

A Design & Access Statement (DAS) is a report accompanying and supporting a planning application, to illustrate the design process that has led to the development proposal, and to explain it in a structured way.

Design & Access Statements are a statutory requirement¹⁰ for certain types of application, including major development.

The legislation sets out that a DAS shall:

- a. explain the design principles and concepts that have been applied to the development,
- b. demonstrate the steps taken to appraise the context of the development and how the design of the development takes that context into account,
- c. explain the policy adopted as to access, and how policies relating to access in local development documents have been taken into account,
- d. state what, if any, consultation has been undertaken on issues relating to access to the development, and what account has been taken of the outcome of any such consultation, and
- e. explain how any specific issues which might affect access to the development have been addressed.

Your DAS should tell the story of the place you are in and the place you are trying to create, so as to demonstrate to others that the requirements of this guide have influenced your thinking.

10. The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) (Amendment) Order 2013

DAS IN THE PRE-APPLICATION PROCESS

However, a DAS should be much more than a retrospective design summary of a scheme. It can be most effective when used as a design tool during the whole design process, to ensure that the earliest design decisions are embedded in strong context appraisal, design principles and access strategies.

Pre-application discussions are critically important and benefit both developers and local planning authorities in ensuring a better mutual understanding of objectives and constraints that exist.

Local planning authorities and applicants should therefore take a positive attitude towards early engagement in meaningful pre-application discussions, and a draft DAS can be a useful way to discuss a proposal throughout the design process; setting out at pre-application stage not just proposed layouts but also site and context appraisal, design principles and concepts, and three-dimensional scheme proposals.

PRESENTING THE INFORMATION

Although a DAS can be presented in various formats, we recommend using the checklists from this Guide as a template for structuring your document. In doing so, you should demonstrate how each of the questions has been addressed.

The subjects that the DAS needs to cover might best be represented not merely with written text, but also annotated sketch plans and street-scene sections, drawings, access diagrams, precedent images, historic landscape maps, site photographs or even a model on more complex sites, all sufficient to explain the particular proposals and the design decisions taken.

HOW THE HIGH WEALD AONB DESIGN GUIDE RELATES TO OTHER DOCUMENTS

The guidance within this document brings together policies, best practice and analysis from a wide range of areas, from national policies relating to design quality, through adopted development plans to local studies of landscape character and identity.

In doing so, we aim to provide a concise, easy to access, one-stop shop for designers and decision makers, using signposting where this is helpful – e.g. Building for Life references are included within the Overview section.

However, there is a great deal of extra detail and advice that we encourage designers and decision makers to familiarise themselves with, and this is included below.

All of the supporting information to this Guide is readily available online from either the relevant statutory agencies, local authorities, or the High Weald AONB Partnership.

National planning policy and guidance

- National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – Section 12 concerns ‘Achieving well-designed places’.
- National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG) – includes a Design section covering issues such as ‘The importance of good design’, ‘What is a well designed place?’ and ‘How should buildings and the spaces between them be considered?’
- National Design Guidance (2019)
- Building for Life
- Manual for Streets (DfT/DCLG 2007)

Natural England National Character Assessment (NCA 122)

High Weald-wide Landscape Studies

- East Sussex County Council Landscape Character Assessment (LCA)
- West Sussex County Council LCA
- Surrey LCA
- Kent LCA
- Historic Landscape Characterisations Studies (West and East Sussex)
- Extensive Urban Surveys – a series of Historic Character Assessment Reports of 41 towns in East and West Sussex, prepared by Dr Roland B Harris in association with Historic England. Many of these are for towns which sit within the High Weald AONB

Local Authority Development Plans (contact the relevant Local Planning Authority for further information):

- Core Strategies/Local Plans
- Development and Site Allocation Plans
- Supplementary Planning Documents
- Conservation Area Appraisals
- Landscape Assessments
- Neighbourhood Plans

High Weald AONB Joint Advisory Committee

- High Weald AONB Management Plan 2019–2024
- High Weald Guidance on the Selection and Use of Colour in Development
- High Weald Planting Guidance
- Settlement: Summary of historic settlement development in the High Weald
- High Weald Farmstead Guidance

Lead Local Flood Authority studies

- East Sussex County Council Guide to Sustainable Drainage Systems in East Sussex (June 2015)
- East Sussex Flood Risk Management Strategy 2016–2026
- Water, People, Places AECOM 2018 (prepared for the Lead Local Flood Authorities of the SE of England)

Other

- Guidance from the Wildlife Trust: Homes for people and wildlife
- Marine Policy Statement and Coastal Management Plans



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