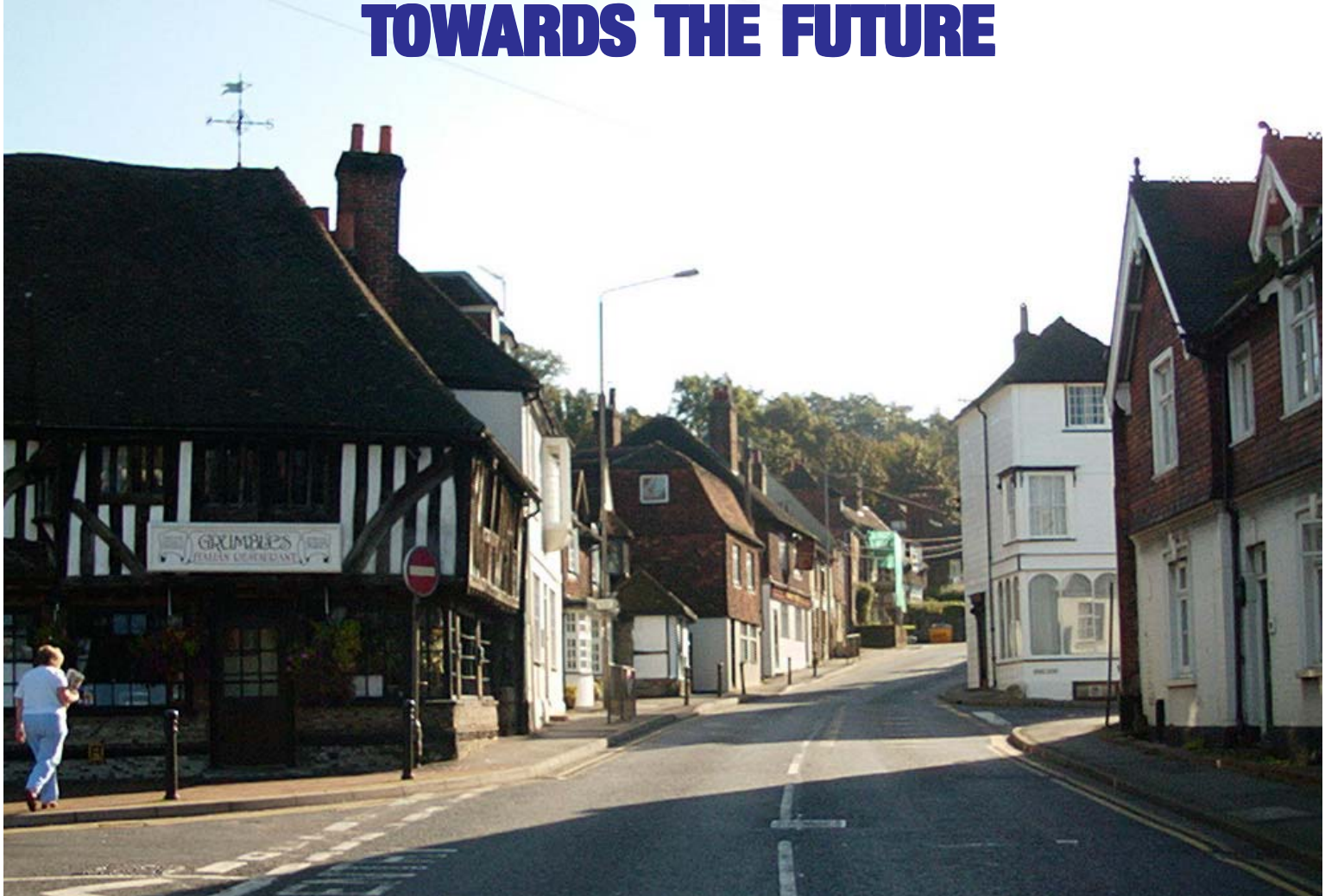


SEAL

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2004



TOWARDS THE FUTURE



INTRODUCTION

This Village Design Statement has been produced at the request of the Seal Parish Council, who have asked for similar Statements from Underriver and Stone Street. This Statement covers Seal Ward - that is, the centre of the village, the housing areas along Childsbridge Lane to the north, and the surrounding countryside west as far as the Sevenoaks boundary one way, and east towards Seal Chart the other way. To the south it covers the eastern end of the Wilderness Estate, and the separate hamlet of Godden Green.

Village Design Statements (VDSs) are a new idea, sponsored by the Government's Countryside Agency. They are intended to give local people a chance to say how they want their communities to look in future. They have to be prepared within the general framework of the Local Plan (in our case, the Sevenoaks District Local Plan, adopted by the SDC in March 2000) which itself has to fit into the Government's strategy for the South East and into KCC's County Structure Plan. Their purpose is to elaborate those plans in the detail required for local application. Once agreed by the local residents and endorsed by the Parish and the District Councils, they have the legal status of Supplementary Planning Guidance - that is, the District Council has to take them into account in deciding on future Planning Applications, and the individual Design Statements which should now accompany them, although the VDS is not necessarily the last word. VDSs are also an important input into the revision of the Local Plan (next due for Sevenoaks in 2005); and that is the stage at which major changes to the framework can be proposed. Changes in the planning laws outlined in the Government's 2001 Green Paper will not affect this system.

But a strategy for the design and appearance of the village depends on the way the village has grown up and the way it works today. So this paper contains a good deal of general background and some related proposals before setting out some detailed suggestions about Design in Section 11. These are cross-referenced (R1, &c) in the main body of the text.

This Statement is the product of a lot of discussion within the local community. It started with a questionnaire distributed to all the residents with the local newsletter. That was followed by a public meeting in the Village Hall. After redrafting, it was then approved by the Parish Council on 13 March 2003 and sent to the Sevenoaks District Council for further statutory consultation.



Aerial view of village centre

1. The Shape of The Village

Seal is a very old village, standing at the edge of the greensand ridge above the Holmesdale valley. Originally an agricultural centre, it is now largely a commuter settlement. But it has retained its rural look and its separate identity. The village was originally built out of local materials, mainly ragstone, with a bit of flint from the other side of the valley, or local timber (oak and chestnut, mainly), and with locally-made bricks and tiles, whose warm colours now give the village its typical Kentish character. It grew naturally out of the landscape.



View of Seal from Church roof with Childsbridge Lane in foreground and looking south-west toward Sevenoaks

1.2 The village lies at the northern end of the present civil parish. The very fine church stands at the top of the little rise above the valley, and the village grew up just south and west of the church, originally around a village green of which only two fragments remain. The villagers are very anxious to retain these two little “green lungs” and as much as possible of the remaining open space in the centre of the village. It is bisected by an ancient road, now the A25, which still carries very heavy traffic despite construction of the M26 just north of the village.

1.3 This motorway, together with the railway line and the flood-meadows along the ancient Guzzle Brook, all running east-west, mark the northern edge of the village and still provide a natural break between Seal and Kemsing. It is essential to retain this barrier, because modern housing, mostly post-1945, has crept for over half a mile along Childsbridge Lane to the north of the village, and this is where a large part of its

population now live. To the west, there is only the narrowest of gaps between Seal and Sevenoaks. The District Plan recognises that this break must be maintained. To the south lie the grounds of Wildernesse House, now covered by the Wildernesse Estate, and by the golf course. Together, these provide a very clear natural barrier. To the east, where the main road climbs steeply out of the village up to Seal Chart, the barrier is maintained by the gardens of a few big houses, well-concealed from the road, and by the common land further along the Chart.

1.4 The whole area (apart from the built-up part of the village) lies within the Green Belt and is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The historic centre of the village is a Conservation Area.

1.5 So Seal is a well-defined separate village, with a typical Kentish character, within clear natural boundaries, and surrounded on three sides by agricultural or wooded land. It is very clear from our consultation exercise that the residents want to keep it that way.



Seal Church Hall (opp. church) - wood structure

2. The Village Centre

The original village centre provided services for the local farmers, for the people who worked on the farms and for their families. As recently as thirty years ago, there were five shops in the centre of the village. Now there are only two non-specialist shops, and a Post Office. This means that most shopping has to be done outside the village, with serious implications for transport (see Section 9). While many residents would like more local shops, recent experience suggests that these would not be

economically viable. Three of the original five pubs remain, and are well-patronised, both at lunchtime and in the evenings. There are also two restaurants and a fast-food outlet (recently converted from a third restaurant) all of which seem to thrive. There are at least twenty-five small businesses based in and around the village centre, ranging alphabetically from accountancy to welding. (There are about 300 businesses registered for VAT in the parish as a whole, but not all of them actually operate here). Some of these businesses serve a mainly-local clientele, and there are clearly limits to the size of the local market for these. Others, often established by local people, use Seal as a convenient base, within reach of London, from which to serve a wider public, and in principle could expand further. All these generate some local employment (about 600 people at the last count, not all living in the parish), but the majority of the working population of Seal has to travel to work outside the village.

2.2 There does not seem much scope for further expansion of this local economy. The District Plan makes no allocation of large sites for business development here (or elsewhere in Seal parish). It does provide for small-scale development or conversion of sites, subject to fairly rigorous tests, and provided no housing is lost in the process. But in fact there seems little commercial demand for this and although more local employment might be welcome, the local population is strongly against it, mainly because it



The M26 breaks up the view to Kemsing from Seal

would add to the parking and congestion problem in the centre of the village. (R2)

2.3 Some change, however, is inevitable and right. The village cannot be frozen just at this point in its thousand-year development. But the residents are very anxious to keep its character. In particular, they want to preserve the village centre in something like its present form. Fortunately, the High Street, and the older parts immediately to the north and south are protected as a Conservation Area, and any changes to these buildings for commercial reasons (whether in structure or in appearance) are severely limited by the District Plan. Some detailed implications for design are set out in Section 11 (especially R4, R7, R8).

3. Transport

Local consultation shows that this is top of the list of almost everyone's concerns: one local resident said sharply that it is much more important than prettifying the village. Traffic affects the total appearance of Seal and the design of individual buildings. Traffic through the High Street, particularly in the rush hours (both business and school) has clearly reached saturation point. It is now an urgent safety and health issue because of the high level of pollution, as well as a visual and noise horror for residents. The solutions are largely outside the control of the village community. They are already under study at

Church Road





High Street from Church Street showing mix of building styles

District and County level, and in the A25 Forum which represents all the local communities, but action is constrained by national legislation and financial resources. A bypass for Seal itself is not on that agenda, and does not feature in any official plans. Top of the list of other suggestions comes the need for eastward-facing slip roads off the motorway at Chipstead or at Otford Road. Although outside our own boundaries, these would clearly have the biggest impact. But the problem of congestion would remain; much of the through traffic using the High Street originates within a few miles of Seal, and the heavy traffic to and from the west end of Kemsing adds a turning problem at the junctions with School Lane and Church Street. On the main road, solutions might include more speed cameras or a second Speed Indicating Device (SID), restriction on road works at peak periods, and stricter enforcement of speed limits and parking restrictions; more islands or other traffic calming devices; and different surfaces to indicate the residential nature of the street. On the very narrow side streets, especially School Lane and Church Road, where accidents are already a problem, pavements are lacking, and the threat to pedestrians is very real. Here, even lower speed limits, backed up by more traffic management devices, including “sleeping policemen”, white lines like those in School Lane, and rumble strips, need study. Because of the lack of alternative routes, pedestrianisation is clearly not an option, although some restrictions on the use of Zion Street, Pudding Lane and Church Road are worth a

look. Although many residents wanted traffic lights at the Park Lane/Church St. junctions with the High Street, recent advice from the traffic consultants is against this option. However, it is important that improved traffic systems are not visually-intrusive; some of the recent additions to traffic signs detract from the buildings or the countryside around them. (R15)

3.2 Parking is another problem near the top of residents’ lists. Clearly, local businesses and local residents need some parking space. There is very little room for any more. The District Council has rejected a possible permit scheme, following a separate public consultation process. Meanwhile, more daytime use can and should be made of the small parking lot on the edge of the Recreation Ground (and signs might be erected to show visitors where it is). Parked cars seriously diminish the attractiveness of the centre of the village (e.g. Church Road) but at present there is nowhere else for them to go.

3.3 Can the demand for cars be reduced by better public transport? Because most residents work and shop outside the village, and all the older children go to school elsewhere, there is heavy use of private cars. In the 1991 census, 530 families, out of 779 in Seal Ward, owned at least one car, and 105 had three cars or more. Two points emerged strongly from the current consultation. One is that the existing bus service, while much better than in many surrounding villages, could be made more convenient without much extra cost. Better-timed connections with the trains, extending

The New Sports Pavilion on Seal Recreation Ground next to the Old Sports Pavilion (since demolished)



into the evening rush, might tempt some London commuters to leave their cars at home, particularly since parking near Sevenoaks and Otford stations is now so full. (Although a railway line runs right across the northern edge of the village, there seems little prospect of an additional station at Childsbridge Lane.) Buses to the out-of-town shopping centres at Riverhead (Tesco) or Otford Road (Sainsburys, etc.) would suit many shoppers and some of the staff there, (as well as serving a social need for older or disabled residents without their own cars). Changes in the school bus system, while more expensive, are also an option which needs study. So does car pooling among parents. Such a study needs to extend beyond Seal itself, because of the heavy school traffic from Kemsing, and to the Prep School in Godden Green, which adds to the congestion in Seal village.

3.4 It is clear that the traffic problem has serious implications for the appearance of the village and for the design of individual buildings and the land around them.

4. Community Facilities

By comparison with other local centres, Seal is quite well-served by community facilities, and the residents saw little need for further provision. The church still provides an important focus for village life. The village hall and the church hall, with the Memorial Pavilion on the Recreation Ground, the school hall, and the old scout hut, between them provide space for a very wide range of village activities, both formal societies and informal groups. The pubs and restaurants already



Modern Housing, to the north of Seal Village Centre

described are another essential resource. Outdoors, the allotments (managed by a local group of trustees) and the Recreation Ground (maintained by the Parish Council) cover most needs, and provide an important addition to the open spaces; the shortage here is of people to run the clubs and youth groups, not of space. Walkers and horse riders are well catered for, and while there are some suggestions for additional routes (to be separately reported to the authorities) the majority of residents are content with what is already available. But it is important to safeguard all the existing rights of way. In general, community facilities do not present serious design problems for Seal.

5. Historic Buildings and the Centre of the Village

Seal is lucky in having 62 “listed buildings” in the Conservation Area in the centre of the village (and about another 20 in the rest of Seal Ward). As part of this study, and as a contribution to a future history of the village, a computerised database of all these

buildings is now being drawn up; more information from owners will be welcome. We understand that English Heritage is also preparing a web-site of listed buildings for the whole country, which will include Kent; some local buildings have already been photographed for this purpose. Apart from the church (reclassified as Grade I early in 2002), which is basically a thirteenth-century building with later additions, there are no specially-distinguished buildings here of great architectural merit – they are all Grade II in the government lists. Some are very old: there are two Kentish Hall Houses: the Kentish Yeoman and 31 High Street (next to the butcher’s shop). Recent

Sympathetic conversion of Black Barn





1990's Housing Development of Starter Homes at Robinwood Drive

discoveries suggest that the Crown also contains some very old timbers in the roof and an ancient fireplace. Forge Cottage in Church Road, with a splendid vaulted cellar beneath it, is about fifteenth century. The rest are mainly eighteenth or early nineteenth century. But individually and perhaps more importantly in groups, they are what people remember about Seal.

5.2 In addition to the officially-listed buildings, there are several others within the centre of the village which need to be protected, both individually and as groups. That is why the residents think the Conservation Area is so important. SDC has recently completed a regular Appraisal of the Conservation Area, which reaches broadly the same conclusions, and makes some specific suggestions about individual buildings. It also proposes a minor extension of the Area to include Garden Terrace. The village contains a number of attractive buildings, mostly of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries - the original Wildernesse House; its stables (now Sealclean Laundry); the Grey House; Lychgate House (the former vicarage, with rare white "mathematical tiles" on the front); The Croft; Bretanby; and several others. There are also many attractive smaller houses, especially the white-painted or tile-hung terraces along School Lane and by the green, and those put up by the owners of Wildernesse House in the late nineteenth century for their estate workers, in a distinctive "Arts and Crafts" style - these include the village hall and its adjoining houses, "Roseville", and the row of three black and white houses in Church Street. The best loved and most often mentioned building is the apparently ancient block at the corner of Church Street and the High Street; although this contains the core of a very old house, the present picturesque half-timbered facade is actually a reconstruction done in the 1950s. But it has become

so much a part of the village scene that it seems essential to preserve it. These structures, and the more distinguished Listed Buildings, contain many attractive features (illustrated inside the back cover) which collectively help to build up the village picture and must be carefully maintained. (R9)

5.3 A few modern buildings have been fitted in among the older ones. The new school, hidden away at the end of Zambra Way, is pleasant and unobtrusive, although many regret the loss of the old Victorian buildings nearer the centre. Not many residents like the library on the

corner of School Lane, though it attempts to blend in to the local scene. The offices which replaced the garage at the eastern end of the High Street are less obtrusive, and match well. The modern flats for older people, such as Knox's Court and Johnson Court, are also successful attempts at fitting in. Clearly there will be more changes as businesses close or expand, or as families require modifications to their houses. But there is an overwhelming view among residents that the centre of the village should retain something very like its present appearance. There is a strong preference for the use of locally distinctive and sustainably-produced materials and styles in any new work or alteration within the Conservation Area. (R6) It is therefore important that building owners considering such changes should consult the Parish Council early, even before starting any formal planning application. The recent refurbishment of some key buildings in the centre of the village, including the three pubs, is particularly welcome.

5.4 The layout of the village means that there are few long views, into or out of the centre of the village. The most important inward views are those which focus on the impressive sixteenth century perpendicular Church Tower. The tower also turns up in internal views, notably several gaps between houses or at the corner of streets, or from the allotments. Looking outward, the predominant feature is the long skyline of the North Downs. It is essential to keep these views unspoilt. (R4)

5.5 There is also support for some additional greenery in the centre of the village. Despite some recent mindless vandalism, property owners might like to add to the existing and attractive window boxes and hanging baskets, or to sponsor a few new trees. Voluntary

efforts could provide a few more features like the excellent horse trough flowers, or the memorial garden by the pavilion. There may be room for more planting, outside the Library or along the edge of the Recreation Ground (provided that traffic sightlines are kept clear). But it is equally important to see that the existing stock is well-maintained. (R12) Another idea currently being reconsidered is the erection of a village sign somewhere in the centre of the village, possibly outside the Library.

6. The Northern End of the Village

The village has expanded along Childsbridge Lane in the half -century since the war, in several phases. There is former Council property (some of it now managed by the West Kent Housing Association, and some now privately owned) at Zambra Way, Ragge Way and Wilmar Way and Bentley's Meadow. (Some non-traditional construction properties will be replaced here in the next few years and others are now being extensively modernised). There is also much modern private housing, for example in Meadowlands and most recently at Robinwood Drive. (Infrastructure problems, notably flooding caused by inadequate surface drainage, may be a problem). Nearly all of this is in a pleasant unobtrusive style, using traditional materials, which relates well to the original core of the village. These areas are well planted with trees, and most of the gardens are carefully maintained. A few discordant notes intrude - usually new windows or doors, or unusual colour schemes. Parked cars are sometimes visually intrusive, but these roads were not designed to accommodate the present levels of car ownership, and there does not seem much chance of improving the



Church of St Peter & St Paul, Seal

situation. But in general these areas are very attractive, and need to be kept that way. (R3, R6, R13, R17, R18)

7. The Wildernesse Estate

On its southern side, Seal Ward overlaps a part of the Wildernesse Estate. This was developed in the 1920s, having formerly been the grounds of a mansion belonging to the third Lord Hillingdon. Since 1954 the original house - now known as Dorton House - has been used for educational purposes by the Royal London Society for the Blind.

Dangerous junction where Park Lane meets Seal High Street



7.2 Designed from the outset to retain the original estate roads and much of the original planting, it was the developer's desire to maintain the impression of single homes situated in the countryside. To this end, he encouraged a number of well-known architects to design the first houses on the Estate, including several representatives of the then flourishing Arts and Crafts Movement, notably H. M. Baillie Scott. Many of the houses are of great individual merit, and the importance of the area has now been recognised by Sevenoaks District



Dorton House - Royal London Society For The Blind

Council which has extended the existing Conservation Area to cover virtually the whole Estate.

7.3 Houses on the estate are subject to significant covenants laid down by the original developer. The Estate has its own flourishing Residents Association. Most of the guidelines in Section 11 apply with particular force to Wildernesse.

8. Godden Green

The small hamlet of Godden Green lies one mile to the south of Seal. Although it is quite separate from the central village, and has more in common with the hamlets of Seal Chart and Stone Street, it forms part of Seal Ward and is therefore dealt with here. It straddles the main route between Seal and Underriver with a characterful mixture of open green spaces, Kentish cottages and substantial residences, surrounded on all sides by Green Belt – most of which is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

8.2 The Green itself consists of two main spaces, both triangular in nature, lying north to south along the road. The centre of the hamlet is significantly defined by the buildings clustered around the smaller open green to the north, and by the focal aspect of the Buck's Head pub and adjacent pond.

8.3 Little has changed in the quality of the enclosing landscape's form and character over the last 100 years. The hamlet is defined to the south by woodland (Rambles Wood and Lord's Spring Wood), to the west by Knole Park and to the north

by Wildernesse Golf Course. Areas of pasture to the east break through the woodland pattern opening up farmland and distant views. This gives the area its characteristic rural identity and quality as an area of great landscape value.

8.4 New construction and development have generally been constrained by Green Belt policy – particularly to properties fronting the green. Traditional materials - red brick, Kent ragstone, red clay tiles and slate – combine with local building styles to provide a typical representation of a small Kentish hamlet, one which local residents feel must be conserved. (R5, R6)

8.5 Godden Green provides a central location for rural activity – walking, riding, visiting Knole Park- but is limited in the provision of other community facilities. The Prep School, pub and Godden Green Clinic (formerly Mary's Mead) generate some local focus, as does the Green itself. A very restricted bus service exists with links to Sevenoaks and surrounding villages. Some residents have suggested that the hamlet could sustain a village shop or some form of communal use of the green to encourage local user interaction. The Old Post Office on the green originally served this function. Inappropriate parking around the green has been an issue in the past and needs occasional monitoring, but generally visitors to the area are respectful of the hamlet's rural quality. Physically the defining character of the hamlet is complete. Its rural setting, open green configuration with different but sensitively scaled buildings bordering two sides offer little scope

New Buildings at Dorton College



or need for change. Recognition of the quality and importance of maintaining such rural spaces so near to towns like Sevenoaks is of prime concern to both local residents and countryside visitors. For these reasons, the Parish and District Councils may wish to consider whether Godden Green should become a separate Conservation Area.

9. The Surrounding Countryside

Seal is surrounded on three sides by open country, and residents are most anxious to keep it that way. This is a mixture of arable and pasture land, broken up by hedges and small copses, and of more extensive woodland, especially on Seal Chart. Part of the Chart is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) where, experimentally, the District Council and English Nature are trying to restore small sections to its original rough grazing condition. This countryside all lies within the Green Belt, and most of it is protected as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (one of 41 AONBs across England and Wales which are equivalent to National Parks in terms of landscape quality.) Some is also part of the North Downs and Greensand Ridge Special Landscape Area; a small area on the western edge is listed as of Local Landscape Value. This means that the Seal countryside is generally protected from intrusive development, even for agricultural use, although individual proposals need to be monitored carefully by the Parish Council.

9.2 As so often in Kent, this countryside is scattered with small groups of farms and cottages. Some of these are Listed Buildings (Penfield, Waterden, the old farmhouse at Fullers); others, while not so safeguarded, are of great value to the local scene (Tanners Cross,

The last cows at Penfield Farm



Typical farming scene in Seal

Fullers Hill, etc.). The District Plan recognises that these must also be protected. While changes and additions to these buildings may occasionally be allowed, even for industrial or commercial use, and would be welcome if they generate additional jobs, the Local Plan requires that these must be well-designed and not intrude on the longer views. The village strongly supports this policy. (R5, R6, R7)

9.3 At the edges of the village are a few key areas which need special care, to ensure that the distinction between village and country is maintained. The fields to the west of the church, already mentioned in the section on the centre of the village, was the subject of a recent Planning Application, which was rejected following an Appeal. But whatever the decision on that case, it seems essential to leave the church standing on the edge of open country to the north and east. It is also important to care for the other public spaces (the churchyard; the allotments; and the recreation ground) on the fringe of the built-up areas. (R13).

9.4 In addition to the Sites of Special Scientific Interest, much of the rest of the local fields, woodland and hedgerows are rich in wildlife which needs to be protected. The landscape suffered greatly from Dutch Elm Disease and from the Great Storm of 1987, and other big trees (notably oaks) have recently been lost. It is therefore important that landowners should replace trees when possible, using set-aside land in some cases, and reinstate hedgerows rather than use wire fences. Maximum use should therefore be made of any available grants from government agencies, and the Parish Council can help in identifying suitable opportunities. The narrow and steep local lanes also need special attention, and the Councils should study the County guidance



SEAL VILLAGE CENTRE

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Buildings shown in black are listed

on Rural Lanes, as is being done in Tonbridge and Malling already. It is particularly important to consider the sustainability of any improvements; one-off projects are not always sufficient. (R14)

9.5 Within the built-up areas of the village, householders can add to the variety of wildlife by careful planting, and by avoiding the use of chemical pesticides etc. In this way, the total appearance of the village can be enhanced.

10. Future Changes

A Village Design Statement is not about general land-use planning questions. But because future planning has implications for the appearance of the village (including existing buildings) it needs to be mentioned here. So long as present government policies remain in place, there is little scope for expansion of Seal, or for more than very small amounts of infilling. The District Plan provides for some additions in the Sevenoaks District area, but Seal is not among the sites selected, and current County policy means that in practice only minor infilling (one or two houses at a time) or small developments (up to five houses) will be permitted. The latest

Housing Monitoring Statement shows that the Sevenoaks District area has already more than fulfilled its housing quotas under the present structure plan. This has not prevented applications being submitted for larger schemes, which raise important issues of design of the proposed new buildings. (R1) The most recent met a lot of opposition from residents, and was rejected following a Public Enquiry in 2002. (R3)

That might all change if, as part of the current review of strategy for the South East, Kent were required to absorb a significant amount of new housing. It is clear from the consultation that most present residents would

Godden Green





Entrance to Seal Laundry - former stables to the Hillingdon Estate



The Grey House - an historic village house

strongly resist any such moves. In an attempt to be realistic, residents were asked where, if at all, such new housing might be provided. Very few sites within or around the village were suggested for this purpose. In any case, the local infrastructure, particularly sewage and land drainage facilities, seems inadequate to support any such expansion without significant new investment. But if such major new development is authorised, this Village Design Statement may have to be reconsidered.

11. Design

All the elements just described combine to determine the shape of the village, and largely govern its general appearance. Most residents like it the way it is now (if only something could be done about the traffic ...!) Much of the village centre still looks like a traditional Kentish village. The residential areas to the north and south, though very different from each other in character, fit in well with this village core. They are typically outer-suburban in appearance - nothing very special individually, but taken

together, make for a very pleasant living environment.

This has implications for the way the planning rules must be applied when proposals are put forward for new buildings, or when changes to existing buildings, old and modern, come to be considered. The Sevenoaks Local Plan contains important general guidelines (its policies EN1, in general terms, H5, about plot and building size, EN18, about listed buildings and EN 23, about archaeological remains, are particularly relevant). It also sets out useful detailed suggestions for the appearance of the town centre (e.g. Appendix 6 on Shop Fronts and Advertisements) it is much less specific about the appearance of the villages.

11.2 Within the Conservation Area, existing rules are intended to prevent damaging changes; recent disputes emphasise the need for these rules to be explained clearly and then applied rigorously. (R16, R17) Ideally, some existing intrusive illuminated signs should also be removed. And even in smaller matters which need no planning permission, most people consider that standards of appearance are important and must be kept up. (R10, R11, R15) Good neighbours will remember this.

More specifically, the village wants to see the following guidelines observed. It asks the District and Parish Councils, and all property owners and developers within the area to follow them.

- R1 **NEW CONSTRUCTION.** Under the existing District Plan, it is unlikely that there will be much new residential or commercial/industrial construction in Seal. It is essential that any new buildings should be on a small scale, and should not significantly alter the overall appearance of the area.
- R2 **New business developments** should be designed so as not to harm the character of the area. They should not add significantly to local traffic. Nor should they cause a nuisance to other properties through excessive noise, dust, vibration, noxious emissions, loss of daylight, visual intrusion or clutter. They must provide adequate off-road parking which should be screened by new planting.
- R3 **New housing** must similarly respect the character of the village, in the ways described below.
- R4 **Within the village,** new structures should not block familiar vistas, or overshadow existing buildings. They should normally be limited to two storeys, or three when adjacent buildings are already of that height. If the site stands above existing roads, height should be reduced accordingly. Adequate parking must be provided, so as not to add to existing congestion in the village.
- R5 **Outside the village centre,** new structures must be as unobtrusive as possible. They should take advantage of the lie of the land and of natural screening. They should not show above the skyline, and should not obtrude on long views.
- R6 **All new buildings** (residential or commercial) should normally be in local materials (ragstone, red brick and tile, black or white painted weatherboarding) or closely-similar products and in local styles, except where a really distinguished piece of modern architecture can be included after proper consultation with local residents.
- R7 **EXTENSIONS AND MODIFICATIONS.** Within the Conservation Area, existing regulations greatly limit the possibility of any major changes. But outside the Area, it is equally important to maintain very high standards. This is particularly important in the conversion of agricultural buildings for other uses.
- R8 **Timber, stone, brick and tile work** should match existing structures. This is particularly important in terraces or groups of similar adjoining buildings. Replacements should normally be “like for like”: aluminium or plastic windowframes and doors look out of place in older buildings. Where this is not possible, the outside appearance should remain unchanged; our increasing range of double-glazing systems now incorporate appropriate architectural features.
- R9 **Attractive features** of older buildings, including chimneys, gables, windows and doors, should be retained or replaced with similar work wherever possible, safety and structural soundness permitting.
- R10 **Paintwork and colour schemes** should normally be in sympathetic colours and avoid clashing with neighbouring buildings. (WKHA have issued guidance to their tenants on these points, offering a range of suitable colours).
- R11 **Fencing** should be kept low. Where more than one metre high, it should be screened by appropriate planting.
- R12 **THE VISUAL CONTEXT.** There are important points here, many of which do not fall within the planning laws, but which are vital to maintaining the general appearance of the village and its surroundings.
- R13 **Planting in the village** should make the fullest use of native species of trees; intrusive planting of large trees, e.g. of *Leylandii*, can interfere with neighbours and should be avoided. Planting must not interfere with traffic sightlines. Otherwise, additional planting, window-boxes and hanging baskets are encouraged within the village. More hedges and roadside trees are encouraged. The Seal Horticultural Society and the Parish Council’s Tree Warden can offer practical advice on this topic and the next.
- R14 **Planting outside the village** can include copses, roadside trees, ponds and ditches which both improve the appearance of the area and extend natural habitats for wildlife. Landowners should make the maximum possible use of grants now available for these purposes.
- R15 **Street names and road signs** should be as clear but as unobtrusive as possible consistent with safety.
- R16 **Advertisements and signboards** on commercial and industrial property must be kept small-scale, in keeping with the visual character of the village.
- R17 **Outdoor lighting**, and especially illuminated signs and security lights, must be very restrained and must not interfere with neighbours or distract drivers.
- R18 **Aerials, satellite dishes, masts and wiring**, must be as unobtrusive as possible, and within the conservation area should be invisible from the street. Preferably they should be concealed or sited away from public roads.



Various architectural features, old and new, combine to present a unique image that is SEAL

*Above: Seal Village Hall in High Street
Below: Seal High Street on a quiet Sunday morning*



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Front Cover: Above - a lithograph of Seal High Street looking East at the turn of the nineteenth century (unknown source) . Below - Seal High Street looking East taken at the turn of the Millennium

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