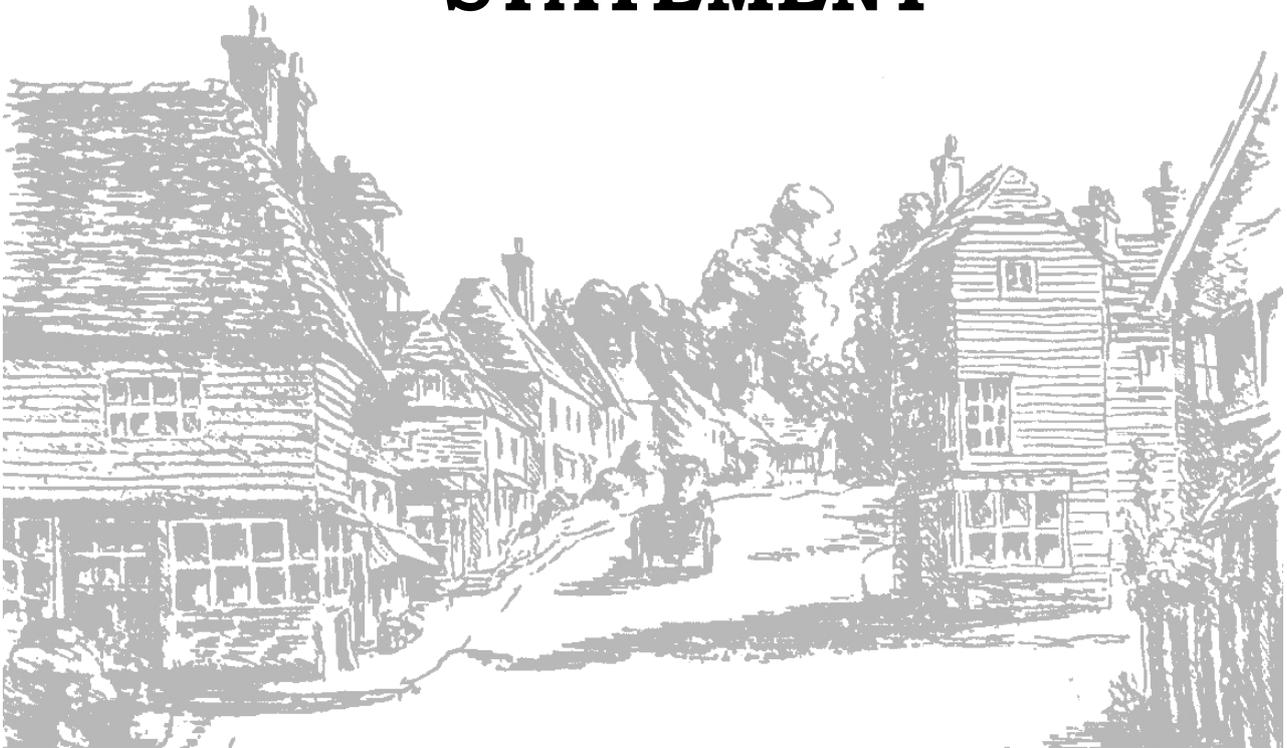


SEAL VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT



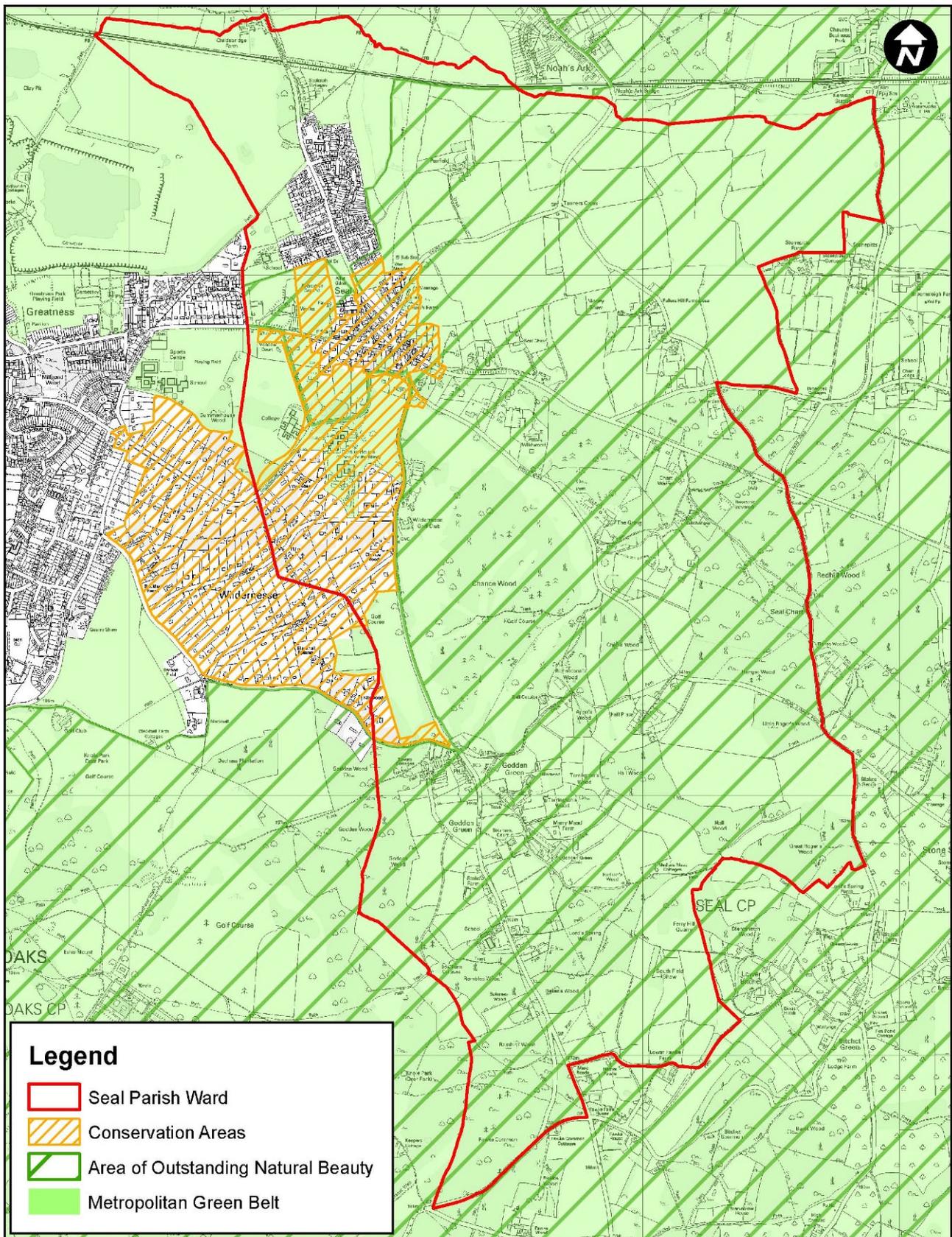
TOWARDS THE FUTURE



SEAL VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

Contents

	Page
Map of Seal Parish Ward	3
Foreward	4
1. Shape of the village	5
2. The village centre	6
3. Transport	7
4. Community Facilities	9
5. Historic Buildings	10
6. The Northern end of the village	10
7. The Wildernesse Estate	11
8. Godden Green	11
9. The surrounding countryside	12
10. Future Changes	13
11. Design	14
Appendix	16



This Village Design Statement is an update of that produced in 2004 at the request of Seal Parish Council. This update reflects changes in planning guidance and the environment as well as the views of residents of Seal as expressed in their responses to a questionnaire in September 2010. 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 Wildernesse Estate, and the separate hamlet of Godden Green.

Village Design Statements (VDSs) are intended to give local people a chance to say how they want their communities to look in the future. They have to be prepared in conformity with the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework (in our case, the Sevenoaks District Core Strategy, adopted by the SDC in February 2011). 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 means the District Council has to take them into account as a "material consideration!" in deciding on future Planning Application

This document has been prepared in conformity with the District Council's Core Strategy. Policy SP1 of the Core Strategy states that:

"All new development should be designed to a high quality and should respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated. Account should be taken of guidance adopted by the Council in the form of Kent Design, local Character Area Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, Village Design Statements and Parish Plans. In rural areas account should be taken of guidance in the Countryside Assessment and guidance produced by the AONBs..."

The delivery mechanisms for the policy include:

The Council will work with local communities to produce Village Design Statements, Parish Plans and Character Area Assessments to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents to provide detailed locally-specific guidance to support the general policy."

This Village Design Statement for Seal is intended to fulfill the role identified for Village Design Statements in Policy SP1 in providing detailed locally-specific guidance on the design of new development.

The approach to the design and appearance of the village depends on the way the village has evolved 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, R2 etc) in the main body of the text.

This Statement is the product of a lot of discussion within the local community. The original statement of 2004 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. This update follows a further questionnaire distributed to all the residents of Seal in September 2010.

December 2011

In preparing this document, recognition has been made of the responses by people from the Seal Ward to the Seal Parish Plan Questionnaire 2010, in particular the following:

- 22% of Seal respondents have looked at the Seal Village Design Statement. However the policies of the VDS were reproduced in the questionnaire, and 63% felt that it was a useful document to ensure that development is carried out in a way that local people would wish.
- 86% think the Parish Council should consult with the Local Planning Authority to agree a policy to provide effective control of replacement dwelling in the area in the Village Design Statements.
- 84% think planning rules should be used to protect local pubs and shops from closure and conversion to housing if at all possible.
- 71% think the Parish Council should seek consultation with the local authority to improve facilities for cyclists to ensure their safety on the roads.
- 95% think the Parish Council seek to ensure that the extension of Sevenoaks Quarry in the direction of Seal does not cause material harm to residents of Seal.

In conjunction with the Seal Parish Plan Questionnaire, an Affordable Housing Survey was undertaken, the result of which determine that there is a need for affordable housing in the Parish of Seal, for local people.



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 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.

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 Sevenoaks Local Development Framework's Core Strategy (para 4.2.4) 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 Metropolitan Green Belt. A large part of it (excluding the built-up area of the village and some land to the North and West of the village) is within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The historic centre of the village is a Conservation Area. The map on page 3 shows the extent of the areas designated as Metropolitan Green Belt, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and 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 Village



2. The Village Centre

The original village centre provided services for the local farmers, for the people who worked on the farms and/or 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. 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. At the time of writing only one of the original five pubs is trading. There are also two restaurants and a fast-food outlet 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. 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 convenient base, within reach of London, from which to serve a wider public, and in principle could expand further. All these generate local employment, 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 Local Development Framework 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. In any case, 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 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, R8, R9*).



Traffic on Seal High Street

3. Transport

In the recent parish questionnaire, speeding traffic and the quality of the road environment were ranked first and second respectively in order of priority among a list of 13 possible options. 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 problem for residents. The solutions are largely outside the control of the village community. 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, a proposal which is supported by 90% of residents of Seal according to the questionnaire. Although outside our own boundaries, this would clearly have the biggest impact. It is fair to say that there needs to be a study into what impact new slip roads would have and to assess whether they would be value for money, so the priority for the Parish Council at this point should be to lobby for such a study to be undertaken.

However, even with new slip roads 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 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 considering. As pointed out by a number of respondents to our questionnaire, the proliferation of signs and street furniture can be visually intrusive. It is important that improved traffic systems do not detract from the buildings or the countryside around them. (R16)

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. More daytime use can and should be made of the small parking area 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 2001 census, 847 families, out of 984 in the parish of Seal, owned at least one car, and 165 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 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 edge-of-town shopping centres at Riverhead (Tesco) or Otford Road (Sainsbury, 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. The Prep School creates particular difficulty on Park Lane, a narrow country lane through Godden Green, at drop-off and pick-up times, a point which was raised by a number of respondents to the questionnaire.

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.



Seal Pavilion



Seal Library



Seal Village Hall

4. Community Facilities

While Seal has more community services than some other local centres, the loss of the Post Office in 2009 was regretted by many respondents to the questionnaire.. 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 pub and restaurants already 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 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). 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 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.



The Grey House



Lychgate House

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. The village contains a number of attractive buildings, mostly of the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries - the original Wildernesse House; its stables; 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 was actually are built 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. (R10)

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. The library on the corner of School Lane attempts to blend into the local scene while 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.

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. 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, along the edge of the Recreation Ground (provided that traffic sightlines are kept clear) or on the raised bank to the east of Childsbridge Lane at its southern end. But it is equally important to see that the existing stock is well-maintained. (R13).



Bentleys Meadow



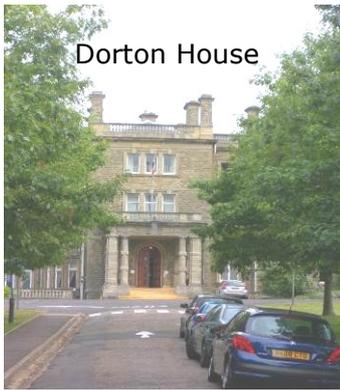
Zambra Way



Robinwood Drive

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. There is also much modern private housing, for example in Meadowlands, Robinwood Drive and most recently at Childsbridge Farm Place. (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 situation. But in general these areas are very attractive, and need to be kept that way. (R3, R6, R14, R18, R19)



Dorton House



Wildernesse Avenue

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.

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 been recognised by Sevenoaks District Council which extended the Conservation Area in 1998 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.

Godden Green



The Bucks Head



Godden Green



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 Cygnet Hospital 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 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 will consider whether to recommend to Sevenoaks District Council that it should make Godden Green a separate Conservation Area. It is important that the Cygnet Hospital and Prep School continue to respect the essentially rural character of this area.



Views of Seal Chart

9. The Surrounding Countryside

Seal is surrounded on three sides by open country, and residents are most anxious to keep it that way. Many respondents to the questionnaire pointed out the importance of this: “Above all I value the rural environment in Seal parish” was one of many similar comments. 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). 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). 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. (R21)

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, Fullers Hill, etc.). The Local Development Framework 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, R8)

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, were the subject of a Planning Application in 2004, which was rejected following an appeal. 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. (R14).

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 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. It is particularly important to consider the sustainability of any improvements; one-off projects are not always sufficient. (R15, R21)

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 Local Development Framework's Core Strategy (Policy LO7) permits infilling and redevelopment on a small scale only. This should take account of the limited scope for development to take place in an acceptable manner and the limited range of services and facilities available. This policy also states that new development should be of a scale and nature appropriate to the village and should respond to the distinctive local characteristics of the area in which it is situated. Nevertheless, applications are submitted from time to time for larger schemes, even in the centre of the village, which raise important issues of design of the proposed new buildings. (R1)

A survey of affordable housing needs in Seal, which was carried out at the same time as the Parish Council questionnaire in September 2010, identified a need for a small number of affordable homes. The Sevenoaks Local Development Framework's Core Strategy (policy SP3) and government guidance in PPS3 allow for small scale affordable housing to be provided through the use of a "rural exceptions site policy" under which small sites that would not normally be suitable for development because of restraint policies can be developed solely for affordable housing to serve small rural communities. Rural exception sites should only be used for affordable housing in perpetuity.

It is fair to say that some respondents to the questionnaire expressed opposition to such a scheme. 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. Nevertheless the Parish Council considers that if there is a possibility of helping local people who would otherwise be forced to leave Seal to remain here, it should fully explore options available.

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 Development Framework contains a general design policy (SP1) and the remaining Local Plan policies include a general design policy (EN1) and guidance on archaeological remains (EN23). The Local Plan also contains an appendix on Shop Fronts and Advertisements. It is less specific about the appearance of the villages.

11.2 Within the Conservation Area, existing rules are intended to prevent damaging changes; it is important for these rules to be explained clearly and then applied rigorously. (R17, R18) 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. (R11, R12, R16) 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 Local Development Framework, 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 respect and be consistent with the distinctive character 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. In assessing the acceptable height account should be taken of the relative height of the site and the surrounding area. Adequate parking must be provided, so as not to add to existing congestion in the village.

R5 **Outside built confines of the village,** 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. Where relevant the development should be consistent with policies relating to the Metropolitan Green Belt.

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 **Water and Drainage** New developments should be kept at a reasonable distance from the stream banks and protection measures put in place. Any new development must provide adequate drainage facilities. All new developments, where possible, should incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS).

R8 **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.

R9 **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 window frames 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.

R10 **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.

R11 **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).

R12 **Fencing, walls and gates** should be kept low. Where a fence is more than one metre high, it should be screened by appropriate planting. Large walls and entrance gates should be avoided.

R13 **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.

R14 **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 Parish Council's Tree Warden can offer practical advice on this topic and the next.

R15 **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.

R16 **Street names and road signs** should be as clear but as unobtrusive as possible consistent with safety.

R17 **Advertisements and signboards** on commercial and industrial property must be kept small-scale, in keeping with the visual character of the village.

R18 **Outdoor lighting**, and especially illuminated signs and security lights, must be very restrained and must not interfere with neighbours, distract drivers or obstruct long views.

R19 **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.

R20 **Non-residential agricultural buildings, domestic stabling and field shelters** should be designed to minimise their impact upon the beauty of the countryside – for example by using subdued colours or cladding them with timber and be appropriately landscaped and screened with native species of trees and hedges.

R21 **Landscape** The historic pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows that gives the modern landscape its character should be protected during development. Where possible, historic features should be enhanced and promoted as key components of the local environment.

Any impacts on the important designated sites and ancient woodland within the area be fully mitigated.

The Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) prepared by Sevenoaks District Council provides a context for looking at possible changes and for seeking to ensure that countryside character is protected and enhanced, and where possible, opportunities are taken to create new and to protect and enhance existing habitats, wildlife corridors and stepping stones. An understanding of LCA will also help to ensure that planting outside settlements is in harmony with the character of the countryside.

Appendix

Extracts from Sevenoaks Local Development Framework Core Strategy

(The full text of the Core Strategy and Saved Local Plan is available at http://www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/environment/planning/planning_policy_and_the__local_development_framework/default.asp)

Policy LO7 Development in Rural Settlements

Between all the settlements, provision will be made for a total of approximately 1,160 dwellings (2006-2026) on a range of sites suitable for residential use

Within the settlement confines of New Ash Green, Otford and Westerham development on a modest scale will be permitted where it can take place in an acceptable manner consistent with local character. In New Ash Green the village centre will be regenerated so that it better meets the needs of the local community whilst respecting the distinctive character of the settlement.

Within the settlement confines of Brasted, Crockenhill, Eynsford, Farningham, Halstead, Hartley, Hextable, Horton Kirby, Kemsing, Knockholt Pound, Leigh, Seal, Sevenoaks Weald, Shoreham, South Darenth, Sundridge and West Kingsdown infilling and redevelopment on a small scale only will be permitted taking account of the limited scope for development to take place in an acceptable manner and the limited range of services and facilities available.

Within all the settlements covered by this policy new development should be of a scale and nature appropriate to the village concerned and should respond to the distinctive local characteristics of the area in which it is situated.

The loss from rural settlements of services and facilities that serve the local community will be resisted where possible. Exceptions will be made where equivalent replacement facilities are provided equally accessible to the population served, or where it is demonstrated, through evidence submitted to the Council, that the continued operation of the service or facility is no longer financially viable. The Council will support and encourage innovative proposals to improve provision of services and facilities to serve the local community, subject to any development being of a scale and character appropriate to the area.

Existing suitable employment sites will be retained with the opportunity for regeneration and redevelopment to better meet the needs of business. The Council will work with service providers to maintain and where possible improve rural transport services, so that the accessibility of rural communities is maintained.

Policy LO8 The Countryside and the Rural Economy.

The extent of the Green Belt will be maintained.

The countryside will be conserved and the distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape and its biodiversity will be protected and enhanced where possible. The distinctive character of the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced.

Particular regard will be given to the condition and sensitivity of the landscape character and securing the recommended landscape actions in the proposed SPD to ensure that all development conserves and enhances local landscape character and that appropriate mitigation is provided where damage to local character cannot be avoided.

Development that supports the maintenance and diversification of the rural economy, including development for agriculture, forestry, small scale business development and rural tourism projects, and the vitality of local communities will be supported provided it is compatible with policies for protecting the Green Belt, the Kent Downs and High Weald Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty conserves and enhances the value and character of the District's woodland and the landscape character of other rural parts of the District and that it takes account of infrastructure requirements.

Policy SP1: Design of New Development and Conservation

All new development should be designed to a high quality and should respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated. Account should be taken of guidance adopted by the Council in the form of Kent Design, local Character Area Assessments, Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans, Village Design Statements and Parish Plans. In rural areas account should be taken of guidance in the Countryside Assessment and AONB Management Plans. In rural areas account should be taken of guidance in the countryside Assessment and AONB Management Plans.

In areas where the local environment lacks positive features new development should contribute to an improvement in the quality of the environment.

New development should create safe, inclusive and attractive environments that meet the needs of users, incorporate principles of sustainable development and maintain and enhance biodiversity.

The District's heritage assets and their settings, including listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeological remains, ancient monuments, historic parks and gardens, historic buildings, landscapes and outstanding views will be protected and enhanced.

Policy SP 4: Affordable Housing in Rural Areas

Small scale developments for affordable housing only will be developed to meet local needs identified through rural housing needs surveys. The following criteria will be applied in identifying sites:

- a. the local need identified through the rural housing needs survey cannot be met by any other means through the development of sites within the defined confines of a settlement within the parish or, where appropriate, in an adjacent parish;
- b. the proposal is of a size and type suitable to meet the identified local need and will be available at an appropriate affordable cost commensurate with the results of the appraisal. The proposal is accompanied by a financial appraisal proving the scheme will meet the defined need. Schemes which propose an element of cross subsidy will not be acceptable;
- c. the proposed site is considered suitable for such purposes by virtue of its scale and is sited within or adjoining an existing village, is close to available services and public transport, and there are no overriding countryside, conservation, environmental, or highway impacts The initial and subsequent occupancy of sites developed under this policy will be controlled through planning conditions and agreements as appropriate to ensure that the accommodation remains available in perpetuity to meet the purposes for which it was permitted

