

# OTFORD VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2



**2015**

**PREPARED BY THE OTFORD COMMUNITY**

# THE OTFORD VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2

## FOREWORD

The first Otford Village Design Statement, (VDS) prepared in 2007, was accepted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Sevenoaks District Council in 2008. Since then, much has undergone change in our parish. It was the declared intention of those who contributed to the first VDS that a revised version be updated as circumstances in planning changed.

This new document (VDS2) has subsequently been approved by Sevenoaks District Council as a further Supplementary Planning Document, superseding the earlier VDS document of 2007. The revised edition (VDS 2) seeks to provide a clear expression of the community's wishes in 2015. It has taken several years in its compilation but we believe it encompasses the importance of good design within all the elements which make up a village, not just its houses. It is our hope that in the coming years VDS2 will continue to provide architects, developers and district planners with helpful information when considering applications for any buildings or extensions in Otford.

The status of this document ensures that it may be considered as material guidance by planners within Sevenoaks District Council, when considering planning applications within Otford parish in the future. It will join the Otford Parish Plan as well as the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan as providing material guidance on all planning matters within the community.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has radically changed much planning regulation. Mr. Greg Clark, the minister responsible, has written: *"it makes clear that all plans and all decisions should respect the special character of each area, and in particular, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside."* It is with that statement in mind that the Otford VDS 2 has been prepared. This document seeks to point out and emphasise the special character of Otford and its buildings, which any future planning proposals should respect.

There are still many outside pressures put upon a rural village which is in such close proximity to the Sevenoaks urban area. The parish is under threat of concentration and enlargement. Developers are continually on the look-out to purchase properties throughout the village often with the intention of replacing them with atypically larger buildings or cramped, two-for-one developments.

On our borders, large developments like the recently-expanded Sainsbury's superstore dominate our landscape and continual applications for large, new development in this important buffer zone area demonstrate how close we are to urban creep. To be able to maintain and nurture the integrity of our historic, rural village, we desperately need as much legislation and support on our side as possible. It is for that reason that this new Village Design Statement 2 is as important today as the first edition was, seven years ago.

## THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The first Village Design Statement was the result of much dedicated work by many individuals and groups within the village. Thanks must go to:

- The twelve members of the Design Team, who worked for over a year to collate the wide range of information and comments used in the preparation of this report and convert it all into the final text;
- The whole community of Otford, who expressed their views, participated in work shops and meetings and commented on aspects of the VDS during its preparation;
- Those outside the Design Team who offered the benefit of their insights, experience and specialist knowledge and thus enabled the accuracy, validity and potential for impact of the document to be enhanced.
- Those authorities and associations including the SDC, Kent Downs AONB, Action with Communities in Rural Kent and all those who generously gave so much of their advice and support to this project.
- Phil Clucas (MDA) whose design talents led to the final preparation of the finished printed document;

The *Village Design Statement 2* was prepared to take account of changing requirements within the village since 2007 as well as the significant amendments, both national and regional, which have been incorporated into present planning regulation.

The proposals contained within the up-dated (VDS 2) version were studied and approved by the members of the Parish Council in November 2012. A full public display of its contents then took place over two days during February 2013 in the village Memorial Hall. This event was well attended following announcements being made at the Otford Society meetings and Parish Council meetings. Residents were provided with post-it notes and pens to add their views on any factors they wished amended or deleted. These were all taken into account in the submitted version. The full draft of the proposed document was then put on-line at [otford.info/vds](http://otford.info/vds) and further comments invited. Following its submission and consideration by Sevenoaks District Council, a number of guidance amendments were recommended. These were incorporated in the final, shortened draft, submitted in October 2014.

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### Designations applying to the area

The terms “parish, “village” and “village envelope” are used in this document.

The *parish* of Otford comprises the whole geographical area within the parish boundary (as designated by maps drawn up by Sevenoaks District Council.) It covers the largest area since it includes not only the built environment but also many fields, woods, rivers, railways and roads.

*Village* is used to refer to the main residential area, largely consisting of the Conservation Area and including those dwellings and other buildings in or emanating from the original historical village centre, based on the east-west axis of High Street and Station Road as far as the rail bridge.

*Village envelope* refers to the habitable area clearly designated by the SDC map and covering all the inhabited areas within the parish.

# **1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND OPEN SPACES**

## **1.1 Otford's rural setting**

The landscape surrounding Otford plays an integral part in the village. It is the result of many centuries of evolution. The pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows is firmly rooted in the past. Our community recognise this and have made clear that they are committed to maintaining these patterns of the historic landscape both in the village and outside. Much of Otford village and all the surrounding countryside is fortunate to be located within an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As such it is afforded protection against development which fails to protect or enhance its natural beauty. (See Appendix map 3)

## **1.2 Preserving the countryside to the North of the village**

The North Downs escarpment, below which Otford is sited, has changed little since the last Ice Age. Its high position forms an iconic backdrop to the whole village. Any proposals to introduce new housing or to extend homes located on the periphery of this important landscape feature could potentially have an effect upon the whole community. Thus visible prominence should be taken into account in consideration of any proposals or applications which can affect an unspoilt view of the Downs. The SDC Core Strategy states: "*The distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape ... will be protected and enhanced where possible... The character of the Kent Downs... and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced... to ensure that all development conserves and enhances the local landscape character.*" (Policy LO8) This is a view shared by Otford residents. Protecting the biodiversity of the whole downland area is also reflected in the designation of the Otford to Shoreham Downs as an area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Otford community have indicated a clear commitment to its protection.

## **1.3 Green areas within the village**

Otford village contains a number of green areas adjacent to homes. These include the central *Green* and *Palace Field* as well the *Recreation Ground* and *Allotments*, all located close to the village centre. Less evident are other green areas like the *Chalk Pits*, beyond the station, *Telston Park* and *Hale Lane Recreation Ground*, to the west of Otford, the *Community Woodland* beside Sevenoaks Road and *Oxenhill Woods* to the south of Tudor Drive. Each of these areas is of great importance to the community and is continually maintained and in continual use.

## **1.4 Preserving the countryside to the South of the village**

Most of the countryside surrounding Otford is contained within the Metropolitan Green Belt (*see appendix*). It therefore enjoys national protection from creeping development.

The fields, woods and water meadows located to the south of Otford, stretching to the M26 and the nearby parish boundary, are valued by all as a green breathing space establishing the village as an independent entity separated from the northern urban area of Sevenoaks. The major role of this area is to absorb and hold heavy rainfall and reduce the risk of serious flooding by the river Darent. They form an important part of our green infrastructure.

Land lying to the north of the Vestry Estate has been worked farmland for over a century. The introduction of the M26 motorway, however, left a narrow unproductive strip running along the rising ground of Ladds Hill beside the Old Otford Road. This continues to be designated 'Green Belt' land. Residents have indicated its importance to the village as it forms an important buffer zone between the green fields and the light-industrial buildings of the Vestry Estate. Its role is perceived as protecting our village from creeping development from the Sevenoaks urban area.

### **1.5 Sports and playground areas**

Otford has a varied and active sports community which extensively utilizes the recreation grounds and other open-space areas. Junior and senior cricket teams play on the carefully maintained cricket square and practice in the custom built nets adjoining their changing rooms in the village hall. The football club's principal pitch is flood-lit and the club utilizes a custom-built pavilion. This is owned by the Parish Council but for which the club raised most of the money. The junior football teams are based at the pavilion and pitch at Hale Lane recreation ground. An alternative recreation area at the Chalk Pits is used occasionally by the junior footballers. As well as a public court, the tennis club, which also has a junior section, plays on three hard courts. Close-by, the Otford Petanque club has its own terrain located on the recreation ground.

There is a much-used junior playground on the village Recreation Ground which is fully enclosed. A new toddler's playground has recently been installed on the Hale Lane Recreation Ground. Both are now in continual use.

Residents have indicated that on-road cycling is considered dangerous on local roads which have no provision for cyclists. It is hoped though, that funds can be raised for one of the Parish Plan's objectives, to introduce further out-doors fitness equipment for use by senior residents. The SDC Core Strategy also indicates its support '*where there is clear evidence of support from the local community*' (5.6.4)

### ***Design Principles***

- 1a** The community wish to retain the existing pattern of roads, footpaths and field boundaries. *(CS SP11/ LO.8 and ENV 13)*
- 1b** All areas within the current designated Metropolitan Green Belt should ideally be kept free of inappropriate new development. However we accept that in the light of Supplementary Local planning policy, applications may be considered under certain circumstances. *(ADMP GB1-GB9; CS SP10; RESPD 3.2, GBSPD)*
- 1c** Proposals for new homes or extensions sited on or near the periphery of the North Downs, should not compromise the uninterrupted views of this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. *(CS LO8:)*
- 1d** Every effort should be taken to protect the important agricultural land to the south of Otford. The community has indicated that particular care is required to protect the Green Belt 'buffer zone' lying beside the Vestry Estate from intrusive development. *(CS LO8; RESPD 3.2)*
- 1e** The community supports the preservation of all remaining areas of permanent pasture, cultivated land and woodland within and adjoining the village envelope and which contribute to the sense of open space within the village.

- 1f** The community fully supports all opportunities to extend or promote safe cycle routes within the parish (*CS SP2*)

*NPPF= National Planning Policy Framework*

*CS = Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy*

*RESPD = SDC Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Doc.*

*GBSPD = SDC Development in the Green Belt Supplementary Planning Document.*

*CAAMP = Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

*ADMP = Allocations and Development Management Plan*

## **2: BUILDING DESIGN WITHIN THE VILLAGE ENVELOPE**

### **2.1 The general vernacular of village housing**

Otford is a village community. The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that new buildings "*should respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials...*" This is a view shared by the residents of Otford. Thus the general vernacular and colouration of new buildings will benefit by integrating easily with neighbouring homes.

Otford buildings, in the main, maintain a very traditional identity. For that reason the use of traditional facing materials on new properties appear far more suitable than non-traditional ones. These include: facings of traditional brick or tile rather than plasticised wood or composite materials; laid bricks rather than pre-fabricated blocks; tiles rather than metallic sheet. Materials which reflect the general vernacular help to integrate new design within the built community.

The evolved character of the village has relied upon a haphazard variety of individual house designs. Today, there is so much opportunity for original design to continue to bring individuality to the housing mix. Regrettably some developers seek to economise by using repetitious designs. Proposals for new homes which appear to urbanise the village by the use of repetitious designs appear inappropriate. These are out-of-place in this village. Steep roofs or shallow pitched roofs are untypical of established local design. They introduce a discordant look to the integrity of a village that still seeks to remain a rural community.

The majority of buildings in the village have two storeys. Design proposals which incorporate dormer windows facing the street, give the impression of 3-stories. Such houses would appear untypical within the Otford community. Otford's roofs are mostly covered in Kent peg or nib tiles with the occasional use of slate. Many have the traditional Kentish 'barn hip' and gablet detail at the gable ends. Brick is the most common building material but there are examples of local ragstone and timber framing.

Upper floors often have tile hanging matching the roof tiles, particularly in the case of the older timber-framed buildings. The preponderance of local brick and tile imbues the settlement with an overall warm colouration. Extensive plaster rendering or painting of the facia, therefore appears out of place in Otford.

### **2.2 Consistency of house size**

Otford is a village of typical family homes. Its houses and gardens reflect this purpose. Proposals to introduce properties whose mass far exceeds the normal requirements of a home for a single family, simply appear out-of-place and unsuitable within this small community. They can create a discordant effect upon the rest of the community.

In recent years, particularly in the north of the village, very large and un-typical homes have been permitted to be built with features such as 3-storey *Tudorbethan* designs. In discussions, the community have indicated that such properties do not fit comfortably within the design of the wider, essentially rural, village. They are not typical of the settlement and appear to erode the coherence of the overall village design.



When such out-of-scale buildings include close-boarded fencing and electric gates, the effect appears to alienate the residents from the general community. Developers however have already begun to point to such properties as ‘acceptable precedents’ which the community strongly feel they are clearly not. In discussions, the community considers that the building of further homes on this scale will be contrary to the aims of coherent village design.

### **2.3 Introducing dormer windows and roof-lights/Velux**

Loft extensions have been a popular development in many of Otford’s older properties with an additional ‘spare’ room with a small, rear dormer, created within the available loft space. There has been concern expressed however, when new development proposals include a line of dormer windows or roof-lights facing the street. This is perceived as a clear intention to introduce a third floor to the property under the guise of it being ‘spare rooms’. The fact that these windows are just below the roof line is not seen as a mitigating factor in a village, largely made-up of two-floored houses. The village supports general planning policy that dormer windows and roof-lights/Velux windows should not face to the front. (With those exceptions allowable under terms of permitted development)

### **2.4 The perception of height**

Acceptable design within the village is occasionally compromised by the difference in ground level between properties. A significant number of houses within the community are sited on rising ground. Inevitably, the perceived effect that one property can have upon another can be increased by differences in ground level. This cannot readily be appreciated from a proposed ground plan. It is suggested that architects, when considering extensions in areas of rising land, provide information on the effects of their comparative height with near-by properties.

### **2.5 Allowing provision for off-street parking**

The pleasing design of the village relies upon restricting on-road parking to a minimum. Many outside factors contribute to parking problems but residential parking should not exacerbate the situation further.

Whilst acknowledging the requirement within the NPPF regarding car parking spaces, it is strongly recommended that any proposed development should always allow for a minimum of two off-road parking spaces per 3-bedroom household. If future extensions increase this number, then the community feels that there should be a provision for further off-road parking to match. Many residents have expressed a view that only the minimum area of a front garden should be used for parking.

## **DESIGN PRINCIPLES**

**2a** Respect for local building design, materials, and general colouration should be evident in any planning proposal. (*CS L07; ADMP EN1 and EN2*)

**2b** Whenever possible, natural materials should always be employed on fascias in preference to look-alike substitutes. (*RESPD 4.48*)

**2c** Proposals to introduce front-facing dormers or roof-lights/Velux windows giving the perception of a third storey are not encouraged. (*RESPD 4.34*)

**2d** The scale and mass of any proposed new dwelling or extended dwelling should be comparable to the majority of existing homes within the adjoining community. (*ADMP EN1 and EN2*)

**2e Most** houses within the village have individual designs or features. Proposals for urban-style designs which employ repeat or 'mirrored' features are therefore not encouraged. (*SP1: LO7; CS LO7, ADMP EN1 and EN2*)

**2f** It is recommended that any new development or an extension which increases the number of bedrooms, should take account of the number of off-street parking spaces it will require and where possible include this in its application or provide justification as to why it cannot be provided.

**2g** Proposals for any developments or extensions sited on rising ground, should carefully consider their perceived affect upon near-by properties. (*RESPD 4.16*)

**2h** Wherever possible, only the minimum of the available front garden area should be replaced with permeable hard-standing for cars. (*RESPD 4.56 and 4.57*)

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## **3: THE OTFORD CONSERVATION AREA**

### **3.1 Protecting our Conservation Area.**

There is a great richness, variety and history contained within the centre of Otford village. The character of our Conservation Area can so easily be altered or lost through inappropriate action; no matter how apparently small it may appear. The challenge is to manage change in ways that maintain and reinforce the area's special qualities. It is for that reason that this part of the Village Design Statement has been prepared.

### **3.2 The content and character of the Conservation Area**

The Otford Conservation Area covers some 16 hectares and contains approximately 40 listed buildings and the Scheduled buildings of the Archbishop's Palace (which is currently on the National Heritage 'At Risk' register). A separate area of Special Scientific Interest outside the Conservation Area contains the archaeological site of the Progress Roman Villa. Sevenoaks District Council produces a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) every 5-6 years and this may be used as Material Guidance when assessing the appropriateness of applications for building or extensions within the conservation area. The most recent review was in 2010. Much of the content of this part of the VDS is drawn from that document.

The Otford Conservation Area comprises the entire centre of the village. It is bordered to the west by the river bridge and to the east by the east boundary of Moat Cottage (excluding the houses of Colet's Orchard). To the north it runs from the Oast House, sited in Park Lane, down to its southern extremity along the north side of Bubblestone Road. This marks the original southern edge of the Archbishop's palace. The Conservation Area includes residential, retail and public buildings as well as the ancient monument of the Archbishop's Palace and the Norman church of St. Bartholomew – a true cross-section of village property and the historic nucleus of the settlement. The ages of the properties range from modern to medieval and earlier. There is plenty of open green space. It is essentially the unspoilt ancient heart of a typical West Kent village. The overall architectural style is an eclectic blend of the Kentish vernacular tradition.

*(Details of the Otford conservation area are to be found in Appendix 3 (maps)).*

### **3.3 Development issues within the Conservation Area**

In general, building and extensions within the Conservation Area have, in the past, been sympathetically carried out. No matter how apparently insignificant or small an addition may be, if it is out-of-keeping, it can contribute to the steady erosion of the area as a whole. The community supports the view that extensions within the Conservation Area should reflect the form and character of the original building.

Views, setting and topography are particularly important. Similarly, original boundaries such as walls, fences or hedges should be retained whenever possible. Schemes for their replacement will require careful planning consideration.

The street scene, street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area. In Otford, this is not always the case. Otford village still retains

much standard, old and often unnecessary, highways signage. Despite intensive work by the community to highlight this issue, there has been no attempt to install a style of signage which might reflecting the special status of the village as occurs in several other historic locations. The community has indicated a hope that future signage might be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area.

Conservation plays a key part in promoting prosperity, particularly for our village retailers. A coherence of discreet shop signage would benefit the overall perception of the area and help increase the footfall of visitors. As shops change, the wishes for larger and brighter shop signage has been to the general detriment of the street scene in the village and introduced urbanization to the village High Street. A-frame display boards have been part of the street-scene for generations. When however, a local outlet employs more than one, it can become street-clutter. The visual appeal of the Conservation area appears adversely affected by advertising and promotions hoardings stuck onto shop-fronts or attached to street furniture. It is generally felt that these have an adverse effect upon the quality of this historic location by introducing unsightly clutter to a valued heritage site.

### **3.4 Shared space. The effect of re-design upon the village centre.**

A reduction in both the volume and speed of traffic within the village is a priority for our community. Though control of traffic is not a concern of the Design Statement, the community's recommendation for 'a means to control it', can have important design implications for the centre of the village. One possible approach, proposed by the Kent Downs AONB Unit and supported by the SDC Conservation Management report (2010), would be to create a 'shared space' around the pond at the centre of the village. This method has been used very successfully in many historic English towns in order to slow traffic movement, free up pedestrian access and bring an attractive coherence to an area. The community has made clear their belief that introducing shared space into the centre of the village would benefit the design of the whole central conservation area. Because of the cost involved in amending the layout and re-surfacing the whole area, this would, if pursued, be a long-term objective for Otford. Whilst addressing the problem of speed, it would not have an effect upon the volume of traffic. It would however, create a more people-friendly and usable pedestrian space with easier and safer access to the village pond and the Green.

*(For further information on this type of scheme, refer to Ministry of Transport's recommendation document: "Streets for all")*

### **3.5 The future of the Archbishop's Palace Tower and Palace Field**

The remains of the Archbishops Palace' (c. 1518) are an iconic Otford landmark. They form an important part of Otford's identity. There has been a recent proposal that ownership and responsibility for the whole site be transferred from Sevenoaks District Council, to the Otford community. This proposal has been received with a great deal of local support.

However, the tower structure has already been registered as 'At Risk' by English Heritage and is in a progressively poor state. If the means can be found to restore the Tower to the satisfaction of English Heritage, then there is every hope that the site can form part of an active community asset, benefitting all. How the Tower may be enhanced and made of greater benefit to the village, will be a decision made with the support of English Heritage, the conservation architect and the outcome of much local discussion. (NPPF 6:55)

### 3.6 Areas of enhancement within the Conservation Area

#### **A: St Bartholomew's Church**

Recently, considerable restoration work was carried out to the tower of St. Bartholomew's Church, replacing an earlier cement render with the original style of lime-plaster which once covered it. The beautifully carved church porch has also undergone restoration and this has considerably enhanced this beautiful village building. Any future alterations to the interior of this medieval building should only be undertaken with considerable care and community involvement.

#### **B: The village pond**

The village pond has similarly undergone a major-make-over in recent years. Not only have its borders been carefully re-built and made impermeable, but considerable re-design of the pond's water-features have, with the re-introduction of reed-beds and small islands, made the look and lay-out of this central village feature much more attractive both to humans and bird life. Its grass borders with the road however, endure continual damage from turning lorries.

#### **C:1 Information boards (Palace)**

One of the enjoyments of visiting a Conservation Area is to gain a greater understanding of its history and role in the development of the community. There are no imaginative publicly-displayed boards within the whole Conservation Area. We hope, with local support, future opportunities will be found to respond to this need.

#### **C: 2 Information boards (Village)**

One or two of the older homes within the village have fascinating histories which, if made more generally known, could increase the enjoyment of both visitors and local residents. A proposal to introduce 'historic' plaques on village houses of particular interest is under consideration. The inspired mosaic which adorns the side of the Luyten's-designed church-hall would also benefit from an explanatory text. The objective is not to turn the village into a museum exhibit but to bring fresh interest to our rich historical environment.

#### **D: The Heritage Centre and Solar System model**

The fascinating Otford Heritage Centre (OHC) is a welcome asset to our village. Open every morning it is also staffed by volunteers over weekends. The OHC is a fund of local information, models and exhibits, used by all our local schools and very popular with visitors. The extensive Solar System model, located on the recreation ground is also a popular visitor attraction. The introduction of timber finger posts within the village centre directing visitors to these amenities would be of great help and could help provide coherence to the whole Conservation Area.

## **E: Archaeological remains**

Within the parish, there is clear archaeological evidence of a Roman farm (Progress villa), an extensive villa complex (Church Field), a significant Roman cemetery (Frog Farm), a small settlement and several other Roman homes. It would appear that Otford was well inhabited during the Roman period. On-going work by local archaeology groups has indicated even more important finds from this period. It is therefore of paramount importance to Otford residents that no development (or extensions) should take place in what could be considered sensitive areas without a thorough archaeological watching brief being undertaken.

All of these proposals are not only to the benefit of the residents of Otford but to our many visitors, retailers and restaurants. The National Planning Policy Framework (3.28) states that it will: *“support sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments that benefit businesses in rural areas, (including) the provision and expansion of tourist and visitor facilities in appropriate locations.”*

### ***Design Principles***

- 3a** Proposal for development of any kind within the Conservation Area should take cognisance of the role it plays in determining the essential character of the area. Only appropriate materials and designs should be used at all times. *(ADMP EN4; RESPD 2.6)*
- 3b** Street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area. Wherever possible, cluttered standard traffic signage and un-required street furniture would be better removed or replaced. *(CAAMP 4.32)*
- 3c** Original boundaries such as walls, fences or hedges should be retained whenever possible. *(CAAMP 4.33 and 4.36)*
- 3d** New or replacement shop signage should, whenever possible, be discreet in their size and colouration in order to maintain the overall cohesion of the conservation area *(ADMP SP1 and EN1; CAAMP 4.32)*
- 3e** Promotional or advertising material attached to street furniture or period buildings within the Conservation Area, including retailers, are considered out-of-place and unsuitable. *(CAAMP 4.32)*
- 3f** It is a long-term objective, voiced by the community in their Parish Plan, that the surface of the central part of the village, street and pavements be adapted to become 'shared space' and permit easier pedestrian routes and safer vehicle movement. *(CAAMP.12.5: NPPF 3.23)*
- 3g** The introduction of well-designed information boards would be of benefit and to the greater enjoyment of the area's history and heritage.
- 3h** The introduction of timber finger posts giving directions to local points of interest would provide coherence to the Conservation Area.
- 3i** Every effort should be made to repair the Palace Tower, already designated as 'At Risk'. All its parts should be protected from further weather deterioration *(Listed Building & Conservation Act Statement 5: Policy SP1: ADMP EN4)*
- 3j** No development should take place in an area considered by archaeological specialists to be of potential archaeological interest without a thorough archaeological watching brief being undertaken. *(ADMP EN4)*

*Abbreviations:*

*NPPF= National Planning Policy Framework*

*CS = Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy*

*RESPD = SDC Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Doc.*

*CAAMP = Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

*ADMP = Allocations and Development Management Plan*

## **4: HOUSING DEVELOPMENT, EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS**

### **4.1 It is important to maintain the separateness of the village**

The individuality of Otford as a separate village is clearly recognised by the whole community as supported by the VDS research. Otford should not appear as a suburb of Sevenoaks, nor should it become one in fact or in appearance.

For this reason, any development which is proposed outside the existing built area which would have the effect of extending the village envelope into the surrounding countryside would be considered as having the potential to erode the separateness of the village settlement.

### **4.2 Development needs to be appropriate to a village.**

The SDC Core Strategy 5.1.3 states that: *“New development must be accommodated without damaging the features that contribute to the quality of the rural environment. Therefore it is important that development is designed to respect and improve the character and distinctiveness of the area in which it is located.”* As the local characteristics of Otford are those of a rural village the community supports this statement.

Otford is a village in the countryside, surrounded by fields. It is not an urban area surrounded by houses. The SDC Core Strategy states that *‘all new housing will be developed at a density that ...does not compromise the distinctive character of the area in which it is situated’* (Policy SP7) An increase in a rural village’s housing density such as Otford, based upon urban requirements will neither help to sustain nor improve the character of this village. The community therefore wishes to ensure their view is understood.

### **4.3 Integration with the countryside is part of the village heritage**

Throughout its history, most private homes in Otford have been constructed with sufficient space provided on either side, through which the surrounding fields and hills may be seen. It is one of the reasons visitors and residents alike find Otford so attractive and it is something which the community clearly wishes to retain. This is applicable to proposed extensions in addition to new developments, particularly if backing on to open countryside.

The community’s view is clearly supported by the SDC’s Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (RESPD). For that reason, house extensions in particular should, whenever possible, be designed to maintain the existing spacing between properties and not reduce the views of the countryside beyond. By closing a gap, an extension can steadily erode one of the special qualities of this village.

### **4.4 Gardens form an important part of our community**

Judging from the many written comments in the VDS workshop sessions, it is clear that any form of new development should be required to incorporate clear plans for soft landscaping, including (where appropriate) the use of natural foliage on front, side and rear boundaries to provide a more evolved appearance and soften the visual impact of a new development on the surrounding area. The effects of introducing an extension can, on occasion, significantly reduce the garden and amenity area.



The loss of a growing garden is a loss for the wider community as well as the ecology of the area. Whenever possible, whether designing a new home or paving an area for parking, a space for a natural garden should always be retained in the front of a home. Our community is situated in the country, not the town and the community have clearly indicated that every effort should be made to retain a natural growing environment around our homes. Otford residents have clearly supported the view that when hard-standing is required, home owners should always try and utilise porous materials to permit the rain to enter the ground, rather than flow wastefully into local drains and sewers.

#### **4.5 Two-for-one developments**

The re-use of a single residential plot on which to build a number of houses are not encouraged in this village. Where it has taken place previously, the results have sometimes created untypical congestion within the street scene. Residents, in their questionnaire replies, have been quite clear that such examples should not set a precedent. Planning proposals should be compatible with the established surrounding properties and the available plot size. Compressing two-for-one developments into a village community can have an adverse effect upon the local area and the village as a whole. Although all development proposals will be judged on their merits, plot size and access are relevant factors. Residents have however indicated that it is important; both on environmental grounds and to preserve the cohesion of the village, that substantial garden areas remain a strong feature of Otford.

#### **4.6 Garage development**

The building of larger (often two-storey) garages can have a significant impact on the space surrounding homes. New garages should not be considered an automatic excuse to add another spare room to a property. A number of these have been allowed in Otford in recent years and in many cases, the effect has been to 'over-fill' the frontage facing the road. Residents have indicated that generally, within the village environment, garages should be only of one storey. New garages should *'fit unobtrusively with the building'*. SDC's supplementary planning document presents clarity on the matter, in that new garages should *'not have an unacceptable impact on the space surrounding buildings'* (RESPD 4.49 and 4.53)

#### **4.7 Planning Loft Extensions and dormers**

Loft extensions should not cause any alteration in the height or the pitch of a roof. An important consideration is that they should maintain a common continuity of roof profile when seen from the street. It is desirable also that dormers should always be sited to the rear of the building and be of a scale and size that complements the building. What is untypical of Otford homes is when a proposed dormer size is either of a disproportionate scale or misaligned with the other windows of the house. Front-facing dormers and roof-lights/Velux windows are not encouraged as they are felt to be un-typical and out-of-place in the village.

#### **4.8 Extension and alterations**

The majority of older Otford homes have evolved over time. It is the view of residents that all forms of extension or alteration to a building, no matter what its age, should always try and blend naturally with the existing structure by using similar materials and colouration. However extensions which are perceived to give a terracing effect are not encouraged.

#### **4.9 Housing will be sought for older residents wishing to down-size**

The community's Parish Plan set a long-term objective to create, on the principle of the almshouse, a series of low-profile properties, sited on common ground, that can be leased by older long-term residents of Otford until such time as they shall choose to leave, where-upon their capital is returned in full and the property passes to another long-term resident. Such a scheme has worked successfully elsewhere (i.e. Rockdale) but would be dependent upon suitable land becoming available, the support of the District Council and a developer willing to support such communal aims.

It is often mooted at local meetings of residents, that opportunities to create housing for older, long-term residents be sought within the parish. This is also reflected in the Otford Parish Plan. The community recognises the complexities of achieving such an aim. However it continues to seek any opportunity to realise such a wish. Core Strategy policy SP5 supports the requirement for housing being developed for older residents. One day it is hoped that Otford can build its own small 'retirement hamlet', designed to fit discreetly within the village envelope.

#### **4.10 Otford's requests for benefits from the Infrastructure Levy**

The government has introduced an Infrastructure Levy on new developments being built in the region. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) requires developers to pay a standard charge per sq.m on all qualifying new development to Sevenoaks District Council. The majority of the money raised from this levy can only be spent by the Parish Council on infrastructure, its installation or improvement. A small percentage will be allocated to those parishes where applicable developments have occurred. In the main, these funds will be used in relation to support the developments themselves however parishes have been asked to list what other infrastructure projects they may wish to support. Amongst Otford's requests which relate to future design within the village, are:

- the creation of a retirement homes community for older residents;
- funding to support the introduction of Shared Space within the village centre to control car speed and facilitate greater pedestrian movement;
- the development of an 'over-spill' car park to respond to future needs (NPPF 9:90);
- the development of Palace Field as a communal and visitor heritage facility;
- the introduction of an area for outdoor adult exercise equipment.

#### ***Design Principles***

- 4a** Proposals for new dwellings should not be located in a way where the village might appear to merge with neighbouring villages or with Sevenoaks. *(CS L07 and SP1)*
- 4b** The appropriateness of new homes should conform to policy EN1 of the Allocations and Development Management Plan (2015) and be of a scale, height and mass similar to adjoining buildings. *(CS L07; ADMP EN1 and EN2)*
- 4c** The appropriateness of any new development or extension should be judged by its prominence and/or intrusion within the landscape. *(RESPD 3.6: 3.7: 3.11: 3.12 and 3.13, AONBP)*
- 4d** Maintaining existing spaces between buildings will help integration with the surrounding countryside. This should be encouraged whenever possible. *(CS L0.8 (RESPD 4.17: 4.18 and 4.19)*

- 4e** The ratio of building to plot size should always be in harmony with other homes in the vicinity, without the effect of crowding. This is particularly applicable to applications for front extensions and 2-for-1 developments. *(CS LO7)*
- 4f** Any form of extension should always try to retain a consistency of style with the original building. *(RESPD 4.48 and 4.23)*
- 4g** When building an extension, whenever possible, the original boundary materials should be retained or be re-instated. Please note the community would wish it to be noted that gaining permission for an extension does not imply permission to change the original boundary materials. *(RESPD 4.62: Summary)*
- 4h** Proposals for properties to introduce forward-facing dormer windows or roof-lights/Velux windows which appear to introduce a third storey, are not typical in Otford homes and are not encouraged *(RESPD 4.31: 4.34 and 4.35)*
- 4i** The height of the roof ridge should be similar to the majority of other properties in the surrounding street scene. *(RESPD 4.11 and 4.14)*
- 4j** Garages should generally not exceed one storey in height *(RESPD 4.49: 4.50 and 4.51)*
- 4k** In order to promote individuality in new housing, the inclusion of local vernacular designs like gables and hips are welcome as typical of the area. *(CS LO7)*
- 4l** Garden size and ratio are an important element of integration with village home design and should be considered as part of any proposal *(RESPD 6.11 and 6.12)*
- 4m** In response to an initial need, support will be given by the Parish Council to advance a proposal for the building of a number of suitably designed, low-profile lease-hold homes for older residents within the parish in a suitable location. *(CS SP 54 and CS5)*

*Abbreviations:*

*NPPF= National Planning Policy Framework*

*CS = Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy*

*RESPD = SDC Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Doc.*

*CAAMP = Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

*AONBMP – Kent Downs AONB Management Plan*

*AONB= Roads Handbook*

## **5: PROPERTY BOUNDARIES AND STREET FURNITURE**

### **5.1 Types of local boundary material**

Much of the character of Otford is reflected in the house boundaries bordering public streets. Historically, Otford house boundaries have generally been formed from traditional species of hedging, or traditional picket fencing. On some residential roads, open-plan gardens with trees have been preferred, providing the area with an unenclosed environment. A large proportion of residential roads have grass verges, often carefully maintained by local residents although Kent County Council is responsible for maintaining verges which are not part of private properties. Generally, hedges and fences are low, permitting a view of the house and the land beyond. Well-maintained hedgerows commonly bound agricultural land bordering our roads.

### **5.2 Close-board fencing**

Developers of new (mainly large) detached private homes have, in recent years, incorporated high close-boarded fencing and gates. Villagers feel that this has had an urbanising effect on the area and gives the properties an isolated and stockaded appearance. A large proportion of Otford residents consider this unattractive, untypical and unsuitable in our rural village community. A community is defined as a group of people living together, not separately. Recent revisions in planning regulations recommend such fences and their close-boarded high gates although they are not encouraged in Otford village.

### **5.3 Verges**

Although not strictly street furniture, trees are a feature of the verges in a number of residential roads. They beautify the area and are also of ecological benefit to all. A general concern has been expressed that in recent years these roadside trees have not been maintained and that many trees have been removed by Kent County Council and not replaced.

### **5.4 Lighting**

The residents of Otford have for many years resisted the installation of street lighting. Many properties have their own external lighting such as security or porch lights and these can be helpful to visitors. Any new proposals for lighting, in particular on new development, should be carefully placed and angled and not so powerful that they are detrimental to neighbouring properties. ADMP EN 65 is quite clear on this point.

Though Otford football pitch has high level lighting, it is not considered to set a precedent as it is not for residential use and is required for specific purpose. Should any new lighting be proposed it should be designed in a way which minimises light spill.

### **5.6 Planters and street furniture**

There are a number of timber planters located within the village. Maintaining planters and protecting their plants from vandalism requires much attention and the volunteers and Parish Council who support this work are to be thanked.

There are also a number of well-maintained public bench seats located within the open areas of the village. Some smart cast-iron waste-bins are located on the Green and the village centre. Well designed and selected elements of street furniture, using natural materials are encouraged in Otford as they can help to enhance the character of the village. Our listed public telephone box on the Green, already forms part of the village heritage.

### ***Design Principles***

- 5a** Any proposal to incorporate high, close-boarded, fencing and gates facing the street should be discouraged (*RESPD 4.62/Summary*)
- 5b** Roadside trees are valued and should, wherever possible, be replaced if removed.
- 5c** For front boundary hedging, the use of traditional tree and shrub species or of traditional picket fencing is encouraged. (*ADMP EN1 and EN2; RESPD 6.11 and 6.12*)
- 5d** Planters, window boxes and hanging baskets are encouraged in public areas throughout the village. Members of the community should be encouraged to take responsibility for their maintenance.
- 5e** An excess of unsympathetic road and direction signs should be avoided and wherever possible redundant signs and posts removed. Signs within the village centre should, whenever possible, be of a traditional design in keeping with the village character. (*CAAMP 4.32.*)
- 5f** Within the village, an increase in sympathetically designed pedestrian signage should be encouraged. (*CAAMP 4.32:* )
- 5g** The introduction of appropriate historical information boards would be to the benefit of visitors and should be supported
- 5h** Where possible, exterior lighting in private homes should be of limited power and designed with care. New development should avoid creating light spillage to the detriment of adjoining properties or road users. (*ADMP EN 65*)

***Abbreviations:***

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## **6: PUBLIC FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS**

### **6.1 Importance to the community**

Footpaths and bridleways within the parish are the pedestrian arteries of the community, prized and used daily by the people of Otford and our many visitors. Most paths have been established for many centuries, providing a far safer route than along the busy main roads. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, there should be no diversion or obstruction of footpaths by encroachment from existing properties or new developments. The two pedestrian railway crossings in the village are essential for ease of movement, maintaining the current right-of-way and for connecting the various parts of the village.

### **6.2 Village Paths**

Typical of these important pedestrian routes, used by a high proportion of residents to and from the village centre, is the ancient long distance footpath known as the Greenway (49). This runs from the Village Green across the railway and on to the next village of Kemsing. Other popular village paths include the path (51) connecting Sevenoaks Road to Pickmoss Lane in the village centre, and the path between Bubblestone Road and St Bartholomew's Church (50). Maintenance of these attractive, established village pedestrian routes is essential both for practical and environmental reasons. This is particularly important for the disabled and elderly who find overhanging branches and encroaching nettles an often alarming hazard.

Residents have expressed concern that on occasion, these important pedestrian arteries are not adequately maintained. Each summer many village paths become narrowed by swathes of leaning stinging nettles and brambles which are a hazard to young people especially and particularly to children in push-chairs. It is hoped that a more efficient means of maintaining the borders of the paths can be found. An inevitable consequence otherwise is that more and more people will take to their cars rather than risk walking along footpaths that are becoming unfit for purpose.

### **6.3 Countryside Paths**

Our footpaths leading out into the countryside and valley are one of the reasons so many walkers come to visit Otford (see the footpath map for details.) The prehistoric track way, the North Downs Way (International Route E2), which follows the high chalk escarpment of the North Downs from Salisbury Plain to Folkstone, crosses the Darent Valley at this point. One can follow it from Donnington Manor Hotel, across the fields into Telston Lane (58), through the village and then north-eastward up Otford Mount (14) and along Birchin Cross Road. Despite attempts to use unsympathetic surfacing of one section, this important ancient track way still retains much of its original nature. Protecting its integrity is considered the ongoing responsibility of each generation.

Footpath 66 provides a route to Bat & Ball (Sevenoaks). Leading from St. Bartholomew's Church southward, it runs beside Palace Field down the Old Walk to cross the fields to Long Lodge. This is the location, it is believed, of one of Henry VIII's hunting lodges within what was once a deer park. The path, having crossed the railway and motorway, then skirts the land-fill site of Greatness Quarry to arrive at Bat & Ball.

Three path routes head northward up the valley toward Shoreham. Walking up Park Lane (aka. Cow Lane) from the village centre, one can bear right to take a scenic path (47) across the railway and then up the fields of the steep escarpment (60) to look back across the head of the valley to the Vale of Holmesdale and Sevenoaks atop the Lower Greensand Ridge beyond.

An alternative route is to stay on Park Lane and take the bridle path (32) which leads through the Darent Valley Golf Club to Shoreham village. This bridleway is however in serious need of maintenance. The section between Park Lane and the golf links is churned, contains deep ruts and turns to deep mud after October. Work is needed urgently on this section to level and hardcore it. During winter months it is a dangerous obstacle to walkers and our many visitors on this popular walking route.

A second path, the Darent Valley Path (17), follows a lower route across the fields to rejoin the former path to Shoreham. The recent introduction of metal self-closing gates has meant that older walkers, the disabled and young children are no longer hampered by the old fashioned, though attractive, wooden stiles.

Rye Lane follows the line of an ancient winding track from Dunton Green. Where it forms a junction with Pilgrims Way West, a footpath (43) continues northward, running parallel with the Darent. A rougher walk, but none the less pleasurable, can be enjoyed by taking the path as it follows a route across Twitton Brook and into the grounds of Filston Farm and its great oast houses. The moated Filston Hall, now a separate private residence, was once a medieval hall house, leased in 1529 to Thomas Cromwell. All these countryside paths are well used throughout the year and are generally (with a few exceptions) well maintained. Occasional information boards on the local history, flora and fauna could, in the future, bring added enjoyment to visitors and ramblers. The District Council and KCC support this view : *"...and will seek improvements in interpretation facilities to promote enjoyment and understanding of the countryside"* (Core Strategy SP10)

#### **6.4 Private house boundary materials**

Where a house boundary lies along a public footpath, security for the householders is naturally very important. However, over recent years, the convenience of using close-boarded fencing as a barrier has led some paths to look like narrow alleyways rather than footpaths. The decision by a householder to use high fencing, whilst understandable, has a wholly negative effect upon the path itself and the villagers and visitors who use it. The path becomes perceived as dangerous because it has become enclosed. High fences are also a magnet for graffiti and removal is an unwelcome job which falls on the parish office rather than the householder, who usually is unaware of the problem. In public meetings, many residents have recommended the use of robust open-mesh fencing planted through with natural shrubs, hedges and trees, rather than employing panel- or close-boarded fencing. By amending the design in this way, the pathway gains natural light and openness, and both

householder and public benefit in terms of appearance, security and privacy. Turning footpaths into narrow alleyways between high fencing is not safe for the walker or in any way community-spirited.

### ***Design Principles***

- 6a** Footpaths, bridleways, public rights-of-way and railway crossings should be kept properly maintained throughout the year. *(CS SP2)*
- 6b** In line with existing legislation, properties adjoining established footpaths should not encroach upon them or in any way make them narrower. *(CS SP2)*
- 6c** Close-boarded fencing is not encouraged as a boundary material adjoining public footpaths. With any new development householders are recommended to soften the design of their boundary by use of strong mesh or un-pointed railings with associated plant-through natural shrubs. *(CS SP2: RESPD 4.62)*
- 6d** The community have made it clear that they would not like to see trees felled and natural shrubs and flora removed from alongside public footpaths, unless to maintain the path itself. *(CS SP2: RESPD Summary)*
- 6e** Otford residents welcome the creation of new linking footpaths (statutory or permissive) and support opportunities for these being explored with landowners. *(CS SP2)*
- 6f** Greater use of interpretation boards particularly on country paths would be of great benefit to walkers and families. *(CS SP10)*
- 6g** All opportunities to support and expand rural tourism within the parish should be encouraged as well as appropriate visitor facilities. *(NPPF 3.28)*

***Abbreviations:***

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*CAAMP = Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

*OPP = Otford Parish Plan*



## **7: THE TRADING ESTATE AND SURROUNDING LAND**

### **7.1 Location and History**

The Vestry Light Industrial Trading Estate is located near the southern parish boundary, with access on the A225, Sevenoaks Road. On the south side, this Estate adjoins the Riverside Retail Park, containing a variety of retail outlets and a supermarket, through whose car park and following the line of the ancient Gunnilda Brook, the Otford parish boundary lies.

The Vestry Estate is built upon extensive earlier brickwork excavations that were used for 70 years as a rail-supplied landfill site for Southwark Vestry (Southwark Borough Council). The area was designated a trading estate in 1960. It is separated from the village community by the east-west M26 motorway, the Otford cemetery and the public woodland of Palace Park Wood. To its west and beyond the A225, lies the expanse of attractive water-meadow land that acts as a water-retention area, reducing the likelihood of the river Darent flooding.

### **7.2 The Vestry Estate**

Given the reclamation area that this once was, the majority of buildings are light-weight pre-fabricated warehouse structures, not requiring extensive foundations. Apart from the siting of Becket House, the majority of the buildings (warehousing and light industry) are set well back from the A225 and, as seen from the main road, do not intrude into the attractive rural quality of the local landscape. This is a designated Biodiversity Opportunity Area located between the trading estate and the Green Belt. Therefore all new building, or replacement buildings, must be sited sensitively. Proposals to site new warehousing, light industrial buildings or office buildings closer to the A225 or the M26 are unlikely to be supported by the community because of the intrusion they would have upon the essentially rural nature of the area. For similar reasons, it would be beneficial if designs for new buildings maintain a low visible profile against the skyline and do not invite attention through use of bright colours or extensive use of glass. Careful use of landscaping will support such a recommendation.

### **7.3 The effects of reflection and use of artificial light.**

The retail and the trading estates to the south of Otford are clearly visible from the many footpaths on the surrounding hills above the village.

The effect of the sun's reflection from buildings whose design employs a lot of glass or bright colouring on their fascias can make them highly visible from a long distance away. The effect is contrary to the valued tranquillity and muted tones of the meadows and countryside which face them. For that reason, the village community appeal to commercial developers in this area of the parish bordering Sevenoaks, to be aware when designing, of the high visibility of their designs when seen from afar.

Otford is still an un-lit village. It does not employ street-lighting. That is the community's choice. Thus proposed developments which employ high-mounted lighting visible from the village are felt particularly inappropriate in the effect they may have upon residents and will be considered un-welcome.

#### **7.4 Bartram Farm Estate**

Bartram Farm was built in the early 1900s and held considerable land beyond what are now the M26 motorway and the Sevenoaks Road (A225). As happened to many such farmsteads with the advent of major road-building schemes, the original estate became untenable.

Today the Victorian farm building and its ancillary bungalow occupy the centre of a triangular site at the entrance to the Vestry Estate in front of Becket House. This is located within the Green Belt area. Within its curtilage where once there were farm buildings, there are now a wide range of independent small businesses which carry out their trade from separate utility buildings. The whole site is located above the adjoining Sevenoaks Road, being on the side of Ladds Hill which, when seen from the main road, is effectively screened with shrubs and trees. It is located on the Old Otford Road.

A number of proposals have been put forward over recent years for different forms of recreational and commercial development of this site. Until recently, all have been refused as they represented inappropriate development in the Green Belt and therefore harmful to its openness. The form and bulk of many of the proposals detracted from the character of this area and its street scene. This area is also surrounded by potential protected species and insufficient information was provided to show that the proposal would not be harmful to these species or their habitat.

Among the purposes of the Green Belt are the prevention of unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas. The Green Belt also seeks to prevent neighbouring towns merging one into another. It is therefore recognised by both Otford residents and district planners that this area of land between the industrial estate and the countryside beyond is an important area to protect from inappropriate development. We would therefore seek to ensure that the aims of the Green Belt are maintained to prevent urban sprawl and keep this land permanently open.

#### **7.5 Riverside Retail Park**

The retail park is a group of industrial-scale retail stores, together with a McDonald's and a petrol outlet for Sainsbury's. The total mass of building that these buildings occupy appears out of scale within our rural parish. These tall, retail outlets exist as an outcome of an earlier planning system, and our community must continue to live with them within our boundary. This document is however not giving implicit or explicit approval of their design or location, which run contrary to the requirement for buildings to integrate with the surrounding area. In parish design terms, the danger is that such developments can then, despite their inappropriate nature, be quoted by other developers as precedents for similar schemes. Familiarity may have made them less visually intrusive to residents who pass them every day, but they remain out of place in our rural landscape. As long as the community of Otford has a voice about what is sited within its parish, it is unlikely to support any further building proposals on this scale. Any opportunities to introduce tree and shrub screening, however limited, would be beneficial and help to improve the prospect.

#### **7.6 Sainsbury's Supermarket**

The recently extended Sainsbury's building is not located within the parish of Otford. The parish boundary follows the ancient Gunnilda brook (aka. Watercress Brook), which runs

through the centre of its car park. Every one of our village food retailers has closed since its arrival. Our community is therefore directly affected by its presence and would certainly wish to be consulted in any planning applications in the future. In terms of maintaining a quality of design within this parish, Otford is likely to be concerned with any future alterations or changes of this scale, even when the development is not directly within the parish boundaries. We appreciate that the supermarket provides employment for a number of Otford residents as well as provisions and services, however in parish planning terms, it is hoped that the community's views will be taken into account since the visual impact of a building such as this, is not affected by boundary lines.

### **7.7 Residential homes within the area.**

The small residential enclave of Vestry Cottages is the important historical heart of the original estate. The estate is of great value both historically as well as part of Otford's heritage. The upkeep and maintenance of this attractive Victorian line of cottages is important to the whole community. All the Vestry Cottage residents have indicated their pride in being part of Otford parish. To the rear of Vestry Cottages is the boundary of the Green Belt which continues up to Otford village. The line of the Old Otford Road runs northward at this point until it is terminated at the motorway. There are also several detached homes located on this spur of road.

#### ***Design Principles***

- 7a** Proposals for siting of industrial buildings or offices on the Vestry Estate closer to the Sevenoaks Road than at present are unlikely to be welcome. Any large proposals that could be harmful to the street scene or of an inappropriate size and scale would be considered unacceptable. *(CS LO8: RESPD3.2)*
- 7b** Any new proposal to alter or replace buildings within the Vestry Estate or Riverside Retail Park should seek to harmonise and integrate them with the rural surroundings. *(CS LO8: RESPD 3.2:)*
- 7c** Any proposal for the development of the Bartram Farm estate should seek to minimize its visual intrusion within this agricultural, Green Belt site and minimise its visibility on the hillside. *(CS LO8: RESPD3.2)*
- 7d** The community has made clear that increases in the volume of heavy vehicle traffic through Otford village are not welcomed. (There already exists a width restriction of 7' 6" between pond and railway bridge). The community would wish that any proposed development, whether inside or outside the parish boundary, that will have a further impact on the volume of traffic passing through the village, should provide an accurate prediction of future traffic flow and volume increase as part of its planning submission. *(ADMP LO8, SP10, SP11, EN1, GI1 and GI2)*
- 7e** The introduction of trees between the A225 and the Vestry Estate and throughout the Estate would help soften the harshness of the industrial buildings and better mirror the rural character bordering on the Green Belt would be welcome. Any new development in the estate will therefore be encouraged to introduce planting to soften the harshness of the industrial buildings. *(CS LO8: RESPD 3.2)*
- 7f** When developing or re-cladding industrial units or new office units, particularly on the margins of the estate, proposed designs should seek to maintain a low profile within the landscape and owners be requested to use cladding and paint which will merge into the natural background. *(CS LO8: RESPD3.2)*

- 7g** Proposals for any large-scale development of land adjoining the residential properties close to the Estate should be resisted, acknowledging the role of the area as Green Belt and the effects of traffic and noise on local residents. (*CS LO8: RESPD 3.12 and 3.13*)
- 7h** Proposals within the Vestry Estate or Retail Park which employ an extensively glazed, or partially glazed frontage or the use of reflective white or light-coloured fascia material, should consider the effects of high visibility within the nearby Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. (*CS LO8: RESPD 3.12: 3.13 and 4.48*)

*Abbreviations:*

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*RESPD = SDC Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Doc.*

*CAAMP = Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan*

## **8: AGRICULTURE AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

### **8.1 Introduction**

The local landscape that we see today is the result of many centuries of evolution. The pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows, that gives the modern landscape its character, is firmly rooted in Otford's past. We live in a sought-after scenic valley which annually receives an increasing numbers of visitors, many of whom come here to walk and explore the surrounding countryside. It is already becoming evident that this increase in visitor numbers, while welcome in so many ways, can have an adverse effect upon the countryside. Community volunteer groups working with the authorities will need to maintain the area and protect it from unintentional harm. There is considerable practical support available from a number of agencies to help such initiatives. The Government has made clear their overall support through their statements in the National Planning Policy Framework.

### **8.2 Agriculture**

Agriculture has been for millennia an essential and valued part of the life of the village and its surroundings. It is primarily arable in nature, though it also supports dairy herds and sheep on the North Downs pastures and sheep along the low-lying southern river plain. Well-established fields are mostly bordered by ancient hedging with traditional plant species. These hedgerows act as essential wildlife corridors and support the natural and evolved nature of the countryside. Current legislation to protect them is welcomed. Coppices and mature trees add to the quality of the natural environment. The open, rolling, arable nature of the parish with its scattered woodlands ensures its popularity with residents, day-visitors and the many visiting walkers and cyclists. There are no natural stone walls as the local chalk is not a robust boundary material and flint is rarely used.

There is limited agricultural building, none sited within the public open-space areas. Careful location and screening can help to reduce any negative visual impact that such buildings might otherwise have. Any new structures such as domestic stabling and field shelters should be similarly carefully placed. The recent change of use of the Park Farm agricultural buildings as a horse livery stable has introduced many more horses into the local fields. The community agrees that any permanent caravan or mobile home sites should not be allowed within the parish.

### **8.3 Natural Woodland**

There are some wooded areas on the upper part of the Downs, but the main area of woodland in the Parish is contained within Oxenhill Woods which extends from the eastern part of the village. This is a managed wooded area and is considered a unique example in the South-East of naturally regenerated woodland. It is now a prime recreational walking site. Sevenoaks District Council, assisted by Otford and Kemsing Parish Councils manages this area. Unfortunately vandalism within some of the area has become a recurring problem and occasional motor biking causes destruction to the paths. Coppicing and good tree management occasionally causes alarm with some local residents who may not appreciate the concept of managed, rather than wild, woodland. More information would help in this regard. The other area of managed woodland runs beside the Sevenoaks Road and is called Palace Park Wood. Being low-lying it is prone to some surface water retention in the winter

months, however it is a popular venue with dog-owners and local walkers, and provides a rural backdrop to the Otford burial ground at its Southern quarter.

#### **8.4 An Area of Special Scientific Interest.**

A large part of the south-facing escarpment of the Downs, which lies on Otford's eastern perimeter, between Otford and Shoreham, is registered as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The flora and fauna which exist on this sunny grassed escarpment are varied. Over 130 different varieties of moth were identified in a recent one-night survey. The area is also a protected butterfly habitat for similar reasons. A wide range of meadow and other flowers grow here, and the escarpment is the location for a wide variety of wild orchids native to the down-land. Preserving and protecting this important habitat is of great importance, and volunteer groups help to monitor and maintain the area throughout the year. The future will present the problems of balancing the enjoyment such an area brings to visitors and families whilst its maintenance and protection remain secured.

#### **8.5 The Darent**

In 2013 the Government finally agreed that the benefit to the river outweighed the cost of adapting abstraction practices and agreed that there should be a significant reduction in abstraction at Eynsford, Lullingstone and Shoreham. It is hoped this will have a positive effect upon flow along the whole course of the river.

The Darent has a broad rain catchment area which includes most of the Vale of Holmesdale up to Westerham and as far as Dartford. However the chalk bed which provides its clarity is also greatly fissured and leakage of water into the aquifer is considerable. Rainfall does however have a very immediate effect upon water levels, which can change rapidly.

The flooding risk to Otford village is reduced by the presence of the water-meadows to the South which store much of the flow until the river can cope with the drainage, and by the fact that the flow is divided within the village into the mill's leat and the river itself. A new association, the Darent Catchment Improvement Group, working with the Environment Agency, are now actively seeking ways in which the quantity and quality of the water as well as the improvement to fish passage can be improved. Otford is actively participating in this endeavour. It is hoped that steadily the river will regain its importance and benefit the lives of both visitors and villagers.

#### **8.6 Action**

Biodiversity is a key concept in the maintenance of our rich natural habitat. Not all residents can be involved in helping to coppice woodland or making reed bundles to maintain water flow in the river. However, all can help by suitable approaches to gardening, for example by not using pesticides which kill off the food on which local birds rely; by keeping a pile of wood and twigs in a far corner to provide a home for insects as well as wintering hedgehogs; by composting vegetable waste; and by using water-butts rather than a hose. The examples are numerous and small in themselves, but when carried out "en masse" they can help protect the shared environment.

### ***Design Principles***

- 8a** The continuance of farming should be actively encouraged within the parish. **(CS SP11)**
- 8b** Traditional hedgerows need to be protected and maintained as a key feature and an important animal habitat within the rural landscape. **(CS SP11)**
- 8c** Coppices and trees in agricultural areas are greatly valued and should be maintained and retained. TPOs should be sought and applied where possible and appropriate. **(CS SP11)**
- 8d** Any new agricultural buildings should be so designed to meet a functional need but should also be sited in a way to minimise their visual impact within the countryside. **(CS SP11)**
- 8e** Areas of special importance for the survival of animal or plant species should be afforded protection. **(CS SP11)**
- 8f** The banks of the Darent should be kept clear of excessive overgrowth and the flow clear of obstructions. **(CS SP11)**
- 8g** Maintenance of Oxenhill Woods should be fully supported by the Parish Council as it is recognised locally as an important area of local woodland and part of it is designated as Ancient Woodland. **(CS SP11 and NPPF)**
- 8h** Information boards should be encouraged to be introduced and maintained at suitable sites so that visitors can appreciate the importance and special interest of the area. **(CAAMP.12.5)**

*Abbreviations:*

*NPPF= National Planning Policy Framework*

*CS = Sevenoaks District Council Core Strategy*

*RESPD = SDC Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Doc.*

## APPENDIX 1

# OTFORD ROADS GAZETEER

### **CENTRAL OTFORD**

The heart of the historic village, centred on the Parish Church and Green, with remains of the nationally important Archbishops of Canterbury's Manor house, later Royal Palace to the south.

**Station Road (A225)** The eastward extension of the High Street had two farms, Hilldrop Farm and Moat Farm in the 19c. In the early 20c a few large detached houses were built opposite the station, and a row of Council Houses erected nearer the village.

**Becket's Place**, a speculative development of large houses erected in 2005 on the former coal yard adjacent to the Station Yard.

**Colet's Orchard** was developed on the adjoining land as a cul-de-sac of individually designed bungalows in the early 1960s at which time Colet's Well ceded Otford Pond to the village. The walled rear garden of Colet's Well, the principal house overlooking the Green, still abuts Station Road, but the grounds extended eastwards to include Friar's Pool, the weather-boarded house on the roadside, which was formerly the laundry.

**Leonard Avenue**, originally partly built up with terraced houses c1900. Several were destroyed by bombing in 1940, and semi-detached houses replaced them and also completed the development, with the surgery at its northern end dating from c1970.

**The Green**, with its 'listed' Pond, has been Otford's focal point for more than a thousand years. The Parish Church, dedicated to St. Bartholomew, whose present fabric partly dates from c1050, was probably established many centuries earlier.

The adjacent, late 18c, Colet's Well was built on the site of a Tudor mansion of similar name. By the church gate is the Chantry, formerly Church Gate Cottages, originally built in the 15C as the village Court Hall.

Other interesting buildings around the Green include Holmesdale and Pond House, an unusual pair of 18c semi-detached houses and The Corner House - formerly Mount View, an 18C rebuild of an earlier, timbered farm house. Its substantial boundary wall from the earlier period once also encompassed Bubblestone Farm.

To the south of the Green are the still impressive remains of Otford Palace, the Tudor North range being the only upstanding ruins of an estate originally conveyed to the Church by a King of Kent in 821.

The north side includes commercial properties, formerly cottages, together with the Crown PH (16c), and the Woodman PH, a farmhouse until the 1860s. The Green and High Street comprise the centre of the village Conservation Area.



**The High Street**, still the only east-west route through the parish, is the present-day guise of the prehistoric track-way linking Dover with central England. It is also part of the modern North Downs way. The upper part is lined with a variety of smaller cottages now mainly commercial. The Bull PH formerly a Tudor dwelling, retains some original features as well as a fine weather-boarded barn.

The School and adjoining Headmaster's House (now the Parish Office and Heritage Centre) were built in 1871. Opposite is the Church Hall (designed by Sir Edwyn Lutyens), backed by the Car Park and Village Memorial Halls. The lower part of the High Street is filled with mainly 19c semi-detached and terraced houses. The Library (1980) and the Methodist Church (1935) are modern buildings in harmony with the street scene.

**Pickmoss Lane**, formerly Worth Lane, is a row of mainly 19c cottages while Pickmoss, a refurbished hall House and attached cottages in the High Street, faces the Horns PH, formerly three 16c cottages.

**Mill Lane**, a charming cul-de-sac of cottages and a converted oast, leads to the site of the water mill - replaced after a disastrous fire in 1924, beyond which is Troutbeck, a much altered polygonal house dating from 1905. Opposite Mill Lane is The Grange, 18C, a former vicarage on the site of a tannery,.

At the bottom of the High Street is the modern Catholic Church (1985), opposite the fine Broughton Manor, late medieval and later, for many years the seat of the Polhill family, the local squirearchy. Next to School House is the imposing Old Parsonage, a 15C house once the home of the incumbents of Shoreham with Otford.

**Park Lane**, to the north, serves Park Farm and two dwellings originally a part of the farm.

**Warham Road**, a cul-de-sac of mainly semi-detached houses erected in a variety of styles in the 1970s, most having open plan front gardens,

## FOOTPATHS

SR. 17 Darent Valley Path to Shoreham from Mill Lane.

BR. 32 (bridleway) Park Lane northwards to Shoreham.

SR. 729 A new east-west path linking SR. 17 at Lower Barn with SR. 32.

## APPENDIX 2

# HISTORIC AND GEOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

### Historical Summary

Otford has grown up at where the river Darent traverses the escarpment of the chalk North Downs at a river crossing of the ancient east-west trackway known today as the Pilgrims Way. The light soils of the valley sides were cultivable by early farmers, and there is evidence of late Neolithic/Bronze Age habitation some 4,000 years ago in the Combe, a steep-sided re-entrant valley, today dry, overlooked by a round barrow on Otford Mount, itself the probable site of an Iron Age hillfort. Intensive Roman settlement including three villa/farmsteads, a 'township' (village) and a cemetery are known.

Reference to a battle here in 775 provides the earliest mention of 'Otta's ford', though pagan burials indicate earlier Anglo-Saxon settlement. In 821 a gift of land by Cenulf, King of Kent, to Wulfred, Archbishop of Canterbury, formed the basis of a vast estate centred on Otford Palace, which became one of the most prestigious houses in medieval England, visited by virtually all the Kings of England. The moated house was rebuilt and greatly expanded in Tudor times by Abp. William Warham, the last of the great medieval prelates, and in 1537, at the desire of King Henry VIII, was exchanged by Warham's successor, Thomas Cranmer, for lesser crown properties in east Kent. It thus became a royal palace. Queen Elizabeth I disliked the house and allowed it to fall into ruin by 1600, and shortly afterwards the estate was broken up after 800 years. The Polhill family, with its seat at what is now Broughton Manor, was the principal landowner until the 19C. From 1882 Otford station provided a direct link with London, and the beginnings of commuting, and an incentive for expansion of the village and diversification of employment, hitherto predominantly agricultural and extractive (brick-making and chalk-quarrying). The 20C saw an expansion of the population from under 1000 to 3200, and the construction of business parks at the southern edge of the parish, though Otford's incorporation within the officially-designated Metropolitan Green Belt, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, Special Landscape Areas, and Sites of Special Scientific Interest, has curbed indiscriminate large-scale housing development.

### Geographical Summary

Otford is located at the point where the eastward flowing river Darent leaves the Gault clay of the Holmesdale Vale and turns north, cutting through the chalk hills of the North Downs, one of only five rivers to do so between the English Channel and Salisbury Plain.

Holmesdale Vale is a low-lying valley with water meadows, in contrast to the steep-sided valley carved through the Downs. On each side of the river the land rises some 500ft (170 metres) above the valley floor. Springs at the junction of the chalk and underlying Gault provide rivulet tributaries of the Darent, with water of purity sufficient to support a fish farm and watercress beds.

### Distant buildings in the landscape

In addition to Twitton, a settlement of ancient origin remote from the village, there is only one significant group of farm buildings away from the centre, that at Long Lodge, formerly a lodge in the archbishop's deer-park. Today it comprises a single house and an imposing group of oasts, converted into a dwelling. The remaining farms are essentially a part of the village, whilst one large inappropriate milking parlour, which was inserted into Green Belt land in the centre of the valley, was ultimately re-located at the heart of the farm it served. A

late-Victorian hunting lodge on the scarp slope of the Downs was converted in the earlier twentieth century into a preparatory school, and extensions to meet educational needs have been very sympathetically designed and implemented.

### **Past, present and future**

The centre of the village comprises the church and a good representative group of vernacular architecture of various ages surrounding the Green with its 'listed' pond. An extension to the Green leads to the imposing remains of the Tudor wing of the archiepiscopal, later royal, Otford Palace, which stands in Palace Field, a public open space within the village. In recent years the Parish Council has been instrumental in obtaining two significant blocks of land south and east of the village, Palace Park Wood and Oxenhill Meadow and Shaw, extending to some 72 acres (30 hectares) for community access and recreation, and creating a permanent green wedge between both the M26 motorway and the neighbouring village of Kemsing, a partner in the latter scheme. The village, besides being a part of the Metropolitan Green Belt, has been designated as AONB, SLA and SSSI. Whilst there are no nature reserves within the parish, two long distance footpaths, the national North Downs Way and the regional Darent Valley Path cross at Otford. A network of footpaths and bridleways provide access to the surrounding countryside, with its rich flora and fauna and a variety of rural views.

With the proposals for extensive new housing schemes being planned along the Thames Gateway, the Darent Valley naturally provides an attractive area for relaxation and tourism. The valley is also the first area of genuinely open country to the south east of London and in consequence already attracts large numbers of visitors from the conurbation. Tourism, with both its benefits and disadvantages, will therefore become a staple part of the human environment in which all the valley communities will need to operate in the future. Sevenoaks District Council is helping to promote tourism in the valley with an emphasis on walking and access by public transport. The effect, however, will likely be felt in every village and therefore planning for a significant influx of visitors should form part of Otford's forward planning. The character of the village and its surroundings must be safeguarded if planned tourism is not to adversely affect the quality of the village or its heritage.