

Vicarage Lane, Westfield, Hastings, East Sussex

Landscape appraisal

for

Mr. Simon Faulkner

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background to the project

- 1.1.1 The Landscape Partnership has been commissioned by Batcheller Monkhouse to prepare a report setting out the landscape-related opportunities and sensitivities of a parcel of land on Vicarage Lane, Westfield, Hastings, East Sussex.
- 1.1.2 The land in question fronts onto the southern side of Vicarage Lane, and forms part of a small field. The landowner is currently exploring the possibility of developing a small number of residential dwellings on this parcel of land, hereafter referred to as 'the site.'
- 1.1.3 The site is located within Rother District and falls within the High Weald National Landscape (re-branded from Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in November 2023).
- 1.1.4 The proposed dwellings would be accessed from Vicarage Lane.
- 1.1.5 No design proposals have been prepared at this stage. This landscape appraisal will discuss the specific sensitivities and opportunities of the site, which can be used to inform the development of suitable design proposals.

1.2 Objectives of this report

- 1.2.1 This report provides a description of the existing site features and site context, landscape character, and views. The findings of the report are set out in Section 3. This section considers the key landscape and visual receptors that might be influenced by residential development, gives an outline of the potential effects on those receptors, and provides initial commentary on the extent and form of any potential mitigation measures that may be required.
- 1.2.2 The report also gives some advice on the potential layout of development from a landscape perspective. The High Weald Housing Design Guide¹ notes that the National Landscape is accommodating increased levels of housing. New housing is not necessarily detrimental to the character of the landscape; however, it must reflect the character of the local area. The characteristic features of the local built environment are explained in more detail in the High Weald Housing Design Guide. This report summarises the design guidance and also considers how it might be applied to the proposed development.
- 1.2.3 The appraisal was undertaken by a Chartered Landscape Architect and Member of the Landscape Institute who viewed the application site during a site visit in August 2025 when the weather was bright and clear and visibility was good. It was noted that at this time of year deciduous trees were in full leaf and ephemeral vegetation was present, and so the site could be considered to be at its least visible. Consideration was given in the appraisal as to how the visibility might vary with the seasons.
- 1.2.4 In undertaking the appraisal private property (other than the site) has not been accessed as it is generally considered impracticable to seek approval to gain access to residential properties or other buildings to assess the effect on views from each window in a property or adjoining land.

¹ <https://highweald.org/guidance/planning-and-development/design-guide-colour-study/>, accessed 19.08.2025

Assessment is therefore based on the nearest publicly accessible location, which will usually be a road or public right of way, or on views within the site looking outwards. Professional judgement is used to extrapolate what the likely effect on views would be from windows, making allowances for changes in height, e.g. from a first-floor window.

2 Site context and site features

2.1 The site

- 2.1.1 The site has a westerly aspect. The highest part of the site is adjacent to Vicarage Lane. The upper part of the site is relatively flat, but the ground then begins to fall into a minor stream valley.
- 2.1.2 The proposed site forms part of a larger, irregularly-shaped field which is currently in pastoral use. The grassland has some floristic interest, and there is also visible evidence of mammalian activity within the site.
- 2.1.3 The site lies between The Vicarage (to the north-west), Vicarage Lane (to the north-east) and a farm track (to the east). To the south it borders a residential conversion at The Parlour, and an associated garden and paddock. The remaining boundary is open to the wider field.
- 2.1.4 The boundary with The Vicarage is defined by a dense hedge with hedgerow trees. The hedge includes an understory of holly and hazel, and the hedgerow trees include oak, silver birch, sycamore and holly. The Vicarage is considerably lower than the site.
- 2.1.5 The boundary with Vicarage Lane is defined by a native hedge which is maintained at a height of 2-3m. Vicarage Lane is slightly sunken relative to the site, and this accentuates the sense of enclosure. The species-rich native hedgerow includes hawthorn, field maple, hazel, sycamore, ivy and bracken.
- 2.1.6 The boundary with the farm drive is defined by a timber post and rail fence. The boundary with The Parlour is defined by a closeboard fence, and the boundary with the garden/paddock is defined by a rudimentary post and wire fence.

2.2 Site context

- 2.2.1 The site lies within an intimate valley with complex undulating topography which is typical of the High Weald. The site falls towards a minor stream, and the opposite side of the valley is clothed with woodland at Whiteland Wood. This woodland comprises blocks of oak-birch woodland interspersed with conifers.
- 2.2.2 The site adjoins a group of buildings at Church Place Farm. The farm is reached from Vicarage Lane via a short drive, and there is a line of mature lime trees adjacent to the drive. Church Place Farm is a vernacular building with orange-brown roof tiles and an oast house. Church Place Barn has a hipped roof with orange-brown roof tiles, and the farmhouse and barn are both characteristic of the area. The residential conversion at The Parlour however has introduced more domestic features including a tall closeboard fence, which looks out of place. A fine oak tree is present within the garden of The Parlour, just beyond the site boundary.

- 2.2.3 Vicarage Lane defines the southern edge of the churchyard. The lane is lower than the churchyard and there is a bank with various trees on it, including oaks and yews. As it rounds the corner and heads in a north-westerly direction the lane starts to descend into the valley, and is slightly sunken. The site lies opposite the church hall, which is located within the churchyard. A dense hedge is present on the bank, and there are further trees including oaks, a poplar, young silver birch, an elder, a lime, and two mature sycamores.
- 2.2.4 The immediate site context is well-vegetated with trees in the churchyard and on the north-western boundary. The eastern end of Vicarage Lane is also lined by a dense hedge which continues along Church Lane (the A28) and there are a good number of trees to the east of the site which limit views from this direction. The site is more open to the west. Views to the west however encompass woodland, and it is inconceivable that there would be any views back towards the site from within these woods.

2.3 Site features

Geology

- 2.3.1 The underlying geology consists of alternating sequences of siltstones, silty fine-grained sandstones and mudstones within the Ashdown Formation. In south-east Sussex, around Hastings, there is a well-developed series of clay seams within the Ashdown Formation which are informally named Fairlight Clays. The Ashdown Formation outcrops across much of the High Weald.²

Soils

- 2.3.2 The soils at the site are likely to consist of slightly acid, loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage.³ This soil type has medium to high fertility and can support a wide range of pasture and woodland types.

Landform

- 2.3.3 The land within the site falls from east to west towards a minor stream valley. The highest part of the site is at the field gate on Vicarage Lane (c.38m AOD). The lowest part of the site is adjacent to the woodland on the western edge of the site (c.28m AOD). The land within the blue line continues to fall towards a small stream, and the lowest point is c.15m AOD.

Land use

- 2.3.4 The site currently forms part of a small field on the edge of the village which is in pastoral use. It is not physically demarcated from the wider field in which it is located.

Vegetation

- 2.3.5 Woody vegetation is limited to the site boundaries. The sward includes various grasses and perennials, and may have some ecological interest. There is also a damper part of the site which has a different grassland vegetation.
- 2.3.6 There are no Tree Preservation Orders in the vicinity of the site.⁴

² <https://geologyviewer.bgs.ac.uk/> accessed 13.08.2025

³ <https://www.landis.org.uk/soilscapes/> accessed 13.08.2025

Public access

2.3.7 There is no public access to the site.

2.4 National Landscapes

2.4.1 Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in England are now known as National Landscapes. The statutory designation remains an 'Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).' The Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 (as amended) requires all relevant authorities to "seek to further the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty."

2.4.2 The statutory duty needs to be considered in tandem with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), in particular paragraphs 11, 189 and 190.

2.4.3 The NPPF states that great weight should be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes, which have the highest status of protection in relation to these issues. It also states that the scale and extent of development within National Landscapes should be limited. Some small-scale housing development has been permitted within the High Weald National Landscape in recent years.

The High Weald National Landscape

2.4.4 The site is located within the High Weald National Landscape, which was originally designated in 1983. The High Weald has been described as follows:

Its scattered settlements, ancient routeways, abundant ancient woodland, extensive open heaths, and small, irregular shaped fields, all draped over rolling hills of clay and sandstone, together create a unique landscape distinct from other parts of Britain.

The area's natural beauty arises from a long history of human interaction with the natural environment; its main features were established by the fourteenth century and it is considered one of the best surviving coherent medieval landscapes in north west Europe.⁵

2.4.5 A key document for the management of the National Landscape is the High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024-2029) which has been published by the High Weald Joint Advisory Committee.⁶ The Management Plan identifies eight Core Character Components which encapsulate the natural beauty of the area:

- Natural systems – a deeply incised, ridge and faulted landform of clays and sandstone with highly variable, relatively undisturbed soils and numerous headwaters (gill streams) functioning under an oceanic climate.
- Settlement – dispersed historic settlement including high densities of isolated farmsteads, hamlets and late-medieval villages founded on trade and non-agricultural rural industries.
- Routeways – a dense network of historic routeways (now roads, tracks and paths).

⁴ [Tree Preservation Orders - Public Maps - Rother D.C. - WebGIS](#) accessed 14.08.2025

⁵ High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide

⁶ High Weald AONB Management Plan (2024-2029), High Weald Joint Advisory Committee, 2024

- Woodland – an abundance of ancient woodland mostly in small holdings, highly interconnected with hedges and shaws.
- Fieldscapes and heath – small, irregular and productive fields, bound by hedgerows and woods, and typically used for livestock grazing; with distinctive zones of lowland heaths and inned river valleys (reclaimed marshland).
- Dark night skies – intrinsically dark at night with our own galaxy (the Milky Way) visible.
- Aesthetic and perceptual qualities – arising from the interaction of people with the landscape, including the notion of a quintessential English pastoral landscape, intimacy of scale, a sense of history and timelessness; rurality and tranquillity; glimpsed long views; freedom to explore and make connections with the natural world, and a rich legacy of features and ideas left by writers, poets and gardeners inspired by the landscape.
- Land-based economy and rural living – with roots extending deep into history, and which has visibly and culturally shaped the landscape.

2.4.6 The eight Core Character Components provide a rich description of the landscape of the High Weald.

2.4.7 It has long been established that:

‘Natural Beauty’ is not just an aesthetic concept, and ‘Landscape’ means more than just ‘scenery.’⁷

2.4.8 ‘Settlement’ has been identified as one of the Core Character Components of the National Landscape, and the built features of the landscape can then contribute to the natural beauty of the National Landscape.

2.4.9 The High Weald Housing Design Guide provides practical and detailed advice on creating locally appropriate development which can contribute to the character of the National Landscape. The recommendations of the design guide and potential responses are discussed in Section 4.

2.5 Landscape character assessments

National Character Areas

2.5.1 At a national level the site is found within National Character Area 122: High Weald. National Character Area 122 has considerable overlap with the High Weald National Landscape described above. The descriptions of the area in the National Character Area profile have been used to inform the recommendations in this report.

East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment

2.5.2 The East Sussex Landscape Character Assessment provides a description of Landscape Character at the county level. The assessment divides the county into 26 unique landscape character areas. The site falls within the **Brede Valley Landscape Character Area**. This LCA includes the Brede valley itself as well as the wider river basin up to the Battle Ridge watershed. Numerous tributary streams flow off the Battle Ridge, and ghyll woodlands are present on the upper slopes. Westfield

⁷ Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty Management Plans – A guide. The Countryside Agency, 2001

is found within a belt of undulating countryside between the Battle Ridge (to the south-west) and the Brede Valley (to the north-east). The landscape in the vicinity of Westfield is typical of the wider Landscape Brede Valley Landscape Character Area and includes tributary streams, well-wooded side slopes, scattered farmsteads, oast houses, and lines of Italian poplars. The village of Westfield has expanded over time with some 19th century development and more considerable 20th century development. Whilst the village contains some characterful buildings and lanes the later development has diluted the character of the settlement.

- 2.5.3 Rother District Council has not published a landscape character assessment at the district-scale. The county-level assessment is based on fairly large units of land, but each character area has a recognisable identity and is described in detail, so the county-level assessment can be considered sufficient.

2.6 Views

Visual context

- 2.6.1 The site is located on the edge of Westfield in an area of gently undulating landscape. The landscape in the vicinity of the site is well-wooded and this limits the extent of the visibility. Besides the woodland which is present there are also well vegetated gardens, as well as trees within the churchyard and at Church Place Farm which further limit views. The site then is fairly well contained, and there are only a few potential views to be considered.
- 2.6.2 Close proximity views of the site are available from Vicarage Lane and the churchyard as well as from the neighbouring properties at Church Place Farm. There are also potential partial views from certain points to the north-west, but it is unlikely that there would be any further viewpoints beyond these.

Views from Vicarage Lane

- 2.6.3 Beginning from the eastern end of Vicarage Lane there are channelled views along the lane towards the hedge which is on the site boundary and, beyond that, to the roof of a cart lodge. The features at Church Place Farm become increasingly visible as users move along Vicarage Lane. The farmstead includes an oast house, but the view is somewhat marred by a closeboard wooden fence and a cart lodge which sit in front of the oast house. To the right of the farm there are views over the site to the wider landscape. The view looks primarily to the mixed woodland at Whiteland Wood which is visible a few hundred meters away, but there are also glimpses of the wooded Battle Ridge in the background of the view. As users approach the site itself views are limited by the tall hedge on the site frontage. As users travel along the lane it becomes increasingly sunken relative to the site, and there is an increased sense of enclosure. Some of the vegetation on the bank, however, consists of bracken, and winter views are potentially more open.

Views from Carr Taylor vineyard

- 2.6.4 The Carr Taylor vineyard is located to the north of the village and was one of the first commercial vineyards to be established in the country. The vineyard was until recently open for tours but is currently for sale. From the vineyard car park there is a framed view towards Church Place Farm which includes the oast house and the attached farmhouse. The site is located in front and to the

left of the farmhouse but is screened by a line of Italian poplars in the vineyard and by mature garden trees on Vicarage Lane.

- 2.6.5 More general views from the vineyard are limited by foreground trees and by the lines of Italian poplars which serve as windbreaks. The vineyard is also crossed by a public footpath - Westfield 24. Views from this route are similarly screened by the windbreaks and by other trees.

Views from public footpath Westfield 41

- 2.6.6 The footpath follows the route of a farm track from Parsonage Lane westwards towards Hoad's Farm. The footpath is situated on the opposite side of a minor valley and there are open views across the valley towards Westfield. Vicarage Lane can be seen ascending the valley side and some of the existing properties on the lane are visible. The village has a very well-vegetated character, and houses are seen amongst trees. Church Place Farm is also visible from this route. The view encompasses the oast house as well as some wooden stable buildings and paddocks at Church Place Farm. The western part of the site is visible in front of Church Place Farm, but the eastern part is screened by garden trees on Vicarage Lane. There are potentially some filtered views in winter months.

Views from public footpath Westfield 42

- 2.6.7 Views from public footpath Westfield 42 were also considered. The path extends westwards from Vicarage Lane and into Whiteland Wood. It is situated between two pastures with a trimmed native hedge to the eastern side of the path. The site is located close to the path, but at a somewhat oblique angle. Views from the path are restricted during summer months by the adjoining hedge. Winter views would be heavily filtered by the foreground hedge and by other vegetation.

Views from the churchyard

- 2.6.8 The churchyard offers views westwards over the site to Whiteland Wood and the Battle Ridge. Summertime views are dominated by the mature churchyard trees, with some glimpses to a wooded landscape beyond. Many of the trees are deciduous and winter views would be much more open. In wintertime then it can be anticipated that there would be views over the site to Whiteland Wood and the wider landscape.

Views from the A28

- 2.6.9 From the A28 there is a brief channelled view down Vicarage Lane towards the eastern corner of the site, but summertime views are generally prevented by the trees and hedges which adjoin the road and the churchyard trees. In wintertime there would be some oblique, filtered views towards the site from a short section of the road.

3 Key landscape and visual-related opportunities and sensitivities

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 Key sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the site are considered below, together with a brief outline of the likely effect of the proposed development, and notes as to potential mitigation

measures that might be appropriate to negate or offset such effects to within acceptable thresholds. It should be noted that such receptors and mitigation measures have been identified as part of a high-level initial baseline appraisal, and without recourse to an appropriate impact assessment or scheme proposals, thus they may not be exhaustive.

- 3.1.2 The findings of this section will be used to inform the design and layout of the emerging development proposals.

3.2 Key sensitive landscape and visual receptors

Site features

- 3.2.1 The site consists of a part of a field, and the site features essentially comprise a pastoral field and a native hedge on the Vicarage Lane frontage.
- 3.2.2 There would be a wholesale change in land use from agricultural to residential use, and the proposal would inevitably have an effect on the existing site features.
- 3.2.3 The starting point should be to retain the existing hedge, accepting that it may be necessary to remove some vegetation to facilitate safe access to the site. The emerging design should also protect the off-site trees by avoiding any disturbance within their Root Protection Areas.
- 3.2.4 The existing grassland potentially shows some ecological interest, and it may be expedient to retain as much of this as possible. It is recommended that an ecological survey is undertaken to determine what ecological interest the site has as this is likely to have implications for the design of the development and the future approach to BNG.
- 3.2.5 The proposal would also introduce a number of new site features. Recommendations in relation to new site features are included below.

Landscape character

- 3.2.6 The proposed site is outside the Development Boundary as defined in the Local Plan and is therefore in the countryside in policy terms. At the same time it is recognised that there is a significant shortfall in available housing sites within the District at the current time.
- 3.2.7 Vicarage Lane lies at the edge of the settlement, and a certain amount of development is already present on both sides of the road. The Development Boundary excludes the vicarage, churchyard, tennis courts and playground, though these would seem to form a natural part of the village. It also excludes Church Place Farm. Whilst farms are often part of the countryside, Church Place Farm is very closely associated with the village, and the buildings have now been converted to domestic use. The site itself lies in a gap between The Vicarage and The Parlour/Church Place Barn, and it is considered that it relates well to the settlement, despite being technically within the countryside. Vicarage Lane features bespoke houses on large plots which are accessed from the lane, as well as a row of 20th century cottages at Churchfield which overlook the road. The lane has retained its original alignment and width, and has a vegetated character.
- 3.2.8 It is noted in the committee report for application RR/2022/1118/P (Cottage Lane – a more rural location to the north of Westfield) that “*A sensitive landscape led development on this site could provide an opportunity to conserve and enhance the AONB landscape.*” Arguably this relates to a

specific site, but equally it articulates the principle that a well-designed development can contribute to the character of the National Landscape.

- 3.2.9 The proposal would inevitably change the character of the site as it would take on a developed character. The site however sits in a gap between The Vicarage and The Parlour/Church Place Farm, and development already extends along Vicarage Lane, which lies at the edge of the settlement. The proposal is consonant with the existing settlement pattern; development traditionally extended along existing lanes, and this form of development is more likely to conserve and enhance the character of the National Landscape than development based on cul-de-sacs.
- 3.2.10 The surrounding context includes the church, Church Place Farm and Vicarage Lane which together create a sense of local identity. Whilst there are some views to the surrounding countryside the site lies at the edge of the village, and there is a settled character. The locally distinctive features mentioned above would remain in place and would continue to contribute to the character of the National Landscape. The church and churchyard form a focus for the southern part of the village, but it is important to note that the churchyard is effectively contained within the settlement, and is overlooked by existing housing.
- 3.2.11 Vicarage Lane is a characterful historic route. Historic lanes however are not necessarily undeveloped. Development tended to occur historically along existing routes, and this can be part of their character, as is the case with Vicarage Lane. The proposal should retain the bank and native hedge, which are important to the character of the lane, and the new houses should be set back, so as not to dominate the lane. It is proposed that the new houses would overlook the lane, to create a traditional relationship with the street. The new dwellings should be set within generous gardens to retain the medium-low density settlement pattern on Vicarage Lane. This would also allow for glimpsed views between the dwellings to the more distant countryside. The buildings could also contribute architecturally to the distinctiveness of the National Landscape.
- 3.2.12 The views over the site also have to be considered in terms of how character is perceived from such points. The views are typical of the High Weald in that there is a view to woodland, and this creates part of the setting of the village. It is suggested that medium-low density development with vegetated boundaries would maintain the rural village character which is present, and there would still be a sense of the countryside beyond.
- 3.2.13 The site context consists of a typical Wealden landscape, with settlement being seen as part of the landscape. Effects on character can be considered locally (the effect on Vicarage Lane) and also more broadly in terms of the effects on the Brede Valley LCA or the High Weald National Landscape. The same set of considerations apply to the effects on the Brede Valley and the High Weald. The site context does display some features of the Brede Valley and the High Weald, and is therefore sensitive. This does not however preclude development entirely. The existing hedge on the site frontage should be retained, and the new buildings could potentially contribute to local distinctiveness. Buildings would be present beyond the foreground hedge, but there would still be a sense of countryside beyond. Extending development along Vicarage Lane would reflect the established settlement pattern, and a suitably designed development could conserve and enhance the character of the National Landscape.

Visual effects

- 3.2.14 The site is contained to a large extent by existing vegetation and the visual effects of any new development would be limited. Close proximity views of the site are available from Vicarage Lane and the churchyard, and a filtered view is available from a short section of the A28. Besides this there is some potential visibility from the north-west, mainly from public footpath Westfield 41.
- 3.2.15 The potential views across the site are partially screened by the hedge and bank on Vicarage Lane, but there are nonetheless some views over the site to Whiteland Wood, Church Place Farm, and more distant woodland on Battle ridge. There would be views of at least the upper portions and roofs of any development at the site.



View from Vicarage Lane over site to Whiteland Wood

- 3.2.16 With regard to views from Vicarage Lane it will be important to retain the existing hedgerow. The proposed houses would sit behind this. A single shared access would minimise the effect on the existing hedgerow. New buildings should be in a local style. The lane is slightly sunken relative to the site, so buildings should not be overly tall. Buildings should be orientated to face the street. Well-vegetated gardens could also make a positive contribution to the view. A relatively low density development would allow some glimpses to the countryside beyond, and would retain the rural village character of the lane.
- 3.2.17 The same set of considerations apply to views from the churchyard and the A28. There would be some changes to these views, which would be more noticeable in winter months. New buildings should be in a local style and spaced so as to allow some sense of the countryside beyond.



View from public footpath Westfield 41 towards Church Place Farm

- 3.2.18 The north-eastern part of the site adjacent to Vicarage Lane is screened from public footpath Westfield 41 by trees in the neighbouring garden. The south-western part of the site is visible in front of The Parlour. The effect on views from this route would depend on the exact layout of the development. The site is however seen within the context of the existing settlement edge, so views are not considered especially sensitive. A view to the oast house should be retained.

Landscape-related designations

- 3.2.19 The potential effects on the character of the High Weald National Landscape have been discussed above.
- 3.2.20 The site is also found in close proximity to listed buildings at The Church of St John the Baptist (Grade I) and Church Place Farmhouse (Grade II). The effects on heritage assets are a specialist topic which is dealt with by heritage professionals. Some comments can however be made about the landscape setting of the buildings and views towards them.
- 3.2.21 The church is found within a triangular churchyard which is surrounded by roads on all sides. The churchyard is overlooked by development on Churchfield, and development and recreational facilities extend along Church Lane. The church is considered to be within the settlement. There are some views to the countryside from the churchyard, but the church is at the same time found within a village context. The proposal should retain a village setting to the church i.e. development should be of a type which is typically found within a village. Some glimpses between dwellings to the wider countryside would also help to maintain the sense of a village setting.
- 3.2.22 Church Place Farmhouse is a vernacular building, and the attached oast house in particular is distinctive. The farm is in private ownership and the main public views are from Vicarage Lane,

the churchyard, and public footpath Westfield 41. The farmhouse is also visible from the vineyard, but this is not a public view. Whilst the farmhouse is attractive to look at, there is considerable foreground clutter in views from Vicarage Lane which detracts from the view. The immediate context of the farmhouse is formed by a domestic conversion at The Parlour which has introduced somewhat less than sympathetic elements including wooden stables, a cartlodge with a slate roof, and a closeboard fence. It would seem that the farmhouse and barn have also been converted to residential use, and the immediate context is defined by domestic use. It may be beneficial to retain a view of the farmhouse from Vicarage Lane, though the foreground clutter makes this less of a clear-cut case. The proposal is unlikely to affect views from Westfield 41 towards the farmhouse.

4 Design Guidance

4.1 High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide

4.1.1 The High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide has been prepared by the High Weald National Landscape Partnership to support the objectives of the High Weald AONB Management Plan 2024-2029.

4.1.2 The High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide aims to give succinct, practical and consistent advice to set clear expectations for new housing development within the High Weald AONB.

4.1.3 Delivering appropriate new housing development within the National Landscape is a key part of local planning policy for the local authorities covering the High Weald. The design guide describes housing development as necessary and desirable; however, *“past development has shown how this special opportunity has often been squandered on generic housing developments failing to capitalise on the true character of the place, often referencing local distinctiveness merely in superficial detailing or vernacular ‘styling’ of individual buildings, but without understanding or deploying deeper, locally characteristic design or place-making elements in layout, grain and massing for example.”*

4.1.4 The built character of the High Weald is understood to be an integral component of the landscape and contributes to the natural beauty of the High Weald.

Settlements of the High Weald: Brief history of the formation of their character

For new development to reinforce the settlement character of the area, it is important that designers understand its history and the processes that formed the High Weald.

4.1.5 The High Weald was originally heavily wooded and clearance of the Wealden Forest on a significant scale did not begin until the 9th century. From the mid-14th century until the First World War the High Weald was relatively unchanged, and even today many of the traditional field patterns and woodlands remain. By the 15th century the High Weald's characteristic dispersed settlement pattern based on small-scale family holdings was well established. Medieval farmers shaped the present-day landscape of small fields and scattered farmsteads, with woodland and shaws left among them. The ridgetops provided higher and drier land which was more suitable for transport. The settlement pattern originated with small isolated farmsteads which later evolved into the characteristic High Weald ridgetop villages such as Mayfield, Wadhurst and Hawkhurst.

The landholdings within the High Weald were generally small, and industry was important to supplement agricultural incomes. A flourishing iron industry was maintained from the 15th to the 17th century. Villages and towns are of later medieval origin and are typically located at historic focal points, or along ridgetop roads. These settlements developed later as service centres founded on trade and craft (rather than agriculture). For 500 years the rivers of the eastern High Weald were an important link between the woodlands of the High Weald and the seaports of Winchelsea and Rye, and wooden barges were still moving goods until the end of the 19th century.

Siting development in the landscape

New development should be designed in a way that is sensitive to existing historic settlement patterns

Settlement traditionally extended along existing routes, and the site offers an opportunity to continue this pattern. Medium-low density development is present on Vicarage Lane already, and the site lies within a gap on the frontage. The proposed development could therefore be considered to form a continuation of an established settlement pattern.

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

- 4.1.6 The site is partially screened in mid-distance views from the north-west. The site is not otherwise visible in long views.

Understanding topography

Schemes need to work in harmony with the landscape, working with existing site levels where possible and minimising cut and fill. 'Extreme' engineering solutions will alter the intrinsic character of the area and will not be acceptable.

- 4.1.7 The housing should be aligned with the existing slopes and cut and fill should be minimised. Sharp changes of level and the need for retaining structures should be avoided. The existing slopes may however offer the chance for some creative architectural responses.

Watercourses

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

- 4.1.8 Adequate space needs to be left within the proposals for ponds to ensure there is space for natural, shallow side gradients and so that an over engineered response can be avoided. Ponds should be placed on the lowest part of the site.

Existing site features

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

- 4.1.9 The site itself does not contain trees but the architect must be aware of offsite trees and their root protection areas.

Connected streets, lanes and routeways

- 4.1.10 The proposal would relate to a historic route, with the individual dwellings being accessed off a shared drive. This is considered more appropriate to the National Landscape than a cul-de-sac layout.

Views

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

- 4.1.11 Buildings should be spaced so as to allow some glimpsed views between them to the countryside.

Forming edges and transitions

Where sites form a new edge to the countryside, transitions need to be soft so that development sits appropriately in the landscape. New edges should be defined by existing or new green infrastructure consistent with the local landscape character.

- 4.1.12 The new edge to the countryside should be defined by a hedgerow. Solid boundary treatments such as closeboard fencing would not be appropriate on this edge. It is suggested that hedges could also be used to form the boundaries between plots. Cleft chestnut post and rail fencing could also be used to enhance character.

Street character

The character of the streets and lanes in the High Weald are integral to the wider character of the area.... As such, modern or generic approaches to highways design are especially harmful to the High Weald's character and identity.

- 4.1.13 Soft edges to streets are typical of the High Weald, and Vicarage Lane does not have kerbs. Considering the shared drive this should be designed as a shared surface with soft edges, i.e. without pavements or upstanding kerbs.

Locating meaningful public realm

- 4.1.14 Confirmation is required as to how much public realm a development of this size would be expected to deliver.

Multi-functional green space

- 4.1.15 The design guide states that “the wildlife of the High Weald is embedded in landscape character” and there is a close connection between these two topics. Meadows are a component of landscape character, as are the native hedges, coppices and Ancient Woodlands of the High Weald. At the site level, swales and ponds must be designed to offer ecological value, and the various habitats should be connected as much as possible (via native hedges for example). The main potential in this area lies in planting additional native hedges. The landscape proposals could therefore make a positive contribution to landscape character.

Relating buildings to the street

- 4.1.16 The design guide emphasises how buildings typically create a strong and positive frontage to the street. The site context, however, is more rural, and buildings set back within well-vegetated plots would be more appropriate to this location.

Boundaries and front gardens

Where there is private front curtilage, however small, within the High Weald it is typically enclosed.

Close board fences are not an appropriate boundary treatment to define either the fronts or sides of plots from the public realm.

- 4.1.17 Whilst front gardens in the High Weald are often defined by picket fences, hedging would also be an appropriate option. The existing close board fence at The Parlour does appear inappropriate in its location and could potentially be screened by development at the site.

Scale, form and massing of buildings

Domestic buildings within the High Weald are typically 2 storeys in height.

The roofscape within the High Weald is particularly distinctive. Hipped or half-hipped roofs are commonplace, as are catslide roofs, varying roof orientation, eaves height and angle can add to character.

- 4.1.18 The most appropriate typology for this site would be a cluster of smaller-scale detached cottages, typical of those found within Wealden villages. The High Weald does include some larger buildings such as farmhouses or manor houses, but a development consisting only of large, detached properties is discouraged within the design guide.

Integrating parking into the design

- 4.1.19 Parking provision should be adequate and conveniently located. It is assumed that parking would be provided on plot. On plot parking “*should usually be to the sides of buildings.*” Garages would seem to be acceptable, particularly if set back from the building line. Vernacular style car barns have also been used successfully.

Built details and colour

Use of the right local materials and details is a key factor in creating High Weald housing developments that are genuinely ‘of the place’.

- 4.1.20 Local details can be incorporated in either traditional or contemporary designs. Local details which are noted in the design guide include relatively steep clay tiled roofs, open eaves, and simple canopies over doors (not porches). The roofscape of the settlements in the High Weald “*is one of the key defining built characteristics.*” “*Clay tile roofs and tile hanging is common to most of the High Weald*” and “*new development should use small module clay tiles*” which are available from a number of national producers. Bricks vary in colour across the High Weald but generally they display rich red hues. Burnt headers are also a common feature. A brick ground floor with first floor tile-hanging or weatherboarding is the most typical form for the area, while white weatherboarded houses are also characteristic of the area.
- 4.1.21 Westfield contains some vernacular buildings which display characteristic features of the High Weald, but the majority of the houses are 20th century in origin.

4.2 Other considerations

- 4.2.1 The part of the lane directly in front of the site offers parking for the church and church hall. The potential access to the site would then need to be carefully considered by a transport professional.

5 Conclusions

5.1 Summary of design considerations

- 5.1.1 The following notes provide a summary of landscape-related matters that should be taken into account when development proposals for the site:
- The existing hedgerow on the site frontage should be retained. Proposals should also avoid disturbing the root protection areas of existing off-site trees.
 - The most appropriate typology for this site would be a cluster of smaller-scale detached cottages.
 - Wealden houses are typically 2 storeys in height. The slopes on the site offer some potential for split level dwellings.
 - The proposal should reflect the local vernacular. Hipped and half-hipped roofs are distinctive features. Brick walls with hung tiles on the first floor is the most characteristic finish. Materiality should reflect the local vernacular in some way.
 - Buildings should be aligned with the street, and sit naturally within the landform. Roads should have soft edges i.e. no upstanding kerbs.
 - The buildings should be spaced to provide some glimpses to the countryside beyond.
 - A view to Church Place Farmhouse from Vicarage Lane could be retained, but there are at the same time unsightly elements which would benefit from screening.
 - The proposals will need to provide at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain. Swales and ponds must be designed to offer ecological value, and the various habitats within the site should be connected.
 - A native hedge is recommended on the new settlement edge. Native hedges could be used to form the boundaries between plots. Cleft chestnut post and rail fencing could also be used to enhance character. Solid fences should not be used on the site boundaries.

5.2 Recommendations

- 5.2.1 The potential access to the site needs to be carefully considered and it may be wise to seek specialist advice on this aspect of the proposed development.
- 5.2.2 The site potentially has ecological interest and it is recommended that professional ecological advice is sought.
- 5.2.3 Professional heritage advice should be sought if effects on Listed Buildings are raised as an issue.