



WOODCHURCH

Village Design Statement



An Introduction



This Village Design Statement (VDS) is for Woodchurch near Ashford within the Low Weald of Kent. It has been prepared by a representative group of residents through public consultation. This started with a public meeting in July 2001 where the VDS aims were explained. In August there was a workshop at which about twenty participants photographed features of the village that they considered important; afterwards the same people reviewed the prints and made a selection. The drafting of written text was done by a Core Group, including most of the photographers; members talked with other residents. Copies of current drafts were publicly displayed in several key village locations and also at a village history society meeting with a further presentation of the project to the 70 members present. Use was also made of local newspapers and the parish magazine to explain the VDS process and seek comments. The Parish Council was kept informed at all stages. Current

drafts were displayed at the Annual Parish Meeting in April 2002, the project status was explained, a dozen copies of the VDS draft were made available and comments invited from all 50 present.

This document describes the distinctive character of our village, its setting within the countryside and its rich heritage of traditional Kentish and Wealden dwellings. We are proud of Woodchurch and very much wish to see its distinctive character preserved in any future building development. Our Design Guidelines are given on the last page.

This Design Statement has been formally adopted by Ashford Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG). The Council is not necessarily supporting all the local views expressed here but is undertaking to take into account the 'design guidelines' included in the text when making planning decisions. The council does not have sufficient powers as

planning authority to require these 'design guidelines' to be met in all cases - the active support and commitment of developers, landowners and householders is also essential. The VDS should be used as a guide by all builders, developers and architects when new building developments are proposed for the village. It is applicable to all scales of development. The guidance in this document is intended to supplement and support the policies of the Ashford Borough Local Plan.

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A Little of the History of Woodchurch

The village became firmly established in the 13th century with the erection of a large church (All Saints) made of Kentish ragstone. Although it was extensively restored between 1840 and 1850, it still boasts a 13th-century chancel and a famous brass of the 14th century, depicting a floriated cross design. It has an unusual four-faced clock and a spire which is 18 inches out of the vertical at the top.



Woodchurch has a wealth of listed buildings concentrated mainly around the Green and the church; there are still a dozen early Wealden Hall houses in the parish. Two notable examples situated on the eastern edge of the Green are Henden Place (above) and brick clad Place Farm (on facing page) .



Elegant houses from the late 16th to the 18th centuries are to be found along The Pavement to the west of the Green. Most of these dwellings were built in Kentish styles and several feature Georgian brick facades.



Most of these houses on the north-eastern side of the Green exhibit common building themes that can be found frequently in the Weald including Kent peg-tiled roofs, simple weatherboard-clad elevations and the use of timber framing.



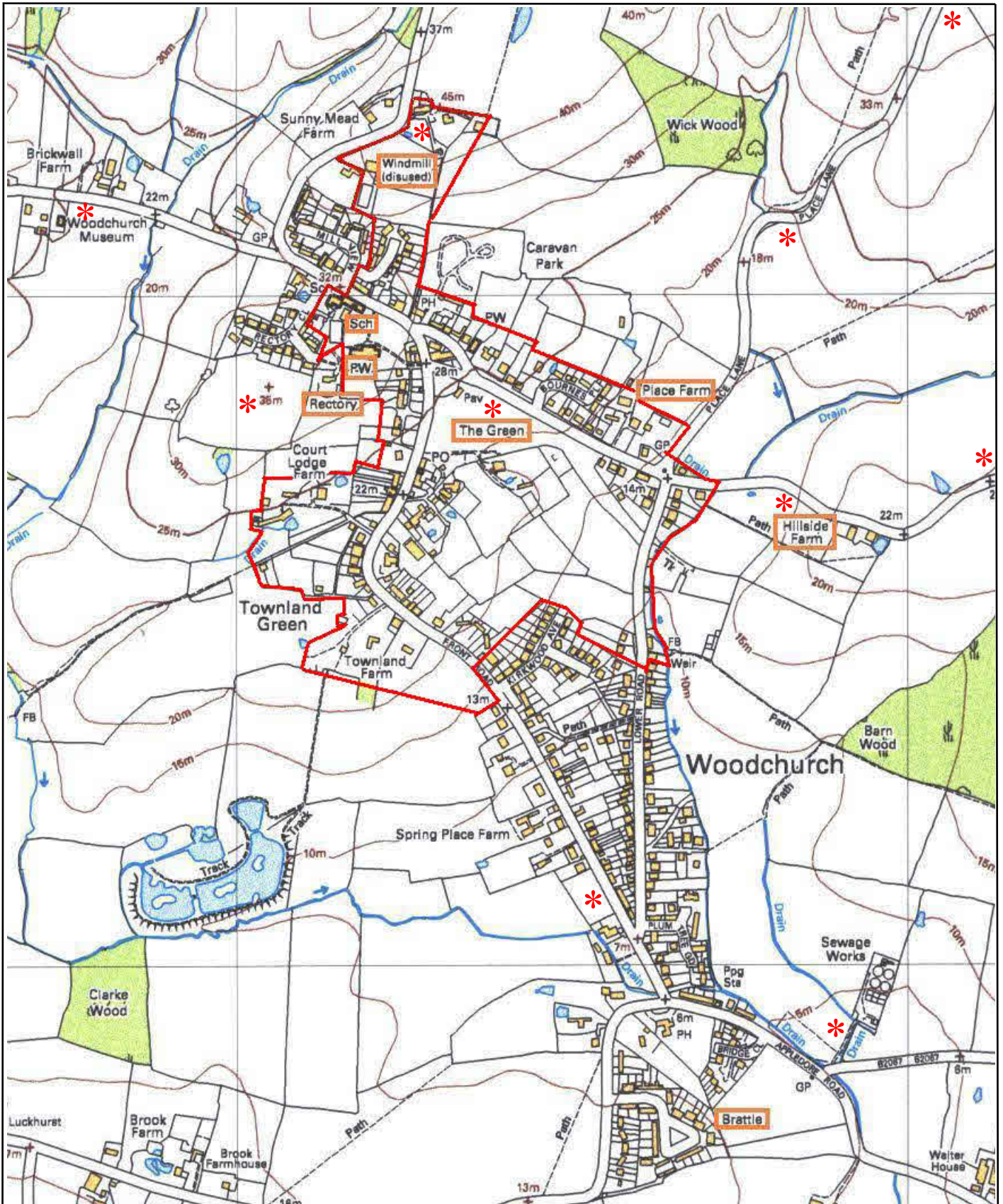
Woodchurch currently boasts three public houses, two of which are located close to the church. Both these licensed properties were built in the 17th century; the Bonny Cravat has since seen many changes both inside and out, whilst the Six Bells retains an older Kentish look. The third is the Stonebridge Inn situated at the southern tip of the village, between Bridge Close and Brattle, facing up Front Road.



The village primary school is situated near the church and was a National School. The first building was erected in 1844 and the school has since been sympathetically enlarged on three occasions, namely, in 1872, 1896 and most recently in 1998. The extensions retain the distinctive English bond brick pattern using dark red headers.

The village has gradually expanded over the years, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, mainly by ribbon development and in-filling along Front Road and Lower Road. At the same time, some 20th-century building has been permitted at the most southerly and northerly tips of the village road system. In 2001, Woodchurch had about 1500 adult inhabitants in more than 780 dwellings, of which around 70% are in the village centre.

Woodchurch Village Centre and Its Surroundings



The approximate boundary of conservation area is outlined with a thick red line. For development planned near this line, reference should be made to the authoritative version available from Ashford Borough Council. Key locations mentioned in the text are boxed in orange and can be identified in the aerial photo on the back cover. The best views are from points marked with red asterisks. This map is based on the 1:10000 Landplan April 2001. Reproduced from Ordnance Survey mapping on behalf of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. © Crown copyright 2001. Licence Number MC 100038357

About the Village Setting in the Surrounding Countryside

Village Setting - The parish of Woodchurch extends 6 miles north to south and 4 miles east to west, one of Kent's largest. There are few buildings to interrupt the views from the approach roads with a sharp transition from countryside to the village when arriving by the main roads. The village is a closely knit settlement on land which gently slopes to the south. To the north lies undulating scenery of hedged and pastured land with substantial woodlands. To the south-west, the flat expanse of Shirley Moor leads to Romney Marsh. The low wooded hills overlooking Appledore and the Marsh are to the south-east. In terms of landscape, the typical pattern of small fields and bushy hedgerows that characterise the Low Weald is evident around Woodchurch. The surrounding area is designated as a 'Kent Special Landscape Area'. The village has a feeling of openness. From a distance, the settlement is seen to be situated on a wooded slope with the skyline being dominated by two buildings – its church and its windmill.



Village Layout - The layout of Woodchurch is based on an elongated diamond pattern of roads with a north-south axis as can be seen on the map facing this page. The westerly boundary is Front Road which is generally straight except for a bend at its centre near Woodchurch Garage. The easterly village margin is made up of two intersecting roads, The Green (the road along the north side of the Green) and Lower Road. The Green is the core of the Conservation Area. The two main through routes carry 2-way traffic. The layout is evident in the aerial photograph on the back cover. Little street lighting pollutes the night sky and the few road markings and signs on the highways of Woodchurch are unobtrusive.

Development Pattern - Initially, the main concentration of houses was around the church and Green. From the end of the 18th century, ribbons of development spread first along Front Road and later along Lower Road, largely filling the southern part of the diamond. In the last 50 years, spurs of development have extended the settlement northwards and to the south, beyond the basic shape. A few further developments have taken some land from within the diamond. The houses on the outermost edges back directly onto the surrounding countryside giving the village its strong sense of rural setting. The green heart of the northern part of the diamond comprises the Green itself and the adjacent open fields and is clearly evident in the aerial photograph. It is crucial to the open character of the village; in places, this openness allows wide views onto the surrounding countryside.



Pavements and Footpaths - The pavements adjoining the principal roads are mostly narrow, made of macadam and are edged with narrow shallow kerbstones. Some old pavements survive within the Conservation Area and are constructed with blocks of limestone (Bethersden Marble). Examples of the use of this local building material can be found in the church, along The Pavement shown here and outside the houses known as 1 – 13 The Green. Bethersden Marble is also found in several neighbouring villages being used as a building material. A number of narrow, well-used footpaths link Lower Road with Front Road to provide short cuts. Similarly, a number of public footpaths lead away from Woodchurch in all directions. These are popular and provide excellent views of the village from the surrounding countryside.

Our Open Spaces and Vistas



The Green - The most important and locally appreciated open space within Woodchurch is the communal land known as the Green (above). From its central position it is possible to look beyond the houses in a wide range of styles to the open countryside, especially to the south. These views are of gently wooded hills and fields - of particular beauty is the view towards the south-east (above right). Views from the Green are best glimpsed through the open spaces on either side of Drayson House (above left). The Green is flanked by listed buildings and others of architectural interest, and allows good views of these. These groups of buildings frame this open space. The Green is used regularly throughout the year for team sports or just walking and is rarely deserted.



Georges Lane - To the east of the village and the Green is Georges Lane, which runs up towards Hillside Farm. It is bounded on the north by arable land leading onwards to coppiced woods. On the southern side of the Lane there is open grazing land with extensive views over Shirley Moor. There are fine views of the village from the lane and fields in the vicinity of Hillside Farm, and crucially of that area from the village.

The Area around the Windmill - To the north of the village, the windmill stands on an open hill 20 metres above the Green. The open spaces around the windmill are vital to the character of Woodchurch because the views of the village and the surrounding wooded countryside (right) and of the windmill itself (above) are all remarkable. The views demonstrate the close link between the settlement and its rural setting. Similarly, the approach to Woodchurch from Shadoxhurst along Place Lane has dramatic views of the village, Shirley Moor and of the windmill on the skyline (above).



The Surgery & The Rectory - On the south-west side of the village and to the north of the Medical Centre is a 200 metre stretch of land adjoining Front Road. At this point pedestrians come in very close contact with fields and the interplay between the village and its surrounding countryside is obvious. Extensive pastoral views to the west towards Tenterden can be enjoyed. Another attractive stretch of open country with lovely views of the village and its church is from the relatively high ground behind the Rectory and Rectory Close (left). Here a network of public footpaths offers access to open country between the village centre, Susans Hill and Brook Street. This is ideal for walking and for the enjoyment of the rural setting of our village.

On Walls, Fences and Boundaries

Features that contribute towards making Woodchurch a unique and outstanding village include the style and construction of the walls, fences and boundaries. Local Wealden style buildings are complemented by the sympathetic use of hedges and wooden fences as boundaries.



The use of low green hedging and picket fencing around the boundary of most homes adds to the open aspect of the village. This is encouraged in the Conservation Area. Hedges are normally of indigenous trees and shrubs, with beech, laurel, hawthorn and privet predominating. The variety of heights of the hedging adds to the individual character of the village but low hedging is most common.



There are very few examples of stone or brick boundary walls in Woodchurch. However, within the Conservation Area, a roughcast wall of local ragstone bounds the churchyard (below). There are only a few instances of rendered brick walls and these therefore can be considered atypical.



Some houses are set back from the road behind low, picket fencing. In these instances, such wooden fences are left either in their natural colour or are painted white. The characteristic low height of both the hedging and the fencing creates an open and airy feel to the village which also helps to create a strong visual link between private and public spaces. Low natural boundaries allow the countryside to be glimpsed from many points in the village.

Building Styles and Materials



There can be no claim for the village to have a specific ‘Woodchurch’ style of architecture, although the scale of the buildings is characteristically small. Most of the oldest houses are grouped near the Green; the group on the west side has a particularly intimate character (see foot of page 5). Elsewhere there is a kaleidoscope of building styles from the 14th century (Diamond Farm, above left) to the present day (Bridge Close, above right). Much of the building material used until early in the 20th century was of local origin. Peg-tiled half-hipped roofs, tiled walls, white weather-boarding are all common and these traditional styles have been picked up in several more recent developments. The village is not homogenous in character. Houses in the northern part, especially around the Green, often benefit from generous front gardens with spaces between buildings that make an important contribution towards a sense of openness. However development in the south of the village tends to be more compact with buildings closer to the road.



Early roof styles include the steep catslide (top left) and the popular half-hipping (some examples here on this page). Hipped and gable dormer windows make most of the roof space and are usually clad on the cheeks with rendering or hung tiles. Some late 19th-century houses have slate roofs. Locally few houses dominate their neighbours. There is sympathy between buildings in terms of scale. Few cottages exceed 4 metres in height at the eaves level and 6 metres at the roof ridge.



The use of white weather boarding, sometimes just on the upper elevation (above right) is frequently seen and appreciated. This is also true of half-hipped roofs to be found on both period and modern houses (above left and top right). Large chimneys are common on period properties (above right and in centre of the facing page)

Some Architectural Detail



Redundant farm buildings - Oast houses, barns and stables have been converted to dwellings or used as garages, usually with plain double doors.



Gates - There are very few ornamental metal gates in Woodchurch. Most are simple 5-barred field gates made of oak or elm or soft wood painted. Some are picket gates set in a matching fence or in a low clipped hedge.



Doors - are in a wide variety of styles including heavy natural oak, studded, tongue and grooved, painted, panelled; a few Georgian front doors have fanlights (above left).

Windows - often comprise wooden sash windows with painted wooden glazing bars. Traditional side-hung flush casement styles are prevalent. Very few houses have early leaded, diamond paned casement windows (below); these would be out-of-place in a modern house.



Porches - are brick with tiled roofs to match main roof or simple canopies with wooden supports and leaded roofs as in these four examples (above, right and top right).



Tiling - The colours of most roofs blend with that of the walls. A number of houses have traditional hanging tiles on walls, either plain or elaborately patterned in a variety of shapes, replacing the decayed lath and plaster. This use of hanging tiles is usually confined to the upper floor. It improved weatherproofing for early timber-framed buildings and, by avoiding brick, reduced the total weight of the structure on unstable clay foundations.

Weather Boarding - This is used in the same way as hung tiles, sometimes completely covering the original timber frame as on the front elevation of this 17th-century house.

Modern Developments

In 2001 and 2002 there were two developments on in-fill sites within the centre of the village, the most recent of about a dozen in Woodchurch since 1950. Both need time for the landscape to mature and for them to blend into their surroundings. On this page there are eight examples of 'modern' developments built over the last 60 years. Most of the established ones are softened by a setting of flowers, shrubs and trees.



← **Bridge Close** - a small development of eight units, comprising 16 semi-detached dwellings. This group of houses was completed in 1996 for local housing needs. About half the houses have dormer windows. The buildings are either faced with red brick or are half-tiled.

Brattle - an older development with a total of 42 dwellings built for Local Authority letting soon after 1945. The development comprises four dwellings of a terrace type, 26 dwellings of a large semi-detached design and four dwellings of a miscellaneous character. →



← **Kirkwood Avenue** - has 24 similarly designed, two-bedroom bungalows. This group of houses was built in the early 1960s.

65-75 Front Road - the style of this pre-war Local Authority housing is particularly pleasing since it incorporates characteristics of regional building (weather boarding, red bricks and catslide roof forms). There are six semi-detached dwellings. →



← **Mill View** - a mature Local Authority development of 18 plain brick semi-detached houses and half a dozen small bungalows for pensioners, built in the mid-1950s. The view of the windmill is sadly obstructed by trees.

Bourne's Place - has seven detached houses linked by garages. They were built in the 1980s on the site of the old Bourne's builders yard. Some of the houses are weather-boarded whilst the rest are tiled. →

Cherry Orchard - a development off Mill View of 16 mostly detached houses, built in 1980. Most of the residents do enjoy a fine view of the windmill. The houses are variously faced - with white rendering or with white weather-boarding or with red brick. →



31-37a Front Road - this is the most recent development in Woodchurch. The designs of these five houses use some features of our village including tile-hung walls, white weather boarding and rustic-style carports with half-hipped roofs. There is one house with a slate roof, like some of our 19th-century houses. →



Many of these developments can be said to create their own 'sense of place'. The more successful ones have tended to feature styles and materials traditionally found in Kent. New developments should try to emulate this use of half-hipped and catslide roofs, vibrant red bricks, white weather boarding and detailed decorative tile cladding to help make them characteristic of the village as a whole.

Our Design Guidelines

On Building Styles and Architectural Detail

- 1) New buildings should have design features and use materials found in the village that are typically associated with local Kentish styles - for example red brickwork and tiling, tile-hung and weather-boarded walls, and half-hipped roofs (see pages 8 & 9).
- 2) New extensions and additions should be sympathetic in style and scale to the existing building using materials and designs characteristic of the fabric and that respect the setting of the village (see pages 8 & 9).
- 3) The roof pitch of our village houses is usually between 40° and 60°. Therefore particularly low or highly-pitched roofs should be avoided. The pitch of porch and garage roofs should mirror that of the main roof and gable ends (see page 9).
- 4) The height of houses should be in proportion to those prevalent in the village - generally no more than 5 metres to the eaves (see page 8).
- 5) Window shapes and sizes should reflect styles characteristic of the village. Dormer windows should be either gable-ended or of hipped design and lie completely above the eaves line. (see page 8).
- 6) To retain the village character, the size of new houses should be in proportion to those prevalent in the that immediate area of the village as should their relationship to the road and siting within their plots. (see pages 8 & 10).

On Walls, Fences and Boundaries

- 7) Proposed development should strengthen the local landscape character by providing buffer zones of bushy hedgerows and trees along lanes and roads. In communal spaces, trees planted should be of native varieties (e.g. beech) rather than decorative or non-indigenous species (see pages 6 & 8).
- 8) The typical use of low fencing enhances an open feel to the village and often allows glimpses of the surrounding countryside. Boundaries of front gardens should be of low hedging or picket fencing (see page 7).
- 9) Brick is not a material typically used for boundary walls in the village and should be avoided (see page 7).

On Open Spaces and Vistas (see pages 6 & 8)

- 10) New developments should respect the sense of openness in the village and seek to protect important views. The green heart of the village in the area around the Green is crucial to the open character of Woodchurch in its Wealden setting. The views towards and from the Green should be preserved for future generations. Much of the open space within the village, that gives it a sense of countryside, actually lies within the Conservation Area, for example around the windmill and the undeveloped meadows south of Drayson House. Outside the Conservation Area, other important open views which are essential to preserve the character of the village are from areas of open space including land to the south of the Rectory, the fields to the north west of Hillside Farm and the short stretch of land just north of the Surgery.

On Roads and Footpaths (see page 5)

- 11) The present network of village footpaths should be maintained and where possible expanded.
- 12) The kerbs of pavements should reflect existing styles with a modest height.
- 13) Road signs and markings should be kept to a minimum.

On Street Lighting (see page 5)

- 14) Street lighting in any new development should be minimised if possible to help maintain the existing low level of lighting in the village. However where street lighting is a requirement, it should be sympathetic to the locality.

General

- 15) The sharp transition between the countryside and the built-up area of the village on the main approach roads is an important characteristic. This well-defined settlement edge should be protected (see page 5).
- 16) Developers are encouraged to discuss their proposals at the earliest opportunity with the villagers and show how the details of their proposals reflect this design statement.

