

DRAFT ONE

THE OTFORD VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

2012 REVISED EDITION

FOREWORD

The first Otford Village Design Statement was prepared in 2007 and published in January 2008. Since then much has changed and some parts of our village have altered significantly. A Village Design Statement (VDS) gives clear expression to the hopes and wishes of residents about the shape and future of their locality. This VDS represents and expresses the wishes of residents of Otford. Once adopted by the Sevenoaks District Council, it also constitutes official 'supplementary planning guidance' for District planners when considering applications for any buildings or extensions in Otford.

Perhaps our original VDS was rather tame in its recommendations. Certainly many would agree that a great deal of inappropriate development has been undertaken within the parish over the intervening years. We cannot go back and undo what is done, but we can at least do our best to stop our community being altered further for the worse. Change will happen, but at least let it be better managed.

The National Planning Policy Framework has radically changed much planning regulation. It simplifies many thousands of complex and often contradictory rules into 50 pages of straightforward, if rather loose, guidance. 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."* That sort of planning statement is to be applauded. As part of the process, Sevenoaks District Council has prepared a 'Core Strategy', a road map of how the region will achieve these aims. Not all those earlier planning regulations have been thrown out, but there is less scope for developers to circumvent the system. The important thing is to focus on the principle that every proposal should, using Mr Clark's words, *respect the special character of Otford, and in particular, the intrinsic character and beauty of our countryside.*

There are still outside pressures on us. Not least of these is the seemingly inevitable increase in traffic, reinforcing the pressure on parking space in the village. Developers are still buying up small properties, particularly in the north of the village, with the intention of replacing them with far more profitable but atypically larger buildings. On our borders, giant developments like the expanded Sainsbury's superstore dominate our landscape and demonstrate how close we are to fully-fledged urbanisation. As a community we desperately need as much legislation and support on our side as possible, to be able to maintain and nurture the integrity of our historic, rural village.

Five years ago in this introduction I wrote:

"If this Design Statement, representing as it does the clear and authoritative voice of Otford residents, is to make its full contribution to this essential work, it must continue to be relevant. To do so, it is essential that it be updated regularly to respond to new pressures, opportunities and changes in planning processes as these emerge. Responsibility for the changing shape of Otford's future will be yours."

It is for that reason alone that your revised Village Design Statement is as important today as the first edition was then.

Rod Shelton
Chairman, Otford Village Design Team
August 2012

THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This Village Design Statement is the result of much dedicated work by individuals and groups. 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;
- In particular to Phil Clucas (MDA) whose design talents led to the final preparation of the finished document;
- The whole community of Otford, who expressed their views, participated in workshops 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.

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INTRODUCTION

Why create a Village Design Statement?

Otford's integrity as a village is under threat. Though a small community, it is subject to a constant flow of applications for new building developments. Many of these proposals appear out of scale and out of character with our rural settlement. It is the role of a document such as this to provide guidance to developers and householders when they want to build within our parish.

Any form of new development should be on a scale and nature appropriate to our village and should display the distinctive local characteristics that make Otford what it is. A Village Design Statement seeks to provide this sort of guidance. It is the codification of the 'voice of the community' in a format that is readily accessible to all those involved in planning and development and presents a unified vision of how residents would like their village to develop.

Why is the Otford VDS important?

Otford is a small historic rural village sited within the Metropolitan Green Belt. Protection of its intrinsic values is of major importance not only to its residents but to the task of maintaining the quality of the surrounding area as well as the heritage of the Kent Downs for future generations. Under current legislation, if a developer appeals against a District Council decision and wins his case, then the District Council will likely have to pay extensive legal costs to that developer. The dice seem stacked in his favour. Unlike the developer, District Councils do not have the funds to pay out if they fail, so they are naturally nervous about any appeals. Therefore any reasoned case against a planning proposal must be made as robust as possible from the outset. A VDS plays a part in this. It represents the voice of the community and, in law, its views must be taken into account in any decision. While a developer can appeal against a planning decision made by the District Council, the community itself cannot appeal against what they believe to be an unfair decision. All the more reason to get any objection right from the start.

Who is the VDS for?

This document is directed at planners, planning authorities, architects, designers, developers, builders and residents who are considering development within the parish of Otford. It reflects the views of Otford residents and seeks to give clear guidance as to their wishes. The document does not contain technical specifications: rather, it attempts to

encapsulate the opinion of residents on aspects of development that affect the village, with clear justification of the views expressed. The aim of this Design Statement is to ensure that future development and design within the parish reflect the wishes of residents.

How was it drawn up?

The Otford VDS was **originally** prepared in line with guidance provided by the Government through the Natural England agency as set out in their web pages. A team of 12 volunteers, all of whom were Otford residents, met fortnightly and compiled the Otford Village Design Statement. The following steps were taken in its preparation:

- written questionnaires were sent to all residents and responses analysed;
- a full-day VDS workshop was organised in which participating residents visited all parts of the village in teams, photographing and noting key design elements and issues; each team prepared a presentation of its findings;
- an exhibition of the presentations, with the participants' comments attached, was held at the Village Hall;
- a well publicised and well attended public meeting was **then** held at which residents were again invited to state their views.
 - **The revised plan (2012) was prepared by the VDS chairman and debated in full with members of the Otford Parish Council Planning Committee, who have extensive experience in local planning matters.**
 - **Details were passed for comment to the committee of the Otford Society who represent 80% of the local residents.**
 - **The proposed draft was then put on-line at www.otford/vds and comments invited.**
 - **A public display of its proposed content was then held at the Village Hall with written contributions invited.**

Where is Otford?

The village and parish of Otford (1346 households, population 3258 - 2001 Census figures) sits at the southern end of the Darent Valley at the point where the river cuts through the North Downs to the Thames. The village lies at the intersection of the Vale of Holmesdale and the Darent Valley. To the south is the Lower Greensand ridge on which Sevenoaks stands.

Two road systems run through the village. The A225, a major road, runs north from Sevenoaks and down the Darent Valley to Dartford. Two minor but busy roads intersect the A225 at Otford. These are Pilgrims Way West, which becomes Otford High Street, and Pilgrims Way East, both on an east-west alignment. The High Street bridges the river Darent and a main line railway station connects Otford with London.

What is Otford's history?

Otford is a unique village site within the region. The village is steeped in history, having been a settlement for over four thousand years. A major prehistoric trackway crosses the river at this point and both Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements have been found here. Three villa farms, a township and a significant cemetery date from Roman times. Two great battles were fought here. A king of Kent gave the manor to the Archbishops of Canterbury and Otford became the centre of a huge Manor throughout the Middle Ages. Most English kings at one time visited the magnificent moated, house before Archbishop Warham remodeled it and built a great palace here in the mid 1500s. It is believed that Hampton Court was modeled on Otford palace. It became the property of Henry V111 who spent extensively on it. Following his death however, the palace fell into disrepair and all that remains today is a solitary north west tower and part of the range and gatehouse.

Why is Otford now so vulnerable?

The desire to find residential development sites in this popular region, with close proximity to Sevenoaks and within easy reach of London and the motorway network, puts an attractive rural village like Otford in the spotlight in the search for suitable building land. It is vulnerable to change which, if uncontrolled, will alter the essential rural **and historical** character of this village (and the region) which are the very factors which make them so attractive. It is essential that the heritage of both Kent and Otford be conserved for future generations.

How can the Otford VDS help?

A clear view of the impact that any development might have on the traditional appearance of the village, as set out in this Design Statement, is intended to provide the local Planning Authority with grounds for resisting many proposals. The Conservation Area status, covering most of the village centre, provides additional protection, as does the Green Belt which surrounds us. The Otford Village Design Statement seeks to inform developers and residents about good practice in development. It also seeks to provide the local Planning Authority with a support tool for use where necessary to refuse consent for poor, inappropriate or unsuitable design.

How can the VDS help to safeguard the future of the village?

Change is inevitable both within and beyond the village borders. The essential thing is for authorities and village community to ensure that all future change is managed, planned for, and implemented in ways that:

- maintain **and enhance** those features of the village which make it what it is;
- foresee and divert those pressures which risk eroding the local environment;
- engage with opportunities for enriching the quality of life within the village and its appeal to residents and visitors.

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 and woods rivers, railways and roads. *Village* is used to refer to the main central 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.

Areas of Otford parish have already been designated as Metropolitan Green Belt (MGB), Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Special Landscape Area (SLA), Area of Local Landscape Importance (ALLI) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). It is also part of the Kent Downs AONB area, and the North West Kent Countryside Project operates in the area. Most parts of the Parish are covered by at least one of these designations, in some cases by several. The designations define Otford’s special character and position and justify the clear wish of its residents to avoid any intrusion into the Green Belt or being overwhelmed by new housing. Otford’s chalk downlands and their associated flora and fauna are already under serious threat, as highlighted in the Kent Habitat Survey of 2003, produced through the Kent Biodiversity Partnership. The residents have indicated that protection of the local flora and fauna is a high priority.

1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND OPEN SPACES

1.1 Otford's rural setting

The individuality of Otford village and parish is characterised by its setting within the unspoilt rural countryside of the Darent Valley and Vale of Holmesdale. The spacing of housing and integration with the countryside, enabling views of fields and trees between houses, are of paramount importance to the majority of **all** residents, **not the sole prerequisite of the developers**. It should never be assumed that the gaps in the original frontages are automatically ripe for infilling. Such spaces often make a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the **whole** settlement. **Thus any planning applications which adversely affect an established view by 'infilling' or extending an existing property, should be considered in their context.**

The landscape has played, and still plays, an integral part in the village. The landscape visible today is the result of many centuries of evolution. The pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows that gives our modern landscape its character is firmly rooted in the past. It is the responsibility of our community to recognise this and commit to trying to maintain the pattern of the historic landscape both in the village and outside. The village exhibits too many examples of inappropriate and insensitive infilling

1.2 Green areas

In historical terms, Otford has existed millennia before Sevenoaks was even a clearing in the forest. As a valuable example of a nuclear settlement based on an agricultural hinterland, Otford merits a degree of precedence over other nearby villages. It still retains its central pond as well as extensive recreation grounds, allotments and playing fields within the central village area.

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. Their role is essential to Otford as they absorb and hold heavy rainfall and reduce the risk of serious flooding by the river Darent. The rural character of the village is enhanced by the extent and variety of indigenous trees and hedgerows.

1.3 The importance of natural woodland

The managed wooded area in the east of the parish, known as Oxenhill Meadow & Shaw (**aka Oxenhill Woods**), is a unique example in the South-East of a naturally regenerated woodland and a prime recreational walking site. It helps to maintain the separation between the communities of Otford and Kemsing. It is of vital importance to both communities as well as to the ecology of the South-East that these wooded areas continue to be maintained and protected at all costs.

1.4 Open spaces and the village's identity

The green spaces and open areas of recreational land of the village are held dear by all who live here and are essential to the character and quality of life within the village. They include the popular sports areas of the village Recreation Ground, Hale Lane recreation ground, the Chalk Pit, Otford Village Green, Palace Field and Approach, Station Field (Castle Farm Fields), Telston Park, Oxenhill Meadow and Palace Park Wood.

The village allotment area is fully and actively used and enjoyed by many residents and considered to be of prime importance to the village amenities. It must be protected from any development.

Any form of development that reduces or harms the open spaces in the village would be to the detriment of the whole community.

Visually the North Downs escarpment, below which Otford is sited, has changed little since the last Ice Age. It forms an iconic backdrop to the village. Any creeping development of homes or extensions which visibly intrude into this precious downland area, should be resisted. The introduction of wind turbines or additional radio masts would also contribute to the destruction of the heritage of the village. 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)

1.5 Sports and playground areas

Otford has a varied and active sports community which extensively utilizes the recreation ground 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 principle pitch is flood-lit pitch and they utilize their own pavilion. The junior and colt 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 flourishing tennis club, which also has a thriving junior section, plays on its three hard courts. Near-by, the Otford Petanque club has its own sand-pitch located on the recreation ground.

There is a much-used junior playground on the recreation ground which is fully enclosed. It is shortly hoped to introduce a toddler’s playground on the Hale Lane recreation ground. The community have clearly supported such an aim as many parents in this furthest part of the village are unable to conveniently bring their children to the main recreation ground. The Parish Council who have led the project are to be congratulated for their response to the Parish Plan in this regard. The Core Strategy also indicates its support ‘*where (as in this case) there is clear evidence of support from the local community*’ (5.6.4)

Design Principles

- 1a** 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 must be preserved and **any proposal for building development must be resisted** (CS Green Infrastructure 5.6.7 Policy SP10/ CS Policy LO8)
- 1b** Whenever possible the community should seek to maintain existing field boundaries and landscape features against change. (CS LO.8)
- 1c** The natural beauty and ecology of the area, including its flora and fauna, must be respected and nurtured, particularly in terms of the maintenance and/or replacement of the existing hedgerows and trees. Any proposals for new development must show details of how this will be achieved. (CS Policy SP11/LO8)
- 1d** Groups of trees within the landscape, particularly when forming boundaries, coppices or areas of woodland, are of high importance to Otford residents, and any felling without replacement is unacceptable. (CS Policy SP11/LO8)
- 1e** Individual mature trees forming part of the familiar landscape, whether on public or private land, must wherever possible be protected with Tree Preservation Orders

(TPOs). When such trees reach the end of their natural life, they should be replaced with native or locally indigenous species.

- 1f Applications to install overhead cables and telecommunication equipment should be rejected on principle. (ref *NPPF 4.43*)
- 1g Whilst maintenance of the River Darent is the responsibility of the Environment Agency, the community should be prepared to do everything possible to ensure the continued purity of the water and to support the agency with local action if requested, in times of flood or drought.
- 1h Views of the surrounding countryside between buildings are an integral part of the whole village design. Proposals for development or extensions which adversely constrain or block this important characteristic of the Otford settlement must be resisted. (*CS.LO.7/EN6*)
- 1i There should be no building on any of the village open spaces under any circumstances (*CS Policy SP10*)
- 1j Maintenance of the quality of the rising downland adjoining the village, is of great importance to all residents. Applications for extensions or development into the rising downland, particularly where this will adversely affect the perception of 'open-space', should be resisted. (*RESPD 3.6: 3.7: 3.11: 3.12: 3.13*)

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

2: BUILDING DESIGN WITHIN THE VILLAGE ENVELOPE

2.1 The vernacular style of Otford's buildings

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework states that new buildings "*should respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials...*"

Most buildings in the village have two storeys and do not vary greatly in height. Roofs are covered in Kent peg or nib tiles with the occasional use of slate. Many have the traditional 'barn hip' and gable detail at the gable ends. Brick is the most common building material but there are examples of local ragstone and timber framing. In some cases the original timber framing has been encased in masonry.

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.

Windows are generally small wooden casements, often with leaded-light glazing. Sash windows are found on some of the grander properties.

While it is not suggested that new buildings slavishly mimic earlier construction methods, the community have indicated a clear wish that the general vernacular and colouration of new buildings be complementary to neighbouring homes and that whenever possible natural materials are used in the construction. For that reason, the details of the exterior materials being proposed must always be included in all planning applications and once agreed, must

be adhered to in the construction. If changes to materials or design occur which are different from those approved, then they will be challenged.

2.2 Integration with the countryside

One element of design provides Otford with its unique rural identity. Throughout its history, most private homes in Otford have always been constructed with sufficient space provided on either side, through which the surrounding fields and hills may be seen. For generations, this feature has integrated the village with its surrounding countryside. It is one of the reasons visitors and residents alike find Otford so attractive and it is something which the community clearly wishes to preserve. Today, it is a factor which planners are requested to consider most carefully when proposals for new housing or extensions are made which use up the entire width of an available curtilage, effectively eroding the character of the village..

2.3 Ribbon Development

There has been some inevitable ribbon development of individual houses, both pre- and post-war, along routes radiating from the traditionally styled village centre. These buildings may reflect little by way of individual style, but with their traditional pitched roofs, those that remain still help to sustain the visual character of the village.

Unfortunately, in recent years, a number of the smaller pre-war homes standing in their generous plots outside the village envelope, have been bought by developers. Following demolition, very large and un-typical homes have been built with features such as 3-storey 'Tudor-bethan' designs, high close-boarded fences and electric gates. Such properties do not sit comfortably in the wider rural community. A design statement must hold to the core values which provide the community with its identity. Otford is a rural village. Urban, pastiche-designed homes where new residents are encouraged to 'retreat behind the gates' are not a welcome ingredient in our small village. Therefore this VDS argues strongly against further developments of this kind in Otford as being untypical and likely to inhibit social integration. Developers have already begun to point to such properties as (totally inappropriate) precedents for further similar development (see below).

Despite the presence of major traffic routes in the village, this typical West Kent village has sought to retain its sense of integration both within itself and in relation to the surrounding countryside, valued and much enjoyed by residents and visitors.

2.4 Preserving local housing styles, layouts and scale

Every old village has a certain architectural cohesion. Houses may differ but they all speak the same language of design. Thus proposals for homes of three rather than two floors, are inappropriate in Otford. Steep roofs over 45 degrees or shallow pitched roofs of under 35 degrees, are similarly untypical of established local design, introducing an urban look to this rural community.

Otford has a strong village identity. New homes or extensions will always be strongly opposed by residents if the plans involve the use of unsuitable materials such as facings of plasticised wood or composite materials rather than solid timber, or pre-fabricated blocks rather than bricks or metallic sheet rather than tiles.

The vernacular of the village relies upon its variety of individual house designs. Proposals of more than one home which utilize 'pattern-book' or 'mirror' designs are simply out of character within the neighbourhood and should always be considered inappropriate.

The layout of a proposed new dwelling within its curtilage is very important to residents. Simply obeying the one-metre-gap rule, is not considered a justification for blocking the views of the surrounding countryside that have been to the villagers' benefit for generations. Filling all available space with bricks and mortar does not create or enhance a community. For similar reasons, proposals for two-for-one developments within the village envelope are

often inappropriate due to their unsuitability in terms of reducing and urbanizing the available space. The freedom that space between homes brings is a valued asset for all residents of Otford.

The countryside surrounding Otford is considered by residents to be a natural extension of their homes. The countryside has been there, constant and secure, for generations. Proposals for developments that will create prominent built features within this landscape, will be strenuously opposed. Particularly proposals to extend or enlarge properties on the edge of the envelope and 'creep' into more prominent positions will likewise be opposed. The effect of the sun's reflection from buildings in a high location whose proposed design employs a lot of glass or inappropriate colouring, can make them instantly visible from a distance. Proposals that employ an extensive, glazed or partially glazed frontage which will reflect the sun, or which increase their prominence by the use of white or light-coloured paint or facing material, will be opposed.

Otford is a village of typical family homes. Its houses and gardens reflect this purpose. Proposals to introduce structures whose sheer mass far exceeds the normal requirements of a home for one family are not welcome. They are not typical of the settlement and erode its coherence. Otford is a village community and both its past and future architecture should reflect this fact.

Large parts of the housing within the community are sited on rising ground. Inevitably the effect of one property upon another can be increased by this factor. Unfortunately, in recent years, a number of apparently minor extensions to some properties have resulted in their becoming out of proportion and scale with their lower neighbours. The Otford community therefore request, that any proposals for developments or extensions which are located on rising ground, clearly show their position and height in relation to nearby properties on all sides. (1m or 2m-gradient contour lines drawn on all plans) Without this information, a fair assessment of the effect of the proposal cannot take place.

Trees and shrubbery are natural enhancements found within and between Otford homes. The desire, evidenced by some recent developments, to utilize all available space within a plot for bricks and mortar without regard to landscaping, is untypical of the village and unwelcome. Every home should sit comfortably within its location and with its neighbours. Providing room for landscaping is an important ingredient in any development proposal and all landscape proposals should be included in planning applications.

The provision of a single on-site parking space per household is no longer adequate. (See Otford roads are generally narrow and have little room for extensive on-road parking facilities. It is therefore strongly recommended that any new development should allow for a minimum of two on-site parking spaces per household. The desire of many homes to apply to replace or enlarge garages into granny-annexes or playrooms, often reduces the amount of on-site parking space and this factor should be taken into consideration in the planning application process.

Privacy of residents should not be compromised and any risk of overlook must be minimised. Particular care should be taken of comparative house levels when applications are made which include a balcony or a 'Juliette balcony' which could have this effect.

2.5 Wrong precedents for planning

Setting a precedent in planning matters can occur for a number of reasons. Designs that are not appropriate for the village do occasionally get passed. It does not however make them any more suitable or justified to be copied. The objective of our Village Design Statement is, among other things, to ensure that future developers do not use the precedent of atypical or unsuitable developments within the parish as justification for similar proposals. The Otford

community wishes to clearly state that every proposal for either new or extension development, should be judged solely on the appropriateness of its design and location within this rural community, rather than on previous examples of similar proposals. We believe that the views of the community should always be given precedence when considering any development application.

When assessing such designs in future, the Planning Authority should assess the degree to which the proposal is well integrated and complements the neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally in terms of scale, density, layout and access. It is important to villagers that designs for proposed developments reflect the village's local vernacular styles exemplified in its Conservation Area, rather than copying the impersonal, untypical and unwelcome designs evidenced in some recent developments

Design Principles

2a Respect for local building design, materials, vernacular style and general colouration maintains the natural evolution and character of the village and surrounding parish and should be evident in any planning proposal. *(SLPPC Policy EN1: CS 5.1.3)*

2b The village fabric and character should not be eroded by schemes involving the removal of one property and replacing it on the same site with two or more new properties which create a squeezed effect when compared to adjoining properties. *(SLPPC EN1)*

2c The scale and mass of any proposed dwelling must be comparable to the majority of existing homes within the adjoining community. *(SLPPC Policy EN1.4)*

2d Most houses within the village have individual designs or features. They have a common vernacular. Proposals for pattern-book or mirror designs for more than one house, should be opposed. *(SLPPC Policy EN1: SP1: LO7)*

2e Natural materials should always be employed in preference to look-alike substitutes. *(RESPD 4.48)*

2f In any proposal for a new development or an extension which broadens the front or sides of a property, sufficient on-site parking space must be made available for two cars.

2g Proposals for any developments or extensions which are located on rising ground, should indicate their relative height & position in relation to nearby properties on all sides and include 1m or 2m contour lines on proposed drawings. *(RESPD 4.16)*

2h Proposals that employ an extensive, glazed, or partially glazed frontage which will reflect the sun toward the village, or which increase their prominence by the use of white or light-coloured paint or facing material, will be opposed. *(RESPD 4.48: SLPPC EN1.3)*

2i Particular care is required when proposals include a balcony or 'Juliet' balcony which may result in the privacy of neighbours being compromised. *(SLPPC EN1: RESPD 5.8)*

2j Close-boarded fencing and 'Solid' gates over 1.5m high, are considered untypical of our rural community. It is the community's view that they introduce an urbanized, stockaded, and isolationist feeling to an open, rural neighbourhood and should be resisted. *(RESPD 4.62: Summary)*

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

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. That is why it has been designated a Conservation Area and Local authorities are required by law to preserve or enhance such areas as they constitute a National asset. It is crucial therefore that we maintain and enhance this quintessential part of the traditional image of rural England. It does not mean that changes should not occur. The challenge is to manage change in ways that maintain and reinforce the area's special qualities. The character of a conservation area can be so easily altered or lost through inappropriate action, no matter how apparently small it may appear. It is for that reason that this part of the Village Design Statement was prepared.

3.2 The content and character of the Conservation Area

The Otford Conservation Area covers some 16 hectares and contains about 40 listed buildings and the Scheduled Monument of the Archbishop's Palace. A separate area of Special Scientific Interest outside the Conservation area, contains the site of the Progress Roman Villa. Sevenoaks District Council produce a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) every 5-6 years and this can 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 Collet'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. (See map inside the back cover) 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 there is plenty of open 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.

The many mature trees within the Conservation Area add to its visual appeal. Residents value them greatly and appreciate their protected status

Details of individual properties of note as well as a map of the Otford conservation area, are to be found in the appendix.

3.3 Development issues within the Conservation Area

In general, building and extensions within the Conservation Area have been sympathetically carried out, although one or two recent exceptions now stand as permanent reminders of the attention the community needs to pay to all forms of future planning proposals. 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. All extensions within the Conservation area should reflect the form and character of the original building.

Views, setting and topography are very important within the Conservation Area and the openness of buildings, giving a glimpse of countryside beyond, is an essential part of the character of the village centre. Similarly, original boundaries such as walls, fences or hedges

should be retained whenever possible. Applications for their replacement will require planning permission.

The street scene, street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area. Otford village is beset with standard, old and often unnecessary Highways signage. Despite intensive work by the community to highlight this issue, there has been no attempt to install signage reflecting the special status of the village. A weed-invaded traffic island, located beside the village pond, continues to house a snapped-off street-light base which was put there by mistake over 12 years ago. To date, there has been no attempt for any signs to represent the special status of the village as in many other historic locations. Signage and broken street furniture within the village centre need urgent attention. These should 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 is to the general detriment of the street scene in this area and introduces urbanization to the village High Street. A-frame boards have been part of the street-scene for generations. When an outlet employs more than one though, it becomes street-clutter. The visual appeal of the Conservation area is damaged 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 historic site.

3.4 Management of traffic and pedestrian access. Shared space.

Traffic levels are already having an erosive effect upon the Conservation Area. The community have clearly indicated that a reduction in both the volume and speed of traffic within the village is now a priority concern and one of the declared objectives of the Parish Plan. One possible approach would be to create a 'shared space' throughout the village centre. This method has been used very successfully in many historic towns in order to slow traffic movement, free up pedestrian access and bring an attractive coherence to an 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 and whilst addressing the problem of speed would not alter the volume of traffic. It would however, create a more people-friendly and usable pedestrian space with easier and safer access to the pond and the Green. It is a scheme described as suitable for Otford by the West Kent AONB Street Design Handbook. It would also respond not only to the wish of the residents but to the recommendation of the SDC Conservation Area Management Plan (2010).

(For further information on this 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

Land at Otford was first gifted to the archbishop of Canterbury by the king of Kent, in 821. It remained as a major holding of Canterbury until Henry VIII took over its responsibility in 1537. Throughout this seven hundred year period, successive archbishops rebuilt and enlarged a great moated mansion on the land adjoining what is now called, Palace Field. Circa 1518, Archbishop William Warham replaced this 'grandest house in all England' with an extensive palace, which Cardinal Wolesey, when building Hampton Court, sought to emulate. King Henry ensured that the next archbishop, Cranmer, gifted both Otford palace and Knole to the Crown in 1537. The king spent extensively on the palace over the next 10 years, and was a regular visitor. Following his death however, this great palace was left untended and became progressively a ruin. Its stone and brick provided a ready supply to builders for the next four hundred years and today, just the north-west tower, a range of three cottages built within the old walls, and the lower storey of one part of the great gatehouse remain.

Sevenoaks District Authority took on responsibility for Palace Field and its ancient monument in the early 1960's. Significant work was undertaken on the tower and gatehouse in this early period, using cement and reinforced concrete which, though effective, today sits uncomfortably and creating progressive erosion of the sandstone casements and Tudor brickwork. Inexplicably, the cottages adapted from the north-west frontage, were sold off by West Kent Housing under the 'right-to-buy' act in 1968 and are all now privately owned. English Heritage supervises the protection of the field and the remaining monument.

The 'Palace', as it is commonly known, is an iconic Otford landmark. Every resident feels a personal connection with it. There has been a recent proposal from SDC that ownership and responsibility for the whole site be transferred to an Otford Community trust. This has received a great deal of local support. There is however, considerable concern that parts of this historic building are not protected from the weather sufficiently to have prevented deterioration (NPPF 13.126/130). Roofs are still not in place on two of the adjoining towers and masonry has now fallen from an upper doorway and remains at this time, un-repaired. The cost of taking on this work would be beyond the resources of a local un-funded organisation. If however the means can be found to repair this damage to the satisfaction of English Heritage, then there is hope that the community may take on this responsibility in the future.

Just how the site may be enhanced and made of greater benefit to the whole village, will be a community decision and the outcome of much local discussion. (NPPF 6:55)

3.6 Enhancement of the Conservation Area

Recently, considerable restoration work has been 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.

The village pond has similarly undergone a major-make-over. 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.

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. Many Otfordians also gain enjoyment and pride in pointing out such information. However, with the exception of two very shabby illustration boards on Palace Field, there are no imaginative publicly-displayed boards within the whole Conservation Area and it is to be hoped that in the future opportunities will be found to respond to this need.

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. The inspired mosaic which adorns the side of the Luyten's-designed church-hall would also benefit from an explanatory text that parents can explain to their children. How else would they learn of the bloody battles that took place here and great kings who passed this very spot? The objective is not to turn the village into a museum exhibit but to bring fresh life to our rich historical environment.

The fascinating Otford Heritage Centre, open every morning and staffed by volunteers over weekends, deserves better, more appropriate signage within the village. It is a marvellous, but often undiscovered source of local information, models and exhibits. The introduction of timber finger posts throughout the village centre directing visitors to the Palace, the church,

the Solar System models, the Heritage Centre, the halls and footpaths, could help provide a coherence to the whole Conservation Area.

All of these proposals are not only to the benefit of the residents of Offord but to our retailers who rely upon a regular source of visitors. 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** Any proposal for development of any kind within the Conservation Area must take cognisance of the role it plays in determining the overall nature and the essential character of the area. Only appropriate materials should be used at all times. **(CAAMP.12.5)**
- 3b** Building extensions within the Conservation area should always reflect the form and character of the original building. **(SLPPC EN23: RESPD.2.6)**
- 3c** Street furniture and signs should be compatible with and enhance the appearance of the area. Cluttered standard traffic signage and un-required street furniture should be removed or replaced. **(CAAMP 4.32)**
- 3d** Original boundaries such as walls, fences or hedges should be retained whenever possible. Formal application must be made prior to their replacement or alteration. **(CAAMP 4.33/4.36)**
- 3e** Established views between existing buildings should not be blocked or impeded. **(CAAMP.6.2 / 9.13)**
- 3f** New or replacement shop signage should be discreet in its size and colouration in order to benefit the overall cohesion of the area **(SLPPC 31:EN27 Appendix 6)**
- 3g** Un-sought promotional or advertising material attached to street furniture is unwelcome and should be removed. **(CAAMP 4.32)**
- 3h** It is a long-term objective of the 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)**
- 3i** Aerials, satellite dishes, masts, wiring etc. must not be visible from the street. **(CAAMP 4.31/ 4.32))**
- 3j** Mature trees within the Conservation Area which are over the specified size (over 7.5cm diameter, measured at 1.5m high on the stem/trunk) have protected status which must be respected. 6 weeks notice must be given before any work is carried out. **(CAAMP.7)**
- 3k** The introduction of well-designed information boards would benefit the greater enjoyment of the area’s history and heritage. **(Local Plan objective iii)**
- 3l** The introduction of timber finger posts giving directions to local points of interest will provide coherence to the Conservation Area. **(Local Plan objective iii)**
- 3m** Historic buildings within the conservation area should be kept weather and water tight to prevent further deterioration. It is necessary to keep roofs in particular in a good state of repair **(Conservation Act Statement 5: Policy SP1: SLPPC EN25)**

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

4: HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

4.1 Maintaining the separateness of the village

Any development that takes place within the village envelope should utilise only the existing available developed area. Development should not, under any circumstances, extend into the Metropolitan Green Belt. The individuality of Otford as an independent and separate village is vociferously defended by the whole community as supported by all the VDS research. Otford is not a suburb, nor must it become one in fact or appearance.

Development along the highways but outside the existing built area has the effect of extending the village envelope into the surrounding countryside and should be resisted. Applications to locate new development within any of the important green spaces already integrated within the village should also be strongly resisted.

4.2 The character of residential buildings

Outside the Conservation Area, the buildings are primarily domestic, the distinctive character created by a mix of individually styled 1- and 2-storey homes. There is universal agreement among residents that houses in excess of two storeys or with atypically steep or shallow roof angles, or flat roofs, are out of keeping with the character of this small rural village **and should be resisted. The SDC Core strategy confirms that; “development on a modest scale will be permitted where it ...is consistent with local character..and should respond to the distinctive local characteristics of the area.”**

Throughout the village there are well spaced homes of individual design, most containing gardens with attractive flower beds, grassed areas and trees, which enhance the sense of space and sustain the impression of Otford’s rural environment. The most important benefits to residents of Otford are the rural aspects and open feeling of the village. Thus in any planning application, consideration of the relationship between buildings and the space between them is of great importance when judging their appropriateness and suitability. Otford residents consider it important that the current uncongested housing pattern, well integrated with the surrounding countryside, should remain unaffected. Otford’s character is in its physical structure and population size. Increasing the present density and size of the village will help neither to sustain nor to improve its current character. Design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted.

4.3 Concentration of houses within new developments

It is a stated objective (EN1) that local planning should ensure that all development proposals maintain and enhance the quality of the environment, respecting its character and functions. Suitability of design depends upon siting, design, quality and integration with surrounding houses. It is the view of residents that new developments which have concentrated a large number of new houses, **particularly** of a repetitive pattern, into a limited available site with insufficient off-road parking, have created cramped estates which are not beneficial to the general village setting. The Otford community has made it clear that it does not wish this type of development to be repeated as it undermines the essential character of the village. **The SDC Core Strategy now supports this view 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)**

4.4 The phenomenon of ‘Garden-grab’

Residents have made it clear that the re-use of a one-house garden plot to build a number of close-packed houses is, as a general rule, unacceptable, as it creates a sense of untypical congestion among houses. Where this has occurred previously, they should not be considered a precedent. Proposals should be suitable for the available plot size and

uncomparable with the established surrounding properties, and should have no adverse effect upon the local area and the village as a whole. It is important both on environmental grounds and to preserve the **cohesion** of the village that substantial garden areas remain a strong feature of the village.

4.5 Dormer Loft windows

Loft extensions have been a popular development in many of Otford's older properties with an additional 'spare' room with its small, rear dormer, created within the available loft space. There has been concern expressed however, when new developments automatically include a line of dormer windows facing the front. This gives the impression of a third floor to the property. The fact that they are just below the roof line is not a mitigating factor. Dormer windows should face to the rear in order to maintain the continuity of Otford homes which are of two storeys.

4.6 Landscaping and garden requirements

Judging from the many written comments (WSC), 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. Equally important is maintaining a balance between each proposed building and its plot size, and providing for adequate garden areas particularly where there may be families with children. These are all factors which Otford residents feel should influence every planning decision.

Two further factors regarding boundaries are considered important: The distaste felt for the use of high close-boarded fencing and gates. The community has made it clear that these are generally considered unattractive and have an adverse affect upon the surrounding area and the village as a whole. They are urban in character and detract from the openness of the countryside. Natural materials should always be used for boundary treatments whenever possible. We are a rural village, not a stockaded encampment. These should be no more than 1.5m. in height, measured from the level of the adjoining pavement. (not from an earthen bank or wall) When driveways are included on which to park more than one car, these should be made only of porous material to allow for natural drainage.

4.7 Inappropriate design

Given the small size and intimate character of the village, opportunities for innovation are limited. Under Policy EN1 new homes should “ *be compatible in terms of scale, height, density and site coverage with other buildings in the locality. The design should be in harmony with adjoining buildings*”. The introduction of buildings designed as a pastiche of country mansions or baronial halls **are** not in harmony with adjoining buildings. **New properties that have immediately become absorbed into the village are built to an appropriate scale and traditional designs from** a range of traditional materials. Natural planting helps them merge with the landscape. **Examples have shown** how careful location and sympathetic landscaping can also promote acceptability and sympathetic harmony within the village.

4.8 Affordable Housing

Getting onto the 'housing ladder' is the objective of every young couple. Given the new planning regulations which ensure that a percentage of all new development includes, or contributes toward, a proportion of affordable housing, (Policy SP3) this aim may now become achievable for future generations elsewhere. In Otford however, whilst the community have indicated their support for affordable housing, the land is simply not available within the parish for any affordable housing-projects and the parish is not considered an 'Exception' site (under policy H9) where such houses might be built within the Green Belt.

The only remaining option for consideration within our parish, is for couples to consider 'sub-division' or jointly purchasing a larger family home and then dividing it to create two affordable semi-detached residences. Under H6A, the District Council have stated that their objective is to *encourage the conversion of appropriate residential properties into smaller units of accommodation*. There are of course conditions but the principle is now established, so talk with the District Planning Office if you would like further information.

4.9 Housing for older residents wishing to down-size

Demographic research carried out in the preparation of the Parish Plan established that 27% of the community are over 65 and 22% of residents live on their own. 53% of residents have also lived in the parish for over 20 years. On a separate questionnaire it was clear that many of these older residents did not wish to move to a home outside the parish as they would lose their important network of local friends. They all indicated a wish to down-size to a smaller, more manageable property but on condition they could remain within the village. Until that was a possibility they would remain in their large family homes.

The Parish Plan has therefore set a long-term objective to create, on the principle of the alms house, a series of single-storey properties on common ground that can be leased by older long-term residents of Otford until such time as they shall chose 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 but would be dependent upon suitable land becoming available, the support of the District Council and a sympathetic developer willing to support such communal aims. Under Policy SP4 *"the development of Green Belt land for rural exception sites will only be acceptable through a needs survey ...that could not be met by developing non Green Belt land."* Certainly Core Strategy policy SP5 supports the requirement for housing for older residents but it will require all these elements to come together before Otford can build its own small 'retirement hamlet'.

4.10 Infrastructure. The Community Infrastructure Levy.

The infrastructure of Otford is based upon a rural village community of some 1,300 houses. Concern has been voiced **by the community** that any proposals for the introduction of multi-house estates will put an intolerable strain on the current services. It is the view of the VDS that when considering the suitability of any new development, large or small, the developer should be able to demonstrate that Otford's existing services and utilities are capable of supporting additional housing.

Since the first VDS was prepared, the government have proposed the introduction of an infrastructure levy on new homes being built. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) allows local authorities to secure funding for infrastructure to support development by requiring developers to pay a standard charge per sq m of qualifying new development. The money will be spent primarily upon the new development which has provided the funding, however a percentage will also be allocated to other parishes who have need to develop aspects of their infrastructure. For that reason, parishes have been asked to list capital infrastructure projects which will benefit the community, to which the levy can contribute.

Amongst Otford's requests are funding to support: a children's playground at Hale Lane Recreation Ground; the introduction of Shared Space throughout the village centre to control car speed and facilitate pedestrian movement; the development of a second 'over-spill' car park on the village outskirts (NPPF 9:90); the creation of a retirement homes community for older residents; the development of Palace Field as a communal heritage facility; and the introduction of outdoor adult exercise equipment.

4.11 Summary

Although current instructions from the government are for District planners to presume in favour of every planning proposal, the community of Otford hold to the belief that proposed developments outside the Conservation Area should **have to** comply with existing district policies in full, as well as with the wishes expressed by the Otford community in their Village Design Statement. **Within our parish, any proposed development must demonstrate that it will fully** integrate and harmonise with existing buildings in the vicinity **and enhance the local area** by being designed in line with the Design Principles below.

Design Principles

- 4a** No new housing development should be located in such a way that the village appears to merge with neighbouring villages or with Sevenoaks. **(CS.4.5.5/5.1.3 :SP1 Policy H10A)**
- 4b** No proposed development should adversely affect the existing green spaces within the village. **(CS SP10: SLPPC EN9)**
- 4c** The appropriateness of any development must be judged by its prominence and/or intrusion within the landscape and the effects it will have upon the immediate vicinity, the available infrastructure, utilities and other support services. **(RESPD 3.6: 3.7: 3.11: 3.12: 3.13)**
- 4d** The suitability of any proposed development should be judged by the extent to which it is in harmony in terms of proportions, scale and density with other dwellings in the vicinity. **(SLPPC Policy EN1.4)**
- 4e** The appropriateness of new homes should conform with Policy EN1 and be of a scale, height and mass similar to adjoining buildings. **(CS Key Issue 3: Policy EN1: Policy L07)**
- 4f** Proposals for new properties with forward-facing dormer windows, are inappropriate among other Otford homes. **(RESPD 4.31/4.35)**
- 4g** The height of the roof ridge should be similar to the majority of others in the community. The pitch angle of the roof should be between 35 and 45 degrees. **(RESPD 4.11)**
- 4h** The ratio of building to plot size must always be in harmony with other homes in the vicinity **(SLPPC Policy EN1.4)**
- 4i** Any proposed dwelling with two or more bedrooms, and thus likely to be a family home, should have a rear private garden with no less than the minimum area of the footprint of the whole dwelling.
- 4j** Every new building should occupy a proportion of its plot width similar to that of the majority of houses in the proximity, permitting a clear view of surrounding countryside between it and its neighbours. **(CS 4.5.5 / 5.1.3 : SPI Policy H10A)**
- 4k** In order to promote individuality in new housing, the inclusion of local vernacular designs like gablets and hips will be welcome as typical of the area. **(CS Key Issue 3: Policy L07)**
- 4l** All planning proposals should include clear plans for landscaping including, wherever possible, the planting of trees and the use of boundary hedging using traditional species and/or traditional fencing, to front, side and rear as appropriate. **(SLPP EN1.2 : RESPD 6.11 / 6.12)**
- 4m** Support should be given for proposals which will permit the building of a number of suitably designed, single-storey lease-hold homes for older residents within the parish. **(CS 5.3.16/5.3.19/5.3.20: Policy SP4: CS5.3.25: Policy SP5: Policy H9)**
- 4n** Carbon-neutral housing is welcome within the parish if sympathetically designed and appropriate to surrounding properties. Those dwellings outside the conservation area incorporating solar or wind energy-collection devices should aim to be in harmony with others in the area in size, scale, proportions and colour. It is important to minimise any visual and/or aural intrusion to other properties. **(SLPP EN1 .1 / .3)**

5: EXTENSIONS AND ALTERATIONS OUTSIDE THE CONSERVATION AREA

5.1 Retaining the spacing between properties

The spacing between properties and the integration of homes with the surrounding countryside is one of the factors most valued by Otford residents and clearly supported by the SDC's Residential Extensions Supplementary Planning Document (RESPD). For that reason, house extensions in particular should 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 effectively erode one of the special qualities of this village.

5.2 In the Green Belt

Residential extensions can have a significant environmental impact on the visual openness around the property, its character or its setting. Extensions therefore should not be disproportionate to the original building or have an effect upon the openness of the Green Belt. The objective is always to minimize the intrusion of an extension into the near-by countryside. This is particularly the case for homes sited on high ground.

5.3 Garages

The presence of larger and often two-storey garages can have a significant impact on the space surrounding buildings. A number of these have been built in Otford in recent years. However, SDC's supplementary planning document is now very clear. New garages should *'fit unobtrusively with the building'*. They are not an automatic excuse to add another spare room to the property. In fact within the Green Belt, they must not exceed one storey in height. Outside the Green Belt, SDC makes it quite clear that they should *'not have an unacceptable impact on the space surrounding buildings'* (RESPD 4.49/4.53)

5.4 Extension design and appearance

The basic design components of any good extension in Otford, are siting, scale, form and external appearance. To integrate successfully into their surroundings, extensions should respect existing building lines as well as maintaining the spaces between buildings. Being unobtrusive and compatible with surrounding properties is important.

Side extensions should not unduly expand to block what was previously a natural gap between the neighbouring property. As the supplementary planning document points out, a view of the countryside between homes is an important community asset and should not be blocked. Two-storey side extensions have an even more significant impact when viewed from the street. It is therefore important that applicants are aware that blocking existing views will be a factor in determining their appropriateness.

When a house is on a corner site, the side extension should not vary from the building line of those homes in alignment with the property's side.

Extensions to the front of a building naturally have more visual impact. It really all comes down to how much the extension will affect the visual relationship with other homes in the street. The extension should not compromise the established building line of the street. There is also concern when a front extension could result in a loss of off-street parking or trees that are important to the character of the area

Throughout Otford, architectural character is varied, and many of the older properties have evolved through changes of use and alterations over a considerable period. It is the clearly

expressed view of residents that all forms of extension should blend naturally with the existing structure of a building by using similar materials and colouration.

5.5 Keeping front gardens 'green'

Gardens are important in maintaining the pleasing appearance of the village, preserving wildlife and allowing water to sink into the aquifers. **Amendments in planning law now ensure that any conversion of a front garden to incorporate hard-standing, must employ approved permeable surfaces or land drainage systems so that surface water is not allowed to flow wastefully into drains and sewers. Otford residents have clearly indicated they support such measures as a key part of future village planning.**

5.6 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 therefore 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 unattractive and unacceptable is when a proposed dormer size is either of a disproportionate scale or misaligned with the other windows of the house.

5.7 Preserving mature trees

Trees are greatly valued by residents, who strongly support Tree Preservation Orders (TPOs) and wish all mature trees to be retained unless there is sound reason for their removal (*PM*). The many mature trees within Otford form an intrinsic part of the local landscape. The removal of even one tree can affect the quality of the landscape significantly.

Design Principles

- 5a** The scale and form of an extension in the Green Belt should not adversely impact on the character of the countryside or the openness of the undeveloped character of the Green Belt (***CS Policy LO8: SLPPC EN6 / EN7: RESPD 3.2***)
- 5b** A planning proposal should not result in a large, bulky or intrusive building in the landscape which is likely to have a detrimental impact on the area. (***CS Policy LO8: SLPPC EN6 / EN7: RESPD 3.2***)
- 5c** The impact on the countryside is clearly greater if an extension is located in a highly visible location. In such locations any extension may be inappropriate. (***CS Policy LO8: SLPPC EN6 / EN7: RESPD 3.2***)
- 5d** It is expected that when building an extension that the original boundary materials be retained or be re-instated. It is wrong to assume that gaining permission for an extension implies permission to change the original boundary materials. (***RESPD 4.62: Summary***)
- 5e** Any form of extension should always retain a consistency of style with the original building. Rural buildings often have a simple form which should not be significantly altered (***RESPD 4.48***)
- 5f** Materials should blend with the existing structure. 'Replace like with like' is the general rule. (***RESPD 4.48***)
- 5g** Materials should be chosen that will mellow with time and blend in to the natural environment. Inappropriate patching or new building using unsympathetic materials will be resisted.) (***RESPD 4.48***)
- 5h** When extending to the side of a corner property, the extension should not exceed the building line of the properties in alignment with it. (***RESPD 4.5/4.40/4.53***)
- 5i** With the possible exception of garages, flat roofs are considered inappropriate to any extension as they are untypical of existing village buildings. The pitch of an extension roof should be similar to the main house roof pitch. (***RESPD 4.11***)
- 5j** Garages should not need to exceed a single storey in height or have excessive volume (***RESPD 4.49/4.50/4.51***)

- 5k** Garages should not have a detrimental impact on the space surrounding buildings or the character or openness of the surrounding countryside, nor should they be sited in front of the building line. *(RESPD 4.49/4.50/4.51)*
- 5l** Rear extensions of semi-detached houses should extend no more than 3 metres. Extensions on detached houses should generally not extend further than 4 metres *(RESPD 4.14)*
- 5m** The acceptable height of a side extension will be determined by the ground levels. *(RESPD 4.16)*
- 5n** Extensions to the front of a property should not cause the loss of trees or of off-street parking area. *(RESPD 4.21)*
- 5o** Attractive features like chimneys, gables and windows should be retained (or replaced with similar) as they contribute to the distinctive character of properties.
- 5p** Aerials, satellite dishes, masts and wiring should be as unobtrusive and discreet as possible.
- 5q** Permission to build barns, stables or stores on larger properties must be subject to the condition that these will not later be used for accommodation.
- 5r** Only the minimum necessary area of the available front garden area should ever be replaced with hard-standing for cars. Suitable porous materials should be used for this purpose, rather than impermeable surfaces.*(RESPD 4.56/4.567)*

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

6: WALKING AND VEHICLE MOVEMENT

6.1 Busy roads affecting pedestrian movement

The village envelope is intersected both by an ancient east-west route (Pilgrims Way) and a major north-south trunk road, the A225. It also has many residential roads serving groups of houses. Technical transport issues such as traffic management and road maintenance are outside the remit of this document (*Kent Highways being the relevant authority*). However, *this part of the document concerns the practicalities of transport movement through our parish and the safety of pedestrians who use our pavements. Therefore it contains clear recommendations to facilitate movement through the parish.*

Otford is an attractive historic village at the head of the Darent Valley. It also has main rail links with London and Sevenoaks. Given its location, it is inevitable that there will be a steady increase in tourist traffic year on year and already the effects of this can be felt on local roads and in-village parking, a matter with which the community is constantly struggling..

6.2 Lanes and historic routes

The rural quality of Otford is enhanced by its attractive winding lanes. These have influenced the historic design of the settlement. Many of these historic approaches to the village originated as traditional tracks. These include Telston Lane, Rye Lane, Row Dow, Pilgrims Way East, Park Lane and Ivy House Lane. It is important to all residents that the character of these old roads be preserved and that no widening or straightening of them be **permitted**

in future to accommodate higher and faster traffic flows. Any such action will seriously damage the rural character of the village and will be resisted by the residents of Otford.

Of increasing concern is the future of the narrow and winding, Rye Lane. Any traffic using this road at present, has regularly to stop and often reverse, to allow on-coming vehicles to pass. A new estate of some 500 homes, *Ryewood Meadows* is now being built at the end of this road in Dunton Green. It is considered imperative by the Otford community, that in the interests of safety and common sense, access and use of this ancient trackway should be restricted to local householders with homes already located on the road, cyclists and emergency vehicles only. This needs to be instigated as soon as possible. Even at current car and commercial traffic rates, the environmental damage caused to the lane's high sides create continual soil falls and consequent flooding from the blocked drainage. Further increases in traffic will considerably exacerbate this.

Concern over the protection of the meandering, narrow road, Pilgrims Way East, grows each year as traffic volumes and speeds increase. It is without question, a very dangerous road on which to drive and as long sections contain no pedestrian pathway what-so-ever, the many residents of this road are compelled to use cars for even the shortest of journeys. A more stringent limitation on commercial traffic width and weight is imperative both for public safety as well as the protection of this ancient pilgrim's track. The introduction of a 20mph limit and the re-introduction of a limit on vehicle width is strongly recommended.

6.3 Schools

There are four schools located within the parish, including a popular primary school in the village centre. The consequence is that there are high levels of traffic delivering children on The High Street, Station Road, Pilgrims Way East and RowDow. This occurs twice daily throughout the school terms, creating serious traffic congestion to other road users.

Walking to school is not a reliably safe option for parents or children in Otford because of the real and perceived hazards represented by traffic passing close to narrow and un-even footways. On some residential roads there are no footways what-so-ever and pedestrians are forced to share the roadway with passing traffic. The Parish Plan has made clear that the safety and improvement of pedestrian movement within the village is of prime importance to all residents and their children and must be addressed urgently.

6.4 The Conservation Area

The Conservation Area stands at the centre of our historic and sensitive village. A long-term proposal included within the Parish Plan is to convert the surface of road and pavements within the village centre to an attractive 'shared space' area. The principle is to raise the status of pedestrians in relation to road traffic and encourage a more human context, involving greater mutual respect and eye-contact. It is a system well proven elsewhere and if properly implemented, such a scheme would slow traffic, make pedestrian movement easier and bring cohesion to this attractive village centre. Such a proposal is supported by AONB as well as the Transport Department in their respective books on the subject ('The AONB Road Handbook'/DOT 'Streets for All')

6.5 Proposals and actions for greater pedestrian safety

Since the production of the Otford Parish Plan in 2011, a community group has been actively seeking improvements in the management of traffic flow, speed and pedestrian safety within the parish. They have put forward well argued and supported cases for improvements in pedestrian safety within the parish. They also have the full support of the Otford Parish Council and district and county councilors.

The poor state of much of Otford's public pedestrian facilities (in particular footways alongside main roads) has resulted in pedestrians retreating from the roads. Residents

resort to the use of cars even for short journeys, with resultant parking congestion within the village. It is not only detrimental to the village character but also environmentally undesirable. Consideration of any future planning proposals must include attention to these issues. **Only by the introduction of more and safer pavements within the parish, can Otford residents safely return to walking.**

The introduction of Pelican crossings in Station Road and the High Street are one aim of the group in order to increase the safety of pedestrians, particularly children and commuters, at these important crossing points. Meanwhile, the Parish Council is actively lobbying for speeds on Sevenoaks Road to be reduced on the un-restricted dual carriageway section and for speed limit signs to be relocated.

Having raised the funding, the pedestrian safety group and the Parish Council, supported by our elected county member, are also seeking to persuade Kent Highway Services to install roadside village “gateways” at the parish boundaries in order to raise awareness of pedestrian presence along these busy roads.

The clear support of our District Council and Kent Highways Services are imperative in all of these proposals. Bureaucratic difficulties must be set aside. It is now imperative that positive action is undertaken to provide safety to Otford’s pedestrians. Regrettably however, the continuing failure of Kent Highway Services to address the needs of our community will lead us to conclude that it has little interest or influence over this aspect of village life which affects so many residents on a day to day basis.

6.6 Parking in a country village.

The village car park holds 116 cars and is often ‘full’ for large parts of the day. Research has indicated that this is not the cause of commuters, as commonly believed, but a result of the parking requirements of a combination of local shop-workers, school teachers, and local (High Street) residents. The Parish Council is struggling to find a solution as the demand for parking continues to increase, on the part of residents, workers and visitors. Consequently, cars are being parked in increasing numbers on residential roads throughout the village and more and more ‘yellow line’ restrictions are being introduced, bringing an urban feel to Otford’s quiet roads. The overall consequence is the erosion of our country village into an urbanized area of parked cars, ‘no parking’ signs and grid-locked traffic. Radical steps need to be taken before the whole Conservation Area and surrounding streets become some giant carpark.

One proposition is the creation of a ‘green’ car park (with no signs or raised areas) which uses permeable mesh or honeycomb blocks. This might be located in the field behind Otford Primary School, with its vehicle access opposite Bubblestone Road. It would permit the increasing number of school teachers and parents to use the area safely for children’s drop-off/collection, greatly relieve the pressure on the village car park, negate the twice-daily traffic congestion in Otford’s main roads and provide an over-spill car park when required for additional visitors and tourists. It constitutes a significant investment but given its ‘out-of-sight-ness’ and the significant effect it will have upon traffic movement and parking, it is hoped that it may yet be a serious consideration. This document recognizes that the proposal would be located on the edge but within Green Belt land. It hopes however that the far-reaching justification for its existence would create an ‘exceptional circumstance’ making its location permissible.

Demands for parking space do not disappear, they simply increase and broaden. Our visitors are an important ingredient to the sustainability of Otford’s retail economy. A solution must be found.

6.7 Road signage – excessive and unsuitable

Concern has been expressed by residents that the increasing quantity and unsympathetic nature of road signage in the village is to the detriment of Otford's Conservation Area. The increased controls over parking have meant the introduction of numerous, un-necessary poles throughout the village. All the signage is of standard design and takes no account of the historically important and sensitive areas in which it is sited. The SDC Conservation Area Appraisal recommendations are quite clear and suggest removal of much un-necessary highways signage in the village and replacement of the remainder with more tasteful indicators. The pedestrian safety group has detailed all excessive or poorly maintained signage and seeks support from the Highways Agency to effect changes. The Otford community supports their proposals in the interests of maintaining the integrity of our village street scene.

6.8 Cyclists and cycle paths

The SDC Core Strategy states it "will seek improved facilities for cyclists and pedestrians" (Policy SP2) The Otford Parish Plan also proposes to 'actively review opportunities for safe cycle routes – and to lobby for their introduction'. Within the parish there is a growing demand by families for safe cycle routes. However, with the exception of the bridle path leading toward Shoreham (32) and the bridle path toward Kemsing (45), there are no other safe off-road cycle paths within the parish. SDC with the support of the Sevenoaks Cycle Forum, have approval to create a safe cycle path from Otford to Sevenoaks along the route of the A225. This though, is still seeking funding. All other roads within the parish have too much heavy traffic and are only suitable for experienced cyclists. A 'Darent Path' has been proposed to link a cycle path from Otford to Dartford. Some sections are in the process of being created but the whole route may be some years in the making. To facilitate the many cyclists who do visit the village throughout the summer, the introduction of cycle 'racks' would be of great benefit in future.

6.9 Public lighting

Otford has no street lighting. This matter has been discussed at a number of public meetings in recent years. Minutes of an OPC meeting in 1997 record that a public vote was taken, with a majority voting against. There is no evidence that this community decision has contributed to any increase in traffic accidents or other safety hazards within the parish. No future developments should involve any requirement for street lighting to be introduced.

Design Principles

- 6a Narrow, winding lanes are an integral part of the rural nature of the village and must be protected. (***Strategic Policy ENV13/EN34***)
- 6b Road straightening and/or widening, with a consequent increase in traffic volume and/or speed, are inappropriate and must be resisted. (***Strategic Transport Policy***)
- 6c Any opportunity to enhance safety for pedestrians by the installation/application of pedestrian/pelican crossings, village gateways, Speedwatch and other traffic-calming measures should be supported. (***Strategic Transport Policy***)
- 6d The development of a pedestrianised 'shared space' area in the village centre should be supported. (***AONB Roads Handbook / CAAMP 9.25***)
- 6e The introduction of safe pedestrian access beside public roads within the parish should be considered a priority. (***CS Policy SP2***)
- 6f The option of a green car park to the rear of the village primary school should be explored. (***SGI A: GB5: VP11***)
- 6g The removal of excessive highways signage within the village envelope is a clear requirement in order to maintain and enhance our Conservation Area (***CAAMP 4.32***)
- 6h All opportunities for the development of safe cycle paths should be pursued. (***CS Policy SP2***)
- 6i Support is required for the introduction of public cycle racks to enable the many cyclists who visit Otford, to park safely and securely. (***CS Policy SP2***)

- 6j Any new development application must supply plans for safe pedestrian access to the village centre.
- 6k Any new development application should be supported by evidence, based on a reliable and proven statistical model, of how many additional cars will be using the village roads.
- 6l No new development should be dependent on the introduction of street lighting within the parish. (*SLPPC EN31*)

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

AONB = The association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty

7: BOUNDARIES AND STREET FURNITURE

7.1 Types of local boundary material

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. Well-maintained hedgerows commonly bound agricultural land bordering our roads.

7.2 Close-board fencing

Developers of new (*mainly* large) single private homes have, in recent years, incorporated high *close-boarded* fencing and gates. This has *had a regrettable* urbanising effect on the area and gives the properties an *isolated and* stockaded appearance. This is regarded by most residents as highly unattractive, untypical and unsuitable in our village community. The recent revisions in planning regulations recommend such fences and their close-boarded high gates are unsuitable *and do enhance the surrounding area.* A village is first and foremost a community of people. It is difficult to offer a friendly welcome to a family which chooses to hide itself behind an electrically-operated stockade.

7.3 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 of ecological benefit to all. There is general concern about the fact that in recent years these trees have not been maintained and that many trees have been removed by Kent County Council and not replaced.

7.4 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 road users and pedestrians at night. Such lighting needs to be carefully placed and angled, and not so powerful that they are detrimental to neighbouring properties. Policy EN31 is quite clear on this point.

7.5 Planters and street furniture

There are several planters located within the village High Street and it is the wish of the community for there to be more. **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, can help to enhance the character of the village and are encouraged in Otford. **Our listed public telephone box on the Green is already part of Otford's heritage.**

7.6 Signage

The centre of Otford forms the junction of two major highway routes. **As stated in the previous chapter**, residents comment that there is excessive signage that is having the effect of progressively urbanising the village. Signs both for traffic and for pedestrians should be designed to match the rural village context, particularly within the central Conservation Area.

As referred to in the section 3, the Parish Plan has suggested the introduction of local timber finger-posts pointing visitors to places of interest within the village, as well as information display boards which can help bring the past to life and make the visitor experience more interesting.

Design Principles

- 7a** The proposal to incorporate high, close-boarded fencing and gates facing the street, should be discouraged. **(RESPD 4.62/Summary)**
- 7b** Roadside trees are valued and should be replaced if removed. **(SDLP EN12B)**
- 7c** For front boundary hedging, the use of traditional tree and shrub species or of traditional picket fencing should be actively encouraged. **(SLPPC EN1.2: RESPD 6.11/6.12)**
- 7d** 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.
- 7e** An excess of road- and direction signs must be avoided and redundant signs and posts removed. Signs should be of traditional design in keeping with the village character. **(CAAMP 4.32:AONB)**
- 7f** Within the Conservation Area especially, but also more generally in the village, pedestrian signage for directions, footpaths and walking routes should be sympathetically designed to match the village environment. **(CAAMP 4.32: AONB)**
- 7g** The introduction of signage and information boards, sympathetically designed, which are to the benefit of Otford's visitors, should be supported **(Local Plan Objectives iii)**
- 7h** Exterior lighting should be of limited power. It should not create light spillage to the detriment of adjoining properties or road users. **(SLPPC EN31)**

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AONB= Roads Handbook

8: PUBLIC FOOTPATHS AND BRIDLEWAYS

8.1 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. The District Council supports the importance of our footpaths and bridleways "...and will seek improvements in interpretation facilities to promote enjoyment and understanding of the countryside" (Policy SP10)

Most paths have been established for many centuries, providing a far safer route than along the busy main roads. 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 and for connecting the various parts of the village.

8.2 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.

8.3 Maintenance

Residents express great concern when these important pedestrian arteries are not adequately maintained. At present this is the responsibility of Kent County Council. Yet each summer these village paths become narrowed by swathes of leaning stinging nettles which are a hazard to young people especially, and particularly to children in push-chairs. The annual lowering canopies of overhanging branches also create serious difficulty in some locations to the partially sighted and the elderly, and complaints are numerous.

Regrettably our local footpaths are simply not monitored thoroughly by KCC and consequently they are not adequately maintained. It is not sufficient to rely on volunteer working parties of local parishioners to rectify the problem; indeed residents may be acting illegally and/or putting themselves at risk by doing such work. The situation needs addressing and a more efficient means of maintaining the borders of the paths must be introduced. An inevitable consequence otherwise is that more and more people will take to their cars rather than risk walking footpaths that are simply unfit for purpose.

8.4 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 trackway, 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 unsympathetic surfacing of one section with modern materials, this important ancient trackway still retains much of its original nature. Protecting its integrity has been 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. A second path, the Darent Valley Path (17), follows a lower route across the fields and golf club to rejoin the former path to Shoreham. These paths are well signposted and maintained by SDC, and the recent introduction of metal self-closing gates has meant that older walkers 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 well maintained. Occasional information boards on the local history, flora and fauna could, in the future, bring added enjoyment to visitors and ramblers.

8.5 Private house boundary materials

Where a house boundary lies along a public footpath, security for the householders is clearly a priority and of paramount importance. 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 all 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. 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

- 8a** Footpaths, bridleways, public rights-of-way and railway crossings must be kept properly maintained by our authorities. *(CS Policy SP2)*
- 8b** Properties adjoining established footpaths must not encroach upon them or in any way make them narrower. *(CS Policy SP2)*
- 8c** Close-boarded fencing is definitely not encouraged as a barrier material adjoining public footpaths. Householders are recommended to use strong mesh or unpointed

railings (maximum 1.5m. in height), with associated plant-through natural shrubs. (**CS Policy SP2**)

- 8d** Trees should not be felled and natural shrubs and flora should not be removed from alongside these footpaths, unless to maintain the path itself. (**CS Policy SP2**)
- 8e** Otford residents welcome the creation of new linking footpaths (statutory or permissive) and support opportunities for these being explored with landowners. (**CS Policy SP2**)
- 8f** Greater use of interpretation boards particularly on country paths would be of great benefit to walkers and families. (**Local Plan objective iii**)
- 8g** All opportunities to support and expand rural tourism within the parish should be sought as well as appropriate visitor facilities. (**Local Plan Objective: NPPF 3.28**)

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SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.

OPP = Otford Parish Plan

9: THE TRADING ESTATE AND SURROUNDING AREA

9.1 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, which bridges the parish boundary at this point.

The Vestry Estate is built upon extensive earlier brickworks 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.

9.2 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 do not intrude into the attractive rural quality of the local landscape. This is a designated area of Local Landscape Importance on the boundary with the Green Belt and therefore all new building must be sited sensitively. Any proposals to site new warehousing, light industrial buildings or dwellings closer to the A225 or the M26 will be actively resisted because of the intrusion they would have upon the essentially rural nature of the area.

The estate is highly conspicuous from distant footpaths on the North Downs, and Otford residents have requested that any replacement or refurbished buildings utilize muted greys

and greens in their exterior cladding or painting. The profile of this industrial estate could be further softened by appropriate tree planting to integrate it better with the rural surroundings.

9.3 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 unmanageable. 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 a Green Belt area. Within its curtilage where once there were farm buildings, there is now a wide range of small independent businesses which carry out their trade from single-storey utility buildings. The whole site is located above the adjoining Sevenoaks Road, being on the side of Ladd Hill which is effectively screened with shrubs and trees. It is located on the Old Otford Road.

A number of proposals have been made over recent years for different forms of commercial development of this site. All have been refused for various reasons, not least the fact that such developments would be conspicuous and visually intrusive on this hillside. The Otford community and Sevenoaks planners have supported the argument against further encroachment of industrial/recreation developments into the sensitive periphery of Otford parish.

9.4 Riverside Retail Park

The retail park is a rather grandiose term for a group of three industrial-scale retail stores, together with a McDonald's and a petrol outlet for Sainsbury's. The total mass of building that these occupy is completely out of place in our rural parish in terms of its scale and height. They exist as the inexplicable 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 every local planning requirement for buildings to integrate with the surrounding area. The danger is that such developments can then, despite their inappropriate nature, be quoted by other developers as precedents for similar schemes. They demonstrate the powerful ability of big retailers and developers to ride roughshod over the sensitivities of a community and its rural surroundings. Familiarity may have made them less visually intrusive to residents who pass them every day, but they remain a blot on our landscape. As long as the community of Otford has a voice about what is sited within its parish, it will not support any further building proposals on this scale. Further opportunities to introduce tree and shrub screening, however limited, would be beneficial and help to improve the prospect.

9.5 Sainsbury's Supermarket

The recently extended Sainsbury's building is not located within the parish of Otford. The parish boundary follows the ancient Gunnilde brook (aka. Watercress Brook) which runs through the centre of its car park. However, this is a classic example of next door's extension blighting the view from one's sitting room. All users of the Otford/Sevenoaks Road are now compelled to look at this massive structure. It is a mystery why the building needs to be as high as it is, why it needs a giant logo to top its fascia, and why it uses acres of glass – all to face out into our water-meadows. The redesign reflects very poorly on a company which had gone to great lengths to sympathetically integrate the brick-built and terracotta-coloured exterior and its attractive, pitched roofs of its previous store within its rural setting. Sevenoaks, whose residents it mainly serves, are not required to look at the frontage of this 'flagship' store, as it faces away from them. Otford residents have to look at it every day, reflecting perhaps that every one of its village food retailers has closed since Sainsbury's arrived. Our community is therefore directly affected by its presence and should be consulted in any planning applications in 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. The

community's views must be taken into account since visual impact is not affected by boundary lines.

9.6 Residential homes within the area.

The small residential enclave of Vestry Cottages is the important historical heart of the original estate. 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.

It has been clearly indicated by Otford residents that this Green Belt buffer zone should at all costs not be developed, either by residential or commercial premises. Its location on the lower slopes of Ladd Hill between the Vestry estate and the motorway faces toward the village and south-bound traffic on the Otford/Sevenoaks road. Currently, as a Green Belt - protected area, it presents an attractive continuation of the local countryside before one reaches the urban sprawl of Sevenoaks. It must be protected as such, and any form of inappropriate development will be actively resisted by the Otford community, in whose parish it lies.

Design Principles

- 9a** Any proposed siting of industrial buildings within the Vestry Estate closer to the Sevenoaks Road than at present is undesirable. **Policy LO8: (SLPPC) EN6/EN7: (RESPD)_3.2**
- 9b** Any new proposal to alter or replace buildings within the Riverside Retail Park must seek to harmonise and integrate *them* with the rural surroundings. **Policy LO8: (SLPPC) EN6/EN7: (RESPD)_3.2**
- 9c** Any proposal for the development of the Bartram farm estate should minimize its visual intrusion within this agricultural, Green Belt site. **(SLPPC) EN6/EN7: (RESPD)_3.2**
- 9d** Increases in the volume of heavy vehicle traffic through Otford village should be discouraged. Thus any proposed development within this area must include an accurate prediction of traffic flow and volume increase.
- 9e** The introduction of trees between the A225 and the Estate and throughout the Estate would help soften the harshness of the industrial buildings and mirror the rural character of its surroundings. **Policy LO8: (SLPPC) EN6/EN7: (RESPD)_3.2**
- 9f** When developing or re-cladding industrial units or roofs, particularly on the margins of the estate, owners and developers should be required to use cladding and paint which will merge into the natural background. **Policy LO8: (SLPPC) EN6/EN7: (RESPD)_3.2**
- 9g** Large-scale development of land adjoining residential properties close to the Estate should be resisted by the authorities, acknowledging its location within the Green Belt. **Policy LO8: (SLPPC) EN6/EN7**

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10: AGRICULTURE AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

10.1 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.

10.2 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 will introduce many more horses into the local fields. The community however agrees that any permanent caravan or mobile home sites should not be allowed within the parish.

10.3 Natural Woodland

There are some wooded areas on the upper part of the Downs, but the main area of woodland within the Parish is contained within Oxenhill Meadow & Shaw (aka 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 a naturally regenerated woodland. It is now a prime recreational walking site. The Otford and Kemsing Parish Councils manage this area. Unfortunately vandalism within some of the area has become a recurring problem and occasional motorbiking causes destruction to the paths. Coppicing and good tree management occasionally causes alarm with some local residents who have yet to understand the concept of managed rather than wild woodland. More information would help in this regard.

10.4 An Area of Special Scientific interest.

A large part of the south-facing escarpment of the Downs, which lies on Otford's eastern perimeter, 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 of a wide variety of wild orchids native to the downland. 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.

10.5 The Darent

The river Darent is no longer that wide flow which once provided the artery for Roman grain ships to carry their cargo down to the Thames, or even the broad stream which was reputed for centuries to be one of the finest trout streams in all England, celebrated by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene*. Unfortunately the great increase in numbers of homes along the Thames Corridor, the proximity of the London urban sprawl and the demands of modern farming have all led to abstraction of this high-quality water, to an extent where the river today can only survive as a shallow stream. In the drought of 1980 a combination of low rainfall and uncontrolled abstraction ran the Darent entirely dry for long stretches. It was a national disgrace and must never be allowed to happen again. Fortunately and for that reason its flow is now carefully monitored by the River Authority of the Environment Agency.

The Darent has a 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 throughout its course, 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 stream and the river itself. A local voluntary group (DRIPS) maintains much of its course, and angling societies help to maintain long stretches from excessive overgrowth or blockage. Any resident seeing the stream being misused in any way should report this to the parish office, so that appropriate action can be taken.

10.6 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

- 10a** The continuance of farming should be actively encouraged within the parish. *(SP11)*
- 10b** Traditional hedgerows need to be protected and maintained as a key feature and an important animal habitat within the rural landscape. *(SP11)*
- 10c** 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. *(SP11)*
- 10d** Any new agricultural buildings should be so designed and placed as to minimise their visual impact. *(SP11)*

- 10e** Areas of special importance for the survival of animal or plant species should be afforded protection. *(SP11)*
- 10f** The banks of the Darent should be kept clear of excessive overgrowth and the flow clear of obstructions. *(SP11)*
- 10g** Maintenance of Oxenhill Woods should be fully supported by the Authorities as an important area of local woodland. *(SP11)*
- 10h** Information boards should be introduced and maintained at suitable sites so that visitors can appreciate the importance and special interest of the area. *(Local Plan objective iii)CAAMP.12.5)*
- 10i** Applications for caravan or mobile home sites should be resisted within the parish *(H16)*
- 10j** Applications for pursuits which could cause damage to the countryside (Rallycross/motorcross/mountain biking etc) should be resisted. *(SP11)*

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

SLPPC = Saved Local Plan Policies Compendium.