PLAXTOL PARISH

Design

STATEMENT

Introduction

This document which has been developed, researched and written by local people:

- describes the visual character of the Parish;
- shows how local character and distinctiveness can be protected in new development;
- is compatible with Statutory planning systems;
- is intended as supplementary planning guidance;
- applies to all types and sizes of developments and emphasises the need to manage change.

The Committee has involved a wide section of the Parish community in the consultation process to establish a fair and balanced view. A flowchart on page 5 describes the consultation process.

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HOW TO USE *this Guide*

GUIDANCE TO DESIGNERS AND DEVELOPERS

The document:

- describes the visual qualities and character of the Parish as an inspiration for design;
- portrays the character of the Parish as perceived by local people;
- can shorten the process of planning negotiation and application by reducing conflict;
- encourages parishioners to take a positive view of developments.

GUIDE TO PLANNERS

The document:

- represents the view of the community;
- makes a positive contribution to the development debate;
- addresses Parish character and is a basis for a structured and flexible approach to the preservation and enhancement of those characteristics;
- can be used as a guidance in design and development briefing, complementing the existing planning and development control system.

GUIDE TO LOCAL PEOPLE

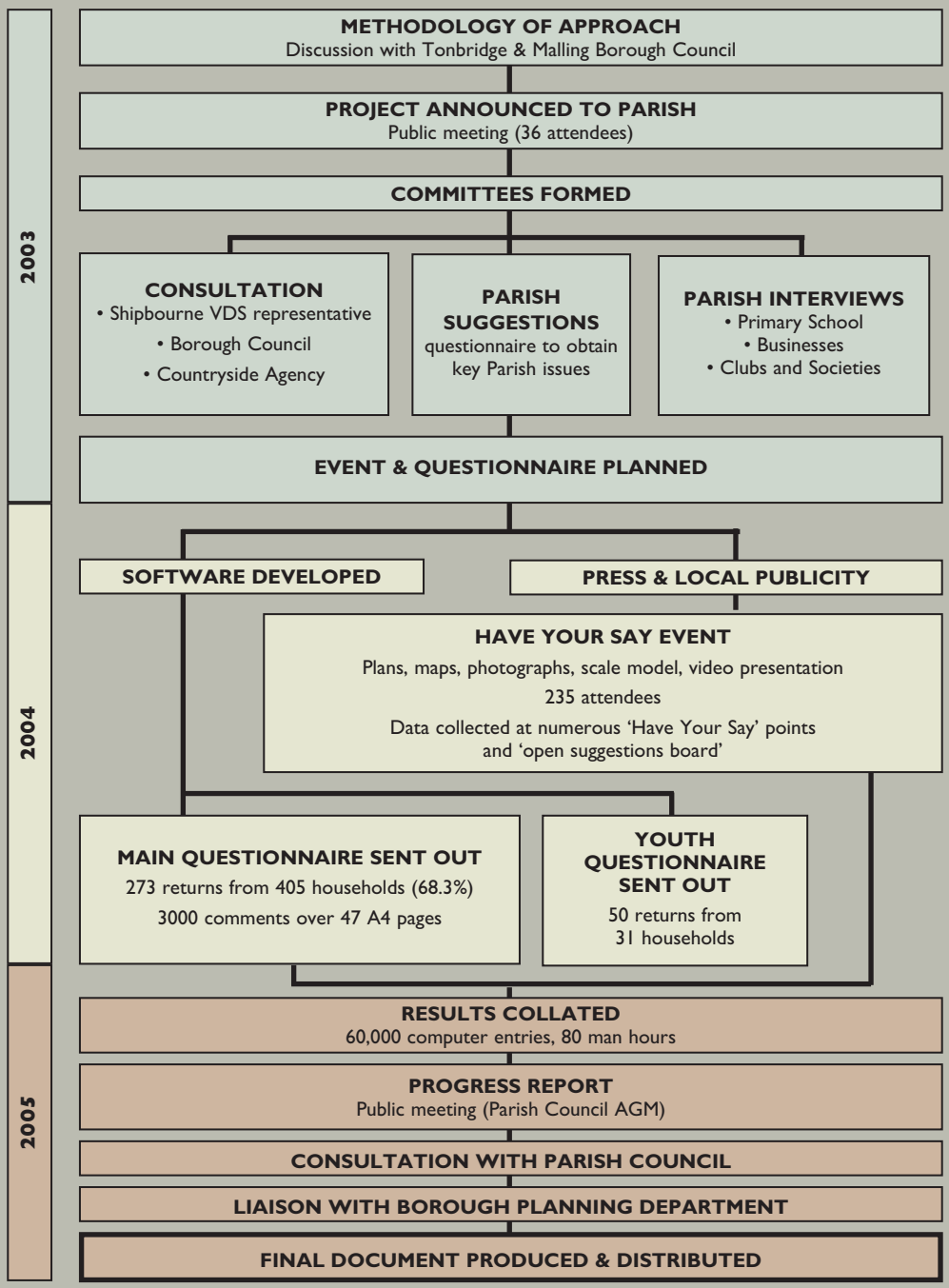
As the document is a representative view of local people it supports and strengthens the role of the Parish Council when consulted over planning applications. Thus it gives the community a recognised voice to respond in an informed and professional manner in the planning processes that affect the visual quality so that it will encourage local distinctive design.

Additionally the document:

- demonstrates local commitment to appropriate development that will improve the quality of life in the Parish;
- contributes to securing a thriving and viable future for the Parish;
- enables local priorities to be considered in the development process.

CONSULTATION *Process*

Wide ranging consultation has been a key factor in the compilation and production of this document which reflects the views of the community.



Geology

'Plaxtoole lyeth towards the middle of the county, about three miles (towards the south west) distant from Wrotham, in the Bailiwick of Hoo, Hundred of Wrotham, Lath of Aylesford, West Division of the County and South Division of Justice of the Lath. The liberty of Wrotham claimeth over the same.'

(A Topographie or Survey of the County of Kent, printed in 1659).

The village lies about eight miles south east of Sevenoaks and four miles north of Tonbridge in the county of Kent. Sited on the side of the Lower Greensand Ridge, the upper part of the village is built on Hythe Beds consisting of layers of limestone, known as Kentish Rag, alternating with layers of 'hassock', a loamy sand. This contrasts with the lower part of the village where the geology changes to Atherfield Clay, which introduces a spring line and, nearer the river Bourne, changes to Wealden Clay.

The Greensand Ridge is split by the broad valley of the river Bourne, a tributary of the Medway and it was the action of such rivers which helped to wear away the various strata of the Weald.

It is thought that at one time the whole of the Weald was covered with a dome of chalk: the erosion has exposed the Wealden clays from which this chalk and the upper and lower greensands have been worn away, leaving escarpments of rock to the North and South. Over the rest of the area only the chalk has been eroded, exposing the lower greensand and the two great chalk escarpments of the North and South Downs.

It is on this bond of greensand between the Weald and Downs that the village of Plaxtol was built.

Sedgebrook Roman Villa
Brook Lane, Plaxtol. Archeological dig 1986-89

Old maps: 1936 (top right) *& 2005* (right)
show how the village has evolved over the past decades

Grange Hill
Plaxtol Church
The Street

Grange Hill
Plaxtol Church
The Street

THE *Character* OF PLAXTOL

The setting of Plaxtol is picturesque and unique, being surrounded by some of the finest scenery the Garden of England can offer. Plaxtol is one of the few villages in Kent that has not been severely affected by a main road running through its centre and this is a major factor in the Parish retaining its air of peace and tranquillity.

Situated in the Bourne Valley, the Parish has a long history of industry such as papermaking and tanning which brought great wealth to the area, hence the proliferation of fine old properties which add much to the character of the area. Generally, settlements have grown around the estate houses, farms and mills.

The village is remote from other large settlements and main roads, the nearest being the A227 Gravesend to Tonbridge road, which is hidden by the hills to the west.

Plaxtol village has a linear character with distinct areas. Apart from the post war development at St Hildas, most of the development has taken place within the village enclosure, which has had the effect of increasing the density within these confines. As the confines are not destined to change there will be continuing pressure to allow more sub-division of individual plots for redevelopment.

Ashenden

The approach from the A227 towards the church is representative of much of the style of Plaxtol. On one side is a faced and capped ragstone wall behind which stands the imposing Fairlawne House and grounds. Opposite is sloping pasture land and mature trees enclosed by metal parkland railings. Continue on and the road narrows between the ragstone walls of Old Grainger's and the white weather-boarded terrace of Church Row, a classic example of the cottages which we associate with our village. At the junction of Tree Lane, the Church, War Memorial and surrounding properties, in conjunction with the magnificent horse chestnut trees, combine to set the character of the western end of Plaxtol. Without the chestnut trees there is mainly hard landscaping of walls and railings.

The top of the village has a greater density of buildings and a sense of enclosure, with dwellings close to the highway with minimal boundary treatment. At this end of the village the pattern of development is irregular with terraces and groups of smaller dwellings built off the main street. The houses are grouped in clusters combining many styles and scale of dwellings of which some are conversions of commercial buildings such as public houses, shops and the forge.

Yew Tree House (left)
Church Row (top right)
Bank Cottages (bottom right)

Between Plaxtol Stores and The Papermakers Arms there is a change in the mix of styles with dwellings set back from The Street with walls and hedges forming a screen whilst terraced cottages sit close to the road boundary.

The Street changes once again after The Papermakers Arms and there is a greater feeling of space and openness with mainly detached properties screened from the lane by tall hedging. Gaps between the properties and hedges allow glimpses of the Bourne Valley. Plaxtol Spoute marks the eastern end of The Street. A mixture of new and old properties cluster around the small triangular green and the 15th century timber framed Spoute House forms an historical backdrop.

Outside the village, the Parish of Plaxtol has a collection of small hamlets and groups of houses, some of which are within designated Conservation Areas. Each has its own style but all follow a similar pattern of a small collection of dwellings grouped around a farm or mill.

Historically, agriculture and local industry had a considerable influence on the style, size and design of dwellings now seen in the Parish. Oast houses and barns that have been converted into dwellings are a familiar sight.

Haslemere Cottages (left)
Appleyard Farm (below)

Bartons Farm (above)
Spoute House (below)
Bartons Cottages (right)
Crouchers Cottage (bottom right)

Building MATERIALS

In the past the use of locally sourced materials has contributed considerably to the character of the Parish. The combination of these 'vernacular'* materials as seen today has evolved over time and fine examples associated with the Parish are ragstone, red multi-stock bricks, clay 'plain' tiles, oak timber frames and feather-edge boarding.

Ragstone

Ragstone is a hard brittle stone which was once quarried locally and has been used widely in the construction of boundary walls and buildings. A commonly seen detail in ragstone walls is 'galleting' (middle left) where small chips of ragstone are used to fill the mortar joints between the stones to provide better weathering. Various bonds have been used in constructing walls.

Red Multi-Stock Bricks

Red multi-stock bricks have been used extensively in the construction of both external and internal walls as well as to add a new wing or clad or re-clad existing timber framed buildings.

Bricks from locally sourced clay have mellow russet tones. The older houses use a solid wall bond such as English bond, Flemish bond or Rat Trap bond.

**__Vernacular:__ The traditional architecture of an area, used typically for houses, cottages and farm buildings and constructed of the locally available materials. Vernacular architecture was prevalent until the coming of the railways in the mid 19th century made the importing of building materials from outside the local area an economic proposition.*