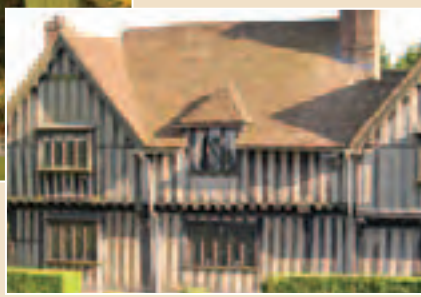
Clay 'Plain' Tiles

Traditionally clay plain roof tiles have been used in the Parish for centuries. The oldest tiles were hand-made and fixed with wooden pegs. More recently, both hand-made clay tiles (visually similar to Kent peg tiles) and sand-faced machine-made clay tiles have been used and are in evidence within the Parish. Clay 'plain' tiles require a minimum roof pitch of 40 degrees. Coloured concrete 'plain' tiles have also been used but the colour starts to fade after 20 years.

Clay tiles used as vertical cladding to the upper part of walls are a characteristic of Parish buildings. Shaped tiles are often used to create a feature band course. Hand-made clay tiles have more colour variation and irregularities than machine-made tiles, which is why their appearance looks much more vibrant and textured due to the shadow lines.

Plaster or Painted Masonry

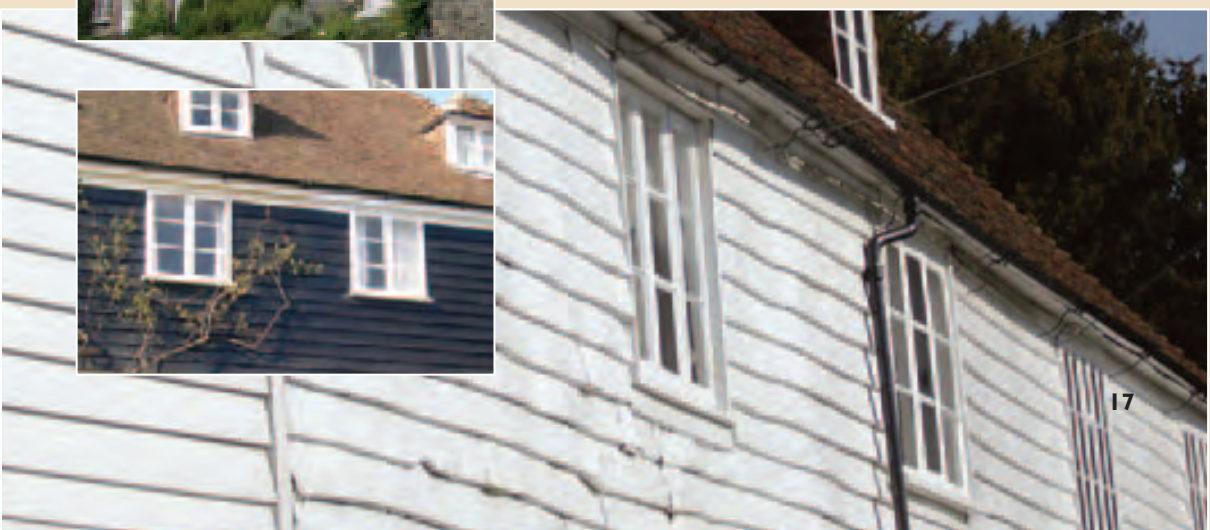


Oak Timber Frame

Oak frame is probably the oldest form of house construction in the Parish and notable examples include Jordans (above) and Nut Tree Hall (right), both of which are listed buildings. Houses in this style have a very steep pitched roof of about 50 degrees which enabled the old thatch to work. Various methods of infilling between the oak frame were used, including wattle and daub (plaster), hung tiles or feather-edge boarding and, latterly, brick (nogging).

Feather-Edge Boarding

Both black and white painted feather-edge boarding have been used as external cladding on many old rural buildings including agricultural conversions and houses. Church Row (left) is a good example.



Plaxtol Church

Fairlawne House

Basted

Claygate Cross

Bewley Bar

Yopps Green

Plaxtol

Dunk's Green

PLAXTOL *Parish*

Clakkers Hall

Grey Ladies' Oast

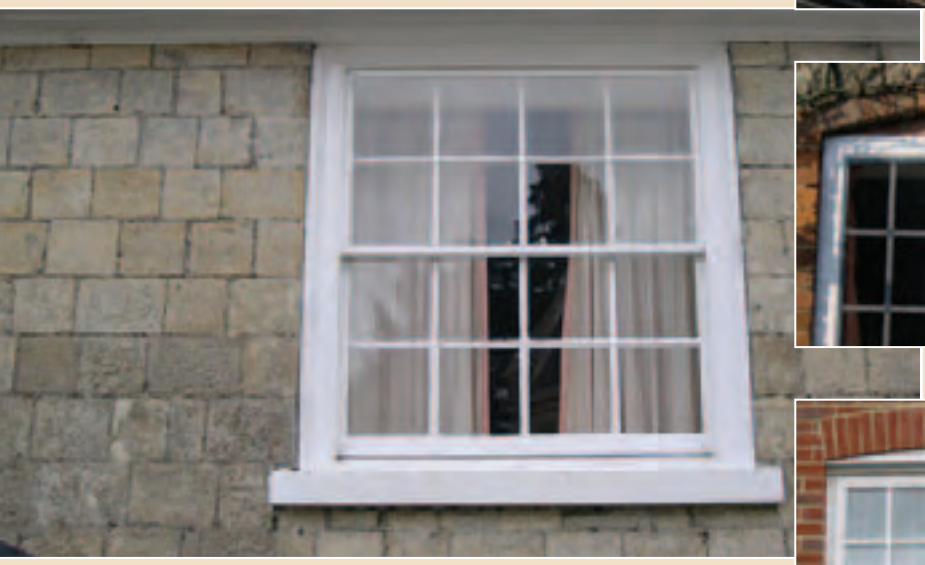
Old Soar

Rats Castle

Crouch

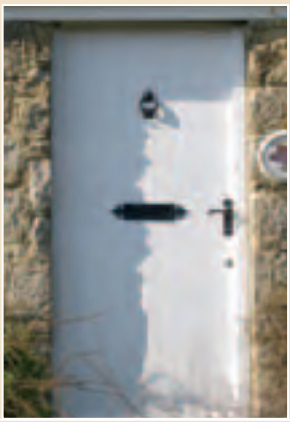
Roughway

BUILDING *Features*



Prime examples of windows, chimneys and doors.

Tree Cottage



GATES *& Boundaries*

The traditional way to mark boundaries in Plaxtol is, predominately, with ragstone walls or hedges. The responses from both the main questionnaire and the village event of July 2004 showed overwhelming support for a continuation of this style of boundary.

Conversely, high close boarded gates and fences are not considered suitable for a traditional, rural environment. Where close boarded fences are needed for security or privacy, they should be screened and visually softened by hedging. When planting or replacing hedges, native species (hazel, blackthorn, field maple, holly, hawthorn, spindle) should be used, rather than conifers or cultivars (ie garden shrubs) especially where a section of native hedgerow is being replanted.

The increased volume of vehicles has had a big impact on villages. Many older houses - often sited close to the road boundary - were not designed with cars in mind and as a consequence have no provision for off road parking. The parking of cars can dictate the layout of front gardens and drives unless carefully designed to conceal parking areas. If possible off road parking should be hidden from view.

The impact on the street scene can be limited by the selection of the most appropriate drive materials that blend with the local situation. The consultation process showed that gravel is the material most favoured for surfacing drives, followed by block pavior with the least popular being concrete.

Highways

Traffic Control: Despite the concerns over safety on our narrow lanes and village streets, a proliferation of urban signs and road markings is not compatible with Conservation Areas and groups of period buildings.

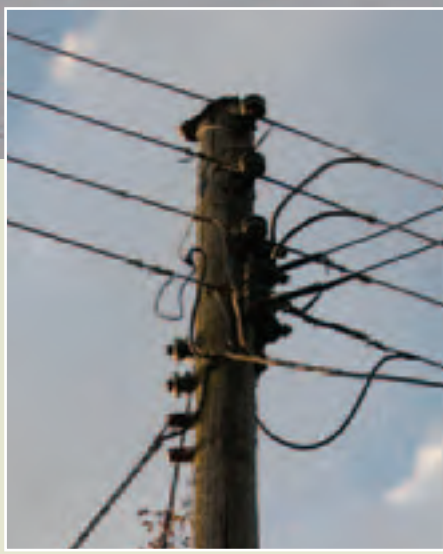
Fortunately, the current thinking is that removing signs and markings has a positive effect on road safety. By making roads and junctions look more hazardous and uncertain, the driver is made to slow down and concentrate more. This could be good news for environmentally sensitive areas such as Plaxtol. However, some traffic signs are necessary and they need to be positioned sensitively and be reasonably sized.

During the consultation process a huge proportion of parishioners were concerned about traffic speed. Vehicles parked in the village create a traffic calming effect, causing traffic to slow down, although there are areas where the narrowing of roads causes more danger to pedestrians. The use of yellow lines in the Conservation Area would require very careful consideration and would be sure to cause a great deal of consternation in the village. Possibly a reduction of parking in these danger spots could be achieved by other means.

Traffic Speed: The network of 'Quiet Lanes' around the Parish is at present indicated by fairly unobtrusive signs mounted on oak posts. Although these signs suit their rural locations, many motorists seem either not to see or just ignore them. However, hard, urban type engineering or large obtrusive signs to slow down traffic would spoil the very beauty that people have come here to enjoy. Some other methods may need to be investigated.

Despite the build up of local traffic, the residents of this rural village expect motorists will drive with common sense and consideration for their neighbours and surroundings, thereby negating the need for undesirable calming measures.

Bridges: There are seven road bridges in the Parish. Any future repair or replacement should be in the existing style or local vernacular and remain low profile in keeping with the scale of the highway – often rural lanes. Any safety railings should be in a neutral colour scheme.



Overhead Cables: Parts of the village are strung with a "cats cradle" of overhead power and telephone lines that do little to enhance the surroundings. Although it is realised that overhead supply is inevitable in rural areas, there should be a concerted effort to place it underground in the built up parts of the Parish.

Lanes: Generally the lanes throughout the Parish are well surfaced and are maintained in good order. There are, though, areas where water run off from the land causes problems and overgrown hedges reduce the useable width of the carriageway. Branches and brambles protruding from hedges and boundaries pose particular dangers to pedestrians, cyclists and riders, who may move suddenly into the path of a passing vehicle in an effort to dodge the obstruction. Although some may cite the decrease in farm incomes as a reason, landowners need to be encouraged to properly maintain their hedges and ditches.

The ever increasing size, speed, and quantity of traffic means that the verges and banks of our lanes suffer ever more damage. There is a dilemma in trying to solve this problem. Kerb stones are unsuitable for rural areas, stones and rocks can cause damage to vehicles and wooden posts can create a look of suburbia.

The appearance of our verges created a number of comments throughout the consultation process. Some preferred to see them mown and tidy whilst the majority thought it preferable that, subject to safety and good visibility, they should be left to grow and the wild flowers allowed to set seed.

Litter: This is seen by parishioners as a huge irritant. There is also concern that a few irresponsible dog owners do not clean up after their pets, despite it being an offence not to do so in much of the Parish.

Signage: The use of traditional designs is to be preferred for direction and footpath signs, particularly in Conservation Areas, whilst commercial signage should be carefully thought out, controlled and uncluttered.

Street Furniture: Litter and grit bins should be well designed and sited, and the retention of the few traditional phone and post boxes that are left should be encouraged.

Street Lighting: The majority of parishioners think that the present lighting is adequate for a rural village and that it should not be further increased.

Environment - INTRODUCTION

In our survey Plaxtol was described as 'a typical Kent village in an idyllic setting' and 'the views of the surrounding countryside are some of the most superb in the South East'. To residents, the surrounding countryside is possibly the aspect they love most about living in Plaxtol.

The surrounding landscape, comprising orchards, meadows and fields is a treasured asset fundamental to the enjoyment of residents and visitors. A great many of the historically grown crops still exist. Top fruit (mainly apples, plums and pears) and cobnuts (with their ever diminishing rare plats), are mixed with arable (cereal, cow beans, and oil seed rape), soft fruit (strawberries and raspberries) and grazing. Pheasant game management has an impact on shaping the landscape in the Parish.

The network of sunken lanes, bridleways and footpaths makes the Parish particularly popular with ramblers and riders, who come from miles around to enjoy the far reaching views from the well-marked public rights of way.

The beauty of the area is in many forms. The walk through the Lime Tree Avenue in Fairlawne Park - where sheep graze - is quiet and pastoral and is in contrast with the many coppiced woods and hedgerows that provide a thriving habitat for wildlife. There are numerous panoramic views in the area: notable examples are across the Bourne Valley from the village, Yopps Green and the Hurst.

There are many fine buildings throughout the Parish and over sixty of them are 'Listed'.

The river Bourne rises in the chalk of the North Downs and flows into the Medway. Historically, by providing a good flow of water, the river brought a great deal of industry to the area, including tanning, milling and papermaking. With the decline of industry, the Bourne is a much quieter place and the footpaths along its banks provide residents and visitors with pleasant walks.

A balanced policy must be continued in relation to any proposed new buildings in the vicinity of the identified flood plains as flooding is becoming an increasing environmental problem.

The Parish hedgerows, verges and uncultivated river margins provide excellent diverse habitats for a wide variety of small mammals, reptiles, birds and insects.

Environment - AMENITY SPACES

Whilst the established properties and gardens harmonize with the countryside and environment, the tranquillity of the Parish is enhanced for residents by the wide diversity in the open spaces and amenities available.

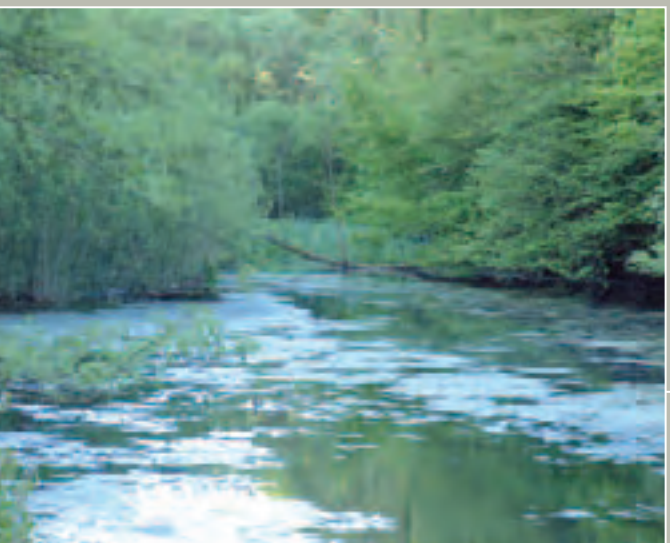
In addition to the large network of footpaths and tracks, with their stunning views across the valley, there are the wide open spaces of **Fairlawne Park** as well as the more formal areas.

The Recreation Grounds - one in the centre of the village and the other near 'The Spoute' - provide facilities and activities for local children and visitors. The latter, bordering the river Bourne, also hosts special village events.

In contrast, the **Garrett Memorial Land** – a gift to the village – is a one-acre amenity area situated between The Street and Long Mill Lane. This is planted with rare varieties of apples and pears, as well as the well known locally-bred 'Golding' hop. The area provides an attractive place for picnics and school visits owing to an abundance of fauna, flora and insect life.

The Spoute and **Yopps Green** are fine examples of established greens that retain the village type atmosphere within close proximity to the centre of the village.

Further evidence of diversity is the **Basted Mill Public Open Space** which is an example of involvement of the community in preserving local countryside. Created in 1999, this land surrounds the new Basted Village and is situated at the junction of the areas governed by three Parish Councils namely Plaxtol, Platt and Borough Green. The area consists of a mill pond, woodland and meadows. There are marked walks and the area which was the former cricket ground is mown and eminently suitable for picnics.



Basted Pond (left)
Yopps Green (top right)
School Lane Recreation Ground
(bottom right)

Environment - SPECIAL INTEREST

Protected areas are a feature of the Parish. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 affords protection to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI's), which are designated by English Nature. Local Authorities are required to give full consideration to nature conservation when drawing up policies for inclusion in development plans prepared under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, and when determining individual planning applications. Plaxtol has one SSSI, known as **Bourne Alder Carr**, which follows the course of the Bourne from Basted to just south of Bourne Farm.

Within the Parish there are also several Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI's), which have been identified by the Kent Wildlife Trust. **Bourne Valley Woods SNCI** follows the Bourne and its small tributaries from the end of the SSSI, south of Bourne Farm, to the edge of the village behind Shrubshall Meadow.

Boot Wood SNCI lies at the bottom of Sheet Hill and **Mereworth Woods SNCI** (including Hurst Wood), is an Ancient Woodland and at over 900ha. is the second largest area of woodland in Kent after Blean Woods.

Beside Roughway Lane, there is a **Roadside Nature Reserve** which was also identified by Kent Wildlife Trust, because of the diversity of its plants and wild flowers.

Fly tipping and Litter: Pressures on the Parish environment arise from a number of sources. The more visible threats are in the guise of unwanted litter and fly tipping. This has been exacerbated by the high landfill taxes and the abandonment of old motor vehicles.

Light Pollution: A more subtle pressure is that the South East suffers from a high degree of light pollution. The increased use of security lights is a contributory factor and street lighting in surrounding areas, whilst heavily restricted in the village, also adds to the problem. A sensible approach is needed to restrict unnecessary lighting and to conserve power. The use of time clocks and PIR sensors can help in achieving this. Any external lighting scheme should, in any event be the minimum required commensurate with security and working purposes and where installed on the edge of settlements, landscaping should be considered to screen the installation from view.

Telecommunications: There is a likelihood of more requests in the Parish for the construction and proliferation of telecommunications masts which will add to the current unsightliness of overhead cables. The situation currently, is that the Parish Council and residents cooperate and consult with the companies involved, so that any future masts are well away from populated or much used areas and any requests for mast sharing need to be considered on merit.

ROADSIDE
NATURE
RESERVE

PRINCIPLES, GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

1. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE

The consultative process described within this document has been exhaustive and has established that the existing local character and distinctiveness of the Parish is paramount when considering future Planning applications.

2. NEW AND REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS

a) Requirements in relation to housing density are a matter of Government Policy. As a result, new housing sites and replacement building sites are generally developed at higher densities. Due to the restrictions of village confines, Conservation policy and Green Belt policy (PPG 2), there is mounting pressure for increasing the density within Plaxtol village and replacing dwellings outside the confines but within the Parish.

It is therefore essential to focus on those areas that allow change whilst retaining the overall local style and character. These points include:

i) the building line, scale and massing of the dwelling should take into consideration the lie and level of the ground, the positioning within the plot, landscaping, including boundaries, and trees should be preserved to retain the character;

ii) in the case of infill housing, new proposals should be supported by 'street scape' plans or photo montage to demonstrate how the new properties would relate to surrounding buildings in terms of height and scale;

iii) a major challenge for the Developer is to design buildings with similar and existing qualities whilst also accommodating the car but avoiding the frontage being dominated by car parking.

b) When considering future development proposals, it is most important to bear in mind that within all villages, the style and design of properties have changed and evolved with a number of individual dwellings not contributing to the character of the village. It is considered that in appropriate cases high quality, innovative and contemporary designs utilizing local materials and detailing may be acceptable.

All designs would address features such as:

roof pitches	front doors and porches	style of windows
eaves details	height of walls	brick detailing and bonds

c) There is a presumption in favour of the preservation of Listed Buildings which are protected under legislation. Whilst the character, design and materials in such buildings may be considered as a reference point it is not intended that all new constructions should replicate such buildings.

d) New residential development should address the need for low cost housing in line with Government and Council policy and a wider range of accommodation including smaller dwellings is encouraged in the interests of retaining a balanced community.

3. EXTENSIONS & ALTERATIONS

a) Extensions and some alterations to existing dwellings require planning permission and during this planning process the fundamental requirements on design and style of the proposal can be considered.

b) Extensions should not detract from the original design of the property and not dominate unless the alterations/extension are believed to be an improvement of the original.

c) Generally, extensions should be recessed behind the front elevation of the host property and be positioned to avoid masking historic elevations of older buildings.

The extension should reflect the style, proportions and character of the existing building with similar roofs (including pitches), windows and materials.

d) Glazing patterns should be followed and any double glazing installed should be sympathetic with the main building.

e) Materials could be contrasting provided they are selected from the range portrayed in this publication. Detailing on the existing house should be used as a point of reference.

f) Outside decoration may need to be addressed and considered particularly in the case of a Listed building.

g) There is a presumption against the demolition of period buildings unless there are strong architectural arguments.

4. PERMITTED DEVELOPMENT

a) Some dwellings have permitted development rights which allow, within limits, small-scale extensions and work without the need for planning permission.

b) As there are many variations in this area of development, advice should be obtained from the Planning Authority to see if permission is needed. Thus it is important that residents who use permitted development rights respect the style and design of their existing dwelling and any alteration reflects the local character.

c) If a resident is in doubt about the need for Planning permission or the nature of design, contact should be made with the Borough Planners.

5. PROCEDURES RELATING TO PLANNING

a) Future applications for Planning permission should include a Design Statement that sets out the specific design features/characteristics of the development proposal and how the proposal has addressed the guidelines and good practice described in this document.

b) Planners, designers and developers should be encouraged to present their plans to both Parish and Borough Councils as early as possibles and to become involved in discussions on how best to implement proposals.

c) The community expects parties involved in the development and planning processes to pay due regard to the contents of this Statement and that Designs and Plans, when submitted, should respect content and character. Such parties should be familiar with the terminology and express terms of the Kent Design 'A Guide to Sustainable Development' which also provides a check list for site appraisal.

The numerous photographs and drawings in this publication address and emphasize the principles and guidelines of design, detailing, materials and other relevant matters.

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University of Gloucester Countryside & Community Research Unit

'Have Your Say' Event - *July 2004* (pictured right)

Questionnaire Results *(available on Website:* www.plaxtol.com*)*

Acknowledgments

The Chairman of the Plaxtol Design Statement thanks all Committee Members, individually and collectively, for their participation, contribution and effort in the production of this document. The Project involved over two years work and the Parish is fortunate that Members – all volunteers – were able to provide the broad skill base, commitment and purpose needed for a successful conclusion.

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