

## **Well-Being, Water and Wildlife (tbc)** *Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan Design Statement.*

### **What is a design statement?**

*Design statements provide a context for new development, based on local character and sense of place. They are intended to help manage change, at whatever scale it occurs. They are not about whether development should take place; that is a job for the local plan. They are about how planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the local community and environment (Countryside Commission 2012).*

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Following consultation and gathering of evidence to support the development of the Barcombe Neighbourhood plan this document identifies the key themes listed below. These themes support the formation of a consistent and coherent narrative thread that will guide design philosophy and development principles for the village. They provide a clear baseline assessment and analysis of current conditions. Together with corresponding design guidelines they will help to ensure new development in the village is sufficiently characterful and characteristically 'of Barcombe'. They should also be consistent with the overarching village vision statement for the neighbourhood plan:

### **Draft: Village Vision Statement (version March 2017).**

Barcombe Parish in 2030 will have retained and enhanced its character to support a flourishing, vibrant and sustainable village. The Neighbourhood Plan will have improved the balance of residential accommodation to better fit local needs, by providing housing suitable for smaller families, young people wishing to live independently and older people wanting to downsize and remain in the community. Any new development should therefore support Barcombe as a thriving community of modest scale, in harmony with its rural surroundings. Residential development in the parish over the period will be focused at Barcombe Cross. New building will be of a scale and appearance that is sympathetic to the established village character, but in a way that is authentic and relevant to its contemporary context, rather than superficially historic, imitation or pastiche. The style of architecture should be of its time and should celebrate and exemplify the use of local, sustainable materials and significant vernacular building crafts.

## **Guiding themes**

### **A vibrant community**

Barcombe is seen as a desirable place to live. It has a mixed constituency, with villagers who have family ties going back generations living alongside more recently settled members of the community. Time spent living in the village averages in decades. Barcombe has an identifiable community spirit. Over a third of polled village participants commented on the need to retain a 'village feel' and that any significant development should recognise this. (Barcombe Housing Survey 2015). The survey also suggested that there is strong residents' support for development at a level appropriate to sustaining the community and its services - providing new opportunities for affordable housing without diminishing village character or contributing to 'creeping urbanisation'. The size, spatial structure and pattern of the settlement, as well as the density and mixture of housing provision, plays a vital role in fostering social cohesion and community spirit.

### **A rural hilltop village**

This design statement will focus on Barcombe Cross, having been identified as requiring housing development by the Lewes District Plan 2017. It is clearly identifiable as a nucleated hilltop village, with all three roads leading distinctively uphill into its centre and High Street. There are far-reaching views on all sides of the village over the unspoilt countryside of the Low Weald and its characteristic 'big skies' (ESCC Landscape character assessment, 2015). The South Downs form a dramatic backdrop to views from the south side of the village. (Pictures and map of key inward/outward views) Barcombe Cross is part of a matrix of small Low Weald rural settlements that give a strong sense of historic landscape. The village can be seen, discretely emerging from surrounding trees, from several local vantage points, including the expansive views across the Ouse valley from Lewes and the South Downs. Any future plans should consider the visual impact of housing development upon these key views.

### **Soft transitions**

Barcombe Cross has a distinct centre, with well-used services and social hubs that interrelate and are situated in a way that currently enable supportive relationships between people. Whilst the village experiences increased traffic at peak times through its main arteries, the current arrangement of narrow roads, on-street parking, residential cul-de-sacs and pavements, slows traffic to a relatively safe speed. A network of back alleys, footpaths and pavements allow pedestrians multiple safe, quick routes to services, public spaces and to visit their neighbours. 'Soft edges' (Jan Gehl, 2010) - small semi-private front gardens along residential roads - allow for increased social interactions and a feeling of safety. This is seen as contributing to the overall well-being of the village and is valuable in ensuring social cohesion. (Pictures)

### **Network of social hubs**

There are many hidden social spaces in Barcombe, as well as the more conventional semi-private spaces of the shop and post office, pub, primary school, day nursery, churches, cricket pavilion and village hall. Public open spaces include the much-loved recreation ground, tennis courts, bowling green and allotments – all of which play host to and are well-cared for by very active clubs, societies and community groups. The playground on the rec is small but well used by younger children, although LDC figures and village survey results reveal a shortfall in equipped play space. Meanwhile, the more informal public spaces of ‘Wild About Barcombe’, the bike jumps, and the lower field all provide space for un-organised recreation for older children. Similarly, the network of tree lined footpaths, stream beds, quiet dead end lanes and even the smallest roadside benches and bus stops prove vital to rural children and young people as places to meet, play out and socialise unsupervised. Finally, seating at the front of the Royal Oak pub, and the adjacent area where the weekly visits from specialist catering outlets, the bench outside the village shop, the steps of the cricket pavilion and the school gate all become key focal points for the social life of all ages and the whole village in fine weather.

### **Dark night skies & tranquility**

A lack of street lighting is notable in Barcombe and is identified as having low levels of light pollution and subsequent dark skies (ref; 0.25-0.5 nanowatts per cm sq/sr in England’s Dark Skies / CPRE). This is distinctive in comparison to many villages nearby. It also supports the village’s ‘rural’ character and provides enabling habitats for nocturnal wildlife within the village boundary. Data suggests that Barcombe is also a village of relatively high tranquillity – a characteristic defined by *“openesss to the landscape, perceived naturalness, lack of noise and disturbance, and presence of features such as rivers or views”* as opposed to detracting factors such as *“the visibility of urban developments and roads, noise and light pollution, and other overt signs of human impact”* (State of the South Downs National Park, 2012).

### **Old and new**

The oldest dwellings in Barcombe Cross are Mongers Farm House at 1420 and the Old Forge at I think 1450, in comparison to the older, nearby ‘Barcombe’ settlement where the oldest section of the parish church dates as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. Historically, building design in Barcombe Cross is of mixed character and vernacular (ref landscape assessment) with 47 listed buildings in the civil parish, as well as houses indented as of local and historical interest (LDC-Barcombe Cross and Barcombe Conservation Areas), post-war developments, and modern buildings are well represented. The new village hall is identified in The Buildings of England (Antram Pevsner 2012) as *“a building of good contemporary design...with sustainability important in its design”*, it has won critical acclaim and presents Barcombe as having a progressive attitude towards community building(s). This is situated alongside more historic areas of conservation status that provide visual amenity and reference characteristic Sussex building styles and materials. Area of archaeological priority? – see local plan.

### **Mixed media**

The vernacular of the village and its material, visual language is mixed. This ranges from red bricks, tiles and timber of the Weald to the Downland flints and sandstones of Spithurst and Newick. The high street has many historic types of cladding materials including bricks, tile-hanging, painted timber boarding, painted corrugated iron and render. This rich diversity of ground floor exterior detailing, with appealing textures, forms and materials, enhances the feeling of being part of an organic settlement that has grown with the narratives of its residents. The post-war buildings tend to be brick and tile-hung and are largely unseen from the high street, constructed in purpose-built cul-de-sacs.

### **Sustainable services**

Services such as the village shop, public house, school and bus provision face on-going threats and challenges. These amenities remain critical to the lifeblood and well-being of the village community and are highly valued in supporting social cohesion. The village community showed how much it values these amenities by collectively raising in excess of £385,000 in summer 2017 from local residents to purchase the village shop and post office. A board of directors has been appointed from the local residents, and a local village couple put themselves forward and have been retained to run the shop and post office. The village fund raised for Wild About Barcombe (circa £100,000) and the **new village hall**. The village has embraced and supports local care home Bevenview for young people with significant and complex needs and has considered these needs in many new developments and initiatives. The village has a retained fire station, which needs continued resource of young people to replace those who retire.

### **Natural boundaries**

Barcombe Cross is encircled by sites of significant ecological value and natural capital. (ref). There are natural boundaries and gateways to the village - disused railway lines, woodland corridors and water systems, which are characteristic and identifiable features of the village. Ephemeral springs rise in the village and feed tributaries of the Bevern stream and subsequently the Ouse. Woodland screens at 'Sidehills', the old Lewes-Sheffield Park railway line, Barcombe Place designated area of conservation woodland, riverside trees at Clappers Bridge and several preservation order status trees provide wildlife habitats, important ecological corridors and visual amenity at the village edge. *"An abundance of trees, woods and hedges reinforce local experiences of remoteness and tranquillity"* across the surrounding landscape (ESCC Landscape character assessment, 2015).

### **Green & blue infrastructure**

The density of development in Barcombe Cross has reduced green space within the village boundary (with exceptions) and the community has funded provision of Wild About Barcombe and The New Village Hall, which have sought to provide environments of value to both people and wildlife. Nature conservation areas and

nearby managed woodland identifiable in the village provide valued feature creating natural or semi-natural networks of green and blue (water) corridors that maintain and enhance ecosystem services (EU report / Naumann et al, 2011). This concurs with established research identifying the inter-connected social, health and well-being, economical and environmental benefit to communities afforded by the provision and integration of green and blue infrastructure. Rivers, streams, ponds, ditches and springs provide key landscape and identity characteristics of Barcombe and greatly benefits the community and visitors to the village, even whilst occasionally imposing risk at times of excessive rain and flooding.

### **'Eco-logical'**

The 2009 Barcombe Action Plan clearly identified sustainability issues as being of significant concern and this has manifested in a range of initiatives and developments that have sought to address composite issues, including: affordable housing, an eco-focused village hall, Wild About Barcombe and Barcombe Community Energy Plan and Group. Whilst these kinds of interventions have not always been systematic or part of an overall governing strategy, they demonstrate a local appetite for a pragmatic and logical approach to supporting the needs of people through the use of principles of efficiency and sustainability.

### **Progressive**

Local identity should be as important today as it was in the past (Countryside Commission, Village Design Statements 2012).

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*“Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who are...behind the curtain, landmarks are no longer only geographic but also biographical and personal.” (Berger, 1967)*

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### **Issues**

- Flooding and the management of water is of concern; beyond routine, notable and sometimes significant flooding events at Barcombe Mills, water courses across the village suffer from localised flooding and run off issues.
- Peak oil and reliance on non-renewables
- Diminishing green and social space and deficit of equipped play.

- Traffic – increase in by-passing traffic North of Lewes between the A275 and A26 with significant flows at peak times.

### **Opportunities**

- Deliberately embracing the eco-systems services, community and well-being potential offered by reflecting and enhancing the natural capital and eco-logical amenities that can be designed into future development. The maintenance of a progressive identity for the village as well as associated benefits provided.
- Exemplary management of water reducing risks attributed to increasing excessive rainfall and periods of drought. Mitigate against local flooding and reduced speed of run off, storage of water and water for public and natural amenity.
- To engage both of the former opportunities to support well-being, social engagement, social cohesion and community.

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### **Development guidelines**

1. New building will be of a scale and appearance that is sympathetic to the established character, but in a way that is authentically modern and relevant rather than synthetically or superficially historic, imitation or pastiche.
2. The style of architecture should be of its time and celebrate and exemplify the use of local and sustainable materials and significant tradecrafts.
3. Minimise the ingress of 'urban' characteristics and clutter in favour of vernacular material methods and modest management of highways.
4. Seek to maximise affordances offered by integrating 'eco-logical' principles to dwellings and domestic development that support more sustainable and efficient building use and consumption of resources.
5. To integrate multi-functional green infrastructure that deliberately acknowledges the value of eco-system services in providing concurrent benefits to society, economy, culture and ecology. A pro-active approach to landscape management - planning for restoration and enhancement of existing habitats, in addition to their conservation as an integral part of housing development design.

6. Seek to provide alternative routes and modes of travel between places of significance in the village to avoid use of roads. Prioritise walking (or cycling) and in provide opportunity for social and environmental interaction. Sustainable transport corridors between Barcombe and other villages and towns.
  7. Ensure 'soft edges' between dwellings and space between private and public space (and subsequently any road or traffic) to support social interaction, shared space and security.
  8. Development will ensure sustainable and resilient management of water as a resource and in contributing to pollution and flooding. Demonstrably considering adaptation to changes enforced by climate change such as habitat changes, water catchment, tree diseases etc.
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