

Charing Parish Design Statement



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INTRODUCTION

Design Statements are the outcome of a 1996 initiative by the Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency), intended to encourage and influence local participation in the planning system. They are sometimes known as Village Design Statements (VDSs).

The parish of Charing, in the east Kent borough of Ashford, decided that it is more appropriate in its case to refer to a Parish Design Statement (PDS), as it contains not only the principal settlement of Charing, but also Charing Heath, at least two significant hamlets, and many isolated properties which are a feature of the parish. All share the same landscape and environmental conditions.

A village is a small community, usually set in a rural environment. In this respect Charing is typical, and the aim of this statement is to ensure that these two defining characteristics are preserved. The limited size allows the adjacent landscape to form an ever-present factor in the lives of the people who live there and the bond between them is its essential foundation. The various settlements have grown over a long period of time. Their past is part of their present, and hopefully should continue to be so in the future. It is this that sustains the sense of identity and fellowship, and makes Charing an attractive place in which to live. But these are fragile assets, and increasingly vulnerable to ill-considered changes.

Of the 68 per cent of the inhabitants who took part in the 2000 Charing Parish Appraisal, about two-thirds opposed any further commercial or housing

development. They felt that further developments would threaten to destroy its essentially rural character and quality of life. More than a quarter of them came to live in the parish because they love the countryside and village life.

Although fears of undue urban influence and encroaching pressures are implicit in the Statement, it is accepted that its main purpose is to manage change, rather than prevent it. It is less about whether development should take place, and more about how it should be conditioned, so as to harmonise with the existing character of the parish and its natural surroundings. Thus it is mostly concerned with appearance and the desirable consequences of sensitive planning and good design. It is not involved with facilities and services as such, but with how their provision can alter the look and feel of the whole parish for good or ill.

The Statement seeks to raise awareness of our built and natural environment as something inherently precious. It hopes to assist planners and developers, builders and architects, landowners and householders, when they are contemplating new buildings or alterations, to influence the choice of details which are likely to affect the visual qualities and amenities of the parish, and to indicate the standards that residents are entitled to expect. Above all, it is dedicated to the avoidance of misplaced and unsympathetic developments, whether they be housing estates, commercial premises or simple day-to-day extensions or alterations.



Rear view of the High Street from Palace Farm field

A collective view

The Charing PDS and the views expressed in it are the result of wide consultation and the contributions of a large number of residents, through workshops, exhibitions, committee and individual input. It represents the beliefs and feelings of the majority of local people who took part in the exercise during 2001/02, and it faithfully describes the concerns and qualities which they consider most important. It is thus an advisory document produced by the community, rather than by the planning authorities. It is not intended to be a local history or an appraisal, but a thoughtful and responsible perspective for the future. See also *Charing Parish Design Group* inside back cover.

A MAJOR CONCERN

Further substantial housing and transport developments in the parish threaten to destroy its essentially rural character and quality of life.

Arrangement of the Statement

Each of the following chapters is intended to provide a brief description of the characteristics which distinguish the parish, together with concerns, guidelines and recommendations where appropriate. These are defined as follows:

Concerns: Current problems and possible future developments which a large number of local people and organisations see as destructive or threatening to the environment, character, amenity or quality of life in the area.

General guidelines: Desirable planning aims and objectives for any rural village or parish not specific to, but shared by, Charing.

Local recommendations: Specific advice, applying directly to the hopes, fears and needs of the parish of Charing.



Members of one of the Workshop teams about to depart!

Supplementary guidance

This Design Statement has been formally adopted by Ashford Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance. The document expresses many views held by local people involved in its preparation. In adopting the Design Statement the Council is not necessarily supporting all of these opinions but is undertaking, when making planning decisions, to take into account the 'Local Recommendations'.

The Council does not have sufficient powers as planning authority to require these 'local recommendations' to be met in all cases so the active support and commitment of developers, landowners and householders is essential.

This Statement should be read in conjunction with the documents referred to under *References* inside the back cover.



The Church and Palace Farm barn

BACKGROUND

Charing owes its present form and position to the interaction between physical characteristics, lines of communication and historical circumstances.

The land and its influence

Geologically the parish lies astride the northern rim of the greater Weald, which was formed by the differential erosion of the buckled marine deposits of the Upper Cretaceous period, seventy to a hundred million years ago. This exposed a succession of geological strata in close proximity which have produced a variety of local building materials of distinctive colour and texture, including sand and ragstone from the Lower Greensand in the south of the parish, brick and tile from the Gault clay belt in the middle, and chalk, lime and flints from the Downs in the north. The chalk of the North Downs also forms a natural reservoir feeding springs that occur along the clay line at the base of the escarpment - the reason the village is sited where it is.

Routes through the parish

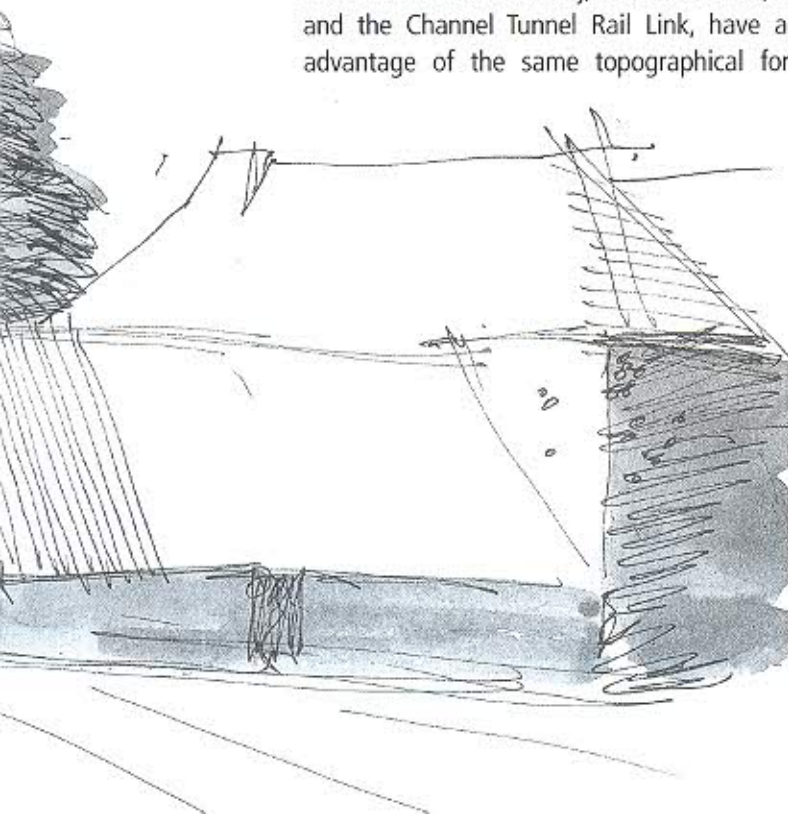
Two sets of routes have crossed one another in the parish: east to west, and north to south. The earliest of these were the prehistoric trackways on and below the Downs, the main one being the Pilgrims' Way, which converges with the North Downs Way National Trail in Charing. Medieval roads from London to the coast were established further south; to be followed in the 18th century by turnpikes. Since then the Maidstone-Ashford railway, A20 trunk road, the M20, and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, have all taken advantage of the same topographical formation.

Supplementing these long-distance routes were the ancient drove roads connecting the early manors of north Kent with the Weald. These were important in the Middle Ages, and many still survive as secondary or minor roads, tracks and by-ways. The early roads created a focal point around which the main settlement grew and a staging post for long-distance traffic. In the 20th century trunk roads and railways have by-passed the centre and cut the parish into segments, often forming boundaries for subsequent development.

Historical circumstances

For seven hundred years, from the 8th century to 1545, Charing was one of the estates of the archbishopric of Canterbury, and at first the settlement existed to supply and service the palace which the archbishops used as a staging post in the course of their travels. By the end of the Middle Ages it was no longer dependent on the palace. The 15th century prosperity of the village is reflected in the tower of the parish church and the surviving houses of the High Street. After the Reformation, Charing was the centre of a small, self-contained, rural community with outlying settlements on the sandy outcrops at Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon. The economy was almost wholly concerned with agriculture; and in effect this state of affairs persisted until well into the 20th century. It is only since the Second World War (WW2) that the village has been drawn into the multifarious activities of the technological age, in which the distinction between town and country is no longer clear-cut. Traditional boundaries have been redrawn (Westwell Leacon only became part of the parish in the 1950s). But the principal consequence has been a huge increase in population.

The rate of growth is reflected in the following statistics. In 1664, there were 170 households in the parish. This had not yet doubled by the end of the 19th century, when there were 300. Rapid escalation came only after WW2. By 1999, there were 1180 dwellings, of which 700 were centred on the village and the roads leading from it, 100 in Charing Heath village, and about 30 in Westwell Leacon. The remainder were dispersed across the parish, including 75 in two mobile home parks, and a smaller number in the hamlets created out of the old farm complexes at Pett and Newlands. As yet, despite this increased population, the parish has managed to retain its rural character.





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LANDSCAPE AND SETTLEMENT

The landscape of the parish

Charing village nestles at the base of the North Downs, in and around the fork of the A20 Maidstone-Ashford road and the A252 road to Canterbury, but has major extensions up the hill to Stocker's Head and southwards to Coppins Corner. Charing Heath is a rural settlement about a mile and a half to the south-west, on the Lower Greensand. About a mile to the south-east of Charing is the small hamlet of Westwell Leacon. Although the population is concentrated in the villages and hamlets, a significant proportion is fairly evenly scattered throughout the parish.



On the Downs to the north of the village, where clay-with-flints overlies the chalk, woodland is interspersed with agriculture and small-holdings, while to the north-east there is an extensive area of ancient, deciduous woodland - beech, sycamore, ash, birch, oak - and coppiced sweet chestnut traditionally used for fencing and hop poles. More recent plantations have included coniferous species. Woodland elsewhere is less prominent, but many mature trees throughout the parish are well-loved local landmarks, and are protected.

Chalkhill Blue Butterfly



The Great Stour River runs along much of the southern boundary of the parish. The streams, which feed into it from the north, shape the valley into a gently undulating landscape, where mixed agriculture,

grassland and smaller farms are typical. Between this and the Downs are the larger, mostly arable, fields on the good quality Grade II soils of the lower chalk slopes. Heights above sea level vary from around 80 metres in Charing Heath to over 190 on Charing Hill. Most rural areas in the parish are rich in fauna and flora and many species are protected, including badgers, great crested newts, and rare orchids.



Wild Bee Orchid

A large chalk quarry operates on the steep slopes of the Downs to the east of Charing, and sand pits occupy considerable areas of land to the east and south of Charing Heath. A small seam of ragstone in the south-east corner of the parish was worked until recently, but the extraction of clay has long since ceased.

The 2000 Parish Appraisal showed how much the residents cherish their rural environment. When asked to say what aspects of Charing they value most, well over 60 per cent placed 'views of the surrounding countryside' and 'access to the countryside' at the top; and 72 per cent said 'the Downs and the woods' needed most protection.



Settlement

Charing village began as a small settlement outside the Palace, the first houses lying on or near the High Street. Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon started as small clusters of houses on the edge of common land. Throughout the parish dispersed farmsteads lay in the surrounding countryside. When expansion began around 1900, a series of isolated properties extended Charing and Charing Heath along the north-south roads, and later blocks of estate housing were established on the fringes of the original centres. This recent pattern of building has left a number of fields with houses on one or more sides vulnerable to



- Main picture left:
View across Charing village,
from the Downs to the
Greensand ridge
1 Charing Heath
2 Westwell Leacon
3 Towards Charing Heath
from the Downs
4 Aerial view of the sand
quarries at Charing
Heath
5 The rich arable
land on the
lower slopes
of the Downs
6 Charing Heath
to Lenham Heath
7 The Great Stour
8 Wild flower meadow at
Charing Heath
9 Coppiced woodland at
Longbeech Wood



'urban sprawl', and individual plots of land between or behind houses open to intensified ribbon development. Particularly at risk are the fields along Pett Lane, the A20 and Tile Lodge Road, and the open spaces between houses along Charing Heath Road (East), The Hill and Charing Hill. These open areas make important contributions to the setting and views, and afford crucial visual links to the countryside. Development here would be liable to change the character of the current settlements.

Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)

Most of the north and east of the parish is designated as an AONB under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949. The primary purpose of designation is to conserve the natural beauty of the landscape. This is reflected in the Ashford Borough Local Plan (BLP) and should be maintained by the development control process. A large area has protection under county designation as a Special Landscape Area (SLA).

CONCERNS

- 'Urban' and commercial pressures threaten the villages' relationship with the countryside, especially dense housing and increasing traffic.
- The AONB boundary around the historic settlement is perceived to be too limited, especially to the north-east/south-east of Pett Lane.
- Extension of sand and chalk quarrying, and the future of worked-out pits.
- Disappearance, without replacement, of hedgerows and hedgerow trees.
- Insensitive, out-of-scale building or construction in AONB/SLA countryside.
- Mis-use of open land isolated by transport projects.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- The natural beauty, flora and fauna of the countryside should be preserved, and new habitats created whenever possible.
- Planting, especially of native species, should be encouraged. Clear-felling, as opposed to coppicing, should in most cases be followed by immediate re-planting.
- Agriculture should continue to be recognised as a primary activity. But where land falls out of productive use, restoration for nature conservation should be considered, and sensitive conversion of quality farm buildings may be encouraged within BLP guidelines.
- Open land, isolated by road, rail, or other major developments, and unsuitable for agriculture, should be preserved for purposes that conserve the land and landscape and should not be in-filled with industry or housing.
- All development should reflect the character of the landscape.
- To preserve the amenity and landscape of the parish, disused chalk quarries and sand pits should be sensitively restored to e.g. agriculture, forestry or nature conservation and not used for industry or land-fill.
- In the countryside, new, isolated, non-agricultural development should be carefully controlled.

LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

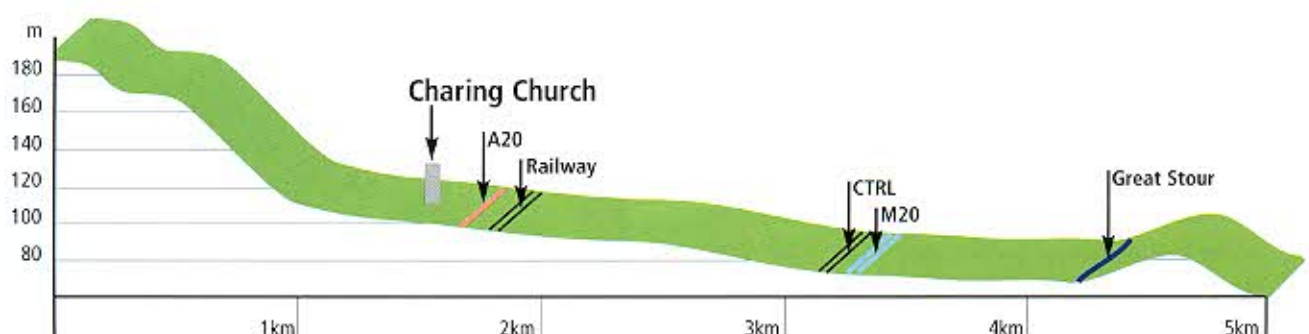
- Planning submissions for major developments should be accompanied by a landscape plan.
- The compact nature of the settlements should be respected, and future development should not be allowed to sprawl further into the surrounding countryside.
- Preservation of locally cherished views, such as those to and from the Downs, and of the High Street and the Church and its surroundings, should be given high priority at all times. They are among aspects most valued by those who live or work in the parish.
- Change of use of agricultural land and woodland should be resisted in order to maintain the beauty of the landscape and the rural nature of the parish.
- Where trees and hedgerows have to be removed, replacement planting and maintenance schemes should be carried out using native species whenever possible.



11 Aerial view of the AONB

Recommendations consequent on the Kent Downs AONB

- The AONB should be extended on the eastern side of Charing village to cover the whole of the area between the Pilgrims' Way and the A20 (see map).
- Any developments in the rest of the locality are likely to have a significant impact on the AONB setting. All such developments should accord with national legislation and planning guidance for AONB's, particularly in regard to the enhancement of landscape quality and natural beauty, the removal of unsightliness, and the preservation of local character and distinctiveness in design, scale, setting and the materials used.



12 Topographical cross-section of parish

BUILDINGS AND SETTING

There are no less than 127 listed buildings within the parish, sixty-three of them within the Conservation Area of Charing village.



Until the late 19th century, the buildings of the area were constructed of indigenous materials. Timber, which was in plentiful supply, was preferred in the Middle Ages, in-filled with wattle and daub or lime plaster. Roofs were covered by locally fired plain clay tiles, secured with wooden pegs at pitches of up to fifty degrees. Local brick became the pre-eminent material for the majority of buildings from the 17th century onwards. Other materials used for cladding included painted weatherboarding, mathematical tile, tile hanging and painted rendering.

Locally available flint and Kentish ragstone were used in the construction of Charing Church, the 14th century archbishops' palace and its boundary walls, and some later buildings. Plain tile, which contributes so much to the character of Kentish buildings, continues in use to the present day (although the modern sand-faced concrete tile lacks the individuality and weathering characteristics of the clay). With the coming of the first railway to Charing, cheaper roofing slates were brought in increasingly, but are mainly limited to the area near the station.

The Charing Conservation Area

The High Street on the north-south axis, together with the Market Place leading to the church, form the medieval heart of the village. The predominant impression on entering the High Street is of light-coloured, contiguous facades under plain-tiled roofs of varying heights. The variety of materials and building styles is, however, extraordinary. Some timber-framed houses still reveal their structure, some have been covered in weatherboarding,

rendering, painted brickwork or mathematical tile, and some have been renovated in past times with Georgian frontages. These, together with some fine individual 18th century dwellings, in brick and tile with elegant detailing, display the charm and accumulation of change over the centuries.

Recent additions have been mostly limited to dormer windows, but where access was possible from the High Street and School Road, small housing enclaves have been built with mixed success.

The character of the Market Place contrasts markedly to the High Street. Dominated by the church and the flint-clad remains of the palace, the Market Place expands into the equally ancient open space of Clewards Meadow, now a registered Village Green. The library in the Market Place is one of the few new buildings within the Conservation Area. Built in 1978 of Wealden stock brick and reclaimed plain tile on the irregular site of an old slaughterhouse, it was carefully designed to relate to its surroundings, and won awards for a contribution to the environment.

Station Road

The High Street extending to the south (cut by the A20) becomes Station Road and the route to the Weald. The railway station, established in the 1880s, follows the 'house style' of the sister stations of the line – neat patterned brickwork in contrasting colours under slated roofs. The railway brought development to Station Road in the shape of modest terraced cottages of painted brick or white weatherboarding, with sash windows under slated roofs, together with more substantial dwellings, some with exuberant Edwardian detail. Post-war development includes a group of houses in Burleigh Road and Hither Field, a small estate built on the former rail goods yard. Nearby, the new village surgery, in brick and tile in rural vernacular style, has received much favourable comment.

- 1 Timber-framed C16th house
- 2 The church of SS Peter and Paul
- 3 An C18th house
- 4 The High Street



Housing between the wars

The increase of new houses in the parish between the wars was fairly limited, and confined mainly to the siting of individual dwellings on the routes out of Charing towards Canterbury and Pluckley, including a small local authority housing development on the A20 to Ashford. Of interest are the so-called 'Homes for Heroes', a collection of small-holdings on the Downs.



5 C15th house in Charing village

6 Housing Association development

7 Local authority housing

8 Bungalows for the elderly

9 Timber-framed farm-house clad in brick

10 Cottages at Charing Heath

11 Estate housing in Charing Heath

12 All Saints church at Charing Heath

13 Estate housing in Charing village

14 C15th farm at Westwell Leacon

15 Mobile home park

16 Brickworkers' cottages at Westwell Leacon

Post-war housing

The expansion of Charing after the second World War can be seen in two main areas:

The triangle between School Road and Canterbury Road. This has been mainly developed by the local authority, and is a mixture of non-traditional 'Airey' houses and traditional brick and tile terraced and semi-detached houses, which reflect the generous space standards of the time. In contrast, the latest Housing Association development in Centenary Close is high density, attracting much criticism for the non-local character of yellow/brown bricks, interlocking tiled roofs, and lumpish proportions.

The area between Pett Lane and the Moat. This is generally of private housing in the form of individual houses and bungalows. Although the housing is generally of good quality, it does not reflect the unique character of Charing and could be found in any local community.

Less conventional are two mobile home sites – one on the A20 Maidstone Road, and the other in woodland on the A252 Canterbury Road. Both are attractively landscaped.



Conversions

Throughout the parish a number of redundant farm buildings have been converted. At Pett and Newlands unobtrusive hamlets have been created in a sympathetic manner, and the reuse and extension of the old water works building on the Pluckley Road provides an excellent example of what can be achieved by sensitive conversion.

Charing Heath

This village has a unique settlement pattern, resulting from a scattered community built up around the perimeter of open heath land, together with isolated farms and small manor houses. Since the Enclosure Acts, the division and cultivation of the heath has concealed these origins. The buildings range from the Middle Ages to the present day, and include timber framed and brick houses and farm buildings with steep pitched hipped roofs, 19th century artisans' cottages (with characteristic Flemish bond brickwork, showing overburnt headers such as those found also at Westwell Leacon), individual houses, bungalows and a post-war housing estate. The 19th century church and vicarage in stone and yellow brick share design features and materials with Charing village school.



Westwell Leacon

Another scattered community, similar in origin to Charing Heath, developed around open heathland and subsequently enclosed, but now cruelly torn apart by the motorway and high-speed railway. There are a number of delightful houses and farms, dating from the 15th and 16th centuries (originally timber-framed and later clad with brick), and some charming cottages of later date. The bricks which produced the distinctive brickwork, noted under Charing Heath and here in the 19th century 'brickworks cottages', were made at the local brickworks on the north of the A20, now occupied by the intrusive and alien bulk of a new cold store warehouse.

CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES

Roofs

Roofs are predominantly Kent peg tile, laid to a steep pitch, generally of hipped construction (with bonnet hip tiles), but with some gable ends, or gablets, and some catslide outshots. There are also some slated roofs of appropriate lesser pitch.

Eaves are generally open, of modest projection, and finished with black gutters. More decorative examples can be found of brick corbelling with brick dentils and classical cornices to the larger 18th century houses.

Verges to the gable ends are finished with a simple mortar fillet, although some of the 19th century houses show decorative barge boards.

Dormer windows, which are an established feature of the main village street, are generally of modest proportions under hipped roofs; the spandrels may be glazed, rendered or finished with sheet lead.

Chimneys are another important element of the parish settlements; they are usually central to the dwelling, constructed of brick with simple detailing of string course and corbelling.

Walls

The variety of facing material is extraordinary, but brickwork is generally the major structural element or is used as a covering to earlier timber framing. Local flint and ragstone are also used.

Brickwork, with flush lime mortar pointing, tends to be uneven in texture and varied in colour, ranging from soft orange or brown to dark red, often interspersed with blue burnt bricks. Flemish bond, with vitrified or dark glazed headers, is characteristic. Brick detailing, seldom in contrasting colours, includes corbelling to eaves, single string courses between floors, moulded plinths (sometimes of ragstone), and segmental arches over window openings. There are also many examples of rubbed brick voussoirs over the window heads of the 18th century houses. Some facing brickwork has been painted in white or light colour with a black plinth. This treatment merges happily with other walling materials of painted stucco, weatherboarding, tile hanging, and a few examples of exposed half-timbering. **Weatherboarding** is generally feather-edged and painted white or allowed to age naturally.

Tile hanging, generally plain and confined to upper storeys, is traditionally of similar colour to the local brick, but sometimes darker.

Windows are either simple casements of two or three lights, or double-hung sash. Both types are generally painted white and divided into smaller

panes. Original painted windows replaced by stained timber or upvc. strike a jarring note.

Bay windows are a numerous and attractive feature of the High Street and elsewhere.

Shop windows are generally divided into smaller panes of glass, and fit unobtrusively into the village context.

Doors are usually panelled, with well-detailed and elegant door surrounds, and are topped by simple flat doorhoods supported by decorative brackets.

Porches are not a traditional feature of the locality, but there are a few tiled and gabled examples.

Boundary treatments

These range from solid walls of mixed local materials (coursed or random flint, ragstone and brick) to iron railings, white painted or natural picket fencing, timber post and rail, and hedging. The unscreened use of chain link boundary and security fencing is considered inappropriate.



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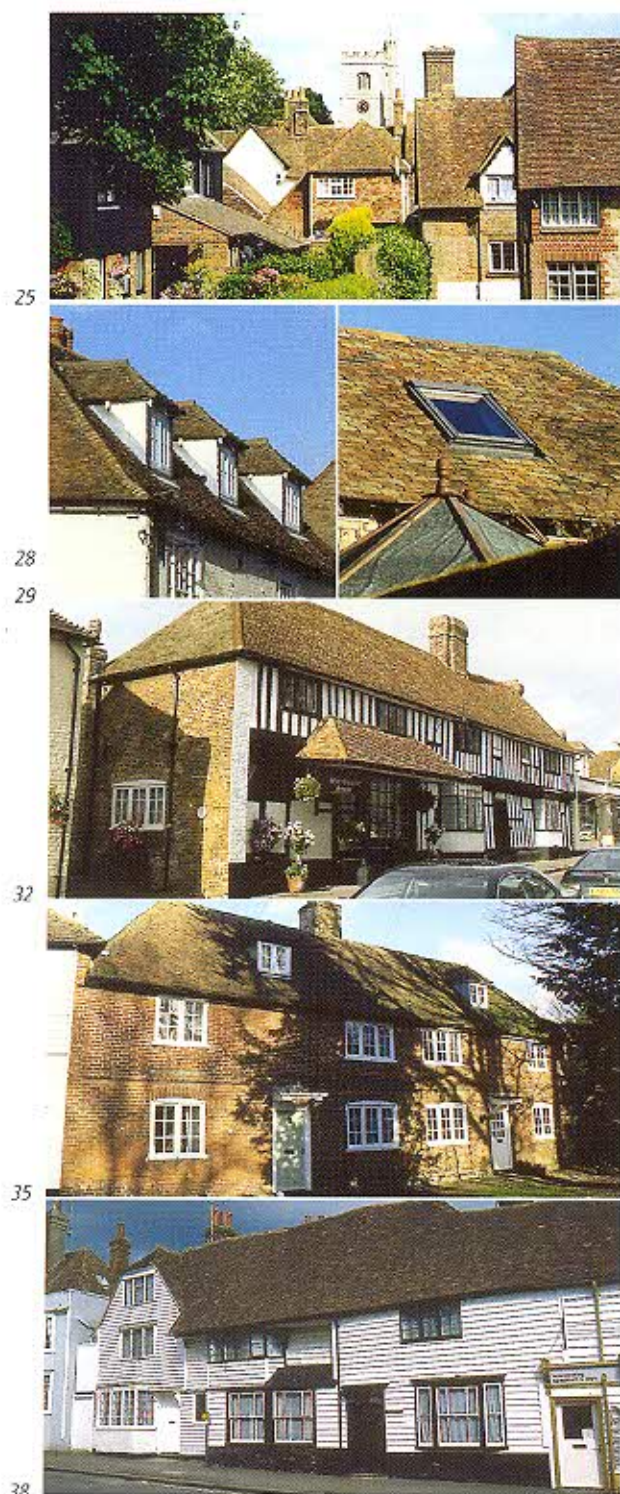
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NEW BUILDINGS AND CONVERSIONS (previous page)

- 17 The surgery at Hither Field
- 18 Monk's Walk, Charing village
- 19 New building at the Royal Oak
- 20 The library in Market Place
- 21 Converted waterworks
- 22 Converted warehouses
- 23 Part of converted farmstead
- 24 Converted stables

See also line drawings on p.22



CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES: roofs and walls (this page)

- 25 Roofscape of Kent peg tiles with typical hips and gables
- 26 Kent peg tiles and corbelled eaves
- 27 Slate roof in Station Road
- 28 Dormer windows
- 29 Appropriate rooflight
- 30 Verges on half timbered house
- 31 Edwardian bargeboards in Station Road
- 32 Hipped roof and timber framing in the High Street
- 33 Centrally placed chimney in rural area
- 34 Mathematical tiles
- 35 C17th brickwork
- 36 Ragstone with brick dressing
- 37 Plain and decorative tile hanging
- 38 Weatherboarding
- 39 Timber and plaster walls
- 40 Stucco facades

CONCERNS

- Estates of standard pattern housing or executive modern homes are not appropriate in a rural parish.
- In some cases conversions, extensions, or alterations to existing buildings have been undertaken using inappropriate detailing or materials.
- Residents feel that starter homes and small dwellings suited to single occupation, including for the elderly, are of more importance to the community than executive-style housing.
- There is increasing pressure to divide large plots on the edges of settlement, sometimes replacing a single house with several, and to develop empty plots, often former orchards, both along main roads and behind existing properties. These are changing the nature of the settlement pattern, leading to a loss of varied plot and garden sizes, and, by introducing 'hard' suburban edges in place of the 'soft' edges created by gardens and trees, altering the way the settlement relates to the surrounding countryside.
- The need for control over visual impact, noise, smell and light pollution of any industrial development.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Privacy of existing and adjacent residents should be respected in any new development.
- Adequate provision should be made for outside waste storage.
- New buildings should be designed with regard to the principles of environmental sustainability.
- Safe access for pedestrians and cyclists, with interlinking to existing routes, should be considered in new developments.

LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the recommendations generally refer to the traditional styles and character of the parish, this should not be a barrier to the introduction of imaginative and innovative design which is complementary to the surroundings.

- Housing adjacent to service roads should be at variable distances from the verge, to avoid monotony, provide privacy, and reduce the impact of car parking.
- The many local examples of simple terracing of up to six houses, see illustrations 16 and 35, are recommended as models for inclusion in any future layout.
- Access roads should reflect the rural nature of the locality in terms of layout, alignment, scale, detailed design and materials. The use of shared surface roads to small groups of dwellings with comprehensive landscaping to public areas and service strips, should be encouraged, and bleak open highways avoided.

- Developments should be appropriate to the context in colour, form, size and scale, matching local materials, with meticulous attention to details such as brickwork, ornamentation, doors and door canopies, windows, etc., reflecting the rural nature and wide variety of the parish.
- Off-street rear parking should normally be provided in all new development to reduce the impact of the car and to enable more traditional village layouts.
- Communal green spaces or recreational areas should be included as appropriate to the character of the location in all large new developments.

New buildings for housing or commercial use should be of simple design and proportion, reflecting the locality in scale, form and detail. They should be generally of one or two storeys and not more than three, but have a variety of roof heights to eaves and ridge.

Roofs should be usually of plain clay tile at appropriate pitch, with a mixture of hipped and gabled forms, together with chimneys and dormer windows conforming to local details.

Walls should be of facing brickwork to match local colouring, with other forms of local facing to achieve variety, i.e. painted brickwork, painted weatherboarding, tile hanging, flint or ragstone.

Windows should be normally white painted traditional joinery in proportion to the elevations; preferably they should be of two or three light casement windows, simply divided, and set into brickwork with segmental arched brick lintels.

Doors should be simply panelled or vertically battened under flat hoods in accordance with local details, or within plain tiled gabled porches.

Garages of a flat-roofed, prefabricated concrete box type are not acceptable; they should be constructed of brick and tile, or timber, to complement associated housing.

Extensions, conversions and alterations should reflect the character of the existing building and its setting, and be carried out with similar materials and detail. Replacement doors and windows should similarly mirror the existing, and avoid inappropriate materials and styles.

Surfacing of large areas with concrete or tarmac in commercial or housing developments should be avoided. Brick or block paving should be encouraged and, in areas of light use, pea shingle on hoggin would be a viable alternative.

New industrial buildings should be considered not only in context with the locality, but also in environmental terms of noise, smell and light pollution.

Boundaries Ragstone and flint with brickwork should be encouraged for screen walling. Where chain link or similar fencing has to be used, a living screen of planting should be established on the public side. Planted boundaries of native species should be encouraged in rural areas, in conjunction with paling fences of natural colour. Picket fencing is acceptable in other situations.

Settlement edges and subdivision Subdivision of large plots in semi-rural locations, infilling along the main roads, and back development, should be strictly controlled in order to maintain the sensitive 'soft' edges between the current settlements and the rural landscape.



41 Palace Farm from
Pett Lane



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CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES: windows, doorways, boundaries and surfaces (this page)

- 42 Domestic bay window
- 43 Casement window with cambered arches
- 44 Former shop window and decorative doorhead
- 45, 46 Shop windows
- 47, 48, 49 Doors, doorways and ironwork
- 50, 51 Porches, fanlights and sash windows with gauged brick heads
- 52 Casement windows and a gabled porch
- 53 Brick house wall and flint boundary wall
- 54 Ragstone wall with brick buttress
- 55 Picket fencing
- 56 Hedge of native species
- 57 Brick paving and brick and timber gabled garage
- 58 Post and rail fencing
- 59 Gravel surface and estate fencing

STREET FURNITURE (next page)

- 60 Bare metal security fencing and proliferation of signs
- 61 Wooden bus shelter enhances attractive village entry
- 62 Over-prominent commercial signs
- 63 Unattractive fencing spoils entry to the High Street

See also line drawings on p.22.

STREET FURNITURE

The main road approaches to Charing are generally marred by unsightly street furniture. Security fencing, lighting installations, and road and business signs compete for space. En masse, the effect is insensitive and unwelcoming. All four entrances (A20, A252 and B2077) could be improved. On minor roads, and once inside Charing village, signs and street furniture are handled more sympathetically. Wooden bus shelters, seats and flower tubs are assets; but various metal railings are out-of-place, and disparate objects are often juxtaposed with little aesthetic sense.

In several places, redundant road-sign poles have been left in position and telegraph poles and wires in the outer areas of the village are frequently untidy and unattractive. Prominent aerials and satellite dishes are considered out-of-keeping.

Business signs

In the Conservation Area, business signs are generally

low-key and in sympathy with the surroundings, but some permanent commercial signs on the main roads are too large and garish in colour, and some temporary signs are unsightly and not well-secured.

Lighting

The design of the street lamps in the Conservation Area is in character with the historic village, and the muted lighting is appreciated. Elsewhere, exposed high-intensity white lights can be offensive to residents and modern orange lighting tends to kill the night sky of a rural area. The tall lamps on the A20 round-about unfortunately interfere with the spectacular night-time view of the flood-lit church tower, installed as a Millennium celebration. In rural settlements street lighting is considered inappropriate.

Street barriers

Metal fences, now dented and rusting in places, have been erected to prevent accidents at the A20 cross-roads. In fact they are a hazard, and are unsightly in the Conservation Area.

CONCERNS

- Unsightly or untidy street furniture and obtrusive lighting.

GENERAL GUIDELINE

- National agencies, the local authorities, and owners of commercial properties should be encouraged when erecting signs to consider them in context.
- Signs, particularly temporary ones, should not be erected without planning consent.

LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Materials for street furniture or railings should be suited to their site, particularly in the Conservation Area.
- Poles, wires, aerials and satellite dishes should be hidden in all new developments, and if possible concealed when alterations take place to older properties.
- Lighting fittings should not be too tall and, where consistent with safety, the light should be muted rather than produce an orange glow or obtrusive glare.
- Village approaches should be improved by restricting the number and size of signs and advertisements, and increasing tree planting and boundary screening.

ROADS, RAIL AND PATHS

The parish is characterised by a variety of roads, lanes and footpaths that typify the natural beauty of the Downs and the Greensand Ridge and the valley in between.

North-south routes through the parish are mainly based on old droveways and packhorse routes. They extend from the top of the Downs into the valley and off to the Weald of Kent. Several are the victims of heavy traffic with consequent damage to verges and danger to pedestrians.



A series of six virtually parallel, east-west routes through the parish has developed over many centuries and in general, they have heavier use than the north-south roads. The exception is the byway known as the Pilgrims' Way. Most lanes in the parish carry a volume of traffic to which they are not suited, causing erosion to the high banks, wildflower verges and overhanging trees which characterise them. The A20 trunk road continues to be the major east-west route for parish access and exit. Although carrying a smaller volume of traffic since the opening of the M20 motorway, it nonetheless remains busy.



The increasing volume and pace of traffic in the parish has a significant effect on the quality of life. Problems are exacerbated where footways are inadequate and crossings badly sited. Charing village is cut in half by the A20 and as the southern half develops (e.g. new Surgery, Hither Field estate), pedestrian movement between the two sections is increasingly an issue of concern. Sixty per cent of respondents to the Charing Parish Appraisal identified the intersection of the A20 with the High Street and Station Road as the most dangerous

place. In addition to damaged verges, problems are intensified when commercial traffic does not confine itself to designated routes. Charing High Street is frequently congested and at other times used as a fast-track through route. The village has inadequate parking facilities for the volume of users.



There is an extensive network of footpaths and byways in the parish. The Charing Parish Appraisal confirmed the importance of local footpaths when nearly 200 people expressed support for a rambling club. The footpaths provide access to the superb surrounding countryside. However, in the south of the parish the intersection of footpaths by the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (CTRL) and the M20 means some of them are now discontinuous and falling into disuse.

- 1 North-south route
- 2 The Pilgrims' Way
- 3 Lane with high banks and wildflower verges
- 4 The A20 trunk road and roundabout
- 5 The intersection of the A20 with the High Street and Pluckley Road
- 6 Charing railway station on the Ashford-Maidstone line
- 7 The parallel formation of the M20 and the CTRL



The parish is well served by its 1884 Ashford to Maidstone railway line and its Ashford to Maidstone bus service.

The development of the CTRL has compounded the damaging consequences of the construction of the M20. The problems for residents include visual desecration, unacceptably high noise levels, destruction of agricultural acreage, and the virtual severance and isolation of the southern end of the parish.



CONCERNS

- Environmental damage and pollution caused by volume and noise of traffic.
- Physical erosion of verges and hedgerows in country lanes.
- Safety and ease of movement for pedestrians, cyclists, wheelchair users, pushchairs and horse riders because of speed and volume of traffic.
- Obstruction of minor roads and footpaths as a result of the construction of transport routes.
- Inadequate parking facilities for residents and shoppers, especially in Charing village.
- Charing High Street as a through route, and frequent congestion there.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- Preserve and maintain the historic ways.
- Discourage the use of minor roads by heavy commercial vehicles and the creation of 'rat runs'.
- Maintain foot access and rights of way through settlements and out into the countryside.
- Improve safety for all road users.
- Avoid adding congestion to already heavily-used routes, if necessary by seeking radical alternative solutions.
- Maintain the character and vitality of Charing village through such improvements as additional off-street parking for High Street users.
- Physical protection from traffic and other transport noise, such as tree screening, bunds, walls or a combination of these, should be provided for new housing developments. Similar protection for existing housing should be incorporated in all new transport schemes.

LOCAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- Respect the character of existing roads, green lanes and footpaths.
- Include provision for separate foot/cycle access to village amenities, and include new countryside access where appropriate.
- Preserve the pedestrian nature of Charing village by, for example, introducing traffic calming measures on through-routes and improving options for safe crossing of the A20.

A LIVING AND WORKING ENVIRONMENT

A 1994 local survey identified almost 200 businesses of varying kinds spread throughout the parish, and this level is likely to have been maintained (although there has been a significant fall in the number of farmers and farm-workers). The Appraisal showed that many of the present-day businesses in the area employ local people.

More than a quarter of those who live in the parish also work in it; another quarter work in Ashford. Apart from agriculture, forestry and retailing, local commercial enterprises include quarrying, car and machinery repairing, professional and other services, building, warehousing, an abattoir and a crematorium. Also, increasingly, people in the service industries are working at home. A number of point-to-point meetings are held in the parish each spring, and the historic heart of Charing attracts many additional visitors in season.

Today, the parish has two churches, a church hall and a chapel, a primary school, a parish hall and a memorial hall in Charing Heath, a library, a surgery, three garages and a petrol station, a fire station, a home and sheltered accommodation for the elderly, a train station, about a dozen shops (including post office and newsagent) in the High Street, several public houses or inns, and a number of eating establishments.

Variety and choice are essential in successful retail areas. The level of retail business in the village centre is reaching a critical point beyond which it will cease to be sustainable. Charing residents want Charing shops to survive. The majority of those involved in the current consultation process do not see many more houses as the key to a thriving village but support increased small-scale business and retail development.

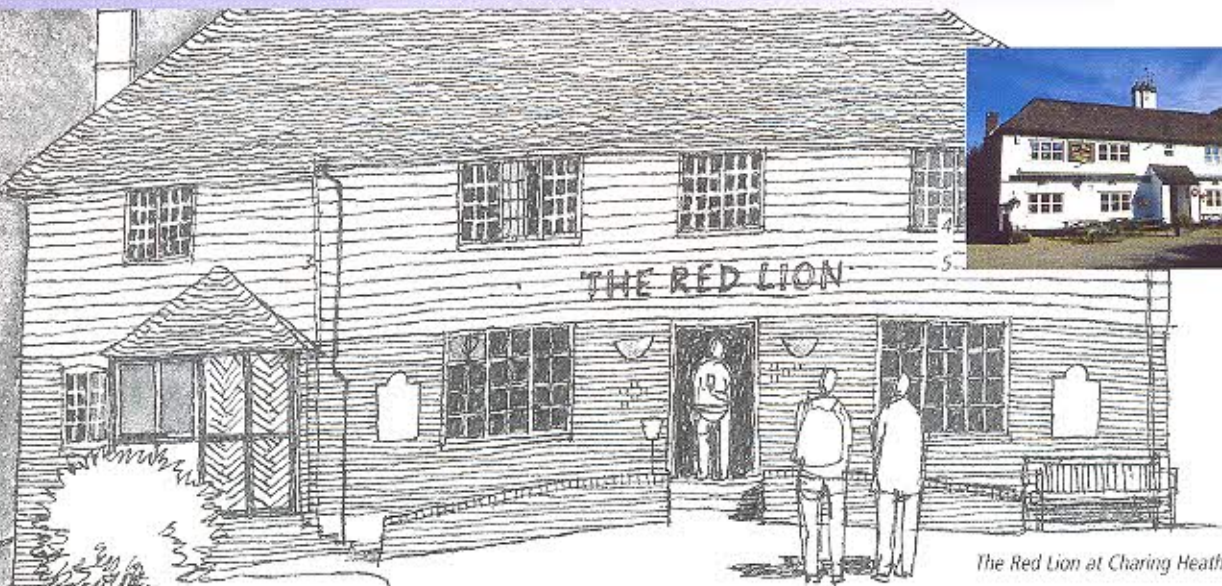


CONCERN

- Decline of shops in the village centre, owing to the high price of listed buildings in the Conservation Area.

GENERAL GUIDELINES

- The establishment or re-establishment of shops in the village centre should be encouraged.
- Small businesses, providing genuine local employment, should be fostered whenever possible.
- Support should be provided for agricultural and forestry activities, having regard to the beneficial effects of a vibrant rural economy as well as to the preservation of the abundant wildlife and scenic beauty of the parish.



- 1 Agriculture is still an important activity
- 2 A working chalk quarry
- 3 The point-to-point course on the lower Downs
- 4 Typical public house and restaurant
- 5 One of three garages in the parish

The Red Lion at Charing Heath

MAKE YOUR OWN DESIGN ASSESSMENT

If you are considering building a new garage, adding a conservatory or porch, inserting rooflights or dormers, altering doors or windows, or changing any other external features of your property, the following steps may help you to achieve the best result:

1 Look at the frontage of the property from some distance. Note down the most distinctive features and, separately, those that seem to be more recent and out of character with the building and surrounding properties; perhaps take some photographs.

2 Now stand right in front of the property and do the same, but this time study the details of the windows, doors, eaves and so forth.

3 Repeat these processes for each elevation or aspect of the property after studying the guidance given in this Design Statement (see pp8-15).

4 Now think about the changes you have in mind. Consider whether they could prejudice the distinctive characteristics and details that you have noted down. If so, examine other ways of meeting

your requirements - but which will conserve this irreplaceable heritage.

A policy of minimal intervention and simplicity of design is nearly always appropriate.

5 Next check whether the changes you now envisage will assist in removing any of the uncharacteristic features and details you have noted.

6 Finally, go to Ashford Borough Council or to your builder or architect and ask whether they agree with your Design Assessment or can suggest any improvements to it.

7 If you live in a listed building, consult the Borough Conservation Officer and discuss your ideas before you submit an application for Listed Building Consent. The Council has guidelines on shop fronts and Listed Buildings which may prove useful.

Thank you for helping to conserve the heritage of the Parish of Charing.

Based, with thanks, on Cartmel Design Statement.

CHARING PARISH DESIGN GROUP

The idea of producing a Statement was first raised by the Parish Council in 1999, and the Design Statement Group was formed in October 2000. Leaflets describing the project were sent to all parishioners, who were invited to a workshop. 80 residents attended a public meeting (February 2001), and 60 took part in the subsequent workshop (March 2001). Later stages were publicised in the local press and through public notices. Drafts of the document were made available for comment, both at an exhibition (October 2001) and in the local library (October 2001 and January/February 2002). The statement was adopted by Ashford Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance in April 2002.

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Finally, the Group would like to thank the many residents of Charing who took part in the project, by contributing to the Workshop, making constructive comments, or taking an active part in formulating the Statement. We hope that the result justifies their input and represents their views.

References

The Statement has been written in the context of the following guidelines and policies:

National Planning Policy Guidelines, PPG 3, PPG 7
Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW), 2000
Ashford Borough Local Plan, June 2000
Kent Design Guide, Kent County Council, 2000
Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act (CTRL), 1996
Kent Downs AONB Advisory Committee

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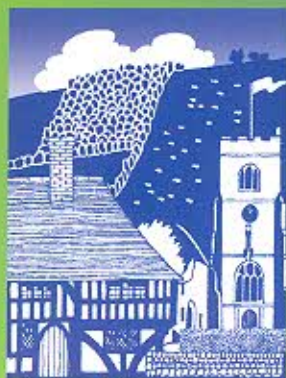
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The Statement is on sale at local outlets in Charing village and at The Red Lion in Charing Heath.

For further information contact:

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Charing Parish Design Statement

