

Design Code for Lower Hardres & Nackington.

(Draft document for public consultation – September 2022)

1. Introduction

The main objective of this Design Code is to develop design guidelines that any potential development in the parish should follow in order to retain and protect our rural, tranquil character, and the scenic beauty of the area. New developments or alterations to existing homes can be worrying to residents and the aim is to ensure that development is gradual, gentle, and in keeping with the existing character of the area. The aim is always to foster and strengthen community spirit and involvement. The Design Code is intended to manage development and change in the parish not prevent it.

The parish of Lower Hardres & Nackington lies about 5km (3 miles) south of Canterbury, Kent. The population is approximately 600, in 249 homes.

2. Local character analysis

2.1. Introduction

The parish of Lower Hardres & Nackington dates back to Saxon times at least, and is one of the smallest parishes in the county at just 9.14 square kilometres (3.53 square miles) in area. Much of the parish is productive farmland resulting in a small population of just 570 in 2011. That gives a population density of just 62 people per square kilometre (160 people per square mile). Until 1934 the parish was two separate parishes, Lower Hardres to the south, and Nackington to the north. This explains why such a small parish has two churches in it.

There are no schools in the parish, the last, a tiny primary school in Lower Hardres closed permanently in August 1987 mainly through lack of children.

There are a few small businesses operating in the parish and there is a highly regarded farm shop and a Village Hall that has excellent facilities and is much used, and is frequently hired out as a venue for many different types of events. There is a village cricket ground and one public house.

Historically most people resident in the parish were employed in agriculture, but mechanisation of farming over the past 70 years has meant that very few do so now. Housing in the parish is mostly high price.

2.2. Landscape and open space

The Parish lies on gently sloping land, rising as you move south away from Canterbury, Most is farmland with some woodland. The soil is good quality and productive, over chalk. There is a high degree of openness with pleasing views across the countryside.

2.3. Street and public realm

Most of the roads in the parish can best be described as country lanes. The exception is the B2068, a road running roughly north/south through the parish, linking Canterbury and Hythe. There is an extensive network of footpaths spreading out in all directions, but there is no convenient footpath linking Lower Hardres with Canterbury. Given the very limited bus service, car ownership is very helpful.

2.4. Pattern and layout of buildings

Homes in the parish mostly face the road and many back onto farmland as a result of the one plot deep ribbon development configuration along much of the parish roads.

2.5. Building height and roofline

Homes in the parish are mostly two storey, though there are some bungalows. The roofline is irregular as most homes differ architecturally from their neighbours. The parish is not flat but the topography is gentle and with many mature trees. Most buildings are settled in the environment and not obtrusive.

2.6. Car parking

The Granville Public House, the Village Hall and the Farm Shop have car parks for their users, but there are no public car parks in the parish and few places where vehicles can be parked on road without causing an obstruction. Roads in the parish are mostly too narrow to accommodate on-street parking.

Most parking in the parish is on the front gardens of homes.

2.7 Heritage

There are two buildings of historic and heritage importance, namely the parish churches of the village of Lower Hardres and the hamlet of Nackington.

3. Design guidelines

3.1. Pattern and layout of new buildings

Lower Hardres is a small village, primarily ribbon development with low density housing, and no really obvious village centre. New housing developments must be sympathetic to the rural nature, protecting views of countryside and enhancing the character and appearance of the village. New housing should be in small groups and in clusters where this is in keeping with the surrounding pattern of development, with a turning area for vehicles rather than along a straight road. Homes should have both front and back gardens. Developments should be designed to maximise daylighting and opportunities to capture solar energy. New developments need to consider the health and well being of future residents. This could, for example, be by grouping houses such that residents are

more likely to see, talk to, and get to know each other. Careful routing of footpaths can encourage residents to walk more into and around the existing village and thereby foster community spirit and involvement.

3.2. Road layout and connectivity

Where new roads have to be constructed the design and layout must meet design criteria for roads. Additionally, roads should be gentle curves to assist in keeping vehicle speeds down. Where possible new roads should be “shared space” instead of conventional roads and pavements. Developments should offer alternative routes for pedestrians and be designed to encourage walking and cycling.

3.3. Pedestrian and cycle connectivity

New developments should take into account ease of access to the rest of the village and further afield. Signage should increase awareness of our Public Right Of Way network. New signs must respect our rural nature and not be visually obtrusive.

3.4. Green spaces and views

The parish of Lower Hardres & Nackington is in a visually attractive area, part of it a designated Area Of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Developments should have soft edges when adjoining farmland, allowing where possible long distance views and avoiding restrictions to the views from existing properties. Some parts of the parish offer dramatic views of the cathedral and these long distance views must be retained. The need for on-street parking should be minimised. Public areas in new developments need to include landscaping and planting of native trees and/or shrubs to enhance the aesthetic appearance of a development and support biodiversity. Existing trees and hedgerows should be retained as much as possible. Many of the remaining hedgerows date back to late medieval times and must be protected. Tall structures, be they buildings, telecommunication masts, or pylons, should be resisted.

3.5. Enclosure

Development frontages should be staggered in relation to the highway as this helps to create an informal character to a development that is visually more attractive.

3.6. Gateways and access features

Where a new development includes new roads the design should create a sense of arrival and departure. This will assist in encouraging drivers to reduce speed. It may include a distinct change in the road – colour or road surface, transferring from straight to winding road, from conventional road to shared space. It may be by introducing a sense of entering through a gateway by means of pillars at the entrance, or native hedge planting.

3.7. Building scale and massing

New builds need to be sympathetic to the mass, height, and scale, of existing homes, and therefore not exceed two storeys. Small variations in pitch angle of roofs and ridge heights will add interest, but need to fit in with the character of the locality. Building styles and types must not be uniform across a development. New builds may be in a cluster but the massing of buildings should allow a reasonable level of privacy, allow access to natural light, and as far as possible avoid overshadowing existing buildings. The density of a new development should reflect the existing low building density in this area.

3.8. Roofline

Uniformity of roofline can be visually boring. Slight and subtle variation in height and angle helps a great deal, as does the use of different colour and style of tiles. Use of dormer windows as design elements is effective. A roof needs to be in proportion to the rest of the building. Variation in the orientation of ridge tiles is helpful.

3.9. Vehicle parking

Due to the lack of public transport all new homes built must have their own off-road parking. A minimum of one space in the case of a one bedroom property, and two for a two or three bedroom home, and three for a four bedroom (or larger) home. Most garages are used as storage spaces instead of covered car parking so these off-road parking spaces will be in addition to any provision of garages.

In view of the rapid decline in sales of vehicles powered by internal combustion engines all new build homes are to be constructed with either an electric vehicle charging point, OR the required high current mains cable and associated isolating switch and fuse installed ready for a resident to have a charging point added.

3.10. Building modifications, extensions, and plot infills

Alterations to existing buildings are to be expected over time. However, extensions should be appropriate to the scale and design of an existing building and also complement the existing streetscape. The choice of materials and architectural detailing should reflect the host building and the character of the area. Consideration needs to be given to any potential for overlooking or overshadowing a neighbouring property.

3.11. Fenestration

New build houses should have a good amount of appropriately sized windows so as to maximise internal daylight and sunlight. There should be windows on all walls as expanses of unbroken brickwork are visually unsightly, reduce apparent surveillance of the area, and thereby increase potential for crime. At the same time, windows should not impact on neighbours' privacy, and be in keeping with the area in terms of style and scale.

3.12. Building line and natural boundary treatment

All new build homes should front onto a road or shared space. Any open spaces should be open to natural surveillance. Boundaries between properties and the road/pavement at the front of homes should be low walls or native hedges, to be in keeping with a village atmosphere.

3.13. Architectural details

Homes in a new development must be in a variety of styles and designs in order to reflect the wide variety of designs in neighbouring properties.

Homes should be designed to be accessible and inclusive, and their design should consider the needs of elderly or disabled residents. In particular, access to the homes needs to be practical for a wheelchair user, and all doors wide enough. Power points should be raised so that the elderly or infirm can insert or remove plugs without needing to bend down almost to floor level. Homes should where possible be designed to meet part M(4)2 of the building regulations, with a minimum of 20% being designed to this standard to align with the Canterbury Local Plan 2017.

Affordable/shared ownership homes must be scattered throughout a new development and the external design should not allow for identification of affordable housing.

Change in working practices brought about by the pandemic could be reflected in making one bedroom also capable of being used as a home working office. This could be by additional mains power points at desk top level to serve computers, printers etc. Houses could be fitted with fibre to the premises and hard wired for internet access in the home office/bedroom.

Consideration should be given to security – appropriate security standard for door and window locks, and also fire safety.

3.14. Materials and building details

The choice of building materials and colours must be appropriate to, and sympathetic with, the surrounding area. The use of sustainable sources for building materials is to be preferred.

3.15. Eco design

All new developments must be designed to be of the highest possible standard of energy efficiency. This will include thick layers of insulation, and the use of triple glazed windows where possible. Solar panels must be included and homes completed from 2025 onwards may not have a gas supply. From that date there must be low-carbon heating, such as ground or air source heat pumps. Houses should be more airtight and consideration needs to be given to the installation of mechanical ventilation and heat recovery.

3.16. Rainwater harvesting

Rain water is to be retained in the environment as much as possible. Run off from a roof is to be directed to soakaways in the gardens. Consideration should be given to the location of rain water collection butts. Consideration should be given to collecting rainwater in an underground tank and using it as grey water for filling lavatory cisterns and use in the garden.

3.17. Permeable paving

Driveways must either be permeable or have drainage gulleys close to the road diverting rain water into a soakaway in the front garden or an underground tank for later use as grey water.

3.18. Servicing

All homes now have at least three wheelie bins of various colours and a waste food caddy, and now storage boxes are also coming into use. These are visually unattractive and in order to maintain the aesthetic appeal of a development suitable bin storage is expected. New homes should have a garden compost bin.

3.19. Solar roof panels

All new build homes must be fitted with solar energy collectors. This should be both photo voltaic to generate electricity and for water heating. The design of a roof and selection of panels should aim to visually conceal the presence of solar panels as much as possible.

3.20. General questions to ask and issues to consider when presented with a development proposal.

This section provides a number of questions against which the design proposal or planning application could be evaluated by the Parish Council.

Most development or planning applications will only require some questions to be answered. The relevant questions, however, should provide an assessment as to whether the design proposal has taken into account the context and provided an adequate design solution that will enhance our parish.

As a first step there are a number of ideas or principles that should be present in the proposals. The proposals or design should:

1. Integrate with existing paths, roads, circulation networks and patterns of activity;
2. Reinforce or enhance the established village character of roads and lanes, greens, and other spaces;
3. Respect the rural character of views and gaps;
4. Harmonise and enhance existing settlement in terms of physical form, architecture and land use;

5. Relate well to local topography and landscape features, including prominent ridge lines and long-distance views.
6. Reflect, respect and reinforce local architecture and historic distinctiveness;
7. Retain and incorporate important existing features into the development;
8. Respect surrounding buildings in terms of scale, height, form and massing;
9. Adopt contextually appropriate materials and details;
10. Provide adequate open space for the development in terms of both quantity and quality;
11. Incorporate necessary services and drainage infrastructure without causing unacceptable harm to retained features;
12. Ensure all components e.g. buildings, landscapes, access routes, parking and open space are well related to each other;
13. Make sufficient provision for sustainable waste management (including facilities for kerbside collection, waste separation and minimisation where appropriate) without adverse impact on the street scene, the local landscape or the amenities of neighbours
14. Positively integrate energy efficient technologies.

Street grid and layout:-

Does it favour accessibility and connectivity over cul-de-sac models? If not, why?

Do the new points of access and street layout have regard for all users of the development; in particular:-

What are the essential characteristics of the existing street pattern; are these reflected in the proposal?

How will the new design or extension integrate with the existing street arrangement?

Are the new points of access appropriate in terms of patterns of movement?

Do the points of access conform to the statutory technical requirements?

Local green spaces, views and character:-

What are the particular characteristics of this area which have been taken into account in the design; i.e. what are the landscape qualities of the area?

Does the proposal maintain or enhance any identified views or views in general?

How does the proposal affect the trees on or adjacent to the site?

Has the proposal been considered within its wider physical context?

Has the impact on the landscape quality of the area been taken into account?

How does the proposal affect the character of a rural location?

How does the proposal impact on existing views which are important to the area and how are these views incorporated in the design?

Can any new views be created?

Is there adequate amenity space for the development?

Does the new development respect and enhance existing amenity space?

Have opportunities for enhancing existing amenity spaces been explored?

Will any communal amenity space be created? If so, how this will be used by the new owners and how will it be managed?

Gateway and access features:-

What is the arrival point, how is it designed?

Does the proposal maintain or enhance the existing gaps between settlements?

Does the proposal affect or change the setting of a listed building or listed landscape?

Is the landscaping to be hard or soft?

Buildings layout and grouping :-

What are the typical groupings of buildings?

How have the existing groupings been reflected in the proposal? Are proposed groups of buildings offering variety and texture to the townscape?

What effect would the proposal have on the streetscape?

Does the proposal maintain the character of dwelling clusters stemming from the main road?

Does the proposal overlook any adjacent properties or gardens? How is this mitigated?

Building line and boundary treatment:-

What are the characteristics of the building line?

How has the building line been respected in the proposals?

Has the appropriateness of the boundary treatments been considered in the context of the site?

Building heights and roofline:-

What are the characteristics of the roofline?

Have the proposals paid careful attention to height, form, massing and scale?

If a higher than average building(s) is proposed, what would be the reason for making the development higher?

Household extensions:-

Does the proposed design respect the character of the area and the immediate neighbourhood, and does it have an adverse impact on neighbouring properties in relation to privacy, overbearing or overshadowing impact?

Is the roof form of the extension appropriate to the original dwelling (considering angle of pitch)?

Do the proposed materials match those of the existing dwelling?

In case of side extension, does it retain important gaps within the street scene and avoid a 'terracing effect'?

Are there any proposed dormer roof extensions set within the roof slope?

Does the proposed extension respond to the existing pattern of window and door openings?

Is the side extension set back from the front of the house?

Building materials and surface treatment:-

What is the distinctive material in the area, if any?

Does the proposed material harmonise with the local materials?

Does the proposal use high-quality materials?

Have the details of the windows, doors, eaves and roof details been addressed in the context of the overall design?

Does the new proposed materials respect or enhance the existing area or adversely change its character?

Car parking solutions:-

What parking solutions have been considered?

Are the car spaces located and arranged in a way that is not dominant or detrimental to the sense of place?

Has planting been considered to soften the presence of cars?

Does the proposed car parking compromise the amenity of adjoining properties?

Have the needs of wheelchair users been considered?

Do new parking spaces integrate electric vehicle charging technology? Can existing parking spaces be retrofitted with electric vehicle charging points?

Architectural details and contemporary design:

If the proposal is within a conservation area or area of outstanding natural beauty, how are the characteristics reflected in the design?

Does the proposal harmonise with the adjacent properties? This means that it follows the height massing and general proportions of adjacent buildings and how it takes cues from materials and other physical characteristics.

Does the proposal maintain or enhance the existing landscape features?

Has the local architectural character and precedent been demonstrated in the proposals?

If the proposal is a contemporary design, are the details and materials of a sufficiently high enough quality and does it relate specifically to the architectural characteristics and scale of the site?

4. Delivery

The Design Code is aimed at ensuring that any developments in the parish will contribute to gentle, slow, and acceptable change in the area that brings people together and helps foster a sense of community and well-being. At the same time it should maintain the peaceful rural nature of the parish and its biodiversity – the key factors in making our local area so enjoyable to live in.

It is hoped that applicants for planning permission, landowners, and developers, will find the expectations on design helpful in guiding design and thereby securing consent to build more easily. It will help the Parish Council assess and comment on planning applications.