

Parish of Peasedown St. John

PARISH DESIGN
STATEMENT

SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING
GUIDANCE

The Parish of Peasedown St John

Parish Design Statement

In 1999 the Parish Council of Peasedown St. John actively supported an initiative for the 'village' to have a 'Village Design Statement' prepared.

A series of public discussion meetings was held, initially under the guidance of a consultant from the Countryside Agency (who have undertaken similar exercises across England), a steering group formed, several specialist sub-groups set up to undertake research, and a questionnaire circulated to every occupied premises in the Parish (both domestic and commercial).

A first draft document resulted and discussions followed at a senior level with Strategic Policy officials of Bath & North East Somerset council, from which it was clear the original remit attempted had been too wide and insufficiently targetted.

Conversely, the 'village' concept had been drawn too narrowly, and consideration needed to be extended to the whole of the 'parish' (to the Parish Council boundaries), to take in relationships with adjoining areas.

The document has therefore been re-titled 'Parish Design Statement' and is now in two parts, the first sets the geographic and demographic background to Peasedown St. John, followed by specific guidance points based on significant measures of local opinion regarding the context for future planning applications.

It was necessary to separate "Village Design" and "Village Appraisal" aspects and remove the wider 'operational' issues in village life that arouse most concern among local residents. These 'non-planning' aspects have not been ignored, but are already being translated into an Environmental Action Plan to be progressed as a rolling programme by the Parish Council.

The aim of the revision was to make the document conform better with national guidelines, so that our Planning Authority (B&NES) could consider it for formal adoption as : Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The DoE has laid down in 'Planning Policy Guidance Note No.12 (Development Plans and Regional Planning Guidance)', in respect of SPGs that, as well as being consistent with relevant national and regional planning guidance and development plans, they are to be issued separately from such plans and made publicly available. Whilst Planning Applications can only be decided in accordance with development plans complying with Section 54.A of the 1990 Act, SPGs may well be taken into account as a material consideration, adding valuable detail, and in particular can be used to emphasise important elements of "character" in local design.

Our draft document is currently (26th October 1999) lodged with B&NES for consideration for formal adoption, and a copy follows for the interest of local residents and others concerned. Any suggestions or comments on the content or wording, within a formal SPG context, will of course still be welcomed ---as further review and revision is envisaged.

The Parish of Peasedown St John

Parish Design Statement

Objective

The prime aim of this document is to provide information, well-researched as a combined community endeavour, designed to assist Bath & North East Somerset Council when considering the character of any proposed new developments or changes within the **Parish of Peasedown St. John**.

This is the 'Planning Aspects' core of a Parish community action plan intended to influence the yield of a better quality of life, with environmental stewardship for every one of its 5000 inhabitants. It also forms the written contribution by this community to 'Local Agenda 21' with the aim of helping to manage change at whatever level or scale that it occurs and ensuring that any changes made remain in harmony with the design of the various settlements within the Parish setting. As it is considered essential that any changes should make a positive contribution to the local environment, it is felt necessary to provide an influence towards protecting and where possible enhancing the quality, safety, character and existing diversity of the environment of this Parish, to ensure its continued enjoyment not only by the present population but also by future generations.

It is considered that, in future, elements of all additions or changes proposed as developments should be checked to ensure they are responsive to the local character of the Parish, suitably reflecting local building styles where appropriate and otherwise enhancing the local environment in a positive manner. Those about to prepare planning applications, whether local inhabitants, small builders or major developers, are to be encouraged to exceed the basic requirements of Planning formalities, by consulting with the community in a relevant manner via the Local Council, using this document as a background when designing schemes and preparing their formal applications. This will serve not only to influence the raising of design standards and reinforcement of local distinctiveness, and promote quality of life and environmental stewardship to help build a healthier and safer community, but will facilitate the ready processing and universal acceptance of future formal development applications.

Geographical location

The **Parish of Peasedown St. John** lies some six miles to the south of Bath and straddles a hilltop. The main settlement is aligned along the ridge of the hill, at an altitude of some 170.m at its highest point (Huddox Hill). This follows the line of the old Roman Road, the Fosse Way (and until the village centre was by-passed in 1996 this had been the A.367 trunk route). There are other habitation areas, effectively separate hamlets within the Parish, located on the hill slopes at **Carlingcott** and **New Buildings** to the north, and at **Woodborough** and **Braysdown** to the south.

In the valley to the north runs the **Cam Brook**, in the valley to the south the **Wellow Brook**, and these delineate the respective northern and southern Parish boundaries.

These subsidiary settlements are located within and are surrounded by agriculturally developed, actively utilised land that has supported and been sustained by both arable and livestock farming over many centuries up to the present day.. Some of the land, particularly on the northern flanks, is steeply inclined, and much lies within designated Green Belt extending overall from Timsbury in the north west along to Wellow in the east.

Geologically the hilltop location is founded on **Lower Jurassic Limestone**, with hedges and mature trees softening the village boundaries to the north-east and south-west. The countryside is readily accessible, with a network of footpaths and minor roads giving ready access to the adjacent villages of Shoscombe, Dunkerton and Camerton which lie outside the Parish boundary.

The southern boundary of the main settlement is now formed by a new by-pass road. This is located on a plateau extending as far as Braysdown before the ground falls away down to the Wellow Brook in the valley on the south side. The by-pass road has an acoustic bund separating it from the major new housing development now built to the north of its alignment, and this bund needs extensive additional afforestation before its appearance can compare with the other older parts of the settlement.

Historical development

Formally the 'Parish' is a relatively recent 20th century creation, having been created from parts of **Camerton**, **Dunkerton** and **Wellow** Parishes only in 1955.

However, in historic and physical terms it is possible to trace continuous local occupation forward from an Early Iron Age settlement at the site, through Roman Occupation into Saxon developments, the latter causing a number of local inclusions in the 1086 Domesday Book.

Although the hamlet of **Carlingcott** existed prior to 1800, the main 'modern' settlement developed as part of the 19th century expansion of the Somerset Coalfield during the Industrial Revolution, and in particular with the sinking of the local **Braysdown** Colliery in 1845. Indeed, as with several other neighbouring villages and hamlets, it was coal mining that provided the main employment for the local population for over one hundred years until the second half of this century, there being some half-dozen collieries within a two-mile radius of Peasedown St. John. Apart from Braysdown within the Parish, other mines on its periphery were at Camerton, Dunkerton, Writhlington and Shoscombe.

Apart from the Red Post Inn, dating from the 18th century and disparagingly referred to by the Rev. John Skinner, Rector of Camerton in his 1803-1834 diaries, the main settlement erected in the latter half of 19th and early part of the 20th centuries comprises separate and terraced dwellings and ranks of cottages. These are substantial, dignified homes of modest utilitarian design, constructed in local stone ('lias'), or brick, or a combination of both, with Welsh slate roofs. Siting occurred mostly as a progressive linear development along the line of the Fosse Way (by then a metalled road providing a strategic link to connect Bath with Radstock and communities to the south). The line of buildings, homes and retail businesses was strung along the area now known as Ashgrove and Bath Road, with a spur road, Braysdown Lane, going down to the in-village colliery. These buildings were placed close to the road, which was only formalised with pavements during the inter-war period at which stage they acquired a uniform frontage with walls or railings and small front gardens.

Mid-20th century developments after the Second World War mainly comprised local authority housing and private dwellings. The former brought adequate and suitable housing facilities at affordable rents, usually in generously spaced settings, but have contributed little towards enhancement of the general architectural appearance of Peasedown St John. The majority of the privately-commissioned residential dwellings built in the same period, mostly on the village perimeter, tended to be individually-designed bungalows, giving a 'softening effect' on the village edge as it encroached into the surrounding countryside. By the end of the 1960s these additions had stabilised the village size at around 1500 homes.

More recently there has been a doubling of the village size within a short period as a result of large-scale residential estate developments commenced in the late 1980s. These have been built on former agricultural land previously used for mixed farming, sited on the southern plateau and bounded by a line drawn from the cemetery in the east through to the Red Post Inn in the west, and circumscribed by the by-pass road that was integral to the scheme. This latest development has been undertaken by four major building contractors of 'national' status (and therefore using national rather than regional design patterns), and has produced a mix of housing from starter homes through to substantial detached houses incorporating prestige features.

Some parts of this development have been arranged in a layout comprising a series of cul-de-sacs, which have the advantage of bestowing local privacy coupled with road safety due to the absence of through vehicular traffic. However it has been found that such linking by single access points tends to deter social integration with the rest of the village, extending feelings of isolation and heightening fears of crime. In this regard the Parish now has more than twelve Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in operation, and these, together with other desirable design features, have been discussed with the Police Officers responsible for the Parish and have their full support. Thus a joint effort exists to ensure that the Parish is a safe place in which to reside and bring up a family.

Despite the addition of these major housing developments, there is now very little accommodation available for renting other than remaining former Local Authority housing that is now operated by the

Somer Community Housing Trust. The latter comprises some 252 dwellings of which 59 are specifically designed as sheltered accommodation for the elderly. This rented housing stock approximates some ten per cent of the total within the main settlement.

In summary, the Parish has an acceptable mix of homes including estates built in the 1960s which introduced new forms such as long terraces, some single storey and some double storey, with interspersed architect-designed homes that have contributed to a refreshing variety in the architectural pattern. However, there should always be some local affordable housing for first time buyers, avoiding the exclusion of this group by any undue trend towards building a majority of larger, detached, and more expensive dwellings.

In some Parishes of the old coalfield area, building development has unfortunately been allowed to take place in such a way that former logically separated communities have disadvantageously melded. The main settlement of Peasedown St. John is separated from that of Shoscombe in the adjoining Parish by a strip of farmland a mere 400m. wide, and exemplifies that vigilance is necessary to obviate any similar local future physical joining of separate communities by unwise new linking developments.

Local demographic trends

Following cessation of coal mining as the primary employer, lack of other local opportunities made it necessary for the Parish inhabitants to seek alternative work outside, taking them progressively further away to Norton-Radstock, Paulton and then as far as Bath, Bristol, or even to London. Recent doubling of residential housing has exacerbated this situation so that by now the vast majority of working-age people living in Peasedown St. John now need to travel out of it each day in order to reach suitable employment.

Notwithstanding this adverse change, it is noted that by May 1999 fewer than fifty local people were registered as seeking employment, the majority of these being males within the age range from 18 to 44 years. With no railway system to provide access to Bath, Bristol, or communities to the east and south, commuting has progressively become mainly dependant on use of private cars. However the cumulative effects of congestion on the local A.367 artery is also causing a deteriorating reliability of service by the desirable alternative of bus-based public transport, as the latter has to share the same restricted road system without benefit (or seeming possibility) of priority measures.

Currently the opportunities for village-based employment are few, even though there is light industry located within the main settlement and at Braysdown. Some retail businesses, trades and services are located in a ribbon-like manner in the 'central' portion of the main street. These aim to supply some everyday domestic needs, but many householders find that as they need to travel at least to Norton-Radstock, Paulton or Bath to satisfy their total weekly requirements, it is convenient to do the majority of their shopping on these occasions, aided by greater choice and opportunities for bargain prices. As a result, progressively since the 1970s to current date there has been a steady loss of local businesses attributable at least in part to lack of support from the local community, and this despite the doubling of the local population in recent years.

Whilst the main settlement can still be considered to be well served with essential main services, with the exception of banking facilities, prosperity of the Parish is almost totally dependant on the normal process of economic growth and development in the surrounding urban areas, and these are matters over which the Parish community has little control and ineffectual opportunity to influence the way events develop.

The Way Ahead

The Parish community would like each future planning proposal, **within its presentation**, to demonstrate how full account has been taken of the need for :

- good inherent design, and
- regard to compatibility with the local environment in which it is set.

With sections of the older part of the Parish main settlement dating well back into the 19th century, and approximately half constructed from 1960, even the practice of **in-filling** (which is generally to be commended, especially where it is suitable as an alternative to use of greenfield sites) should address the appearance of the proposed development in relation to its surroundings, in order to ensure compatibility of design and scale. Relationships between buildings are as important as the design of the buildings themselves and skilful use of spaces between buildings can help the successful assimilation of new developments. However designs should include subtle variations to avoid monotonous repetition

The originators of future planning applications should be asked to provide :

- a short written statement setting out the need for and the principles behind any proposed development, indicating that consideration had been given to any likely impact on :
 - ◇ adjacent building(s),
 - ◇ the settlement and landscape setting, and
 - ◇ the Parish community as a whole.

To facilitate better understanding of proposals for mixed or large-scale developments, they should be accompanied by readily-assimilated visual information in an appropriate format such as :

- perspective views, or
- isometric drawings, or
- computer-generated views, or
- three-dimensional models.

or a meaningful combination of the above, as appropriate to the nature of the application.

Small-scale proposals should be illustrated by conventional plan drawings supported by good-sized photographs of the intended site that clearly reveal the relationship to existing surroundings and the potential effect of adding the proposed development.

Applicants should demonstrate that they have already consulted widely within the Parish, especially with those who might be expected to have a relevant and legitimate interest in the design aspects of the proposed development and how the final end product will both affect and impact on the community.

By consulting from the initial stages with the Local Council, so that careful and early consideration of the design issues can be undertaken, it can be expected, to the benefit of all parties including the applicant, that the whole planning process can be materially facilitated and speeded.

Specific guidance factors

for Planning Permission Applications within the Parish of Peasedown St.John

- Environmental setting

It will be noted that when approaching the Parish from both the north-east and the south-west the scene is set of substantial groupings of trees at the entrances to the village, including fine specimens of native broadleaf trees. Even where substantial additional house building has been undertaken since the late 1980s, many **trees and hedgerows have been retained** within newly built-up areas.

- ◇ **This policy should be stringently maintained.** Regard should be given wherever possible to avoid perpetuating any adverse effect on wildlife such as that caused by loss of the field system to the south east of the main settlement that has been replaced by urban development within the last 25 years.
- ◇ The needs of wildlife can be enhanced by developers, landowners and householders protecting existing wildlife environments and actively helping to **create new habitats in such forms as hedgerows, ditches and open spaces (especially rough grass land)**.
- ◇ Proposed future developments at the edge of any of the settlements should give high priority to landscape design in order to protect and enhance the external view of each settlement and from within the Parish. To obviate a stark edge to any such development, native broadleaf tree species and hedges **should be maintained and where necessary be newly planted as appropriate.**

- 'Green Belt' developments

The Parish community is fully appreciative of the benefits of Green Belt policies and would be strongly opposed to any further developments to either the north or south of the main settlement. Developments within the Green Belt are already covered by separate policies limiting allowable extensions and alterations to existing properties. However, any addition or alteration to buildings in this part of the Parish tend to be very noticeable, and consequently it is desirable that **attention should be given to the use of closely-matching materials** and the maintenance of existing style. B&NES has an excellent record regarding re-use of recycled materials, and such sourcing should be borne in mind when giving approvals for any such work, as well as appropriate adjacent landscaping.

- Open recreational spaces

Access to public open spaces and recreational green areas are to be maintained and enhanced, with particular reference to the

- ◇ Peasedown St John Institute and Recreation Ground, and the
- ◇ Beacon Field and Play Area.

- Building styles

Within the Parish a wide variety of building styles and designs is to be found. However several small 'pockets' can be discerned which comprise an area of consistent and cohesive style, usually because adjacent properties were erected together in a particular era and type of development. In many cases this has resulted in a combination of satisfactory and sympathetic relationship in terms of scale, height and alignment, which coupled with subsequent weathering of the original construction materials, has produced a most pleasant unifying effect in a localised setting.

Any proposed development, whether of premises modification or in-filling, needs to be scrutinised to see whether it lies within a pocket of similar adjacent properties, and if so, ensure that it suitably blends and does not conflict with any localised consistency of style.

- Proposals for new housing

Any proposals for new housing should be scrutinised to ensure, if possible, that the development is scaled to provide additional affordable housing for first time buyers.

- Undergrounding of cabled services
 - ◇ All new developments, including in-fill construction, must include **undergrounding** and concealment of all wires cables and pipes.
 - ◇ In addition, the statutory utilities need to be directed towards a policy that encourages the progressive undergrounding of all installations **carried at present** by overhead cables.

- Street-furniture
 - ◇ **Standardisation of street-furniture to an improved coherent design** applicable throughout the Parish is needed in order to counteract a wide range of diversely designed fittings that have been installed by various agencies over past years.
 - ◇ All new **street lighting** should incorporate muted downlighting using white light if possible.
 - ◇ To avoid despoiling the frontages of houses, individual householders need to be encouraged to choose TV dishes and aerials of minimum size and to site and install them unobtrusively.

- Crime prevention

All new development proposals need to be able to demonstrate that due account has been taken of

 - ◇ the best design advice to ensure that they embrace the concept of community-based action to inhibit and remedy the causes and consequences of criminal, intimidatory and other anti-social behaviour.
 - ◇ the need for new or refurbished dwellings to incorporate adequate prevention measures to inhibit burglary and thus be made secure by design. Active consideration should be given to the planting of aggressive shrubs with thorny branches under ground floor windows.
 - ◇ the views of the local community, via the Local Council, ensuring that they have the opportunity to implement safe neighbourhood proposals and thus encourage the determination of safety initiatives that would be required to design out crime.

Acknowledgments

Thanks are due to all the many people who have freely contributed to this document.

Within the Parish this has included those who attended the public discussion meetings, those who responded to the Questionnaire that was delivered to every occupied premises in the Parish, and those who worked together in the specialist Sub-groups and on the Steering Committee.

The Steering Committee are particularly grateful for the individual and collective support of members of the Parish Council and of the Community Association (Beacon Hall).

The Local Council (Peasedown St.John Parish Council) has supported the development and preparation of this document from the outset and recognises that the Guidelines that have resulted will assist that Council in adequately reflecting community views of the Parish in a consistent way. It will also augment the effectiveness of that Council's representations to B&NES Council when making comments and recommendations on planning applications relating to developments within the Parish, or on other proposed external measures that could impact on the Parish.

this revision updated to 26th October 1999 (formal submission to B&NES 'Strategic Policy')