

Key man-made landscape elements

Historic buildings/settlements

Many villages of great charm and antiquity exist throughout the Borough. Their conservation is central to overall landscape character.

Guidelines:

- Ensure that proposals respect (but do not extend) the linear character of settlements and avoid the creation, expansion, or consolidation of more scattered farmsteads and cottages.
- Building materials, layout and style should reflect the local vernacular character. Landscape proposals should also reflect local character, using appropriate form, structure and species.
- The character area guidelines for planting and vernacular should be used, except where further more detailed guidance is available from Parish or Village Design Statements.

Landmark buildings and historic parkland

Across the Borough are a large number of buildings that have become part of the landscape, frequently occupying isolated, elevated, or open aspects in the landscape, often visible over considerable distances. They may be reference points of past activities that remain only in fragmented pockets of the modern landscape. Examples include churches, sometimes standing aloof from the village, the unmistakable oast cowl viewed across fields or (rarely now) seen peaking above the hop garden or orchard, or perhaps isolated farmsteads, barns and mills, or the large country house sitting in its historic parkland.

Guidelines:

- Conserve and enhance landmark buildings and historic farmsteads, together with their setting and views and restore the visual and if possible, the historic integrity of historic parkland landscapes.
- Encourage the re – use of redundant barns and agricultural buildings. Have regard to ‘The Conservation of Traditional Farm Buildings, Planning and Development Guidelines No. 3’ (Swale Borough Council Development Services Department, 1993) and Planning Policy Statement 7: Sustainable Development in Rural Areas, 2004).
- At historic parkland sites:
 - Conserve and manage parkland and veteran trees for their biodiversity value and encourage new planting to maintain age diversity.
 - Hard landscaping details should be conserved with replacements in facsimile and in natural materials. New structures should contribute to the planned landscape and its setting.
 - Look for opportunities to revert from arable use to pasture and grassland and avoid the ploughing of grassland.
 - Retain ponds and wetland areas to enhance their visual and nature conservation functions.

Generic Guidelines for development types

All development

- Should submit site landscape assessments or statements, depending upon the size and type of development. These should provide an analysis of the site and its context and demonstrate how development has responded to the Swale Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines.
- Should relate to settlement pattern – i.e. linear, clustered etc. Consider plot size and shape and the relationship of the buildings within the plot and to each other. Small-scale proposals are more likely to be sympathetic to landscape character.
- Should promote landscape, biodiversity and cultural benefits and provide links between urban and rural areas, in addition to recreation and access opportunities, which would constitute locally relevant examples of the multi - functional green infrastructure that is advised by the South East Green Infrastructure Framework.
- Landscapes that have a strong established landscape structure (e.g. field patterns with natural boundaries such as hedges, woodlands, shelterbelts, ditches etc) with a diverse mix of uses should, as a general rule, better accommodate change than simple landscapes with an open structure. Look for targeted opportunities to enclose most landscape types (i.e. create new natural connecting landscape structure), whilst avoiding the opening up of enclosed landscapes.
- Respect local vernacular and distinctiveness when considering massing, form, height, detail, colour and texture, blending innovation with tradition. Use materials in their traditional manner e.g. avoiding prefabricated flint panels.
- Minimise the number of new vehicular accesses and use minimum acceptable width. Access tracks/roads should relate to landform and field patterns, with materials appropriate to the locality.
- The re-use of, or grouping of buildings, is likely to have the least impact on the landscape, as opposed to the isolated positioning of buildings in exposed or prominent locations such as ridgelines or hilltops. Avoid: straight lines or regimented buildings on the settlement edge; extending the linear form of settlements; the creation, expansion, or consolidation of more scattered farmsteads and cottages.
- Protect settlement setting, important views and spaces and avoid intrusion onto ridgelines, prominent slopes, hillsides and tops, open fields and valley sides and bottoms.
- Avoid proposals that would impinge on the sense of undeveloped openness between settlements vulnerable to coalescence.
- Retain key landscape features – e.g. woodland, shaws, hedgerows, orchards, trees, watercourses and ponds. Where possible, extend and buffer key habitats from new developments and intensive agricultural practices..

- Within the Kent Downs AONB, refer to the suite of relevant guidance documents set out in the Bibliography.
- Refer to the Kent Design Guide 05/06 (Kent Design Initiative).

Residential

- Generally avoid close board fencing or other suburban features such as walls, gates, lighting, bollards, block paving, concrete kerbs and ornamental planting. Provide the minimum acceptable width access and use timber gates, with a minimal driveway of (normally) bound gravel. Retain vegetation and make use of grass, hedgerow planting and existing natural features.
- Limit domestic curtilage extensions where settlements depend upon the surrounding field pattern, landscape form, cover, or boundary treatment, for their distinctiveness. Where extended, look for opportunities to re-instate traditional landscape features e.g. hedges and avoid over-suburbanising the garden with ornamental plants and structures.

Commercial (including Agriculture, Tourism and Leisure) and Equestrian

- Avoid the use of chainlink, weldmesh, close board and other fencing and gates associated with urban industrial sites.
- Use neutral colours for buildings and limit open storage and lighting. Creative use of colour can be used to reduce the apparent scale of larger commercial buildings.
- Caravan/chalet/campsites/gypsy and traveller sites are likely to have the greatest visual impact in open landscapes, whilst small-scale proposals may be more appropriate in enclosed landscapes. Ensure that they are well screened by existing vegetation and avoid suburban features (see ‘residential’). Consider guidelines set out within the CLG Good Practice Guide - Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites (<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/pdf/designinggypsiesites.pdf>).
- Golfcourses should relate to the existing landscape form and pattern, avoiding hilltops, hill and valley sides. Look for opportunities to naturalise their appearance by use of traditional landscape elements such as hedgerows, shelterbelts, shaws, woodland and large areas of rough grassland. Consider the colours and textures of grass seeding. Reintroduce native planting in intensively farmed areas. Consider English Heritage guidance on golf in historic landscapes. Avoid floodlighting.
- Minerals extraction brings a variety of environmental harm, however this can be minimised by following best practice and establishing a landscape strategy pre, during and post extraction. This should ensure that the post-quarrying landscape is as good, if not better than the pre-quarrying landscape. Opportunities for biodiversity should be maximised here. Refer to DCLG Mineral Planning Guidance Notes and Minerals Policy Statements.

- For new stables (including non-commercial) and ménages/exercise areas, re-use or locate buildings as part of existing building group or in field corners and avoid the proliferation of buildings and other structures. Use natural folds in the landscape, existing vegetation, or copses. Use dark matt colours for stables and surfaces or (preferably) local materials. Black weatherboarding should be used in historic landscapes, historic groups of buildings or on traditionally designed ‘barns’. Avoid overgrazing and excessive field sub-division with post and rail fencing/wire/white tape. Look for opportunities to plant hedgerows around and between the fragmented fields (including replacing evergreen belts) and to replace/supplement fencing with hedging. Within the Kent Downs AONB, refer to the Good Practice Horse Management Pasture Management (DRAFT - Kent Downs AONB Unit) See also separate guidance issued by the Council (<http://www.swale.gov.uk/1491-supplementary-planning-guidance-spg/>).

Infrastructure

- New roads often contrast with landscape pattern so design and landscaping should integrate the road with the surrounding landscape and extend beyond the road corridor.
- For highway works and management, conserve hedges, grass verges/banks, trees, walls, bridges and roadside features like finger posts or milestones, whilst avoiding concrete kerbing, standardised ‘features’, excessive sight-lines and lighting, especially between settlements. Make restrained use of coloured surfaces and road markings.
- For masts, avoid breaking open skylines or intruding into sensitive views. Site on lower slopes against a backdrop of trees. Landscape both close to the structure and, where practical, close to receptors.
- With the exception of marshland, flatter large-scale landscapes, can, generally, better accommodate overhead cabling where associated with existing structures. Often, the use of underground cabling will be the most appropriate.
- Wind farms in exposed locations are often prominent features. Visual impacts are likely to be reduced when located in landscapes where there is a diverse mix of land uses against which the turbines can be viewed.
- Within the Kent Downs AONB, have regard to the ‘Rural Streets and Lanes: A Design Handbook’, (Kent Downs AONB Unit, June 2009).
- In rural areas, take design cues from rural lanes; avoid engineered lines, parallel kerb lines and consider indigenous finishes (pea shingle) rather than standard bitumen McCadern.

The landscape assessment has been undertaken based on the methodology promoted by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England) through their Countryside Character Programme and Landscape Assessment Guidance 2002. It also has incorporated the latest developments in biodiversity (habitat) opportunity mapping. In addition to the characterisation of the landscape, judgements have been made on its condition and sensitivity to generate guidance to assist Swale Borough Council in targeting resources and actions to those areas with greatest need.

The landscape assessment has identified 42 landscape character areas across the Borough. Each of these areas has physical and cultural characteristics that are distinct and identifiable from the others. Some of the differences between the character areas are not immediately apparent until they are broken down to their basic landscape components. The transition between the areas on the ground may be quite gradual in some places but the essential characteristics are quite distinct from each other. Some character areas appear

to change quite dramatically within themselves. These changes may be due to either very local variations or more typically due to changes in condition or land management.

This number of landscape character areas shows Swale Borough as having a highly diverse landscape, ranging from freshwater and saltwater marshes, open chalk downs, unspoilt enclosed dry valleys, strongly patterned fruit producing landscape, large tracts of ancient woodland and areas of mixed farming. Within these landscapes are many attractive villages with historic buildings and parkland estates, which complement the natural environment and reflect its historic past.

Landscape character is not static. For example, many farming landscapes are under pressure due to intensification of arable cultivation. To the north of the borough, agricultural intensification is threatening the extent of traditional grazing marsh and salt marsh, along with traditional features such as timber wing fencing and gates and sporadic features such as windmills, sheepfolds/washes and footbridges.

Modern agricultural practices have caused extensive loss of traditional hedgerow boundaries throughout the farmed landscape to the north of the borough and throughout the dry valleys and downs to the south. Agricultural intensification is fragmenting the traditional small scale enclosure pattern of the fruit belt landscape, central to the borough, and many orchards and hop gardens have been removed. It is also threatening the extent of species rich chalk grassland within the dry valleys and downs to the south of the borough. Woodland fringe is also vulnerable, and parcels of woodland which lack ecological connectivity with other woodland habitats are becoming isolated.

Modern trends and market forces have influenced the continuity of traditional orchards, so that some are derelict and left unmanaged. Similarly, trends such as conifer plantations and sweet chestnut coppice are threatening the integrity of traditional native broadleaf woodland planting.

The quality and rural character of the borough is vulnerable to insensitive and inappropriate development. Whilst the marshland is particularly sensitive to new development which is most obtrusive in open views and detracts from the undeveloped quality of the landscape, farmland to the north of the borough is vulnerable to insensitive urban fringe developments such as industrial development and infrastructure.

However, there are still numerous areas of landscape with a well-developed traditional patchwork of fruit fields, shelterbelts and woodlands that are worthy of conservation and opportunities to restore landscape structure through the actions of landowners or developers, as part of agri-environmental schemes, or through the actions of conservation organisations. In a different way, our coastal landscapes will be subject to increasing changes due to sea level rise and alteration of sea defences. It is hoped that this document and its guidance will assist the process of accommodating changes whilst maintaining the essential character and variety of these landscapes.



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