

ASHFORD HILL

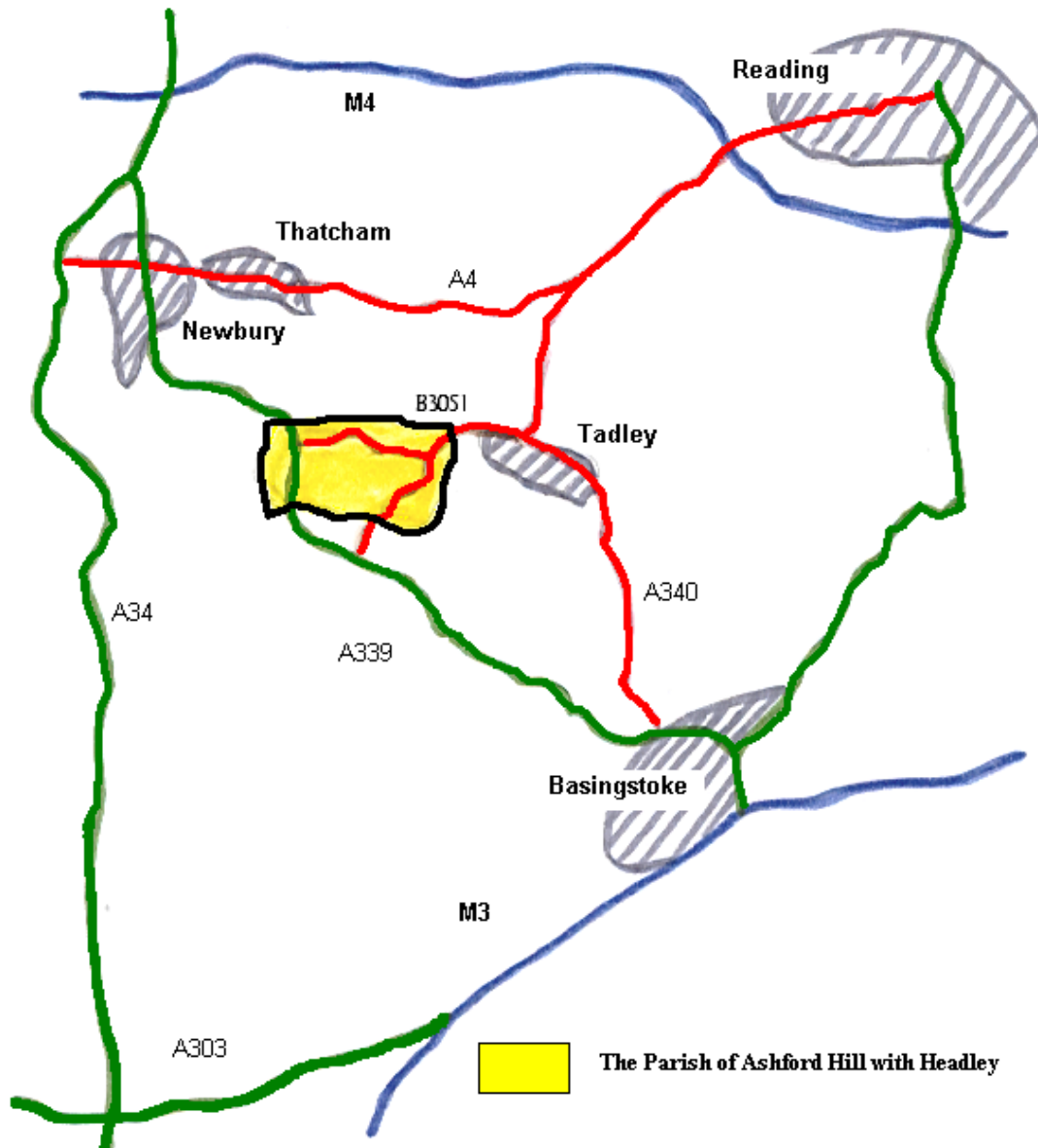


with HEADLEY

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

March 2004

LOCATION MAP



This document was adopted by Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council as supplementary planning guidance on 19th February 2004

Thanks are due to the residents of the parish who took part in meetings, completed questionnaire surveys, took photographs and contributed their expertise in a variety of ways, and to the staff of the planning department of B&DBC for their help and advice

ASHFORD HILL WITH HEADLEY

A PARISH DESIGN STATEMENT

INTRODUCTION AND CONTENTS

The parish of Ashford Hill with Headley remains largely undeveloped and is used for a wide variety of agricultural and other countryside pursuits. This Design Statement is written at a time when the Parish still retains its essentially rural character. There is grave risk that, if future change is not managed with great care, the parish will become essentially suburban. The remaining challenge would be merely to keep it as "pretty" a dwelling space as possible. The existing character and especially its utility is cherished. Preservation, coupled with compatible evolution, is the theme of our recommendations.

Visually, there is considerable variety within the parish. We have therefore concluded that, for simplicity and usefulness, this document should deal with each part separately. This treatment results in some repetition. The "Planning Guidelines" set out below recognise that an obligation for Village Design Statements is to contribute to the management of change; not to prevent it. The intention is that these guidelines should be applied throughout the parish and supplement rather than replace the existing protection provided by Planning Regulations.



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OPEN SPACES AND COUNTRYSIDE



Landscape and General Character

The parish lies between the expanding towns of Newbury, Thatcham, Tadley and Basingstoke. It has a population of 1,150 and consists of 6.5 square miles of virtually intact rural landscape, broken only by the two villages and five small settlements, all of which blend well into the countryside. Two types of open space exist and deserve preservation, the land between the villages and the open spaces within.

Away from the settlements there is a scattering of attractive dwellings set in a mosaic of mixed farmland with numerous small copses and larger areas of irregular shaped, mainly broadleaved, woodland. The wooded areas are, in the main, remnants of the mediaeval royal forest of Pamber. Mainly small fields are under a mix of pasture and arable with a strong structure of surrounding native hedgerows, many of which incorporate mature trees. Such hedgerows form an attractive and important part of the character of the landscape. Agriculture includes wheat, barley, oilseed rape, and crops for the fragrance industry. There are six or seven small beef herds and a few sheep. Apart from the farmland there are pockets of wild wetlands sustaining an abundance of rare plants and birds. The whole parish is rich in wildlife. Several streams run from south to north into the River Enborne. A dominant feature of the area is the wide variety of scenic patterns and views towards the down-land escarpment to the south and to the high ground overlooking the Kennet valley to the north.

This area of very English landscape deserves to be maintained, particularly in view of extensive urban development nearby. With the exception of a few unsightly barns, the buildings blend in such a way that the landscape is generally free of visually intrusive development or any excessive light or noise pollution

Specially protected areas

The rural merit of the area is acknowledged by the past designation of a large proportion of the parish as areas of Special Landscape Quality (ASLQ). Ashford Hill Meadow is a National Nature Reserve, a larger area is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Other areas around the meadows and Headley Gravel Pit are Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation.

Land Usage

Past and present landowners deserve praise for the quality of the landscape. The woodlands, wetland and hedgerows require and have had appropriate management. They would, otherwise, deteriorate into inaccessible scrub.

In an era of low agricultural incomes policies are needed which will foster care of the land by a wide variety of users. The necessary incentives include capacity to earn a living locally, recreational facilities including walking, riding, shooting and the satisfaction of preserving the ecology. Horses have become an increasingly important part of the local scene; racehorses, event horses, riding school and children's ponies are all represented.

There are five established shoots, the keepers of which play an important role as guardians in their areas of operation. The shoots provide useful part-time employment and without them the wilder areas of the parish would deteriorate through lack of care, incursion of bikes, cars, dumping and vandalism.

The Commons, central to both villages, make open space characteristic of the whole parish. From them there is often a fine view of the night sky marred only slightly by the urban glow from nearby towns.

Planning Guidelines.

- Fitting into the countryside is seen as the most important criteria for new designs.



- Farm development which increases commercial or recreational activity should be encouraged provided there is no significant increase in any kind of pollution (including noise, light and traffic) and that the impact on the environment is kept to a minimum. Sensitivity is needed to balance priorities.



- Any future development should be encouraged to take the opportunity to enhance the visual impact of the site by improving materials, planting of native trees and landscaping.

- No additional street or other public lighting should be permitted anywhere in the parish unless public safety cannot otherwise be assured.

- There should be encouragement to plant boundaries with indigenous species to maintain and enhance the rural character.



- Riders and Walkers should not be deprived of quiet roads, footpaths and bridleways.



- Any development that creates unacceptably higher levels of traffic or traffic hazards should be resisted.



BUILDING STYLES AND MATERIALS

An important characteristic and fascination of the whole area of the parish is the variety of building types. Because they have developed over the years they are sited in their own best interests rather than conforming to a disciplined pattern.



Small country estates and farms fill the rural spaces between the villages. Most are set back from the roads and are surrounded by cottages and other outbuildings. The houses here are generally a century old or more, and show the characteristics of an age of care and craftsmanship. Most are of handmade clay brick and many have interspersed blue header bricks. Blue bricks are also used for string courses and to create features around arches to windows and doors. Sash, casement and dormer windows add interest. Plain clay tiles are the predominant roofing material. These houses have developed and changed over time to suit the needs of their owners and not surprisingly show a huge variety of style. However they are generally of low aspect and fit easily into their surroundings and neither dominate nor mark the countryside.

Small cottages or homesteads were built in earlier times and these have been modified and extended to suit more modern needs. The earliest originated as squatter cottages built in a day and consisting of two rooms with a thatch roof. Few survive. In the early nineteenth century a standardised cottage style became common featuring two rooms either side of a central entrance door with inglenook fireplaces at each end and with a further two rooms upstairs. Thatch was the normal roofing material often replaced by slate or tile. Tile hangings are used on some houses while others are lime rendered and painted in muted colours. Later additions typically have been extensions to the side and rear of the cottages or conversion of adjoining units, but many still show their history in their names and appearance.

There has been some modern development, mainly in the centre of the villages but rural styles generally predominate. A recent infill development at Ashford Hill was opposed by residents and refused by the BDBC Planning until the average density and the height of the buildings was reduced. The development now features a good diversity of style, attractive detailed brickwork, dormer windows, porches and broken rooflines. Care has been taken with brickwork, style, preservation of hedge screening and the new houses are a good example of sympathetic modern village design. Opposition to such developments can be minimised by thoughtful design and adherence to existing character and planning guidelines.



Nearly all the houses in the parish are detached and overlook open views. Many are attractively surrounded by trees and hedges. However, the front aspect of some properties is blemished by the presence of unsightly fences and fast-growing cypresses that contrast inappropriately with the neighbourhood street scene.



From the village centres there is a gradual thinning of housing density toward the village boundaries, with a distinct break into open countryside in every direction along the access routes. Most of the development since World War II has been a very gradual infill within the village settlement boundaries. Generally there is low building density both within the two villages and in the surrounding hamlets.

Planning Guidelines

- The break between the villages and open countryside should be maintained.
- Where there is scope for small infill building the development should be of similar building density to the surrounding area.



- Affordable housing of suitable character should be incorporated into any new plans where required by the Borough Councils' adopted affordable housing policy, but should maintain diversity of style and character.
- The older properties and the few terraced cottages should be preserved. Any extensions should harmonise with the best of existing characteristics and proportions. We encourage development rather than replacement where possible.



- There should be encouragement to plant boundaries with indigenous species as a means of enclosing private gardens and to maintain and enhance rural character.
- Further ribbon development would harm the rural character of the parish and should be avoided; Headley must not become encompassed and absorbed by Greenham Common and Newbury.

- Traditional styles of brickwork should be encouraged. Houses built to modern designs should incorporate traditional materials and brickwork..



- The spaces around building should be retained and owners encouraged to maintain the trees and hedgerows which mark the boundaries.



- Any future development of new buildings should maintain the form, scale and proportions of existing vernacular buildings and reflect the diversity of building styles, materials, colours and textures in order to keep the essentially rural character evident across the whole parish.



ASHFORD HILL



Ashford Hill is an excellent place in which to live, although this may not be apparent to those passing through the village between the high walls lining the busy main road. The village, having developed piecemeal over the centuries, typifies the diversity of local building styles and has an attractive and open lack of order. A variety of styles and types of houses are clustered around the edge of the common, which is used as a recreation and sports area for all ages. Houses there are sited on peaceful narrow lanes, well separated by gardens and surrounded by hedgerows interspersed with trees. Almost all of the houses in the village enjoy views over open pasture and woodland and have direct access to excellent walks through open country, woodland and along the brook. The majority of houses rely satisfactorily on septic tank drainage.



The Ship Inn provides a part-time post office and shop but pedestrians have to negotiate a hazardous length of road to get there. Butler's Garage stocks garden machinery, some food and clothing. Following refurbishment the Victorian church complies with the laws on accessibility, is suitable for wider use and runs a programme of concerts.

Planning Guidelines. (Ashford Hill)

- Ashford Hill has rich variety in its buildings and general setting and the openness of true countryside up to its doorways. Building around the village would encroach on this and should not be encouraged.

The current efforts to increase road safety through the village are commended, although the danger and noise from heavy vehicles using the road as a rat-run is becoming an increasing problem. Public transport consists of one bus to Newbury per week. We encourage the forthcoming trial of a rover bus.

The successful modern Primary School attracts pupils from outside the parish as well as from within. A pre-school group meets in the cricket pavilion and a toddlers group in the modern Village Hall.



Holt Cottages were redeveloped recently and a new group of houses has been built on open ground in the centre of the village.

There is a pleasing absence of ribbon development.

The problems of surface water throughout the village, caused by the presence of clay and by ditches remaining uncleared have never been comprehensively addressed. The lack of mains drainage is relevant to future planning.



- Problems of surface water on roads, lanes and paths and drainage problems in general should be addressed as part of any development plan.

HEADLEY

The attractive village of Headley is centred on a triangle of roads, the A339, Thornford Road and Ashford Hill Road. The Common at the centre of the triangle acts as a focus for the village and is bordered by houses, which thus have immediate access to open space. Other properties back onto open countryside and enjoy pleasant rural views.



Headley consists of many older properties which are interspersed with post war houses of varying styles and designs. Housing has expanded as ribbon development along the roads leading out of the village. Open fields and spaces separate Headley from Common Road where a good variety of buildings line the roads.

There is a small church and village hall, access to both of which, from the main village, is across the busy A339. There is a Baptist Chapel, the Harrow pub and a combined village post office and shop. Cheam School, a private school for children from nursery age to 13 with excellent well-landscaped grounds is centred on a fine country house just outside the village.



Planning & Highways Guidelines (Headley)

- The Greenfield areas towards Common Road and Galley Hill should be maintained to preserve the green gaps between existing development.
- New construction of light industrial units should be permitted only if they are not visually intrusive and in accordance with other planning policies.
- The design of industrial development should reflect and enhance the rural character of the village, in keeping with the Borough Council's adopted SPG on the subject.
- The Headley Bypass project could be resurrected.

The light industrial units on the southern side of village are inappropriate to a residential area. They are visually intrusive, feature unattractive corrugated grey roofs and are surrounded by tracts of concrete. There has been little attempt at landscaping.

There has been some recent infill development, which has been sympathetically designed and executed to maintain interesting diversity. There are many modern single storey houses using hedges as the primary choice for property demarcation. The spaces around the village are used for livestock farming of all sorts and the attractive and well maintained Common is popular with all ages for sports and other activities throughout the year. The result is a pleasing sense of openness and rural character throughout the village.



The A339 running through the western edge of the village is a very busy link between the M3 & M4 motorways for lorry, truck and car traffic; it is a feeder route to the A34(T) and for the rapidly expanding New Greenham Park industrial estate, barely 2 miles north. Access onto and off the road is difficult, time consuming and dangerous. The delays and danger caused by morning and evening rush hour traffic at the entrance to Cheam School is a matter of particular concern, it has already caused accidents and the volume of traffic is increasing.

- The problems caused by the A 339 to the whole village include danger to pedestrians, delay to joining traffic, noise and stress. A fundamental study to resolve this problem is needed.



SETTLEMENTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The minor settlements are Mill Green, Holdrops Hill, Goose Hill, Plastow Green, and Wheathold. The characteristics and locations of all these groups of houses are such that they do not spoil the intact nature of the parish countryside. They are virtually free from suburban-style features, which would appear incongruous in these settings. Where dwellings have been built within the last century care has been taken to keep the architecture and building materials in keeping with their environment.



Buildings blend well with the landscape, there is a good degree of screening and they are generally of low aspect. There is good use of combinations of wood and brick, attractive windows and porches, which avoid uniformity. An important factor is that the size of the land-holdings with most of the houses is such that there is both scope and incentive to maintain well-landscaped surroundings. The houses, with their attractive gardens and trees, blend into and enhance the landscape of surrounding farmland and hedgerows.

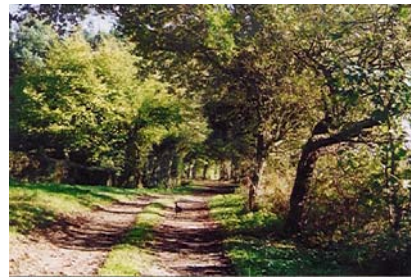


Roads, other than A339, Lanes and Footpaths.

The B3051 Ashford Hill to Kingsclere road is attracting more and more traffic in terms of both volume and size of vehicle. It is largely straight and increasingly busy. Speeds are often excessive especially through the hidden corners. Safety on this road is worthy of study.

The major commuter traffic through the parish on the C111 Ashford Hill Road is between Newbury, the Atomic Weapons Establishment and the nearby Calleva Park on the north edge of Tadley. On this stretch of road there are several hidden dips, which despite signing, are very dangerous. Initiatives which make roads in the parish safer for all users such as the Village Speed Limits Initiative and The Quiet Lanes Initiative are strongly supported

The minor roads and lanes adequately serve the needs of the parish. In general there is enough signage and more would become unsightly. Traffic using the lanes is forced to slow and they do not lend themselves to becoming rat runs. Regular and caring roadside maintenance, including hedge/grass cutting and ditch clearing, could add immeasurably to the pleasure for users of these lanes.



Many of the smaller lanes remain unadopted and unmade and add immeasurably to the character of the parish. The attractive ford on the River Enborne near Headley is a prized feature. There is an extensive and well-used network of footpaths and limited bridleways.

Much of the land is clay so it is desirable to keep the footpaths, which crisscross the area, separate from bridleways. This may involve the promotion of new paths and bridleways away from residences. Together with their signs, stiles, bridges and culverts, they should be kept up, while retaining their natural character.

Over-head Wires.

The value of this landscape was recognised in 1986 when a plan for a new line of pylons south and west of Ashford Hill was abandoned for the more expensive option of a deeply entrenched cable. However there remain many overhead transformers, power and telephone cables. They are visually intrusive and vulnerable to storm damage.

Community Policing.

An excellent system of mutual support between residents of the whole Parish and the Police is a very welcome feature of life.

Planning & Highways Guidelines

- The settlements and farms could be easily spoilt by change. However, there should not be a total bar to sympathetic development or adaptation to meet well-founded needs or aspirations.



- Any development that creates unacceptably higher levels of traffic or traffic hazards should be resisted.
- Footpaths and bridleways should be maintained and kept separate from each other.
- The many unmade lanes should be preserved and be maintained only by the use of traditional materials



- The rural nature of the lanes should be preserved. Straightening and widening should be avoided and pavements and kerbs installed sparingly.

- Traffic density and speed on the B3051 and C111, is a growing problem. Road safety should be improved without attracting more traffic.



- Overuse of standardised signs and street furniture is inappropriate to the parish. HCC guidelines for special areas should be extended to Ashford Hill with Headley.



- The Low voltage power lines should be installed underground wherever possible, overhead lines should be sited in a manner which minimises their impact on the landscape and the loss of the best and most versatile agricultural land
- In granting approval for development plans consideration should be given to disposal of surface water from places used by both vehicles and pedestrians.

CONSULTATION & QUESTIONNAIRE

Research for this document was initiated at public meetings held in Headley and Ashford Hill village halls in the autumn of 2001. From that time meetings have been called by notices in the village shops and pubs and published in the Parish Magazine. Robust consensus on all major issues did not waiver throughout this period.

The features, benefits and advantages of having a Village Design Statement were explained during the first meeting and a management team was set up. Subsequently the team undertook to call volunteers and to recruit camera teams to get photographs of the area. The brief asked for pictures of aspects of interest or value in the Parish. Many of those photographs appear in this document.

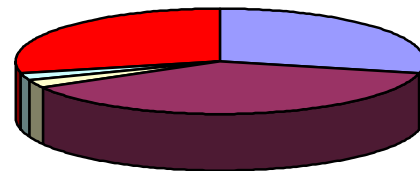
The first working meeting was held in Ashford Hill on 19 Nov attended by 35 people. The proposed outline of the document was agreed, six working groups were formed. Each was asked to study and report on an area of the parish. These work groups made a short presentation to a meeting in Headley on 22 April 2002. They were asked to describe their work and to make recommendations for inclusion as planning guidelines. Their reports and photographs were collected for consolidation into the final report.



The Primary School raised interest and awareness by devising a related project. The older children were asked to draw pictures of places they liked in the villages and countryside.

A questionnaire, available to all households through village shops and pubs, attracted a good response. The general view was that we should maintain the countryside as it is as much as possible, and that any development within the villages should be carefully planned. No respondents said that we should build what and where we like, 88% said that the green gaps between the villages should be maintained and 66% said development should be on spare land within villages.

BUILD ON SPARE LAND WITHIN BOUNDARIES



■ Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree ■ Don't Know

70% liked old houses and wanted new ones to be built in similar styles. 65% agreed that we should use traditional materials. The commons, fields and woods were selected as the most important open spaces and the churches, commons and water meadows as special places.

A small team consolidated the outcome of all this work into a draft. This was posted on the Internet and copies were available in the village shops. An advance copy was sent to the District Council and the comments that were sent back were discussed at a public meeting in February 2003. There was a good deal of feedback from this meeting and all of these views were included into a further draft. This final draft was discussed at a public meeting at Headley on 16 October and the consolidated result submitted for council approval in November 2003.

SUMMARY



What we wish to retain.

The parish should remain a working rural area with dwellings. It must not become a place of dwellings decorated with artificially preserved patches of manicured "country".

The villages and settlements should retain their cohesion, variety of construction and openness.

There must be continuing and, where possible, enhanced incentives for good land management.

The rural nature of the lanes should be preserved. Straightening and widening should be avoided and pavements and kerbs installed sparingly.



What we wish to improve.

Ways should be found of reducing the impact of the A339 on Headley.

Road safety on the B3051 and C111 should be improved without attracting more traffic.

Disposal of surface water should be improved.

The impact of overhead wiring and transformers should be minimised.

Any further development to the industrial units south of Headley should incorporate improvements to the existing industrial units.



Scope for development.

The density of any new development should be in keeping with building in the surrounding area. Buildings should reflect the form, scale and proportions of the best of existing vernacular buildings.

Any extensions or developments to existing properties should harmonise with the best of existing styles, characteristics, materials and proportions.

There is very limited scope for development of new properties in the hamlets.

Any development to improve farms or adaptation for commercial endeavours should be done in a way to improve the overall visual aspect.

