

Wellington Heath Parish Building Design Guide

Introduction

This design guide was first prepared as a result of concerns and shortcomings in developments mainly within the village as communicated by residents during the early stages of the 2006 Parish Plan consultation process. In 2014 this guide was reviewed following the Parish Questionnaire in 2013 and following a decision by the Parish Council in September 2014 the Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design has been adopted.

During the summer of 2005 all residents of the Parish were given a questionnaire which sought their views on a variety of topics relating to the enjoyment of living within Wellington Heath parish. One of the topics concerned housing and development. 54% of parishioners returned their questionnaire and the detailed results can be found within the Parish Plan published in March 2006. The next questionnaire was in 2013, to which 70% of parishioners responded and the detailed results can be found in "Report on the findings of the 2013 Parish Plan Questionnaire".

The 2006 Plan and subsequent 2013 Questionnaire report can be viewed at :
<https://sites.google.com/site/wellingtonheath/parish-council/parish-plan>

Apart from the specific questions asked within the questionnaire residents were able to provide comment and opinion on all the topics covered. This design guide has picked up such comment and opinion where relevant and constructive as well as the 2006 statistical data on the answers to each specific question. Within the housing and development section residents expressed strong feelings toward housing development and as a result it was decided to ask the Parish Council to commission a design guide as one of the Action Points in the Parish Plan. The 2013 questionnaire was shorter (to encourage a higher response rate) but nonetheless covered similar ground although questions were frequently worded differently. The nature and magnitude of replies was similar for the two questionnaires, hence this Design Guide retains the 2006 responses and statistics, the 2013 statistics have not been included in the interests of readability. The guide has however been updated to reflect significant changes e.g. the re-routing of the 675 bus.

Because of planning restrictions on residential development outside the village envelope and "new builds" being confined mainly to "infilling" development within the village, this design guide of necessity concentrates on development within the village although some aspects (e.g. extensions and alterations) are relevant to the whole parish.

In September 2014 the Parish Council decided to adopt the Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design which contains complimentary guidance on building design. The short section on Forest Smallholdings and Dwellings in part 2 covers the Wellington Heath locality, however part 1 of the document also gives important detailed generic guidance and many excellent pictorial examples which are harmonious with views expressed by Wellington Heath residents.

The Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design can be found at :
http://www.malvernhillsaonb.org.uk/documents/MalvernBuildingDesignGuideLoRes_001.pdf

Description of the Parish

The parish of Wellington Heath has a population of approximately 480 living in about 190 dwellings. The village is situated just over one mile (2 kms.) north of the town of Ledbury and is separated from Ledbury by agricultural land put mainly to pasture and orchards. Most of the village and all the land to the east is included within the designated Malvern Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). The western boundary of the parish follows the Bromyard Road (B4214) as far as the small hamlet of Staplow. The land to the west of the village is open countryside formerly designated as an Area of Great Landscape Value. Outside the village the agricultural land use is predominately pasture and fruit growing with areas of woodland. The village contains a public house, a village hall and a church, but no other facilities such as a shop. A fuller description of the parish can be found on pages 3 and 4 of the Parish Plan.

A significant feature of the landscape is the hilly topography around and within the village which is dominated by Frith Wood (230m/755ft.) to the east. The village is of linear shape with housing broadly following hill ridges (eg. Ledbury Road and Ochre Hill) and valleys (The Common and part of Horse Road) with other roads such as Floyds Lane developed on the intervening sloping land. The sloping nature of the land within the village is considerable with a drop of some 60 metres (200 ft.) between Church Lane and parts of Horse Road and The Common. For this reason special design requirements are necessary. These are dealt with in full later in this guide.

Another important feature of the whole parish is the narrowness of the roads which are, in effect, country lanes with the need for vehicle passing places every few hundred metres. Virtually all the roads do not have footpaths and none have street lighting. These aspects together with the topography, lack of facilities and services place a significant constraint on future development.

About half of the existing housing stock was built before 1960 (i.e. about 90 houses) with over half of these houses being built before 1900. The “boom” years of the 1960’s and 70’s have accounted for the majority of the remainder with smaller scale “infilling” development since. There are 11 grade II Listed Buildings within the parish and these range from small farm worker’s cottages (such as Squatters Cottage) to larger timber framed farm houses (such as Callow Croft and Pegs Farm). The pre 1900 houses are a mixture of black and white timber framed houses, stone and brick cottages with slate or tile roofs. Some of the pre-1960 houses have pebbledash or smooth rendering usually painted in white or cream. The modern houses are of typical simple design sometimes utilitarian, mostly of modern brick and tile, some having features from other architectural eras such as Georgian windows. The most recent vary from contemporary modernism to attractive reproduction timber framed design.

As a Herefordshire country village Wellington Heath has historically had strong links to the farming and fruit growing community and these still exist. More recently however a larger proportion of its permanent residents have become commuters to Ledbury and nearby towns such as Malvern, Hereford, Worcester, etc. although 20% of the working population now work from home. Since 2006 leisure pursuits are gradually increasing in importance to the village, and include walking, equestrian, and crafts.

Only 5.6% of households do not own or have access to a car or other vehicle. A high proportion (nearly 60%) have more than one vehicle and over 65% travel to work driving a

car or van. The re-routing of the 675 Malvern to Ledbury bus since 2006 has been welcomed by residents, nonetheless car ownership is high and whilst the facilities and transport links in Ledbury are appreciated the lack of a safe walking route to the town concerns many residents. This presents a need to ensure adequate parking facilities in any new development. It is apparent that on-street parking is already a problem within the village (eg. parts of the Common).

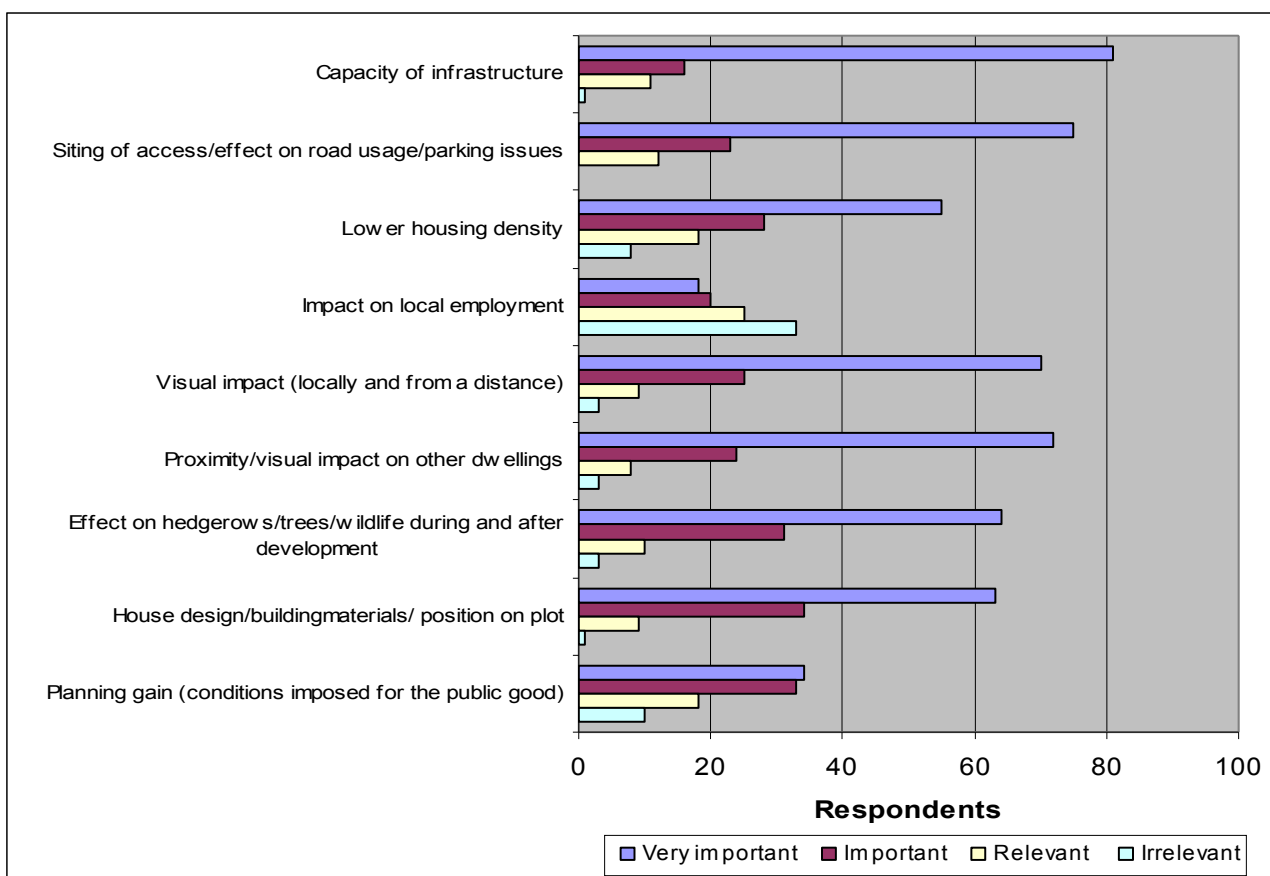
A relatively high proportion of the population is retired (19%) with 24% of the population over 60 years of age. 87% of households own their own house. The findings of the parish plan questionnaire perceived Wellington Heath as a quiet rural village set in beautiful countryside with fine views. Its proximity and relative convenience to Ledbury is seen as a positive advantage. All these attributes are seen as desirable and one of the reasons why a high percentage of people (57%) stay in the parish for more than 10 years.

The above statistics are derived from the 2001 Census (Crown Copyright 2003). Further statistics can be seen in the Parish Plan itself. The history of the parish has been well researched by local historian Peter Garnett in his book "Portrait of Wellington Heath".

Survey Findings

It is worth repeating extracts from the Parish Plan before relating some relevant comments made by residents. Firstly it is apparent that in 2006 there has been a hardening of opinion against further development in the parish although in 2013 this had softened slightly, perhaps in response to more sympathetic and individual buildings such as framed properties in Floyds Lane and the restoration of squatters cottage. Of the total number of respondents in 2005 78% felt no additional housing was needed within the parish. This compares with 57% in the 2000 questionnaire. In 2013 almost half were against further development although the numbers may not be directly comparable since the questions were different and about half of residents chose not to answer this question.

The table below shows the relative importance of certain issues requiring consideration at the time of any planning application as judged by residents.



A very high proportion of residents felt there should be adequate on-site parking in any new development (98%). An adequately sized garden was also considered important (85%).

Infrastructure constraints need also to be considered in relation to any new development. Flooding of roadways and adjacent land is a major problem particularly at times of heavy rainfall. This is exacerbated by the steep hills and valleys within the village but is also partly due to the inadequacy of stormwater drainage and poor maintenance of ditches and watercourses outside the village. Any new development should be designed in a way that does not make the problem worse. Residents were also asked to comment on other existing services. The results were as follows:

Electricity supply (too many short failures) (50 respondents)

Poor TV/Radio reception (27 respondents)

Land line telephone faults (22 respondents)

Mains water problems (lack of pressure) (22 respondents)

By 2013 only a small minority reported problems with power cuts and low water pressure.

More had problems with drainage and over half complained about poor broadband speed.

Another factor gained from the 2006 questionnaire survey was the feeling that recent residential developments had been very intensive with too many houses being “crammed” onto small infill sites with little or no surrounding garden land. This is out of character within a rural village and inevitably results in a lack of privacy and potential overlooking problems. This factor is also addressed later.

There follows a selection of relevant comments made by residents within the 2005 questionnaire survey:

“The 3 split level houses at the top of The Common at the Swallow have spoilt the village; it should have been one. What were the Planning Dept. thinking about? I would have thought there has been sufficient in-filling recently to justify leaving Wellington Heath alone now. It is in danger of losing its village character and could become just a suburb of Ledbury”

“We consider further new build of houses would damage the rural tranquillity of the village. Recent developments have spoiled the appearance of the village and seem inappropriate. The population size of the village is small enough to function as a friendly, supportive community”

“The 3 house development at the top of The Common is an example of what we do NOT want”

“I love the traditional appearance of the 2 new houses in Floyds Lane – I loathe the modern look of the 3 new houses at the top of The Common. The former blend in, the latter do not”

“Reasonable infill within the village – well built and of good design (outer and inner)”

“The planning authority have shown no understanding of good housing design in the past. I suspect they will not in the future. It is appalling what is allowed to be constructed”

“Choice of site is critical so as to maintain the rural aspect and views enjoyed from existing homes within the village. Equity share and other low cost ownership opportunities should be promoted to assist new households”

“It is important the village maintains its status as a ‘smaller settlement’. Further expansion is not a realistic option due to topography, infrastructure and lack of amenities. The village is already overcrowded with housing.”

Planning Issues

As can be seen from some of the above comments there is a feeling amongst residents there has been a lack of design control in the past which has resulted in inappropriate development out of character with the rural nature of the village.

It is also apparent that the lack of architectural flair during the “boom” years has not set a very good standard. It is the diversity of architectural designs already existing within the village that make it difficult to enforce specific design styles in any new development. Wellington Heath is not one of the “Black and White” Herefordshire villages nor a typical Cotswold “stone and thatch” village where strict design requirements can be enforced to maintain the visual character of the village. Despite the lovely surroundings there is no conservation area within the parish. For these reasons it is proposed that Wellington Heath is unsuitable for a comprehensive “Village Design Statement” but more a document that is less formal and deals more with practical design issues specific to Wellington Heath.

Building design is largely subjective and a matter of opinion. In Wellington Heath it is not appropriate to attempt to dictate design styles to be adopted by architects but more to ensure any new development is in keeping and sympathetic to its surroundings. It is also important to ensure the infrastructure can cope, proper siting of buildings, materials to be used and to minimise undesirable effects such as overlooking existing housing. Such undesirable effects are dealt with in the next section.

Herefordshire Council have adopted their Unitary Development Plan (UDP) as from April 2007 following the Inspector’s report published in June 2006. Development requirements are set out in policy S2 in the UDP. Design requirements are set out in policy DR1 in the UDP and these address the points raised in the above paragraph. Both these paragraphs are included in the Appendix for ease of reference. It is important for the Parish Council and local residents to raise concerns with the local planning authority to ensure these requirements are met and development proposals are altered accordingly before planning consents are granted. In 2014 the Herefordshire Core Strategy is at an advanced stage but will not replace the UDP until at least mid 2015.

The UDP designates Wellington Heath as a ‘Smaller Settlement’ which limits housing development within the village to ‘infilling’ subject to certain criteria (policy H6). This criteria requires the proposed dwelling to be limited in size to 90m² for 3 bedroomed houses or 100m² for 4 bedroomed houses. The plot should not exceed 350m² with a frontage of no more than 30m. The reasoning behind these limits is to encourage smaller dwellings on smaller plots. Housing development outside the village is governed by policies H7/8. Policies H6, H7, H8, H13 are also included in the Appendix.

Using these maximum sizes and assuming a ‘normal’ 2 storey building this would result in a ratio of 1:7 for 3 bedroomed houses and 1:6 for 4 bedroomed houses (ratio represents building footprint to plot size). As maximum ratios these have the effect of providing high density development which may be out of character in a rural village location and is at odds with the comments communicated by residents. The guidelines therefore suggest a minimum ratio to be achieved in order to maintain the rural character of the village.

Design Guidelines

This section draws together all the issues raised in the previous sections and is intended to provide guidance to developers for consideration before they put forward plans and planning applications for development within the parish. The Parish Council will use this guide when commenting on and considering planning applications in the future. The guidelines have been prepared having regard to the Herefordshire UDP but the latter takes precedence if any inconsistency is found.

Many of the guidelines deal with practical issues which would normally be imposed as conditions attached to planning permissions and for which the building control or development officers of Herefordshire Council are responsible. The Parish Council and local residents should ensure such conditions are imposed where appropriate and such conditions are met in any development carried out.

Issues specifically arising from the 2006 Parish Plan are :-

Road access – any road access should be sited to maximise visibility. Due to narrowness of roads and lack of visibility in certain locations it is preferable for vehicles to turn onto roads in a forward direction. In these situations space for on-site turning is required.

Drainage – stormwater drainage of roofs and pavings to be to on-site soakaways in order to alleviate further capacity issues with the mains sewer. Driveways should be adequately drained at the point of road connection to on-site soakaway. Shared drive drainage channels to be sufficiently large to cope with high volumes of water during heavy rainfall (50mm/hr). In particular, drives, especially on a slope, should be constructed so as to eliminate run-off onto roads. Developers should consider a permeable surface such as gravel, brick pavers, matrix pavers, grass reinforcement or other surfacing material which will promote efficient drainage to the ground beneath. Ditches and culverts may need improvement to accommodate greater volumes of water particularly in areas prone to flooding from stormwater flowing down roads.

Foul drainage is to be via connection to mains within the village. Should existing sewers be inadequate the mains will require upgrading. For developments involving several houses this may require conditions requiring such works to be completed before the development is occupied.

Car Parking – to be on-site for at least 2 vehicles per residential unit.

Size of buildings – ratio of building footprint to plot size to be no less than 1:5 to ensure adequate space for on-site parking, turning and garden/amenity space. This will help to protect the rural character of the village. Building rooflines should not exceed neighbouring properties wherever possible. Windows and balconies should be sited to avoid overlooking.

Siting of buildings – aspect to existing buildings requires sympathetic treatment with thought given to minimising overlooking and safeguarding of views from existing properties. Adequate space between existing properties and the new development should be maintained. The local street scene should be carefully considered in order to minimise impact and enhance local architectural and natural features.

Use of materials – traditional or contemporary building methods, materials, colours, features and architectural styles to be selected to ensure compatibility with neighbouring properties and the rural character of the village.

Extensions to existing buildings – to be of modest scale having regard to the principal building. Any extensions or alterations should be designed to enhance and complement the principal building in its style and use of materials. Minimal impact to neighbouring properties and the local street scene should be the aim. The design guidelines set out in the above paragraphs apply equally to extensions.

Construction period – care to be taken during the construction period to minimise disruption to neighbouring properties and the village as a whole. Particular care to be taken to ensure satisfactory stormwater drainage to prevent mud run-off into roads. As far as possible parking of all vehicles to be on-site and other vehicles including contractors' and delivery vehicles to be parked away from ditches. Any damage to hedges, verges, ditches, etc. to be repaired immediately.

The Malvern Hills AONB Guidance on Building Design has been adopted by Wellington Heath Parish Council and should be followed. This guide should be followed in its entirety, however the local guidance specifically relating to Wellington Heath is repeated here :

Landscape and setting: Respect the rural, ad hoc settlement pattern of small wayside dwellings with open spaces between. Avoid dense development.

Domestic Buildings: New development, alterations and extensions should respect the local character of modest buildings in terms of size, form, style and limited ornamentation.

Domestic Buildings: Individual and unique buildings are preferable. Avoid uniform developments of identical buildings or larger buildings. Focus on creating character and identity between different buildings to reflect the historic building character.

Domestic buildings: Maintain the simple small scale, modest character and the integrity of historic buildings when carrying out alterations, extensions and conversions.

Domestic buildings: Avoid enlarging existing buildings and maintain open spaces between buildings. Buildings should be modest in size and style.

Gardens and boundaries: Maintain and enhance characteristic hedgerow boundaries with hedgerow trees. Where opportunity allows, replace those that have been lost.

Materials: Enhance the characteristic mix of materials including red brick, which reflects the softer, less uniform appearance of traditional handmade brick, stone which complements the stone that is used locally, and timber framing.

Colour: Rendering on some buildings may be appropriate in this landscape. Muted, pale shades of white, yellow and cream would be more characteristic.

Details: Maintain the simple form of development with limited ornamentation.

This document forms part of the Wellington Heath Parish Plan dated March 2006, updated in 2014. As such it is intended to be adopted by Herefordshire Council as “further planning guidance”.

Appendices

Extracts from the Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan are included for ease of reference:

Policy Nos.

H6 – Housing in smaller settlements

H7 – Housing in the countryside outside settlements

H8 – Agricultural and forestry dwellings and dwellings associated with rural businesses

H13 – Sustainable residential design

S2 - Development requirements

DR1 – Design

The complete Herefordshire Unitary Development Plan can be found at:

<https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/unitary-development-plan>