

Charing Parish Design Statement



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INTRODUCTION

Design Statements are the outcome of a 1996 initiative by the Countryside Commission (now the Countryside Agency), intended to encourage and influence local participation in the planning system. They are sometimes known as Village Design Statements (VDSs).

The parish of Charing, in the east Kent borough of Ashford, decided that it is more appropriate in its case to refer to a Parish Design Statement (PDS), as it contains not only the principal settlement of Charing, but also Charing Heath, at least two significant hamlets, and many isolated properties which are a feature of the parish. All share the same landscape and environmental conditions.

A village is a small community, usually set in a rural environment. In this respect Charing is typical, and the aim of this statement is to ensure that these two defining characteristics are preserved. The limited size allows the adjacent landscape to form an ever-present factor in the lives of the people who live there and the bond between them is its essential foundation. The various settlements have grown over a long period of time. Their past is part of their present, and hopefully should continue to be so in the future. It is this that sustains the sense of identity and fellowship, and makes Charing an attractive place in which to live. But these are fragile assets, and increasingly vulnerable to ill-considered changes.

Of the 68 per cent of the inhabitants who took part in the 2000 Charing Parish Appraisal, about two-thirds opposed any further commercial or housing

development. They felt that further developments would threaten to destroy its essentially rural character and quality of life. More than a quarter of them came to live in the parish because they love the countryside and village life.

Although fears of undue urban influence and encroaching pressures are implicit in the Statement, it is accepted that its main purpose is to manage change, rather than prevent it. It is less about whether development should take place, and more about how it should be conditioned, so as to harmonise with the existing character of the parish and its natural surroundings. Thus it is mostly concerned with appearance and the desirable consequences of sensitive planning and good design. It is not involved with facilities and services as such, but with how their provision can alter the look and feel of the whole parish for good or ill.

The Statement seeks to raise awareness of our built and natural environment as something inherently precious. It hopes to assist planners and developers, builders and architects, landowners and householders, when they are contemplating new buildings or alterations, to influence the choice of details which are likely to affect the visual qualities and amenities of the parish, and to indicate the standards that residents are entitled to expect. Above all, it is dedicated to the avoidance of misplaced and unsympathetic developments, whether they be housing estates, commercial premises or simple day-to-day extensions or alterations.



Rear view of the High Street from Palace Farm field

A collective view

The Charing PDS and the views expressed in it are the result of wide consultation and the contributions of a large number of residents, through workshops, exhibitions, committee and individual input. It represents the beliefs and feelings of the majority of local people who took part in the exercise during 2001/02, and it faithfully describes the concerns and qualities which they consider most important. It is thus an advisory document produced by the community, rather than by the planning authorities. It is not intended to be a local history or an appraisal, but a thoughtful and responsible perspective for the future. See also *Charing Parish Design Group* inside back cover.

A MAJOR CONCERN

Further substantial housing and transport developments in the parish threaten to destroy its essentially rural character and quality of life.

Arrangement of the Statement

Each of the following chapters is intended to provide a brief description of the characteristics which distinguish the parish, together with concerns, guidelines and recommendations where appropriate. These are defined as follows:

Concerns: Current problems and possible future developments which a large number of local people and organisations see as destructive or threatening to the environment, character, amenity or quality of life in the area.

General guidelines: Desirable planning aims and objectives for any rural village or parish not specific to, but shared by, Charing.

Local recommendations: Specific advice, applying directly to the hopes, fears and needs of the parish of Charing.



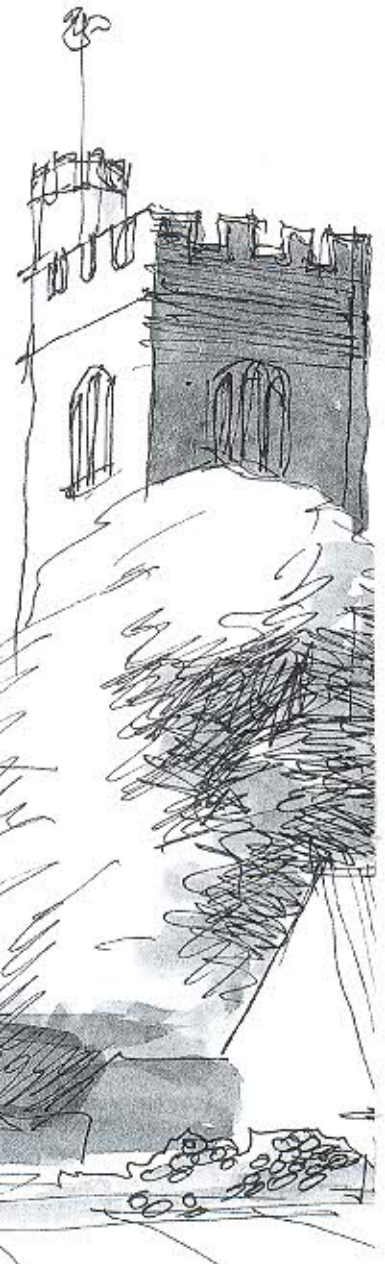
Members of one of the Workshop teams about to depart!

Supplementary guidance

This Design Statement has been formally adopted by Ashford Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance. The document expresses many views held by local people involved in its preparation. In adopting the Design Statement the Council is not necessarily supporting all of these opinions but is undertaking, when making planning decisions, to take into account the 'Local Recommendations'.

The Council does not have sufficient powers as planning authority to require these 'local recommendations' to be met in all cases so the active support and commitment of developers, landowners and householders is essential.

This Statement should be read in conjunction with the documents referred to under *References* inside the back cover.



The Church and Palace Farm barn

BACKGROUND

Charing owes its present form and position to the interaction between physical characteristics, lines of communication and historical circumstances.

The land and its influence

Geologically the parish lies astride the northern rim of the greater Weald, which was formed by the differential erosion of the buckled marine deposits of the Upper Cretaceous period, seventy to a hundred million years ago. This exposed a succession of geological strata in close proximity which have produced a variety of local building materials of distinctive colour and texture, including sand and ragstone from the Lower Greensand in the south of the parish, brick and tile from the Gault clay belt in the middle, and chalk, lime and flints from the Downs in the north. The chalk of the North Downs also forms a natural reservoir feeding springs that occur along the clay line at the base of the escarpment - the reason the village is sited where it is.

Routes through the parish

Two sets of routes have crossed one another in the parish: east to west, and north to south. The earliest of these were the prehistoric trackways on and below the Downs, the main one being the Pilgrims' Way, which converges with the North Downs Way National Trail in Charing. Medieval roads from London to the coast were established further south; to be followed in the 18th century by turnpikes. Since then the Maidstone-Ashford railway, A20 trunk road, the M20, and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link, have all taken advantage of the same topographical formation.

Supplementing these long-distance routes were the ancient drove roads connecting the early manors of north Kent with the Weald. These were important in the Middle Ages, and many still survive as secondary or minor roads, tracks and by-ways. The early roads created a focal point around which the main settlement grew and a staging post for long-distance traffic. In the 20th century trunk roads and railways have by-passed the centre and cut the parish into segments, often forming boundaries for subsequent development.

Historical circumstances

For seven hundred years, from the 8th century to 1545, Charing was one of the estates of the archbishopric of Canterbury, and at first the settlement existed to supply and service the palace which the archbishops used as a staging post in the course of their travels. By the end of the Middle Ages it was no longer dependent on the palace. The 15th century prosperity of the village is reflected in the tower of the parish church and the surviving houses of the High Street. After the Reformation, Charing was the centre of a small, self-contained, rural community with outlying settlements on the sandy outcrops at Charing Heath and Westwell Leacon. The economy was almost wholly concerned with agriculture; and in effect this state of affairs persisted until well into the 20th century. It is only since the Second World War (WW2) that the village has been drawn into the multifarious activities of the technological age, in which the distinction between town and country is no longer clear-cut. Traditional boundaries have been redrawn (Westwell Leacon only became part of the parish in the 1950s). But the principal consequence has been a huge increase in population.

The rate of growth is reflected in the following statistics. In 1664, there were 170 households in the parish. This had not yet doubled by the end of the 19th century, when there were 300. Rapid escalation came only after WW2. By 1999, there were 1180 dwellings, of which 700 were centred on the village and the roads leading from it, 100 in Charing Heath village, and about 30 in Westwell Leacon. The remainder were dispersed across the parish, including 75 in two mobile home parks, and a smaller number in the hamlets created out of the old farm complexes at Pett and Newlands. As yet, despite this increased population, the parish has managed to retain its rural character.

