

# Design Guide



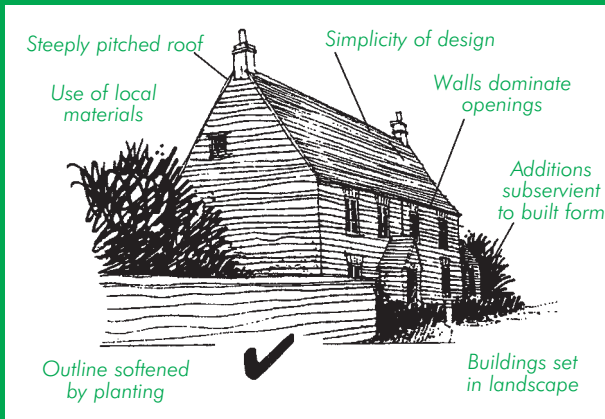
# New Buildings in the Countryside

## INTRODUCTION

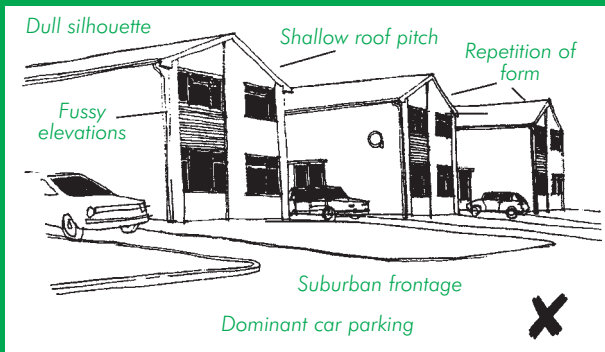
This guide is one of a series of design guidance publications prepared by Aylesbury Vale District Council. Whilst other design guides deal with design issues associated with specific land uses or building types, this guide is concerned with more general issues of new buildings and their countryside setting.

The Local Plan includes a range of policies related to design issues in the countryside. This Guide takes these policies further and looks at how they can be applied to specific design areas. This leaflet has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance and will be used by Aylesbury Vale District Council in assessing planning applications. For more information contact the Forward Plans team on 01296 585439.

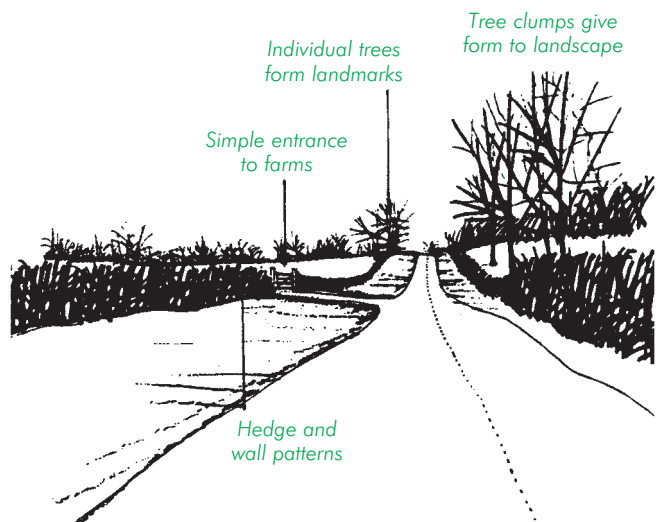
## LANDSCAPE FORM



Traditional farm complex that has grown organically keeping the farmhouse as the dominant feature



The countryside of Aylesbury Vale, away from the built-up area of Aylesbury is typified by a varied, rolling landscape. The escarpment of the Chiltern ridge provides a distant horizon whilst the lower hills, some with wooded crests, give an intermediate scale. Pockets of old woodland survive. Villages are mostly well-defined and form identifiable clusters seen from a distance, often with a church tower giving a focus to their overall composition. Farm complexes also form smaller building clusters dotting through the landscape.



Typical country road



The typical form of an Aylesbury Vale village

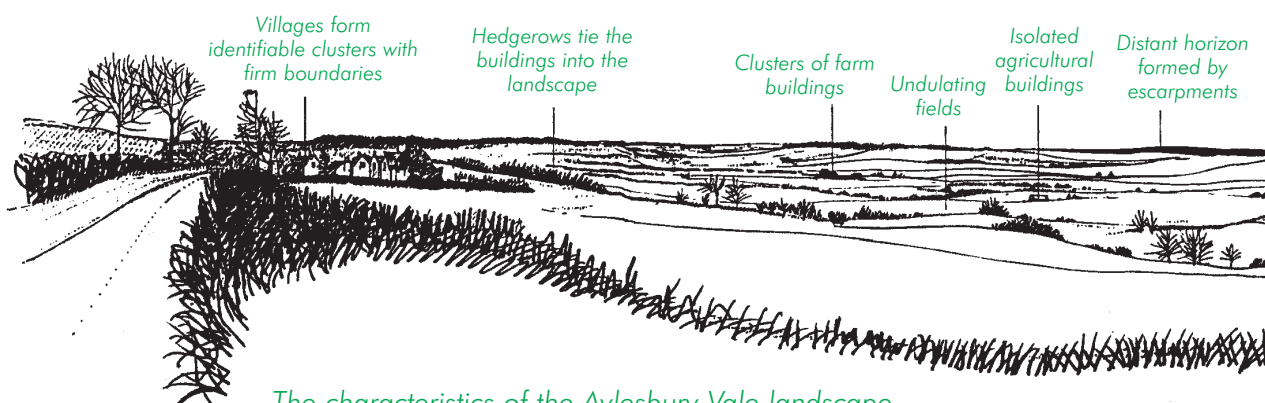
The landscape is given form and pattern by the network of fields and boundaries. Walls, hedgerows and trees tie the elements of the landscape together. Natural shapes and irregular patterns give a strong visual structure at all scales. Panoramic views see these elements knitted together across the landscape. Distant landmarks give scale. Country roads give a constantly evolving sequence of spaces and forms. Winding roads are complemented by mature trees which give punctuation and emphasis. In all the views near and far across the countryside the treatment of boundaries is fundamental to their character. As well as defining the broader scale of the landscape, field boundaries emphasise the curves of country roads. They also provide the setting for buildings in the countryside. Most established development is seen over a boundary, so that the buildings are given a base, visually anchored to their landscape setting. Their setting may be further complemented by tree planting, either in groups or single specimens.

## LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

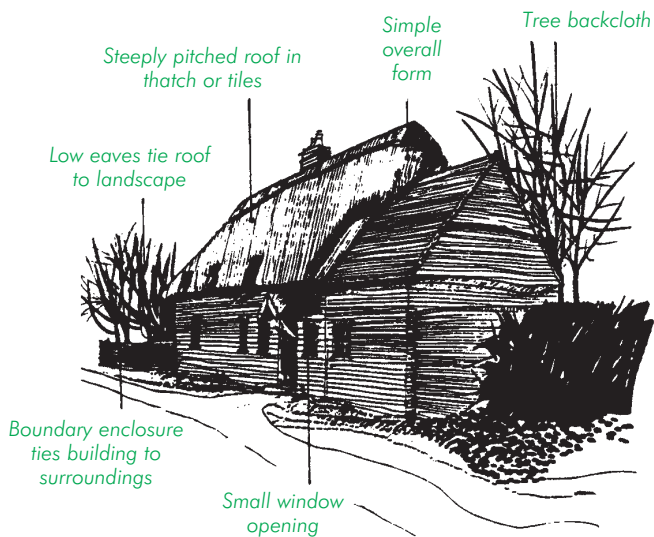
The features of the countryside evolved over centuries of farming. Traditional buildings that belonged to the working landscape formed part of its character. Appearance varied according to a range of local materials. The earliest houses were timber-framed with thatched roofs, later replaced in many cases by clay tiles. Churches were built

in stone and some villages have mainly stone buildings. Witchert, with its distinctive character, is found in the south-west of the District. There is a range of local bricks mainly in warm orange/reds. The grand country houses of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were designed to have their own special relationship with their landscape setting. As techniques for production developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century some new materials were introduced into the landscape, notably the use of slate for roofs. This led to deeper buildings with roofs of a shallower pitch. 'Tudor' cladding appeared on houses with render and tile hanging, possibly the first examples of 'imported' styles. As the century evolved, housing clusters of a suburban nature arrived with inappropriate bay windows and porches, out of scale with their rural setting. Post-war housing of an alien character appeared, showing no respect for traditional siting, design or materials.

Agricultural buildings have always been part of the rural scene. Timber-framed barns were often large buildings but their strength of character and use of local materials made them good neighbours. Few early barns survive, their place taken by corrugated steel and asbestos, and now, composite materials. The honest use of suitable materials in strong forms has made these modern structures acceptable in all but the most exposed of locations. Industrial complexes have made their mark on the open countryside, often bringing a different scale and character. In recent years



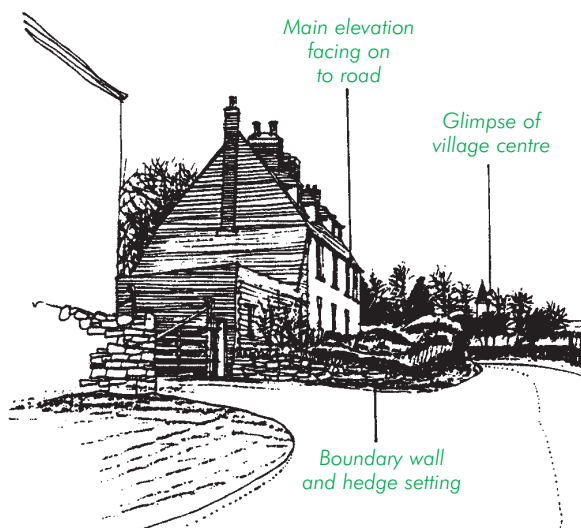
The characteristics of the Aylesbury Vale landscape



Traditional country building

power lines and telecommunications towers have appeared. These man-made structures have a size and rhythm which is at odds with their natural surroundings. New uses in the countryside such as riding centres and golf courses bring with them new buildings which can look very intrusive.

Traditional building forms evolved through an understanding of their setting and the optimum use of materials. This resulted in a happy relationship between buildings and landscape. There is a widespread concern that this relationship is being lost. AVDC, through its role as Local Planning Authority, is a custodian of the countryside and is anxious to see a revival of understanding of good principles of building in the countryside, and their application to new development. Centuries of development have evolved models of good practice for large, small and groups of buildings. These have usually resulted from a thorough understanding of local conditions and their sites. Successful rural buildings are simply integrated into their setting to be at one with the landscape.

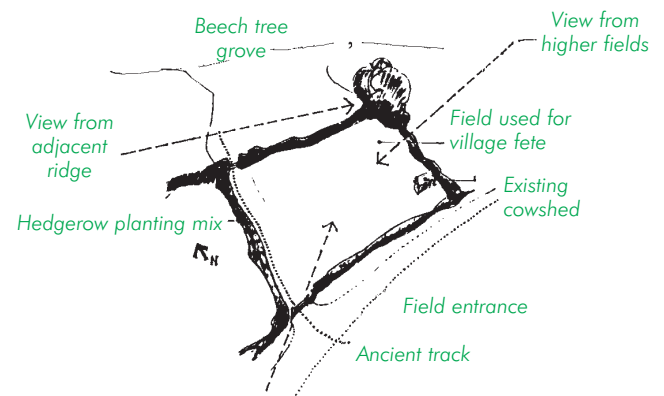


A village approach

## SPECIFIC DESIGN GUIDANCE

### 1. SITE APPRAISAL AND SITE PLANNING

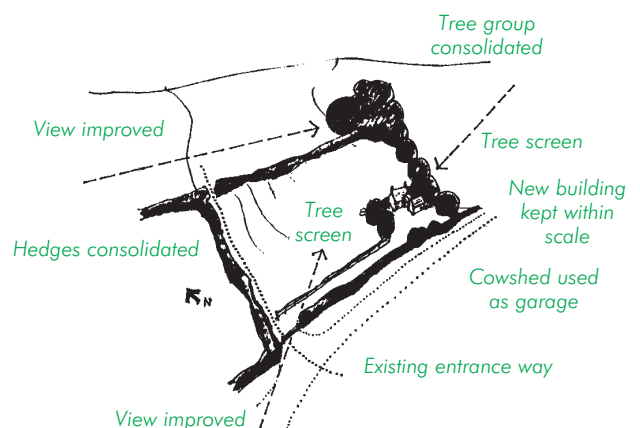
**1.01** As well as a dimensional survey it is very important to undertake an appreciation of a site's other characteristics. A thorough understanding of wider physical aspects as well as historical and social associations leads to the development of principles for building on the site.



*A full site appraisal is essential before design work is undertaken*

**1.02** The following is a check list of factors which should be covered in the analysis stage. These should be made available when a planning application is made.

- Context in established landscape, views out, in and across the site, especially from public places.
- Details of site levels.
- Details of existing buildings and structures.
- Information on existing trees, vegetation and wildlife on site.
- Historical and archaeological features.
- An evaluation on how the site is currently used and valued.



*Understanding the site and its context will assist in the preparation of a development brief*

**1.03** This information should be evaluated to provide a brief for development and lead to a site layout. There are a number of principles which should be applied at this stage of the design process.

- The retention and enhancement of positive features on the site including trees and hedgerows.
- The mitigation of any harmful effects of the scheme.
- The application of wildlife conservation principles.
- The integration of the development with its surroundings.
- Creation of physical and visual links with the wider landscapes.
- Creation of identity and sense of place.
- Significant tree planting over the longer and shorter terms, including hedgerow trees.

## 2. SPACE ABOUT BUILDINGS

**2.01** New buildings in the countryside must be sensitive to their location. Sufficient space should be allowed around new forms to avoid clustering of masses and to allow tree planting between. Consideration must be given to the relationship of buildings with their boundaries on all sides.



*Allow adequate space between buildings*

**2.02** Buildings may be designed to partially screen their bulk and tie their form closely to their sites by an extended roof in traditional materials. The use of details such as tile-hanging may have a similar beneficial effect.



*Extended roofs help to blend in*

**2.03** Integration of new buildings is helped by a close link with traditional boundary treatment. Trees should be used to provide a backdrop and also a partial foil. A combination of front and rear planting creates the pleasing 'scissors' effect.



*Trees provide a backdrop and a screen*

**2.04** Placing of buildings on ridges or exposed sites makes their silhouettes dominant. A location that blends into the hillside looks better and gives protection against the weather. This makes for a more energy efficient building with lower maintenance costs. As a general rule, no new building should create a new silhouette against the sky seen from adjacent sites, especially when seen from public places such as roads and footpaths.



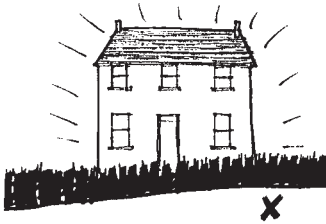
*Avoid exposed siting.*

**2.05** Traditionally, buildings in countryside locations are integrated into the landscape by their siting and form, and by a blend of countryside elements producing a harmonious composition.



*Traditional locations are integrated into the countryside*

**2.06** Buildings in prominent rural locations tend to look larger and nearer than they really are. This is known as the 'foreshortening' effect due to the scale of the countryside.



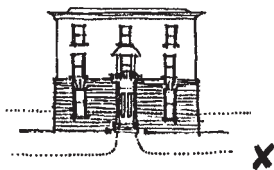
*Exposure creates foreshortening*

**2.07** New houses should be set back sufficiently from their boundaries to allow for native species tree planting all round. This will allow for a full tree canopy to mature and should minimise any disturbance caused by tree roots.



*Setting back from boundaries allows tree planting*

**2.08** Town buildings are rarely seen from a distance and rarely seen as a whole. In city streets 'fronts' and 'backs' are evolved with the front facade designed to have greatest importance. In the country, buildings are invariably seen fully in three-dimensions in a wider context. Individual facades are less important than the appearance of the building as a whole. Balance and harmony must be achieved by the overall design.

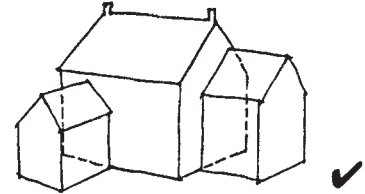


*Avoid 'facade'architecture*

**2.09** New buildings on the edges of villages play an important role. They form part of the composition of buildings seen from a distance and also as the interface between settlement and countryside. Close-to they are part of a local townscape.

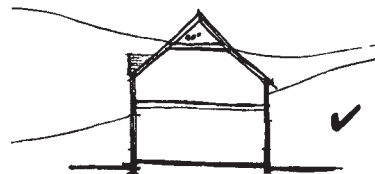
### 3. INDIVIDUAL BUILDING FORM

**3.01** Individual houses should have a simple dominant form which may be based on a rectangular plan and have a pitched roof with a central ridge. This basic form may be extended and added-to. Carefully placed 'additions' can enhance the overall composition. Simple forms are the key to success. These principles apply to other types of building as well as residential.

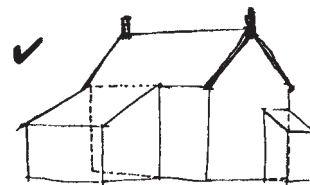


*Single dominant form with additions*

**3.02** Traditionally houses were rarely built over two stories in height. The upper story often used part of the attic with 'A' framed trusses. This kept the ridge height down making for a more compact and efficient building that hugged the landscape and established the tradition of countryside building. Thatched and tiled roofs have pitches of at least 40° to ensure efficient dispersal of rainwater. The introduction of slate allowed pitches to be reduced to 30° although these can appear squat from a distance. In all but special circumstances 40° should remain the normal roof pitch. Unequal main pitches never look comfortable and should be avoided.



*Traditional houses were low with steep roofs*



*Traditional back addition roof*

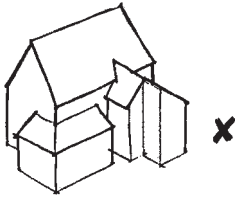
**3.03** The single dominant form can be enlarged by extending the main roof pitch. This should follow the main roof angle or be a slightly lower pitch, joining at eaves level.



*Traditional roofs form pleasant compositions*

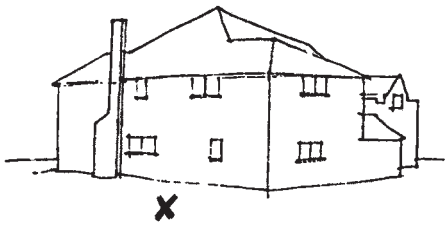
**3.04** Local building traditions often include low eaves lines and extended roofs. This helps to bring new buildings down in scale and relate them to their sites.

**3.05** 'Additions' that cause awkward junctions should be avoided. They look unresolved and cause difficult weathering problems.



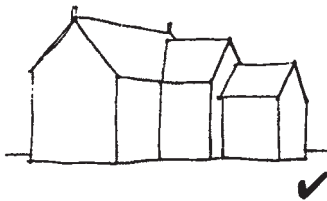
*Avoid awkward junctions*

**3.06** Plan depths that exceed seven metres can create large building forms that are out of scale with the countryside. Squat-looking buildings with shallow roof pitches look particularly incongruous.



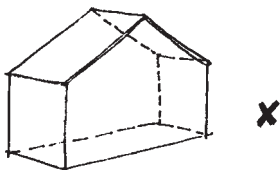
*Deep plans create boxy buildings*

**3.07** The same amount of accommodation can be provided in groups of building forms, creating a pleasant composition seen from all angles in the landscape. Diminishing ridge heights emphasise the single dominant form.



*Groups of simple forms suit countryside locations*

**3.08** Roofs pitched on the short axis of their plan create large gables which look out of proportion.



*Avoid dominant gables*

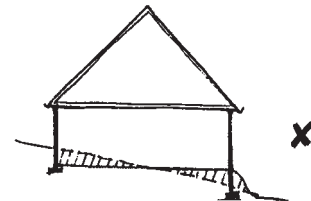
**3.09** There are many examples of traditional building where a doubled roof with parallel pitches is adopted. These reduce the bulk and look satisfactory but a central valley gutter is created which needs careful detailing.



*Twin ridges reduce overall bulk*

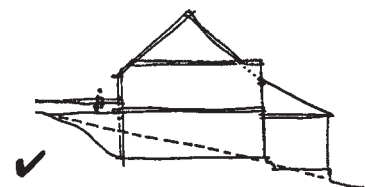
**3.10** Buildings with deep plan depths sit awkwardly on sloping sites, requiring substantial ground works to provide a level surface. Roofs spanning large plan forms look overscaled. This is why the bungalow form appears so alien to the rolling countryside.

**3.11** Substantial excavations can despoil the terrain and are expensive. However, cutting and filling can effectively lower the height of a large building where a flat area is absolutely necessary. Spoil should be used to soften the setting and reduce the scarring effect. Substantial planting is important to help visual integration.



*Deep buildings require extensive excavation*

**3.12** Rather than fighting a sloping site a section can be developed, using the principles of good design to produce an interesting building form. This may produce a building of linear form, following the contours of the landscape.



*Use a sloping site to advantage*

**3.13** Agricultural barns and sheds have long been part of the established rural scene. They are simple structures in local materials giving them a straight-forward relationship with their setting.



*Traditional agricultural buildings*

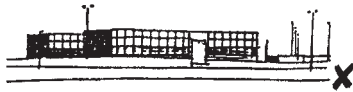
**3.14** This form provides a model for new types of development in the countryside and may be adapted for commercial, industrial or leisure uses.

**3.15** Bulky individual buildings can be broken down into component forms. It is important however that a single form dominates the composition. Subsidiary elements should have a lower ridge height.



*Breaking down a large mass*

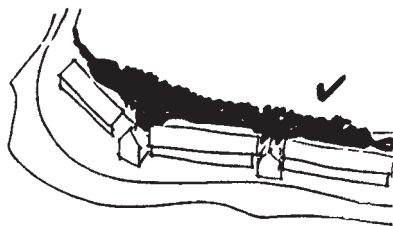
**3.16** It is difficult to reconcile large angular building forms with the flowing landscape. All development should establish a dynamic and pleasing relationship with its site.



*Angular buildings look out of place*

**3.17** Relating large buildings to sloping sites is achieved by a combination of forms stepping down. A pleasant composition can be formed by the use of two or three gables preferably of dissimilar span. This articulates the form.

**3.18** Building along the contours of the landscape rather than cutting across them cuts down on groundwork. It also produces a better composition seen against a sloping site.

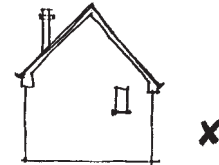


*Building along contours respects the site*

## 4. IMPORTANT DETAILS

**4.01** Established building techniques using load-bearing walls meant that window and door openings were kept small to minimise arch widths. Openings were kept away from corners to strengthen the structure. This gave a solidity to the overall appearance.

**4.02** Gable walls were traditionally detailed very simply with minimal openings. Gable boards should be slim or replaced with undercloak tiles. Boxed ends to gable boards are suburban details inappropriate in the countryside.



*Inappropriate gable details*

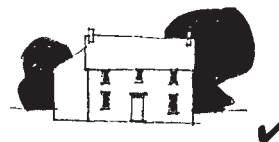
**4.03** Chimney stacks were built into gable walls to give strength and keep heat in. They were placed centrally on the ridge line and could be substantially constructed. Robust chimney stacks look attractive seen from a distance.



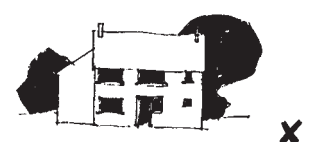
*Robust chimney stack design*

**4.04** Chimneys, porches and dormer windows of a good scale can form part of the overall design, adding to the basic form.

**4.05** Individual windows can, if badly designed, spoil the appearance of an elevation and unbalance the whole building. Harmony and balance can be achieved in a number of ways. The simplest solution to window design is to choose windows that are symmetrical about both axes. Setting the glazing into the structure by at least a half brick width creates a shadow and gives articulation to the elevation.



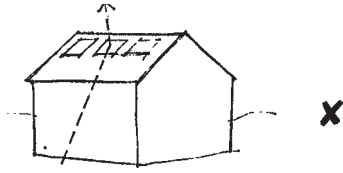
*Traditional balance between windows and wall*



*Inappropriate window design*

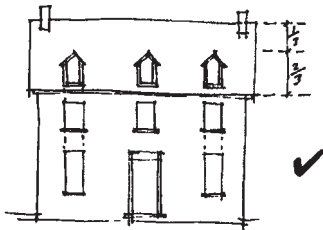
**4.06** Modern building techniques allow window openings of any size. However large expanses of glass in the form of patio doors and picture windows look out of place and can produce extremes of heat loss and solar gain inside. The traditional balance of window to wall is easily lost.

**4.07** Large rooflights, although they may follow the form and slope of the roof, can look dominant, promoting reflections of the open sky.



*Rooflights can be over dominant*

**4.08** Where dormers are used to light a full attic floor it is important that they are kept small so as not to dominate the roof. Location within the lower two-thirds of the roof helps to ensure this. The eye should always be attracted to the main elevation initially.

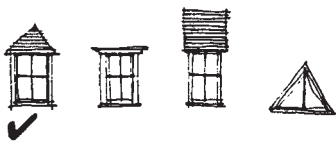


*Satisfactory dormer design*

**4.09** The traditional use of attic space for accommodation led to dormer windows being located on the front wall.

**4.10** Linking through with traditional windows maintains the balance of the facade. In these circumstances the external width of the dormers should not exceed the internal width of the main windows.

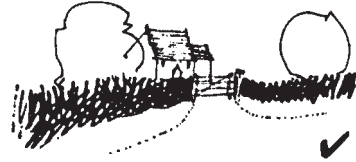
**4.11** There are many different types of dormer which can sit happily in a traditional roof. The choice depends on the form and materials of the main roof.



*Acceptable dormer types*

## 5. ENTRANCES AND BOUNDARIES

**5.01** Farm entrances have usually been very informal, often consisting of an opening in the hedgerow with a simple sign. A simple barred side-hung gate maintains the boundary line. Emphasis on the entrance can be made with tree planting.



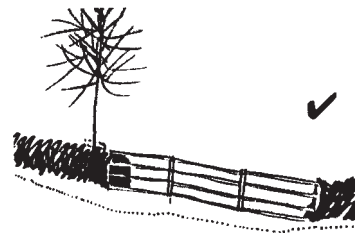
*Entrances should be simple*

**5.02** Over-elaborate and ostentatious entrances are generally out of place in the countryside.



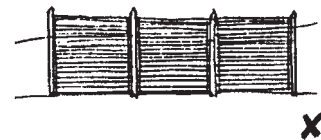
*Elaborate gates took out of scale*

**5.03** Post and rail timber fencing forms a traditional boundary treatment backed by native hedging and trees.



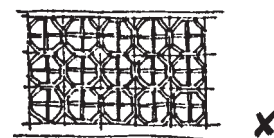
*Traditional post and rail fence*

**5.04** Close-boarded fencing can form a barrier obscuring open views. It is hard to detail satisfactorily and is prone to wind damage on exposed sites. Similar problems affect interwoven panels and these forms of fencing should be avoided.



*Close boarded fencing*

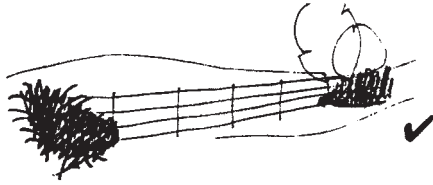
**5.05** Precast concrete blocks are too geometric for countryside use. They impose a rigid pattern of too small a scale which does not accord with the rise and fall of field boundaries.



*Fancy precast concrete blocks*

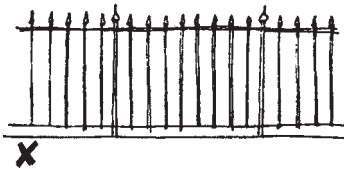


**5.06** Simple open steel fences have been used for many years along field boundaries, giving an added security to the familiar hedgerow. They are of a good scale, robust and capable of being used on sloping or undulating surfaces following the contours.

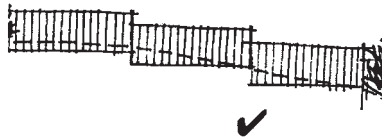


*Steel fencing combines well with hedgerows*

**5.07** Decorative railings are usually too suburban to suit the open landscape. However, railings of a simple type can be used, provided that rail centres of at least 200mm are used. This prevents them looking solid when seen from angle. Tops can be angled to suit a falling site. Concrete bases should be obscured by moulding the adjacent soil.



*Decorative railings*



*Robust railings*

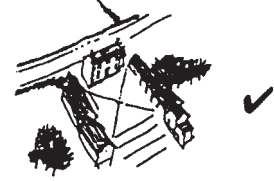
**5.08** Bricks, especially a local type, can form a very strong boundary wall. Walls should not appear over-dominant and look better if associated with planting. Details should be kept as simple as possible. Half-round copings are a traditional way of finishing walls.



*Simple brick walls*

## 6. BUILDING GROUPS

**6.01** Traditional farm complexes contain a variety of buildings often clustered around the farmhouse. Such complexes can grow in an organic way without spoiling the overall composition.



*Traditional farmhouse group*

**6.02** Repetition of building forms create a geometric pattern or rhythm which is out of place in natural surroundings.



*Repetition of forms looks alien*

**6.03** It is desirable that new groups of buildings mimic the organic forms of traditional village settlements. These buildings can be clustered around a central space.

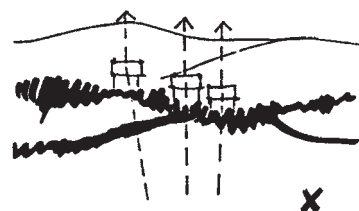


*'Organic' building groups*

## 7. MATERIALS AND COLOUR

**7.01** Rural buildings were traditionally constructed in local materials until the advance of industrial techniques and better transportation allowed new materials to emerge. These early buildings readily blend into their setting. Many individual settlements developed in a particular range of materials which give a distinct identity. It is very important for designers to study the local vernacular.

**7.02** The introduction of new materials such as 'imported' slates and bricks occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although these added a new character the continuity of traditional building techniques helped to integrate them into the landscape.



*Shiny or bright materials can stand out*

**7.03** Roofs are the most dominant element of a building seen across the landscape. Natural roofing materials such as thatch, clay tile and slate are matt in appearance and weather to a dark hue. Substitute materials including some composites like artificial slates retain a shiny surface which reflects the sky and makes the building more prominent. Modern materials have introduced possibilities for new colour in the landscape and these may be at odds with the colours of local and traditional materials. Light and strong colours make a building more conspicuous and should be used sparingly, especially on large structures. Lightweight cladding can be obtained in a variety of finishes. Reflective and glossy surfaces should be avoided in favour of matt, the choice of colour to relate to the context and immediate surroundings. Earth colours and dark greens are preferred to a more individual colour.

**7.04** Buildings in the open countryside may be seen from great distances and this is why form and setting are so important. The simple outline and modest form of a traditional countryside building has a dignity of its own. Over elaborate details can be of an unsuitable scale and also spoil a pleasantly-proportioned building.

*Keep form and details simple*



**7.05** An acceptable building form can be made incompatible with its surroundings by the use of unsuitable cladding or finishes and also the use of bright colours. White-rendered walls may appear clean and bright close-to but they draw attention from afar. Dark and muted colours are preferred.

**7.06** A strident appearance can be avoided by using cladding materials such as tile hanging and weather boarding.

*Avoid strident materials*

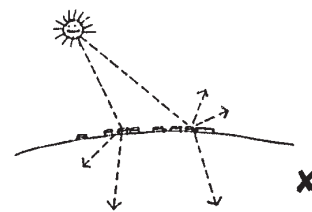


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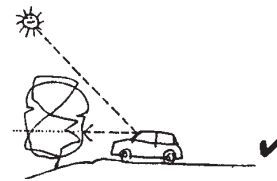
**7.07** Modern materials, particularly profiled steel cladding, plastics and cement have led to an erosion of the traditional appearance of the countryside. The Council's Design Guide Building Materials advises on selection and specification of suitable materials.

## 8. COPING WITH THE CAR

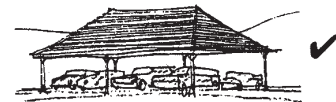
**8.01** The number of cars in use in the countryside make them a serious cause of pollution. Visual pollution is caused by both their movement and also when they are parked. Roads can be well-screened to mask vehicle movement from a distance. The new commercial and leisure uses in the countryside bring with them large areas of surface parking. The shiny finish and bright colours of cars make them visible over large distances. They glint and reflect, drawing attention especially if sited in a prominent place. This can be subdued by close screen planting of a suitable scale. In some areas open-sided structures may be considered to provide cover for parked cars and reduce their visual impact.



*Cars can look very intrusive*



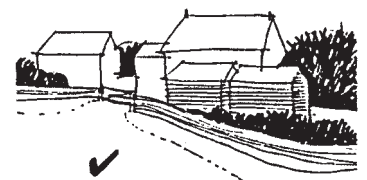
*Parking screens help*



*Parking areas may be covered*

**8.02** Garages can look like traditional outbuildings, at ease in a rural setting. Freestanding garages also screen parked vehicles and manoeuvring areas.

*Garages can look like traditional outbuildings*

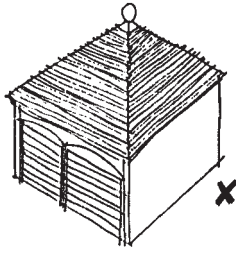


**8.03** Garage doors can be very intrusive especially if they are steel and painted a bright colour. Muted, dark or neutral colours are essential to help to blend into the natural scene. Timber doors give a better scale and can be stained or painted.



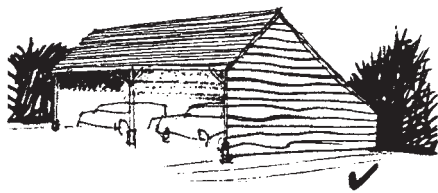
*Garage door details are important*

- 8.04** Housing estate double garages with a square plan and pyramid roofs are too boxy to sit happily in the countryside.



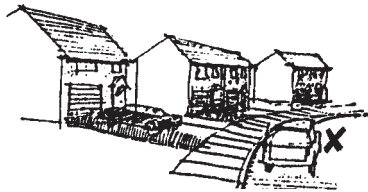
*Suburban garage blocks look out of place*

- 8.05** There are a number of traditional building forms that are seen as models for garages or car ports. Cart sheds are a readily acceptable form. Timber structures with plain tiled roofs are traditional but corrugated steel is an acceptable alternative.



*Cart sheds make good models*

- 8.06** Use of an extended pitch with equal roof angles can keep the overall bulk down. Deep tar boarding is another traditional material used for cladding.



*Inappropriate garage design*

- 8.07** Suburban housing layouts with dominant car parking are out of place. Garages do not integrate well with traditional building forms.

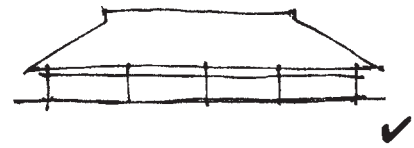
- 8.08** Where garages must be attached they may take the form of a subsidiary element to the main house or as a lean-to extension.



*Traditional extension to form garage*

## 9. NEW TYPES OF BUILDING

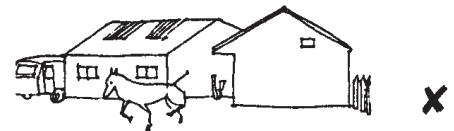
- 9.01** New uses in the countryside such as golf courses have introduced larger freestanding buildings such as club houses and pavilions. These can be dominant and unsympathetic to the countryside.



*Large buildings can follow traditional barn design.*

- 9.02** The use of a barn form with traditional materials can produce a building providing satisfactory accommodation but looking at ease with its surroundings.

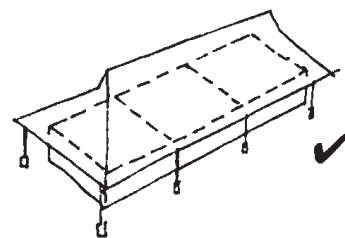
- 9.03** Stables and riding schools have become established throughout the countryside. The use may be strongly related to its context but often the associated buildings and paraphernalia clutter up the landscape with unsuitable forms.



*Stable buildings can look intrusive*

- 9.04** Ready-made stables tend to be constructed in cheap materials including roofing felt at a shallow pitch making them look out of place.

- 9.05** It should be possible to design stable buildings in a more traditional form. Materials too should follow the country code, with tiled or slated roofs and dark painted weatherboard.



*Traditional forms and details*

## 10. EXTERNAL LIGHTING

**10.01** The deeper countryside away from city lights is a haven of solitude. There is a romance about seeing distant lights across dark fields. Clear skies mean bright stars. Cloudy skies mean inky blackness. However, modern lighting capabilities mean that lights in or on buildings can be very intrusive. Light pollution is spoiling the tranquillity of night scenes and where illumination is misplaced it represents a considerable waste of energy.



*Dark rural skies and bright stars*

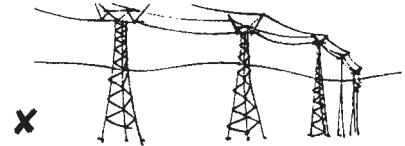


*Light pollution.*

**10.02** Some of the worst offenders are yards and depots which are lit by gantry lights to provide blanket security lighting. New development should include tree screening of all unwanted illumination to restrict the spread of light to the operational areas only. This also applies to recreational uses such as golf driving ranges which are used at night.

## 11. POWER LINES AND MASTS

**11.01** Pylons, masts and telecommunications masts have become unwelcome features of the countryside. Lines of pylons create a scale and a rhythm that is out of keeping with the undulations of the landscape. It should be possible to design individual pylons to be slender and graceful where they cannot be routed out of sight. The unwelcome rhythm could be prevented by planting tree groups alongside the power lines so that only three pylons are visible from one place.



*Pylons out of scale and creating an unwelcome rhythm*



*Tree planting can restrict views*

**11.02** Water towers have been assimilated into the landscape to become familiar landmarks, often seen across long distances. Tele-communications masts could be designed to be more compatible with the traditional countryside scene by adopting a more sympathetic form, scale and silhouette.



## A TEN POINT CODE FOR BUILDING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

An application of the policies in the Local Plan enables the following working code for development to be adopted.

- 1.** An appraisal of the site and its context is essential to understand its special qualities. Analyse these characteristics before designing new development.
- 2.** Site new buildings to blend with the landscape, its form, planting and boundaries. Retain existing trees and hedgerows. Allow space around and between buildings with sufficient distance away from boundaries for planting new trees.
- 3.** Look at simple building forms in combination with their landscape setting. Aim to minimise their visual impact.
- 4.** Keep building masses small, with large buildings broken down into components of a satisfactory scale. Avoid large areas of tarmac in favour of permeable surfaces like crushed stone.
- 5.** Roof forms are all-important. Use lower eaves lines and extended roofs to help to relate the building to the landscape.
- 6.** Harmony of design must be achieved over three dimensions. Buildings should relate to distant views as well as close-to. Repeated patterns should generally be avoided in favour of organic forms.
- 7.** Traditional countryside buildings such as cottages, farmhouses and barns can offer examples of good design practice. Use established building forms for new uses in the countryside.
- 8.** Use local materials and details wherever possible. When modern materials are essential, soft and muted colours should be used.
- 9.** Boundary enclosure and entrance details are an integral part of the established landscape character. Use simple entrances and enclosures that suit the scale and form of their site.
- 10.** Modern technology has brought new forms to the countryside which erode its character. Use all available techniques to screen the private car.

**For advice on planning applications :**

Call 01296 585679

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Planning

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