

## Responses to the requirements of the Planning and Advisory Committee. (Below)

The Planning and Advisory Committee have recommended to Cabinet that the VDS be accepted, subject to the following:

- a change in the tone of the Forward and the remainder of the document so that it reads as an adopted document and therefore it is a material consideration rather than saying for example that it may be considered as material guidance.
- Change the wording in Paragraph 1.1 to meet the current Policy test which is that the natural beauty of the AONB should be conserved and enhanced.
- That the reference to 'Buffer Zone' is removed from paragraph 1.4.
- That the second paragraph of section 3.5 is removed.

## THE OTFORD VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT 2 SELECTED SECTIONS

**Words shown scored through** are the original copy from VDS2

**Words shown in red** are the recommended replacement copy approved by the Otford community.

### FOREWORD

The first Otford Village Design Statement, (VDS) prepared in 2007, was accepted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Sevenoaks District Council in 2008. Since then, much has undergone change in our parish. It was the declared intention of those who contributed to the first VDS that a revised version be updated as circumstances in planning changed.

This new document (VDS2) has subsequently been approved by Sevenoaks District Council as a further Supplementary Planning Document, superseding the earlier VDS document of 2007. The revised edition (VDS 2) seeks to provide a clear expression of the community's wishes in 2015. It has taken several years in its compilation but we believe it encompasses the importance of good design within all the elements which make up a village, not just its houses. It is our hope that in the coming years VDS2 will continue to provide architects, developers and district planners with helpful information when considering applications for any buildings or extensions in Otford.

The status of this document ensures that it ~~may be~~ should be considered as material guidance by planners within Sevenoaks District Council, when considering planning applications within Otford parish in the future. It will join the Otford Parish Plan as well as the

Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan as providing material guidance on all planning matters within the community.

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has radically changed much planning regulation. Mr. Greg Clark, the minister responsible, has written: *“it makes clear that all plans and all decisions should respect the special character of each area, and in particular, the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside.”* It is with that statement in mind that the Otford VDS 2 has been prepared. This document seeks to point out and emphasise the special character of Otford and its buildings, which any future planning proposals should respect.

There are still many outside pressures put upon a rural village which is in such close proximity to the Sevenoaks urban area. The parish is under threat of concentration and enlargement. Developers are continually on the look-out to purchase properties throughout the village often with the intention of replacing them with atypically larger buildings or cramped, two-for-one developments.

On our borders, large developments like the recently-expanded Sainsbury’s superstore dominate our landscape and continual applications for large, new development in this important ~~buffer zone~~ rural area, **protected by the Green Belt**, demonstrate how ~~close~~ **vulnerable** we are to urban creep. To be able to maintain and nurture the integrity of our historic, rural village, we desperately need as much legislation and support on our side as possible. It is for that reason that this new Village Design Statement 2 is as important today as the first edition was, seven years ago.

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## **1: LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND OPEN SPACES**

### **1.1 Otford’s rural setting**

The landscape surrounding Otford plays an integral part in the village. It is the result of many centuries of evolution. The pattern of roads, tracks, field boundaries and hedgerows is firmly rooted in the past. Our community recognise this and have made clear that they are committed to maintaining these patterns of the historic landscape both in the village and outside. Much of Otford village and all the surrounding countryside is fortunate to be located within an area designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). As such **the community has a responsibility to conserve and enhance its natural beauty. Meanwhile** it is afforded protection against **any** development which ~~fails to protect or enhance~~ **acts against these intentions.** (See Appendix map 3)

### **1.2 Preserving the countryside to the North of the village**

The North Downs escarpment, below which Otford is sited, has changed little since the last Ice Age. Its high position forms an iconic backdrop to the whole village. Any proposals to introduce new housing or to extend homes located on the periphery of this important landscape feature could potentially have an effect upon the whole community. Thus visible prominence should be taken into account in consideration of any proposals or applications which can affect an unspoilt view of the Downs. The SDC Core strategy states: *“The distinctive features that contribute to the special character of its landscape ...will be*

*protected and enhanced where possible...The character of the Kent Downs... and their settings, will be conserved and enhanced...to ensure that all development conserves and enhances the local landscape character.”* (Policy LO8) This is a view shared by Otford residents. Protecting the biodiversity of the whole downland area is also reflected in the designation of the Otford to Shoreham Downs as an area of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The Otford community have indicated a clear commitment to its protection.

### **1.3 Green areas within the village**

Otford village contains a number of green areas adjacent to homes. These include the central *Green* and *Palace Field* as well the *Recreation Ground* and *Allotments*, all located close to the village centre. Less evident are other green areas like the *Chalk Pits*, beyond the station, *Telston Park* and *Hale Lane Recreation Ground*, to the west of Otford, the *Community Woodland* beside Sevenoaks Road and *Oxenhill Woods* to the south of Tudor Drive. Each of these areas is of great importance to the community and is continually maintained and in continual use.

### **1.4 Preserving the countryside to the South of the village**

Most of the countryside surrounding Otford is contained within the Metropolitan Green Belt (*see appendix*). It therefore enjoys national protection from creeping development.

The fields, woods and water meadows located to the south of Otford, stretching to the M26 and the nearby parish boundary, are valued by all as a green breathing space establishing the village as an independent entity separated from the northern urban area of Sevenoaks. The major role of this area is to absorb and hold heavy rainfall and reduce the risk of serious flooding by the river Darent. They form an important part of our green infrastructure.

Land lying to the north of the Vestry Estate has been worked farmland for over a century. The introduction of the M26 motorway, however, left a narrow unproductive strip running along the rising ground of Ladds Hill beside the Old Otford Road. This continues to be designated 'Green Belt' land. Residents have indicated its importance to the village as it forms an important *buffer zone but vulnerable strip of land* between the green fields and the light-industrial buildings of the Vestry Estate. *Its role Given its prominent siting on a rising area of land overlooking the water meadows*, it is perceived as protecting our village from creeping development from the Sevenoaks urban area.

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### ***Design Principles***

- 1a** The community wish to retain the existing pattern of roads, footpaths and field boundaries. (CS SP11/ LO.8 and ENV 13)
- 1b** All areas within the current designated Metropolitan Green Belt should ideally be kept free of inappropriate new development. However we accept that in the light of Supplementary Local planning policy, applications may be considered under certain circumstances. (ADMP GB1-GB9; CS SP10; RESPD 3.2, GBSPD )
- 1c** Proposals for new homes or extensions sited on or near the periphery of the North Downs, should not compromise the uninterrupted views of this area of outstanding natural beauty. (CS LO8:)
- 1d** Every effort should be taken to protect the important agricultural land to the south of Otford. The community has indicated that particular care is required to protect the

this vulnerable Green Belt 'buffer zone' area lying located beside the Vestry Estate from intrusive development. (CS LO8; RESPD 3.2)

- 1e The community supports the preservation of all remaining areas of permanent pasture, cultivated land and woodland within and adjoining the village envelope and which contribute to the sense of open space within the village.
  - 1f The community fully supports all opportunities to extend or promote safe cycle routes within the parish (CS SP2)
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### 3.5 The future of the Archbishop's Palace Tower and Palace Field

The remains of the Archbishops Palace' (c. 1518) are an iconic Otford landmark and amongst the oldest in the Sevenoaks region. They form an important part of Otford's identity. There has been a recent proposal that ownership and responsibility for the whole site be transferred from Sevenoaks District Council, to the Otford community. This proposal has been received with a great deal of local support.

The District Council is currently undertaking essential structural works on the tower which were identified by their condition survey. ~~Following this first stage, if the financial means can be found to restore the Tower to an acceptable state as a heritage asset which will permit it to be visited by the public, then~~ There is every hope that, at some future date, the site can will form part of an active community asset, benefitting both the community and the district. How the Tower may be enhanced and made of greater benefit to the village and district, will be a decision made with the support of English Heritage, the conservation architect and the outcome of much local discussion. (NPPF 6:55)

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