

Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan 2010 – 2030

Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan – Design Statement

(July 2018 / updated June 2024)

Document Endorsement and Approval

Endorsed and approved by:	Date
Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan Working Group	June 2024
Barcombe Parish Council	October 2024

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1. Introduction

The Neighbourhood Plan sets out the Barcombe Parish Council's core strategic objectives and intentions under a number of key themes. A Village Design Statement is one of those themes.

1.1 Purpose of a Village Design Statement

A Village Design Statement can be used by communities who want to influence the design of future development in their village. They help to identify and analyse the local character of individual settlements and areas so that future development can contribute to local distinctiveness and sense of place. Originally outlined by the Countryside Commission (now Natural England), they are intended to be user-friendly documents that describe the existing essential character of a village and provide local perspectives on the design and advice on future development.

1.2 Identified guiding themes

Following consultations and evidence gathering to support the development of the Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan in 2015 and 2024, a set of key themes have been identified to provide a consistent and coherent narrative thread to guide design philosophy and development principles for the village. These themes provide a clear baseline assessment and analysis of current conditions and describe expectations for the future.

- A thriving rural community
- Safety, ease of access and connections
- Network of facilities and social spaces
- Rural character

1.3 Guidelines for development and developers

The community of Barcombe have demonstrated a strong desire for any developer to adhere to our Village Design Statement principles and guiding themes and ensure that the village character is not lost. This document acts as a conduit and guide for developers to ensure this is achieved.

2. Document Endorsement and Approval Statement

The Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan, which includes a Village Design Statement, is currently being reviewed and cannot be completed until the final Lewes Local Plan has been published. However, the Barcombe Neighbourhood Plan Working Group (BNPWG) believes that this updated Design Statement, which includes information from a recent parish-wide survey, is a reliable reflection of how the community would like to see the village evolve in the future.

There are immediate and potential planning / development proposals that the village has to embrace. The working group (BNPWG) and the village community expect that the local planning department and developers will fully acknowledge, accept and action the principles, guidance and details within this statement to the benefit of current and future Barcombe parish residents.

3. Our Vision for the Village

Our vision is that Barcombe Parish in 2035 will have retained and enhanced its character to support a flourishing and sustainable village. The Neighbourhood Plan will have improved the balance of residential accommodation to better fit local needs by providing housing suitable for smaller families, people wishing to live independently, and people wanting to downsize and remain in the community.

Any new development should therefore support Barcombe as a thriving community of modest scale, in harmony with its rural surroundings. Residential development in the parish should be within or contiguous with the village envelope of Barcombe Cross. New building will be of a scale and appearance that is sympathetic to the established village character, but in a way that is authentic and relevant to its contemporary context, rather than superficially historic, imitation or pastiche. The style of architecture, building materials and methods should be of their time and should celebrate and exemplify the use of local sustainable materials and building crafts, and support the long-term energy requirements of residents. The implications of climate change for drainage and sewage systems, pedestrian and traffic management, and the rural environment will all be thoroughly and sustainably addressed.

4. Our Guiding Themes

These key themes provide a clear baseline assessment and analysis of current conditions and expectations for the future.

4.1 A thriving rural community

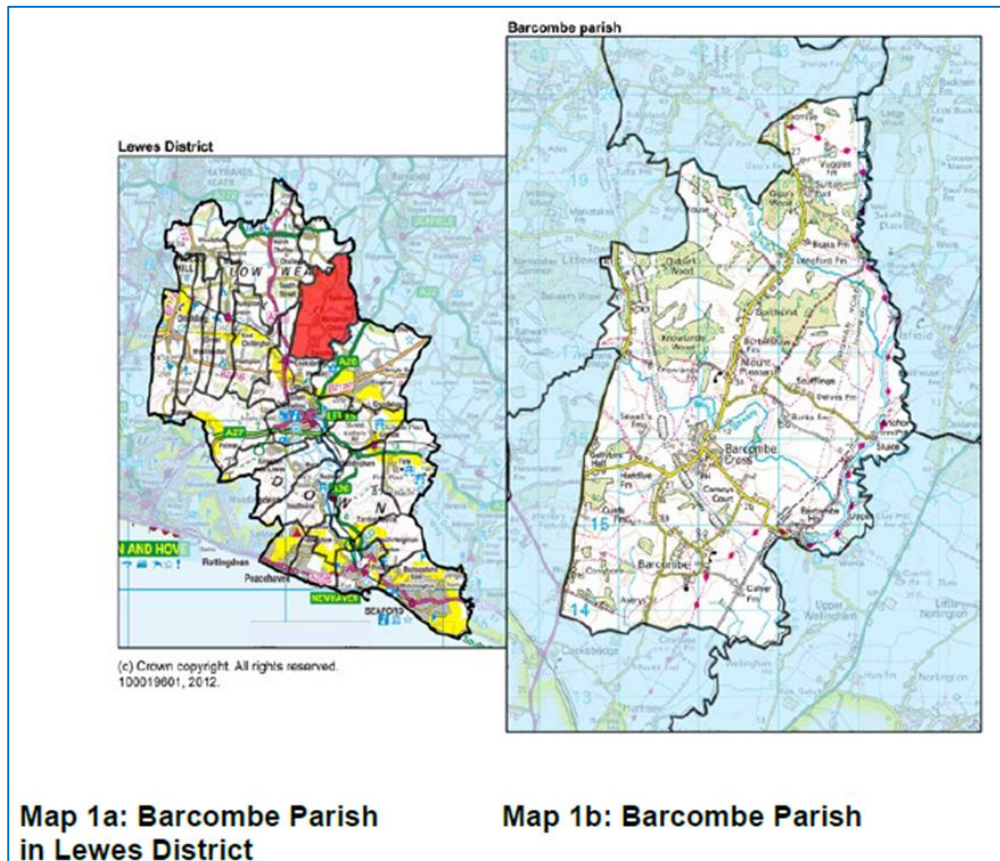
Barcombe parish is part of a matrix of small Low Weald rural settlements that give a strong sense of historic landscape. The village can be seen, discretely emerging from surrounding trees, from several local vantage points, including the expansive views across the Ouse valley from Lewes and the South Downs.

Barcombe Cross is identifiable as a nucleated Hilltop Village, with all three roads leading distinctively uphill into its centre and High Street. There are far-reaching views on all sides of the village over the unspoilt countryside of the Low Weald and its characteristic 'big skies'. The South Downs form a dramatic backdrop to views from the south side of the village (ESCC Landscape character assessment, 2015/2016). The Parish Council has a dark skies policy.

The village is seen as a desirable and safe place to live, as confirmed in recent surveys. It has a mixed constituency, with villagers who have family ties going back generations living alongside more recently settled members of the community. Time spent living in the village averages in decades. Barcombe has an identifiable proud community spirit as illustrated by the numbers participating in local events and the activities of multiple local clubs and social organisations.

In response to the Barcombe Housing Survey 2015 and the recent 2024 Neighbourhood Plan Survey, many respondents commented on the need to retain a 'village feel' and that any development both small or large should recognise this. Both surveys suggested there is support for development at a level appropriate to sustaining the community within the constraints of its limited services. Whilst it is understood that local residents cannot be prioritised, any development should aim to offer opportunities to meet the identified local need for suitable homes for first-time buyers, for downsizing, and offer a variety of sizes and numbers without diminishing the village character or contributing to 'creeping urbanisation' or the feel of suburbia.

All future plans should consider the visual impact of housing development upon the key landscapes, views and skies. There is little support for development outside these criteria. The size, spatial structure and pattern of the settlement, as well as the density and mixture of housing provision, plays a vital role for a thriving community in fostering social cohesion and community spirit.

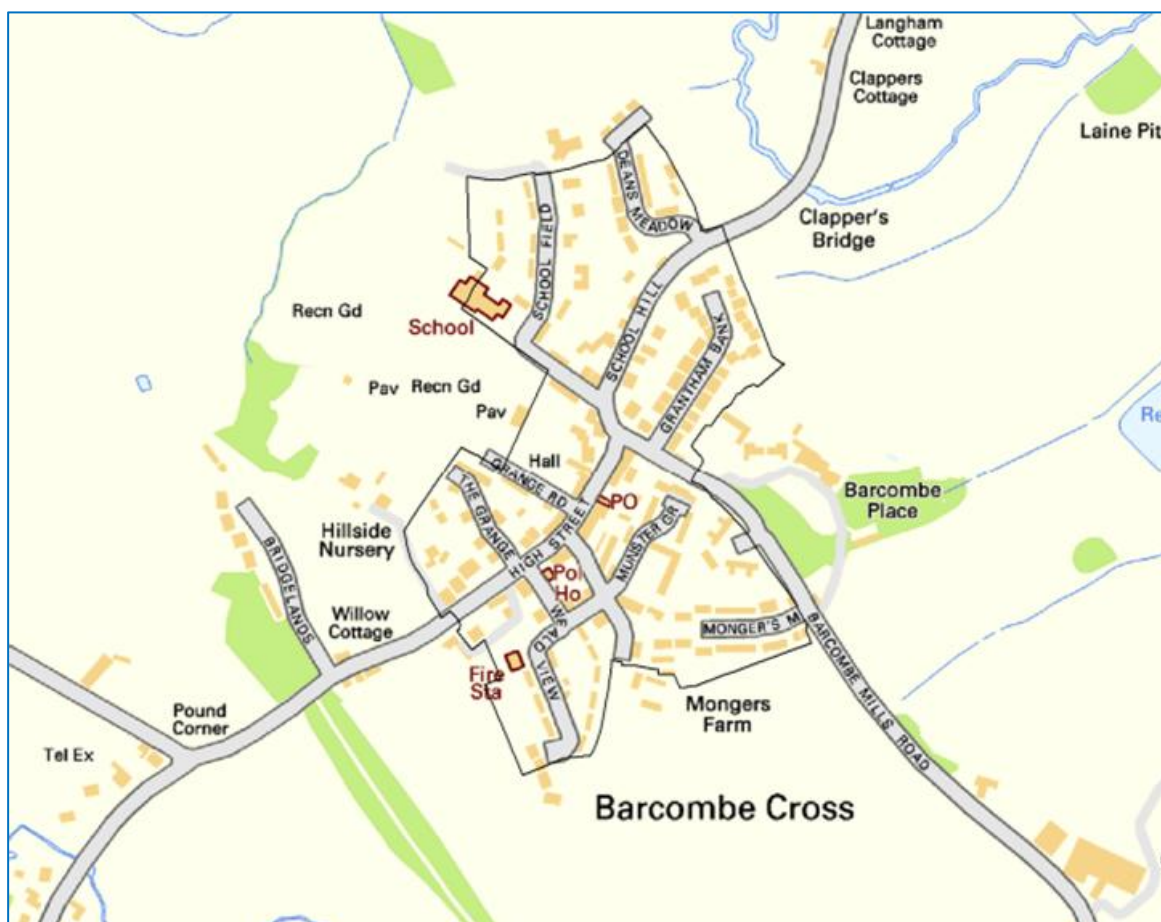


4.2 Safety, ease of access and connections

Access to Barcombe is via narrow roads leading through the congested high street in the village centre. Well-used services and social hubs are connected and situated in a way that currently enable positive relationships between people, for example, the pub, the small general shop, primary school, sports and recreation area which has Village Green status (DEFRA), and village hall. A network of twittens, footpaths and pavements allow pedestrians safe, quick routes to services, public spaces and to visit their neighbours. However, nearly all those who responded to the 2024 Neighbourhood Plan Survey expressed concern about road safety for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders throughout

the parish. Development related increase in traffic volumes, both inside and outside the parish, would exacerbate the situation.

Developments of any size should use a design approach that carefully considers the local physical and social context, availability of local resources and materials, and local needs to ensure a cohesive, safe environment in which residents may thrive. For example, small, semi-private front gardens, alongside residential roads increases social interactions and a feeling of safety (Soft edges', Jan Gehl, 2010). Developers are also encouraged to follow the principles of Placemaking as set out by the government, the process of involving communities in establishing what good design means to them through consultation and engagement. Placemaking can empower communities to have a sense of belonging and pride in their local area as places change over time.



4.3 Network of facilities and social spaces

The village has a number of facilities, social spaces, clubs, societies and community groups, and routes to nature, which contribute to local employment, and the welfare and social cohesiveness of Barcombe as a thriving community. Additional demand on the existing network will need to be given consideration when assessing the viability of new developments.

- **Facilities and services**

Situated directly on the village high street is a small, community-owned shop and post office and The Royal Oak pub. Off the high street, yet still within the village centre, is the fire station (ESFRS), a primary school (currently full to capacity), a church, a village hall which houses a day nursery and is home to other community groups such as scouts, and on the edge of the parish is The Anchor Inn pub. The nearest health centre and GPs are in Newick, Ringmer or Lewes with either little or no access by public transport.

- **Public open spaces**

The recreation ground, located in the centre of Barcombe Cross, provides a sports pavilion, fixed tennis courts, a bowling green and a newly refurbished play area. There are shared pitch spaces for seasonal sports including stoolball, cricket and football, and space for general recreational use. There is also access to a lower informal recreational field that includes a teenagers' 'hang-out' shelter, a zip-wire and a small football pitch. Other key focal social points include the bench outside the village shop, the bench on the green space next to High Street roundabout, along with other informal spots such as the steps to the sports pavilion and school gate. The recreation ground has been awarded Village Green Status, which provides considerable statutory protection.

- **Access to nature, footpaths and local walks**

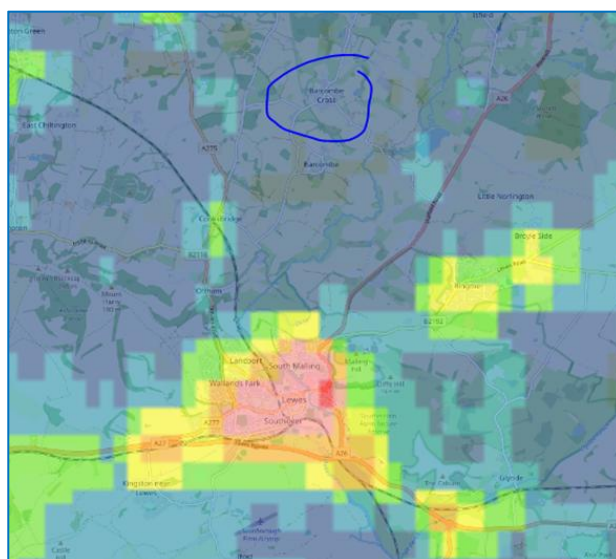
Barcombe has a series of designated footpaths and informal historical paths that are potentially vulnerable to being lost. These paths lead across open fields, through woodland and to the rivers, and enable easy access for walking and being in nature. There is an informal community space designated to nature 'Wild About Barcombe' with its tree-lined paths, pond and picnic fire pit area, plus two sets of highly sought-after allotments near to the recreation ground.

4.4 Rural Character

Barcombe has a genuine rural character reflected not only in its location, surrounded by actively farmed agricultural land, natural features and a wide variety of nature, as evidenced by extensive and updated records, its strong community spirit and its physical layout. It has a mix of domestic and commercial architecture and building material types, for example, red brickwork (Hamsey brick), flint, tin, wooden weatherboarding and wooden gables. This provides a strong sense of place that has grown organically, retaining its relatively high level of tranquillity – a characteristic defined by “openness to the landscape, perceived naturalness, lack of noise and disturbance, and presence of features such as rivers or views” as opposed to detracting factors such as “the visibility of urban developments and roads, noise and light pollution, and other overt signs of human impact” (State of the South Downs National Park, 2012).

Barcombe retains the key rural character of Dark Skies. It is identified as having low levels of light pollution and subsequent dark skies (ref; 0.25-0.5 nanowatts per cm sq/sr in England’s Dark Skies / Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) which is distinctive in comparison to many villages nearby. This is a direct benefit of the restricted use of street lighting and encouragement of discreet domestic outside lighting which provides and enables habitats for nocturnal wildlife within the village boundary (N.B. Barcombe Parish Council has a Dark Skies Policy along with guidance set by the government and CPRE). This has implications for the design and planning of new developments.

Snapshot from CPRE interactive light pollution – dark skies map (Barcombe circled in blue)



5. Barcombe Cross Conservation Areas

There are two Conservation Area Appraisals (CAA) within the parish of Barcombe, one in 'old' Barcombe and the other in Barcombe Cross, which highlight that the historic core is focussed on the village crossroads (Barcombe Cross). The village has grown incrementally to the south (Weald View), to the east (The Grange) and to the north (The Willows).

Conservation areas exist to protect the special architectural and historic interest of a place - in other words, the features that make it unique and distinctive (Historic England). New development should therefore be of high quality and respect the qualities of the Conservation Area.

Snapshot shows Barcombe Cross Conservation Area marked in the darker green



6. Old and new buildings

The oldest dwellings in Barcombe Cross are Mongers Farm House at 1420 and the Old Forge around 1450, in comparison to the older, nearby Barcombe settlement where the oldest section of the parish church dates as early as the 12th Century. Historically, building design in Barcombe Cross is of mixed character with 47 listed buildings in the civil parish, as well as houses identified as of local and historical interest. Post-war developments and modern buildings are well represented. The new village hall is identified in *The Buildings of England* (Antram Pevsner 2012) as “*a building of good contemporary design...with sustainability important in its design*”. It has won critical acclaim and presents Barcombe as

having a progressive attitude towards community building(s). This is situated alongside other sites of conservation status that provide visual amenity and reference characteristic Sussex building styles and materials.

N.B. Barcombe Cross is listed as an Archaeological Notification Areas for East Sussex.

7. Building materials – a rich mix of media

There is a rich diversity of building styles, exterior details, and materials reflecting the long history and evolution of the village. The high street has many historic types of cladding materials including bricks, tile-hanging, painted timber boarding, painted corrugated iron and render. The post-war buildings tend to be a mixture of brick and tile-hung and are largely unseen from the high street, constructed in purpose-built cul-de-sacs.

8. Sustainable services and facilities

Services and facilities such as the village shop, public house, school, and bus provision face continued challenges, and in some cases, the threat of closure. These amenities remain critical to the lifeblood and wellbeing of the village community and are highly valued in supporting social cohesion. The village community showed how much it values these amenities by collectively raising funds in 2017 to purchase the village shop and post office, and before that raised funds for Wild About Barcombe and the new village hall. There is a fire station and team of locally retained fire officers. The village has embraced and supports a local care home, Bevern View, for young people with significant and complex disabilities and has considered their needs in many new developments and initiatives. These services and facilities, including the retained based fire station, generate much needed local employment for the community but rely on the continuing availability of truly affordable local homes. Working young people who wished to remain in the locality have had to move away to find housing that they could afford.

9. Natural boundaries and gateways

Barcombe Cross is encircled by sites of significant ecological value. There are natural boundaries and gateways to the village, which include two disused railway lines and bridges, ancient woodland and hedges, long-established, multi-habitat nature corridors,

extensive streams and river systems, and farmed agricultural fields - all of which are clear characteristics of the village. There are multiple springs and underground watercourses, some rising as a direct result of rainfall in the village, which feed via tributaries into the Bevern stream and the Ouse. Mixed and ancient woodland, scrub, meadow areas, natural watercourses at 'Sidehills' and along the old Lewes-Sheffield Park railway line, Barcombe Place designated area of conservation, and woodland and trees, provide wildlife habitats, important ecological corridors, and visual and social amenity at the village edge. *“An abundance of trees, woods and hedges reinforce local experiences of remoteness and tranquillity”* across the surrounding landscape (ESCC Landscape character assessment, 2015/2016).

10. Natural spaces – our green & blue infrastructure

The density of recent development in Barcombe Cross, such as The Grange in 1988 and The Willows in 2002, has reduced the green space within the village boundary. The community funded, created and conserves a wild area called Wild About Barcombe, which along with the new village hall and its setting, have sought to provide new environments of value to both people and wildlife. Nature conservation areas, Designated Local Wildlife Sites, and their connected habitats and woodland, provide valued local features and natural or semi-natural networks of blue-green corridors that maintain and enhance ecosystems (EU report / Naumann et al, 2011). This concurs with established research identifying the inter-connected social, health and wellbeing, and economic and environmental benefit to communities afforded by the provision and integration of green and blue infrastructure. Rivers, streams, ponds, ditches and springs provide key landscape and identity characteristics of Barcombe, and greatly benefit the community and visitors to the village, despite the occasional risk of excessive rain and flooding.

11. Environment impact – issues and concerns

The 2009 Barcombe Action Plan, The Barcombe Housing Survey 2015, and the recent 2024 Neighbourhood Plan Survey all identified sustainability, environmental issues, and climate change as being of significant concern. This has also manifested in a range of initiatives and developments that have sought to address composite issues, including: residents creating some affordable housing, an eco-focused village hall, Wild About

Barcombe, and a community wildlife group. Whilst these kinds of interventions have not always been systematic or part of an overall governing strategy, they demonstrate a local appetite for a pragmatic and logical approach to supporting the needs of people through the use of principles of efficiency and sustainability.

Highlighted issues are:

- **Flooding and the management of water:** Flooding and the management of water is of concern, and includes disruptive and recurrent flooding events and road closures at Barcombe Mills, and other localised flooding and run-off issues from water courses across the village.
- **Sewage and water treatment infrastructure:** The current infrastructure is old and limited and means that even the lengthy Barcombe Sewage Works upgrade will not prevent all discharges after heavy rain. Many homes in the parish have private septic tanks, cesspits or treatment plants.
- **Energy:** Reliance on oil and non-renewables.
- **Open spaces and biodiversity:** Diminishing green and social space and reduction in green fields due to past and future development, deficit of equipped play, increased demand on existing village social space and resources, loss of biodiversity through domestic impact such as increased footfall, pet fouling, domestic cat predation, and lighting.
- **Traffic:** By-passing traffic north of Lewes between the A275 and A26 already causes significant flows, which increase at peak times. New housing sites have implications for pedestrians, cyclists and other road users at key pinch points such as the High Street, beside The Crink, Spithurst Road, and on the approaches to the village.

Highlighted opportunities are:

- **Community, wellbeing, nature and biodiversity:** There are opportunities for enhancement of nature and biodiversity through the provision of local mitigation of the ecological and environmental impact of developments rather than offsetting this elsewhere, and for maintenance of the village rural identity and social wellbeing.
- **Water management:** Exemplary management of the consequences of increasing rainfall and periods of drought. To mitigate against local flooding and rapid run-off and provide storage of water for domestic use and as an environmental amenity.

- **Energy:** New builds must incorporate up-to-date energy systems such as solar panels, air source heat pumps, and insulation. Consideration of site ground source heat pumps and other sustainable eco technologies.
- **For the community:** To support wellbeing, social engagement, social cohesion and community. Community engagement, cohesion and wellbeing should be prioritised when addressing these opportunities.

12. Village Design Statement Summary

Our Village Design Statement, together with our Vision for the Village and corresponding design guidelines and themes, will help to ensure that new development in the village is sufficiently characterful and characteristic of Barcombe.

- **Scale and appearance:** New building will be of a scale and appearance that is sympathetic to the established character of the village and its sustainability but modern and relevant rather than synthetically or superficially historic, imitation or pastiche.
- **Style of architecture:** This should be of its time and use sustainable materials and methods. These materials and the tradecrafts required should be locally sourced, as much as possible.
- **Characteristics:** Minimise the ingress of 'urban' characteristics and clutter. Reduce the need for additional road building.
- **Conservation Area:** To protect the special architectural and historic interest of the village and its features that make it unique and distinctive. New development should be of high quality and respect the qualities of the Conservation Area.
- **Historic Assets:** Any new development adjacent to or near listed buildings or other historical assets should respect their heritage value. Developers should prioritise site layout, scale, materials and design elements to complement the historic character and minimise any negative impacts. Careful landscaping and thoughtful design should enhance the historic setting, ensuring that new structures fit in and contribute positively to both the historic assets and the village's identity.
- **Environmental impact:** Use processes and systems that reduce the environmental impact on the parish. Ensure effective mitigation of any environmental and ecological impact on site and in its immediate setting, and make the mandatory biodiversity

gain local and not deferred. Retain dark skies policy in any lighting design including no street lighting. Follow the principles of 'Placemaking' (Gov. Eng) and based on precise assessments and surveys

- **Climate change:** Development must ensure sustainable and resilient management of water based on up-to-date facts. Rainwater is a domestic resource which could be harvested. Plans must prevent flooding and pollution from domestic run-off and meet the ongoing water requirements and maintenance of landscaping and planting plans.
- **Landscape management:** Integrate landscape, design and ecological impact and provide a pro-active, long-term approach to landscape management both on site and in the immediate surroundings. Anticipate the well-known risks of new on-site planting failings and consequences for nearby habitats. Encourage the restoration and enhancement of existing habitats, and local mitigation based on precise assessments and surveys.
- **Transport:** Enable residents to avoid use of roads between places of significance in the village, provide alternative routes suitable for all, and facilitate walking and cycling. Ensure road safety on site and at access. More sustainable transport corridors are required between Barcombe and other villages and towns.
- **Spaces:** Ensure safety, ease of access and connection ('soft edges') between dwellings and protected space between private and public area. Ensure safe roads and traffic movements.-
- **Local identity:** Village identity should be as important today as it was in the past.

“Sometimes a landscape seems to be less a setting for the life of its inhabitants than a curtain behind which their struggles, achievements and accidents take place. For those who are...behind the curtain, landmarks are no longer only geographic but also biographical and personal.” (Berger, 1967)

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