

# Otterton Village Design Statement.

## Otterton Village Design Statement -

Supplementary planning guidance for the village of Otterton

A Village Design Statement has been produced by the local community for the Parish of Otterton as part of the Countryside Agency initiative. The Village Design Statement was adopted as interim Supplementary Planning Guidance to the emerging East Devon Local Plan on 13th October 2004. It's guidelines add detail to, and complement, the Local Plan policies and will be used in the determination of planning applications and to guide householders undertaking works not requiring planning permission.

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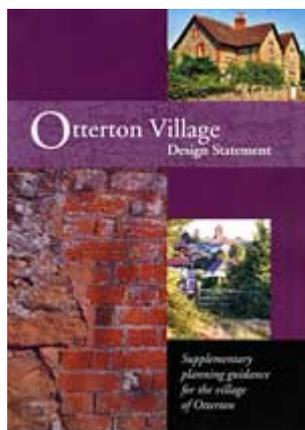
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## Otterton Village Design Statement -

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## INTRODUCTION

*"Just across the water is Otterton, a quiet village of cob cottages, an ancient priory and an old mill. They still make Honiton Lace here."*

S.V.B. Mais, 'Glorious Devon', 1934

The purpose of a Village Design Statement is to manage change, whether that change is major new development or just cumulative, small-scale additions and alterations. It is not about whether development should take place; that is a job, in this instance, for the East Devon Local Plan. Rather, it is about how planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the conservation and enhancement of the local environment. Its purpose, therefore, is to complement the statutory planning process and to that end this Village Design Statement for Otterton has been adopted by East Devon District Council, from October 2004, as 'Supplementary Planning Guidance'.

This statement and the principles that it sets out emanate from the community. Following published guidance from the Countryside Agency a series of village appraisals were undertaken during the summer of 2003. The results were presented to the wider community through a consultative exhibition staged in December 2003, supported by a household questionnaire. It is the analysis of this questionnaire, (nearly a third of households responded) together with feedback from the exhibition and initial appraisals, which have shaped, and are referred to, in this document.

Such views, often strongly held, have been tempered and underpinned by reference to a number of publications on the East Devon landscape and the village of Otterton, its environs and its heritage, the 'East Devon Conservation Appraisals' and 'Mark Rolle - his architectural legacy' to name but two (see bibliography). It should be stressed that this 'Statement' does not seek to replace or repeat these exemplary works but rather to draw from them in establishing this guidance.

## Background



England's countryside has been shaped by man's activities from the prehistoric times to the present day. The village of Otterton, and the countryside that frames it is no exception although, up to the middle of the last century, that change was gradual. Developing principally as a linear settlement its small farmsteads fronting on to a long central thoroughfare. Over time, these became interspersed with estate cottages, the whole commanded by the Church and former manor house, (itself built upon and from an earlier priory), reminders of former power and patronage. *Very much a case of evolution rather than revolution.*



It was this historic value of the village that was recognised by the designation of a conservation area in 1972 and which was extended in 1993 to encompass some 55 individually listed buildings. The wider landscape in which Otterton sits had already been recognised as nationally important through its designation as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1963. Although still sitting relatively easily within the landscape, Otterton has witnessed substantial change in the last sixty years. Today, no working farm remains within the boundary of the village. Of the businesses that do remain, the mill (principally a craft centre and restaurant) and the pub (housing the village post office and shop) depend to a degree upon the many walkers and tourists drawn to the village by its character and setting. (A hairdresser and an engineering works complete the short list). Moreover, leave the older part of the village behind and the change is clearly evident. Development has taken place in clusters using designs that sit uneasily with what has gone before and the rural landscape that surrounds.

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## **PART 1 - THE WIDER LANDSCAPE**

*"Otterton, a pretty fisher town,  
standeth on the east side of the haven.  
About a mile from Ottermouth,  
and on the west side is Budleigh."*

Leyland, 1542

### **Background and context**

The basis for the settlement was the Otter, a meandering lowland river, its flood plains once a traditional water meadow landscape now criss-crossed with drainage ditches. Framed by tall red sandstone cliffs its estuary mouth, a salt marsh since the build-up of a shingle bar in the 15th century. To the west (outside the parish) lie the commons of Bicton, Woodbury and Colaton Raleigh, heathland overlying infertile pebble beds. To the east rise undulating greensand ridges, overlaid with clay and flint, characterised by larger fields, enclosed by a network of hedgerows and mature trees. This remains estate land, which has a parkland appearance as it slopes down to the River Otter below.

### **Today**

The village yet retains a rural feel. The effect of fields and former orchards reaching down into the village is to divide the built environment and give glimpses of the surrounding countryside. Views into the landscape reinforce the rural character of the village and are very important to the character of Otterton as each of them retains something of the settlement's heritage. Chestnut trees are a feature of the Green, rough grazing of the Glebe Field, the apple trees in the Orchard and aged yew trees in the church yard - precious links with our past. Indeed, for the overwhelming majority of people (over nine out of ten) the fact that views from the village are mostly rural with few manmade features is considered to be important or indeed very important.



Relevant Local Plan Policy: EN1 (Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)



### **Design Principles for Otterton:**

1. The open green spaces on the periphery of or rising up from the village, that define its character, be retained, safeguarded from development and, where possible, enhanced. (In particular, land of amenity status i.e. the Glebe Field (Eatcombe Field) and also Anchoring Hill).

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## **PART 2 - THE SHAPE OF THE SETTLEMENT**

*"On the opposite side of the Otter river is Otterton, a village grouped around a knoll on which stands a modern church."*

J.H. Wade, 'Rambles in Devon', 1930



### **Background and context**

Otterton was established as a valley settlement at a river crossing point (typical of the area). A nucleated settlement that has developed along the contours of a tributary valley running into the larger Otter Valley, a brook running in season along its length. Almost certainly established by the Saxons, who introduced an open field system, large fields of narrow open strips bounded by earth banks planted with hedgerows, ('Devon banks') - the latter, still a characteristic feature today. From the 13th century enclosure of these strips gave rise to the narrow hedged plots, or 'closes', appearing on older maps of Otterton. These too are still evident today as the thin,

but relatively long, gardens rising up from Fore Street and in other parts of the village. The shape of the settlement confined and accessed by narrow lanes that originate from the early middle ages, again typical of the East Devon area. Each field, its own name, each farm its own orchard, the effect was, and still is, to create a vegetated and wooded effect.



## Today

Latterly, the shape and nature of parts of the village has been altered. Early 20th century development in Fore Street, Behind Hayes and Lea Road (formerly Pig Street) have been followed by significant post war development in more recent years. Traffic growth has also had an impact on the feel of the settlement. Once quiet streets are now busy with the passage of increasing volumes of traffic which nearly nine out of ten feel has had a detrimental impact on the village (though traffic calming is not widely regarded as a solution). Nonetheless, Otterton still retains narrow lanes that as yet remain largely unspoilt - their Devon banks and old walls, or passages worn through red sandstone are tangible links with the past and an inspiration for the future.

Otterton has evolved over time, its shape defined by green spaces, traditional narrow lanes, trees and hedgerows, all of which combine to create a diverse patchwork. The retention of such features and the avoidance of further development in large clusters are considered important or very important by almost nine out of ten inhabitants.

Relevant Local Plan Policies:

S2 (Built-up Area Boundaries for villages)

S3 (Development within Built-up Area Boundaries)

EN5 (Land of Local Amenity Importance)

EN16 (Preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas)

EN17 (Demolition of Unlisted buildings in Conservation Areas)

EN26 (River and Coastal Flooding)

Design principles for Otterton:

2. Future development should avoid the skyline and not dominate the village.
3. Large cluster single design development should be avoided.
4. The green open spaces within the village that define its character be retained, safeguarded and where appropriate enhanced. (In particular land of amenity status i.e. The Green and The Orchard).
5. Retention of existing, and provision of new planting using native species should form an integral part of any future development proposals.
6. Protection, enhancement and creation of traditional features including lanes, walls and boundaries, (Devon banks) to form an integral part of any future development proposals.

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## **PART 3 - BUILDING DESIGN AND MATERIALS**

*"Otterton is a thorough Devonshire village - thatched cottages built of `cob', a material much used in all the southern part of the county"*

Walter White, 1855

Background and context

Till recent times the practical and monetary cost of importing building materials led to the use of those available locally. Otterton displays a range of such materials, which lend it a sense of time and place. A settlement that, for the most part, sits easily and naturally in the landscape, built as it is from that very landscape.



These materials include a wide variety of stone: pebbles (or 'popples'), sand stone, flint and 'Chert'. An alternative to stone was cob, formed from the red clay sub-soil mixed with straw and built up in layers, typically on a course or two of stone, or rubble. The whole being rendered and lime washed. Typically roofs were thatched with combed wheat straw known as 'Devon Reed'. Such materials are evident in:

- Remaining 15th to 17th century farms fronting onto the main street(s) built around courtyards, many with later (17th century) lateral stone chimney stacks (a feature largely unique to east Devon and west Somerset).
- The Mill largely rebuilt in its current form from sandstone during the 1850s.
- 18th and early 19th century terraced thatched cottages of plastered cob on rubble footings  
e.g. nos. 1-9 The Green (built 1808-1814).

The use of 'local' brick became commonplace from the 19th century and with clay readily available, a small brick and tile works was established in the 1840s on a site then known as the 'brick plot'. This was to the east of the village in the vicinity of what is now 'Hawkern' while the coal to fuel both brick and lime kilns (the latter for lime mortar) was landed at Ladram Bay. (Previously, the use of local handmade bricks, expensive to produce and a mark of prestige, was limited, e.g. the walled garden to the Mill House c1670).



From the middle of the 19th century tile and slate took over from thatch, the former made locally or 'imported' from Somerset or Whimble, the latter from further afield Delabole in north Cornwall or Wales. Such materials are typically represented by:

- 19th century Estate cottages. From the 1860s the Rolle Estate, under the patronage of Mark Rolle instigated an extensive programme of improvements replacing older failing cob cottages with modern accommodation for estate workers. Although largely following a common layout within, externally an imaginative and varied use of local materials defied uniformity. Contrasting

colour bricks were employed for corner and arch work, contrasting bands three courses deep at the first floor level (the middle course sometimes set diagonally) and the use of burnt headers (bricks end on and blackened) to form patterns. Roofs were tiled, with trefoil crested ridge tiles and had deep eaves. The use of 'Bridgewater' pantiles also notable, while some upper windows were gabled (two notable exceptions to the use of brick are the knapped 'flint cottages' in Ottery Street).

- Late 19 th /early 20 th century cottages of rendered brick, above a course or two of stone, typically roofed with slate and with notable porches. (46-54 Fore Street).
- 20th century terraced Estate cottages and non-estate houses of rendered brick decorated with bands of local tiles, some with gables, and roofed with slate.

Houses, built during different periods and displaying distinct styles, create an effect of unity by their use of materials of *common origin* and shared elements of design while displaying individuality and character through details and motifs.



For example, roofs have fairly steep pitches and often noticeably overhanging eaves, while a wide variety of distinctive porches (and pediments) frame the doors of houses from many eras. Timber small pane casement windows and planked doors are also common. Some cottages bear commemorative plaques to mark the patronage of their founder (predominantly the 'MR' of Mark Rolle), thus rooting the present buildings into the social history of the village. Many of the older buildings still have outhouses, or in the case of former farmsteads, one-time barns, as testimony to their earlier use.



### **Height, scale and density of buildings**

As a result, there is a mixed density of building in the village - from larger detached houses (often former farmhouses retaining significant gardens), to terraced cottages

with narrower plots. Notably, there are few tall buildings within the village (and few bungalows too) and as a result the similarity in scale creates a sense of unity. A handful stand out either because of their size or position. Of these, the Church which was rebuilt in the 1870s is substantial, its retained 14th century tower the tallest structure in the village. The former 16th century manor house, 19th century Mill and the 'Old Vicarage' (18th century) also command attention.

### **Hedges and walls**

Devon banks and boundary walls of local stone e.g. flint, brick or cob and of varying heights, textures and colours provide continuity between distinct areas within the village, though the condition of many are deteriorating. The combination of these features enhances the character of the village and it is important that any future development takes this into consideration.



### **Today**

Ottertton has experienced much development in recent years, some with considerable regard to vernacular design and detail - much not. Rationalisation of farms and farm buildings has seen many become residential dwellings. This had lead to '*courtyard development*' comprising new building, the impact to an extent screened by existing structures e.g. Watering Court and *mixed building*, i.e. conversion interspersed with new development e.g. Rolle Barton. The latter is universally regarded as an example of good design practice. The existing 'Mark Rolle' stone and brick buildings having been retained and sympathetically converted while untenable structures were replaced with new development, constructed in materials and to designs that complements the locale.

Of greater impact upon the character of the village has been the 'green field' development that has taken place since the war and particularly in recent years. Immediate post war development stands in stark contrast to that which went before, dominating the skyline on the western approach to the village, while the latter half of the 20th century has witnessed cluster development largely in the form of single generic designs. In a rural setting such designs can have an urbanising effect with prominent garage blocks, retaining walls of modern or imported materials and expanses of Tarmac.

In addition the (understandable) trend toward replacement doors and windows of general designs has to an extent resulted in a loss of traditional carpentry. The proliferation of overhead cables and highway signs in parts of the village has also had an impact.

From this certain elements emerge as integral to the character of the village. Namely that there are few tall buildings, that local building materials e.g. cob, local stone and brick and traditional roofing materials e.g. clay tile, slate or thatch, predominate and should continue to be emulated.

Related, is the issue of parking and it is considered that garaging and off road parking are essential to any new development. Ideally there should be a parking facility for residents and visitors. Finally that the siting of overhead cables and telecommunication masts is regarded by nine out of ten inhabitants as an important issue.



#### **Relevant Local Plan Policies:**

EN1 (Development in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty)

EN16 (Preservation and enhancement of Conservation Areas)

#### **Design principles for Otterton:**

7. New development should be in scale with adjacent buildings, take account of the ridgeline of existing structures and be of a size that does not dominate the surroundings, or the wider village.

8. Generic 'off the peg' designs should be resisted. Rather, architectural design should refer to the style and detailed traditional features of the area to enhance the appearance and character of the settlement. Particular support will be shown to the incorporation of local building types, styles and details. (See Appendix I for detail).

9. Materials employed in the external appearance should be in keeping with the traditional character of the village. e.g. brick and tile of similar colour/texture to what has gone before, clay tiles not concrete, use of local stone or stone of similar colour/texture etc. (See Appendix I for detail).

10. Off road parking, set back and/or concealed is integral to any new development.

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## **PART 4 - THE FUTURE**

*"I don't want the village to change too much or else it would become a town. I don't want any more car parks, or big housing estates. If houses are built, they should be built for the locals, not holiday homes. Otherwise, local people won't have any neighbours."*

Pupil, Otterton School, 2004

The local plan sets a 'development boundary' for Otterton and designates areas of 'land of local amenity importance'. There appears to be an endorsement for these by the community through this document. Their enforcement should protect Otterton's remaining green space from the type of off-the-peg development clusters that have begun to erode the settlement's intrinsic character.

None the less, opportunities for development will arise, (e.g. a windfall site, a redundant farm building etc) and these could, depending upon their nature, be potentially beneficial to the village. But any such gain is easily lost. Currently the planning framework cannot prescribe what type of dwelling is built on any given plot, especially in relation to small-scale development. This might well soon change and accordingly, there are clear views as to what would and perhaps would not, benefit the settlement.

Nearly nine out of ten inhabitants felt that any new development should take the form of small/first time buyer properties. (In the South West's rural areas, house prices are rising faster than anywhere in the country and have reached levels second only to London, while the ability to purchase continues to diminish. The term 'affordable housing' is therefore easily used and yet difficult to enjoin. For housing to remain affordable it would have to be subject to some form of community land trust or other similar mechanism).

Approximately half felt that there should be retirement or sheltered housing. Perhaps the fact that this is not higher reflects the fact that Clinton Devon Estates currently maintains 48 residential properties within the village which are let under a policy of affordable housing for local people. A direct legacy to improvements instigated by Mark Rolle and a practice which has contributed immeasurably to maintaining the social fabric of the village, it should be applauded accordingly.

There is a clear view that Otterton would not benefit from further executive housing. Although there is no clear consensus as to the need for further shops, three quarters of villagers who expressed a view said no to any new industrial/business premises.



*"We returned in the fly we had hired for the trip - the roads were very bad most of the way along narrow lanes where for considerable distance two carriages could not pass - passed the poor village of Otterton and also Budleigh - saw Bickton Park, Lord Rolle's at a distance.... got home about three."*

Thomas Russell, 1837

**Clearly, Otterton will and must continue to evolve, but that evolution must as in earlier times, be for the good of the settlement, for the people who live here, rather than for the good or convenience of would be developers. For the character of Otterton's built environment yet remains special - different eras and distinct styles, unified by their use of materials of common origin, individuality linked by common elements of design.**

**However, Otterton is much more than a collection of individual buildings. It is the sum of all the buildings, spaces, streets and trees; it is the material heart of the community.**

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## **APPENDIX 1:**



### **Design and material detail**

Much can be done to ensure new development enhances and complements the old. It is vitally important that new development, however innovative, evolves and draws

from the past and that it is of a scale and design that complements, not dominates, its surroundings.

Through careful thought, modern construction methods, e.g. rendered block construction, can be softened through the external/decorative use of stone or brick (as noted below) and through the sensitive choice of roofing material: clay tile, slate or thatch is preferred.



### **Roofs and chimneys**

Particular regard should be given to roof lines and pitch. If appropriate, consideration should be given to matching the tall graceful stone or brick (or more recently, rendered) chimneys of mediaeval to twentieth century design.

### **Colour of stone**

Though no longer made locally, brick and clay tiles should match the mellow orange/red of the Devon clay utilised in the past. Local stone also is difficult to source in any quantity, although substitute stone, if used, should match as far as possible the indigenous reds, oranges, purples and greys, (e.g. Rolle Barton).





### **Use of carpentry**

The use of traditional carpentry through porches, pediments, doors and casement windows (whether single or double glazed) easily complements the past while continuing the tradition for individual detail, so evident in the village's older buildings.





### **Echoes of tradition**

Finally, the use of stone, brick and flint, or perhaps a traditional bank for boundaries should be promoted, while the art of cob construction also still exists.



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## **APPENDIX 2:-**

### **The shape of the settlement. -**



*A current map of Otterton depicting the conservation area boundary:*



*A Photographic panorama of Otterton looking south from Anchoing Hill, illustrating the current composition of infill and open space*

The prominence and visual importance of the valley slopes and green space within the village to the essential character of the settlement are plain. Further infill of any significant volume would distort that balance and erode the rural nature of the settlement:

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