

## Background document BD3 Environment and the AONB

### B.3.1 Setting

The village of Wye is situated in Kent 1 mile east of the main road A28 between Ashford (5 miles) and Canterbury (10 miles). The Great Stour River runs along the western side of the village, while to the east the land rises sharply up the west-facing chalk escarpment of the Downs that forms a backdrop to most views of the village.



The Great Stour

From the top of the Downs, views extend over the Parish and the farmed landscape to the downs on the opposite side of the river valley. To the south east the English Channel can be seen from the Downs across an open agricultural landscape.



*View from the Downs*

The village sits within a predominantly agricultural landscape. To the immediate north lies Olantigh Park, a historic landscape. There are also formal gardens and parkland within Wye as part of the grounds of Withersdane Hall. This historically significant and naturally beautiful landscape has been recognised. The village and much of the surrounding Parish fall within the Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Olantigh Park is further protected as a grade II park listed in English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens, while the grounds of Withersdane Hall are locally listed. Any development proposals will need to be observant of the statutory protections of the local landscape and conscious of their impact on such a sensitive context.

The landscape setting of Wye consists of wide-open farmland and pastures interspersed with woodland and poplar windbreaks. The chalk escarpment of the North Downs unfolds to the north and east of Wye forming a dramatic background for the village. The Wye Community Farm has an important role to play in management of parts of the Downs near Wye. Woodland copses are more common to the north and along the rolling chalk downs of the AONB. They consist mainly of mature Ash, Oak, Beech, Sycamore with an understorey of Hazel and Elder. Alongside the woodland copses a number of Tree Protection Orders in the wider area highlights the value of some of the specimen trees for the landscape setting of Wye. A plantation woodland including North American species forms a distinct feature in the landscape to the north of the village and adjacent to the College campus. The Arboretum is arranged in a north/south direction and develops along Olantigh Road. The plantation woodland frames the village to the north east and following the topography abuts the northern edge of the Crown Memorial.

Wye is on the North Downs way, the Pilgrims Way, and the Stour Valley footpath, on Sustrans Cycle Route 18 and adjacent to a network of bridleways. A new off road stretch of Route 18 has recently been opened close to Wye, between Godmersham and Shalmsford Street. Many people visit Wye to enjoy the landscape and its natural history –or just to walk.



*Early morning view of Church St looking south from the church tower*

### **BD3.2 Green spaces**

**Church Field:** The Church Field is the largest public green space in the village. It is surrounded by Churchfield Way to the south, the Churchfield Way Estate to the north and west and adjoins the Parish Church Yard and burial ground to the east. The space affords panoramic views to the North West and the Downs. A diagonal path emphasises a desire line towards the view and allows the view and movement axis to Church Street to coincide. The Green has now been taken over by the Parish Council to preserve it, and develop its use.



*Churchfield Green and views to the north west*

*Churchyard and Parish burial ground:* The church tower is a landmark structure for the churchyard, the village, and the wider countryside around Wye and this gives the space surrounding the tower a particular importance. The main path leading to the church continues on the axis of Church Street allowing views to the main street from the churchyard. The network of informal paths within the churchyard allows an appreciation of the history of the place.

*The Green:* This small enclosed space is overlooked by the College and historic houses (including the Old vicarage) in the heart of the Conservation Area. It is used mostly by families with young children, and young people as well as for the Farmer's Market, the Beer Festival and other events

*The Fountain garden:* The Fountain Garden is a small ornamental garden at the corner of High Street and Olantigh Road. A low wall along both roads allows views to the garden but at the same time forms a distinct boundary that is enhanced with vegetation in the internal side. The boundaries between public and private are well defined in this space and there is an aspiration to highlight its potential for wider public enjoyment.

*Playing fields, allotments and recreation grounds:* These are part of the boundary of the village on the south, north and eastern sides. The spaces are extensive, and provide routes around and through the village. The playing field is linked to the village hall and community facilities are described in detail in section 2.6.

### **BD3.3 Statutory protection of the surrounding environment**

The ecological value of the chalk grassland, including rare species of plants and insects, is also nationally recognised and afforded statutory protection for its ecological value and biodiversity. The Wye and Crundale Downs Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Wye National Nature Reserve (NNR) run along the Kent Downs to the west of the village. The SSSI/NNR/SAC are characterised by fragments of ancient woodland and calcareous grassland, both UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) Priority Habitats. The woodland character varies depending on the soil type. On the steep chalk slopes Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) and Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) high woodland predominates; where heavy clay soils overlie the chalk, Ash, Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) and Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*) coppice occurs under Oak (*Quercus robur*) standards. Beneath this is a shrub layer containing Field Maple (*Acer campestre*), Wild Cherry (*Prunus avium*), Wych Elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and Whitebeam (*Sorbus aria*). Within the field layer below the rare Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis*) and Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) are of particular note. The range of the latter being restricted in Britain to Kent.

The Hazel Dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) the UK's only native dormouse and a protected species (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 5) can be found in the woodlands around Wye. The calcareous rich grassland, embedded within the fragments of ancient woodland, is a habitat lost throughout much of Britain through intensive agriculture and lack of management. The grassland adjacent to Wye is rich in orchid species, including the specially protected (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, Schedule 8) spider orchids *Ophrys sphegodes* and *O. fuciflora*. It also provides habitat for the Black-veined Moth (*Siona Lineata*) a species that requires infrequently grazed/ungrazed chalk grassland.

While its range was always restricted to Southern England it is now found only on a few sites around Wye. The Black-veined Moth is a protected species

The variety and extent of the ecological and biodiversity designations around Wye illustrate the complexity and fragility of the surrounding landscape. These designations are a material consideration for planning should it be felt that future development would be likely to have an impact upon them. Rather than be seen only as a potential constraint, the proximity of such rare habitats should be seen as an opportunity to extend their range.



*View from the church tower to the north east*

#### **BD3.4 Renewable energy**

There is a major growth in interest in applying renewable energy technology to supply energy as part of the mitigation and adaptation strategies for climate change. Results of the NP questionnaire revealed a strong desire for the development of an environmentally sustainable community, making full use of and preserving our environment, and striving towards the provision of renewable energy sources in the Parish. For example, in response to the question –“*Would you be interested in supporting a community owned electricity generation initiative from renewables that could provide funds for community activities?*” responses were 46.5% yes, 19.7% no and 35.8% don’t know. In written comments several replies emphasised no wind turbines and others responded in favour of more photovoltaic electricity generation.

Renewable energy can be generated at all levels from individual households to major installations. It is noted that the Supplement to PPS1 on Climate Change requires a

significant proportion of the energy supply of new development to be gained on site. We encourage the use of renewable energy schemes in the Parish but fully support the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement (2011) that confirms that...

*“Working in an AONB, a sensitive environment, requires creativity to ensure renewable energy developments are of an appropriate scale, location and design in relation to the character of the landscape and its setting. It requires innovation in the use of technology too. The AONBs aim is not just to conserve, but to enhance the qualities found within them.”*

Solar renewable energy generation systems (Photo Voltaic (PV), Photo Voltaic Thermal (PV-T), Solar Hot Water/Solar Thermal) are recommended for small scale and household applications. In all cases, whether on individual houses or other developments, visual analysis should be required to ascertain visibility from within and outside the AONB, and opportunities for the mitigation of effects. Alternative sources of heating including- ground, water and air source heat pumps, biomass boilers (such as wood chip/pellets), are also considered appropriate within the Parish. The ADAS site has been identified as a good location for renewable energy generation.

### **BD3.5 The Neighbourhood Plan and Kent Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)**

The Parish of Wye with Hinxhill lies within the Kent Downs AONB. This section summarises how proposals within our NP have been aligned with the overall aims of the AONB Management Plan 2014-19. It is expected that the AONB designation will both provide support for, and defend, the sustainable development that we propose. Although all of the subjects covered by the AONB framework (ranging from “Biodiversity” to “Geology and Natural Resources”) impact on the NP, reference to quality of life components including, “Vibrant communities” and “Sustainable development”, are topics of great significance to the Parish. The ideas within the NP have also taken close account of features of the “Farmed Landscape” identified in the management plan. Aspects of the NP addressing these three core issues and other features within the AONB plan are summarised below.

**“Vibrant communities”** The Kent Downs AONB is a living and working landscape. The NP fully supports the aim of the Management Plan to ..*“find ways of achieving thriving vibrant communities and a sustainable and prosperous local economy that conserves and enhances this nationally important area.”*

Wye is a unique village being surrounded by the Kent Downs AONB, but with direct rail links to London for commuters The Parish already enjoys a high standard of facilities. These features make Wye a very attractive place to live. However the NP takes account of the threats that development poses to the village and Parish in terms of new house building and the erosion of local rural industries. The demand for new building to accommodate incomers outweighs the local housing need from established families within the Parish. Balance and diversity in the provision of housing are integral components of the proposals within the NP and also AONB management plan. Sustainable rural leisure and tourism are recognised as important targets in any proposals for development.

When considering preservation of the AONB, it is important in any new development that sufficient internal green infrastructure is provided to enable everyday leisure use for example, dog walking and children's play, to ensure that the surrounding countryside is not

eroded or put under undue pressure that would challenge its conservation and enhancement.

An important component of the NP is our appraisal of business opportunities. We have identified opportunities to safeguard the facilities for technically advanced horticultural projects such as those associated with biological crop protection. Our surveys also indicate a strong demand for workspace with good links providing a hub of internet and high technology-based projects. We are determined to maintain the retail outlets within Wye and to expand our tourist facilities. In addition we aim to develop new and better facilities utilising the River Stour more actively and through the development of interlinked cycle routes around the village of Wye. The proposed realignment of national Cycle Route 18 falls well within our remit. All of these plans integrate closely with proposals in the AONB Management Plan.

### **“Sustainable development”**

The principles of sustainable development underpin the UK Sustainable Development Strategy and are reiterated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). AONB management plans are an important way to help achieve sustainable development in the context of a Protected Landscape.

The AONB literature points out that since the first AONB Management Plan was adopted (April 2004), there have been seven major development proposals within or immediately adjacent to the AONB. Government guidance, in the NPPF, is clear that major development should not occur in AONBs except in exceptional circumstances and when national need and a lack of suitable alternative sites outside the AONB is demonstrated; lack of alternative ownership does not equate to a lack of an alternative site. Against this backdrop of large-scale development, there is continual pressure for small-scale development and change, it is estimated small scale change accounts for a significant proportion of development in the Kent Downs AONB. The development of Wye being considered in the NP, including the Imperial College Masterplan, may be considered a good example of incremental small changes. The cumulative effect of unplanned developments within Wye, however small, could be extremely damaging to the AONB.

To conserve and enhance the natural and scenic beauty of the Kent Downs, the design of new development, re-development and restoration is critical. The NPPF focuses on the importance of design, stating that *‘permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions’*. The cumulative effects of incremental development - be it in buildings or roads, must not be allowed to create loss of distinctiveness and character. Certain policies within the Management Plan are of special relevance to Wye with Hinxhill Parish and are fully supported within the NP, namely –

- *SDT1 The need to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the Kent Downs AONB and is recognised as the primary purpose of the designation and given the highest level of protection within statutory and other appropriate planning and development strategies and development control decisions.*
- *SDT2 The local character and distinctiveness of the Kent Downs AONB and environmental sustainability will be reflected and required in the design, scale, setting and materials of new development and infrastructure and will be pursued through*

*design guidance and position statements which are adopted as components of the AONB Management Plan.*

- *SDT3 New development or changes to land use will be opposed where they disregard or challenge the primary purpose of the Kent Downs AONB or the principles of sustainable development.*
- *SDT4 A collaborative approach will be pursued to secure the provision of appropriate ecosystems services and green infrastructure, which supports the landscape character of the Kent Downs, for the benefit of the community and economy.*
- *SDT5 Proposals which have a negative impact on the setting and views to and from the AONB will be resisted or opposed unless they can be satisfactorily mitigated.*
- *SDT6 Positive measures to mitigate the negative impact of infrastructure and growth on the natural beauty, amenity and tranquillity of the AONB will be supported.*
- *SDT7 A strategic approach to the use of road signage, furniture, design and maintenance that conserves and enhances the local character and distinctiveness will be pursued through the adoption and implementation of the AONB Rural Streets and Lanes Design Handbook.*
- *SDT8 Transport and infrastructure schemes will be expected to conserve and enhance landscape character and achieve a net reduction in impact on the components of natural beauty.*
- *SDT9 Where it is decided that development will take place that will have a negative impact on the landscape character and components of the Kent Downs AONB or its setting, mitigation measures appropriate to the national importance of the Kent Downs landscape will be identified, pursued, implemented and maintained.*
- *SDT11 Local renewable and sustainable energy initiatives will be pursued where they help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty and landscape character of the AONB and bring environmental, social and economic benefits to local people. Proposals will be expected to conform with the Kent Downs AONB Renewable Energy Position Statement.*

The proposals for development described in our NP comply fully with the vision of the AONB management Plan. We have developed a core set of design Principles that embody the vision of the AONB (Section 4). The principles build on the guidance given in the Village Design Statement 2000 and embrace targets established within the management plan. Details of design include the use of appropriate roofing materials and cladding - dark non-reflective colours are best to avoid visual impact from the AONB. Solar panels on roofs should, in a sensitive village such as Wye, always be black and non-reflective. The NP takes account of the Kent Downs Landscape Design Handbook that concisely addresses the impact of small and incremental changes. A second element of impact in Wye is light pollution. Wye is in a very sensitive location in relation to increased lighting and its impact on the dark night skies around Wye and from the AONB Scarp. Dark night skies are an element of tranquillity and the NP follows guidance from the management plan (chapter 3.6). Importantly it is accepted that any new development should not have street lighting and improvements to sports and school facilities should have lighting kept to a minimum and very carefully designed.

Our scenarios for development have been produced with protection of the AONB in mind. In particular, the views of Wye from the surrounding countryside have been assessed using

computerised images of the rural and village landscapes. An example of our approach is presented in Figure 1 below that views the village from the South, showing options for the development of the WYE2 designated site for housing.



*Fig. 1a Current view of the village from the South*



*Fig. 1b View from the South showing proposed new development of WYE2 in gold. Note the enhancement of the concentric village and the well-defined village border with cycle track. Our aim is to establish a concentric village with a well-defined border that will enhance the position of the settlement within the surrounding landscape. Extension of any development into the green border around the village is strongly opposed, a policy in close accord with AONB status.*

### **“Farmed Landscape”**

The AONB management plan lists the issues, opportunities and threats to the landscape over the next decade. The summary presented concisely raises all of the issues of direct relevance to our Parish and NP and has, therefore, been copied below in italics. Additional comments on the status of farmland within the Parish have been added.

- *Need to balance a viable, resilient and competitive farming industry with the need for sensitive environmental management in a landscape of national importance.*
- *Decline in farmland area and grazing livestock industries and loss of skilled graziers.*  
The NP proposes minimal development on farming land.
- *Greater volatility in agricultural commodity prices (both scale and speed) leading to uncertainty about the future direction of agriculture in the Kent Downs.*

Mixed and organic farming systems that integrate well into the Parish landscape are strongly supported within the NP. However it is acknowledged that the economic viability of such approaches remains problematic.

- *Uncertainty and limited funding for agri-environment schemes and the incentives they offer, particularly in the face of rising farm gate prices, along with the ending of long run Stewardship schemes.*

- *Changes in landholdings and land management practice. Loss or amalgamation of medium-sized mixed farms and growth of large/ block units with 'share' or 'contract' farming, and establishment of small farming units/residential or leisure owners, where farming is not the main source of income and experience and continuity of land management are not guaranteed. Rationalisation of the farming system and loss of landscape diversity and distinctiveness and selling off of farmhouse and buildings/cottages from the farmland estate; separating land and accommodation changing the character and landscape setting of former farmhouses; estate cottages and farm buildings.*

Conversion of farm buildings to dwellings provides an irreversible decline in rural economies and is to be avoided within the Parish.

- *Given the relatively high proportion of grade 2 and 3 land there is a need to encourage investment in landscape character management.*
- *Farm diversification and development activities such as increased equine facilities, shooting and field sports, alternative crops (e.g. lavender, biomass energy crops, vineyards) and non-agricultural enterprises (e.g. self-catering cottages and new uses for traditional farm buildings) can have important impacts as well as benefits for the landscape character, biodiversity and rural economy of the Kent Downs.*

"Green" tourism is an area of business activity strongly supported in the NP.

- *The need to manage adaptation and mitigation strategies for climate change, promote low carbon farming, sensitive water storage, new livestock housing or bio energy crops, to create a positive impact on the farmed landscape.*
- *The opportunity to develop a wide collaborative approach to farmland management in the Kent Downs.*
- *Lack of public awareness of the links between farming and land- based activities, environmental issues, landscape conservation and management.*

Our sustainability workshop has heightened awareness of these issues within the local community.

In its approach to farmland the NP will, therefore, embrace the conclusions reached within the AONB Management Plan. Protection of the rural environment and the enhancement of diversity and economic sustainability are common aims.

### **The role of the River Stour**

Within the NP we thoroughly endorse the aims of the AONB management plan's chapter on Geology and Natural Resources and are encouraged by the statement that, "A strategic collaborative approach will be taken to the management of water resources in the Kent Downs AONB to secure a more resilient supply, achieve good ecological status and the conservation and enhancement of the landscape."

We plan to make full use of the river for activities ranging from fishing to swimming and will work towards the improvement of water quality and fish stocks. The proposals within the NP are entirely in accord with the strategy outlined in the management plan, but place even more emphasis on the river as a community asset.

### **The AONB and control of development within the Parish**

Any development within the Parish will be greatly influenced by the proposals within the AONB Management Plan 2014-2019 and several aspects of national planning legislation specifically related to National Parks and AONBs. In particular....

Making the correct planning decisions on development both within the AONB and within its setting are crucial to ensure that the AONB is conserved and enhanced in accordance with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (the CROW Act), which gave greater support to their planning and management (1).

- *Section 82 – sets out the primary purpose of designations an AONB to conserve and enhance natural beauty*
- *Section 84 – states the powers that LAs have to take action to achieve conservation and enhancement Section 85, Duty of Regard”: states that in exercising or performing any functions in relation to, or so as to affect, land in and AONB, authorities “shall have regard” to their purposes. Further information is available in the Natural England [Duty of Regard publication](#).*
- *Section 89 - The Act requires a management plan to be produced; the first Kent Downs AONB Management Plan was published in April 2004 and the first revision management plan (2009- 2014) was published in April 2009. This has been formally adopted by all the local authorities of the Kent Downs and is a material consideration in all planning decisions.*

The National Planning Policy Framework ([NPPF](#)) confirms that AONBs are equivalent to National Parks in terms of their landscape quality, scenic beauty and their planning status. Planners within the AONB are encouraged to refer to the AONBs Management Plan and supporting guidance when making their decisions on both planning applications and planning policy formulation.

It is within the context of the impact of the AONB designation on planning that we expect development of Wye to be carefully assessed. The Parish Council is working closely to the template outlined in the AONB Management Plan and we anticipate strong support from the AONB Joint Advisory Committee in any discussions about housing and business development. We hope to be able to work together for our mutual benefit - in environmental terms a truly *symbiotic relationship*.