

PRESTON VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

Consultation Draft

Prepared by the Village Design Statement Sub-committee

of the

Preston Parish Plan Steering Committee

at the request of

Preston Parish Council

February 2008

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1. Background

1.1. Introduction and Context

The historic parishes of Preston and Elmstone are now treated as one parish for the purposes of civil administration as Preston Parish Council, which falls within the administrative remit of Dover District Council as the local authority. The Government's Rural White Paper "**Our Countryside - the Future**" announced the Parish Plan concept in 2000. The Parish Plan was envisaged as a means of enabling rural communities, through extensive local consultation, to identify their wants and needs and to provide written evidence of community priorities. A key aim is to foster greater community involvement and to revitalise the community and the work and relevance to the local population of Parish Councils.

Preston Parish Council, taking the view that the production of a Parish Plan would benefit the Community, requested volunteers and early in 2005 it set up what became a 15 member Parish Plan Steering Committee to create the Preston Parish Plan (PPP). A website was launched, wide consultation with two open days and an extensive questionnaire followed with a high proportion of responses. From this data a draft document and action plan was produced and reviewed in summer 2006. The final agreed document "**Preston Parish Plan**" was published in August 2006.

Subsequent to the Parish Plan's publication, the PPP Steering Committee has continued its work in order to oversee the implementation of aspects of the agreed action plan and in particular to progress two major projects. These are: to promote the refurbishment of the village hall in partnership with the Village Hall Committee, and to research, consult and draft a **Preston Parish "Village Design Statement" (VDS)** on behalf of the Parish Council.

Together, the **Preston Parish Plan** and the **Preston Parish Village Design Statement** can be seen to form parts 1 & 2 of a single enterprise. These are both important documents allowing the community to take stock of its identity, priorities and needs in the first decade of the 21st century.

1.2. Why have a Village Design Statement?

The Town Planning process is undergoing its greatest change since its introduction over 50 years ago. The government said in July 2002:

"For too long, people have been alienated by a planning system which has acted in the community's name but without its support. Our proposals will open up the planning system and increase participation right from the start of the process"

The Village Design Statement is part of this process and enables the community to have some input into local planning matters.

1.3. What is a Village Design Statement?

A VDS describes the distinctive character of a village and its surrounding countryside.

The aim of the Preston Parish Village Design Statement is to ensure that future development and change, based on a considered understanding of the village's past and present, will contribute positively to the character of the built and natural environment and to the life of the community.

Production of a VDS encourages working in partnership with the local authority, engenders understanding of current and emergent planning policies and offers the chance to influence future policies. It is in line with Government policy to ensure community involvement at the local level and in rural communities.

Village Design Statements were inaugurated in 1996 by the then Conservative Secretary of State for the Environment, and have since been undertaken by villages and communities such as ours in all parts of England. They have been endorsed and are supported nationally by all the main political parties. Their role is officially encouraged by Department for Communities & Local Government, by Defra, by the Commission for Rural Communities and by Kent County Council in "The Kent Design Guide."

Involving the Community

"The public and their representatives have an important role to play at key stages in the development of projects and in the preparation of Local Development Frameworks, conservation area appraisals, Development Briefs and Village Design Statements."

"Community involvement in the design process can help designers and developers become fully aware of local priorities and concerns as well as helping the community develop understanding and interest in the scheme and its constraints and opportunity"

The Kent Design Guide (section 3.7) K.C.C. 2005

In Kent more than 20 Village Design Statements have already been completed and adopted by their local councils while another dozen are currently in progress. They are of value to residents, planners, designers and developers. The finished design statement should be a representative document in which there has been a broad involvement of the local community. It is also important for us that the Parish Council and our District Councillors and officers are drawn into the process.

An effective Village Design Statement:

- is about managing change in the community, not preventing it;
- is developed, researched, written and edited by local people;
- reflects the representative views of the community;
- involves a wide cross section of the community in its production;
- describes the visual character of the village;
- demonstrates how local character and distinctiveness can be protected and enhanced in new development;
- is compatible with the statutory planning system;

- should be adopted as supplementary planning guidance (and thereby influence developers and decisions on individual applications);
- is relevant to all forms and scale of development.

1.4. Some Notes on the Planning System

1.4.1. Local Development Framework – The new style of Plan Making

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 replaced local plans with a new system of plan making: the **Local Development Framework** – LDF for short. The LDF will comprise a series of plans called **Local Development Documents**, which will be of two general types:

- **Development Plan Documents (DPDs)** which will contain your District Council's planning policies and proposals on a range of topics. DPDs will be subjected to extensive consultation as well as to independent examination and endorsement by an independent Inspector.
- **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)** providing more detailed planning guidance on the policies and proposals in the Development Plan Documents. SPDs will also be subject to consultation but not to independent examination.

The Council is also required to produce a **Statement of Community Involvement** setting out how it will involve residents and stakeholders in the preparation of its Local Development Documents.

1.4.2. The LDS to LDF process

At the outset of the process the Council publishes a **Local Development Scheme** (Dover District Council did this in April 2007) This document contains a programme and timetable for the drafting, consultation, revision, adoption and submission of the several documents comprising the LDF. This is a lengthy process, taking between three and four years to final adoption following the Inspector's report.

1.4.3. How the VDS fits into the system

The status of Village Design Statements is essentially advisory. They can be adopted by the local planning authority either as an SPD (Supplementary Planning Document) or as a "material consideration" within the consultative process. In practice either form of adoption can have a significant influence on the planning process. The support for the concept and role of the VDS from central Government, at regional and County level and from our elected District Councillors should ensure that our VDS is recognised as a significant contribution to the consultative process of the Local Development Framework.

2. Facts

2.1. A brief history of Preston and Elmstone

From Early Settlement to 1900

Archaeological digs have established the existence of Bronze Age and Iron Age settlements within the existing parish at Hardacre as well as a Romano-British burial ground and settlement on the western boundary. The latter is unsurprising given the proximity to the route from Richborough to Canterbury, the gateway to Roman occupation of Britain.

St. Mildred's Church was reputedly founded by Saint Mildred in 700 AD. The churches of Preston and Elmstone retain evidence of stonework from the Saxon period and Preston is recorded in the Domesday Book (1066 AD) as consisting of about 60 households. This was quite a sizeable village in relation to the population of the British Isles at the time, given that Preston only has some 275 households today.

In the medieval period both churches were substantially rebuilt in Gothic style. This period before the Black Death was, it seems, a period of some wealth for Preston. Just to the north of St. Mildred's Church a medieval palace renowned for its magnificence stood where the upper Preston Court pond is now. It was the favoured home of Juliana de Leybourne, known as the Infanta of Kent, a popular figure with close connections to two Kings of England and with the Black Prince.

In the late 14th century Friday markets and an annual Fair on Saint Mildred's Day were established. One of the finest Elizabethan timber frame houses in the village is Hardacre House in Mill Lane, built reputedly in 1588. Many timber frame cottages in the village date from this period and from the 17th century. Most were probably originally thatched, hence the steep roof pitches and while some have retained their thatch, more have been re-roofed, typically with Kent peg tiles.

By 1801 the population of Preston was 418. Elmstone was tiny as noted by Edward Hasted, writing in 1800: "The Parish of Elmstone is very small, it is an unfrequented place, having no village and only six houses and a half in the parish, which happens from one of the houses standing over a stream and the other half in Preston."

Around 1810 Preston Court was rebuilt in handsome late Georgian style, probably following a fire. The front section of Forstal House is of the same date and Preston House in The Street dates from c.1815. An Independent Chapel was founded in Preston in 1825 and enlarged in 1836, eventually becoming the United Reformed Church until it closed in 1989. In 1991 the Chapel was imaginatively but sensitively converted into a house, without loss to its external architectural character.

Until 1841 the only schooling in Preston had been in the north chancel of Saint Mildred's, but in this year two schools, for 100 boys and 60 girls respectively, were privately endowed. The present School regards its foundation as dating from 1873 when it was St. Mildred's National School, while the current building dates from 1906.

In 1856 Saint Mildred's Church was renovated, the novel feature of the dormer windows was added and Bishop Jenner, the Rector, donated the fine organ, and also purchased another organ, formerly at Hatfield House, for Elmstone Church

Self-sufficiency in the early 20th Century

By 1901 the population of Preston was 495. The village school had been enlarged. There were two inns - The Moon and Seven Stars and The Swan. At this time there were two windmills in the village, both with wind power enhanced by steam power. There was a bakery, a grocer, a saddler, a blacksmith, a carpenter's workshop and a bricklayer. Most people who lived in Preston at that time worked on the land, fruit farming, hops, sheep and cattle rearing predominating. Nearby at Chislet coal mining was developed in the 1920s as part of the East Kent coalfield development in the inter-war years.

The 1930s witnessed an even greater variety of businesses in the village. For many villagers the horse, the bicycle or Shanks's pony must have been the usual means of getting around. At this time there were ten retail shops, including two competing groceries, a greengrocer, a dairy, a paper shop which also ran a taxi service, a motorcycle and bicycle repair shop, a tiny shop selling tobacco and sweets and the Parsonage Farm fruit stall where "Oaklands" now is. Preston's very successful baker at that time ran four delivery vans serving Ash, Wingham and Littlebourne. He took over the bakery and the Old Bake House in Mill Lane in 1936, and only retired in 1979, after which, sadly, Preston lost its bakery.

In the 1930s, in addition to these shops, there was also an undertaker, a coal yard, a post office, the garage, a telephone exchange and a blacksmith whose forge was at the corner of Grove Road. Next to the forge was the British Legion Hall while further down the other side of The Street, just before the Garage was the Working Men's Club, and even a small cinema next to the Half Moon pub for a few years.

Also in the 1930s there were ten local council owned small holdings were built around the Parish, all to the same identical specification (house, store and 20 to 30 acres). These were tenanted as starter farms as part of a national campaign to attract labour back to farm ownership and to increase food production during the inter-war years. These distinct, solid constructions can still be seen today, many extended beyond their original intent while only one is still part of a commercial farm.

Through the wider intervals between the houses in The Street there were apple orchards with much larger trees than we see today. Older residents remember that there were hop fields on either side of the road to Wingham from the Longmete Road corner.

Fifty years of rapid change

During the 1939-1945 War the Home Guard and the Fire Watchers used to meet in Swan House (formerly The Swan Inn). Several of Preston's young men served in the War and peacetime saw great changes. The "Airey" council houses were built in Court Lane on the site of the former football ground and a successful campaign, helped by the National Playing Fields Association, led to the compulsory purchase of the land where the present Playing field now is. A Preston branch of the Women's Institute was founded in 1946.

The greatest impact of the 1950s was the introduction of a bus service, wider car ownership and the arrival of electricity - Preston had to wait until the 1980's for gas. More people travelled out of the village to work and increasingly to shop, and as farms became more efficient and more mechanised fewer people worked locally on the land.

Between the 1960s and 1980s smaller pairs of cottages were frequently modernised and converted into single residences and the green orchard gaps in The Street and The Forstal were gradually replaced by modern houses and bungalows. The Downs retirement bungalows were built and most recently the 9 houses in Shotfield Close were built by Rural Housing Trust in 1998. Sadly, for our older and younger residents, the village Post Office finally closed after two robberies, one armed, in two months in 2003.

Preston still retains the Village Stores, the Half Moon and Seven Stars Pub, the Farm Shop and a Butcher while within the last decade Preston Nursery has developed and expanded to offer a wide variety of garden shrubs and trees, including many exotic species. The annual Steam Rallies and ploughing matches at Preston Court have been popular events on the village calendar attracting visitors from far afield. What was once Sandwich and District Growers, a distribution centre for local farm produce, is now a successful medium sized general transport and distribution company. There is also a commercial van repair centre recently located at the site of one of the former mills.

The present Village Hall replaced an older thatched hall in the 1960s and served Preston well for some years. However it suffers from the poor build quality of so many buildings of that decade and is also too small for the range of activities it needs to support, including the Pre-school Playgroup. Raising the impetus and funding for a new larger and more sustainable Village Hall is the next campaign requiring a major effort by the village community.

***Note:** The above is an amended and condensed version of the four pages “Preston and Elmstone: Some Historical Snapshots”, published in The Preston Parish Plan 2006.*

2.2. Village location and communication

Preston with Elmstone lies midway between the cathedral city of Canterbury to the west and Sandwich to the east. It is an attractive and popular location for its climate, its proximity to the coast to the north, east and south and its access to the Channel ports.

The main arterial roads into East Kent are the Thanet Way A299 and the A28, both some 6 miles to the north of Preston, the A2 to the west and the A257 from Canterbury to Sandwich, running some 2 miles to the south of the village. The nearest main line railway stations are at **Adisham** on the Dover to London Victoria line, at **Birchington** for the Ramsgate to London line and at **Minster** for the Ramsgate to Canterbury line – all these are within 15 minutes driving time. Preston Parish is also located on the new National Cycle Network. There is an infrequent daily bus service linking the Parish to Wingham, Canterbury and Thanet.

Farming and market gardening were historically, and remain, key economic activities within the surrounding district. It has been encouraging to note the recent revival of traditional Kentish production of apples and top fruit locally. For a village of its size Preston is unusual in retaining five retail outlets within the village and several farm shops lie within a three mile radius. This is no doubt partly due to the fact that the leading urban supermarkets are at least a 25-minute drive away. This measure of day to day relative self-sufficiency needs sustaining and supporting.

It is worth noting that people like living in village communities such as Preston which offer a good quality of life. One of the issues which came up very strongly from our questionnaire, when preparing the Village Plan, was the need for more affordable homes for local young families.

It is somewhat of an anomaly, often commented on locally, that Preston is included within the northern perimeter of the Dover District Council area. It is evident that, both historically and currently, Preston's main employment, educational, cultural and shopping links lie predominantly towards Canterbury. To a significant though lesser extent, the Thanet towns of Ramsgate and Margate and the north Kent coast have considerable linkage with the village in terms of employment, retail shopping and leisure activities. The constituency of Thanet South provides our parliamentary representation. These realities

are evidenced in the lack of any direct public transport links to Dover, our administrative centre.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Council offices in Dover can seem somewhat remote to our local community. This reinforces the Parish Council's commitment to ensuring that our views, concerns and local knowledge are listened to and heeded by Dover District Council.

2.3. The character of the landscape setting

2.3.1. General

Situated approximately 10 miles to the east of Canterbury, Preston parish lies on slightly higher ground at the edge of the Wantsum channel. The parish includes the villages of Preston and Elmstone and the hamlets of Perry (part), Santon, Deerson, Walmestone and Wyborne's Charity. Immediately to the west is the Little Stour valley, with the river flowing north and east via the neighbouring Parish of Stourmouth to join the River Stour. Thereafter the river flows eastwards through the Thanet marshlands, before looping south through Sandwich and north again to gain the sea at Pegwell Bay. The topography is of gently undulating land falling to the north and east to the rather featureless but nevertheless important landscape of Minster Marshes and the Ash levels.

The floodplain of the Little Stour and the Great Stour sweeps around the parish in a horseshoe from the northwest to where it approaches Court Farm on the northeastern corner of the hamlet of Elmstone. However the central core of Preston village is well above the floodplain averaging between 12 and 15 metres (and in places over 15 metres) above sea level. Preston Court is about 10 metres above the flood plain with the lower lake at about 5 metres. Elmstone is on lower ground, mostly just above 5 metres above sea level. Of areas with buildings only part of the hamlet of Santon and the Salvatori Depot in Grove Road appear to be below the 5-metre level.

With generally highly fertile soils characterised by the brick earths on clay, agriculture features strongly with a mix of soft fruit and orchards, market gardening and general arable farming. Indeed the agricultural land lying within a man's sighting of Ash Church spire is said to be amongst the best for market gardening in the country. With the high proportion of orchards, windbreaks are a strong visible feature, particularly around Elmstone, Perry, Santon and Wyborne's Charity.

Old quarry workings can be found at Grove Road, where they now accommodate the transport depot, and at Preston Court where they are now grassed over.

Increasingly land is being enclosed for the keeping of horses as riding becomes an increasingly popular activity in the parish.

Treescape and farmland

With the relatively flat surrounding topography, trees feature strongly only within the parish. The centre of Preston has a good area of mature trees within the gardens of Swan House. To the north and west of Preston Court there are mature ancient woodlands and areas of coppiced chestnut. The farmland west of Preston Lane is a mixture of arable, newly planted orchard, brassicas, and grazing for sheep and horses. A recent 10 acre plantation of mixed native broadleaf woodland south-east

of Hardacre Farm, subsidised by a grant from by MAFF and the Forestry Commission, will make an increasing contribution to the landscape and habitat as it becomes established.

The majority of Preston Valley has now reverted to naturalised grazing marsh for cattle and sheep, managed under a special agricultural scheme for the last 16 years to provide habitat for a wide variety of migratory and ground nesting birds and waders. There is now a network of promissory paths and it is hoped that this significant local asset will continue to be properly protected by legislation. The Stour Valley has long been recognised as an important migratory route for birds and it appears logical that Preston Valley should in time be accorded the protection of SSSI status, as does the adjoining Stour Valley marsh.

Trees particularly define Elmstone. There is a combination of parkland trees (at the Rectory, the Vicarage and Elmstone Court), with some more general small blocks of woodland and high windbreaks to the orchards. The presence of these three large houses with their substantial gardens and specimen trees gives the village a different look from the predominantly open country around. The 'wet wood' to the north-east of Elmstone is characterised by native broadleaf trees. To the east trees are noticeably absent.

Surrounding Elmstone the farmland is a mixture of arable, market garden, orchard and grazing. There is no area entirely "natural", but there are many pockets of wildness encouraged by sympathetic landowners. The status of the plant life is the core on which the wildlife depends.

2.3.2. Wildlife

Wildlife benefits from the agricultural diversity in the parish and the consequential 'non-uniform' approach to pesticides, and reduced agrochemical application. Avian flight paths link the coastal Kent Wildlife Trust reserves at Sandwich and Pegwell Bay with the inland National Reserves at Stodmarsh and Grove Ferry a few miles to the west of Preston.

Birds

There is a long history of ornithological observations in the parish dating back to the mid-19th Century. There are records of little bittern and of golden oriole breeding regularly in Elmstone prior to 1909, wryneck breeding nearby in the 1930's and of bean goose shot at Perry in February 1940. Regular sightings of birds have been recorded for the past 40 years (currently totalling some 152 species), and also since 1971 the breeding population of an area of farmland has been the subject of an annual census. As well as the more common garden birds, green woodpeckers, owls and sparrow hawks are not uncommon.

In the special marshland of the Preston and Deerson valleys many birds can be seen including marsh harrier, hen harrier, grey heron, and bittern. Mute swans are a regular sight, as are barn owls hunting across the marshland during the early evening. Other birds of note include reed warblers, buntings, finches, little egrets, lapwing, kingfisher, curlew and field fare.

Mammals

By their nature, being mostly nocturnal, mammals are more difficult to study. There have been changes during the last forty years including some decline of water voles and the larger bat species (noctule and serotine). There are hedgehogs, hares and significant increases in grey squirrel, rabbit, fox and badger populations.

Recent viewings of dormouse were exciting, while sightings of two mink in the past three years were not welcome.

Insects

This is an area that would benefit from further study. The impression is that there are now fewer butterflies, but no statistics to substantiate this. Some years the migrant Painted Lady butterflies arrive in large numbers; there have been two records of the diurnal Humming Bird Hawk Moth in recent years. Increases in numbers of beneficial insects (aphid eaters) – ladybirds and lacewings reflect the increasingly responsible use of pesticides. The marsh area is rich in invertebrates and insects especially the vivid electric blue Emperor dragonflies which are now very common in warmer weather.

Reptiles and Fishes

Following declines and extinction probably caused by agricultural pollution there is now a steady increase in these animals. In the marsh area fish and eels abound in the Little Stour and surrounding drainage ditches. Frogs, both common and marsh, toads, common newts and grass snakes are commonly seen or heard. In 2007 the first viviparous lizard was seen in Elmstone.

2.4. The character, distinctiveness and development of Preston and Elmstone

2.4.1. The distinctiveness of the Parish

The villages were formerly two separate parishes, each of considerable antiquity and each with its own ancient parish church. Locally owned working farms continue to be an important factor in making the parish distinctive. Having developed slowly over time the parish is characterised by a mix of historical and 20th century development with a wide diversity of building types, styles and scale. This slow evolution of the two villages has allowed them to retain their unique rural character, while enabling them to function well in the contemporary environment.

Both Preston and Elmstone are living communities. The Parish is ideally situated in relation to the surrounding towns: far enough away to avoid over-dependency, while not too distant to reach when necessary. There is a traditional English country pub and a thriving and successful village Primary School. For its relatively small population, it is distinctive in the number of shops it has retained and in the recent regeneration of small businesses. Indeed businesses based within the Parish currently total 35, which makes it far from being a dormitory commuter village.

Historically from late medieval times the hub of Preston developed along The Street which runs north - south between Stourmouth and Wingham with the centre at the small green at the junction of The Street and Mill Lane. It is a linear village accessed by narrow roads, and there are still quite large spaces between properties as compared with the main streets of Wingham or Ash. Preston Parish Church is half a mile to the west of the village. It is approached by Court Lane, which terminates in a cluster of buildings comprising Preston Court, the Regency period manor house, with its fish ponds, oasts, barns and pair of farm cottages.

Elmstone, which is more of a hamlet than a village, has a markedly different character from Preston. It has a less defined centre and is characterised by a circuit of narrow lanes bordering agricultural fields. It is low lying, averaging about 6

meters above sea level. Trees form a strong feature of Elmstone's centre. The several ponds and the two rivulets which flow in parallel through the hamlet north eastwards towards the Ash Level marshland are characteristic features of Elmstone. From the ponds opposite the Old Vicarage, Padbrook Lane loops north-east, then east and south, while Sheerwater Road loops south-east then curves up in a north easterly direction to intersect with Padbrook Lane just before the mound on which stands Elmstone church at the eastern end of the hamlet. Around this circuit there is a scattering of 22 houses, some quite large, and three farms. The houses, all but six of which pre-date 1900, are mostly set well back behind mature trees and widely separated by large gardens, orchards and fields. Beyond Elmstone Church there are half a dozen 20th century houses on the north side of Sheerwater Road.

Preston and Elmstone residents cherish the Parish's narrow lanes and lack of aggressive street lighting. The green triangles at road junctions are important features throughout the Parish, as are the trees and surrounding orchards. Another feature of the parish is the soft treatment of boundaries with hedges and discrete fencing as opposed to "hard" brick walls and fences.

Preston and Elmstone are linked together by two roads: Mill lane and Longmete Road. From the Primary School Mill Lane heads north-east, then south-east and south to run closely parallel to Padbrook Lane before meeting it at the Old Vicarage. Longmete Road is the southerly link.

A further distinctive feature of the parish is its position in a "no-man's-land" on the boundaries of three District Councils: Dover, Canterbury and Thanet. This results in a certain isolation, but contributes to an attitude of relative insularity and independence.

2.4.2. The character of the built environment

The number of dwelling houses within the parish totals 274, of which 200 are in Preston village together with 27 farmsteads and hamlets towards the northern and southern periphery. A further 35 are in the hamlet of Elmstone together with 12 in outlying farmsteads and cottages to the north east and eastern boundary of the parish.

Listed Buildings

Both Elmstone and Preston churches are listed as Grade II* and Grade I respectively. A further 32 dwellings and other structures are listed as Grade II, of which 24 are in Preston and its periphery together with 8 in Elmstone. (See tables in Appendix 2)

The Street Preston

The Street is now the most densely built-up part of the Parish but even so there are spaces between the houses, which are mainly detached or paired, with a couple of terraces of three. Historically up until 1900 most of the properties fronting The Street were on the western side of the road. The Half Moon and Seven Stars Pub at the northern end, the Village Stores in the middle and Parsonage Farm at the southern end all date from the 17th.C or earlier. Between them are 18th and 19th century cottages, the late Georgian Preston House and the converted oasts of the former Lockett's Farm. In-filling occurred in the 1960/70s with four pairs of bungalows and the six retirement bungalows of Bishop Jenner Court were built in 1972 facing on to a small green.

Until 1900 the east side of The Street had a smaller number of dwellings grouped around the former Chapel between Pryor House and the former Swan Inn. South of Street Farm on the east there were orchards and open fields and just a couple of cottages and the former Girl's School before reaching Sweech Farm. Significant in-filling has taken place since World War 2, predominantly of bungalows and chalet bungalows built between 1960/75. There are two small adjacent developments of socially funded housing, comprising The Downs retirement bungalows and Shotfield Close with its two storey rented houses. Both of these are set back from the street and fronted by a small green. They occupy the sites of the orchards that characteristically formed part of the central village streetscape until the last quarter of the 20th. century.

The Street has only intermittent pavements, though only ten buildings (six on the west side, four on the east) front directly onto the street, all the remaining 80 properties are set back to a greater or lesser extent behind lawns, driveways, gardens or hedging.

The Forstal, Park Lane and Court Lane

The north side of the Forstal had ten homes of varied antiquity by 1900, including two surviving traditional thatched cottages. The former Workhouse was converted and renovated in the 1920s/30s to become 1 to 4 Speedwell Cottages, and these were subsequently enlarged with extensions to the north side. The four bungalows date from the 1960s. Holly Trees, a Victorian cottage, was much extended in the 1970s and 1990s.

Until the 1960s the south side of the Forstal was open fields for some 200 meters to either side of Forstal Farm, a medieval hall house. Five bungalows were built west of Forstal Farmhouse in the 1960s and two large family houses were built to the east of the farmhouse in the 1980s. Further to the west Windycroft, Whytegates, Forstal House and the thatched Rose Cottage date variously from the 17th to the early 19th century.

It is a marked characteristic of The Forstal that, with the exception of Holly Trees, all the houses are set well back from the road, most by an average of 12 to 15 meters. The other striking feature is the wide diversity of building types in The Forstal.

Park Lane is a short footpath linking The Forstal to Court Lane with two pairs of late 19th century cottages and a pre-World War 2 white weather-boarded bungalow on its western side.

In Court Lane 12 of the post- WW2 concrete beam council houses were demolished and replaced in 1999, in their former footprint, by 12 two-storey semi-detached houses in brick, tile and weather-boarding.

Mill Lane

On the north side of Mill lane there is a cluster of 19th. Century cottages beyond the former windmill, and then some widely spaced houses looking south onto open fields. The timber-framed thatched cottage "The Breeches" at the corner where Mill Lane turns southwards is a former inn.

St. Mildred's Church Preston, Preston Court, cottages and farm buildings

To the south west of Preston Street and within the village curtilage lies Saint Mildred's Church (listed Grade 1), Preston Court, the manor house and its

adjoining farm. The church traces its origins back to the 8th. century Saint Mildred of Minster, the present building being mainly of Norman and 12th century construction.

Preston Court is an early 19th century building in the Regency style replacing a long line of habitation going back at least to Roman times. The ruins of the former early medieval palace of Juliana, Infanta of Kent, are reputed by local legend to lie at the bottom of the pond. The present farm buildings comprise a pair of 18th century cottages, a fine 3-kiln oast house in the "gothic" style, a traditional Kent barn and a granary and two larger 20th.century barns.

Preston Court, the cottages and farm (listed Grade 2) all lie within a conservation area and have been sensitively restored over the last 25 years. Home to the Preston Steam Rally and Preston Ploughing Trial annual events, the farm also houses The Steam Museum, founded in 1989.

Elmstone

Elmstone has evolved from a historic 'core' in the 'square' formed by Padbrook Lane to the north, and centred around what was almost certainly a moated manor site currently occupied by Elmstone Court. This 'square' evolved over the centuries with farm buildings and buildings related to Elmstone court and it shows building types from medieval to C20th. Latterly, there was development along 'fingers' stretching out from the historic core along Sheerwater Lane, Church Hill and Mill Lane. Elmstone Church sits on slightly higher ground to the east of this 'square' and is constructed of high status flint and stone (high status because they could not have been sourced in the immediate vicinity and would have had to have been transported from several miles away).

With the exception of two pairs of 19th century cottages in Padbrook Lane, all of the dwellings are detached, siting on generous plots of land and set back from the lanes. The buildings are spaced out with varying gaps of open land between, and boundaries between are ill-defined and generally formed by hedges or rustic fencing.

With the exception of the bungalow known as Forge Cottage, all the buildings are of two storeys. The buildings show a variety of styles and materials typical of the period in which they were constructed. They range from substantial medieval timber frame structure to lightweight C19th timber frame with weather-boarding, from locally made soft red brick to the harder and more regular yellow stocks, from Kent peg tiles and thatches to the later Welsh slate (and later still asbestos slates of the mid C20th). Because mains gas has never reached the village, heating fuel is solid fuel, or oil and so dwellings still generally retain their original chimney stacks.

Similarly, because of the rural nature of the settlement, overhead wires supply the electricity and telephone services.

2.4.3. Domestic Buildings: Scale & Diversity

Scale

Domestic buildings range in scale from small single storey cottages and bungalows to substantial farmhouses, five bedroom family houses, a large vicarage and Preston Court, the manor house. Most dwellings are detached or in semi-detached pairs, with some short terraces of three or four. Two storey houses predominate, some having a further attic floor in the roof space lit by dormer windows, gable end windows or roof lights.

Diversity

In some regions of the U.K. there are villages that present a remarkable homogeneity of style, period and building materials (e.g. Lavenham in Suffolk, Broadway in the Cotswolds). By contrast the built environment of Preston, as in many Kentish villages, has evolved slowly over more than seven centuries of alternating prosperity and poverty. This is reflected in the heterogeneous range of building types.

The combination of an acute need for inexpensive housing and post-WW2 shortages resulted in Preston's most rapid period of growth between 1950-1975. In the 1960s there developed a somewhat standardised bungalow. This was typified by the use of Fletton bricks, combined with large rectangles of render below equally large single glazed north facing "picture windows" under roofs of shallow pitched concrete tiles.

Since the mid-1970s building and design quality has improved nationally. However in Preston, apart from one very welcome Housing Association development of 11 dwellings, there has been little new building, as opposed to replacement building, extensions and some conversions, due in part to the very tight definition of the village envelope.

2.4.4. Architectural Detail

Roofs

The roofs of the earliest surviving dwellings in the Parish are either thatched or roofed with Kent peg tiles. The surviving thatched roofs are characteristically steeply pitched. Where peg tiled roofs are equally steeply pitched on buildings originating from the 17th century or earlier this can indicate that they were previously thatched. Some older cottages feature a "catslide" roof. (III.- examples)

In the 18th.Century peg tiles are standard with pitches of 45° to 50°, but from c.1810 some larger late Georgian and Victorian houses more often have slate roofs, often with a lower pitch, reflecting the influence of changing urban taste. (III.- examples)

In the mid-20th century there are several surviving example of asbestos tiled roofs from the 1930s, a few examples of pan-tiled roofs, and many shallow pitched concrete tiled roofs from the 1960s and 1970s. On more recent buildings machine made clay tiles of similar colour to Kent pegs are more often the choice. (III.- examples)

Walls

Many of the oldest surviving buildings were originally of timber-frame construction with wattle and daub or brick in-filling. External walls are often rendered and painted - predominantly white. The upper storey is often clad with weather-boarding or tile-hung.

From the mid-17th century local terracotta red brick is more commonly used for external walls. A range of traditional bonding styles is to be found. The more substantial older buildings were in several cases “modernised” in the late 18th. or early 19th. centuries by the addition of a new brick façade or even a whole new front extension, often with the use of yellow stock brick and with a front parapet hiding the eaves, following the London fashion. Stone was used for cills, lintels, parapet tops, hearths and paving but not, in this area, as a prime structural material.

Brick remains the predominant walling material in the 19th. and early 20th centuries with two good examples of polychrome brickwork enlivening double fronted facades dating from c.1907. (Ill. “Woodville”) The eight smallholding starter farmhouses, all built to a standard design in the 1930s, had white rendered walls and rustic black tarred weather-boarding in the two steep gable ends. (Ill. – Starter farm)

The council houses in Court Lane, clad by experimental concrete beam construction, provided good family homes with long gardens in the post WW2 context, but their materials did not meet the test of time and they were replaced in 1999.

In the second half of the 20th. century, as the standard austerity bungalow gave way to more diversity, single skin stretcher bond brick was a prime external walling material, covering block-work or timber frame construction. Tile hanging and weather-boarding, usually painted black or white, again become frequent choices at first floor level and for gables. (Ill.- brick bonding, timber cladding and tile hanging details)

Preston’s most innovatory 21st.century dwelling, Hardacre Farm, is of laminated timber frame construction, with well insulated panels, rendered and painted white. A Huf house, bespoke but of prefabricated modular units imported from Germany, it is a significant addition to the diversity of building types in the village that at the same time has a structural affinity to the adjacent Elizabethan Hardacre House. (Ill. – Hardacre Farm)

Windows

The more modest older dwellings have small wooden casement windows, though in most cases they will have been replaced more than once over time.

From the end of the 17th.century larger sash windows with well-proportioned panes and glazing bars become the norm at least until the 1840s. Window frames are flush with the brickwork at the start of this period but as the 18th century evolves they are increasingly recessed. The more prestigious houses have double fronted facades of symmetrical design in which the spacing of the windows conforms with a code of classical proportion and balance. Wooden sashes remained standard features of the Victorian and the Edwardian periods up until 1914, although small panes were replaced with larger sheets of machine rolled glass. Most wooden casement and sash

Windows on older houses are currently painted white. (ill. – casements and sashes)

Many buildings have dormer windows, usually small in relation to the overall roof area, with either hipped or gable-end roofs, with either tile hung or timber clad sides.

Sometimes subsequent loft conversions have wide flat roofed dormers that are not always sympathetic to the character of the original building. (Ill. – dormers)

In the inter-war period wooden casements and metal frame “Crittall” style casements were more usual, but few of these metal frame windows survive as most succumbed to corrosion. During the housing boom of the 1960s windows were frequently of wide horizontal rectangular design with the opening casements asymmetrically set to the left or right. (ill.- picture window)

In the final quarter of the 20th Century, double-glazing became the norm. There was increasing use of stained hardwood windows in preference to painted softwood for new buildings. Factory produced plastic windows were also popular choices, especially as replacement windows.

2.4.5. Extensions and conversions

Extensions

Within the Parish a large proportion of properties have been very considerably extended since they were first built. In many cases it may be possible to detect up to four phases of extension and enlargement. Historically, each succeeding era tended to build extensions using the new building technology and design ethos of its time and this can be seen as contributing to the character and interest of the whole. There are also some examples in the village of 20th. Century extensions to older cottages that have been undertaken sensitively, with scrupulous care to match materials, scale and proportion so that it is hard “to see the join”.

However over the last half-century the practice of adding successive extensions in piecemeal and ad-hoc manner has redoubled. Side and rear extensions with flat or low pitched roofs, poor quality materials, ill-considered choices of brick and poor design and proportion unrelated to the character of the original building are too often the result.

The pressure and impetus for continued extension is due a number of factors. These include the cost of moving home, the need for expanded space for local families, the high cost and limited supply of houses in attractive villages and crucially, since the 1990s, the increasingly restrictive planning policies with regard to new building in rural areas.

Conversions

Conversion into dwelling houses of existing non-residential, institutional and agricultural buildings whose previous use is redundant can prove very successful.

(to be expanded with examples)

2.4.6. Settings and Boundaries

In Preston most older properties have some form of boundary including low brick walls, post and bar fencing, iron railings, picket fencing and hedging. The socially funded houses at Bishop Jenner Court, The Downs and Shotfield Close are fronted by open plan landscaping with grass, specimen trees and seating providing pleasant spaces for social interaction.

Elmstone, as noted above, has several large properties set in large wooded gardens. In the centre along Sheerwater Road boundaries are dominated by high mature trees and thick hedging though there are sections of pre-1900 high brick walling at the Old Vicarage and at Elmstone Court. Properties along Padbrook

Lane are mostly hidden behind thick hedges, until the landscape opens up alongside the fields of Lodge Farm on one side, and more hidden orchards on the other.

2.5. The Local Plan (2002) map, Conservation Areas and Village Confines

(DDC visual from Local Plan to be inserted)

The Dover District Council Local Plan (2002) included an Adopted Proposals Map, which is reproduced overleaf. This is a planning tool used by council officers and by the Council's Planning Committee to help determine planning applications.

Note: This Local Plan expired on the 27th September 2007 as part of the transitional arrangements from the old Local Plan to the new Local Development Framework (LDF). Only policies saved by the Secretary of State's direction will continue to be part of the Development Plan, pending their replacement by specific LDF policies. .

Conservation areas:

The Local Plan map showed four areas bounded and hatched in brown. Three of these distinct areas comprise:

- The northern half of The Street, Preston, from the Half -Moon and Seven Stars pub southwards to the Village Stores and Street Farm;
- Preston Church, Preston Court, the adjacent hop kilns, barns and fish ponds;
- The entire hamlet of Elmstone apart from the early 19th. Century Lodge Farm and the six 20th, Century house extending eastwards along Sheerwater Road.
- The fourth area, south of Hardacre House, is defined as of archaeological importance as an area of prehistoric and Roman activity and settlement.

The Village Confines:

The map shows an area outlined in red and this defined as the "village confines". The presumption is that it is normally only within this area that planning consents for new building as permitted "infill" may be given. The confines exclude the hamlet of Elmstone and the whole of Mill Lane. The designated confines include Preston Street, The Forstal, part of Court Lane (west side only), a short length of Grove Road (150 metres, south side only) and a short length of Longmete Road (240 metres, north side only).

Thus the currently designated confines coincide with the central core of Preston. This is the area that has, since 1950, gradually seen former orchards, fields and some larger gardens replaced by infill building. Now this area of the village has attained a reasonable density while retaining the gaps between houses identified above as contributing to its distinctiveness. In view of this the time has come, within the context of LDF consultation, for consideration of a less restrictive definition of the confines.

This would allow for some modest expansion to the breadth of the village settlement, while preserving current levels of density. The importance of resisting ribbon development northwards and southwards of the village limits is recognised. However some measure of back land development or of linkage between the village and its dependant hamlet of Elmstone would allow for a degree of sustainable organic growth consistent with the settlement hierarchy and enable more young families to remain or join a thriving village community.

2.6. The Local Development Framework: Consultation on Preferred Options

To replace the Local Plan 2002 (now expired), Dover District Council is currently developing its Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework (LDF), which is the key plan for the District covering the period 2011 to 2026. Having considered four strategic options, the LDF Group recommended Option 3: Medium High Growth as its preference and this strategy was adopted by the Dover D.C. Cabinet and by Full Council in December 2007.

Public consultation on the Core Strategy 2008 Preferred Options will be undertaken over an eight-week period from 27th March to 17th May, 2008.

Compared to the expired Local Plan the new Core Strategy document contains timely indications of a more positive community strategy for rural areas.

The Core Strategy document states that:

- The rural area has an important role to play in providing choice in the housing and business markets.(para.5.36, page39)
- The Strategy will promote the creation of rural businesses through the re-use of buildings and new build of an appropriate scale and location. (para.5.37, page 39)

Links with the Community Strategy in relation to the rural areas include:

- to increase the choice, quality and availability of housing;
- to support and encourage business start-ups. (para.5.7, page 62)

In the Core Strategy (Table 5.3, page 67) the village of Preston is identified as:

- Suitable for a scale of development that would reinforce its role as a provider to essentially its own community (Policy CP 2).

Source: *Draft LDF Core Strategy 2008*

2.7. Chart of new homes built in Preston & Elmstone
By quarter century since 1900: Preston and periphery

	New houses built by quarter century since 1900				
73	5	43	68	22	1
Pre 1900	1900-25	1926-50	1951-75	1976-99	2000-08

Elmstone and north-east periphery

	New homes built by quarter century since 1900				
34	2	14	6	5	0
Pre 1900	1900-25	1926-50	1951-75	1976-99	2000-08

2.8. Socially Funded Housing: Preston and Elmstone

The total number of households in Preston and Elmstone is 274. Of these the number of rented family homes is currently 34 (12.4%), and the number of rented retirement bungalows is currently 20 (7.3%). All are located in Preston within reasonable walking distance of the School, local shops and the bus route.

		Type	No. of homes built	Date built	Currently still rentable	Now Freehold
1	Starter Farm small holdings : across the Parish	2 storey house, barn and small-holding	8	1930s	0	8
2	Langton Cottages, Longmete Road	2 storey Council houses DDC	8	1930s	4	4
3	Airey Houses, Court Lane	2 storey former Council houses, now T & C Housing Ass.	14	1947 rebuilt 1999	12	2
4	Groveyay, Grove Road	2-storey Council houses DDC	8	1950s	7	1
5	Bishop Jenner Court	Retirement bungalows	6	1972	6	0
6	The Downs, The Street , Preston	Retirement bungalows	14	196?	14	0
7	Shotfield Close	2 storey homes SGH Housing Association	11	1998	11	0
Totals			69		54	15

DDC = managed by Dover District Council

T & C = Town and Country Housing Association and S H G = Southern Housing Group

The Preston Parish Plan questionnaire and the more recent VDS Forum revealed local demand for a Housing Needs Survey. The Parish Clerk has contacted the Housing Needs Enabler at Action with Communities in Rural Kent to request that a survey be undertaken.

2.9. Social and Economic Factors: Local Employment

At the time of the 2001 national Census the population of the parish of Preston and Elmstone was recorded as 713. Of this population the total number of economically active adults residents in employment was recorded at 253, of whom 179 were full-time and 74 part time. Our Parish Plan (2005) survey revealed that of those respondents who were in employment nearly 30 % worked from home or were employed within the parish.

In January and February 2008 our VDS sub-committee undertook a thorough survey to gain a fuller picture of the extent of local employment. This survey revealed that 138 people were in full-time plus 51 in part-time employment within the parish. 72 of the full-time and 21 of the part-time employees travelled into the parish to work but many of these came from nearby villages within a 5-mile radius. These totals do not include figures for local part-time employment beyond the retirement age (for example gardening and domestic help). These figures are unlikely to reflect fully the growing trend to home office self-employment and home out-working. They also do not include the seasonal farm workers: these are estimated below.

2.10. Commercial Life: Farming

There are fifteen active farming and market gardening businesses with acreage wholly or in part within the parish. Of the total 138 persons in full-time local employment, currently 40 work full-time in the farming sector, together with a further 11 in regular part-time work. Additionally up to 90 seasonal workers are employed full-time on the local farms each year during the peak harvesting periods.

2.11. Other Employment within the Parish

Apart from agriculture the employment survey identified approximately 30 other employment concerns based within the parish, although a dozen of these are individual professionals, designers or sole traders.

Salvatori S.D.G., based on the transport and storage depot at Grove, is the largest employers and businesses in the parish, with over 40 full-time staff. Other enterprises based at Grove include Premier Packaging and The Bubble Factory. Preston Court Services is based at Preston Court in Court Lane.

The retail shops include Preston Family Butcher, the Village Stores, Mossy's Farm Shop and Preston Nursery, which together with its wholesale nursery at Marleybrooks employs 11 staff. The hospitality sector ranges from the Moon and Seven Stars pub and the café at Preston Nursery to bed and breakfast accommodation. A Riding School, an Equestrian Centre and a Livery Yard contribute to a growing leisure sector, as does the Steam Museum. There are two caravan parks and at least three providers of landscape gardening services.

Preston School employs 21 staff of whom 7 are full time. The school has been expanded recently, is highly successful and needs further accommodation. There are currently 132 pupils on the roll. The school's continued well being is a priority for the whole community.

2.12. Employment figures for Preston Parish: residents employed in the parish, out- commuters and in-commuters

	Full-time	Regular Part-time	Total
Total employment in the Parish	138	51	189

	Full- time	Regular Part-time	Total
Number of Preston residents Working in the Parish	66	30	96
Number of Preston residents out-commuting to work	116	48	164
Total Number of Preston residents in employment	182	78	260

	Full-time	Regular Part-time	Total
Number of people coming into the Parish to work (inward commuters)	72	21	93

	Full-time	Regular Part-time	Total
Net number of outward commuters from Parish	44	27	71

Additional to the employment charted above, up to 90 seasonal workers are employed each year within the Parish for periods of three to six months full-time on the local farms. These are predominantly recruited from continental Europe.

3. Statement of Community Involvement

3.1. The Genesis of the Village Design Statement

As noted in the introduction, the Preston Parish Plan was published in July 2006. Consultation in preparing the Plan had established that the undertaking of a Village Design Statement was a “high priority” in the resultant Action Plan. Accordingly the Preston Parish Council requested the Preston Parish Plan Steering Committee to undertake a Village Design Statement. Following fruitful discussions with our District Councillors and with officers of Dover District Council, the Steering Committee set up a VDS Working Group in May 2007 which began researching and initial drafting.

In November 2007, following feedback from community participation in two public meetings in the Village Hall, the PPP Steering Committee enlarged the Working Group to form the Village Design Statement Committee as a formal sub-committee of the Steering Committee, with a membership of ten.

3.2. Evidence from the Preston Parish Plan Questionnaire

All 271 households in the Parish received the questionnaire in autumn 2005, to which 157 (57%) households responded. The majority of respondents wished the village to have an influence on future planning decisions affecting the village (71%). Some respondents supported the need for additional housing for families (70 respondents) and for low cost affordable housing so that their grown-up children could remain in the locality (66 respondents). These comments suggested the need for a Village Design Statement and for a Housing Needs Survey.

3.3. Community participation (2007 – 2008)

Preston Annual Parish Meeting

At the Annual Parish Meeting on 24th April 2007 the Chairman announced that the Parish Council had asked the PPP Steering Committee to undertake the drafting of the Village Design Statement. The value and purposes of a Village Design Statement were explained and discussion and questions followed. The initiative was fully supported by those present.

Village Design Statement Launch Event

The VDS Launch event was held on 14th September 2007 and was prepared in consultation with KCC and Dover D.C. The key speakers were Oliver Chapman, Parish Council Chair, and Pete Davis, co-author of KCC’s Kent Design Guide with contributions from Roger Weaver (Littlebourne VDS) and Margaret Ludwig (Walmer VDS). Our two local District Councillors attended and pledged their support. The event was publicized by flyers to every home and by posters throughout the Parish.

The VDS Forum

The VDS Forum, held on 4th October 2007, was also well publicized in advance: at the previous Launch event, in the Parish Newsletter, with flyers to every home and posters. About 46 people attended, including most of the PPP Steering Committee. Each of five tables discussed each of the five Forum Topics, and reported back to a plenary session at the end of the evening. The Topic responses were subsequently posted on the Preston Parish Plan web-site.

Preston Parish Newsletter

The Newsletter was launched in Autumn 2006, and is published quarterly and delivered free to every household in the Parish. It carried prominent accounts of both the VDS Launch and the Forum as well encouraging all residents, especially those unable to attend the above events, to consult the Preston Parish Plan Web-site and to send in their views. Progress reports on the VDS initiative have become a regular feature of the Newsletter.

Website and Feedback

The web-site at www.prestonparishplan.co.uk, as noted above, carried the summaries of responses to each of the five topics from each of the five tables. As a result several residents e-mailed or contacted the committee with further views and comments. As the VDS document progresses it too is being posted on the website.

Consultation with Farmers and Local Employers

In January and February 2008 the VDS sub-committee contacted farmers and local employers to establish employment data and to seek their opinions. There was concern that the Parish still lacked good broadband connection. Respondents commented upon the lack of local youth to employ due to an ageing population. There were jobs available if limited development attracted young families and young people with the right skills. Several farmers commented that their younger sons and daughters wished to be able to live in the village and a less restrictive planning policy was needed to make this possible..

Open Day, Exhibition and Feedback

(1st. March2008 – to follow)

4. The Policy Context

4.1. Evolving Government Policies for the Countryside: Housing, Planning and the Rural Economy

By 2001 the construction of new homes in the UK had fallen to its lowest level since the Second World War, in spite of rising demand for housing. This shortfall has been a major factor in fuelling steep rises in house prices. Now only 35% of would be first time buyers can afford to buy a property and the problem is even more severe for new starter families in rural areas who wish to remain within their communities, exacerbated by restrictive rural planning policies.

In 2003 and 2004 the Government commissioned Kate Barker to examine the serious and related issues of housing supply shortfall and affordability in two Reviews on **Housing Supply** and **Planning Policy**. Both Reviews were accepted by the Government, which announced a “step-change” in housing supply targets and changes to planning policies to make them more flexible and responsive to need. This has since been followed up by Green Papers, wide consultation and the issue of revised Government planning policy statements.

HMG Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) December 2005

This Policy Statement replaced PPG 3. The new Document Stated the Government’s key objective as:

“To ensure that everyone has the opportunity of living in a decent home, which they can afford, in a community where they want to live.”

To achieve this the Government would seek to ensure the availability of a wide variety of housing types, both affordable and market housing, and to create sustainable inclusive mixed communities in all areas. The Statement recognised that:

“Local Authorities should make sufficient land available either within or adjoining market towns and villages, for both affordable and market housing, in order to sustain rural communities.”

Local planning authorities should consider how:

“to meet the needs of the rural economy, and in particular the needs of households who are either current residents or have existing family or employment connection, in order that rural communities remain sustainable, mixed, inclusive and cohesive.”

(Source: PPS 3, Objectives, page 8, and Rural Housing, page 16)

HMG Green Paper Homes for the Future July 2007

The Government, in its July 2007 Green Paper, recognised the need for additional rural housing and that rural communities face particular pressure. It endorses the Affordable Housing Commission Report that we need more affordable homes in rural areas to help families stay in the countryside. The Green Paper confirms that PPS 3 gave rural planning authorities powers “to positively address the need and demand for housing in rural areas”. Homes for the Future “Meeting the Rural Challenge” (page 28).

The Green Paper also refers to PPS 3 guidance that “places an emphasis on the need for family homes. For the first time, the planning system must consider the housing needs of children, including gardens, play areas and green spaces. Local authorities have more flexibility to ensure larger homes are being built alongside flats and smaller properties”. Homes for the Future (page 58). Chapter 8 of the Green Paper calls for more delivery of social housing alongside market housing in rural areas in particular considering small villages, and states its commitment to supporting the delivery both of affordable housing in rural areas and to increased provision of family homes where they are needed. (pages 72-73).

4.2. Annual Reports of the Commission for Rural Communities

Under the title *The State of the Countryside: Living in the Countryside*, the Commission for Rural Communities publishes an annual Report. The most recent Reports, those for 2006 and 2007, acknowledge that the enduring attraction of rural living is one of the factors placing unrelenting pressure on rural housing markets. They recognise that the combination of continuing high demand and constrained supply results in housing affordability remaining a critical issue in rural areas. Although more “affordable” homes are now being built in rural areas, the level is far below that required to meet established needs.

The reports comment that environmental quality is generally better in rural areas than in urban areas. With regard to primary and secondary education rural areas have a continuing higher level of pupil performance than in urban areas.

The Reports contain some interesting findings on employment and enterprise in rural England:

- More rural than urban authorities report employment rates at or above the EU and UK government targets for full employment (80%).
- It notes that data from the clearing banks suggests greater entrepreneurial activity in rural than in urban areas.
- Rural England offers high rates and diverse forms of employment and self-employment.
- Entrepreneurial activity amongst rural women and older people is higher than in urban areas.
- Children and other family members working in family firms are a more prevalent feature in rural areas and may be a hidden form of employment.

Source: *The State of the Countryside 2006*, (page 87)

4.3. Joint Industry/ HMG Report Barriers to Farm Diversification 2007

This Government initiated Working Group Report was prepared by representatives of Defra, the Regional Development Agencies and 4 key stakeholder organisations: National Farmers Union, The Country Landowners & Business Association, The Small Farmers Association and The Tenant Farmers Association.

The Report is a further indicator of emergent national planning policy, confirming the Government’s intention to reform and streamline the planning system to make it less restrictive and more responsive to economic and social needs.

The following Recommendations from the Working Group’s Report are supportive of a more positive Local Planning Authority response to farm diversification proposals:

- When applying Sustainable Development considerations, Local Planning Authorities should actively and fairly consider the economic costs and benefits of proposals equally with social and environmental impacts.
- Planning is not an appropriate route for taking indirect action. Environmental issues such as travel, transport patterns and emissions should not be used as a basis to reject small-scale rural development.
- Thresholds for minor commercial development should be raised to allow small-scale developments with minimum external impact to proceed outside the planning system.
- Planning and Economic Development Departments in Local Authorities should be encouraged to work together more closely.

5. Sustainability Statement

5.1. Preamble

'Sustainability' is a word used in common parlance but which can mean different things at different levels. For example, the term 'sustainable development' may, on the surface appear to refer to building low energy buildings but can also be used to justify development to maintain population levels so as to maintain economic activity in an area. For the purposes of this document the discussion of both issues is relevant.

5.2. Transport and Employment

The village is not well served with a public transport infrastructure but does have a limited local bus service. As a consequence most of the population is dependent upon the use of cars for both business and leisure use and, indeed, for access to essential services. Although the employment trend of the village, in common with most others, has changed since the 1950's, it is significant that the Preston Parish Plan 2005 survey revealed that, of those in employment, nearly 30% worked from home or were employed within the parish.

With the wider spread of speedier broadband connection, locally as well as nationally, this trend is likely to continue. Since 2000 employment and entrepreneurial activity has grown faster in rural than in urban areas – mainly sole traders or in very small enterprises. (*Source: The State of the Countryside 2007, published by the Commission for Rural Communities*). There is a significant rise in computer and electronically facilitated home working by employees of larger firms while larger homes in rural areas increasingly incorporate "home offices".

A substantial number of residents continue to work in the parish. Our most recent employment survey (2008) shows 189 people with regular employment in the parish (138 full-time, 51 part-time). Of these about 96 are resident in the parish and about 93 are inward commuters, mostly from local villages.

Preston Parish Plan 2005 questionnaire showed that, of those residents travelling outside the parish to work, 50% travelled less than 10 miles and only 12% more than 25 miles to work. (See the graphs appended to the Preston Parish Plan for numbers and distances travelled). We estimate at that time, of 260 parish residents in full or part-time employment, 78 were working in the parish and 164 were out-commuting. Therefore, subtracting 93 inward commuters, net out-commuting works out at about 71 workers.

Positive encouragement can be given to reducing dependence on motorised transport by encouraging walking and cycle use, retaining and building upon locally available services, improvements to the public transport network locally, and fostering local employment.

5.3. The Village School and retail shops

The Primary School, the Preston Family Butcher, the Village Stores, the Farm Shop and Preston Nursery together with the small industrial estate and substantial agricultural employment in Preston all make an important contribution to Preston's sustainability as a village community.

Only two miles distant in Wingham there are two banks, a baker, a general grocery store, a hardware store, two restaurants, three pubs, a timber yard, four antique shops, two

estate agents and a further small industrial estate. Within a 3½ mile radius of Preston are two farmers' markets offering a good range of local organic produce thus further reducing the need for over-frequent journeys to major urban centres.

5.4. Sustainable Building

The term 'sustainable' relating to buildings is somewhat misleading and the term 'less unsustainable' may be more appropriate. The increasing concern at the rate of use of finite fossil fuels is an issue that cannot be ignored. Reasonable and measured steps to reduce fossil fuel use should be taken where practicable, in manufacture and transport of materials, construction, heating and lighting of our homes. Provided such measures do not have a more general adverse impact upon the environment, they should be promoted and encouraged.

The construction of buildings is, in itself, a huge user of energy. But conversely measures to reduce ongoing energy (heating, lighting etc.) are easier to achieve when installed as part of initial construction as opposed to taking the same measures retrospectively. Similarly, account should be taken of the balance of energy originally expended to produce and install a product (its 'embodied energy') against the expected energy savings over the expected life of the component.

Sustainability of construction materials: issues here concern costs of extracting and transporting raw materials, and renewable sourcing of materials – e.g. timber from managed forests and energy costs in the manufacture of materials. (See [Kent Design Guide Section 2.4.2](#), page 162)

'Internalised' energy conservation measures: such as roof and wall insulation and geothermal heating clearly have no impact upon the external appearance of buildings but external measures must be carefully considered. Currently, common issues likely to be encountered in the parish are replacement windows, solar panels, wind turbines, and photovoltaic panels.

Replacement windows: Since 2002 these have needed Building Regulations consent, and must meet the new thermal insulation and safety requirements, with some exceptions for listed buildings and Conservation Areas. It can prove difficult to replace windows without detracting from a building's appearance. Respect for the character of the original building and high quality of design detailing is needed in the case of replacement windows, especially in older and historic properties.

Solar panels: These need to face towards the south, ideally at a 45° pitch, and are usually raised up above the plane of the roof. Consequently, they may or may not have an adverse visual impact depending upon the orientation of the building and its exposure.

Photovoltaic panels: These tend to 'mimic' roof coverings and, in some cases are hard to distinguish from tiles or slates. If carefully selected for the situation they are likely to have minimal adverse visual impact.

Wind turbines: Because turbines must be sited to use the wind, they tend to be 'out in the open' and so are likely to be exposed to view. There are also issues of noise and scale. Wind turbines may not be suitable for domestic situations where buildings are close together.

Passive Solar Design: Passive solar design takes advantage of natural light from the sun and uses air movement for ventilation. This reduces the need for artificial lighting, heating, cooling or ventilation.

A combination of some or all of the energy efficient measures listed above can significantly reduce energy costs and carbon footprint, although they will currently increase the initial build cost. See the Government's White Paper Towards a Sustainable Future, 2007 and The Kent Design Guide pages 97, 172 and 173.

The challenge for manufactures, designers and architects is to ensure that, in embracing the new technologies of energy efficiency, they will strive equally for design quality that enhances the visual environment.

5.5. Sustainability and the assessment of Flood Risk

Guidance regarding flood risk and flood risk assessment related to building development are outlined in the Government's Planning Policy Statement 25 (December 2005). The county of Kent has been subject historically to coastal, tidal and fluvial flooding. These risks are thought to have increased recently, with greater extremes of weather attributed to climate change.

We describe in Section 2.3 of this document, "The Character of the Landscape Setting," an area of flood plain which sweeps round from the north west to the north east of the parish following the curve of the Little Stour, the Wantsum Channel and the Ash levels. These areas of managed grazing marshland experience substantial periods of partial inundation once or twice per decade following prolonged winter rainfall.

However the village of Preston and its buildings are raised above the valley, between 10 and 15 metres above sea level and there is no record of flooding. Most of the hamlet of Elmstone is just over 5 metres above sea level and it has two rivulets that flow north east towards the Ash levels. These are unlikely to become a problem unless they become temporarily blocked.

With regard to new development and extensions, good design should aim to avoid problems caused by flash flooding and surface water run-off. The use of permeable surfacing materials, careful location of green space and sustainable drainage systems is recommended. (See: The Kent Design Guide, pages 47, 95 and 215)

6. The Village Design Statement

6.1. Preamble: Scale of development – stasis or modest growth?

In the third quarter of the last century (1950-1975) the village experienced rapid housing growth in the post-war context (74 dwellings). While much of this was of a build and design quality that would not meet today's higher design standards and building regulations, it cannot be doubted that the resultant growth helped to maintain Preston as a viable community.

The period 1976-1998 saw a further 27 new dwellings. By contrast over the last decade housing growth in Preston and Elmstone has come to a virtual standstill. The village community does not favour major large-scale developments, either of "executive home" estates or of large standardised estates of social housing. However, the village has recorded its support for modest growth to provide some affordable homes for young families, some larger family homes and retirement homes for the elderly.

Any new development should be proportionate in providing for diversity of size, cost and type of tenure to meet local need and to sustain a balanced and thriving community.

Managing sustainable rural Growth

"The planning process and policy framework ... are intended to manage growth so that it achieves the best long-term benefits for the local community and the environment as a whole" [Kent Design Guide December 2005, page 18](#)

"A thriving and viable village has to strike a balance between its traditions and the needs and demands of modern life and all that this implies. Some development in villages is both healthy and desirable to maintain thriving village communities."
[Village Design, Countryside Commission, page 7](#)

"Housing growth will therefore be critical for the survival and prosperity of rural areas. And a significant proportion of rural households are likely to need help to enable them to meet their reasonable housing aspirations. But the delivery of housing in rural areas should respect the key principles that now underpin planning policy – to provide for high quality housing that contributes to the maintenance of sustainable rural communities in market towns and villages."
[HMG Green Paper July 2007: Homes for the Future, "Meeting the Rural Challenge", paragraph 22, page 28](#)

6.2. Key Principles

It is important that the living, distinctive and diverse nature of the community is sustained and able to evolve with modest growth. The aim is to manage but not to stifle change. However new development should be sympathetic to the character of the parish. The Design Statement aims:

- To facilitate a proportionate provision of affordable housing and of new homes for families to respond to perceived need provided they are in such locations, numbers and design as not to detract from the rural character of the parish.

- To assist new business development that creates employment provided that this does not result in ribbon development and that development is appropriately designed and screened.
- To encourage opportunities for leisure, sport and tourism, provided they are not detrimental to the existing green spaces and residential areas of the parish.

6.3. General design principles - Good Design should:

- enrich existing character and reinforce local patterns of development and landscape while not ruling out innovation;
- foster variety in the form of buildings, in materials and in the mixture of uses;
- have a clarity of form and layout that is easy to understand;
- encourage developments that maintain or create a sense of place with attractive and lively public spaces that draw people together;
- ensure that places and buildings are easy to get to and move through, with routes and access that are safe and welcoming;
- be energy efficient and sustainable with design that is built to endure but with the flexibility to be easily converted to an alternative purpose.

(Adapted from: Kent Design Guide 2005, page 14)

6.4. New Buildings

“A legacy of good buildings that reflect the spirit of our age without detracting from the historic context is our aim.” [Kent Design Guide, page 45](#)

“New design should avoid the confused application of architectural styles or inappropriate historic imitation. Emphasis should be placed on the quality of the design solution, whether it is a reflection of a historic style or a contemporary approach.”

“A modern house dressed up in ‘period’ costume is immediately obvious and merely devalues the original concept.” [Kent Design Guide, page 158](#)

Design

- Planning applications, where appropriate, should include a statement detailing how the principles and recommendations of this Preston Village Design Statement have been addressed.
- High quality contemporary architecture and designs, that complement their surroundings and incorporate variations in geometric form, mass and scale, will be encouraged.
- However, designs based on a confused mix of architectural styles or buildings that mimic but lack the integrity of genuine historic buildings should be resisted.
- It is a general feature of the village that buildings are well spaced on generous sized plots and new buildings should fit in with their surroundings in that respect.
- The design of a new building should either harmonise with adjacent buildings having regard to local design characteristics, or may equally well be designed to form an attractive contrast with an existing adjacent building provided siting and proportion are carefully considered.
- Features designed to conserve natural resources such as energy and water should be incorporated in all new building.

- Design layouts should specify proposed treatments of boundaries such as hedges, walls, fences, gates and open frontages, in keeping with the existing character of the surroundings.
- Adequate off-street parking should be provided for all new buildings: parking spaces and garages should be sensitively incorporated into new developments and combined with appropriate soft landscaping to minimise their impact.

Materials

- All materials, whether modern or traditional should be appropriate to their context.
- Principles of sustainability should be encouraged in the choice and source of materials.
- The choice of materials should involve consideration of colour, texture and appearance and of the high quality traditional materials available locally.
- Hard surfaces should be of appropriate materials and designed to minimise the problems and risk of flash flooding.

6.5. Advice regarding minor alterations to existing buildings

A large number of existing older buildings within the Parish have important and in some cases unique architectural features that need to be retained and preserved to maintain the aesthetic and historical integrity of the original design, even where changes may have taken place in the use of the buildings. This is especially important in the designated Conservation Areas.

- In the case of historic buildings replacement doors and windows should preferably match the original in terms of size, design and material. Any change should reflect the character of the original.
- The substitution of plastic for wooden window frames and the insertion of mock Georgian fanlights is likely to be out of character and can often detract from the quality of an historic building.
- Substitution of Kent peg tiles or slates by concrete roof tiles when re-roofing is unwise: it not only destroys the integrity of the original design, it can also cause roof joists to bow and sag with the increased weight.
- In the case of listed buildings there are already strong safeguards against arbitrary and ill-considered alterations.

6.6. Extensions

Extensions to existing buildings should:

- respect the original design concept of the original building;
- be subservient to the original building in terms of its height and mass;
- replicate or complement features of the original building;
- use materials of a quality similar to those used in the original build;
- respect the vertical integrity of the building i.e. not extend into the roof space unless this can be achieved without compromise to the original roof form
- blend 'quietly' into its surroundings.

Care should be taken to ensure that extensions do not:

- 'overpower' or detract from the original structure;
- use poor quality materials;
- appear visually over-prominent.

6.7. Settings and boundaries

Respecting the rural environment

“ Some external features that add to an urban scene can detract from a rural one (for example: ornate walls, railings and lamps, ornamental plants and trees). The inappropriate use of hard paving and kerbs can also be detrimental to the rural environment”

Kent Design Guide, page 45

- Large areas of concrete hard standing for driveways should be discouraged with preference accorded to “softer” materials to assist natural drainage.
- Hedging rather than fencing should be encouraged where possible to maintain the continuity of the rural setting.
- Where fencing is used it should be made of natural materials and of a sympathetic design and colour.
- New developments should retain existing hedges and trees where possible, especially along boundaries and additional planting of native trees should be encouraged.
- The use of Cupressus species (Lawson, Leylandii and other fast growing conifers) for boundary hedging is strongly discouraged. Native beech, hornbeam, hawthorn and yew are slower growing, more manageable and more neighbourly alternatives.
- Where screening is a condition of planning consent a time limit for completion should be set and enforced.
- Plot sizes for new family homes, including socially rented homes, should be of sufficient size to allow for gardens and safe recreational space for young children.

6.8. Signage, Street Furniture and Lighting

- Road signage should be well designed, sensitively sited, fit for purpose and kept to a necessary minimum consistent with safety;
- The design of street furniture including seating, guard railings, litter bins and shelters should be agreed with the Parish Council and accord with good design standards.
- The existing low incidence of street lighting in the Parish should be maintained and any replacement lighting should be well designed and unobtrusive. It should avoid any increase in light pollution and be of low energy consumption.
- Any provision of new telephone and electricity services should use underground cabling rather than overhead supplies.

6.9. Safe Movement Appraisal and the Design of Speed Management

The problem of design for effective speed management and of pedestrians’ and cyclists’ safe movement and access has engaged the attention of the Parish Council increasingly over the last decade. It also emerged as a major concern in the Preston Parish Plan Action Plan. These two issues are interconnected, and the Village Design Statement can legitimately make appropriate recommendations reflecting the strongly voiced concerns of the local community.

6.9.1. Recommendations for Movement and Access

- Any new development should maintain or enhance adjacent safe direct routes for pedestrians and cyclists.

- Walking and cycling should be encouraged with such schemes as “Safe Routes to Schools”
- Existing footpaths paths and bridle-ways should be retained and well maintained to ensure safe access and movement.
- Additional safe routes should be identified and developed for pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders.
- New building developments, where appropriate, should include provision for access ways for walkers, cyclists and horse riders.

6.9.2. Recommendations on Design to Control Speed (to the Highways Authority)

- Apart from the obvious advantages of reducing speed limits to more acceptable levels, effective self-enforcing design solutions are required.
- These might include sensitively designed horizontal restraint measures such as strategically sited pinch points and associated planting.
- (For good reasons raised restraints, such as speed humps, are not recommended by the Kent Design Guide, see page 138)

Note: It is recognised that the above recommendations (6.9.2) are matters for Kent County Council as the Highways Authority, but on which we would welcome the support of our local Planning Authority.

6.10. Public open Spaces and Amenity

The village community greatly values its open and public amenity spaces and wishes to preserve, maintain and enhance them. Specifically we seek:

- To retain the small green at the junction of Mill Lane and The Street;
- To preserve the green triangles and grass verges that are a distinctive feature of both Preston and Elmstone;
- To maintain the benches sited in strategic locations around the parish where the elderly and the young can pause to rest or chat;
- To maintain and enhance the recreation ground and its facilities for sport and recreation throughout the year;
- To provide a well designed and robust Youth Shelter in the vicinity of the Village Hall and recreation ground.

6.11. Community Facilities

The Preston Parish Plan Steering Committee, the Village School and the Village Hall Committee, following the recommendations in the Parish Plan’s Action Plan, are currently actively discussing proposals to rebuild the Village Hall. The aim is to raise funding and plan for a more sustainable contemporary building, which can better serve the needs of the community in the new century.

This group is also considering the further development of the recreation ground and the possibility of acquiring land to provide tennis courts

The Vision for the Future: maintaining a thriving village community

The parish of Preston and Elmstone is a place where people want to live and work and to send their children to school in a safe and friendly village environment, which retains and celebrates its links with the land and its agricultural heritage. We wish to sustain and foster an inclusive, cohesive and forward-looking village community, which cares for its young and its elderly citizens: a bold community able to speak for itself with increased participation in civic and democratic decision making and projecting a strong parish identity.

We regard it as essential to retain and strengthen the village school, the retail shops and a diversity of local employment opportunities, and also to promote the creation of new rural based businesses and appropriate farm diversification. Linked to this we support a proportionate scale of new housing development as essential to reinforce the village's role as a provider of local services and to enable more young families to join and contribute to a sustainable and thriving village community.

In preparing this Village Design Statement we seek to promote and encourage the highest standards of architectural design, building quality and sustainable energy-efficient design solutions. A key parish priority is the creation of a well-designed and more sustainable modern community centre to replace the existing village hall.

Much remains to be done to secure safer pedestrian and vehicular movement through the parish, including improved speed management measures, and well considered speed limits.

We will also seek to maintain and enhance our public amenity spaces and to promote an extended network of footpaths, cycle tracks and bridle ways for horse riders, to encourage fuller access to and enjoyment of the surrounding countryside.

**This Village Design Statement was initiated by and is published by
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Acknowledgements

The Village Design Statement Sub-Committee wishes to thank the following for their advice and assistance during the preparation of this document:

HMG Department for Communities and Local Government: Emer Costello and Marcus Howard

Dover District Council: Mike Ebbs, Clive Alexander, Tracy Watson

Kent County Council: Pete Davis

K.C.C. Rural Regeneration

Action with Communities in Rural Kent: Victoria Lawson, Trevor Skelton

Walmer Parish VDS team: Margaret Ludwig

Littlebourne Parish VDS team: Roger Weaver

Preston Parish: All those members of the Parish community who responded to the PPP questionnaire, attended Open Days and meetings and participated in the Village Design Statement Forum.

We would especially like to thank:

- The Women's Institute (refreshments for open days and Forum)
- The Village Hall Committee and Ruth Roberts (Village Hall bookings)
- Alastair Henderson (wild life information)
- Local farmers and employers for employment data
- Older residents for their help in researching how the Parish was before 1950