

A Village Design Statement for Hermitage





Above : This map shows the Hermitage settlement boundary, or “village envelope”. Apart from some very small realignments, it has remained unchanged for many years. The parish boundary is denoted by the dotted line which runs across the M4 at the northern end of the village. The parish lies within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - which implies planning status similar to that of a national park.

Front Cover Photo: An aerial view of Hermitage (taken year 2000) looking south along the B4009. In the centre foreground is the village school and opposite, at bottom left, the Cementation industrial site which has planning permission for a large number of houses.

1.0 A VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT FOR HERMITAGE

1.1 What is the Hermitage VDS?

The Village Design Statement (VDS) for Hermitage is a document which sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in the village, based on its character. It describes the essential characteristics of Hermitage and highlights the qualities valued by its residents. As an advisory document produced by the local community it is intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system by recommending design pointers which are appropriate to the character of the village. The VDS has been prepared as part of a wider Parish Plan for Hermitage¹, but has been produced to enable it to be used as a 'stand alone' document by West Berkshire Council as part of the planning process.

Public consultation is an important element of both the Parish Plan and the VDS. A detailed outline of the main community consultation undertaken is provided in the Parish Plan. The VDS in particular has been informed by a detailed questionnaire and ongoing consultation (by newsletters and public meetings) with the local community. In addition, West Berkshire Council consulted with statutory agencies, national interest groups, relevant Parish/Town Councils, local interest groups and local developers (or their agents) on the final Draft VDS for six weeks in April/May 2004. Comments were taken on board as appropriate. The final version of the Hermitage Village Design Statement was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) by West Berkshire Council at the Kennet and Pang Valley Area Forum on 14th July 2004 and its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed. Compliance with its recommendations/guidelines does not by itself guarantee planning permission as each case is judged on its merits.

1.2 Historical background

The settlement of Hermitage originated at the intersection of two ancient drove roads. One of these (Long Lane) ran north from Newbury to Hampstead Norreys and The Downs; the other (Old Street) went from west to east connecting with the Thames Valley at Pangbourne. Legend has it there was a holy well near by where a hermit once made his abode - hence the name of the settlement. Evidence of far more ancient occupation can be found in Fence Wood where one can still see extensive Iron Age earthwork fortifications. There are smaller defensive ditches to be seen on Oare Common while the site of a Roman villa is at Wellhouse along the Marlston road out of the village. At Wellhouse Farm are a number of listed buildings including 17th to 19th century stables and barns; some of these are being converted to housing with due regard to their original character and materials

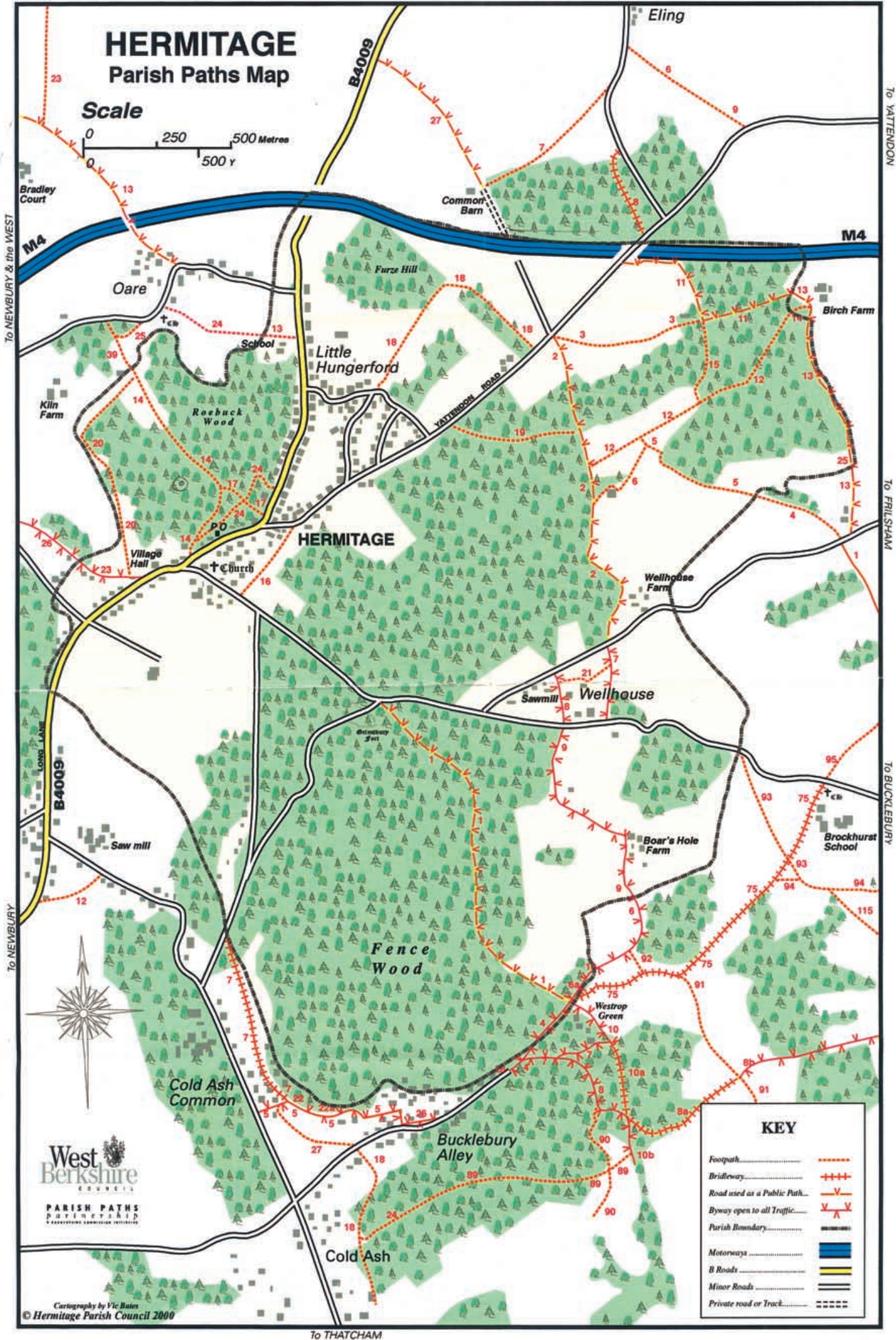
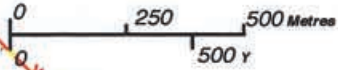
In 1835 the village built its own parish church, (originally called the Adelaide Chapel after the Queen who presented it with a silver Communion set), now the Church of the Holy Trinity.

It was not until 1880, when the Newbury-Didcot railway went through, that the village began to expand and acquired its own station. Soon after the turn of the new century, the Pinewood Brick & Tile Works was established close to what is now called the Cementation Site. The land around the village is mainly sand and/or gravel but with rich overlays of clay in many places and to the northern end some chalk layers. The brickworks, which had its own rail halt, at one time employed 70 people but it finally ceased to exist in 1967 when the site was redeveloped.

*The Parish Plan has been divided into two clear parts for ease of use:- **Part One:** A Village Design Statement. **Part Two:** A comprehensive look at the village as a whole, how it could develop over the next few years, and the actions that may need to be undertaken. Because of ongoing major developments, this is not being finalised and published at the present time.*

HERMITAGE Parish Paths Map

Scale



To NEWBURY & the WEST

To NEWBURY

To YATTENDON

To FRILSHAM

To BUCKLEBURY

To THATCHAM



West Berkshire
COUNCIL

PARISH PATHS
partnership
A COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENT INITIATIVE

Cartography by Vic Bales
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KEY	
Footpath.....	-----
Bridleway.....	++++
Road used as a Public Path.....	-v-
Byway open to all Traffic.....	v-v
Parish Boundary.....	-----
Motorways.....	=====
B Roads.....	=====
Minor Roads.....	=====
Private road or Track.....	-----

During World War 2 the MOD built a large emergency supplies store close to Hermitage Station. When the railway disappeared under the Beeching “axe”, the Station area became a light industrial site and was eventually occupied by the Arena Seating Company. Soon after the war, what is now the Royal School of Military Survey was established just beyond the south west boundary of the parish on a site formerly used as a military hospital. In the 1970s the facilities were expanded considerably to become an important base for the Royal Engineers.

1.3 Settlement Character

Hermitage is most fortunate in its geographical location within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). It is a linear settlement running roughly north and south along the B4009 as it climbs gently towards Hampstead Norreys and then more steeply to the Downs. The parish church with its granite war memorial (a sculpted Celtic cross), together with much of the post-war housing, is situated well to the east of the main road, sheltered by thickly wooded hills to the Cold Ash Ridge (147m/477ft). Much of this eastern side of the parish is carpeted with well managed mixed forest comprising Fence Wood, Grimsbury Wood and Pheasant Hill Wood. These ancient woodlands include many broadleaf specimens which are home to a great variety of biodiversity.

To the west of the High Street the ground also rises steeply to Oare Common and is characterised by natural birch woods interspersed with many old oaks, ash, sycamore, holly and willows. As these woods harbour Muntjac and Roe Deer there is an increasing lack of young trees and the villagers feel it would be useful to encourage some new planting and protection in this area close to the village which is well served by public paths. All of the higher density housing is located in “pockets” to the east of the main road.

From almost anywhere within the village there are outward views between buildings, providing a visual link with wooded skylines of the surrounding AONB. Villagers consider it is important not to lose too many of these gaps through small developments. There are substantial groupings of mature trees at the four main entrances to the village (north, south, east and southeast). Also many fine specimens on private property within the village itself including large oaks, cedars, limes, horse chestnut, scots pine, yew, larch and an impressive ‘Giant Redwood’ at Grimsbury Castle. All of these add character to the village scene.

Most residential growth in the village has taken place post-World War 2. During the past 30 years the housing stock in the village has grown by around 25% to reach its current level of some 430 dwellings. Despite this, there is still a considerable number of 19th century and earlier buildings mixed along the main thoroughfares of Hermitage. These sit comfortably in the landscape, adding character to the village

Entering the village from the south along the tree-lined Newbury Road, a useful landmark is the well-kept Village Hall - in pre-war days a small school and house. Almost opposite is Barnaby Thatch, an 18th century, Grade 2 listed cottage with partly thatched roof - at one time it housed the village post office. Two period properties in the area of the Village Hall are Hermitage Farm (with yard and stable block), and the White Horse Inn which has been a public house since the mid-1800s or earlier. Directly opposite is the large, Victorian property, Hermitage House, which hosts two large, old cedar trees on its frontage, behind a long, high, decorative brick wall (recently restored in parts).

Just beyond this point, a right fork (Marlston Road) leads to the parish church, fronted by some very old walling and a large lych gate. It also leads to Briant’s Piece, a cul-de-sac development of neatly laid out, 1960s-style bungalows. Opposite the church, the more recent development (1970’s) of Lipscombe Close comprises two-story dwellings in a variety of styles, some of the houses being built around three sides of an open space laid to grass and accommodating a large oak tree. A recently added feature is a stone column plus seating, commemorating the millennium (the column contains a “time capsule” of village information.

Running north from the Marlston Road junction, High Street has a pleasant mix of modern houses and

POSITIVE DESIGN FEATURES



- Plain clay roof tiles
- 45° roof pitch
- protruding string course between ground and first floor
- vertical oriented windows
- small panes
- small scale dormer windows in roof
- small simple porches
- gravel driveways



**Deacons Lane
Hedgerows provide
privacy to front
gardens**

- Vitreous blue brick on front elevation
- Contrasting window and door surrounds
- Vertical oriented small pane windows
- Low picket fence to road



- Low brick wall and planting to small front garden (left)
- Decorated brick wall fully enclosing garden (right)
- Slate roof with lower pitch
- Sliding sash windows



bungalows interspersed with several houses of character. The prominent, blue-brick Fir Tree Cottage has large, well laid out gardens allowing outward views of the wooded slopes. To the rear, the nearby butcher's shop was started in 1926, though the buildings, which house it, date from 1904, and originally were a carpentry and carriage business. Some yards further on, the Post Office and Stores with its gabled front and large shop window, externally has changed but little over the years. It was built in 1896 alongside an earlier small cottage.

On the other side of the High Street are two older dwellings, which add character to this area. Fairlight is a small black and white timbered cottage with a roof of weathered old tiles. Wolverton Lodge is a large imposing Victorian house with prominent decorative gable-ends. There are several other examples of architect-designed dwellings from an earlier age such as Crossways House, on the corner of Marlston Road and The Old Vicarage. Further along, beyond the parish church, frontages along the High Street (as on other parts of the main thoroughfare) are a well-varied mix of hedges, fences, palings and low brick walls.

Another landmark at the north end of High Street, where the road branches east for Yattendon, is the Fox Inn. It has been a pub since before World War One, but parts of the original cottage-style building are said to date back 400 years. In the early 1960s, the site opposite (on the main road) featured a grocer's shop and the village petrol pump. These have long gone and been replaced by a garage/workshop and used car business, though planning permission currently exists for a new house in place of the forecourt.

The northern part of the B4009 within the village shows some mixed ribbon development, plus a few older houses and the Community School. It also has two branch roads going off to the east leading to another two residential areas. Dines Way is a mixed 1970's development of some 50 houses and incorporates a large, grassy open space (owned by the Parish Council) which backs on to the line of the disused railway. Chapel Lane leads to Pinewood Children's Playground, before giving access to two other village roads, Deacon's Lane and Pond Lane which encompass much earlier residential properties. These old roads are extremely narrow with houses mostly set well back behind high hedges. The lanes exit to the Yattendon road where there are a few older properties.

Design Pointer 1: As the village has no obvious centre or village green residents particularly value the existing open spaces and would welcome new ones large enough for organised recreational purposes.

Design Pointer 2: Access and connecting roads to new developments should reflect the rural character of existing roads with the appropriate planting of native hedges, shrubs and trees. Native trees and shrubs are also desirable where new developments meet the wider landscape in order to soften new "hard edges" of the village by integrating them into the surrounding countryside

1.4 Building Character

1.4.1 House Design & Materials

Houses have a wide range of design and materials; these often reflect the styles of the periods in which they were built. Though there is much modern development this is less obvious than the more traditional buildings which are generally placed alongside through roads. Whilst variety can add interest to a street scene, jarring contrasts do not, so it is useful to identify some broad parameters of layout, design and materials which should be sought in all new developments in the village so that such development respects and builds on the best of the existing.

The majority of houses in Hermitage are two-storey detached. Bungalows are also found in individual closes such as Colyer Close and Briants Piece and there are also some semi-detached houses. Most houses are three or four-bedroom and sit on plots that allow for open gaps between them, often providing outward views. Some houses are sited very close to the road while others are set well back. Layouts are generally informal and variety is the key element.

Design Pointer 3: Two-storey developments, with informal layouts are encouraged. Three-storey designs and any uniform estate layout should be avoided.

1.4.2 Roofs

The older properties in Hermitage generally have plain, red clay tiled roofs with a 45-degree pitch and gabled ends. There are examples of slate roofs with a lower pitch on some older houses, and many of the more modern houses have concrete interlocking tiles. Ridges usually run parallel to the road and there are few front-facing gable ends. Hipped roofs do occur but are much less common. Most houses have chimneys and some of the older properties have decorative clay ridge tiles and white-painted decorated bargeboards. Dormer windows are not common but where they do occur are small in scale in relation to the roof and set low down.

Design Pointer 4: Red clay tiled roofs generally parallel to the road, with gable ends and 45-degree pitch are preferred. Decorative ridge tiles and bargeboards may be appropriate but not to excess. Multi-coloured tiles, interlocking concrete tiles and lower roof pitches should be avoided. Gable-fronted and half-hipped houses are also discouraged.

1.4.3 Walls

The predominant building material is brick, both in older and modern properties. Rendered walls, tile hanging and wooden features, though present, are more unusual and sometimes discordant. The traditional brick is a plain, dark red/orange red facing brick and decoration is often provided by the use of high fired vitreous bricks with a blue-grey finish. In some houses the two types are used in Flemish bond with red stretchers and blue headers, but more commonly the blue bricks are used to provide string courses, quoins and window surrounds. In some cases the front elevation is built largely in the vitreous brick with red detailing, but the side and rear elevations may remain red.

Design Pointer 5: Plain red brick walls, with blue brick detailing are encouraged. String courses between ground and first floor should be accentuated by projecting forward of the main plane of the wall. Multi-coloured bricks (and colours other than dark red) painted or rendered brickwork and tile hanging should generally be avoided.

1.4.4 Windows and Doors

Traditional windows in the village usually have a vertical emphasis with either small panes or sliding sashes. Woodwork is normally painted white. There is, as one would expect, a great variety of doors, though painted wood prevails.

Design Pointer 6: Vertically oriented windows with, preferably, small panes or sliding sashes are encouraged. Paintwork should be in white. Window frames with a square orientation should be avoided.

1.4.5 Porches and Garages

Traditional porches are small and simple in form, and usually have open fronts with simple monopitched roofs. Older properties were built without garages so these have generally been introduced later either to the side or rear of the house. Detached garages prevail. Most garages are not prominent and the examples of modern houses with forward projecting garages are discordant.

Design Pointer 7: Porches that are small in scale with a simple roof are encouraged. Open porches are preferred. Detached garages should be sited in discreet locations to the side or rear of the house.

Garages should have pitched roofs and be finished in materials which match the house. Garage doors should have a vertical emphasis and be painted rather than stained. Garages which project forward of the house should be avoided. Flat roofed garages and those in contrasting materials are discouraged.

1.4.6 Walls, Hedges and Driveways

A major unifying feature of development in Hermitage is the use of hedgerows to provide enclosure and privacy for individual dwellings. In those cases where houses are very close to the road, decorative brick walls or low picket fences may also be found. In the smaller roads such as Deacons Lane, tall hedges largely hide the houses. Open plan gardens are found in some more recent developments such as Lipscombe Close and Briants Piece, but these are basically a suburban form, which should be avoided in the future. Driveways tend to be gravelled rather than tarmac or block paved.

Design Pointer 8: Hedgerows and brick walls, which provide enclosure between the road and individual houses, are encouraged. Where timber fencing is to be used it should be low level and picket-type construction. Gravel, or bound natural materials, are preferred for driveways. Open plan front gardens and close-boarded or panelled timber fences in highly visible locations are discouraged.

1.5 The Character of the Street Scene

Over recent years the speed of some passing traffic through the village has been of major concern to the local community but they feel that junction improvements proposed by the Highways Authority, as a result of recently proposed new developments, will help to mitigate this problem.

Pedestrian safety was a major concern to respondents in the survey. There are a number of existing pavements throughout the village, the materials mainly tarmac edged with either granite setts or the engineering standard concrete kerb. Along the main road through the village the pavements are relatively wide in some places but narrow in others; their continuity is felt, by the local community, to be in need of improvement. At the same time, with 35% of respondents having one or more cycles, the opportunity to incorporate cyclepaths within new developments would be particularly welcomed.

There is no existing street lighting in the village which helps to contribute to the rural nature of Hermitage. Although there was no direct question in the community consultation questionnaire about lighting, 10% of respondents suggested that there should be some degree of street lighting (e.g. at dangerous corners) although 3% said they would not like it introduced at all.

Design Pointer 9: Any additional traffic calming in the village would be welcomed but should be in sympathy with the character of the village.

Design Pointer 10: Within new developments, the incorporation of cyclepaths that could link with the wider cyclepath network in the area is encouraged.

Design Pointer 11: The general introduction of street lighting in the village would be unwelcome. However, if limited street lighting has to be introduced into Hermitage for safety reasons, then it should be aesthetically designed and should ensure that upward light pollution is kept to an absolute minimum.

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Printed by: Apple Print Ltd., 2Q Faraday Road, Newbury, Berkshire, RG14 2AD
Tel: 01635 521 654 www.appleprint.co.uk

