

# Village Design Statement

## The Parish of Compton Bishop



*We are privileged to live within this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) which so dominates our ancient Parish. Great effort is needed to be sensitive to its historical and visual character for the benefit of future generations. The residents of our villages, together with local authorities, are the custodians of our architectural, historical and landscape character.*

*This document provides a foundation to assist this aim when any property development or enhancement is proposed.*

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**Manor Farm, Compton Bishop, retains the most examples of the local vernacular architecture within the Parish**



The major features are :-

- ✓ Simple rectangular floor plan with gable ends giving a straightforward basic building form
- ✓ Roof shape in this instance is made more complex by the insertion of large gabled dormers. Dormers of this scale are common in the parish but would be unusual in other parts of the district
- ✓ Use of local stone for building and walling - mainly irregular blocks ("rubble" rather than "dressed") - note colour variation
- ✓ Gable walls project slightly above the roof plane and have dressed stone copings and kneelers. Outbuilding shows simpler construction.
- ✓ Clay roof tiles
- ✓ massive stone gatepost
- ✓ brick chimneys
- ✓ small paned windows

## **INTRODUCTION - The Village Design Statement (VDS)**

The Compton Bishop VDS has been developed by members of the parish at the request of the parish council and in consultation with the residents of the parish. It provides guidance for both planners and local residents to help them preserve the character of the place where we live, when making decisions about new developments and alterations. It was adopted by Sedgemoor District Council as supplementary planning guidance on 16<sup>th</sup> July 2003.

This document :-

- Describes the distinctive character of the parish and the surrounding countryside.
- Defines the design principles on which decisions should be made. These principles are based on the distinctive local character of existing buildings (vernacular tradition).
- Forms a framework for working in partnership with the local planning authority in the context of existing local planning policy, and influencing future decisions.

### **1. THE LANDSCAPE SETTING**

The villages within The Parish of Compton Bishop nestle unobtrusively on the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills. The rural landscape dominates our parish. From Cross Plain, unspoilt country views embrace the Mendip Ridge. The view to the north is towards the ancient Kings Wood, Wavering Down, and Crook Peak; to the east, the view takes in Cheddar Gorge; to the south the expanse of the River Axe valley and the Somerset Levels spread below with Brent Knoll and Glastonbury Tor as prominent land- marks; to the west, Bleadon Hill and Steep Holme.



Those parts of the parish which lie to the north of the Axbridge to Bleadon Road, outside Cross Village boundary, are within the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (A.O.N.B.). South-eastern parts of the parish, east of the A38, lie within the Somerset Levels and Moors Environmentally Sensitive Area (ESA).

The original patterns of land use and development in the parish were determined by the combination of well-drained, south-facing limestone escarpment, with a pronounced spring-line at its base adjoining an area of seasonally flooded moorland, an equable climate and proximity to the sea.

The interaction between the local geology, climate and human activities has produced the rich and varied landscape we now enjoy.

The Parish covers 860 hectares (2,125 acres) its highest point being 211 metres at Wavering Down and its lowest at 6 metres. Within this small area there are at least 10 distinct wildlife habitats with an unusually wide variety of plants, birds, animals and fungi, including some that are nationally scarce. The parish has three major landscape character areas :-

- 1.1. **The limestone escarpment** - Calcareous grassland dominates Wavering Down, Cross Plain, Crook Peak and Compton Hill. Much of this area is classed as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The fine-leafed grasses and small herbs provide ideal feeding and breeding sites for butterflies and small mammals. Woods in our parish are of two types. Kings Wood is an Ancient managed woodland of hazel coppice with standards and is nationally important for its avenue of small-leafed lime. Regenerating woodland and scrub occurs at the boundary between the open hillside and farmland. This is a mixture of hazel, dogwood, hawthorn, bramble, blackthorn, elder scrub and ash trees. There are many bare rock and scree areas (including at least four small disused quarries) which are essential basking sites for reptiles and nesting sites for raptors.
- 1.2. **The strawberry belt and footslope villages** - The footslope of the limestone escarpment is characterised by deep, fertile soils with adequate water. These sheltered soils, were previously important for strawberry growing and market gardening and still hold a number of ancient orchards. They also provide excellent conditions for arable crops, such as maize, and sheltered pastures, which are important feeding sites for winter migrants.
- 1.3. **The Somerset Levels** - The flood plain of the Old River Axe was originally all moorland - low-lying and waterlogged for much of the year, providing a fine habitat for many birds, insects and amphibians. From the thirteenth century onwards, drainage works gradually changed much of this low moorland into the rich summer pastures, sometimes called 'fattening pastures', that now comprise Cross Moor. Many of these fields are still waterlogged during the winter and in spring have an early crop of lush grass with a beautiful display of flowers. In winter these fields attract many wading birds.



## 2. BOUNDARIES

Boundaries are an important element in all landscapes. In this parish, the landscape types and traditional patterns of land-use have created distinct types of boundary, each with its own distinct wildlife.

2.1. Ditches and rhynes - These divide fields in the levels. Poplar trees and pollarded willows along the rhynes help to stabilise their banks. The ditches and rhynes are an integral part of the areas' drainage system and landscape. They form part of an important habitat for aquatic plants and animals.

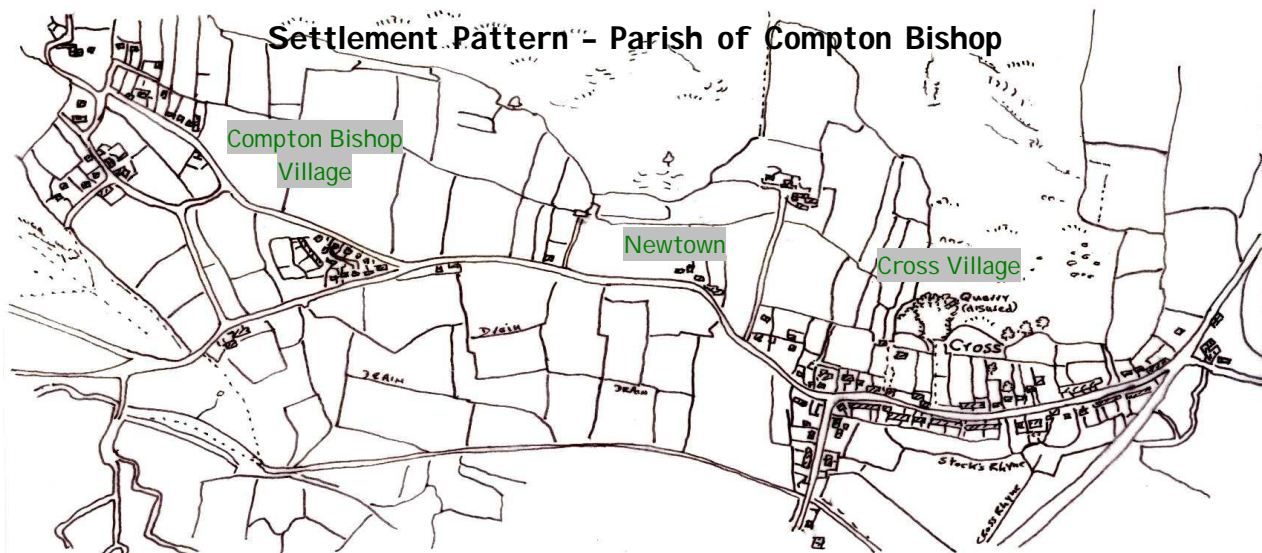
2.2. Hedgerows - The small fields on the footslopes were often divided by hedges. The mixture of shrubs and small trees act as woodland margins supporting much wildlife.

2.3. Walls - There are many limestone walls in the parish, some unusually large. They are often capped by large water-worn boulders. Their natural colours are enhanced with the abundant growth of lichen and ferns.



## 3. SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Settlement and employment within the parish has always been strongly influenced by the local geology. The linear pattern of housing seen in the parish, particularly in Cross, reflects the limited availability of flat, well-drained land.



Most houses are built on the more or less level rocky ledge that forms the base of the limestone escarpment of the Mendip Hills. Until the late 19th century employment in the parish was mainly agriculture or industries relating to transport, i.e. coaching, livery and tourism. Today, because of very good road links, the majority of workers in the parish commute to larger centres leaving our small hamlets as

dormitories. The movement of employment away from the parish has affected the availability of services which may have a detrimental impact on the quality of life on our increasingly ageing population. For the same reason, our children are dependent on their parents for almost all transport. At the time of writing, there is no permanent shop or Post Office. The nearest are at Axbridge and Loxton.

All land within the Cross village envelope has been developed leaving no major gap sites between buildings. Development in other parts of the Parish is strictly limited by current planning policies.

**3.1. Cross**

The Parish is now dominated by the ancient village of Cross. The older houses in the village reflect its importance as a staging post for coaches between the 16 and 19th centuries. As a result, commerce in the village focused on facilities for repairs, stabling and accommodation until recent times. There are a number of 17th century farmhouses in the village, but there are no longer any working farms and only one working smallholding. There are well-spaced 18th and 19th century houses lining the north side of Old Coach Road. During



the 20th century there was major development, particularly after the designation of the village envelope, and there is now contiguous linear development, one dwelling deep, from the junction of Old Coach road with the A38 to Bow Bridge on Old Coach Road. The exception is a recent re-development of a brown field site which departs from the dominant characteristic of Cross's linear pattern.

**3.2. Compton Bishop**

Compton Bishop has, arguably, one of the most beautiful village locations in Somerset. Its development around the horseshoe shaped coombe still adheres, by and large, to the linear pattern typical of the parish but is along winding lanes and in a more scattered form. The only exception is the post-war development of Big Tree Close.

Once important as the private estate of the Bishop of Bath and Wells (from the 12th century), the church-owned buildings dominated Compton Bishop. The village developed around the 13th century Church of St. Andrews and the Manor, with a number of large houses belonging to wealthy traders and also farm workers cottages. Most notably,



the fine 16th century stone farmhouse at Manor Farm in the centre of the village has most of the architectural details that embody our parish's vernacular tradition.

**3.3. Other settlements** (New Town, Bourton, Rackley, Shute Shelve and Webbington)

These small, isolated, and random developments are all on small areas of building land either close to former Saxon farmsteads or disused quarries. These take a variety of forms including compact rows of cottages as at New Town; a loose association of roadside plots, as at Webbington, which includes one large house in substantial grounds which subsequently developed into country hotel; and the redevelopment of a former isolation hospital site at Shute Shelve.



**4. BUILDINGS**

The buildings of Compton Bishop parish show tremendous diversity. The character of each settlement is the result of the interaction of many factors. There is no single "right answer" to making local character count in any property development but, this section of the document, identifies the various characteristics which may contribute to designing new buildings that are in keeping with the character of this parish. For convenience these are set out under a number of sub-headings. However, it will be an amalgam of these influences which should inspire responsive design.

**4.1. Scale, Form and siting of buildings**

4.1.1. Scale -The parish has a rich mixture of older properties ranging in scale from humble two storey cottages with low ceilings and squat doors to former coaching inns and grand detached houses three or four storeys high. Some buildings are built into the hillside and therefore have higher elevation on the lower side.

4.1.2. Form - There is also a mix of built forms : detached buildings are predominant but there are a number of short terraces. The terraces are

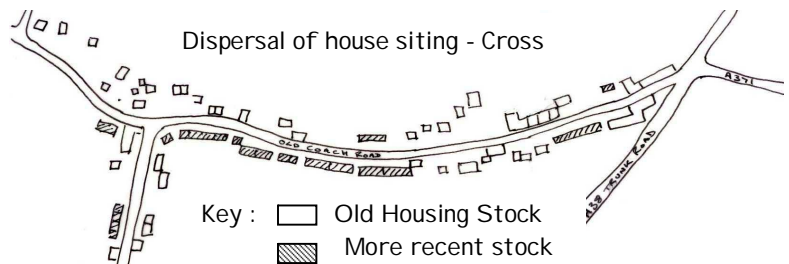




generally not uniform but rather consist of a group of attached buildings which may be varied in height and design. Farmhouses and associated barns often form interesting groupings.

- 4.1.3. Siting – The siting of buildings relative to the street also varies and is a further factor in the varied character of the street scene. Houses which are set back from the street may have open space or accommodate large trees in front (e.g. The Cedars, The Yews). Houses built at the road edge produce a more enclosed space.

Overall, there is a varied mix in the historic pattern which all too often has been lacking in modern developments that comprise individual houses or bungalows with uniform siting and design. Suburbanising influences, such as these, can be moderated if care is taken to ensure that key street scene features such as stone boundary walls or native trees / hedges are included. Greater sensitivity in the siting and design of new buildings is a more robust way of properly harmonising with traditional village character.



#### 4.2. Building Styles - vernacular traditions and other influences

There is, despite a great variety of different styles, a clear vernacular tradition which is based upon both the design and the materials used in the construction of the many buildings built between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The older buildings of the parish tended to be built from the same range of available local materials and were limited by the building technologies of their day. This gives them some consistency of character and appearance but there is nevertheless tremendous variety in their detail. These old farmhouses, cottages, barns, inns etc. are referred to as “vernacular”, or local / native architecture.

- 4.2.1. The vernacular architecture is dominated by the use of local stone, sometimes rendered and whitewashed, and a relatively simple rectangular building form with gabled roof.





4.2.2. Additional influences come from the architectural styles of particular periods or schools (e.g. Georgian, Victorian, Arts and Crafts).



Georgian



Victorian/Edwardian Villa

4.2.3. The design of twentieth century houses and bungalows has departed in many different ways from traditional building styles, e.g. the plan form, roof pitch and shape, window size, use of reconstituted stone blocks etc., and often creates a pocket of "suburban" character if built as a group.



1930's farmworkers bungalow



Semi-detached former council house



1970's design for hillside site



1970's bungalow of reconstituted stone

### 4.3. Important features

The following features give specific character to buildings.

4.3.1. Doors and Windows – Timber lintels or arches built of stone or brick are evident as the traditional construction for door and window openings. This limits the overall width and give rise to windows of a square or vertical rectangle shape, proportions also favoured in Georgian facades. Examples of horizontal windows (width greater than height) can also be found. Bay windows and oriel windows also feature. There is a risk that large-paned replacement UPVC windows will lack the character of traditional sash and casement windows.



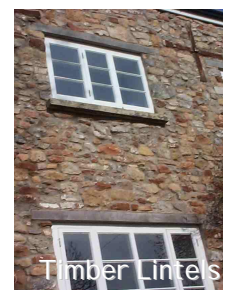
Bay Window



Oriel Window



Small Paned Windows



Timber Lintels

4.3.2. Roofs are predominantly of a simple gabled form but some hipped roofs are also found and small extensions might traditionally be of a lean-to form. Large gabled dormers are a common feature of this parish's vernacular tradition. Roof pitches are commonly about 45° and sometimes steeper, probably reflecting a thatched history. Red clay tiles made locally at Weare, Highbridge or Bridgwater became the main roofing material. Made in a variety of profiles, "pantiles" and "double Romans" are amongst the most common and their colour and texture is an important component on the local scene. Slate would be the alternative roofing material, evident particularly on higher-status buildings. Traditional roofs in this area tend to have no significant overhang at the eaves or gables, indeed gabled walls often project above the roof plane and are capped with coping stones.



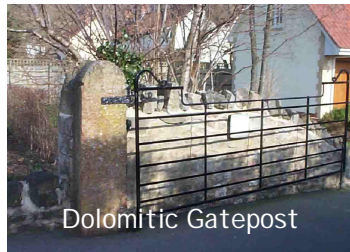
4.3.3. Chimneys are a significant architectural feature, normally positioned at the apex of the gable walls. Built of brick or stone and positioned internally (not projecting on the external face of the wall). Chimney pots of the 4 foot high yellow 'crown' type were commonly used, with some later buildings using squat pots of red clay on brick stacks. While essential and occasionally a status symbol of houses in the past, modern houses may have no need for them which, in itself, is out of keeping with the character of the village.



4.3.4. Stone Walls are extensive and constructed of locally quarried Mendip stone, some are ten feet high. Their purpose was for the definition of boundaries and protection of property and crops from the occasionally very severe winds. Roadside boundary walls, normally topped by a line of upright coping stones, are a key feature of the street scene. There is a recently re-built dry stone wall, marking the parish's Saxon boundary along the Mendip ridge.



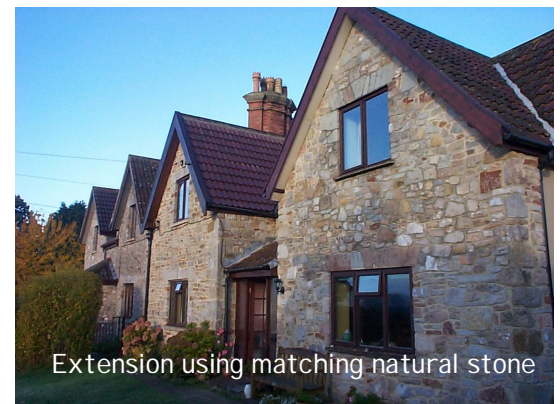
4.3.5. Stone Gateposts are typical of this and the surrounding area, and are made of Dolomitic Conglomerate, a locally occurring rock which is a form of natural concrete.



4.3.6. Porches / canopies and portico's are a feature of many local properties. Designs vary, ranging from rustic porches of timber or stone under tiled roof (gable or lean-to) to more grandiose architectural features on columns or ornate metalwork.

#### 4.4. Materials

4.4.1. Mendip stone, once quarried locally, was used extensively for building and walling. This limestone is predominantly grey but can also exhibit red / ochre staining. Other less common materials are sandstone with red / ochre colours and dolomitic conglomerate, which is a natural concrete of a grey / pink / red colour. The limestone and sandstones are mostly rough "rubble" blocks rather than neatly squared up or "dressed" blocks.



4.4.2. Orange /red bricks are used for details such as chimney stacks and window reveals.

4.4.3. Orange /red and dark red clay tiles of a variety of traditional designs - pan, single and double roman.

4.4.4. Welsh roof slate.

4.4.5. Buff-coloured dressed stone (Doulting, Bath or similar) for door / window surrounds, parapets and copings

4.4.6. Occasional use of pink-tinted pointing.

4.4.7. Extensive use is made of rendering, usually colour-washed in white, pale pinks, ochres or cream.





## **5. HIGHWAYS AND TRAFFIC**

- 5.1. The Parish is adjacent to the A38 and has easy access to the M5.
- 5.2. Housing developments and trunk road traffic controls have encouraged through traffic from the junction of the A38 towards Weston Super Mare. Egress from driveways onto this village street has become a serious safety issue which must be considered in any development or alteration.
- 5.3. Whilst safety is the most important issue for road signs, the fragile visual quality of the landscape must be considered for all signage.

## **6. GUIDELINES FOR PROPERTY ALTERATIONS (extensions, replacement windows, porches, dormers, garages, etc.)**

Property alterations should follow the Planning Recommendations and have regard to the positive and negative factors identified in section 4, particularly: -

- 6.1. That alterations are in keeping with the environment and neighbouring properties.
- 6.2. Use traditional materials, if appropriate.
- 6.3. Identify features which are appropriate and those that are not - consider the visual impact both from near and far.
- 6.4. Check to see if there is any opportunity to improve the character of the dwelling.
- 6.5. Note the shape, design and size of windows, doors, rooflines, walling materials, chimney, colour, etc.
- 6.6. Simplicity of design is generally more appropriate.
- 6.7. Consider privacy and avoid anything that will overlook neighbours, especially windows and balconies.
- 6.8. Preserve or emphasise historical features in the property.
- 6.9. Extensions should be designed with the style and materials of the rest of the building in mind and be of an appropriate scale, both to the original building and its environment.

## **7. GUIDELINES FOR NEW DEVELOPMENTS**

Developments should preserve the character of the area and retain some of our vernacular tradition by considering the following:-

- 7.1. How the building sits in the landscape and the street scene.
- 7.2. Any changes must consider scale of the property in proportion to the landscape (height of hills) and the appropriateness of the materials that are used.
- 7.3. Preserve and protect the various wildlife habitats including hedges.
- 7.4. Protect the extensive panoramic views from public spaces.
- 7.5. Retain a gap space between buildings where possible and appropriate.
- 7.6. Protect the rural nature of the parish.

- 7.7. Protect and preserve the openness between the settlements.
- 7.8. Adhere to the existing development envelope.
- 7.9. Any new property should complement neighbouring properties, not necessarily be uniform, but have a diversity of styles as appropriate to our vernacular history.
- 7.10. Be considerate to neighbours. Ensure lighting, particularly security lighting is not intrusive and include adequate soundproofing if planned activities will generate noise.
- 7.11. Size and shape of buildings to complement and be in keeping with the visual landscape.
- 7.12. Buildings to use, where possible, local Mendip stone or be rendered with colours in keeping with the local traditions.
- 7.13. Buildings to be maintained with materials which are sympathetic to their original design.
- 7.14. Windows, preferably, to be timber casement or sash with small panes.
- 7.15. Timber lintels or brick/stone arches.
- 7.16. Roofs to be a steep pitch with pantiles or double roman tiles in muted terracotta or dark red.
- 7.17. Boundary walls should ideally be of natural Mendip stone or indigenous hedges.
- 7.18. Garden size should be in keeping with the rural environment.

## **8. GUIDELINES FOR HIGHWAYS**

Where developments have some impact on highways, the following should be considered :-

- 8.1. Design or controls should limit the volume and speed of traffic with a minimum of signage.
- 8.2. Where possible the visible impact of cars should be kept to a minimum.
- 8.3. Provide adequate footpaths and cycle-ways for non-vehicular access to local facilities.
- 8.4. Include noise reducing surfaces and screening.
- 8.5. Overhead electricity and telephone cables to be avoided.
- 8.6. Street furniture should be minimal, unnecessary signs and clutter removed so that the visual character might be enhanced.

## 9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND REFERENCES

### 9.1. Our thanks are extended to :-

- Parishioners of The Parish of Compton Bishop
- Compton Bishop Parish Council
- The VDS Steering Committee and Design Team
- Sedgemoor District Council
- Community Council for Somerset
- Other Parishes whose documents were studied and advice given :-  
Allerton, Cartmel, Congresbury, Shapwick, West Bagborough, Edington
- The Kings of Wessex School
- National Trust
- AONB
- Mendip Society

### 9.2. Consultation Record – Significant items only

July 1999	Exploratory public meeting with PC and interested parties
March 2001	Project Team meeting – project kick-off
April 2001	Open Parish Meeting – Discussion of VDS and form Steering Group
May 2001	Questionnaire delivered to every parishioner over age 11 yrs
October 2001	VDS report to steering group/Parish Council and workshop
December 2001	Open VDS Exhibition
April 2002	Report on VDS to Parish Council
June 2002	Draft VDS sent to Sedgemoor District Council
February 2003	Draft VDS sent to Sedgemoor District Council
March 2003	Draft reviewed at CB Parish Meeting
April 2003	Final Draft to SDC and CB Parish Council – for final approval

### 9.3. Useful publications :-

#### Planning Regulations

- Planning – A Guide for Householders by The Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR)
- Internet Web Site - <http://www.planning.odpm.gov.uk/householders/> - planning guide

#### Sedgemoor District Local Plan 1991 - 2011

#### Building Regulations

- Building Regulations Explanatory Booklet by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
- Internet Web site - <http://www.safety.odpm.gov.uk/bregs/brads.htm>

#### Other

- Mendip Hills AONB Management Plan
- Various Countryside Agency Publications