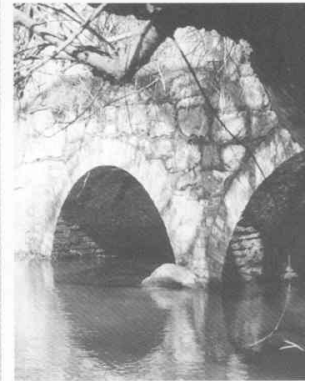


Fyfield, Lockeridge and West Overton

Village Design Statement



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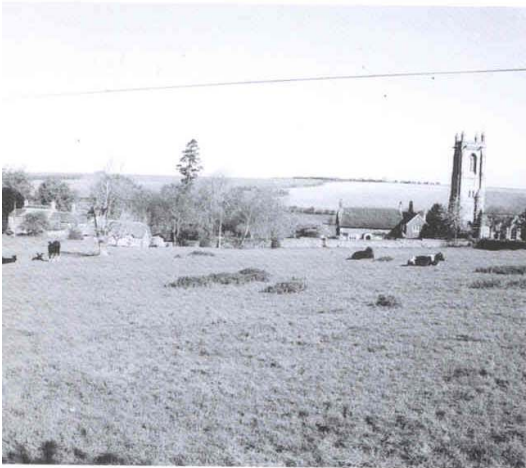
Introduction

OUR three villages, Fyfield, West Overton and Lockeridge, are three settlements sharing a stretch of the Kennet Valley at the foot of prehistoric downland. They are within the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

This Design Statement aims to describe these villages as they are today, and to highlight the qualities valued by residents, so that local knowledge, views and ideas will contribute to any development in the area, large or small. We all agree that we want to protect and help our villages to retain their own particular local distinctiveness.

This statement has been assembled by using contributions from all three villages and combining them into a common position where possible. Where a village has a unique situation, that point is retained. The preparation involved some 90 villagers of Fyfield, Lockeridge and West Overton, between September 1997 and May 2000 and was supported financially by their Parish Council.

The Statement has been adopted by Kennet District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance.



The Village Context

Historical, Topographical and Environmental



History -

THE shape and area of the modern civil parishes were already set by Saxon times and probably, like the network of tracks in the area, date back into prehistory. The valley has always been a communication corridor: its accessibility has influenced its settlement patterns and contributes to its present housing pressures. Today's Overton once comprised two estates which became ecclesiastical parishes with the spread of Christianity. Tenth century charters reveal that East Overton was centred around the church and manor: its medieval remains are still visible in Rings Close. The original Saxon West Overton village started life on the parish's western boundary with East Kennett but, through time and with settlement shift, was re-established on its eastern border, close to East Overton. At the time of the Charters the manor of East Overton belonged to Wulfswyth, a nun at Winchester, and eventually passed to the Bishops of the Cathedral. West Overton is recorded as being gifted to Lady Aelflaed, possibly also a nun, at Wilton, to which Abbey the property passed. Fyfield, mentioned first in Domesday, belonged to the Sacrist of Winchester Abbey and was often managed in conjunction with East Overton. Of the three surviving villages Fyfield may be the only one able to claim a Roman origin.

Within the parishes there were further settlements. Lockeridge grew from several foci and was much influenced by the running of the estate there belonging to the Templars between the 1150's and their dissolution in 1308. Shaw, whose earthworks still remain visible, is mentioned in Domesday and was probably at its most active in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. It is last referred to in 1377; it may have been abandoned shortly after this. To the north, adjacent to Wroughton Copse, a farmstead was established in the twelfth century.

Following the Dissolution the parishes experienced a variety of mostly absentee landlords, in particular the Earls of Pembroke, Dukes of Marlborough and the Meux family. Boundary stones set up by Henry Meux can still be found in West Woods.

Landscape and Natural History -

TODAY'S landscape of Fyfield and Overton has evolved over the last ten thousand years though would essentially still be recognisable to its Saxon inhabitants.

To the north the chalk downs have been mainly used for grazing and only ploughed at times of high agricultural need, as happened during the middle Bronze Age and the Roman period. The resulting ridge and furrow can still be seen in places. Today much of this area falls within the Fyfield Down National Nature Reserve, designated originally for reasons of landform and its sarsens, accidentally thereby preserving valuable archaeology. The more recent recognition that the sarsens host rare lichens has led to the status of Site of Special Scientific Interest being applied to the NNR and to other nearby areas such as Piggledene and Lockeridge Dene.

To the south lie West Woods, once the western reaches of the Royal Forest of Savernake. Research indicates that there have always been woodlands here, for many centuries a carefully managed resource. Today the woods are largely beech, renowned for their bluebells and wild daffodils, and supporting a variety of other flora, fauna, insects and bird life.

Two mature belts of trees, mostly beech, stretch between Lockeridge Dene and West Overton and between Piggledene and Fyfield Dene. Planted by the Meux Estate, they are now in need of maintenance.

The third land division, the Kennet Valley, has been shown through excavation to have been used as an agricultural resource since at least Neolithic times. More recently it had a water meadow system, the remains of which can be seen at West Overton alongside a relict Withered Bed. The river itself is a classic chalk winterbourne attracting many waterfowl.

Economic environment, people and prospects



UNTIL the 1960s the local economy was based on agriculture. This was reflected in the built environment, which mainly comprised farm houses and buildings, cottages and local authority housing. Changes in working practices led to a huge drop in agricultural labour requirements, but this was countered by the relocation of business from London to regional centres such as Swindon and also by a greatly increased general desire to live in the country. As a result there are novel pressures on these old-established settlements. Demands for more and different types of housing have arisen, reflecting national trends such as the increase in “second home” owners, the acceptance of longer commuting distances, the increase in working from home. General housing demand has also increased due to longer life expectancy, a rising divorce rate and overall economic growth.



The effect on the pattern of development takes several forms. Older properties, including redundant farm buildings, have been sold off and “restored” or converted. Infilling has provided the bulk of the increase in housing stock in recent years. Fyfield has seen enormous growth in the last ten years, including a large development from redundant farm buildings. This has produced a very different village from that flourishing in the 19th century and early 20th century before the widening of the A4 flattened a swathe of village buildings including the “Fighting Cocks Inn” and a congregational chapel. Elsewhere small groups of houses have been built (for example Rookery Meadow in Lockeridge), in other cases plots which were once large gardens around individual properties have been developed. Largely ignored by planners until now, ‘local’ design aspects are starting to be considered for all housing development including social housing, as has been the case in the new West Overton development at Wymans Field.



During the 1930s the first council houses were built on the ridge above and outside the settlement of

Lockeridge and, like Fyfield’s Priest Acre houses, were built in solid matching rows, set well back from the road. In contrast the development in West Overton was in the heart of the village and followed a ‘close’ layout. Now, as then, there is total dependence on local land-owners (usually working farmers) to make land available. The vast difference in cost between such land and private building plots arises from tight planning law defining the limits of development. Social housing is currently allowed “in or on the edge of the village”.

Unless there is radical change in national trends from, say, limitations on private car usage or a sudden love of city life, the villages will continue to be a classic example of quasi-rural life, even if employment in the farming industry declines further. Apart from occasional recessions, Swindon, Reading and other similar towns will continue to expand, leading to increased housing demand in areas such as the Kennet Valley. Improved road and rail communications, for example the Newbury by-pass, will only exacerbate this. Locally there are virtually no sites remaining for new dwellings, resulting in numerous applications for extensions and conservatories (often on originally tiny cottages) and high prices on all village properties. This in turn will lead to demand for subsidised housing.

Local Facilities -

The market town of Marlborough, together with Devizes and Swindon, now supplies regular shopping requirements. In 2000 West Overton still has its village stores and sub-post office, and Fyfield’s filling station has a small shop.

The Village Hall, situated half way between West Overton and Lockeridge, also serving Fyfield, is used for a range of social, leisure and educational activities.



It faces stiff competition from further afield, as village families are prepared to travel elsewhere for these facilities.

The Primary School and the two pubs supply mainly a local demand, and, assuming they are well run, should not face economic difficulties if supported by local households. This scenario could change if second home owners and retired people increase disproportionately, in which case the viability of the school, already federated with East Kennett, and the nursery school in a mobile unit in the grounds of the lower (Lockeridge) school, might be in question. Currently there are ninety primary pupils, including some children from further afield.

Public transport (by bus) is very limited although we are currently better off than many rural villages. After many years of this situation inhabitants have learned the advantages of using cars and become dependent upon them, households often running two vehicles. This leaves a small population of students, the old and infirm requiring community transport. Retired people able to afford property here will almost certainly be able to run a car.

Each village has a play area, protected and run by the Parish Council. None contains much equipment beyond swings and a climbing frame. There is a recreation field behind the village hall, used mainly as a football pitch, but there is no village team. The Village Hall has changing facilities and could be used as a pavilion/clubhouse for different sports.*

The community still has a resident but non-stipendiary priest who with a colleague runs the team of parishes from Fyfield to Broad Hinton. Maintenance of the local church buildings is a continual worry.

Despite these economically related changes, there is a feeling of community within the individual villages and as part of the wider group, as illustrated by the results of our questionnaires. The Church, the School, the two pubs and Kenner Valley Hall all contribute to binding our community together. The vastly altered socio-economic structure of the community, particularly the mobility of individuals, means that social interaction now exhibits a very different character from that in the past when villagers "made their own entertainment". Clearly the residents of a village choose for themselves whether they wish to live as a community by supporting the village fete or saying 'good morning' to their neighbour. Within the villages of Fyfield, West Overton and Lockeridge the facilities are still available for these choices to be made.

* A cricket side, recently revived, is now attempting to establish a 'square' and play 'at home' again.

Housing Stock

(as at Jan 2000 showing social housing included in brackets)

Fyfield	Lockeridge	West Overton	Outlying Settlements	Total
72	126	149	18	365
(14)	(18)	(30)		(62)

Residents

(Source: 1991 census - Resident adult figures overall have not changed significantly since 1991, but numbers of households have increased, and numbers of children.)

	Fyfield	Lockeridge	West Overton	Total
Adults	135	231	243	609
Under 18s	55	60	92	207 (34%)
TOTAL	190	291	335	816
% over 65's	9%	15%	13%	13%
% under 10's	15%	8%	16%	12%

Cars in Households

	Fyfield	Lockeridge	West Overton	Total
No car	4	12	14	30 (10%)
1 car	22	52	57	131 (42%)
2 or more cars	38	55	55	148 (48%)
TOTAL CARS	103	177	177	457

Buildings and Materials



WE have skipped lightly over the first four or five thousand years of building in our villages but the most recent five hundred also give us a visible history with a progression of building methods and materials. Time has never “stood still”.

The oldest houses still in use are cruck framed and there are examples in each village. Their early origins are concealed behind walls of rough hewn sarsen and later additions. **Sarsen** in workable quantities is found in only a few valleys and gives our villages a very particular local character. There are several early timber framed buildings but sarsen prevails. The proportions of these older cottages are dictated by economy and their materials.



Roofing - Thatched roofing is still widespread. Before the war long straw thatch was typical. It has a shaggy surface and is fixed with straps at the eaves. Longstraw flows easily round half hipped roofs and “eyebrow” windows and probably contributed to these local forms. A flush wrap-over ridge is traditional. Recently combed wheat has been widely used. It has a more compact appearance. There is not much slate, which was unpopular in Wiltshire before the advent of the canals which brought slate from Wales. Roof tiles, in recent buildings, seem to be returning to the plain red clay which mellows well within the valley.

Windows - The more important sarsen houses like Dene Farm declare themselves not by different materials but by their size and prestigious mullioned windows. For the most part cottages have casement windows, where not replaced, often under low arched brick heads.



Some time about the beginning of the 18th century bricks appear but sarsen lingers on in gable ends, and footings as at Tawney Thatch, Fyfield and Dene Cottage, Lockeridge. It can still be seen in the plinth and rear walls of the later Overton Post Office.

Bricks - Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries our brick was a speckled red made from local clays found at Glory Ann on Totterdown and in the West Woods, where wood was also at hand for firing the kilns. The firing produced a blue header often used to decorative effect, as at The Cottage, West Overton, and Lockeridge House. Towards the end of the 18th century another brick of more uniform russet red made an appearance as at Manor Farm, West Overton, and Fyfield House.

Outlines - The advent of clay tiles and slate changed outlines. Some mansard roofs can be seen at West Overton House, Dene House in Lockeridge and Ivy Farm in Fyfield. Roofs generally became less steeply pitched. Newly popular sash windows gave a more vertical line to openings.



After the mid 19th century the Meux estate buildings proclaim a new public spirited management. Designed to make a statement, the land mark tower of the church at West Overton, the school in Lockeridge and the estate houses in all three villages stand prominently. The bricks are marked HM. These buildings are not strictly local in style but their appearance in our small villages gives them much of their peculiar charm and they do have one very local characteristic: sarsen had status again. Stone masons had devised new cutting methods and their trimly faced blocks could be used as precisely as brick. They can be seen in decorative bands in the new houses and the school and, chequered with flint, in West Overton church. They are the main construction material of Gypsy Furlong in Lockeridge and the Coach house in the West Woods and they are there for all to see beside the old Bath Road at Fyfield. Nineteenth century enthusiasm revived “half timbering” and added diaper patterned brickwork, tile hung facades, deep eaves, porches and imposing chimneys.

The more robust old sarsen also made a comeback for farm yards, utilitarian outhouses and barns where it was used together with brick for the precision work of doorways and quoins. Barns were often roofed with a local three ridged red clay tile.

The 20th century has brought enormous changes: among them semi-detached social housing, small developments, some confidently individual houses, and bungalows grouped gregariously at the edges of each village. It has brought a new type of farm building and farmhouses in the open countryside.

Double garages and conservatories are changing appearances. Stables and sheds of improvised materials or of prefabricated wooden construction have arrived casually on the village scene and become part of its nature.

Cottages are being extended. Most of these extensions have followed the style of the older building but one or two have used the annexe solution of different construction and with a visually weaker linking fabric.

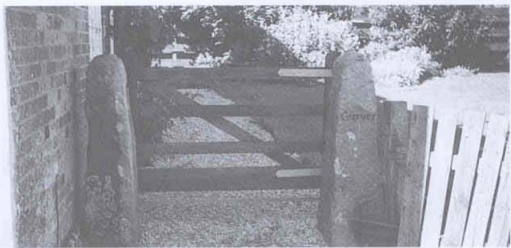
This description is not meant to be a Pevsner. Beautiful houses have been omitted and modest ones cited. It is an attempt to describe what is typical of our villages and is not found everywhere else.

Streets and Street Furniture

MUCH of the rural character of the villages is shaped by minor roads, lanes and byways, irregular spaces and areas of verge. These are very desirable features.

There is a variety of street furniture, much of which, although essential, detracts from the character of its surroundings. Included are street lighting, cables and their supporting poles and 30mph speed restriction signs.

Most striking to the eye are the sarsen stone walls around many of the gardens. Both old and new property is enhanced by the use of this traditional material. There are also some fine old walls of considerable height made of mellow brick. In general modern houses tend to have hedges or wooden fences and occasionally brick walls with a decorative pattern. In West Overton some of the 'close' developments built in the 70's and 80's lack any formal definition. In Lockeridge, some modern development has 'grown' natural boundaries. Fyfield has a wide variety of boundaries - beech and privet hedges, chain link, post and rail, sarsen stone walls, barbed wire etc reflecting its speedy recent expansion.



Fyfield



LANDSCAPE

THE village is set on the lower slopes of the Fyfield Downs rising up from the valley of the River Kennet. From high ground it can be seen from all sides. Likewise from within the village a wide sweep of open landscape views are enjoyed: south to the river with its water meadows and up through fields to Fyfield Wood, west over farmland to Lockeridge, east over water meadows to Clatford and northward to the steeply rising Fyfield Downs.

All the approaches to the village are open and there are no hard boundaries between current development and the countryside, which is accessible in a few minutes walk from any house via tracks, footpaths and bridleways. This is an important aspect of Fyfield's character which should be preserved.

Apart from the Thames Water site, buildings seen in the landscape are mainly agricultural. The old barns in Lower Fyfield are derelict and obtrusive on the skyline as are farm buildings north of the A4, but most are low rise.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

Since the 1930s Fyfield has changed from a 'linear' village along the A4 into one which almost encircles a central field with an incomplete southern boundary. It is this which provides the unique open feel to the village and should be retained as an area of transition between the village and the countryside and which together with the adjacent children's playground is starting to replace the village



centre ripped out in the early 1930s by the widening of the A4. Similarly an important open space to be kept undeveloped is the area between Fyfield house and the river corridor.

The village is cut through in the north by the Bath Road (A4) which is extremely busy with fast and heavy traffic, the road to Lockeridge and Alton Barnes bounds the western side of the village and the remainder of the village to the east is served by Church Lane, which leads from the A4 down to the River Kennet and on to the Sewage works ending in a cul-de-sac. The importance of this cul-de-sac in keeping out through traffic cannot be overemphasised as it is the major contribution to the peaceful nature of this corner of the village. Various public footpaths and bridleways provide access to neighbouring villages and the surrounding countryside.

The settlement pattern generally follows the roadways and lanes. It is irregular with houses of different types mixed together, but there are stretches of uniform housing to be found on the Lockeridge Road and a courtyard development is tucked between Church Lane and Fyfield House on the eastern side of the village. Along the A4 some older buildings remain which escaped destruction in the 1930s and there are some recent additions on its northern side. There are some isolated downland farms to the north.

BUILDINGS

There are some 70 dwellings in Fyfield. The building types tend to be found in distinct areas of the village:

Set back along Priest Acre on the higher western boundary of the village is a row of brick semi-detached houses with long gardens built in the 1930's to re-house those who lost their homes when the A4 was widened. Opposite them is a mixture of brick built semi-detached houses and bungalows.

The Bath Road has several mid 19th Century Meux Estate and modern houses; continuing eastward there is mixed development dating from the early 19th century to the present day, including a petrol station and workshop.

Nearer the centre of the village and close to the Church is Georgian Fyfield House with its adjacent Meux Estate racing stables, recently converted to dwellings around a central courtyard. Nearby the 'Old Rickyard' has a development of modern houses.

A mixture of modern semi and detached houses is found along Church Lane and Taylor's Green. Further down Church Lane Pheasants, Spring and Thatcher's cottages exemplify original sarsen work and thatch; between them is found a sole but typical example of 1920's housing.



The mixture of sizes, styles and types of buildings

Thus there are four main types of building in the village: sarsen stone and thatched, the neo classical Fyfield House (1819), Victorian Meux Estate built of sarsen with brick quoins, slate or decorated tiles often with semi-hipped roof lines, walls often tile hung, deep eaves with decorative barge boards and decorative porches, and finally modern houses built from the 1980s onwards.

Special buildings in Fyfield include: 14th century St Nicholas Church built of limestone and flint on sarsen foundations with lead and tiled roof added in the mid 17th century; Pheasants, a listed cottage, part cruck framed, sarsen with brick additions and thatch roof; Spring and Thatcher's Cottage, sarsen, brick, thatched roof, believed to be a drowner's cottage; and finally Fyfield House, thought to have been built on a Roman Villa site (mosaic floor seen pre the 1819 building works).



Lockeridge



LANDSCAPE

A Hidden Village.

THERE are no vantage points that command an overview of Lockeridge. It comes as a surprise from all its approaches. Its nestling character is contradicted only by the imposing facade of Lockeridge House, the housing along Rhyls Lane and one or two outlying farmhouses and it is an important characteristic to preserve.



The river and its peaceful meadows form an open space to the north and a psychological barrier against the busy A4. The river corridor should be kept free from encroachment.

The other branch of the valley contains the sarsen strewn Dene where cottages stand among the building materials they share with Stonehenge and Avebury. There are other Denes but none within a village.

To the south lie the West Woods with their footpaths and bridleways. A few houses reach into them along an unsurfaced by-way/bridleway.

Surrounding all are the downs; a landscape of great visual space.

The Streets, Hedges, Walls, Open Spaces

Lockeridge High Street is distinctive with its pollarded limes and sarsen stone walls. Box and beech hedges, orchard trees, scots pines and the fine avenue of horse chestnuts along West Overton Road give a rural appearance. Unsurfaced drives add to it. All the farmyards have gone from within the village but some attractive farm buildings remain.

There are still open spaces within the village, mainly paddocks. Many houses back on to fields which also reach into the village in several places and most people have grazing animals within sight or earshot. The Dene is preserved in the hands of the National Trust - and recently enlarged by the purchase of the bank to the north aided by local contributions. These spaces provide the village with views of the wider downland surrounding it and of the West Woods which dominate the skyline to the south.



SETTLEMENT PATTERN

A ribbon of old cottages and farmhouses can still be seen today. This remains from the Lockeridge of centuries ago. Beginning above the floodplain where Castle Cottage still stands, it stretches south away from the river and then turns south-west up the dry valley of the Dene. These oldest houses are not placed in any regular pattern in relation to the road. Some are close up against it; some are back from it or sideways and some are down paths, scattered higgledy piggledy along the valley. There are also a few outlying cottages of which Audley Down and Breach House remain.

In the 18th and 19th centuries the village stretched north and west. Lockeridge House and then Lockeridge Down were built and set in spacious grounds. West Overton Road became part of the village though here the Meux estate kept itself at a genteel distance. Agricultural cottages continued to be built in haphazard spaces among the earlier ones.

In the second half of the 19th Century the Meux estate changed the village dramatically. The School, the Alehouse and the Post Office (both now private homes) and Who'da (then a bakery) gave the village its present centre. Between them the estate houses now stood at a "proper" distance facing the road from up their garden paths.

