

Design Task Group Report Raising Design Standards within the Parish

9th April 2016

Section A - introduction to the stages of consultation/research carried out

1. This report explains the work carried out by the Design Task Group (DTG) in January – March 2016.
2. It has been written by the Neighbourhood Plan Design Task Group Leader and records input from DTG members and some of the NP Working Group in addition to evidence received through the parish survey and at the public consultation exhibitions which were held in Bledlow Village Hall and Bledlow Ridge Village Hall.
3. This report summarises:
 - 3.1. **Consultation Stage 1** – The responses from the parish survey, which took place in January 2016 in the form of a questionnaire sent to all households on the electoral register within the parish. Part of the survey invited responses concerning the design of the built environment. It also included consultation with various interested parties and culminated in the public consultation exhibitions at Bledlow Ridge Village Hall on Saturday 27th February and at Bledlow Village Hall on Saturday 5th March.
 - 3.2. **Consultation Stage 2** – feedback arising from the public exhibitions, subsequent evening clinics and DTG/HTG workshop held in Bledlow Ridge on 23rd March.
4. **Consultation Stage 3** will begin once the draft Neighbourhood Plan has been approved by the Parish Council and is ready to be reissued for wider public consultation. All residents of the parish will have the opportunity to comment on the report in its final draft form.

Section B – Summary of Stage 1 consultation, research and analysis up to public exhibitions on 27th February and 5th March.

5. In December 2015, the DTG Leader, the assigned Task Group Member and the Working Group Representative met to discuss the tasks that had been set by the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.
6. The tasks set concerning raising design standards within the parish were:
 - 6.1. Assess what constitutes ‘good design’ within the wider Chiltern AONB region and collect photos/drawings to form part of the future exhibition.

- 6.2. Evaluate the existing 'Chiltern Building Design Guide', how successfully it is actually being implemented and ways of making it more effective in practice.
 - 6.3. Suggest draft proposals for ways to improve the quality of design of all new development in the parish above and beyond existing standards.
 - 6.4. Consider if any 'area design policy' linked to the specific character of well-defined areas within the Parish should be developed.
 - 6.5. Review the Bledlow Conservation Area Statement and update it as necessary (including possibility of extending the designated area) in order to manage future planning applications. Produce annotated plan and photos as appropriate.
 - 6.6. Identify sites/buildings/views across the Parish for the possible creation of a 'Local Heritage List' (including important positions in the street scene).
 - 6.7. Consider the possible scope/value of drafting specific parish development policies out of the more general policies contained in the Chiltern AONB Management Plan: Historic environment; Development.
7. The DTG agreed that consultation concerning design issues should be made as wide as possible and target a range of interested parties, including those concerned with commissioning, funding, designing, constructing and marketing new buildings within the parish. It was decided to start by approaching a range of people who may be interested in being involved. These included:
- A member of the Chiltern Building Design Award Judging Panel
 - The Chiltern AONB Conservation Board
 - The Chiltern Society
 - WDC Conservation Officer/Case Officers dealing with the applications in the parish
 - Architectural practices either based or doing work in the Chilterns
 - Local builders with reputation of producing quality construction
8. Contact was made with most of the above via email. A letter was sent via email to all ARB registered architects based in the Chilterns or known to have worked in the Chilterns inviting them to contribute in any of the following ways:
- Send pictures/plans/project descriptions of buildings/landscapes/developments they had have worked on that they considered demonstrate a high quality of design.
 - Send sketch/written ideas of how they would approach designs for small groups of 'infill' housing in Chiltern villages.
 - Send sketch/written ideas for how they would approach designing large numbers of housing/mixed use on brownfield sites within the Chilterns.

- Give their opinion on the existing 'Chiltern Building Design Guide'; its content, presentation, how it might be improved and more widely applied/promoted.
- Give their views on WDCs methodology/opinions when determining planning applications in the AONB and Green Belt and any aspects of current local planning policy they felt could be reviewed.

9. The response to this request for involvement was;

9.1. **Chiltern Building Design Award Judging Panel** - a previous winner and member of the judging panel was approached but not able to have any formal input due to time commitment. However, the DTG Leader is a previous winner of the Design Awards and has attended the presentation ceremony, so is familiar with the criteria used to assess shortlisted entries and to make awards.

9.2. **Chiltern AONB Conservation Board/ Chiltern Society** - not able to offer any formal regular input but happy to meet and discuss draft proposals once they had been formed. Offered mounted photographs of past entries and winners in Chiltern Building Design Awards and copies of Chiltern Building Design Guides for use at public exhibitions.

9.3. **WDC Conservation Officer** – at a meeting with Charlotte Morris in December 2015, the DTG Leader was advised they should not communicate directly with WDC officers and that CM would put us in touch with a relevant Case Officer but no contact details were forwarded. The DTG therefore studied comments made by the Conservation Officer and Case Officers in the decision notices concerning applications for extensions, replacement and new dwellings in the parish.

9.4. **Architectural practices** either based or doing work in the Chilterns – many were interested and happy to send in examples of their work but none were prepared to have any formal input in the work of the DTG. Several made suggestions as how to improve design and to address limiting factors, which are discussed in section E.

9.5. **Local builders** – informal discussions were had with local builders operating in the parish.

10. During January/February, the DTG carried out consultation/research needed to deliver the tasks listed in point 6 above. This included:

10.1. Collecting examples of buildings judged to be of 'good design' by the Chilterns Building Design Awards and analysing the criteria used to make the awards. See Appendix 1.

10.2. Making an extensive photographic survey of the range of building types within the parish. These were grouped in approximate settlement areas e.g. Bledlow Village

and its outlying hamlets, Bledlow Ridge, Saunderton and buildings in Open Country to show the character of each different area. See Appendices 3A & B.

- 10.3. Carefully reading the 'Chiltern Building Design Guide' (CBDG), and its technical supplements and assessing the research and knowledge this guide is based on, the nature of advice offered, any gaps in the information presented. Extracts of specific relevance to our parish are listed in Appendix 4.
- 10.4. Investigating the extent to which the CBDG is actually being implemented by looking at a range of past planning applications to see if the CBDG is referred to in the application, if its advice is being cited by WDC in determining applications and if the end built result actually reflects the intentions at the early design stage. See recommendations in Section E.
- 10.5. Examining other WDC policies/guidelines currently being used to shape the design of the built environment within the parish. Particular attention was given to Policy GB6 and WDCs internal guide policy 9.23, which places a 50% increase limit on any extension in the GB. While the DTG supports the need for all new housing to be of a smaller scale, it also recognises the need to allow residents to extend their homes in such a way that they can continue to live long term in the parish if they choose to and supports the changing social trends that are seeing young adults returning to live with their parents and elderly grandparents being cared for by their children – both important aspects of family life that may need larger houses. The methodology used by WDC to calculate this 50% increase was examined to determine whether or not it was to the benefit or detriment of residents realistic needs and if it was encouraging or hindering good building design.
- 10.6. Reviewing the Bledlow Conservation Area Statement and updating it as necessary (including possibility of extending area) with photos. See Appendix 6.
- 10.7. Carefully reading the more general policies contained in the Chiltern AONB Management Plan: Historic environment; Development and drafting specific Parish development policies derived from this.

The findings from the above consultation/research revealed the following:

11. Award winning buildings in the Chilterns and surrounding areas.
 - 11.1. The Chiltern Building Design Awards shortlisted entries and past winners demonstrated that there was a wide range of settings, groupings, building style and materials that could be used to achieve a high standard of design. The criteria given for each award provided a useful basis upon which future buildings/developments could be assessed – refer to the Chiltern AONB website for details on past winners. A small selection of past winners is shown in Appendix 1.
 - 11.2. RIBA regional awards had also been made to buildings within and around the Chiltern region. Of specific note was the recent RIBA award for The Flint House near

Waddesdon, which demonstrated that a traditional material like flint could be used in a very contemporary way to stunning effect. While this particular example is clearly at the top end of the spectrum in terms of house design, it is a useful reference for design in our parish to show that using traditional materials does not have to mean ‘pastiche’ design. See Appendix 2.

11.3. In addition to local award winning buildings, a selection of high quality designs from other AONB/ Green Belt/ Rural settings are included in Appendix 2 to illustrate possibilities of contemporary design using both traditional and new materials.

12. Photographic surveys – See Appendices 3A & B

12.1. The extensive photographic survey of Bledlow Ridge demonstrated that there is a huge variety of building style and materials. These were roughly grouped as:

- Pre-19th Century traditional rural vernacular two storey buildings, most in brick/flint e.g. The Old Vicarage, Wayside Farm
- 19th Century detached houses and rows of smaller cottages e.g. Seymour Cottages. Lily Bank. Most had a compact building footprint, steep pitched roofs and were built right up against the road/pavement.
- Pre-19th and early 20th Century larger detached houses – most set back from the road with many now behind high gates and tall hedges.
- Mid 20th Century medium sized detached houses – many on Haw Lane and adjoining cul-de-sacs. Predominantly red or yellow brick, large windows, shallow roof pitches.
- Late 20th Century ‘chalet bungalows’ with large footprints, low ridge lines and dormer windows inserted to create rooms within the roof space – many on Haw Lane and north end of Chinnor Road.
- Mid-late 20th Century semi detached houses around Fords Close and The Crest.
- Late 20th – early 21st Century modern designs such as the Huf House and 4 Haw Lane.

12.2. At the two public exhibitions, visitors were invited to express their preferred building styles and to mention any that they were keen to avoid in the future. The feedback from this is summarised in section C below.

12.3. The extensive photographic survey of Bledlow village, Saunderton and outlying hamlets showed:

- The absence of consistency of styles and materials means that it is the diversity of styles that leads to its character.
- The spacing between houses and maintaining views is important.
- There are many very poorly designed late 20th century houses.
- There are a few good examples of modern buildings.
- Bledlow is made up of hamlets or “Farmhouse clusters” all of which could be classed as settlements.

- 12.4. The combined photographic surveys and findings resulted in the following conclusions for the parish:
- 12.4.1. There is no consistent style to the buildings. Diversity is the prevailing characteristic, there are examples of architectural styles from the 14th century right up to 2016.
 - 12.4.2. There are many varieties of materials, with a prevalent use of brick, clay tiles and flint but also timber frame, render, slate, thatch, contemporary oak frames and glass - many of which are not listed in the CBDG - some of which complement the traditional buildings and others that have been used in an inappropriate manner which once again detracts from the character of the villages.
 - 12.4.3. There has been some attempt at modernising in a way which ties in with the style of the existing buildings. Many of the late 20th century houses tend to be “National style modern housing” including ‘chalet bungalow’s which are incongruous in the Chilterns villages.
 - 12.4.4. Whilst these many of these modern houses do detract from the character of the villages, there are some good examples of modern design such as the Lyde Cottages development in Bledlow Village, and some sensitive modernization of existing houses and barns.
 - 12.4.5. It is important that space is maintained or created between buildings, however, it should be noted that the presence of some terraced houses can enhance the contrast of open space and views created between sensitively designed terraces. Over development of sites should be strongly resisted to ensure that each new house enjoys a generous setting and does not impact on the setting of the existing houses.
 - 12.4.6. New dwellings should be designed to cater for a good cross section of society, particularly young people wanting to buy their first home and older people looking to downsize but stay living locally.
 - 12.4.7. The Parish needs well designed new buildings, which use traditional - and where appropriate innovative - materials in a modern way.
 - 12.4.8. A guide needs to be produced that sets out what is good design relevant to our parish based on the CBDG.

13. Review of the Chiltern Building Design Guide (CBDG)

- 13.1. Copies of the CBDG were made available at the public exhibitions (with thanks to the Chilterns AONB Conservation Board) and visitors were invited to comment on them. Most visitors were very interested in reading them and very complimentary

about what was presented, but alas many had not been aware of the CBDG prior to the exhibition.

- 13.2. The CBDG was read thoroughly by the DTG and the conclusion was it is a well researched, clearly written and nicely presented publication.
 - 13.3. Certain parts of the CBDG were considered to be of particular relevance to this parish. Important aspects of the CBDG are included in the proposals of the DTG in Section E using the CBDG reference numbers. The full recommended extracts are included in Appendix 4. While most of the CBDG advice was supported by the DTG, there were certain guidelines listed on checklists that were considered to be unnecessarily restrictive in assessing contemporary innovative design. Reasons for this are shown in brackets after each item in Appendix 4.
 - 13.4. A review of a range of past planning applications in the parish found that the CBDG was rarely referred to in application documentation and infrequently mentioned by WDC in Case Officers' notes used to determine applications.
 - 13.5. In the scarce cases where the CBDG was mentioned, the reality of implementing the advice was often a 'token effort' such as inserting a few flint panels in brick walls. The end built result often did not reflect any advice that might have cited during the pre-planning stages. This is clearly not the intention of the Board who produced the CBDG and the DTG recommend that the NP does all it can to promote the guide.
 - 13.6. Although much of the Parish lies outside the boundary of the AONB, the proximity to AONB means that the NP must address the above points to enable the parish to have an active role in shaping the future of our built and natural environment.
14. WDC policy used to assess applications for extensions and replacement dwellings in the Green Belt, AONB and Open Countryside.
- 14.1. The ability to reasonably extend a house is essential for many families to be able to stay in the parish. Not only is it financially unviable to move every time their family grows, it would also be a great loss to the village community if families had to move away because they were unable to extend their homes due to the current policies being implemented. There is also an increasing trend for older children to return and live with parents - or grandparents to be cared for at home and this was raised at the workshop held in Bledlow Ridge on 23rd March. These social trends/needs must be supported and the current policy GB6 used to assess applications for extensions/replacement dwellings in the Green Belt is very restrictive for most households outside the current GB4 area.
 - 14.2. Feedback on extending the existing GB4 boundary of Bledlow Ridge (see HTG report) has focused primarily on concerns about allowing more infill sites for new houses. This understandable concern has meant that the need to extend GB4 to allow for more relaxed extension/replacement dwelling polices, which are needed to enable families to grow and remain in the village, could not be addressed by extending the

GB4 area. The DTG therefore recommends that the internal policies currently used by WDC to assess appropriate sizes for extensions/replacement dwellings are reviewed.

- 14.3. The DTG recommends that the evidence collected in points 14.4 – 14.11 below are used to redefine the internal policies being used to assess whether or not extensions and/or replacement dwellings are an ‘appropriate size’. Recommendations are made in Section E.
- 14.4. WDC have adopted an internal guide policy 9.23 with regard to identifying original floor area and permit a guide threshold of 50% increase limit on any extension in the GB. Policy 9.23. states that:

“The ‘original dwelling is defined as the building which existed on the site on 1 July 1948, or first building to be built on the site after this date, even if that building has since been replaced, or was not in residential use at that time. In assessing the amount by which the existing building has been extended, any extension which has been added to the original building shall be taken as comprising increased floor space, irrespective of whether it was constructed with the benefit of planning permission, or did not require it. Garages and other ‘outbuildings’ which are attached to the dwelling will also be included in the floor space calculations. Where habitable floor space has been previously created in the roof space, either through the grant of planning permission of as permitted development, or if such accommodation is proposed to be created, the floor space will be included in the floor space calculations only where it is lit by dormer windows or where other alternations were or will be made to change the shape or volume of the roof.”

- 14.5. While the DTG understood the reasoning for this in principle and supports the policy of ensuring extensions to dwellings in the GB are not ‘over-sized’, research into how this policy is actually being implemented gave cause for concern. Investigation into recent planning applications revealed the following:
- 14.6. Extensions/replacement dwellings were **being measured by their gross external area**. This meant that any **energy saving steps** such as insulating older solid walls with external insulation was translated into an increase in gross external floor area, deducted from any internal floor area gains to be had. It also discouraged new designs with thick walls and therefore **dissuaded clients from choosing well insulated forms of construction with a high thermal mass**.
- 14.7. The method of calculating new habitable floor space within roof spaces was considered by the DTG to be inconsistent. Cases were found where extensions into roof spaces were **including the floor area where there was head room of just 1.5m**. The DTG felt that this could not be classed as habitable and that a minimum headroom of 1.8m should be used as a guide line for calculating floor space within roof spaces.

- 14.8. Conversely, cases were found where ‘original floor space’ was **excluding the upstairs of traditional dwellings** where the original roof space had not been ‘lit by dormer windows’. There were cases of vernacular buildings that had a ridge height of over 6m that enclosed an upstairs **space lit by gable windows** at each end, but owners were being told that their existing upstairs was not ‘original’ as it was not built originally with dormer windows. The DTG believe such traditional dwellings should clearly be classed as having two floors of original accommodation.
- 14.9. Further ambiguities were revealed found in cases where applicants had been told that **external roof overhangs**, for example designed to shade large areas of glass and provide protection from rain if glass doors were left open, needed to be included within the internal floor area of a new extension – on the debateable grounds that it could be filled in at a later date. This practice appeared to be the detriment of good design, where generous roof overhangs are an important feature to provide protection against solar gain.
- 14.10. Another ambiguity was the classification of **new one and a half storey or double height spaces** being counted as two floors of habitable accommodation – again on the debateable grounds that they ‘could be floored in at a later stage’. This ruling was to the detriment of the design of interesting internal spaces and encouraged single ceiling heights without any three dimensional spatial features.
- 14.11. Several cases were found where applicants had chosen not to over extend their house but instead to **build a detached outbuilding to provide additional accommodation ancillary to the main house**. These were totally separate structures, subservient to the host dwelling, yet providing necessary extra space such as a home office or to house an elderly relative. Applicants who wanted to provide a minimal weather tight link in the form of a glass canopy or pergola type structure were being flatly refused this. In the rare cases where a link was allowed, the outbuilding was being included in the house internal floor area and therefore counted towards the 50% extension limit. The DTG felt that this approach of **avoiding over extending original dwellings** by building a subservient partly detached outbuilding should be encouraged and saw no reason why they might not be connected to the main house by a lightweight subservient structure – as long as it had no detrimental impact on the vicinity or surrounding landscape. As these ‘links’ were usually well within the curtilage of properties and on a very small scale, it seemed unlikely that there were any grounds for negative impact on surroundings.
15. Feedback from architectural practices about proposals of a contemporary/innovative design revealed that:
- 15.1. Responses from architects and clients who had aspirations to build in a contemporary and innovative style was that the advice from WDC at pre-planning stages was generally discouraging and did not appear in any way to actively encourage modern design forms or materials.

- 15.2. Several architects felt that it would be beneficial if a series of workshops on contemporary innovative design were run for WDC Case Officers and others involved in the decision making process. The DTG would be willing to organise this in the future.
16. Existing Protected areas of the Parish – Bledlow Village Conservation Area
- 16.1. The existing Conservation Area in Bledlow includes Church End and West Lane from Bledlow Homes at the East end of Church End to Whitakers on West Lane. These areas of the parish are currently protected under the Conservation Area.
- 16.2. The DTG were asked to assess whether the existing protected area should be extended. Whilst each of the outlying hamlets contain some interesting traditional older housing, none of the presented any specific architectural character worthy of note. Inquiries to local groups has failed to identify any areas which the inhabitants have felt should be listed.
- 16.3. The DTG have reviewed and prepared a suggested update of the Bledlow Conservation Area Statement, a copy of this is in Appendix 6.
17. Following the above research and consultation, the results of the parish wide questionnaire were received by the DTG on 14th February. The survey responses showed:
- 17.1. Most respondents valued the open space, wildlife and countryside. Aspects such as the open rural character of the farmed landscape, the dark skies free from street light pollution and the local heritage and vernacular architecture were cited as positive features.
- 17.2. Negative aspects of living in the parish that concerned the DTG included too many 'estate style properties, lack of individually design developments, the sub-urbanisation of villages into dormitory towns and the restrictive attitude of WDC towards extensions or new/replacement one-off dwellings and the lack of a 'proper heart' or centre to the villages and a sense of isolation at the extreme ends as the villages are spread out and lack pedestrian links.
- 17.3. Concerning the priorities that the Neighbourhood Plan should have for protecting the built and natural environment, the top priorities were:
- 92% - protect views of and from the Chilterns AONB from inappropriate development
 - 86% - ensure development is in harmony with the rural character of the parish and sites well within the landscape
 - 83% - use designs that are in keeping with the scale, location and appearance of existing buildings.
 - 73% - define and preserve the boundaries of our settlements North Mill

- 17.4. The survey responses indicated a clear preference that **new** houses should be smaller ones and the DTG support all recommendations that any new housing on infill or larger sites should address this need and to ensure a more balanced range of dwelling sizes. Where appropriate, some new houses should be designed as “Lifetime Homes” which can be adapted as the family needs change.
- 17.5. Based on this survey feedback and the wider consultations undertaken, the DTG presented a series of five posters that summarised the existing policies and guidelines currently used to assess design and showed the range of architectural styles to be found in the parish. The intention was to encourage feedback by showing a wide variety of both existing buildings and of new buildings elsewhere in the Chilterns.
- 17.6. The information displayed at the exhibition was a direct response to the survey summary received by the DTG, presented in the context of the research and consultation described in section 10 above. The purpose of the exhibition was to consult as widely as possible and gather feedback from as many as possible.

**Section C – Explanation of posters in Display Area 5 presented at public exhibitions
(Posters can be viewed on the Parish Council Website)**

18. The first poster displayed the range of responses that had been received from the parish wide survey and explained the tasks that the DTG had been set. It included quotes from responses concerning design issues and most importantly, highlighted that the presentation was work in progress and the ideas and input of the parish were welcomed and help with the task in hand would be much appreciated!
19. The second poster showed the priorities that respondents felt the Neighbourhood Plan should have in protecting the built and rural environment.
20. The third poster showed a range of photographs taken around Bledlow Ridge to show the diversity of building styles. It asked visitors to indicate if there were any types of buildings they particularly liked or disliked.
21. The fourth poster showed a range of photographs taken around Bledlow village to show the diversity of building styles. Again, it asked visitors to indicate if there were any types of buildings they particularly liked or disliked.
22. It was also stated that the intention was to make a parish wide photographic survey and help was needed to take all the photographs and compile them.
23. The fifth poster set out to explain how the quality of building design is currently controlled in our parish. It explained the role of WDC and drew attention to the current schemes/guides that are in operation; the CBDG and the Chiltern Building Design Awards. It made a clear statement that the DTG endorses the CBDG and also encourages high quality contemporary design. Some suggested draft policies and actions were listed for people to comment on.

24. The five exhibition panels were supplemented by a range of photographs supplied by the Chiltern AONB Conservation Board that showed past short listed and winning entries – included in Appendix 1.

Section D –Consultation stage 2

25. Following the public exhibitions, the consultation period was extended to March 23rd to allow the parish to have enough time to digest the exhibition contents and to give their feedback. During this time, the posters were made available online.

26. The feedback concerning design issues received in the period of 7th – 23rd March was summarised in the feedback spreadsheet analysis. A total of 31 comments were received which were summarised as follows:

- 10 comments stated that there should be a mix of design styles in the local area
- 8 comments said that suburban / developer cookie cutter designs should be avoided
- 6 related to ‘chalet bungalows’ – 4 opposed and 2 approved
- 5 requesting for the Chiltern Building Design Guide to be enforced by WDC more so than at present
- 5 comments mentioned that housing should be clustered near the (relevant) main road to encourage a sense of place and social cohesion
- 2 stated that traditional designs should be prioritised

27. The feedback log also included the following individual comments (each is from individuals so = 1 comment):

- would like to see better examples of good design
- pastiche designs should be avoided
- ultra-modern designs were not appropriate
- development should be as small as possible – priority to protect AONB
- important to keep traffic, noise & light pollution to a minimum
- approved use of modern materials and forms such as zinc cladding
- housing should be near to road/pavement to encourage walking and socialising
- extensions and conversions within existing village ok
- move away from ‘developer led infill’
- encourage more modern designs – Huf House and No.4 Haw Lane (both illustrated in appendix) cited as good examples.
- more imagination needed on part of WDC planning officers
- ultra modern should be discretely positioned away from street view
- new gates to large properties having detrimental effect on street scene
- encourage historically sympathetic designs using local materials but also allow contemporary, environmentally friendly designs
- provide small scale houses with shared use facilities aimed at the young/elderly

- new high gates and fences should be avoided
- against building any new developments too near to the road
- changes to GB4 would not improve the style of properties

28. In addition to these written responses, a lot of ‘verbal’ feedback was given at the public exhibitions that included:

- 28.1. Affordable housing should be affordable to live in, not just to buy. Buildings should be designed to make the most of passive energy and to utilise renewable energy where possible to keep running costs down. This was considered especially important for the elderly.
- 28.2. The general perception was that applications for contemporary innovative designs were not supported by WDC.
- 28.3. It would be useful to have a Chiltern Building Design Guide Technical support section on building with timber – current technical guides are for brick, flint and roofing.

29. Based on the level of interest generated, the DTG suggest staging a bigger future exhibition of ‘Design in the Chilterns’, showing the types of new buildings being built in other parishes. It would also be good to see how other rural areas within a similar AONB/Green Belt setting deal with new design.

30. At the workshop held in Bledlow Ridge on 23rd March it was suggested that the DTG identify and record certain ‘key views’ that should be protected. These are shown on map in Appendix 5.

Section E

Suggested Policies to be included in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan

31. Having carefully reviewed findings the early consultation/research, the parish survey responses, feedback from the two public exhibitions and the extended public consultation period, the DTG overriding conclusion is that both the Parish Council and WDC Planners should make more active use of the CBDG, though also allow for and encourage high quality modern design. To enable this to be successfully implemented, the DTG suggest the following policies/actions be included in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan:

32. The NP should include all CBDG Advice and Checklist points listed below. Deviations from the checklists points should only be allowed in cases of exceptional or very high quality design.

- 32.1. To ensuring new buildings are carefully set within the landscape and are considered in relation to their village setting, emphasis should be given to CBDG points 1.16, 1.18 & 3.7.

- 32.2. To support high quality innovative contemporary design, emphasis should be given to CBDG points 1.20, 3.31, 3.32, 3.3 & 3.5.
- 32.3. The DTG recommends that the CBDG points 3.28 and 3.29 are included to discourage imitating the late 20th Century trend for ‘chalet style bungalows’.
- 32.4. The following checklists should be included in any CBDG synopsis that forms part of the NP. The DTG recommends that some checklist items can be deviated from but **only in cases of exceptional or very high quality design.**

3.9 Location of new buildings

3.10 Designs for any new development or extension

3.11 Approach to landscape and setting,

3.25 Designs for individual or groups of houses

3.33 Roofs

3.53 Walls

3.66 Window

3.75 Porches

3.89 Landscape and setting

- 32.5. While most of the extracts above focus on new/extended residential buildings, the DTG recognises that agricultural building design is of equal importance on the quality of the built and natural environment and recommends the inclusion of the following CBDG guidelines 4.2, 4.3, 4.8, 4.9, 4.14, 4.24.
- 32.6. The DTG also considers the conversion of existing buildings to have a significant impact on the quality of the built and natural environment and recommends the inclusion of the checklist 5.1.
33. A policy should be formed that requires all planning applications to state clearly in the Design Statement:
- 33.1. How the design or development responds to the CBDG checklists; or
- 33.2. If it does not, state why it does not.
34. The Parish Council will view planning applications more favourably where the ‘on the surrounding landscape’ has been demonstrated, good design is shown to be a priority, architectural input is demonstrated and reference to the CBDG is made.
35. WDC should demonstrate use of the CBDG when assessing planning applications in the parish. Officers notes and recommendations for approval/refusal should make specific reference to the relevant parts of the CBDG listed in Appendix 4 of this report.
36. WDC’s internal guidelines for assessing applications within the Green Belt as set out in clause 9.23 need to be re-examined. The DTG recommend the following:

- 36.1. Original and proposed floor areas should be calculated **as gross internal areas** – not gross external areas. This will allow for more thermally efficient buildings and upgrading of poorly performing old buildings to be carried out without deducting useable internal floor area.
- 36.2. Original habitable floor area in roof spaces should be included where a roof space is lit by original windows at the gable ends and not limited to roof spaces lit by dormer windows.
- 36.3. New one and a half storey or **double height spaces should not be classed as two floors** of habitable accommodation.
- 36.4. **External sheltered areas such as roof overhangs** needed to reduce solar gain or shelter from rain **should not be included in internal floor area** calculations.
- 36.5. Applications for extensions within the Green Belt should be **assessed on their true impact** in the neighbouring area and surrounding countryside, **not by a floor area number**. The approach currently taken by WDC is resulting in ‘design by numbers’, rather than case by case consideration for what was really appropriate in specific contexts.
- 36.6. Proposals to **link new or converted detached outbuildings providing accommodation ancillary to the main house** (such as a home office or guest accommodation) should be considered on a case by case basis and criteria such as the distance from the main house, height of proposed link and type of materials used should form the basis of any ruling.
- 36.7. Where there is a clear external door between the house/link and link/outbuilding, the **additional floor area within the linked detached outbuilding should not be included as an ‘extension’ to the main house**. The purpose of limiting large extensions in the Green Belt is to avoid impact on its open character. A detached building that already exists or has been given planning permission will have no more impact on the Green Belt if it is attached by a subservient minimal link.
37. The DTG suggests the following amendments to clause 9.23 to take into account the above recommendations:

*“The ‘original dwelling is defined as the building which existed on the site on 1 July 1948, or first building to be built on the site after this date, even if that building has since been replaced, or was not in residential use at that time. **It is measured as gross internal floor area and does not include roof overhangs or other external areas sheltered by a roof such as external porches or verandahs.** In assessing the amount by which the existing building has been extended, any extension which has been added to the original building shall be taken as comprising increased floor space, irrespective of whether it was constructed with the benefit of planning permission, or did not require it. Garages and other ‘outbuildings’ which are attached to the dwelling will also be included in the floor space calculations **unless***

they are essentially detached in form, subservient in scale, separated by external doors and connected only by an independent linking element that is secondary to both the main house and the outbuilding. Where habitable floor space has been previously created in the roof space, either through the grant of planning permission of as permitted development, or if such accommodation is proposed to be created, the floor space will be included in the floor space calculations only where there is headroom of above 1.8m or where other alternations were or will be made to change the shape or volume of the roof. Ceiling voids above internal double height spaces will only be included in floor space calculations if the resultant ridge height over that specific area is such that it could easily be converted to two full stories of accommodation with headroom in excess of 1.8m.

Suggested Actions to be supported in the Draft Neighbourhood Plan

38. In addition to the above recommended draft policies, it has been suggested by a number of architects consulted that a series of workshops led by design professionals working in the Chilterns is held for WDC Case Officers and Parish Councils to illustrate options for contemporary and complementary styles and encourage modern design. The DTG would welcome cooperation from the NP and WDC to facilitate this.
39. It is recommended that attendance at the type of seminar of seminar suggested above is a requirement for induction or CPD for Planning Case Officers and Parish Councillors.
40. The PC and WDC should support other initiatives to promote examples of good modern design such as exhibitions/a dedicated website/promoting existing design guides and award schemes. The DTG and past winners of the Chiltern Building Design Awards could contribute to such initiatives.

Section F Appendices 1 – 6 (separate document)

- 1 Selection of shortlisted and award winners in the Chiltern Building Design Awards
- 2 Selection of contemporary designs and innovative combinations of traditional and modern materials.
- 3A Edited photographic survey of buildings in Bledlow Ridge.
- 3B Edited photographic survey of buildings Bledlow, Sauderton and Outlying hamlets
- 4 Full recommended quotes *in italics* from the CBDG to be included in any NP Design Advice
- 5 Key views into and out of the Bledlow Ridge AONB area to be preserved in any future development or extensions to the existing GB4 boundary.
- 6 Recommended update to the Bledlow Conservation Area Character Survey