

1. Introduction

1.1 The Parish

Membury parish lies within the Blackdown Hills Area Of Natural Beauty (AONB) in East Devon, with its centre some 3½ miles NW from the nearest town (Axminster) and 7 miles south-west of Chard. The parish is 4 miles long (N to S) and is bordered by Somerset (to the North) and within 1½ miles of Dorset (to the East).

This is a rural parish of scattered farms, dating back to before Anglo-Saxon times (and mentioned in the Domesday Book) containing the hamlets of Crawley, Furley, Rock and Webble Green - all within 3 miles of Membury Village centre, where there is a School, Village Hall, C of E Church and a licensed PO/Shop/Meeting Place. There is an extremely active range of clubs (badminton to short mat bowls, pantomime to local history) meeting in the village hall and/or the Meeting Place.

The parish is connected by a maze of narrow sunken lanes derived from original track ways and is defined by its open, sweeping views across valleys: views down to and from small hamlets: lanes with their high mixed-species hedges, Devon banks, passing places and abundant, varied wild fauna: small orchards and local-stone-walled buildings with a variety of traditional roofing materials (clay tiles, slate, thatch and corrugated iron).

1.2 Methodology, Data Collection and Assessment

In 2006 the Parish Appraisal was published following the feedback from public meetings and a questionnaire sent to all 213 households. Some 183 (86%) responses were received and analysed with the help of Devon County Council (DCC). The Parish Appraisal was formally adopted as Membury Parish Plan in March 2007.

In 2006 the Parish Council, as a result of discussing at Council the Actions identified in the Appraisal, began to investigate the next strategic steps to maximise the usefulness of the Appraisal. In February 2007 a sub-committee was established responsible for preparing a Village Design Statement to formally identify the landscape, building design and material features that the majority wished to see protected (with the intention of it being formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance for Membury).

This exercise was publicly launched with an open-meeting presentation in April 2007 at the Annual Parish Meeting. Further public feedback through an exhibition and questionnaire gained a 50% electoral roll response plus a document created by all the pupils in the village school which resulted from their parallel project - "What we like about Membury". The Design Statement progress was reported through open discussion, as an agenda item at all Council meetings and articles in The Membury Mercury, a quarterly magazine delivered to every household in the parish.

1.3 Design Statement Summary

This Design Statement is the result of public consultation and consensus, working with EDDC to complement and augment the statutory planning processes.

It specifies how we wish to manage change in our parish and the landscape and standards we want to see maintained. Even apparently small deviations if insufficiently considered, whether they be by private individuals, commercial or agricultural organisations or local authorities, have and will combine to make the parish appearance noticeably worse.

The purpose, therefore, of this design statement is to set down those special features and happy circumstances that combine to make Membury such an attractive parish.

2. Background [provided by Membury History Society]

"When I was young I felt in my bones that the landscape itself was speaking to me." Prof. W.E Hoskins

People who have had the good fortune to live in the parish of Membury for several years must have become aware of the many different facets that have produced its unique landscape and history.

The Iron Age 'Castle' that gave the village its name; its lanes, old road and trackways that provide keys to its settlement patterns; and the names and layout of the fields that reflect the development of agriculture from the very earliest of times.

Whilst we have archaeological evidence of the presence of man within the parish from at least Neolithic times through to the Romans, written records associate the parish with King Athelstone and the Norman occupation onwards.

The parish has been 'owned' by kings and abbeys (and their underlings) but the people - being so far from these centres of administration - have always displayed an independent, nonconformist spirit, as evidenced by those who fought in the Civil War, followed the Duke of Monmouth to Sedgemoor or joined the Quaker movement. Our most well-known local campaigner was Thomas Wakley (MP and founder of The Lancet) who supported the rights of the Tolpuddle martyrs, spoke out against flogging in the army and the inhumanity of the workhouse.

Today we still celebrate the restoration of the monarchy on Oak Apple Day in the churchyard of St. John Baptist in Membury, Devon. We are truly unique — we must preserve our uniqueness.

3 The Landscape

3.1 Wider Landscape

Existing natural features i.e. trees, hedgerows, boundary walls, etc [even where they are not afforded specific protection by tree preservation orders, through being in a conservation area (AONB), or as curtilage to a designated listed building] should be considered for retention and enhancement in any new development or redevelopment to both protect and enhance the existing character of Membury parish.

Impact on the skyline should be carefully considered and the existing skyline maintained wherever possible.

3.1.1 There is a presumption of retention unless a better design solution arises from removal and the justification for removal must be covered in the Application Design Statement.

The public surveys and questionnaires have highlighted the vast number of views within the parish that people wish to see preserved and protected - which is translated as indicating the desire to protect what exists and that the present countryside structure, building density and styles complement each other and constitute "our parish" - which most people wanted to protect.

3.2 Trees, Hedges and Orchards

Within our parish mature trees, hedges and orchards support a huge range of species. Our native broadleaved trees help support a rich wildlife; they are often large and old, providing a natural habitat for our native flora and fauna and food for insects, birds and animals. Even isolated trees standing in fields in farmland provide a haven to wildlife.

Our hedgerows support a wide variety of wild flowers and wildlife and are an intrinsic part of the parish landscape. These are all in decline through hedgerow loss and the careless use of oversized agricultural machinery.

We also have a number of old, small orchards with mature trees that are particularly important because they provide both a link to our past and a variety of old fruit species that are no longer being planted. They, too, often provide regular favoured habitats and food for birds and animals and their continuity makes them particularly important.

3.2.1 Removal of trees, hedges or orchard.

If removal is proposed this must be justified in the application Design & Access Statement and be supported with a specific plan for replanting/rejuvenation with appropriate varieties procured from local stock.

3.2.2 Trees: planting and/or replacement planting should be of native species selected from: oak, ash, beech, field maple and hazel.

3.2.3 Hedges: must be of traditional single or mixed species e.g. any of the above trees plus hawthorn and/or blackthorn, holly, yew, juniper, wild privet, dog rose and wild cherry.

3.2.4 Orchards: any development must make every effort to preserve veteran fruit trees and small orchards. Replacement of an existing orchard, as opposed to new additional planting, must be with veteran varieties.

3.3 Lanes

The network of lanes around the parish is an important part of its historic character. The lanes are now a mix of metalled roads and unmetalled tracks, the latter forming part of the access routes around the hamlets. Their character is defined by the low level of vehicle traffic, the lack of inappropriate signage, the mature/ancient mixed traditional species hedgerows on Devon banks and a profusion of wild flowers growing in the banks and verges beside the lanes. The hedge banks provide a natural habitat for animals, wild flowers and plants. All this provides a balance between nature and man which forms an intrinsic part of our parish.

3.3.1 Actively resist any attempts to introduce any extra signs to the area.

3.3.2 It should be accepted as the duty of all residents and contractors to maintain this aspect of our rural heritage through specified use of suitably-sized vehicles, which includes contractors eg removal or delivery company vans and harvesters or other agricultural vehicles and machinery.

3.3.3 The Design & Access Statement must explicitly address vehicular access and handling.

3.3.4 Farmers must use vehicles appropriate to their access routes to prevent damage to the lane and track banks and hedges.

4 Building Design and Materials

4.1 General Design Principles

All planning applications (outline and full) are required to provide a Design & Access Statement at the time of submission.

4.1.1 Additionally it must highlight how it respects and enhances the character of the area and highlighting - with explanation and reasoning - any areas that do not meet this Design Statement.

4.1.2 Mass.

Typically, Membury is not a parish with imposing, grand, large houses but of farmhouses and their support dwellings nestling in the clefts within the countryside. It is noticeable that some newer properties and extensions blend in to their surroundings and the topography whereas others do not.

All new building (including light industrial and farm buildings) should consider this aspect of their design and ensure that their mass and degree of prominence considers the adjacent buildings, the land contours and the consequential views of the new build.

4.1.2.1 Where the applicant deems appropriate and in all cases of dispute, it is recommended that a scaffold outline of the proposal should be erected (at the applicants cost) to show all interested parties the impact of the proposal.

4.1.2.2 Any development or extension/re-build should not dominate the landscape, hamlet or village but be in harmony with its surroundings.

4.1.2.3 Plans must show the proposed ridge height relative to those of adjacent properties with appropriate estimation of the effect of the contours around the sites.

4.1.2.4 Ridge heights must recognise and follow the landscape and contours.

4.1.3 Dormers

4.1.3.1 The use of dormers, to reduce ridge height, is approved but they should have pitched roofs and be subservient to the main roof.

4.1.4 Skyline

4.1.4.1 Future development should wherever possible avoid building on a skyline.

4.1.5 Fuel & Refuse Storage

4.1.5.1 Fuel & refuse storage should be concealed from public view and, if possible, from neighbours.

4.1.6 Footprint size

Membury is a rural environment, typified by houses of "farmhouse/country" designs, all with gardens. Building footprints are typically less than 25% of plot and also provide on-site parking. This is a major contributor to the spaciousness and feel of both the parish and it's hamlets.

4.1.6.1 The scale of future developments should seek to retain the existing balance between buildings and greenery, which is part of the distinctive character of the parish. As a guide, developments (including garages and hard-standings) should be less than 25% of the plot area.

4.1.7 Developments of more than one building

4.1.7.1 High density development will be resisted as it is not appropriate to the area.

4.1.7.2 The scale of future developments should reflect the existing pattern of development which is characterised by small groups of dwellings (not usually exceeding six) of varied traditional designs.

4.1.8 Aerials

4.1.8.1 TV dish aerials should be discreetly sited and where possible away from the main frontage.

4.2 Buildings and External Walls Appearance

Typical of an established community, Membury has grown over the years using a mix of local materials - primarily flint and Tolcis stone - and in more recent times (as local sources became restricted) economically available materials such as stone cladding and painted render. The use of modern materials **MUST** be in keeping with the locale and not become a feature in itself. Where possible traditional materials (flint, stone and rendering [of a traditionally designed building, not a "modern" house]) should be used.

4.2.1 Obvious faux stone and full timber cladding of houses should be avoided.

4.2.2 All-brick is not preferred as an external wall finish. However, it is suitable when used as window reveals/surrounds, coignes or in conjunction with other finishes.

4.2.3 Render colours should blend with, be sympathetic to and tone in with adjacent properties and those in the area around the development/extension.

4.3 Roofs

[See 4.1.2 Mass - and particularly 4.1.2.3]

Within Membury traditional materials (clay tiles - usually roman or double roman style, slate, thatch or cedar shingles) dominate and are the preferred roofing materials for on-going use. Many roofs were originally thatched and are therefore of significant pitch. This should be reflected in new designs. It is recognised that concrete tile over traditional timber and roofing felt is considered an "A rated" material in the BRE's *Green Guide to Specification*, however public opinion was against the use of these tiles.

4.3.1 When re-building or extending, roofing materials must, firstly, be of traditional materials (roman or double roman style clay, slate, cedar shingles or thatch) or, secondly, match existing - providing they are traditional.

4.3.2 Concrete tiles are not preferred.

4.3.3 Gable overhangs and eaves are preferred.

4.3.4 Flat roofs (except where they form part of an holistic design approach that complies with the spirit of the general statement) should be avoided.

4.4 Windows

Double-glazed timber frames of hard wood (from sustainable sources) or painted softwood is the preferred design. Recent developments in u-PVC have resulted in an increasing use of this modern material. However, it is noted that separate multi-paned styles with external glazing bars are more appropriate within the parish.

4.4.1 Whilst u-PVC is acceptable in all bar Listed Buildings - see below - all fenestration design with externally applied glazing bar detail must be in keeping with the property period and design.

4.4.2 Listed Buildings: should replicate existing materials if appropriate to the prime listed building period - or be in wood. Replacement windows should duly consider conservation and use the latest specification heat-retaining glass.

4.5 Boundaries

As well as Devon banks, property boundaries, in the main, are of local stone and flint, hawthorn and mixed hedging or stock fencing.

4.5.1 The above are the preferred boundary types for all future developments and should ordinarily be incorporated into any property changes. Consideration should be given to adjacent boundaries in finally deciding which is the most appropriate style for the new application.

4.5.2 Wooden panelling should be avoided particularly as front and visible side boundaries.

4.5.3 Boundary walls greater than 2m in height should not be used between adjacent properties.

4.5.4 Open plan layouts should be avoided.

4.6 Energy Conservation features

In general, we want to encourage appropriate conservation methods and features within both new and re-build - providing they do not compromise the final design. Green building design is welcome providing it is appropriate to the site.

4.6.1 Wind generation: units may not be installed in locations where either:
- the noise would affect neighbouring properties or
- the landscape, or views of the landscape around the wind generator, would be adversely affected.

4.6.2 Solar generation: These units are to be sited such that they are visually unobtrusive when seen from public access.

4.7 Garages - free-standing

Garages should ordinarily not have flat roofs.

4.7.1 Garages should have pitched roofs similar to their main house and, where detached, need to be set back from the building line.

4.8 Porches and Car Ports

4.8.1 Porches should have pitched roofs matching the main roof of the property to which they are attached and be of a restricted size, with a footprint no more than twice the width of the door in either direction.

4.8.2 Porch joinery design should be traditional

4.8.3 Car ports, in the main, are not deemed to be appropriate. If absolutely necessary they should be designed and constructed to be subservient to and in a traditional style with roofs to match the main. Their size and visual impact must be minor when compared to the main dwelling.

4.8.4 Car port position should be obscured and away from the main building line

4.9 Surface Water & Drainage

The centre of Membury village, running down the valley to Rock is an area at risk of flooding. From Selah/Bewley Down, through Challenger the numerous springs and surface water from the surrounding buildings and lanes is funnelled into this valley and the street gully. It is therefore of concern to those inhabitants to ensure that risk of flash-flooding and the management of surface water is controlled.

4.9.1 When planning permission is granted for new residential development within or adjoining a Flood Zone (as identified by the Environment Agency), permitted development rights in respect of extensions, curtilage buildings and hard-standings shall be withdrawn. Any resultant planning applications can then be assessed by the Local Planning Authority in the light of Environment Agency advice.

4.9.2 All new drainage must be into a demonstrably adequate soak-away.

4.10 Exterior Security and Street lighting

One of the attractions of the parish is that it benefits from a low level of light pollution. Responses from our parish surveys have shown a very strong desire that street lighting should be avoided wherever possible unless clear reasons are provided for any additional lighting.

Further, exterior security and flood-lighting must be carefully designed to ensure that the "dark skies" are protected. Typically this will mean that flat glass, full horizontal cut-off luminaires (light units) should ordinarily be used. Lamp wattage and type must be important considerations

4.11 Agricultural & Brown Site Buildings

The Parish recognises the positive advantages of having a healthy agricultural economy. In turn the farming community are required to understand their impact upon all parishioners and the visual impact they do and can have on the countryside.

4.11.1 All new agricultural buildings must meet sections 3, 4.1.2, 4.1.4, 4.1.5, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.9 and 4.10 above.

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