

GUIDANCE NOTE

THE DESIGN OF REPLACEMENT DWELLINGS & EXTENSIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE



INTRODUCTION

New development in the countryside should be modest in scale and should not result in a large, bulky or intrusive building in the landscape. This guidance note provides further detail about how Medway Council will assess planning applications for:

- the full replacement of dwellings in the countryside;
- extensions to existing dwellings in countryside locations; and
- the refurbishment or ‘improvement’ of existing dwellings, including proposals for outhouses, garages, boundary fences, gates and walls and garden structures, in countryside locations.

The formal basis for assessing such planning applications is set out in ‘saved’ Medway Local Plan Policy BNE 25: Development in the Countryside and paragraph 3.4.77 of the explanatory text that accompanies the policy. It states that normally any rebuilding or modest extension to a dwelling

would not be expected to result in more than a 25% increase over the original¹ dwelling’s floorspace.

This guidance note is presented as a series of questions that should be addressed to help to ensure that a proposal will not have a detrimental impact on rural character. Whilst Policy BNE 25 is the formal basis for assessing applications, these questions will also be used by planning officers in assessing the merits of proposals. In effect, they provide additional clarification as to how the policy will be applied on a case-by-case basis.

Property owners and their agents are strongly advised to have full regard to this guidance in formulating proposals for dwellings in the countryside but it should be noted that consideration of the guidance does not guarantee planning consent.

¹ The “original dwelling” is the building as it first stood on the 1 July 1947 or as first built if constructed after 1 July 1947.

CONSIDERING THE WIDER SETTING OF THE SITE

Stand back and look at the position of the replacement dwelling or extension from a range of near and long distance viewpoints in the surrounding area. Imagine how the proposed building will appear within the landscape.

Consider the guidance contained within the Medway Landscape Character Assessment.

[www.medway.gov.uk/
environment and planning/
conservation/landscape.aspx](http://www.medway.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/conservation/landscape.aspx)

This will provide a useful starting point for understanding the character of the area surrounding the site.

The following questions can help to identify the character of the surroundings, suggesting important factors which should influence the design and siting of the extension or new dwelling.

- A** Will the proposal appear to be in reasonable proportion to the original building or other buildings in the vicinity?
- B** Will it nestle into the landscape or be set against a backdrop of large trees or the roofscape of a village beyond?
- C** Does the landscape have an open or enclosed character? An open landscape character may increase the proposed development site's sensitivity because it will be more visible from the surrounding area.
- D** Will the proposal be more visible from the road or footpaths than the original building?
- E** Are there any important or sensitive views in the surroundings and how will the proposal appear in these views? For example, will it interrupt views of a church spire or wooded ridgeline. If it does distract the eye from the focus of the view does it provide something better to look at?



RESPONDING TO EXISTING FEATURES OF THE SITE

In planning the position of the new dwelling within the plot the proposal should respond sensitively to the natural topography, existing trees and planting, orientation and neighbouring buildings.

If the proposal is an extension to an original building its form, and detailing should form a harmonious and respectful addition. It should be limited in scale and clearly ancillary to the original building. Sprawl should be contained by locating any separate buildings close to the original house.

New development in rural settings may initially appear harsh until new soft landscape establishes. The retention of established trees, vegetation, weathered walls etc can 'soften' the appearance of a new development. Large trees can provide significant visual appeal. The development should, therefore, make good use of existing landscape features on the site to help it integrate with its rural setting.

Successful buildings in the countryside tend to work with the grain of the landscape. This is a traditional practice that contributes to rural character.

In siting the building, consideration should be given to how its position will relate to planted shelter belts and natural landform changes. The contours of the site may help orientate the building towards the sun and shelter the building from prevailing wind. This could achieve a more energy efficient development and comfortable living environment for future occupants of the dwelling.

- A** Does the position of the building or extension enhance the setting of its neighbours?
- B** How is the proposal positioned on the plot? Does it sit comfortably within the site contours or respond sensitively to any changes of level?
- C** Will the proposals result in the loss of an individual tree or group of trees or hedgerow that is judged to enhance the character of the site?
- D** Will the proposal benefit from a south facing aspect or features of the site that provide shelter from prevailing winds?



Depending on the viewpoint, new development may appear more or less visually prominent.

Above: in ground level views the building interrupts the ridgeline and as a result appears discordant. Below: In views from higher ground, this new building sits comfortably in the landscape.



RESPONDING TO RURAL CHARACTER

Many features of new development can be harmful to the character of the countryside even if views into the site from the surrounding area are limited.

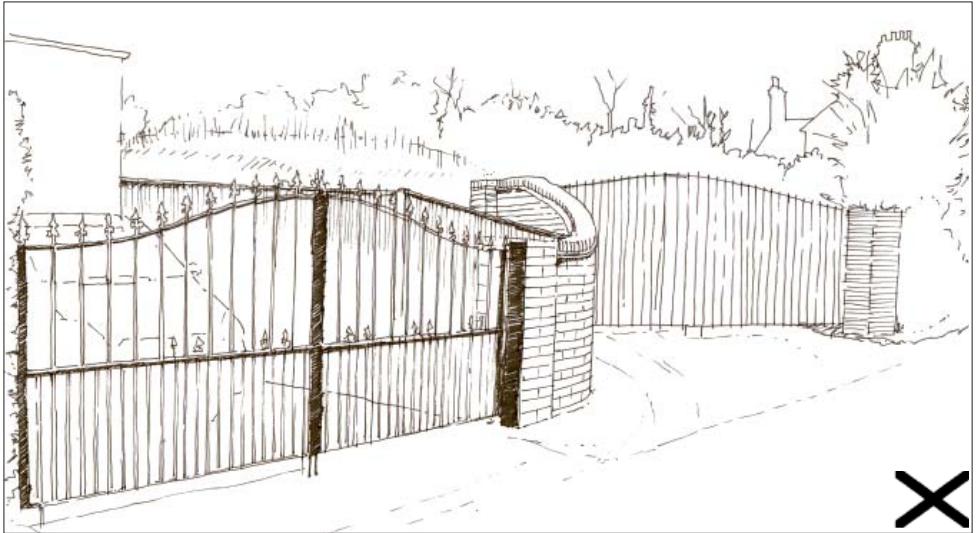
Details in towns and villages are often different. In rural areas a driveway with a surface dressing of gravel with a soft edge will be more appropriate than the hard, formal paving that tends to characterise towns.

The facing images show contrasting types of rural development. The suburban style house with concrete driveway, close boarded fencing and high, overstated gates is not considered appropriate to a rural setting. The extensions to the original building in the lower image are sympathetic to rural character in scale and materials, as are the grass verges, gravel driveways, hedges of native species and low open timber fences.

The following checklist provides a summary of considerations that should guide development.

- A** Are there features of buildings in the locality which give them a particular character? For example the type of roof form or exposed timber frame construction. Such features may provide useful reference points for the design of new development.
- B** Are particular building materials or details characteristic of the area? For example, stone, flint, brick, tile.
- C** Will the materials and quality of workmanship in the proposal be as high or represent an enhancement of the original building?
- D** Will the colour or reflectiveness of the proposed materials cause it to stand out against its background in longer distance views?
- E** What is the overall impression created by the development? Does it make an exaggerated outward show, overstating its importance?





Above: Boundary treatments considered inappropriate in a rural setting - high metal and solid timber gates and fences and high brick walls.

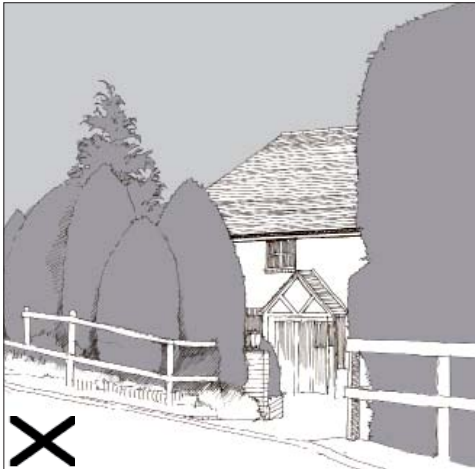
Fences, Walls and Gates

Boundary treatments can have a highly detrimental impact on rural character both in the countryside and at the edges of rural settlements.

As a general rule, particularly in open landscape, frontages should seek to avoid total enclosure behind high boundaries. Solid, close boarded timber and steel palisade fences should be avoided as they introduce a particularly harsh and insensitive edge treatment.

Generally, planning permission is required to erect or add to a fence, wall or gate that would be over 1m high and next to a highway or footpath of such a highway, or over 2m high elsewhere.

Where planning permission is not required, the retention of site boundaries that share common characteristics with others in the area is encouraged. For example, semi-natural boundaries and those that are more open in character such as native hedges, post and rail fencing, ditches or low walls.



Above: steel palisade fences and densely planted boundaries of non-native species that seek total visual enclosure of the site are not encouraged.

Above: Boundary treatments considered appropriate in a rural setting include walls in natural building materials such as stone and flint, low native hedges and open timber post and rail fences and gates.

Who to contact



Customer services: 01634 333333 8am to 8pm (Mon-Fri) 9am to 1pm (Sat)

Please note: Calls to customer services may be recorded or monitored for security and staff development purposes.



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Website: www.medway.gov.uk



Minicom: **01634 333111**

This information can be made available in other formats
from **01634 333333**

If you have any questions about this leaflet and you want to speak to someone in your own language
please ring **01634 335577**

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