

South Lenches Neighbourhood Plan 2015 - 2041



Design Guide

1 PURPOSE OF THE DESIGN GUIDE

The purpose of this Design Guide is to assist and guide all those who are either planning to develop or are assessing the design quality of a proposal within the South Lenches Neighbourhood Plan Area. It relates to all scales of development and is equally applicable to home-owners, businesses and developers

This Guide has been drawn up alongside the South Lenches Parish Neighbourhood Plan to ensure that local distinctiveness will be enhanced, and local issues are addressed

The guide has been developed following a comprehensive assessment of the South Lenches Parish and in consultation with the Lenches community

The Design Guide builds on the Wychavon Design Code and provides a local context for all new development within the Neighbourhood Plan area.

The intention of the Design Guide is to allow for unique and innovative design solutions, whilst maintaining a high quality of design which fits with the local characteristics. The Guide is intended to assist in decision making at an early stage and is not intended to prescribe specific solutions or inhibit innovation.

2 STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This Guide has been prepared in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024 and the National Planning Practice Guidance for Design, in conjunction with the South Worcestershire Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document, March 2018 and the Wychavon Design Code Supplementary Planning Document, Draft Consultation March 2026.

THE NPPF (DEC 2024) Para 12 – Achieving Well-Designed Places

131 *The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process.*

132 *Plans should, at the most appropriate level, set out a clear design vision and expectations, so that applicants have as much certainty as possible about what is likely to be acceptable. Design policies should be developed with local communities, so they reflect local aspirations, and are grounded in an understanding and evaluation of each area's defining characteristics. Neighbourhood planning groups can play an important role in identifying the special qualities of each area and explaining how this should be reflected in development, both through their own plans and by engaging in the production of design policy, guidance and codes by local planning authorities and developers.*

133 *To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences. Design guides and codes provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places with a consistent and high-quality standard of design. Their geographic coverage, level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety.*

134 *Design guides and codes can be prepared at an area-wide, neighbourhood or site specific scale, and to carry weight in decision-making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents. Landowners and developers may contribute to these exercises but may also choose to prepare design codes in support of a planning application for sites they wish to develop. Whoever prepares them, all guides and codes should be based on effective community engagement and reflect local aspirations for the development of their area, taking into account the guidance contained in the National Design Guide and the National Model Design Code. These national documents should be used to guide decisions on applications in the absence of locally produced design guides or design codes.*

3 AREA COVERED BY DESIGN GUIDE

South Lenches Parish consists of a number of small communities which are identified as follows:

- Church Lench
- Atch Lench
- Ab Lench
- Sherriffs Lench

The one designated as 'village' in the SWDPR (¹ is Church Lench. Church Lench is designated Category 2² and Atch Lench, Ab Lench and Sheriffs Lench can reasonably be regarded as open countryside.

Church Lench and Atch Lench lie approximately 7 km north of Evesham Town centre and 2 km northwest of Harvington. Although Atch Lench is not classified as a 'village' in the current SWDP, it is the largest of the remaining 3 settlements sitting in open countryside. Along with Church Lench, Atch Lench has a Development Boundary and a designated conservation area.

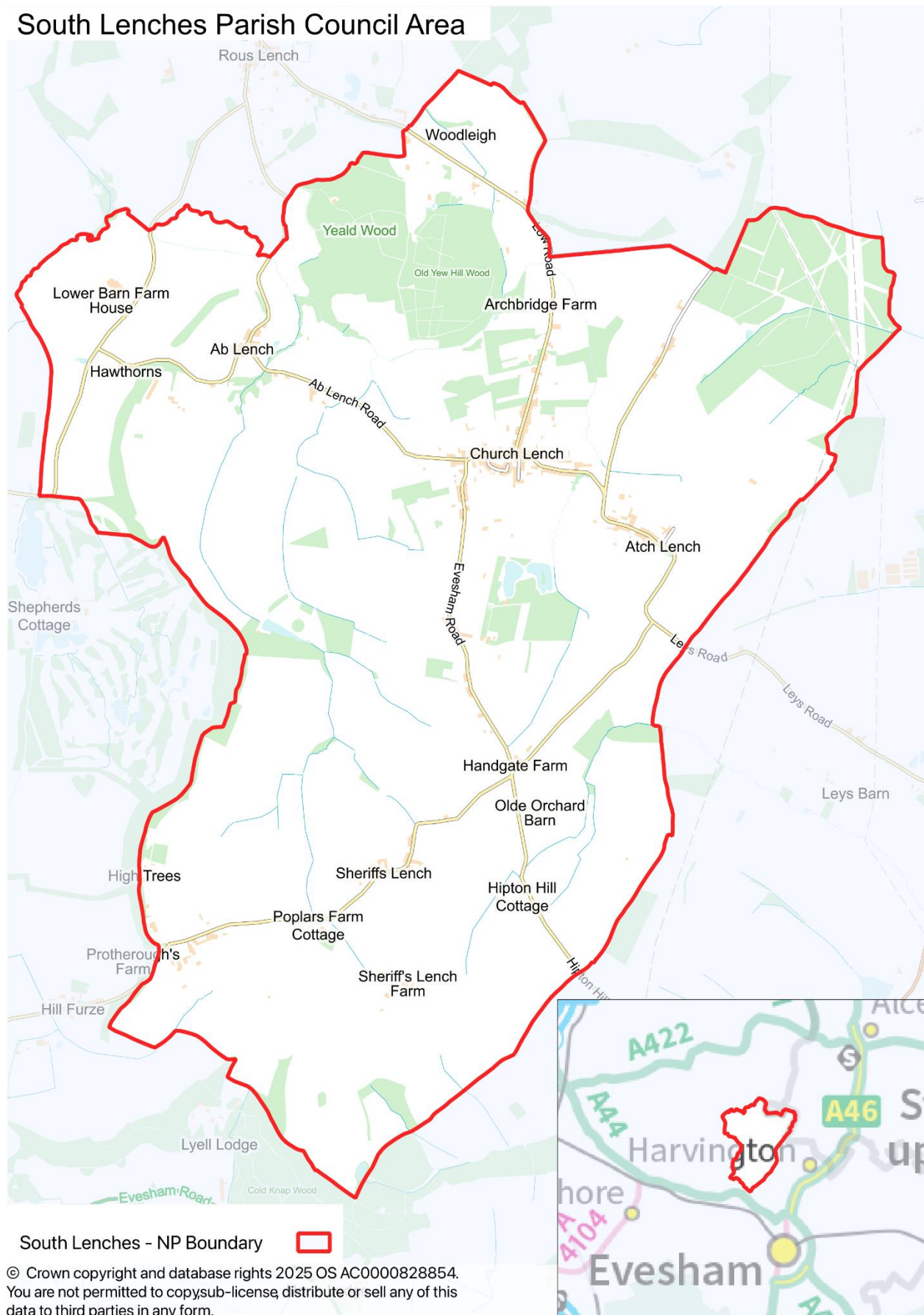
Atch Lench lies to the east of Church Lench on the adjoining small plateau called the Lenches Ridgeway and the parish boundary meets Harvington Parish boundary a few hundred metres beyond the Lenches Ridgeway.

Ab Lench is a small settlement one mile downhill on the western slopes of Bishampton Bank. Sheriffs Lench is another small, dispersed settlement 2.6 km south of Church Lench.

¹ <https://www.swdevelopmentplan.org/swdp-review>

² <https://www.swdevelopmentplan.org/component/fileman/file/Documents/South%20Worcestershire%20Development%20Plan/SWDP%20Review/Evidence%20Base/DBR/8.%20Wychavon%20Category%202%20Villages.pdf?routed=1&container=fileman-files>

South Lenches Parish Council Area



4 ENVIRONMENTAL AND HISTORIC CONTEXTS

In terms of landscape character, the four South Lenches Parish villages all fall within the Timbered Plateau Farmlands Landscape Type (LT) defined within the County Landscape Character Assessment³ (LCA).

Key characteristics identified include ‘dispersed settlement pattern of farmsteads and hamlets and the Landscape Guidelines include the (need to) maintain the characteristic dispersed settlement pattern, avoiding the formation of pronounced settlement nuclei.’

Local maps indicate that dwellings are generally in a linear arrangement along the arterial roads with most dwellings facing the road with garden areas to the rear.

In Church Lench, to the south of Main Street there is a mid-20th Century cul-de-sac called ‘The Croft’ and further down Atch Lench Road is Malt House Lane where there is some increase in the depth of development away from the main road. We believe that it is officially accepted that these developments do not distort the nucleation of the overall linear settlement pattern.

“The Lenches” is the term used to describe the five settlements of Ab Lench, Atch Lench, Church Lench, Sheriffs Lench and Rous Lench. South Lenches Parish only includes the first four of these. Earliest records show that the history of the Lenches goes back to at least the 7th Century A.D.

5 PARISH CHARACTER ASSESSMENT BOUNDARIES

The character assessment concentrates on the four villages within the Parish - within the development boundaries of Church Lench and Atch Lench and within the primary developed areas of Ab Lench and Sheriffs Lench.

6 LOCAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENT AND DISTINCTIVENESS OF THE SOUTH LENCHES

For photographs to accompany the details in this Design Guide please see Appendix B, Parish Character Assessment

Church Lench

The largest village in the parish is Church Lench. This is a small rural village with a long history, and around 188 dwellings. It is located on rising ground around the junctions of several roads.

The historic core of the village is located around All Saints Church on Main Street, with a 20th Century development located to the south of Main Street (The Croft) and further modern development spreading north, east and south along Low Road, Atch Lench Road and Evesham Road.

The Church Lench Conservation Area covers the village’s historic core. This includes a number of listed buildings and several historic unlisted buildings that are considered non-designated heritage assets (effectively locally listed buildings) including, for example, Church Farmhouse. Pilgrims Cottage, Pilgrims Rest and Bank House.

The village and Conservation Area have a strongly rural character that is derived from the interaction between the surrounding countryside, which directly adjoins the historic core of the village to the north of Main Street, extensive planting of trees and hedges along the lanes within the village, private gardens and views between buildings and through the village.

There is an eclectic mix of housing around the centre ranging from ancient timber framed black and white cottages to 19th and 20th Century dwellings as seen on the Evesham Road.

During the last Century there has been slow, mostly linear expansion along the north, east and southerly arterial roads, namely: Low Road, Atch Lench Road and Evesham Road. There has been very little expansion along Ab Lench Road.

³ [County Character Landscape Assessment](#)

The general trend over the last sixty years has been for a variety of houses and bungalows of varying styles and sizes, most with large rear gardens and many along Atch Lench Road set well back with large front gardens.

For ease of Character Assessment, Church Lench is divided into 3 main sections, along the 3 main arterial roads, namely Evesham Road; Main Street / Atch Lench Road; and Low Road

Evesham Road runs south from the centre of Church Lench towards Lenchwick and Evesham

There is a mix of modern design, and 20th century houses and bungalows on the west side, and on the eastern side, a mix of dwellings which contain some larger houses set well back from the road. Boundaries are a mix of greenery, or post and rail fencing.

The Conservation area has a mix of historic and Grade II listed buildings.

Ab Lench Road

At the junction of Evesham Rd and Main Street is Ab Lench Road

The properties on Ab Lench Road consist of barn conversions/newer houses, a post war bungalow and The Old Rectory set back from the road behind trees and hedging at the edge of the village.

On the south side is a modern house with black and white facade and then the Lenches Club.

MAIN STREET including The Croft and Malthouse Lane

Main Street continues from the Evesham Road junction by the Church and School and slopes gently downhill in an easterly direction towards the T junction with Atch Lench Road and Low Road. On Main Street itself there is a mix of old and new, two- and three-story dwellings, with a number of half-timbered traditional medieval buildings typical of many houses in the Wychavon area. This is the oldest part of the village and includes most of the Conservation Area and several listed buildings.

On the north side of Main Street at the highest point of the village is All Saints Church which is the defining feature of Church Lench.

Main Street consists of some distinctive listed and unlisted old timber black and white and timber framed cottages and a few large 19th and 20th Century houses, all in the Conservation Area.

Timber-framed cottages and red brick houses are a key characteristic of Church Lench and are in evidence throughout this street.

Malthouse Lane is a narrow lane running off Main Street and sits mostly within the Conservation area. There are some traditional old timber framed workers cottages and some Victorian terraced properties, as well as Toy Cottage which is black and white and retains its thatched roof. This is reputedly the smallest timber-framed house in Worcestershire, hence the name.

The Croft is a ribbon development cul-de-sac consisting of detached and semi-detached houses and terraced, semi-detached and detached bungalows built mostly in the fifties/sixties. Most of these are privately owned and some are low cost/affordable properties.

Low Road leads to the neighbouring small village of Rous Lench (c3 km). Housing development on Low Road follows the linear settlement pattern of Church Lench with mixed dwellings flanking both sides. The road is a narrow-metalled road rising gently upwards into the village. There are no pavements or street lighting along the whole length of this road, and the roadside edges simply join the gardens and some green verges. Low road is bounded along most of its length by hedges of varying heights and large native trees which give it a very rural and green appearance, and open fields and woodland can be seen between many houses.

The houses are a mix of styles and designs ranging from 20th Century houses built of traditional red brick and slate, to a few older cottages several hundred years old, featuring black and white timber frames and thatch roof. Most houses can be seen from the road and primarily have smaller front gardens with extensive rear gardens. Behind the eastern side houses is open countryside falling downhill and across the shallow valley.

Almost directly opposite the junction from Low Road to Main Street, and offset to the right is the houses of Malthouse Lane - distinctive traditional old farm workers black and white buildings which are part of the Church Lench Conservation Area

Atch Lench Road

From the junction with Main Street and Low Road, Atch Lench Road is a narrow road sloping downhill. It runs from west to east down a shallow valley to Whitsun Brook at the bottom of the hill before rising up a steep hill, up to the small village of Atch Lench.

Whitsun Brook runs around the village boundaries and has been a home to great crested newts in the past. An Iron Age skeleton was discovered in the banks to the north of the village some years ago.

Atch Lench Road has experienced linear development throughout the 19th and 20th Century and has an eclectic mix of residential properties including bungalows and extended bungalows, dormer style 1970s houses and some larger red brick/rendered houses. Most dwellings on the northern side of the road are set back from the road with some long garden frontages and large rear gardens which mostly back onto extant medieval ridge and furrow fields on the hillside behind.

On the south side of Atch Lench Road, moving downhill, there are a large number of white rendered, semi-detached houses originally designed as social housing/Council houses but now a mixture of privately owned & Housing Association residential properties. The frontages vary from open views of the properties to a mix of hedging and brick walls of various heights.

There are no pavements on the northern side of the road, only grass verges. Many driveways have had brick edging inserted by the Council to prevent run off of rainwater from the road into gardens. The south side is paved from the bend down to the bridge over Whitsun Brook at the bottom of the hill and the end of the village.

It should be noted that because of the steady incline down the length of Atch Lench Road it is subject to significant rainwater run-off and a few times has overwhelmed the drainage system.

Atch Lench Road continues out of the village steeply uphill towards Atch Lench and the narrow road is bounded by natural roadside hedging on both sides.

Atch Lench

Atch Lench is an ancient settlement sitting on the top of a hill (height 105 m above sea level) overlooking Harvington, the Vale of Evesham and the Cotswolds to the east and the Malvern Hills to the west. Atch Lench was part of the land which belonged to the Church from early times and earliest written references date back to the 7th Century AD.

Although we call Atch Lench a village, it is not classed as such by South Worcestershire Development Plan (2016). Apart from Church Lench all the other settlements making up the South Lenches are classified as open countryside. Atch Lench is a typical Timbered Plateau settlement with linear development and in the heart of the village there is a small Conservation Area of older houses and cottages. The village is residential with the exception of Manor Farm. Atch Lench is separated from Church Lench by c.300m.

The approach to Atch Lench from Harvington, about 2.5 km to the east, is via a narrow country road, lined with established mixed hedgerows and some native trees.

Before entering the village, from Harvington is a community owned orchard of about 11.131 acres. This is proposed as a Local Green Space. The orchard has a frontage to the road of about 500m.

On entering the village, on the right is the Atch Lench Baptist Chapel, built in the 1850s. The chapel is now privately owned and has been converted into residential premises. Chapel Lane runs north along the side of the Baptist Chapel graveyard and serves three houses, one of which is an old three storey brick-built farmhouse - Firs Farmhouse. The track and bridleway lead to open countryside and arable fields and runs along the crest of a hill, called the 'Lenches Ridgeway' with panoramic views to the east, of Harvington and the Cotswolds.

Continuing along the main street of Atch Lench, on the left (south side) there is a large old farmhouse (Manor Farm) with a high walled frontage and a post box embedded in the wall. Farm buildings can be seen to the rear, and the farm now is arable only.

Moving west towards Church Lench the road narrows to a left-hand bend between a red brick, barn conversion and The Old Manse. Continuing along the main street there are a number of old timber-framed, thatched cottages and some Victorian red brick tiled.

Halfway down the main street, on the south side, there is an ancient cruck frame black and white thatched cottage on the left - Manor Farm Cottage- which is late 13th Century in origin and is still occupied today. This is the start of the extensive Conservation Area which runs from here to the far side of Court House Farm over halfway through the village. There are no pavements in the village beyond the Chapel and frontages tend to be either directly onto the roadside or with small front gardens - some with parking space and hedges or small stone walls.

Leaving the Conservation area there is an eclectic mix of more modern houses and bungalows of differing sizes and with larger front gardens and large rear gardens. Most of these are set higher than the road on both sides. There are a number of large trees in gardens and most front gardens are hedged or walled.

There are defined Development Boundaries protecting the village following the usual pattern along the rear of the property gardens and there is no obvious space for further infill development.

Ab Lench

Ab Lench is small hamlet just over 1 km east of Church Lench with a dozen scattered dwellings and farms along Ab Lench Road, Bishampton Road and Rous Lench Road either side of the central T junction of all three roads. There were five working farms of which four were sold off in the twenties and thirties. It is in open countryside at the bottom of Bishampton Bank down the western slopes of the Lenches plateau. There are one or two older farm buildings on the way down the road built of red brick and tiled, such as Rookery Farm. There is a large and active Lenchwood Christian Centre at Spitten Farm.

Entering the hamlet there are a few red brick houses - some with a farming history - and then farm buildings on the crossroads. Brookfield Farm (197 acres of arable and dairy land) has sold its cows, as keeping livestock becomes less attractive and is now converting barns into private dwellings.

Ten small holiday cottages in the centre of Ab Lench have been converted back into private dwellings (2017/18) and have added significantly to the stock of affordable small homes in the parish.

Ab Lench has been part of the old Rous Lench Manorial properties for centuries. Buildings are mainly red brick and tile with one or two more modern buildings. Some of the older ones were rebuilt in the mid-1800s in the so-called 'Great Rebuilding'.

Those buildings are easily recognised today as they invariably include a prominent date-stone, showing the year of construction and the relevant initials (ChRB or WKWCC).

Sheriffs Lench

A scattered settlement in the open countryside with a long agricultural history sitting approximately 3.4 km south of Church Lench and approached from the west (from Bishampton road) along a narrow country road (Hill Furze Road). The road is bounded by natural mixed hedging with occasional glimpses of open country.

The village is set in a linear pattern in the middle of open countryside with mixed farming of arable and livestock and hedged fields with Bishampton Bank and Church Lench to the north, Hipton Hill to the east and Craycombe to the south and southeast. There are no facilities in Sheriffs Lench, although there is a bus-stop at Handgate Farm, just to the north of the village.

Heading south-west from Handgate Farm, towards Sheriffs Lench, the first buildings on the right-hand side are those of the old Observatory (behind barbed wire) which are Grade II listed and have been abandoned since the 1960s. Early in the second World War 2.25 acres of land at O.S. field number 2943 were requisitioned by the Air Ministry and a VHF wireless station to serve RAF Pershore was established which later became a ballistic missile and satellite tracking station. All activity ceased in 1990. The Wychavon Way footpath forms one side of the site boundary.

The observatory site has recently had planning permission accepted to turn the buildings into holiday accommodation.

Continuing the theme across the Lenches are traditional old black and white timber framed cottages of probably similar age (17th/18th century). Behind these cottages, there is a medieval site in the field behind. Local Blue Lias stone features in cottages dating from 1740 and 1760 as well as further red-bricked houses which carry the marker stone (WKWCC 1867), showing they were part of Chafy-Chafy's mid-19th century rebuilding programme in the parish.

Very extensive planting of thousands of saplings is evident in nearby fields which now belong to the Heart of England organisation which is dedicated to replacing traditional old woods.

6 DESIGN PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR ALL DEVELOPMENT

Given the Lenches history, detailed character assessment and plethora of ancient buildings, these guidelines are designed to take the tradition and character of the villages into account while aiding new development, by

- understanding features and architectural details of valued historical buildings
- using stone boundary walls and hedges
- being sensitive to key views from the village
- retaining greens, verges and trees
- being sympathetic to the green belt between the villages

Ensure development is in keeping with the villages, by

- thorough site appraisal, so that design is appropriate in size, sensitive to location and respects the context of adjacent buildings
- use of materials appropriate to the location
- demanding high standards of design and workmanship and use of traditional detailing in the older areas, avoidance of reconstituted/synthetic materials, untypical finishes, inappropriate entrance drives
- avoiding obtrusive lighting, using down-lighting in preference to up-lighting to minimise light pollution and in keeping with our neighbourhood Plan Dark Skies policy number 16

Making development sensitive to surrounding by ensuring

- developments/alterations in conservation areas do not detract from their surroundings
- that, outside conservation areas, design is interesting and/or original without being intrusive or detracting from the village approaches
- use of architects with good understanding of local traditions and design, so that buildings make a positive contribution to the area

7 GUIDELINES FOR NEW DEVELOPMENT

The unique and individual character of the Lenches villages should form the context for all new design and planning. This context should be identified prior to drawing up plans and form the basis of all planning applications. The traditions of local building should be integrated with current technologies to produce architecture that is appropriate for today but respectful of the past.

New buildings must be harmonious with, and appropriate to, their location in scale and design.

This means:

- infilling should not obscure key views of the surrounding landscape
- and those at the periphery of the villages should harmonise with surrounding countryside
- materials should harmonise with surrounding buildings
- new buildings should respect neighbouring roof profiles and pitches, as well as the characteristic spacing between or in front of surrounding buildings
- ridgelines should, in general, be low, especially within historic areas, and roofs be gable- ended rather than hipped
- window style and size should reflect local tradition
- detailing should follow traditional design and avoid intrusive dormer windows, flat roofs, ostentatious entrances and gates
- “standardised” house design should be avoided

DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Design and layout should be appropriate and sympathetic to the village's appearance. The layout of new groups of housing should respect the villages' linear tradition and the sympathetic, organic expansion in each village where buildings sit side by side with surrounding landscape

DETAILS AND MATERIALS

The rural character and appearance of new buildings are an important part of South Lenches. New Development should therefore reflect the historic environment on which the communities have expanded organically over the centuries.

New development proposals should allow for the retention of open space between buildings to retain balance and to protect existing views within the villages and out into the open countryside.

Timber framed cottages and houses are a feature of Church Lench and Atch Lench, along with traditional red brick houses. New buildings should reflect this local context in materials, design and layout. While there is not one specific design or layout across any of the villages, there are historic features which need to be taken into consideration

BRICK WORK

- Red brick reflects the rich red / orange tones of the bricks used from before and up to the 19th century
- Examples of painted brick and rendered brick work are common
- Contrasting brick work features particularly in Church Lench
- Date stones are used in both old and new buildings

WINDOW DESIGN

- Sash, casement, diamond shaped, fixed, bay and dormer windows are in evidence in all villages.

DOOR DESIGN

- Timber paneled doors as a practical feature of the rural character

OTHER DESIGN DETAILS

- Thatched roofs are in evidence primarily in Atch Lench and Church Lench.
- Roof eaves details can include features such as dentil led eaves corbels
- Post and rail fencing reflects historic agricultural / horticultural practices and is a characteristic of the heritage seen across the Lenches villages. Where appropriate, this style of fencing is encouraged

ENVIRONMENT

Environmental Assessment

Renewable energy can be generated in communities such as the South Lenches in a variety of ways without damaging the beauty of the landscape or the appearance of traditional buildings. The move to free-up planning controls on solar photovoltaic panels and solar water heating is to be welcomed as long as strict guidelines are observed, particularly where listed buildings are concerned.

We encourage use of solar energy in all new developments.

Solar voltaic panels and solar water heating

Our communities support the use of solar power, and many residents have chosen to retro-fit appropriate solar panels to their dwellings. Voltaic panels can generate 25% of an average household's annual electricity directly from sunlight and surplus electricity can be sold back to the National Grid. New roofs, e.g. on house extensions, are eminently suitable for such a system.

Panels are typically composed of a number of small tiles fitted together to form a unit of varying dimensions. Tiles with the appearance of Welsh slate can be obtained, which would be appropriate for some properties in the villages. Panels can also be obtained in cladding materials, suitable for the roofs of agricultural or domestic outbuildings. Where listed buildings and conservation areas are concerned, it would not be acceptable for the solar panels to be visible either on the property or from significant views. However, panels can often be sited without harming the character and appearance of the buildings. Solar panels for heating water using the sun's energy are either evacuated tube collectors or flat plates, usually black in colour. Both are designed for installation on south facing roof slopes. Their installation should be subject to the same planning safeguards as voltaic panels, particularly on listed buildings.

Additional sources of renewable energy could include small-scale hydroelectric systems using local water courses, wood-fired heating (though this may have significant energy and pollution costs) and heat pumps.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Landscape and Visual Impact

Landscaping relating to new development should consist of native species which reflects existing planting, examples of which can be seen with the Heart of England forestry planting between Church Lench and Sheriff's Lench and extensive tree planting on the land on Low Road leading up to the Parish Boundary with Rous Lench.

The planting of trees and hedges is welcome, but care should be taken not to obscure valued views. Streets lined with shrubs and trees are in evidence throughout the South Lenches.

New development should avoid encroaching on the root protection zone of mature or established trees or lopping to a degree that would materially hinder the future growth of the tree.

Planting of vigorous conifers, such as leylandii, is not appropriate.