

Frensham Parish Council

Village Design Statement

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Double page spread of parish map in the centre of document

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What is a Village Design Statement?

A Village Design Statement (VDS) highlights the qualities, style, building materials, characteristics and landscape setting of a parish, which are valued by its residents. The background, advice and guidelines given herein should be taken into account by developers, builders and residents before considering development.

The main document outlining development policies for the Frensham Parish area is Waverley Borough Council's Local Plan, which is reviewed and updated every five years. This is set within the framework of Government advice and regional and Surrey planning policies. We intend that Frensham's VDS will be adopted as non-statutory planning guidance reinforcing the Local Plan and Waverley's Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Over recent years the Parish Council Planning Committee, seeing very many applications relating to our special area, came to the conclusion that our area has individual and special requirements that we wish to see incorporated into the planning system. Hopefully this will make the Parish's requirements clearer to those submitting applications and give clear policy guidance. This document cannot be exhaustive but we hope that we have included sufficient detail to indicate what we would like to conserve in our village, and how we would like to see it develop.

This VDS is a 'snapshot' reflecting the Parish's views and situation in 2007, and may need to be reviewed in the future in line with changing local needs, and new Waverley, regional and national plans and policies.

This statement has been compiled using the Parish questionnaire responses (all households were surveyed in 2004/5 with a 25% response) and in the light of the Parish Plan subsequently produced by the Council, discussed at the Parish annual assembly and displayed on the FPC web-site. Many individuals and organisations across the Parish helped with production of the various sections of the Statement, which was then circulated (in summary form) in the Parish newsletter with the full document available on the web-site. The full document was then discussed and agreed at the Parish Annual Assembly in April 2007.

The Parish Council wishes to thank all those who have helped to produce this VDS.

Introduction & History

The Parish of Frensham lies in the Southwest corner of Surrey, close to the Hampshire border. Apart from the two villages of Rushmoor and Frensham, some farms and small-holdings, the vast majority of the parish is open countryside owned and protected by national (the National Trust, the RSPB, and the Countryside Restoration Trust) or local (Waverley Borough Council) organisations dedicated to protecting and preserving the environment.

There is evidence of settlements (including tumuli) on Frensham Common and around the Great Pond dating back 8000 years, and the area seems to have been continuously occupied since Neolithic times. Our ancestors have shaped the landscape of heathland and oak woodlands by grazing cattle and foraging, and the two Ponds were created, damned and managed to supply fish for hundreds of years. Frensham Church dates from Norman times, and several village houses are over 400 years old. With no major routes through the parish, Frensham remained a largely agricultural community until the mid-20th century. The settlement at Rushmoor grew up after WWII around existing footpaths and bridleways to the east of the Little Pond, and even today children walk to school in Frensham village along these ancient footpaths.

Apart from agriculture there are **no large or medium size industrial or commercial sites**, and our survey showed a clear desire by residents to keep things this way. Most residents today are commuters but there are a growing number of home-based workers, adding to those employed locally in agriculture, tourism and the timber business. There are a significant number of retired residents with 40% of households responding to a recent survey comprising people over 65. Although there are many residents whose families have lived locally for generations, there is also a steady influx of younger 'newcomers' with an annual household turnover of about 10%, helping to maintain a good mix of age groups.

With this background it is no surprise that there is a deep sense of continuity with the past; the rural agricultural 'feel' of the Parish is greatly valued by all residents, old and new.

It is important to maintain the separate identities of Rushmoor and Frensham villages and to prevent the gradual encroachment of other settlements such as Rowledge (to the north of Frensham) and ribbon development along the main road from Tilford to Rushmoor. The existing 'gaps' between the villages should be preserved and protected from development.

Open Spaces and Landscape Features

The Parish comprises open countryside of designated **high landscape quality**, including Frensham Common, a beautiful area of heathland and light woodlands of international importance for nature conservation, in which nestle the small communities that make up Frensham Village and Rushmoor. The Common is owned and managed by the National Trust and Waverley BC. With Pierrepont (a large dairy farm) now owned by the Countryside Restoration Trust and Tankersford Common taken over by the RSPB, a large part of the Parish is protected from development. The Parish is bounded to the west by the 2000-acre Alice Holt Forest owned by Forest Enterprise and to the east by Hankley Common, a MoD site that is part of the Wealden Heath Special Protection Area, which includes Frensham Common itself.

The whole of the Parish lies within the **Surrey Area of Great Landscape Value** (AGLV), and some 65% of it lies within the Surrey Hills AONB. We believe there is no discernable difference in the landscape quality of those areas within the AONB and the rest of the Parish, and would wish to see the AONB extended to cover the entire Parish.

The landscape quality varies from the open heathland and light woodland in the east of the parish to the agricultural landscapes in the west. There are rolling hills, a mixture of large arable fields, small pastures and meadowland, hedgerows and mature hedgerow trees and significant areas of broadleaved woodland. All are dissected by the river Wey, its tributaries and its associated river meadows.

The open countryside offers several **splendid views**, including along the King's Ridge in Frensham Common, in the river valley, along Pitt Lane, and on the ridge leading from Shortfield Common to the Bluebell Public House on the border with Dockenfield.

Photo of view from Kings Ridge

Following the decline of the traditional grazing and foraging activities on the Common, and where there is no proper management, the heathland is suffering an invasion of conifer and birch. After WWII many pines were planted around Tankersford to provide timber for coalmines, and Rushmoor in particular is now heavily wooded with pines, to the exclusion of other indigenous species. The RSPB project at Tankersford (now called Farnham Heath) is clearing these 50-year-old trees to re-create the traditional heathland and provide habitat for rare birds such as woodlark and Dartford Warblers. As this increases the attractiveness of the area and helps to restore indigenous flora & fauna, the Parish supports the project and welcomes all attempts to restore and maintain the **natural heathland** habitat.

Photo of Cleared RSPB land &? Warbler

In addition to the CRT dairy farm there are several farms and smallholdings in the Parish, mostly cattle and arable, but with some sheep. This **active farming** has done much to create and preserve the uniqueness of

Frensham's open spaces and should be supported where possible. Any move to re-classify current agricultural land should generally be opposed. Recently a number of fields have been turned over to grazing for horses, and this seems a growing trend. In extreme cases fields have been sub-divided into paddocks with access and hard standing created for horseboxes, stables built, with a yard, services connected, and flood lights erected. This gradual loss of rural feel must be avoided, so **stable numbers should be limited**, and their siting should be unobtrusive. Existing field sizes should be retained, and the minimum acreage per horse specified by the British Horse Society should be observed or exceeded. There should be no floodlighting at all.

Photo of Woodside Stud "Disproportionate"

Farmland to the west of the Parish (and elsewhere) has been identified as having significant **deposits of sand** suitable for building purposes. Whilst Surrey County Council currently has no plans to extract this, our survey shows a very strong wish to ensure that it never happens. Apart from the considerable loss of landscape amenity, any extraction would entail heavy traffic for which our narrow country lanes are totally unsuited. Upgrading the area (around Pitt Farm) from AGLV to **AONB** would inhibit such activities, and would take the Surrey Hills AONB virtually to the borders of the proposed South Downs National Park.

Photo of narrow portion of West End Lane

The prevalence of conifers, spreading like weeds to the east of the Parish has already been mentioned; there is little support for their retention, but there are many native, character, deciduous **trees** which should, in any development, be retained, or, if absolutely necessary, replaced. There are some 40 'Veteran Oaks' identified as over 400 yrs old on the bridleway from the War Memorial to Tankersford, with several more abutting the Reeds Rd. These 'Smugglers' Oaks' should be protected.

Photo of Oak tree in Reeds Rd

The many roadside **verges** encourage local flora and bio-diversity and as such are valued by residents. Shortfield Common & Woods are the responsibility of the Parish Council and we are committed to retaining them as they are, and wish to open up a wild life corridor from the Common through Spreakley to the woodlands above Pitt Farm.

Frensham Common includes over a thousand acres of the Wealden Heath **Special Protection Area** (SPA), which extends eastwards as far as Witley. The SPA is an international designation, which recognises the global importance for nature conservation of the Surrey lowland heaths and entails a very high degree of protection from development. The comparative absence of intensive farming in the Parish, the quality of the habitat with an abundance of broadleaved woodland and hedgerow trees, the influence of the River Wey and its tributaries and the buffering effect of Alice Holt Forest on the western boundary mean the Parish is ideally qualified as an "**ecologically functional area**" within Natural England policies. We will work to achieve this designation so as to facilitate future 'landscape-scale' conservation.

Building Style & Detail

Farmland and the area of Frensham Common around the Little Pond separate the two main settlements of the parish, Frensham Village and Rushmoor. Neither ward has a village 'centre' as such although the shops and Post Office on the west side of the Tilford straight provide a useful meeting point. Frensham village has St Mary's Church and primary school to the south of the river Wey linked by footpath to the pub, community shop/Post Office and recreation ground to the north. There are a number of hamlets dispersed around the village, including Millbridge to the east, Peakfield to the south and Hammonds Wood to the west.

The two wards are also separated by period, with Frensham Village being predominately Victorian/Edwardian, with hardly any recent 'new builds' and Rushmoor being largely 20th century. In view of this there are separate guidelines for each ward, as well as a number of general points.

Photo of St Mary's

Frensham Village

Although there are a number of larger houses dating back over two centuries (e.g. Hall's Place), and some even older farm houses, most of the current houses were developed in the Victorian or Edwardian periods, with a characteristic style of steep pitched roofs of slate or plain clay tiles, gable ends, barge boards and decorative tile hanging. There are also some half-timbered buildings. Dormer windows are common in all shapes and sizes, giving a pleasing variety. Generally there is mix of one or two storey dwellings with the occasional three-storey house where the natural lie of the land dictates. (e.g. South View Cottages).

Photo of South View Cottages

There are many semi-detached or terraced properties in the village where extension is unfeasible and this ensures a good mix of residential use (singles, retired couples, young families, etc) that in turn helps to maintain a well-mixed community. Most properties enjoy both front and back gardens, usually with a garage, and there are some very large gardens (e.g.) which help to maintain the rural nature of the Parish, and should be retained.

Our survey showed a great appreciation of the present, cosy, architectural feel to the village and a clear wish for its retention and so future developments should respect this. The characteristic Frensham style of steep-pitched roofs, gables, tile hanging and dormer windows is to be encouraged, and the introduction of 'town house' style and unsympathetic architecture should be opposed. The use of traditional materials such as clay tiles, Bargate stone and Selbourne bricks (or similar) is to be encouraged. Any new development should take into account the height, character and mass of adjoining buildings. Recently there have been a number of applications to replace a single medium-sized dwelling on a larger plot with several 'executive-style' homes, thus creating individual plots that are much smaller than the surrounding properties. This is strongly opposed by residents. Gardens should be retained, not 'grabbed' for building (e.g. Overside). New

developments should include some smaller dwellings where possible so as to retain the existing mix of house sizes and thus a balanced community.

Rushmoor

The more recent development of Rushmoor is reflected in the building style, with no overall 'look' to Rushmoor properties. The plot sizes are generally large, containing what were originally small (or smaller) houses many of which have been extended over the past twenty years to give larger family homes. The original open heathland appearance of the village has been obscured by the spread of pine trees giving a shady, back-water, feel. The variety of modern house styles produces, in its own way, a characteristic look for Rushmoor that should be maintained, with slightly more modern, late 20th-century designs being encouraged. From our survey it is clear that the residents of this largely commuter-land area are opposed to extensive housing development, support reasonable house extensions, and wish to enjoy their homes with as little council 'interference' as possible.

General Points

Where an established **building line** exists, all developments should respect this. (eg Holly Bush Lane – photo showing non-adherence). Verges and front gardens are greatly valued by residents and should be retained, particularly for those parts of the parish where no pavement exists. Buildings should only exceed **two-storeys** where roof dormers are used for the third storey, and **flat roofs** are to be avoided whenever possible.

Our survey shows **car parking** to be an increasing problem throughout the parish, with more and more 'on-street' parking causing traffic difficulties, especially around two Post Offices, and the two Community Projects planned by the Parish Council will partially address this. The increase in the number of vehicles owned by villagers is inevitable (our survey showed several households with more than 4 cars), so any new buildings or extensions should be capable of providing off-road parking of **one vehicle per bedroom**, to ease the pressure on narrow lanes. The current tendency to convert garages into residential accommodation should only be permitted where alternative off-street parking is made available.

Parking by St Mary's School at peak times is becoming hazardous, and the Council will continue to press Surrey Highways to sequester a portion of the village green from the National Trust for school parking.

There are a number of problems with what could be designated as '**creeping development**'. Care should be taken over planning applications for **log cabins**, caravans, summerhouses, and the like, lest they effectively become full residential dwellings in their own right. Accordingly no approvals should be given for bathroom/toilet facilities in such cases. Similar care should be taken over plans for outbuildings associated with horses (and other animals) which can become excessive, with new tracks, wider entrances, installation of services, vehicle parking, and so on, leading ultimately to de facto residential

use. However, the Parish does not wish to discourage in any way horse ownership and use.

Despite the above, where suitable **vacant farm or industrial buildings** exist, we would encourage applications to convert them to residential dwellings, thus increasing the stock of houses in the parish as we are conscious of the very limited opportunities there are for new development.

Highways and Byways

Footpaths:

An important and distinctive feature of the parish is the complex of quiet lanes, bridleways and footpaths linking the separate parts of Frensham village and connecting the two halves of the Parish with Frensham Common; these paths are valued by both residents and visitors, and help to reduce pollution. Much of the Parish is more directly interconnected by footpaths than roads; children still walk to school from Rushmore across the common to St Mary's in Frensham, and the easiest route from The Street to Shortfield Common is by footpath. These paths should be retained and protected.

Photo of footpath & bridge by cemetery

Of major concern to residents is the Bridleway Open to All Traffic (**BOAT**) running from the end of Sandy Lane across the Common to Grange Rd. Historically local residents objected unsuccessfully when the BOAT designation was made, although there were no compelling reasons to allow traffic. All groups of Common users object to the occasional car or motorcycle using this track, and the wardens say it makes their life more difficult, encouraging litter and vandals, and discouraging wildlife. We will continue to push for this track to be downgraded to a simple bridleway.

Roads:

Apart from the two main roads through the Parish (A287 and the Tilford Rd), the roads are narrow, winding and generally unsuitable for heavy traffic although there is an inevitable growth in local traffic and delivery vehicles. We propose to work for '**Quiet Lane**' designation for Sandy Lane, The Street and other village lanes so as to retain the current rural feel.

The Reeds Rd, Grange Rd/Priory Lane, and the roads around the Great Pond are tree-lined rural lanes without pavements or road markings, and should be protected to retain their rural character. Where alterations to existing properties or boundaries are proposed, their design should not be allowed to spoil this character, or to damage the areas of environmental importance.

Finally the Parish survey was strongly against any form of street lighting, which should not therefore be introduced. With the existing low level of background noise, and a minimum of light pollution, the area enjoys **an intrinsically dark and quiet tranquillity**, which we wish to preserve.

Residents are in favour of stricter speed limits and traffic calming measures (pinch points, speed humps) on both main roads (A287 & Tilford Rd) where

they pass the village centres. Off these roads there is a wish to restrict the number and size of all **street furniture**, speed signs, etc so as to reduce their urbanising effect. The current proposals to (finally) introduce speed limits through the Street and Shortfield Common are welcome. Local residents have volunteered to operate speed cameras along speed sensitive stretches of road in liaison with Surrey Police to record and report speeding drivers. This initiative is being co-ordinated by the Parish Council

Generally properties in the parish reflect the rural feel with **boundaries** of either bush & hedge; where fences are used they are usually low palings or of post & rail construction. Six foot high close-boarded fencing introduces an incongruous suburban feel and should be avoided where possible.

Sports & Rural Pursuits

The Parish is greatly enhanced by the wide range of sporting and recreational activities undertaken. There are thriving football, tennis, bowls, and cricket clubs, all playing on the Hollowdene recreation ground so generously donated to the Parish by Mme Huitfeldt, with the excellent pavilion built largely by the clubs themselves and maintained by the Parish Council. Rural pursuits are actively supported, with sailing on the Great Pond and riding on the Common being well known nationally, and shooting and fishing also very popular.

These activities all help to create and maintain a **strong sense of community**, encourage physical well-being and also help to conserve the environment. The sailing club help to keep the Pond from silting up, the shooters help maintain the woodland, riders keep paths open, and fishermen help with the management of the Ponds. They are all greatly valued. The Parish and its surroundings are unrivalled for walkers with open access over Frensham Common, Hankley Common and Alice Holt Forest and a good network of public footpaths. Frensham Common attracts visitors from far and wide, so much so that the current management plan sensibly adopts policies of restraint to minimise the damage to the fragile heathland habitat by excessive visitor numbers.

Photo of Hollowdene when active