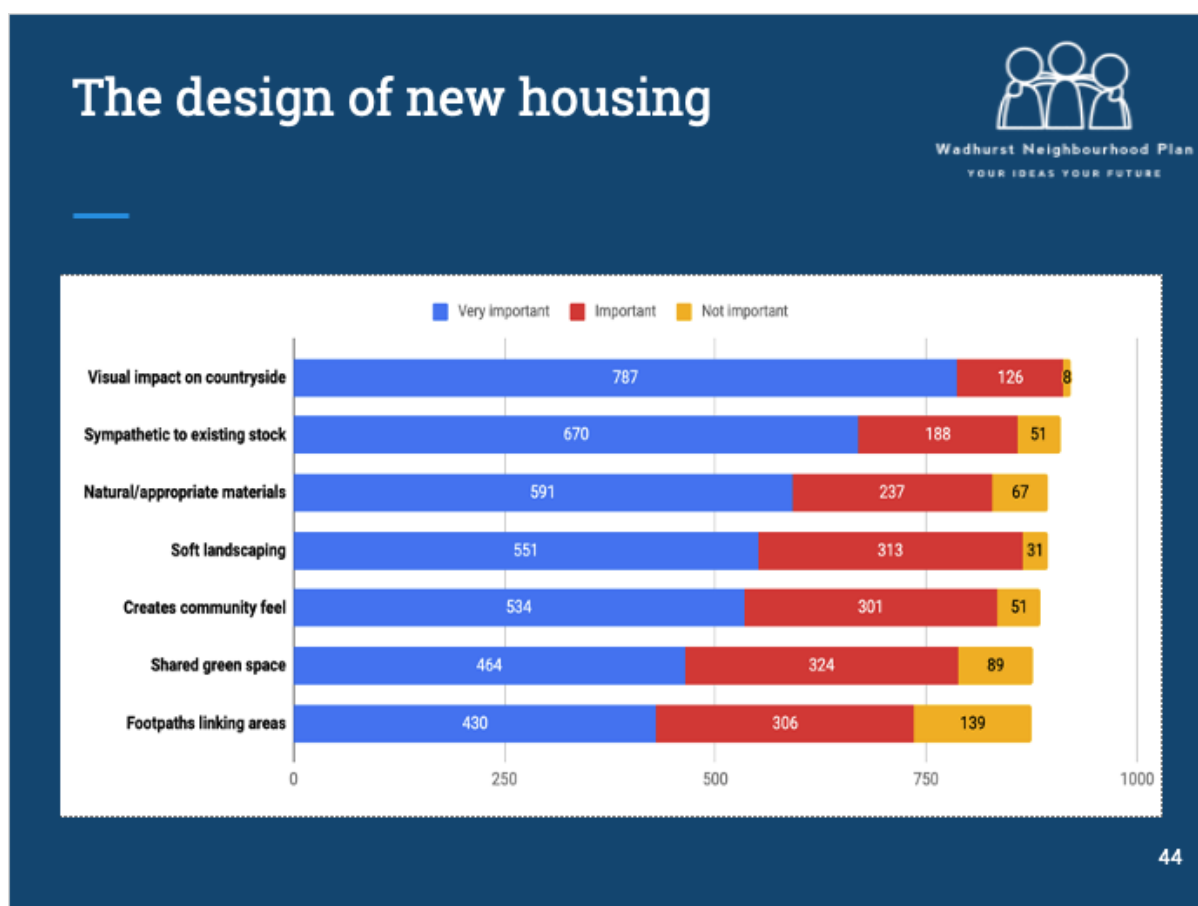


Wonderful Wadhurst – a gem in the High Weald AONB

Why we need a design code to protect Wadhurst's place in the AONB

The Design Code within the Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan has been developed in order to address resident desires for the Parish to maintain its rural village feel. These wishes were expressed in the household survey which overwhelmingly supported designs that minimise the visual impact on the countryside, are sympathetic to existing housing stock, use natural appropriate materials and incorporate soft landscaping and green spaces. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: Extract from the Wadhurst Neighbourhood Plan Household Survey Results showing the items of most importance, to respondents, of different factors in new housing design



These wishes align closely with the statutory protection objectives of the AONB designation and High Weald AONB Management Plan. Larger settlements within the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (such as Heathfield, Crowborough and Tunbridge Wells(See Figure 2) are specifically excluded from the AONB and consequently do not have the protection afforded by AONB designation. It is widely recognised that these settlements have been urbanised and no longer retain a rural village feel. It is therefore imperative that all of Wadhurst Parish remains within the AONB if the 'rural village feel' is to be retained.

Figure 2: Boundary map of the High Weald AONB showing the exclusion of Heathfield, Crowborough and Tunbridge Wells



Wadhurst's AONB designation is predicated on the 'Natural Outstanding Beauty' of both its natural and built environment. Hence, it logically follows that to remain within the AONB Wadhurst's built environment must retain its distinctive character to remain "Outstandingly Beautiful".

In fact, the High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide states that "*The dilution of local distinctiveness is harmful to the character of the High Weald*". Additionally, the High Weald AONB Management Plan states that the top threats to the distinctive character of its settlements are;

- an increase in greenfield development pressure for housing
- generic layout and design of new housing developments
- suburbanisation, including pressure for residential intensification

These threats are particularly pertinent to Wadhurst as Wadhurst has been singled out as the only "High Growth Potential" rural settlement in the High Weald AONB by Wealden District Council in its Core Strategy Local Plan (2013). (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Extract from Wealden District Council's Core Strategy Local Plan (2013) showing Wadhurst as the only rural settlement in the High Weald AONB with 'high growth potential'

6 Local Spatial Implications of the Strategy

Figure 11 Growth potential of rural settlements and where development boundaries will be retained



Key to protecting the distinctive character of the built environment is to ensure that new development is in keeping.

The solutions listed in the High Weald AONB Management Plan, to ensure development reflects local character, focus on the utilisation of design guidance published by the High Weald AONB unit.

Unfortunately, adhering to this guidance is not currently mandatory for developments in Wealden.

Hence, the Wadhurst Parish Council has commissioned a Design Code for Wadhurst as part of its Neighbourhood Plan.

As a statutory document, the 'made' Neighbourhood Plan, including its Design Code, must be taken into account when the local planning authority (Wealden District Council) decide planning applications.

The Design Code has been created in consultation with residents and with regard to the guidance of the High Weald AONB Unit as well as other relevant planning documents. The Design Code is the distillation of the essential components of Wadhurst's distinctive character into a simple to use format.

Whilst some might see the use of terms in the 'Design Code' such as 'must' / 'could' / 'should' as being prescriptive, it is important to note that the Design Code has been created in line with the Government's new model Design Code framework and is intended to ensure that community wishes cannot be circumvented in the same way that 'guidance' can currently be ignored. It is also important to note that the Design Code applies to new buildings and extensions and not existing properties, for which the use of 'like for like' materials in any renovations is excepted.

The intention of the Design Code is therefore to ensure Wadhurst is a gem in the AONB by protecting it against out of character development; thereby ensuring that the 'Outstanding Beauty' of the built environment, which secured its position within the AONB, is retained.