

Weaverham Village Design Statement

Foreword

The guidelines set out in this document are intended to supplement policies in the development plan for the area. This is an essential pre-requisite of this document becoming supplementary planning guidance. In the case of Weaverham, this comprises the Cheshire 2011 Structure Plan (1999) and the Vale Royal Borough Local Plan First Review (2000). The key policies that this document has been framed around are:

Cheshire 2011 Structure Plan policies

- R1 Heritage conservation
- R2 Areas of Special County Value
- GEN3 General requirements for the quality of new development

Vale Royal Borough Local Plan First Review policies

- NE7 Protection and enhancement of landscape features
- NE8 Provision and enhancement of landscape in new development
- NE9 Trees and woodland
- BE1 Safeguarding and improving the quality of the environment
- BE12 Historic environment – Conservation Areas
- BE23 Conservation Area character appraisals

The guidelines also supplement the equivalent policies in the Cheshire 2016 Structure Plan Alteration and the Vale Royal Borough Local Plan First Review Alteration.

It should be noted that this document has been adopted by Vale Royal Borough Council insofar as the guidelines it contains can be used in the consideration of design matters when dealing with planning applications. The document has been produced by the community of Weaverham and expresses a number of views and aspirations which cannot be addressed through the development control process. These views and aspirations are nonetheless considered to be important to the local community.

Introduction

For the most part the history of Weaverham shows it to be a small and settled rural community in the heartlands of the County of Cheshire. The 20th Century, however, gave rise to significant change as demand for local labour at ICI's Mid Cheshire works far exceeded local supply. As a result significant areas of land within the parish boundary were developed for housing. Weaverham grew hugely in the 1920s and 1950s to take the village to its current size of some 6,500 people. Its built environment now covers many times the area of the old village but one of its main assets, immediate access to the countryside, remains. Other benefits include a wide range of facilities within the village and more are but a short bus ride away.

This Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement (VD&PLS) seeks to ensure that those characteristics of the village, a close knit community and a much loved place to live, are held in harmony with the aspirations of the Vale Royal Borough Local Plan as it seeks to continue to provide a haven for future generations.

Diary of Events and Activities*

The Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement has been prepared by a working group, consisting of local residents in partnership with the community of Weaverham. It presents design and landscape objectives that both the community and developers should consider in the event of building and landscape projects.

The consultation process has sought to involve the whole community. The village as a community has been involved at several stages during the development of the Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement. At the outset all village community groups were contacted and discussions held; several open days were held when the community and its organisations took part in activities aimed at describing and defining Weaverham's built and natural environment. The Parish Council and the Weaverham Trust were involved in the formulation of the VD&PLS, Vale Royal Borough Council was consulted about its content and finally the whole village was consulted with a draft VD&PLS for comment.

* See Appendix 1

History of Weaverham

The name Weaverham is Saxon in origin. 'Weverham, Wareham, Weeverham' have all been used to name 'the hamlet on the winding river'. The parish of Weaverham at one time consisted of the township of Weaverham with the Lordship of Sandiway and Gorstage and the townships of Acton, Cuddington, Crowton, Onston, Wallerscote, the hamlet of Milton and detached portions of Whitegate, Norley and Hartford.

The settlement may be older as some evidence is available of a Roman road branching off from Watling Street to cross the River Weaver. The crossing is the likely cause of a hamlet at this point, but the Saxon manor owes much to the ownership of the area by the Earl of Mercia. Weaverham appears in the Domesday Book (1086) where it is mentioned as having a resident priest and a Church. At this time it was one of the most important settlements in Cheshire. Only Chester, Nantwich and Eastham (on the Wirral) are recorded as being worth more.

The middle ages saw steady growth. In 1272 the last Baronial owner Roger de Clifford gave the manor to his wife Lauretania. On her death it passed to the Crown as part of the Earldom of Chester. In 1277 Edward 1st founded Vale Royal Abbey and part of the land given to the monks was the manor of Weaverham. The Cistercian monks of Vale Royal ruthlessly ruled over Weaverham for the next 300 years, probably from Hefferston Grange. The monks had a prison and a courthouse, the latter is presumed to have been on the site of the Grammar School in Weaverham.

After the dissolution of the monasteries Vale Royal Abbey and the manor of Weaverham were sold to Sir Thomas Holcroft. His brother was Vicar of Weaverham.

By 1721 Weaverham was changing greatly with the River Weaver becoming canalised, making it navigable from Frodsham to Winnington Bridge. Earl Barrymore (who had become Lord of the Manor in 1711) was appointed a Commissioner. The scheme was a success enabling salt (some from Weaverham) and local cheeses to be transported down the river.

In 1801 Weaverham was a rural community of 1040 people. This did not change significantly for over 100 years. However, in the 1920s, with the need for housing for the workers of ICI, Owley Wood housing estate was constructed. The challenge was to build 365 houses in 365 days. This fell to the construction company Williams Tarr of Warrington. The post war building boom followed, backed by Northwich Rural District Council, at

which time the population of Weaverham rose rapidly with many families settling here from Liverpool. By the 1970s the population was 7,936. Since then it has reduced to 6,794 (1991). Much of the population decline can be attributed to boundary changes. Although the population declined the numbers of housing units did not.

In the late 1950s and early 60s a parade of shops was built 100 yards due east of the Old Village, double yellow lines were painted along the length of the High Street and at this point the commercial heart of the old village began to die. It had become devoid of shops.

Spring 1994 brought the new A49 trunk road diversion on the edge of the village; this has alleviated the traffic problem on West Road and Sandy Lane, but still leaves the High Street and Station Road vulnerable.

The village has changed much since Ormerod (1785 - 1873) described it in 1819 as a charming village of courtyards and foaming blossoms. Most of the open farmland is now used for building and many of the inhabitants commute to employment elsewhere.

Settlement Pattern Character

The village has evolved over a long period. From its beginning until the 20th century it was a very rural community since when it has experienced several distinct periods of growth. Therefore its overall pattern has resolved into several distinct areas.

The first major development occurred in the 1920s when, to the northeast of the village centre, an estate of some 300 houses was constructed by ICI for its growing workforce.

For its time it was revolutionary in concept, design and layout. Many who lived there considered it to be a separate village. Some council building at Nicholas Road, Forster's Avenue and Morris Drive also date from this period.

In the 1950s a further but much larger public housing development took place to the east along either side of main Northwich Road. The three areas of build were known as Lime Avenue, Keepers Lane and Farm Road estates. Again they were well designed and generous in their layout of roads, pathways, public spaces and playing areas with an average of eight houses to the acre. The housing provision was also very varied to serve community needs being comprised of maisonettes, bungalows, two and three bedroom semi-detached and terraced houses. The estate layouts made provision for spacious greens, gardens and blocks of rented garages.

The original tenants of the Lime Avenue estate were mainly local people. The Farm Road and Keepers Lane estates were tenanted, in the main, by employees of ICI. Continued tenancy relied on continued employment with ICI. The Liverpool overspill was accommodated in these two estates.

In the early 1960s such tied tenancy was stopped. Today over 72% of all previous local authority housing in Weaverham is privately owned and the estates reflect the pride owners take in their properties.

The growth of the village resulted in the increase of shopping provision. The shopping parades at Lime Avenue and Northwich Road date from the 1950s to the early 1960s respectively.

Since the 1960s significant areas of farmland have succumbed to private development in a variety of architectural styles. The only remaining open spaces are those that are dedicated to specific use, primarily for sport or recreational areas. All the orchards, which were once a common feature throughout the

old village until the 1950s, have disappeared, with one exception.

The character of the street scene in the older parts of the village is similar to that found in many Cheshire villages. The High Street in particular is visually very pleasing. It has a diversity of architectural types, which evolved over many years. It was the commercial and retail centre of the village until the early 1960s.

When viewed from the air, one is impressed by the amount of open space within the village in particular within the former public housing areas - and every effort should be made to retain this. As well as the larger open areas of Lakehouse Field, the Cricket Field and the various school play and sports areas, one is impressed by the number of smaller 'squares / greens' which are a strong feature of the 1950s estates. Owley Wood and the adjacent meadow also contribute to this atmosphere and forms a natural transition to the wider countryside.

The relationship of buildings and spaces is a strong positive feature of most areas of the village, although the standard of design of buildings is very varied. All are well served with the proximity to open spaces. For example pensioners' bungalows are usually provided with access to lawned areas.

The 'modern' centre of the village is grouped around the most prominent open space - Lakehouse Field. The shopping parade on Northwich Road faces the field. Other community buildings - comprising the Community Centre, Youth Club, Doctor's Surgery, Library, Learner Pool, the Brownie Hut and Play Area are grouped together on the east side along Withens Lane and Russet Road. Weaverham High School and Forest Street Primary School border the south and west sides respectively.

Many of these buildings date from the 1950s, and some are of indifferent design and quality. The shopping parade in particular would benefit from a sympathetic design scheme to co-ordinate the fascias to improve the visual quality.

The Co-operative and Tesco supermarkets have recently set a good example by taking the initiative to improve their appearance.

It is the older parts of the village, which have lost some open areas in recent years to 'infill' development. It is felt that this has been detrimental to local character.

Settlement Character Guidelines

Weaverham's character and scale must be protected by limiting any further development to that which can be achieved within the existing boundary shown on the Local Plan.

Any development, should not involve the loss of open spaces that are important to the character of the village.

Scope for development in the older part of the village should be very strictly controlled and should take full account of the guidelines set out in the Conservation Area Appraisals.

New buildings or the replacement or refurbishment of existing buildings must respect the character of their immediate surroundings and the street scene. Careful attention should be given to materials, massing, scale and architectural style in this regard

Development within the village should be in keeping and reflect the existing scale and style in order to maintain the visual character and continuity of the area. Future housing schemes should be small in scale, be composed of a range of house types and, where possible, include pavements and provision for open spaces.

Existing open spaces are important to the character of the village and should be retained. Lakehouse Field is of major importance, being a vital part of the village centre atmosphere and the focal point of community activity. Other examples of open spaces that play an important part in village life range from Weaverham Cricket Field to smaller play areas and greens that are dispersed throughout the village.

The existing public rights of way network should be protected and, where possible, extended to new housing areas to provide safe routes for pedestrians to schools and the village centre.

Proposals for new public rights of way, to give access to the surrounding countryside and in particular the River Weaver area, should be encouraged and supported.

Existing mature trees in and around the village should be retained as part of new development. Development involving the unacceptable loss of such trees should be resisted unless there is significant new mitigating tree planting.

Buildings and Spaces in the Village

The distinct areas of the village have resulted in a diversity of characteristics. The older village has narrow streets, which evolved before the age of the car and most buildings front directly onto the street. There is a great variety of sizes and styles, although buildings are mainly two storeys and are of modest proportions. In High Street, cottages, shops, pubs, restaurants and small business premises combine to create an attractive street scene, although in recent years some buildings have changed their function and reverted to dwellings.

Together with High Street – Church Street, Forest Street and West Road have some distinctive buildings, many (18) being listed Grade II, while St. Mary's Church at the junction of Church Street and Church Lane is listed Grade I.

Many of the listed buildings are of the black and white, timber framed and thatched cottage type which are a feature of Cheshire, with the remainder being mainly of Cheshire brick [sometimes decorative] construction with slate roofs. Low sandstone walls and wooden paling type fencing are common in this area.

New buildings have 'infilled' throughout the area, but in the main have not been well integrated. The older village has two designated Conservation Areas, one that runs for most of the length of West Road. The second embraces most of the old village area of High Street, Church Street and Forest Street.

The early housing development at Owley Wood in the 1920s was well planned with tree-lined roads and homes grouped around allotment areas. House construction was unique with a steel framework clad in pebbledash and grey cement type brick; floors were of concrete and roofs were tiled. The developers, who were ICI, also provided a large recreation facility within the development, which consisted of tennis courts, bowling greens, a hall for social events and a bar. This facility continues to be a much-valued amenity. As many houses are now privately owned, they have been extended and have added porches, garages, new windows and doors, which in some instances have led to loss of the visual character. A pleasant feature of this estate is its tree lined roads, but its grassed roundabouts at the junctions of some of the main thoroughfares were removed in the 1970s to accommodate large service vehicles as continued over runs had rendered the roundabouts an eyesore. It is felt locally that the Owley Wood Estate may merit consideration for Conservation Area status.

Visual integration with adjacent properties should be a consideration when properties are modified, or, extended. For example Conservation Area boundaries, being irregular may lead to adjacent buildings, sometimes in the same road, being treated totally differently.

There has been local concern about the damage to/loss of trees by Scottish Power as they seek to keep overhead electrical service poles and wires free from interference by growing trees. There is particular concern in Conservation Areas where existing trees are very important to the character of the area.

Building and Spaces in the Village – Building Guidelines

The distinct areas of the village are very different in character and design features. Therefore they require different treatments. However, there are some basic principles, which can serve as overall guidelines.

New building, extensions and alterations should conform to the existing character of each area and retain the visual continuity.

In the older parts of the village (see map), reclaimed or new brick, which closely resemble Cheshire brick, should be used. The occasional rendered building would not be out of character, but mock timbering should be avoided. Dark tiles, or slate should be the predominant roofing materials and all roofs should be pitched to an angle of not less than 35%.

Within Conservation Areas windows should reflect traditional proportions and materials. For example, large picture windows should be avoided and glass doors in Upvc doorframes are not appropriate. Six panel or tongue and groove cottage type doors should be the norm.

In the High Street in particular, the changes from predominantly retail to residential use will require sensitive handling to ensure that these changes reflect the existing style and character.

The Owley Wood Estate houses require the use of grey cement type bricks with some cement rendering and roofs of dark tiles, while the estates constructed in the 1950s are of red rustic brick and red tile roofs. Extensions and alterations should reflect these factors, with door and window treatment reflecting existing proportions wherever possible.

All of the later private developments are so varied in nature, that no specific guidelines can be defined, however any further developments or alterations should reflect or complement their surroundings.

To maintain visual integrity and character throughout the village two storey buildings should be the norm for any new dwellings. Where appropriate the development of a range of property types and costings within small scale schemes should be encouraged.

Front garden boundaries should maintain the visual continuity of the street scene.

In some newer areas of the village, in particular the large previously council owned estates, proposals to remove some of the grass verges and green areas to provide car parking spaces may be reconsidered.

Highways, Byways and Alleyways

Highways - Traffic Flows

Weaverham is approached from the East and West end of the village by the B5153 along Station Road and Northwich Road. Both these roads have national speed limits. The point at which the speed limit is reduced to 30 mph is as the road comes into built up areas. The geography of both roads (long and straight) induces drivers to speed into the built up areas with obvious danger to the local inhabitants. Traffic calming measures, although not available through planning applications, could be introduced to obviate the problem and danger caused by speeding traffic.

Similar problems exist on Wallerscote Road, Well Lane and Sandy Lane. Again, traffic calming measures could be introduced to reduce the danger. Similar situations in other parts of the village could also be considered for such measures. However, it is important that owners of all properties adjacent to such measures are consulted prior to development. Problems associated with such measures in other towns and villages can thus be avoided.

The High Street is very narrow at several points. Its width is insufficient for some of the Heavy Goods vehicles, which use it. Consideration should be given to re-routing larger vehicles. Older buildings in High Street and the Northwich Road area suffer from traffic volumes and large-scale developments such as the proposed urban village at Winnington may add to this problem. The High Street forms part of a traffic link to the industrial activity in Winnington and Northwich. Because of this it has in recent years been overwhelmed by modern traffic flows and now has yellow lines on either side. This has contributed to its decline as a commercial centre; many of the shops have been converted to dwellings. Wallerscote Road which branches off the High Street / Northwich Road route is similarly affected by heavy industrial traffic; this is of great concern as this road is primarily residential. However this problem has been partly alleviated by a Weight Restriction Order on Wallerscote Road. The re-routing of the A49 Trunk Road, which runs along the west perimeter of the village has reduced some of the traffic flow along West Road, but High Street, Wallerscote Road and Station Road continue to experience heavy traffic. Many local people believe that consideration should be given to the re-routing of heavy vehicles, which pass along these roads.

Parking - Parking in narrow streets and roads

The streets within the former public housing areas and the private estates are in the main well planned and generous in layout. However, due to increasing car ownership the older estates, which were designed before this age, are experiencing problems with parking provision. As a result parked vehicles congest many of village streets and roads. This is particularly so in areas where residents cannot park within the curtilage of their properties. In some areas the grass verges have become so damaged that the scheme to replace them with hard standings has been seen as an improvement. In such areas (e.g. Walnut Avenue, areas of Lime Avenue, Church Street, etc.) consideration should be given to how such congestion can be relieved. A suitable solution for this problem is needed and many people feel that off street parking is urgently required.

Parking by Northwich Road shops

The popularity of the Northwich Road shopping area has led to the overuse of the car parking facilities to the front of this area. Many local people feel that consideration should be given to improving access to the parking facilities at the back of the shops as well as investigating improving the parking facilities themselves. With regard to elderly people, disabled people, children and those who wish to walk, or cycle, access to the shops should be as user-friendly as possible.

Parking to pick up and set down schoolchildren

The roads around all schools in the village are severely congested at 'school run' times. This is particularly so around Forest Street and the High School as they are on opposite sides of the same stretch of Lime Avenue.

The combination of school buses, private cars transporting children and narrow roads frequently brings traffic to a standstill outside all schools.

Northwich Road is congested as cars are parked alongside Wallerscote School to pick up and set down children. Consideration should be given to a scheme, which would allow children to be picked up in the school grounds. This would not only alleviate traffic congestion on Northwich Road, but would reduce the likelihood of accidents to children as they leave school.

Consideration should be given by those schools to the provision of lay-bys within the school grounds such as is required of other schools (The Grange School at Hartford is an example).

Alleyways and footpaths

A pleasing feature of Weaverham is the number of alleyways, which lead off the main streets and roads. These provide intrigue, interest and shortcuts between different parts of the village as well as access to properties. These help knit the village into a closer community as distance between neighbouring areas is reduced. They are much to be encouraged and even extended! (See Settlement Character Guidelines)

Weaverham has a network of public rights of way, some of which are ancient, dating from the Roman era. These paths originally connected outlying areas to the centre and also spread further afield to other settlements like Barnton, Cuddington, Acton Bridge etc. They continue to perform an important function; most have been incorporated into modern developments, providing 'short cuts' to village facilities. They also continue to diverge into the surrounding countryside to provide a valuable recreational resource.

Observation

Lost Footpath

Unfortunately, Weaverham lost a most valuable footpath connection with the River Weaver and Barnton, when Wood Lane was closed in the early 20th century. It is desirable that this is reinstated.

This observation is not part of the Supplementary Planning Guidance

Observation

The quiet nature of Weaverham's side roads encourages local cyclists of all ages. Indeed Route 5 of the National Cycle Network is planned to pass through Weaverham, en route from Northwich to Frodsham and Runcorn via the River Weaver, as part of a longer journey from Reading to Holyhead. Current plans are to route it through the quiet roads north of the village centre. However a more ambitious plan of greater benefit could take it along Northwich Road/High Street. Such a measure would help to discourage in-village car journeys and encourage would-be cyclists.

This observation is not part of the Supplementary Planning Guidance

Highways, Byways and Alleyways

Guidelines

Good and safe access for pedestrians and cyclists must be maintained throughout the village and particularly in the areas of the schools.

Where ever possible opportunities should be taken to provide 'on site' dropping off and pick up points for buses and cars at schools.

Alleyways should be made safe, passable and clearly marked. Likewise Byways should be made safe, passable and clearly marked.

No development should take place, which would require an access to a highway in a way which would destroy a street scene.

Conclusion - A Vision for the Future

Sustainability is paramount to Weaverham, which has a keen sense of place and as such has a well developed and often voiced understanding of its position with respect to future generations. Our Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement has been careful to cherish the history of the village while taking account of the present with a view to the legacy that will be left for the children of today and the generations beyond them.

Acknowledgements

The Weaverham Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement Working Group is composed of the following local residents:

Peter Andrewatha,
Ruth Batsford (local coordinator),
Peter Bryan,
L.Burrows,
P. M. Coane,
I. Curnwell,
Pat Daffern,
Guy Daffern
Tony Daffern,
Pat Dale,
Glen Gidley
Elizabeth Gidley,
A. Gomm,
Richard Gorrill,
Brian Jamieson,
Graham Lomas,
Roger Moss,
Anthony Powell,
Lynne Rafferty,
Eric Redford,
Jean Ross,
Pam Shingler,
Pat Sinnott,
Albert Till,
P. Wear,
Alice Welch,
Noel Woodhead.

The project is facilitated by John Gittins, Cheshire Landscape Trust and Philip James, University of Salford.

The working group would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their help in various ways.

Officers of Vale Royal Borough Council, Cheshire County Council, Weaverham Parish Council, past and present,

The Countryside Agency,
Cheshire Landscape Trust,
Colleagues at
Countryside,
Weaverham Trust,
Head Teacher and staff,
Wallerscote County Primary
School, Weaverham.

Produced and designed by
The Weaverham Village Design and
Parish Landscape Statement
Working Group and
printed by the Print Unit of
Vale Royal Borough
Council.

The Countryside Agency funded
the Cheshire Landscape Trust
to undertake research into the
preparation of landscape character
assessments by communities
working at the parish level.
The research report is available to
download from the Countryside
Agency's website.
www.countryside.gov.uk

.