

Ashwick Parish

DESIGN STATEMENT



Ashwick Parish Design Statement



Above - Oakhill Village High St c. 1905 Right - The High St now

AIMS

Design Statements are about helping local communities participate and influence the way the planning system operates locally.

The steering committee have addressed the local community's concerns about the effect of any future new development within their area. Through exhibitions, meetings and questionnaires they have tried to involve every household within the Parish, in the process of putting together an effective Design Statement.

The aim has been to ensure that all views, local knowledge and ideas are brought together to create guidelines for future development.

This Design Statement has been adopted by Mendip District Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance, and its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications which affect our Parish are addressed. (See pages 11-12)

Ashwick Parish



The Parish is situated in the eastern area of the Mendip Hills, 4 miles north of Shepton Mallet, and 6 miles north-east of Wells.

It is one of dispersed settlement, with the village of Oakhill being the largest populated area. Smaller hamlets are at Benter and Neighborne and a small cluster of houses close to Ashwick Church. The Parish also embraces part of the hamlet of Nettlebridge and part of the village of Gurney Slade. There are many isolated farmsteads and today farming is the major economic activity taking place in the Parish.

The Parish boundary as depicted on the 1841 tithe map ran down the centre of Oakhill High Street with the properties to the south being in Shepton Mallet parish. By a petition in 1897, signed by 60 people, the Parish boundary was extended southward to the old Frome-Wells Road and in 1933 it was further extended to Yelling Mill Lane.

The village of Oakhill, where the majority of the residents of the Parish dwell, is likely to have originated as a small farming settlement, further developed as the local woollen cloth industry grew. From the late 18th Century it grew again as a Brewery hamlet.



THE NAMING OF ASHWICK

Ashwick is an ancient parish taking its name from the Ash trees which grow there in abundance. Its Saxon name of 'Escewiche' means Ash and Village. The earliest reference to Ashwick is in a gift of land by Edward the Confessor to Wulford, Abbot of Bath in 1061. It comprised about 120 acres, three of which were woodland. In the description of the land there is mention of Nettleford, presumably the present Nettlebridge.

The Abbot in turn gave it to Bath Priory who held it until the reign of Henry VIII when the manor was granted to

Thomas Horner, who later sold it to John Stidman and his heirs. Then it passed to Lord Fortescue who later sold it to J. B. Hippley.

There have been various spellings of Ashwick and Oakhill over the ages:-

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1086 Escewiche (Domesday Book) | 1633 Ashweeke |
| 1200 Ashwyke or Aisewika | 1592 Ocle |
| 1303 Axwyke | 1622 Okehill |
| 1392 Aysswyk | 1668 Ockle or Oakhill |
| 1450 Aysshewicke | |

Geography

The Parish of Ashwick lies on the eastern edge of the Mendip Hills, (the most southerly example of a carboniferous limestone escarpment in Britain) extending southward from the stream at Nettlebridge to Yelling Mill Lane and eastward from the Fosse Road to the 16th and 17th holes of Mendip Golf Course. In all the Parish has an area of some 2700 acres which at its highest point reaches to almost 300 metres above sea level.

The Parish reflects the local topography with the vast majority of the outlying farmland consisting of permanent limestone pasture divided into small fields by hedging or stone walling. Agricultural land within the Parish maintains its traditional grazing role for sheep, beef and dairy cattle.

The wooded areas are mainly non-commercial although some extraction of timber occurs at Beacon and Harridge woods, under active management.

These deciduous woods are closely associated with the many streams that arise in the surrounding hills. Some of these streams run underground in places via swallets (underground waterways) and connect to the cave systems within Harridge Woods on the eastern boundary.

The villages and hamlets within the Parish have developed in empathy with the surrounding landscape, in particular by the use of local stone in the construction of buildings and boundary walls and the extensive planting of trees.

There is little surface water in the Parish with much of it disappearing into cracks and fissures in the limestone, although Oakhill Brewery capped off many of the springs lying to the south for use in both beer making and as a domestic water supply for the brewery workers. It is believed that the system of lakes and grottos within the grounds at Pondsmead House were used as a reservoir for the Brewery, there not being enough spring water for a continual supply.

History

The Nettlebridge Valley contains the earliest evidence of man's occupation in the Parish with artifacts dating from 2500BC found in a cave in Cockles Wood.

The Parish has as its Eastern boundary the Roman Fosse Way and is crossed by another Roman road running from Charterhouse to Old Sarum (Salisbury).

Ashwick was part of the Kilmersdon Hundred (an area so called from their containing one hundred families or by being able to supply one hundred able bodied men whenever they were required for the service of their King in his wars) and its church, St James' was a chapel of ease under Kilmersdon. The site of the original church is still represented by the tower, which appears to date from the 15th century although the church was almost completely rebuilt in 1825, when it became independent. The Pound at Ashwick is also mentioned in the history of Kilmersdon and

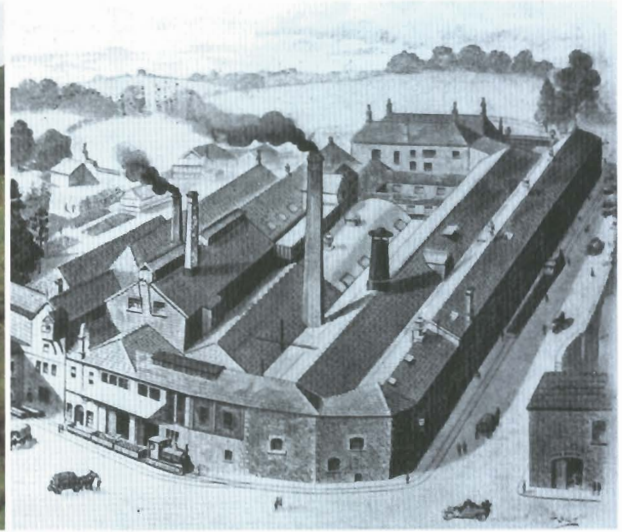
predates 1632. All Saints Church in Oakhill was built in 1861 and consecrated in 1862.

Coombe House, at the eastern end of the Oakhill High Street, is mentioned in documents dating from 1366 and appears to be the oldest property in the Parish, although it is not known if any of the original building remains.

Mr. John Billingsley, who built Ashwick Grove and founded the Brewery, wrote a book on Agriculture in Somerset in which he gives us an excellent picture of life in his time. This book was published in 1797.



Economic development/settlement pattern



The Parish developed economically from earliest times as both a coal mining and agriculture community. There has long been an association with coal mining in the Parish which dates back to Roman times. As coal lies very close to the surface in this area it would have been encountered during Roman road building. There is some evidence of Mendip coal mining in Medieval times but the earliest known deed relating to coal in Ashwick dates from 1605. Mining increased in importance during the 19th century principally at Old Moorewood and then at New Moorewood collieries which employed 150 men in 1924. Mining ceased with the closure of New Moorewood colliery in 1932 following poor coal production, due to awkward coal seams and flooding.

Quarrying for ochre, quartzite and stone (for building) was also important in the area and, with the increased need for mineral extraction during the 20th century, the now disused Highcroft quarry in Gurney Slade was an important employer.

Historically the first mention of Oakhill occurs in the early 17th century when it was a small agricultural hamlet which developed as the local woollen cloth industry grew. Now, however, the main visual character of Oakhill stems from its development in the Victorian era as an industrial settlement centered on the Oakhill Brewery.

The brewery started life in 1769 and grew rapidly during the next century. It was fed by the natural springs to be found on the hillside above. Beers such as the famous

Oakhill Stout were brewed and transported all around the country. The brewery was directly responsible for the growth of Oakhill as the largest centre in the Parish. Oakhill had the benefit of piped water, sewage and then gas, in 1894, before many major towns.

A small railway line was also built linking Oakhill brewery with the nearest main line in Binegar. Built in 1904 and running until 1921 it was the only brewery light railway in England.

The original brewery was mostly destroyed by fire in 1925 following which the brewing operation merged with, and then moved to the Courage Brewery sites in Bristol.

There were many small businesses within the Parish. Oakhill, like much of the Mendip area, has an association with the wool trade, centered on the appropriately named Dye Lane. In 1841 Oakhill had three straw bonnet workers and was home to several clockmakers, the best known being Richard Hardwick who lived on Zion Hill.

More recently Oakhill has become a commuter village with most of the working population travelling to and from Bristol, Bath, London and smaller local towns. **There is little employment currently within the Parish and thought should be given to future developments incorporating small business opportunities.**

The Ashwick Parish Community



ALL THESE IN ONE PARISH OF 2,691 ACRES

COMMERCE

- 1 Brewery
- 3 Public Houses
- 1 Golf Club
- 1 Garage
- 2 Car Sales Sites
- 2 Post Offices with General Stores
- 1 Shop with mobile grocery van
- 1 Residential Nursing Home
- 1 Undertaker
- 4 General Builders
- 1 Furniture Upholsterer
- 1 Electrical Goods Repair Shop

- 1 Landscape Gardener
- 1 Farm Equipment Supplier
- 1 Ornamental Cement Works
- Farms including dairy, beef, sheep and chicken

ORGANISATIONS

- Oakhill Primary School P.T.A.
- Sunday Schools
- All Sorts Drama Club
- Football Club
- Parish Council Youth Group
- Gardening Club

- Youth Club
- Toddlers Club
- Cricket Club
- Playgroup
- Hockey Club
- Millennium Group
- Bowls Club
- Local History Group
- Women's Institute
- Village Hall
- Mendip Ramblers
- 2 Parochial Church Councils
- Good Companions

EDUCATION

- 1 Primary School

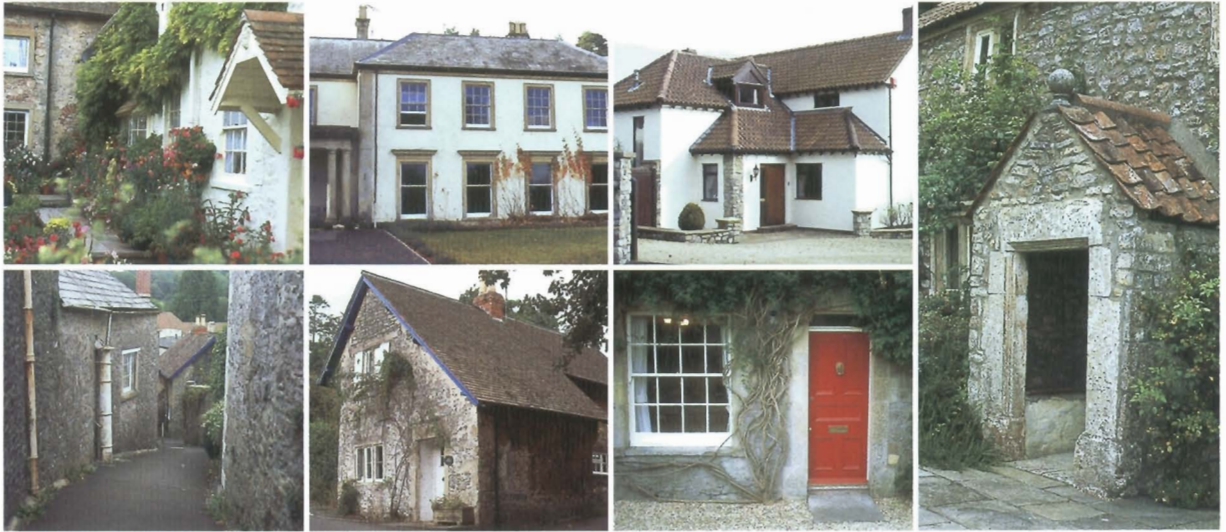
HEALTH

- 1 Health Centre

RELIGION

- 2 Anglican Churches with meeting rooms
- All Saints – Oakhill
- St. James' – Ashwick
- 1 Methodist Church





Population: 1991 census 1,144

From which ever direction the Parish is approached, the visitor gains an impression of stone houses beyond green fields with a high density of tall coniferous and deciduous trees.

The present day appearance of Oakhill is of a residential village which maintains its linear structure. The Victorian

appearance of the village has to some extent been eroded by more recent building and development.

Footpaths criss-cross the parish along with green lanes and long established byways. **The Nettlebridge Valley is largely unspoilt and should be considered for an AONB status.**

Parts of the village are designated as a Conservation Area





OAKHILL

There has been a substantial amount of infilling development within the last 50 years during which over 100 new homes have been built. Whilst it is impossible to identify a typical Oakhill property, there has been some effort within the newer developments to keep some flavour of the original housing stock. For example, the vast majority of the houses within the village have boundary stone walling, with typical 'cock and hen' capping.

The centre of Oakhill has always been dominated by the brewery site situated in the High Street. Many developments radiating out from the brewery are historically linked to it, including Pondsmead, now a nursing home, the Old Maltings and some properties along the High Street, such as Underleigh. In more recent times some of the brewery land has been turned over to housing stock as with the Maltings development.

The High St starts from the A367, and runs westward through the village up to the A37. The general linear development of the village is maintained along the High St and Little London, with the majority of the properties backing on to farm land or paddocks.

Branching off the High Street is Zion Hill, a narrow lane snaking between high stone walls or the stone elevation of houses, some with characteristic curved corners. The houses along Zion Hill and the parallel Dean Lane reflect the mix of old and modern properties seen throughout Oakhill. Many of the properties to the north of Zion Hill, including the secluded Oakhill Manor, have extensive mature evergreen trees and this part of the conservation area is typified by stone or rendered stone houses surrounded by quite densely wooded gardens or grounds.

To the north and east of the village school is a large field with wonderful mature deciduous trees and an old avenue of horn beams, which is part of the original Ashwick Grove Estate dating back to the 17th Century. The estate was broken up and sold at auction in 1937 and many of the properties in the Parish, which are now privately owned, were once part of the Estate. The house was partly demolished in the 1950's and the remains with its associated buildings, gardens and park can still be seen.

Future plans for new country houses/mansions should use Ashwick Grove, Ashwick Court, Oakhill Manor and Oakhill House as reference.

"It is impossible to identify a typical Oakhill property"

ASHWICK

The name Ashwick is of Saxon origin, (Ash Village), and indeed, in this rural hamlet the Ash Tree grows freely. Ashwick has at its centre the Church of St. James' the tower of which dates back to the 15th century when a much larger church existed. Behind the church is Ashwick Court built in 1698 (there is also evidence of much older building on the site). It is thought that during the Monmouth Rebellion Judge Jeffries stayed at the Court and tried cases, and that those sentenced to hang spent their last days in a building at the Court. The hamlet comprises scattered rural housing with some recently built housing in Ashwick Lane.

In the past agriculture would have been the main economic activity and its original cattle pound has been recently restored as a Millennium project.

BENTER AND MOOREWOOD

This scattered community, in a rural setting, lies adjacent to the Mells stream.

The surrounding landscape bears testimony to man's earlier activities in the search for coal. It was once a thriving community with two mills, an iron works and a colliery. It also had a public house 'The Fire Engine' and a Methodist meeting house at Wesley Cottage.

The dwellings are mostly stone built, with many being lime washed with tiled roofs.

GURNEY SLADE (BINEGAR)

To the north of the Parish lies the village of Gurney Slade, which, until the mid 18th century, was known as Binegar. This name, in its various forms, can be traced back to 1065 A.D. when it was BEAZENHANGRA (which is believed to translate as "the slope where the beans grow").

The village straddles the main A37 trunk road from Bristol to Dorchester but only the southernmost end of the village is within Ashwick, and this, in part, is dominated by the Gurney Slade quarry.

Although there are a variety of materials used in the construction of properties (red brick, concrete block, reconstituted stone, etc.) the main impression is one of stone dwellings with tile or slate roofs. This is complimented by the stone boundary walls which can be seen there.

NEIGHBOURNE

Set in a rural landscape, this is a linear hamlet on a N/S axis.

Laundry Lane was so named as the local laundry was located in a now listed cottage. The area once had a Presbyterian Meeting house, which became a barn and then a private dwelling. Woodhill cottage dates to 1726 and Neighbourne Farm is probably older.

At its Southern end is an area once mined for Yellow Ochre whilst its Northern end extends into the area once the scene of much activity in the process of mining coal.

Its buildings are mostly lime washed with tiled roofs, there are two modern bungalows and some recent conversion of farm buildings into dwellings which reflects the current requirement for housing and the decline of farming, which would have been Neighbourne's principal economic activity in the past.

NETTLEBRIDGE

Nestling in the beautifully scenic valley of the Mells stream lies the hamlet of Nettlebridge (called Nettleford until the Anglo Saxons built a bridge). The Stream forms part of the Ashwick Parish boundary which Nettlebridge straddles, so that only part is in Ashwick Parish. The Fosse-Way, built by the Romans ran close by and more recently the Turnpike Road to Bath ran through the hamlet where a toll house was located.

Nettlebridge has a long history – Cockles Wood caves, where human remains dating back some 2500 years were found, overlooks the hamlet. A number of the properties have interesting histories; one was a woollen stocking factory, another a public house and another, a religious meeting house for dissenters. All are now private dwellings. The general impression of the architecture is of stone built properties, some of which are colour washed, with a sprinkling of more modern materials in the newer buildings.

Satellite Photograph of Parish



1. Oakhill
2. Golf Course
3. Gurney Slade
4. Quarry
5. Neighbourne
6. Fosse Way

7. Ashwick
8. Harridge Woods
9. Benter
10. Coal Workings
11. Nettlebridge
12. Cockles Wood





4

3

9

10

12

7

5

11

8

1

2

6

Future Development

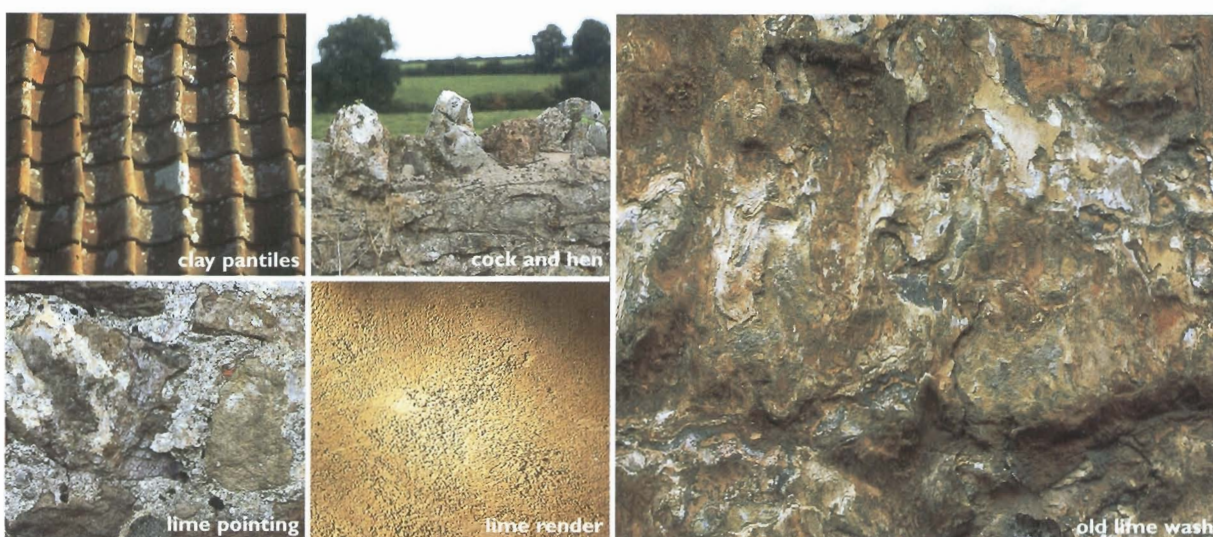
WITHIN THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

The vast majority of those who responded to the question

"How important to you is the countryside surrounding your home?"

replied that it was highly valued both for its beauty and recreational importance. It follows that any development within the rural areas of our parish will require an approach in keeping with our desire to maintain the integrity of the countryside which surrounds us. Man has through the

centuries made his impact on the landscape and we are fortunate that in the main our rural areas remain unspoilt. We must ensure that, with pressure for new housing, applications for development are treated with great care to ensure that the buildings fit in with their surroundings without impacting upon the very things from which those who aspire to dwell in the countryside hope to benefit. **We must encourage developers to incorporate affordable housing for first time buyers.**



BUILDING STYLES

The developments within Oakhill demonstrate the changing use of building material over the years. Traditionally the houses associated with the Brewery were constructed in local stone with tiled roofs. Many properties have Douling stone quoins and details, particularly around the windows. Few houses have slate roofs. However, Underleigh, the former Brewery Manager's house has a stone façade fronting the High Street, but viewed from the rear has more typical Victorian red brick elevations, similar to Pondsmead.

Within Little London one can see red brick Victorian properties, stone and rendered stone cottages, 1970's rendered block detached houses set back from the road and modern properties of stone clad construction, or rendered block with reconstituted stone detail. The rest of the Parish is an eclectic mix of styles including Medieval, Georgian, Victorian, random stone and modern rendered block.

Sympathetic development for the future should try to incorporate local rubble stone boundary walling, stone detail or facing and steep pitched tiled roofs. Both double roman tiles and clay pantiles are common. Only a couple of properties within Oakhill are more than two storeys high, and these are not in keeping with the other properties surrounding them. Three storey developments should be discouraged, to preserve neighbours' rural vistas and to ensure even roof lines. The influence of the linear development is that the majority of the houses within Oakhill have aspects of open countryside. Wherever possible new development should be contained within the existing village boundaries and should not be changed without due consideration of the effect on the surrounding landscape, it should include suitable planting and landscaping and should not detract from existing rural views. The following recommendations need to be followed to avoid creating a confused visual statement.

Recommendations

- a. The siting of any new development is of the utmost importance. Property should be no more than two storeys in height. The long established vistas, enjoyed by most, which are part of the character of our rural area, should not be impacted.
- b. We would strongly discourage the use of reconstituted rubble building stone, the appearance of which fails to mimic the real thing. New buildings should be built in local stone or rendered with a soft limewash finish.
- h. Lintels, sills, jambs and mullions should be of the correct proportions and made of stone or reconstituted stone. Brick detailing above doors and windows should be built in the traditional arched manner and quoins made of reconstituted or real stone.
- i. If boundary walls are to be built they should be built of local rubble stone and capped by the 'cock and hen' feature where appropriate. Wooden fencing and composite brick walling should be deemed unacceptable.



- c. Developers should be encouraged to put all cabling underground and plastic meter boxes concealed or decorated sympathetically.
- d. Roofing materials most appropriate in our parish are weathered pantiles or slate. Gable ends should be normally finished with mortar with slate slippers or edged with stone parapets not PVCu or wooden bargeboards. However there are Victorian villas with ornate bargeboards and fascias in the village.
- e. There should be sufficient parking space allowed within the boundary of any new properties for off street parking.
- f. Wherever possible, existing trees should be preserved and consideration should be given to new planting to reduce the impact of any development. This should be built into planning approvals.
- g. Guttering should be attached directly to new buildings by pins and not screwed to PVCu or wooden fascias.
- j. New or replacement windows and doors should be of similar proportions to those of surrounding properties and constructed of wood wherever possible. PVCu as a material should be discouraged as it has a detrimental visual effect. It is now possible to construct wooden sash or casement windows incorporating double glazing units.
- k. New buildings or renovations to an older building should be pointed or rendered with lime rich mortars of the correct colour or painted with lime washes both of which allow movement and the material to breath. Recipes for conservation mortars and lime washes are printed on the back cover. Dormer windows should be in proportion and scale to the existing roof line.
- l. New signage should be sympathetic in design, style and proportions to comfortably fit with the surrounding area and landscape. We urge the Council to draw up guidelines incorporating both domestic and commercial property signage.

Highways and Transport

PROBLEMS

1. The Parish is dissected by the A37 in the north and the A367 in the south, both major trunk routes, the latter cutting through the village of Oakhill – separating the local primary school, All Saints church and the Oakhill Inn from the main body of the village.
2. Cars parked on Oakhill High Street, which connects the two trunk routes, can be a problem, as it is narrow and in places has no pavement.
3. Within the Parish are a series of minor roads connecting the outlying hamlets, which, although often not more than one car's width, add to the rural charm and character of the Parish, however the state of these roads is poor:
4. Cars approaching and leaving Oakhill on the Gurney Slade /Oakhill Road are not subject to speed restriction from the top of Zion Hill past The Pound.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

1. We would urge the authorities to improve speed control on the A367 from Oakhill through to Nettlebridge. Speed cameras should be considered.
2. Where possible, car owners should be encouraged to park their vehicles off the High Street through Oakhill Village or within their own grounds.
3. Better road maintenance is needed. Public transport needs to be dramatically improved.
4. Parish Council has long been asking for the highways department to extend the 30mph speed limit at the top of Zion Hill to beyond the cross roads by the Pound.

Ashwick has always been close to major traffic routes, sitting at the junction of two Roman roads – the Fosse Way and the old Frome Road



Footpaths, bridleways & rights of way

Footpaths: 19 miles in total

Throughout the whole of the Parish extends a network of paths, many dating back to the time when labourers made their way on foot to the local farms and miners to the collieries. Other paths led to the churches, pubs, school and the shops.

Now they are mostly used for leisure purposes and allow the walker to get off the beaten track and into Ashwick's delightful countryside and woodlands. There are over 19 miles of footpaths and some 60 stone stiles in the Parish. Many of the fields through which they pass had fascinating names some of which remain today. Galley Batch, Welsh Womans Close, Old Sexe, Fatten Leaze, String and Ham, being examples from the 1841 tythe map.

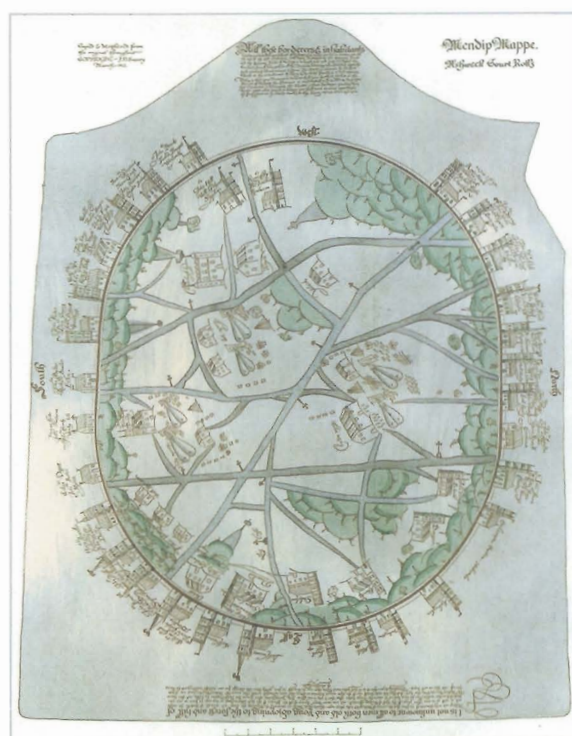
Many of the old hedgerows surrounding the fields contain indigenous flora – oak, ash, blackthorn, hazel, hawthorn and elder and together with wild rose, spindleberry, honeysuckle and much else besides, these help to support a great variety of wildlife.

We need to ensure our medieval woodlands are professionally managed so as to make certain of their continuing use as nature reserves and amenity sites.

There are many historic features to this landscape, such as burial mounds, mill leats, gateposts, dew ponds and stone stiles which need to be protected and preserved. Every effort should be made to maintain the present field boundaries and existing hedgerows.

We should endeavour to retain the special features of coal-worked landscapes by avoiding damaging activity such as deep ploughing, clearance or inappropriately sited development.

Established footpaths as rights of way must be maintained and future development should include footpaths which give safe access to both villages and countryside.



Ashwick Court Rolls c. 1450



Conservation Techniques

LIME MORTAR FOR POINTING OR RENDERING

Ingredients:

- 3 parts course grit (Chard stock if possible)
- 1 part lime putty (must be lime putty NOT hydrated lime)
or
- 2 parts Wareham wash sand
- 1 part gritting stone dust
- 1 part lime putty

NB. Colour can be adjusted by changing sand types.
Use of putty lime mortar is not that straightforward and takes time to learn.

Application:

- Mix for a minimum of 30 mins
- Needs 3 days to 'go off' before re-applying
- Protect from sun while 'going off'
- Do not apply in frosty weather

INTERIOR FINISHED PLASTER

Ingredients:

- 3 parts washed silver sand
- 1 part lime putty

Application: as above

TRADITIONAL LIME WASH

Ingredients:

- 3 parts water
 - 1 part lime putty
- Casein or a very small amount of linseed oil is often added to prevent it being rubbed or washed off.
Pigments may also be added, producing pleasing subtle tones.

Application:

Mix with electric drill and attachment until smooth consistency. Add more of either ingredient if necessary. Test by putting clean builders trowel into mix until wash is even all over when the trowel is held vertically.

Lime putty and lime washes can be bought 'off the peg' from:

Potmolen Paint, 27 Woodcock Industrial Estate,
Warminster BA12 9DZ 01985 213960.

**We must retain the best from the past but be sufficiently
brave to incorporate current technology
and design where appropriate.**

This document was officially adopted by Mendip District Council on January 14th 2003
as supplementary planning guidance.

The Parish of Ashwick Design Statement Committee

Arabella Beatson-Hird (Chairman), Tony Britton (Treasurer), Andrew Tyler, Ewan Davidson and Percy Lambert

The committee would like to thank the following for their help and support:
The residents of Ashwick Parish, The Parish Council, Mendip District Council,
Somerset Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, Gurney Slade Quarries,
Francis Flower, CRW Ltd, Scimitar Services Limited, Wells Museum, Paul Reynolds Builder, Martin Wade.