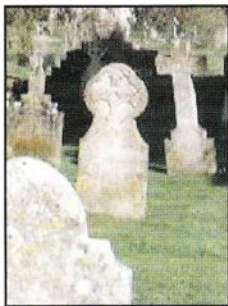
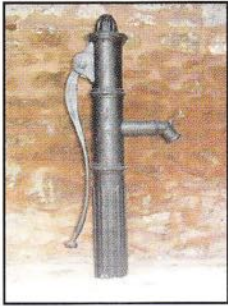
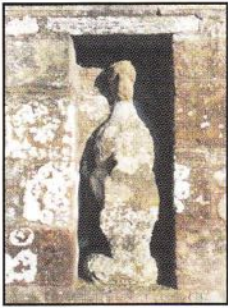




Bicknoller

Village Design Statement



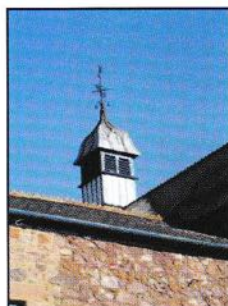
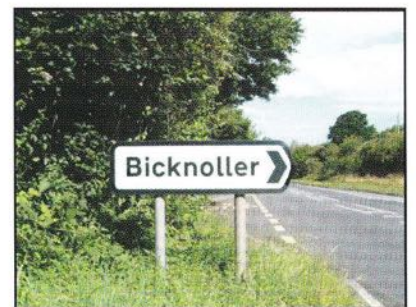
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This document has drawn freely on the Village Design Statement for West Bagborough and we are very grateful for the advice, help and support of its authors.

We are also indebted to our District Councillor, the Planning Services Manager of West Somerset District Council, the Quantock Hills AONB Service representing the Quantock Hills Joint Advisory Committee, and the Community Council for Somerset.

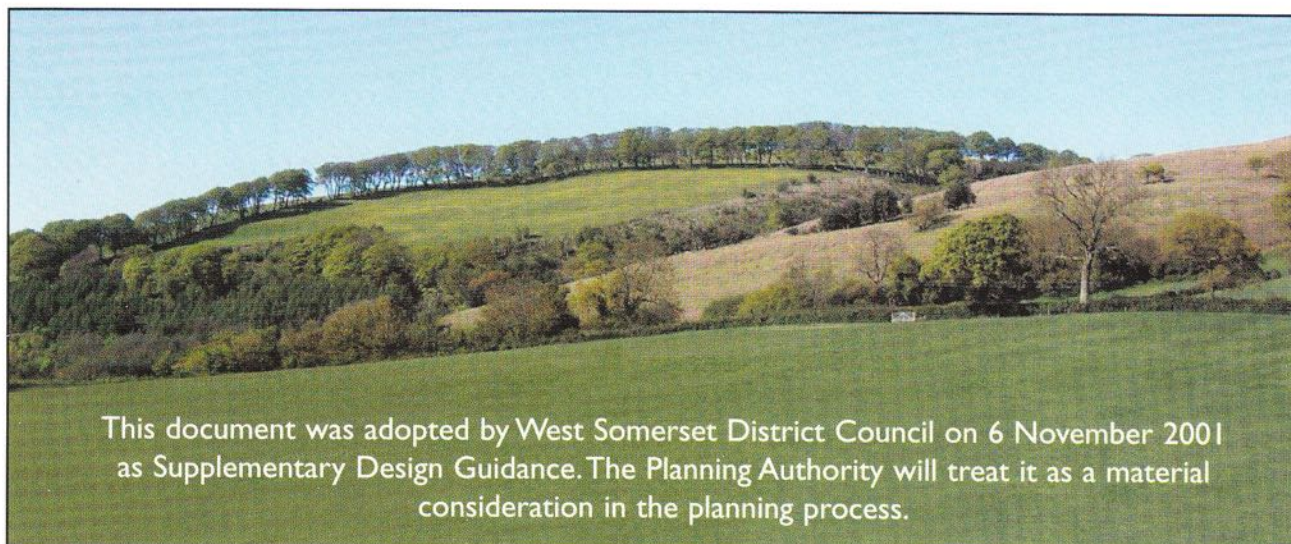
Last, but certainly not least, our thanks are due to the parishioners, too many to list here, who have made it possible to produce this document.



Correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to:
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BICKNOLLER VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT



This document was adopted by West Somerset District Council on 6 November 2001 as Supplementary Design Guidance. The Planning Authority will treat it as a material consideration in the planning process.

I INTRODUCTION

This Design Statement describes the whole of Bicknoller parish as it enters the third millennium and highlights what makes it special. It has been compiled by local residents with the full support of the Parish Council.

The purpose of the Statement is to influence conservation work and to guide future developments. It should be used by residents, planners, developers, builders and public bodies as a tool to help manage change.

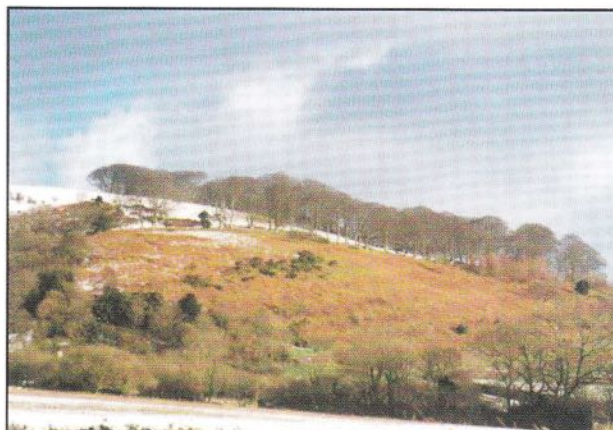
The Statement has been endorsed by the residents of the parish through a process of consultation which has involved

- a Parish Meeting, consisting of a photographic exhibition and public lecture attended by fifty parishioners, at which a draft version of the Statement was discussed
- distribution of a revised draft to all parishioners for their comments
- a Parish Meeting attended by thirty parishioners at which the final draft was discussed
- approval of the final document by Bicknoller Parish Council.

2 PARISH CONTEXT

2.1 GEOGRAPHY

Bicknoller lies on the lower slopes of the Quantock Hills. From the village the Hills rise steeply to the north-east while land to the south dips towards Doniford Stream. Tributaries of this stream flow alongside many village and hamlet streets and lanes, and are a feature of the area as are the views of mature beech tree 'hedges' on the Quantock slopes and skyline. More than half the parish, including the village, lies within the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty to be created in England and consists of moor and woodland. Most of the remainder is farmland.



The parish has a flattened diamond shape with the A358 Taunton to Minehead road forming the long east to west side and Bicknoller village roughly at its centre. The northernmost point is Bicknoller Post, high on the spine road along the top of the Quantock Hills, and to the south are the hamlets of Culverhays and (part of) Kingswood. Eastwards the diamond takes in Halsway and at the western boundary is Woolston with its small but unspoilt moor.



2.2 HISTORY

Bicknoller is first mentioned in 1243. The name may mean “the alder trees of a man called Bica” or “little treasury”. Within the parish are Trendle Ring and Turk’s Castle both of which are ancient earthworks. The hamlets of Halsway, Newton, and Woolston are mentioned in the Domesday Book.

Parts of St George’s church date to the 12th century and the churchyard is dominated by a (mainly) 14th century cross with a set of stocks beneath the 1,000 year old yew. There are no records of other buildings until the 16th century. By the mid 17th century Bicknoller was just a cluster of fifteen houses around the church (by then already 400 years old). Four big houses (Dashwoods, Locks, Warres and Wyeville) dominated the scene, all inhabited by tenant farmers paying their rent to the bishop of Bath and Wells.

Halsway Manor is the oldest surviving building in West Somerset and has been occupied for over a thousand years. Woolston is dominated by the Grange with its attendant cottages, some of which have fine mouldings on their ceilings.

2.3 PRESENT DAY BICKNOLLER

About 220 villagers, few of whom were born in Somerset, live in 110 houses, and the hamlets of Woolston, Halsway, Newton, Thorncombe and Culverhays have about 40, 30, 10, 10 and 6 inhabitants respectively. Other than three farmers/smallholders, no parishioners work the land for a living; the only sizeable employer being a meat processor. Most of those who work - about a third of the population - do so outside the parish. The non-working population are mainly those who have retired. The cultural and social heart of the community, apart from the church and the inn is the village hall (built in 1954) and its immediate surroundings: a playing field, car park, and shop/post office run and staffed by volunteers. At Woolston there is a well cared-for community field for all ages to enjoy.

Bicknoller is a rare example of a village that successfully runs a post office and shop on a co-operative basis, resulting in a strong community spirit. Apart from the Bicknoller Inn, there are few other services within the village. The rural centre of Williton is less than three miles away.

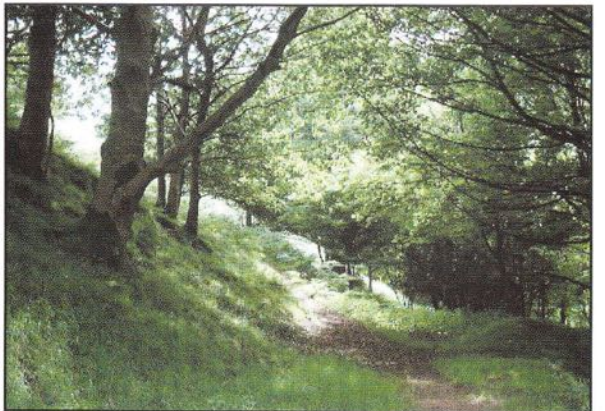
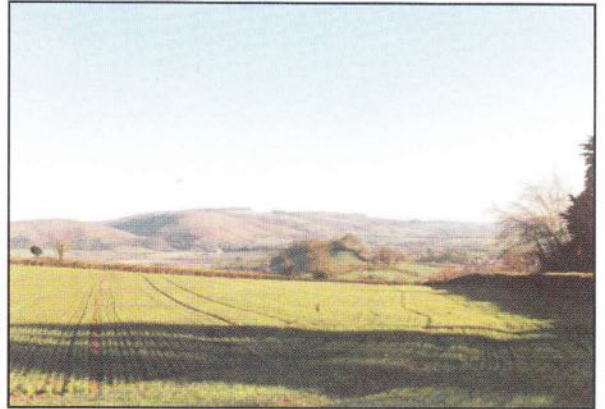
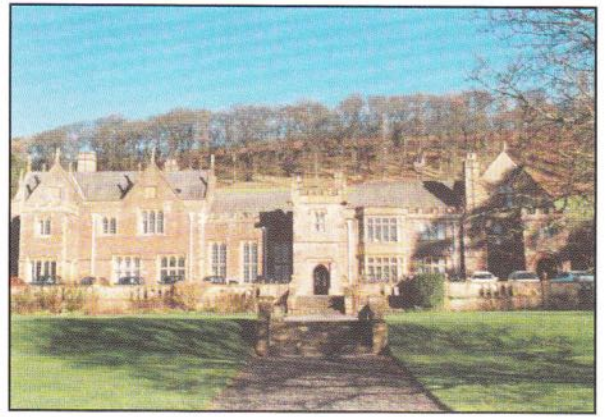


2.4 PLANNING CONSTRAINTS

North of the A358 the parish lies within the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. All developments must maintain or enhance the visual amenity of this area and no developments are allowed outside the boundary of the village. South of the A358, where there are currently no special landscape considerations, aesthetic values and the need to avoid additional traffic are the main criteria.

The strongest planning criteria apply to the Listed Buildings, which are an important feature of the parish.

See Recommendations 7.1 to 7.2



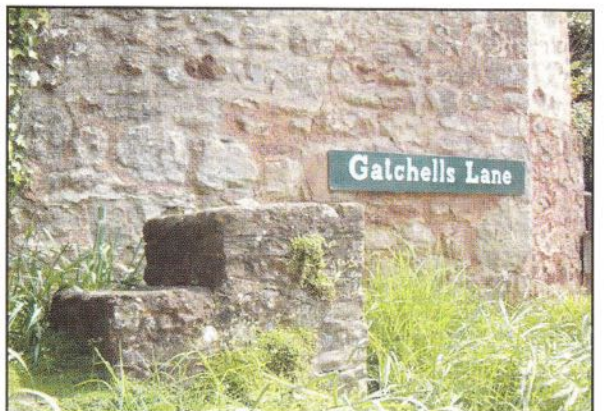
3 LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE

The tranquil combes and high ridges of the Quantock Hills are a superb backdrop to the parish. Direct access to the Hills for walkers, riders and bikers is particularly valuable and the magnificent scenery and varied wildlife habitats which surround the village form an essential part of the quality of life of its inhabitants.

Miles of delightful public paths and country lanes meander through the agricultural land surrounding the village and hamlets. Although wildflower meadows and wetlands have been lost to modern farming methods, the surviving banks, hedges, streams and stands of mature trees provide a habitat for a wide variety of flora and fauna. Many species of wild flower can still be seen on the banks of lanes, and because of the mixture of moorland, woodland and agricultural land more than fifty species of birds can be seen in gardens.

The village has several trees, both groups and individuals, which are protected by Tree Preservation Orders, and there are other trees which are excellent specimens and collectively help to screen the village from outlying areas. The rich but fragile biodiversity of the area is documented by Somerset Environmental Records Centre in its Biodiversity Action Plan 1999.

See Recommendations 7.3 to 7.9



4 SETTLEMENTS, BUILDINGS AND SPACES

The original village was compact, with buildings constructed of local stone and other vernacular materials. Close by the Church were farmhouses, four large and one small, and thirteen cottages. All would originally have been constructed of wattle and daub, cob or local stone, and thatched using wheat straw, with high chimneys to carry fire smoke and sparks well clear.



Many still have their original windows and most now bear the names of former owners such as "Dashwoods", "Gatchells" and "Harcombes". Seven buildings are listed for their special architectural and/or historical interest.

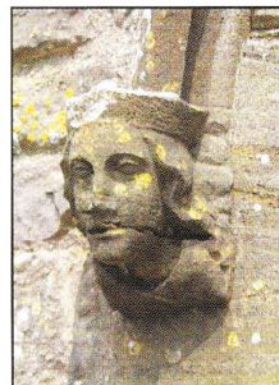
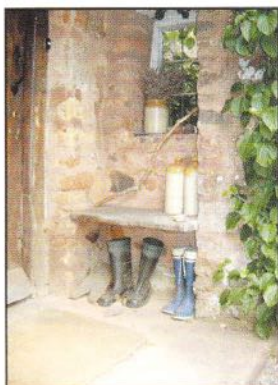
After the core was formed some houses were built in Victorian times, and there was further development between the wars. The settlement pattern now takes the form of a compact village centre made up of historic buildings from which four main limbs of twentieth century development radiate. Hill Lane, leading up to the Quantock Hills, has varied, mainly large, 'between the wars', houses in sizeable plots. In contrast, the lower part of Church Lane, which leads to the main road, and Honey Row Lane, which leads to West Quantoxhead, consist of post-war houses, including many bungalows. Trendle Lane, which until the early nineteenth century was part of the main Taunton to Minehead road, is a ribbon development with a wide range of house ages, sizes and styles mostly in good sized plots. During the 20th century construction materials were mainly brick or breeze block, usually rendered. Many newer buildings use roughcast render with various degrees of stone facing.



Infilling has not enhanced the look of the village. Small plots, and houses with garages which occupy too great a proportion of their plot, are the main culprits. But the steep roof pitch of many new buildings, quite untypical of rural Somerset, coupled with unnatural roof colours, has added to the cramped and unattractive look of several recent developments.

In contrast to Bicknoller, the three hamlets have not grown through development over recent years, and have therefore not been marred by unsympathetic infilling. Some older hamlet houses are colour washed under slate or tile roofs. In Woolston, cottages facing the stream are characterised by their low walls. The appearance of the hamlets has greatly benefited from the use of local stone in buildings and walls. Local, or visually similar, stone should continue to be used.

See Recommendations 7.10 to 7.17



5 HIGHWAYS, TRAFFIC AND SIGNS

Bicknoller and its surrounding hamlets are served by narrow, often winding, lanes. These are a natural feature which greatly add to the character of the parish.

Horses form a significant part of village and hamlet traffic, and there are numerous bridleways together with well-marked footpaths for walkers.

The parish's cast-iron signposts are precious for aesthetic reasons and pre-war post-boxes are still in use. There is street lighting only in Parsons Close, where the bungalows were originally designed for elderly tenants. Security lighting is becoming more common, but it needs to be installed in a way which avoids light pollution in a rural environment.

One of the least attractive aspects of the village is the abundance of overhead cables, wires and poles. Laying these underground would be one of the most important improvements to this, or any other, village.

See Recommendations 7.18 to 7.24

6 PROPERTY ALTERATIONS AND DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

If the exterior of a property is to be altered, or if changes to paint-work, front garden or boundaries are planned, those concerned should be encouraged to look at their property as if they were impartial observers and ask

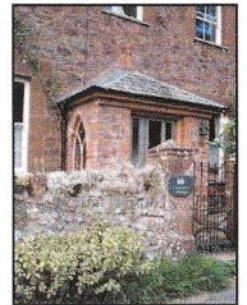
- what makes the property distinctive from, or blend in with, its neighbours ? Roof lines, roofing materials and colour, chimney patterns, window patterns, boundary walls/fences etc. should be looked at in relation to neighbouring properties.
- are there unusual features such as special stonework/brickwork, windows or doorways which need to be preserved ?
- can lessons be learnt from other restored or converted or altered buildings ?
- will the changes be in sympathy with the original design and the surrounding area ? If not, are there other ways of achieving the functional changes whilst conserving the look of the building ?
- are window proportions being maintained ?
- can reclaimed or closely matching materials be used ?
- does the architect or designer understand the requirements ? Has he/she read these guidelines and been given the opportunity to make suggestions ?

If there are any doubts about the design of a project, particularly if it involves a Listed Building, or trees subject to Tree Preservation Orders, the West Somerset District Council Planning Services Manager should be contacted.



7 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The planning criteria which apply within the village boundary should also be applied to the parish hamlets, and the open character of the landscape between the village and the hamlets should be preserved (2.4)
- 7.2 The planning criteria for Listed Buildings, and buildings in their immediate vicinity should be strongly enforced in order to preserve the character of the parish (2.4)
- 7.3 Any future development in the village should be critically examined to ensure the protection of the local environment and to avoid the destruction of wildlife (3)
- 7.4 The panoramic and rural nature of the views from, and of, the parish and its surrounding countryside should be preserved and, when the opportunity arises, enhanced. In particular, care must be taken that tree plantings will not lead to a deterioration of such views (3)
- 7.5 The preservation and maintenance/replacement of all trees, not just those subject to a Tree Preservation Order, is to be encouraged except where it is in conflict with the former recommendation (3)
- 7.6 Developments which involve the removal of field hedges and banks, the felling of mature indigenous trees, or the piping of natural watercourses should be resisted (3)
- 7.7 New/modified developments should use walls made of natural materials, or hedge screens of indigenous trees/shrubs, rather than fencing (3)
- 7.8 The dumping of waste should be strictly controlled (3)
- 7.9 A Parish Council member should be responsible for environmental issues, keep in touch with local conservation organisations, and raise the awareness of parishioners (3)



- 7.10 Architectural drawings should show new developments/alterations in their environmental context (4)
- 7.11 Local, or visually similar, stone should be used for the construction of buildings and walls (4)
- 7.12 Any new development/alteration should have regard to the (mainly) low density of buildings in the parish, and consequently the need for adequate space to be provided between buildings (4)
- 7.13 In the light of 7.12 above, each planning application for a new development must state the size of the plot, the percentage of the plot being built upon, and the distance to the closest boundary (4)
- 7.14 In the light of 7.12 above, each planning application which changes the external dimensions of an existing building, must state the percentage of the plot that will be built upon and the distance to the closest boundary if the application is successful (4)
- 7.15 The architecture of new or modified businesses and buildings should be sympathetic to their surroundings. Garages should preferably be constructed with pitched roofs. Pathways and drives should also be sympathetic to their surroundings (4)
- 7.16 The height and pitch of roofs should be in sympathy with surrounding buildings (4)
- 7.17 Developments/alterations should not interfere with existing culverts, streams, flood plains or land drainage. They should also be able to cope with the overflowing, or temporary, watercourses which result from extreme weather conditions. This is of benefit to both properties and wildlife. (4)
- 7.18 Preserve the natural, winding character of parish lanes whilst ensuring that they can be safely negotiated (5)
- 7.19 Retain and maintain the cast-iron signposts and distinctive street name signs (5)
- 7.20 Retain the existing post-boxes (5)
- 7.21 Do not introduce further street lighting (5)
- 7.22 Ensure that security lighting does not detract from the natural darkness of a rural environment (5)
- 7.23 Bury service wires and cables (5)
- 7.24 Ensure that new/modified developments incorporate adequate off-road parking space (5)

