



# *Over Stowey*

## *Parish Design Statement*

*December 2006*

# 1. Introduction

## Why a Parish Design Statement?

**1.1** It was apparent from the Village Appraisal of 2002 that the majority of the residents of Over Stowey recognized and appreciated our heritage, and wished to keep our parish much as it then was. With this in mind, the Parish Council decided to respond to the residents' request and to initiate the preparation of a Parish Design Statement (PDS).

The purpose of this PDS is to describe and record the village at the beginning of the third millennium, and to set out guidance for its conservation, and for any future development, which residents, planners, developers, builders and public bodies may consult. It seeks to highlight what is special about Over Stowey, and to act as a means through which all residents can influence change.

**1.2** In accordance with Countryside Agency Guidelines the statement which has resulted has been compiled from the views expressed by residents through the following process of consultation:

- (a)** Preliminary publicity in the Quantock Messenger, followed by the formation of a group to take the idea of a Parish Design Statement forward, comprising two volunteers from the Parish Council, three from the community, and Tim Russell, Senior Quantock Ranger from the AONB Service.
- (b)** A public presentation and discussion in the Village Hall in the evening of 3rd March 2005, with speakers from the AONB Office, Sedgemoor DC Planning Department for Regeneration, and members of the PDS Group. Cameras were subsequently provided

by the AONB Office for interested residents from various parts of Over Stowey to photograph any feature which they liked or disliked, and felt should be taken into account.

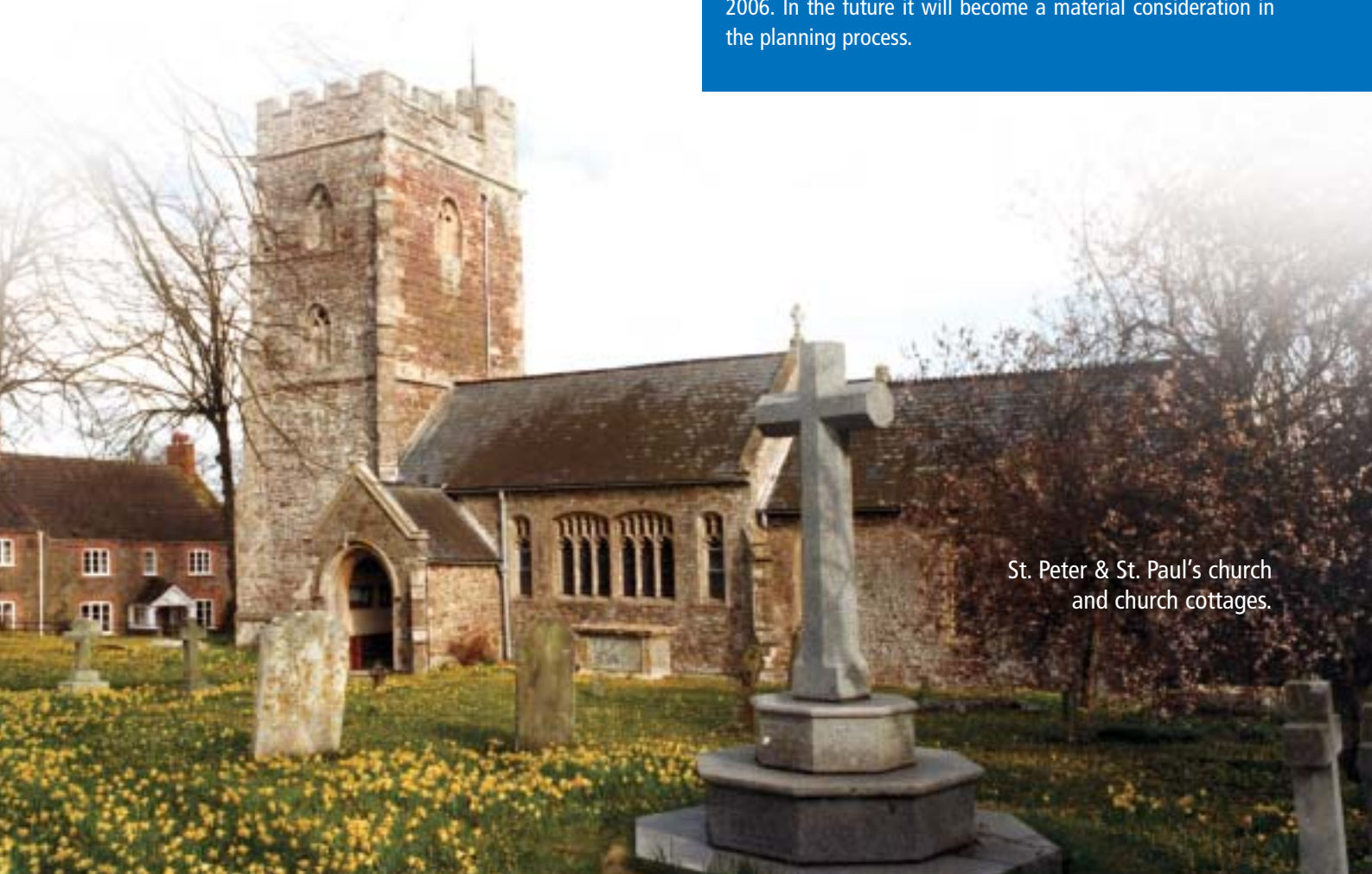
- (c)** A second, daytime, presentation in the Village Hall on Saturday 23 April 2005, with a display of photographs of many aspects of Over Stowey provided by members of the PDS Group and by residents, and inviting frank comments.
- (d)** An open morning on 11 February 2006 to consider and discuss the Draft PDS.

Following submission of the Draft Document to Sedgemoor District Council for Planning Officer feedback, the final draft was approved by the Parish Council on 16th April 2006\*\* and submitted to the the District Council for formal adoption.

This statement could not have been compiled without the enthusiastic input received from the community of Over Stowey.

We are grateful for the help we have received for this project from the Quantock Hills AONB Service and the Countryside Agency.

This document was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the Sedgemoor District Council on 23rd August 2006. In the future it will become a material consideration in the planning process.



St. Peter & St. Paul's church and church cottages.

## 2. Parish Context



Ruins of Adscombe chapel



The Old Vicarage



Adscombe Farm



Over Stowey Cricket Ground

### 2.1 Geographical Location and Description

Over Stowey, one of the most rural parishes in Somerset, lies on the north-eastern slopes of the Quantock Hills, with much of it in sight of the sea to the north, the Somerset Levels to the east and the Polden and Mendip Hills beyond.

As the ground rises to the summit of the hills to the south and west, the agricultural land and the small scattered hamlets give way to the moorland, woodland and forestry plantations which constitute some three quarters of the parish, and into which run three of the deep and steeply sided Quantock combs.

### 2.2 Historic Over Stowey

There have been settlements in this part of the Quantocks from earliest times. Flint tools found on the top of the hills are evidence of Prehistoric inhabitants. The hill fort in Cockercombe and the many burial barrows confirm the presence of Bronze and Iron Age peoples. The road from Combwich, through Keenthorpe and Over Stowey and over the hills was an important Anglo-Saxon military road, and by the time of the Norman invasion in 1066 Over Stowey formed part of a royal hunting estate belonging to King Harold himself. The Norman baron to whom William the Conqueror granted the Stoweys, meaning the Stoneways from which the name derives, established his first fortress beside the military road, before constructing the strongly fortified castle on the Mount. Plainsfield and Marsh Mills are both recorded in Domesday Book.

By the 12th century Over Stowey had a church, and, one hundred years later, a monastic settlement with a small chapel in Adscombe. Parsonage Farm and Plainsfield Court have medieval cores—Plainsfield Court was the ancestral home of the Blake family from whom Admiral Blake was descended. Subsequent building styles are well represented. In 1833 the liberal politician Henry Labouchere, later Lord Taunton, purchased a substantial estate from the Earl of Egmont, and in 1857 commenced the building of the great house which is Quantock Lodge. In 1920, purchased by the Local Authority, this became an isolation hospital for TB patients until the early 1960's, and housed Quantock School for the next thirty years. Over Stowey once had three water mills—at Adscombe, Plainsfield, and Marsh Mill (which was still working well into the 20th century). Copper was mined in Bincombe in the 1750s, and for hundreds of years many villagers scraped a living burning charcoal or manufacturing brooms from heather. The gathering and selling of whortleberries remained an important contribution to the income of the poorer people until the middle of the twentieth century.

In literature, Coleridge, Wordsworth and their friends were frequent visitors to Over Stowey during their walks in the Quantocks; the vicar the Rev. William Holland kept a diary from 1799-1818 which has come to be recognised as one of the outstanding journals from this period, and Phyllis Bottome, daughter of a later vicar, wrote beguilingly of her childhood here in the late nineteenth century in *Search for a Soul*. In 1956 the Quantock Hills were designated the first Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England, since when areas which lie in the parish have also been made a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a County Wildlife Site.

### 2.3 Present Day Over Stowey

The population is about 450, most of whom live in the small hamlets which are so characteristic of the parish. Industry is predominantly forestry and farming. Over Stowey has neither shop nor public house, but is well served for local facilities by nearby Nether Stowey. Amenities include the church; the village hall with club and bar; the sports field with tennis court and cricket pitch; Quantock Lodge with swimming pool and gym, the hills and their wildlife.

## 2.4 Planning Constraints

The designation of the Quantocks as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty - the first such designation in England - underlines the need for sensitive and appropriate planning controls.

Recent AONB policy calls for surrounding areas to be subject to the special planning constraints that apply at present to the designated area.

Parish (Village) Design statements will provide a local supplement to the design policies of the adopted Sedgemoor District Local Plan, which contains a range of policies relating to the control of development in the countryside and to design matters. With the exception of a small part of the Nether Stowey development boundary, which lies within the parish, none of the settlements in Over Stowey parish are recognised as "villages". Development will therefore generally be limited to adaptation of existing buildings and uses for which a rural location is necessary.

Our parish has thirteen listed buildings and many more which make a positive contribution to local character.

## 3. Landscape Setting

Some three quarters of the parish consists of moorland, natural woodland and forestry plantation, and the remainder fields, with scattered woods. Small streams run down each combe. The moorland flora is principally heather, whortleberry and bracken, with isolated holly, hawthorn and mountain ash trees. The higher ground comprises Hangman grits, with marls and valley gravels lower down the slopes, where stone, including the green Cockercombe tuff from which Quantock Lodge is built, has been quarried for centuries. The natural forest, which comprises sessile oak, mountain ash, holly and beech, was utilised for charcoal burning until the twentieth century, and a number of the pits and platforms from this activity has survived. The forest has reclaimed a number of former fields on the lower edge. Many parts of the forest are still bordered with the characteristic beech hedge banks. The extensive Forestry Commission plantations, mostly of conifers, with some deciduous trees on the borders, were started around the time of the Great War, when timber could not be imported.

The fields remain mostly small, and divided by thick banked hedges of hazel, blackthorn, holly, spindle and beech, with many hedgerow trees, notably oak, ash and beech. The great elm trees are gone, but the species survives in the hedges.

## 4. Settlements, Buildings and Spaces

Over Stowey has seven distinct, long established settlements—the village of Over Stowey itself, Adcombe, Aley, Bincombe, Friarn, Plainsfield, and a settlement on the western slope of the castle hill of Nether Stowey. The only additions of any size to the parish have been in the 20th century—Council housing in Hack Lane and Aley, and new school buildings at Quantock Lodge.

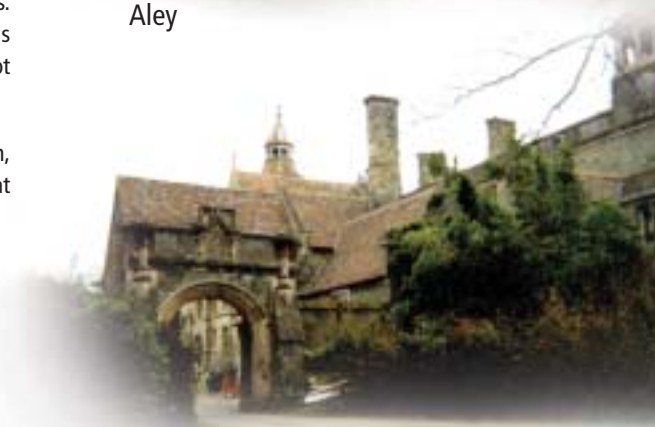
All the settlements are small; none are regarded as "villages" in the Local Plan Policy.



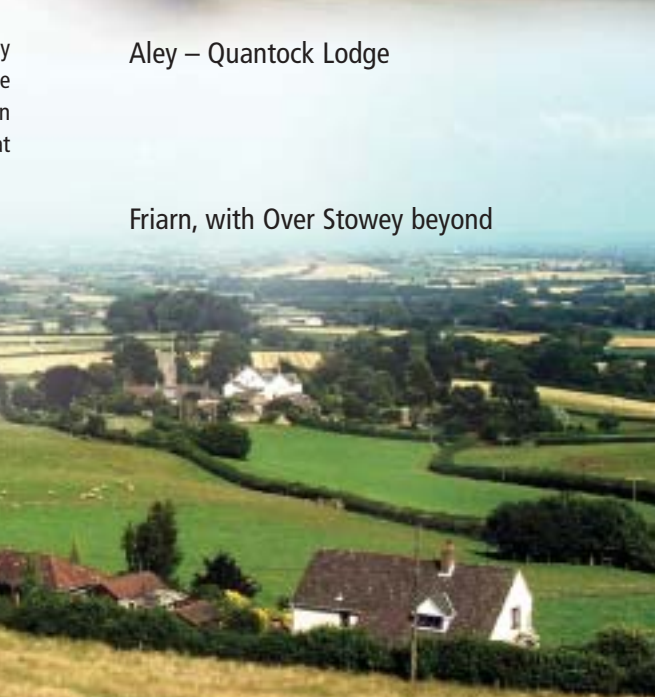
Plainsfield Court



Aley



Aley – Quantock Lodge



Friarn, with Over Stowey beyond

**Over Stowey village**, the original settlement beside the Norman castle, has changed little, and includes the parish church, known to have been in existence by the 12th century; the parsonage (now Parsonage Farm), mostly 17th century, but with a medieval wing which may well have been the original priest's house; the 17th century manor house (now Cross Farm), the vicarage, dating from the first part of the 18th century, the early Victorian school (now the Village Hall) and its school house. East of Over Stowey along the Bridgwater road are a number of houses and cottages of varying dates, including Marsh Mill House, dating from the eighteenth century, the adjoining Mill, built about 1815, Park House, also of 18th century origin, but extended at the time that Quantock Lodge was built, and Halsey House, of about 1980.

**Adscombe** is a small hamlet with a substantial farmhouse and adjoining cottages, dating from the 18th century, and a cross-passage house of tudor date, believed to have been the guest house to the nearby monastic farm.

**Aley** is a concentrated group around a former Tudor yeoman's farmhouse, with cottages of 18th or early 19th century date, a large walled barton or farmyard serving Quantock Lodge, and 20th century Council houses. Quantock Lodge, a substantial Victorian mansion, with two large modern annexes, replaced the small hamlet of Aley Green, with its public house, the Dial, said to have been the oldest in the county.

**Bincombe** comprises a single cob cottage by the green at the top of the hill, and a small group of early, traditionally built cottages and farm at the bottom. Bincombe Green lost many of its dwellings in the middle of the 19th century.

**Friarn** housing, spaced out along the lane high on the hillside, originated as humble huts built by squatters on the roadside verge, became estate cottages to Quantock Lodge, were sold off in 1920, and extensively modernised and extended in the late 20th century.

**Plainsfield**, on the southern edge of the parish, is the largest settlement—previously with its own smithy and mill and centred round its medieval manor house, with farm and cottages mostly of 19th century origin or earlier.

**Castle Hill**. 20th century infilling between the cottages on the western slope of the Mount have made this in effect a continuation of Nether Stowey's principal street, Castle Street/Castle Hill.

**Hack Lane**, on the hill opposite, originated as council houses in the 1930s.

## Building Styles

Before the 19th century the principal local building material was the local red sandstone, with some cob, generally of an early date. At the beginning of the 19th century the traditional thatched roof began to be replaced with clay pantiles and roman tiles, initially imported, but later produced locally at Bridgwater, and this is now the predominant building style, later houses having dressings of red Bridgwater hard brick around window and door openings. Later in the 19th century many of the more important Quantock Lodge estate buildings were standardised with slate roofs and dripstones above windows. A few houses were built between the wars with pebble-dashed walls, and this fashion led to this finish being applied over original stone elsewhere. Modern planning has allowed some additional external finishes such as brick, but traditional roof tiles are generally insisted upon.

**Agricultural and Equestrian Buildings** dating from before the 20th century are of stone. A few early 20th century corrugated iron farm buildings remain, but in recent years increasing numbers of barns have been built of asbestos or composition sheeting, and stables and field shelters of timber construction.



Adscombe with  
Bridgwater Bay beyond



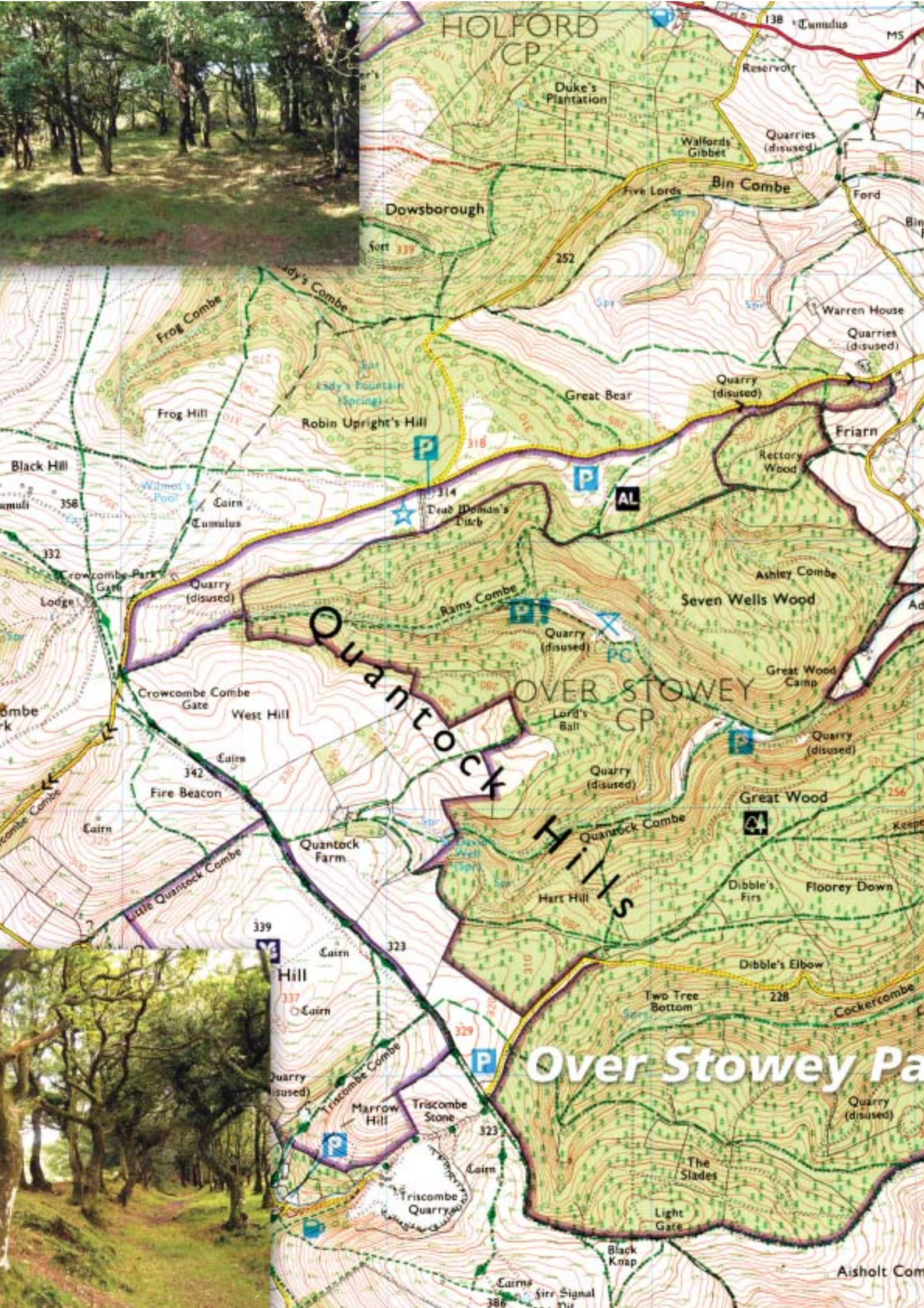
Bincombe Combe and the ford



View over Plainsfield to  
Bridgwater Bay



Hack Lane



HOLFORD CP

OVER STOWEY CP

Quantock Hills

Over Stowey Park

Frog Combe

Frog Hill

Robin Upright's Hill

Black Hill

Wilmot's Pool

Crowcombe Park

Crowcombe Gate

Fire Beacon

Quantock Farm

Triscombe Hill

Marrow Hill

Triscombe Quarry

Great Bear

Dead Woman's Ditch

Rams Combe

Quarry (disused)

Lord's Ball

Quarry (disused)

Quanceck Combe

Hart Hill

Great Wood

Dibble's Firs

Dibble's Elbow

Two Tree Bottom

The Slades

Black Knop

Warren House

Quarries (disused)

Rectory Wood

Ashley Combe

Seven Wells Wood

Great Wood Camp

Quarry (disused)

Floorey Down

Cockercombe

Quarry (disused)

Aisholt Com

Reservoir

Walford's Gibbet

Bin Combe

Five Lords

Dowsborough

Fort

Lady's Combe

Lady's Fountain (Spring)

Cairn

Quarry (disused)

Cairn

Cairn

Cairn

Cairn

Quarry (disused)

Cairn

Cairn

Fire Signal

138

252

339

318

314

342

339

337

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228

228

228

228

M5

Ford

Warren House

Quarries (disused)

Friarn

Rectory Wood

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Quarry (disused)

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## Key

Parish boundary



Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Not to Scale

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# 5. Highways, Traffic & Signs

**5.1** Apart from the straight 'New Road' from Marsh Mills to Plainsfield, built by Lord Taunton in 1857 to divert the old Taunton road around his estate, Over Stowey's roads are the centuries old narrow, winding and undulating lanes, often wide enough for only a single vehicle, and unsuitable for much more than local traffic.

**5.2** The agricultural areas of the parish have a network of ancient footpaths and bridleways, many of which require regular clearing to prevent them becoming impassable. Most have been signposted with unobtrusive wooden finger posts, and this work is continuing. The recently created AONB Quantock Greenway, intended to lure the public away from the heavily visited parts of the hills, has its own discreet signposts. The moorland and forest are open to all walkers, with an extensive network of public rights of way. The increasing use of the bridleways by cars and motor cycles is likely to lead to restrictive legislation.

**5.3** Under a recent AONB scheme the traditional Somerset cast iron signposts have been refurbished, and many modern signposts replaced in the same style. AONB notices, with the Quantock symbol, a buzzard, have been placed at a number of approaches to the village of Over Stowey. Parish post boxes old and new are of traditional design.

**5.4** As in most rural areas, electricity and telephone poles and cables are an unattractive feature. The cost of siting all these underground would be prohibitive, but it is hoped that in due course this might be achievable.



Bincombe Green



Quiet lane



Cockercombe

Woodland Bridleway



Electricity pole



Street Furniture at Bincombe Green



Notice board & letter box



Cast iron signpost



AONB village sign



# 6. Suggested Guidelines for Property Repair Work, Alterations & Development

## How Can This Help Me?

The character of local buildings, of whatever period, is defined by a few major elements including window design and construction, outside finishes such as stone, rendering and pebbledash, and colours. Respecting these elements will help to preserve the character of the parish. If you are considering extending or making any changes to your property please consider the following important points.

**6.1** Look at your property as others will see it. Take a look from all sides and especially from a distance.

**6.2** Note what makes your property distinctive. How does it blend in with its neighbours? Look at rooflines, roofing materials, chimney patterns, window design and construction, pointing of stonework, rendering, colour of paintwork, boundary walls, etc.

**6.3** Take a closer look at specific elements such as special brickwork/stone detail and pointing, window material, design and shape, doorways and door design. E.g. are window proportions being maintained? Can reclaimed or closely matching materials be used? Are there original features which have been changed and should be restored?

**6.4** Visualise the changes you need to make, and consider the effect on the appearance of your property and how the changes you make will relate to neighbouring properties, especially where yours is joined to or grouped with others of the same or very similar style.

**6.5** Look at changes made to other buildings; are there lessons that can be learnt?

**6.6** Will your new building or proposed changes sit well with the original design and the surrounding area? If the answer is not a clear yes then examine other ways of achieving the functional changes whilst conserving the scene.

## Who should I contact for help or advice?

The Clerk of the Parish Council can give you the name of a member of the PDS Group who can offer free preliminary advice.

Alternatively, contact Sedgemoor District Council, Development Services, Bridgwater House, King Square, Bridgwater, TA6 3AR. Telephone 0845 408 2545.



Before and after restoration: glazed porch removed, period windows and door reinstated; paint removed from stonework.



Cross Farm

Barn conversion-  
Plainsfield

# 7. Recommendations

**7.1** In view of Over Stowey's nationally recognised 'hill and valley' landscape, planning applications should address the impact of the proposed work on the landscape setting.

**7.2** New developments should respect the predominance of local stone or render as the traditional materials.

**7.3** Salvaging and reuse of local stone is encouraged. Reconstituted stone is inappropriate as it is unlikely to replicate the characteristic irregularity of local stone. Pointing should be flush in the traditional style.

**7.4** The height and pitch of roofs should be in keeping with those of surrounding buildings.

**7.5** Garages and outbuildings should have pitched roofs.

**7.6** Special regard should be given to the siting and appearance of agricultural and equestrian buildings.

**7.7** Boundary walls of local stone can often help new development blend with its village setting. Large expanses of concrete or tarmac for driveways are discouraged, and greater use of natural materials recommended (e.g. cobbled forecourt).

**7.8** The use of quick growing alien conifers for boundaries is discouraged in favour of traditional hedging species. Tree plantings should make use of local native species and consideration given to their effect on views.



Thatched cob cottage destroyed by fire restored to original form.



Park railings - Pepperhill Farm



Sympathetic extension to 1920s house



Agricultural building painted green.



Modern stables in Cockercombe



Double Roman tiles on an old cottage



Victorian slate roofing on the village hall



Pantiles on modern garage of traditional construction.



Local red sandstone—dressed.



Rough hewn local sandstone / slate with flush pointing



Extension with dormer and reclaimed double roman tiles

**7.9** Given the growing awareness of 'light pollution', external lighting, including security lighting should not detract from the natural darkness of the rural environment.

**7.10** Any new development or alteration should have regard to the low density of buildings in the parish, and retention of rural views.

**7.11** Vehicular entrances from lanes should preserve their small-scale character, whilst ensuring that they can be safely negotiated.

**7.12** Conifers felled on forestry plantations should ideally be replaced with native hardwoods planted informally, or returned to heathland.

**7.13** As many existing services as possible and all new services should be placed underground.

**7.14** Street furniture should be unobtrusive and in keeping with its setting.

**7.15** The local highway authority should ensure that the rural character of the roads and verges is maintained and that signing is kept to a minimum.

**7.16** Due regard should be given to action points in the Quantock Hills Management Plan 2005—see over:



Red sandstone with rusticated piers and traditional telephone box.



Red sandstone with brick dressings and traditional casement window.



Lime based render on cob, with thatched roof



Stone garden wall with cock and hen coping



1920s pebbledash—probably over stone and traditional sliding sash window.



Cast iron gutter and downpipe..

# Development and Planning Action Points

The Quantock Hills Management Plan (2004/2009) is a statutory document of great significance for the Parish of Over Stowey, and the development and planning action points of this plan provide a legislative backdrop to our PDS guidelines and recommendations.

Key elements from the Development and Planning Section of the Quantock Hills Management Plan are:

**DAP 1** Monitor and identify significant potential development in the Quantock area and protect local distinctiveness, biodiversity and character through JAC comments influencing planning issues from an AONB perspective.

**DAP 3** Encourage the preservation of significant traditional Quantock buildings.

**DAP 4** Encourage district councils to refuse planning permission for new agricultural buildings where the proposed development is out of character in terms of scale, size, location, design or external appearance and would adversely affect the appearance of the locality.

**DAP 5** Encourage district councils to refuse planning permission for telecommunications masts or any structures including wind turbines that affect the skyline, character or landscape of the AONB and villages.

**DAP 6** Encourage the locating underground of services hardware in the AONB including cables and wires

**DAP 7** Pursue early JAC consultation in respect of planning applications outside the AONB boundary that may have a significant affect on the setting of the Quantock Hills or their outlook, including increased light pollution.

Consultation in the Village Hall  
on Saturday 23 April 2005



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