



Introduction

In 2000 the Parish Council and a group of volunteers worked on a major Parish Survey to measure opinion on future needs in our community. The results of the survey were published in June 2001 and included detailed recommendations on steps to be taken to improve the quality of life in both Wortham and Burgate. Since then the council and other organisations in the village have been working to implement this parish plan.

The list of actions needed was long and we knew it would take several years to complete. In the years since the parish plan was completed, the community has designed, funded and built a village sign, introduced adult education classes, improved footpath signage, published a map of local walks, improved parish council communications, organised a Helping Hand group of volunteers, produced a welcome pack for new residents, established twice-yearly litter collections, launched an after-school club, and published a monthly email newsletter. A parish web site has been set up and plans for a second affordable housing project in the village are under way.

The Parish Council also acted on a suggestion that we should consider making an entry into a 'best village' competition and, in 2004, Wortham won the Mid Suffolk Village of the Year competition and went on to win the award for Suffolk Village of the Year.

Now we are turning our attention to another of the action points in the village plan that called for the rejection of property designs that are out of character with existing traditional architecture. The result is the Wortham Village Design Statement.

Wortham is mentioned in the Domesday Book and 800 years later was made famous by the Reverend Richard Cobbold who wrote about the residents and made paintings of them and their houses. The Reverend Richard Cobbold's work and generosity amongst the residents of Wortham was later made famous in the two authoritative books, "*The Biography of a Victorian Village*" edited and introduced by Ronald Fletcher and "*Parson and People in A Suffolk Village Richard Cobbold's Wortham, 1824 -77*" edited by David Dymond.



Why a Village Design Statement?

Most residents agree that Wortham is a very special place. Its open spaces and commons, beautiful timber framed buildings, the Grade I listed church, miles of hedges, abundant wildlife and absence of light pollution make Wortham unique. Without these features the village would change radically; they are features that are appreciated by residents and visitors alike and should be celebrated and protected for the future.

However, in common with other similar communities in East Anglia, there are threats to the visual character of our village. Economic and social factors have meant great change. For the most part, the changes have brought major benefits to the quality of life in the countryside and continuing change is both inevitable and welcome. However, if the special character of Wortham is to be retained, change must be effectively managed. Until now, development decisions have been made on an individual basis and without the benefit of an overall vision to protect and enhance the character of the village.

The Wortham Village Design Statement (VDS) aims to provide this vision through clear, simple guidance. It is intended to influence the statutory planning system, developers and individual residents planning alterations to their homes. We should retain the key characteristics and features of the village and ensure that new development is appropriate for our rural setting.

Above all, Wortham should continue to be an active, living and working community that people feel proud to live in. We want to leave a village that our children and theirs are proud to inherit.

How this Design Statement was developed

The work on this VDS was commissioned by the Wortham & Burgate Parish Council for the village of Wortham only. It was led by a working party made up of parish councillors and local residents. The views of all Wortham residents have been sought through questionnaires and surveys and through comments at public meetings. Valuable help has also been received from Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC), Suffolk County Council (SCC), the Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS) and the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE).

“ Many of the people who live and work in Suffolk value it for the sense of being unspoilt and retaining a character which by contrast has been made less recognisable elsewhere by ubiquitous developments.”

**Suffolk Design
Guide 1993**

The view across Long Green, that has been called the widest thoroughfare in Suffolk.



The Tithe Memorial, near Magpie Green, commemorates the 1934 seizure of pigs and cattle for unpaid tithes.



Wortham Ling is home to several rare grasses and has been designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.



What characterises Wortham today

Wortham is an attractive, thriving and lively village in mid Suffolk. The village is set in an agricultural landscape. It is spread over 1109 hectares with more than 103 hectares of common land. The common land and the agricultural setting give Wortham its intrinsically open, rural feel.

Wortham includes five hamlets - Long Green, the Marsh, Magpie Green, the Ling and the Brook, each with their own characteristics. The village has a population of c730 occupying approximately 270 houses. Some 20% of the buildings in the village are Grade II listed because of their architectural or historical significance.

The village has developed around its open spaces and is characterised by single rows of dwellings, set back from the road. This is a significant feature of Wortham and new development must be sensitive to and in character with it.

Wortham's open spaces

The four unenclosed commons - Long Green, the Ling, Magpie Green and the Marsh - are a unique feature of the village and give the village its distinctive character. Two of these deserve special mention because of their status. Long Green has been designated a Visually Important Open Space in recognition of its unique features. 15 hectares of Long Green and the area towards Magpie Green are boulder clay grassland – DEFRA has estimated that there are only 100 hectares of this important species-rich habitat remaining in Suffolk.

The Ling, an area of sandy heathland, is a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It is important for its lowland dry heath and a variety of grassland that has developed on this sandy, drift deposit. Like the other commons, it is home to a variety of wildlife.

There is an extensive network of footpaths and bridleways throughout the parish that are well-used and enjoyed. They provide important access to the countryside and allow Wortham to be seen from many vantage points through its mature trees and rich hedgerows.

“ Local Planning Authorities should prepare policies and guidelines that encourage good quality design throughout their rural areas, using tools such as Landscape Character Assessment, Village Design Statements and the design elements of the Parish Plan. ”

**Government Policy
PPG7 (2004)**

Almost 20% of Wortham's buildings are listed — from the Church (Grade I) and the Manor (Grade II*) to a variety of beautiful cottages (Grade II).



The playing fields, at the centre of the village, provide a different type of open space that contributes nonetheless to Wortham's special sense of openness giving excellent access to the open views of Long Green.

These open spaces, footpaths and bridleways are features of the village that it is vital to protect. In three separate opinion surveys since 2001, residents identified the commons and open countryside as the most valued feature of the village.

Fauna and Flora

Anyone walking along the network of lanes and paths of Wortham will be impressed by the rich diversity of plants and wildlife. You can find rare orchids, hear nightingales and turtle doves, spot grayling butterflies on the Ling and see a wide range of mosses, flowering plants and grasses. The ponds, also a feature of the commons, provide habitat for the great crested newt.

The variety of trees is an important part of the Wortham landscape and help give the village its character. Most roads and paths are tree lined and there are dense hedgerows. A hedgerow survey currently being undertaken by local residents has found a wide range of native, deciduous species.

The rich flora and fauna are a direct result of the varied habitats afforded by large areas of open space.

A Heritage worth conserving

Wortham is a large open village with no clearly defined centre. Its combination of special features - open common land giving a sense of spaciousness and calm, hamlets with their own distinctive feel and the high proportion of listed buildings, make it unique in East Anglia. Why would anyone want to risk losing or spoiling this? Future changes must be sensitive to this very special environment. New buildings and developments must be in keeping with their surroundings or we will lose the heritage we want to conserve.



“ Your commons are part of your visual heritage. Your ancestors looked out on essentially the same scene. All of this is the reason why DEFRA is continuing to provide financial support for the upkeep of your commons.”

Chris Hainsworth
English Nature
Wortham &
Burgate Annual
Parish Meeting
2007

Wortham is a thriving village with a strong sense of community. Its agricultural setting is part of its character.



Problems and opportunities

Ask residents how they feel about living in Wortham and you will get a positive response: there is a strong sense of community. However, not everything is perfect. Like many other villages, there are issues that need to be considered.

The commons are a valuable part of the identity of the village but they currently have about 23 different owners. The variety of ownership has the potential to be a positive influence but there needs to be a united, coherent approach to their use and management. Without this, multiple ownership creates the risk of different approaches and interpretations of the management principles that apply to the commons. Ownership brings with it special responsibilities. The Parish Council will resist any actions by individual owners that might impair the visual impact and well-being of the commons.

Until now, new development proposals have been considered on a case-by-case basis because there was no guiding vision for the future. Fortunately, most recent development has been in keeping with the style of the village but, regrettably, not all. We can all cite examples of buildings that do not blend in; we do not have to be experts to know that when too many buildings are crammed into a small space this conflicts with the open nature of our village. Similarly, we do not welcome buildings that are too close to the roads, which would be out of keeping with most of our community. For most of us, it is only when we see new developments or extensions that do not respect the current line, form or spacing that we realise that they diminish the visual character of the village.

Although planning applications have to be considered on their specific merits, this VDS provides essential guidance on the visual aspects of new development. It reflects the views of the local community and therefore must be treated as an important and influential resource.

“ A particular settlement should always be respected in terms of density, scale and environmental quality. Villages vary in character and what might be appropriate in one could be out of place in another.”

**Government Policy
PPG3 2000**

Geese on Long Green. Sheep and horses also graze here.



The Ling provides an excellent habitat for many birds and mammals.



Trees on Long Green between the Post Office and the A143.



Design Principles

So, how do we protect and enhance this heritage? The principles below set out the key steps and, together with the more detailed Design Checklist on pages 24 – 25, give valuable guidance to architects, developers and individuals alike.

Underlying all the principles is the fundamental view that, in order to retain the village's special character, design must be appropriate for a rural setting. Suburban style estates, street lighting and advertising hoardings are not for Wortham.

Principle 1: *Retain Wortham's sense of space.*

Low density housing is preferred. New development should not be allowed to dominate the views in, out and through the village. Boundaries should complement the feeling of spaciousness in the village and, wherever possible, be of traditional native, deciduous hedging.

Housing density, perhaps more than any other design feature, can change the character of the village. High density is more likely to reflect urban rather than rural design and so housing density is a critical issue for Wortham. If we want to protect the current nature of the village and if new development is to be sensitive to its surroundings, which is what we urge, development around the commons and on any other greenfield site should be infill or rows of single dwellings with no backland development. Infill that would result in cramming will be resisted. As a general guide, infill developments should occupy no more than 50% of the available frontage.

Brownfield site development might be more appropriate for slightly higher density but should still retain a sense of spaciousness. Scale, size and layout must be appropriate for the location. Where higher density housing is essential, terraced housing is much preferred to detached houses with minimal space around them. Adequate parking should be included in new developments but parking areas should be well screened and unobtrusive.

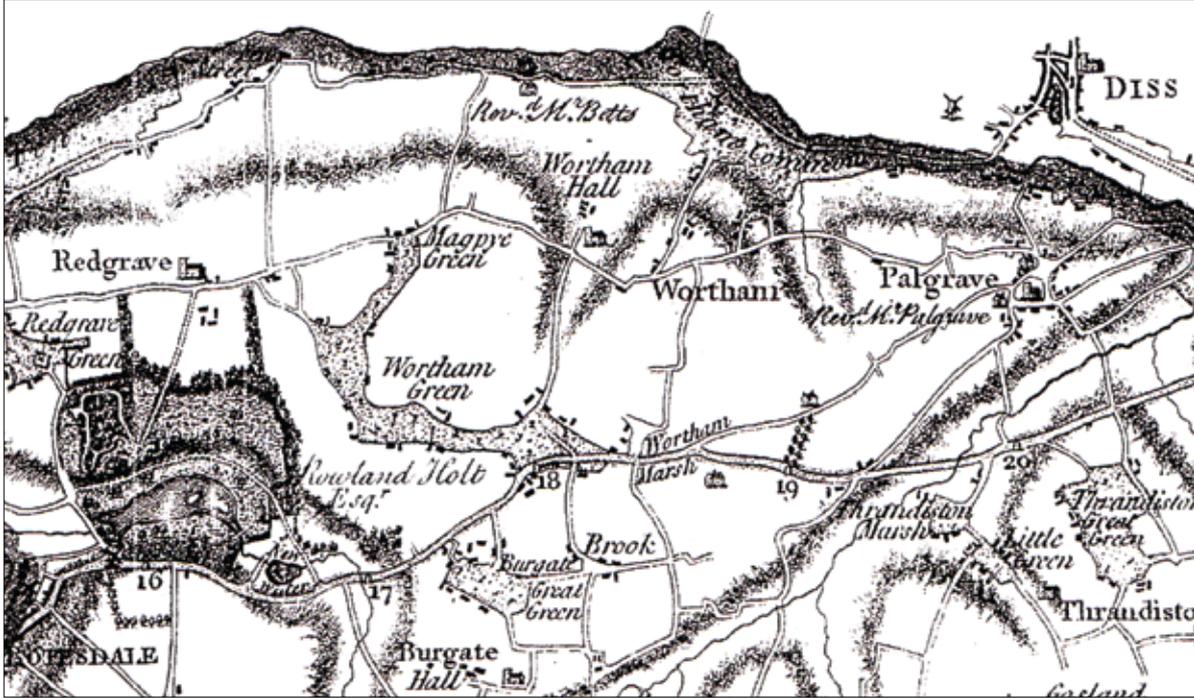
“ The overall vision for housing in Mid Suffolk up to 2021, based on the community's priorities, is: to meet the requirements for new housing while maintaining the special character of Mid Suffolk's towns, villages and countryside. New housing development will be of a high standard of design and layout and will address the need for energy and resource conservation. ”

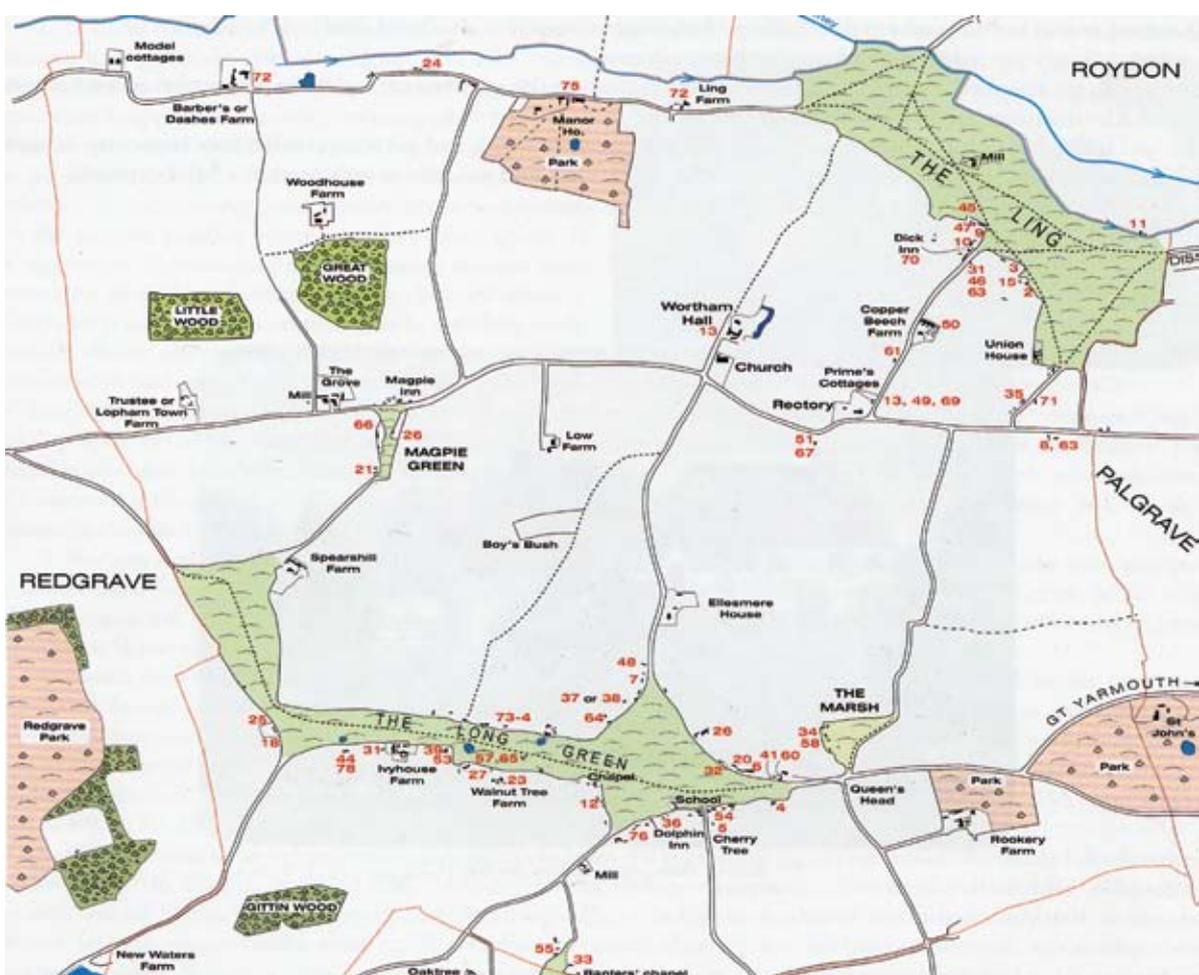
**Mid Suffolk
District Council
'Final Issues &
Options for Core
Strategy' 2007**



Seen from the air, Worham is dominated by its farm and common land. This illustration by Worham artist David Mitchell emphasises the beauty of this green and pleasant land.

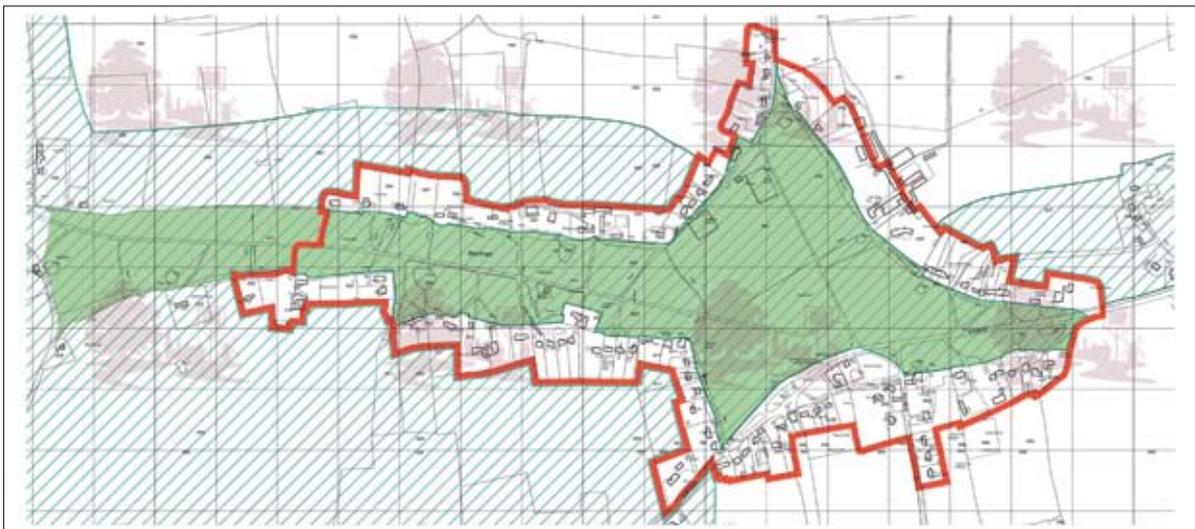
Worham has changed surprisingly little since Joseph Hodkinson's map of 1783 (Property of Suffolk Preservation Society). Note the arrowhead shape of Long Green, shown again on the facing page.





Although it has a relatively small population, Wortham is one of the largest villages in Suffolk by area. The red numbers on this map are from the recent Cobbold book, and refer to properties featured in it.

The illustration below, from Mid Suffolk District Council's Local Plan, shows the arrowhead shape of Long Green, shaded green because it has been designated as a Visually Important Open Space. The hatching around it indicates a Special Landscape Area.



Wortham has an extensive network of lanes and footpaths that are an important feature of the village.



Just minutes away from a busy thoroughfare, this footpath links Rectory Road to Long Green and to almost every corner of the village.



Quiet roads like Marsh Lane have the 'frozen in time' feeling of a bygone era.



Without exception, density must be appropriate to the setting. The planning system does not require slavish following of government density guidelines. The setting is critical and urban design and density must be avoided if we are to retain the rural character of the village.

The real surprise, when driving into Wortham on the A143, is the open space of Long Green. It is unexpected and a pleasure. But it is not the only view that is special. There are open views from the large number of small roads, lanes and paths that criss-cross the village. Views from all of these give different perspectives whether entering from Roydon to Wortham Ling; from Mellis to the A143 or from Redgrave to Spearhill.

It is always easier to appreciate these visual surroundings when walking, cycling or riding rather than in a car but this raises the critical issue of road safety. Road signs are essential but too many can confuse rather than inform and they never add to the visual attractiveness of the village. Signs should be kept to the minimum possible consistent with speed enforcement and other necessary information.

Wortham's sense of spaciousness is enhanced by the dominance of soft landscaping. Buildings are generally set in generous plots that form part of the wider landscape and are as visually important as the houses themselves. Boundaries should therefore complement rather than reduce this feeling of spaciousness.

Traditional, native, deciduous hedging reflects a rural rather than urban feel so we should use it wherever possible. Where boundaries are designed for livestock, wooden post and rail with woven field stock fencing attached is generally preferred. Ideally, this can be erected as the core of a hedge.

Roadside verges are also important for the rural landscape and should be appropriately managed – over-management can lead to erosion and untimely cutting prevents flora from setting seed. Verges should only be heavily cut back where there are genuine safety concerns.

“ It would be odd indeed to cherish a Constable but not the Suffolk landscape he depicted . . . We all share responsibility for not only protecting our environment but also improving it by achieving a high quality of design. ”

**Suffolk Design
Guide, Suffolk
County Council**

The line of charming Victorian houses fits in well with the older buildings on Post Office row.



The Anglia Autoflow buildings sit comfortably on the edge of Wortham Ling.



Rash's Crescent was the first affordable housing project in Wortham. The site of the second is on the Mellis road.



Principle 2: *Ensure design is sensitive to its surroundings.*

Good design is a critical part of the development process. Buildings should be of appropriate design and consistent, in size, scale and materials, with surrounding buildings. They should not dominate Wortham's natural landscape and open spaces. New buildings, extensions and alterations to existing buildings should be of simple design and well proportioned to be in character with traditional Suffolk style and design.

This principle applies to all types of housing – affordable homes as well as executive development. Appropriate design does not have to mean high cost.

Simplicity is essential, both for traditional and modern design. Buildings should form a positive relationship with their surroundings and uphold some key basic concepts – simple rather than over-elaborate, good proportions, subtle not garish colours.

Vernacular architecture should be enhanced and complemented. Two storey buildings are generally more in keeping than single or multi storey and are predominantly rectangular with single or two storey projections. Open porches are more common than closed, neutral colours rather than garish etc. For more detail see the design checklist on pages 24 – 25. However, we are not trying to preserve the village 'in aspic'. There must also be room for the modern and the 'one-off' provided it forms a positive relationship with its surroundings and upholds the basic principles of simplicity outlined above.

Principle 3: *Use traditional materials.*

What do we mean by traditional materials? Traditional local building materials include chalk, timber, clay, straw and flint. Slate is acceptable because, although not a local material, it has been used in the village and surrounding areas, for roofing and damp proof courses, since Victorian times.

“ In any county, there must be room for innovation or even downright eccentricity provided that there is an architect with a distinctive vision behind it. ”

**Suffolk
Preservation
Society 1993**

“ Unless we are prepared to see the character of Suffolk continue to be eroded, new development must complement traditional Suffolk building styles. ”

**Suffolk Design
Guide 1993**

Wortham Post Office Stores and Café is one of what are arguably the three most important buildings in the village.



Another is Wortham School, where new architecture picks up the themes of the older buildings.



Then there is the Dolphin Inn, the regular meeting place for many residents and village organisations.



Principle 4: *Consider climate change but protect village character.*

Steps to mitigate climate change are necessary but we should deal with them in a sensitive way and avoid negative visual impact.

Climate change cannot be ignored. Although not yet a major feature of local housing, the use of devices such as solar panels and individual wind turbines is likely to increase. These are positive moves but the visual impact must be taken into consideration.

New houses must be built to the highest insulation and environmental standards.

Trees are important to help counteract the effects of carbon emissions. The Ordnance Survey map of 1880 shows Wortham Great Wood and Little Wood, now severely diminished. Wherever possible, steps should be taken to restore lost woodland.

Principle 5: *Manage our commons and countryside effectively. Open spaces must be well managed, preserved and protected.*

The commons are actively and effectively managed by the Parish Council and the Ling is managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust. We must ensure the preservation of the space to protect the village character, to support the variety of fauna and flora that exists and to ensure that trees and hedgerows are maintained.

Parking on common land and the use of common land as shortcuts for vehicles between roads is contrary to the by-laws and is therefore forbidden. Both practices detract from the visual impact of these open spaces and risk destroying the environment we wish to protect.

Principle 6: *Avoid light pollution. Proposals and developments that minimise light pollution will be supported.*

Light pollution is spreading. Wortham is in one of the few areas in the country where stars can still be easily seen and where there are clear open skies. Responses to questionnaires indicate how important Suffolk's wide skies are to residents,

“ Traditional Suffolk houses, whether late medieval timber frame or eighteenth and nineteenth century brick, have one most striking feature: they are simple, almost austere, relying far more on beautiful proportions than on ornamental features. ”

**Suffolk
Preservation
Society 1993**

Although many of the period cottages in Wortham date back to the 16th century, not many have their date on display, like this one in Union Lane. (The same cottage is shown in the centre of page 6).



From 1840 to 1905, Wortham Manor was the home of the Betts family. This aerial shot by local pilot Al Mathie shows part of the unspoiled estate.



The importance of the countryside is reflected in one of the stained glass windows on the north side of St. Mary's Church, Wortham. The bird tending its four eggs is possibly a blackbird.



both by day and by night. This is something to be actively preserved.

Principle 7: *Minimise the visual impact of new technology. Satellite dishes, mobile telephone masts and any similar construction must be situated without detriment to their visual surroundings.*

Satellite dishes and mobile phone masts are part of today's environment and will inevitably appear in most settings. While recognising this, the visual attractiveness of our surroundings must be maintained. Wherever possible, antennae and masts should be concealed or disguised. This is particularly important with regard to listed buildings.

The future of our village is up to us

So now we have a Village Design Statement. What next? One thing is certain, if we just file it, sit back and fail to stand up for high standards, then ugliness and mediocrity will be an inevitable consequence. There is plenty of evidence that this is a real risk and apathy in some communities has already resulted in low quality development, unattractive house extensions, inappropriate architectural features and the cramming of too many houses in small spaces. The character of many centuries-old villages has been spoiled in just a few short years; once a community gives up and permits that to happen, it can never be restored. Let's face it, there have been some developments in Wortham that we would prefer to have been handled with more sensitivity and respect for the history and character of our village. However, so far, we have escaped most of the worst excesses of poor quality architecture or inappropriate urban design in a rural setting.

In January 2007, Richard Ward, then Director of the Suffolk Preservation Society, told a crowded Wortham Village Hall, "It's your village, you decide. It is up to you to decide what you want. Don't wait for the developers to tell you what you want."

“ Opposition to development is often driven by . . . fear of environmental dilution – of ubiquitous, bland design that takes everything from the landscape and gives nothing back.

It is greatly soothed in cases where builders take note of local character, and where they see the value of integrating their developments into the community.”

**Campaign to
Protect Rural
England**

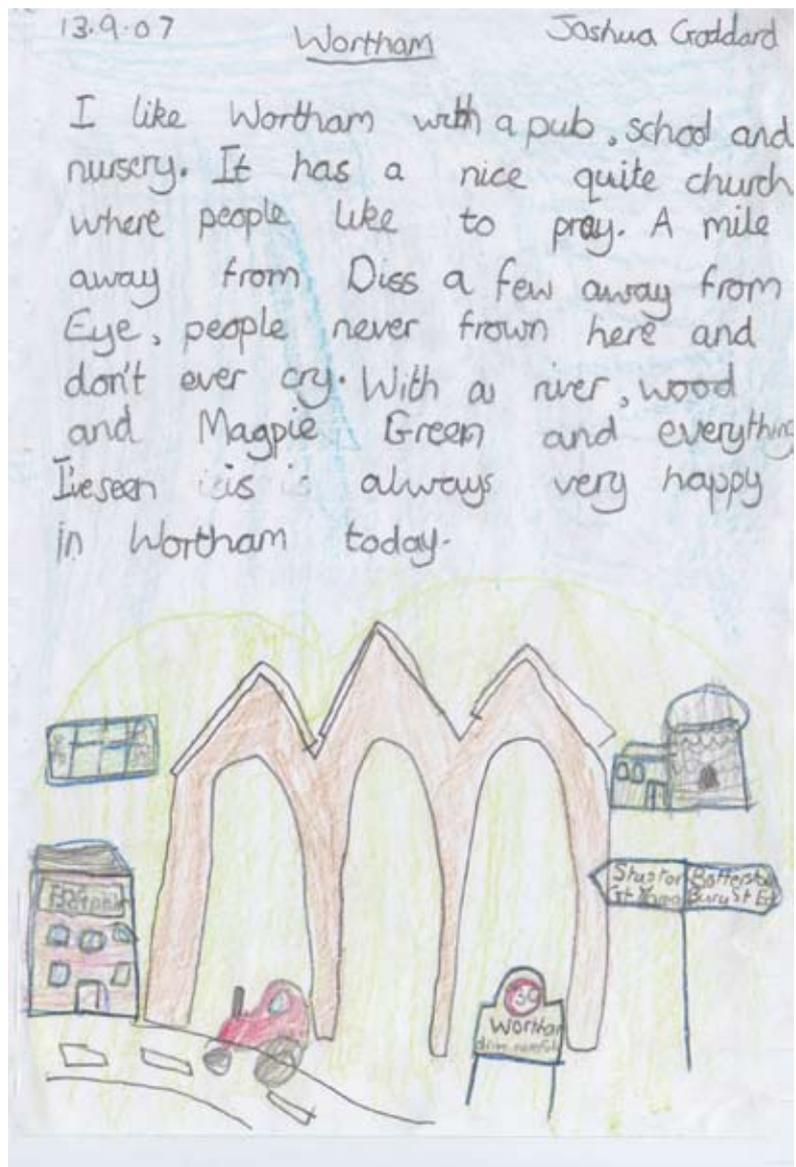
**Worthingham
through the eyes
of its children . . .**

**‘People never
frown here’**

Each of us has a slightly different perspective on the beauty of our village but the eyes of children perceive qualities many adults miss. The children of Worthingham School were invited to illustrate what Worthingham means to them.

Among the many contributions was one from Amy Furness, who drew a scattering of cottages linked by a winding network of pathways across the common.

The Faith, Hope and Charity arches from an earlier school building dominated Joshua Goddard’s illustration and he added a few thoughts on what a happy place Worthingham is.



The message from the team that has produced this Village Design Statement is important for all of those responsible for managing our heritage.

Architects, builders and developers We welcome the chance to work with you to achieve high quality work of which both you and this community can be proud. We ask you to recognize that the reason for our insistence on quality is our conviction that Wortham's character is special and must be protected for future generations.

Planning professionals We are proud of what we have been able to achieve with your help and encouragement but ask you to join us in admitting that we did not always get it right. We firmly believe that Wortham has some unique features that must not be jeopardized and we invite anyone who is not convinced of this claim to come and see.

Wortham residents What can we do as individuals? Spread the word that Wortham will oppose bad design, shoddy work, inappropriate development and cramming. If you are having an extension built, make sure your architect and builder sign up to the principles set out in this statement. Stop to ask about the effect on your neighbours of a new conservatory, a tree planted in the wrong place or security lighting that spoils their night sky. Recognize that apathy is the worst enemy of beautiful places. When you believe your Parish, District or County Council have made a bad decision, tell them so. Write to your MP. Write to the local paper. Tell them that Wortham is special and that you are not going to sit by and see it spoiled. Tell anyone who will listen that we all have a responsibility to manage our own heritage for future generations.

If all of us speak up for what we believe and argue for what we value, Wortham will be a place we will be proud to hand over to our children and grandchildren.

Whose backyard is it anyway?

“ One of the commonest and easiest jibes thrown at opponents of new development is nimbyism. Many protesters implicitly accept the validity of the charge by, often unconvincingly, denying it. The shame is misplaced. Can it seriously be argued that objections to development should be discounted when they come from people who have to live next to it? Should their views weigh less heavily than those of developers with vested interests? Where does the 'environment' start if not in one's own backyard, and what kind of active citizen would fail to defend it?

Like all forms of vulgar abuse, 'nimby' has the intellectual force of a handful of mud. It has no place in any argument worth listening to. ”

CPRE

Don't

- ✗ Infill is strongly discouraged where the space available is less than twice the frontage of the proposed new building.
- ✗ Use high density building on brown field sites that would be out of character with existing development.
- ✗ Develop sites too close to a road or out of alignment with existing buildings.
- ✗ Allow garages to dominate any new development.
- ✗ Build large communal garage blocks.
- ✗ Use close-boarded and woven wooden fences, especially if higher than one metre.

Design Checklist

This checklist is intended to give additional guidance in support of the Design Principles. Much of the detail on buildings has been drawn from the Suffolk Design Guide.

Do

- ✓ Build infill without backfill in areas around the commons and other appropriate sites.
- ✓ Ensure 'clusters' on brown field sites have adequate space.
- ✓ Consider terraces where higher density housing is essential.
- ✓ Ensure new developments have a positive relationship with their surroundings.
- ✓ Give preference to two-storey, predominantly rectangular houses.
- ✓ Use gabled roofs with a fairly steep pitch.
- ✓ Use local materials.

Roofs

- ✓ Eaves and verges: provide generous overhangs, for both practical and aesthetic reasons.
- ✓ Use plain or moulded barge boards to suit individual designs.
- ✓ Use terracotta/red or grey/black clay pantiles or plain tiles for roofs.
- ✓ Create a variety of roof scape (where several houses are being built together). This reflects the way the village has developed and helps avoid the appearance of an urban estate.
- ✓ Build chimneys in brick to match the main walls.

Walls

- ✓ Use good quality facing bricks, without coloured mortars.
- ✓ Where walls are rendered, the render should have a 'smooth' trowelled finish not rough cast, Tyrolean or pebble dash.
- ✓ Use neutral colours (i.e. ivory, cream or buff) or traditional Suffolk pink to contrast with terracotta/red or grey/black roof tiles. A dark plinth (traditionally black) gives a rendered house a firm looking base.
- ✓ Use weatherboarding sparingly (e.g. to parts of an upper storey above brickwork) on residential buildings. It can be used effectively, to clad a single storey lean-to addition or 'outshoot' to a two storey building, or to an entire detached garage, to reflect the tradition of farm outbuildings. (Black weatherboarding was traditionally used for farm outbuildings in the Wortham area).

Windows and doors

- ✓ Use good quality detailing around door and window openings to enhance the appearance of buildings. Windows should be set back from wall faces, to create shadow and relief.