

# CROSCOMBE

## VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT - JANUARY 2013



### INTRODUCTION

This Village Design Statement describes the qualities that Croscombe people value within the village and its surroundings. They are confident that future development will reflect that which is important to villagers so that the village retains its unique character. All villagers have been consulted and their views are reflected in this document. A questionnaire was circulated in October 2011 to all households outlining the process of forming a VDS and asking for comments. A very well attended open meeting was held in February 2012 where the draft VDS was presented and residents encouraged to comment on its contents. Throughout this period and afterwards the Parish Council, in consultation with Mendip District Council, put together the document. This present VDS has the parishioners' overwhelming endorsement.

Croscombe has core facilities such as a school, a meeting place, a bus route and a shop, so is described as a Primary Village in the draft Mendip District Council core strategy document. That strategy sees Croscombe absorbing 32 new dwellings, some of which should be affordable. This can be achieved by appropriate small-scale infill and minor builds on green-field sites; any large-scale development would destroy the unique character of Croscombe.

## LOCATION

Croscombe is 20 miles south of Bristol and Bath and lies halfway between Shepton Mallet and Wells on the busy A371. It is a linear village set on each side of the river Sheppey and the A371 in an attractive valley setting. The steep sides of the valley lead to pasture and woodland. (see map at Annex A)

## HISTORY

Although first recorded by King Ina in 706 AD, it was not until after the Great Plague and the subsequent boom in the Wool trade of the 16th and 17th centuries that Croscombe really emerged. During this thriving period the present St Mary the Virgin Church was reconstructed and many significant houses, cottages and hostgeries were built that survive to this day, particularly in the historic core. However, there are isolated houses of historic interest in other areas of the village. The Church is of great interest with an unusual spire and Jacobean interior woodwork of national renown. It is a popular tourist attraction.



The wool trade declined but was replaced during the Industrial Revolution by silk production, mining, quarrying and milling. These activities have left their mark upon the village landscape and built environment. The tall red-brick chimney belonging to a former gristmill in Long Street is a clear reminder of Croscombe's industrial past.

## PRESENT DAY

Present-day Croscombe is a thriving community with a village shop, school, two inns, church, chapel, bus service, community allotments and children's play area. It has a Parish Council and 16 active village groups.

The population of Croscombe is 640 in some 265 households of which 215 are owner-occupied. There are 105 young people (0 - 15), 365 people of working age and 170 draw a pension. These proportions are broadly in line with those of the County as published by ACRE – Parish Profile for Croscombe, March 2011.

Some residents are self-employed but there are few indigenous employment opportunities. Hence, most employed people commute to neighbouring Shepton Mallet or Wells, and a few to Bath, Bristol and beyond. Future development of jobs in Shepton Mallet and Wells might encourage more families to settle in Croscombe.

## Village Store

During 2006/7 the shop was threatened with closure as the previous owner had retired and put the premises on the open market. The village community came together. They formed a limited company and a village shop association with 135 members. These entities raised a good deal of capital and, with the entrepreneurial initiatives of the lessees, the shop thrives. Its van service visits local communities during the week and provides a seven-day newspaper delivery service.



There are also two public houses that attract a great deal of custom from both the village and surrounding areas and help to provide additional income for village charities via events that they organise.

## Village School

The Croscombe Village School is a Church of England Voluntary Aided Primary. It is inclusive of all faiths and beliefs and has close links with the local community and the local Church. The 1870 building is architecturally interesting while the inside has been equipped with up-to-date facilities.



Children come from the village, Shepton Mallet, Dinder, Darshill and Bowlish. The current role is 63 with a growing number of pupils living in Croscombe.

The School has a playing field nearby, a Forest School in the adjacent Ham Woods and a productive and gold cup-winning allotment.

## Play Area and Village Hall

The Parish Adventure Play Area lies within the Playing field where children benefit from active adventure recreation. There are also picnic benches for all comers. This area is used regularly for many village activities.



The modern and well-equipped Village Hall abuts the play area. It is a very popular and busy facility used by the village groups, visiting organisations, family gatherings, *et al*. It has become an essential hub of village life from its use as a drama society and cinema club venue to use for weddings and other large social functions.

## Village Groups and Societies

Croscombe has 16 groups and clubs catering for the needs and interests of all ages. These contribute hugely to the sense of community and social harmony that characterises the village. They are all thriving with good participation and consistent activities throughout the year.

- Women's Institute
- Frolics Theatre Group – annual pantomime and other productions
- Cricket Club
- Croscombe Society – organises major events and projects
- Church and Chapel Choirs
- Church and Chapel Youth Groups
- Keep Fit Club
- Pilates Club
- Film Club
- Senior Citizens
- Village Orchestra
- OAP and Children's Group
- Skittles and Darts Teams
- Village Shop Committee
- Croscombe Community Allotment Association
- Croscombe Charter Market

## LANDSCAPE

Croscombe lies in a distinctly steep sided valley. Its geology is typical of the Mendip Hills with carboniferous limestone at the top of the hills and dolomitic conglomerate further down. The geology gives Croscombe its natural beauty and charm. The village nestles at the bottom of the valley either side of the River Sheppey.



In the 1960s/70s major work was done to the River Sheppey and its culverts to ameliorate flooding caused by the river in spate. There is a continuing programme of works to improve the drainage of run-off water from the steep valley sides during periods of heavy rain. Not surprisingly, the possibility of an increased flood risk is a material consideration in any new build close to the River Sheppey.

The approach from the hill on the north side of the village is spectacular and enjoyed by the many walkers who visit. It is one of the best views of this area in the Mendip Hills and together with the view from the top of the hill on the south, set the scene and gives the village its distinctive character of being a close-knit community. Again, there is a consensus within the village that there should be no building that would damage this visual character which presents such a recognisable picture of an English rural community.

Farmland lies immediately beyond village properties. The farms are very active, running dairy cattle, beef stock and sheep. Much of the pasture is put to silage during the growing season.

On both sides of the valley are ancient woodlands that thrive with wildlife such as fox, badger, deer, small mammals and many birds. Any construction up to or into the valley walls would have a deleterious effect on a wide range of indigenous wild flora and fauna.



## ROADS AND TRAFFIC, PATHS AND FEATURES



Croscombe is served by the A371 that runs through the centre of the village and then by minor roads that access all the housing not on the main road.

These ancient minor roads, lanes and byways that are interspersed with irregular spaces and areas of verge, shape much of the character of the village. These minor roads are narrow and often congested. They are used predominantly by local traffic but are accessed by delivery, emergency and agricultural vehicles. The houses predate the need for parking space hence many parishioners have to park on these minor roads. This problem is likely to be exacerbated as more and more households own more than one car. These narrow roads are largely, but not exclusively, in the conservation area and their character should be maintained and not compromised by any future development. Access to the Fayreway section of the village (the most obvious area for any development) is by three narrow single-lane access points. Parking should be provided with any new dwellings or made available off-site to accommodate infill schemes.

There are good pavements along almost all of the A371 through the centre of the village, and along Fayre Way. Ancient walls, grass verges and hedges edge these pavements. These features should be preserved and inappropriate urbanisation in appearance avoided. Some of our minor roads have no or, at best, inadequate pavements.

The village is generally well lit with the odd black spot.

Many public footpaths (see Annex A) criss-cross the parish and link the village to Shepton Mallet, Wells and beyond; they are widely used by visiting ramblers and villagers. These are an important leisure and health asset and must be respected in future developments. A longer-term aim in the village is to allow access to some of these traffic-free routes to cyclists and horse-riders.

There is a prominent open meadow between the Play Area and West Lane. It provides the contrast between the close community and the open aspect of the Mendip Hills, and this feature should be preserved. This is an area of land widely used by villagers for walking and for nature observation.

In the public meetings organised to discuss this VDS considerable concern was raised about the effect of any large scale development on the infrastructure and services of the village especially as access to parts of the village off the main road is at times difficult due to the narrow roads. It was recognised that additional housing was needed but the consensus was for small-scale infill rather than specific modern development areas.



## THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND OTHER FEATURES

Over its long evolution Croscombe has absorbed many building styles. The historic core that lies in the conservation area has a distinct homogeneity, but other areas contain diverse building styles and topography that are difficult to generalise precisely. It is difficult to identify one specific village style but are three character areas which reflect how the village has developed. (See Annex C) These are:

- The historic core which is the original village of Croscombe mainly along the A371 and around the church roads of Rock Street and Church Street with a few isolated dwellings added in the 18th century such as Paradise House, but again these are situated in the core.
- In the 1950s/60s council houses were built behind the main street in and around the road called Fayreway, or Back Lane as it is known in the village. Here there are a number of cul-de-sacs built into the valley on both sides of Fayreway which contain some original council houses, privately built bungalows (some dormer) and two-storey houses.
- Private houses (mainly bungalows) lie behind the core on both sides of the valley but mainly on the less steep and less wooded side near to Fayreway.

### Features of the Historic Core

The historic core of Croscombe contains most of the significant conservation area (see Annex B) with many buildings of great character and architectural importance whose arrangement has remained unchanged over several centuries. The earliest is the church of St Mary the Virgin that has elements from the 14th century.



There are 63 other listed buildings and structures listed as of Special Architectural or Historic Interest under the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act of 1990. (Two Grade I, three Grade II\* and 59 Grade II). In addition to the principles applying to the care and maintenance of these buildings, any development should not adversely affect the setting of a listed building.

This core of Long Street, Church Street and Rock Street has a limited palette of materials with a prevalence of natural stone with some render, and clay tiles with some slate.

If any infill occurs in this area, where traditional materials are used and the design seeks to replicate the style of earlier buildings, then it is important that the materials match

village materials and the detailing and execution follows the traditional method to avoid poor pastiche. Dressed stonework (ashlar) should be natural stone rather than reconstituted and free from saw lash.

**Orientation:** Most dwellings tend to sit very close to the road, their ridges running parallel to it (e.g. east and west of Church Street) but these are interspersed with more formal dwellings sat a little further back such as Pointers or Paradise House.

**Walls:** Walling stone should resemble traditional work, be it ashlar, semi-dressed rubble or random rubble rather than laid as an applied skin. This is particularly relevant where it is used only in the facing of the primary façade and then inappropriately returned to a “recessed” rendered elevation.

Traditional buildings in the village use the locally quarried carboniferous limestone (known locally or colloquially as Ham Stone) that has generally oxidised to become a honey warm brown.



Newly quarried stones from out of the area should not be used to mimic the weathered colour as the local stone will suitably weather with time. The local stone has not been quarried for some time; hence, salvaged stone is likely to be the best match. Non-local stone from a similar geological source could be considered if it is a good match.

Hydraulically guillotined stone should be used sparingly as it often does not allow the replication of traditional walling unless further dressed before use. Stone should be laid on its natural bed. The temptation to insert large face-bedded stones should be avoided as it will delaminate sooner than on its natural bed, and it is, in itself, a peculiarly modern practice that indicates that a wall has been recently constructed.

Where possible walling in local stone should include stone whose face has been split as this introduces a mottled effect to the finished wall that characterises the village vernacular, other than on buildings that have extensive areas of punch-dressed stone (these typically being Victorian or those of greater grandeur).

Lime-based mortar used for bedding of traditional material, whether brick or stone, is typically slightly lighter in colour than the stone; it should be textured through the use of a good aggregate and the colour should take the lead from the colour of the stone. These mortars have the added benefit of decaying in advance of the walling material as well as being partially permeable to moisture. Hence, the faces of the stone suffer less from the decay resulting from moisture retention, so prevalent where cement is used for repair work. New buildings should ideally use a lime-based mortar to achieve both the lighter colour and the better weathering characteristics of traditional buildings.

A few houses in the core are rendered and the village accepts that renders and applied finishes are characteristic of many village buildings, in particular those of the 20th century. Rendering should not be discouraged providing that it does not dominate the streetscape by virtue of the sighting or scale of the development. Traditional lime-based renders were once more prevalent than they are today, their removal being a Victorian fashion to reveal the underlying stonework which was often never intended to be exposed.

Where used in combination with natural stone on buildings intended to replicate the local vernacular, consideration should be given to using renders or paints that contain lime as these produce less uniform and more subtle colouring as well as increasing the probability of a variation in texture and long-term weathering.

**Windows:** The historic core generally has timber sash or casement windows in exposed dressed-stone surrounds and any new buildings should avoid the use of UPVC surrounds and any obvious double glazing, although secondary glazing would be acceptable.



Windows tend to be multi-paned timber sliding sashes or smaller side-hung casements often in exposed dressed-stone surrounds. The use of stone labels and moulded stone mullions is also common in the historic core but dormers are not. Most dwellings tend to sit very close to the road, their ridges running parallel to it (e.g. east and west of Church Street) but these are interspersed with more formal dwellings sat a little further back such as Pointers or Paradise House.

**Doors:** Within the historic core, doors are almost exclusively constructed from timber. In the less formal cottages these are usually traditional vertical plank doors, sometimes incorporating a small viewing window in a simple stone surround. In more formal buildings panelled doors are more common, generally four or six, sometimes in a more decorative stone surround with console brackets supporting a small stone slab hood.

**Roofs:** Equally, the majority of the roofing of the core is terracotta pantiles with the odd slate roof and some use of Roman tiles. Few if any, other than the church buildings, use lead, zinc, copper or more modern sheet roofing materials.

All show the colouring and weathering of considerable age and any new infill should also have the same type of roofing applied in order to blend with the vista as seen from the valley sides. There should be no infill building that detracts the eye from the overall ancient appearance of the historic core.



## Features of Fayreway

Fayreway is dominated by one-to-two-storey, 20th-century detached properties with a mixture of render and reconstituted stone. Houses are set back from the road but with the principal ridge running parallel to it, often behind a natural stone wall which is much higher on the south side of the road than on the north side.



Besides the aforementioned council houses, there is a group of Cornish units with their distinctive mansard roofs and low red-brick chimneys which have been individualised by their owners such as retaining the natural grey brick and, in some cases, adding a range of renderings. In this area there are number of window styles from the original metal-framed ones to new UPVC.

In addition to these Cornish units are the council-built properties which reflect the building style of the 1950/60s but which have been extensively individualised/extended into an array of appearances. Any additional building on or near to these houses would have to follow the same height and dimensions in order to allow for a harmonious aspect. Any large dwellings would not fit with the present trait of the standard three-bedroom small dwelling of the 1950s.

At the northern end of Fayreway is a group of later-20th-century bungalows fronting open countryside/play park behind a native hedge to the north. These bungalows around Bennetts Close are a mixture of red brick and render and ridges generally running parallel to the road but with some at right angles. The houses are set back from the road behind natural stone boundary walls with small front gardens and attached flat roofed garages. There is little conformity of design as all have been individualised/extended by their owners.



Fayreway at its southern end has a range of privately built large bungalows, some of which have dormer features. These face onto a large area of farmland that has the potential for sympathetic development.

Many of these village buildings do not have a predominant architectural style, so it is not surprising that the windows within the buildings are equally varied. In general, windows should reflect the architectural style of the parent dwelling. Where intended to mimic traditional designs they should be appropriately detailed, constructed and fitted allowing suitable reveal depths, sill details and so on, and avoid the exposure of modern lintel incorporation. New developments should take into account their setting in the selection of casement style and glazing. This also applies to roofing and these should follow the general use of Roman tiles of either a terracotta or grey appearance with judicious use of slate where required. Coloured roofs such as green ones would not be acceptable.

In the middle of the Fayreway miscellaneous range of housing structures is a small development of seven red-brick houses collectively called “Somerville Cottages”. These houses are distinguished by the attractive large grass area to the front of them reminiscent of the 1930/40s approach to housing before the desire for garages arose. This area (next to the Village Hall) is a distinctive feature and all the residents maintain the appearance of their houses to reflect this snapshot of a bygone era. Infill would be inappropriate here.



### **Perimeter of Village Centre**

Continuing on from the eastern end of Fayreway are Pound Fold and Boards Lane. This is a range of developments above the historic core of Church Street and Rock Street. This area contains a variety of architectural styles although most of the dwellings attempt to take advantage of the southern aspect and both lanes are dominated by their narrow width and flanking natural stone walls. Pound Fold has a number of dormer bungalows on the top valley side and this style would be expected to be the adopted class if any building should occur in fields beyond these dwellings as this would ensure the consistency of aspect for anyone looking down onto Croscombe from the valley sides.

Again, there is a range of roofing, window and brickwork styles and the majority of the more recent buildings have either concrete tiles, modern clay pantiles or double Romans. Generally, the more modern materials tend to be harder and uniform in appearance by virtue of their manufacture or interlocking design but no additional buildings should adopt any appearance that does not balance with these existing styles.



## **General Observations**

Village buildings cannot be characterised by a defining roofing material and new development should not be restricted to a particular material. However, materials should be chosen to reflect the architectural style of the development and should be of a type likely to mellow with time rather than remain brash and new for a prolonged period, a trait that generally only traditional natural materials (stone, clay and slate) can obtain.



The design of any roof features (stone coping, water tabling, chimney stacks, chimney pots, dormer windows, roof lights and rainwater goods) should be to the style of building and particularly to adjacent properties and roof lines.

In addition to the three distinct patterns of Croscombe development there are areas of development such as the cul-de-sac called Coombe Cottages which comprises small bungalows occupied by the elderly and fronted by large individual housing.

## **Extensions**

Several village properties have been extended to increase living space. Extensions that have been granted by both the Parish Council and Mendip District Council are generally subservient to the host building and complement its architecture. Any future extensions should not be constructed to obscure the principal façade or remove the ability to read the original building design.



Similarly, conservatories in the village do not detract from the character of the host building, and their materials do not clash with existing materials and colours. The village would expect that any new dwellings that have such “add-ons” follow the same format and are constructed to merge with the landscape.

Garages and sheds should be similarly proportioned and discreetly positioned. No building should adversely affect the vista of the area in which it is placed. For example, conservatory and modern garage construction would not be welcome in the historic core.

### **Doors and Porches**

As with the style of windows these are very varied and this variation forms part of the character of the village. However, doors of any new dwelling should complement the style of its neighbours. Few houses in the village have UPVC doors; solid wood doors are the norm.



Several dwellings have doors that open directly onto the pavement or road. In other locations it is appropriate that front doors should be set back from the boundary of the property and reflect or complement the architecture of the dwelling. They should be modest and use materials that are in keeping with the design and function.

Porches on village dwellings are generally modest by their nature and should match or complement the existing architecture. Garages and sheds should be similarly proportioned and discreetly positioned. No building should adversely affect the vista of the area in which it is placed. For example, conservatory and modern garage construction would not be welcome in the historic core.



In short, any new building should not dominate but complement the scale, style and materials of adjoining properties.

### **Green Spaces**

Green spaces are an important amenity for the village and should not be used for any form of development. (See map on page 5) The ones below are those that the present villagers regard as essential to their quality of life:

- A small 16th-century Pound, recently upgraded by the Parish Council provides a quiet restful space.
- The larger Griffins Green is leased by the Croscombe Society and has a sitting area, notice board, flagpole and a profusion of wild flowers, trees and shrubs.
- A village allotment (10 plots) was developed in 2011 and thrives.
- Playing field and Adventure Play area and the adjoining field.
- The Green framed by Somerville Cottages.

(See Annex D)



## Future Developments

The emerging Mendip Local Plan proposes a requirement of 35 new dwellings in Croscombe over the period 2006-2038. Three have been built or have planning consent. There are also unoccupied properties in need of development that could provide at least five further dwellings. The remainder, about 28, can be absorbed within or close to the existing village boundaries without resorting to a large estate solution swallowing a large tract of landscape.

Overall the streetscape of Croscombe tends to be very linear in layout with most streets running east-west following the contours with only occasional north-south streets rising steeply from the valley floor. Larger estate or cul-de-sac development is not common with the latter being a development from the second half of the 20th century.

The following are the key planning issues which the residents consider important and need to be taken account of when considering planning applications:

- New development should not adversely intrude on the existing setting of the village and residents' outlooks.
- New dwellings should reflect the style and boundaries of adjacent properties.
- New developments must make provision for additional adequate parking.
- Trees, native hedging and the River Sheppey are important to village character and should be enhanced in any development.
- Rights of way and footpaths should not be eroded by any future building plans.
- Listed buildings and structures form an important part of village character; new development should not detract from that character.

- Open green spaces are a significant characteristic and amenity in Croscombe which should be preserved.
- There is potential for existing sympathetic infill on several small plots in the village; this may rely on existing landowners reviewing the use of their land.
- Boundaries should reflect the style of the area.
- Garages, sheds and conservatories should be modest and not detract from the character of the parent dwelling.

## **Summary**

Croscombe village is a busy and vibrant community. The parishioners are forward-looking and, over recent years, have introduced several innovations to enhance the village. They look forward to continued development but only within, or very close to, the present-day village profile. Further housing allocations should avoid creating a single large estate or extension to the village as it would compromise its setting and character. Given the current supply of sites, modest parcels from some of these would be better than a single large development. There are many opportunities for more dwellings with new build, redevelopment and conversions.

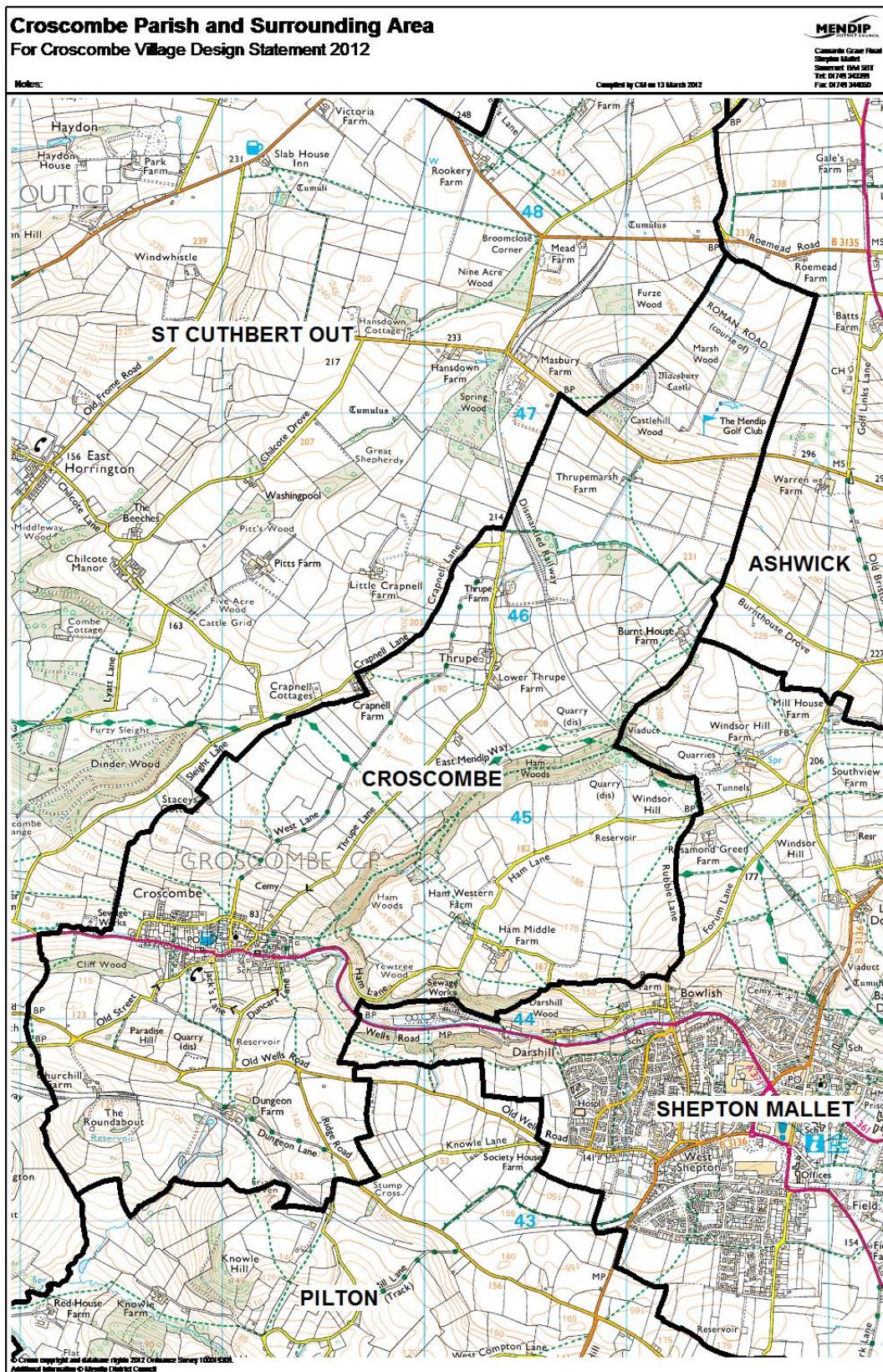
The parishioners look forward to working closely with Mendip District Council and others to achieve the best for the community, both established and new.

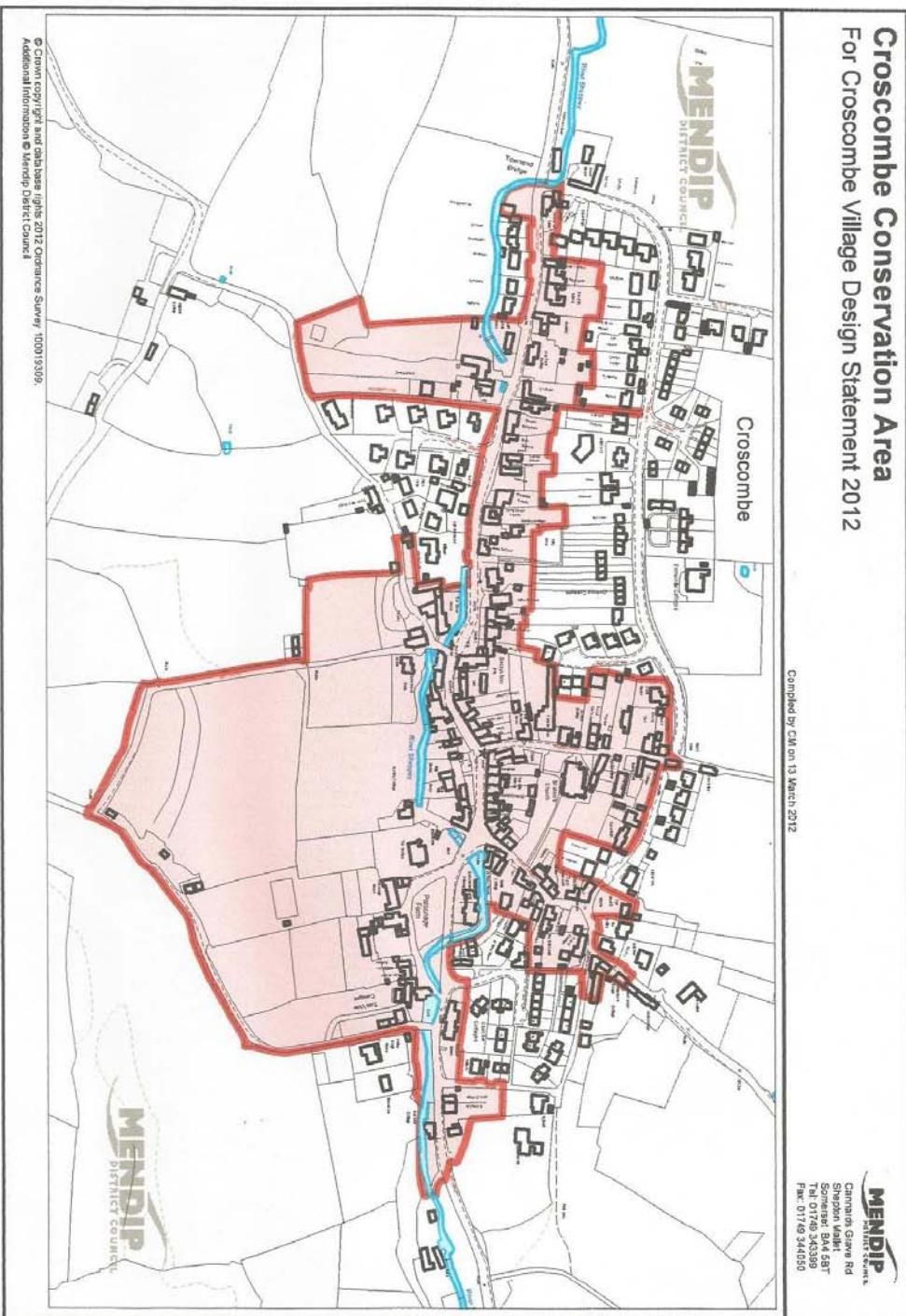
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## **Annexes**

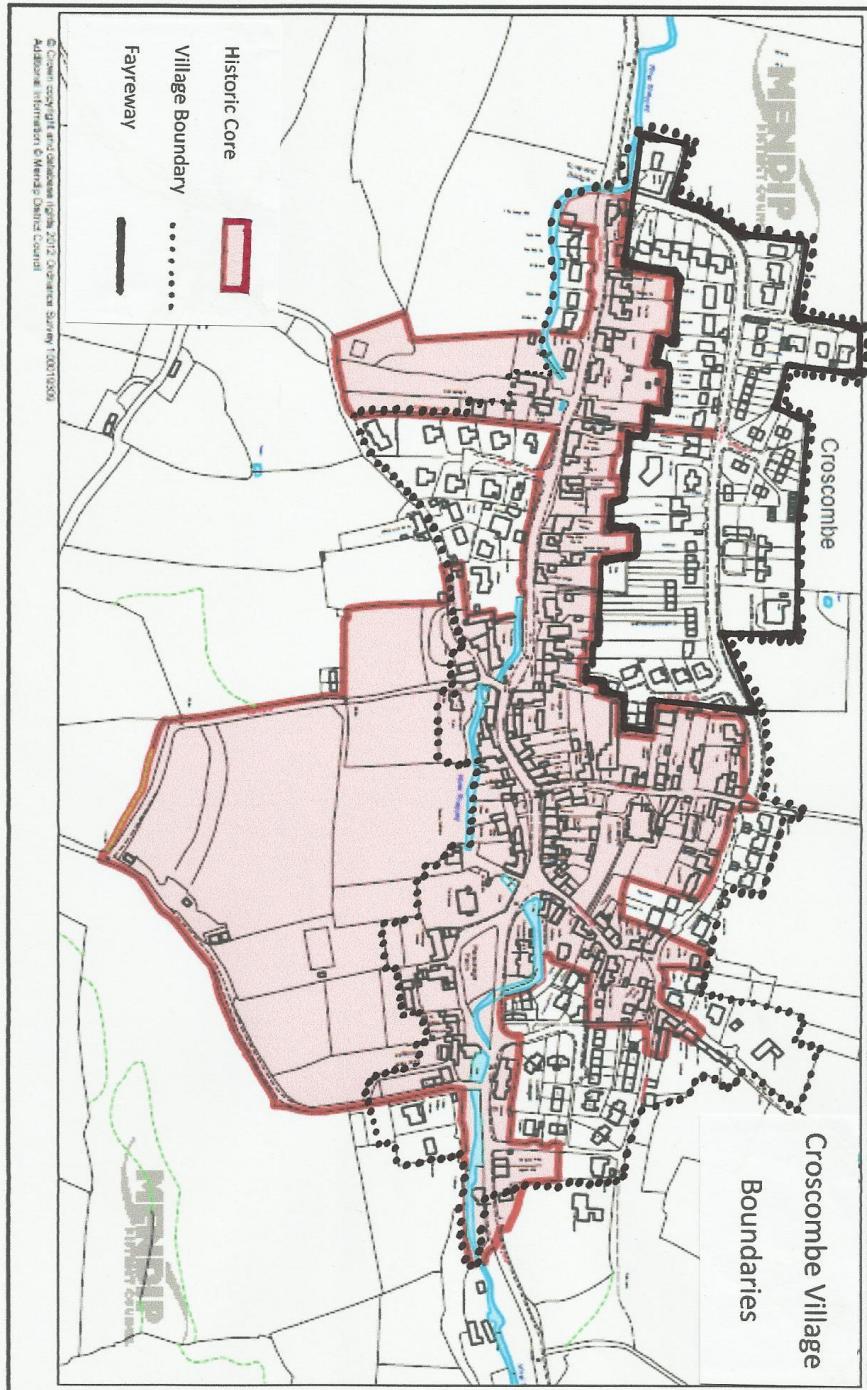
- A. Map of Parish
- B. Map of Conservation Area
- C. Map of Character Areas
- D. Map of Green Areas

## ANNEX A





## ANNEX C



## ANNEX D

