

Policy 12 - The Natural Environment

Environmental Objectives

1. To mitigate the effects of the Climate and Ecological Emergency as declared by the Parish Council.
2. To preserve and enhance the unique rural landscape character of Sedlescombe and the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL) and its setting, including its rural lanes, open spaces, views and the distinct settlement pattern of the village.
3. To conserve and enhance the biodiversity within the Parish, including the protection and creation of green corridors and wildlife connectivity. Development will be required to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain in accordance with national policy and any relevant development plan policy.
4. To protect important landscape features within the Parish, including trees, hedgerows, verges, ponds, watercourses, protected biodiversity assets and the wider rural landscape and setting of the village.
5. To ensure that development is safe from flooding and other environmental impacts including contamination and pollution, including but not limited to, light, water and air pollution, and that development does not adversely affect the high environmental quality of the Parish. Where possible, development should reduce flood risk elsewhere.
6. To promote and give material planning weight to sustainable development, including the use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS), sustainable construction techniques and renewable energy.
7. To preserve and where possible enhance the heritage assets of the village including listed buildings and their settings, non-designated heritage assets, below ground archaeology, ancient and historic routeways and the form of the village settlement pattern.
8. To ensure development is well designed as per the Sedlescombe Design Guide and consistent with the local character.
9. Ensure development is landscaped and ecologically led, so the rural character of the Parish is maintained.

Policy 12a- Landscape Character

Policy Background / Justification

Commented [CV1]: need to renumber as 12a does not exist now

1. The majority of Sedlescombe Parish lies within the High Weald National Landscape (HWNL). The village and its surrounding countryside exhibit a strong rural character and a tranquil environment that reflect the distinctive landscape qualities of the High Weald.
2. Sedlescombe is crossed by an extensive network of public footpaths, creating a high degree of inter-visibility between the village, surrounding countryside, open fields, wooded areas and historic routeways.
3. The openness of the village, its visual relationship with the surrounding landscape, and its agricultural setting are key characteristics that contribute to the tranquility and rural character of Sedlescombe.
4. These qualities are integral to the identity of the Parish and should be conserved and enhanced through future development and land use change.
5. This policy is intended to ensure that development is informed by landscape character and that the cumulative effect of development does not erode the rural character, tranquility or setting of the Parish.

Policy

Development proposals must conserve and enhance the landscape character of the Parish and its setting within the High Weald National Landscape. Development will only be supported where it:

1. **Responds positively to the rural character, settlement pattern, openness and tranquility of the Parish.**
2. **Protects important views, landscape features and the visual relationship between the village and its surrounding countryside.**
3. **Avoids adverse impacts on the landscape character, remoteness and tranquility of the Parish.**
4. **Demonstrates how the scheme has been informed by landscape character and contributes positively to its conservation or enhancement.**
5. **Accords with the Sedlescombe Design Guide and relevant development plan policies.**

Policy 12b - High Weald National Landscape

Policy Background / Justification

1. The Parish lies within the High Weald National Landscape, formerly known as the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.
2. The High Weald Management Plan identifies the core character components of the High Weald landscape, including natural systems, settlement pattern, routeways, woodland, fieldscapes and heath, dark night skies, aesthetic and perceptual qualities, and the land-based economy and rural living.

3. These characteristics are present throughout the Parish and are fundamental to Sedlescombe's identity and setting.
4. National policy requires great weight to be given to conserving and enhancing landscape and scenic beauty in National Landscapes.
5. This policy provides local detail to ensure that the special qualities of the High Weald National Landscape are considered when development proposals are prepared and determined.

Policy

Development within Sedlescombe must conserve and enhance its natural beauty and special qualities. Development will only be supported where it:

- 1. Respects the historic settlement pattern of the Parish and uses materials, scale, form and detailing that respond positively to local character.**
- 2. Relates well to historic routeways and maintains or improves their accessibility and rural character.**
- 3. Protects ancient woodland, historic field patterns, hedgerows, banks, verges and other characteristic landscape features.**
- 4. Conserves and enhances ecological networks, trees, hedgerows, watercourses and wetland habitats.**
- 5. Takes opportunities to restore natural systems, including the natural function of watercourses, where this would improve water quality, reduce flood risk or enhance habitats.**
- 6. Avoids harm to the character, appearance and setting of the High Weald National Landscape.**

Policy 12c – Biodiversity

Policy Background / Justification

1. Sedlescombe has significant and varied natural heritage with Sites of interest in Red Barn Field, Killingham Wood, Churchland Wood, Hurst Wood, churchyard habitat, residential gardens and other areas of ecological value.
2. These areas and habitats provide an important natural asset within the context of a relatively small rural Parish and contribute to the wider ecological network of the High Weald.
3. National policy requires planning decisions to conserve and, where possible, enhance biodiversity. Biodiversity Net Gain is mandatory for qualifying development and must be delivered using the relevant statutory metric.

4. The policy seeks to ensure applicants understand the ecological interest of a site before development is designed so that existing features can be protected and enhancement opportunities can be incorporated from the outset.
5. The Parish supports biodiversity improvements above the statutory minimum where these can be achieved, particularly where they strengthen wildlife corridors, support native species and improve connectivity.

Policy

All qualifying development must deliver a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain, or any higher requirement set by national policy, legislation or strategic development plan policy. Biodiversity Net Gain must be provided on site wherever possible. Off-site provision will only be supported where it is demonstrated that the biodiversity gain hierarchy has been followed and that all reasonable opportunities to achieve measurable and significant gains on site have been exhausted.

- 1. Development will not be supported where it would adversely affect the ecological interest of Red Barn Field, ancient woodland, designated wildlife sites, priority habitats or protected species habitats.**
- 2. Where proportionate to the scale, location and nature of the proposal, development must be informed by an initial ecological appraisal and, where required, further ecological surveys.**
- 3. Design and layout must retain, buffer, restore and strengthen existing wildlife corridors and create new connections where opportunities exist**
- 4. New development must incorporate habitat features within buildings and across the site, such as integral bird and bat boxes, swift bricks, hedgehog refugia, wildlife-friendly fencing, native hedgerow planting, wildflower areas and other appropriate habitat measures.**
- 5. New planting must prioritise native, climate-resilient species from UK sources, suitable for local conditions and beneficial to pollinators and native wildlife.**
- 6. Long-term management and maintenance arrangements must be provided for biodiversity features and new planting.**
- 7. External lighting must comply with Policy 12g - Dark Skies and relevant guidance from the Institution of Lighting Professionals and the Bat Conservation Trust.**

Development achieving biodiversity gains significantly above the statutory minimum will be given positive weight in decision-making, where those gains are deliverable, measurable, appropriate to the site context and secured for the long term.

Policy 12d - Natural Features

Policy Background / Justification

1. The Parish contains important natural features including ancient woodland, veteran and ancient trees, significant trees, hedgerows, watercourses, ponds, wetland habitats and other landscape features.
2. These features contribute to both biodiversity and the rural landscape character of the Parish.
3. National policy affords strong protection to irreplaceable habitats, including ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees.
4. The policy seeks to ensure that important natural features inform the design and layout of development and are protected during construction and over the lifetime of the development.

Policy

Development will only be supported where it protects and, where possible, enhances natural features of landscape or ecological importance. This includes, but is not limited to, ancient woodland, veteran and ancient trees, significant trees, hedgerows, watercourses, ponds and wetland habitats. Development proposals must:

- 1. Retain important natural features as part of the site layout and ensure that those features inform the design of the scheme.**
- 2. Demonstrate how important features will be protected during construction and over the lifetime of the development.**
- 3. Provide appropriate separation between development and retained trees, hedgerows, woodland, watercourses and ponds to avoid future pressure for removal or degradation.**
- 4. Provide suitable mitigation and compensatory measures where the loss of non-irreplaceable local natural features is unavoidable and justified.**
- 5. Avoid the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats except in wholly exceptional circumstances where this would be consistent with national policy.**

Where loss of non-irreplaceable features is unavoidable and justified, mitigation and compensation must be appropriate, local and secured as part of the development.

Policy 12e – Blue Infrastructure

Policy Background / Justification

1. The Parish includes the River Brede and associated floodplain areas, together with streams, ponds, springs, ditches and other drainage features.
2. Parts of the Parish are at risk from fluvial, pluvial and groundwater flooding, including areas around the River Brede valley, the recreation ground and parts of Paygate Road.
3. Climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of flooding and surface water run-off events.
4. Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) are an important means of managing water sustainably, reducing flood risk, improving water quality and creating biodiversity and landscape benefits.
5. The policy seeks to ensure that development protects blue infrastructure, avoids increasing flood risk elsewhere and integrates water management into landscape and biodiversity design.

Policy

Development must protect and enhance the blue infrastructure network of the Parish and manage flood risk effectively. Development proposals must:

1. **Avoid areas at high risk of flooding unless the proposal satisfies the relevant national policy tests and development plan requirements.**
2. **Demonstrate that flood risk will not be increased elsewhere within or beyond the Parish.**
3. **Protect watercourses, ponds, springs, ditches and floodplains from adverse impacts, including through appropriate buffer zones.**
4. **Incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) appropriate to the scale of development, site conditions and ground conditions, unless it is demonstrated that this is not practicable.**
5. **Design SuDS to prevent pollution and to integrate with landscape and biodiversity enhancements.**
6. **Include long-term management and maintenance arrangements for drainage and blue infrastructure features.**

7. Where appropriate, incorporate rainwater harvesting, grey-water recycling, green roofs, green walls, water butts, rain gardens or other water efficiency measures.
8. Positive weight will be given to development that secures demonstrable improvements in flood risk, water quality, biodiversity or catchment resilience.

Policy 12f - Dark Skies

Policy Background / Justification

1. Sedlescombe Parish benefits from relatively dark skies due to its rural character and the absence of street lighting.
2. Dark skies contribute to tranquility, landscape character, residential amenity, biodiversity and the setting of heritage assets.
3. Artificial lighting can harm nocturnal species, including bats and invertebrates, and can erode the rural character of the open countryside and village setting.
4. The policy seeks to minimise adverse impacts on people, wildlife, heritage assets and the wider landscape.
5. The Parish may explore opportunities to work with neighbouring parishes and relevant organisations to support dark skies initiatives, but this policy is concerned with the planning control of lighting associated with development.

Policy

Development must preserve and, where possible, enhance the dark skies of the Parish. External lighting will only be supported where it:

1. **Is demonstrated to be necessary for operational, safety or security reasons.**
2. **Is minimised in intensity, duration and extent.**
3. **Is directed downward and designed to avoid glare, sky glow and unnecessary light spill.**
4. **Prevents, or where this is not possible, minimises, light spillage beyond the application site through orientation, shielding, screening, glazing, timing controls, dimming or proximity controls. Avoids adverse impacts on residential amenities, wildlife, heritage assets, important views and the wider landscape.**
5. **Complies with relevant guidance from the Institution of Lighting Professionals and the Bat Conservation Trust, including any subsequent revisions and details of the light spillage from the dwellings.**

Where lighting is necessary, development proposals must provide sufficient details of the light source, intensity, luminaire design, mounting height, angle, control mechanisms and any baffles or cut-off shields so that the impact of lighting can be properly assessed.