Dalton Village Design Statement

Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance 1999 by West Lancashire District Council

Written by the Dalton Village Design Group with assistance from:
The Countryside Agency
West Lancashire District Council

The Countryside Agency

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet describes the special character of the parish of Dalton in West Lancashire, how it has developed, and how it is today.

Throughout its preparation it has drawn on local knowledge and opinions, obtained by questionnaire, and by consultation with the people of Dalton, and expresses their views on how the parish may continue to develop whilst maintaining its individual identity.

It has been produced by Dalton residents as part of a national initiative by the Countryside Agency, prompted by Government, to involve local residents in the planning of any future development in their villages by asking them to prepare Village Design Statements like this.

Who is it for?

Any change can alter the character of a village, including the smaller adjustments to homes, gardens, open spaces, paths, hedges and woodlands. A Village Design Statement offers everyone considering development in the parish simple design advice on:

- the pattern of the settlement and open spaces
- the scale, height and proportion of buildings
- the detailing of buildings and architectural features
- landscape design
- the treatment of boundaries, materials and finishes

It is addressed to:

- householders and businesses
- planning consultants, developers and builders
- architects, landscape architects, planners and engineers
- local councils
- statutory bodies and utilities

How does it work?

A Village Design Statement is about managing change, not preventing it.

By providing guidance for everyone who lives in the parish and for all concerned in its future planning and development, this document will play a major part in retaining the essential character of Dalton as we move into the twenty-first century.

Through its endorsement by West Lancashire District Council (WLDC), its recommendations will be taken into account when planning applications are assessed. In this way it will support the West Lancashire Local Plan as it affects Dalton and will assist the work of the Parish Council.

The recommendations which follow refer to a wide range of possible changes, not all of which are subject to planning control.

Whilst WLDC has adopted this Village Design Statement as Supplementary Planning Guidance, this does not imply that everything in the statement can be controlled by the local authority. Responsibility for action rests as much with homeowners, landowners and other agencies as it does with the District Council. Anyone considering making changes to their property should check if the approval of the Local Authority is required.
Early maps reveal a scattered settlement and this form is retained today; there is no recognisable centre to the village. In 1839 Dalton had an area of about 2100 acres and land use was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Land</th>
<th>Acres</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arable Land</td>
<td>574</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meadow</td>
<td>380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pasture</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Common or Waste land</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodland</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dwellings</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roads</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At that time there were about 30 properties (mainly working farms) in Dalton. Its population probably reached a peak by the end of the nineteenth century (422 in 1901). The growth of housing reflected the development of local industry, with clusters of settlement occurring in the vicinity of farms and quarries. The church of St Michael and All Angels was built in the 1870s (replacing a short-lived tithe barn church), as was the present school.

Whilst the early to mid-twentieth century brought an increase in the number of houses, the actual population declined; today only a handful of families have roots in Dalton going back for more than a century. The number of parishioners in 1999 is just over 300.

The parish is now reduced in size by the exclusion of an area to the south-west side of Beacon Lane which is taken up by the Beacon Country Park and some of the Elmers Green section of Skelmersdale. The remaining area is about 1750 acres.
Dalton lies in the Green Belt designated in the West Lancashire Local Plan. It is within the Woodland/Pasture Natural Area and contains an Area of Regionally Important Landscape History. The essential character of the latter has remained unchanged for many years, and combines hills which, though low in regional terms, are prominent locally, and a mosaic of pasture, woodland, streams, lanes, banks and hedgerows.

It is an ancient countryside on the foothills of the Pennines, enjoying long-distance views towards them to the east and across the coastal plain to the distant Welsh hills to the west.

The high proportion of pasture provides a continuous green landscape interspersed with densely wooded terrain. Many of the fields are irregular in shape, varying in size and mainly hedged, and there are signs of woodland clearances which have taken place over the centuries. Many streams and rivulets fall through wooded cloughs to the River Douglas; natural ponds abound, and the adjacent Leeds-Liverpool canal, following the course of the river, provides another water feature. An ancient network of winding lanes (some sunken), tracks and footpaths criss-crosses the parish.

Recommendations

- Special Landscape Area status is vital to the countryside around Dalton. Policies which seek to protect the distinctive character and quality of Natural Areas, and features which contribute to the historic character of the landscape should be strictly enforced (see Appendix).

- Much of the area is very visible from surrounding parts and from viewpoints within it. As an important objective of Green Belt designation is to retain openness, settlement edge and adjacent area developments should include perimeter landscaping to reduce impact. Buffer zones around the northern part of Skelmersdale are required by the West Lancashire Local Plan.

- In the matter of property boundaries, householders and landowners should give due regard to the rural character of the area and avoid the use of urban-style fences and walls.

- To minimise adverse or harmful effects, semi-natural habitats in farmland should be retained and appropriate new habitats created.

- Trees should be retained and new planting of appropriate species encouraged.

- Field patterns, ponds and water courses should be retained and maintained, as should existing hedges, and road and track alignments.
The pattern of its settlement is a distinctive feature of Dalton. Whilst there has been habitation for over a thousand years, until this century it has been in the form of isolated farmsteads, smallholdings, and scattered groups of cottages. The number of houses increased in the early to middle years of the twentieth century and many of these clustered around the older establishments. Variations to this pattern are, though, to be found in the sporadic ribbon-type building on the east side of Higher Lane and individual properties and smallholdings along the length of Long Heys Lane. More recently, Green Belt policies have avoided the unsympathetic development that has marred many rural villages in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Today there are about 140 houses, most of which are over 30 years old. Some have been totally rebuilt on the sites of former ones and are in this sense newly built.

Situated, as it is, with the developed villages of Newburgh and Parbold to the north and the urban areas of Skelmersdale and Wigan to the south and east, Dalton presents an immediate contrast. Open space abounds. Most properties enjoy a quiet, rural setting and its identity as a scattered community in attractive countryside has been retained, helped by the care of its residents and major landowners.

Along lower Beacon Lane is an area of land dividing Dalton from Skelmersdale, part of which is formally safeguarded from development until at least the year 2006. Development of this land would link rural Dalton to urban Skelmersdale.

**Recommendations**

Any development should:

- respect the settlement pattern of the parish,
- be restricted to modest improvement and extensions to existing residential buildings,
- consider the impact when viewed from outside the immediate location and consider the impact on the settlement as a whole,
- show, preferably through perspective drawings, what its relationship will be to neighbouring properties and surroundings.

In addition:

- In order to preserve the separate identity of the parish it is important that safeguarded land at Beacon Lane remains undeveloped for as long as possible. Residents would like this land to remain permanently open. It is important that it should remain undeveloped for as long as possible in order to preserve the character of the parish. If development proves inescapable, it should incorporate adequate landscaping and open space so as to maintain clearly the separate identity of Dalton.

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**The Parish of Dalton**

Settlement Pattern
1846 - Present Day

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Key
- Settlement at 1846
- Present day settlement

- Martin's Farm
- Cross Horse Farm
- Ackhurst Hall
- Beech House
- Stone Hall
- Prince William Inn
The whole of Dalton is within the Green Belt and development is controlled by National and Local Policies. Detailed information about these may be obtained from WLDC (see Appendix).

Planning Policy

Briefly, Policies GB1-8 of the Local Plan, determine what development is acceptable in the Green Belt. Control is exercised in matters of siting, scale, design and materials for extension, alteration or replacement of existing dwellings and re-use of buildings for commercial and residential purposes. Other than for purposes of agriculture, forestry and outdoor recreation, permission for the erection of new buildings will not be given except in very special circumstances.

The Policies also control the re-use of rural buildings and proposed works to listed buildings (see Appendix).

Listed Buildings

The parish is fortunate in possessing a number of listed buildings which are categorised as Grade II. Stone Hall, because of its special features, merits a II* grade.

Beacon Lane
Ashurst Beacon
Ashurst Hall
Ashurst Hall Gate House
Pigeon Cote - south of Gate House

Crow Lane
Stone Hall*
Bellevue Farm (derelict)

Higher Lane
Church of St. Michael and All Angels

Lees Lane
Lower House Farmhouse
Priors Wood Hall
Barn at Blackbirds Farm

These historic stone buildings provide interesting evidence of both social change and building development. Proposed work to them (demolition, alterations or extensions) requires Listed Building Consent (see Appendix). It is an offence to carry out such works without permission.

Other Buildings of Local Importance

In addition, the following properties are of architectural or historical interest. They were formerly listed as Grade III Buildings, and whilst they do not have statutory protection, the Local Plan Policy LB9 aims to preserve their character.

Crow Lane
Crisp Cottage
Lees Lane
Blackbird Farmhouse
Prescotts Farmhouse
Holland House
Hillock Lane
Benthams Farmhouse

Recommendations

- In general, alterations should be kept to a minimum and repair is usually preferable to replacement.
- Alterations by way of replacement should only be considered if repair is not feasible.
- Specialist advice should be obtained from WLDC or a qualified architect.
Residential Buildings

In Dalton there is a great variety of styles, materials and architectural detail. Materials range from local stone (predominant in older properties), to faced brick and rendered surfaces. Development during this century has resulted in a wide diversity of house types.

Rural areas derive their character not only from buildings but also from the spaces and enclosures which buildings create through their relationship to one another. Features of historic, architectural and ecological importance (including trees, open spaces, walls, hedges and views), contribute to the visual quality and character of the area.

New dwellings (other than replacement dwellings) are not permitted by planning policies within the Green Belt unless very special circumstances are demonstrated.

An extension should not increase the size of a building to such an extent that it adds to urban encroachment or has an adverse impact on the open character of the Green Belt. Current guidance states that, normally, extensions should not result in more than a 50% increase in volume in relation to the original dwelling and that the footprint of the original building should not be increased by more than two-thirds. The shape, size and position should minimise visual impact and the setting of the building will be taken into account.

An alteration proves satisfactory if, after a few years, it looks as though it were part of the original design. This may be best achieved by the use of materials to match those of the existing dwelling and by reflecting its proportions of windows to walls, etc. Some innovations may be acceptable and, in some cases, the use of totally contrasting materials (such as glass or powder-coated aluminium) can produce an effect which is less obtrusive than a ‘traditional’ scheme.

The sympathetic use of hedges, trees and walls can complement building layouts and design. Hedges of indigenous local species such as hawthorn, beech, holly and privet enhance many properties in the parish; others are bounded by walls and fences of appropriate height.

Recommendations

- Where extensions or alterations to houses are proposed they should complement or match the character and features of the existing building, particularly in relation to materials and the design of windows and doors.

- Details of the proposed materials, including type of pointing, should be approved before development starts. In certain circumstances a sample panel should be provided on site.

- Roof extensions should reflect the shape, pitch and material of the original.

- Dormer roof extensions should be avoided where possible. If they have to be used they should be clearly secondary to the main roof and should not alter the proportions of the original ridge line.

- Outbuildings should be sited close to the main dwelling or linked to it by walls so as to form a unified whole. They should be clearly secondary to the main dwelling.

- Development should not result in the hard-surfacing of a large proportion of front gardens for parking since this would detract from the rural character of the area.

- Boundaries should be appropriate to the location and to nearby building styles. Urban-style fencing should be avoided, as should the widespread use of cupressus leylandii as hedging.

- Satellite dishes and other external aerials should be sited with care and screened where necessary.

- External and security lighting should be as unobtrusive as possible.
"...a great variety of styles, materials and architectural detail..."

Rural Buildings

Owing to its geographical characteristics and to its history, Dalton has a large number of rural buildings. Some, particularly barns, have been converted to residential use with varying degrees of success. However, there remains a number which might be converted or adapted for differing uses.

In relation to the re-use of rural buildings, Policy GB 8 of the Local Plan favours preference for non-residential purposes because in this way the previous character of the building is more easily preserved.

Recommendations

- A converted farm/agricultural building should retain its existing appearance as far as possible even though the use has changed.

- Traditional materials and techniques should be used throughout.

- Original features of interest should be retained and/or enhanced.

- Extensions should be discouraged except for very small, unobtrusive additions of matching traditional materials.

- Landscaping and access details should be in sympathy with the rural character.
Replacement Dwellings

Whilst National and Local Policies permit the replacement of a dwelling, appropriate circumstances must be demonstrated and any proposal must comply with Policy GB 5 of the Local Plan. Any proposed replacement must not be materially larger than the original building.

Recommendations

- Replacement dwellings should only be considered as a last resort.
- Improvement, refurbishment, adaptation and limited extension of the existing dwelling is preferable to replacement.
- The replacement dwelling should respect the character of the local surroundings.
- Materials should be appropriate to the location and used sensitively.

Agricultural Buildings

New buildings for agricultural use may be permitted under certain circumstances.

Recommendations

- Any such buildings should be of appropriate design and scale and be sited and screened to minimize visual intrusion into the landscape. The type and colour of the external fabric should be chosen with great care.
- Vehicle parking and open storage areas should be designed to minimize the extent of hardstanding to avoid visual intrusion into the landscape. The scheme should take into account the possible effects of drainage, sewerage and water pollution problems on the local ecology.

Temporary Buildings

The design and materials of temporary and pre-fabricated buildings are likely to have an impact far greater than would otherwise be expected of a building of similar scale. As such they are inappropriate in a rural area unless designed and located to greatly reduce their impact. The length of time that the temporary building will be in existence is also an important consideration.
Much of the rural character of the parish is shaped by minor roads, lanes and byways, quite varied in nature, though there are no bridleways. Irregular areas of verge, open spaces, hedgerows and mature trees lining sections of the lanes create highly attractive and desirable features.

Recommendations

In carrying out maintenance and repair the Local Highway Authority should:

- ensure the preservation of the character of the lanes,
- avoid urbanisation in appearance resulting from installation of concrete kerbs and other inappropriate elements,
- and landowners should:
  - use appropriate materials for re-surfacing unmade and unadopted roads.

The principal roadways within the parish are Higher Lane and Beacon Lane, both unclassified. They have become increasingly used by through traffic over recent years. The growing volume and speed of traffic is of great concern to the residents.

Recommendations

Action should be taken to:

- reduce the volume and speed of vehicles using these lanes,
- allow 'Access Only' to Heavy Goods Vehicles.

Dallton has a network of approximately 11 miles of footpaths linking it with its neighbouring parishes. These pass by and through a variety of farmland and landscapes, former sites of open-cast mines and quarries, and along the routes of cart tracks.

Originally the footpaths provided a direct means of access for local people to their workplace, to church and school, to families and neighbours. Now they perform a valuable recreational function, affording views of the parish and its surroundings unobtainable from any other source.

Many of the most regularly walked paths are clearly defined and well signposted. Others tend to become overgrown and difficult to follow.
Recommendations

- Existing paths and public rights-of-way should be kept open, in good repair and clearly defined, so as to preserve their benefits to the parish.
- Any proposal to close a public right-of-way should be strongly resisted.
- Any proposal for deviations to public rights-of-way should only be approved when the character of the original path is maintained.
- Paths should be clearly signposted to make access easy for users and to protect landowners' privacy and rights.

Throughout this Statement there are references to trees, both in relation to building developments and to the contribution made to the parish scene by individual trees, groups of trees and wooded areas. They are greatly valued by residents.

Recommendations

- Hedgerows and trees, including groups and wooded areas, should be cared for and conserved. Before they reach the end of their lives they should be replaced suitably.
- Where trees are on private land, owners are encouraged to care for them.
- A record should be created and maintained of important hedgerows, trees, groups of trees and woodland areas.

Dalton has a fine mix of wildlife habitats, ranging from the unimproved, open hill-top pastures, through conifer plantations, woods and copses, farmland and hedgerows, to the flatlands of the Douglas valley. It is in marked contrast to that of the severe moorland away to the east, and the rich, intensively-farmed arable plains to the west.

This mix is reflected in its wild plant and attendant insect, small amphibian and mammal life, and is attractive to a number of larger species, with fox, badger, bats, hare, roe and fallow deer all established.

There are excellent resident breeding, visiting and migrant bird populations of most expected species, over 60 in total. Notably Dalton is on the edge of the expanding range of the nuthatch; raven may recently have bred and grasshopper warbler are in the Douglas Valley. Pheasant and partridge are bred for sport and are much in evidence.

Recommendations

- Landowners should take every opportunity to improve habitats for the benefit of wildlife.
There are four quarries in Dalton, three of which are defunct. The other, in Lees Lane, is still being worked, with existing planning permission to extend the area of quarrying.

**Recommendations**

In determining a quarry’s future use, operational or otherwise, full account should be taken of:

- The relevant development plans and their policies,
- environmental, health and traffic impact on Dalton residents.
- any negative factors which affect planning interests of acknowledged importance.

This Village Design Statement describes the qualities and characteristics of the parish which are valued by its residents. It depicts an open, spacious, natural and farmed environment in which a variety of building styles and materials have, for the most part, been satisfactorily accommodated.

Dalton is evolving and changes will occur. It is the way such changes are managed that matters. When they take account of the surroundings they can add to the distinctive character of the parish; when they do not, they can detract from it. Such considerations are as important for small changes, which do not involve the formal planning process, as for larger changes which do.
Dalton Village Design Group

Dalton Village Design Group was formed by local residents following open parish meetings in response to a Countryside Agency initiative to explore ways of improving design in the countryside.

The Dalton Village Design Statement has been endorsed by the people of the parish through a process of consultation and exhibition. It is intended to be a practical tool capable of influencing decisions affecting design and development in the parish.

The Design Group will continue to express the views of residents on such issues.

The location of all the Village Design reference material, containing photographs, maps and other documents, can be obtained from the Clerk to the Parish Council.

References and further contacts:

Information on National and Local Planning Policies are held by West Lancashire District Council.

Note especially:
- West Lancashire Local Plan.
- Supplementary Planning Guidance booklets.
- The Conversion of Rural Buildings in the Green Belt.
- Natural Area 4: Wood/Pasture (Draft).
- Landscape Submissions.
- Trees and Development.
- Site Planning, Layout and Design.
- Listed Buildings in West Lancashire.

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