

## **Planning Guidelines for the Amberley Scarp**

Amberley sits on a shelf of upper greensand bedrock that emerges at the foot of the scarp of the chalk Downs. To the north of this shelf the land falls away – in places quite steeply - to become the flood plain of the Arun valley and the Wildbrooks SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Importance). This north-facing slope extends from near the railway crossing at the west of the village (where a Second World War pillbox sits on the edge of the emerging outcrop) to the eastern limit of the village where it merges into fields just beyond “White Oaks”. Part of this slope is within the conservation area of the village and a wooded stretch immediately to the east of this is under the protection of a tree preservation order. Beyond and to its eastern limit, where it ends in the gentler gradients of an open agricultural field, the slope lies within the properties of the houses that line the Rackham road on the edge of the greensand shelf, overlooking the pastures of the Wildbrooks below.

This escarpment is a distinctive feature of our landscape seen from the north and from Rackham woods. It is increasingly prominent on the approach to Amberley along the Wey-South path. Appearing as a wooded and scrub-covered belt, the slope serves to frame the pasture edge of the flood plain and to conceal the extent of the built area of the village. At its best the line of the ridge is defined by the canopies of older specimen trees interspersed with glimpses of the houses along the edge. Less desirable are those stretches where trees have been removed or cut back to the point at which it is the buildings that dominate the ridgeline. Recent developments and fashions in design seem to have encouraged this and at the time of writing (2008) several of the houses are increasingly conspicuous as tree cover has been reduced to permit development or open up views. It is possible that in time vegetation will grow back to soften this picture and this should be encouraged, for though it is understandable that homeowners would want to enjoy views from their position on the edge of the shelf it is surely undesirable if as a result the escarpment becomes dominated by a line of prominent buildings along the crest.

Householders along the scarp ridge therefore are obviously in a very strong position to ensure that any developments will not have an adverse impact on the special character of Amberley. This includes the sensitive maintenance and management of trees, shrubs and plants to retain the overall green effect and taking care to ensure that any alterations to property and land respect the special character of the area.

It is the purpose of this guidance to encourage a reasonable balance between homeowners’ interests in expansive or uninterrupted views northwards and the amenity value of this landscape to the wider community (see “The West Sussex Landscape Land Management Guidelines Sheet WG8, Central Scarp Foothills”). This value lies in both the wooded appearance of the escarpment as a feature of the landscape setting - which contributes to the distinctive rural feel of the village (referred to in the Amberley Conservation and Design Advice Leaflet) and in the habitat it provides for wildlife.

The woodland of native or naturalised trees and scrub edging pastureland provides concealment and shelter, nesting and food for our wildlife. On the steeper gradients the established vegetation stabilises the slopes against erosion. Typically the woody vegetation comprises a mix of ash, sycamore, oak, birch, hazel, field maple, elder, hawthorn, willow and crack willow, crab apple, wild cherry, blackthorn and bramble. It provides a corridor of wood and scrub vegetation along much of the north fringe of the village. Ideally the wood includes mature specimen trees and sufficient saplings and younger trees to ensure succession together with standing dead wood, which is an especially valuable habitat capable of supporting rich populations of fungi and insects, especially beetles, and a thriving food-chain above.

To conserve this important landscape feature and avoid a creeping suburbanisation in an area of outstanding natural beauty, landowners are encouraged to:

- resist the urge overly to “tidy up” the vegetation on and at the foot of the slope;
- keep to a minimum any cutting back of tree canopy;
- avoid felling trees – try coppicing or pollarding where it is desirable to open up the vegetation to more light;
- contain any garden area with introduced plants;
- avoid any prominent hard landscaping or boundary fencing;
- preserve areas free of disturbance.

The Parish of Amberley Design Statement (PADS) makes specific references to the Amberley Scarp as follows

- “views into and out of areas of the parish make a significant contribution to its overall character, and should be preserved and respected in the design of new development”
- “buildings ..... along the escarpment edge .....should not be obtrusive in size, style or brightness and colour of materials”
- decking - “further developments of this nature are discouraged; they should certainly not extend over the slope”
- “screening by native trees is also desirable where existing developments have a negative impact on their surroundings”.

Most householders, with some exceptions, have Permitted Development Rights (PDRs). This means that they can make certain types of minor changes to their house and garden without the need to apply for planning permission. However, these rights may be withheld in the Amberley Conservation Area, or for a listed building. Additionally, trees protected by a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) may not be felled or pruned without planning permission.

Any loss of trees or over development of houses would have a serious effect on the character of the village and its relationship with the landscape. Where changes can be justified, great care must be exercised to ensure there will be no adverse impact on the special character of Amberley.

Although normal “garden-type” development, eg sheds, paths and fences, is likely to fall within PDRs, more significant works involving construction and earth moving such as embanking, steps or terracing may well require planning permission and should be checked with the Planners at Horsham District Council before work is started. Additionally an elevated patio or decking might be regarded as an extension or as a garden building and may need permission.

Householders should consider the cumulative impact on landscape character of small developments and land use change and avoid the introduction of suburban styles and materials and inappropriate design and scale of development affecting long open views to the scarp slope.

**Amberley Parish Council**  
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