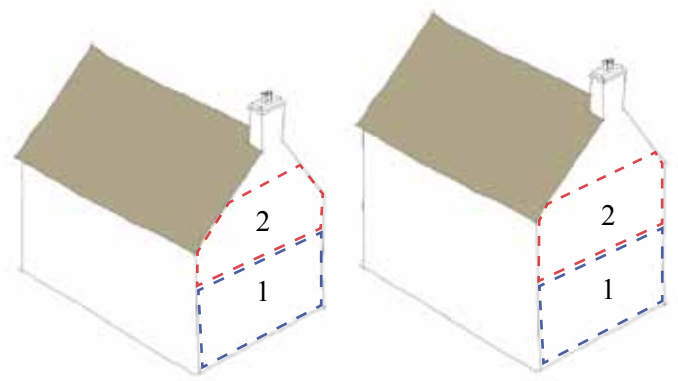# 3.3
How to Create a Harmonious Built Form

form, with rectangular floorplans and gable pitched roofs. Image 272 (right) illustrates how a simple building form with wide frontages and shallow depths can produce different building designs by varying eaves and ridge heights.

Where buildings are of more complex shape, they should be composed of a hierarchy of simple elements each with its own pitched roof.

Where flats are the main dwelling type, the scale of the buildings can be noticeably larger than existing buildings in the area. A design solution is to divide the building into visually distinct elements in order to reduce the overall scale – e.g. wings and bays and varying eaves and ridge heights.
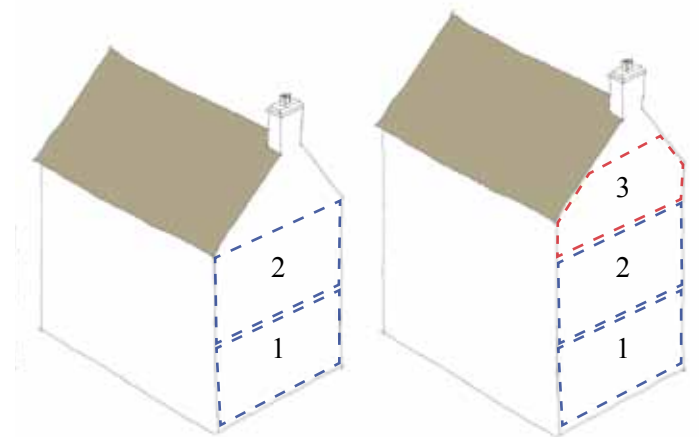
Use scale to aid legibility

The scale of buildings can also be used to improve the legibility of a street. For example, in towns and villages the important buildings such as churches were traditionally taller and therefore more visually prominent. In new developments, individual landmark buildings should be taller to aid legibility.
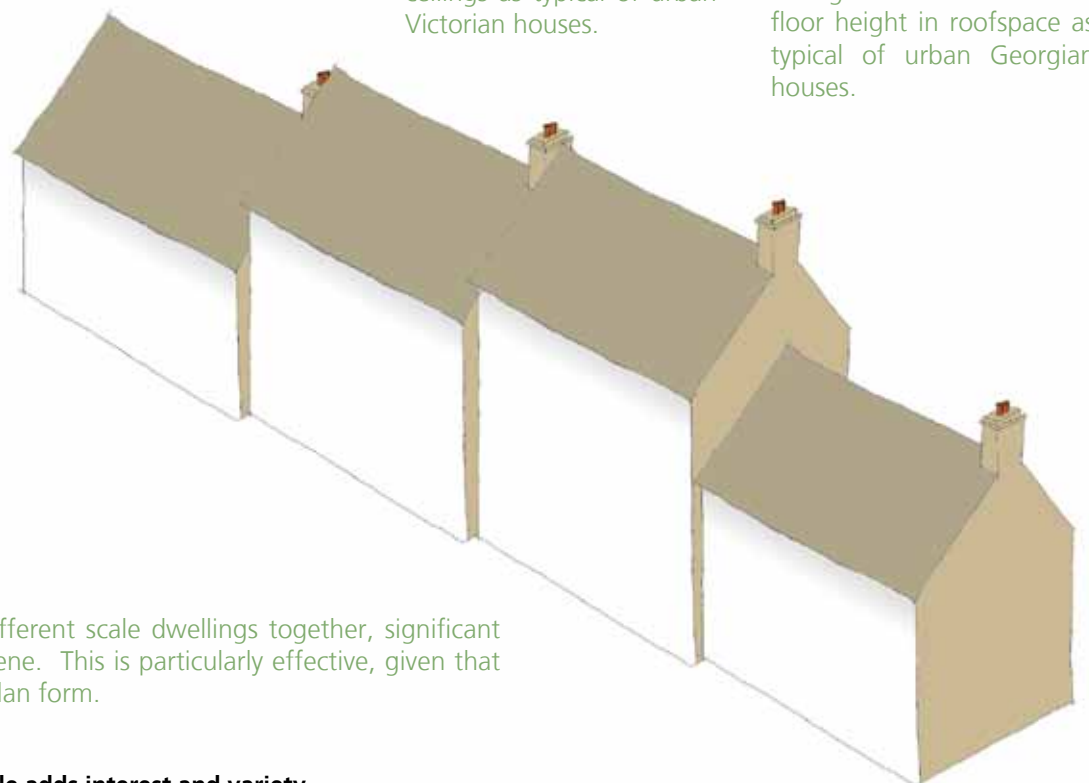
One and a half storey: rooms in roof to be lit by small dormers. low ceilings as found in traditional cottage

Two storey: upper floor partially in roof space and low ceilings as found in traditional cottage

Full two storey: high ceilings as typical of urban Victorian houses.

Two and a half storey: high ceilings and restricted third floor height in roofspace as typical of urban Georgian houses.

By grouping the above four different scale dwellings together, significant variety is added to the streetscene. This is particularly effective, given that all units conform to the same plan form.

272 **Form and Height - how scale adds interest and variety**

3.3
How to Create a Harmonious Built Form

Enclosure

Enclosure is determined by the height of the building frontage relative to the width of the street or square. Trees, hedges and walls can also contribute towards creating a sense of enclosure.

Types of enclosure can include large and small scale, formal and informal, building dominated or landscape dominated. Spaces can be "static" such as a square or courtyard, or "dynamic" such as a street where movement is the main characteristic.
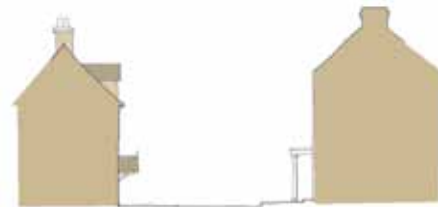
Avoid open spaces that lack character or purpose

A simple way of evaluating enclosure is to calculate the ratio of the height of the buildings to the width of the street or space. As a rough guideline, a ratio of 1:2.5 to 1:3.5 is likely to be appropriate. The overriding factor is that the space between buildings is a safe and pleasant place and does not feel oppressive.

Landscaping can help to create a sense of enclosure – e.g. specimen trees framing the street.

Provide a sense of enclosure appropriate to people

A significant challenge for larger residential developments is to provide a scale that is appropriate to people rather than cars. When buildings are set close to the street it is important to ensure they relate to the human scale. When buildings are set back from the street, it is important to ensure that roads and parking areas do not dominate the street scene.

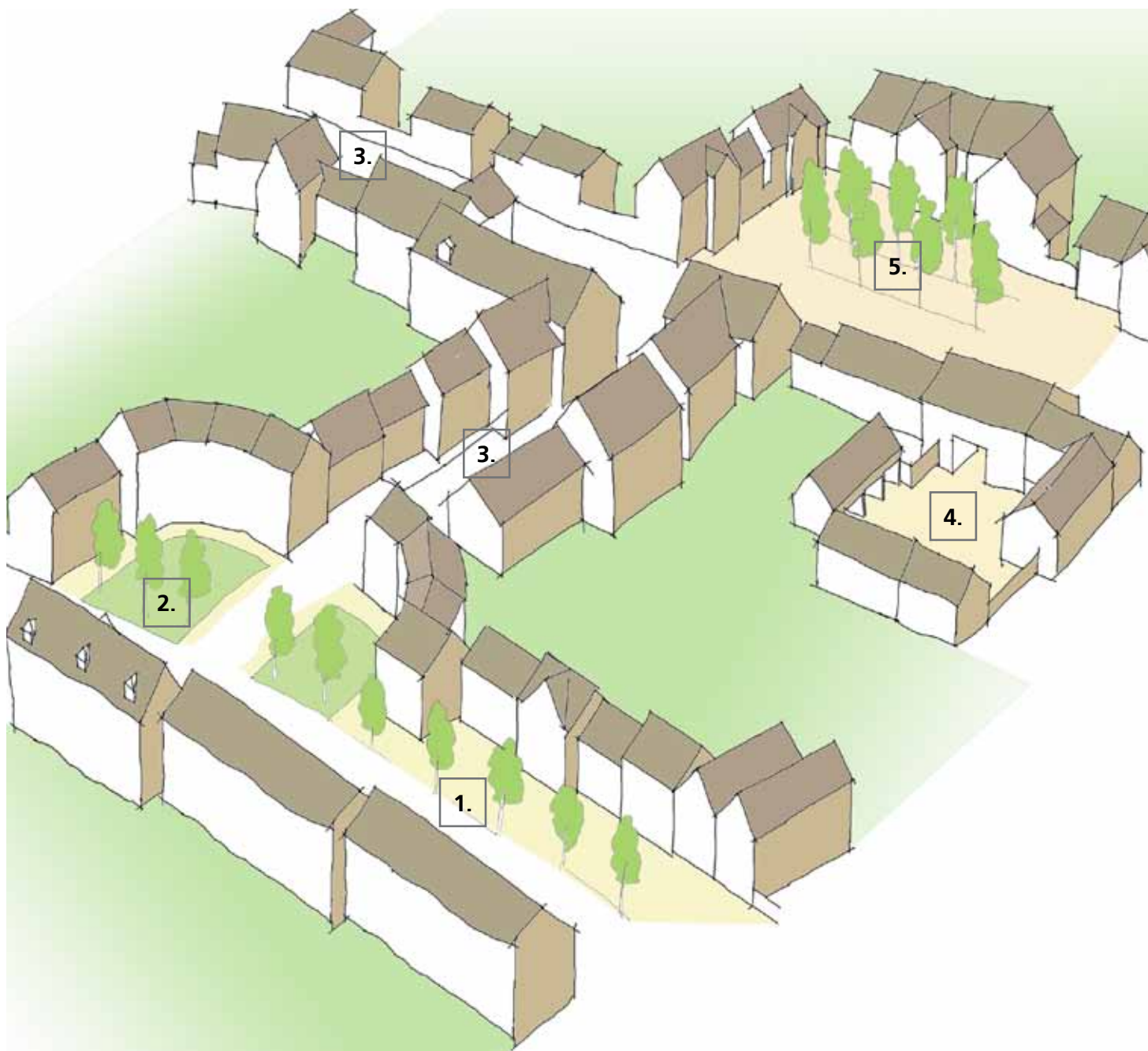**273** Victorian/Georgian town centre enclosure, Abingdon

274 Village enclosure formed by walled front gardens, Wytham

275 Estate village enclosure - deep front gardens and trees, Lockinge

3.3
How to Create a Harmonious Built Form

1.   **Avenue**: Avenues can lack enclosure if poorly defined. Successful enclosure can be achieved by introducing taller building, with formal tree planting between the buildings and the road.

2.   **Public open space**: Appropriate enclosure can be achieved by wrapping apartments or townhouses around the open space. This has the additional benefit of providing natural surveillance of the open space, thereby improving security.

3.   **Residential street**: A high degree of enclosure is provided on residential streets which are typically aligned with 2-3 storey dwellings. Interest can be added to the streetscene by varying roof and eave heights.

4.   **Internal courtyard**: Single to 1.5 storey, potential for occasional 2 storey where residential accommodation above garage blocks.

5.   **Square**: Focal features and building height terminating the vista from each direction. Enclosure is created by formal tree planting within square

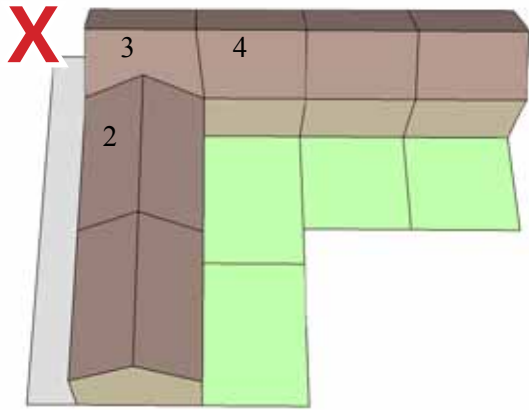**276** **Scale and enclosure - variety of approaches**

3.3
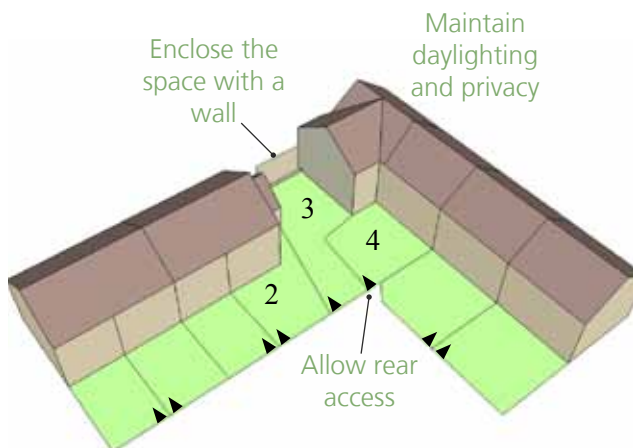# How to Create a Harmonious Built Form

Corner Buildings

Corner buildings offer an opportunity to give distinctive character to a place and should therefore be specifically designed for the corner site. Standard house types are not appropriate on corner sites.

Linking houses together at a corner can cause problems with garden space and privacy. Image 277 below illustrates this problem, and image 278 offers a solution to the problem.

Linking houses together at a corner causes problems with garden space and privacy.
Here the example shows there is no garden for houses 2, 3 and 4.

277 Unsuccessful corner buildings and gardens

By extending plot 3 to turn the corner and setting back plot 2 it provides sufficient space for a garden. By providing plot 2 with a single storey element and an adjoining brick wall, it further assists with maintaining a built frontage.

278 Successful corner buildings and gardens

279 Wide aspect Georgian townhouse turns corner successfully

280 Modern townhouse turns corner successfully

281 Village cottage turns corner allowing rear garden

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

Character

> "Character
> A place with its own identity".

Once the built form has been created, the next step in the design process is to add distinctive character to the development. This process involves creating a sense of place and local identity, and can include traditional or contemporary design elements.

Understand the surrounding area

The first and most important step when adding character to a development is to consider the site's context. Within existing settlements there will be features and characteristics that give a place a special or unique identity. Section 2.0 provides an overview of the character of the Vale. Each of the Character Zones within the Vale is distinct and materials, details and features should reflect this unique quality. However, it is not just built and landscape elements which contribute to character – other factors also contribute, such as cultural references and historical associations.

Buildings should not be designed in isolation. Whether they are of traditional or contemporary design, buildings should be part of a design concept for the whole site, which needs to be explained in the Design and Access Statement accompanying the planning application.

Standard house types, usually associated with volume house builders, are designed for the convenience of the developer rather than for the benefit of an individual site. As such, they are unlikely to enhance local identity or be of a form which best reflects the site and its context.

Identify opportunities to make a positive contribution to character

New developments that share and reflect the characteristics of the local area will reinforce local

282 Distinctive features and historical associations from around the Vale

identity. However, where there is a lack of clear identity, opportunities should be taken to create a sense of place either by incorporating materials, details and features from the wider area or by designing appropriate contemporary buildings.

Protect and enhance important views or landmarks

Views and landmarks perform an important role in navigation through a settlement and contribute to the character of an area. The layout and orientation of buildings should be designed to draw the eye to new or existing views and landmarks.

Elevational Treatment

If a particular style (e.g. traditional or contemporary) is considered to be appropriate for a site, it is essential that the design demonstrates a full understanding of that style and details such as windows, doors, porches, lintels, sills, chimneys and materials.

It is important to note that directly replicating existing designs is not always appropriate. A full analysis of the area can highlight its characteristic features and how these can be reinterpreted and used in a successful modern and innovative design incorporating high quality and energy efficient materials.

Windows

Use windows as part of the overall design approach

The choice of window design should be determined by the overall design approach. For example, a contemporary design may incorporate large glazed elevations, which would be inappropriate in a more traditional design.

The number of window openings and their size can have a profound effect on the appearance of a building. With careful design, windows can

283 Abbey Gardens, Abingdon

284 Ornate Victorian Detailing

285 Contemporary Elevations

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

create a light and airy impression and make a building appear less bulky. However, if poorly designed, too many windows can make a building appear overly fussy and fail to respect the character of the area. It should also be noted that a greater window area will increase the energy demands of a building.

Buildings of traditional design should have rectangular windows, usually constructed of timber, with the emphasis on either the horizontal or vertical axis. Modern buildings can have a variety of window designs provided they are part of an overall design concept.

On sites within conservation areas and adjacent to listed buildings, windows should be constructed of timber.

Position windows on an elevation to reflect local character

Include window recesses (reveals)

The positioning of windows, including sill and arch/lintel heights, needs careful consideration to ensure the design reflects the character of the area. In more traditional designs, the positioning of windows within their reveals is also important – windows that finish flush with the front face of a building can appear flat and uninteresting, whereas windows that are set back within reveals cast shadows which add visual interest. The degree of any window recess should also take into account the choice of facing material. For example, stone buildings can accommodate a deeper window recess than brick buildings.

Use bay windows as a feature

Bay windows can be used to add interest to elevations and create attractive features on buildings. Bay windows in the Vale have traditionally included splayed, curved and square forms often topped with lead flat roofs.

286 A variety of stone-mullioned and often transomed windows. A range of head designs from square, rounded and cusped. Windows are typical from Medieval to Victorian periods

287 Casement windows with leaded lights - ranging from timber to stone. Designs dependant on the period. Occur from Medieval to inter-war period.

288 Timber cottage casements painted (see Appendix D for colours). Range of 2, 4 and up to 12 light casements. Occur from late Medieval to present.

289 Sliding sash - designs with a taller vertical emphasis. Ranging from 4 to 16 or more lights. Occur from Georgian to Edwardian periods.

290 Successful modern window designs

291 When replacing windows it is important to undertake a like for like replacement - as seen here.

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

Use locally appropriate materials

UPVC windows are less successful in design terms due to their bulky frames and glazing bars. Wherever possible, timber should be used unless an alterative material is shown to be more visually appropriate.

Use locally appropriate paint colour

The choice of paint colour for windows can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of a building. Paint colours should respect traditional local colours. Appendix D provides a schedule of paint colours that are appropriate to the individual Character Zones in the Vale.

Doors

Doors can be prominent features and, as with windows, they can have a dramatic impact on the appearance of a property.

Use doors that reflect the design approach

The choice of door design should be determined by the overall design approach. Doors should be simple and well-proportioned and not a pastiche of historical designs. Images 293 to 295 illustrate the types of door that can be found in different property types in the Vale.
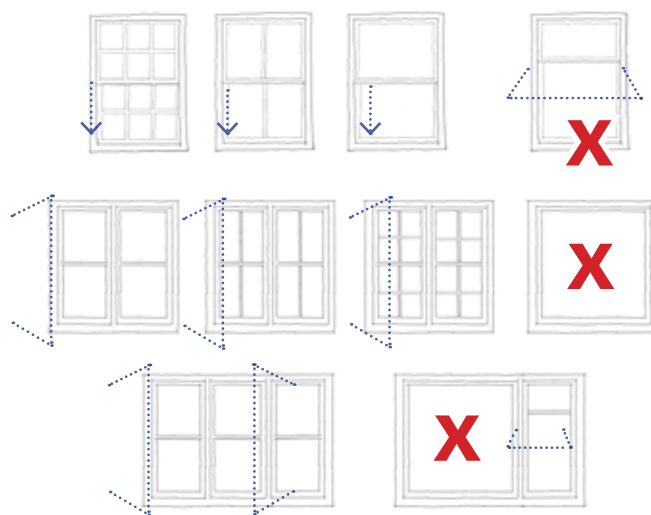
Contemporary buildings can often accommodate large single glazed panel doors.

Replacement doors in existing buildings should reflect the period of the property and be of a size which fits in the existing frame.

Use locally appropriate materials

Wherever possible, timber should be utilised unless an alterative material is shown to be more visually appropriate. UPVC doors are less successful in terms of their design and details.

292 Illustration of inappropriate window alterations

The window proportions, size and number of panes in addition to style of opening should all be respected in traditional buildings.

Sash windows should not be replaced by top or side hung casements.

Glazing bars should not be removed to allow a large expanse of glass.

Proportions and opening styles should not be altered, such as to accommodate modern fanlight designs for example.

293 Cottages (all ages): timber plank doors - 3-5 planks, in random and regular widths. Often a small window is now inserted into this style of door. Glazing should be kept as small as possible.

294 Georgian properties: Timber panelled doors - typically 6-8 panels, usually unlit, but with decorative fanlight over door.

295 Victorian: Timber four or six panelled doors often with the top two panels glazed, sometimes with stained glass

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

They should only be used where justified and should not be used on listed buildings or in conservation areas.

Use locally appropriate paint colour

The choice of paint colour for doors can have a dramatic effect on the appearance of a building. Paint colours should respect traditional local colours. Appendix D provides a schedule of paint colours that are appropriate to the individual Character Zones in the Vale.

Porches and Canopies

Porches and canopies can add interest to an elevation. However, if too bulky of poorly designed, they can overwhelm a building.

Use porches that reflect the design approach

If porches and canopies are to be included on buildings, they should be appropriate to the style of the building and should reflect the character of the area in terms of scale, details and materials. For example, many Georgian properties did not typically include porches, but usually included steps at the front door and a decorative fanlight above the door. In contrast, many traditional village dwellings include simple open porches with modest lean-to roofs.

Images 296 to 298 illustrate the types of porches, canopies and entrances that can be found on different property types in the Vale.

296 **Entrances found in the Vale**

297 **Traditional porches and canopies found in the Vale**

298 Contemporary designs which follow the proportions and principles are usually successful

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

Roofscape

Careful consideration of roofs designs can add visual interest and variety.

Roofs as part of an overall design approach

Roofs should be designed to reflect the style of the proposed development and its context. Careful attention should be paid to roofing materials, pitch, eaves and verge details and the inclusion of chimney stacks or other features that project above the ridge line.
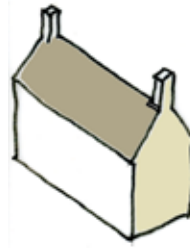
In general, a simple roof form is preferred. Image 299 illustrate some simple, traditional roof forms. The challenge when designing large floorplan buildings, such as flats, is to provide a roof form that does not dominate the building or the surrounding area and does not appear clumsy in proportion to the building. In contemporary buildings, flat or mono-pitch roofs may be appropriate, but only where they are a fundamental part of the overall design concept. Contemporary buildings also provide the opportunity for the introduction of alternative roofing materials such as zinc, profiled steel, and green roofs.
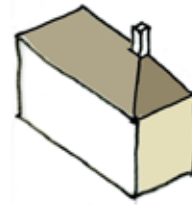
Chimneys

Incorporate chimneys if appropriate to the design approach.

Chimneys are a traditional feature which can significantly contribute to the overall appearance of a development. The use of chimneys, if appropriate to the overall design approach, can therefore be a very positive design tool. It may also be possible to introduce contemporary uses for chimneys, such as solar chimneys to aid ventilation in summer (see section 3.9). Chimneys are a traditional feature which significantly contribute to the street scene. Chimneys on new buildings, therefore, can be a positive design feature.
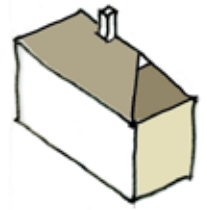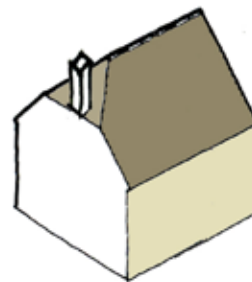
Roofscape Examples

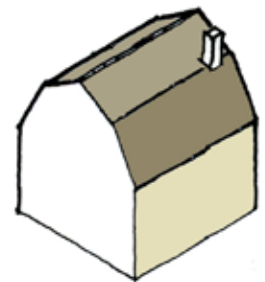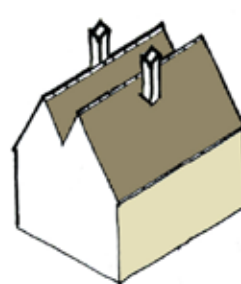Gabled roof - most common form

Hipped roof - common form

Hipped roof with gablet - relatively rare - often on more modern design with glazed gablet

Half hipped roof - common form

Mansard roof - rarely used - mainly found on Georgian Properties

'M' shaped double gable - often used where layout is too deep for the roof pitch to cross

An alternative to the is to undertake the 'M' shaped double gable behind standard gable roof

299 **Simple traditional roof forms found in the Vale**

300 **Chimneys can dominate the roofscape**

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

Chimneys can be located in a number of positions such as:

- On the gable end or projecting from the gable end, usually at first or sometimes second floor level;
- Along a side or rear wall or occasionally on the front (as illustrated in image 304 and 305);
- Within the gable end;
- Along the ridge;
- Projecting from the roof plane away from the ridge.

The location of a chimney will affect the layout of the dwelling and as such it is an important consideration in the initial design.

Dormers

Dormer windows can be prominent traditional features in the street scene. However, care needs to be taken with their design, proportions and position on the roof.

Use dormers where appropriate to the context to provide light to roofspaces

Dormer windows should be a feature that provide light and ventilation to roofspaces and should not just be used as a means of generating additional headroom.

Design and position dormers according to tradition

Flat roof, mono-pitch and gabled dormers are all commonly found in the Vale. The choice of design should be informed by the character and appearance of the local vernacular and should be consistent with the style of the building proposed, e.g. Victorian, Georgian or contemporary.

The size, proportions and details of dormers and their position on the roof are vital to achieve a successful design. Dormers should sit comfortably in the roof, usually back from

301 Chimneys added later to Medieval dwelling

302 Variety of twisted and ornate stacks - a status symbol
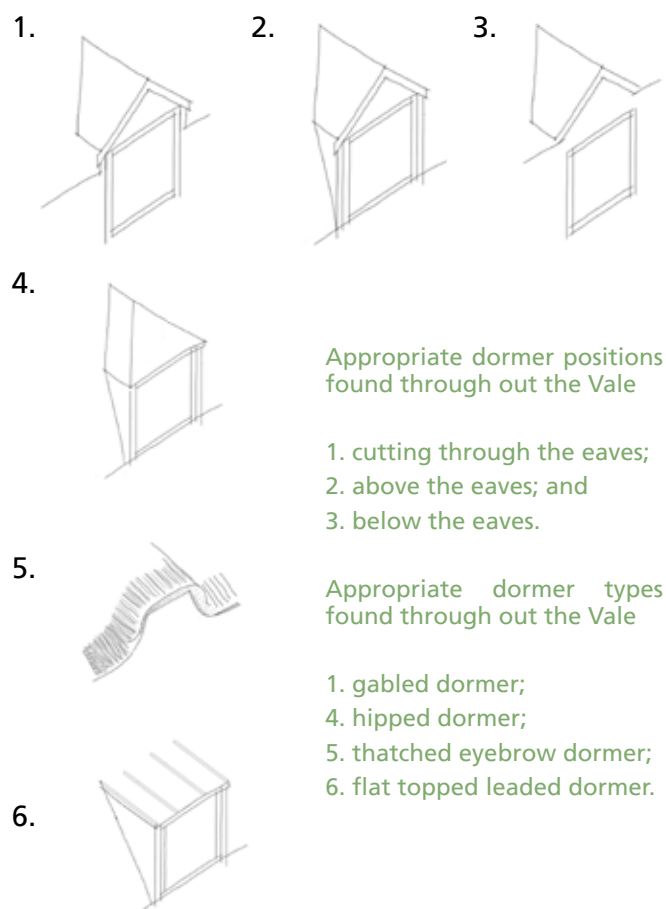

303 Oversailing courses at top of a stack

304 Unusual external stone and brick stack on the frontage

305 Stone stacks with chimney pots added in Victorian period

306 Short stone stack found in northern part of the Vale

1. 2. 3.

4.

Appropriate dormer positions found through out the Vale

1. cutting through the eaves;
2. above the eaves; and
3. below the eaves.

5.

Appropriate dormer types found through out the Vale

1. gabled dormer;
4. hipped dormer;
5. thatched eyebrow dormer;
6. flat topped leaded dormer.

6.

307 Examples of appropriate dormers

3.4
How to add Character and Detail

the eaves line and well below the ridge line. Dormers can cut through the eaves, however if poorly designed, they can lead to an unsightly proliferation of downpipes. Gabled dormers normally need steep pitched roofs, and all dormers should be designed with narrow cheek walls.

Detailing

Architectural details such as decorative brickwork, bargeboards and plasterwork, and window lintels and sills can make the difference between a successful and an unsuccessful design.

Introduce details with care

The inclusion of details should be undertaken with care as overly detailed elevations can appear fussy and historic detailing can appear like a caricature of the original.

Architectural detailing should take into account the local vernacular, although it can be used to provide a contemporary interpretation of that vernacular. Detailing can be used to emphasise an important building or landmark and so improve the legibility of a development.

Detailing around windows and doors can vary considerably and will depend largely on the facing material. Segmental arches or plain stone lintels are preferable to brick-on-end soldier courses – see image 310.

Modern Service Apparatus

The apparatus of modern services (e.g. external pipework, flues, vents, meter cupboards, satellite dishes and aerials) can create a cluttered appearance and detract from the design of an otherwise successful development. Careful consideration, therefore, needs to be given to their positioning on the buildings.

Original dwelling: unlit roof space

Two small dormers

Three small rooflights

Introduction of three large dormers - not recommended

308 Illustration of how dormers can alter a building

309 Building details such as drop and gothic arches, gable detailing and decorative features

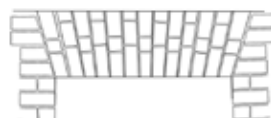Segmental arch with tapered mortar joints

Segmental stone arch with tapered blocks

Segmental brick arch with tapered bricks

Decorative version of segmental brick arch with tapered bricks

Flared soldier arch with tapered bricks

Plain soldier arch - not usually recommended to replace other arches on traditional dwellings

310 Brick and stone openings