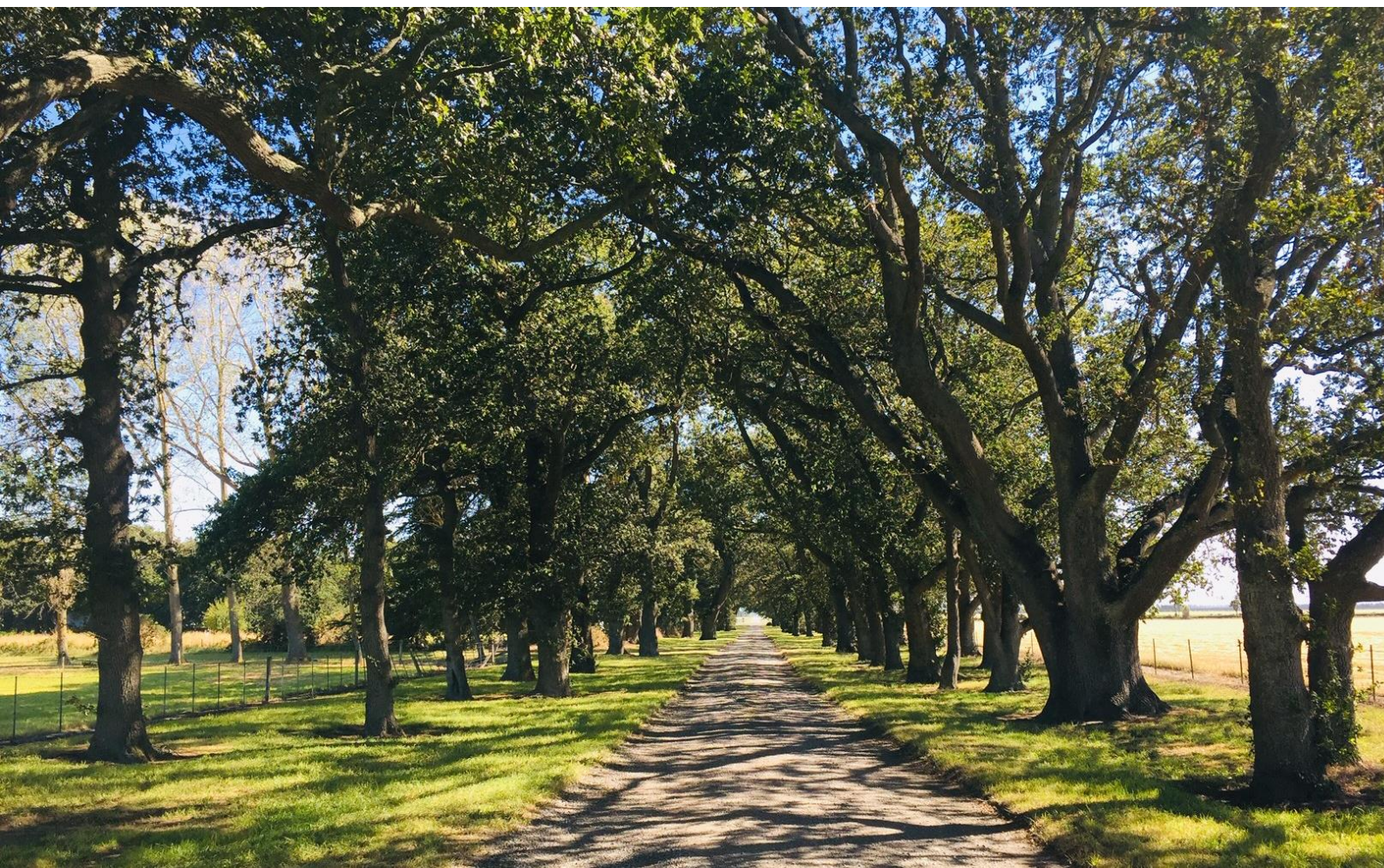


Character Area Design Guide

Barrhill: A model village in Mid Canterbury



1.0 Introduction

Positioned high on the south bank of the Rakaia River, Barrhill sits as a remnant of John Cathcart Wason’s vision of an English model village. Although far from the self-sufficient community envisaged by its creator, the village still retains much of the architectural and landscape character which were fundamental elements of its 19th century design.

Today the village holds considerable historical significance. The grid form and treelined avenues differentiate Barrhill from other small villages in the district. Large sections have been retained, heritage structures conserved, and minimal new development has disturbed the historic layout design.

The challenge now is to understand this significance and ensure that future development complements and enhances these features.

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2.0 Purpose of Guide

The character of an area is often mentioned in the context of considering development proposals. What is often missing is a clear identification of the distinctive features that give the area that character.

It is essential that places have the ability to adapt and evolve to meet demand and changing needs; but in historically significant settlements, such as Barrhill, it is also important to ensure that development responds to local character and reflects the identity and history of the surroundings. This does not mean that new buildings need to be a carbon copy of the originals, or that innovation should be discouraged, but rather that they recognise and complement the historical and architectural form, scale and character of the village.

This assessment aims to provide information and guidance that will inform and enable new development in Barrhill to be sympathetic to the character of the village and the surrounding landscape. It summarises the history of the settlement, identifies its important features, structures and characteristics and provides guidance as to what should be considered when designing new proposals, to ensure that they fit well with the locally distinctive character of the area.

3.0 History of the Village

❖ John Cathcart Wason

John Cathcart Wason was born on the Corwar Estate in Barrhill, Ayrshire, Scotland in 1848 and immigrated to New Zealand at the age of 20. The following year Wason paid £10,000 for the Lendon Run which consisted of 20,000 acres on the south bank of the Rakaia River. He also purchased land from the Lavington run and parts of Hororata Station.

He was known locally as an expert farmer and tree planter, notably growing the first large shelter belts south of the Rakaia and being among the early users of *Pinus radiata*.

Wason renamed his new estate 'Corwar' after his family's property in Scotland and started to establish his estate, building a large mansion overlooking the river, complete with gatehouse and model village similar to those he had known back at home. These model villages were usually part of a private estate and formed self-sufficient communities in terms of housing, shops, pubs and services, with properties rented individually to residential and commercial tenants. This was the aim for Barrhill, mimicking in a way the British ideal of a squire in his manor house with the workers housed nearby.

By 1882 Corwar was a middle-sized freehold estate of 5,226 acres – the estate grew wheat, imported Lincoln sheep, exported refrigerated merino mutton, and used the local water race to power agricultural machinery. It is recorded that by 1884, 600 acres of trees had been planted which were said to bring refreshing relief from what was previously 'the bare monotony of the open plain'.

Wason was heavily involved in the wider community, serving on various boards and clubs. He was elected to the House of Representatives in 1876 for the electorate of Coleridge and was later elected as MP for Selwyn in 1896.



Portrait of John Cathcart Wason c1878

(Source: Alexander Turnbull Library, Rolleston Album II via Te Ara)

He called New Zealand home for over 30 years before selling his property in 1900 and returning to the UK, where he served as Liberal MP for Orkney and Shetland.

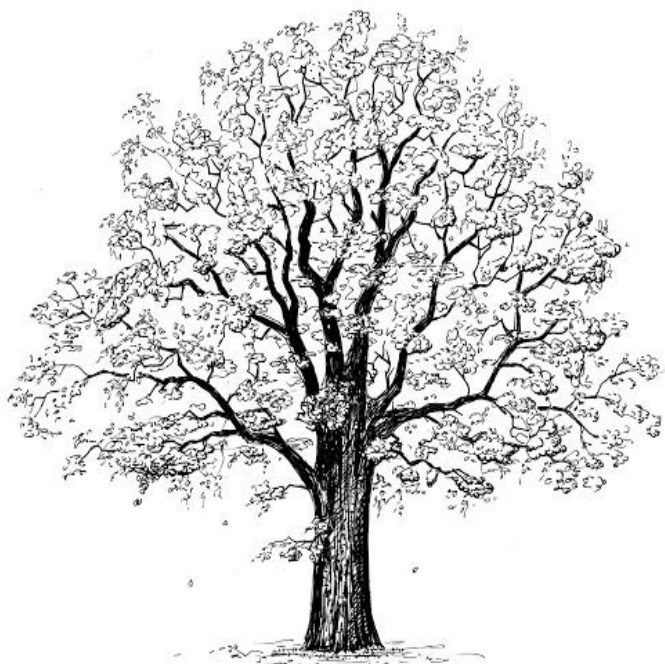
He died in London in April 1921 and with his assertive and dominating 6'6" presence, was remembered as 'no ordinary man'.

Village planting design

Wason established Barrhill with a purposeful and structured design.

There are five avenues in the village, each is planted in its own species of oak, poplar, birch, lime, and sycamore and named accordingly. The three outer avenues (Oak, Poplar and Birch) along with the main road, form a square. This is bisected by Lime Avenue and Sycamore Avenue, forming a cross. This crossroads, which is also the geographic centre of the settlement formed the market square and heart of the village.

These names, choice of species and the picturesque treelined avenues were noted at the time as giving Wason's desired 'homely and English-like appearance to the neighbourhood'.



However, Wason’s planting design may reference more than just his homeland, with hints towards religious symbolism.

The crossing of the two inner avenues, which was the location of the market square, is thought to symbolise a crucifix. At the intersection of the cross stands three circles of oaks containing the church, the schoolroom, and a house. These circles of trees, easily identifiable from aerial views, form what may represent the three circles of Trinity, that is Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

This theory is unverified, but with or without religious intention, the planting of these trees in this formation is clearly deliberate and contributes significantly to both the historical context and village character.



Circles of trees (Base map source: Canterbury Maps)

❖ Historical layout

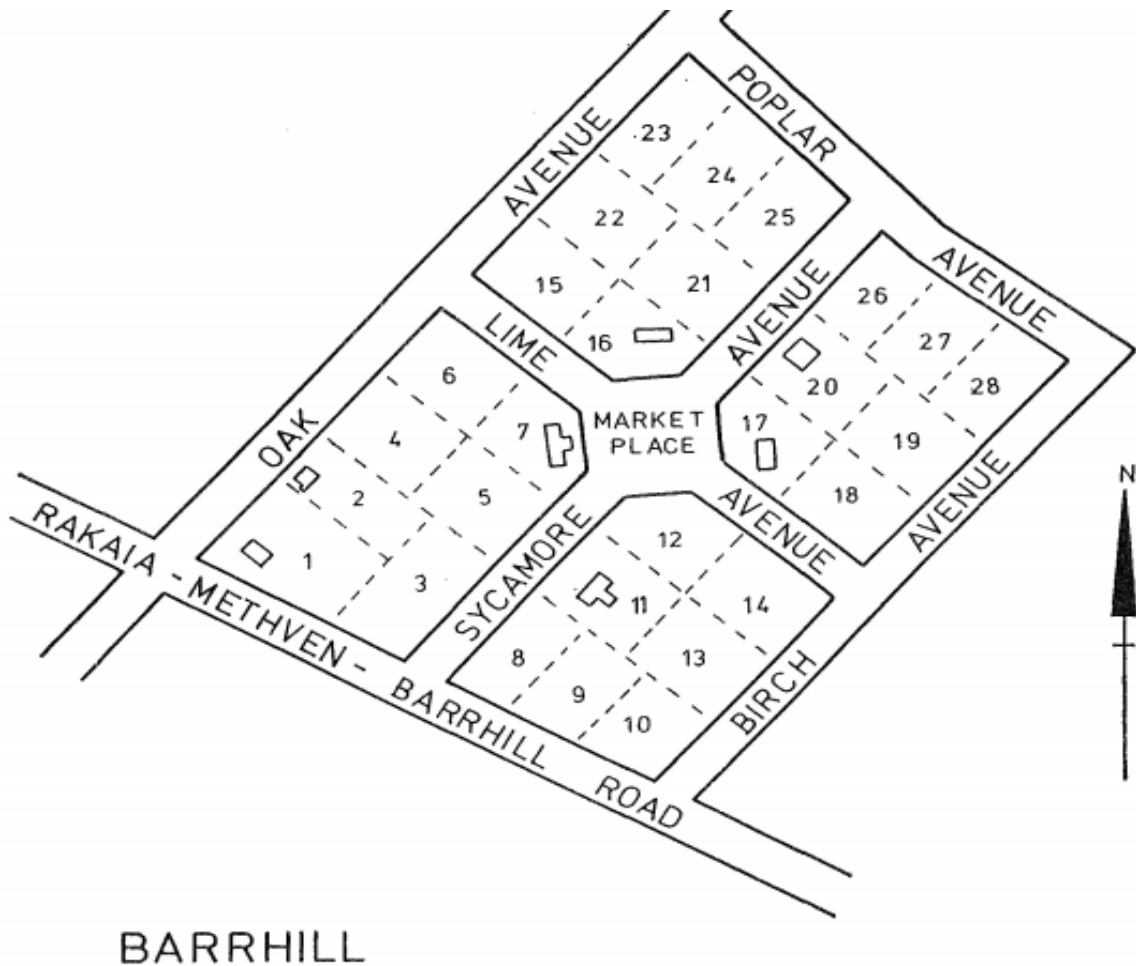
By 1877 the village of Barrhill consisted of 28 sections. The layout is identified in the below plan, which was recreated for the purpose of the village centenary in 1977.

Those sections accommodated 15 cottages, as well as a post office (lot 3), bakery, blacksmith (lot 2), boiling works for mutton, store, and an inn (lot 1) – most of these buildings were constructed of pine, built using the estate's *Pinus radiata*, and have since been lost.

Three concrete buildings remain: the church on lot 7, the school on lot 17, and the schoolhouse on lot 20.

At its peak, during the 1870’s, the village was home to around 50 residents. But Wason’s vision of a sustainable community rested largely on his expectation of a railway line passing the village, bringing people and goods. This did not happen, with the Methven Branch taking a more southerly route along Thompsons Track, following which the village slowly started to decline.

Wason sold up in 1900 and with a decreasing population, the post office closed in 1925 and the school closed in 1938.



4.0 Village Analysis

The term ‘townscape’ relates to the visual appearance of a town or village, including its dominant and contributing features. It can consist of all the different components of our environment, both natural and cultural, and how they interact and are understood and experienced by people – the buildings, the relationship between buildings, and the spaces around them.

Townscape matters because the character and quality of the built environment has a major impact on our quality of life and well-being.

❖ Designed landscape

Most settlements are predominated by their buildings, but Barrhill is unique in the district as its most dominant feature is that of its designed landscape. This is also the feature that has endured most through time when many of the built structures have been lost.

A photographer’s dream, the village is known for its picturesque treelined avenues, particularly Oak Avenue which also affords views across the plains to the Southern Alps.

The extent of the original grid layout is clearly defined by the tree pattern. The addition of the oak circles in the centre of the settlement adds to the aesthetic importance, but even more to its historic story and significance with the idea of religious symbolism. It is acknowledged that over the years a number of the original trees have needed to be replaced, but that has been undertaken in a like-for-like manner to retain the historic design.

The treelines have many purposes – as well as projecting a charming village appearance, they provide a symmetrical uniform structure to the settlement and they protect the inhabitants from weather extremes.



Threats to local identity, such as change in landscape or loss of important buildings, can be cause for public concern.

Understanding what makes up a specific townscape, and the intrinsic character and qualities of a place, helps us to guide the location, design, scale, and type of development that can be appropriately accommodated in the future.

In the case of Barrhill the key townscape features are:

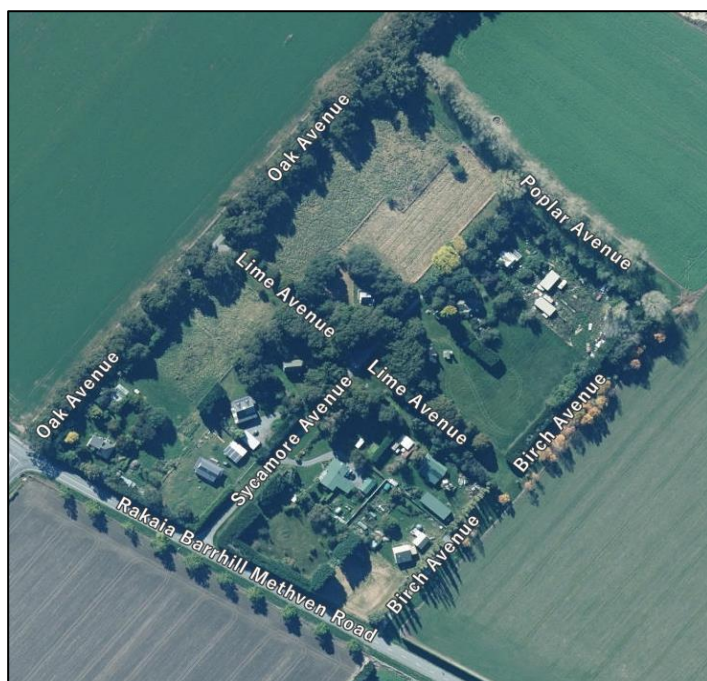
- The designed landscape
- Heritage buildings
- Non-heritage buildings

But perhaps their most valuable design feature is that of spatial enclosure, providing a clearly defined border between the settlement and the farmland beyond, and protecting the inhabitants within. This is only achievable when based upon a masterplan or clear design, rather than the incremental piecemeal development which most settlements are subject to – and even then it is often extended through demand and necessity.

The physical pattern of this settlement has remained almost entirely intact without variation from the original 1870s establishment. It has avoided extension into the adjoining agricultural land over time, or alteration to the shape and size of the residential sections through subdivision or amalgamation. The earliest available aerial photograph is from 1945 in which the physical structure of the village is still almost identical to the aerial view today.

It is a rare occurrence for a village to retain the same design and layout as when it was established nearly 150 years before.

Below: Historic aerial photograph from 1945 (left) and current aerial photograph on the right (Source: Canterbury Maps).



❖ Heritage buildings

The historic buildings in the village represent the past and provide us with a direct insight into what people did and how they lived. They can also help to establish the village's identity and to form a tangible link between the past and our current lives. By protecting these buildings, we are acknowledging the village's history which in turn gives the community a sense of place and belonging.

St John's Anglican Church

St John's Anglican Church was built in 1877 and is constructed of 12-inch-thick concrete walls, a solid concrete floor and kauri roof timbers. The roof is steeply pitched, hipped on the eastern end of the building and gabled on the west. The main entrance sits on the northern elevation and each wall features narrow lancet windows with moulded concrete surrounds.

The church held its first service in July 1877, conducted by the Reverend W.E. Paige of Ashburton, and prior to its construction, religious services are believed to have been held in Wason's woolshed.

The church is included as Heritage Item 5 in the Ashburton District Plan Schedule of Heritage Items. It was also entered onto the New Zealand Heritage List Rārangī Kōrero in 1983, as a Category 2 historic place (#1765).

Unfortunately, many of the original Barrhill buildings were constructed of pine and have been lost over the years, but three original concrete buildings remain. The church, school and schoolhouse not only sit at the heart of the village but were also central to village life. They are all acknowledged as good examples of early concrete construction and also for their ability to provide the village with a physical sense of history.



Former School



The former Barrhill school was constructed of solid concrete walls with a corrugated iron hipped roof. A large concrete chimney dominates the northern elevation which is otherwise completely bare with no openings. The large sash opening windows are located high on the walls to prevent the children looking out and becoming distracted. These windows were located only on one side to allow maximum sunshine during the day – but unfortunately it was constructed to a northern hemisphere design, so the windows are actually on the wrong side (southern elevation) to obtain the sunshine.

The school is included as Heritage Item 6 in the Ashburton District Plan Schedule of Heritage Items. The construction of the school was funded by the government and the building was opened in 1878.

Former Schoolhouse

The former schoolhouse was built to accommodate the local schoolteacher, and as with the other heritage buildings in the village, was constructed of concrete. The building is located next to the school but set privately within its own curtilage. It has a corrugated, double hipped iron roof and concrete chimney, with a small lean-to extension to the eastern elevation and a covered porch above the entrance on the north.

The former schoolhouse is included as Heritage Item 7 in the Ashburton District Plan Schedule of Heritage Items.



❖ Non-heritage buildings

Minimal new development has occurred in Barrhill village and only a small number of the 28 sections are currently built on.

Some modern design features, such as shallow pitched or mono-pitched roofs and large windows have been introduced – and at least one house in the village (not pictured) stands out as being out of character with the original township's scale and buildings - but in general a clear direction towards retaining colonial design exists.



The photographs below illustrate some examples of existing Barrhill homes. The colonial design elements evident in these buildings include:

- Weatherboard construction
- simple consistent rooflines with gables and steep pitch
- vertically orientated windows
- verandahs
- glazing bars
- decorative elements e.g. finials



In general, these buildings also project a good balance between the horizontal and vertical architectural elements, and a balance between the amounts of glazing versus solid wall. This means that there are no overly dominant single features, which can be prevalent in more modern structures, such as floor to ceiling glazing or large sliding doors.

Importantly, all the existing homes are single detached units, all with defined curtilages, and most relate well to their neighbours. Although the houses vary in design, the colonial theme is undoubtedly evident as you pass through the village.

The buildings are also relatively humble in size and, as the sections are spacious, this results in a positive balance between the built and natural environment.

Mature planting affords each section with a relatively good degree of privacy, whilst still allowing a relationship with the street.

5.0 Objectives

Prior to addressing the guidelines, it is useful to consider the objectives of this guide:

General

1. To maintain and enhance the historical and architectural character and nineteenth century layout of Barrhill village, whilst still enabling appropriate development.

Heritage

2. To promote the conservation of historical features, including scheduled heritage structures and planting patterns, that give this village its identity and character.

Landscape and village pattern

3. To maintain and protect the original grid layout of the five avenues, the tree pattern (along the avenues and in the market square) and the spatial enclosure afforded to the village by the original treelines.

Built Form

4. To maintain and enhance the distinctive townscape characteristics, such as scale, composition and external appearance, that distinguish this area from others.
5. To conserve the simple form, scale and appearance of buildings in the village, and ensure that alterations or new development is visually in harmony with the existing character, complementing and enhancing rather than contrasting with existing patterns.
6. To maintain the existing building setbacks, orientation and accessibility and promote these standards in new development.
7. To encourage not only design that replicates the colonial style, but also innovative design that adequately references it.

6.0 Design and development guidelines

❖ Historical context

Barrhill is one of the few villages within the Ashburton District to retain its founding village design and historical character almost entirely intact. As well as its social history and connections with early European settlement, the village is important due to its colonial architecture and landscape design. Respecting these historic values through sympathetic scale, size and location of new development will help to retain the character and unique village feel.

Guidelines:

- Existing heritage buildings should be conserved, and alterations that would result in a change to their external appearance avoided.
- Alterations to the setting of the existing heritage structures should retain their predominantly open aspect.
- New buildings should be in keeping with the historical character of the village, with similar scale, design and architectural form to their neighbour in order to achieve visual coherence.
- New buildings should consider the overall qualities of colonial architecture and how that might inform the design elements incorporated into new houses.

❖ Landscape and Village design

The treelined avenues form the defining landscape feature of Barrhill and emphasise the physical pattern of the settlement which has remained largely unchanged since its 19th century establishment. It is important to acknowledge the importance of this designed landscape and how it can be retained and enhanced in any future development proposals.

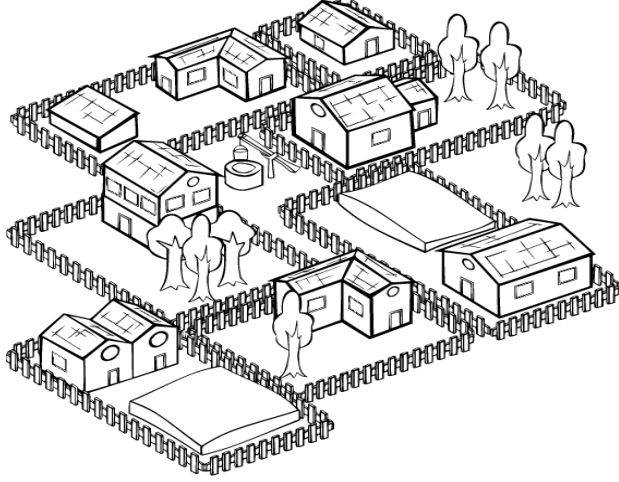
Guidelines:

- Conserve the existing treeline pattern and where necessary replace dead or damaged trees like-for-like.
- Retain the existing oak circles which hold aesthetic, landscape and social history values; and avoid any development that would have an adverse effect on these trees.
- Respect the original village design, retaining individual sections for single residential occupancy.
- Retain the rural character of the village and the balance between built and natural environment.
- Site landscaping should contribute, but remain subordinate to the historic planting design, ensuring the avenues of mature trees are retained as the dominant planting within the village.
- Boundary fences or planting should retain the existing open rural character and not interfere with the historic landscape design of the village.

❖ Density and Siting

Due to minimal new development and no demand for intensification, the village has successfully retained its low-density rural character.

The way in which homes and accessory buildings are positioned and orientated has a cumulative impact on the how the village appears and functions.



Existing homes are moderately sized, single detached units, with defined curtilages and spacious sections. This has resulted in a positive balance between the built and natural environment.

Guidelines:

- Maintain a low-density settlement through the retention of the existing grid pattern of sections and restricting development on each to one detached residential unit.
- New buildings should be setback from the street to retain the open rural character of the village.
- New buildings should be orientated towards the street with a clearly identifiable entrance.

❖ Building scale and form

The scale and design of a building are key factors in determining what impact it will have on the street, on neighbours, and on the character of the village. Houses in Barrhill are a mix of stand-alone single and two storey buildings and are mostly colonial in design with steeply pitched gable roofs, verandahs and vertically orientated openings.

Guidelines - scale:

- New houses should be one or two storeys and consistent in height with existing buildings in the village.
- The scale of new development should reflect the proportions and building footprint size of existing buildings in the village, including the heritage structures, to avoid dominance.

❖ Garaging and Parking

Garaging and parking in Barrhill is generally located to the side or rear of houses, which helps retain an attractive village character free from vehicles in front of the buildings.

Guidelines:

- Garages should be separate buildings to the main house and be of a lesser scale.
- Garages should coordinate with the house design in terms of form, materials, and colour.



Example above of a garage referencing colonial house design through steeply pitched gable roof, weatherboard cladding and architectural features such as finials [Source Hybrid Garages]

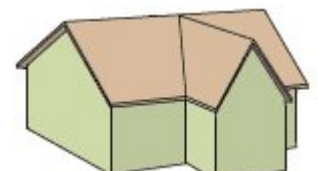
- Garages should be located to the rear of the section or if adjacent, positioned behind the front edge of the house.
- Driveways should be discrete and avoid hard surfacing such as concrete or paving.

Guidelines – design:

- New buildings should reflect, or reference, the colonial design theme found throughout the village to recognise the history of the colonial settlement and to encourage a visually coherent neighbourhood.
- New buildings should have a consistent pitched gable, or cross-gable, roof (minimum 30°), consistent with existing buildings in the village.



Gable



Cross gable



- Building design should reflect the simple rural character of existing village development, incorporating architectural elements but avoiding excessive detail.
- Design should display a balance between the horizontal/vertical architectural elements and a balance between the amounts of glazing versus solid wall.
- Cladding materials should reflect those existing in the village - roofing should be corrugated iron; wall cladding should generally be paint-finished horizontally fixed timber boarding (or similar).
- Colour palette should be consistent with the colonial theme and existing buildings in the village - mostly dark roof and painted walls, with contrasting trims.

The above example illustrates the various design elements discussed here: a simple form with a consistent, steeply pitched gable roof, weatherboard cladding (or similar), a straight roofed verandah, vertically orientated openings and glazing bars. The colour palette features a dark roof with painted cladding and contrasting trims. [source of base picture Heritage Homes]

- Additional architectural elements, such as glazing bars and gable vents, can provide an instant historical reference to a building. Finials are used to emphasise the apex of the gable and, although of much older origins, they were favoured in late 19th and early 20th century colonial design.



Vertical orientation



Horizontal orientation

- New buildings should have a verandah on at least one side of the house. Verandah roofs can be concave, convex (also known as bullnose) or straight as shown in the picture above. Due to the simple design of the buildings in the village, straight roof verandahs are most common and most appropriate.
- Design should display a balance between the horizontal/vertical architectural elements and a balance between the amounts of glazing versus solid wall.
- Openings should have a vertical orientation.

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