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Design & Access Statement REV A

Land off Chapel Brow, Charlesworth
Rear of 44–46 Town Lane, SK13 5HQ

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June 2026

Job number 14,647



Table of Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Site and Surroundings	2
3. Planning and Heritage Context	2
4. Design Principles	3
5. Amount, Scale and Massing	3
6. Layout and Landscape	3
7. Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure	4
8. Description of the Proposed Plans	4
9. Appearance and Materials	5
10. Topography, Levels and Excavation Strategy	5
11. Sustainability	6
12. Access	6
13. Design Evolution	7
14. Policy Compliance, Summary and Conclusion	10

1. Introduction

This Design & Access Statement accompanies a full planning application for the erection of a single detached dwelling on land off Chapel Brow, Charlesworth.

The statement explains the design rationale for the proposal and demonstrates how the development responds positively to its site, surroundings and planning context. It addresses the amount, layout, scale, appearance, access and sustainability of the scheme in accordance with national guidance and the adopted High Peak Local Plan.

The site lies **outside but within the setting of the Charlesworth Conservation Area** and within the setting of nearby Grade II listed buildings. Heritage significance and impact are assessed separately within the accompanying Heritage Statement and are not duplicated here.

2. Site and Surroundings

The application site is located to the rear of 44–46 Town Lane, with vehicular access taken from Chapel Brow. The land is currently undeveloped and forms part of the sloping valley side, falling away from Chapel Brow towards the north-west.

The site is characterised by a pronounced change in levels and is partly defined by historic stone boundary walls that contribute to the wider historic townscape. The surrounding context comprises traditional stone dwellings, the Grade II listed Independent Chapel on Chapel Brow, and the Grade II listed cottages at 44–48 Town Lane.

Although the site lies outside the designated Charlesworth Conservation Area, it forms part of its wider setting and contributes to the spatial and visual relationship between the historic village core and the Chapel.

3. Planning and Heritage Context

The proposal has been developed with regard to the National Planning Policy Framework (December 2024), particularly the objectives relating to achieving sustainable development, high-quality design and the conservation of the historic environment.

At a local level, the scheme responds to the principles of the High Peak Local Plan (2016), including:

- **Policy EQ6 – Design and Place Making**, and

- **Policy EQ7 – Built and Historic Environment.**

The site lies within the setting of the Charlesworth Conservation Area and nearby Grade II listed buildings. The contribution of the site to heritage significance, and the impact of the proposal, are assessed in detail within the accompanying Heritage Statement. This Design & Access Statement explains how the design responds sensitively to that context.

4. Design Principles

The design of the dwelling has been guided by the following principles:

- a landscape-led response to the site's steep topography;
- minimisation of visual impact and perceived mass;
- significant reduction in excavation and ground disturbance;
- scale and form reflective of local vernacular development; and
- a restrained palette of durable, locally appropriate materials.

These principles underpin the layout, massing, appearance and access strategy of the proposal.

5. Amount, Scale and Massing

The proposal comprises a single detached dwelling arranged over two storeys internally. The building is carefully stepped into the sloping site so that it presents as a low and discreet form when viewed from Chapel Brow and surrounding heritage assets.

The dwelling is expressed as **two modest pitched-roof volumes**, connected by a **lightweight glazed link**. This approach breaks down the overall mass of the building, reflects the grain of traditional development in the area, and reduces visual dominance within the landscape.

6. Layout and Landscape

The dwelling is positioned to sit comfortably within the natural slope of the site, maintaining appropriate separation distances from neighbouring properties and heritage assets. The layout preserves the sense of openness between Town Lane and the Independent Chapel, maintaining the spatial break that contributes to their setting.

Existing stone boundary walls are retained and repaired where necessary. New landscaping is proposed to integrate the development into the hillside and reinforce the rural character of the site.

7. Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure

The proposed development consists of a single dwelling on a site area of 888 square metres (approximately 0.089 hectares). Under the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations, this application formally qualifies for the **Self-Build and Custom Housebuilding Exemption**. Consequently, the development is legally exempt from the statutory framework requiring a mandatory 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) output.

Notwithstanding this legal exemption, a **Statutory Small Sites Metric (SSM)** calculation has been proactively completed and accompanies this submission to verify the site's ecological baseline. Rather than artificially engineering the residential plot solely to satisfy rigid statutory metric boxes, the scheme intentionally prioritizes a practical, **common-sense green domestic garden layout**.

Through the sensitive retention of existing boundary features and the introduction of high-quality soft landscaping, native planting, and traditional lawns, the development ensures a meaningful, functional, and localized ecological contribution. This design approach respects the established rural character of Charlesworth and fully aligns with the overarching environmental and sustainable design objectives of **High Peak Borough Council** local planning policies.

8. Description of the Proposed Plans

Ground Floor Plan

The ground floor plan responds directly to the sloping nature of the site, with principal accommodation partially set at existing ground level to reduce apparent height and visual impact.

The sole entrance to the dwelling is located at ground floor level and leads directly into a central entrance lobby. The lobby provides a clear and legible point of arrival and gives access to the principal living spaces, including the kitchen, dining and lounge areas, which are arranged to take advantage of outward views across the valley while remaining visually discreet.

Ancillary accommodation, including utility, WC, storage and garage space, is integrated within the ground floor footprint and positioned where it has minimal impact on the external appearance.

First Floor Plan

The first floor accommodates the private areas of the dwelling, including bedrooms and bathrooms. **At the rear of the building, this level is stepped back and aligned closely with the natural ground level, effectively reading as an upper ground floor**, thereby further reducing perceived mass and visual impact when viewed from Chapel Brow, Town Lane and surrounding heritage assets.

The arrangement ensures good levels of natural daylight while maintaining appropriate privacy.

9. Appearance and Materials

The appearance of the dwelling draws on the local vernacular of Charlesworth, expressed in a contemporary but restrained architectural language.

The principal external walling material will be **natural locally characteristic gritstone (Millstone Grit / Pennine sandstone)**, laid in coursed masonry with a natural tooled finish. The stone will be selected to reflect the grey and buff tones typical of historic buildings within the village and its wider setting.

Roofing to the principal building volumes will comprise **natural blue/grey slate**, laid in a traditional manner. All principal elements of the building are formed with pitched roofs. The **only flat roof** within the scheme is associated with the **lightweight glazed link**, which is deliberately limited in extent and designed as a subservient element, comparable in scale and character to a traditional conservatory or garden room.

Windows and glazed elements will be framed in **slim-profile aluminium with a dark anthracite finish**, selected to minimise visual contrast and allow openings to recess visually within the stonework. Windows will incorporate **high-performance double or triple glazing**, to be confirmed at detailed design stage in accordance with client preference and Building Regulations requirements.

External hard landscaping will include **natural sandstone paving** to principal circulation and terrace areas. Secondary paths and surfaces will incorporate **resin-bound gravel or bonded pebbles in light sand and natural aggregate tones**, providing a permeable and visually soft finish appropriate to the rural setting.

10. Topography, Levels and Excavation Strategy

The steep topography of the site has been a fundamental driver of the design. Rather than imposing a uniform platform, the building follows the natural landform through stepped floor levels.

The proposed dwelling requires approximately **440 cubic metres of excavation**, representing a substantial reduction compared with earlier schemes and nearby development.

For context, the neighbouring dwelling currently under construction on adjacent **Plot 2 (planning application reference HPK/2022/0536)** involved excavation volumes in the order

of approximately **3,000 cubic metres**, highlighting the significantly reduced level of ground disturbance achieved by the current proposal through its landscape-led design approach.

This strategy significantly reduces visual impact, landscape disturbance and engineering intervention.

11. Sustainability

The development has been designed to respond positively to national and local sustainability objectives while remaining appropriate to its sensitive setting.

A **fabric-first approach** is proposed, prioritising insulation, airtightness and thermal efficiency. The compact form and stepped arrangement support efficient environmental performance.

Space heating and hot water are proposed to be provided by an **air source heat pump**, offering a low-carbon alternative to fossil-fuel systems. The reduced excavation strategy also contributes to lower embodied carbon.

Provision is made for the future installation of **photovoltaic panels**, subject to detailed design and heritage considerations. Any photovoltaic panels would be located discretely, positioned to minimise visibility from public viewpoints and nearby heritage assets, and designed to sit flush with the roof plane so as to preserve the character and appearance of the building and its setting.

Durable materials such as stone and slate support a long building lifespan and reduced maintenance.

12. Access

Vehicular access is taken from Chapel Brow, consistent with previous approvals. Parking is provided within the site in a discreet manner.

Pedestrian access is clear and legible, with level changes accommodated through the stepped layout of the building and external spaces.

13. Design Evolution

13.1. Initial Application and Withdrawal (February – June 2024)

1.1 The original planning application, **HPK/2024/0102**, informally referred to as the “*Teletubby House*,” was submitted in **February 2024** by **Howard & Seddon Architects (Hisham Muazzam)** on behalf of **Mr Paul Duffy (Applicant/Owner)**.

1.2 During assessment, both planning and conservation officers confirmed that **residential development was acceptable in principle** under **Local Plan Policy H3**, but concluded that the specific design approach would **not be supported**.

1.3 The design was considered **too contemporary and earth-sheltered**, appearing incongruous within the **rural and vernacular context** of Charlesworth, and likely to cause **harm to the setting of nearby Grade II Listed Buildings** and the **Charlesworth Conservation Area**, contrary to **Policies S7, EQ5, EQ6, EQ7** of the **High Peak Local Plan** and the **NPPF (2024)**.

1.4 In response, the applicant **withdrew the proposal on 7 June 2024** to allow time for a complete reassessment and redesign, with a view to engaging further and positively with the Local Planning Authority (LPA).

13.2. Continuation of Project and Design Review (July – October 2024)

2.1 Following withdrawal, **Howard & Seddon Architects** continued to develop the project internally. **Stephen Foulkes**, supported by **Elliot Justin Giovacchini**, assumed design leadership from **Hisham Muazzam**, ensuring continuity with the LPA and the client.

2.2 Working closely with **Jenny Wetton (Conservation Consultant)**, the design team undertook a **formal Design Review**, reassessing the site’s topography, setting, and the detailed officer feedback.

2.3 The review sought to achieve a **balanced evolution** of the scheme — **bridging the vernacular character of Charlesworth with the modern, low-impact ethos of the original earth-sheltered “Teletubby House.”** The revised design was more contextual and traditional in form, yet retained a discreet contemporary sensibility through its integration with the natural landscape.

2.4 Key amendments included:

- Re-profiling the earlier earth-sheltered design into a **more conventional, above-ground dwelling**, with **living and kitchen areas partially recessed** into the slope to maintain a natural relationship with the land.
- Simplifying the **massing and roofscape**, adopting **dual-pitched slate roofs** consistent with local vernacular buildings.
- Incorporating a **green-roofed garage** that follows the terrain, visually softening the structure and reinforcing the low-impact, landscape-led approach.

- Using **locally quarried gritstone** with lime mortar and **timber joinery** reflective of the local material palette.
- Introducing **dry-stone walling and native planting** to strengthen landscape character and biodiversity.

2.5 A Design Review Statement, accompanied by **amended drawings, 3D visualisations, and a detailed materials schedule**, was submitted in **October 2024**. This version represented a **measured balance between traditional vernacular form and restrained contemporary design**, directly addressing the Council’s previous concerns.

13.3. First Pre-Application Meeting (January 2025)

3.1 A face-to-face pre-application meeting was held at the **High Peak Borough Council offices** in **January 2025**, attended by **Mr Paul Duffy (Applicant)**, **Stephen Foulkes (Howard & Seddon Architects)**, **Jenny Wetton (Conservation Consultant)**, **James Stannard (Planning Officer)**, and the **Council’s Conservation Officer**.

3.2 Officers advised that the revised scheme should:

- Avoid overtly modern features.
- Remove or substantially reduce underground living/kitchen spaces.
- Replace the flat-roofed garage with a **pitched, traditionally detailed form**.

3.3 The design team implemented these recommendations immediately, removing subterranean spaces, adopting a **pitched-roof garage in natural slate**, and confirming the use of **locally sourced gritstone** throughout.

13.4. Second Pre-Application Meeting and Written Feedback (February – March 2025)

4.1 A second meeting took place on **21 February 2025**, attended by **Mr Duffy, Stephen Foulkes, Jenny Wetton**, and **James Stannard**.

4.2 On 14 March 2025, James Stannard emailed formal feedback confirming that the revised scheme **had addressed the key concerns** and was **broadly consistent with officer advice**.

4.3 On 18 March 2025, Howard & Seddon Architects, via **Stephen Foulkes**, responded to confirm that all design refinements — particularly regarding **roof form, massing, and material treatment** — had been implemented, with updated drawings submitted for review.

4.4 While the response was positive, officers raised a **new issue** concerning the **link between the two main building volumes**, described as *“suburban rather than vernacular.”*

13.5. Third Meeting – Glazed Link and Design Review (April 2025)

5.1 In response, the design team introduced a **lightweight glazed conservatory-style link** between the two volumes, creating a clear visual break while maintaining coherence with local building forms.

5.2 A **third face-to-face meeting** was held at the **Council offices on 29 April 2025**, attended by **Mr Paul Duffy, Stephen Foulkes, Jenny Wetton, James Stannard**, the **Conservation Officer**, and the **Head of Planning**.

5.3 Officers acknowledged that **all previous advice had been followed**, recognising the applicant's cooperative and iterative design process.

13.6. Excavation Concern and Final Amendments (May 2025)

6.1 During the April meeting, officers raised a final concern regarding the **extent of excavation**.

6.2 The design was amended to **minimise excavation**, introducing **stepped internal floor levels** to follow the site's natural gradient reducing it of 440 m3 and engineering impact.

6.3 The **amended design was submitted to the Council on 13 May 2025**, following coordination between **Howard & Seddon Architects, James Stannard (Planning Officer), Rachel Robinson (Conservation Officer)**, and **Jenny Wetton (Conservation Consultant)**.

13.7. Final Officer Position – Written Advice (9 July 2025)

7.1 Following receipt of the final drawings, the Council issued its **Final Pre-Application Advice Letter** dated **9 July 2025**, authored by **James Stannard MRTPI**.

7.2 The letter (sent 15:16 hrs on 9 July 2025 to **Stephen Foulkes**, cc **Jenny Wetton** and **Elliot Giovacchini**) confirmed that the design process had included:

- **three formal face-to-face meetings,**
- **two full rounds of revised plans and visuals, and**
- **formal conservation input from Rachel Robinson (April 2025).**

7.3 The officer explicitly acknowledged that the applicant and design team had **implemented all previous recommendations** and had produced a scheme **fully consistent with the advice given throughout the pre-application process**.

7.4 Nonetheless, the letter concluded that, in the Council's opinion, **the site itself was too sensitive to accommodate any form of new dwelling** without resulting in *"less-than-substantial harm"* to the

setting of nearby heritage assets, as defined under **NPPF (2024) paragraph 215**.

7.5 No further design or technical shortcomings were identified. The letter stated:

“It is unlikely that any development could be introduced to this site that would preserve or enhance the significance of heritage assets including their setting, and the intrinsic qualities of the rural landscape, irrespective of its siting and design.”

7.6 This final position made clear that the Council’s **non-support** was **not a reflection of design quality or policy conflict**, but a **subjective professional judgement** regarding landscape and heritage sensitivity.

7.7 Importantly, the letter reaffirmed that the **principle of residential development remains acceptable** under **Local Plan Policy H3**, and that the objection was based solely on **perceived harm to setting and landscape**, not the proposal’s architectural or technical merit.

7.8 As such, the written advice represents a **non-supportive stance derived from subjective interpretation**, despite the applicant’s full cooperation, the resolution of all previously identified issues, and demonstrable compliance with national and local design guidance.

13. Policy Compliance, Summary and Conclusion

The proposal represents a carefully considered response to a sensitive site within the setting of the Charlesworth Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings.

Through a landscape-led approach, stepped massing, reduced excavation and a restrained material palette, the scheme achieves a discreet and well-integrated form of development.

The proposal accords with the principles of the National Planning Policy Framework and Policies EQ6 and EQ7 of the High Peak Local Plan. When read alongside the accompanying Heritage Statement, this Design & Access Statement demonstrates that the development represents an appropriate, sensitive and well-designed form of residential development for this site.

