



# VILLAGE DESIGN

Making local character count  
in new development

Part 1

The Countryside Commission aims to make sure that the English countryside is protected, and can be used and enjoyed now and in the future.

## **Acknowledgements**

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**Part 1**

Guidance based on the work of BDOR Ltd

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## FOREWORD

Diversity and distinctiveness are an inherent part of our culture and history. This is reflected in the rich and varied heritage of our villages which we rightly value. It is vital to ensure that when change and development take place, as they must, proper regard is given to the quality and identity of that heritage.

Encouraging a high quality of design in new development is a high priority for my Department and for me personally. It is central to the *Quality in Town and Country* Initiative, and its importance has been highlighted in the Government's White Paper, *Rural England*. The White Paper emphasised the need to safeguard local character, especially in rural areas, and confirmed the Government's support for the Countryside Commission's work on understanding and influencing the design of development in rural areas.

Village Design Statements are about helping local communities to help themselves, by showing how they can participate in, and influence, the way the planning system operates locally.

They offer a framework for engaging local people in constructive debate about how to help ensure that new development in their area fits its surroundings and is in keeping with local character. They offer a potential alternative to often polarised arguments about development by addressing local communities' genuine and legitimate concerns about the effect of new development on the local area. They can help developers to understand local views and perceptions at the outset of the design and development process. Used properly, Village Design Statements can provide a useful tool for managing long term change.

I therefore welcome this guidance, and commend Village Design Statements to local communities who wish to play a constructive part in ensuring that development is designed to enhance the local character and identity of the villages in which they live.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read 'John Gummer'. The signature is stylized and fluid, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

JOHN GUMMER  
Secretary of State for the Environment

## SUMMARY

The documents in this pack set out the Countryside Commission's advice on the preparation of Village Design Statements. Our advice is addressed to the local communities, who take the lead in preparing Village Design Statements. It is also being sent, for information, to the local planning authorities who need to approve Village Design Statements as Supplementary Planning Guidance, if they are to meet the objectives the Commission envisages for them.

Unlike many other local initiatives, Village Design Statements are intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system. They will provide a context for new development, based on local character or sense of place. They are designed to help manage change, at whatever scale it occurs. They are not about **whether** development should take place; that is a job for the local plan. They are about **how** planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the local environment.

The following objectives are set out for Village Design Statements:

- to describe the distinctive character of the village and the surrounding countryside;
- to show how character can be identified at three levels
  - the landscape setting of the village,
  - the shape of the settlement,
  - the nature of the buildings themselves;
- to draw up design principles based on the distinctive local character;
- to work in partnership with the local planning authority in the context of existing local planning policy, and to influence future policies.

We believe that the objectives and principles set out in this guidance pack are applicable to rural settlements of all sizes (as opposed to larger urban areas). However, the detailed guidance on the process of preparing a Village Design Statement has been written with a 'typical' village in mind, and may need to be adapted to meet the needs of a particularly large or particularly small settlement.



*New development in villages can be both compatible with local character and modern, while meeting village needs, as in this new village hall in Kentisbeare, Devon.*

**This booklet summarises what a Village Design Statement is, and offers detailed guidance on how to produce one.** It explains why local people are best placed to identify and describe local character. It explains how a Village Design Statement will be of value to local people, planners, designers and developers. It summarises the suggested scope of a Village Design Statement, and offers detailed advice about initiating and managing the various stages of its preparation. It emphasises the need for wide involvement, so that the finished Village Design Statement represents the views of the village as a whole, and it offers ideas for stimulating and sustaining that level of involvement.

The role of others in the preparation of a Village Design Statement is discussed. Particularly important are the parish council and the local elected members and officers of the local planning authority.

Advice is provided on managing the programme and timetable for Village Design Statement production; on analysing and recording information about local character; and on the structure and content of the Village Design Statement itself. Guidance is also offered on the consultation process, on organising and managing the publication of the final text, and on the financial aspects of Village Design Statement production.

There is a section on the outside people and organisations who might be able to offer help if needed, although it is emphasised that this should not normally be necessary. The final chapter deals with using the Village Design Statement, once it has been published and approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

In conclusion, the following summary is given of the most important characteristics of an effective Village Design Statement.

#### **An effective Village Design Statement:**

- is developed, researched, written and edited by local people;
- is representative of the views of the village as a whole;
- has involved a wide section of the village community in its production;
- describes the visual character of the village;
- demonstrates how local character and distinctiveness can be protected and enhanced in new development;
- is compatible with the statutory planning system and the local planning context;
- is suitable for approval as supplementary planning guidance;
- is applicable to all forms and scale of development; and
- is about managing change in the village, not preventing it.

**Part 2 of this pack provides background information and draft worksheets.** It covers in more detail the requirements that a Village Design Statement should complement the local planning context and be based on a well-structured assessment of the character of the village and its setting. It provides a basic outline of how the planning system works, and explains how to find out more. It also offers detailed advice, and provides draft worksheets, for the organisation and management of the Village character workshop, which is one of the key stages in our suggested approach to Village Design Statement production.

Finally, this pack contains two examples of successful Village Design Statements, produced by the local communities in Cottenham (Cambridgeshire) and Cartmel (Cumbria) as part of the Commission's pilot programme.

# SETTING THE SCENE

## I. WHAT IS A VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT?

### Introduction

The Countryside Commission believes that the rich and varied character of rural settlements forms an important part of the beauty and distinctiveness of the English countryside. The Commission also believes that this character is under increasing threat from standardisation and poor design. In 1993, we published *Design in the countryside* (CCP 418), which focused on the themes of regional diversity, local distinctiveness, and the harmony between buildings, settlements and the wider landscape setting. It proposed, as one of two new mechanisms for understanding and influencing rural design, the preparation of Village Design Statements.

The Commission established a pilot programme to test the concept of Village Design Statements in four villages. That programme proved very successful, and this guidance is based on the lessons learned from it. Our intended audience is primarily the local communities who take the lead in preparing Village Design Statements. However, the guidance is also being sent, for information, to the local planning authorities whose support is important in the preparation of Village Design Statements, and who are responsible for their approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

A number of other local, community-based, environmental initiatives are already well established, such as Parish Maps and Village Appraisals. However, Village Design Statements are unique in that they set out to influence the way the statutory planning system operates locally, through their approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance. They provide a context for new development, based on an identification and analysis of local character.

The purpose of Village Design Statements is to manage change, whether that change is major new development or just cumulative, small-scale additions and alterations. They are not about **whether** development should take place; that is a job for the local plan. Their concern is about **how** planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the conservation and, where possible, enhancement, of the local environment.

Local communities have a unique appreciation and understanding of their own place, and a Village Design Statement (which from now on will be shortened to VDS) is based on this knowledge. It describes the qualities and characteristics that people value in their village and its surroundings. It sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in the village, based on that character. It is an advisory document produced by the village community, **not** by the local planning authority. It will not stop development and change from happening, but it will help to influence how new development fits into the village.

Design is often seen as the sole responsibility of architects and designers to decide on behalf of everyone else. Many people feel unable to contribute because design is 'a matter of taste' or they have no expertise. Taste relates to personal choice. But good design stems from principles and standards which can be described in terms of size, shape, scale and materials. Everyone can agree how those principles should apply to their own village and how new development should protect and enhance local identity.

*The traditional features of the village and new village housing at Saxthorpe, Norfolk.*

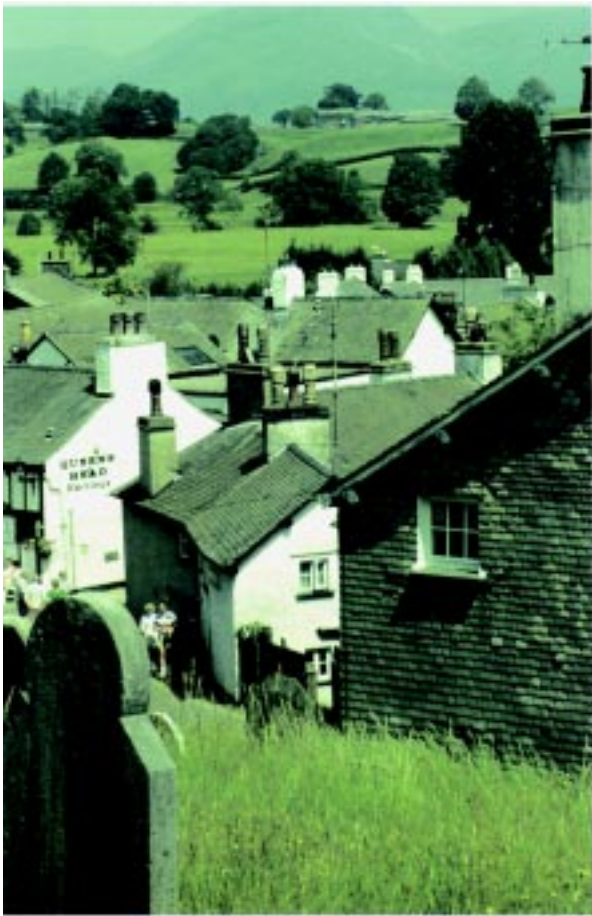


## Change — pickling or progress?

Village and rural communities have responded throughout history to changes in economics, technology and social trends. Village communities have never been static and what we see today is the result of centuries of radical developments and social upheaval. We tend to look at the village scene and imagine it has always been like this, whereas in reality it is a 'snapshot' in time. A thriving and viable village has to strike a balance between its traditions and the needs, and demands of modern life and all that this implies. Some development in villages is both healthy and desirable to maintain thriving village communities.

A VDS offers a positive way for local people to ensure that the nature and quality of development makes a natural progression from village past into village future. In particular the VDS helps to manage change and demonstrate how new and locally distinctive design can add to the visual quality of the village.

Technology has largely removed the constraints on construction, eg ground conditions, locally available materials and climate. However, just because we can build almost anywhere, with any materials, in any form, does not mean that we should. The development of new building technologies has revolutionised building practice, but has done little for diversity of design.



*Traditional building form and settlements were constrained in their development by landform and the availability of materials.*



*Village-based employment in new or converted buildings contributes to the future sustainability of village communities.*

No one would wish to return to the inadequate housing associated with life in the countryside in the 18th or even 19th centuries. **New technology should enable architects, planners and developers to design for the future with respect for the influences of the past. Local identity should be as important today as it was in the past.** The VDS describes the visual features and qualities of the village valued by local people and, far from limiting designers to copying the past, it can identify the characteristics that should inspire new developments in and around the village.



*Design solutions should not merely copy the past. This cottage, on the site of a derelict coastguard's lookout post in Cornwall, clearly demonstrates an awareness of the past tradition but is unmistakably modern.*

## Successful pioneers of Village Design Statements

To prepare a VDS you do not need to be an expert on planning or architecture. You are the experts on the character of your village and its distinctive qualities. VDSs have already been prepared by a number of villages.

The village of Yoxall in East Staffordshire produced the first VDS, with the support of their district council. The Countryside Commission's pilot scheme tested the concept in four very different villages: Down Ampney in Gloucestershire, Elstead in Surrey, Cartmel in Cumbria and Cottenham in Cambridgeshire. Each village developed its own approach and each produced a unique statement. Their success showed that local people can produce useful guidance with minimal professional support, and that their knowledge can enrich the planning process. All these statements have been published and approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance; this makes them part of the planning system, and enables them to influence decisions on planning applications and to be considered by an inspector when determining planning appeals.

The guidance in this pack is based on the experience of the community groups who produced the pilot VDSs. It aims to provide all the basic material you need to assess, describe and compile your own locally distinctive principles for the design of new development in your village, your own **Village Design Statement**. However, the Commission will welcome suggestions as to how this guidance can be improved or supplemented.

## Will anyone take any notice?

The planning system has long recognised the need for public consultation, but many people feel that statutory consultation does not provide an effective means for account to be taken of their views. Formal consultation is usually for comments on specific proposals, rather than allowing positive participation. However, community participation in planning has become better organised and appreciated in the last few years.

"I want to try to generate more debate locally about what makes for a good or a bad environment, to raise awareness of the design of the local built environment and ways it might be improved."

*John Gummer, Secretary of State for the Environment,  
DOE Press release No. 162 30 March 1995*

VDSs have been recognised and endorsed by central government.

"The response to the discussion document on Quality in Town and Country and to the Rural White Paper consultation revealed strong support for the principle that new development in the countryside should contribute to a sense of local identity and regional diversity. The Government too endorses this principle. Modern designs in the countryside can and should be responsive to local character, reflect local building styles and enhance the environment. This does not mean that new buildings should slavishly imitate designs of the past, but simply that they should respect their setting and their neighbours..."

These concerns are reflected in recent work by the Countryside Commission on ways of understanding and influencing the design of new development in rural areas. The Commission has shown how it is possible for local people to become involved in developing guides to village design... We will now discuss with the Commission ways of promoting the preparation of village design statements throughout England..."

*Rural England, Government White Paper,  
DOE and MAFF, October 1995*

"Village Design Statements may be a material consideration in determining a planning application or appeal, and it is for local planning authorities to consider whether to adopt them as supplementary guidance to the development plan."

*Sir Paul Beresford,  
Under Secretary of State for the Environment,  
Hansard, Column No. 711, 28 April 1995*

The first VDSs have already been used to help determine planning applications and appeals. They offer an opportunity for local people to get involved in the planning process at an early stage and to make a positive contribution rather than just responding to proposals. The earlier people participate in the planning process, the greater their opportunity for constructive influence.

## What are the objectives of a Village Design Statement?

- To describe the distinctive character of the village and the surrounding countryside.
- To show how character can be identified at three levels:
  - the landscape setting of the village;
  - the shape of the settlement;
  - the nature of the buildings themselves.
- To draw up design principles based on the distinctive local character.
- To work in partnership with the local planning authority in the context of existing local planning policy, and to influence future policies.

## Why is it useful?

Few local planning authorities have comprehensive and detailed policies for design. There are design guides for some designated areas such as Conservation Areas and National Parks, but for the majority of rural settlements there is little design advice based on local character. The VDS is a planning tool. It can help improve design in rural areas by being applied consistently in the development control process as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Without the status of Supplementary Planning Guidance, a VDS can still be used but its effectiveness will be considerably reduced. There is more information on this in Part 2 of this guidance.

Much antagonism to new development is because of its inappropriate character, rather than opposition to the development itself. Producing a VDS can build better understanding between the village community, the local planning authority, and designers and developers. The VDS identifies the design principles to which proposals should respond, and thus helps to set the context for new development.

### A VDS is important to local people because:

- it sets out the character of the village in a way that will encourage locally distinctive design;
- it gives the community a recognised voice in the planning processes that affect the visual quality of the village;
- it supports and strengthens the role of the parish council when consulted over planning applications;
- it is a representative view of local people of the character of the village;
- it demonstrates local commitment to high quality design and appropriate development that will improve the quality of life of the village;
- it contributes to securing a thriving and viable future for the village;
- it enables local priorities to be considered in the development process;
- it enables local people to be able to respond in an informed and professional manner to planning and development proposals in the village; and
- it is applicable to all villages and settlements, not just conservation or specially designated areas.



*Traditional Cotswold village character interpreted in contemporary design.*

### **A VDS is important to planners because:**

- it represents the view of the whole village community;
- it complements the existing planning and development control system and strengthens the local planning authority's position when advising or negotiating on design and at appeal;
- it provides a structured, flexible approach to assessing village character;
- it is not a drain on their resources as it is undertaken by the community themselves;
- it is applicable to all areas not just conservation or designated areas;
- it enables local people to make a positive contribution to the development debate, rather than having to rely on protest and a NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) stance to make their views heard;
- it provides support for elected members' decisions;
- it can be used as guidance in design and development briefing, when approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- it enables an informed dialogue to take place with the community; and
- it can be material evidence when used at appeals, when approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

### **A VDS is important to designers and developers because:**

- it describes the visual qualities and character of the villages as an inspiration for design;
- it describes the character of the village as perceived by local people;
- it can shorten the process of planning negotiation and application by reducing conflict and NIMBY responses; and
- it encourages villagers to take a positive view of development.

## **Where is it relevant?**

All rural settlements, from small country towns to the smallest hamlets, undergo change. In places where there is pressure for major new development, a VDS offers a practical tool for setting high standards of design. However, a VDS is appropriate in other areas too. It can also help guide small-scale changes to individual properties. The cumulative impact of many small changes can sometimes have as much effect on local character as big new developments.

The Countryside Commission believes that the objectives and principles set out in this guidance are relevant to rural settlements (as opposed to major urban areas) of all sizes. However, the detailed advice which follows on the process of producing a VDS has been written with a 'typical' village in mind. It may therefore need to be adapted to fit the circumstances of a particularly large or particularly small settlement.

## **But I don't know anything about design or planning**

Most people have little contact with the planning system, other than to be offered the chance to comment on specific proposals. The VDS offers a much more creative involvement. Preparing a VDS does not require design or planning knowledge. This pack, team work, and plain common sense will take you a long way.

In most villages there is a wealth of expertise and experience waiting to be shared and drawn upon; a VDS can build on this. Anyone with a keen interest in the identity, character and future of the village, has something to contribute to a VDS.

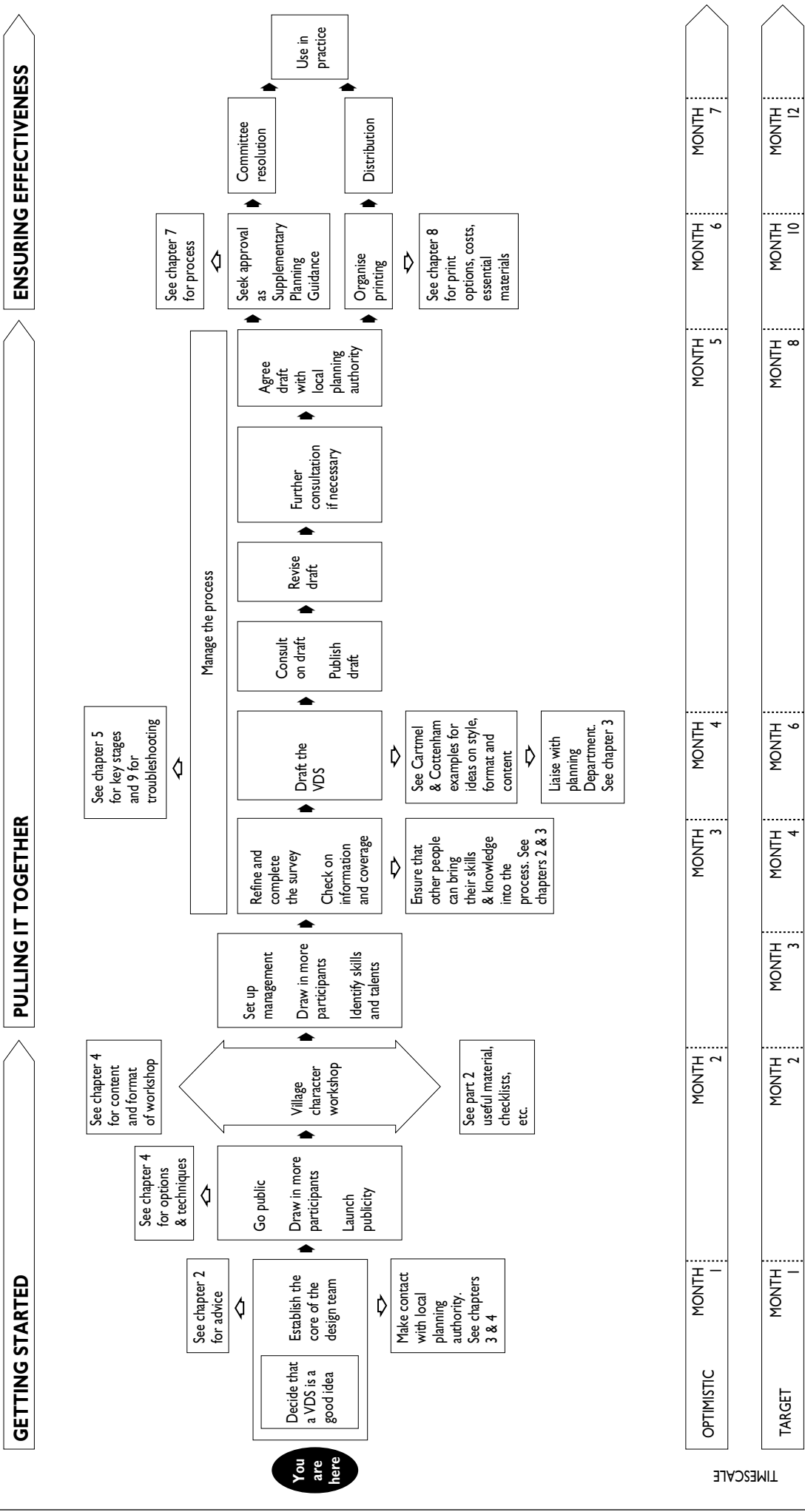
"What is lacking is someone who stands outside all the specialisation and does the visual thinking... That is the inside job, a hope for the future. But the future will be too late. The action is needed now... That is a job for all of us, and the only qualification we need to have is to have eyes to see."

*Ian Nairn, "Outrage",  
Architectural Review, June 1955*

Preparing a VDS is really quite straightforward and, with a little careful planning and cooperation from the local planning authority, will be both interesting and enjoyable to undertake.

The diagram which follows will help you to plan the progress of your VDS. It will also show you what you need to do at each stage and where in this guidance to find the information.

# Village Design Statement progress chart





A VDS should describe the character of the village; its setting and form in the landscape, as well as the details of the buildings and spaces within the village.

## The scope and content of a Village Design Statement

A VDS describes the physical character of the village as it is *now*, through the eyes and experience of local people. For local people the village is much more than a collection of individual buildings. It is the sum of all the buildings, spaces, streets and trees, it is where they live and work, it is the material heart of the community.

It is very easy to become distracted by the village's history. While historical aspects must be understood, it is the *influence* that the past has had on the *present* character of the village that is most important. A good, existing local history will provide useful background information for an introductory description of the physical, economic, social and cultural origins of the village in the VDS, but a VDS is *not* a local history, it is a perspective for the future. **The scope and content of**

the VDS must be both relevant and complementary to the local planning context.

The VDS should describe the visual character of the village in terms of:

- the village in its countryside or landscape setting;
- the form of the settlement as a whole;
- the characteristics and details of the buildings and spaces within the village.

Detailed advice on structuring your description of the visual character of the village is set out in Part 2 of this guidance. However, it is important that *all* the information that goes into the VDS answers the following key questions.

- What does this say about the character of our village?
- Will this help to inform the design decisions of designers and developers?
- Will this be compatible with local planning policies?

## So, would *our* village benefit from a Village Design Statement?

To help answer this question consider the following indicators.

- Are there changes in the landscape around your village, its features, and the pattern of agriculture and other land uses?
- Are there proposals in the Local Plan for new development in your village?
- Are there continuing pressures for development, including small-scale extensions and alterations?
- Are there changes in village facilities including job opportunities, shops, services or schooling?
- Are there changes in village population, eg young people, families or older people moving in or out of the village?
- Are there changes in the pattern of the village, loss of open space, development in gardens, felling of trees, parking problems?
- Is the character of the older village 'core' different to the rest of the village?
- Is a particular kind of development needed in the village?

If the answer to one or more of these indicators is 'Yes', and people in the village are concerned that the current procedures may not be sufficient alone to protect and enhance the quality and distinctiveness of your village; then a **VDS can be a positive way for your village to demonstrate how local character can count in the design of new development.**



*New materials and modern design in Tarporley, Cheshire.*

# PREPARING FOR ACTION

## 2. LOCAL INVOLVEMENT

“If we don’t speak now our feelings about our village may never again be considered.”

*VDS team member*

### **An idea whose time has come**

The best ideas are usually the simplest and based on common sense. If developers, designers or planners are not able to appreciate the character of your village, then perhaps it is because no one has ever explained it to them!

It is easy to take for granted the streets, buildings, spaces and countryside that we see everyday. They are so familiar that we look at them but do not always really see them. It is often only when we feel that they are under threat or about to be changed that our awareness is at its most acute. Writing a VDS enables everyone to look at the village in a new way, appreciate and celebrate what makes it special, perhaps challenge misconceptions or prejudices. Most of all the VDS allows everyone to help sustain the character of the village by influencing the form of new development.

*A VDS looks at the village as a whole; the past influences on development and how this has contributed to the character of the present.*

### **I can’t do a Village Design Statement on my own**

You do not have to, indeed you should not try. The VDS must represent the view of the village as a whole, and that is where much of its strength and influence lies. It may start with the parish council, the parochial church council, the Women’s Institute, the school, a local environmental or community group, or an individual. It may be suggested by the Rural Community Council or even the local planning authority.

It does not matter who starts the VDS process but it does matter where it goes. Compiling a VDS for approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance may seem a daunting task but several communities have successfully completed their own VDS. Villages as large as Cottenham and as small as Cartmel have prepared VDSs that are approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

The parish council will have an important role to play in the production of a VDS. They are elected representatives as well as statutory consultees for local planning applications. Many locally based organisations



such as Civic Societies and Council for the Protection of Rural England (CPRE) local groups also have wide experience and interest in the protection of local character and the countryside. The more people who are involved and contribute to the production of the VDS the better. It must not just represent the view of a single interest group, it has to be *seen* to be a shared and representative view of the village as a whole.

## **I want to help, but I don't want to be in charge... establishing a design team**

The information a VDS provides for planners, designers and developers has to be straightforward, clear and unambiguous. To achieve this, the production of the VDS has to be structured and well organised. It needs a small core of local people, the 'design team or group', who can act as coordinators. The design team can also draw on the help of local supporters and from organisations outside the village through local representatives. The composition of the design team may change during the VDS production, but close contact and communication with the rest of the village must be kept open and free at all times.

In many cases the initial lead for the VDS will be taken by the parish council, but this is not the only way forward. Some parish councillors have expressed caution that a VDS led by the parish council may not be seen as representative of the whole village, and that the parish council's planning position may be complicated by too central a role in the VDS.

In Cottenham the VDS was coordinated by the Community Association, with the support of the parish council. This proved successful because the Community Association has a broad role in the village. Impartial and neutral coordinators are the most appropriate.

The design team are not necessarily the people who undertake all the practical 'field work' or drafting the VDS. The scope of a VDS is very wide and there will be opportunities for people with particular knowledge and skills to have an active role in collecting material, taking photographs, making sketches, surveying and assembling or editing. In the early stages it may not be possible to determine exactly what part each person will play, but it is important to make sure that no one is excluded or taken for granted. Personal skills and interests are as important as professional experience and new people should be able to join in throughout the production process.



*A VDS enables everyone to look at the village anew, contributing to the protection of its character and sustaining the future.*

### **Checklist of tasks for the design team**

- To act as a point of contact and information for the wider village community.
- To encourage the continuing widest involvement by all parts of the village community.
- To undertake the coordination of the VDS preparation and, in due course, its publication.
- To maintain regular contact with officers and members of the local planning authority and obtain advice and guidance on securing Supplementary Planning Guidance status for the VDS.
- To work with other people or groups in the village to draft and edit the VDS content.
- To undertake comprehensive consultation with all the village, local groups and interested bodies.
- To ensure that the VDS is fully endorsed by the parish council.
- To secure appropriate resources or funding for the preparation of draft material and publication of the final VDS.
- To publicise and launch the completed VDS.

## Getting going...

Preparing a VDS is enjoyable and interesting in its own right, as well as producing useful and effective advice to protect village character. People of all ages, professions and interests will come forward when given the opportunity or asked directly.

Sometimes people feel self-conscious or reticent about offering to help. Many will feel that they have nothing to contribute because design is 'all a matter of taste' or that they have no expertise in design. Equally, some professional designers can be over enthusiastic and might end up dominating.

"Quality is not a matter of taste. We should not seek to impose our tastes. Taste is a matter of choice but quality is different. It relates to everlasting standards such as materials, space, proportion, courtesy to neighbours. It is real not subjective."

*John Gummer MP, Secretary of State for the Environment, RTPI National Planning Conference, 20 June 1995*

Having as wide a cross-section of the village community as possible involved at an early stage is valuable in ensuring that local people feel a VDS is relevant to them and that they have a contribution to make.

This also:

- helps to avoid the VDS being seen as the personal preference or taste of only a small number of people in the village;
- brings out useful skills, interests and new ideas from the community;
- shows the local planning authority and prospective developers that there is a broad commitment to the VDS from the whole village; and
- makes everyone more aware of the ways that they themselves affect the appearance of the village.

Most of the changes in villages result from the actions by individual householders and local traders or businesses. Therefore everyone needs to recognise that they have a role in the VDS. It is easy to recognise the changes produced, for example, by the building of a new house on a small infill plot, whereas the uprooting of a garden hedge, the installation of new windows, a new porch, security lighting or shop signs can seem small in comparison, but over time they will change the feel and appearance of streets and groups of buildings dramatically.

In Cartmel local people were aware that they had a joint responsibility for safeguarding their village identity in the small-scale developments for which they, as householders, were responsible. The Cartmel Design Statement includes the following as part of a six point plan for local householders considering altering the exterior of their own property.



*Traditional cottages can be extended to meet changing needs without resorting to standardised solutions.*

"4. Now think about the changes you have in mind. Consider whether they could prejudice the distinctive characteristics and details which you have noted down. If so, examine other ways of meeting your requirements – but which will conserve this irreplaceable heritage."

While the breadth of involvement is important there are some parts of the community which deserve a particular mention because their input can be both influential and central to the way the VDS develops.

### Schools

Young people have a real stake in the future of the village. Their ideas and imagination can be a significant element in the VDS. Environmental education has long been a feature in schools and need not be restricted to primary school children. Within the National Curriculum the process of surveying, recording and assessing the local environment will contribute directly to many subjects across the curriculum, at all stages.

It is worth discussing the preparation of the VDS with local teachers very early in the process to assess how best to encourage children and young people to participate, both in school and out. In villages which have their own local school, it forms a focus of activity for many groups and organisations in the community. Working with children, of all ages, can be an effective way to interest a wider community of parents, and other adults.

### Local designers and architects

Architects are often considered to be responsible for all the architectural disasters that have been built in villages throughout the country. However, the majority of new buildings and development have never had anything to do with an architect.

Local design professionals may be keen to help in producing a VDS and encouraging higher design standards. They may bring special abilities to the design team and help the group to express the village's view in words and images. However, it will be important not to rely too heavily on any available professional advice, as the key to an effective VDS is that it reflects a more widely held view of the whole village community.

Some architects may be concerned that a VDS will prevent imaginative and modern design. A local designer's involvement in preparing your VDS can help to provide design principles that encourage innovative designs, combining modern needs and efficient technology with local characteristics.

“It is important to ensure opportunities for high quality contemporary architecture. Imaginative and original design can extend and renew the distinctive character and traditions of Cottenham's built environment.”

*Extract from Cottenham VDS*

## Farmers and landowners

Around the village the way the countryside is managed is very important in maintaining its character. Changing agricultural techniques have probably altered the appearance of the countryside more than any other factor. Intensive farming methods, particularly in lowland areas, mean that the character of the village

setting is as sensitive as the settlement itself. Farmers and land managers need to be encouraged to consider the way that their activities, such as hedgerow management or the siting of new farm buildings and storage areas, affect the setting of the village.

## Dealing with the doubters

When the VDS preparation begins most people will be keen to support it and many will offer to help, but however hard you try, there will be someone who is determined not to support the VDS or to remain convinced that it is a waste of time and energy. If someone expresses concerns about the VDS it is important that they have the opportunity to discuss them and to be listened to.

If someone remains distrustful do not let them disrupt the process or discourage other people from participating. If the VDS design team is well managed it should be able to constrain the influence of potential 'spoilers'. In these situations the neutrality of the group will be essential, and stressing the non-partisan and inclusive approach of the VDS can help. Always remember that the 'eyesores' in the village were probably built or bought by local people and many were granted planning permission! So a degree of cynicism over the effectiveness of a VDS may be anticipated in the early stages.



*Farmers and landowners have a particular responsibility for the conservation of the character and setting of development in the countryside.*

## Checklist of who might be involved

### Community groups

Community or residents' association  
Allotment holders  
Youth clubs  
Senior citizens  
Women's Institute  
Mothers' Union  
Sports groups  
Scouts, guides and other youth organisations  
Access and disability groups  
Village Hall Committee

### Local countryside or environmental initiatives

Best kept village competition  
Parish tree warden scheme  
Village ventures competition  
Village enhancement schemes  
Countryside Management officers  
Community woodland group  
Footpaths and access groups  
Pocket Parks groups  
Parish Map organisers

### Local bodies

Parish Council  
Parochial Church Council  
Rural Community Council  
Association of Local Councils

### Professionals/designers

Architects  
Surveyors  
Planners  
Landscape designers  
Engineers  
Builders  
Solicitors

### Traders

Post office  
Shop keepers  
Pubs  
Garages  
Local offices  
Estate agents  
Bus and transport operators

### Arts, history and culture

Local history group  
Artists illustrators  
Graphic designers  
Photographers  
Librarians  
Industrial archaeology groups

### Environmental groups with local branches

Council for the Protection of Rural England  
Civic Society  
Friends of the Earth  
Wildlife Trust  
Ramblers  
Open Spaces Society  
British Trust for Conservation Volunteers  
Canal and Waterways groups  
Building Preservation Trusts  
English Historic Towns Forum  
Association of Small Historic Towns and Villages  
Other, more local groups

### Landowners and managers

Farmers  
Parish Council  
Church Commissioners  
Pension funds  
Companies  
British Rail  
Statutory agencies  
Estate land  
Land managers

### Education

Parent Teacher Association  
Teachers  
School children and students  
Pre-school groups  
Colleges  
Further education and  
community education centres

### Key individuals

Vicar/Priest/Minister  
Community policeman  
Doctor

### 3. INVOLVING OTHERS

#### Making friends and making a difference

The VDS represents the view of local people but **to be most effective it needs to complement the other statutory plans and policies** which affect the village. There are a number of people who can assist with this and make the VDS more effective.

#### The parish council

Parish councillors have a double role in the preparation of the VDS, as local residents and elected representatives of local government. The parish council is an essential element in the VDS production and its application. The parish council is a statutory consultee in the preparation and review of development plans and for all local planning applications; its recommendations are considered by district council planning committees in decisions over planning permission.

The parish council's support for the VDS will give it credibility with many people. The district council is less likely to support a VDS that has not involved the parish council, as it could contradict the 'official' responses of the parish council on planning matters.

Parish councils also have access to advice on planning and rural issues which will be useful to the VDS. Requests from a parish council may be treated more seriously by outside agencies than requests from individuals. It is sensible to maximise the opportunities that the status of the parish council offers.

From the earliest stages of the VDS production it is a good idea to think about how it will be used. Again, the role of the parish council is vital here, as it will use the VDS when making its own recommendations on planning applications. It may also encourage local applicants, builders and developers to use the VDS when designing schemes and preparing planning applications. In this way the VDS will have far greater influence in raising design standards and reinforcing local distinctiveness.

#### Local planning officers

The VDS is a planning tool and will only be fully effective with the active support of the local planning authority. The planning officers can help you with useful information, they can provide you with copies of relevant planning policies, and they will be the people who take your VDS through the formal process of approval by the authority.

Although planning officer time and council resources are limited, if your requests for advice and information are clear, direct and relevant, most local planning authorities will be keen to support your VDS project.

They can advise you, but it is not their job to write the VDS on your behalf and they should not be asked or allowed to do so. The guidance in these booklets helps to set out the process for your village to write *its own* VDS. The local planning authority will be your ally and it is *essential* to contact them as soon as you are sure that your VDS team is ready to proceed. This can be done through one or more of the following ways:

- a request for support through the parish council;
- contacting the local district councillor; or
- direct contact with the local plans or development control officer for the area.

Assembling information on the local planning context and talking through the implications for the village with a local plans officer can save you a lot of time and potential confusion or amendments later. The process for adopting and reviewing local plans may seem complex, but securing a direct reference to VDSs in development plans will enhance the status and influence of any VDS approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance. (See Part 2, *Planning information*.) Individual planning officers will be able to advise on how best to reflect the relevant Local Plan context and the process of Supplementary Planning Guidance approval.



*A VDS needs to optimise the content of other conservation policies and designations that operate in the local area.*

Many local authorities have undertaken landscape appraisals or assessments to provide advice on protecting the visual and ecological quality of the landscape. While there is no blanket coverage of landscape assessment, most areas of the country which have areas of designated landscape will have completed an assessment. Some councils have looked at their landscape more holistically, and have undertaken assessments which cover all the landscape in their area.

If you wish to know whether there is a landscape assessment or guidelines that cover your village and its surrounding countryside contact your local planning authority. There may be a specific section in the department with responsibility for landscape or countryside management who can give you more detailed advice on the measures that are being used to protect the local countryside.

Your local planning officer should be able to tell you if your village is in an area that:

- is nationally or locally designated for its landscape or conservation value;
- has special policies that relate to development or conservation;
- has a landscape assessment;
- has a management plan.

## Elected members

Your elected council members will be an important source of information and support in both the production **and** implementation phases, and their involvement in the VDS preparation can be a great advantage. A local councillor can be an advocate within the council as a whole. Decisions which relate to council policy, which would include approval of your VDS as Supplementary Planning Guidance, are made by the elected members.

The development control decisions made by elected members will be informed by policies and other advisory publications as well as a VDS. Many local planning authorities provide a range of planning and design advisory publications, examples of which are included in Part 2. The VDS will work with this other advice, but it will be distinctive in that it gives advice specific to its own village and represents the view of the village community.

## Other planning organisations

The **National Parks** in England act as planning authorities in their own right. They produce both a statutory development plan and a Park Plan, which sets out the overall vision and strategy for the Park. Development is strictly controlled in National Parks and some permitted development rights are reduced. Development plan policies are more likely to be supplemented by detailed guidance on appropriate materials or design of new development.

### Checklist for involving others

- Have you prepared the ground for the VDS production?
- Have you assessed the need and applicability of a VDS for your village?
- Have you assessed the overall level of interest and support in the village for a VDS?
- Have you consulted or discussed the production and use of a VDS with the parish council?
- Have you got the support of an initial team of people to 'launch' the VDS production?
- Have you sought the support and commitment with the local planning authority?
- Have you investigated the local planning, conservation, development and design context of the village?

If so, you are ready for action!



*“Choose what you like about the village and pick out what troubles you: argue with yourself and friends about what you should do, what you can do and who you should shout at to make your views and wishes heard.”*

*VDS team member*

# TAKING ACTION

## 4. LAUNCHING A LOCAL PROJECT AND FIRST PRACTICAL STEPS

If you are reading this you have probably decided that your village would benefit from:

- a greater influence in the design of local development;
- a closer working relationship with the local planning authority; and
- a greater awareness of local identity.

“I started looking and was surprised to discover how much I had never seen!”

*VDS team member*

It is now time to turn the ideas into practical action by introducing the VDS to the community of the village as a whole.

### Going public

The design team must now make sure that the widest possible community is given the opportunity to confirm their commitment and become involved. During the VDS preparation, there must be an open invitation for people to contribute ideas, information or specific expertise. Ideas for encouraging everyone to participate can be found in chapter 7, *Consultation*.

There is no one ‘right’ way of starting but the purpose of a VDS has to be described, shared and agreed with the whole village. It is useful to put the ideas into a simple and clear statement which can be published in a village newsletter or circulated as a flyer. The statement can

provide terms of reference or objectives for the project, to which everyone can agree, and it can be a way of encouraging commitment and demonstrating how the VDS is relevant to everyone in the village. People will have a mixture of reasons for taking part, and these may alter over the lifetime of the project, but everyone needs to feel they want to be involved.

There are a number of ways to introduce the VDS.

- Notices and articles in local or village newsletters, parish council meetings, parish magazines and school newsletters, etc.
- Build on successful local projects in the past, eg village appraisal, (contact people who were involved, they are likely to be able to advise on what helped their initiatives and how they gathered local support).
- Use other local events or activities to introduce the VDS to the village; eg a village social event may give the chance to do something active such as
  - a village walk or trail,
  - a competition to raise local awareness,
  - a questionnaire about the village.
- Mount a small exhibition to encourage interest and involvement at the local village, parish or community hall.
- An **open and informal discussion session** following a series of local contacts and items in local newsletters can be useful. Any meetings should be clearly instigated by the village not outsiders, such as the local planning authority.

In ‘going public’, build on local community networks and experience. A mixture of the above methods is likely to be most effective. Past experience and strong local interests will help you make the decision on how to introduce the VDS to the whole community. Above all, aim to make it interesting, imaginative, relevant and enjoyable.

All the introductory information should have three objectives:

- to increase local awareness and information;
- to extend commitment and involvement; and
- to announce the formal ‘launch’ of the VDS production.

In introducing a VDS project it is important to stress:

- the reasons why a VDS is important for the village;
- the objectives of the VDS;
- the planning role and scope of the VDS;
- the potential for the application of the VDS;
- that the VDS represents the view of local people; and
- that *everyone* can be involved in some way.



## Working in the village

As with any new initiative or project it is important that the VDS preparation is seen to have a recognisable beginning; this ensures that the idea of a VDS moves into reality and genuine activity. An enjoyable and practical **village character workshop** works well as the first practical event.

The workshop:

- provides a visible beginning to the project for local people and supporting organisations;
- gives an opportunity for people to sign up and become part of the VDS project;
- focuses attention on the importance of village character; and
- demonstrates the start of a programme of work.

It is important that the workshop is both enjoyable and practical. Its structure, content and management need to work towards a number of objectives.

The workshop should:

- affirm commitment to the project and make clear that it will be the community's own view of local character;
- explain the local need for the VDS and its planning context;
- establish objectives for the VDS;
- demonstrate that everyone has something to contribute and that the VDS preparation process is open to everyone at all times;
- show that local people can make a difference through the VDS and confirm that other villages have proved it already; and
- describe all the stages of the VDS preparation and establish a work programme. (See the Village Design Statement progress chart in chapter 1.)

The exact nature and content of a workshop will be determined by the needs and choices of each village. The design team and the local supporters and groups will need to arrange and prepare the workshop, including local publicity, venues and materials for the event. Briefing should ensure that everyone in the team feels confident in explaining the nature of the VDS and has a clear understanding of the role it will play in the planning process. At the workshop this knowledge and confidence will be important to encourage others to become involved and offer their skills and time to the project.

**The workshop is a vital point in the VDS preparation process. It should be planned carefully and thoroughly to ensure that the project gets off to a secure start.** The workshop information and briefing sheets in Part 2 will help you to plan and manage the workshop.

## Village character workshop

There are a number of elements in the village character workshop. They can be done in one intensive day or spread over a short period of time.



*Everyone in the community can make an active contribution to the VDS.*

The village workshop should include:

- a public presentation of the nature of the VDS and its role;
- sharing ideas and local views of the village's buildings and spaces and its setting in the landscape;
- starting to assemble and record local character;
- presentation of preliminary survey;
- agreeing the future action, management and drafting;
- agreeing the process of consultation and local feedback of information.

All the information that you need on the detailed arrangements for the workshop are given in *The village character workshop: organisation and materials* in Part 2 of this pack.

### Checklist for the village character workshop

At the end of the workshop there should be;

- village-wide awareness of the VDS and its objectives for the village;
- strong support from the village community for its preparation;
- an agreed and broad-based design team to co-ordinate the VDS preparation;
- a commitment from the parish council to support the VDS preparation;
- declared support from the local planning authority for the preparation and implementation of the VDS;
- an initial photographic survey and assessment of village character;
- an agreed *preliminary* programme of action to follow the workshop.



## 5. MANAGING THE PROGRAMME AND THE TIMETABLE

All the materials, photographs, written comments and notes from the workshop survey will provide the basis for drafting of the VDS.

### Taking stock... and team work

The first job for the design team is to make a preliminary programme for the preparation and drafting process and the timetable necessary to complete the VDS. The Village Design Statement progress chart in chapter 1 will help you plan your timetable.

Share the work between team members and bring in other people as necessary. It is also desirable to have a nominated member of the team who acts as a chairman or coordinator. This does not need to be an arduous task, if roles and responsibilities are shared, but a chairman can receive official correspondence and manage team meetings. It is a good idea to have some form of secretariat for the team, although this could be a shared role. A secretary should keep *simple* minutes of team meetings to record how the VDS was prepared and decisions were made. It should show how the *local* consultation process was carried out and how responses influenced the final document.

The work of the design team has three main elements:

#### 1. Management

- finance and resources
- information gathering
- parish council liaison
- local planning authority liaison
- organise publication and launch.

#### 2. Drafting

- compiling draft text
- assembling photos and illustrations
- identifying need for information and technical advice
- editing and revising text
- overall design and format.

#### 3. Consultation

- local progress reports
- articles, talks and exhibitions
- special activities, eg school work
- organise public consultation on drafts.

### Rome was not built in a day — and neither was an English village

A characteristic of the planning system is that little happens quickly. Planning proposals have to go through rigorous testing before they can become policy. In the same way the preparation of a VDS *will take time*. So the

best time to start a VDS is *now*. A VDS is produced by local people whose time is limited. Their skills are valuable and their help should not be taken for granted.

The finished VDS should fit into the statutory planning process (See Part 2, *Planning information*.) Its preparation must therefore be well managed and its content well structured. A reasonable target for preparing a VDS is a year, allowing adequate time for drafting, revisions and comprehensive consultation periods. The later stages of the preparation will need to take account of council committee meetings to secure approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This can affect the final publication date. Annual holiday periods, Christmas and bad weather will all have delaying effects on the preparation time. Weather and seasonal conditions will need to be considered in planning outdoor activities and a photographic survey.

Whenever you start your VDS, it is important to have a *realistic* timetable for its preparation and to endeavour to keep to it. Inevitably there will be a few things that do not go according to plan but it is important to keep momentum going, to keep people interested and enthusiastic — including the local planning authority.

#### Checklist for managing the timetable

The key stages for the interim timetable for drafting and publication of your VDS.

1. Assembling the materials from the character assessment survey into broad topics and priorities.
2. Identifying the need for, and collecting, further information.
3. Agreeing with the local planning authority the role of the VDS within the local plan framework and development control process.
4. Initial drafting of text
  - by individuals, or
  - by *small* teams.
5. First edited draft of VDS — identify further information needed and photographs, illustrations, etc.
6. Revised draft(s).
7. Prepare consultation draft and process.
8. Final revised draft — submit to local planning committee for approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance (Subsequent adoption by full Council).
9. Arrange printing.
10. Publish your VDS.

## Well, I never knew that before...

Taking a new look at much loved and valued places is a pleasure in its own right. Seeing buildings, streets, open spaces and favourite landmarks in a completely different light inevitably generates questions such as, “Why is it built like that? Why is that here? and When did that happen?”. These questions are important in deciding the special characteristics of the village, but is very easy to be seduced by the fascination of local history! In the pilot projects there was a disproportionate amount of time devoted to investigating the historical aspects of the village. So much was discovered that one village decided to produce a local history as a separate project, after they had published their VDS. A VDS will consider the origins and historical influences on village development, form and buildings, but only as far as it should influence future development.

Throughout the VDS preparation intriguing facts and discoveries will come to light. However interesting the information might be, it may not be relevant to the VDS. It is essential for everyone involved in the VDS to be aware of the seductive nature of ‘red herrings’. **If the VDS is to be approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance and used within the planning system, it has to focus clearly on matters and details that relate to planning and design.**

If in doubt about the relevance of any ideas or material you are thinking of including, ask yourself these three key questions.

- What does this say about the character of our village?
- Will this help to inform the design decisions of designers and/or developers?
- Is this compatible with the local planning policies?

If you can answer positively, to any of these questions, the information is appropriate and may be included.

Information that is not used in the VDS should not be wasted. In all the pilot VDSs much of the ‘extra’ material was saved for future new projects.

Avoiding distractions and keeping to the timetable will be easier if the VDS preparation has an agreed structure and people can see how their contribution will fit in. The initial structure should not be treated as fixed. It may change as the VDS develops, but it will help people to collate the survey and analysis materials and to identify the areas which will need further information.

The structure of each VDS will vary to reflect the diversity of planning contexts, development pressures and local priorities. The headings used in the workshop will provide a good starting point, but the following list may help you construct your own appropriate structure. You may add further topics or disregard elements if they are not applicable to your village.



*Odd or unusual features are often the elements which make one village quite distinct from another.*



*The historical aspects of the village provide useful background material for the design principles.*

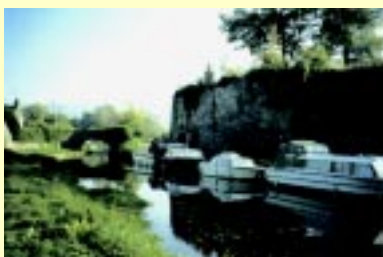
For each topic you may wish to describe the features and identify local characteristics and from these points make recommendations as to how these characteristics should be reflected in the design of new development in the village.

The VDS should refer to the consultation process to demonstrate the strength of local support. It should also make clear the status given to it by the local planning authority.

## Suggested analysis of information for the Village Design Statement structure

### Introduction

- What the VDS is and its aims and objectives.
- The local planning context into which the VDS will fit.



### The village context

- A brief description of geographical and historic background.
- A short description of the village as it is today; the people, economics and future prospects.
- Any special considerations that affect development pressures in the village, such as tourism or mineral extraction, etc.



### The character of the landscape setting

- The visual character of the surrounding countryside.
- The relationship between the surrounding countryside and the village edges.
- The relationship between the village and any special landscape features, such as ancient monuments, woodlands or nature reserves.
- Buildings seen in the landscape, eg farm buildings.



### Settlement pattern character

- Overall pattern of village, distinct zones and layouts.
- Character of streets and routes through the village.
- Character and pattern of open spaces in the village and connections with the wider countryside.
- The relationship between buildings and spaces.



### Buildings and spaces in the village

- The character of distinct areas of building types in the village.
- The height, scale and density of buildings.
- The mixture of sizes, styles and types of buildings.
- Hedges, walls and fences.
- Distinctive village features, materials or building details.



### Highways and traffic

- Characteristics of local roads and streets.
- Footpaths, cycleways and parking.
- Street furniture, utilities and services.

## 6. DRAFTING AND FORMAT

Possibly the most taxing task of producing a VDS is deciding what to leave out! Up to now the VDS preparation has focused on continually expanding the ideas, involvement and information – now there has to be a disciplined distillation of all those ideas, opinions and perspectives to produce effective design guidance.

Who actually undertakes the task of drafting will depend on local circumstances and be the decision of the design team and other volunteers. In the pilot VDSs no two examples were produced in the same way. For example, in Cottenham, small teams undertook to draft particular topics in the first instance and these were later refined by an editing committee. After the full public consultation process, the last revisions and the publication preparations were the responsibility of one or two individuals. Throughout the drafting each section was shared and discussed by the design team and referred back to the wider community. By contrast, in Elstead the drafting was undertaken by a small group with a coordinating editor. Each draft was discussed by the wider team. The final editing and revisions were undertaken by two or three people. In both of these villages the local planning authority were asked to comment on the drafts but *not contribute*. Of all the processes involved in producing your VDS, drafting is the one where common sense is really what matters most. Those drafting the VDS have to:

- be clear and objective in their approach;
- only include information and material that is going to be relevant and effective in the planning, system — particularly for development control;
- have the support of the rest of the design team;
- have a broad agreement on
  - what ‘relevant’ information means,
  - how the final editorial decisions on the drafts will be made,
  - how responses to local consultation will be dealt with.

**In drafting the VDS the principle should be to give clear, sensible design advice linked to the analysis of the village character — simple points, plain language and an easy to follow structure.**

In the pilot projects some of the local design teams found it hard to ‘cut’ material from the VDS. The danger of this is that the VDS could become diverted into a different project.

Every VDS will be unique to its own village and there can be no model format for every VDS. An agreed structure will help to set an *initial* framework for the drafting process, but don’t let it dictate the process entirely. Use the structure as a tool. Modify and develop it to fit your own needs.

In deciding what information needs to be included in the draft. Remember there are three key questions.

- What does this say about the character of our village?
- Will this help to inform the design decisions of designers and/or developers?
- Is it compatible with the local planning policies?

There may be facts you wish to include to help explain the special nature and character of the village. There will be compromises over the content and wording of the VDS before the final version is published. However, in applying these questions early in the drafting process you may be able to avoid a serious ‘pruning’ exercise later on. Material that you cut should be retained, in case it can be used later. The editorial decisions will be up to the design team, influenced by the village as a whole through the consultation process. Under each section or topic heading the statement should:

- provide a brief introductory description of the topic as it relates to the village as a whole;
- describe the characteristics and special features which create the character of this aspect of the village;
- put forward guidance on how these local characteristics could be reflected in new development.

There are many ways of expressing the village’s guidance. The following extract is taken from the VDS for Elstead, Surrey.

### “Roads and Verges

Much of the rural character of the village is shaped by minor roads, lanes and byways, and irregular spaces and areas of verge. These are very desirable features.

In maintenance and repair:-

- The Local Highways Authority should ensure the preservation of minor routes, informal spaces and verges, and
- Avoid urbanisation in appearance resulting from installation of concrete kerbs and other inappropriate elements.
- Appropriate natural materials should be used for resurfacing of unmade and unadopted roads.”

*Elstead Village Design Statement, July 1995*



*The siting of building in relation to roads and verges is often very locally distinctive. Mells, Somerset.*



*A good photograph can be used to express several aspects of the village's character, such as its setting, its overall form and some of the distinctive building details.*

The importance of compatibility between the VDS and the statutory planning process cannot be over estimated. A good working partnership with your local planning authority will be of particular value when the VDS is used in the planning process. However, this does not mean that the local planning authority has a right to veto or redraft the VDS, only to comment and advise.

The drafting process must make the best use of all other local landscape, planning and design guidance to add weight to the recommendations within it. Keep the local planning authority well informed of progress with your VDS. If your local plan is still at an early stage, or is currently undergoing review, there may be opportunities to encourage the local planning authority to include a direct reference to VDSs in it.

Supportive planning information and references may exist in:

- the development plan;
- village plans or Conservation Area statements;
- a Countryside Design Summary;
- landscape assessment or guidelines;
- district and other architectural design guides;
- planning or other design leaflet (see Part 2 for examples);
- Planning Policy Guidance notes (see Part 2, *Planning information*);
- other VDSs (both local and from other areas).

Be creative and imaginative in your approach to planning documents, there are often many useful references to be included and each one will add to the status and weight of your finished VDS.

## **A picture says a lot**

VDSs are about the visual quality and physical appearance of your village. Therefore photographs, drawings and diagrams will be essential in demonstrating both the detail and the broader characteristics of the village. Photography is an important part of the character assessment process, and it will also be useful to illustrate the VDS. Good captions can help to explain the significance of the photograph. Photographs, particularly in colour, are expensive to reproduce and on a limited budget may need to be used only for priority issues.

Photographs can:

- capture the specific character of an area;
- highlight contrast between areas;
- show the village in the countryside.

The village edges are often the focus for new development. The setting, form and pattern of the village can be shown by the use of aerial photographs where they are available.

Building details and important aspects of village character are often better demonstrated with line drawings or similar illustrations. Within your village there may be people with graphic or artistic skills who are willing to contribute. In the pilot VDSs many people came forward with completed drawings or an offer to do specific views or details. An advantage of drawings is the ability to use 'artistic licence' to only include the material necessary to make the point. In a photograph there is no half measure, you have everything the camera sees.

It is not necessary to use photographs in a VDS. The successful Cottenham VDS used no photographs at all, only simple line drawings showing building details and street scenes, and a series of watercolour sketches which depict the setting and character of the Fen edge village. By contrast, the Cartmel VDS is a full colour publication, using both photography and coloured maps and drawings.

In the end, resources will probably determine what kind of illustrative material is used in the VDS. Pictures are a very important part of the VDS, but the quality and clarity of the message they deliver is far more important than the type of image used – colour or black and white photographs, line drawings, watercolours, diagrams or even cartoons, all have their place. In all the pilot VDSs a map of the village has been an integral part of the VDS. A map can instantly bring together many of the essential features of the character of the village, such as:

- its location in relation to local countryside features;
- its setting and form in the landscape;
- the pattern of streets and routes;
- the density or openness of the buildings;
- internal boundaries and special zones in the village;
- village landmarks.

In England we are fortunate to have high quality and comprehensive map coverage by the Ordnance Survey (OS). However, all OS maps are copyright and this copyright is rigorously enforced. If you wish to reproduce even a small part of any OS map in any publication, including a VDS, there is a royalty fee payable on *each* copy. This can add significantly to the cost of a VDS and will be applied to reprints as well as the initial edition. It is an offence to reproduce any part of an OS map without permission, and to do so is punishable by a heavy fine. If VDSs are produced through a district council, it may be possible to produce maps under their OS licence.

In the pilot VDS at Elstead, the team drew their own map of the village. In the Cartmel VDS a 'map' was drawn as a bird's eye view from an aerial photograph. Although time consuming, this avoided the problems of copyright law. It also gave the final publications a unique and distinctive style.

*Drawings or illustrations can be used to avoid difficulties with copyright law and can help to ensure that a VDS has its own unique style.*



## Putting it together

The final draft of your VDS will probably include text, maps, drawings and photographs. Once all the contents are agreed, it is time to decide the format and design of the VDS.

During the drafting process you will have been thinking about “What is it going to look like?” and “How long will it be?”. To some extent these questions will be determined by the contents. Limits will be imposed by printing techniques and cost. The preparation of a VDS need not be an expensive exercise, but funding for the final publication will need to be considered carefully. It will certainly be the most costly part of the whole project.

A local graphic designer will be able to advise you or may even be willing to design a layout for you. Specialist advice will help to achieve a professional finished article. However good the content of the VDS, it has to be seen as a genuine planning document and command the respect of developers, designers and the local planning authority.

As you can see from the VDSs enclosed with this guidance, the VDSs already published have used different formats and styles, but they are all easily recognised and are well organised to make sure that the reader is left in no doubt as to the messages inside.

More detailed advice on organising the publication and evaluating the cost of publication is included in chapter 8, *Publication and costs*.

### **In all the decisions over content, illustrations and format it will be necessary to remember the following points.**

- The real power of the VDS is in the written description and the guidance *drawn directly from* the description of the character of the village.
- Photographs and illustrations are used to explain and emphasise the text, not the other way round.
- The greater the compatibility and linkage with other statutory planning or advisory publications, the greater the status and influence that the VDS will have.
- The text should be clear, concise and written in simple language.
- The guidance is applicable to all developments in the village — whether it is the construction of a group of buildings on a new site or the addition of an extension on an existing property.

## 7. CONSULTATION

You will have noticed that a recurrent theme in this manual is the importance of the involvement of the whole village community in the VDS preparation. Many community initiatives are questioned as to the representativeness of the project.

It is quite legitimate to ask how widely held a view may be, but there is a danger that this may be a way of sidelining challenging ideas. Some planners, architects or developers, may initially feel that a VDS challenges their roles in the design and development process. Similarly, individual householders wishing to make changes or develop their own land could see the VDS as interfering with their freedom. So it is vital to demonstrate a high degree of local involvement and an extensive consultation process.

*There are many ways to share ideas and report on the progress of the VDS preparation other than public meetings.*

It would be nice to think that every individual in the village would commit themselves to the aims and objectives of the VDS, but this is not likely to happen. It is feasible though to make it *possible* for everyone to do so if they wish, and to offer that opportunity on a number of occasions. **Ensuring that all the village is given the chance to contribute to and influence the VDS throughout its preparation has to be a priority for the design team.** As it is impossible for everyone to be involved in all of the processes of the VDS preparation, there has to be an open door policy for everyone to influence its production. This can be achieved by having a well-structured and organised consultation *programme*, not just a one-off exercise at the end of the process.

Consultation needs to be undertaken from the outset of the project and the programme of action and range of methods used should be well documented. All this will provide ample evidence to deal with any situation where the representativeness of the VDS may be in question. Keeping a careful record of all the details of the consultation programme may seem a little excessive but a comprehensive approach gives the VDS its strength in the planning process.

Some of the opportunities to demonstrate the involvement of the village have already been mentioned, but the following checklist may be a useful reminder of *some* of the options.

**During the early stages** keep copies of:

- all the notices, articles and letters sent at the beginning of the project to introduce the idea of the VDS and raise awareness, as well as any responses;
- lists of all the village groups or societies contacted;
- attendance lists from any meetings or presentations in the village.

**During the workshop event** keep copies of:

- all the press coverage and publicity material announcing or reporting on the workshop;
- all the materials used at the event which show how people were actively involved in the proceedings;
- lists of all the people attending the workshop and the groups they represented where appropriate;
- articles in the local newsletter or magazines reporting back on the event;
- any correspondence as a result of the event;
- reports or other contacts with the local planning authority including with elected members.

**During the drafting**

- Design team members should maintain contact with village groups and organisations who have interests in the VDS.
- Reporting on the progress of the VDS in village or parish newsletters encourages comment and responses. This may also include articles on subjects of interest raised by the VDS.
- Drafting teams or individuals should make contact with other groups and individuals with special knowledge or interests in aspects of the VDS, ensuring that all comments are fed into the drafts.
- Arrange exhibitions using the materials and information generated by the VDS preparation.
- Organise parallel or associated activities with the local school, looking at the character of the village.





The formal draft of the Cartmel VDS was widely distributed, but was not an expensive colour production; thus resources were saved for the final document.

### Consultation on the draft VDS

- Draft material should be made available to the village as soon as it is in a form that will allow people to make informed comment.
- Drafts should be distributed by a number of methods, eg door-to-door, with newsletters, at the library or post office. Responding should be made easy, to encourage people to reply.
- Presentations or reports to parish council meetings, and other local groups.
- A revised draft should be made available and this document should form the basis of a wider consultation process with organisations and bodies with interests or responsibilities beyond the village itself. This draft could include some drawings or photographs indicating the style and format of the VDS.
- All the statutory bodies with interests in your village need to be aware of the VDS and may comment on draft material, but it is not for them to re-write the VDS as it must remain the view of local people.

## Consultation to achieve Supplementary Planning Guidance status

This guidance stresses that the preparation process of the VDS should be determined by local people within the planning and development contexts of the village. Supplementary Planning Guidance is the most effective way that the VDS can work with the planning system. The consultation process should be made clear in the

final document. The local planning authority will advise you on appropriate wording for your district but the following example, taken from the Cottenham VDS, was approved by the legal department of South Cambridgeshire District Council.

“The Village Design Statement has been endorsed by the people of Cottenham through a process of exhibitions and consultation. A wide public consultation exercise was carried out in March/April 1994. The draft of this document was circulated to all residents and businesses in the village. It was also sent to a wide range of relevant organisations, particularly those interested in matters of design. The document was also the subject of public notices placed in the local press on 25 and 31 March 1994. The Village Design Statement was adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by South Cambridgeshire District Council on 19 May 1994.”

Good consultation can be enjoyable and interesting if it is seen as a means of enriching and sharing ideas rather than a critical review. **The aim of the consultation is to improve the quality of the VDS not to reduce it to the lowest common denominator of agreement.** The following principles will help make the consultation process rewarding and smooth.

### Checklist of consultation principles

- Plan the consultation process early, make it an integral part of the preparation process, not a separate ‘add-on’ at the end.
- Use a mixture of methods to encourage people to respond. Different people will take part in different ways. Some will be happy to write in response to an official consultation draft, others will comment at an exhibition.
- Allow enough time for people to reply to drafts of the VDS. Plan the timetable of formal consultation into the process.
- The local planning authority may wish to publish a public notice in the local press in order to have the VDS approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance. It will help if this can be coordinated with the formal consultation on the final draft.
- Confirm that all responses will be considered when producing the final document.
- Always try to stress that the VDS is the view of the village and not that of the local planning authority.

## 8. PUBLICATION AND COSTS

However good the information is *inside* the VDS, for it to be effective the VDS has to be picked up and read by the people who need to see it. The last stage in the preparation process is turning all the text, drawings, maps and photographs into an attractive and practical document.

### Going to press

Printing and publishing the final VDS has a number of stages. Although the process is not complicated it is the most expensive part of the VDS preparation and mistakes can prove costly. Therefore it is important to understand the options available for publishing the VDS and the financial implications of each stage.

**If possible get advice from a local graphic designer or printer.** A first enquiry is not likely to cost you anything, although you should make it clear that at this stage you are seeking general advice and not committing yourself to use their services.

Modern printing methods have become quicker and easier as the process is carried out with word processing and computer technology. Even the smallest printers will use computers for typesetting and formatting (assembling the text and pictures). You may have someone in the team who can prepare all of the text on a personal computer or a mock-up example of the VDS for the printer to work from using a 'desk top publishing' software package.

**Always have your text proof read.** Use someone who has never read it before. It is amazing how the first thing you notice when the VDS is published is the spelling mistake, the missed word or numbering error. Once the text has been typeset all additions and changes will be charged as extras so proof reading is important throughout the drafting and production process.

### Briefing the printer

**Try to develop a good working relationship with the printer.** Printers are skilled people, you will be paying for their time and they will want to give you a good service. So be clear about what you want and how much you can afford. Ask the printer to explain what will need to be done to produce the VDS in the way you want it.

The printer will want to know:

- **What size will the final document be?**  
Both the finished page size and the number of pages will need to be discussed. The most common page sizes are A3, A4, A5 and 1/3 A4. Ask to see samples and discuss the implications of the different sizes with the printer.
- **Will the text need typesetting?**  
Typesetting will improve the appearance of your text. Typesetting can be done straight from the word processor text on a computer disk. It may require retyping if your software is not compatible, or if you only have it in a manuscript form.

- **What is the print run?**  
(that is, how many copies?) Generally, the larger the number the cheaper the *individual* copies become, but paper sizes and quality also make a big difference. You will need to consider whether you want to give a copy to every household in the village or only when requested. The local planning authority will need a supply for distribution to prospective developers and applicants. The number of copies the local planning authority will require will depend on the degree of development pressure and the frequency of applications in your village.
- **What sort of paper?**  
Glossy, coloured or heavy papers cost more than plain. Paper weight and finish needs to be considered, especially if you are using colour, and to prevent printing showing through the paper. Ask the printer to show you some examples of different weights and finishes. The range of recycled papers is now extensive but they are still likely to be more expensive than non-recycled papers.
- **How many colours?**  
A full-colour publication will look very attractive but will certainly be more expensive than black and white or two-colour printing. Even using two colours, (black plus one other), will enable you to have quite a range of tones. Printing on coloured paper will also offer opportunities to be creative. Again, ask the printer to show you examples and give you an idea of costs.
- **How many photographs or illustrations?**  
Printers can scan a colour photograph or drawing directly into a computer and place it in the text. The computer can enlarge or crop the picture — cutting or changing its shape to fit in with your overall design. The printer will generally charge for each picture.
- **Will the VDS need any special finishing?**  
The printer will probably have machines to fold, staple or bind the finished VDS. These help to give the final document a crisp and professional appearance. Folding and stapling by hand is time consuming and difficult to keep to a high standard. The printer will charge you for the service but it is likely to be worth it.

When you have made your choices, the printer will be able to give you an estimate. If you are on a tight budget the printer may be able to give you some options to achieve the best results. Prices will vary a great deal, so always get two, or preferably three, quotes for the work to ensure you are getting value for money. Ask the printer to give you an estimate with a cost breakdown **in writing** and ensure that **everything** that you want is included. Most printers will state on the estimate that all alterations or additions to the instructions will be charged for. Simply, you only get what you pay for.

VAT is charged on some but not all aspects of the production. When your printer gives the estimate make sure you know exactly how much VAT, if any, will be charged and on what.

## The proofing process

The printer will produce 'page proofs' of the VDS. These will start to show you how the VDS will look when printed, with all the text and illustrations in place. From these you will be able to make final adjustments, and do a final check for inaccuracies or spelling errors in the text.

A final page proof for black and white, or a colour cromalin or machine proof for a colour publication will show you exactly what the VDS will look like. Any amendments at this stage will be particularly expensive, so these proofs should not be considered as the final chance to change things but more a preview of the finished publication.

A simple VDS may not warrant the services of a designer and printer. The one produced at Yoxall is an A3 sheet, printed on both sides and folded into three. It can be easily reproduced on a photocopier. If this is chosen as the best way of printing it is important that the original is crisp and clear. Copies of copies soon lose their clarity and professional finish.



The first ever VDS was a simple folded leaflet, but has still been able to affect planning applications and decisions.

## Cost examples — for illustrative purposes only

It is impossible to give an accurate guide to the cost of publishing a VDS as each VDS will be different. These are typical illustrative costs.

A modest print run of 750, in full colour, on average quality paper is likely to work out at about £2.00 – £2.25 per copy, for a 16 page, A4 sized VDS. This would not include typesetting costs, but would include a coloured page proof, 25 colour photographs and 10 line drawings, stapling and folding.

A long print run of 4,000, in two colours on good quality paper, with all black and white line drawings and illustrations could cost as little as 50 – 75p per copy. Again this would not include typesetting but would include folding and stapling.

It would be sensible to have a minimum budget of £1,500 for the printing costs. A local printer may be able to offer a small discount or donate some time to the design and formatting to help reduce costs. You may wish to have a modest cover charge for the VDS, to recoup costs or perhaps fund a future reprint, **but the price must not be a disincentive to people using it.**

## Counting the cost

Although publication is the single greatest expense there are other costs in the preparation process that need to be taken into account. As with any initiative there will be minor expenses incurred such as postage and stationery, but the more substantial expenses need to be identified and planned for. The budget should allow for the following items.

## The village survey

The preparation and running of a village workshop event and photographic survey in the early phases of the project will be the first major expense.

- Adequate funding for *film and processing* is essential. A comprehensive survey will need a good supply of photographic material.
- *Maps* of the village may be available through the local planning authority, but you may need to pay for copying.
- Hire of a *workshop venue* and providing refreshments.
- *Publicity*. Some advertising through local posters or in local newsletters.
- Miscellaneous stationery, flip charts, pens, paper, etc.
- If you have the support of outside professionals, they may make a charge for their time and services.

## Drafting

The drafting process will require little expenditure beyond stationery, photocopying and similar office costs.

## Formal consultation

The printing of a consultation draft will need finance. The draft does not need to be elaborate, the content rather than the design is important. A VDS that is being put forward for Supplementary Planning Guidance status may be supported financially by the local authority.

## Suggested budget

By using local skills and services the direct costs of the VDS can be minimised but a total budget of around £2,500 is reasonable at 1996 rates.

In areas where there is development pressure and the planning authority is dealing with frequent planning applications and appeals, the local planning authority will need a supply of VDSs. In these cases the planning authority may be able to help with the printing costs. Discuss this with your local planning authority before deciding on your print run.

There are a number of schemes and sources of grant aid available for local environmental or community projects. Many of these are organised and run locally. Contact your local authority or your Rural Community Council for details of schemes that they may operate.

Some national schemes such as the Shell Better Britain Campaign and Rural Action may be able to help with funding. You will be able to get advice on those and other sources of help from your local authority, Rural Community Council, or Council for Voluntary Service, or perhaps from other bodies who have an interest in protecting the character of rural villages, such as the CPRE or the Civic Trust.

It may also be possible to have the VDS sponsored by local businesses. Local builders, building suppliers, designers and other traders could support the VDS and by doing so be seen to commit themselves to the principles of the VDS itself.

## Pricing policy

The VDS should go on influencing the character of development in the village for a long time. The VDS has to be read to be effective. Fixing an appropriate price will need to be considered carefully. You will have to decide whether to charge for the VDS to recover some of the costs, or to provide resources for reprinting or revising the VDS in the future.

It is tempting to work out a price per copy, based on the costs of production, but there are other factors to be borne in mind. Local people, many of whom will have contributed to the process, may feel that they should not have to pay for their own advice. On the other hand, developers need the VDS to use it early in the design process. The price of the VDS will be relatively insignificant for developers. In between are all the people for whom it will be useful in helping them make minor changes or considering small developments more in keeping with the village.

You may feel that some should pay for the VDS but others should receive it free. Other villages may want to follow your example and be keen to see your VDS. You can support their project by providing them with a few free copies of your VDS. After all, the more VDSs there are working with the planning system, the greater the level of influence of all VDSs.

## 9. VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT FIRST AID AND PROBLEM SOLVING



This guidance is written in the expectation that you will be able, *on your own*, to manage all the tasks and activities necessary to produce your VDS. You may be unsure about this, but will certainly surprise yourselves as existing skills emerge and new ones develop. However, there may be stages in the work, or specific aspects of it, where you feel a need for some help.

This chapter will help you to:

- decide whether you really need any help;
- find and secure the help you need;
- identify what you need help with;
- illustrate at what stages help may be needed;
- clarify what the best form of help might be.

### Do you really need any help?

Preparing a VDS is largely a matter of common sense and organisation, but you might find people asking themselves questions about:

- **influencing people.** Can we really do this? Will it influence the planners and developers? Will the councillors approve it? Will it make any difference?
- **managing the process.** How do we get more people interested? How do we run opening events? How might we best manage a core group? How can we ensure productive editing and drafting? How do we keep track of it all over time?
- **understanding design.** How can we get to know more about buildings and design? Or planning, or landscape issues? How do we describe what we see? Isn't all development standardised now or can we tailor it to suit our village?
- **liaison with planning.** How can we increase the chances of getting the planning authority's support at the outset? Could we get any help with survey work? Can they help ensure our text is drafted properly in their terms? How best do we go about securing approval?

You will find that the answers to most of your questions are in this guidance. You will probably only need help at one or two specific points and very few of the questions you encounter will need outside help. Help is most likely to be valuable at the following stages.

- **The start.**

Reassurance from someone who a year or so ago felt like you, but who has now helped to produce a VDS, can give everyone a lot of confidence. Just talking it through can explain any aspects that are still unclear.

- **First events and surveys.**

Launching a VDS through running a village character workshop may seem daunting. Someone in the local community who is experienced in group activities, perhaps a lecturer or community group leader, may be willing to take a lead role or help you to tackle it. An experienced leader can work behind the scenes to help you be more confident with the ways of running such an event, or be with you on the day to offer quiet support and background help. You may need someone to identify examples of new development that does respond to local character, or of the beneficial effects of someone else's VDS — but remember that you are in charge!

- **Drafting, consulting, redrafting.**

Drafting a VDS can appear quite complicated when lots of people are keen to contribute their views. An independent adviser might have an editorial role to help reach consensus, and possibly ensure that the style and content of the VDS give it the best chance of becoming Supplementary Planning Guidance, or advise on how to circulate drafts for maximum local comment.

- **From approval to launch.**

Once you have secured planning support, which can only be done through your local planning authority, further technical things start to be important — graphics, layout, printing estimates. These booklets provide guidance on these matters but help from someone who's been through it before can be valuable.

## Start at the local level

To start getting the help you want, the first stage is always to look locally. The advantages of a local person can be:

- a personal recommendation;
- local commitment;
- local knowledge;
- a willingness to 'give a bit of help'.

The disadvantages can be:

- getting someone to whom it's difficult to say 'no' because they were locally recommended;
- possible narrowness of expertise;
- missing out on external independence;
- over-stretching demands on a generous person's limited time.

## Use networks

If you need to look wider, the next step is to *use the networks* of local people and groups:

- voluntary groups, such as CPRE, the Women's Institute, or the National Trust;
- professions, such as architects, planners, landscape designers, engineers or surveyors;
- the education system, such as schools, colleges, higher education.

The network approach may find you someone who comes with a personal recommendation, has a limited amount of time to commit, and appropriate independence. However, such a person may be even more narrow in his/her expertise, and lack good local knowledge.

If networking fails to locate the right help, two formal sources, ie the Rural Community Council and local authorities should be contacted.

**The Rural Community Council.** RCCs offer support to a range of rural initiatives through staff who, although may not be experienced in design matters:

- are skilled in all aspects of project management;
- are able to bring authority and influence to your work;
- can give grant aid advice;
- are likely to have a good working knowledge of planning.

Their staff time is also in great demand, and RCCs are required to set clear priorities for allocating their limited resources. They are a natural ally, and most will be helpful. If your own local RCC feels unable to offer direct support, it will be of help in steering you to particular people or groups who may be able to give you what you seek.

**Local authorities.** Limited resources may prevent the local authority from offering as much help as they would wish, but support to community activities can come through several routes other than the planning department, such as Countryside Management or Community Services. Seeking *facilitation* support from your local authority should be kept separate from any involvement that the planning authority may have with the content and status of the VDS. Some authorities have community development officers who, like RCC staff, can offer:

- skills in project management;
- status and influence;
- advice on grant aid;
- a good working knowledge of the planning system.

They too will have great demands on their time, but will also be able to advise you on other people who can help.

The final stage in locating help is to go to someone who is a practising facilitator. If your RCC is unable to help directly, its staff may suggest some names, as may your local authority. It is important to remember that few facilitators have the experience to provide all types of help. In general, design professionals are not experienced at communicating design to non-professionals, while many community action helpers have limited experience of design and planning.

## Who is best to help us?

Now you have some possible contacts and names, the next stage is to provide a brief for yourselves and your adviser, identifying exactly what help you want. The brief should be some short notes on:

- exactly what help is needed;
- what form it might take (eg over 'phone or visits);
- roughly how much is required (eg days/hours);
- when it might happen (eg stages, start/finish).

Your adviser should be able to respond to this by giving you some notes on the following:

- previous experience of VDS work, or similar work;
- references to community clients for previous work;
- the sorts of approaches she/he would take to the tasks;
- an idea of availability, who will actually do the work, and a basis for charging;
- any requirements their help may have from you;
- what aspects they feel they have the skills to undertake, and recommendations for how to deal with any others.

The final stage of securing help is being able to cover any costs. You may be able to secure a certain amount of time free but must expect to cover direct costs, such as travel or materials.

### Checklist for help and problem solving

- Only consider extra help if you are absolutely sure you need it.
- Make sure the helper helps and does not take over.
- Be as specific about what type of help, when in the process and in what form you need it.
- Look locally first in seeking help.
- Use formal agencies, such as the RCC and local authority, for contacts.
- Provide a clear brief and guidance to potential helpers.
- Be clear about any costs or fees involved before you make a commitment.
- Pursue all possible sources to secure any necessary funding.

## 10. USING A VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT EFFECTIVELY

It will be easy to think that once your exciting new VDS has been published and the local planning authority has approved it as Supplementary Planning Guidance, that you can rest in the knowledge that the job is done. This is only partly true. The publication is complete but you will need to promote the VDS and monitor its use and effectiveness.

### Publicising your Village Design Statement

The publication of the VDS should be a celebration. It will announce that the VDS is complete and that it can now be used to guide change in the village. It will also be an opportunity to thank everyone for their support and contributions. The local media should be informed and invited along if you have a launch. Local newspapers or even radio and television will be pleased to cover your event, particularly if it offers some good photographic opportunities. Local dignitaries and celebrities may be willing to attend your celebration.

In the early stages the VDS will need publicity to let everyone know it is there. It is important that the VDS should be used on a regular basis, by local developers and designers, the parish council, and officers and members of the local planning authority. You should ensure that all these people know about the VDS and have ready access to a copy.

### Working in partnership

It is advisable to maintain your good relationship with the local planning authority. This can be formalised through the parish council's contacts or through creating a new role for the production team. They might function as a sub group informing the parish council. In Cottenham, the Village Design Group became formally affiliated to the Community Association, acting with two objectives: first, to provide support for the parish council on the design aspects of planning applications and to monitor the application of the VDS; second, to develop the local distinctiveness ideas that had arisen during the VDS preparation but were not suitable for inclusion in that project. If the design team is to take the VDS forward the approach must be agreed with the parish council. The VDS should give greater credibility and strength to the recommendations of the parish council.

Monitoring progress will be useful in establishing how the recommendations of the VDS are affecting the design and development process. In the early stages, it will enable you to make sure that the VDS is being used consistently by the parish council, and the local planning authority. The results of planning applications will be recorded in the minutes of the parish council, and everyone is allowed to attend planning committees. If the design team feels that the VDS is not having as much impact as expected the planning authority should be approached, initially through the parish council. The objective should be to ensure that all developments in the village are considered, from their earliest stage, in the context of the VDS.

Occasional articles about development and the VDS could appear in village newsletters or magazines, giving success stories and showing how the VDS was used. This will help to keep the village informed and aware of the importance of the VDS. New initiatives which begin as a result of the VDS should be publicised to show how everyone's efforts are influencing change in the village.

#### Checklist for effective use of a VDS

- Celebrate the publication and let everyone know it's there.
- Ensure that those people who promote, design and determine applications for new development have ready access to a copy of the VDS.
- Keep the media informed about the VDS.
- Maintain contact with the local planning authority, either through the parish council or through the design team.
- Monitor the application of the VDS for how it is used, its consistency and the success in influencing design and development.
- Make sure that progress, and particularly the successes of the VDS are reported to the village as a whole, so that everyone feels that their efforts have been worthwhile.



## Conclusion

The preparation of your VDS will take time, energy, imagination and determination. This guidance helps you through the preparation process. It makes lots of suggestions and offers you broad advice. However, the essential ingredients in the VDS are not to be found in this or any other document. The skills, knowledge and unique understanding within the village community are by far the most important ingredients for a practical and dynamic VDS.

A VDS is unlike any other planning document or publication. It is the only planning advice directly applicable to the statutory planning system that is *entirely* community based.

### **An effective VDS:**

- is developed, researched, written and edited by local people;
- is representative of the views of the village as a whole;
- has involved a wide section of the village community in its production;
- describes the visual character of the village;
- demonstrates how local character and distinctiveness can be protected and enhanced in new development;
- is compatible with the statutory planning system and the local planning context;
- is suitable for approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance;
- is applicable to all forms and scale of development; and
- is about managing change in the village, not preventing it.

# COUNTRYSIDE COMMISSION

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CCP 501 (Part 1)

Design Projects

CCP 501

