



TEST VALLEY
B O R O U G H C O U N C I L

PLANNING GUIDANCE NOTE

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS

FEBRUARY 2000

VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS

THE PRODUCTION OF VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS AND THE PROCEDURE FOR THEIR ADOPTION AS SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE BY TEST VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Introduction

At its meeting in August 1999, the Planning & Transportation Committee considered the future role of Village Design Statements (VDS) in Test Valley. The committee resolved that such statements would be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in accordance with guidance provided by the Local Planning Authority. This document was approved by the committee on 16 February 2000 to provide such guidance.

Background

VDS emerged from a Countryside Commission (now Countryside Agency) report in 1993, which focused upon the issues of local distinctiveness. This started the 'Design in the Countryside' initiative, of which VDS is a part. A specific guidance document on VDS "*Village Design - making local character count in new development*" (CCP 501)¹, was published in 1996. This Countryside Agency (CA) document should be used as the basis for guiding VDS preparation and you are strongly advised to obtain a copy. The Borough Council will also refer to it in appraising a VDS for potential adoption as SPG. This guidance note complements and does not substitute for the CA guidance, rather it aims to express and clarify the key issues.

Purpose

The VDS should primarily articulate what high quality design should mean for the village. It should provide a record of local distinctiveness, by describing the qualities and character of the village and make recommendations for design guidance. In this way setting the context for the design of new development, of whatever scale. The intention should be to manage change and how it is carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and where possible enhances the local environment. The VDS should describe character of the village as a whole in terms of:

- countryside and landscape setting,
- form of the settlement,
- details of buildings and spaces.

A VDS is not however about whether or where future development should take place, this being the role of the Borough Local Plan. It should rather address aspects such as details of the design and materials.

¹ Copies available free of charge from; Countryside Agency Postal Sales, PO Box 124, Walgrave, NORTHAMPTON NN6 9TL Tel: 0870 120 6466 Fax: 0870 120 6467 Website: www.countryside.gov.uk

A separate study to a VDS, such as a Village Appraisal; may also be undertaken to look at the future of the parish. This would however tend to detail facilities and other development that could be of benefit to the village. Such a study should be produced by the local community, without the involvement of the Borough Council. Such documents would not influence the planning process, where as a VDS adopted as SPG would.

Village Design Statement Content

In order to identify local distinctiveness and recommend design guidance the VDS should concentrate upon providing a well-structured assessment of the character and design elements of the village and its setting. You should therefore ensure that the VDS satisfactorily addresses the following tests;

- Does it record and describe the unique character, design and local distinctiveness of the village's built and natural environment?
- Do the guidelines for development refer to (and are aided by) any description of village history and character?
- Will it assist in achieving a higher standard of design and informing the decisions of developers?
- Does it provide design recommendations, under the following broad topics?
 - Village setting & landscape, including views
 - Settlement pattern
 - Open & other spaces
 - Building form eg. height, shape etc.
 - Materials and fenestration & chimney details
 - Streets & street furniture
 - Trees, hedges & other landscape features
 - Boundary features eg. walls, fences, etc.
- Does it include an explanation of exactly what is intended by the design recommendations and how they should be achieved in practice?
- Does it relate to the village as a whole including the immediate surroundings which are important in contributing to aspects of its setting? (The extent of any coverage beyond this is for individual VDS determination).
- Are complementary links made to (and guidelines accord with) existing planning policies and guidance adopted by the Borough Council e.g. Test Valley Borough Local Plan and Conservation Area documents? On request, copies of applicable Borough Council planning documents for the parish are available on a loan basis.

A Conservation Area document is likely however to only cover part of the village, whilst the VDS should include the whole. Such areas where the rights to undertake works without the need for consent are reduced, are designated by the Borough Council under specific legislation.

- Is it compatible with the Test Valley Borough Local Plan?
- Does it avoid the use of phrases such as “must be”, “must not”, “no more” “no development” etc? Alternatives include, “wherever possible”, “should” etc.

Village Design Statement Format & Illustrative Material

This in general, is for individual parish determination, although A4 portrait format would be the most suitable for ease of use. The 'standard' should similarly be a local decision. A glossy colour document may be produced, but black and white is equally suitable. The descriptive content and resulting design guidelines are the key element in giving the VDS value. Copies of completed VDS undertaken elsewhere in the country are available on loan from the Borough Council, as general examples of content and presentation. Subject to the approval of the parish concerned, details of contacts within Test Valley will also be provided.

The inclusion of photographs and sketches to illustrate the description of character and the design guidelines would be of benefit. The Borough Council shares the copyright of recent aerial photographs taken from directly overhead at a approximate scale of 1:20,000. These should therefore be available for inclusion if desired subject to the necessary copyright warning being attached.

In the same way an Ordnance Survey (OS) map of the village and also the parish as a whole if desired, would be useful in expressing any geographically based features or design recommendations. The Borough Council's licence does not however allow for maps to be provided for VDS purposes. If a map is needed for inclusion within it must therefore be obtained from an OS Agent direct. The incorporation of a map will also require a specific licence for the VDS document to be obtained from OS², with the fee dependent upon the map size and the number of copies to be printed. A form is available for this purpose.

Community Involvement

A central part of the VDS process is to give opportunities for as many of the local community as possible to contribute and it should reflect the views of the village as a whole. The preparation procedure should enable wide community involvement and build towards a document which reflects local consensus. This is crucial in terms of its adoption as SPG, since the weight accorded to the VDS will be increased if it has been the subject of public consultation and participation.

In considering the VDS for adoption as SPG the following brief information should be available to support its submission, in the form of short notes.

- How the VDS Co-ordinating Group formed.
- The extent and type of publicity for the project.
- The extent and opportunities for community participation and involvement during the various project stages.
- The extent of further local consultation and the availability of a draft VDS in the village for public comments.
- The extent of liaison and consultation with Borough Council planning officers during its preparation.

² Ordnance Survey Licensing Helpline Tel: 023 8079 2913

Preparation Process

Whilst the VDS should be led by the local community, you are strongly encouraged to ensure that Planning Services are informed of progress and given the opportunity to provide comments. A degree of Borough Council prescription and input is necessary in order to help verify that the final form of the statement is in keeping with planning policy and can therefore be considered for adoption as SPG. It is emphasised however that the ownership of the VDS remains with the local community and should reflect their views.

The role of Borough Council Planning Services will therefore be in providing the following assistance, as agreed by the Planning & Transportation Committee;

1. Officers will be available to provide guidance and advice, and will attend workshops or open days as an observer. This is separate from any facilitation support which should be independent of the Borough Council.
2. Copies of the VDS at initial and final draft stages may be forwarded to the Borough Council, in order that any potential difficulties with adoption as SPG, can be addressed at an early stage by giving comments and advice on the specific planning content and wording of development guidelines. Following internal consultation the Borough Council will aim to respond within five weeks.
3. Financial assistance is also expected to be made available from April 2000, which will provide grants of up to £1,000 per parish towards VDS production costs. Support before this date will be considered for those already undertaking the process.

An application for funding should be submitted at the start of the VDS preparation process. Details of the various estimated costs to be incurred should be provided, although it is for parishes to determine the individual costs which they wish to apply for within the total available. Additional spending above the grant level is for parish determination and financing. A programme for producing a VDS will be agreed between the Borough Council and the parish.

Costs may be dependent upon the number of copies to be printed, although this is difficult to estimate the requirement in general terms and this is in part is for the parish to determine. This can be a matter for consideration with the Borough Council once a VDS is to be considered for SPG adoption.

Adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance

The CA guidance advocates the aim of adoption by the Borough Council as SPG where it is in a form which would contribute to a higher quality of development. This will enable weight to be given to the VDS in the consideration of planning applications in terms of village design issues and maintaining local character; as it will be treated as a material consideration. Through adoption as SPG the maximum value will be gained from the local community's collective effort.

Case law supported by Government planning guidance has determined the status of SPG and what may constitute it. Similarly, court cases have also established the relationship between SPG and the Borough Local Plan. SPG should not be cover matters which ought to be included within the plan, rather supplementary information. It is therefore the status given to further guidance which articulates or is addition to existing planning policies.

The VDS will be considered by the Planning & Transportation Committee for adoption as SPG against the CA guidance document, this guidance note and Test Valley Borough Local Plan policies. An officer will prepare a report for the committee which assesses the VDS in this context with a recommendation. Should it be adopted then it will form part of the Borough Council's planning policy for the village.

A VDS once adopted as SPG should be in a form which allows it to be appropriate for planning purposes for many years. In the long term should changed circumstances lead to a potential review being considered, then this can be an issue for discussion between the parish and the Borough Council.

Further Information

Should you require further details or clarification regarding Village Design Statements (VDS) and their adoption by the Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG), please contact Planning Services;

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