

VILLAGE DESIGN

Making local character count
in new development

Part 2



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

VILLAGE DESIGN

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in new development**

Part 2

Guidance based on the work of BDOR Ltd

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INTRODUCTION TO PART 2

Part 1 of this guidance explains what a Village Design Statement (VDS) is, and offers you comprehensive guidance on preparing a VDS for your village.

To be fully effective, the VDS has to complement your local planning context and be based on a well-structured assessment of the character of the village and its setting. Part 2 provides additional background information and detailed advice on these two issues.

It also includes draft worksheets to help with the organisation and management of the village character workshop, which is one of the key stages in our suggested approach to VDS production.

I. PLANNING INFORMATION

This chapter deals with background information about the statutory planning system. It is not exhaustive but should provide all that you need for the purpose of preparing a VDS. If in doubt, ask your local planning authority for further advice.

Most people expect the planning authority to ensure that new development looks good and fits into its setting. Many hope that the planners will prevent changes from spoiling their village. The planning authority can only make its decisions within the limits of the law and government guidance, and according to planning policies.

Your VDS cannot change existing policies, but it can help the planners to influence the character of new developments in the village.

You do not need to understand all about how planning works to write a VDS, but it will be useful if the VDS team takes some simple steps to make it as effective as possible.

The importance of Supplementary Planning Guidance status

Your VDS will tell people how to make new development fit into the existing character of your village. It will be given to people who are preparing designs. It will be used by development control planners in the local authority when they give advice to prospective developers. It will also be used when council officers make recommendations to the planning committee on planning applications. To be influential, your VDS must be approved by the planning authority as **Supplementary Planning Guidance**. This is the term given to advice which adds to or refines information given in the development plan, and approval will only be possible if it fits into the general policies of the government and planning authority. The importance attached to Supplementary Planning Guidance increases with the number of people who have been involved or consulted.

National planning policies

The general planning objectives are set by central government. The most important government design policies are in a document called Planning Policy Guidance Note 1 *General policy and principles* (PPG1). In the past the government has been cautious about allowing planning authorities to have too much influence on the appearance of new developments. This is now changing: planning authorities are being encouraged to seek high standards of design, and the VDS enables the community to identify the important design qualities of its own village. The government supports the idea of VDSs because it is a positive way for people to have a say in the changes in their environment.

There are other Planning Policy Guidance Notes that affect development and design in villages. PPG7 *The countryside and the rural economy* is important as it emphasises the need to integrate protecting the valued character of our countryside with maintaining a healthy and diverse rural economy. VDSs are intended to guide change towards harmonious new development, not to stifle development altogether.

Local planning policies

In most areas, the policies of the government are refined to suit local circumstances by the structure plan and the local plan. Structure plans deal with policies at a strategic level and, other than supporting the principle of good design, they are unlikely to have any effect on your VDS. Structure planning determines the quantity and general distribution of development, for example that a certain number of new houses must be built in your district.

The local planning authority then identifies specific sites and decides where the development will take place. This is done through the local plan. Everyone has an opportunity to influence the allocation of specific sites through the local plan consultation process. A VDS is not the vehicle to try to change those decisions. The VDS can only address the design and the ways in which new development can be made to harmonise with existing character.

To find out more about the types of plans and how to influence them you can get a free copy of a booklet called *Development Plans—what you need to know* from your local planning department or the Department of the Environment (DOE), Publications Dispatch Centre, Blackhorse Road, London, SE99 6TT.

Design standards

The local planning authority may have policies about design standards. These policies often say things like: “The authority will seek a high standard of design”. They less frequently explain what they mean by “a high standard”. An effective plan must relate the authority’s design expectations to other key objectives in the plan. The Countryside Commission recommends local planning authorities to produce a Countryside Design Summary which could be incorporated into the plan to

define the planning authority’s design expectations. You should get a copy of the relevant section of the development plan and ask the authority about a Countryside Design Summary. These will provide an important starting point for your work. To be at its most effective your VDS must be consistent with a CDS if there is one, and with design policies in the local plan or Unitary Development Plan, clarifying and expanding these at the village level.

Using the support of other policies to give strength to the VDS



Determining planning applications

Most new buildings require planning permission. Planning applications are generally decided by the planning committee of the district council, based on planning officers' recommendations, and in accordance with adopted planning policies. It is therefore important that your planning officers and district councillors are aware of your VDS and that it enables them to guide development as you would wish. Compatibility with other policies will ensure that they can apply the views of the village community in their decisions. Other priorities may override your ideas, but in most cases the VDS will influence developments either before they are submitted for permission or in the conditions that the planning authority puts onto approvals.

Parish councillors are important allies in the planning process. Although they cannot decide on planning applications, they are consulted by the planning authority on development proposals.

The VDS will help the parish council to reflect the community's views in a consistent way and improve the effectiveness of their representations.

A free booklet that explains the planning decision process, called *Planning charter: standards*, is available from the DOE Publications Dispatch Centre, address as given on page 4.

Planning appeals

When anyone is refused planning permission, they have a right of appeal. These appeals are decided by planning inspectors who must decide if the local planning authority has been right to refuse permission. Just like the planning authority, they must reach their decision with reference to the circumstances of the particular case and to all of the policies and Supplementary Planning Guidance (called 'material considerations'). The Courts have ruled that layout, siting, design and external appearance, together with landscaping and impact on the neighbourhood, are material considerations.

An inspector will regard your VDS as a material consideration but the significance accorded to it increases with public consultation and formal approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance through a council resolution.

A free booklet called *Planning appeals — a guide* explains the process and is available from the Planning Inspectorate at Tollgate House, Houlton Street, Bristol BS2 9DJ.

Permitted development

Some types of minor development, usually referred to as 'permitted development', can be carried out without the need to submit an application for planning permission. This is because a general permission has been granted through the *Town and Country Planning General Permitted Development Order* (the GDO). There are limits and conditions on the development included in this Order. Your VDS will want to influence these small changes and householder alterations that are outside planning control.

The VDS can offer advice on permitted development and will be a useful way of encouraging your community to respect the character of the village. However, the planners will only be able to enforce your view within the limits of their powers. Most planning authorities have leaflets that explain which developments require planning applications.

The Department of the Environment publishes a free booklet called *Planning, a guide for householders* which should be available from your local planning department or the DOE (see page 4).

Conservation Areas

More stringent rules apply in Conservation Areas, and to Listed Buildings. Planning Policy Guidance Note 15 *Planning and the historic environment* (PPG15) deals with Conservation Areas, and has confirmed the scope for a formal community role through conservation advisory committees. It is important to avoid any confusion between the VDS and Conservation Area activities. VDSs are not reserved for the designated special areas, they apply to the whole village and every village.

Conservation Areas have extra planning controls which cannot be made available everywhere, but your VDS will help people to understand and respond to the special character of your village as a whole.

Farm buildings

On large farms, new buildings can be built under permitted development rights. The planning authority may require the farmer to submit details of the siting, design and external appearance of new farm buildings before construction begins. The planning authority may then consult the parish council and other groups. Planning authorities, in consultation with others such as local interest groups, are encouraged to prepare guidelines for farmers. Small farms, less than five hectares, have permitted development rights for minor extensions to existing buildings, but new buildings require planning permission.

Highways

Sometimes roadworks such as new footpaths and kerbs, a wide new access to development, signs or street lights can change the character of a village. These are controlled by the highways authority, not the planners. The highway authority is normally part of the County Council. Most standards are set by the Department of Transport. These have become much more flexible in recent years and highway engineers have the scope to do more to protect local character. The Rural White Paper, *Rural England*, encourages new roads, footpaths and signs to be built to standards appropriate to their rural location.

Planning Policy Guidance notes

The principles of local planning authorities' involvement in design matters are set out in Annex A to PPG1, although this national policy framework is under review. The Department of the Environment's initiative *Quality in Town and Country* aims to:

- raise awareness of the importance of good design and quality in individual buildings and the built environment as a whole;
- encourage debate and stimulate ideas about how best to achieve quality in future developments; and
- challenge others to see what they are prepared to do to help achieve quality.

PPG1 aims to encourage good design and has widened the role of planning to include greater concern about design and building quality. Although PPG1 is being reviewed, this is likely to place even more emphasis on the importance of securing high quality development and good design. Greater emphasis on the importance of good design will not be an opportunity for authorities to impose their own taste or to become overly prescriptive, but it confirms the importance of establishing a clear statement of the authority's design expectations. The VDS can help to achieve this.

The revised PPG2 *Green Belts* states the general intentions of Green Belt policy where there is a presumption against development. It specifies objectives for the use of land in the Green Belts. It also refines the categories of appropriate development, including providing for the future of existing developed sites. These changes aim to secure greater benefits from development without compromising the overall restrictive policy. The Green Belt is a statutory designation with a precise meaning and should not be confused with other open space policies around settlements. Your VDS can help in establishing appropriate design principles in those cases where development within the Green Belt might be acceptable.

The first section of PPG3 *Housing*, requires developers to strive for good design, which is defined as having respect for the qualities of the local environment. The PPG describes design assessment as having three components: the relationship to setting, the character and quality of the local environment, and the nature of adjacent buildings. These correspond to the three ways in which you are encouraged to consider design in the VDS. Rural areas are given particular mention in PPG3 which states

“the character of the particular settlement should always be respected in terms of density, scale and environmental quality. Villages vary in their character and what might be appropriate in (one) could be out of place in (another).” (para 19).

The Rural White Paper published in October 1995 says that 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... The (Countryside) Commission has shown how it is possible for local people to become involved in developing guides to village design... We (the Government) will now discuss with the Commission ways of promoting the preparation of village design statements throughout England...”.

PPG7 *Countryside and the rural economy*, tackles the dilemma seen by many as being at the heart of the planning process: integrating the protection of countryside with maintenance of a healthy rural economy. These are not cast as alternatives. Although some might regard the character of the countryside as threatened by economic change, in the long term they are interdependent. The guiding principle of PPG7 is that development in rural areas should both benefit the rural economy and maintain or enhance the environment. Well designed and carefully sited development will not be detrimental to the countryside. Two important implications flow from this:

- some rural development is inevitable, especially in response to changing employment patterns as the rural economy evolves;
- development must be appropriate in terms of form and design, so as to have a beneficial impact on the countryside.

The PPG suggests that planning authorities should set criteria for the acceptability of planning applications in rural areas. The VDS will help the planning authority to establish those criteria as far as design is concerned.

Examples of relevant publications from local authorities

Access to buildings for disabled	Improve your environment
Agricultural development	Industrial and commercial development in the countryside
Archaeology, planning and conservation	Industrial archaeology
Areas of high townscape merit	Landscape assessments
Barn conversion for residential use	Landscape design guide
Beach huts	Listed buildings
Buildings and trees in the Conservation Area	New developments in the creation and use of public space
Car parking guidelines	New windows for old
Coast and countryside	Painting facades
Conservation Areas	Permitted development leaflet
Design awards scheme	Planning handbook
Design guide for the district	Protecting trees
Doors and windows	Renovating your cottage
Dwellings in the open countryside	Residential extensions and space about buildings
Estate agents boards — code of practice	Rest homes for the elderly
Estate roads	Rights of Way — a guide to the law
Extending or improving your home	Rural planning policy
Farm buildings design guide	Shopblinds
Farming and archaeology	Shopfronts and advertisements design guide
Finding a plot to build your house	Small housing groups
General improvement areas	Small woods management
Good design in villages	Special criteria for residential infilling
Grants for conservation	Textured coatings
Green Belt or housing?	The conversion of agricultural buildings to residential use
Guidelines on aerals	Town schemes
Guidelines on obstructions and displays on footways (pavements) and forecourts	Trees and development
Historic buildings — a guide for owners	Unauthorised development
Hotel development	Walls, hedges and fences
Housing estates — standards of provision and maintenance	Windmills
How does living in a Conservation Area affect you?	

2. ASSESSING LOCAL CHARACTER

Structuring the character description within the Village Design Statement

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.

It helps to organise the information under headings such as:

- Physical and natural influences;
- Patterns and shapes of the village, its buildings and spaces;
- Local landmarks and special features;
- Roads, streets and pathways;
- Change and village evolution.

The village character description should include the following material.

Physical and natural influences on the village

The earliest and most fundamental influence on the development of every village was the landscape itself. This influence has diminished over time. Consider how the village has been affected by the shape of the land, the climate, water and local materials.

Patterns and shapes of the village, its buildings and spaces

People enjoy landscape by looking at the pattern of woods and fields, and views from favourite places. In the same way we are able to appreciate the pattern of our villages through the rich diversity of the shapes and groups of buildings, spaces and trees within them. The shape and impact of the village in the wider landscape is also important.

Local landmarks and special features of the village

Even in small villages there can be distinctive features or landmarks that enable you to know *exactly* where you are. These features could be as diverse as particular building details or materials, or a folly or simply the church spire. These special features are vulnerable unless they are acknowledged and respected, for example by ensuring that new development does not mask them.

Roads, streets and pathways in and around the village

Villages provided for pedestrians or horse-drawn vehicles and the pattern of roads, streets and footpaths often reflect this. Few of the older parts of our villages readily accommodate motor vehicles, and traffic has had an adverse effect on the visual and often the physical quality of villages. One of the challenges of new development is to respond to the traditional character of spaces in the village while accommodating modern transport.

Change and village evolution

Villages grow and evolve, and what we see today is often very different from the shape, form and purpose of the original settlement. To appreciate what a village may be like in the future it is important to consider how it has evolved. Some changes will have happened long ago, but the majority are likely to be quite recent. Future change needs to be managed to protect local distinctiveness.

Although every VDS will incorporate all these factors, not all will be described in the same way or be of equal priority in each village. 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?

The village character workshop: organisation and materials

The overall content for the workshop is set out in Part 1 of this guidance, as follows:

- 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; and
- agreeing the process of consultation and local feedback of information.

The following notes and Briefing Sheets will help you plan and manage the workshop and carry out all the elements above.

Presentation of the nature of the VDS and its role

The objective of the workshop should be to begin the preparation of the VDS, so the focus should be on practical action. However, it will also be necessary to ensure that there is a common understanding of the VDS, a sense of local ownership, and confidence that it really will represent the view of the village as a whole.

The presentation should:

- explain the nature and scope of the VDS and the local planning context;
- explain the significance of Supplementary Planning Guidance status for a VDS;
- outline how the proposed VDS would be prepared;
- encourage involvement and show where others have already succeeded;
- where possible, demonstrate the support of the local planning authority officers and elected members.

These fundamental points should be reaffirmed in the workshop event, even if they have already been discussed in an earlier village meeting.

Sharing ideas and local views of the village and its setting in the landscape

Few people will have a complete picture of the whole village — its history, development and growth, the buildings, agriculture, industries, and the conservation and planning framework. Inevitably there will be a wide range of views and ideas. Before starting the character assessment it can be helpful to let people share and explore some of their ideas about the character and important features of the village. Ways of helping this and starting to think about how to describe the village are given in the Briefing Sheets. Some of these activities could be incorporated into the workshop or they may also be used beforehand to introduce the VDS or to encourage involvement on a separate occasion (see chapter 2 *Local involvement* in Part 1).

Initial survey to assemble and record local character

The assessment of the character of the village is based primarily on the physical appearance of the village — what it looks like. All the other information that is needed to produce a VDS, such as planning documents or local histories, should be used in association with the visual survey of the village.

The *initial survey* should aim to record the qualities and features that contribute to the character of the village. The best way of assembling the record of character is by photography. Many people will already have photographs of the village and the surrounding countryside which they may wish to contribute. To assemble a photographic survey for a VDS it is not necessary for the pictures to be perfect, it is far more important to show the diversity and distinctiveness of the village as a whole, its setting in the surrounding landscape, and its buildings and spaces.

The survey should be undertaken by small teams of people, preferably working together, rather than as individuals, and aiming to be as comprehensive as possible. The photographs from the survey provide the material for a *preliminary assessment* of the character of the village in terms of the landscape setting, the pattern of the settlement and the buildings and spaces in the village. This preliminary assessment is best organised under the three headings of landscape setting, settlement pattern, and buildings and spaces.

Presentation of preliminary survey

The survey teams should assemble their material to show the characteristic features of the village. This means selecting those images that best capture the spirit of the village. They also need to explain their selection to other teams and compare findings.

The thought of presenting ideas to a group of people may be a daunting task for many people, but teams do need to share their thoughts. The process can be informal, more of an open discussion than a lecture. The presentations provide the first opportunity to discuss and assemble a shared view of the character of the village. The images, descriptions and presentation assessments will provide the core material for the first draft of the VDS.

Agreeing the future action, management and drafting

Up to this point the preparation, local publicity and the organisation of the launch of the VDS has been the responsibility of a small group of people — the ‘design team’. The workshop or other first event offers an ideal opportunity for the initial design team to be confirmed, or to modify and perhaps expand its membership, in order to take the VDS preparation forward.

The team of people who prepare the draft VDS may vary over the lifetime of the project. In some cases the same group of people may continue to coordinate and develop the VDS. In others, it may be better if smaller sub-groups collate and draft particular sections or aspects of the VDS material. People with special interests or expertise may have a short involvement to contribute to drafting the VDS or provide further information.

In Cottenham small groups with particular local interest or knowledge compiled first drafts of information to be assembled by an editing group. In Elstead the volunteer design team worked as a single unit undertaking the drafting and editing themselves.

Each village will need to consider how the management of the VDS preparation should be handled, but it is important that the follow up action from the workshop is decided and agreed by everyone attending the workshop. The team may still change and develop as the VDS preparation progresses, but it is important to keep the commitment and momentum going from the workshop. Although not everyone will be involved in everything from now on, the drafting team should emphasise that there will always be access to contribute to the development process or to find out how the VDS is progressing.

Agreeing the process of consultation and local feedback of information

Once completed much of the strength of the VDS is rooted in the breadth of the consultation process and the broad support it has received from the whole village. So it is crucial that the means of consulting and feeding information back to the village is established early in the preparation process. The design team will have the responsibility of seeing that information on the VDS and its progress is produced and made available to the whole village. They will also need to make sure that local consultation and involvement is fully recorded to support the case for approval of the VDS as Supplementary Planning Guidance. These responsibilities are important and need to be planned for in the managing of the VDS preparation.

Local newsletters, notices, exhibitions and further village meetings can be used to keep people informed, but ensuring that the VDS is fully endorsed by the whole village must be a central role of the VDS management group. If the VDS is to be approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance, consultation must also be maintained with the local planning authority, to ensure that the emerging VDS is compatible with the local plan policies or other advisory design material that the planning authority produces.

The local planning authority will not be able to devote large amounts of officer time to each VDS, but they should be offered the opportunity to comment on drafts and advise on specific planning aspects of the emerging VDS. For the VDS to be approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance, the implications and process for achieving this should be discussed with planners as early in the process as possible to avoid delays or confusion at a later date.

3. PREPARING THE WORKSHOP

Most people generally feel that they have a clear picture of their village or home town. However, we often take for granted the things that are most familiar to us.

The workshop should be enjoyable, as well as interesting, so choose a relaxing and informal venue, where you can provide refreshments, and plenty of room for everyone to work in. The village hall or school may be suitable but make sure that you are able to move the tables and chairs around and that you are able to pin up maps and plans on wall or display areas. Start planning well ahead and make shopping lists for all the materials you will need. Also, get the workshop room ready early. Someone will need to remain at the hall in case of latecomers and to clear up between the morning and afternoon sessions. Late arrivals can join teams out and about, or join the assessment teams in the afternoon. The teams should be able to brief newcomers as to what they are doing.

You could invite officers from your local planning authority to drop in during the day, but not to take part (unless they live in the village, of course). It may help to keep them informed and see how the assessment process is working.

To undertake an assessment of village character requires you to look at the village as if you were seeing it for the first time, without preconceived ideas and expectations. Photography is an excellent way of doing this because the camera is not selective in what it sees. Many people will have excellent photographs of the village already, so why not use some of these in addition to new ones? However, existing photographs will probably have been taken to capture particular events or features rather than to show aspects of local character in a broader sense, but these may be useful later in the process as illustrations in the published VDS. Also, the team approach of a photographic survey as part of a village workshop enables each picture taken specifically for the assessment to be the product of (and also to provoke) group discussion about village character.

The briefing sheets which follow will help you to undertake a village character assessment over the period of a single, intensive day. It is advisable to carry out the survey and preliminary assessment of the photographs in a relatively short period of time, but it may be difficult to arrange to do both on the same day. The lack of a rapid photographic processing service nearby can make a one-day event impossible.

If you decide that you do want to undertake the survey in one day you will need a volunteer to take the films to and from the processor twice, during the late morning and over lunch. This needs careful timing and it helps if the processor is aware of what you are doing and arranges with you what time the films will arrive so that they can be dealt with immediately.

The survey and assessment processes can be done at two separate events, but within a short space of time. The survey could be carried out on a Saturday morning and the preliminary assessment carried out the following weekend or during the evening in the week following the photographic survey.

The advantages of a one-day event:

- a more intensive event, which can attract greater publicity and interest from the media;
- the project gets well under way in a short space of time;
- people start to see results quickly;
- it builds on the enthusiasm of local people.

The disadvantages of a one-day event:

- it might be bad weather and fewer people take part;
- the reliability of the photographs being processed on time might be uncertain;
- some keen people may be unavailable on the chosen day.

The advantages of two events:

- bad weather is less of a problem;
- it can be more convenient for people to attend for a few hours rather than a whole day;
- there is more time to have photographs processed.

The disadvantages of two events:

- some people may not be able to attend both events;
- there may be a loss of momentum between the active survey and the table top assessment;
- two smaller events are less likely to attract publicity from the media.

Whichever way you decide to organise your workshop the following sheets will help you to run your event successfully. The sheets have been used successfully with several VDSs and provide a *general* outline for workshop run as a day event, so adapt them to your own needs.

The following pages provide:

- **A programme**, with timings and content.
- **Briefing Sheet No. 1 – Introduction**. Setting out the principles for the VDS, and explaining its importance.
- **Briefing Sheet No. 2 – Getting to know the village**. Team exercises to familiarise everyone with the village as a whole. The exercises look at ways to describe the character of the village through character zones, local landmarks and routes or walks around the village. This material can be used by the teams to plan their photographic survey. These exercises could be used to encourage people to join in with the VDS or to publicise the project at other village events before the workshop.

Materials needed:

- flip chart paper,
- maps of the village at 1:1250 scale, allow 2 per team. Your local planning authority may be able to provide these for you,
- coloured felt-tip pens,
- drawing pins or Blu-tack for pinning up the finished maps.

- **Briefing Sheet No. 3 – Photographic survey**. This will provide the material for the first assessment of the village character. People should work in small groups, say 6 to 8 people and share out the survey work amongst them. Keeping to time is essential.

Each team will need:

- 2 rolls of 36 exposure colour print film,
- 2 cameras,
- a clip board for making notes on the shots and discussions,
- a clean map as above,
- a wrist watch.

- **Briefing Sheet No. 4 – The initial character assessment**. Working as a group the teams sort their pictures under the three headings of ‘landscape setting’, ‘settlement pattern and spaces’ and ‘buildings’. They can be assembled on a sheet of flip chart paper as in the diagram below.

Landscape	Settlement pattern and spaces	Buildings	Your ideas

Materials needed:

- flip chart sheets, as above,
- felt-tipped pens,
- glue sticks,
- post-it notes,
- 1:1250 map of the village,
- drawing pins or Blu-tack.

A VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT FOR OURPLACE

Programme

- 9.30 Meet at the Village Hall — Coffee or Tea
Collect programme and Briefing Sheets Nos. 1 and 2.
- 10.00 Welcome by the design team.
Exercises on Briefing Sheet No. 2 to start everyone thinking about the village.
Pin up maps and share ideas.
- 10.30 VDS Project briefing by the design team.
Preparation and briefing for the village survey.
Form teams and take a clean map and two rolls of colour print film, clip boards, etc.
Following Briefing Sheet No. 3, go out into the village and start looking, talking and taking pictures.
NB. Watch the time, and when in doubt take a picture and discuss it later.
- 11.45 Have your first film finished, out of the camera and ready to be taken for processing.
Complete your second film by 12.45 and return with it to the Village Hall when it too will be taken away for processing.
- 1.00 Relax with your packed lunch.
Your first film should return during lunch time.
- 2.00 Return to your teams and select and organise your picture using Briefing Sheet No. 4.
- 2.15 (approx)
The second set of photographs should arrive.
Add these to the collection, sort and select them.
- 3.00 Complete your character display sheet and pin it up.
Be ready as a team to tell the others about the images you have chosen and why.
Try to be brief, no more than 5 minutes per team.
- 3.30 Discussion about the village character.
What have you found out about the village that you would want to tell designers and developers when creating or altering buildings in the village.
- 3.45 Planning the next stages.
Arrangements to take the VDS preparation forward and timetable.
Drafting and getting further information.
- 4.15 Thanks to everyone who took part, a final cup of tea and close.

BRIEFING SHEET No. 1 – Introduction

A VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT FOR OURPLACE

Community Hall, Saturday, Sometime 1996

A community workshop organised by *Ourplace* Parish Council

This workshop is the first step in a project to define locally distinctive design principles for new development, however small, in the village of *Ourplace*, by preparing a **Village Design Statement**. We hope that it will be an enjoyable and interesting day.

A Village Design Statement describes the qualities and characteristics of the village appreciated and valued by local people, in the form of design guidance for prospective developers. Village communities have a special and unique knowledge and appreciation of local character and distinctiveness in their own village. Village Design Statements can be linked directly to the formal planning system and used to influence planning applications and decisions. A Village Design Statement offers an opportunity for local people to enter the planning process at an earlier stage and to make a positive contribution to the design of new development.

Most people who live in the countryside are reluctant to see new development change their environment. Often, they feel that recent buildings have altered the character of their surroundings for the worse. This understandable disappointment with new buildings can lead to a resistance to development in general. But the countryside must change if it is to stay alive – farmers need new buildings, villages need affordable housing for young families, maybe they need a health centre or some buildings for local employment, people want to extend and alter their homes.

Whatever the scale and type of new development, we believe that two important principles apply:

- new buildings should follow in the traditions of their setting, reflecting the important characteristics that make each locality special and different from other places;
- standard designs, which could belong in any suburb or industrial estate, are NOT appropriate in the countryside.

These differences of character can be called **local diversity**. It is easy to think of places that clearly show these contrasts. For example, the stone houses of North Yorkshire, which look very different from the colour-washed, rendered cottages of Cornish fishing villages. The settlement pattern and setting of the villages is also different. Some villages have developed along the contours of hillsides, whereas other ancient settlements have spread along the cross roads of old trackways and drovers' routes. All of our countryside and villages have their own special characteristics, and all new development should work with them to reinforce local diversity, instead of spreading more suburban and standard designs.

Most planning authorities would share these ideas, but they can only give a general indication of local character in their area. It is local people themselves who understand what makes their own place special. But it is difficult to explain these ideas, or to make those ideas influence new development. Local communities can produce a Village Design Statement that can be used to help the planning authority advise would-be developers, from householders' alterations to large-scale and complex projects. Our Village Design Statement will make it easier to insist on new buildings that are responsive to local character, and will help to defend local diversity.

BRIEFING SHEET No. 2 – Getting to know the village

Today's workshop will enable us to gather the material for a Village Design Statement for *Ourplace*. This work has two main parts:

- an exploration of the values that we ascribe to different parts of the village buildings and spaces; and
- a description of the things we see around the village which are important in creating its individual character.

When you arrive you will be asked to work in groups A, B, or C, and the first task is to join with the other members of your group and begin thinking about the map of *Ourplace*. Ordnance Survey maps are interesting and give people a lot of information about the physical form of a place — but they do not tell you what is important to the people who live there. This is what we want to find out in this workshop.

A

Group A is to imagine that someone who does not know the village has come to stay. She is going for a walk and you must set out the route that she should follow, so that at the end of her walk she will have a clear and honest impression of what *Ourplace* is like. Her walk should start and finish at the Community Hall. Draw the route on the map, but she will not take the map with her, so you will need to identify clearly the features that let her know when to change direction. Note these down on the map for future reference.

B

Outsiders might see the village as a single whole, but village residents know that there are different zones or areas within the village. *Group B* can draw these invisible zone boundaries onto the plan, and add notes explaining what these zones represent. Planners tend to use physical and statutory boundaries like 'the Conservation Area', but your idea of boundaries might include, for example, busy and quiet, green or built up, safe or dangerous, edges and middles; even 'them' and 'us'! In some places the zones may overlap, if so you can show this using different colours.

C

An important aspect of villages is the diversity of different buildings and places. *Group C* should mark up their map with the important landmarks of *Ourplace*. The big ones are obvious (the Church for example); perhaps these could be marked in one colour, with a second colour used to show the smaller, more local landmarks. Although smaller, they are just as important: for example a particular tree; a length of wall; a decorative sign, even something unique in someone's garden.

You might find it helpful to begin by jotting your thoughts down on paper first and then combining everyone's contributions onto the maps.

BRIEFING SHEET No. 3 – Photographic survey

After the briefing discussion we would like each team to spend the rest of the morning walking around the village, photographing the things that you think are important (please take care when crossing the roads). You will have two films, giving you 70 pictures to build up a description of *Ourplace* and to illustrate what makes it special. (NB The first picture should be of the group members so we can identify the owners of the photographs when they come back from processing.)

The things that you photograph will cover a wide range of aspects, from the way the village sits in the countryside (which probably means going out of the village), right down to small details like the decorative parts of individual buildings, or the particular colour and texture of the stone or brickwork.

All these things contribute to the character of the village.

It also includes:

- **individual buildings and groups of buildings** and the way they make up the street scene;
- **open spaces.** Large public areas, playing fields, greens and churchyards are important, but so are the small spaces between buildings, or private land, such as orchards and gardens;
- **boundaries.** The edges of the village. What is it like arriving or leaving the village? In the village itself, how are spaces and buildings contained (eg by walls, fences, planting, or a combination of these)?
- **trees.** Do trees matter to the shape and pattern of the village?
- If you always drive through the village do you see or miss things about the character of the village?
- Do children have a different view of the character of the village?

What you are doing is trying to capture the essential character of *Ourplace*; the village as a place where people live.

You may find it helpful to give special responsibilities to your team members.

Someone, not holding the camera, could keep a record of your shots and make notes on the map; a second team member could note down your teams' thoughts about why you photographed certain features and your feelings about the village. It would also be useful to note down issues that you think will need to be considered in the statement that you can not take pictures of.

The two films will need to be processed quickly to make sure they are ready for the afternoon. You must finish the first film by 11.45. We shall collect it from a member of your team at *(insert location)*....., and take it to be processed.

The first set of your prints should arrive back during lunch.

You will need to take the pictures quickly — almost one a minute. Don't be concerned about taking too many pictures, you have plenty of film. You should take pictures of anything that strikes you as important. You can make a selection from the pictures later, rather than trying to choose while you are out in the village. You might need to plan your route so that when you have finished your first film you are close to the agreed meeting place. The second film will be processed while you are eating your packed lunch at the Community Hall.

After lunch each team will be given some large sheets of paper on which to mount their selected photographs to illustrate the character of *Ourplace*.

BRIEFING SHEET No. 4 – The initial character assessment

Now we get to the exciting bit of the day!

This afternoon we are going to take all the practical information from this morning, (the photographs, notes and plans), and put them together in a way that illustrates the character of *Ourplace* and what you feel are the most important aspects of the character of the village.

Return to the groups in which you worked this morning. If you have new team members, please introduce yourselves and explain to them what happened this morning as you proceed.

On the worktables you will find large sheets of paper and an assortment of pens, glue sticks, pencils, rubbers, etc. On your pin-up space you will also find a new clean map of the village.

Your first film will have been processed, so look through the pictures and start to sort them according to the headings on the large sheets of paper. Arrange them so that they illustrate your views and feelings about the character of *Ourplace*. Make notes of any particular points that add to and help describe the photographs. **Don't stick anything down yet!**

Use the big plan on the wall to make comments on 'post-it' notes, that add to or expand the ideas on the photographic sheets. Once you are under way have a look at the sheets you produced earlier in the morning, showing routes, zones and landmarks, as these may help in your selection.

Number each of your photos on the back with your team letter and photo number. List them on the sheet which you feel they best represent. Your second film should arrive at about 2.15. When they arrive add them to the collection and rearrange them as necessary. **You do not have to use all the photographs.**

Once you have made your final selection, and added all your notes, use the last section on the sheets marked 'Your ideas', to put down all the issues that you do not think have been covered in the selection, and issues that are priorities. At the end of the session you will be pinning up your sheets and the whole team (well, at least one person from each group!) will be able briefly to present and describe the group's ideas.

After the workshop

All the materials, photographs and notes from the day are important and should be kept, not just the display sheets. Everything will be taken away by the people drafting the VDS and used in the analysis of information for the VDS structure (see page 25 in Part 1).

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CCP 501 (Part 2)

