

Item No.
Date of Meeting

SOUTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET

<p>VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS</p>

REPORT OF THE COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO HOLDER ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR JOHN TOWNSEND

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that: Cabinet resolves as follows:

- 1.1 that appropriate village design statements prepared by parish councils published for consultation for a period of 6 weeks in order to be adopted as supplementary planning Documents.

2. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 The Council recognises the importance of Village Design Statements as an important tool for use in helping to protect the character of villages in terms of sensitive design. Parish Councils have committed a significant amount of work to the preparation of such documents and South Northants Council has worked with them to ensure that they are prepared in a form that enables them to have weight as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 A Village Design Statement [VDS] is a practical tool to help influence decisions on design and development. Prepared correctly, a VDS will provide a clear statement of the character of a particular village against which planning applications may be assessed. A VDS is not concerned with whether development *should* take place (this is one of the purposes of the Local Development Framework), but with *how* planned development should be carried out, so that it is in harmony with its setting and contributed to the conservation and, where possible, enhancement of the local environment.

- 3.2 The main objectives of Village Design Statements are:

- To describe the distinctive character of the village and 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.

3.3 An effective Village Design Statement is one that:

- 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 of development
- Is about managing change in the village, not preventing it

3.4 If adopted as Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), a Village Design Statement can:

- Give designers and developers positive guidance on acceptable design from the community's point of view, which can help avoid conflict later on in planning negotiations
- Improve design in rural areas by being applied consistently in the development control process. It becomes part of the planning process for planning applications and therefore could help local planning authorities reject applications on the grounds of poor design
- Help protect visually important buildings and open spaces

3.5 Producing a VDS is a useful means to establish better understanding between the community, the local planning authority, designers and developers. It can also strengthen and support the role of the parish council when consulted over planning applications and can be used as material evidence at appeals. The VDS is essentially an assessment of all the features that contribute to village character, in order to help guide and manage change in the village so that it respects local characteristics and distinctiveness. A VDS is not just concerned with buildings which are the most obvious features in terms of local character, but the context of the village and its surroundings as a whole are an important aspect of character.

3.6 The Council supports the preparation of VDS as a means to support its Objective of 'Preserving what is special about the District'. The existence and use of VDS can add important detail to the Council's objective of ensuring high quality and sensitive design in its villages. If a VDS is adopted by the Council as a supplementary Planning Document then this adds weight to it in terms of being a material consideration when determining planning applications.

- 3.7 The preparation of a VDS involves a lot of work, organisation and commitment. The Council does not have the resources available to prepare such documents for individual villages. But, the Council does provide guidance on their preparation and content and reviews documents to ensure that they conform to statutory guidance. The Council will also undertake the necessary consultation (on behalf of the Parish Council) before submitting a report to Cabinet seeking formal adoption of a VDS as Supplementary Planning Document.
- 3.6 The Council has been engaged with a number of villages and the preparation of their VDS and proposes that these are adopted as supplementary planning documents. The villages are:
- Yardley Hastings
 - Wappenham
 - Milton Malsor

4. CONTENT OF VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS

- 4.1 Traditionally a VDS is divided into sections, each considering the character of the village under broad headings. These include the following key areas:

Local Distinctiveness

- What is special about the character of the village?
- What makes it different from the neighbouring village, parish?
- In what way is it unique in South Northamptonshire?
- What is its local distinctiveness and what aspects contribute to and maintain its particular character?

Local Setting of the Village (natural evolution of the village)

- How does the village sit in the landscape?
- How has its layout and design been affected by the shape of the land, local climate, availability of water, local materials?
- What are the geographical, topographical and geological influences?
- Does the village stand proud in the landscape?
- What does the surrounding countryside look like? What are its obvious major elements such as woods, river and streams, railways, hills, etc?
- Does the village harmonise with the landscape or are there areas which could be enhanced through further landscape design!

Settlement Edges, Views and Landscape Character

- 4.2 The landscape setting of a village is important as it provides a context for a settlement. The landscape provides the context and setting of the village as a whole and its individual buildings. The edges of the village are often vulnerable to change.
- How do the edges of the village meet the landscape?
 - Are there notable or characteristic “views into” and “views out of” the village??)

- Is there a sense of arrival or departure from the village and its surrounding landscape?
- What are the distinctive features at the edge of a village - are they buildings, trees, greens or other features?
- Are there particular areas from within the village or on the edge of the village
- What buildings or other structures can be seen in the surrounding countryside?
- Are there areas of woodland, orchard, meadow, wetland, topographical, geological or archaeological features - how do these contribute to village character?
- Are there particular types of trees and vegetation that are distinctive or particular to the village?

Settlement Pattern

- How has the village evolved and changed?
- What is the overall shape and pattern of the village?
- Are there distinctly different areas of the village, in appearance or physical character? How do these relate to each other, do they sit comfortably together, what are their characteristics? Does the density of building vary?
- Are there landmarks or visual focal points within the village, such as a church or other building, a pond, a green, a tree?
- What are the patterns of the roads and footpaths?

Street Pattern and Highways

- What are the characteristics of the various local roads?
- Are there features that make any road unusual or unique?
- What materials have been used for road surfacing?
- Are there electricity substations or overhead cables?
- Are there bus shelters, street lighting, signs? How have these been designed?
- Are there important or prominent footpaths, bridleways or cycleways?

Open and Connecting Spaces

4.3 The open spaces within a village are as important as its buildings.

- Does the village have one large open space (e.g. a village green) or lots of connecting spaces?
- What is the character of various open spaces in the village, both private and public, such as greens, allotments, recreation grounds and churchyard
- What do trees, hedges, walls and fences, and the presence or absence of front gardens add to the overall character?. Do parts of the village have any sort of wildlife or vegetation that is especially distinctive?

4.4 Trees are an important part of the landscape and the village itself.

- How do trees contribute to the character of the village?
- Are there particular tree groups or individual trees that are prominent or act as an important focal point, reference point or to help with orientation?
- Do trees provide a foreground or a backcloth to the village?
- Do trees screen views, direct views or frame views?
- Do they represent an important or significant boundary, enclose spaces or provide incidental features in an otherwise open landscape?

Buildings

4.5 A VDS is not just about buildings within a conservation area and individual listed buildings although the VDS will complement any existing conservation area assessment.

- How do buildings differ in height, size, style and density?
- Are there any key buildings that provide important focal points?
- Apart from houses, what are the characteristics of the other buildings in the village?

Building Form, Orientation and Layout

Building Form:

- What is the basic form of the buildings - are they 1 storey, 2 storey, square, rectangular, tall, narrow, deep?
- Are they terraced (long, short, courtyard) detached, attached?
- Do they have flat roofs, pitched roofs, dormer windows, extensions, porches?
- Are their frontages flat, protruding, simple, detailed?

Orientation:

- Does the orientation of buildings take into account the need for sun, shade and shelter from prevailing weather?

Layout:

- Are building frontages on the road or are they set back from the road?
- What are the sizes of the plots - are there front gardens, back gardens, provision for car parking?

Materials

- Are certain materials characteristic?
- Is the form and proportion of buildings more important than materials?
- How are modern materials used and could they be used more effectively?

Proportion and Detail

- What are the proportions and detail of buildings?
- Are there distinctive noticeable features, such as windows, rooflines doors, chimneys, gable ends etc?

Street Furniture

- What is the street furniture like - is it suburban in character or does it maintain local distinctiveness?

Design and the Local Community

- 4.6 Village character and design can influence and improve the sense of community. For example does a village have a centre or a core where people tend to meet and is centre of activity?
- 4.7 Another issue for consideration will be the design of affordable homes that fit in with local character and provide quality homes for young local people. What should the design of this type of housing take into consideration and how could it be integrated into existing village character?
- 4.8 Village Design Statements can also consider ways to stimulate the local rural economy in support of the recently adopted Economic Development Strategy. The local community may wish to see new development designed in ways that respect local character, as well as contributing the rural economy and providing some local employment - it may be the regeneration of buildings for small rural businesses. What would be the most suitable nature and design of this type of development and how should it harmonise with local characteristics. The consultation on the draft SPD for the reuse of Rural Buildings provides more advice on these issues.
- 4.9 The VDS could help to influence traffic management in the village. Does the village have a problem with road traffic? The VDS could, for example, assist in influencing the style of speed restraint measures by promoting changes to the run of the carriageway in keeping with the local appearance. Are there convenient methods of transport available to the village other than the motor car? The VDS could also help to promote the use of alternative transport.
- 4.10 There much a village can offer towards being sensitive to the environment including some factors that may not be immediately obvious to the eye. Initiatives to help reduce the impact of the development on the surrounding environment include the use of sustainable construction techniques (energy and water efficient installations, use of renewable and recycled materials), the encouragement of sustainable urban drainage systems (locating control measures for surface water drainage as close as possible to its source), and community recycling facilities. The consideration of these factors could be fed into the VDS.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Not adopting a robust SPD could increase costs as a result of the need to defend planning appeals that are likely to be pursued if applications are refused in the absence of a robust policy background.

6. IMPACT ON EFFICIENCIES

6.1 Not adopting VDS as SPD could lead to an increased workload in defending planning appeals as set out above that could impact on the ability of the Council to deliver other priorities.

7. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS (INCLUDING REASONS FOR REJECTION)

7.1 The alternative option is not to consult upon the VDS. This should be rejected since this would decrease the weight attached to the document and give the Council less to influence applications within the villages. If proper consultation is not undertaken on the SPD in accordance with Government Policy then the weight that can be attached to it in considering applications will be severely weakened. This would not be in the interests of the district and its communities.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Key decision (yes / no)	No
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact is more than £50,000 in revenue expenditure • Impact is more than £250,000 in capital expenditure • Impact is more than £5m Treasury Management investment of reserves • Will have a significant impact on communities, usually in two or more wards in the district 	
Forward Plan/Urgency	No
Links to corporate priorities and policy framework	<p>This report is relevant to the Council's corporate priorities, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority 2 "To preserve what is special in South Northamptonshire" -- (Objective 1: to ensure the Local Development Framework respects our local communities and the character of our villages and countryside) and • Priority 5: "To be known as a Council that protects the vulnerable" -- (Objective 1: To provide high quality local housing appropriate to the needs of all groups and supporting the needs of key workers).
Risk management implications	Each VDS will be scrutinised as part of the consultation. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that is robust if an Inspector were to determine the document to be unsound it will need to be re-considered.
Consultation undertaken	The villages concerned
Equalities and diversity implications	None

Human rights implications	None at this stage. Any specific implications arising from individual developments will be considered as part of the determination of the application
Crime and disorder implications	None at this stage. Any specific implications arising from individual developments will be considered as part of the determination of the application
Biodiversity implications	None at this stage. Any specific implications arising from individual developments will be considered as part of the determination of the application

8. FORWARD PLAN/URGENCY (KEY DECISIONS ONLY)

8.1 Not applicable

Name Adrian Colwell
Title Head of Strategic Policy
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Background Papers:

Contact Officer(s): Andy D'Arcy – Lead Officer Planning Policy