An Introduction to Village Design Statements

Many people feel that they have no say over what development takes place in their community; but Village Design Statements (VDSs) offer a constructive solution to this dilemma.

Local communities have a unique appreciation and understanding of their own place, and a VDS is based on this knowledge. It describes the qualities that residents value in their village and its surroundings. Around 200 English communities have completed Design Statements to date.

A Village Design Statement sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in a village, based on its character. It is an advisory document produced by the village community, not by the planning authority. It will not stop change from happening, but it can help effect how any new building fits in to the village. VDSs are intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system, so that new development is in harmony with its setting and makes a positive contribution to the immediate environment.

What does a VDS cover?

- It describes the distinctive character of a village and its surrounding countryside;
- It shows 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;
- A VDS sets down design principles based on the distinctive local character;
- Production of a Statement fosters working in partnership with the local authority, engenders understanding of current planning policies, and offers the chance to influence future policies.

Design Statements have been completed by villages in all parts of England - from Cumbria to Cornwall, and from Shropshire to Suffolk. They are of value to residents, planners, designers and developers. There should be broad involvement of local interests so that the finished design statement is a representative document, and one that presents ideas for stimulating and sustaining community involvement in planning issues. It is important that the parish council, plus planning authority councillors and officers are drawn in to the VDS process. Preparing a Village Design Statement doesn’t demand design or planning knowledge - the only requirement is an interest in the future well-being of your village. But it will need time, energy, imagination and determination!

An effective Village Design Statement:

- is developed, researched, written and edited by local people;
- reflects the representative views of a community;
- involves a wide cross-section of residents 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 its local application;
- should be accepted as supplementary planning guidance (and thereby influence developers and decisions on individual planning applications);
- is relevant to all forms and scale of development, and
- is about managing change in the village, not preventing it.

A Village Design Statement is unlike any other planning document. It gives planning advice directly applicable to the statutory planning system and is entirely community based.
Using the support of other policies to give strength to the VDS

COMMUNITY ACTION
Village Design Statement

LOCAL PLANNING
Local Plan Policies, Countryside Design Summary, or Design Guidance

STRATEGIC PLANNING
County Structure Plan

GOVERNMENT POLICY
Planning Policy Guidance Notes

STATUTE
Town & Country Planning Act 1991