

Village, Town and Parish Design Statements in West Berkshire

What is a village, town or parish design statement?

A parish, town or village design statement (VDS) is a community led document which is intended to influence the operation of the statutory planning system. A VDS should describe the distinctive visual qualities and characteristics of a particular area and set out clear design guidance for any future development in it. It cannot be used to stop new development, but it can be used to influence developers and ensure that new buildings respect and reflect existing local character.

What should a VDS include?

- A description of the visual character of an area in terms of:
 - Its setting in the landscape
 - The form of the settlement as a whole
 - The characteristics and details of the buildings and spaces within the locality
- A number of design principles (based on local character and sense of place) to guide future development, whether that be a group of buildings on a new site or an extension or alterations to an existing property.

What status does it have in planning terms?

If it is adopted by West Berkshire Council (WBC) a VDS will support existing planning policies in the West Berkshire Local Plan¹ and, where appropriate, will be used as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The West Berkshire Core Strategy 2006-2026 (adopted July 2012)² makes clear that:

'It is essential that as the landscape evolves in a holistic way it also reflects the value that the public places on it. The Council actively encourages the production of non-statutory community planning documents such as town and village design statements and where they have been adopted by the Council will use them to inform and support the policies contained within this Core Strategy and other subsequent Development Plan Documents (DPDs).' (para 5.140)

Policy CS19 in particular states that

'proposals for development should be informed by and respond to:.....features identified in various settlement character studies including community planning documents which have been adopted by the Council such astown and village design statements.'

In addition, Policy CS14 states that

¹ <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/localplan>

² <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/corestrategy>

'New development must demonstrate high quality and sustainable design that respects and enhances the character and appearance of the area, and makes a positive contribution to the quality of life in West Berkshire. Good design relates not only to the appearance of a development, but the way in which it functions. Considerations of design and layout must be informed by the wider context, having regard not just to the immediate area, but to the wider locality. Development shall contribute positively to local distinctiveness and sense of place...'

The Core Strategy also makes clear that

'.....Town and Village Design Statements ... provide a more detailed local context for the consideration of development and should be taken into account as material considerations.' (para 5.93)

An adopted VDS will also complement the guidance contained in the Quality Design – West Berkshire Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (adopted June 2006)³. This was produced to help developers to create places of high quality design which are sustainable, secure and accessible to all. It places particular emphasis on understanding context, as a full appreciation of the overall site and surrounding area is essential as a starting point for creating a sense of place.

What is the process involved?

It will be particularly important to show that a VDS:

- has been produced in consultation with the local community and stakeholders, including statutory consultees;
- conforms with Local Plan policies; and
- has been adopted by WBC.

A community group wanting to produce a VDS should therefore follow the procedure outlined below:

- contact the Planning Policy team for some initial guidance;
- produce draft VDS with the involvement of a wide cross-section of the local community;
- agree a final draft VDS with the Planning Policy team (in writing);
- Undertake 'formal' consultation for 6 weeks where the VDS group consult with the local community and the Planning Policy team consult with relevant stakeholders & statutory consultees;
- Make appropriate amendments to VDS in conjunction with the Planning Policy team;
- Present the final VDS to the Council for adoption as an Individual Executive Member decision.

Further information

For further information please contact the Planning Policy team on planningpolicy@westberks.gov.uk or tel: 01635 519111.

³ <http://www.westberks.gov.uk/spg>