

An Easy Guide to producing a Village Design Statement for communities within the National Park

1. What is a Village Design Statement?

- A Village Design Statement (VDS) is a means by which the local community can influence the design of new buildings, and help to ensure they add to the character and distinctiveness of the area.
- A Village Design Statement should include:
 - **A brief description of the character of the village, especially those aspects that make it locally distinctive.** Particular attention should be given to the character of the settlements and buildings, although special features of the landscape and land uses may also be included.
 - **A set of guidelines suggesting how any new development should be designed in order to complement or improve the character of the area.** The guidelines should add local detail to planning guidance (such as the Design Guide for the National Park), but not replace or contradict existing planning policies.
 - **The involvement and support of the whole community.**
- A Village Design Statement is not intended to be the same as a Parish Plan or Neighbourhood Plan and therefore does not cover every aspect of village life or specify the location and extent of development. It is instead primarily focused on ensuring the appropriate design of new development.
- Village Design Statements need not be time-consuming to produce, and the National Park Authority strongly encourages communities to produce a short, concise Statement, ideally no more than about a dozen pages long, with clear guidelines for planners, developers and local people.

2. The status of a VDS

- A VDS may be formally adopted by the local planning authority as a Supplementary Planning Document following statutory public consultation. The VDS guidelines can then be used by the National Park Authority, together with other relevant planning policies and guidance, to help determine planning applications within the parish.

3. What should the VDS contain?

A simple format for the contents of the VDS is suggested below. This is designed to focus effort on the critical aspects of the VDS and ensure it is an easy to use practical guide.

Introduction

- The purpose of a VDS
- Who produced it
- How people were consulted

The village context

- A brief description of the parish as a whole (where it is, population, topography, main land uses)
- Location map showing settlements and main features (eg woodland, SSSIs, Conservation Areas etc)
- How the settlement pattern has evolved over time

The character of the landscape

Distinctive features that may be affected by development, including:

- Landscape types and landmarks
- Important hedgerows and trees
- Watercourses
- Protected habitats
- Important views

The character of the built environment

Distinctive features that should be taken into account in designing new development, including:

- Building types and layouts
- Materials and features
- Property boundaries
- Important buildings
- Landscaping and street trees

Design guidelines

A list of guidelines which are planning-related, following from the bullet points under landscape and built environment above. These should include some justification and be framed as helpful guidance rather than be overly-prescriptive or regulatory.

Recommendations

Additional suggestions for conserving the distinctive character of the village, which are not directly planning-related.

It is suggested that in most circumstances the aim should be to keep the VDS to about 12 pages or so in length, concentrating particularly on the sections covering (a) the character of the built environment and (b) the design guidelines.

4. Producing the document

4.1 Getting started

- Look at the planning policies and guidance in the National Park Authority's Core Strategy and Design Guide, and decide whether these already adequately cover design issues in your parish.
- Discuss initial ideas with officers at the National Park Authority.

- Set up a small steering group of about 6 – 10 people, including a mix of parish councillors and members of the local community.
- Produce a short project plan with any costs, and assign roles for steering group.

4.2 Involving others

- Make sure the wider community and the parish council are aware of the VDS, support the principle of producing one, and are kept involved during its production, for instance by:
 - Information in the parish newsletter or on the website
 - Canvassing local views at key stages in the production
 - Consultation on an early draft, before the document is completed
 - Gaining parish council approval for the final draft
- Include the National Park Authority in steering group meetings – this will be important if the VDS is to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document

4.3 Writing and designing the VDS

- Different people may be involved in researching different sections of the VDS. However it is helpful to agree one overall editor or writer to pull together the work, keep it to a reasonable length and make sure it reads as a single document.
- In terms of the design of the document it is suggested that initially a very simple computer programme / format is used (eg Word), which will enable:
 - easy revisions to the text and photos
 - an easily photocopied draft for consultation purposes
- The final version of the document should be compatible with programmes used by professional printers (check with a printing company at an early stage), assuming printed copies are required. The VDS steering group will be responsible for commissioning any design work and printing, but the National Park Authority may be able to assist with costs (see below).

5. Funding

- Subject to resources, the National Park Authority may be able to contribute towards the costs of producing the VDS relating to consultation, design or production. It may also be able to supply specific maps needed for the document.

6. Adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document

There is a formal process for the adoption of the VDS as a Supplementary Planning Document, as outlined overleaf.

Process for adoption of Village Design Statements by the New Forest National Park Authority

Involve officers from the National Park Authority throughout the process
*They can offer advice on the structure and content of the VDS
and may be able to help with maps and funding.*



Make sure it is clear that the VDS guidelines are consistent with and supplement specific policies contained in the Core Strategy and the Design Guide for the National Park
This will be important if the VDS is to be adopted formally as a Supplementary Planning Document.



Involve the local community in producing the VDS, and agree the final draft of the VDS with the parish council and National Park Authority



National Park Authority to check if a Habitats Regulations Assessment is required
This is unlikely to be the case, and will only be needed if the VDS may have a significant impact on European Sites of nature conservation importance.



Formal consultation by the National Park Authority (for four to six weeks)
This is a required part of the adoption process, over and above local public consultation that may already have taken place in producing the VDS. It will involve sending copies to statutory consultees, local organisations and businesses, and include advertisements in local newspapers.



Analysis of consultation comments
The National Park Authority will look at the comments received and discuss how to address them with the VDS steering group and parish council.



ADOPTION BY THE NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY
The National Park Authority will be asked to formally adopt the VDS as a Supplementary Planning Document, with any amendments resulting from the consultation. Once adopted, the VDS will form part of the Authority's Local Development Framework and will be a material planning consideration.



FINAL PUBLICATION AND DISTRIBUTION
As a paper copy and website version, available from the steering group, parish council and National Park Authority.