

# **VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENTS INFORMATION PACK**

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## Introduction

The Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE) was established in 1929 as a registered charity which aims to improve and enhance the quality of life for those who live and work in the rural areas of Essex. It encourages self-help community projects and speaks out to the relevant authorities on issues that matter to people living in rural Essex.

The work of the Rural Community Council of Essex is based on enabling communities to become strong, active and empowered, capable of doing things for themselves – defining the problems they face and then tackling them together. The preservation of local character can be achieved through the preparation of a Village Design Statement (VDS). The VDS will assess local opinion and include guidelines for further development. VDS were originally piloted by the Countryside Commission in the mid 1990s and have continued to be a useful tool in the planning system.

**This Pack** provides information and advice on how to produce a Village Design Statement. VDS have been prepared by towns and villages in Essex for many years and there are examples from across the county (see Community Led Planning pages on [www.essexrcc.org.uk](http://www.essexrcc.org.uk)).

Assistance, advice and support is available at all stages of your VDS. Please contact your community engagement officer at the Rural Community Council of Essex at the address below for further information:

Rural Community Council of Essex  
Threshelfords Business Park  
Inworth Road  
Feering  
Essex CO5 9SE

Tel: 01376 574330  
Fax: 01376 573524  
email: [enquiries@essexrcc.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@essexrcc.org.uk)

## **Partner organisations in the Essex Community Led Planning Network**

Braintree District Council

Brentwood District Council

Chelmsford Borough Council

Colchester Borough Council

Council for the Protection of Rural Essex

Epping Forest District Council

Essex Association of Local Councils

Essex County Council

Maldon District Council

Planning Aid

Rochford District Council

Rural Community Council of Essex

Tendring District Council

Uttlesford District Council

## What is a Village Design Statement?

A Village Design Statement (VDS) gives a detailed description of the existing character and main features of design in the village and guidelines for how this should be respected in any new development. It identifies the physical qualities and characteristics of the village and its surroundings that are valued by local people and the aspects they would like to conserve and protect. It is an advisory document for planners, designers, developers and local people. There is wide involvement in its production so that the finished VDS represents the views of the village as a whole. If it meets the requirements of the local authority, it can be suitable for use as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications (see page 4).

The distinctive local character is identified at three levels

- the village in its countryside or landscape setting,
- the form of the settlement as a whole,
- the characteristics of the buildings and spaces within the village.

The historical aspects and growth of the village over the centuries should be understood in terms of the influence that the past has had on its present character but the village's history should not be allowed to dominate the VDS.

The VDS should be considered within the context of the Local Development Framework to see which issues and recommendations are appropriate to planning policy. Discussions are likely to arise about issues which are not capable of inclusion in the VDS, for example, leisure facilities, village services, traffic volumes, employment, health etc. These are all important issues and relevant to the quality of life of the community but only their impact on the character and future development of the village should be included in the VDS. The "non design" issues can be notified to the Parish Council which might have to refer some of them to another body such as the highways authority, environmental health or social services. The Parish Council may already be aware of these issues but the concerns raised will indicate the strength of feeling in the community. Some villages have tackled social and economic issues affecting village life in a Parish Plan resulting from a Village Appraisal or Participatory Survey. Information about Parish Plans is available from your RCCE community engagement officer.

It may be helpful to focus on the following:

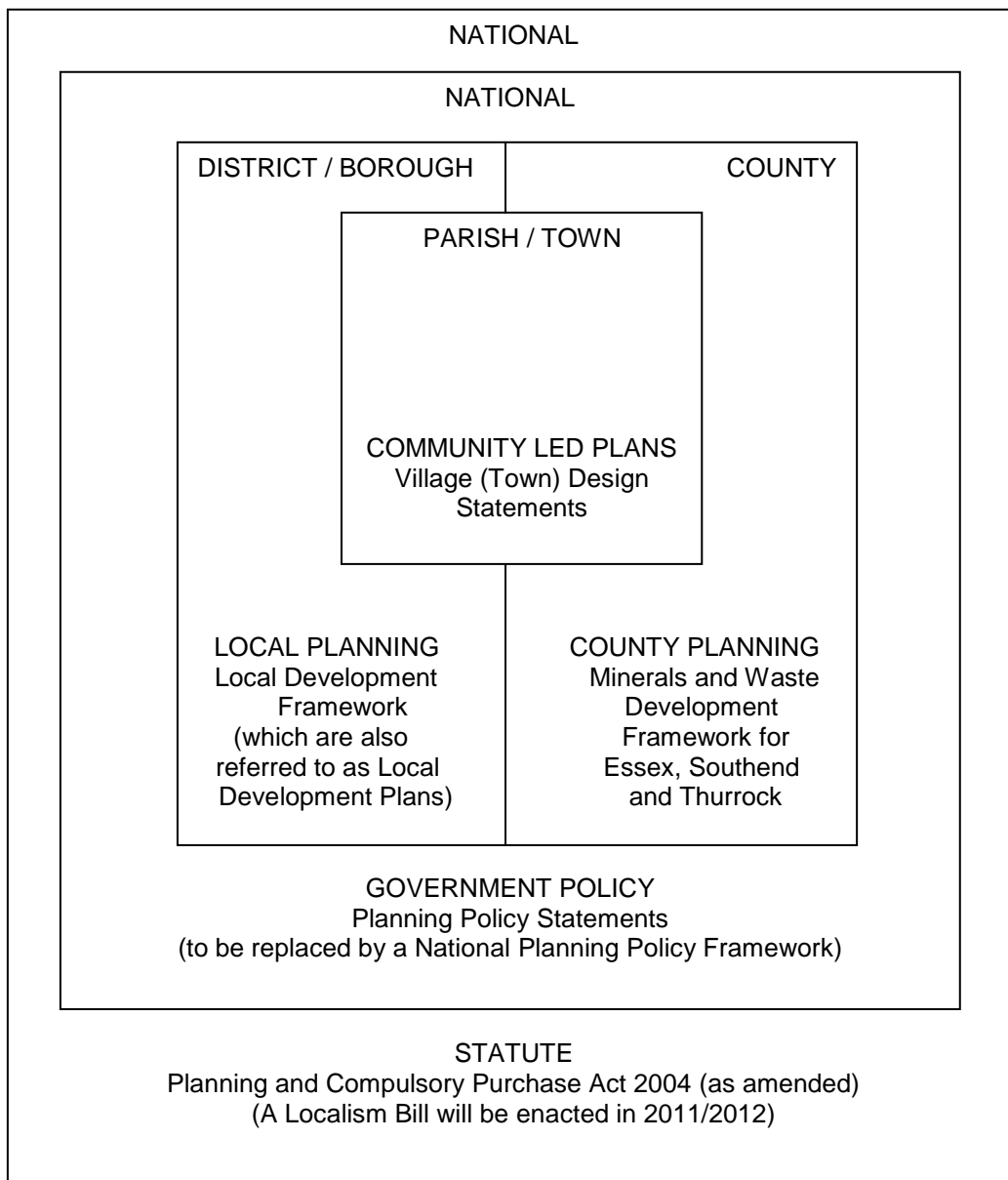
The VDS is a *planning tool* to manage change. It expands on existing local plan policies – it cannot create new local plan policy;

- It should describe the *visual character* of the village
- It is *not* an appraisal of social or economic issues.
- It is *not* a history project.

## A Village Design Statement within the planning process

A Village Design Statement (VDS) can influence the way the planning system operates locally through its approval as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Approval by the local planning authority will only be possible if the VDS is compatible with the statutory planning system and the local planning context.

The spatial planning system is hierarchical; policies at a higher level are given 'primacy' and plans at a lower level have to 'nest within' those at a higher level as summarised below. Further details about the Planning Framework are included in Appendix 5. A planning officer will be able to provide expertise at key stages of the VDS process to ensure it will work effectively within the planning system. The planning officer is there to advise you but should not be asked, or indeed allowed, to write the VDS on your behalf.



## Why do a Village Design Statement?

A certain amount of new development is desirable for a living countryside. One role of a Village Design Statement (VDS) is to show how new development and changes that are acceptable in principle can be accommodated to fit its location and respect local character. In this way a VDS can be a positive influence on development, giving local people a recognised voice in the planning system rather than having to rely on protest to make their views heard.

For the majority of rural settlements the design guidance available sets out general principles for layout and design but does not deal with specific local character. The Essex Design Guide, published in 1997 by the Essex Planning Officers Association, provides guidance about characteristics to be found in Essex and how, in general terms, new development should harmonise with these. The VDS will further refine the design guidance to make it appropriate to your village.

If approved for use as a material consideration, a VDS can

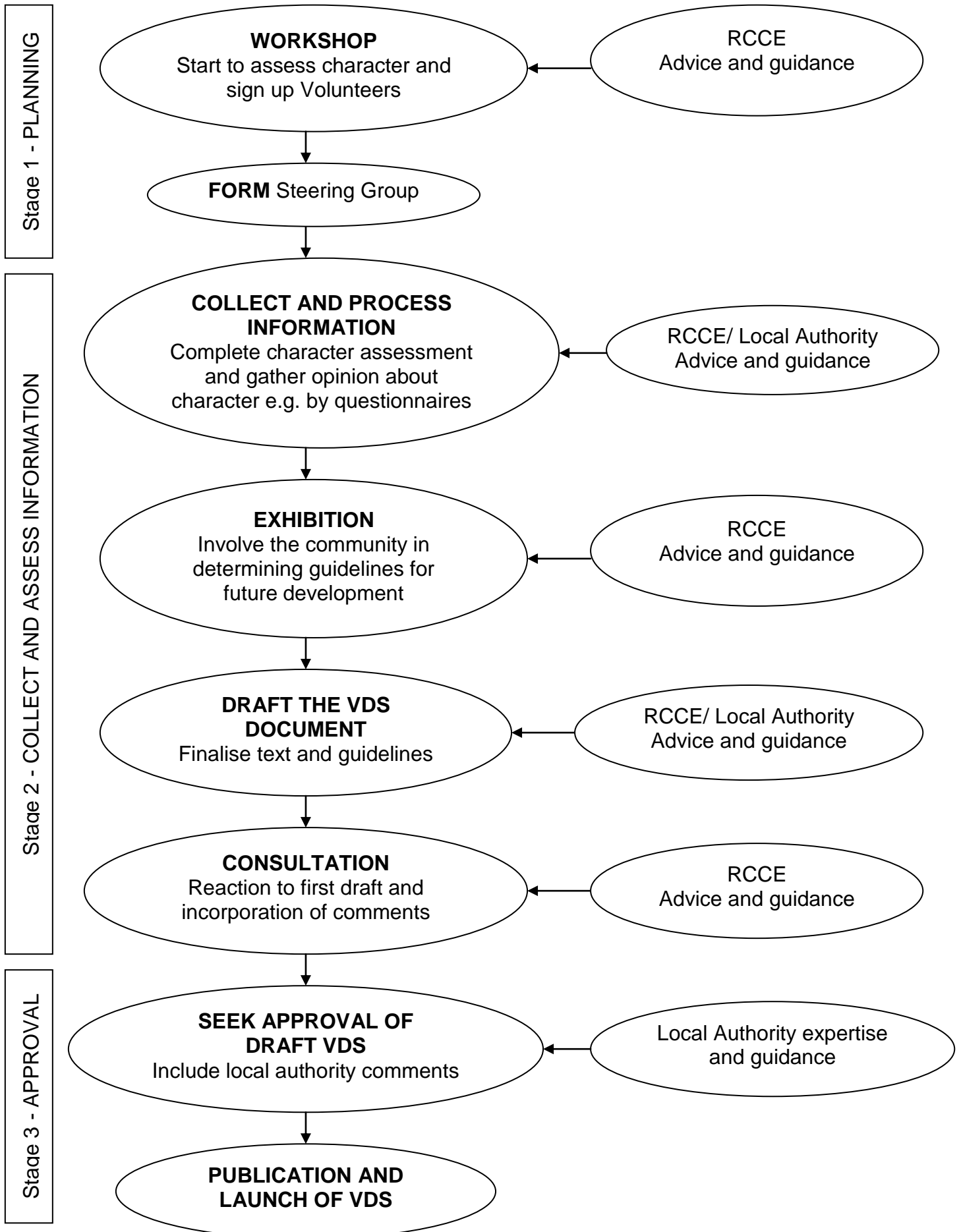
- give designers and developers positive guidance on acceptable design from the communities point of view which can help avoid conflict later on in later planning negotiations.
- improve design in rural areas by being applied consistently in the development control process. It becomes part of the planning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

Without approval, a VDS can still be used but its effectiveness will be considerably reduced. A VDS cannot prevent development from taking place - the question of whether development should be permitted is a matter for the local planning authority in implementing the policies in its Local Development Framework.

Some development does not require specific planning permission (see Appendix 5 – Permitted Development) and the VDS can be a vehicle that offers advice on permitted development. However, an important point to note is that these permitted developments cannot be controlled by the content of the VDS (see Appendix 5 – Article 4 directions). The cumulative impact of minor changes can sometimes have as much effect on local character as new, larger developments. Local people, by being involved in carrying out the work for the VDS, become aware that they have a responsibility for safeguarding the village identity in the small-scale developments for which they as householders are responsible. The VDS encourages them to conserve local character when making alterations to their properties (e.g. extensions, a new porch, changes to windows). The VDS demonstrates local commitment to high quality design and appropriate development that will improve the village environment.

Producing a VDS can establish better understanding between the community, the local planning authority, designers and developers. It will also strengthen and support the role of the parish council when consulted over planning applications and can be used as material evidence at appeals.

## A Village Design Statement Flow Chart





## How to carry out a Village Design Statement

From the many examples of completed VDS, it is clear that communities have adopted different approaches and methods in producing the final document.

This pack outlines best practice to produce a good quality VDS suitable for approval by the local authorities in Essex. It is recommended that the broad framework of this pack is followed although accepted that some of the stages may need to be adapted to suit local circumstances.

The primary requirements are that the VDS is

- compatible with the planning process
- representative of the views of the whole community

Consultation is a priority and needs to be undertaken from the outset. More consultation will give greater weight to the final document. A high level of response is desirable but it is unrealistic to expect 100% participation. The important factor is that everyone in the community is given the opportunity to contribute to, and get involved in, every stage of the process. It is essential that the information circulated and events organised are recorded in a "VDS Community Diary" as evidence of full consultation (see Appendix 3). Keep copies of posters, letters, magazine articles, drafts distributed etc, and record dates and details of events, lists and numbers of groups and individuals invited, attending and responding / making comments.

It is important that publicity is organised throughout the process to maintain public interest. The community must be kept informed of progress to ensure continuing support and enthusiasm.

The VDS process can be summarised in four main stages:

STAGE 1 – Planning	Steps 1 to 4
STAGE 2 – Collect and Assess Information	Steps 5 to 8
STAGE 3 – Approval and Production	Steps 9 & 10
STAGE 4 – Partnership	Steps 11 & 12

The length of time taken to complete the process will be determined by the community and will depend to a large extent on other commitments of the volunteers. The average VDS takes about 18-24 months to complete but it is important not to rush through it. It is an influential document and each stage deserves careful consideration. It may be useful to think about the timing of the initial workshop and the character assessment stages, bearing in mind that there is a better impression of the built form in the winter months and of landscape setting in the summer months. You may decide to undertake the character assessment over an extended period and thereby increase your timescale.

## **An effective Village Design Statement...**

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 use as a material consideration in the  
determination of planning applications

is applicable to all forms and scale of development

is about managing change in the village, not preventing it

(Village Design – CCP 501)

## **STEP 1 – ORGANISE WORKSHOP**

An event or meeting of some kind is needed to initiate the Village Design Statement (VDS) and get the process underway. A small team (4 to 8 people) will be needed to make local arrangements for this event (publicity and invitations, booking the venue, organising refreshments etc) although wider community involvement will be necessary as the project progresses. A more representative steering group will usually be formed after the initial event. It is important to secure the support of the parish council at the outset and that the team includes at least one councillor; the parish council will be the organisation ultimately responsible for using the VDS and monitoring its effectiveness. Other local groups who show an interest in, and comment on, planning applications should also be involved, e.g. members of a local history or preservation group.

The purposes of the initial event are to gather information about local character, and to sign up volunteers to take the process forward; the recommended type of event is a photographic workshop (see Appendix 1 for details). RCCE's Community Led Planning support package can include community engagement officer time to facilitate this event is required.

Whenever an event is organised, a risk assessment of the venue and activities should be undertaken (see example in Appendix 3).

It is useful to find out in advance about planning policies that currently affect your village. The local authority planning officer can advise on policies in respect of the future development in the area, for example whether a particular village is identified for future growth, whether it is protected from growth and also what actual development has been committed. When starting your VDS project it is important to be aware of the constraints and opportunities.

You will also need to find out the level of assistance that may be available throughout the project. Guidance on the support from different organisations is included in Appendix 2. The local authority planning officer is unlikely to be able to attend meetings, but will provide assistance at key stages as shown in the flowchart on page 6.

It is recommended that you contact your local authority at the start of the process to establish a working relationship. Your RCCE community engagement officer will be able to provide contact details.

The local authority may be able to provide you with maps although for some authorities there are copyright implications and there may be a charge.

## **STEP 2 – FORM STEERING GROUP**

The initiating team will need to invite all those who volunteered themselves at the workshop to a meeting. The aims of this meeting are to agree the structure / type of the group, elect officers and allocate tasks (an example agenda is overleaf). There is a lot of information to absorb and sometimes it takes two or three meetings to achieve these aims.

It is recommended that the group is structured so that working groups undertake the various tasks (listed on the agenda overleaf) with a representative from each reporting to a core steering group. This structure will obviously depend on total numbers of volunteers wishing to be involved in the VDS project – in a small group, one person may do several tasks. It is suggested that the core group is between 5 and 9 people. The role of the core steering group is to keep the process on track and be responsible for timescale and funding. The working groups will be responsible for the detailed processes.

The group needs to consider how it wishes to be established, either as a sub group of the parish council with a working agreement / terms of reference, or as a separate new group with its own constitution and bank account. The decision will usually depend on local perception of / relationships with the parish council, and whether a volunteer treasurer is forthcoming. Your RCCE community engagement officer can provide further information about the types of group and sample documents.

The last item on the agenda is to set a date for the next meeting of the core steering group and agree the business of that meeting. It may be helpful to set a rough agenda for that next meeting to include any business not completed at the first meeting and also to take reports from the working groups that have been formed. The working groups can then arrange their own meetings, knowing what tasks they are expected to have completed by the next core steering group meeting.

..... **VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT**  
**First meeting of Steering Group**

... date ...

**AGENDA**

1. Introductions
2. The Village Design Statement process
3. Allocation of responsibilities / formation of working groups
  - Completion of Character Assessment
  - Adult Questionnaire )
  - Youth Questionnaire )and processing
  - Distribution and Collection of Questionnaires
  - Publicity and Information
  - Constitution and Project Plan (timescale)
  - Funding applications
  - Diary of Community Involvement
  - Volunteer Time records
  - Exhibition
  - Preparing the VDS document
4. Election of Officers of the Steering Group
  - Chairman
  - Treasurer
  - Secretary
  - Reps from working groups
5. Dates of next meetings
  - Steering group
  - Working groups (can arrange separately)

## **STEP 3 – CONSIDER TIMESCALE**

It will be necessary to draw up a timescale for the project. The first tasks of the VDS project are to complete the character assessment and to survey opinion about local character. These tasks are often best undertaken in the warmer, lighter months.

Character assessments, where maps and clipboards are taken outside, are better done in warmer months.

Questionnaires are less successful if distributed during dark evenings or holiday periods. The best distribution months are April to June, and September to October.

Workshops in schools need to be in term time – some terms are busier than others for teaching staff (e.g. run up to Christmas with school plays etc).

Decide when you will be undertaking the character assessments and surveys and build your timescale around that, allowing yourselves enough time for preparation. Where visiting other organisations (e.g. schools, youth groups) to gather information, schedule in time to plan the session with teachers / leaders. Build in at least 2 months for formulation of questionnaires, which always take longer than expected, and also allow plenty of time for processing, particularly if being undertaken by volunteers.

At the drawing up proposals stage, allow plenty of time for comment from the local planning authority, and time for negotiation on specific wording of guidelines.

Bear in mind that it may be difficult to contact people and complete tasks during July, August and December as they are busy months socially.

The whole process usually takes between 18 months and 2 years.

## STEP 4 – CONSIDER FUNDING

A budget will need to be prepared for the project. First estimate the expenditure - consider the tasks and stages of the time plan and consider the costs of each task. Build some flexibility into your cost estimates to cover contingencies.

Costs may include

- hire of meeting halls
- publicity materials
- printing and processing of questionnaires
- materials for exhibitions
- publishing the final document

Consider the cost of training and professional support for your VDS project. RCCE provides information packs free of charge and a support service throughout your VDS project is available through the Community Led Planning Network for an annual membership fee of £35. The benefits of becoming a Community Led Planning Network member are set out on the RCCE website. RCCE can also be contracted to provide additional professional support (e.g. facilitation and processing of a community consultation event or a school workshop) if these tasks cannot be undertaken by volunteers. Contact your RCCE community engagement officer for information and costs.

Work out a fundraising plan to provide income to cover all your costs. This may include fundraising events, sponsorship, help 'in kind' (photocopying by local businesses etc), requests for funding from the parish council and local authority and other grant funding applications.

Also consider the value of volunteer time as this is a 'hidden cost' of your VDS. Most grant funders require 'match funding' as your contribution to the project; this is usually a mix of cash and a volunteer time value. If you are applying for grants you will therefore need to estimate the number of volunteer days to be spent on the VDS and include this in your applications. It is important to record volunteer time as evidence for the funding body (see Appendix 3).

Bear the following in mind when making grant fund applications:-

- Grants will not usually cover expenditure incurred before the application.
- Small Grants will often have restrictions on the timescale of spending e.g. needs to be spent within one year or needs to be spent by 31<sup>st</sup> March. Your most significant cost (publication of reports) is incurred towards the end of the project so timing of applications is important.
- Some funders operate several grant schemes but will not usually make multiple awards for the same project.

A sample budget for a VDS is shown overleaf.





## **STEP 5 – COLLECT INFORMATION**

This ‘survey stage’ is very important as the information collected will form the basis of the VDS. Various types of information need to be gathered and assessed:

- Local planning policy and relevant development information
- A character assessment of the village / town
- Views and opinions about local character and future design aspirations

### **Local planning policy and relevant development information**

You will need to be aware of local planning policies, design guidance and development control issues relevant to the area. It will be useful for the group to have the following marked on maps of the parish; Village Envelope, Conservation Area, Listed buildings, Tree Preservation Orders (TPO’s), Statutory allotments, Flood plains etc. The local authority planning officer will also be able to advise if there are any committed and planned developments, highways proposals etc. All of this information can help the group to consider:

- What needs conserving and protecting?
- What opportunities exist for change/improvement?
- What constraints exist?

### **A character assessment of the village / town**

The initial workshop will have produced the first shared views of the character of the village and ideas to form an outline character assessment. Hopefully those who attended the workshop will want to remain involved in the project and complete the character assessment. Appendix 4 contains suggestions on how to organise the character assessment under broad headings.

### **Views and opinions about local character and future design aspirations**

The workshop will also have highlighted the elements of character that are valued and opportunities for improvements which will provide a focus for the surveys. Detailed guidance on undertaking surveys is contained in the RCCE Information Pack “Involving the Community in your Project”, including advice on questionnaire design, use of maps and models, and running workshops.

For VDS projects, a questionnaire is recommended in all but the largest parishes (i.e. up to 5,000 population). This at least provides an opportunity for all residents in the parish to have a say in the process but the larger the population, the greater the burden on volunteers to deliver and collect questionnaires. For parishes of more than 5,000 population, participatory methods using maps and models may be more suitable. Your RCCE community engagement officer can advise on appropriate survey methods.

Below are some general notes about surveys.

#### **Response rate**

Publicity is important to encourage people to respond. Consider incentives such as a prize draw to increase the response rate. Make sure that local people know when the survey is taking place and that their opinion is valued. If using a questionnaire to gather information, let people know where they can

post their completed form if they miss the collection. In some circumstances it may be appropriate to provide pre-paid envelopes for return of surveys. Make it easy for people to respond and for their views and opinions to be included.

#### Inclusion

Remember that questionnaires are suitable for literate adults but may exclude others from taking part. Your survey stage will need to have a selection of methods to involve specific groups. It is essential to involve young people.

#### Visiting venues

When visiting a venue to undertake a survey e.g. sheltered accommodation, gypsy site, school, etc always make advance arrangements. For schools this will often mean a pre-meeting to establish the length of the session and learning objectives for the pupils.

At this step the steering group concentrates on collecting background information, assessing the character of the village and gathering views and opinions about the possibilities or options arising from that evaluation. It makes no proposals or recommendations about the future development of the village. These will start to be explored during the next step, the exhibition.

The workshop and character assessment are likely to generate lots of comments and discussions that extend beyond definition and description of village character. Not all of the comments will be relevant to the VDS (some will be more appropriate to a Parish Plan appraisal and action plan) but should all be noted as valid opinions relating to the quality of life of the village. The steering group will need to consider at a later date how it wishes to record these comments (Step 9, page 22 – Prepare VDS) and if further action should be taken (Step 11, page 24 – Working in partnership).

## STEP 6 – EXHIBITION

The steering group needs to ascertain whether its assessment of village character accurately reflect the views and opinions of the wider community and to open discussions on proposals for future development / conservation of the village. As the information relates to visual character it lends itself well to an exhibition.

Publicity for the exhibition is very important. It is essential to make local people aware that the exhibition is part of the process of preparing a VDS and is open to everyone, not just those who attended the workshop. Publicity should be directed at all sectors of the community by including articles in the village magazine, distributing posters and visiting local schools, churches and community groups. Also send press releases and photographs to the local papers.

A profile of those attending the exhibition will need to be recorded (by using Booking-in Sheets as with the workshop) and details need to be included in the VDS Community Diary.

**The purpose of the exhibition** is to present the information collected at step 5 and to gather comments on possible proposals / guidelines for future development. It is suggested that displays comprise:

- questionnaire responses;
- short paragraphs of character description text with relevant photographs and drawings to illustrate features / characteristics to which they relate;
- maps showing how local planning policy protects the village and the opportunities within those constraints.
- where there are opportunities for change, it may be beneficial to prepare a number of optional proposals and present the alternatives to the community for consultation.

One or more of the following methods can be used to obtain feedback from the community:

- A feedback form or questionnaire for completion during the exhibition (examples overleaf). Great care must be taken to ensure that questions are neither leading nor ambiguous.
- Voting on the displays themselves using sticky dots (examples overleaf).
- Suggestion cards or comment flags relating to development placed on a map of the village (examples overleaf).
- Post-it notes to enable comments to be added to the exhibition material.
- Graffiti wall (a communal sheet of paper inviting anonymous comments).
- Comment box (anonymous comments to be posted on sheets of paper).

It is important that the community feel able to record their opinions anonymously. Your RCCE community engagement officer will be able to advise you on community involvement methods.

Comments gathered at the exhibition, including minority opinions and areas where there are conflicting viewpoints, should be reported back to the community in a newsletter or through the village magazine to keep everyone informed.

Following the exhibition, the character assessment can be finalised to reflect the views of the community and the group will have some information to begin formulating proposals for the VDS.

## EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS

1. The display shows that the following have been suggested as (natural/built) features visually important to local character (in ..... area of the village). Please rank in order of importance to you as a resident. (1 = highest, 6 = lowest)  
*(list features shown on the display)*
2. Which local characteristics should be protected/conserved? Tick all that apply/Rank preferences.  
*(list characteristics shown on the display)*
3. Which of the following types of development/changes are damaging to local character? Tick all that apply/Rank in order of importance  
*(list type of development and effect on character)*
4. The following areas have been identified on the display as having opportunities for change. Please tick those that you would like to see changed and indicate what type of change.  
*(list areas)*

## EXAMPLES OF VOTING

Early suggestions of guidelines, based on the questionnaire responses, can be listed on the left hand side of a large print grid with columns to the right for sticking coloured dots as a way of registering votes e.g. strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. It is advisable to control the numbers of dots distributed at the entrance. There may be occasions when different coloured dots would be given to those attending, to see if opinion differs between age groups or across different parts of the parish.

## HOW TO USE A MAP AND CARDS/COMMENT FLAGS

Stick a map (1:1250 scale) on foam board and mark relevant planning boundaries on it (village envelope, conservation area etc). Use colours and shading to indicate the different areas and notation to describe limitation on development, degree of protection etc and also development possibilities (e.g. social housing on exception site outside the village envelope). Invite people to place cards or flags on the map to record their comments on village character and ideas on designing the type of development in the village to meet local needs.

## STEP 7 – DRAW UP PROPOSALS FOR VDS

Before the steering groups can begin to formulate proposals it needs to determine broad goals and objectives.

It is recommended that one of the objectives is to influence the design of minor alterations undertaken by the community by providing “Guidance to Residents” in framing proposals for their own properties (examples overleaf). This will help safeguard against the cumulative affect of small scale development. Ideas for other objectives will have come from the exhibition. They may include enhancement of the local character of a particular area of the village (e.g. by controlling street furniture); safeguarding key areas of the village; meeting sustainability criteria for new development; channelling new development towards a certain location to strengthen local character; design and provision of particular facilities, creating or extending open spaces, etc.

The survey findings and exhibition will have highlighted suggested proposals to guide future development in achieving the broad objectives. Each proposal will fall into one of the four following categories:

- Recommendations that complement the local development framework and refine planning policy to a village level to safeguard local character,
- Recommendations that conflict with current development plan policy,
- Recommendations that fall outside the remit of planning policy,
- Recommendations for implementation projects requiring action.

Only proposals falling within the first category will be suitable for inclusion in the VDS. These recommendations will contain specific guidance on location, setting, style, materials, colours etc. It is best to make direct targeted statements, for example ‘developers should ...’ or ‘the highways authority is encouraged ...’ rather than using looser terms such as ‘the community welcomes ...’. This will help make the VDS guidance more effective. Each guidance statement should be derived from the issues and objectives highlighted by the community involvement in the process. Clear justification should be included prior to the guidance.

The advice of your local authority planning officer will be crucial in ensuring that the guidelines are compatible with the existing planning framework. Help may be needed with cross-referencing to relevant planning documents, and also with the wording of recommendations to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation of the community’s opinions. It is important that planners and other facilitators do not impose their own views on the group but help you in the expression of yours.

Proposals in the second category cannot be included in the VDS but may become part of the consultation on the Local Development Plan when it is next reviewed. Advice from the local planning officer is recommended.

The remaining types of proposals are not strictly speaking part of a VDS – remember that it is a planning document. The group will need to consider how it will report on these proposals (Step 9, page 22) and how it will deal with actions arising (Step 11, page 24).

## EXAMPLES OF “DESIGN GUIDANCE FOR YOUR PROPERTY”

### 1 Adapted from Cartmel’s VDS

If you are considering altering the exterior of your property, changing any external detail of the building, garden or boundary, consider the visual impact of your proposals –

- Look at the frontage of your property from some distance. Note down the most distinctive features and also any which seem to be more recent and out of character with the building and surrounding properties. Look at the relationship between your property and surrounding buildings and the significance of spaces between buildings. It may help to take some photographs.
- Standing close up to the property, study the details of windows, doors, eaves etc.
- Repeat the process for each elevation or aspect of your property.
- Find out if there are any restrictions on the development of your property and the implications on your proposals e.g. if it is in a conservation area, if it is a listed building, if there are any tree preservation orders (TPO’s) on the site.
- Think about the proposed changes you have in mind. Consider how they affect the distinctive characteristics of your property and its surroundings that you have noted down. If your proposals do not complement local character, examine other ways of meeting your requirements that will be compatible with the design guidance included in the Village Design Statement. Alternatively, your proposals may remove some of the uncharacteristic features you have noted and positively enhance local character.
- You are advised to employ a builder or architect and seek professional advice on your assessment. Contact the local authority to see if planning permission or building regulations are required for your proposal.

### 2 Adapted from Ashwell’s VDS

If you are considering altering the exterior of your property, or changing any external detail of the building, its paintwork, signs, garden or surrounds, please undertake your own design assessment by studying each elevation or aspect of the building and asking yourself the following:

- What are the distinctive features of the property?
- Are there any particular features which are out of character with the building itself or with neighbouring properties or with the Design Statement?
- Is what I am proposing in accord with the Design Statement?
- Does what I am proposing enhance distinctive features or help remove uncharacteristic ones?
- Will it make a positive contribution to the character of the area?

## **STEP 8 – CONSULT ON DRAFT GUIDELINES**

For the VDS to be approved as a material consideration, you will need to satisfy the local planning authority that the document has been arrived at by a democratic process and fully reflects local views. It is therefore advisable to check the extent of consultation on the final draft that will be acceptable to them. If a high level of participation is required, a copy of the draft should be delivered to every household and collected a few days or a week later. A less intensive consultation may be acceptable, for example, distribution to community groups, making the draft available in public places and on request, and providing a number of collection points for the return of comments. Details of the method and number distributed and the level of response should be recorded in the VDS Community Diary. The support of the Parish Council is essential in their role as statutory consultees. It is therefore advisable to seek their detailed comments on the draft guidelines.

Give the community plenty of notice that the document will be distributed and how they can receive a copy and what information is required of them. Keeping them informed and involved in the process will develop a sense of ownership of the final VDS. Ask a few people in the community, from differing backgrounds, if they would mind being “guinea pigs” and comment on the draft document and guidelines. They will give some indication whether the document is self-explanatory or needs further explanation. Depending on the complexity of the draft, you may feel that a community event is necessary to explain the document and guidelines and enable more informed comment. Alternatively it may be possible to piggy-back onto an existing event (e.g. a fete) to gather comments on the draft guidelines.

Comment should be invited on the description of village character, the suitability of the objectives, and the detailed guidelines. One way to set out the document is to print the text on the left-hand side of the pages, providing plenty of space to the right for responses and additional written comment. Another method is by requesting comment on a feedback form. The responses will need to be analysed by the steering group and incorporated into the preparation of the final VDS.

The community should be encouraged to arrive at some form of majority view to strengthen recommendations included in the VDS but it is quite likely that consensus will not be reached on all issues. Any minority opinions and areas where there is no consensus will need to be recorded. The consultation must not reduce the VDS guidelines to the lowest common denominator of agreement.

## STEP 9 – PREPARE VDS AND SEEK APPROVAL

The VDS document must primarily communicate the overall character of the village and the features that make it distinctive. It must get beyond a clinical description of the village and convey the special qualities that are valued by the community. These may not always be obvious e.g. views in a particular seasons or at different times of the day. This should be strongly communicated to the reader of the document.

The VDS will incorporate the results of surveys and consultation on options (where applicable) and will set out the guidelines that will be promoted by the community. The steering group will need to decide on the presentation and treatment of the recommendations falling outside the remit of the planning authority and also the implementation of projects. There may be some negotiation with the local authority planning officer over whether these can be separately identified within the body of the VDS, included in an appendix, or produced as a separate document.

The following elements are recommended for inclusion in the VDS:

- **Introduction.** Keep this brief. Include the scope and purpose of the VDS, the community involvement process, the objectives of the VDS, the status of the document and planning policy context.
- **Background.** Brief description of the history of the village, the settlement pattern and the village today.
- **Opportunities and constraints** identified during the character assessment.
- **Options** presented to the community and the degree of support for each of them.
- **Characteristics and special features** which create the character and distinctiveness of the village.
- **Consensus Recommendations** to guide future development (refer to other statutory planning documents where relevant).
- **Guidance to residents** in framing proposals for their own properties (clear unambiguous design guidance that is capable of being used effectively).
- **Appendices.** Any relevant information that did not fit into the VDS.

It is suggested that the sections are divided between members of the steering group to avoid placing a burden on one or two individuals. The text should be clear and concise with some thought being given to the inclusion of maps, photographs and illustrations in the final document. For continuity, one member will need to take on editorial responsibility for the whole document.

Once the VDS text is completed, the steering group can seek final acceptance from the Parish Council and approval from the local planning authority (the process varies in each local authority). The exact wording to be included in the VDS will need to be agreed with the local planning authority to confirm its status as guidance and a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.



## **STEP 10 – PUBLISH AND LAUNCH THE VDS**

The steering group needs to turn the draft text into a practical document for publication. The Village Design Statement is a working document but should also be attractive and enjoyable to read. Any photographs, drawings and maps must be used to reinforce written text – not vice versa.

It need not be a glossy brochure produced by a printer. A ring bound document produced using desk top publishing software is perfectly acceptable. Colour is not essential - black and white can be more convenient as it lends itself to photocopying. Whatever the nature of the final printed document, ensure that you allow enough time for proof reading, both by the steering group and by someone who has never read it before. If the VDS is to be approved as a material consideration, printing should only take place once this status has been confirmed by the local planning authority.

You will need to draw up an initial distribution list to determine the number of copies to be produced. If your budget will stretch to it, give a full copy of the VDS to every household. If financial resources are limited, provide every house with a summary of the main recommendations and a copy of the “Guidance to Residents” in framing proposals for their own properties. Most local authorities include approved VDS on their website but they may also request a number of hardcopies. You may also like to keep a stock of copies for supply on request, for example, at the library, the parish council office, the village hall, the local shop, and for distribution to other communities.

Prior to distribution, publicise the launch of the VDS in the local press and village magazine. In your publicity, emphasise the positive aspects of the local distinctiveness of your village and draw attention to the role of local people in the conservation of village character.

Organise a launch event to celebrate your achievement and invite local people and organisations that will use the VDS e.g. the parish council, local authority planners, local architects and developers. If you have published details of implementation projects, you might also like to invite representatives from organisations likely to be involved in taking the projects forward.

## **STEP 11 – USE THE VDS - WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP**

Once the VDS has been finalised, the objective of the steering group has been achieved. The document will provide guidance for planners, developers and local people to shape the future development of the village.

The VDS will provide the parish council with information about how the community would like it to comment on planning applications and how change should be channelled. It will be useful in strengthening and supporting the parish council's comments and if necessary will form material evidence in planning appeals. In some villages, members of the VDS group have been invited to assist the parish council in assessing planning applications but it is important to note that the VDS group cannot replace the parish council in this respect.

The parish council will also be in a position to make more informed comments on subsequent development plan reviews, involving members of the VDS group if appropriate. Some of the views gathered whilst preparing the VDS may have been in conflict with existing planning policies but, if supported by the community, can be used as a basis for discussion with the local planning authority for possible input into the Local Development Framework.

It is important to be aware that some planning applications are approved in principle with detailed conditions negotiated at a later date. The community is advised to keep a watching brief on such approvals and ensure that the conditions agreed are made in accordance with the VDS. This is another area in which VDS group members and the parish council can work together.

It is likely that the recommendations within the VDS will have an immediate effect, both on planning applications submitted to the local authority and in design briefs provided by them. The "Guidance to Residents" in framing proposals for their own properties should also have an immediate impact on permitted development, with small scale alterations being more sensitive to local character. Some residents may even be inclined to improve their properties to blend with the surroundings. It is important to continue promotion of the guidance to residents by re-distributing that section of the VDS after a period of time. Another option is to arrange for the guidance to be distributed to all new residents, perhaps in a Good Neighbours Pack or Village Guide if one is produced.

The production of the VDS may have identified a number of projects requiring further action. The onus is on the local community to take them forward. It is important to maintain the momentum but the VDS group should not feel responsible for the implementation of the projects. Its role is more likely to be in kick-starting the formation of partnerships to take the projects forward. The parish council and the VDS group may decide to include actions in a Parish Plan. The plan will identify the organisations likely to be involved in progressing each project, the resources required (manpower, training, funding etc) and potential sources of funding. Your RCCE community engagement officer can advise on this action planning process.

## **STEP 12 – REVIEW THE SITUATION**

Rather than forgetting all your hard work and never knowing how successful your VDS has been, set some review dates, perhaps two or three over the next few years, to look at what has been achieved. The reviews could be reported back to the community through the village magazine, local press and at Annual Parish Assemblies. Be sure to publicise all positive outcomes for village development showing “before and after” photos where appropriate.

The review could include an assessment of the perception of the VDS by local people and the local planning authority. Is it a useful document in practice? How could it be improved?

It is suggested that the VDS is considered for revision and updating in relation to future reviews of the Local Development Plan.

You may also like to make a note of progress on any projects and new community groups arising as a direct result of the VDS process, and report back to the community. If action has been taken on a number of issues and your village is benefiting from positive change then you are to be congratulated. If not, then keep trying. Some things will take time but don't stop working towards a better future for your village.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Workshop session**

The purpose of the event is to

- explain Village Design Statements to local people,
- prepare a Preliminary Character Assessment of the village,
- highlight future design aspirations for the village, and
- sign up volunteers to take the process forward

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. Working in teams will provoke group discussion about village character and help encourage participants to join the design team and form a steering group to work on the VDS.

#### **Venue**

The main part of the workshop is a Village Walkabout starting and ending at a hall which is booked by the local team. The hall needs to be large enough to accommodate people sitting around tables with still enough room for milling about. Consider provision of refreshments and also the need for surfaces to which flip chart sheets can be attached (usually with blu-tak). Undertake a risk assessment (see record sheet in Appendix 3) for the hall and the walkabout.

#### **Dates and times**

The programme overleaf is for a four hour workshop on a Saturday. Some communities have adapted this programme to start later and include lunch (time to get photos printed) and others have shortened it to run as an evening workshop. Details are available through the Community Led Planning Network.

#### **Publicity**

Prepare and distribute flyers and posters; examples are available through the Community Led Planning Network. Write articles for local magazines and letters to local groups and organisations asking them to send a representative to the event.

#### **Format and Content of the event**

If you wish to run this event yourselves, a series of briefing sheets and advice is available through the Community Led Planning Network. Alternatively, your RCCE community engagement officer can be contracted to facilitate the event and type up the output.

The workshop requires advance planning to divide the parish into character areas and determine routes.

Photographs are usually taken on digital cameras, a selection of which can be printed during the event. Consideration needs to be given to compatibility of equipment, quality of print required versus printing costs, and the time taken to print photos if a large number of people attend the event.

## Workshop Programme

- 09.30 Welcome, introductions and outline of the morning  
*Display of other Village Design Statements*
- 09.35 First exercise – Character positives and negatives  
*Post-it note exercise to establish key features and explain the focus of a VDS*
- 09.50 The character areas  
*Briefing the teams - the roles, the routes, the rules*
- 10.00 Second exercise - The Survey  
*Parish walkabout*
- 11.30 Return to the Village Hall  
*Select photos for display and/or printing*
- 11.45 Third exercise - Preliminary Character Assessment  
*Description of character of each area, supported by photographs*
- 12.40 Feedback  
*Sharing findings and discussion*
- 13.20 Next Steps  
*Arrangements for subsequent meetings*
- 13.30 Close

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Essex Protocol for Community-led Plans**

Production of a community-led plan requires a variety of skills and resources and is best achieved by working in partnership. This protocol allocates roles to those with the most appropriate skills to ease burden on any of the partners. The community has detailed local knowledge, RCCE has expertise in community empowerment and participatory techniques, and the district/borough council has expertise in community strategy and planning policy. It is also recognised that all the partners involved have limited time and resources available.

#### **1 Local Groups leading the process will...**

- Fully engage with the wider local community in production of the community-led plan,
- Provide a summary of how the community was involved in the process,
- Keep ward members of the district/borough council informed of progress,
- Seek advice from both RCCE and the Local Planning Authority/LSP Co-ordinator in the production of the plan,
- Respond to LDF consultations published by the local planning authority for comment,
- Comply with the requirements of the LDF Statement of Community Involvement where appropriate,
- Produce action plan/guidance and identify delivery partners where appropriate,
- State how the community-led plan will be monitored, evaluated and updated,
- Link with the district/borough Community Strategy by following the LSP procedures,
- Link with the district/borough LDF by following the procedure for SPD and/or by submitting information in an agreed format,
- Recognise that information may need to satisfy specific assessments before it can be incorporated into strategic plans.

#### **2 The Rural Community Council of Essex will...**

- Explain community-led plans, their purpose and benefits,
- Target communities most in need or with local development issues,
- Provide information packs and examples from other communities,
- Advise on funding sources and project management during the process,
- Advise on how to fully engage with the community,
- Facilitate meetings and workshops where required,
- Advise on appropriate delivery agents for actions/proposals,
- Provide access to RCCE's network of contacts,
- Provide information and guidance to local planning authorities as appropriate.

### **3 The Local Planning Authority will...**

- Explain planning processes and links with community-led plans,
- At the appropriate time, prioritise assistance to those parishes in most need or with local development issues,
- Advise on current and emerging development plan policies for the parish at the start of the process,
- Offer advice and explanation on conservation issues such as listed buildings, conservation areas, archaeology, landscape and wildlife,
- Advise on the drafting of questionnaires about land-use development and design issues,
- Provide maps of the parish and detailed maps of village envelope, conservation area, special designations etc (for use during the process),
- Invite group members to planning department reception (to research information) and signpost communities to other sources of information,
- Provide specific advice on draft policy statements and proposals at later stages of the process,
- Use robust and consistent community-led plan information as part of their evidence base when preparing their LDFs/DPDs,
- Include as SPD or approve as a 'material consideration', consistent and robust community-led plans dealing with land-use, development and design, where they meet the appropriate criteria,
- Inform the local group of their reasons for not including information (e.g. if it does not meet requirements of SCI, SA, SEA etc).

### **4 The LSP co-ordinator will...**

- Explain the community strategy and links with community-led plans,
- Hold a library of completed community-led plans in the district/borough,
- Signpost local groups to relevant LSP partners re action points in the community-led plan,
- Inform the LSP of actions and proposals in the community-led plan that relate to wider strategic issues,
- Inform the local group of how the issues/actions have been addressed by the LSP/individual partners.

### **5 East of England Planning Aid will...**

(subject to a communities eligibility – see national criteria)

- Provide information events and presentations on the planning system,
- Advise and assist on contributing to local development plans,
- Help communities to develop their own strategies, including parish plans,
- Provide training on the planning system and development plans,
- Run educational projects with school children and young people
- Provide a casework service that will support eligible groups and individuals

**6 Role of other partners**

Other partner agencies (for example, Essex Association of Local Councils, Society of Local Council Clerks, CPREssex) also support community-led planning initiatives by offering training and professional advice where appropriate.

**7 Role of Councillors**

Parish councillors and ward members have a vital role to play as community leaders in initiating a community-led plan and forming a working group to take it forward. Ward members should be informed regarding the preparation of community-led plans as they have an important role to play in representing the views of their communities at district/borough level.

**8 Named Contacts**

It is important that the communities know who is involved in supporting the production of community-led plans.

**NOTE**

This protocol has been approved by the Essex Planning Officers Association and adopted as good practice guidance by all local planning authorities in Essex.



## **APPENDIX 3**

### **Records**

It is important that the following records are kept;

- Minutes of meetings
- Financial records
- Diary of Community Involvement
- Volunteer Time Log
- Risk Assessments for events

Minutes of meetings and financial records are standard for all community groups and projects. Your RCCE community engagement officer can provide further guidance on their preparation. Examples of the remaining types of record are included in this appendix.

A Diary of Community Involvement provides important evidence of the communication and information sharing within the community during the process, and of the number of people consulted and responding. A VDS diary will need to be submitted to the local authority as part of the approval process of your final Village Design Statement. An example is on page 2.

The Volunteer Time Log records the number of hours given to the project without remuneration. An example is on page 2. A log will be completed by each volunteer and submitted to a member of the VDS group for collation and summary. A record of volunteer time will provide evidence to funders that the grants they have awarded have been matched by the value of hours donated to the project by volunteers. Such evidence may need to be provided as part of the grant fund monitoring requirement.

A risk assessment should be undertaken prior to any public event e.g. workshop, drop-in session, exhibition, open day. Any potential risks should be identified and steps taken to minimise them. An example is on page 3.

**Example of Diary of Community Involvement**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reason for involvement</b>	<b>Type of involvement</b>	<b>Numbers of people</b>	<b>Other comments</b>
20/2/08	Organising	Meeting of VDS group	10	
10/3/08	Survey	Character Assessment	5	
22/3/08	Informing	Flyer to every house to update on progress	500 houses	
5/4/08	Survey	School Workshop	30 children from years 5 and 6	
18/4/08	Organising	Meeting of sub group	4	
25/4/08	Organising	Meeting of VDS group	11	
1/6/08	Survey	Questionnaire distribution	500 houses	
10/6/08	Survey	Collection	350 houses, 600 adults and 150 youth responses	Others may be put in box at shop

**Example of Volunteer Time log**

Name .....

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Duration</b>
20/2/08	Meeting of VDS steering group	Village Hall	2 hours
10/3/08	Character Assessment	Historic Centre	2 hours
22/3/08	Delivery of flyers	High Street	1 hour
5/4/08	School workshop	School	1 hour
8/4/08	Typing up info from workshop	home	1 hour
13/4/08	Drafting youth questionnaire	home	2 hours
18/4/08	Meeting of survey sub group	Mary's house	2 hours
25/4/08	Meeting of VDS steering group	Village Hall	2 hours
28/4/08	Finalise youth questionnaire	Home	1 hour

..... VDS

## EVENT RISK ASSESSMENT

<b>Event:</b>	<b>Date of event:</b>
<b>Venue:</b>	<b>Organisers:</b>

<b>AREA AND HAZARDS IDENTIFIED (Specify within each area)</b>	<b>PERSONS AT RISK</b>	<b>RISK FACTOR (H / M / L)</b>	<b>MEASURES REQUIRED TO CONTROL THE RISK</b>	<b>ACTION TO BE TAKEN BY (NAME)</b>	<b>DATE COMPLETE AND SIGNATURE</b>
<b>CAR PARK</b>					
<b>MAIN HALL</b>					
<b>KITCHEN AREA</b>					
<b>GENERAL ACCIDENTS</b>					

## ASSESSING LOCAL CHARACTER

This section is intended to offer guidance on the wide range of issues, which can be included in a VDS. It is important to remember that not all of these issues will be relevant to your locality and, therefore, although there are many and detailed guidance notes, the corresponding section in your document, may be much shorter and less detailed. A concise summary is all that is necessary to provide an informative background – this may be best conveyed by including maps or diagrams.

The VDS is essentially an assessment of all 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. Try not to think of the VDS in terms of just buildings, although these are important and the most obvious features in terms of local character; try to assess the village and its surroundings as a whole rather than focus on just one aspect.

This Appendix is divided into sections, each asking questions to help you describe the character of your village under broad headings. It is vital that due consideration is given to the content of reports and other documents relating to the area; this will include any existing character assessments that have been carried out. These documents should be referred to specifically in the VDS, and may include:

- Essex Design Guide
- Conservation Area Character Assessment (if applicable)
- Essex County Council's Landscape Character Appraisal
- Landscape Character Assessment of your District/Borough Council
- Countryside Design Summary of your District/Borough Council

### Local Distinctiveness

- What is special about your village character?
- What makes it different from the neighbouring village, parish?
- In what way is it unique in your district/borough or county?
- What is its local distinctiveness and what aspects contribute to and maintain its particular character?
- What do children notice that adults might miss?

### Landscape Setting of the Village (natural evolution of the village)

- How does the village sit in the landscape, is it coastal, located in a flat landscape, nestled in a valley or on an estuary, on a slope, or on a ridge?
- How did it evolve in the landscape and 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? Is there a watercourse, floodplain or natural feature that makes the place distinctive?
- Does the village stand proud in the landscape; do you see rooftops or right into the heart of the village?
- What does the surrounding countryside look like? What are its obvious major elements such as woods, river and streams, railways, hills, and so on?
- Does the village harmonise with the landscape or are there areas which could be enhanced through further landscape design?



**The landscape setting**

*of a village is important as it provides a context for a settlement. It can often be visually uplifting, particularly if located in rolling countryside. The interplay between built form and landscape and between open and closed views is important.*

**Settlement Edges, Views and Landscape Character**

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? (How much more can be seen in the winter months when trees are bare?)
- Is there a sense of arrival or departure from the village and its surrounding landscape?
- When you walk around the edge of the village looking back in, what are the distinctive features - are they buildings, trees, greens or other features?
- Are there particular areas from within the village or on the edge of the village where there are important views to the surrounding landscape or features within it? Are these views narrow, wide, open, partial, filtered, far distant, short, interrupted? Do you look over the foreground and beyond? Is there a local horizon point imposed by the topography? What are the focal points? Ask yourself the same questions, but this time looking in towards the village from the surrounding landscape, perhaps from local roads and footpaths.
- 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 your area?



**The village edge**

*The relationship between the village and the surrounding landscape is important. Neither should dominate the other although a tall building, usually the village church, can act as a point of reference. The village edge is normally highly visible in winter due to the reduction in vegetation cover.*

**Settlement Pattern**

- How has the village evolved and changed?
- What is the overall shape and pattern of the village? Is it linear, complex, multi-centred, square, random? Is there an overall pattern?
- 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, where do they meet and cross - are these points or nodes important to character?

**Street Pattern and Highways**

- What are the characteristics of the various local roads; are there pavements and kerbs or grass verges and drainage ditches? Are the roads narrow, wide, straight, curving? Are there cul-de-sacs or through 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?



**The original village core**

*is typical of the Essex village, the church being the focal point of the High Street. Period domestic buildings may flank both sides of the street. The church and trees frame the vista and create an attractive enclosed space.*

**Open and Connecting Spaces**

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? Do they provide a connected route to the open countryside or are they contained within the village?
- What is the character of various open spaces in the village, both private and public, such as greens, allotments, recreation grounds and churchyard? Include front and back gardens if these are notable open spaces.
- Take note of trees, hedges, walls and fences, and the presence or absence of front gardens. Do parts of the village have any sort of wildlife or vegetation that is especially distinctive?

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

- How do trees contribute to the character of your 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?



**A village green**

*is often an irregular piece of recreational land which is used for a variety of purposes. The village green is often surrounded by houses of varying architectural styles and dates.*

## **Buildings**

Your village design statement is not just about buildings within a conservation area and individual listed buildings - although the VDS will complement any existing conservation area assessment. Try to look at the village as a whole as well as separate character areas.

- What types of building can be seen and where? How do buildings differ in height, size, style and density?
- Are there any particular key buildings that help orientate you or 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:*

- Is the orientation of buildings a local characteristic - do they 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, such as timber framing, red brick, thatch, clay tiles? Is it simply the material which gives the place its character or the way in which it is used?
- Is the form and proportion of buildings more important than materials?
- How are modern materials used and could they be used more effectively?

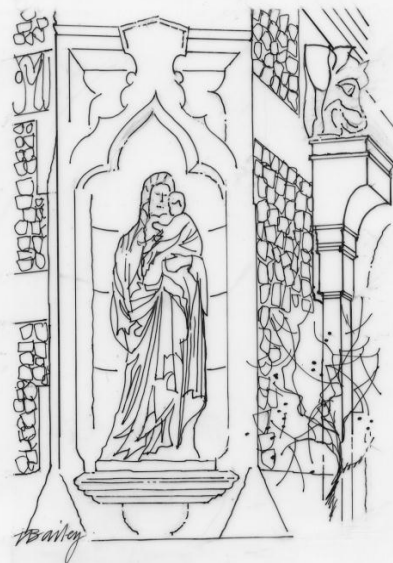


**Doors**

*Attractive individual doors provide a strong sense of character and a door is often the focal point of the front of a house.*

**Pargeting**

*is both a craft and art form that continues to be practised today on new houses. It provides individuality and distinctiveness.*



**Essex churches**

*provide many fine examples of hand carved statuary and stonework. When combined with flint walls, cast iron, lead work and stained glass they provide an enduring range of experience and craftsmanship.*

**The thatched cottage**

*The thatcher's craft is an integral part of village life, with techniques and that have changed little during the centuries, demanding a high level of skill. Thatched cottages evoke a feeling of continuity with the past and the eye is often drawn to them.*

### ***Proportion and Detail***

Consider vertical and horizontal rhythms in the village street scene.

- Take a look at building frontages, what are the proportions and detail, are they similar in all buildings or do they differ?
- Are there distinctive noticeable features, such as windows, doors, pargetting, chimneys, gable ends and so on?
- Do the rooflines have particular characteristics or detailing?

### ***Artefacts and Street Furniture***

Take a look at other elements in the village street scene which contribute to local character.

- Are there peculiarities, unique artefacts or characteristic detailing?
- What is the street furniture like - is it suburban in character or does it maintain local distinctiveness?

You may also wish to try and integrate direct design related topics.....

### **Design and the Local Community**

Village character and design can influence and improve the sense of community.

Does the village have a centre or a core where people tend to meet and is centre of activity? How does this relate to the other parts of the village? For example, some very linear settlements often lack a well-defined village core, or the important community spaces may be at separate ends of the village. Another issue might 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?



#### ***The village hall***

*is enjoying a resurgence. Recent Government grants have enabled the building of many new facilities which help to sustain village life.*

### **Design and the Rural Economy**

Village design statements could help to stimulate the local rural economy. Your village 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 village shop**

*has often been established for a number of years and may be located in an attractive building. The shop is a place where people of all ages meet and talk.*

**Design and Traffic Management**

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.



**The Lane**

*The view along a narrow lane gives a sense of anticipation.*

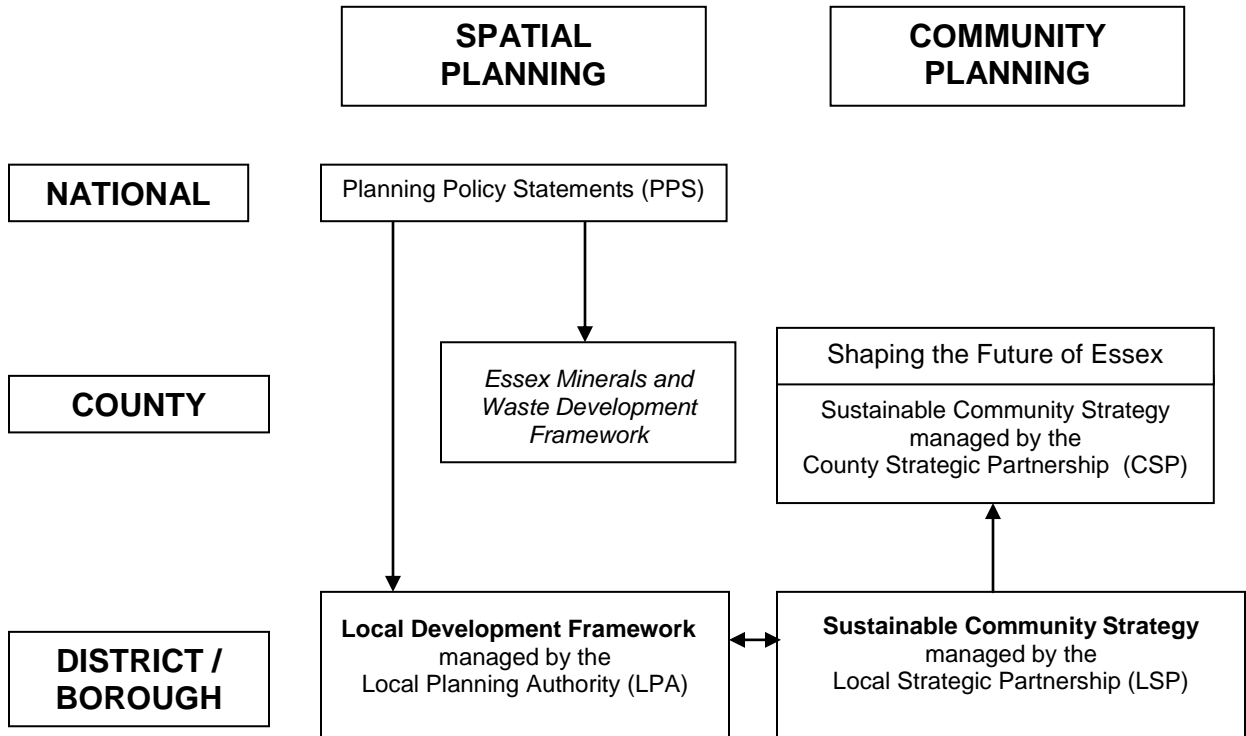
**Design and environmental considerations**

There is a lot 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. Have any of these initiatives been used or do any of them already exist in the village? The consideration of these factors could be fed into the VDS.

# PLANNING FRAMEWORK

## Introduction

Statutory Planning is a system that sets out planning objectives and policies to guide the provision of services and the use of land. The system comprises two planning processes which can best be described as “spatial planning” and “community planning”. The diagram below shows the planning processes in two columns. It shows the documents that each tier of government is required to produce and the links between them. “Community planning”, led by community partnerships, is principally concerned with community well-being, the delivery of services and provision of facilities whilst “spatial planning” is concerned with land use, development and design.



The spatial planning process is described as ‘top down’ meaning that guidance/policy contained in any planning document must comply with the policies contained in documents produced by all of the tiers above. The community planning process is ‘bottom up’.

**NOTE:** At the time of writing (Oct 2011) the government is proposing to repeal the ‘duty to produce a Sustainable Community Strategy’, although the process of community planning will continue to enable statutory authorities to ‘plan’ their services.

This Appendix will focus on the spatial planning system and in particular, the policies relevant to a Village Design Statement at a National and Local (district / borough) Level.

## National Level

At the time of writing (Oct 2011) the Government is proposing to introduce a new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to replace the existing series of Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPG). Following consultation, the new NPPF is expected to be introduced in spring 2012.

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningpolicyframework/>

The new National Planning Policy Framework is designed to enable greater control of design standards (e.g. parking provision, housing density) at a local level, rather than these being dictated by central government. This could mean that locally derived design guidelines become more important.

## Local level

All district and borough councils are required to produce a Local Development Framework (LDF). The LDF is the name for the overall “folder” of documents comprising:

- A Local Development Scheme (LDS)
- A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)
- An Annual Monitoring Report (AMR)
- Development Plan Documents (DPDs)
- Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)

The first three bullets are documents that set out the process for creating and monitoring Local Development Framework. The last two bullets set out planning policy and it is these that we will focus on.

### Development Plan Documents (DPDs)

DPDs are planning documents that cover policies, proposals and allocations.

The Local Development Framework will include the following DPDs:

- The **Core Strategy** will set out a long term spatial vision for the area and a set of objectives and strategic policies to deliver that vision. Planning applications will be assessed against **Development Control Policies**;
- **Site Specific Allocations** and policies will identify land allocated for specific uses together with policies relating to these designations;
- **Proposals Map** will illustrate, on an Ordnance Survey base map, all the policies and proposals contained in the other Development Plan Documents including areas of protection and sites for development proposals;
- **Area Action Plans** will define specific areas where there are any special requirements for significant change or conservation.

Development Plan Documents will be subjected to sustainability appraisal (see below) and to independent examination to assess soundness.

### **Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs)**

These documents can deal with a wide range of issues covering specific subjects or individual sites. They are intended to explain or provide further detail about policies or site allocations in a Development Plan Document. They could take the form of design guides, area development briefs, master plans or issue based documents e.g. affordable housing. The level of community involvement will be related to the issue or the area covered by the SPD. Supplementary Planning Documents are also subject to sustainability appraisal (see below).

The local authority is required to develop and manage an evidence base to inform the production of the Development Plan Documents. The evidence base will be an assessment of environmental, economic, social and physical information which can then be related to the use of land. There needs to be a thorough understanding of the needs of the district/borough and the opportunities and constraints which operate within the area, taking account of other strategies and policy.

### **Sustainability Appraisal**

All Development Plan Documents (DPDs) and Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are subject to a sustainability appraisal (SA) as an integral part of their preparation. The purpose of an SA is to appraise the social, environmental and economic effects of plan strategies and policies.

The process includes preparing a pre-production scoping report, an appraisal during the production of the document and a final report on the sustainability impacts of the policies in the document. For some SPD the sustainability appraisal may not need to be such a rigorous process. For example, where the council has undertaken work at sufficient detail during the sustainability appraisal of the Development Plan Document policy to which it relates, or where the SPD is confined to design and character issues.

Information about Sustainability Appraisals is contained in DIY SA Guide <http://www.levett-therivel.co.uk/DIYSA.pdf>.

At a local level there are several Planning Policy Documents and planning designations that are relevant to VDS:

### **Design Standards**

The Essex Design Guide contains recommendations about design standards and describes Essex character in broad terms. The majority of the local authorities in Essex have adopted the Essex Design Guide as SPD, or maybe even have included a summary of its recommendations within their LDF.

### **Landscape Character Assessments**

These have been prepared for many of the local authority areas in Essex. They divide the landscape into character areas, describe each area and set out planning guidelines and management guidelines. Some have adopted these as SPD.

### **Conservation Area Assessments**

Conservation areas are specific areas designated due to their special architectural or historic interest, where local authorities pay special attention to the desirability of preserving or enhancing their character or appearance in exercising their planning powers. Some of the most obvious features of Conservation Areas are historic buildings, but also the relationship between individual buildings, open spaces, their setting, or views into or out of the area of proposals within or even outside the conservation areas. The character and appearance of many conservation areas is heavily dependent on the treatment of open spaces. Most local authorities have prepared assessments of their conservation areas which may save you some work in the preparation of your VDS.

### **Development Boundary / Village Envelope**

A development boundary identifies an area within which development proposals would be acceptable in principle, subject to complying with other policies. They are usually quite tightly drawn around a town, village or settlement. The aim is to prevent development from extending into surrounding countryside. There are 'exceptions' to the policy of only allowing development within the boundary; one such exception is for affordable housing to meet local needs.

### **Listed Buildings**

Listed building status is conferred by the Secretary of State, primarily for buildings of architectural or historic interest, where more stringent planning regulations apply. Listed Building Consent is required for all changes, including alteration, extension or demolition, both internal and external, which affect the character of the listed building. This does not mean that no changes will be allowed but they will need to be justified. Unauthorised work to a listed building is a criminal offence and carries heavy penalties.

### **Tree Preservation Orders**

Trees are important features in historical as well as visual terms. Trees are often the dominant influence setting the context of scale and framing views into and out of the conservation area. As well as special provision for trees in conservation areas (see above) local planning authorities issue Tree Preservation Orders (TPO) on important individual trees, or groups of trees, in their area. The existence of a TPO generally makes it an offence to carry out any works without the planning authority's permission.

A glossary of planning terms is available at the Planning Portal  
<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/general/glossaryandlinks/glossary/>

## Permitted Development

For most types of development, such as new buildings, extensions, alterations and changes of use, planning permission must be obtained from the Local Planning Authority. However, certain minor changes can be made without needing to apply for planning permission and these are called “permitted development rights”. However a property in a Conservation Area or in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, e.g. Dedham Vale, will require planning permission for certain types of work which would not require an application in other areas. There are also different requirements if your house is a listed building (see below).

The local planning authority may have removed some permitted development rights in specific areas with the issue of an **Article 4 direction**. They often exist in areas where the quality of previously permitted development had threatened the character of the area, for example in Silver End. The existence of an Article 4 direction will mean that a planning application will have to be submitted for work which normally would not need one.

More information about permitted development is available from the Planning Portal <http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/permission/responsibilities/planningpermission/permitted>

Please note that permitted development rights are amended by government from time to time in response to current issues. For example, they have recently been extended to include installation of solar panels in response to the need for microgeneration of energy.

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/download/12913/Solar-Panels-and-Permitted-Development.pdf>