

Village Design Statements

Guidance notes update: Adopting your VDS as SPD

Groups should continue to use CBC's guidance notes for Village Design Statements (September 2005), and the RCCE's Information Pack. Both give groups excellent guidance on producing a VDS and following the guidance carefully will help to ensure the document is approved by Chelmsford Borough Council on completion. In addition, RCCE's Statutory Planning Pack (June 2006) is a useful guide to the planning process.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) has advanced since these guidance documents were published. The main component of the LDF is the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies document, which will be assessed by an independent inspector at a public examination in September 2007. It should be fully adopted by the Council by the end of 2007. In the meantime, these new policies are already being used by planning officers when considering planning applications.

Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) which can include Village Design Statements will support the main policies of the Core Strategy.

Existing VDS

Any Village Design Statement that has been (or is likely to be) approved by Chelmsford Borough Council before the end of 2007 is treated as approved guidance. When the Core Strategy is adopted by the Borough Council, probably at the end of this year, that will not change. The value and status of the VDS is not weakened, and it remains part of CBC's group of guidance documents for use by planning officers when determining planning applications. This commitment is included in the Council's Local Development Scheme at appendix 1.4.

New VDS

Groups currently working or about to start producing their VDS can choose between two routes.

- Approved guidance – with Council endorsement and publicity to enable publication and use by the community. Although this will not be an SPD, planning officers will still use the guidance as a material consideration to help determine planning applications, and most importantly it will still influence all members of the community making changes to buildings and spaces not needing planning permission as long as it is clear and relevant.
- Formal adoption as SPD. The following points deal with this option.

Considerations when producing a VDS

A group may consider it appropriate to produce an SPD if they feel there is some major opportunity for change, or future threat, to their area. A SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats listed in a table and organised into categories) can help to identify areas for change or concern. A SWOT analysis of a village with many strengths and few weaknesses and threats will indicate that SPD is less appropriate.

Generally, proposals that can be adopted as SPD will relate to the following aspects of development:

- Design guidance – the shape, position and materials for new buildings, and other features
- Different uses – proposals to protect or change particular building uses or locations for activity
- Improvement proposals – opportunities for physical environmental improvements such as shop forecourts, seats, street furniture, boundary walls and planted areas.
- Public space and highway improvements – play areas, village greens, street alignment, surfacing etc.

A VDS can only be adopted as SPD if it **adds** to LDF planning policies. Groups may well find that many of their guidelines are already covered by existing borough-wide guidance. Such guidelines can be repeated in the VDS, without the need to adopt them as SPD as they have already been agreed by CBC – but additional, locally distinctive guidance may be added.

Groups should make sure their VDS includes specific proposals that add to policy and existing guidance. The relevant LDF policies should be cross referenced in the VDS, and proposals should be linked to them – in effect as a ‘sub-policy’ that sits under the main policy.

For example, LDF policy number CP21 states that new buildings should be in keeping with their surroundings. Groups have the opportunity to take this to the local level, a VDS could additionally specify for an identified character area of a village, for example, that all new wood cladding should be painted black; or that all new buildings must be of a particular red brick.

To avoid unnecessary work groups should look closely at CBCs policy documents – not only the Core Strategy and Development Control Policies, but also the Affordable Housing SPD, the Urban Design Site Guidance SPD, and the Sustainable Design & Construction SPD. There may also be links to work on Conservation Area appraisals. Chelmsford planners can offer a summary of policies that a VDS group might wish to link guidelines to.

Different types of advice in a VDS

It is likely that many recommendations will emerge as progress on the VDS is made. Many objectives for the community will be outside the scope of planning, and will not be matters that planning authorities can action – but they may be community actions which can be listed; local community interests can be identified to take them forward.

It is important therefore to focus on the types of guidance which adds to existing policy, and which can be adopted by the Council.

To account for this, the document needs to separate the types of recommendations that are not related to planning and physical environment. Proposals in each section of the VDS could be listed under two headings - planning and environment recommendations and community action.

Extra stages

The option to achieve SPD will require additional steps to achieve adoption, to comply with Government regulations. Chelmsford Borough Council can help to manage those extra steps, as follows:

- preparation of an independent Sustainability Appraisal
- agreement from a Borough Council committee to consult
- 4 to 6 (preferred) weeks' formal consultation including public notice in press, letters to specific and general consultees, publicity for locations where the draft SPD is available, publication on CBC's website, collating and analysing consultation responses
- Chelmsford planners would then work with the VDS Group to incorporate necessary changes
- agreement from a Borough Council committee that the document can be adopted as SPD.

The formal consultation includes not only the people who have already had an input into preparing the VDS, such as the VDS group, parish council and villagers, but also the wider community, developers and statutory bodies such as the Environment Agency, Government departments, and neighbouring local authorities. It also brings the VDS to the attention of much wider public scrutiny, which could bring a wide range of comments that will need to be analysed and where appropriate incorporated into the VDS.

Point to note

The new local planning system is changing all the time, and Chelmsford Borough Council is at the forefront of introducing the new Local Development Framework System.

The Government is presently consulting on its White Paper 'Planning for a sustainable future', billed in the media recently as a 'shake up in local planning'. The forthcoming legislation may change some aspects of the process relating to Supplementary Planning Documents.

Conclusion

If the VDS group wants to proceed to SPD then the group will need to justify that the extra work is necessary in consultation with Chelmsford Borough Council. The Council will assist groups preparing VDS under either route of approved guidance or formal adoption.

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