

# Village Design Statements

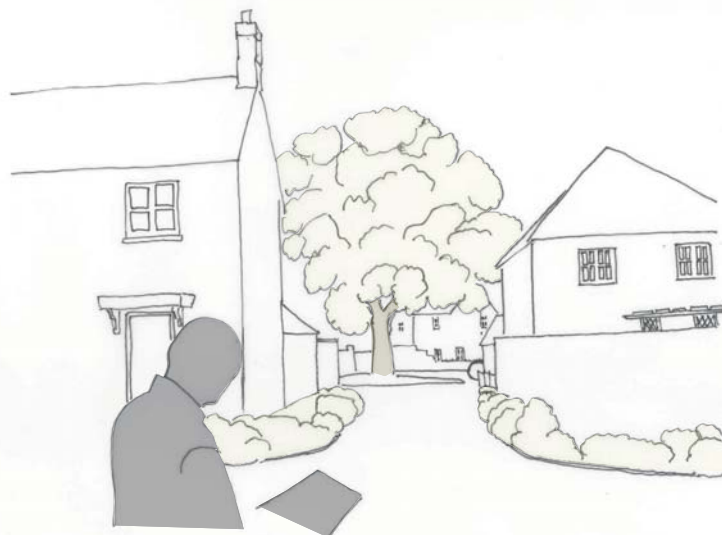
## Guidance notes for communities in Chelmsford Borough

The purpose of this booklet is to provide greater clarity to communities in the Chelmsford Borough who may be thinking about producing a VDS or have already made some progress.

It provides a template to help structure your VDS and to make it as effective as possible.

The guidance for Chelmsford Borough adds to:

- Countryside Commission guidance
- Rural Community Council of Essex, Information Pack.



## What is a VDS?

The focus of a VDS is to describe the character of the local area and to include practical ways to care for and enhance it.

AVDS can give a clear statement of what is special, unique and distinctive about the character of your village. Thorough understanding of your village environment and locally agreed guidance will influence change and improve the qualities of your area.

But a VDS is not a general community plan, such as a Parish Plan.

AVDS is a public document and once adopted by the Borough Council it can carry weight in the determination of planning applications.

However, it is not a statutory planning policy document, and it is not a tool to generate or prevent development.

AVDS is a tool that can influence the people who live and work in the village, increase local pride and encourage care.

It can not take away people's rights to improve their property.

AVDS can help improve physical change and is an positive opportunity to suggest and initiate environmental improvements to enhance your area.

Though it can not make direct orders for action.

AVDS can observe how the qualities of the village have evolved and help to explain current conditions.

But it is not simply a history project.

AVDS can provide an understanding of how the land uses, employment and social make up have influenced the village and its physical qualities.

Though it is not an appraisal of social or economic issues.

AVDS can be renewed, perhaps every 5 years.

Once a VDS document is achieved this is not an end to community discussion about the design of your village, and the VDS can be reviewed.

# Getting ready to produce a VDS

The following couple of pages explain:

- the need to involve people
- the careful preparation of text and pictures
- the scope for writing effective guidance

## The importance of involving the community

The VDS is prepared by the community for the community. Everyone in the community is given the opportunity to contribute and be involved. It is important to obtain wide community involvement so that the VDS represents the views of the village as a whole.

Keep your community informed of the VDS progress and seek their continuing support and comments they might have.

Issues that are not appropriate for the VDS are likely to arise. Note them down separately as they could well be pursued as part of other initiatives but do keep them separate from the VDS document.

A questionnaire is a great opportunity to seek opinion on matters that can be used to add value to the content of your VDS.

The VDS template can be used as the starting point for drafting your questionnaire. Have a brainstorm session using the template whilst thinking about questions.

Here are some pointers to bear in mind in preparing your questionnaire:

- keep it to a manageable length
- try and avoid questions where the answers are obvious
- ensure suitability for all of your community
- construct and put forward questions that are relevant to the VDS initiative
- be clear what you hope to get from asking each question and how it will be used towards your design statement
- ensure that the analysis of the responses can easily be carried out

## Writing a well organised and focused statement

Think about who the audience of your VDS will be and what influence they have in your village for example:

- local people
- building designers
- highway authority
- Parish Council
- property owners
- developers
- utility companies
- planners

The VDS is likely to ask everyone to care for and be sensitive to their local area, for example property owners when looking to alter and extend.

Aim for a document that is simple to read, easy to navigate and to find information, short and snappy and visually interesting.

It also has to be effective as a tool, influencing and guiding people making changes in the village. Please do not underestimate the time for consultation and for making amendments.

Before you commence drafting the VDS be clear about three types of text you will be writing:

- |                                      |                      |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Description                       | 3. Guidance          |
| 2. Identifying issues and objectives | - village wide       |
|                                      | - for specific areas |
|                                      | - for specific sites |

The Borough Council will be most interested in the guidance points as this is what will be adopted. It is also interested in the identification of issues as this will provide the reasoning for the guidance. It is least interested in description which is for you to research, edit and verify and keep relevant.

The lasting value of the VDS will depend on the quality of the statements of guidance. These should be realistic and focused.

# Effective use of illustrations and maps

Carefully chosen sketches and illustrations for your VDS are important for conveying information and guidance.

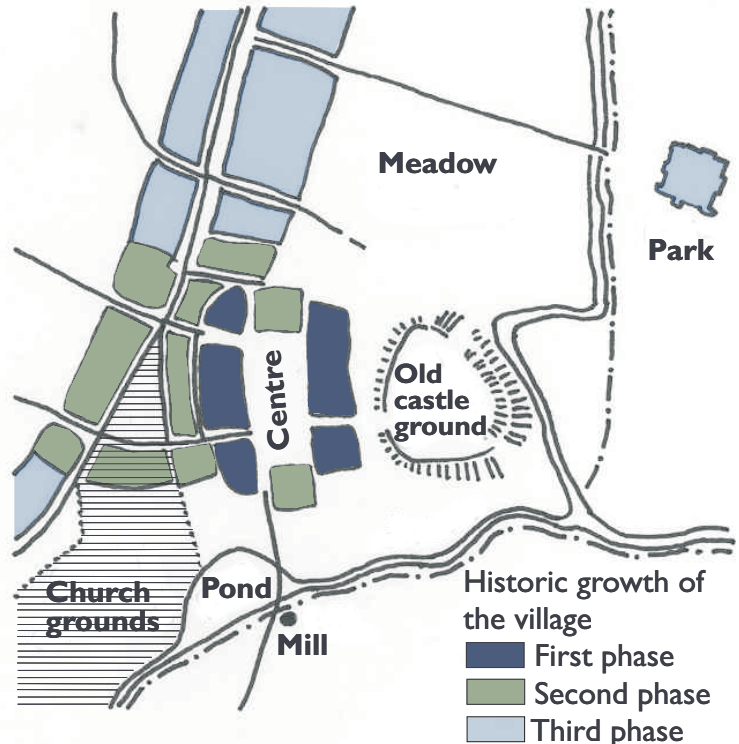
Include captions that spell out what message you want the reader to take from the picture or diagram. This is especially important with photos.

The use of images can inform the reader what the character of your area is whilst avoiding the need for writing a mass of text. Also use images to show good examples and to show places in need of environmental improvements. They can also be used to relate to your design guidelines.

Maps can be hand drawn to show the key characteristics of your area. They can also be produced by graphic designers. Think about your maps from an early stage, including what you want them to show and who will produce them.

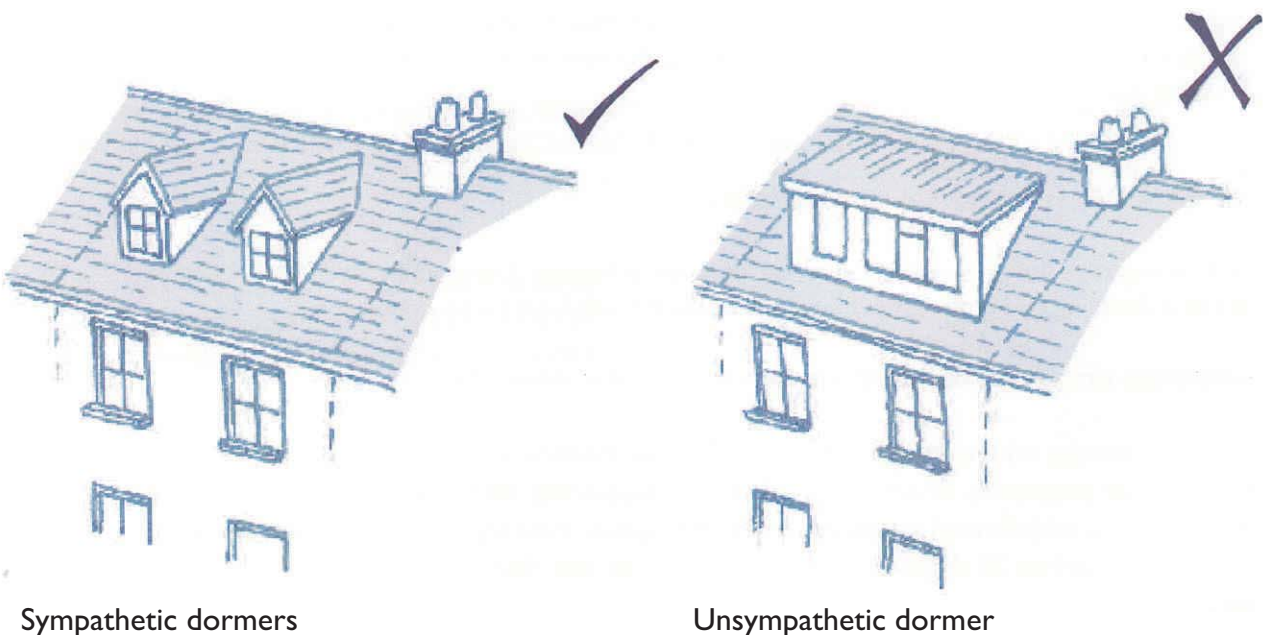
Include a map showing the coverage of your VDS area early on within the document. This could include notations relating to the landscape setting of your village, significant views, the key features of your area, and if there are different settlements within the parish, how they relate to each other.

Include a more detailed map of the main village itself, providing an annotated version of the character appraisal.



*Fictitious example of how a diagram can show phases of development of a village stemming from its original centre.*

The advantage of producing freehand sketches is to illustrate what you consider good and bad examples of design avoiding showing a photograph of a specific building. Further examples of such diagrams can be seen in Borough Council design guidance and the Essex Design Guide.



*Sketches can clearly illustrate what you consider good and bad design.*

# Preparing guidance ....

## What you can and can not say

The VDS gives you the chance to set out helpful and imaginative ways to look after your village.

The VDS can not create new planning policy or conflict with existing planning policy. Guidance has to accord with Borough policies and be adoptable. However guidance can and should be positive - the VDS does not have to be just a “don't build here” or “don't touch that” document.

Your guidance has to be practical and realistic. When writing a particular guidance think about who you are targeting - is it householders, developers, the Borough Council, the highway authority or utility companies that you want to act on the guidance?

Make direct statements, for example, 'householders should ...' rather than using looser terms such as 'the community welcomes ...' This will help people use the VDS which will then be more effective in seeing the guidance adhered to.

Use terms such as 'should' and 'encourage', avoid using terms such as 'must not'.

Each guidance statement should have clear justification. Include this justification prior to the guidance. This will help you to concentrate on the necessary text and will help identify whether it is appropriate for the VDS. This will also ensure clarity and simplicity for the user of the document.

You might also want to include a list of all of your guidance together for ease of reference, if so this could be placed at the end of your VDS.

To know what is appropriate for inclusion in the VDS please use the Chelmsford Borough VDS template on the following pages.



Photo by Rodger Tamblyn

*Panoramic photographs help to support guidance on historic street form and variety of buildings.*

*Think about how else you would use this photograph to make a point in your VDS:*

- *To recommend types of boundary materials?*
- *To demonstrate the importance of the tree?*

**The rest of this booklet sets out a template to help in the drafting of your VDS ....**

# I. The introduction will explain what the VDS is for and will summarise your main objectives

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## Scope of the VDS

- Area covered by the VDS i.e. the village or the whole parish.

## State your reasons for preparing a VDS and what its purpose will be

- This should focus on the community as a whole caring for the village and prompting positive improvements.
- Explain the purpose of the guidance statements - which contain the key messages of the VDS.

## Put your main messages up front - the qualities, the issues and opportunities

- Put together a character overview - stipulate what is special, distinctive, unique about the area and provide a short description about the VDS area as it is at the present day, where it is and what sort of place it is.
- Good points and bad points about the area - carry out and present a SWOT analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, hopes and aspirations, threats.

## The community involvement process

- Led and produced by the community, timescale involved, all parishioners invited to take part, if possible include a sentence stating what response and representation you have had.

## Status of document

- Once adopted as guidance by the Borough Council the VDS will then be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
- A VDS with the support of the Parish Council will have their commitment to follow through the guidance.

## Planning policy context

- Planning policy is contained in the Chelmsford Borough Local Plan 1997, Essex County Structure Plan and Government planning policy guidance.
- Provide a brief account of the relevant planning policies covering your area.
- The Borough Council is working towards the new development plan system. The Local Development Framework will effectively replace the Local Plan but at the time of writing the LDF is at its very early stages.
- The VDS also complements CBC residential design guidance and Essex Design Guide.

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## Plans and diagrams to include

- Plan showing location of the village in relation to Chelmsford and other towns or villages.
- Plan of area covered by the VDS showing place names and the boundary of its coverage.
- CBC will advise as to inclusion of planning policy designations on a plan.

## 2. This section of the VDS can help everyone understand the origins and current nature of the village

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Have a section that gives a rounded understanding of the history, the setting and the current life of the village. This needs to be kept succinct to give everyone a picture of the village.

Detailed information can be put in the appendix. As this section is providing information it is unlikely there will be any detailed guidance.

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### History

- A brief description of the area's historical growth. Why and how has the village evolved and changed, key milestones.
  - The names and local meanings of streets and places.
  - Any special considerations that may influence development and change.
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### Landscape setting and settlement shape

- Describe the visual character of the surrounding countryside. Is it located in a flat landscape or in a valley, on a slope or on a ridge? What are the distinctive types of trees and vegetation?
  - The relationship between the village and any special landscape features or habitats, such as woodlands, watercourses, flood plains, wetlands, meadows, nature reserves, ancient monuments.
  - How has the village shape been influenced by topography, geology, local climate, availability of water, local materials?
  - What do you see when you view into the village from key parts of the landscape?
  - What are the areas within the village or on its edge where there are important views out of the village?
  - What is the overall shape and layout of the village? Is it linear, radial, dispersed, random? Is there a clear edge? What are the patterns of links through the village?
  - What is the pattern of open spaces in the village and connection with the countryside and wider area?
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### The village economy

- What economic activity is important for, and contributes to, the character of the village? Is there any activity that is special or unique to the village?
  - Are rural industries important to your village? Relate the character of rural buildings to their rural economic use.
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### The village culture

- What activities, celebrations and festivals take place throughout the year, bringing the community together and influencing character? You might have yearly events such as a school festival, a market, church fete etc. There may be more regular events such as markets, exhibitions, weddings etc.

## Plans and diagrams to include

- Diagram to show key stages in the evolution of the village and surviving (historical) features of interest.
- Hand drawn plan of your VDS area and surroundings (approximately 0.5km around it) with notations for topographic and landscape features, setting of your village, the settlement shape, significant views in and out.
- Sketches and/or photographs of the landscape setting of your village, significant views, key landscape features. Key these to the plan.
- Hand drawn plan of your village showing location of employment, shops, schools etc.
- A table of regular village events.

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## The type of guidance

- A short and general recommendation covering the unique, special, distinctive qualities of the VDS area that everyone undertaking physical change should respect and care for.

### 3. This section defines the different character areas of the village based on townscape qualities

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A 'character area' is an area with its own identity, in terms of use and appearance. You may find three or four areas with distinct character, or just one covering the whole village.

- Define each character area, its strengths and weaknesses. This will be based on townscape qualities.

'Townscape' is what you see and experience when you are in a particular place. Townscape can be defined as the changing view of building groups that you experience when you walk along the street or through spaces. Each character area will have broadly consistent townscape qualities.

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- What is the relationship between buildings and spaces - does layout or densities of development vary?
  - Where is the good townscape and the poor townscape?
  - Are the streets straight, curved, narrow, wide etc? Describe the skyline and the roofscape.
  - Proportions. Standing back from the buildings look for vertical and horizontal rhythms what are the proportions of the windows, doors, rooflines - are they similar or do they differ?
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#### Plans and diagrams to include

- Plan of the whole village with each character area defined showing building groups and spaces and their townscape strengths and weaknesses.
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#### The type of guidance

- To respect, maintain or improve, the townscape of the character area.

**Then, for each character area consider in more detail the buildings and spaces, as follows:**

### 3a. Describe the character and design of specific buildings and building groups

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For each character area ....

- Which are the key buildings and building groups - do they need care or improvement? Are there buildings that act as landmarks?
  - Consider dwellings, public buildings and other distinctive buildings. What are the different types of buildings? What are the distinctive styles, details, features?
  - Are there distinctive buildings in the rural environment - they might be farm buildings, barns, nurseries, country houses - what is their character?
  - Building form. What is the basic form of the buildings - number of storeys, height, shape, scale, depth? Are they terraced, detached or attached? Do they have pitched roofs, hipped or flat roofs, gable ends, dormer windows, chimneys, extensions or porches?
  - 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 set back? What size are the plots - are there front gardens, rear gardens?
  - Materials. What are the characteristic materials - are there timber framed buildings, flint walls, sash windows, thatched roofs, clay tiles? Identify locally used materials. Do materials contribute to character more than the buildings themselves? How have modern materials been used and how could they be used more effectively?
  - Detailing. What details do the buildings of different ages have? Are there distinctive styles, pargetting, stone carvings, stained glass, lead work? Do the rooflines have particular characteristics or detailing?
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#### Plans and diagrams to include

- Character area plan with notation of key buildings and building features.
  - Sketches and/or photographs of important buildings and characteristic features for each character area. Include captions that enable the reader to understand what you are intending to get across.
  - Diagrams and sketches of building design, features, materials, detailing - show what is considered bad and what is considered good.
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#### The type of guidance

- Identify changes, however small, by building owners and householders that already do or could detract from the appearance of the streetscene. Examples could include changes to building exteriors, building details, colour or signs. Some of these small changes might not actually require planning permission but the VDS is a way to give your community some guidance.
- Consider what design issues developers and applicants should pay special attention to when drawing up proposals to ensure development contributes to the character of your village. This could be design guidance for: Specific building types, new buildings, infill, larger development areas, extensions or alterations to buildings, scale and materials.

## 3b. Describe the character and design of spaces including local streets and lanes and their features and materials

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For each character area ....

- Spaces in the village are as important as its buildings. Not all spaces are immediately obvious. Think in terms of everything that is easily visible to the public, for example, greens, allotments, recreation grounds, the churchyard, front gardens, back gardens.
- Is there a village centre, a village green, one main public space or are there lots of connecting spaces? Are these green soft spaces or hard surface spaces?
- What is the character of the different kinds of open spaces, both public and private?
- Is the space contained by buildings, is it loose with a suburban feel, are there connections from the space to surrounding countryside?
- The highway is public space. The road consists of carriageways and footways, there are also cycleways, footpaths, bridleways - how do these contribute to character? Are they narrow or wide, straight or curving? Are there particular streets with strong character - why is this?
- There are many private spaces that contribute to our impression of a place. Front gardens will provide an important contribution to character and back gardens if easily visible - comment on gardens and grounds and state how they contribute to village character.
- Do parts of the village have any distinctive wildlife and vegetation? Are ponds an important part of the village?
- What exists in the space? Are there any unique structures or other characteristic features within the space? Are there particular tree groups or individual trees that are prominent or act as an important focal point?
- What street furniture exists, such as light columns, signs, public seating, bus shelters, overhead cables, or other utility structures? What is this street furniture like? What designs have been used? Is it suburban in character or does it maintain local distinctiveness?
- What are the characteristic boundaries of different spaces, for example boundaries of front gardens - are there distinctive hedges, walls, fences, ironwork?
- How is the village lit - is there light pollution, are there areas that benefit from good lighting design?
- What materials have been used for surfacing? Are there kerbs, soft verges, drainage ditches at the side of the carriageway? Are there painted lines - do these adversely impact on the visual qualities of the village?

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### Plans and diagrams to include

- Character area plan with notation of key spaces and features.
- Sketches and/or photos of distinctive street furniture, highway and other infrastructure features.
- Sketches and/or photos of recommended street furniture and/or other features that are considered most appropriate for your area.

## The type of guidance

- Identify those spaces of great importance. Identify who is responsible for the space and offer guidance for maintaining and enhancing the space.
- Identify changes, however small, to gardens or other private spaces, that already do or could detract from the appearance of the streetscene. Many of these small changes by property owners might not actually require planning permission but the VDS is a way to give your community some guidance.
- Identify unique features and offer encouragement to their protection.
- Identify places where street furniture could be improved, for example, minimising clutter, careful positioning etc. Identify who you are targeting - is it the highway authority, utility companies or private owners?
- Recommend use of specified styles of furniture designs appropriate to your area, for example, could better designed bus shelters help to encourage greater use of public transport?

## 4. Show how the social and economic activities of the community are reflected in the design and character of the village

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As well as the physical characteristics of the village, as set out in the previous sections, character comes from activity.

- How different land uses affect character, whether building appearance, special structures, signs and lights, or from the effects of the activity, sounds, comings and goings, deliveries etc. Land uses affecting character could include: Industry, agriculture, shopping, the school, places of worship and health.
- How special events and informal social interaction are managed, such as, weekly markets, fetes, fairs, processions, weddings, exhibitions.
- Are there places where people meet and activities are centred in the village? Do you have ideas for enhancing these places?

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### Plans and diagrams to include

- Sketches and/or photos of key places of activity to help portray village character.

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### The type of guidance

- Suggest ways of protecting the distinctive appearance of local business activity.
- Identify those activities and their land uses that could benefit from better management.
- Suggest ways of managing the effects of specific activities.
- Proposals for enhancing local events - consider the space where events are held, put forward suggestions to improve the space whilst also bringing benefit future events.
- Aim specific guidance towards shop owners, businesses, the school etc, as appropriate.

## 5. How movement within, to and from the village affects design and character

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Where are people going to and from, walking, cycling and driving, where are they parking, what conflicts occur?

- Does the village have a sense of arrival or departure?
- What effect does a through-road and road signs, or footpath, have on character?
- If parking is a significant issue in your village clearly state what the issues are and where the problems are.
- Is parking on front gardens creating a visual eyesore to the streetscene? Have residential hardstandings in particular areas become common?
- Do traffic calming measures exist? These could be hard urban measures such as bumps, build outs, chicanes, or more natural measures, such as the flow of the road and positioning of features such as road side vegetation or buildings - how do these contribute to character?

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### Plans and diagrams to include

- Sketches and/or photographs of walking and cycling showing the effect on character, and road, traffic and parking issues.
- Any suggestion of change in parking in the village should have a plan demonstrating how it can work.

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### The type of guidance

- Any suggestion of change in parking in the village should explain how it could work and who would carry out the works.
- If parking in front gardens is a main issue consider in design terms what may be acceptable and offer guidance on how to do it.
- If the community identifies potential for traffic calming measures suggest your design preferences for potential schemes for example, would you want to avoid urbanised measures such as traffic humps and side build outs, but encourage design led schemes to fit the context of the area?

## 6. Making proposals for positive improvements to the appearance of the village

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The VDS offers you the opportunity to identify positive improvements and suggest practical ways to make them happen. You can sow the seeds of positive action, prompt people to give practical help and identify possible funding sources.

- There might be specific sites you have identified which could be visually enhanced, made safer or more useful.
- Provide objectives and proposals that will improve these areas.
- Identify opportunity sites where you can indicate objectives for use, type of action, appearance.
- Identify problem sites where you want to prompt an improvement.
- Identify owners and possible enablers of change.

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### Plans and diagrams to include

- Plan showing location of possible improvement areas.
  - Diagrams of proposals.
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### The type of guidance

- Identify each specific improvement proposal and how they might be achieved - good ideas but simple and practicable. You may be able to include cost estimates.
- Identify the landowner and people with responsibility for the land, for example, the Parish Council, the Church, farms, businesses.
- If you have identified eyesore sites you could encourage the owner to tidy the site up.
- If you have identified intrusive storage and vehicle parking, you could encourage land owners to manage the site better.
- Consider who might actively assist including direct discussions with land owners, in the design, funding and implementation of your proposal.
- Suggest works that could be linked to planning permission for significant developments.
- Recommend types of tree and vegetation, local species etc, ideal for enhancing village character.
- Identify sources of materials suited to the village.
- Identify areas where natural habitats could be enhanced and nurtured through careful works.

# Appendices would not be part of the adopted document

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## Appendix 1

**Other village issues raised during public consultation that are outside the scope of the VDS.**

There might be various important matters that local people raise during preparation of the VDS but which the VDS cannot properly deal with.

If matters do not concern the physical design and care of the village environment, but you wish to acknowledge what people have said, list them in this appendix.

## Appendix 2

**Detailed information that is useful, but not appropriate in the main text.**

This appendix can list detailed information such as lists of buildings, descriptions of economy, wildlife.

# This diagram indicates the drafting you will be undertaking for your VDS to obtain Chelmsford Borough Council's (CBC) approval

The Chelmsford Borough adoption process

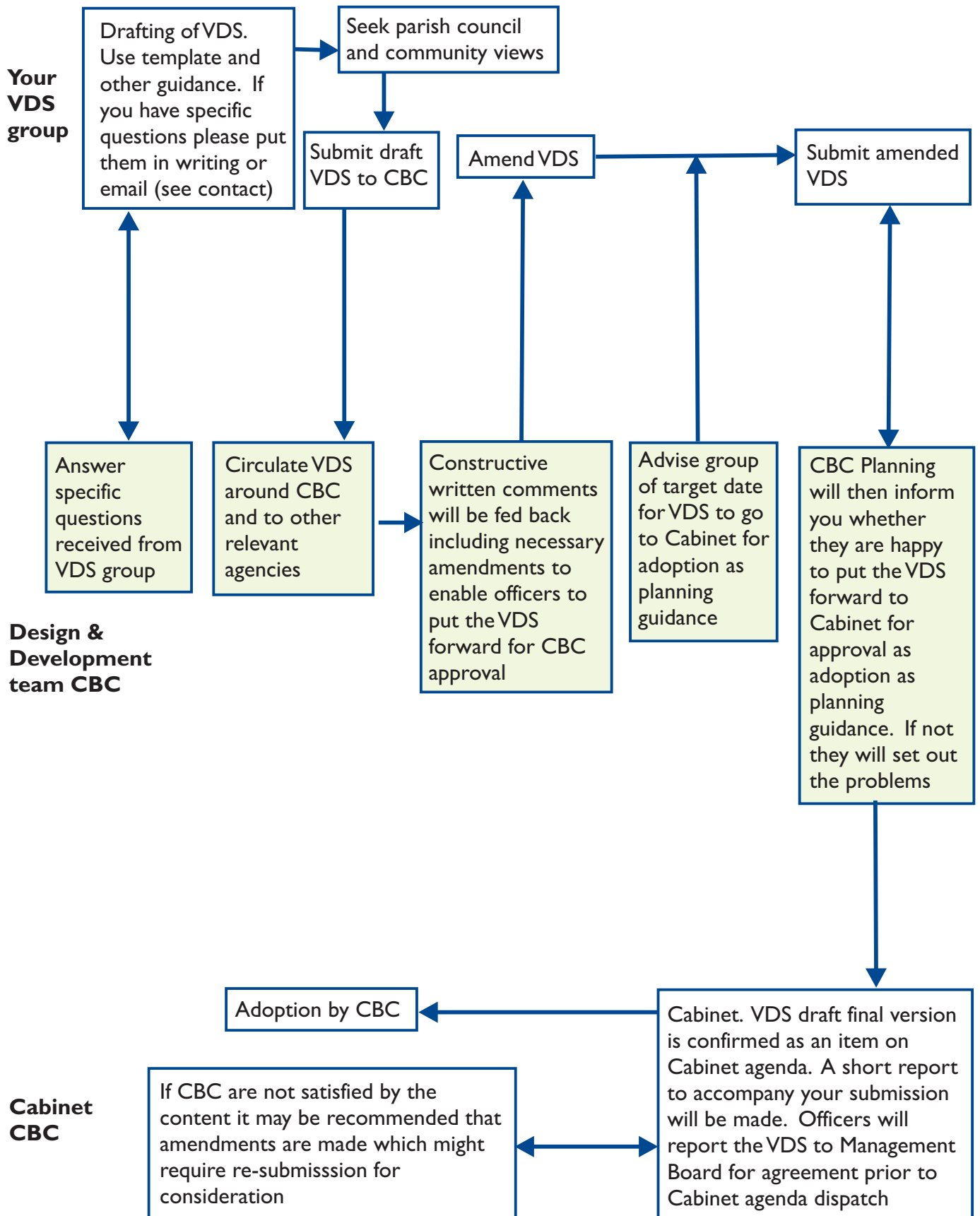




Photo by Rodger Tamblyn.

How would you use this photograph to make a point in your VDS?

*To show the location of an annual fete?*

- *To support guidance on design of shop awnings?*
- *To support guidance on clutter free spaces?*
- *To demonstrate the importance of a footpath route through the green?*
- *To recommend more tree planting?*
- *?*

The VDS is all about character. It is also a great opportunity to seek improvements to benefit the village character.

For additional copies of this document or to have it made available in large print, translated into other languages, or recorded onto audio tape please call 01245 606884

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2003-2004  
Quality of the Built Environment

