

**Local Plan Working Group**

**29 January 2015**

**Report of the Director of City and Environmental Services**

**Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement/ Supplementary Planning Document**

**Summary**

1. This report presents a summary of the responses received following a consultation on Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement. A number of amendments are proposed as a result of the consultation. Subject to Members views, it is intended that the amended document becomes draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to the emerging Local Plan. The document would thus be a material planning consideration when considering applications for development within the designated Village Design Statement area.

**Background**

2. In 1996 the Countryside Commission launched the 'Design in the Countryside' initiative, and produced advisory packs to help villages produce Village Design Statements (VDS).
3. Village Design Statements have been supported by City of York Council as a means of fostering good design, appropriate to its local context, and have so far been completed in Heslington, Copmanthorpe, Rufforth, Skelton, Holtby, Murton, Dunnington, Poppleton, Askham Bryan, Askham Richard and Knapton.
4. Village Design Statements are prepared by local communities. They offer a framework for engaging local people in constructive debate about defining the special character of their village, as a basis for ensuring that new development in their area fits its surroundings and is in keeping with that character. The VDS can help everyone involved in a development to understand local views and perceptions at the outset of the design process, and help new buildings to be designed in a way that is more likely to suit the local setting. They are a practical tool to help influence decisions on

design and development, and manage long-term change, rather than prevent it.

5. A VDS provides a clear statement of the character of a village, and identifies guidelines to be applied to future developments against which planning applications may be assessed.
6. Whilst VDS were historically endorsed by Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 7 'Sustainable Development in Rural Areas' (paragraph 13) and PPS3 'Housing' (paragraph 18), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) superseded Planning Policy Statements at the end of March 2012.
7. National Guidance (NPPF paragraph 58) says that 'planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments respond to the local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation'. It is considered that Village Design Statements are consistent with the overall NPPF guidance and provide an evidence base to inform local development decisions.
8. Some of the key proposals in the NPPF are being taken forward by the Localism Act. The Localism Act introduces a new 'neighbourhood' layer to the planning system which is aimed at giving people the opportunity to shape the places they live in through neighbourhood plans. Neighbourhood Plans allow communities to develop a vision of what their area should be like and make decisions on where certain types of sustainable development should go. They will form part of the Statutory Development Plan if it is in accordance with national and Local Plan policy. Neighbourhood plans will complement but do not replace existing community-led plans such as Parish Plans and Village Design Statements.
9. The Council are committed to supporting communities in preparing Neighbourhood Plans under the Localism Act, and continue to support communities who have commenced Village Design Statements to conclude the process.
10. To summarise, Neighbourhood Plans shape and direct where development should go, whereas Village Design Statements provide design guidance to encourage development that is in harmony with its setting and contributes to the local environment.

11. City of York Local Plan Preferred Options (June 2013) Policy DHE1: Design and the Historic Environment recognises York's special qualities and the opportunities for improving and enhancing the character and quality of an area as key considerations in determining the design implications of development.
12. Whilst the NPPF does not make specific mention of VDSs, its general approach to the delivery of good design focuses on understanding and responding to local character and distinctiveness. The Local Plan's emerging design and heritage policy will therefore continue to support Village Design Statements as a means of ensuring that future development is based on a thorough understanding of local character and context. VDSs would thereby retain their planning status as material considerations in the determination of planning applications.
13. NPPF paragraph 153 says that 'supplementary planning documents should be used where they can help applicants make successful applications'. If a VDS is approved by the local planning authority as a draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), it becomes a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications. A SPD is intended to expand upon policy or provide further detail to policies in the Local Plan. It does not have development plan status, but it will be afforded significant weight as a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications. The SPD, once approved, remains a draft until such a time as the Local Plan has been through examination and is formally adopted by the Council. Although a 'draft' SPD this document is a material consideration in the planning application process.
14. The VDS, once approved, would assist in making decisions upon planning applications, through the Development Management process. VDS's have also been given weight by Planning Inspectors in individual planning appeal cases. The VDS is valuable and carries weight as a material consideration because of the degree of local community involvement in producing it.

## **Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement**

15. Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement, incorporating the proposed amendments, is attached at **Annex A**.
16. The introduction to the VDS explains that it represents the views of local villagers and includes some aspirations that are outside current planning regulations. However, this is the villagers' own document and the inclusion of non-planning issues can be appropriate because the information is relevant to all, not just the local planning authority.
17. As a result of comments received during the consultation (Annex B, 21a), CYC Senior Solicitor recommended to separate elements that are beyond the remit of the VDS, and therefore this information was transferred to Annex A within the VDS as background information.
18. The VDS group are now keen to see the document approved as a draft Supplementary Planning Document to the emerging Local Plan.
19. NB. The group intend to intend to have the final version professionally designed and produced once the text is approved. CYC is only being asked to approve the textual content, graphic presentation and photographic quality will change post approval.

## **Consultation**

20. Strensall with Towthorpe village began investigating a VDS in April 2010, and a working group for the VDS was established in June 2012. Displays were shown at the Queen's Jubilee Celebration and at the Village Show in 2012 to recruit members and to inform Villagers about the VDS. In February 2013 a website was set up to allow access to all Villagers to ongoing work and decisions. Strensall with Towthorpe Parish Council was regularly briefed, regular articles were placed in the monthly parish Outreach Magazine. In summer 2013, a survey of Villagers was carried out both on line and through a questionnaire, funded by the Strensall with Towthorpe Parish Council and a City of York Council Community Grant. All businesses in Strensall with Towthorpe acted as both information stands and collection points for the

questionnaires. The response rate was 13 percent of the households in the Village. From November 2012, the results of the survey have been published both on the website and through Outreach Magazine and underpin the VDS. An Open Evening on the draft VDS was held in early December 2013.

21. On 30 June 2014 the draft VDS was approved to go out to formal Council consultation by the Local Plan Working Group.
22. The consultation ran for seven weeks, from 21 July to 7 September 2014, and comprised:
  - copies of the draft documents will be available at:
    - the Council reception at West Offices
    - Strensall library
    - Strensall Village Hall
    - online via [www.york.gov.uk](http://www.york.gov.uk)
  - email/ letter to consultees (list of consultees in Annex E)
  - press release
  - ward based social media promotion
23. 32 responses were received. A schedule of responses from the consultation, together with subsequent officer/ VDS group amendments are set out in **Annex B**.
24. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report was consulted upon at the same time. The three statutory bodies for the SEA process are English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency. No specific comments were received on the SEA and therefore no updates are proposed. The SEA Screening report will be published on the council website alongside the approved VDS/SPD.

### **Options**

25. Officers request that Members consider the following options:

**Option 1:** Recommend that Cabinet, subject to any identified amendments, approve Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement as a draft Supplementary Planning Document to the emerging Local Plan.

**Option 2:** Recommend that Cabinet request changes to Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement and produce a further report for consideration.

**Option 3:** Recommend that Cabinet do not approve Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement as a Supplementary Planning Document.

### **Analysis**

26. Option 1 is preferred, unless there are any omissions or inaccuracies in the VDS. Options 2 and 3 could delay or halt the VDS process.

### **Council Plan**

27. The VDS guidelines support the Local Plan's spatial vision (Preferred Options paragraphs 3.17 – 3.21) and relate to the following Council Plan priorities:

- Build Strong Communities
- Protect The Environment

### **Implications**

28. The following implications have been assessed:

- **Financial** - It would be necessary for the Council to meet the cost of part of the print run of the final version of the VDS, so that copies are available for the planning team and local libraries. The cost of £50 for 20 printed copies plus an electronic version of the final document has been agreed for Strensall with Towthorpe VDS.
- **Human Resources** - The production of Village Design Statements requires the continued implementation of a work programme that will predominantly, although not exclusively, need to be resourced with CES.
- **Community Impact Assessment** - A Community Impact Assessment has been carried out for Strensall with Towthorpe VDS and highlights the positive impact on age and disability groups. The full CIA is attached in Annex C. Groups of people with protected characteristics under equality legislation are not disadvantaged by the VDS. The guidance will be accessed

equally by all community of identity groups, and no risks of inequality or discrimination were identified.

- **Legal** - No implications at this stage
- **Crime and Disorder** - None
- **Information Technology** - None
- **Property** - None
- **Other** - None

### **Risk Management**

29. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, the main risks in producing Village Design Statements for the City of York are:
- Risks arising from failure to comply with the laws and regulations relating to Planning and Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment processes.
30. The main risks in not concluding Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement for the City of York are:
- Potential damage to the Council's reputation if a SPD is not approved in an appropriate timeframe.
31. Due to the protracted timeframe in getting the VDS through the approval process, there is a risk of criticism of project delivery which if delayed further could damage the Council's reputation. Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk associated with this report have been assessed as requiring regular monitoring.

### **Recommendations**

32. In accordance with Option One, that the Local Plan Working Group recommends the Cabinet to:
- (i) approve Strensall with Towthorpe VDS text attached at Annex A as a draft Supplementary Planning Document to the emerging Local Plan.*

Reason: Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement follows in the footsteps of other previous examples that have been agreed;

observing the general guidance and principles required in their production, whilst successfully defining the individual qualities of the villages and bringing forward appropriate Design Guidelines.

*(ii) delegate to the Director of CES in consultation with the Cabinet Member the making of any incidental changes to the VDS as a result of the recommendations of Cabinet.*

Reason: So that changes recommended as a result of discussions at this meeting can be made, in liaison with the VDS group.

*(iii) delegate to the VDS group and officer the final graphic design.*

Reason: To allow changes to the final graphics/ layout as required e.g. improved photo quality, or number of pages to meet print specifications.



## Contact Details

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**Chief Officer Responsible for the report:**

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**Report  
Approved**

**Date** 09/01/15

**Cabinet Member Responsible for the report:**

Cllr David Levene  
Cabinet Member for Transport, Planning  
& Economic Development

**Report  
Approved**

**Date** 21/01/15

**Specialist Implications Officer(s):** N/A

**Wards Affected:** *Strensall with Towthorpe*

**For further information please contact the author of the report.**

**Annex A:** Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement,  
December 2014

**Annex B:** Schedule of Consultation Responses/ Amendments

**Annex C:** Community Impact Assessment, Strensall with Towthorpe  
VDS

**Annex D:** Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report,  
Strensall with Towthorpe VDS

**Annex E:** List of Consultees

**Annex F:** Abbreviations