

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

**Draft Village Design Statements For Wheldrake, and For Strensall with Towthorpe To Be Agreed For Consultation**

**Summary**

1. This report presents two consultation draft Village Design Statements, one for Wheldrake and one for Strensall with Towthorpe. It outlines the process so far in producing the documents and concludes that a consultation process should be undertaken, with a view to approving the guidance as draft Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) to the emerging Local Plan.

**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in Rural Areas' (paragraph 13) and PPS3 'Housing' (paragraph 18), the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) superseded Planning Policy Statements at the end of March 2012.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.
15. The draft Wheldrake Village Design Statement is attached as Annex A, and the draft Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement is attached as Annex B to this report.
16. The introduction to both VDSs explains that they include 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

## **Draft SPD - Wheldrake Draft Village Design Statement**

17. Wheldrake village first started work upon the VDS in February 2010. A steering group was formed in April 2010. A local history exhibition “Wheldrake – Then and Now” launched the process. The views of local people were sought through a questionnaire to all households in the village, 30% were returned. A draft document was placed upon the Parish Council website to give everyone the opportunity to get involved in the process, and to ensure that the VDS was representative of the views of Wheldrake parishioners. Copies of the draft VDS and reply forms have been placed in village meeting places and their availability publicised in the Wheldrake Parish Magazine. Since these events several drafts of the VDS have been produced and council officers have commented on the contents.

## **Draft SPD - Strensall with Towthorpe Draft Village Design Statement**

18. 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.

## **Consultation**

19. As a result of this considerable work by these two VDS groups, the documents have now reached the stage where it is appropriate to undertake a formal Council consultation exercise, for which this

report seeks approval to proceed. Local people should also be afforded a final opportunity to comment on the drafts.

20. As the Village Design Statements will become SPDs, they will become 'local development plan documents' and therefore fall under the remit of the Duty to Cooperate and, hence, the need to cooperate with the prescribed bodies set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 for the purposes of implementing section 33a(i) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. For York this comprises the neighbouring authorities of Ryedale, Selby, Harrogate, Hambleton and the East Riding (where appropriate), and also of those listed in the regulations it is considered that the following bodies are most relevant to the City of York Council:
  - the Environment Agency
  - the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (known as English Heritage)
  - Natural England
  - the Civil Aviation Authority
  - the Homes and Communities Agency
  - the Office of Rail Regulation
  - the Primary Care Trust
  - the Highways Agency
  
21. The Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Screening Report will be consulted upon at the same time (see Annex E and F). The three statutory bodies for the SEA process are English Heritage, Natural England and the Environment Agency. Following consultation with these bodies, the results of the screening assessment will be published alongside the updated SEA Screening report and approved VDS/SPD.
  
22. In accordance with the adopted Statement of Community Involvement (2007), the consultation exercise will run for six weeks, beginning summer 2014 and will include the following elements:
  - copies of the draft documents will be available at:
    - the Council reception at West Offices
    - Strensall Library, Mobile library (Wheldrake)
    - appropriate local venues to be confirmed
    - online via [www.york.gov.uk](http://www.york.gov.uk) and appropriate local websites to be confirmed (e.g. [strenthorpevds.co.uk](http://strenthorpevds.co.uk) [www.strensallparishcouncil.co.uk](http://www.strensallparishcouncil.co.uk) and [wheldrake.net](http://wheldrake.net))

- email/ letter to consultees (see Annex G)
- press release
- appropriate local promotion - ward based social media promotion

Due to the extent of local consultation already undertaken to date then specific events are not proposed. However, Strensall VDS group will be manning a stand at the village show which may coincide with the consultation process.

23. The local working groups and officers will consider the comments and make subsequent amendments. It is intended that a consultation statement detailing the outcomes of the consultations and the final draft VDS/SPDs will be reported to the Local Plan Working Group and Cabinet in autumn 2014.

### **Options**

24. Officers request that Members consider the following options:

**Option 1:** Recommend that Cabinet, subject to any identified amendments, approve the documents attached as Annex A and Annex B, along with supporting information for consultation.

**Option 2:** Recommend that Cabinet request changes to the document(s) and produce a further report and draft for consideration.

**Option 3:** Recommend that Cabinet do not approve the draft VDSs for consultation.

### **Analysis**

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

### **Council Plan**

26. 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

27. The following implications have been assessed:

- **Financial** - Costs associated with the consultation process would need to be met through the planning budget. It would be necessary for the Council to meet the cost of part of the print run of the final version of the VDS, if approved, 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 each VDS (£100 total).
- **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 each VDS and highlights the positive impact on age and disability groups. The full CIAs are attached to this report in Annex C and D. 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

28. 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.

29. The main risks in not concluding these Village Design Statements for the City of York are:
- Potential damage to the Council's reputation if a SPD is not approved in an appropriate timeframe.
30. Due to the protracted timeframe in bringing these draft documents forward for consultation, 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**

31. In accordance with Option One, that the Local Plan Working Group recommends the Cabinet to:
- (i) approve the documents attached at Annex A and Annex B, along with supporting information for public consultation.*

Reason: The draft Village Design Statements follow 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 draft documents and supporting information 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 Director of City and Environment Services (CES) in consultation with the Cabinet Member the consultation strategy.*

Reason: To ensure that the proposed methods of consultation are satisfactory to Members. The consultation process as suggested in paragraph 22 of this report follows the procedure established for other Village Design Statements at this stage of their production.



## Contact Details

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### Chief Officer Responsible for the report:

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Report  
Approved



Date 17/06/14

### Cabinet Member Responsible for the report:

Cllr Dave Merrett  
Cabinet Member for Environmental  
Services, Planning and Sustainability

Report  
Approved



Date 17/06/14

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

**Wards Affected:** *Wheldrake and Strensall with Towthorpe*  
**For further information please contact the author of the report.**

### Annexes:

**Annex A:** Wheldrake Village Design Statement, June 2014

**Annex B:** Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement, May 2014

**Annex B1:** Strensall with Towthorpe Map

**Annex C:** Community Impact Assessment, Wheldrake Village Design Statement

**Annex D:** Community Impact Assessment, Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement

**Annex E:** Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report, Wheldrake Village Design Statement

**Annex F:** Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report, Strensall with Towthorpe Village Design Statement

**Annex G:** List of Consultees

**Annex H:** Abbreviations