

## The New Forest Village / Town Design Statement Guide

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## **1. Introduction**

This guide is aimed at providing information and advice to parish and community groups who wish to produce a village or neighbourhood design statement (VDS). The Guide will refer to Village Design statements throughout for ease of reading; however the information is equally applicable to more urban neighbourhood areas.

In 1996 the Countryside Agency (then Countryside Commission) produced a two part document 'Village Design, Making local character count in a new development'. Part one of this document provided detailed advice on what a village design statement is and how to undertake one. Part two dealt with the planning side and linked to Local Plans. 2005 saw a change in the planning system with the introduction of the Local Development Framework (LDF), so Part Two is now out of date. Part one is available electronically and can be downloaded from the District Council's Community Planning web page on <http://www.newforest.gov.uk/index.cfm?articleid=5336>

In addition, the District Council's recent publication 'The Community Planning Guide', also offers information which is useful for the VDS process. The resource sheets on forming a steering group and consultation may be especially helpful. This is also available electronically on the above link.

Therefore, this guide is not aiming to duplicate information that is already available but should be read in conjunction with, and seen as a companion guide to, Part One of the Countryside Agency document and the New Forest Community Planning Guide.

The key aims are to:-

- Highlight important aspects of the VDS process
- Share new ideas that have been established since the original was written
- Provide relevant information on the LDF to inform the VDS process
- Make the information local to New Forest communities

## **2. The New Forest Context**

Community Planning is a generic term used to cover a parish plan and market town healthchecks. Village design statements are often done at the same time as or following on from a community plan. All of these plans focus on consultation within the community to identify what is important, what are the issues and how residents want to see their environment in the future.

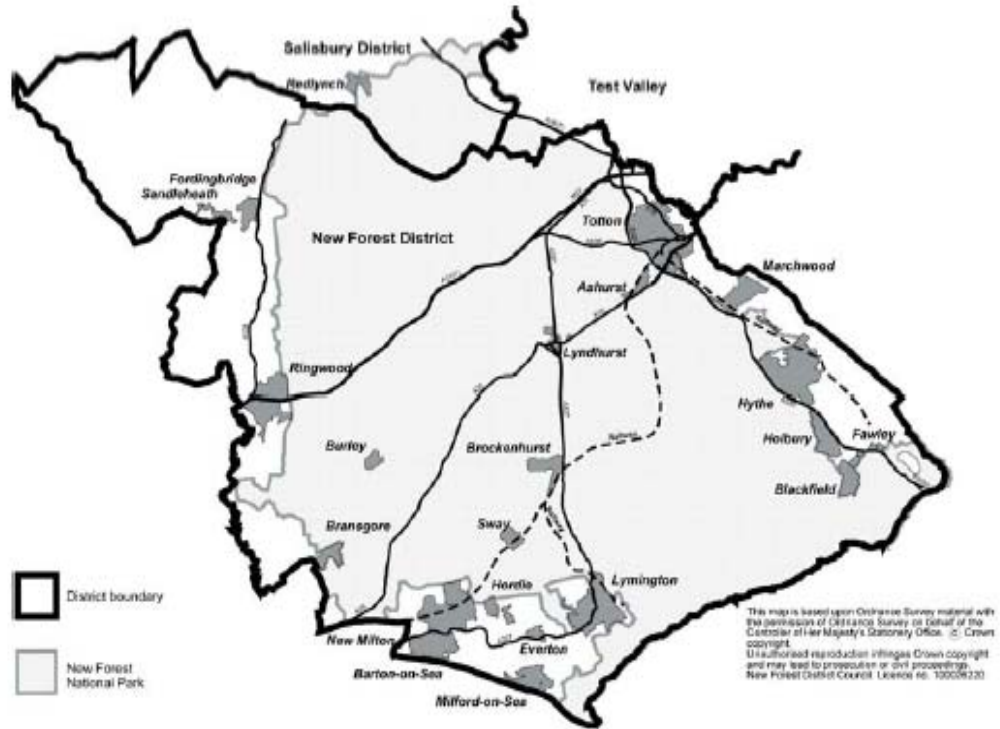
Some communities will complete a parish plan or healthcheck first and through that process identify the need to produce a VDS. Other communities may have concerns about impending developments or increasing changes and undertake a VDS first to address those issues.

Breamore and Milford On Sea have completed VDSs and had them adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

New Forest District Council is unique in Hampshire through having a dedicated Community Planning Officer to support and advise communities in undertaking a community plan. It is advisable to contact the Community Planning Officer at the earliest stage to get her advice and involvement. Experience has shown that support in the beginning is one of the key contributions to a successful community plan.

New Forest District Council has responsibility for local planning issues outside the National Park. The New Forest National Park Authority is the planning authority for the National Park. Both planning authorities have agreed that the Community Planning Officer will cover the whole district directing planning issues to the relevant organisation. For most parishes this will be straight forward but for those straddling the boundary officers from the Council and National Park will agree appropriate involvement.

# Map of District Council / National Park boundaries



### **3. Key points of a Village Design Statement**

#### **What is a VDS?**

Many communities feel that they have no say over what development takes place in their village. VDSs offer a constructive solution to this problem. Local communities have a unique understanding and appreciation of their own environment and a VDS is based on this knowledge.

A VDS sets out clear and simple guidance for the design of all development in a village and surrounding countryside, based upon its character. It is important to note that a VDS will **not** stop change from happening. However it can help influence any new building details, such as design and materials, to ensure they are in harmony with the settings and make a positive contribution to the immediate environment.

Village design statements do not detail what type of development should take place in a village or the state of local services. These issues are normally covered in the parish plan or healthcheck.

#### **What makes a good VDS?**

Preparing a VDS does not demand expert design or planning knowledge- the only requirement is an interest and enthusiasm regarding the future well being of your village. However it will require time, energy, imagination and determination.

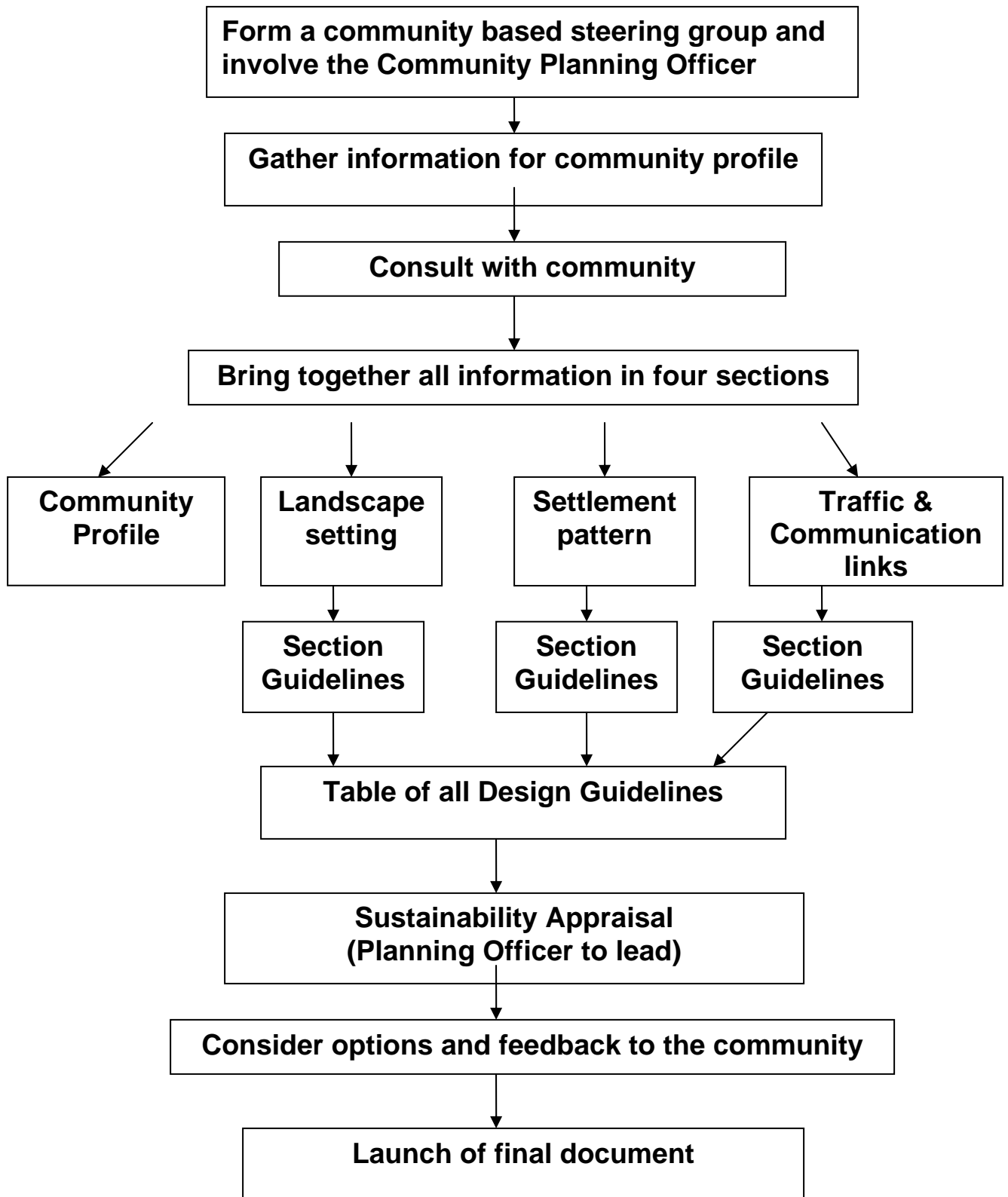
A good VDS:

- is developed, researched, written and edited by local people and reflects the views of the whole community not just those writing the VDS
- should describes the character of the village as a whole in terms of
  - countryside and landscape setting
  - form of the settlement

- details of buildings and spaces
- demonstrates how it is possible to protect and enhance local character and distinctiveness in new development
- uses positive not negative language. Avoid the use of phrases such as 'must be', 'must not', 'no more development' etc. Alternatives include 'wherever possible', 'should' etc
- uses maps to show the position of the village in relation to neighbouring communities (Ordnance Survey licensing regulations need to be met)
- includes pictures to illustrate the points being made
- identifies clear design guidelines explaining what is intended and how they should be achieved (these are vital for the sustainability appraisal)
- includes a sustainability appraisal
- considers all various options open to the community
- shows links to, and is compatible with, the relevant statutory plans
- should be suitable for adoption as Supplementary Planning Document (ie meet the planning criteria)

Remember a VDS is about **managing** change in a village, not **preventing** it.

## What are the key stages of a VDS?



## What is the recommended structure for a VDS?

There are several important sections that should be included in a VDS to demonstrate a thorough approach and maximise opportunities for it to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. Have a look at other VDSs to get ideas on what may work or not work for your community – why reinvent the wheel?

- **Introduction** to your VDS, what are it's aims
- Map and pictures of the village and surrounding area - use throughout the document to highlight points being made
- **Village and Community Profile** – (you may already have this information if you have completed a parish plan or healthcheck)
  - Location – Description of location in relation to the nearest major town, geographical features such as a river, and transportation links such as the railway or roads.
  - History and development- Outline of how the village has evolved from its earliest traces as a settlement through to any recent developments.
  - Map- A map showing the built up area of the village and its surrounding area.
  - Population breakdown (available from census)
  - Employment- A brief description of where those who live in the village are employed and employment opportunities in the village itself.
  - Shopping- A description of the shops and services available in the village.
  - Educational facilities- Outline any nurseries or schools located in the village.
  - Community facilities- Description of facilities such as a doctor's surgery, day centres, residential homes, community centres, village halls etc and groups that use such facilities e.g. scouts and guides. In addition details should be provided of any affordable housing needs.
  - Sports and leisure facilities- An outline of the sports and leisure facilities in the village including details regarding maintenance and ownership. Identification of any major

issues regarding sports and leisure facilities, for example shortfall.

- **Landscape Setting**

- Topography- An outline of the physical landscape. For example the soil type on which the village is located, the location of any hills or valleys, rivers or streams, areas of woodland etc.
- Water courses and drainage- A brief outline of the quality of the water courses in the village and any biodiversity, land designations attached to it. The quality of drainage in the village should be considered with regards to the permeability of underlying rock type.
- Vegetation- Description and identification of the nature of the trees in the village both deciduous and non-deciduous. Additionally description of the hedgerows that line the fields and roads and any other notable vegetation in the village.
- Where village and country meet: Important views- A note of the views out of and in to the village from different directions around the village.
- Landmarks and views within the settlement: Description of the important landmarks within the village, e.g. churches, public houses and any features that form a natural barrier within the village. For example a main road or an abandoned railway line. In addition the views with a settlement, for example at a crossroads or along a main road.
- Open spaces: An outline of the main recreational; open spaces within the village and open areas that are important for their visual amenity.
- Map- It may be useful to include a map at the end of this section identifying the main landmarks, important vegetation and important views.

- **Settlement Pattern, Character and Buildings**

- Building Types and Layouts- Outline any particular patterns of development within the village such as development stretching along main roads (known as ribbon development). Additionally provide a description of

the type of housing located on these plots e.g. whether the housing is detached or semi-detached, bungalows etc. This section is likely to involve splitting the village up into different areas which have similar building styles.

- **Materials and Features-** Provide a brief description of the materials used in building the properties in the village and the general features of the buildings. Once again it might be necessary to split the village up into several areas and describe the materials and features of the properties in the different areas.
- **Property boundaries-** Provide detail on the nature of the gardens and the boundaries between public/private space. For example whether there are mature planting, beech hedging or iron railings. If necessary split the village up into different areas or zones to reflect the difference in boundary type.
- **Roofs-** Provide detail on the nature of the roofs if it is out of the ordinary e.g. the village has a large amount of thatched roofs.
- **Architectural features-** Provide a description of any special architectural features such as leaded windows or cast iron casement windows.

- **Transportation Links**

- **Introduction-** A general discussion of the access into the village via roads and footpaths and the transportation links within the village itself.
- **Principal roads-** A brief description of the principal roads within and surrounding the village and their relationship to the village. Furthermore identification of any areas prone to bad traffic or accidents and any issues regarding speed limits.
- **Local roads-** A brief description of the local roads within and surrounding the village and their relationship to the village. Furthermore identification of any areas prone to traffic or other problems.
- **Cul-de-sacs and minor lanes-** A brief description of the minor roads and lanes within the village and any issues associated with them e.g. poor lighting.

- Footpaths- A description of the main footpaths within the village and the links that they provide within the village themselves and beyond the village
  - Parking- Outline any issues with regard to parking in the village if there are any. For example a possible lack of off road parking in the village.
- **Section guidelines** It is a good idea, when writing each of the above sections, to identify points which are particular to your community and you wish to see as forming your guidance. This could be done as a list of recommendations at the end of each section which can then be pulled together at the end of the report as your design guidelines. The final list will provide an instant overview on how your community would like to develop in the future and also be used for the sustainability appraisal. Look at other Statements or talk to your Planning Officer for examples on wording the guidelines in a positive and professional way
  - **Design guidelines** – a complete table of all three section guidelines (see above)
  - **Appendix One** – describe your consultation process and options considered
  - **Appendix Two** - the Sustainability Appraisal - description of process and matrix
  - **Appendix Three** – links to the Local Plan policies and Local Development Documents as they emerge

## 4. The Planning Context

Your VDS can have a significant effect on planning decisions in your area. Through following the advised procedure and showing wide consultation with your community you will have a document that meets the planning requirements and should be able to be adopted as Supplementary Planning Document by the District Council or National Park Authority (NPA). This means that your VDS will be considered by planners when there is to be development or change in your area.

Therefore VDSs must work within the context of the statutory planning documents and not propose any policies that are contrary to what is proposed in any statutory planning documents.

However, having said that the new planning system is complicated as it still contains parts of the old system. This section picks out the basic aspects of planning that you will need to consider and be aware of when writing your VDS.

### **What is the Local Development Framework?**

In autumn 2004, the Town and Country Planning Act brought about changes to the planning system with Local Plans being replaced by Local Development Frameworks (LDFs).

LDFs consist of a portfolio of documents that deliver the Council's planning strategy. The Framework will **gradually** replace the New Forest District Local Plan and the Hampshire County Structure Plan Review as the statutory development plans for the area. However some policies in the existing Local Plan are likely to remain current until 2011.

Until replaced by the new LDF policies both the NPA and District Council will be working with the existing New Forest District Local Plan, First Alteration, Adopted August 2005. Your parish / town Council will have a copy of the Plan. Given the complicated situation, you are advised to consult with NFDC or NPA early in the process.

## **What is a Supplementary Planning Document?**

Under the old planning system VDSs could be adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Through the new system they can be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). SPDs expand or add details to policies laid out in the LDF. These documents can use illustrations, text and practical examples to expand on how the authority's policies can be taken forward. They are also subject to a Sustainability Appraisal to ensure economic, environmental and social effects of the plan are in line with sustainable development targets

SPDs have additional criteria for adoption:

- They do not conflict with the policies of the LDF
- Thorough consultation with, and involvement of, the community throughout the process is essential
- A sustainability appraisal has been undertaken to ensure that objectives contribute to the achievement of sustainable development
- All options are considered before the final plan is completed

## **What is the link with conservation areas?**

A conservation area is defined in legislation as 'an area of special architectural or historic interest, the character or appearance of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance'. There are 37 widely differing sizes and types of conservation area in New Forest, some of which have been the subject of a conservation area appraisal.

A conservation area appraisal provides a detailed assessment of the area. If you are one of the following areas reference to the existing conservation appraisal is a must.

- Fordingbridge
- Hythe
- Lymington
- Lyndhurst
- Milford
- Ringwood

Further conservation areas appraisals are planned and the Conservation Officers at both the National Park and District Council will be able to provide further information.

### **What is a Sustainability Appraisal and how do we do one?**

A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a process through which the sustainability of a plan or programme under preparation is assessed.

The SA process aims to test the plan or programme against sustainability objectives which have been agreed for this purpose. The plan/ programme can then be altered if desired or justified if it is not. SAs are intended to ensure that planning authorities aim to achieve the Government's framework goal of sustainable development in line with the five principles set out in the UK Sustainable Development Strategy:

#### **UK Sustainable Development Strategy Principles:**

- **Living Within Environmental Limits**  
Respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generations.
- **Ensuring a Strong, Healthy and Just Society**  
Meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal wellbeing, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.
- **Achieving a Sustainable Economy**  
Building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunities for all, and in which environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (polluter pays), and efficient resource use is incentivised.
- **Using Sound Science Responsibly**  
Ensuring policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst

taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the precautionary principle) as well as public attitudes and values.

- **Promoting Good Governance**

Actively promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society engaging people's creativity, energy, and diversity.

The Sustainability Appraisal objectives and criteria are listed in Annex One. It is a good idea to familiarise yourselves with the criteria at the start of the VDS process as this will help guide your information gathering and consultation.

However as a Sustainability Appraisal is very complex both the National Park Authority and District Council have identified Planning Officers who will lead this process for you. The Community Planning Officer will introduce you to your Planning Officer early on in the process to get their support and advice.

### **How do we consider the Options?**

Once the Sustainability Appraisal has been completed you will need to consider whether the design guidelines you have developed are the best options for your community.

As explained in the section on the Local Development Framework, adoption of the VDS as SPD requires the community to consider the effect of the guidelines. If any of the design guidelines are likely to create a negative effect the community or you are unclear of the effect you may well wish to revisit them and discuss alternatives. There may be more than one way to achieve the design guideline but a basic option choice is 'do we include it or not'?

This 'testing options' process could form part of the final feedback/consultation with the community. This information could then be added to the VDS Appendix One as part of your consultation process.

## How do we show links to the Local Plan for Appendix Three?

In order to show that your VDS does not conflict with the Local Plan it is necessary to list the links to adopted planning policies.

You will not be expected to produce this list yourself. As planning policies are a specialised area your Planning Officer will be able to advise you.

### 5. Useful contacts and links

The following contacts may be useful to you in undertaking your VDS

| Name                                           | Organisation                       | Contact details                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Penny Velandar<br>Community Planning Officer   | New Forest District Council        | 02380 285342<br><a href="mailto:Penny.velander@nfdc.gov.uk">Penny.velander@nfdc.gov.uk</a>                 |
| Paula Freeland<br>Head of Environmental Design | New Forest National Park Authority | 01590 646658<br><a href="mailto:Paula.freeland@newforestnpa.gov.uk">Paula.freeland@newforestnpa.gov.uk</a> |
| Edward Gerry<br>Planning Officer, Policy       | New Forest District Council        | 02380 285375<br><a href="mailto:Edward.gerry@nfdc.gov.uk">Edward.gerry@nfdc.gov.uk</a>                     |