

## RAVENSTHORPE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS) UPDATE

### PROJECT BACKGROUND & INFORMATION DOCUMENT

#### **1. Background: The Planning Framework as it was in 1999 ...**

When the original VDS was brought out in 1999 , there were various national planning policies and these were translated into increasing more local detail, via firstly the Northamptonshire County Plan and then through Daventry District Council's Local Planning Policies.

The several dozen individual Daventry policies fell into several major groups setting out local priorities to guide decisions on planning applications that are taken in the planning committee:

These policies (also known as "saved policies") are all available on Daventry's website and are numbered, with the numbers having a two letter prefix:

GN - general policies, CM - commercial development, EM -protected areas, EN- environmental  
HS - housing development & RC- recreation provisions.

This suite of Daventry policies all together is often referred to as the "**Local Plan**".

#### **...& How the Ravensthorpe VDS fitted in**

There was a system by which additional policies could be created, that interpreted the local plan at a village level of detail, via the creation of Village Design Statements. Once adopted by Daventry , these became official "**Supplementary Planning Guidance**".

These had to be taken into account in planning decisions at Daventry, and by the planning Inspectorate, in the event of any Daventry decisions going to appeal.

So, non-compliance with the local VDS could be used as a valid argument against a particular planning application, in the same way that non-compliance with a Daventry policy or a national policy could.

Conversely, showing that a planning application *did* comply with both the local plan and the VDS would made it more likely to be approved.

Daventry policies of particular relevance to Ravensthorpe include those defining the area around the village as a "Special Landscape Area" and the village itself as a "Restricted Infill Village". Being in these designations meant that other policies restricting the amount and type of development to be allowed.

## **2. Changes in the Planning System since 1999....**

There have been several changes to the national level regulation which have change the shape of the planning policy system, and the terms used for its components.

(a) The *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004* replaced Supplementary Planning Guidance (including VDS documents) with "Supplementary Planning Documents" and these were to be one part of a new format for the Local Plan, namely the "Local Development Framework"

(b) The *Planning & Compensation Act 2004* required councils to publish a "statement of community involvement" showing how they were to go about ensuring there was adequate local consultation (of all economic ethnic and age groups in the community) before drawing up local policies.

(c) *Localism Act 2011* abolished Regional Plans (the level above County Planning) and introduced the "**Neighbourhood Plan**" as a vehicle for local planning policy to be guided by local residents. Unlike a VDS, which has to operate within its Local Plan (i.e. Daventry's policies for our area), a Neighbourhood Plan can actually over-ride some of policies in the Local Plan.

While this is clearly a more powerful version of a VDS, it is much more onerous to set up and requires a local referendum before it can be adopted.

(d) the **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)** was introduced in 2012. This set of national guidance completely overhauled the national framework and set out the general principles under which all local policies , at County, District or neighbourhood level are to be drawn up.

A central requirement of the NPPF is that all new development policies should ensure that development is "sustainable". " Sustainable" is defined as balancing three things - Economic, Social & Environmental needs.

In addition any development that was "sustainable" would be presumed to be acceptable, unless it was clearly contrary to the new local policies.

So, County and District Authorities have had to overhaul and update their policies to bring them into line with the NPPF and the other legislation above , which they are still in the process of doing.

### **....& Transition to the new System**

In the meantime, the old local (Daventry) policies would continue to apply, until they were upgraded in line with the NPPF.

BUT This was conditional on the district being able to demonstrate that it had secured the next 5 years' worth of additional housing land with planning approved. In the event that it couldn't, it's policies would no longer be taken into account and decisions would be taken solely using the NPPF guidelines.

Daventry's 5 year housing supply evidence was turned down in 2014 and they are currently rectifying this.

Daventry also has a suite of draft new planning policies going through approval, which will replace the old ones.

### **3. Why Update the VDS?**

The VDS is the document carrying local residents' views and priorities into the planning decision process, and provided they are up to date and compliant with the NPPF and Daventry policies, its requirements have to be complied with in planning application approval decisions.

When it was first introduced, Ravensthorpe VDS was held up as a good example and, where quoted, carried significant weight in decisions at Daventry.

More recently, while it can still carry a lot of weight (indeed has formed the basis for appeals against planning permission refusal to be turned down), however-

(a) it is being questioned as to whether, at 15 years old, it is still an up to date representation of current villagers' views on development of the village .

*We should get an updated "take" on local views.*

(b) with so much change in the national framework, certain statements in it may no longer comply.  
*We should update the wording to fit the new terms and weed out non-compliant statements.*

(c) recent cases have shown that certain of the guidelines in the old document could be more clearly stated. Any vagueness in its statements is certainly being picked open during appeals.

*We need to ensure that VDS guidelines are as clear as possible by cross referencing the text with maps and photos so that a non-local person can easily interpret the local wishes.*

(d) the NPPF has some new provisions, for example on the formal designation of valued open local green spaces, which could be included in an updated document.

*We need to add in any such provisions.*

### **4. Why a VDS update, not a whole new Neighbourhood Plan?**

The Parish Council decided to adopt this route as the quicker and simpler route to having local views taken account of in the planning process.

Daventry are accepting updates to local VDS documents for those villages where they already exist, but where they don't, are requiring local communities to draw up a full Neighbourhood Plan.

Putting together a full Neighbourhood Plan is a far more onerous, expensive and time consuming project and is felt to be beyond the resources of Ravensthorpe at the moment. Updating the VDS can be done relatively quickly and does not prevent a Neighbourhood Plan being also drawn up to replace it at a later stage.

## **5. What has been done so far & What needs to be done ?**

A small steering committee was put together to get the project started.

It originally had five members which has recently slimmed down to three due to family commitments:

Richard Marsh (Chairman & PC reporter) , Mary Worthington and Nick Ellison.

In 2014 we researched the changes to national framework and made contacts with Daventry DC to take advice on the best route to follow.

We drew up a list of the current policies and those in the process of being updated at Daventry against which to cross check an updated VDS.

A VDS update would have two main components-

(a) technical updating -of the local data (population figures etc) , wording, photographs etc to fit with the new national and district policies and to remove any ambiguities in any of the VDS guidelines.

(b) sense checking the local views expressed in the old document - are they still a reasonable statement of local views? If not, what should be added or taken out?

Before even starting on work on these, the first thing was to get a measure of general support for the project. Without evidence of local support it would be pointless trying to get any update approved by Daventry.

Assuming there was sufficient support for the project, the second would be to assemble a team of local volunteers to work together to carry out the actual work involved in actually gathering local views and re-writing the document, along with producing the necessary maps , photos and so on.

### *1st Local Survey, Summer 2014*

An initial survey was carried out to gauge general support for the project and get a bit of very basic feedback on whether the old guidelines in the VDS were still supported.

Just over half the households in the village responded and 96% showed broad overall support for the project. A dozen or so people volunteered to help with the project.

The responses to rest of the questionnaire, in terms of the individual guidelines and people's free-form comments have been gathered together for further analysis.

The following is a very general summary of the response data:

- All the existing summary guidelines continued to have a good level of support (>80%), however..
- The existing guidelines with biggest spread of views were those concerned with conversions for commercial development and respecting the ancient settlement pattern. Attention needed to details.
- Healthy level of scepticism – would the VDS actually be able to influence planning decisions?
- Boundary features – hedges trees and fences and trees - attracted quite a lot of comment
- Several comments regarding provision and maintenance of footways,
- Several comments regarding concern about control of traffic and parking
- Several comments showed expectations beyond what a VDS can deliver – i.e. provision of resources, control of individual behaviour, stop all development.

#### *Next Steps*

The steering committee will meet with volunteers in a public meeting in October 22 .

The basic aim is to decide together how we can all work together to complete the project:

1. Enable all interested villagers to meet face to face get up to date on progress so far and generally get an understanding of what the project is about and what needs to be done.
2. Discuss what time resources and skills individuals can offer to the project -
3. Agree a basic project plan , identifying the sub-projects that will contribute to the final result , who can get started on what and how we will all see it through as a team.

Broadly the suggested time plan is that we aim to get most of the technical updating done during the coming winter , gather more detail on local views during the spring , and put it all together with photos etc during summer 2015 ready to submit to Daventry early autumn 2015.