Draughton Parish Council – Meeting on 21 March 2022

Village Design Statements

Introduction

At the Council briefing meeting held on 17 January 2022, councillors suggested that they would like to consider producing a Village Design Statement (VDS), structured to be consistent with and complementary to the version currently being developed for the planning authority’s Local Plan framework.

Craven’s draft Design Code SPD had been circulated to councillors, but no comments were received and therefore no response was submitted to the planning authority’s consultation on the document, which closed on 1 February 2022.

This report now provides further information for discussion and decision by the Council at its meeting on 21 March. A copy of a sample VDS is attached.

Background

Introduced by the Government in 1996 with guidance produced by Natural England, a VDS is a means by which the local community can influence the design of new buildings and help to ensure they add to the character and distinctiveness of an area. It has to include a description of a village and set out guidelines suggesting how any new development should be designed in order to complement or improve the character of the area. It has to be developed with the involvement and support of the local community.

If formally adopted by the local planning authority, following statutory public consultation, the VDS becomes a Supplementary Planning Document.

The Government’s proposals for planning reforms, published in 2020, provide the immediate context for the current emphasis on “good design”, but the most recent revisions to the Government’s NPPF, in 2019 and 2021, emphasise the importance of design which reflects the “local area”, and require planning authorities to refuse planning applications where developments are not well-designed. Local design codes have to be consistent with the Government’s national design guide and also with the Government’s national model design code (these documents are available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/957205/National_Model_Design_Code.pdf> and

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide> ).

The setting of local policies for design have been included as a feature of the neighbourhood planning process since the Localism Act 2011. The Levelling-up White Paper published on 2 February 2022 provided for the continued inclusion of neighbourhood plans in the local planning framework.

Current policy context and documentation

In considering the possible preparation of a VDS for Draughton, Council may like to bear in mind the political background for local planning. At central Government level, there remains a presumption in favour of development, and both neighbourhood plans and village design statements are conceived as tools to aid good development. The planning policies, design policies, guides and codes currently in place at both Government and principal authority level ours provide the strategic context for this presumption to be implemented. As currently set out in Craven’s Local Plan, there is no significant development directed to Draughton as it is a 5th tier settlement area with limited services and poor infrastructure. Any applications which may be appropriate (ie for small-scale and infill building works) are currently assessed by the planning authority in the light of plan policies and criteria which take the status of the village into account, both as a 5th tier settlement and as a conservation area.

Any application for development will be assessed against the plan policy for good design (ENV3). This requires developments to respond to the context and enhance local distinctiveness, taking account of the area’s heritage and its setting in the landscape. Applications will also be assessed against the new design code, as recently issued for consultation, which contains a considerable level of detail, and specifically requires adherence to conservation area appraisals to guide good design.

Issues for consideration

In reaching a decision on whether to proceed with the preparation of a VDS for Draughton, Council is invited to consider the following key factors –

* Our VDS would need to be consistent both with the Government’s guidance, including the NPPF and the national code and guide, and the planning authority’s Local Plan’s policy ENV3 and good design spatial strategy, once adopted following the recent consultation. VDS’s are obviously unable to diverge from any of these principal documents in policy terms, and the detail included in a VDS would have to complement the relevant policy (Local Plan ENV 3). Unless our VDS is simply a re-statement of the strategic wording of the principal authority’s code (in which case, it is questionable why we would need a separate document), the technical work required to ensure conformity with the new code at a detailed local level would be extensive, and require specialist advice (see below), even if we were initially aiming to work on a “cut and paste” basis, relying on local templates and guidelines.
* In order to produce a VDS which contains a level of detail which extends and deepens the detail already contained in the planning authority’s design code we would almost certainly (unless we have resident architects/designers in the village) need specialist advice. This would need to take into account the additional requirements for our village, where the area is designated as a Conservation Area.
* The appointment of consultants or advisers could involve us either in incurring expenditure ourselves (which is currently unbudgeted) or in sourcing grant funding for the purpose.
* The document would need to be produced by the Council with community involvement. This would potentially entail setting up a working group led by one or 2 councillors, as well as the organisation of community events and publicity. Council needs to consider the extent of this, and whether, at a time when we are already engaged in facilitating a community climate change initiative, this is the right time to ask for volunteer input on a different exercise.
* The process for getting the VDS adopted as part of the local planning framework would be in the hands of the planning authority. It is debatable whether they would be adequately resourced to support us with such an exercise at the present time, when they are occupied with transitioning to form part of the new unitary council for North Yorkshire.

Recommendation

Council is invited to consider the issues raised and decide whether to proceed with proposals for preparing a Draughton Village Design Statement now, or whether to wait and possibly reconsider matters as part of the budget-setting exercise for a future financial year, once the new planning authority has been established and the local planning framework has been confirmed by the new North Yorkshire unitary authority.