

SOUTHERN WILTSHIRE AREA BOARD
(25 August 2011)

WINTERSLOW VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT

A REVIEW ON BEHALF OF THE SOUTHERN WILTSHIRE AREA BOARD

Purpose of review

An essential condition which must be met before any Village Design Statement (VDS) can be formally adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance by the Local Planning Authority – in our case Wiltshire Council (WC) – is that it must be shown to have been produced as a result of a genuine and truly representative democratic process of consultation with the community.

It must be shown that all sections of the community have had an equal chance to make their views and opinions known and that the resultant document is a proper reflection of the majority view throughout the community – rather than just those of the VDS project team.

So whilst the Southern Wiltshire Area Board has no mandate from WC to formally adopt Winterslow's VDS as SPG it can at least review the way the VDS project was conducted and determine whether or not it has been produced as a result of an appropriate consultation process. If it was satisfied on this point the Area Board could endorse the VDS and support its submission to WC with a recommendation that it be formally adopted as SPG.

With this in mind the Area Board commissioned its chairman, Richard Britton, to undertake a review of the conduct of the VDS project and produce a recommendation to the Board.

This review is not concerned with the contents of the VDS – but with the process whereby it was produced.

Background to VDS project

In February 2009 Winterslow Parish Council commissioned the production of a Parish Plan which, after endorsement by the Southern Wiltshire Area Board, was adopted in October 2010. One recommendation of the Parish Plan team was that a VDS should be produced and the Parish Council formally launched this project at its meeting on 7th June 2010.

A project team was set up consisting of five former members of the Parish Plan team, two parish councillors and a further volunteer from the village. The team held its inaugural meeting on 30th June 2010.

Since the Parish Plan project had already undertaken a comprehensive questionnaire survey through the village (and had achieved an 84% response rate) the VDS team, fearing “questionnaire overload”, decided that a second questionnaire survey was inappropriate.

Description of project

- Three working meetings of the project team were held June – August 2010 inclusive. Work streams were identified and planned – Environment and Open spaces; Settlements and infrastructure; Building styles and materials. All minutes of these and other Steering Group meetings were placed on the village website and on Notice Boards throughout the village.
- A stand at the “Celebrate Winterslow” event on 9th October 2010 displayed photographs of different building styles and materials. Around 300 visitors produced 178 detailed comments.
- Throughout the rest of October, all of November and the first part of December consultations with various village groups were held. A “Road Show” held on 11th December was attended by 48 people. These events built on responses to the Parish Plan questionnaire with more detailed photographic displays under the headings of the three workstreams. Special efforts were made to ensure the involvement of young people and the elderly. 40 home visits took place between November and April. There are varying estimates of the number of residents (including those at Lopcombe Corner) who participated at some stage and contributed “several thousand” comments. The minimum can confidently be put at 20%.
- Comments were put into a database under the headings of the three workstreams. Analysis and collation took place throughout January, February and March.
- On 19th March 2011 another Road Show was held in the Village Hall when 277 residents gave their opinions about potential development sites which were ranked in terms of their acceptability to residents. Results were published in the parish magazine and on the village website and further comments invited.
- The individual workstreams produced preliminary copy during the latter part of April 2011 and work to amalgamate these submissions into a VDS draft took place throughout May.
- A draft was presented to the Area Board chairman on 11th July. A detailed review took place with the chairman challenging the source and justification of many of the statements made in the draft.
- As a result of this review several changes were made and a further draft on disc collected by the reviewer on August 1st.

Reviewer’s comments

- 1 The Winterslow VDS project team provided well-publicised opportunities for all sections of their community to contribute to the work. However, following soon after a very successful Parish Plan project, it struggled to attract large numbers of people to its events. Nevertheless, it had the

comfort of being able to draw upon the meaningful data derived from the large number of responses to the Parish Plan questionnaire.

- 2 The fact that no new questionnaire specifically designed to be the source of information appearing in the VDS was used has, in some cases, constrained the ability of the team to provide specific numerical support for some of the broader statements made in the VDS about wider development issues.
- 3 Some of the statements depend for their verification on an amalgam of references – eg the Parish Plan survey together with comments submitted by visitors to the Celebrate Winterslow stand. This has made precise quantification difficult.
- 4 There is meaningful and reliable evidence that the statements in the VDS regarding building materials and design features are genuine expressions of public opinion.
- 5 The separate work done on potential development sites can be relied upon as being genuinely representative of public opinion.
- 6 Although there are some limitations to the quantification of responses on some issues overall the document can be taken as being a true representation of general public opinion.

Recommendation

The Southern Wiltshire Area Board is recommended to endorse the draft Winterslow Village Design Statement as having been produced by a genuinely representative consultation of village opinion and to support its submission for adoption as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Wiltshire Council.

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