

Town Design Statements

Why and how to produce them

Good practice advice



Town Design Statements



What is a Town Design Statement?

It is a published document that gives a detailed guide to the character of a town. It sets out the specific nature of the buildings and landscape which make the town distinctive, with recommendations on how to encourage new development that enhances and compliments what already exists. A Town Design Statement is similar in concept to a Village Design Statement (see further information) but the scale and complexity of towns means that a carefully co-ordinated approach is required in its production.

The key features of a Town Design Statement are:

- the involvement of the community in its production, in partnership with experts in a range of disciplines;
- its adoption as 'supplementary planning guidance'. This ensures that it will have real influence on new development.



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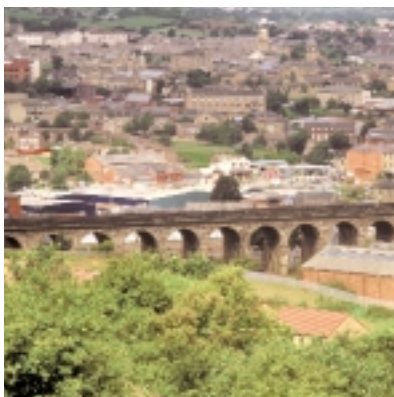
Why produce a Town Design Statement?

The main aims of a Town Design Statement are to:

- improve new development by providing guidance to landowners, developers and architects before they prepare proposals;
- reduce unsympathetic development by making it easier for planning authorities to seek improvements in planning applications and reject those which are not in sympathy with what local people want.

Other positive benefits may include:

- raising awareness of local design and environmental issues;
- creating partnerships between different groups in the community;
- acting as a catalyst for new initiatives which may be started as a result;
- speeding up the development process.

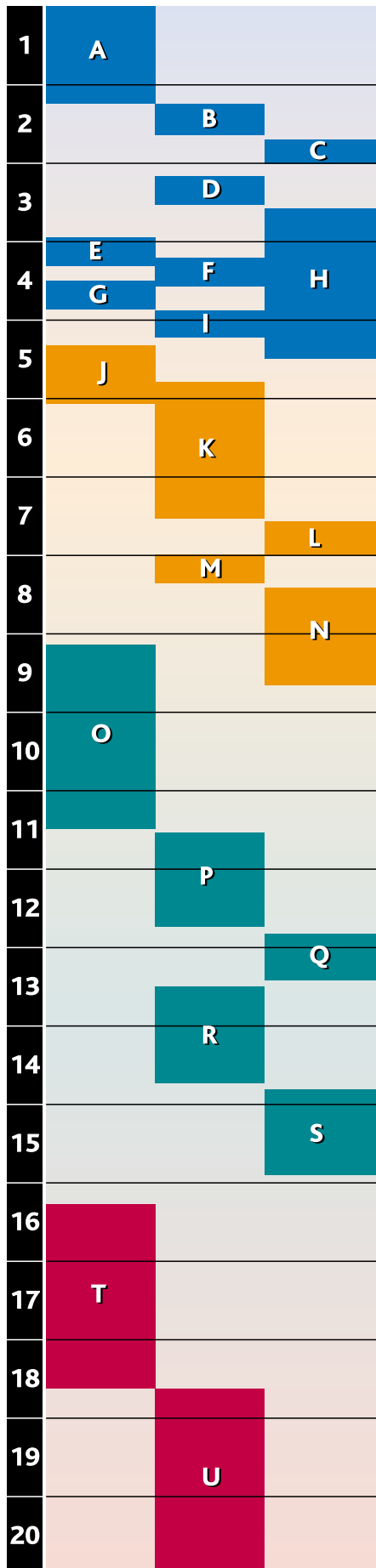


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How does a Town Design Statement relate to other plans and initiatives?

A Town Design Statement can be produced in isolation or as part of a wider community planning exercise. For instance, it can be a valuable component of a local community strategy. The need for one might be identified during a Market Towns Healthcheck (see further information) or community appraisal.

months



Process

Producing a Town Design Statement needs careful planning and management. The process shown here is one possibility, but it should be used as a guide not a blueprint.

Getting started

- A Obtain background information and discuss with the local authority.
- B Identify key parties and form steering group.
- C Form secretariat and editorial team.
- D Training session/s to cover, for example, townscape character analysis and website management.
- E Workshop to identify main issues, neighbourhood areas (including the town edge) and interest/topic groups.
- F Establish project identity, for example title and logo.
- G Form neighbourhood area groups and any special topic groups.
- H Publicise the project and call for volunteers.
- I Project launch event.

Gathering material

- J Townscape character analysis training for volunteers.
- K Undertake townscape character analysis in each neighbourhood.
- L Local area exhibitions and workshops.
- M Town exhibition and workshop.
- N Review and revise area character assessments.

Production

- O Prepare draft Town Design Statement.
- P Consult on draft Town Design Statement.
- Q Revise Town Design Statement.
- R Secure formal approval as supplementary planning guidance.
- S Revise and print.

Using the end product

- T Publicise. Make widely available in print and on a website.
- U Update and reprint Town Design Statement as necessary. Maintain website with updates.



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Organisational arrangements

Steering Group

The Steering Group should be a partnership of all key interest groups and agencies including representatives from town, district and county councils, voluntary organisations and the private sector. Monthly meetings are recommended. It is essential that the Steering Group keeps focused on design and character issues and leaves controversial policy issues to other initiatives (eg local plan review).

Secretariat

A strong secretariat is needed to drive and co-ordinate the process and give day to day direction. It should include people with expertise in project management, character assessment and community involvement. Where key skills are unavailable on a voluntary basis, it is recommended that they are provided ‘in kind’ by agencies or that funds are available to buy them in.

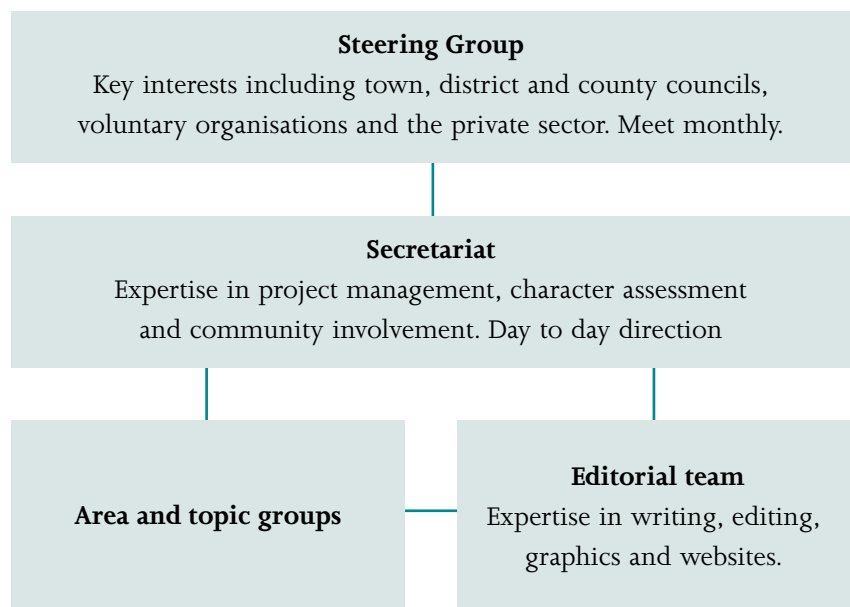
Area and topic groups

Area groups based on townscape character, not administrative boundaries, are likely to be most effective for townscape character analysis. But townwide special topic and interest groups may also be useful (eg. on transport).

Editorial team

The editorial team should include expertise in writing, editing, graphics and websites.

Suggested Organisational arrangements



Product

Sample content

The list below shows the possible content of a Town Design Statement. However, this is just a suggestion. Your Statement should be tailored to the particular character and needs of your town.

- 1 **What makes Anytown special?** A selection of quotes, facts and images.
- 2 **Main issues** Summary of the main problems and opportunities affecting design issues in the town: economic, social, environmental.
- 3 **Neighbourhood areas** Overview of different parts of the town and how they relate to each other. Map.
- 4 **Townscape analysis - area by area** Distinctive features, main issues and recommendations for each neighbourhood area. (See sample format in the box below.)
- 5 **Conclusions** Overall distinctive features, issues and recommendations for the town as a whole.
- 6 **About this Design Statement** Who produced it and how. Who it is for and how to use it. When it will be revised.

Supplementary Planning Guidance

Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) is advice which adds to, or refines, the local authority development plan (or the new local development documents). To make it easier for your Statement, or part of it, to be adopted as SPG by the local authority, you should:

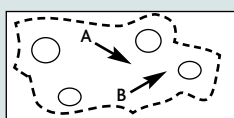
- ensure that planning officers are involved early on in the process;
- ensure the recommendations are consistent with local plan/local development document policies;
- cross reference recommendations in the Statement to relevant policies in the local plan/local development document.

Tips

- The Town Design Statement will normally be a printed report which can also be placed on a website. But do not be afraid to experiment with other possibilities.
- Developing a clear Statement structure early on will help keep people focused. It can always change later.
- Making the Statement visual - using photos, drawings, sketches, diagrams - will help make it accessible. And include people in some photos - it's the community that makes the place what it is!
- Use Village Design Statements as inspiration but remember that a Town Design Statement will almost invariably be more complex.
- Getting people to take photos of their area and putting captions to them is one of the best ways of generating enthusiasm.

Townscape character analysis format

Area name and short summary description



Area map with key features and photo locations marked



Context
Location in town diagram

Distinctive features Bullet points covering building design styles, spatial layouts, building materials, landscape setting and special features.

Main issues Bullet points covering the problems and opportunities in the area as seen from a variety of perspectives.

Recommendations General design principles for upgrading or for new development.



Distinctive features and issues illustrated (caption for each illustration)



Materials and detailing (caption for each photo or sketch).

The diagram (left) shows a possible format for collecting and presenting townscape character analysis and recommendations. Something similar should be completed for each neighbourhood area. Any quantity of material can be collected but editing it down to fit on one or two sheets will make it more useful for the end product and will help to keep the project focused

Further information

Publications

Town Design Statements

Research Note (CRN 56).

Town Design Statements: an evaluation of pilot projects. Countryside Agency, 2002.

Market Towns

Market towns toolkit (CA 27). Countryside Agency, 2000.

Parish Plans

Parish Plans: guidance for parish and town councils - interim guidance, 2002 (*available from the Agency website - see below*).

Design

Design of rural workplace buildings (CA 36). Countryside Agency, 2000.

Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment - Guidance for England and Scotland (CAX 84) Countryside Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, 2002.

Publications are available from:

Countryside Agency Publications, PO Box 125, Wetherby, West Yorkshire, LS23 7EP

Websites

Countryside Agency – General

www.countryside.gov.uk

Countryside Agency – Market Towns

www.countryside.gov.uk/market-towns

Countryside Agency – Parish Plans

www.countryside.gov.uk/vitalvillages

Countryside Agency – Village Design Statement

www.countryside.gov.uk/villagedesign

Landscape Character Assessment –

Countryside Character Network

An on-line discussion forum at www.ccnetwork.org.uk

Community Planning

www.communityplanning.net

Organisations

The Countryside Agency

Planning & Sustainable Development,
John Dower House
Crescent Place, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 3RA
Tel 01242 521381
Fax 01242 584270
Email psd@countryside.gov.uk
www.countryside.gov.uk

Action for Market Towns

A national network for local action.
PO Box 299, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1UU
Tel: 0845 644 6202
Fax: 01284 761816
Email: info@towns.org.uk
www.towns.org.uk

Planning Aid

Free, independent and professional planning advice to groups and individuals unable to afford to employ a planning consultant.
The Royal Town Planning Institute,
Planning Aid Manager
Unit 319, The Custard Factory,
Gibb Street, Birmingham B9 4AA
Tel: 0121 766 5282
Fax: 0121 693 1201
Email: planaidcoord@rtpi.org.uk
www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-advice/pa-help

Funderfinder

Develops and distributes software to help individuals and not-for-profit organisations in the UK to identify charitable trusts that may provide funding.
65 Raglan Road, Leeds, LS2 9DZ
Tel: 0113 243 3008
Fax: 0113 243 2966
Email: info@funderfinder.org.uk
www.funderfinder.org.uk

Countryside Agency pilot Town Design Statement contacts

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Selby

Steve Shaw-Wright,
Civic Centre, Portholme Rd,
Selby, North Yorks YO8 4SB
Tel 01757 705101

Stratford-upon-Avon

Maggie Lewis, 9 Heron Lane,
Stratford-upon-Avon,
Warwickshire CV37 9EG
Tel 01789 292878

Other Town Design Statements

Buckingham

Order:
carolynsgarden@hotmail.com
Web:
www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/
services/default.html

Our Statement has proved enormously valuable for improving planning applications - it's another tool in the armoury of those who want to see better design.

Carolyn Cumming

Buckingham Town Design
Statement Steering
Group.

Feedback

This advice has been prepared after detailed evaluation of three pilot Town Design Statements produced for Maldon in Essex, Selby in North Yorkshire and Stratford-upon-Avon in Warwickshire. If you have any comments or feedback on using this advice, we would like to hear from you. Please send them to the Planning and Sustainable Development Branch at the Countryside Agency (address shown opposite).

The Countryside Agency would like to thank all those involved in the pilot projects for their help and assistance.

This Good Practice Advice was produced by Nick Wates for The Countryside Agency.
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July 2002.

It makes people stop and take stock of where the town is going and how it could be better - you focus on it and think about it.

Margaret Day

Maldon Town Design Statement
Steering Group.





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