



# RISELEY VILLAGE

DESIGN STATEMENT





## **Riseley Village Design Statement – Notification of Amendments (August 2009)**

This note serves as an amendment to those planning policies within the Riseley Village Design Statement that have been updated or replaced since its adoption. Subsequent notes will be issued as Wokingham Borough Council continues to progress with its Local Development Framework. New Regional or National Guidance will also be included within these amendment notes.

### **Local Plan policies which are still valid:**

- WBE4 - Landscape and Planting

### **Local Plan policies which are no longer valid:**

- WBE1 - Design and New Development (Superseded by PPS1)
- WIC15 - Surface Water Run-off liable to cause flooding (superseded by PPS25)
- WIC17 - Foul Water Drainage (superseded by PPS25)
- WOS9 - Energy Efficiency in the design of new development (Repeats RSS policies INF4, INF5, INF8 and INF9 and SEP policies EN1-6)

### **Local Plan policies that have been replaced by Core Strategy Policies:**

- WOS2 - Housing Development Principles – *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP9 Scale and location of development proposals*
- WOS3 - Development Control Principles - *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP3 General Principles for Development*
- WH12 - Affordable Housing - *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP5 Housing mix, density and affordability*
- WT5 - Environmental Aspects of Traffic - *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP6 Managing Travel Demand*
- WT6 - Parking Provision - *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP6 Managing Travel Demand*
- WT7 - Road Safety - *replaced by Core Strategy Policy CP6 Managing Travel Demand*

**Policies that have revised numbering in the Core Strategy:**

None

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# INTRODUCTION

The Riseley Village Design Statement has been produced by the people of the Parish and is based on an identification and analysis of local character. It is intended for consistent use in the development control process in order to encourage improved development design in the village. The Riseley VDS is a means for local people to contribute to the Planning Process and help manage change in their community.

Whilst some development in the parish is inevitable, the people of Riseley value their environment and landscape and wish to ensure that its special character will be retained or enhanced by any new development. Within the Wokingham District Local Plan, (WDLP) Riseley is a Category B settlement, surrounded by areas designated as Countryside, Green Gap and Wedge, and adjacent to a Wildlife Heritage Site. Therefore any development will be limited.

While consultation within the village itself included developers, business people, developing businesses, other interested concerns outside the village have been consulted. A statement of consultation and responses accompanies this VDS.

The VDS will be of use to:

- the Local Planning Authority who can draw on its information for supplementary planning advice
- the Parish Council when commenting on planning applications
- prospective builders and developers
- residents and owners of existing buildings who want to either extend or change the use of a building.

## WHAT MATTERS TO VILLAGE PEOPLE

Main areas of concern expressed by villagers were about encroaching urbanisation, increasing industrialisation of existing agricultural sites, the concentration of modern housing developments and further industrial in-fill of green spaces.

In contrast to the ever encroaching towns with their industrial and urban pollution and traffic, the village environment provides places to ride and walk, to breathe and to appreciate the natural world, with a night sky at present dark enough to clearly see the stars.

Look outwards from anywhere in the village and the beauty of the surrounding countryside is instantly apparent. When asked, villagers expressed strong, real and protective appreciation of both landscape and countryside pursuits.



**A rural environment presents problems for modern living.**

**This village, for example, has:**

- No mains drainage, except for the two main streets. Many houses are served by septic tanks or sewage plants which are adversely affected by surplus water run-off, so large areas of hard-standing can create on-going difficulties at lower levels.
- Ditches, which need to stay open in order to drain the hills and fields and carry surface water to the three rivers that virtually surround us. So in-filling of ditches can cause widespread problems.
- Hedges and trees, which absorb prevailing winds, prevent soil erosion, are a living reservoir for quantities of water, and provide shelter for plants, birds and small animals. Fences provide none of these functions but seem to be a preferred option by developers.
- Lanes, whose ditches, drainage pipes, hedges and verges, were put in to provide services to isolated housing clusters. Now damage from heavy traffic for modern developments puts their efficiency at risk.

**Group feedback from meetings identified certain trends:**

- The strong emphasis on the value that people place on the environment itself and the desire to cherish and protect plant and animal wildlife.
- An appreciation of, and a wish to retain, the way the space between houses and clusters allows the countryside to be part of the village itself.
- A wish to retain the cluster characteristics of housing in the village.
- An appreciation of traditional materials and design in buildings.
- An appreciation of traditional materials and methods for boundaries to homes, fields and roads.
- The wish to ensure that change in building remains in keeping with the character of the area as well as with the building itself.
- The need to keep road-signs, and traffic calming measures rural in character.
- The importance to villagers of country pursuits.

## HOW THE VDS DEVELOPED

The Swallowfield Parish Council organised a meeting for Riseley residents to show how a Village Design Statement (VDS) could benefit the village. A VDS could be used as a Supplementary Planning Guide by the District Council Planning Department, provided the following conditions were met.

The VDS could not attempt to halt development planned within the overall aims of the Local Plan.

- The VDS must represent a collective village opinion.
- The VDS would collate and present preferences and information which could influence the design and placing of development.
- The VDS options presented must be within the remit of action permitted to the Planning Authority.

The invitation was taken up by the residents of Riseley, mainly because of the impact on the village of recent changes to an already existing commercial development, changes which strongly affected the character and ethos of the village.





# OUR VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT



## LANDSCAPE AND WILDLIFE

Riseley village, although divided by major roads, lies on open farmland rising gently from the Blackwater, Broadwater and Whitewater rivers and then crosses a ridge of higher land before sloping down again to the River Loddon. From the ridge there are clear, exceptionally beautiful views across both valleys to the next range of hills, over arable farmland divided by very old hedges and trees, woodland, copses, marshes and ponds.

There are two wildlife heritage sites together with other areas of special scientific and archaeological interest. In 1991 a survey found iron-age pots in one site, while at others Roman finds were discovered. These sites show that people from prehistoric times have settled here, between the three rivers. The survey only indicates the archaeological possibilities, as the area has not yet been explored in depth.

Hedgerows of hawthorn, sloe, hazel, wild rose, honeysuckle, hop and bramble form boundaries to lanes and fields, and huge oak trees, willows, poplars, alder, birch and ash inhabit fields, hedgerows and gardens. There are several areas of woodland in which sheets of wild flowers bloom in succession for several months in the spring, and in one area the rare Snakes Head Fritillary can be found, also some orchids flourish.

Green spaces between house clusters host a variety of wildlife, some common species, some rare, some endangered. Deer, badgers, foxes, rabbits, hare, weasels can be seen in the lanes, woods and fields, also stoats, water voles, dormice, shrews, squirrels and bats. The bird population is very varied. Some species that are becoming rare elsewhere are settled here, and some very rare species are thriving and breeding well.

Marshy land close to the rivers has a rich population of frogs and toads, many newts, some of which are rare. Residents regard these green spaces as vitally important to the village and its quality of life.





## BOUNDARIES

The Parish Boundary lies to the east along the Blackwater River, and to the south it follows the County Boundary with Hampshire along the Roman Road (or Devil's Highway) to Stanford End, on the River Loddon, where in Roman times there was a river port supplying Silchester.

From there, Spring Lane and Taylor's Lane form the northern boundary, connecting to the main settlement via a farm-bridge over the Swallowfield By-pass which now limits access. These lanes and footpaths are usable only in dry weather.

The Village Settlement as indicated in the Local Plan is very limited in terms of the area that Riseley people inhabit.

It does not take into account the outlying clusters of houses around farms or where forges and mills once existed, which Riseley people see as socially and historically, part of the village.

The land that separates Riseley from Swallowfield is important as green gap. Currently, this land is not available for further urbanisation though developers have shown long-term and continuing interest in it. Should this land ever become included in the Settlement, and vulnerable to development, the rural environment and infrastructure would be irredeemably endangered. It is important to maintain the protection afforded at this time by the Local Plan, to all the fields in this area of separation.



## How THE VILLAGE HAS EVOLVED

Over the years, Riseley has, like other small villages, seen a major decline in local services. In the 1950's the village was self-sufficient. There was a school, garage, two pubs, a post-office, several shops, bakery, two chapels and a church. There was a village green and a large playing field for football and cricket.

## COMMERCIAL CHANGES

The most recent developments within the village have created a change of character. There is a business park at the centre, visible from all points of entry into the village. The site of St. Mary's Church in Part Lane now has a commercial use. While some farms continue in agriculture, others have diversified as livery stables. Several farms are evolving into light industrial sites, with units clearly visible from across the fields.

This commercial trend signals a social change within the village. During the decline of villages, instead of working locally on the land or providing village services, many residents would commute to work outside the village. Improved road networks encouraged people working in towns to become rural dwellers. Now the new opportunities

bring groups of people into the village to work, including some itinerant workers on farms, and these changing patterns in work affect village rural life in ways that the community feels will have to be managed with care.

The land may no longer support such a major role in providing livelihood for the population, but even so, it still strongly affects the lives of those who live and work in Riseley.



*Broadwater Barn*

## RESIDENTIAL CHANGES

The village has some very old houses and listed buildings, modern homes, and residences converted from older buildings. The chapels, shops and pubs have become houses and small clusters of homes have evolved from the old farms, mills, forges, laundry and school.

Terraces of agricultural cottages have been combined to make larger homes, and gardens and unused plots have provided space for extra housing. Most of the land within the village envelope has now been developed, with the housing density increasing and extending along the main roads. Three of the fields within the village have been developed into small estates, but even so, Riseley today has maintained a rural identity, which is highly valued by residents.



*Originally Riseley Old School*



*Originally a working mill*



*Originally a bakery and grocers shop*



*Originally the pub 'The Bells'*



## CHANGES IN AMENITIES

**The village has lost most amenities, with now no shop, place of worship, post office or garage.**

The green is separated from the main village by one busy road, and is intersected by another which also divides the recreation ground from the village.

This fine recreation ground is used by children and sports enthusiasts, and has a skateboard ramp; football and tennis facilities with a club-house; a play area for toddlers and also a hall for village events which is the main meeting point for village groups and social gatherings.

We also still have two excellent pubs.

The countryside itself remains our most valued asset, with woods, fields, footpaths and rivers, all within easy reach.

The old solutions to problems in managing land are still effective, but their practical function within the infrastructure needs recognition from developers.

The villagers want not just appropriate building design for aesthetic purposes, but also want protection for the vital part functional design plays in any rural community.

Caught between encroaching suburban developments from three major areas of urbanisation, Wokingham, Reading and Basingstoke, the villagers identified a strong need for planning support. In order to preserve this area's highly valued rural character, we need planners who understand the basics of rural living to represent our needs.

The community in the past has vigorously attempted, when faced with development, to argue for the rights of the rural atmosphere to remain so.

VDS discussion has disclosed how people here have felt threatened by the unrelenting trend towards development, their quality of life adversely affected by the frustration of attempting to make clear the real differences between rural and urban living.

Change may be inevitable, but we want change to be beneficial, to respect the natural and seasonal functions of the environment and to make sure that landscape, wildlife, and village people, have higher priority than opportunity for profit or development.





## TRAFFIC ISSUES

The main roads affect the way the village functions. Riseley is separated into three sections by major roads. The Swallowfield bypass (A33), has virtually isolated the Stanford End part, though it can still be reached through an underpass or over the farm bridge provided. Between the A33 and the B3349 lie farms, fields and woods, with three small estates of houses, which together with those lining the B3349, form the bulk of village housing. East of the B3349 lie the scattered clusters of houses which form the rest of Riseley.

The heaviest and most fast-moving traffic uses the A33, which acts as a link between the M3 and M4. However, a recent local survey shows that up to a thousand vehicles ignore the bypass and use Riseley village roads between seven and nine o'clock on weekday mornings because use of this route gives vehicles preference over A33 traffic at the Three-Mile Cross Motorway access roundabout.

Evening traffic is lighter, about halved, as access to the bypass from the motorway roundabout is not a factor.

**Road usage falls generally into the following categories:**

- Some heavy and fast moving traffic, and most local traffic, uses the B3349, formerly the A33, which runs through the village.
- Norton Road, Chapel Lane and Sun Lane are single track and serve the residents of those lanes.
- Bull Lane, even narrower, connects farms and small clusters of houses around Stanford End.
- Part Lane, Trowes Lane and School Road, little more than a single track, link the more outlying parts of the village, carry local and farm traffic, and as well some of the very heavy vehicles serving the commercial enterprises that have grown up around stables, farms and barns.
- Riders, cyclists, dog-walkers and pedestrians use the local lanes, bridle paths and bye-ways.
- Footpaths: some are accessed only by stiles, which prevent usage for some people.

The roads, lanes and paths contribute to the character of the village. Going from the village in any direction there is an abrupt change from habitation to countryside. From the main roads the views are wide and sweeping, from the lanes the hedges and trees frame glimpses of the hills and rivers. The lanes have grass verges and turf triangles at junctions.

They are lined with hedges, ditches, and mature trees, especially the huge oaks characteristic of this area, and carry a wide range of plant species as well as providing a refuge for a variety of wildlife. And, not least, there are stunning views.









# SETTLEMENT





# INFRASTRUCTURE

The effects of development on rural infrastructure needs to be given serious consideration because experience has shown that:

- land converted to hard-standing creates changes in surface drainage, causing flooding or water collection in roads, houses and gardens at lower levels. Marshy areas have become larger and more dangerous and lakes and ponds have increased in size.
- increased populations from new building, whether part-time as in commercial development, or permanent as in housing development, have an effect on the sewage disposal systems; soak-aways increase water-flow to lower levels, and increased usage of inadequate main drainage causes back-up.
- where ditches are filled in or replaced with undersized pipes and culverts, surface water runs along the road or footpath. Road edges and surfaces become damaged, and in winter the frozen excess water reduces road size and creates hazard to all road users. Footpaths become impassable for months.
- when hedges are taken out:
  - wind-barriers are lost and topsoil erosion occurs
  - living reservoirs for water are lost
  - rich wildlife and plant areas are destroyed
  - traffic speeds up
- where new access to property is needed, clear views for all those approaching is essential and traffic management needs to be in context for each design so that:
  - anyone approaching or using the access can have a safe haven
  - local use of amenities is assessed, enabling people to safely cross roads busy with fast-moving traffic
  - deliveries and visitors to commercial premises sited on lanes are regulated.
  - lane surfaces unsuitable for heavy vehicles can be protected and other road users, like pedestrians, riders or cyclists can be safe.



# PLACES AND BUILDINGS

The following more detailed description of existing architecture and design in the landscape is intended to put into context the aspects that villagers want to emphasise for the future.

## DOMESTIC

Apart from the central spread of houses around the main roads, Riseley has small, diverse, clusters of buildings, mostly originally built for a specific purpose, and set in well-defined space. There is a cluster around the old school for example, another at the Banks. Three more modern clusters developed, as cul-de-sacs.

Yeosfield characterises design that blends into the village scene; originally built as council houses of traditional materials, with large gardens, around a central green, the houses in Yeosfield remain in their original form.

Visually, Yeosfield sets a good architectural example with plenty of variety in line and size, and with restful proportions fitting well with the landscape. The view of Yeosfield roofs, glimpsed between hedges and trees and sited between woods and fields is a very pleasant introduction to habitation as approached from the surrounding lanes

Portway takes its name from the road serving the Roman river port at Stanford end. Portway provides a variety of housing styles and sizes, and was intended to cater for a range of housing needs. The houses visible from the main road are larger and well spaced out. Some of the smaller houses have big gardens, particularly suitable for young families, and some were designed for first-time buyers.

The houses have varied roof-levels, are brick, with the mortar being the same colour as the brick, which by presenting a solid block of same-colour seemed for a while to prevent the buildings blending well into the landscape. Maturity has helped with this though. The Portway provides a quite large, though unobtrusive cluster with its own character.

Russet Close is the latest development of residential properties, in-filling fields behind houses on the main road to Reading. The houses are large, detached, and are in a variety of styles and materials.

The roof lines echo the style of The Bull opposite, a pub that is very old. These houses demonstrate that new buildings can sit well with the old, having been designed with sensitivity to existing context and character.

Several groups of cottages, although converted, remain in keeping with their original character. The Beehive cottages in Trowes Lane hug the line of the landscape and allow uninterrupted views to the hills the other side of the Whitewater river valley. In the Loddon Valley also, the cottages in Barge Lane merge into the sloping fields and hedges, so rising ground towards Burghfield, Beech Hill and Tilehurst can be clearly seen.

Elsewhere, redundant but sound commercial buildings from a bygone age have been converted very successfully for housing. The two mill houses and one mill have been



renovated and form part of very beautiful and atmospheric housing clusters, as has Spring Barn and the buildings around the former Riseley School.





## COMMERCIAL

Modern commercial development demonstrates a trend that could change the rural nature and character of Riseley. A once unobtrusive and well-screened commercial property has been developed into a business park that now dominates the village centre.

As screening trees mature, the impact will lessen, but the overall impression of the building is of a large, tarmac parking area, strong security lighting, bulk, brick, iron railings and windows that stare out over the heart of the village.

Although the village has benefited from a newly grassed area, planted with trees and bulbs, and from an improvement in the road and pavement layout, the effect on village design has been to change village character and focus.

Two local farms which have diversified into light industry are developing into a sprawl of small units, which, with parked vehicles, are clearly visible from many parts of the village. Sensitive screening with trees could mask the development and enable it to be in keeping with the rural character of the village. Suitable provision for transport servicing new industries is needed as HGV traffic is damaging the surfaces of the lanes as well as affecting under-road drains. The vibration of such large vehicles also causes damage to house foundations and shakes slates from roofs.

Riseley has two businesses whose design fits the village character. A now nationally known cheese factory is tucked away behind the main road, whilst another new development, where St. Mary's Church once stood has been converted into business premises.

More sensitive use of brick and wood, reduction of proposed roof height, screening by hedges and trees and improved security lighting was negotiated and have resulted in a building which fits well into the landscape. Villagers feel that through consultation and adhesion to existing planning conditions protective of the environment, a more acceptable design compromise has been achieved.





# MAKING THE MOST OF RISELEY

## GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPMENT

In general, Riseley residents appreciate buildings that sit well in the landscape so that they do not interrupt the line of the land. Preferred roofs are of thatch, slate or tile, and successful developments have rooflines and use materials that blend well, presenting some variety in height, angle and plane.

The spatial relationship between buildings and landscape is important for the character and feel of the village. Buildings with soft-edged boundaries like hedges and trellises, weathered walls, paling or picket fencing which blend well into the landscape are preferred. Solid fence panels or iron railings are less in character.

Buildings which use detail, such as coloured brick inserts, mouldings or patterns of raised brick around windows or between levels to break up monotony of line are more appropriate to the character and feel of the village. Porches breaking up flat wall surfaces are appreciated, and weatherboards and fascias to emphasise roof-lines are preferred, especially those made of wood rather than plastic.

The following points, in two parts, emerged as most important and acceptable outcomes for design in Riseley. Firstly, the village requirements for the design in any development, and secondly the environmental and social issues to be considered.

There is no specific opposition to modern or innovative design, though villagers want their VDS to enable best solutions for respecting rural living. The main requirements are for openness and consultation at all stages in development so that the following principles for design can be met to the benefit of all.

## Boundaries & Fences





## Brickwork



## Facias & Porches



## Undesirable Urban Features



## WDLP POLICY TABLE

• Final plans should include a clear indication of the setting of the intended development within the wider context from all aspects and elevations.	WOS3/WBE1
• Development should continue to follow the cluster theme, respecting the 'space between' principle.	WOS3/WBE1
• Any cluster, where applicable, should include a mix of housing suitable for a varied community to develop, with affordable housing opportunities included.	WH12
• Care needs to be taken to set buildings in their space to allow them to blend into the landscape rather than to dominate and interrupt the landscape.	WOS3/WBE1
• Tall blocks of buildings should be avoided.	WOS3/WBE1
• The line, angle and height of roofs should vary, but complement existing roof-lines.	WOS3/WBE1
• The size and positioning of the windows should be appropriate, in proportion with the building, and in relation to the roof.	WBE1/WOS3
• Materials, design and space should blend in with the natural aspects of the area.	WBE1/WOS3
• The colour of materials should complement each other and blend with the landscape.	WBE1/WOS3
• Large areas of hard-standing should be avoided wherever possible. Areas of hard-standing need to be carefully sited and designed to reduce the risk of surface water run-off. Where possible the use of permeable surfaces such as SUDS should be encouraged.	W1C15
• In addition areas of hard standing should be designed to reflect the character of the area, the use of native species landscaping should be encouraged.	WOS3/WBE4
• Surface water and sewer drainage design should take into account capacity issues to avoid the detrimental effects of increased volume on others in the wider community.	W1C15/ W1C17
• The design of new buildings should have regard to how they fit within the landscape and environment.	WOS3/WBE1
• The design of buildings should have regard to energy efficiency.	WOS9
• Applications relating to commercial premises, including storage facilities and parking facilities should be adequately screened. Where possible native species should be used.	WBE4
• Natural screening should be encouraged, in all development, for example strips of copse or shrub, using native species.	WBE4
• Environmentally friendly alternatives should be used instead of solid panel fencing, high concentrate walling, heavy-duty chain link fencing or hard, ornate, decorated wrought-iron paling. Boundary treatment should have regard to existing village-appropriate styles of design, such as paling fences, walls, hedges.	WOS3

### Matters of particular concern for design purpose and infrastructure were:

• That any commercial development should be of a scale and character which reflects current village design characteristics.	WOS3
• The effect of movement of traffic from commercial development should not be detrimental to the character of the rural roads of the locality.	WT5
• That standards of architectural design should reflect individual taste and village character, as off-the-shelf urban style design is rarely appropriate.	WOS3/WBE1
• That housing conversions should not change the character of the property beyond its original intent, so that for example first-time or small-family affordable houses with big gardens for family use remain so and do not become big expensive houses in smaller gardens.	
• That changing the use of part of a property should not affect the community in general, so that for example in considering the conversion of garages to living accommodation there should be adequate off road parking available.	WT6/WT7

Regard should also be given to the Council's adopted supplementary guidance on Landscape Character and the design of new residential schemes.



# WIDER ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Many villagers expressed concerns regarding wider issues which, although outside the scope of a VDS, are important to the character of Riseley. They should be taken into account when considering any future development. There may be scope to further raise these issues in a parish plan.

- the volume of traffic trying to access routes to motorways, towns or business parks, especially during rush-hours. Traffic should be deterred from using village roads and directed to the bypass provided.
- the need for traffic calming, designed to use raised beds of wood construction, with small shrubs and plants, made visible by cats eyes and reflective strips rather than lights.
- provision of appropriate cycle facilities on the main roads to facilitate safety.
- reduction of the weight and frequency of traffic in lanes so that:
  - houses near the road are less affected by vibration which loosens slates and damages house foundations
  - water supply pipes and drains crossing under lanes become less vulnerable to damage
  - pedestrians, riders, vulnerable people and animals can use lanes safely
- Road-signs are reduced to the minimum, and design is appropriate to a rural environment
- Lighting pollution is kept to a minimum.
- The effect of light pollution should be considered for any Security lighting installation, with sensor



controlled and intermittent lighting recommended instead of continuous lighting.

- Roadside lights marking entrances are at an appropriate height-level and brightness to avoid dazzle to road users
- Road sign lighting is reduced to a minimum
- Night sky is protected from glare
- Design of village amenities need to be simple so that:
  - Amenities like bus shelters for example should be rustic in design, made of wood.
  - Public seating should be wooden, rural and plain.
  - Bins for rubbish placed where most used, by bus stops, car parks, public seating, recreation grounds and playing fields, simple in design, unobtrusive in appearance.
- Footpath access should facilitate all, so stiles should be replaced.

# VILLAGE DESIGN WITHIN THE ENVIRONMENT

**The village has experienced adverse effects of change as roads clog up with inappropriate traffic, lanes and footpaths flood and erode, ditches fall into disrepair, and hedges and trees are damaged or lost.**

Having regard to the rural nature of Riseley, consideration should be given to the issues noted above in the early stages of development and design. This may help mitigate some of these effects to the benefit of all. Putting buildings in a space because it is available does not make for a successful outcome, unless rural requirements are also met.

Many believe that a more holistic, in-depth approach to design and country-living could effectively reduce problems, and this belief has strongly affected design statement aims.

Village people accommodate change, provided it is done in ways that work with the natural environment that we care about so much. Villagers do not want to exchange fields for brick and concrete, or look at uniform buildings, or stretches of ribbon development.

Any development needs to have variety in line and style, graceful proportions, use of natural materials and blend

with the existing landscape. Rural solutions to functional design are vitally important for basics such as sewage, drainage and road safety, and these matters affect the health and wellbeing of all.

Very important to people living here is the planned protection and care of the countryside and landscape; fields, trees, hedges, waterways, wildlife and especially, the green spaces around houses, between clusters, and separating villages.

This village is surrounded by open countryside; this open space and the constantly changing landscape, light, seasons and weather provide living art free for all to enjoy.

The quality of these rural views and the ethos they create contribute to the wellbeing of local people. It is not change that makes local people fear, it is the type of change that concerns us. We live here because we are rural-dwellers. We trust that this VDS will help the village to develop along rural lines to benefit the people, the environment and the natural world.

# STATEMENT OF CONSULTATION

One of the most important aspects for a Village Design Statement is the consultation process. Riseley VDS Team adopted the following procedures to ensure that the villagers of Riseley were consulted at all stages, had opportunity to express their ideas, experiences and opinions, and could contribute in any way they felt to be appropriate.

## ACTION PLAN

A group of people volunteered to represent the village in creating a VDS. A series of informal meetings took place, during which an Action Plan was created.

The group aimed to:

- Discover information about planning in the village.
- Determine how planning in the district would affect the village.
- Gather information and gain advice about creating a VDS.
- Convey all relevant findings to the residents of the village.
- Encourage as many residents as possible to become involved in the creation of the VDS.
- Achieve consensus in the village about what matters in future development.
- Create a document that would ensure the basic character of the village is retained while enabling flexible and appropriate change for the benefit of future generations.
- Create a document that would reflect the feelings and attitudes of the residents concerning their village.
- Establish and develop a relevant timescale for production of the VDS.

## ACTION

The volunteer group decided to publish a news-sheet to be delivered to every house in the village, whenever a stage was reached where everyone should be consulted.

Volunteers agreed to form fact-finding groups to learn about the issues concerning village development. Main areas of research were the planning and politics of planning, history and change in the environment. Local Council Departments were consulted, including the Planning Department, Highways Department, Landscape Department and also, help was provided by the then Countryside Commission, the Environment Agency and the Department for the Environment.

An event was to be organised where all the information gleaned could be made available, and where aspects of village life could be displayed. The whole village was invited to attend.

The event included:

- Historical data, photographs, maps, writings, posters
- Social information about the village, past and present
- Archaeological data; sites excavated and important finds
- Sites of scientific interest
- Wildlife information
- Geographical format
- Planning information re the Local Plan, local planning applications etc.
- Maps showing future development in the area
- Road development information
- A presentation about VDS
- Presentation of examples of VDS from other villages
- An opportunity for discussion
- An opportunity for every visitor to write on Post-it Notes® any suggestion or comments about the village planning, future development, current situations, and post them onto various headings provided, which were appropriate to the guidance and advice gained from the Planning Department and the Countryside Commission.

## AFTER THAT

After the meeting, which was attended by more than one hundred people, representing a high proportion of village residents, the volunteers met to review what the meeting had achieved and organise the data collected.

This was then sorted, classified and presented to all the villagers via the news-sheet.

Following the guidelines for producing a VDS, a further meeting to which all villagers were invited, was organised by the volunteers. The aim was to examine specific areas of the village, take photographs to illustrate their ideas, with notes, to enable explanation and discussion at a later date.

A third meeting was attended by other interested parties including representatives of Swallowfield Parish Council and Wokingham District Council.

After viewing the photographs and listening to the comments and ideas collated by the groups, the Planning Officer advised the meeting that some aspects raised, important to village people, would be seen as outside the scope of the VDS. The new suggested approach differed from the remit and guidance previously given.

## NEXT

Faced with the revised remit, the group had to re-assess the relevance of the information gathered. The volunteers had initiated the development of the VDS to incorporate the views and aspirations of the village residents in their environment, as recommended in the original guidelines.

Now, as representatives of the village, the volunteer group had to review how best to prepare the document in order to acquire supplementary planning guideline status. After some considerable discussion, the group decided that they were committed to present the village views as sought and received. Only in this way could the VDS give Planning Departments the information they would need to ensure that decisions made are appropriate and relevant to our village life.

Finally, the volunteer group met every month and went through all the guidelines recommended by the Countryside Commission, as in the original remit. Under each heading we introduced data from the post-it notes, from later meetings, from response to the news-sheets, and from volunteer research efforts.

At each meeting notes were made of all the points, then collated into text and reviewed at the next meeting. Photographs, sketches and maps were added and a working draft was produced for the village to review. The comments and suggestions of those who responded were incorporated into the text.

## WIDER CONSULTATION

As well as close consultation within the village, the VDS Team were advised to seek comment and advice from other interested parties. During the course of the development of the VDS, business people, land-owners, farmers, and developers living and working in the village had access to the whole process and were therefore invited to comment or become involved at any time. In addition, the team contacted the following, sending a complete copy of the final draft, and asking for reply within four weeks.

The Stratfield Saye Estate  
Thames Water,  
Southern Electric  
British Telecom  
The Environment Agency  
Hart District Council  
The Royal Institute of British Architects

Of these, only Thames Water responded, and a copy of their response follows. Their response made clear the procedures and legal requirements for any changes involving mains water and public sewerage systems, all of which are already consulted at District Council level as part of their normal planning procedures.



*Stanford End Bridge*

After another check against the guidelines provided by the Countryside Agency, three further edits to the whole were made. As the original remit for a Riseley VDS came from the Parish Council, previews of the draft were sent to Parish Councillors prior to presentation to the District Council.





# DEDICATIONS & THANKS

To The Villagers of Riseley  
and to those who provided photographs,  
artefacts, paintings, sketches and maps,  
as well as their time.



*The Marshes Pond, Wildlife Heritage Site*

To those consulted for their responses.

To the Policy Planning Team at WDC  
for invaluable help and advice.







*Riseley's highest point (79m), Deserted house & garden - rich in wildlife*