

Preparation of a Village Design Statement began in 2007 and was completed in 2011. This first edition was published online in 2012 on the Theydon Bois Village website although a few printed copies were made available. There was a change of government in 2010 but the new planning regulations they introduced were still in the process of being implemented in 2012.

The VDS refers to the local planning authority (Epping Forest District Council) needing to prepare a Local Development Framework (as required by the Planning Act of 2004). Under the new planning regulations this has reverted to the old name of *Local Plan*. The EFDC Local Plan was supposed to be completed by 2013 but is unlikely to appear in its final form before 2016. The VDS is said to have been used by the EFDC as 'material evidence' in making planning decisions but there is little documentation of such cases.

The National Planning Policy Framework published by the Department for Communities & Local Government in 2012 has been criticised by bodies such as the National Trust and the Campaign to Protect Rural England. It ominously states that in the absence of an up-to-date local plan there should be a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The absence of any targets for development on brownfield sites is seen by some as a threat to the Green Belt and to the countryside in general. The Government believes priority must be given to building both to ease the housing shortage and to boost the economy. The consultative documents published by EFDC as part of the preparation of the Local Plan suggest three possible development sites on the edge of TB village, all in the Green Belt. Threats to the Green Belt by developments on the Blunts Farm estate have receded; the plan for a golf course has been shelved and there has been some amelioration of the devastation caused by dumping of land-fill; the old sportsground still needs some tidying up. There is concern about plans by Transport for London to build a car park on the east side of the station. This is in the Green Belt as is Station Hill where excessive parking of commuter cars is an ongoing problem.

The Localism Act of 2011 was intended to facilitate devolution of decision-making powers to communities but so far there has been little de-centralisation in planning matters. But it did pave the way for the Neighbourhood Planning Regulations of 2012 which introduced the idea of a *Neighbourhood Plan*. The Parish Council has recently taken the first steps towards producing such a plan for Theydon Bois. It is assumed that the Village Design Statement will be a source of valuable information for the Neighbourhood Plan. Government spokesmen welcome the contribution of local people in identifying sites for development but have said that 'nimbyism' would not be tolerated.

Within the village itself the relaxation of planning restrictions has encouraged the construction of more and more house extensions including large two- storey side extensions. Apart from changing the street scene the magnitude and frequency of building work has had a detrimental effect on the tranquillity of the village. Residents in their replies to the 2007 VDS questionnaire mentioned the importance of the four public houses but since then two have been closed, one replaced by an apartment block. It is now possible to designate features as 'community assets' and in some areas this has been used to save public houses from development. The last car servicing garage has recently been replaced by apartments although the design of the block is sympathetic to its position overlooking the Green.

Constant vigilance is needed to protect desirable design features of the village and to improve less desirable aspects.