

**COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY –
CHESHIRE LANDSCAPE TRUST**

**PARISH LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
PILOT PROJECT**

**FINAL REPORT
(Updated 30th November 2005)**

**PREPARING PARISH LANDSCAPE STATEMENTS
USING THE COUNTRYSIDE AGENCY/SCOTTISH
NATURAL HERITAGE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
ASSESSMENT GUIDANCE
FOR ENGLAND AND SCOTLAND**



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1. INTRODUCTION

Landscapes have meaning for people of all ages. Landscape provides the setting for our lives. For the child, the home area and the school playground can be magical places. As we progress through the ‘seven ages of man’ landscape plays an important role either directly or indirectly. For some of us, it may lead to a lifetime’s calling in one of the land based professions. To others it provides the base for leisure time activities or simply the backcloth to our lives.

Landscape characterisation is the process of understanding and explaining what makes the local landscape distinctive and different from neighbouring areas. It’s about identifying the particular features of the landscape which create the special character of a particular area.

Over the years, communities have contributed in various ways to caring for their local landscape. In an era in which **community participation and empowerment** have become keywords, it is understandable that local people, defined as ‘communities of place’, have demonstrated their desire to influence the quality of the landscape where they live. Landscape quality can have a profound impact on their health and well being, and thereby on the quality of life of the individual and the community.

For a number of years, the **Countryside Agency**, and its predecessor, the Countryside Commission, has promoted a number of **community based initiatives aimed at giving local people a greater say in what happens in the place where they live**. One example is the ‘Village Design Statement’ (VDS) process, which is developed by community driven action and can lead to a VDS being approved as ‘Supplementary Planning Guidance’ in support of the Local Plan. In a similar vein, the **Rural White Paper and Planning Policy Statement Number 1 ‘Creating Sustainable Communities’** contains a number of pointers to devolve a greater degree of decision making to Parish and Town Councils, for example, the ‘Parish/Town Plan’. Furthermore, the Planning & Compensation Act 2004, requires all local authorities to prepare a Statement of Community Involvement. This new responsibility is intended to give greater weight to community participation in spatial planning.

The Countryside Commission’s Countryside Character: Volume 2: North West states: ‘Giving national meaning to local action by encouraging local people to engage in the process lies at the heart of ensuring that the character of England continues in all its diversity into the future. Local people have the greatest potential of all to recognise and strengthen local distinctiveness. The character of England provides a national context for local action, strengthening the link between local and national heritage, and providing a source of information and ideas to feed into local decision making.’

2. COUNTRYSIDE CHARACTER: THE PARISH & THE CHESHIRE LANDSCAPE TRUST

While the **VDS process is focussed primarily on the built environment of a settlement**, it does require a community to produce text and illustrations that describe the **landscape setting of the village/parish**. However, it became apparent to the Cheshire Landscape Trust (CLT), which has helped, or is currently helping, 20 communities to produce their own VDS, that many communities felt the need, and have the desire, to produce a more detailed analysis and statement about their landscape.

During the preparation of the **Landscape Character Assessment Guidelines**, by the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage, the **CLT** contributed to the **Guidance Documents**, in particular in the context of community engagement.

It is recognised that excellent work has been produced at the national, regional, county and district levels, which has provided characterisation based on mapping, classifying and describing landscape character, and in the process of making judgements about landscape character to inform a range of different decisions. **However, to date there has been no detailed application of the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance at the parish level.**

It was in this context that CLT approached the Countryside Agency in late 2001, with a proposal to run a community based trial at the parish level in two geographically contrasting Cheshire parishes. Our proposal was accepted by the Countryside Agency, who issued a contract in January 2002, with an initial completion date of December 2002, which was subsequently extended to September 2004. The contract being to undertake a pilot study to test ways of engaging local people in the value free process of landscape characterisation and subsequently making judgements about landscape character, in two Cheshire parishes. Thereby making a contribution to the decision making and if appropriate, as a direct input into the Parish Plan process. An integral element of the work will include an assessment by CLT of the use of the Guidance and lessons learnt from the approach, both in producing the character statements, but also as an empowering and educational exercise.

As experienced grassroots facilitators, CLT saw the potential of taking the Characterisation Process down to the very local level: the parish. A pilot project would we felt have local, district, county, regional and national significance. In May 2002, Dr. Philip James from the University of Salford joined the Working Group as a co-facilitator.

3. THE PILOT PROJECT APPROACH

The Landscape Character Assessment Guidance published by the Countryside Agency in partnership with Scottish Natural Heritage, clearly states that at the **'local scale'....** 'sometimes it may be necessary or appropriate to carry out assessment of small areas at the 1:10,000 scale or even more detailed scales, such as an individual parish or an estate, farm, a Country Park or a proposed development site. At this local scale it is important to set the area firmly in the context of a wider character assessment, to show which landscape type and/or area it falls within. A detailed assessment may then either map landscape types and/or areas at an even finer scale or add detail by mapping and describing the individual elements which contribute to the character of the area, such

as hedges, arable fields and farm buildings. Local assessments may also consider the contribution made by the site to the character of the surrounding areas as well as views into and out of it.’

The process which we adopted followed the ‘**Six Step Approach**’ described in the Guidance, that is: **(a) The Characterisation Process:** Step 1: Defining the Scope, Step 2: Desk Study, Step 3: Field Survey, Step 4: Characterisation; **(b) Making judgements about landscape character:** Step 5: Research and analysis, Step 6 Making judgements and producing a **Landscape Character Strategy for each parish.**

4. THE PILOT PARISHES: BURWARDSLEY AND WEAVERHAM

(a) BURWARDSLEY

The parish of Burwardsley with a population of approximately 179 people, occupying 76 dwellings, lies some 10 miles south east of Chester and 2 miles from the larger township of Tattenhall. It is set



amongst the undulating western slopes of the Peckforton Hills on the central section of the Mid Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. It is part of the Countryside Commission’s North West Character Area 62 the ‘Cheshire Sandstone Ridge.’ The 961 acres (389 hectares) of the parish are within an Area of Special County Value (ASCV) designated by the County Council and described in the County Structure Plan. The parish is also within a Core Area for nature conservation as identified by the European Union funded, ‘Life EConet Project’.

Land ownership still follows the traditional English model, with around 90% of the land forming part of two family estates. The Bolesworth Estate owns over 80% of the land to the south, west and north, with the Peckforton Estate owning most of the land in the north east corner and to the east of the village. The continuity of ownership has helped prevent over development in Burwardsley.

Burwardsley: Landscape & Settlement

(b) WEAVERHAM

The parish of Weaverham, is an ‘inset’ village within the Green Belt with definite boundaries and is surrounded by low rolling countryside, much of which is given over to dairy and arable farming, with many hedgerows and small blocks of woodland. Those properties outside the nuclear settlement (the village) are in small groups at Blue Cap Cottage, Hefferston Grange and Gorstage. The parish is situated on a gentle slope of the southwest bank of the River Weaver. This is a strong visual feature of the Weaver Valley landscape and is adjacent to an area of Special County Value (ASCV). The parish is within Area 61, the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain of the Countryside Commission’s Countryside Character Volume 2: North West.



Weaverham: Landscape & Settlement

The built environment has now developed well beyond the original settlement, thereby extending the village boundary well into the surrounding countryside.

Weaverham benefits from several major features that define its character, these are:

1. The River Weaver, which meanders around the north and northeast border. This is greatly valued.
2. Lakehouse Field, a registered village green situated in the centre of the 'village'. It is the focus point of community activity.
3. Owley Wood, an 'ancient woodland' that borders the Owley Wood housing estate. It is set on an escarpment which falls steeply to the River Weaver.



Weaverham: Buildings

For most of its history, Weaverham has been a small and settled rural community in the heartland of Cheshire. It is situated three miles west of Northwich. Hartford and Acton Bridge, the two nearest villages, are each separated by one mile of Green Belt. The 20th Century, however gave rise to significant change as the demand for local labour at the ICI's Mid Cheshire Works far exceeded local supply. As a result significant areas of land within the parish boundary were developed for housing. Weaverham grew hugely in the 1920s and 1950s; today some 6,500 people live in the parish.

5. THE REASONS FOR CHOOSING BURWARDSLEY & WEAVERHAM

There were two principle reasons for choosing Burwardsley and Weaverham as pilot parishes:

- Our desire to work in two parishes with contrasting landscapes:

Burwardsley is part of Character Area 62, the Cheshire Sandstone Ridge. The nuclear settlement is divided into two parts, Upper and Lower Burwardsley. It is set in undulating countryside, which levels off to lowland on its western boundary. Field boundaries consist of hedgerows with oaks and dry stonewalls on the ridge. The ridge is wooded with a mixture of coniferous and broadleaved trees.

Weaverham is located in Character Area 61, the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain, which is a very large Character Area. It is located in a flat bottomed river valley with field boundaries being delineated by hedgerows. With the exception of Owley Wood, there are few blocks of woodland. The nuclear settlement comprise the original 'village' which grew considerably during the 1920s and 1950s.

- Our desire to work in a community where we had already achieved a considerable degree of success through community participation, notably, the production and implementation of a

'local' Local Agenda 21, i.e. **Weaverham**, and to work in another community where we had not worked previously, i.e. in **Burwardsley**.

6. THE WAY WE WORKED

(a) The Process

From the commencement of the project we have kept a comprehensive diary. This starts with the initial contact and meetings with Burwardsley Parish Council and Weaverham Parish Council. It then goes on to describe chronologically the establishment of a Working Group in each Parish, the public workshops, the meetings of the enlarged Working Groups, meetings with members and officers of Chester City Council, Vale Royal Borough Council, Cheshire County Council and the public exhibition held in Burwardsley on the 31st January 2004, for which good local press coverage was obtained. An exhibition was held at an open meeting of the Weaverham Trust Meeting held in January 2005. A public presentation was also given at the Annual Assembly of Weaverham Parish Council in March 2005. In June a further round of public consultation was undertaken, during which copies of the draft Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement were on display in Weaverham Library and on line at Vale Royal Borough Council site. Through the **Countryside Character Network**, which is so excellently facilitated by **Countryside**, an article on the Burwardsley project has been published in the Spring 2004 Newsletter. In addition, John Gittins gave a presentation at a CCN Workshop held in Bristol on the 26th May 2004, when the theme was '**Landscape Character and Sustainable Communities**'. **A copy of the diaries for Burwardsley and Weaverham are appended to this report.**

The Process in Weaverham has been different to that in Burwardsley, due to two factors: (i) The track record of Cheshire Landscape Trust's working relationship in the Parish and our initial contact through the Weaverham Trust, and (ii) That having had initial meetings in May 2002, and written to the Parish Council in late 2002, a Working Group was established in November 2002. In June 2003 there were elections for the Parish and Borough Councils, the result being that with one exception, there was a completely new membership of the Parish Council, with two new local members being elected to the Borough Council. During this period the Working Group continued to operate. In late June 2003 a public Workshop was held and subsequently the Working Group expanded. In November 2003 a further workshop was held to develop the Parish Landscape Statement through the Landscape Characterisation Process. The end product will be a combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement, which will be linked to a Parish Plan for Weaverham which is currently be prepared by a linked group from within the community. Some members of the VD & PLS Working Group are also members of the Parish Plan Working Group.

The Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement has been prepared by a Working Group consisting of local residents in partnership with the community of Weaverham. It presents design and landscape objectives that both the community and developers should consider in the event of building and landscape projects.

The consultation process sought to involve the whole community. The village as a community has been involved at several stages during the development of the Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement. At the outset all village community groups were contacted and discussions held; open days were held, by 'piggy backing' on planned community events, for example, the 'Rose Queen Fete'. The Parish Council and the Weaverham Trust are involved in the formulation of the VD & PLS, Vale Royal Borough Council have also been actively involved in the process.

(b) The Products

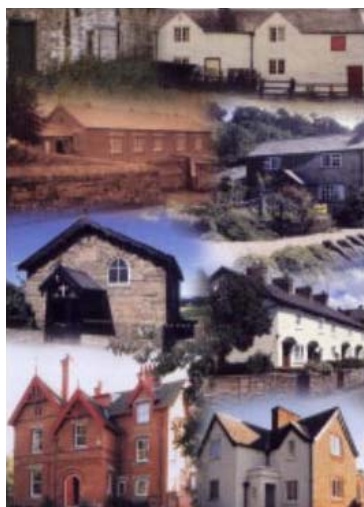
(i) Burwardsley

The Burwardsley Working Group consists of twenty local residents and two facilitators: John Gittins from the Cheshire Landscape Trust and Dr. Philip James from the University of Salford. On average, between eight and fourteen local members of the Working Group plus the two facilitators attended meetings, with regular contact being kept with all members.



Burwardsley: People & Promotion

A Public Workshop, which was well advertised throughout the community, was held on the 30th October 2003. 20 local residents and the two facilitators attended.



Burwardsley: Buildings

A collection of photographs and field records has been maintained.

An outstanding set of **'field' sketches** has been produced by the local coordinator, George Bramall. George is a qualified architect and the key local link throughout the project.

A **GIS model of the parish landscape** has been produced by Dr. Philip James, the co-facilitator.

A very **comprehensive set of display materials illustrating the parish landscape** was produced for the public exhibition held on the 31st January 2004 (copy attached).

The whole parish and a wide range of interested individuals and groups were invited to the **public exhibition** held on the 31st January 2004. Over 75 individuals of all ages attended, including elected representatives from the County and City Councils, plus the County Council's Landscape Manager. In addition two representatives from Countryside, who coordinate and facilitate the Countryside Agency's 'Countryside Character Network' were also present.

A **questionnaire** entitled 'What changes would you like to see to the landscape of Burwardsley?' was produced for the exhibition. Eighteen replies were received. Of the responses, there was a high percentage in favour of new buildings conforming to the existing styles, using materials that blend into the landscape. There was concern about the loss of the 'night sky' with the suggestion that the local authority should produce a set of Guidelines relating to this issue and encourage Parish Councils to comply with them. The provision of signage and on-site interpretation panels at key locations was favoured. There was strong agreement in favour of a more comprehensive approach to litter control in the parish, with a role for a partnership of local residents and the local authority to undertake the work. There was a wide range of responses to the question of how to retain the integrity of the narrow and sinuous road network in the parish, with priority being given to local traffic, including farm vehicles, with a restriction being placed on coaches entering from the Harthill direction. Any new businesses coming into the village should make use of existing buildings, with appropriate landscaping and access provision to the public highway being made. Wherever possible, power lines and telephone cables should be put underground. A survey of existing dry stone walls in the parish, including their condition should be undertaken and an action plan for their restoration, should be implemented as an outcome from the Landscape Statement. Ecologically friendly land management should be encouraged, with a restoration programme for hedgerows and hedgerow trees being another outcome from the Landscape Statement. There was agreement that the exhibition was excellent.

A selection of the material produced for the exhibition formed part of the documentation submitted to the City Council in order to obtain approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance.

There was agreement that the Parish Council should be encouraged to act as a catalyst for seeking implementation of many of the suggestions contained in the Parish Landscape Statement, and that an Action Plan should be developed from the document. A partnership role was seen as being vital to the successful implementation of the Parish Landscape Statement and Action Plan. This would involve, local residents, landowners, tenant farmers, the Parish Council, Chester City Council, Cheshire County Council, Leader+ and the voluntary sector. It was also recognised that changes to the European Union Common Agricultural Policy, relating to Environmental Stewardship could provide very valuable financial incentives for landowners (Bolesworth Estate and Peckforton Estate own over 80% of the

land in the parish) and farmers wishing to implement elements of the Action Plan.

There is, subject to funding being obtained, scope for implementing elements in the Action Plan through Phase 2 of the EcoNet Project.

Chester City Council has produced a set of ‘Guidelines for Village Design and Parish Landscape Statements’. They have insisted that material relating to the parish landscape, must be incorporated into the Village Design Statement, in which context it was considered for approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance (this is an officer requirement).

A working relationship with **Chester City Council** has been developed and maintained. In 1998 they produced a ‘Landscape Character Assessment and Guidelines’ which places Burwardsley in the ‘Sandstone Ridge’ Character Area.

Throughout the project there has been close cooperation with **Cheshire County Council**, who are currently producing a **Landscape Character Assessment for the County**, in which **Burwardsley**, falls within two Landscape Character Types: LCA Type 2 – Sandstone Ridge and LCA Type 3 – Sandstone Fringe.

In the Countryside Agency’s documentation for the North West England, Volume 2 North West, Burwardsley falls into Landscape Character Area 62: Cheshire Sandstone Ridge.

Having followed the methodology described in the **Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance**, Burwardsley has been mapped into 5 Landscape Types and 12 Landscape Areas. A written Description has been produced. A Landscape Character Strategy has been drafted, this describes in general terms what landscape changes are thought to be desirable within the Parish, with specific suggestions for each of the 5 Landscape Types. An Action Plan for implementing the suggestions will be produced.

The Burwardsley Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement was approved by Chester City Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance on the 30th March 2005.

Funding to publish the document was secured from Burwardsley Parish Council, Cheshire County Council and the Countryside Agency.

The combined document was launched on Sunday 20th November 2005, the chief guests being the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Chester and the Rt. Rev Alan Chesters, former Bishop of Blackburn and Vice Chairman of the Countryside Agency at the time of the Landscape Character Assessment Guidance being published. Over 120 people attended the event, which was funded by Chester City Council.

The combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement will be put onto the Sandstone News website www.sandstonenews.co.uk in January 2006.

Sadly George Bramall, the local co-ordinator died on the 24th August 2005. George was the key local driver throughout the project. The published document has been dedicated to George, with the challenge to all, to ensure that his vision become a sustainable reality in Burwardsley.

(ii) Weaverham

The Weaverham Working Group consists of twenty seven local residents, fourteen of whom were regular participants. On average between ten and twelve local members of the Working Group plus the two facilitators attended meetings, with regular contact being kept with all members. From time to time, two officers from Vale Royal Borough Council attend meetings, and were always on hand to offer advice and support.

A collection of photographs and field records has been produced by the Working Group, who sub-divided themselves into smaller survey groups.

An Editorial Group consisting on four local members and one of the facilitators, has undertaken the task of editing the texts produced for both the Landscape Character Assessment and the Village Design Statement. The local co-ordinator, Ruth Batsford, has committed a considerable amount of time to the task.



An initial public consultation was undertaken at the Rose Queen Fete held in July 2004.

A draft text was produced and subjected to wide ranging public consultation.

Weaverham: People, Workshop & Fieldwork

The Countryside Agency, Vale Royal Borough Council and Weaverham Parish Council funded the publication of the combined Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement.

Vale Royal Borough Council has yet to produce a Landscape Character Assessment, but is working on one at the present time.

Throughout the project there has been close cooperation with **Cheshire County Council**, who are currently producing a **Landscape Character Assessment for the County**, in which **Weaverham**, falls within two Landscape Character Types: 'Broad River Valley' and 'Medium Scale Enclosure with Rolling Topography'

In the **Countryside Agency's documentation for the North West of England, Volume 2, North West, Weaverham falls into two Landscape Character Areas: Character Area 61: the Shropshire, Cheshire and Staffordshire Plain, and Character Area 62: Cheshire Sandstone Ridge.**

Having followed the methodology described in the **Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Guidance**, **Weaverham has been mapped into 6 Landscape Character Types and 11 Landscape Character Areas. A written description has been produced. A Landscape Character Strategy has been drafted, this describes in general terms what landscape changes are thought to be desirable within the Parish, with specific suggestions for each of the 6 Landscape Character Types. An Action Plan for implementing the suggestions will be produced.**

Agreement will be sought by which the Parish Council will be encouraged to act as a catalyst for seeking the implementation of many of the suggestions contained in the Parish Landscape Statement, and that an Action Plan will be developed from the joint VDS/PLS. A partnership role is seen as being vital to the successful implementation of the PLS and Action Plan. This would involve local residents, landowners, farmers, the Parish Council, Vale Royal Borough Council, Cheshire County Council, and the voluntary sector. It is also recognised that the changes to the European Union Common Agricultural Policy, relating to Environmental Stewardship could provide very valuable financial incentives for land owners and farmers wishing to implement elements of the Action Plan.

The Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement was approved by Vale Royal Borough Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance on the 28th July 2005. The Parish Plan was completed in November 2005. We believe that this is the first such occasion in the country where a parish has produced a Parish Plan and a Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement.

7. LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE PILOT PROJECT

- a. The Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance for England and Scotland works well at the 'local' Parish level.**
- b. In Burwardsley and Weaverham, which are communities with a track record of community participation, it is possible for them to produce a 'local' (Parish) based Landscape Character Assessment. However, our experience as facilitators indicates that some degree of facilitation was necessary.**

- c. **The pilot project has demonstrated that a local community can produce a Parish Landscape Statement based on Landscape Character Assessment and make judgements as to a future strategy for their parish. However external facilitation was considered to be essential.**
- d. **Our experience indicates that facilitation will be required in most instances. Our work on Village Design Statements indicates a similar need.**
- e. **Throughout the project, the facilitators have had to spend a considerable amount of time explaining and revisiting the principles underlying the methodology. In particular, there has been ongoing confusion with the terms: LANDSCAPE TYPE AND LANDSCAPE AREA.**
- f. **The Burwardsley Working Group was given access to the Guidance Documents and encouraged to use them. However, only one member of the Group did so, and in this instance, he obtained part of the material from the Countryside Agency's website. Throughout the process, the facilitators had to constantly remind the Working Groups as to what can and cannot be included in a Landscape Character Assessment and a Village Design Statement. In particular, this was the case with the relationship between the Parish Landscape Statement and the Local Plan and the requirements that are necessary in order to obtain approval as Supplementary Planning Guidance.**
- g. **In Weaverham, only one member of the Working Group used the Guidance Documents. Otherwise, the process followed the same pattern as in Burwardsley.**
- h. **A Geographical Information System methodology was used to produce a 3D visualisation model of Burwardsley. This was used in the public consultation exercises. Whilst the GIS material was very well received in Burwardsley and elsewhere where it has been demonstrated, this is by no means essential. However, it does provide 'added value'.**
- i. **By its very nature, undertaking a Parish Landscape Character Assessment by **community participation takes time. In fact a serious time commitment is required by local people and facilitators.** In Burwardsley and Weaverham the process will have taken over three years. Nevertheless, the community must set the pace. The challenge is to get as wide a range of residents as possible into the Working Group, in this, the facilitators believe they succeeded. In future projects, facilitators should set clearer guidelines as to timescale, the degree of commitment required, the way of working and implement a withdrawal strategy from the start. All of which should be regularly revisited. The degree to which facilitators prepare materials, in particular at the Desk Study stage requires careful consideration.**
- j. **As an estimate, the amount of volunteer time spent by local people undertaking the Pilot Project in Burwardsley, is in the region of 1700 hours. Of which 1200 hours were contributed by General Volunteers, and 500 hours mainly by George Bramall, the local coordinator and most prolific contributor to the document. The 1200 hours were given by members of the Working Group in attending meetings, carrying out fieldwork, writing up their findings and in preparing the public exhibition. Using the current Government figures for volunteer time at £6.35 per hour for a General Volunteer (1200 hours x £6.35 = £7620.00) and £18.75 for a volunteer with specialist skills, that is George**

Bramall, who is a qualified architect, (500 hours x £18.75 per hour = £9375.00). Making a combined total of £16995.00

- k. **In Weaverham, the amount of volunteer time spent by local people undertaking the Pilot Project is in the region of 1220 hours. Of which 970 hours were contributed by General Volunteers and 250 hours by Specialist Volunteers.** The 970 hours were given by members of the Working Group in attending meetings, carrying out fieldwork, writing up their findings and contributing to the public exhibition. In addition some members of the group were also active contributors to the work of the Parish Plan Group. Using the current Government figures for volunteer time of £6.35 per hour for a General Volunteer (970hours x £6.35 = £6159.50) and £18.75 for a volunteer with specialist skills, these being the local coordinator, the two graphic designers and members of the editorial group, (250 hours x £18.75 = £4687.50). Making a combined total of £10847.00
- l. **What has been the amount of time spent facilitating the project?** To date, 60 days have been spent facilitating the project. In terms of cost, **this amounts to £9000, based on a day rate of £150 per day.** The work includes desk study, preparing material for the public workshops, and the exhibition in Burwardsley, organising and facilitating Working Group meetings, liaising with Chester City Council, Cheshire County Council and Vale Royal Borough Council. Also included is time spent in maintaining links with the Countryside Agency, report writing and submitting financial claims. The amount of time spent by Dr James in preparing the 3D visualization using GIS, amounts to 10 working days. **The real cost, if it had been charged by the University, being £450 per day, which equates to £4500.**
- m. **These are very impressive figures that probably under estimate the amount of time spent by volunteers in Burwardsley and Weaverham. They are also indicative of the considerable contributions, which individuals give to community life in just two Cheshire parishes.**
- n. **Views expressed by officers at Cheshire County Council, Chester City Council and Vale Royal Borough Council clearly indicate the value of such work and its usefulness in providing a finer grain to the levels at which they work.**
- o. **While there is real value in a community group producing a Landscape Character Assessment of their locality, the ‘added value’ of producing a combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement has been clearly demonstrated in this pilot project. Furthermore, by linking this into a Parish Plan it would provide even greater value. Throughout the project the facilitators stressed the importance of both the process used and the products produced.**
- p. **On the 28th September 2004, new spatial planning legislation came into effect, regarding Supplementary Planning Guidance. Planning Policy Guidance 12 provides information on how the new approach to Local Plans will develop. This provides the context for the production of a Local Development Documents, including a Statement of Community Involvement.**
- q. **The best advice, which we have received to date, is that there will be implications in the short term for community-led ‘plans’ such as VDS/PLS. The key will be for the Local Planning Authorities, Chester and Vale Royal, to make sure that they have the right**

hooks in their Local Development Framework for dealing with locally derived Supplementary Documents. The tricky area is the conversion from existing Supplementary Planning Guidance to Supplementary Planning Documents as this is likely to take a low priority for Local Planning Authorities, who will be concentrating on getting their core policies and strategies written for the Local Development Framework. Supplementary Planning Guidance will have very little significance in the new system. In most cases, it is thought that so long as the parent policy is in the new Local Development Document, re-adoption as a Supplementary Planning Document should be straightforward. What will take longer is the further consultation process to ensure that it fits to the Statement of Community Involvement and the Sustainability Appraisal (although the Sustainability Appraisal should not be onerous if it has been done for the supporting policy). For most Local Planning Authorities it will be a case of dealing with their deemed priorities first.

- r. The implications of these changes have been raised with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), indicating that local communities might lose some faith in the system after the efforts they have already made as volunteers, particularly and ironically when there is a renewed emphasis for involving communities in the new system. The ODPM seem to appreciate that the short term issues might need a little lateral thinking but it is better for the future.
- s. The decision to make Supplementary Planning Documents more formal is intended to give them more weight, whilst seeking to achieve a more consistent approach to their adoption across all local authorities. It would seem that this approach will, in the longer run benefit local communities, but it means that Local Planning Authorities need to be much more proactive in the way they work with and look ahead to what might flow up from the grassroots.
- t. The Local Planning Authorities are of course grappling with this themselves, as they rely a lot on Supplementary Planning Guidance, which they prepare themselves, and it is thought that there will need to be a lot of advice from Government Offices around the country.
- u. Our experience both in the current Pilot Project and in the work on Village Design Statements, has indicated that there is considerable merit in grouping parishes for future work in this area. In fact we took this approach in Warrington Borough Council's area, when we ran a day for all parishes in the Borough and provided a 'one stop shop' where ongoing help and advice could be obtained. To date three parishes have produced their own Village Design Statements, all of which have been approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Two benefits spring to mind, (i) the considerable economics of scale which result from the grouping process and (ii) the 'soft' form of partnership which can develop.
- v. Positive support from District and County Councils is vital. In particular from the District, as they are the Local Planning Authority. We received excellent support from Chester City Council, Vale Royal Borough Council and Cheshire County Council. Member support was excellent at County Council level, and from Chester City and Vale Royal. Officers at Chester City Council produced an excellent set of guidelines for approving Village Design and Parish Landscape Statements as Supplementary Planning Guidance. However, as a general point, some local authority officers had difficulty in recognising the

nature of community participation and in acknowledging that local people are, in some respects, experts in, on and about the places where they live.

- w. It is the view of the facilitators and the two Working Groups that there is **scope for the production of a Countryside Agency Research Note on Landscape Character Assessment and Parish Landscape Statements, with linkage also to Village Design Statements and Parish Plans. Such a document would supplement the Agency's 'Parish Plans – Guidance for Parish & Town Councils' Resource Pack Section 13 'Introduction to Landscape Character' and Section 14 'Village Appraisals and Village (Town) Design Statements'. An alternative would be to post an edited version of this report and the two pilot assessments on the Landscape Character website.**
- x. Throughout the project we have received the unstinting support of officers at the Countryside Agency, in particular, Amanda Matthews and Andrew Gale.

8. THE POSITION AT 30th NOVEMBER 2005

By the 30th November 2005, the position is:

(i) BURWARDSLEY: The combined Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement was approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Chester City Council on the 30th March 2005, making it for first such document in the country to achieve such status. It has been printed and was officially launched on the 20th November 2005. The next stage is to implement the Strategy in the form of an Action Plan for which discussions are in progress with a number of organisations including the Bolesworth Estate, the major landowner in the parish, the Parish, City and County Councils and the EcoNet Sandstone Ridge Project, Cheshire Landscape Trust, Cheshire Wildlife Trust, rECOrd (the local biological record centre for Cheshire) and local residents.

(ii) WEAVERHAM: The parish of Weaverham is unique in that it has produced and printed its Parish Plan and a combined Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement. The Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement was approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Vale Royal Borough Council on the 28th July 2005, making it the second such document in the country to achieve such status. The documents will be officially launched in early 2006. The next stage with regard to the Village Design & Parish Landscape State will be to develop and implement an Action Plan.

9. FUNDING THE PROJECT

The following information gives an indication of how the pilot project was funded. This should be read in conjunction with the figures given for the notional value of 'volunteer time' spent on the project given on pages 11 and 12.

1. Countryside Agency

- | | |
|--|------|
| | £ |
| • Project Development Grant | 7500 |
| • Contribution towards publishing the Burwardsley & Weaverham Village Design | |

& Parish Landscape Statements	<u>3539</u>
	11039

2. Burwardsley

- Publishing the Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement
 - Cheshire County Council 2000
 - Burwardsley Parish Council 200
- 2200
- In Kind
 - Chester City Council – Launch of VD & PLS
 - Cheshire County Council - maps

3. Weaverham

- Publishing the Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement
 - Vale Royal Borough Council 2317
 - Weaverham Parish Council 1000
 - Cheshire Landscape Trust 317
- 3634
- In Kind
 - Vale Royal Borough Council - Launch of the VD & PLS
 - Cheshire County Council - maps

10. CONCLUSION

The pilot project has demonstrated that a local community can, with some degree of facilitation, produce a Landscape Character Assessment using the Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage ‘Landscape Character Assessment Guidance’ and to make judgements about a future strategy for their parish.

However, issues of community commitment, providing resources, facilitation and project management (in particular time management), are likely to always be present. In some instances the outcome(s) from the process, whilst not being entirely what were originally intended, can be positive in terms of community enrichment and practical action.

This pilot project has demonstrated that Landscape Character Assessment can lead to the production of a Parish Landscape Statement, which adds value to a Village Design Statement, thereby producing a combined document: ‘a Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement’. By ‘twin-tracking’ or as a ‘follow-on’ project they can become part of a Parish Plan, as in the

case of Weaverham, forming a comprehensive approach to community planning at the parish level.

Based on the work undertaken, the facilitators, members of the Working Groups and their communities have demonstrated the value and reality of the following quotation from the Countryside Commission's 'Countryside Character –Volume 2, North West, Page 12: "Giving national meaning to local action can encourage local pride, and that this lies at the heart of ensuring that the character of England continues in all its diversity into the future."

John W. Gittins & Philip James

30th November 2005

Parish Landscape Statement Check List and Diary*

BURWARDSLEY

NB: A key requirement in preparing a Parish Landscape Statement is to ensure that individuals and groups from within the community are welcome, at any time, to join in the work. The Parish Landscape Statement is based on the joint Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, published in 2002.

REMEMBER AT ALL TIMES – IT IS YOUR PARISH LANDSCAPE STATEMENT (PLS)

Aspect(s) of the PLS process and product	Action Taken To Date	Documentation Produced	Comments
Set up a meeting in the community to test the idea, ideally the PARISH COUNCIL SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public meeting – 25/11/01 – initial meeting jointly with EcoNet Project, Parish Council & community to discuss parish landscape matters. • Initial Parish Council/CLT meeting – 12/06/02 • Parish Council agree 12/09/02 		Countryside Agency: CLT submit project brief to CoAg – Nov 2001 CoAg agreed to fund Pilot Project – Jan 2002 CLT submit Work Plan to CoAg – Feb 2002 Desk Study – March – May 2002
If there is a desire to produce a Parish Landscape Statement establish a WORKING GROUP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting with G. Bramall to set up initial Working Group – October '01 • Working Group establish 25/05/02 • Working Group met on 20 occasions between 25/05/02 and 24/03/04 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr P. James, University of Salford, becomes co-facilitator – May 2002 • George Bramall, Burwardsley resident, becomes the local coordinator – 25/05/02
Record all meetings and events in a DIARY – to demonstrate transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pro forma Check List & Diary produced – Oct 2002 • Updated Mar 2004 		
Meet LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNERS AND YOUR LOCAL ELECTED MEMBER. Seek their support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First meeting with Chester City Council Landscape Architect – 11/02/03 • Meeting with City Council's Head of Services, Forward Planner and Landscape Architect – 29/05/03 • Draft guidance for Parish Landscape Statements produced by City Council 21/08/03 (promised for 11/03/03) 		
GO PUBLIC – set up an open Landscape Character Workshop	Held on 30/10/02	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicity – posters & fliers to all dwellings in parish, produced by CLT • Briefing notes, recording sheets, photo recording sheets – produced by CLT • Disposable cameras issued 	20 local residents & the 2 facilitators attend
Use the Countryside Agency/Scottish National Heritage documents, adapt to suit your needs, but maintain the basic format	Used as the base for the process		Some amendments both initially and subsequently to meet local requirements – particularly for the 2 nd parish in the Pilot – Weaverham
EXPAND THE WORKING GROUP INTO A PLS GROUP	Done following workshop		Average attendance at Working Group meetings – 12
Allocate work tasks	Sub Groups established – 07/12/02	Text, maps, photos	Undertook initial tasks of field survey, recording, mapping and taking photographs. Landscape Types and Areas mapped in draft – Jan 2003 (revised and remapped June 2004 – text, including strategy, also amended). Landscape Character descriptions completed July 2003.
Work on the draft text , using maps, photographs, drawings and quotes from local residents to bring the PLS to life	Draft text completed by Sub-Groups and presented to Working Groups – March 2002	Text, maps, photos	Additional text added – April 2003. Some editing. Parish descriptions – whole area complete – Parish Setting,

			Geology, Landscape Types & Areas, and Historical Background – July 2003
Agree the working draft	Ongoing	Text, maps, photos	Working Groups divide into 2 new Sub-Groups to work on 'Making Judgements'. Landscape Strategy completed – January 2004
Identify any GAPS in the working draft	Ongoing – completed January 2004	Text	Discussed Chester City Council Draft Guidelines – September 2003
Make LINKS with other groups and individuals in your community not currently involved in the process	29/09/03 Working Group agrees to hold Public Exhibition	Corresponded with major land owner (Bolesworth Estate) Nov/Dec 2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parish Council kept up to date – 2 members are 'in' the Working Group Public exhibition held 31/01/04. 75 people attended including local members of County & City Council & Officer of County Council.
Produce the DRAFT PLS , incorporating text, photographs, map(s) and drawings	January 2004	Text, maps, photographs & free standing exhibition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Copies available at public exhibition 31/01/04 Publicity – posters and fliers sent to all dwellings in parish and to a wide range of organisations and individuals outside the parish
LIAISE WITH PLANNERS & LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS	Continued liaison with Officers from 11/02/03 onwards		Officers require PLS to be incorporated into Village Design Statement to obtain Supplementary Planning Guidance
Incorporate suggestions aiming to get SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE approval for your PLS			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minor amendments made to PLS following public exhibition held on 31/01/04 PARISH LANDSCAPE STATEMENT – INCLUDING A LANDSCAPE STRATEGY COMPLETED – 24/03/04 READY TO BE INCORPORATED INTO VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT – CoAg 1ST PILOT COMPLETED 24/03/04, I.E. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER ASSESSMENT PROCESS & PRODUCT
Consult the community using, for example, exhibition(s) in public places, parish website (if available) or piggyback on existing county events.	31/01/04	Text, maps, photos & free standing exhibition inc questionnaire	Wide publicity obtained. Article for Countryside Character Network newsletter produced by Countryside and published April 2004. Article with references to the Pilot Project in 'Green Places' published by The Landscape Design Trust in April 2004
As required , amend the DRAFT PLS			Ongoing Oct 2004
LIAISE WITH PLANNERS and incorporate suggested amendments, being mindful that it is YOUR PLS	To be submitted April 2004	Material produced for the public exhibition together with a letter updating the officers of how we are progressing the PLS via a VDS, i.e. incorporating the PLS into the Burwardsley VDS	Initial comments from Officers to draft 1 received 10/05/04
Submit the DRAFT PLS to your Local Authority for formal officer and elected members views and approval	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To Parish Council – Nov 04 with VDS To Officers of City Council by Dec 04 To City Development Committee – Jan 05 To full Council – Mar 05 	VDS, inc PLS, Timetable completed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorsed by Parish Council Dec 04 Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance by Chester City Council 30/03/05

Incorporate any significant changes	None received		
Submit the PLS to the Local Authority for endorsement as SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE	To City Council Dec 04	Complete VD& PLS	Approved as Supplementary Planning Guidance 30/03/05
Prepare and implement an ACTION PLAN for the PARISH LANDSCAPE	Between Sept 2005 & Dec 2005	Draft Plan	Discuss with Parish Council, key land owners and tenants, EcoNet Project and other interested parties
Public launch of VD & PLS by Lord Mayor of Chester and Rt. Rev. A. Chesters, President of Cheshire Association of Local Councils	20 th Nov 2005		Over 150 people attended
PRINT and CIRCULATE throughout the community (1 per household)	July 2005	VDS incorporating PLS	Seeking funding - Oct 2004 ongoing
VD & PLS document put on Sandstone News website	Jan 2006		Can be viewed on the Sandstone News website: www.sandstonenews.co.uk
REVIEW and MONITOR PARISH LANDSCAPE STATEMENT & performance AGAINST THE ACTION PLAN	Ongoing	Amend documentation in the light of developments i.e. ACTION PLAN	Suggest that the PLS/VDS Strategy and Action Plan is revisited at least at the Annual Parish Council Public Meeting.

1. A Geographical Information System based Landscape Character Map with linked text was produced by Dr. P. James and used at public exhibition on 31/01/04 and at subsequent events – to be amended – June 2004.
2. Discussed ODPM PPS7 (draft) especially Areas of Special County Value (for landscape) – 10/07/04. Comments sent to ODPM Sept 2003
3. Ongoing liaison and advice from and with CoAg National Heritage Adviser (CoAg Reporting Officer). CoAg initial contract for Pilot Project issued Jan 2002, extended to 30/09/04 to cover work in Weaverham. Report on Pilot Project (to 31/03/04) submitted to CoAg in April 2004.
4. Green Places – April 2004 – Article on LCA refers to Burwardsley Pilot Project
5. Countryside Character National workshop – ‘Landscape Character & Sustainable Communities’ – May 2004 – Facilitator presented a paper.
6. Countryside Character Network – facilitated by Countryside – publish a Burwardsley case study in CCN News, Issue 14 Spring 2004.
7. CLT Facilitator and Local Coordinator presented the draft VD & PLS to the City Council’s South Area Committee in May 2004 and Jan 2005.

Revised 16/12/05

* Parish Landscape Statements will be incorporated into the Village Design Statement for Burwardsley. Some of the meetings listed in this statement are linked to the VDS.

Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement Check List And Diary

WEAVERHAM

NB: A key requirement in preparing a Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement is to ensure that individuals and groups from within the community are welcome, at any time, to join in the work. The Parish Landscape Statement is based on the joint Countryside Agency/Scottish Natural Heritage Landscape Character Assessment Guidance, published in 2002.

REMEMBER AT ALL TIMES – IT IS YOUR VILLAGE DESIGN AND PARISH LANDSCAPE STATEMENT

Aspects of the joint Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement – Process and Product	Action Taken	Documentation Produced	Comments
Set up a meeting in the community to test the idea, ideally the PARISH COUNCIL SHOULD TAKE THE LEAD	01/05/02 28/11/02 17/12/02	Letter and other documentation produced by CLT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial meeting with members of the Weaverham Trust to test the idea. • Letter to Parish Council seeking support to undertake project. • Letter from Parish Council agreeing to proceed with the project.
If there is a desire to produce a Village Design and Parish Landscape Statement establish a WORKING GROUP	22/11/02 10/03		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Group – 1st meeting – local coordinator, Ruth Batsford, appointed. • Dr P. James, University of Salford, appointed as co-facilitator
Record all meetings and events in a DIARY – demonstrate transparency	01/05/02* 10/03/03 17/04/03	CLT produced a proforma for this purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Began recording – see attached schedule of meetings • Weaverham Parish Council Annual Meeting • Parish Council progress meeting
Meet LOCAL AUTHORITY PLANNERS AND YOUR LOCAL ELECTED MEMBER to discuss with them the fact that you are to undertake a VD&PLS. Seek their undertaking to provide funding, cash to fund the workshop and print the VD&PLS, also possible help in kind – for example maps and aerial photographs	18/02/02 04/03 06/03 05/04 ongoing meetings	CLT e-mailed Vale Royal Borough Council – Jeremy Owens and Laura Needham – Officers and Cllr B. Jamieson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed to proceed and to have work included in the CLT/VRBC Service Level Agreement for 2003-04 • As above but for 2004-05 • Cllr R. Gorrill, newly elected Borough Councillor for Weaverham, agrees that the project should continue. Endorsed by Parish Councillors 07/03. NB: In June elections 2003 there was a complete change (save 1) in membership of the Parish Council and new Borough Councillors. • VRBC Planners submit comments on 1st draft of VDS • With officers and members
GO PUBLIC – set up an open Village Character Workshop and Parish Landscape Workshop	28/06/03 29/11/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation produced by CLT • Documentation produced by CLT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • VDS Workshop Day – 28 attended. All groups and organisations in parish invited. • PLS Workshop Day – 15 attended. All groups and organisations in parish invited
Use the Countryside Commission’s ‘Village Design’ documents as the tool, adapt to suit your needs, but maintain the basic format	17/06/03 21/11/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation produced by CLT • Documentation produced by 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documentation used in workshops • Documentation used in workshops

		CLT	
EXPAND THE WORKING GROUP INTO A VD&PLS WORKING GROUP	13/06/03		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working Group met at Cllr R. Gorrill's house
Allocate work tasks	28/06/03 21/08/03 29/11/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letters and progress notes produced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VDS & PLS
Work on the draft text, using maps, photographs, drawings and quotes from local residents to bring your VD&PLS to life	07/03 11/03 12/03	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All materials produced at the workshop held on 28/06/03 analysed and mounted – VDS Materials analysed and mounted – PLS Reassessment of some of the Landscape Character Types/Areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> By local coordinator – Ruth Batsford By project facilitator By 2 facilitators and 1 group member
Agree the working draft	17/06/04 – Draft 07/07/04 – Draft 25/08/04 – Draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documentation produced by CLT Documentation produced by CLT Documentation produced by CLT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Editorial Group established 17/11/03. Met to work on each draft
Identify any GAPS in the working draft	Ongoing		
Make LINKS with other groups and individuals in your community not currently involved in the process	13/06/03 ongoing		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive brief and documentation sent to all Weaverham organisations
Produce the DRAFT VD&PLS , incorporating text, photographs, map(s) and drawings	17/11/03 ongoing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drafts produced – no photographs, Landscape Types and Areas maps included. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised drafts sent to all group members. Landscape Types and Areas mapped on GIS and paper by Dr P. James
LIAISE WITH PLANNERS & LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS and incorporate suggested amendments, being mindful that it is YOUR VD & PLS	18/02/03 ongoing 05/05		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VRBC Planners comment on VDS Draft 1 and attend meetings of the Working Group VRBC Planners comment on VDS Draft 4 & 5
Incorporate suggestions focussing on the aim of getting SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE for your VD&PLS	06/05		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Editorial Group undertook the task
Consult community using exhibition(s) in public places	07/04 26/01/05 14/03/05 06/05		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local coordinator consults residents and St Bedes School and at Rose Queen Fete Weaverham Trust & CLT give progress report at a public meeting organised by the Weaverham Trust Progress Report at Annual Parish Meeting Public consultation using VRBC website. Posters distributed throughout parish. Copies placed in public library. Press release issued.

As required , amend the DRAFT VD&PLS	05/05	Draft VD & PLS	
Submit the DRAFT VD&PLS to your Local Authority for formal officer and elected members' views	14/07/05	Draft VD & PLS	Submitted to VRBC Executive Group - Approved
Incorporate any significant changes	Nil		
Submit the VD&PLS to the Local Authority for approval as SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE	28/07/05	Draft VD & PLS	Approval by full Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance
PRINT	09/05	VD & PLS printed	800 copies printed
PUBLIC LAUNCH & CIRCULATE	11/05		
REVIEW VD&PLS ON AN ANNUAL BASIS, e.g. @ annual Parish Council meeting	On going		

* See attached Schedule of Meetings

Countryside Agency:

- CLT submitted project brief to Countryside Agency – November 2001
- Countryside Agency agreed to fund Pilot Project – January 2002
- CLT submitted work plan to Countryside Agency – February 2002
- Desk study – March/May 2002
- Burwardsley start – 05/02
- Weaverham start – 11/02
- Supplementary grant to part fund publication of the combined Village Design & Parish Landscape Statement – 07/05

Vale Royal Borough Council:

- Provide Sustainable Development Grant – April 2005
- Provide 'in-kind' contribution in lieu of time spent on designing the folder, VD & PLS documents by Tony & Pat Daffern and members of the Working Group – July 2005

Weaverham Parish Council:

- Contribute to the costs of printing the VD & PLS

REVISED 11/2005

