COMMUNITY-LED
LOCAL CHARACTER ASSESSMENT
and
DESIGN GUIDANCE

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WHY NOT A FULL CODE? WHAT IF NOT?

- Impossible to produce code level detail for a city as large and varied as ours
- Authority-wide codes would be incredibly time- and resource-intensive
- They would also threaten the local distinctiveness of many places
- Local distinctiveness is important and valued
- So what can be done to capture it, celebrate it and produce guidance for it?

- Bristol City Council are not alone in preferring the Design GUIDE approach
- Wiltshire has gone down the same route as Bristol
- They now have a county-wide Design Guide
- It encourages communities to fill the local detail gap themselves
- After all:
  - Who knows any area, neighbourhood or place better than those who live there?
  - Surely that's true for you in Bristol?

- And the government seem likely to be supporting this:
  - "*local design guides and codes, prepared in line with the national guidance*" should be "*the primary means of assessing and improving the design of development*".

A DIP INTO HISTORY!

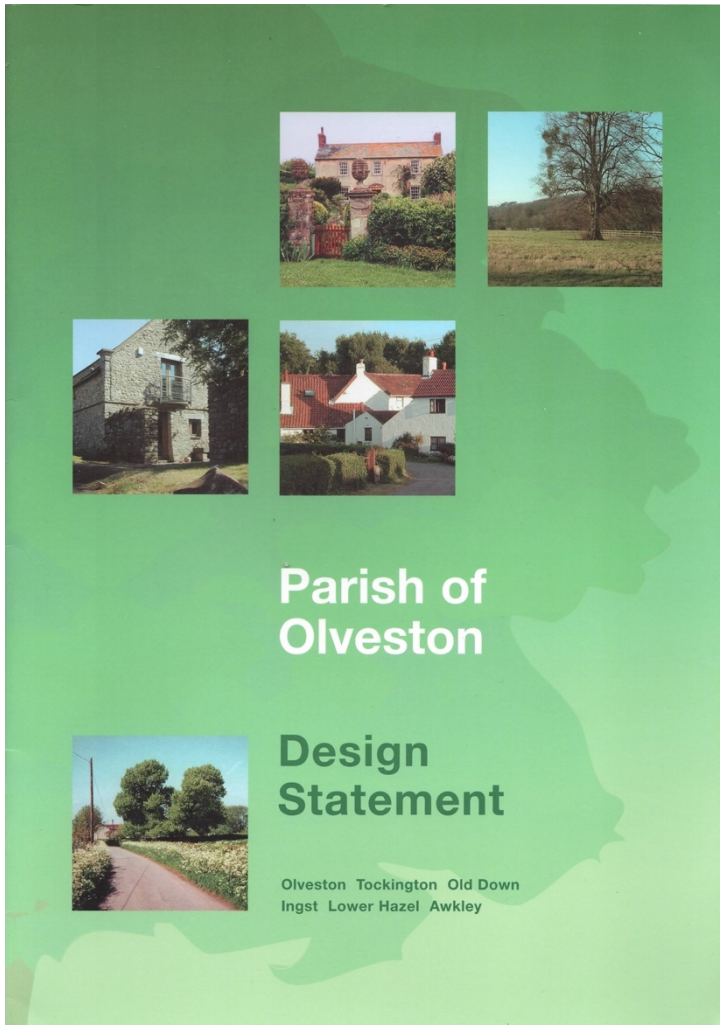
- Early in the 1990s, we were approached by the Countryside Commission
- Research had highlighted concern amongst people in rural areas:
  - The standard of housing design is appalling
  - Just standard developer's designs damaging and eroding local distinctiveness
- The Commission had no architects, so they asked us what they might do
- We started with three principles:
  1. Find consistent and defensible ways of analysing and describing local distinctiveness
  2. Develop an approach to enable local communities to do such work themselves and develop guidance to protect and enhance distinctiveness
  3. Get that approach embedded in our planning system

- We developed 'Village and Town Design Statements' (VDSs/TDSs)
- To be led mainly by local people themselves
- We did pilots - all worked, so we lobbied key people for support
- Government agreed that properly done VDSs/TDSs could become SPG
- We then:
  - Drafted guidance for communities
  - Ran training courses for planners and communities
  - Supported loads of communities with their own Statements
- Over 2,500 have now been adopted across England (and some in Wales)
- Some are still being produced

- Here is one done for a place near here – Olveston
- In fact this is that community's recently revised version

- Research in around 2003 found that good quality* and hence adoptable Design Statements succeeded in stopping developers' standard designs
- *(* Not all are good!)*

- There are reasons why they have not been done as much in urban areas and cities such as Bristol
- But quite a few <u>have</u> been done, so we now just call them all:
- COMMUNITY DESIGN STATEMENTS - CDSs.

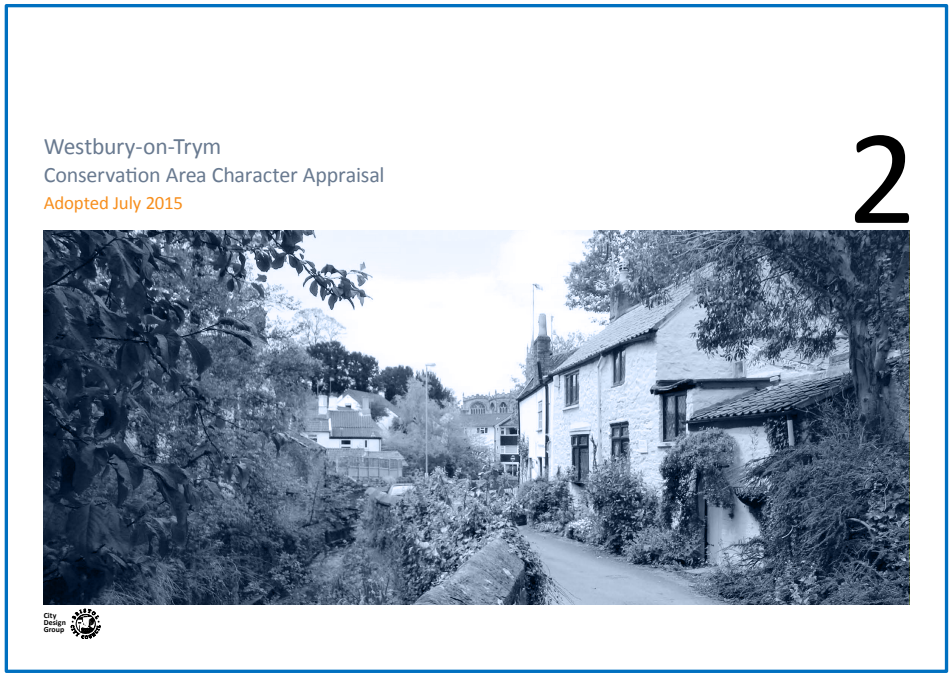


NOW BACK TO BRISTOL

A MODEL TO COPY?

- How might we back up the City's overall Design Guide with local material?
- This reminded me of a programme of work with a District Council
- I ran training followed by helping a few communities with their own local Statements.
- 34 of their 47 Parish and Town areas now have adopted Design Statements - almost 70%
- *(And, given the current lack of £££ in local government, the sweat equity value of local people's work contributed around £1,500,000 to their Council)*

- Could a similar approach work in Bristol?
- There are already relevant examples:
- Several Conservation Area Character Assessments were done with local input
- *(Caution: these are just assessments, not really design guidance)*
- Some had little local input, some had a lot - as in Westbury-on-Trym
- There are two other interesting examples



- One: Character Assessment for Henleaze, done very much by the local community.
- The group had some training from Pete Insole
- And help from an old colleague of mine
-

- Henleaze was still an assessment not a guide or a code
- But one other example includes both assessment and general guidance
- That's the one I led with my local community in Westbury Park

SO …. IT COULD BE DONE IN BRISTOL!

WHAT'S INVOLVED?

- **I'm sure it would help to give you an outline of what would be involved in such work**
- **So ….**

- **First of all would be the TRAINING SESSION, probably half a day**
- **My training is always highly practical and enjoyable**
- **Probably covering:**
  - **The basic things to address in an assessment and guide**
  - **Ensuring how to make it supportable by our City Council**
  - **Various ways to undertake the work, maybe even trying one or two**
  - **Help with how to engage as many other people as possible from your area**
  - ***(PS. I would also explain about the 'Local List of Valued Buildings')***

- **FOR THE WORK ITSELF, here's what we did in Westbury Park, but there are lots of other ways**

  - **Set up a STEERING GROUP**
  - **Ours was 7 people, a good number, but 4 …. or 10 maybe**

  - **Summarise the area's HISTORY AND HERITAGE**
  - **Use Know Your Place! And other sources**

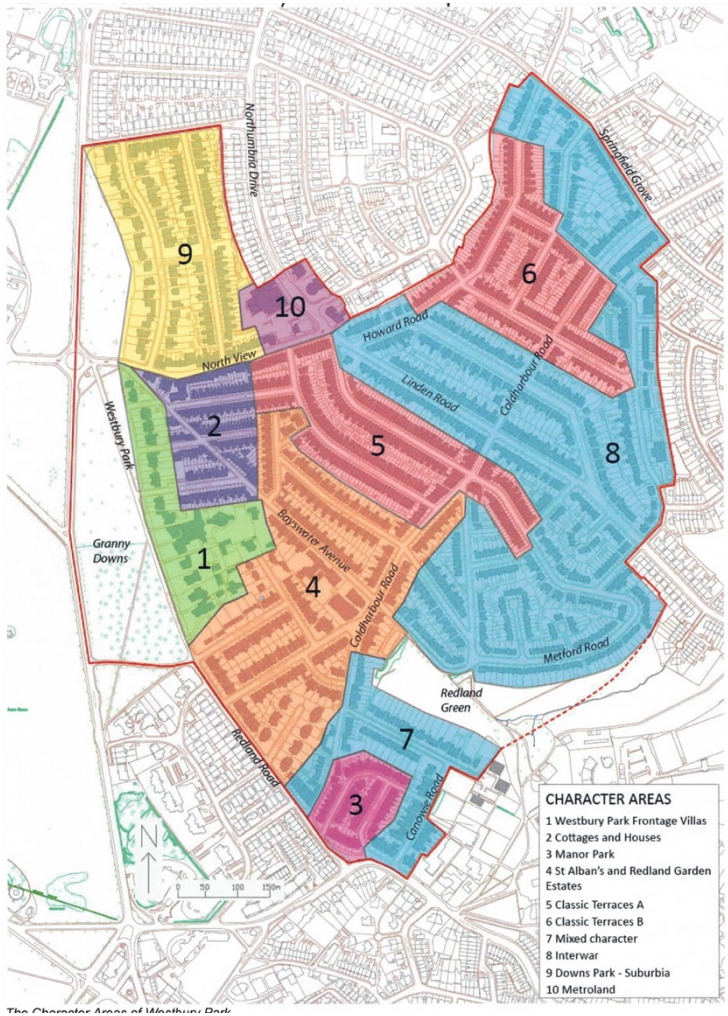
- Define the CHARACTER AREAS
- A classic first step
- Here are ours, 10 in total, really just three basic ones:
  - Big houses, some along the Downs
  - Streets of Victorian terraces
  - Areas of detached and semi-detached houses

- STREET SURVEYS
  - Simple form about building types, heights, front gardens, materials etc.
  - Done with 1 or 2 local people per street or two
  - Lots of photos
  - Draft descriptive text

- GUIDANCE – ours was not really a code
- Yours may or may not need to be

- DRAFTING – lots of maps, diagrams and especially photos
  - Circulate widely – essential consultation
  - Check with City Council

- POLISHING AND PRODUCTION



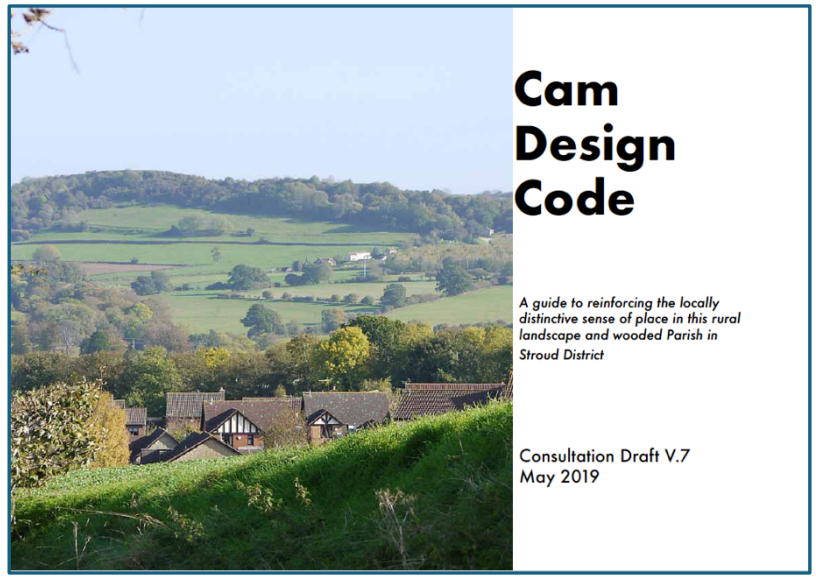
WHAT STATUS MIGHT THESE HAVE?

- **Key question - will your Community Design Statement make any difference?**
- **If what you produce is well prepared and consulted on and supported locally, it can become a 'MATERIAL CONSIDERATION'**
- **This would mean that it should (must?) be taken into account when determining any planning application**

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

- There's another route that could give your work even more weight
- Some of you already have a Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP), some of you are underway with one and some of you may be considering doing one
- The new government is keen to encourage groups to include character assessment and design guidance in their NDPs
- They are also keen to get more urban groups doing NDPs
- Key point: one of the very first NDPs was done by a community in London, in Kensington, and that was nothing but a Design Statement
- The one right (one of ours) was one of the first real Codes included a made NDP

- You could follow the NDP route but that comes with good news and two lots of bad news
- Good: your NDP Steering Group can get up to £8,000 in grant aid specifically for work design
- There's now national guidance on how to do that
- Bad news 1: You can't get registered without setting up an 'Urban Forum' - never easy
- Bad news 2: The bureaucracy and time an NDP takes is numbing - two formal consultation stages, a formal Examination and a referendum!
- But …. there are early signs that some of the bad news may be on its way out



WHERE NOW?

- There are a few things up in the air, probably into the new year - the proposed changes to the NPPF and maybe NDP procedures
- Community level work must fit with what the City Council are doing
- And assessment work is best done when the weather is better anyway
- So …. no rush for now

- Can we please have a show of hands to see if - just in principle for now - any of you think you would like your communities to be involved and help fill that crucial gap of celebrating local distinctiveness that the City Council - and our city - will really need?

- If you put your hands up (or decide to later):

Please send me a brief message telling me who you or your group are, what your neighbourhood is and stating a wish to be kept in touch with next stages

Messages to: patandjeff@cbnd.com