THE VILLAGE APPRAISAL AND

THE VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT (VDS)

If you read the Governance section of this Project, especially for the middle of the 1970s, you should be left with the strong realization that Local Government in England and Wales was at that stage on the up-and-up. Following the passing of the 1972 Maude-Radclyffe Act and after the various structural reorganization were implemented in 1974, it was the period when even Parish Councils had consultation powers delegated to them. To make this effective, it was realized that such powers – known as tool kits - needed to be exercised in an environment where Councillors, of whatever level, knew what was acceptable and what was not. This structure was called an Appraisal and Parish Councils were encouraged to develop and publish one for their individual parishes. So that is the theory – what happened in practice, especially in Teffont?

At a Parish Council meeting on 22nd March 1977, the following items were minuted:

*“Notices of a one-day courses at Hanging Langford were circulated. It was agreed that a Village Appraisal should be discussed at the annual Assembly. Major and Mrs Mordaunt-Hare offered their assistance in the preparation of an Appraisal. The Chairman undertook to discuss a possible approach with Mr Young of the District Council Planning Department”.*

At the annual Assembly meeting two months later, the Chairman explained the purpose, scope and possible methodology of Village Appraisals emphasizing the need for all householders to be consulted. At the end of this, the Assembly recommended that an Appraisal be undertaken.

At a meeting in July it was decided that Councillors should pass over the responsibility for the first part of the Village Appraisal – a survey of the current position – to Mrs Mordaunt-Hare for her to work on. No detailed instructions were provided to her and no Councillor present wished to be involved personally. The investigation of the views of those living in the village was to be left until the Survey was complete.

By September, an Appraisal sub-committee of the Planning Committee had been set up with three members, Mrs. J Willan, a Councillor and Chairperson for this sub-committee, Mrs G Mordaunt-Hare and the Clerk, Mr E R Long-Fox. This sub-Committee reported on the split of responsibilities for Survey subjects among the three sub-Committee members. Through the autumn of 1977 and the following early winter, there were a number of working sessions which were not minuted as members developed their ideas; these sessions were held in Fitz House and were considerably lubricated with Mordaunt-Hare gin.

By the middle of March, the sub-Committee were on their second draft but work was being delayed by the lack of census population details which were not available from the District until April. During that month, a copy of work done to date was reviewed by a Planning Officer, Mr Adams. This resulted in Draft 3. In a long meeting. His comments - the result of Draft 4 - were then reviewed by the whole Planning Committee. Four of the points raised were deferred, specifically those about the proposed Open Spaces, the use of the Pound, tree planting by the Parish Council and bridges over the stream – this was because they were considered to be better included in the forthcoming village survey. A further one about sites with outstanding planning permissions was covered by showing the recommendations involved on the maps rather than in the text. Six recommendations covered bridges over the stream, building materials, width restrictions on the B3089, car parks, replanting dying trees and village deliveries. Mr Adams’s comments on these were accepted along with two on hedges and walls and agricultural buildings. Four recommendations were rejected, two of them concerning trees (Conservation Area would cover these) along with ones on bus lay byes and extending the 30 mph area through Evias.

Finally, the meeting agreed that the objective of the Appraisal should be:

“To encourage the Community to express its views of the way the village and the Community itself should develop.”

It was agreed that the next steps should be:

1. The Clerk, accompanied with Mrs Mordaunt-Hare, to discuss the Appraisal with Mr Adams on 2nd May.
2. The Clerk to produce a 5th draft incorporating the changes agreed (Drafts 3 and 4 had been working documents used.
3. The Chairman to report at the Village Assembly on progress to date on 30 May.

4. The Clerk to produce a draft questionnaire for circulation to all members of the village. Copies of this would be circulated to all Councillors (District and County) for their views. At Group Captain Willan’s suggestion, it was agreed that the Clerk to get Planning Office help in the drafting and, hopefully, the production of this questionnaire.

5. Parish and Councillors and other interested parties would take the questionnaire to specified families (to ensure the whole village was covered) and discuss it with them.

6. When the results are compiled, a general Village meeting on the subject to be held

before the results were incorporated into the Appraisal.

The next two stages in the Appraisal process were planned to be done in parallel to save time but each turned out to be very time-consuming. The first of these two stages was to write, to design, to publish, to distribute, to get filled in, to collect, to analyse and finally to incorporate into Draft 6 – yes people thought of improvements to [Draft](file:///\\\draft) 5 - the Survey Document. This took a year as some of the Councillors were very dilatory and very few people seem to enjoy completing survey documents. Some families wanted a copy each, some wanted one per family and some did not want it all.

Dealing with the Survey including incorporating the views expressed with Draft 6 took nearly 18 months. Even that, however, did not take as long as the other “parallel” stage. This stage was the writing and agreeing of the Preface.

There is a very short entry in the minutes of a Parish Council meeting of 4th August 1980 that reads:

*“The Clerk reported that agreement with SDC (Salisbury District Council) on the wording of the Preface was still awaited. After that there is only the marking up a 6 inch map and printing.”*

Why was this – just idleness or overwork? I think not. In the two plus years since the Kick-Off meeting a lot of attitudes had changed and the amount of power which Planning Departments were happy to delegate from District Council down to Parish Council level had been reduced. That is shown by the wording of the Preface of the Appraisal on which the SDC insisted and on which the Parish Council very reluctantly accepted:

“*The Appraisal of the Parish of Teffont was prepared between 1978 and 1980 by Teffont Parish Council with advice and help from Wiltshire County Council and Salisbury District Council. It is a non-statutory document which will be used by the Parish Council in making observations on planning applications and related matters referred to it for consultation prior to determination by the County and District Councils. Copies are also held by both these authorities and the former have agreed to regard it as “consultative” in making decisions which affect the village though it does not represent a statement of policy or commitment of either of them.”*

It was the best we could get out of them, especially the District Councils. With that settled, the final draft was made available to the village with copies in the Post Office and the printing was under way. Mrs Willan wrote a report on the whole development process which, her husband read to the Council on her part.

At a meeting on 27th March, Councillors were handed with their personal copies and reminded them that they were responsible for their safe keeping. Copies were sent to the other relevant Councils.

Looking back from then one asks if the considerable effort expended was worth the time. Certainly it was the first time Teffont Parish Council had attempted anything like this and it would be a useful learning experience for many of the Councillors. Did the availability of the Appraisal from 1981 onwards result in better consultations and recommendations to SDC Planning Office? Possibly. Were the Parish Council able to put pressure onto developers resulting in better designs? Perhaps. The Parish Council has had two versions of the Appraisal and one “son-of-Appraisal” (the VDS), all with similar aims and one gets the impression that the Parish Council of yesterday and today has tried to use these new tool kits as effectively as possible.

What is this about two versions of the Appraisal? A section has been dealing with the first one that took almost three years in total to prepare and publish. At some stage in 1989 the question was asked as to whether the Appraisal was still relevant or should it be revamped. At a Council meeting in December 1989, the Chairman reported that a sub-committee had looked at this. They had agreed that the Appraisal was a useful document – to some degree answering the questions asked above – and needed only a small amount of updating - no major changes then. A vote was taken on a proposed paragraph stating that the field in the middle of the village below Kings Orchard (The Paddock) might be an area for future development. This was agreed on a vote of 4 by 2 but was reversed at the next meeting held on 31s t January 1990. The other updates which were just updating some of population numbers etc were incorporated in what became Appraisal Version 2. We have yet to come to the VDS (Village Design Statement) but before that was instigated, the Appraisal was reviewed again; this was in November 2002 where a discussion took place comparing the three alternatives of updating the existing (1989) document, writing a new document based on something called the Planning Toolkit or producing a Village Design Statement which was a way of writing a document that would be official Supplementary Guidance.

For reasons still being researched, nothing came of these discussions but around 2006 Wiltshire First asked us whether Teffont was interested in writing a Parish Plan as, if so, they would help us. Parish Plans were apparently not only the flavour of the month but also much more comprehensive rather than just addressing Planning issues. To see whether the Village was interested in developing one of these Parish Plans. A special Parish meeting was held on a Saturday afternoon. There was a turnout of 50 or 60 people and, after an explanation of what would be involved had been by Community First, a vote was taken as whether we should proceed. Half the attendees were in favour but a quarter were against. Although that was a substantial majority for proceeding, Community First strongly recommended that we should not proceed as they believed that so many people were in the NO camp as to make this unlikely to be successful. At the next Parish Council meeting this advice was accepted and we decided not to proceed; all seemed peaceful until one Councillor asked whether, if we could not do a Parish Plan, we should think about a VDS – as this would be much less contentious!

In a moment of madness a small group of people came forward and agreed that they would form a committee to work on the submission of a Village Design Statement. Following some consultation throughout the village and a prolonged period of development over a number of years by the team, a presentation was made in 2010 to the village, which did not receive full support, and another team offered to take over the project from the original committee.

It was thought that the document presented was insufficiently detailed and lacked qualitative information and illustration. It was considered to be too generic and could have applied to any of the other local villages as it had not highlighted those special features which make Teffont such an attractive and unique place.

The new team drawn together from across the village comprised relatively new residents as well as those long established villagers who were all committed to articulating what makes Teffont so special and why new developments should be considered in the context of where they are to be placed. This new team comprised a wide range of professional skills, from graphic design and art to extensive local historical and geological knowledge as well as mapping skills, printing, editorial and proof reading experience.

Their starting point was a wide ranging survey of the village to ascertain what it was that people valued about Teffont. As well as providing good quality data it also provided some wonderful comments which were included as quotes throughout the finished document.

This dedicated team worked hard for just over a year to pull together a Village Design Statement that was worthy of the village that it represented. They met regularly, tempted to meetings by cake or other suitable refreshments.

The Parish Council, who whilst they agreed to support the initiative, had no involvement in the production of the final document. However, they had set a tight deadline for publication asking that the finished document be produced within 12 months. Unfortunately this was not achieved, but it was delivered in 15months.

The Parish Council wished to be updated regularly by the Chair of the VDS committee and these updates were given to Parish Council Meetings as well as being posted on the Village email circulation so the whole village was aware of the progress of development. There had been much talk of the VDS over the years and it was felt that swift action was needed to bring the project to a conclusion.

On completion of the proposed document, it had to be adopted by the Parish Council and then approved by Wiltshire Council. The development process had involved Wiltshire Council’s conservation officer and planning officers throughout and it was finally approved at a South West Wiltshire Area Board meeting with full support of the Councillors and Officers in 2012.

It has since been held up as an exemplar Village Design Statement and it has become ‘a material consideration in the determination of a planning application’ for all development.