

MID DEVON DESIGN GUIDE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Graeme Barnell, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Mrs Jenny Clifford, Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration

Reason for Report: To approve the draft Mid Devon Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document for Public Consultation

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **That Cabinet approves the draft Mid Devon Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (comprising Appendices 1 to 5 to this report), the Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Report (Appendix 6 to this report) and the Habitat Regulations Assessment Screening Report (Appendix 7 to this report) for public consultation.**
2. **That delegated authority be given to the Head of Planning, Economy and Regeneration in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration to finalise the material and arrangements for consultation.**

Financial Implications: There is existing budgetary provision for the preparation of the Design Guide SPD. There will be some limited additional costs associated with consultation which may involve printing and postage, for which budgetary provision also exists.

Legal Implications: The process of preparing the Design Guide SPD will need to comply with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Adoption of the Mid Devon Design Guide will help raise design standards in development proposals that are submitted to the Council for determination and help guide planning decisions made on these.

Risk Assessment: The Design Guide SPD will provide guidance on design issues in Mid Devon. The document will reduce the risk of costs being awarded against the Council where decisions are based on its content.

Equality Impact Assessment: A full Equality Impact Assessment has been prepared as part of the Mid Devon Local Plan Review evidence base. The assessment undertaken for Policy DM1 "High Quality Design" indicates a high possibility of a positive impact in regard to the protected characteristics. This policy will provide the policy baseline for the more detailed guidance to be included in the Design Guide SPD.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: The Design Guide SPD will contain guidance on the urban, village and rural design issues for development in Mid Devon. It will therefore help deliver all four objectives of the Corporate Plan.

Impact on Climate Change: One of the core principles of the Design Guide SPD is to support, through design, the Council's commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2030. The Design Guide SPD has regard throughout to climate change.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 Mid Devon District Council is proposing to expand on local plan policy for design through a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide detailed guidance on urban, village and rural design issues in Mid Devon. It is intended that the Design Guide SPD will raise design awareness and standards throughout the planning process.
- 1.2 The National Planning Policy Framework (2019) paragraph 124 makes clear "the creation of high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectation, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process." Paragraph 126 adds "To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, plans or supplementary planning documents should use visual tools such as design guides and codes. These provide a framework for creating distinctive places, with a consistent and high quality standard of design." The Mid Devon Design Guide is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework.
- 1.3 The Government published the National Design Guide in October 2019. This provides a common overarching framework for design based on ten characteristics reflecting the Government's priorities for design. It also highlights the importance of local Design Guides in setting out and understanding the local context and analysis of local character and identity. The Mid Devon Design Guide complements the National Design Guide by doing this.
- 1.4 The Design Guide SPD will be prepared in accordance with Part 5 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. The Design Guide will be adopted by the Council as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The SPD will not be part of the development plan and does not introduce new planning policies into the development plan. However, it will be capable of being a material consideration in determining planning applications. The Mid Devon Local Plan Review 2013 – 2033 Policy DM1 "High Quality Design" will provide the policy baseline for the Design Guide SPD. This policy is currently subject to a proposed main modification as part of the examination of the Local Plan Review, following advice in the Inspector's Post Hearings Advice Note. The Design Guide SPD can also complement design policies in the current adopted local plan for Mid Devon.

1.5 The Design Guide SPD (attached as Appendices 1-5) have been prepared by consultants DHUD Ltd in conjunction with Hilton Barnfield Architects and Hyas Associates Ltd.

2.0 Process of Preparing the Design Guide

2.1 The overall aim of the Design Guide is to equip all parties in the planning process to more easily identify contextual factors which influence design response and enable them to prepare a coherent and evidenced response to these. Regular and meaningful stakeholder engagement is therefore essential in shaping the Design Guide.

2.2 A series of stakeholder engagement sessions were held as follows:

- Informal Member Workshop (March 2018) – Members were asked to consider key design challenges in Mid Devon and identify top design priorities for the Design Guide. This information was provided to the consultant team during project inception.
- Technical Stakeholder Session (November 2018) - This was aimed towards a wide range of local architects, agents and developers as well as statutory consultees and other public sector organisations involved in the planning process. A total of 15 stakeholders attended. A good balance of delivery and debate was achieved throughout the day and attendees were exposed to each other's, as well as the consultant's and the Council's perspectives on a wide range of design issues. This allowed all stakeholders to develop an understanding of each other's varied interests in preparing a robust Design Guide.
- Design Guide Training Session (March 2019) – This was aimed towards the Council's Elected Members, Planning Officers, town and parish councils and neighbourhood plan groups. A total of 34 stakeholders attended. The aim of the event was to equip interested parties with the skills and knowledge to apply the Design Guide alongside their existing involvement in the planning process and 'road-test' the emerging Design Guide material on sample development proposals.

2.3 These sessions have usefully helped to shape both the methodological approach, and usability of the Design Guide. Since these workshops, officers have been working closely with the consultant team to finalise the content and structure of the Design Guide.

3.0 Structure of the Design Guide

3.1 The content of the Design Guide is structured into four volumes and a Pocket Toolkit as follows:

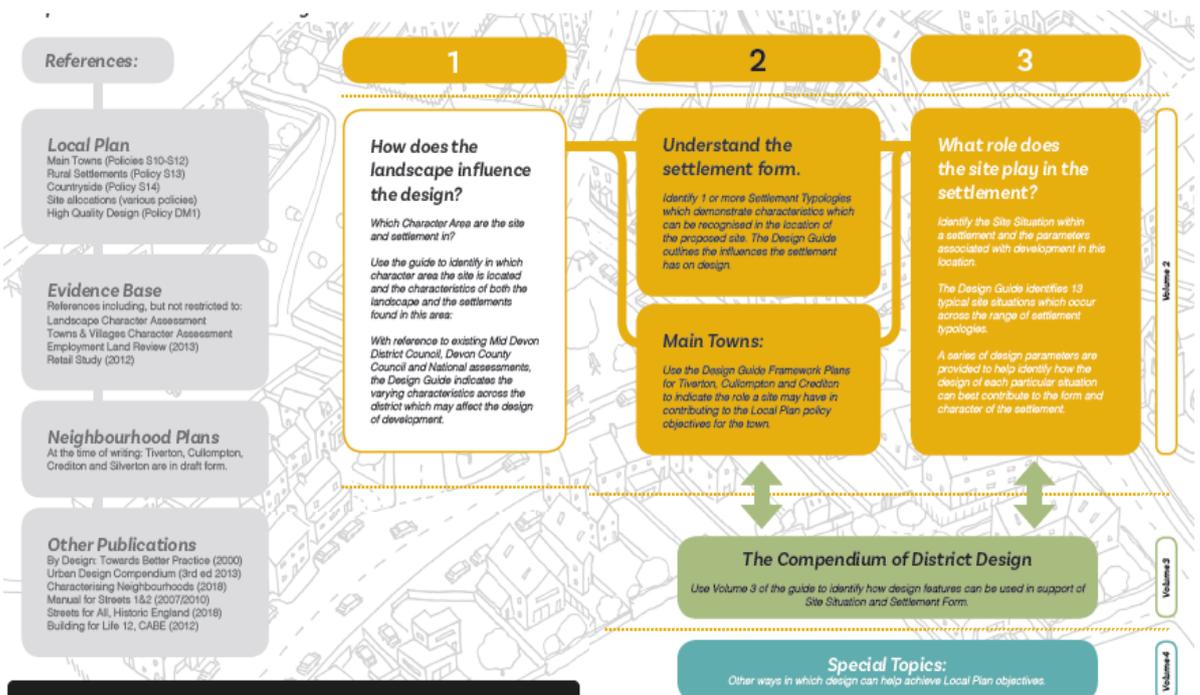
- Volume 1: Procedural Guidance (Appendix 1)
- Volume 2: Designing for Landscape & Settlement Form (Appendix 2)

- Volume 3: Compendium of District Design (Appendix 3)
- Volume 4: Special Topic Guides (Appendix 4)
- Pocket Toolkit (Appendix 5)

3.2 A brief description of each volume and the Pocket Toolkit is provided below:

Volume 1: Procedural Guidance

3.3 This volume sets out overarching core principles for the Design Guide and as well as background and context. It provides guidance and instructions on how to use the Design Guide to enable all users to help shape the design of sites and ensure that they are influenced by and respond to the district’s contrasting distinctiveness. The diagram below provides an overview on how to navigate through the Design Guide:



Volume 2: Designing for Landscape & Settlement Form

3.4 This volume provides a step by step guide to preparing design responses to landscape, settlement form and site situation. Initially, this volume should be used to understand a site’s context with reference to Landscape Character descriptions associated with its location, the form of the settlement the site lies within. Users can then identify the role of the site within the settlement. A framework of design guidance is also provided for each of the 3 main towns in the district, providing a spatial interpretation of the policy objectives for each of these towns. Finally, additional guidance is provided for development in the countryside in accordance with the Local Plan policies for this part of the district.

Volume 3: Compendium of District Design

- 3.5 This Compendium of District Design represents a study of the features of the built environment throughout the Mid Devon District. Each feature is presented and analysed in a separate chapter. These chapters cover public realm, proportion and scale, frontages and elevations, boundaries and thresholds, doors and porches, windows, materials, roofs and dormers, chimneys, extensions and alterations, parking and transport and agricultural and commercial buildings. Each chapter includes a summary of the treatment of each feature and the contribution it can make to good design when carefully considered as part of a robust design process. The summary also provides a brief overview of how each feature has been used in examples across the district in both historical and more contemporary contexts.

Volume 4: Special Topic Sheets

- 3.6 This final section provides guidance on a range of specific ‘special topics’ and outlines how design considerations in these areas can help to achieve the objectives of the Local Plan. The ‘special topics’ include:

- Designing for Community
- Designing for Health and Wellbeing
- Design, Housing Delivery and Viability
- Design, Accessibility and Inclusiveness
- Employment and Commercial Development
- Designing for Custom and Self Build

- 3.7 In most cases, information and guidance provided under these special topics refers to established national guidance and best practice. Where this is the case additional relevant documents are referenced. Whilst previous volumes in the Design Guide have encouraged a bespoke approach to landscape, settlement and site there are also a series of more generic principles applicable to good place making and which all development should have concern for. This series of special topics are areas within the Local Plan in which design can have a key role in facilitating good outcomes.

‘Pocket Toolkit’

- 3.8 Finally, the Design Guide also includes a ‘Pocket Toolkit’ to enable the Council’s Officers and applicants easy ‘table-top’ use of the Design Guide to help inform discussions about the design of development proposals at the pre-application stage and throughout the application process.

Strategic Environmental Assessment / Habitats Regulation Assessment Screening

- 3.9 The Design Guide SPD has been ‘screened’ to establish whether it requires a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). The SEA Screening Report (Appendix 6) has identified that the Design Guide SPD is unlikely to have significant effects on the environment. The SEA

Screening Report has also found that there is no requirement for the Design Guide SPD to be subject to a full SEA.

- 3.10 The Design Guide SPD has been ‘screened’ for the purpose of the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) to assess whether it may affect the protected features of a European ‘habitats site’ identified under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Conservation of Offshore Marine Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The HRA Screening Report (Appendix 7) identifies that the Design Guide SPD is not likely to have significant adverse effects on the integrity of Habitat sites, either alone or in-combination with other plans or projects and further ‘Appropriate Assessment’ is not required.

4.0 Public Consultation

- 4.1 In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 and the Council’s Statement of Community Involvement, a six week public consultation exercise is proposed to be undertaken, commencing on a date to be agreed. Once the consultation has ended and all comments have been taken into account, the final version of the Design Guide and a statement of public participation will be presented to a future meeting of the Cabinet with a recommendation to adopt the Design Guide as a SPD.

5.0 Groups Consulted

- 5.1 The Planning Policy Advisory Group (PPAG) considered the Design Guide SPD at its meeting of 7th November 2019 and the group recommended that Cabinet approves the document for public consultation subject to the following minor changes:
- Review the Mid Devon Settlement Character Area (SCA) naming conventions. It was felt that a number of the SCA titles were unclear and did not reflect the geography of the area.
 - Add an additional reference to make clear that the document can be amended (particularly in relation to the climate emergency) as planning policies are reviewed.
 - Ensure that images are correctly referenced and cover a broad range of settlements (i.e. avoiding repeating images in a given section).
 - Add a reference to encouraging ‘trim trails’ and the health and wellbeing benefits of these to the special topic guide ‘Health and Wellbeing’.

Officers will work with the consultant team to complete these changes prior to commencing public consultation.

Contact for more Information:

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Circulation of the Report:

Cabinet Member

Leadership Team

List of Background Papers:

Appendix 1: Volume 1: Procedural Guidance

Appendix 2: Volume 2: Designing for Landscape and Settlement Form

Appendix 3: Volume 3: Compendium of District Design

Appendix 4: Volume 4: Special Topic Sheets

Appendix 5: Design Guide 'Pocket Toolkit'

Appendix 6: SEA Screening Report

Appendix 7: HRA Screening Report