

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

2 May 2023

Subject: Wiltshire Design Guide – Draft for Public Consultation

Cabinet Member: Cllr Nick Botterill Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Control and Strategic Planning

Key Decision: Key

Executive Summary

Wiltshire Council has produced a draft Wiltshire Design Guide which, once adopted, will be used to ensure that developments in Wiltshire are consistently of a high-quality design.

The Design Guide is structured around the '10 characteristics of good design' as described in the National Design Guide, focusing on local priorities and qualities for Wiltshire.

The Design Guide is intended to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). As such it will become a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.

The draft design guide has been through extensive internal consultation across all relevant service areas.

Environmental Select Committee on 14th March welcomed the draft document. A few minor suggestions were made which have now been incorporated.

Subject to Cabinet approval of the draft (**Appendix 1**) the next stage is to seek the views of external stakeholders and the community through statutory public consultation in early Summer. Consideration of comments and any amendments necessary will be made during July and August in anticipation of the final version being considered by Cabinet and adopted by Council in October 2023.

Proposal

That Cabinet:

Approve the Wiltshire Design Guide for public consultation and delegate to the Corporate Director Place in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, Development Management and Strategic Planning, to finalise subsequent matters as required and take all necessary steps.

Reason for Proposal

The Wiltshire Design Guide is intended to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document following public consultation to support the delivery of consistently high-quality design standards in new developments.

Terence Herbert
Chief Executive

Wiltshire Council

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Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet approval on the draft Wiltshire Design Guide (WDG) in order for it to be progressed to statutory public consultation with the intention that, subject to any further amendments and approval by Council, it will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The WDG will ensure that planning decisions regarding new development align with the Council's stated mission, in particular, to have a resilient society, a thriving economy and a sustainable environment.
3. The draft WDG identifies poor design features which singularly or collectively can lead to poor health and wellbeing outcomes and identifies positive design approaches, principles and features which promote health and wellbeing. It recognises the value a high quality built and natural environment has to health and wellbeing, a fact which has been increasingly brought into the forefront at a national and local level.
4. The Council has acknowledged a climate emergency and has committed to becoming carbon neutral as an organisation by 2030. The Council's Business Plan sets out that through its leadership, it must now seek to make the whole of Wiltshire carbon neutral too. Having an adopted WDG will support the delivery of this objective.
5. The Council's Business Plan makes clear the importance of building the right homes in the right places; Wiltshire Council aims to improve housing supply to ensure people can live and work locally, play an active part in their community, have easy access to high quality and affordable housing, close to family, that is right for them and in a beautiful place. Having an adopted WDG will help ensure the delivery of these principles.

Background

6. In the Housing White Paper in 2017¹ the Government concluded that "*Good design is fundamental to creating healthy and attractive places...*" Subsequently, in 2019 the Government produced The National Design Guide² (NDG). It "*sets out a blueprint for*

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/590464/Fixing_our_broken_housing_market_-_print_ready_version.pdf

2

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/962113/National_design_guide.pdf

how local authorities can achieve quality and great design, and recommends what developers need to deliver to help win the support of communities – ensuring new homes are built faster and better.”

7. However, it states: *“Specific, detailed and measurable criteria for good design are most appropriately set out at the local level. They may take the form of local design policies, design guides or design codes, prepared either by local authorities, or applicants to accompany planning applications.”*
8. Under current National Planning Policy Frameworks (NPPF 2021) legislation, in the absence of locally produced design guides or design codes, the NPPF and The National Design Guide are to be used to guide planning decisions. The draft updated NPPF (2023) is unchanged on this point.
9. The NPPF (paragraph 128) recommends that any such local design guide should *“provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places with a consistent and high-quality standard of design”* and that *“the level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place and should allow a suitable degree of variety.”*
10. This means a Wiltshire Design Guide should provide new, locally authored design guidance that would apply across Wiltshire at a level of detail which does not exist in the National Design Guide.
11. The role of Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements will remain important. These shall continue to incorporate design guidance which relates to specific neighbourhoods or sites, which cannot be covered in the county-wide WDG.

Main Considerations

12. The process of creating the draft WDG has been based around the following objectives:
 - i. To comply with a national government directive to produce up-to-date local design guidance which addresses local priorities and preferences.
 - ii. To ensure that the WDG advances the delivery of the Council’s Business Plan objectives and the Core Strategy in particular Core Policy 57.
 - iii. To ensure the WDG is not singularly focused on the appearance of new buildings and addresses all 10 characteristics of good design as described in the National Design Guide. In doing so it will provide the framework for any additional local design guidance that may be produced as part of Neighbourhood Planning or through Village Design Statements.
 - iv. To create a more detailed level of good practice guidance than currently exists at a national level. This will ensure all Wiltshire is covered by comprehensive, local design guidance which will have material weight when considering planning applications.
 - v. To ensure the text and presentation of the WDG is clear, engaging and of practical use to a wide audience, ranging from members of the public to developers and designers.

- vi. To create a document that developers can use to make more informed, early decisions when planning projects before they engage with the planning authority through a formal planning application process.
- vii. To formally adopt the guidance as an SPD, to ensure it has proper weight in planning and that this weight is publicly recognised.

13. The draft WDG has been through extensive internal consultation across all relevant service areas.

14. The draft WDG has been progressed and is now at a stage where the views of external stakeholders and the community are sought through formal statutory public consultation. All comments received through this process will be taken into consideration and revisions made accordingly prior to the document being brought back to Cabinet in October with the intention that it recommends adoption as a supplementary Planning Document to Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Engagement

15. Environmental Select Committee (ESC) considered the draft Design Guide at a meeting on 14 March 2023. The Committee welcomed the Draft Design Guide and suggested some minor amendments of wording which have now been incorporated. A record of the changes can be found in **Appendix 2**.

Safeguarding Implications

16. The proposal is to create a design guidance document which supplements Core Policy 57 and as such there are no safeguarding implications.

Public Health Implications

17. This Guide is focused on the design of new places. It identifies poor design features which singularly or collectively can lead to poor health and wellbeing outcomes and identifies design approaches, principles and features which promote health and wellbeing.

18. The value a high quality built and natural environment has to our health and wellbeing and the significance of achieving this in development has been increasingly brought into the forefront at a national and local level. Comments received during the internal consultation have been incorporated.

Procurement Implications

19. There are no procurement implications associated with the proposals set out in this report.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

20. To understand any potential equalities impact of adopting the new guidance as anticipated, the statutory public consultation will first be undertaken, so that evidence can be collected and data analysed. An equalities impact assessment of the proposal will follow.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

21. The proposal has no direct no implications for energy consumption, carbon emissions or associated environmental risk management. However, a golden thread running through the WDG encourages design that positively addresses climate change objectives, adaptation, and resilience.
22. The Guide includes design expectations which seek to reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions and through good design protect and enhance the natural environment, supports active travel and promote climate change mitigations measures through nature-based solutions.

Workforce Implications

23. The creation of a design guidance document supplements Core Policy 57 and will sit alongside other existing national and local design policy and guidance. Officers already utilise these documents where appropriate when executing their remit. As such there are no additional workforce implications.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision and related work is not taken

24. If a decision is made not to progress to statutory public consultation, the objectives listed about under 'Main Considerations' will remain unachieved. A key risk is that gaining the critical and essential insight and input from the general public including wider stakeholders such as the development industry or other special interest groups will be delayed.
25. Any additional interim work done revising or otherwise amending the draft WDG instead of progressing to statutory public consultation may prove to be redundant should statutory public consultation transpire to reveal some unanticipated public or industry sentiment which requires a wholesale review of the scope of the draft WDG or the vision it represents for the Council.
26. It is a requirement for any draft supplementary planning document to consider community and stakeholder views through public consultation.

Risks that may arise if the proposed decision is taken and actions that will be taken to manage these risks

27. Statutory public consultation will accord with the usual processes for adoption of SPDs and as such no particular risks are anticipated to need management.

Financial Implications

28. The proposal is to create a guidance document which supplements Core Policy 57 and as such there are no direct financial implication.

Legal Implications

29. The process of preparing and adopting a SPD is prescribed within Regulations 11 to 14 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

30. Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted Local Plan. In this regard, the WDG has been prepared to supplement the design policies within the adopted Wiltshire Core Strategy and once adopted, any replacement design policies set out in the currently emerging Local Plan Review.
31. As set out in this Report, once adopted the WDG will be a material consideration in decision making and hence have weight in the decision-making process.
32. The Council's Legal Services have been consulted on the proposal set out in this Report. They have confirmed that they have no comments.

Options Considered

33. Options considered were:

- i. To create a short (10-20 page) document which could succinctly compliment the National Design Guide. However, such a short document would not read as a coherent document as it could only include some of the National Design Guide's 10 characteristics of good design. Instead, this draft WDG is comprehensive and more coherent, with references to (rather than repetition of) the National Design Guide.
- ii. Produce a WDG but not seek to adopt it as an SPD. This was rejected as it is important that its content is given proper weight in decision making in all matters relating to planning.

Conclusions

34. The draft Wiltshire Design Guide responds positively to the list of objectives set at its inception and has undergone a comprehensive internal consultation process. The next logical step is to undertake a 4-week statutory public consultation when the views of the wider community and stakeholders can be gathered. Indeed, this constitutes the necessary evidence to enable completion of the project.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Draft Wiltshire Design Guide

Appendix 2: Record of consultation with Environmental Select Committee

Background Papers

There are no background papers associated with this report.