

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

14th March 2023

Wiltshire Design Guide – Draft for Public Consultation

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 application.

The draft design guide has been through extensive internal consultation across all relevant service areas and is ready to be considered by Cabinet ahead of formally consulting with external stakeholders and the community.

Public consultation will be in early Summer with adoption as a SPD by Council anticipated to be in Autumn 2023.

Proposal

That the committee:

- a) Consider the draft Wiltshire Design Guide ahead of public consultation in early summer and:
- b) Note the timeline for public consultation and the process by which the comments will be considered ahead of the Design Guide being formally adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document.

Reason for proposal

To share the draft Wiltshire Design Guide (WDG) before it is progressed to statutory public consultation with the intention that it will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The WDG has been produced to support the delivery of consistently high-quality design standards in new developments.

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Wiltshire Design Guide – Draft for Public Consultation

Purpose of report

1. To share the draft Wiltshire Design Guide (WDG) before it is progressed to statutory public consultation with the intention that it will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). The WDG has been produced to support the delivery of consistently high-quality design standards in new developments.

Background

2. 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 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.”*
3. 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.”*
4. 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.
5. The NPPF (paragraph 128) recommends that any such local design guide should *“provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places*

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

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.”

6. This means a Wiltshire Design Guide should provide new design guidance that would apply across Wiltshire at a level of detail which does not exist in the National Design Guide.
7. The role of Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements will remain important. These should continue to incorporate design guidance which relate to specific neighbourhoods or sites.

Main consideration for the committee

8. Design guidance needs to be relevant to the level of use to which it is intended. At the highest level National Design Guidance sets out broad principles of good design through 10 characteristics:
 - CONTEXT – enhances the surroundings.
 - IDENTITY – attractive and distinctive.
 - BUILT FORM – a coherent pattern of development.
 - MOVEMENT – accessible and easy to move around.
 - NATURE – enhanced and optimised.
 - PUBLIC SPACES – safe, social and inclusive.
 - USES – mixed and integrated.
 - HOMES AND BUILDINGS – functional, healthy and sustainable.
 - RESOURCES – efficient and resilient.
 - LIFESPAN – made to last.
9. These 10 characteristics create the framework for considering good design. These characteristics are followed at the next level down in the draft Wiltshire Design Guide in which expectations are set at a county wide level.
10. Settlement level distinctiveness should be picked up through community led neighbourhood plans or village design statements. These should follow the same characteristics of good design as set out in the local and national guidance but are best placed to reflect very local level design and character.
11. These three levels of design guidance; national, county and settlement level, each provides a greater degree of granulation to the one above. However, each should follow the guiding principles of those above to ensure the principles of good design are consistently applied.
12. To support communities to align with the Wiltshire Design Guide and National Guidance, the council has also produced a Guidance for Neighbourhood Planning within Wiltshire – Integrating High Quality Design document that neighbourhood planning groups and communities can use. This helps take groups through the design process to deliver good ‘placemaking’.

13. Given the aforementioned context for the draft Wiltshire wide design guidance, 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.

14. The timetable for adoption is consideration by Cabinet in May followed by a 4-week public consultation period which will include a webinar and an opportunity for the public to discuss the document at in person events that will be held at libraries across Wiltshire. All comments will be considered, and any revisions made before the final version is considered by Cabinet and Council in the Autumn.

Consultation and Approval Process

15. The development of the guide has been through two consultations amongst internal council officers in different departments. The cross-cutting nature of the guide has sought to produce a series of clear expectations that pick up on good design practice across a broad spectrum of specialisms including highways, climate change, waste, public art, planning and ecology, to create a document that supports excellent 'placemaking'.

16. The guidance that is in the draft WDG is presented mostly as 'Expectations'. This is a deliberate choice of word as there is a risk that inflexibly mandating

compliance with all new guidance could have unintentional environment, social or economic implications.

17. On occasion the word 'must' has been cautiously used when experience has shown that it is justified to do so. But despite the choice of wording, it will remain at the discretion of the Planning Case Officer (or Planning Inspector) to give weight to multiple factors and make decisions accordingly.

Environmental impact of the proposal

18. The WDG includes expectations which seek to increase the standard of protection and improvement to the natural and historic environment as well as design considerations that help address climate change objectives, adaptation, and resilience.

Financial implications

19. This is a guidance document and as such there are no direct financial implications.

Legal implications

20. Legal has been consulted to ensure the draft document is suitable for adoption as an SPD.

Alternative Options Considered

21. 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.

Conclusion

22. The draft Wiltshire Design Guide fulfils the list of objectives set at its inception and has undergone a comprehensive internal consultation process. The next step would be to undertake a 4-week statutory public consultation when the views of the community and stakeholders can be sought.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Draft Wiltshire Design Guide