

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 12th January 2016

Report: Cheshire East Borough Design Guide public consultation

Subject/Title: Cheshire East Borough Design Guide – authority to undertake public consultation

Portfolio Holders: Cllr Rachel Bailey, Cabinet member for Children and Families with Cllr Ainsley Arnold, Cabinet Member for Housing and Planning

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 Cheshire East is a unique and treasured place, but one experiencing significant pressure for change. Securing high quality design and protecting the character of Cheshire East are key Council and community priorities. In response, the Council will be implementing a number of measures, including the preparation of a Design Guide, which will be adopted by the Council as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to the Local Plan.
- 1.2 e*SCAPE Urbanists were appointed to assist the Council in preparing the Design Guide. They were specifically chosen because of their local knowledge, being based just outside Macclesfield, and because they have a practical understanding of modern housing development, through working with a number of the main housing developers.
- 1.3 The Design Guide that has been developed comprises two documents. The first volume defines what is special about Cheshire East as a place and the process developers need to follow to deliver and explain design quality within proposals. Volume 2 builds on the content of volume 1 and sets out guidance on achieving quality in respect to a range of topic areas ranging from urban design through to achieving quality of life for occupants of new development.
- 1.4 During the Guide's preparation there has been extensive engagement with internal stakeholders, in addition to engagement and training for Councillors and Development Management officers. There has also been some soft testing of the guide and meetings with Developers and Agents, both at the commencement of the project and recently to unveil the Design Guide in its draft form. The Guide is also to be presented to the Parish Conference on 10th December.

- 1.3 Officers now feel confident that the Design Guide should be consulted upon publically, following a Sustainability Assessment (SA). The intention is to use the same consultation portal as that for the Local Plan consultation. The consultation period would be for 6 weeks, with the intention of getting the Design Guide adopted as soon as possible thereafter.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That officers be authorised to conduct public consultation on the Draft Cheshire East Borough Design Guide after undertaking a Sustainability Assessment and making any minor amendments required to the document as a result of the SA and initial informal feedback.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The design guide has been through extensive informal testing and iteration involving a variety of stakeholders, primarily within Cheshire East Council. It has also been presented to elected members at joint officer/member workshops and also to representatives of the Development Industry via separate tailored events.
- 3.2 Officers now feel confident that, with the benefit of a sustainability appraisal and minor amendments to take account of informal feedback and the SA, the Guide is ready to be consulted upon publically.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 All

5.0 Local Ward Members

- 5.1 All

6.0 Policy Implications

- 6.1 The Guidance will form part of the Local Plan, supporting initially the saved policies within the Legacy Local Plans. Once the Local Plan Strategy (LPS) has been adopted, the SPD will be updated to relate to policies within the LPS and subsequent site allocation and Development Management Policies.
- 6.2 The future impacts of the Design Guide SPD cut across 4 of the 5 Core outcomes of the Council's 3 year corporate plan (Outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 5).

7.0 Implications for Rural Communities

- 7.1 The design guide has been developed to consider the design implications of development for both rural and urban communities. This should mean that developments in rural communities will also be better designed and required to relate far more positively to the character of the place. Where

development is not of the requisite quality, then the Design Guide SPD, in support of Local Plan Policy, provides justification to refuse instances of poor design as part of the planning balance.

8.0 Financial Implications

- 8.1 The guide has been prepared using consultants via a Cabinet budget allocation of £50,000. It is anticipated that the total cost of preparing the design guide will not exceed this. The costs of undertaking public consultation have been accounted for within this overall budget figure. The funding for this will come from the Investment (Sustainability) reserve

9.0 Legal Implications

- 9.1 The Cheshire East Borough Design Guide SPD will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications for new housing development.

As a proposed SPD there are requirements in terms of public consultation and Sustainability Assessment (SA). The Draft SPD must be consulted upon for at least 4 weeks and comments should be taken into account in adopting the SPD and details set out in an adoption statement. In respect to SA, as the Design SPD will initially relate to saved policies, this will be required prior to public consultation taking place.

10.0 Risk Management

- 10.1 The process undertaken in preparing the Design Guide by specifically targeting and engaging with internal and external stakeholders, Councillors, Parishes and Developers and agents, and the undertaking of some soft testing of the Guidance as it has evolved has reduced the potential for requiring significant alteration to the Design Guide post consultation, before adoption.

11.0 Background and Options

- 11.1 Cheshire East has a high quality built and natural environment, which is an important part of what makes the Borough attractive and successful. However, this also makes it a focus for development interest and the associated pressure for change. The Local Plan Strategy sets out ambitious plans for growth, whilst an announcement is imminent on the location of the HS2 hub station. This all means that it is crucial for the quality of new development to be high, so as not to erode the character of the Borough and undermine its success and the quality of life it provides.
- 11.2 The Local Plan Strategy identifies the future production of a Design Guide SPD to support its design policies. However, the design guide has been brought forward in response to the number of development applications being proposed in advance of the Local Plan being adopted.

- 11.3 There will be a requirement in the short term for the SPD to relate to the Saved Policies in the Legacy Plans in order that it can be adopted in Advance of the Local Plan, but the intention is that, ultimately it will relate to the new Local Plan.
- 11.4 The design guide focuses on new housing. It has been divided into 2 volumes: volume 1 sets out the character of Cheshire East and the process for delivering design quality, whilst volume 2 provides the practical design guidance on a range of topics that impact on design quality,
- 11.5 Volume 1 is a very important document and has been written to provide the context for not only housing design but also any future additional design guidance.
- 11.6 An important element in securing the Council's design objectives is to set out concisely the varying elements of the character of Cheshire East. This forms a solid basis to inform both the detailed design guidance, but also to enable developers and designers to gain a sound understanding of the place.
- 11.7 The guidance also places significant emphasis on process, steering developers toward designing new development in the appropriate way, including the use of Design Codes. It also sets out expectations in regard to how Design and Access Statements are prepared and their content.
- 11.8 The second volume of the design guidance is topic based and leads users through various layers of design thinking and best practice.

i working with the grain of the place,
ii urban design,
iii street design, green infrastructure and landscape,
iv sustainable design and lastly,
v quality of life.

Each chapter is concluded by case studies of best practice and a quality checklist, to assist the assessment of a proposal and its performance. The guide has been written to dovetail with Building for Life 12, the industry standard on designing better quality homes and neighbourhoods.

- 11.9 The Design Guide has been developed involving a number of stakeholders with a general stakeholder group covering multiple disciplines, and a technical working group including highways and adoption, drainage and open space and streetscape. These working groups have been invaluable in building consensus in relation to topics that previously have been areas of disagreement, often resulting in poor quality design solutions.
- 11.10 Members and officers were introduced to the Design Guide at three workshop sessions in October, whilst the developers and agents had a preview of the guide at two recent events, following which we have received some feedback. It was felt important to gauge their reaction to the guide at

this stage. The Design Guide will be introduced to communities at the Parish Conference event on the 10th December. Several of the Neighbourhood Planning Groups are also aware of the Guide and it is intended to present the Guide to the Neighbourhood Planning Groups when an event is arranged by the Council's Neighbourhood Planning Team.

- 11.11 It is considered that, subject to some minor amendments as a result of comments received and final proof reading, the Guide should be subjected to Sustainability Appraisal and then consulted upon with the Cheshire East community.

12.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer or via the following link:

<http://preview-cheshireeast.contensis.com/planning/cheshire-east-borough-design-guide.aspx>

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