
Meeting: Executive
Date: 18 March 2014
Subject: Central Bedfordshire Design Guide
Report of: Cllr Young, Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development
Summary: The report proposes that Executive adopt the revised Central Bedfordshire Design Guide as technical guidance for Development Management purposes.

Advising Officer: Assistant Director of Planning, Trevor Saunders
Contact Officer: Connie Frost-Bryant, Acting Principal Planning Officer
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive
Key Decision Yes

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

Council Priorities:

The revised Design Guide will support the Council priority of:

Enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.

Financial:

1. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.
2. The Design Guide provides detailed guidance in relation to the draft Development Strategy 'Lifetime Homes' policy (Policy 32) which sets a target to deliver adaptable homes for people with different needs at different stages in life. This approach has the potential to support elderly and disabled people to live in their homes for longer, thus decreasing the future cost to the Council of supporting them in residential care or with other forms of additional support.
3. The updated guide will also increase efficiency in the planning process and thus hopefully save some officer time in re-negotiating schemes that do not meet high enough design standards.

Legal:

4. There are no specific legal implications arising from this report.

Risk Management:

5. Policy 43: (High Quality Development) of the Draft Development Strategy defers to detailed design guidance to fill in the details necessary for the delivery of successful developments. A failure to have detailed design guidance to help in the determination of planning applications would risk poor standards of design being delivered on new development schemes.
6. An endorsed Design Guide will also give more certainty to the development management process and to developers in terms of what the Council's expectations are in relation to layout, street design, parking provision and internal dimensions. These elements must all be understood early on in the design process in order to provide clarity to developers and to enable them to make informed financial decisions.
7. Other risks, such as failure to deliver the Council's priorities, reputational risks, failure to discharge statutory responsibilities, failure of partnership working, and environmental and financial risks could also be incurred. The Design Guide serves to minimise these risks by setting an agreed framework for development in advance of the planning applications and then onwards through to implementation.

Staffing (including Trades Unions):

8. Not applicable.

Equalities/Human Rights:

9. Public authorities have a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination and to foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender re-assignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
10. The Design Guide builds on the Draft Development Strategy policy on Lifetime Homes (Policy 32) which are homes that are adaptable for those with different needs at different stages of their lives. It provides the detail for how this policy would be delivered in practice to allow people, in particular elderly or disabled people to live independently in their homes for longer.
11. The revised Design Guide has an entirely new supplement entitled 'Accommodating Specific Housing Needs' which seeks to support an increasing need to develop both extra care and residential care accommodation in response to the needs of an ageing population in Central Bedfordshire. The Guide also provides guidance for the provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation which is another specific housing requirement that has not been addressed by previous design guidance.

12. The Guide seeks to rationalise the Council's approach to street design and as such recommends that level surface streets where safe pedestrian areas are still designed in on either side of the carriageway are considered rather than shared surfaces which can be difficult for visually impaired people to navigate through safely. Further guidance relating to the design measures that can be implemented e.g. tactile paving will also be included in the Movement and Streets supplement to address the need for streets to be safe and useable for all users.

13. Overall, one of the overarching principles of the Design Guide is to ensure that developments are planned in sustainable locations so that residents can access employment opportunities as well as facilities and services to meet their everyday needs.

Public Health:

14. The revised Design Guide also has the potential to improve the health and wellbeing of Central Bedfordshire residents as it is clear that in every development, consideration should be given to pedestrian and cycle routes and to informal and formal public open space. By encouraging the use of sustainable modes of transport, this will also in turn reduce harmful emissions and pollution that can lead to respiratory illnesses and aggravate existing medical conditions. Living in a pleasant environment both from an aesthetic and a functional point of view is also conducive to good mental health and overall wellbeing.

Community Safety:

15. The Council needs to ensure that it complies with its statutory duties under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act and as such the Guide references appropriate elements of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) 'Secured by Design' guidance in the document, particularly around the design of residential properties.

16. The revised Design Guide also recognises the community safety concerns that have been raised by residents in relation to the 'shared spaces' concept for street design whereby pedestrians and vehicles share a non-demarcated street. In a street in the Land South of Leighton Buzzard development, the lack of a safe area for pedestrians and demarcation of any kind has prompted complaints in relation to pedestrian safety, anti-social behaviour and poor parking practices. It is considered that the compromise position of level surface streets adopted by the revised Design Guide will address these problems by retaining safe areas for pedestrians.

Sustainability:

17. The revised Design Guide fully supports sustainable development as the principles of good design and sustainability are indivisible from one another. A holistic approach to design as encouraged by the Design Guide, necessarily takes into account economic, social and environmental aspects when developing a new scheme whatever the scale. The Guide also directly supports many of the policies in the draft Development Strategy and all have been subject to a Sustainability Appraisal and Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Procurement:

18. Not applicable.

Overview and Scrutiny:

19. The revised Design Guide was presented to Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 February and following detailed debate it recommended that Executive adopt the revised Guide as technical guidance for Development Management purposes, subject to the following recommendation:

- that the 'Art in the Public Realm' supplement be re-titled to 'Public Realm'.

Members also commented on the following points:

Communal Bin Storage

- It was requested that text in the revised Guide be strengthened to encourage developers to consider the provision of appropriately designed communal bins for all types of development rather than just flats. This has been inserted into the text at paragraph 5.05.16.

Maintenance of Surfacing Materials

- Members considered the long-term maintenance of non-standard surfacing materials to be important but appreciated the benefits of high quality materials for creating local distinctiveness and high quality spaces. It was suggested that management agreements for new developments could be encouraged together with the use of service trenches to minimise the need for excavations. These suggestions have been incorporated into the revised Movement and Streets supplement.

Car Parking Standards

- Some Members initially expressed a degree of concern that the parking standards had been lowered slightly for three and four bedroom homes. Members were reassured that the proposed car parking standards still matched levels of car ownership in Central Bedfordshire and that a pragmatic approach had been taken to the design of parking as it is known that the suitability and convenience of car parking is as important as the level of provision. The point was also made that the need for more than two car parking spaces is usually only for a limited period of time while older children are living at home. It is therefore not necessary or appropriate to accommodate parking to meet this higher level of need for every property. It was also confirmed that the reference to unallocated parking would be removed from the parking standards table (Appendix B) to ensure clarity. Instead it was suggested that this option for parking design should be described in the accompanying text. This is further referenced in the key changes section at paragraph 41 of this report.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Executive is asked to:

- 1. note the proposed changes to the Design Guide and adopt the revised Design Guide as technical guidance for Development Management purposes; and**
- 2. delegate to the Director of Regeneration and Business Support, in consultation with the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development, the authority to make any minor amendments to the revised Design Guide prior to publication.**

Reason for Recommendations: To meet the Council priority of enhancing Central Bedfordshire – creating jobs, managing growth, protecting our countryside and enabling businesses to grow.

Executive Summary

20. The main issues that the revised Guide seeks to address are as follows:
- To give a strong lead on the high quality of design that is expected for all development in Central Bedfordshire.
 - To increase efficiency in the planning process and thus save valuable officer time in re-negotiating schemes that do not meet high enough design standards or indeed take entirely the wrong approach to design.
 - To provide certainty to developers on the expected technical standards for elements like car parking, gardens and room sizes.

- To enhance the quality of design in Central Bedfordshire thus making it a more attractive place to live. This will in turn lead to an increased sense of wellbeing and greater prosperity.
- To improve the quality of green infrastructure in all developments by confirming the current best practice a material consideration in planning decisions.
- To address the needs of both an ageing population and climate change by making clear what standards need to be met to make homes capable of adapting to future needs.
- To incorporate the approach of existing strategies (Green Infrastructure by Design, The Public Art Framework, Central Bedfordshire Parking Standards, Manual for Streets 2) into one design guide.

21. Once adopted, the revised Design Guide will assist Development Management in the determination of planning applications.
22. The comments and recommendations from the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee are set out in paragraph 19.

Background

23. The current Central Bedfordshire Design Guide sets out the policies and principles which guide the delivery of high quality design in the authority area. The Guide is a supplementary planning document which supports the policies set out in the adopted development plans for both North and South Central Bedfordshire, and was formally adopted as a material consideration for development management purposes in January 2010. It is currently organised into two parts; a core document and seven accompanying supplements covering design solutions for specific building types or uses.
24. While the existing guide was adopted comparatively recently and is award-winning, the approach of the document was geared towards small and medium scale developments, is somewhat conservation orientated design and is not considered wholly fit for purpose in guiding the developers of the large urban extensions that are being proposed in the emerging Development Strategy. Furthermore, the guide does not reflect some of the current best practice guidance and internal standards for various key elements including parking, street design, green infrastructure, density, public realm, Lifetime Homes and adaptation to climate change. In order to successfully incorporate these various design interventions, policies and strategies, the Design Guide needed to be fully updated.

25. Central Bedfordshire is set to see significant growth in both housing and employment in the coming years and is planning for this growth with the production of a new Development Strategy. The Strategy plans for 28,700 new homes and 27,000 new jobs up to 2031, and focuses the majority of this development in strategic urban extensions (East of Leighton Linlade, North of Houghton Regis, and North of Luton). In addition, five of the towns in Central Bedfordshire have been the subject of town centre masterplans (Biggleswade, Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard, Houghton Regis and Flitwick); This work will lead to significant regeneration work in these towns over a number of years.
26. The Council has stated that its design priorities are the provision of homes with decent room sizes and gardens; and the ability to adapt to changing lifestyles, an ageing population and climate change. Design will be a key issue in determining and shaping the successful delivery of development being planned.

Consultation

27. Continuous engagement between internal teams has been a strong feature of this project. When the project was initiated, an internal officer working group was formed and this allowed different teams and disciplines like green infrastructure, Transport and archaeology to help to steer the project.
28. Once a basic draft version of the document had been produced, two themed workshops were held to bring together Members, developers, officers and local interest groups. The workshop focused on those issues and elements of the Design Guide that were considered to be more contentious; namely residential space standards, Lifetime Homes, street design and car parking provision.
29. The first workshop focused on design for residential properties. The session was comprised of two introductory presentations; one on the role of design and another which provided some background on the issues to be discussed. The key questions that the assembled delegates were asked to consider centred on whether space standards and garden standards could be delivered. A total of 45 people attended the workshop and the lively and useful debate helped to then further shape the public consultation draft.
30. The second workshop focused on design for movement and streets. The session was comprised of three introductory presentations; one on the Council's aspirations for design from the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities - Strategic Planning and Economic Development, another which provided some background on the issues to be discussed and a further presentation on parking in practice from a Planning Consultant working for the development industry. The key questions that the assembled delegates were asked to consider centred on whether shared spaces worked in practice and what level and type of parking provision should be required for new residential developments. A total of 65 people attended the workshop and once again the well-informed debate that was had helped to refine our approach to this particularly contentious topic.

31. Following the workshops; a focus group comprising a representative sample of the workshop participants took place. The group was comprised of the Executive Member for Sustainable Communities – Strategic Planning and Economic Development, Central Bedfordshire Council Planning Officers, a developer, a planning consultant, two urban designers, and a house builder. This purpose of this session was to allow key stakeholders to act as a critical friend and provide their assessment and analysis of the changes that had been proposed to the draft document as a result of the workshops.
32. Following this, final alterations were made to the draft before it was published for further public consultation. This commenced on 21 October 2013 and ran for a period of four weeks until 24 November 2013. The consultation and publicity of the Design Guide proposals was carried out in compliance with the Central Bedfordshire Statement of Community Involvement (October 2012).

The Supplements – A summary

33. (a) Placemaking Principles

This supplement follows the approach of the current guide and acts as a core document crystallising Central Bedfordshire’s approach to design, but deferring to the theme based supplements to add detail. The key change in this supplement relates to car parking standards (Appendix B) which have been revised down from those in the Central Bedfordshire Parking Strategy’ previously adopted by Executive in October 2012. Rather than one space per bedroom being required, the new standards are structured to better match levels of car ownership in Central Bedfordshire. They also differ by dwelling type in order to ensure that they better match the type of household more likely to be occupying those homes and that appropriately designed parking with trees and good landscaping can be delivered. For example a detached wide fronted dwelling can deliver more curtilage parking than a narrow mid terrace property with the same number of bedrooms. In addition to these revised standards, the Council may also require parking enforcement plans to be implemented particularly during the site construction phase in order to encourage from the outset, appropriate use of the parking provided.

(b) Green Infrastructure and Sustainable Buildings

This is an entirely new supplement which has been produced to capture the information in the award winning Milton Keynes & South Midlands ‘Green Infrastructure Design Guide’ and to respond to the challenges presented by climate change; including the need to make buildings capable of adaptation to more extreme weather in the future.

(c) Historic Environment

This supplement is a revision to the previous one and captures the changes and fills in the detail following the withdrawal of ‘Planning Policy Statement 5: Planning for the Historic Environment’. It also includes further guidance on archaeology than the current Guide.

(d) **Public Realm**

This condenses the key material in the 'Central Bedfordshire Public Art Framework' to provide a user-friendly how-to guide for developers when looking at the integration of public art into new developments.

(e) **Residential**

This supplement is a revision to the current one. The main elements that are new are the residential space standards, the garden standards, the need for sufficient bin storage, detailing and chimneys, and details of which of the Lifetime Homes criteria must be met.

It is proposed that all properties have at least 10m depth of garden and that this increases to 12m for three and four bedroom homes. This provides minimum areas of between 60 and 96sqm.

In terms of space standards, suggested overall standards are set out together with minimum standards for bedrooms and CEL (cooking, eating, living) areas.

On the topic of bin storage; the revised Guide recognises that in certain contexts, communal bin storage can be a more appropriate solution to minimise the need to provide accessible personal storage areas in higher density developments where space may be more limited. Where individual bin storage is provided, sufficient provision will also be emphasised in order to limit the visual blight of bins which are left out on property frontages.

(f) **Accommodating Specific Housing Needs**

This is an entirely new supplement which covers the design of extra care units, residential care homes and gypsy and traveller accommodation.

(g) **Alterations and Extensions**

This is a revision to the current supplement and covers the information needed for standard householder applications. This has been updated to take account of the changes to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development Order) 1995 that allow larger extensions until 30 May 2016.

(h) **Larger Footprint Buildings**

This is a revision to the current guide and the main updates are in relation to the changes in requirements for Sustainable Drainage Systems to combat surface water flooding.

(i) **Town Centre Vitality**

This supplement incorporates material from the current Town Centres supplement and the Shop Front Design guidance supplement but combines them so that all of the necessary guidance can be found in one place.

(j) **Movement and Streets**

This supplement is a revision to the current one, setting out a new approach to the provision of user-friendly parking to support the new standards of provision set out in the Placemaking Principles supplement. It also gives new guidance in relation to level surface streets and raised crossings which offer an appropriate balance between slowing down traffic, making attractive places and ensuring safety for all road users including pedestrians. The use of appropriate trees and landscaping to enhance the character of streets is also emphasised from tree lined boulevards at main street level to smaller scale planting on lower order streets.

Analyses of Consultation Exercise

34. A summary of the representations received as a result of the public consultation exercise can be found at Appendix A.
35. The level of responses shows that there is a high level of interest in the Design Guide. In total, 45 responses were submitted on the feedback forms provided, or by letter or e-mail in the weeks that followed. The comments and feedback were very diverse as would be expected on such a wide ranging document. There were also several submissions that were extremely detailed.
36. In addition, 11 out of the 45 respondents gave positive or neutral feedback, with many of the remainder just offering suggestions for revisions on specific elements rather than opposing the principle of the guide or the vast majority of its content. This lack of contention, is in part due to the fact that much of the content in the document builds on very established good design practice which has been inherited from the current Design Guide, which was award-winning and widely accepted and appreciated.
37. Most of comments received, related to car parking provision. There was a split between those that sought a higher provision and those that sought lower per dwelling standards. The revised standards that are now proposed are intended to act as a sensible compromise between the views received and make clear that they can be applied with some degree of flexibility in appropriate circumstances as outlined in paragraph 41.
38. Other comments related to the need to reference documents; the need to rationalise paragraph numbering and improve photo resolution; the need to emphasise the importance of pedestrians and cyclists throughout; the overall viability of the proposals; to the importance of bird habitats; the for cross referencing and to various detailed consistency issues.

Key Proposed Changes

39. A summary of all proposed changes and who has suggested them can be found in the background papers (Tables 1-10). Due to the length of the document, it was considered imprudent to reproduce a track changed version as an appendix to this report as is the usual form and instead it is available to all members to download as a background document.

40. There are some **190** changes proposed. Many are detailed and technical because of the nature of the document and so only the key proposed changes are set out below.

41. **Parking**

(Placemaking Principles Supplement paragraph 1.13 p.28-29)

- Allow the option for one parking space out of the three required for four bedroom properties to be provided in front of the property on the street if a width of at least 5.5m is provided or in an inset bay on a narrower street.
- Change the wording from 'tandem parking will not usually be acceptable to 'tandem parking of more than two vehicles will not be acceptable unless one additional on street parking space is provided'.
- Change the wording to allow greater flexibility on how many properties rear courtyard parking should serve to around five rather than five.

Overall, these changes are designed to allow for greater flexibility as it is not appropriate to take a standardised approach to the design of parking.

42. **Garden Sizes**

(Residential Supplement, paragraph 5.06 p.14)

- Standardise garden depths for 3 and 4 bedroom properties to 12m rather than 14m as proposed in the Public Consultation Draft for 4 bedroom properties.

This is to take account of the fact that the garden area rather than the depth is of greater importance. The average range of property widths for these homes is between 5 and 8m and so this still gives very reasonable sized gardens areas of between 60 and 96sqm.

43. **Residential Space Standards**

Residential Supplement (paragraph 5.05, p. 8-9)

- Made clear in text and in accompanying rationalised tables that the space standards for bedrooms and cooking, eating, living (CEL) areas are minimum standards that should be complied with.

This change is proposed because if all of the standards are merely 'suggested' then developers may not seek to meet them when designing houses.

- Make clear with explanatory text that the 12m² requirement for double bedrooms applies only to the master bedroom rather than to all additional bedrooms.

This is a point of clarification.

44. **Art in the Public Realm Supplement**

- Supplement to be retitled 'Public Realm'

This change was recommended by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 27 February.

Conclusion and Next Steps

45. The revised Design Guide is a comprehensive review of the existing Guide. The many changes proposed add considerable value to guidance and build upon the acclaimed merit of the original Guide. Its revision has been greatly helped by the keen support and interest that Members and stakeholders have taken throughout. The importance of having design guidance that Members, officers and external stakeholders feel that they can buy into is crucial; as it serves as a starting point for the Council's aim to deliver high quality design on every development. Adoption of the new Design Guide will also give more certainty to the development management process and to developers in terms of what the Council's expectations are in relation to layout, street design, parking provision and internal dimensions. Detailed consideration has been given to the feedback from consultation at all stages in preparing the Guide, and it is therefore concluded that as a technical document and subject to the changes set out in the background papers, the Design Guide is fit for development management purposes and should be endorsed as such by this Committee.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Summary of Design Guide Public Consultation Responses

Appendix B – Revised Parking Standards

Appendix C – Internal Space Standards

Background Papers: (open to public inspection)

- A. Draft Central Bedfordshire Design Guide (marked-up version showing proposed changes)
- B. Detailed Proposed Changes by Supplement