

Cherwell District Council

Executive

6 November 2017

Cherwell Design Guide: Supplementary Planning Document

Masterplanning and architectural guidance
for residential development

Report of Head of Development Management

This report is public

Purpose of report

To seek Member endorsement to consult the public for four weeks on the Cherwell Design Guide, Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), Masterplanning and architectural guidance for residential development (Design Guide)

The Cherwell Design Guide SPD forms part of the Council's Local Development Framework and its content will be subject to one formal consultation.

1.0 Recommendations

The Executive is recommended:

- 1.1 To approve the Draft Cherwell Design Guide SPD (Design Guide), for a four week public consultation.
- 1.2 To authorise the Head of Development Management to make any necessary minor and presentational changes to the Design Guide before formal consultation commences.

2.0 Introduction

- 2.1 Cherwell has a distinctive character, defined by its market towns and picturesque villages. The Council is proud of the District's rich history and its high quality environment. Maintaining a high quality of development is important if the development coming forward in the Local Plan period is to leave a positive legacy for future generations.
- 2.2 Delivering high quality homes and places is important to the long term prosperity and positive legacy of the District. High quality attractive places are valued by

those who live and work in the District. New places need to be designed in a way that makes sustainable use of resources and fosters community interaction and pride.

- 2.3 The objectives of the Design Guide support the Council's strategic priorities for the period 2017-18 including:
 - Cherwell: A district of opportunity
 - Cherwell: Safe, green and clean
 - Cherwell: A thriving community
 - Sound budgets and customer focused council
- 2.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is based around a presumption in favour of sustainable development of which good design is a key aspect. The NPPF is explicit on the importance of good design. *"The Government attaches great importance to the design of the built environment. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, is indivisible from good planning, and should contribute positively to making places better for people."* (NPPF para. 56). Paragraphs 56–68 of Part 7 of the NPPF sets out key issues relating to design.
- 2.5 High quality and locally distinctive design is a key theme set out within the adopted Cherwell Local Plan (Part 1). Key issues set out within policy ESD 15 include the requirement for development to complement and enhance its context through sensitive siting, layout and high quality design. The Design Guide will provide clear direction on how the design policies in the Cherwell Local Plan should be translated for major residential development.
- 2.6 The intention of the document is that it provides a clear and comprehensive guidance on the quality of site layout, architecture and materials expected by the Local Planning Authority. In doing so, the guide will provide greater clarity on design standards and streamline the development process.
- 2.7 The Design Guide is structured into eight chapters and read together, provides clear guidance on all stages of the development process. The document has primarily been written to provide clear guidance on the development of major / strategic residential development sites, though the development principles will also translate to smaller residential sites.
- 2.8 The first two chapters provide background information on the role of the guide and the distinctive character of the District. The main body of the document provides comprehensive guidance on an extensive range of design issues, which together take you through the design process for a residential site.
- 2.9 Chapter one sets out the importance of the design agenda and the need to deliver high quality places, alongside the document's role in relation to Local and National Planning policy. Chapter two provides an analysis of the character of the District, including landscape character, materials and built form. This provides an important starting point for the design of any site and the basis for the guidance that follows.

- 2.10 The main body of the document (chapters three to eight) is broken down into six main areas, to provide clear information on each stage of the design and development process. These are:
- Responding to the site and its context
 - Establishing structural principles
 - Streets and spaces
 - Building and plot arrangements
 - Building elevations and details
 - Innovation and sustainability.

3.0 Draft Cherwell Design Guide SPD

- 3.1 The Design Guide is intended to be used by all involved in the creation of new residential places and neighbourhoods. It is intended that the document will predominantly be used by architects, urban designers and developers as well as planners and members of the planning committee. It has, however, been written in a way that avoids excessive technical jargon, so it is hoped that it will also be used by Parish Councils, community groups and residents interested in the future of their settlements.
- 3.2 A key aim of the document is to help provide a level of certainty and consistency in the development process, while raising the quality of design throughout the District. It is intended that the Design Guide will help:
- Promote high quality design standards for new development
 - Ensure that development is site specific and responds to the character and context of an area
 - Bring greater clarity to the design and planning process to help streamline delivery.
- 3.3 The Design Guide is underpinned by the importance of creating new places that are locally distinctive and respond to the surrounding townscape, landscape and historical built form. It is not an exhaustive guide that covers every aspect of design, nor does it remove the need for applicants to undertake their own proper assessment of the site context and development impact.
- 3.4 The Design Guide provides clear guidance on the historic character of the District and that where a 'traditional style' of housing is proposed it should be site specific and true to the area's vernacular. The aim of this Design Guide is to promote high quality design which is in keeping with its context. The Council welcomes proposals for high quality contemporary design and sustainable construction and guidance is provided on this in Chapter 8.
- 3.5 The Cherwell Design Guide SPD has now been prepared for public consultation subject to approval by Members. When completed it is intended that the document be adopted by the Council as a formal Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) which would then have statutory status as planning guidance.
- 3.6 The Cherwell Design Guide SPD does not create new policy. The adopted Cherwell Local Plan 2011-2031 sets the planning framework up to 2031 with the SPD providing a further level of detail to guide development.

- 3.7 The consultation will also be supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening process.

Next Steps

- 3.8 If approved, it is intended that the document will be consulted on for a four week period between November and December 2017.
- 3.9 Following consideration of comments received through this consultation, the Council will review the document and make any appropriate amendments before presenting the final document back to this committee for consideration in early 2018.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 A number of formal and informal consultation discussions and events have taken place to inform the development of the Cherwell Design Guide. Early engagement was used to guide the issues and principles that structure the Design Guide. More recent engagement has been used to test the overall balance of the document. A key addition to the document in recent months has been Chapter eight, which was written in direct response to comments from Officers, developers and others reviewing the emerging draft earlier this year. This focuses on the value of innovation and sustainability in the built environment.
- 4.2 A formal workshop was organised in July 2016. This was attended by Planning Officers from Cherwell DC, Members of the Planning Committee as well as Officers from neighbouring authorities. Key issues discussed include:
- How to establish a high quality design approach
 - The special character of Cherwell District Council, including layout, materials, topography and landscape
 - Challenges to delivery, in particular, how to balance the pressure for delivery against maintaining design quality. The use of standard house types and layouts and quality of building materials / detailing.
- 4.3 A formal presentation was made to Parish Councils at the Parish Liaison Meeting in November 2017, alongside a surgery on the design guide at the same event. Key issues raised include:
- Importance of design quality in new developments
 - The role of design in supporting the creation of safe and secure environments.
- 4.3 A formal workshop was organised in November 2017 to test the draft structure of the document. This was attended by Planning Officers from Cherwell DC, members of the Planning Committee, as well as Officers from neighbouring authorities. The event was run as a presentation and workshop. The underlying principles were presented, followed a workshop which tested key criteria using a recent application. Key issues discussed included:
- Responding to the site and its context
 - Establishing the structuring principles
 - The public realm: streets and spaces
 - The private realm: building design.

- 4.4 A workshop was held as part of the Developers Forum in June 2017. This was attended by a range of agents, architects and developers working in the District. The key issues discussed were:
- The guides ease of use
 - Relevance of issues covered
 - Role of guide in supporting delivery
- A key issue which was raised by a number of attendees was how the guide could promote distinctiveness and creativity. There was some concern that the guide could promote a 'tick box' approach. It was also felt that the Design Guide should give greater consideration to modern design character. In response to this we have written Chapter eight which promotes architectural innovation and sustainable technology.
- 4.5 A questionnaire was compiled for local residents and was completed on-line by over 60 people between February and March 2017. This was promoted through social media and the Council's website. Key issues include:
- Over 95% of respondents agreed that Cherwell should establish a design guide to ensure all new residential developments are high quality and in keeping with the local character of existing towns and villages
 - The majority of respondents felt that the architectural character, landscape character and public space character are important to the Design Guide
 - 70% of respondents also felt that sustainable design is extremely important.
- 4.6 Informal discussions with Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Highways department were held in August and November 2016 to discuss the approach to streets and public realm. Key issues raised include:
- Broad support for the approach taken by the guide. The principles established are aligned with the OCC's approach.
- 4.7 In addition, internal meetings and workshops have taken place with officers in Development Management, Planning Policy, Landscape, Trees and ecology throughout the process of writing the guide.

5.0 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 The Design Guide seeks to provide clear guidance on the design of the built environment to ensure that the detailed policies for high quality design set out in the Cherwell Local Plan are delivered. The document is a comprehensive guide covering an extensive list of design issues that should be considered in residential design / development.
- 5.2 The document proposed for consultation has been prepared having regard to national policy guidance and through informal engagement with key stakeholders. It is considered by Officers that the document presents guidance that provides an appropriate balance between high quality development and the viability of future development proposals.
- 5.3 Proceeding to consultation will provide a further opportunity for stakeholders and members of the public to address matters formally and inform the preparation of the document.

- 5.4 It is recommended that the Committee approves the Draft Cherwell Design Guide SPD for a four week public consultation.

6.0 Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

Not consulting on the proposed documents

- 6.1 Officers consider that without proceeding with this consultation the Council will not be able to provide clear guidance to developers on the design standards of residential development expected by the council. Consultation will help ensure a robust and transparent process.

7.0 Implications

Financial and Resource Implications

- 7.1 Costs for this document have already been met and further costs for Officer time to make amendments can be met within budget.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

- 7.2 The Design Guide must be subject to public consultation before adoption.

Comments checked by:

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8.0 Decision Information

Key Decision

Financial Threshold Met: No

Community Impact Threshold Met: No

Wards Affected

All

Links to Corporate Plan

This report directly links to all four of the corporate priorities and objectives set out in the Cherwell District Council Business Plan 2016-17 as follows:

- A district of opportunity
- Safe, green, clean
- A thriving community
- Sound budgets and customer focused council

Lead Councillor

Councillor Colin Clarke - Lead Member for Planning

Document Information

| Appendix No | Title |
|---------------------|--|
| One | Draft Cherwell Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document |
| Background Papers | |
| None | |
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