

9 PLANNING POLICY

9.1 National policy and guidance

The framework for national planning policy is provided by Planning Policy Statement 1: *Delivering Sustainable Development* (PPS1). This sets out the Government's aims for development, which are to be achieved by:

- Making suitable land available for development in line with economic, social and environmental objectives to improve people's quality of life
- Contributing to sustainable economic development
- Protecting and enhancing the natural and historic environment, the quality and character of the countryside, and existing communities
- Ensuring high quality development through good and inclusive design, and the efficient use of resources
- Ensuring that development supports existing communities and contributes to the creation of safe, sustainable, liveable and mixed communities with good access to jobs and key services for all members of the community

PPS1 states that the key role of good design is achieving sustainable development. Local Planning Authorities (LPA) should plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development and contribute positively to making places better for people. High quality and inclusive design should create mixed and integrated developments which avoid segregation, have well-planned public spaces and provide people with opportunities for recreation.

PPS1 outlines that good design should:

- Address the connections between people and places by considering the needs of people to access jobs and key services
- Be integrated into the existing urban form and natural and built environments
- Be an integral part of the development process for ensuring successful, safe and inclusive cities, towns and villages
- Create an environment where everyone can access and benefit from the full range of opportunities available
- Consider the direct and indirect impacts on the natural environment

LPAs should prepare robust policies on design and access, which reflect LDF objectives and an understanding and evaluation of its present defining characteristics. Access and inclusiveness for all is a key tenet of design and must be reflected in policies.

In planning for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design, LPAs should have regard to good practice set out in:

- By Design - Urban Design in the Planning System: towards better practice
- By Design - Better Places to Live
- Safer Places - the Planning System and Crime Prevention
- Planning and Access for Disabled People: A Good Practice Guide

- Manual for Streets
- Streets for All

PPS1 clearly states that whilst it is proper to seek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness, particularly where this is supported by clear LDF policies or supplementary planning documents, LPAs should not attempt to impose architectural styles or particular tastes and they should not stifle innovation, originality or initiative through unsubstantiated requirements to conform to certain development forms or styles.

There is also increasing demand for sustainability in construction methods, energy efficiency and accessibility to services including public transport. The supplement to PPS1 (*Planning and Climate Change*) states that LPAs, developers and other partners in the provision of new development should engage constructively and imaginatively to encourage the delivery of sustainable buildings. Planning policies should support innovation and investment in sustainable buildings and should not deter novel or cutting-edge developments unless there are exceptional reasons for doing so.

The principles of sustainable development and high quality design are also applied to housing in Planning Policy Statement 3: *Housing* (PPS3), town centres in Planning Policy Statement 6: *Planning for Town Centres* (PPS6) and consultation draft PPS4: *Planning for Sustainable Economic Development*. PPS3 also highlights the role of design codes in building upon visions for particular areas or sites.

National guidance on design is also produced by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE). CABE documents of particular interest include:

- Better Neighbourhoods: Making Higher Densities Work
- Better Places to Work
- Moving Towards Excellence in Urban Design and Conservation
- Physical Activity and the Built Environment
- The Cost of Bad Design
- The Value of Public Space

9.2 Regional policy

The South East Plan sets out the context for Local Development Frameworks and includes a number of policies relevant to high quality design. The best of the region's historic, built and natural environment will be protected and where possible enhanced both for its own sake and to underpin the social and economic development of the region. New development will be of high quality sustainable design and construction, and be an asset to the region

South East Plan Policy SP3 (*Urban focus and urban renaissance*) places the prime focus for development in the South East on urban areas, in order to promote accessibility to services and avoid unnecessary travel. To achieve this, it expects at least 60% of all new development to be on previously developed land or converted from existing buildings.

Policy CC1 (*Sustainable development*) defines sustainable development to include the conservation and enhancement of the physical and natural environment. Policy CC6 (*Sustainable communities and character of the environment*) builds on this by requiring a local shared vision which:

- Respects, and where appropriate enhances, the character and distinctiveness of settlements and landscapes
- Uses innovative design processes to create a high quality built environment that promotes a sense of place; this will include consideration of accessibility, social inclusion, the need for environmentally sensitive development and crime reduction

Policy H5 (*Housing design and density*) seeks measures to raise the quality of design and also higher densities in order to make the best use of scarce land resources. H5 sets a target of 40 dwellings per hectare for the region, although it is not expected that this target will be applied uniformly. Policy H6 (*Making better use of the existing stock*) seeks the full use of empty housing and the improvement or redevelopment of outworn areas.

Policy BE1 (*Management for an urban renaissance*) seeks to exploit the opportunities provided by new development to enhance the quality of life and improve services. In particular to:

- Promote and support design solutions relevant to context and which build upon local character and distinctiveness
- Identify opportunities for appropriate higher density and mixed-use development schemes
- Draw up design-led supplementary planning documents to help implement development

The South East Plan expresses concern that much infill development in suburban areas has been piecemeal and unplanned, resulting in poor design, poor housing choice, the loss of wildlife habitats and the promotion of unsustainable travel patterns. Accordingly, Policy BE2 (*Suburban intensification*) expects local authorities to 'identify locations where intensification could assist wider planning objectives.

Such locations could include areas of high accessibility immediately around public transport nodes in predominantly residential neighbourhoods, underutilised industrial estates and low density retail parks. BE2 adds that guidance will be necessary to set out the basis on which proposals for the intensification of existing residential areas will be assessed.

Where there are neighbourhoods, particularly in suburban areas, that are at risk due to social and economic deprivation and long-term decline, Policy BE3 (*Suburban renewal*) expects local authorities to develop Neighbourhood Management Plans in consultation with local communities. Such plans should set out a clear framework for the integrated delivery of community services, environmental quality and infrastructure provision.

Policy BE6 (*Management of the historic environment*) requires local authorities to protect, conserve and, where appropriate, enhance the historic environment and the

contribution it makes to local and regional distinctiveness and sense of place. Management of the historic environment through the planning system should be based upon an understanding of its significance and vulnerability to change.

9.3 Local policy

Current planning policies for the Hart district are those that have been formally saved from the Hart District Local Plan (Replacement), which was adopted in 2002, and from the First Alterations to the local plan. The saved policies have been re-published in a single document and will remain effective until the Core Strategy of the Local Development Framework has been published.

The saved policies start with general principles, such as GEN1 under which development proposals will be permitted subject to a series of safeguards, and GEN4 which promotes improvement of:

[‘The urban design qualities of towns, villages and other settlements which derive from their layout and form, scale, character or appearance, special features, or the arrangement, scale and design of buildings and spaces.’](#)

Conservation policies concentrate on designated heritage, but CON22 resists development that would adversely affect the character or setting of a settlement where it would obscure significant views, result in the loss of green space or ‘otherwise have a serious adverse effect on the character or setting of the settlement.’

URB12 provides that residential development will be permitted within the main settlement boundaries subject to good urban design principles such that:

[‘The proposal is sympathetic in scale, design, massing, height, layout, siting and density both in itself and in relation to adjoining buildings, spaces and views and makes optimum use of the site at densities commensurate with good innovative design in relation to site characteristics.’](#)

There are further requirements for neighbourliness and no loss of any notable local features.

Density is addressed at URB18 in relation to North Fleet where the prevailing low densities are a significant local characteristic. However, it is noted that government policy was changing during the preparation of the local plan and that future policy will have to balance ‘character’ with the expectations of PPG3 (Now PPS3) for the efficient use of land.

10 SUMMARY

The urban renaissance referred to in the South East Plan Policy BE1 carries an expectation for rising standards of design. Indeed, high quality design is an essential element of sustainable place-making. By setting challenging standards that reflect the distinctive character of local areas, design policies will help to deliver the spatial objectives of the LDF.

High quality design relates to buildings and architecture, but also to the spaces between buildings. The quality of the public realm of streets and open spaces, and the relationship of developments to the surrounding area are equally important. Public realm principles are set out in the 'Manual for Streets' and in 'Streets for All'. It is also accepted that good design, layout and spatial relationships can make a positive contribution towards improving community safety.

It is necessary, therefore, to ensure that all new development has regard to key sustainable design principles that interpret and reflect local character and distinctiveness.

The UCDS identifies the elements that give distinctiveness to neighbourhoods and character areas. Where these are particularly significant, it is important that this should be recognised by designation. Nationally and locally listed buildings should all survive in a clearly recognisable form, with their historic features and layouts still present.

The analysis of neighbourhoods and character areas in the UCDS has defined the elements that make them distinct. The UCDS identifies the elements that give distinctiveness to neighbourhoods and character areas. These elements include:

- Spatial layout
- Architectural form
- Building materials
- Consistency or diversity of details
- Density
- Land uses
- Streetscape and planting

All of these elements are vulnerable to ill-considered changes but the effect may be more marked in some parts than in others. For this reason, the study has also included a measure of sensitivity.

In areas of **high sensitivity**, proposed development should demonstrate that the proposals will enhance the quality of its surroundings and will reflect the prevailing character of the area. Some of these areas are of sufficiently special interest to justify designation as conservation areas, or as additions to existing conservation areas.

These are:

Pondtail, Fleet

- Pondtail is an area of High Townscape Value with large detached or paired houses, mostly of late Victorian and Edwardian date, between Dunmow Hill and Fleet Pond, including Wellington Avenue and Chestnut Grove. The buildings have Arts and Crafts details including applied timber frame decoration. The planned layout of the streets, the many mature trees and the many hedges are particularly important.

The Grid, Fleet

- This is an area to the south of Fleet Road comprising Albert Road, Clarence Road and Connaught Road. It was laid out in a grid pattern in the early 20th century, producing an area of High Townscape Value. It has a unique and discernible urban grain of narrow plots with detached, semi-detached or terraced houses located close together.

Hook Village Green

- This is another area of High Townscape Value with well detailed and relatively well preserved late Victorian and Edwardian houses which front an attractive triangular green open space to the west of Hook Town Centre.

Yateley Green

- This is another area of High Townscape Value based on Mill Lane and Moulsham Green, and it is considered that it would be appropriate to add it to the existing conservation area which it butts up to.

In areas of **medium sensitivity**, it will be necessary to take careful account of all the factors that contribute to local character before deciding whether the proposed development is appropriate.

In areas of **low sensitivity**, redevelopment or regeneration might be positively encouraged. In such cases, the new buildings will have to be of a higher quality than the existing buildings, and other enhancements may be sought as part of the new development. This may be achieved through the production of a Masterplan, an Urban Design Brief or a Neighbourhood Management Plan.

11 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenge for the Local Development Framework (LDF) therefore is to address the national, regional and local design related issues outlined in Section 9. Three broad themes emerge from the review of relevant policies:

- The need to promote high standards of urban design in new developments
- The need to safeguard and strengthen local distinctiveness in the existing environment
- The need to promote, not stifle, innovate design solutions when they are appropriate to their context

The consultation draft UCDS, summarised in Section 10, is the main component of the evidence base, which will underpin any design based policies in the LDF that seek to address these broad themes. Reflecting national planning guidance, PPS12 (*Local Spatial Planning*), the UCDS should also be used to help form Hart's emerging LDF Vision and Objectives.

Hart are currently proposing two LDF Development Plan Documents (DPD): a Core Strategy which will outline the strategic direction of future development in Hart, and a Site Allocations and Development Management DPD, which will provide more detailed policy guidance.

It is therefore recommended that relevant policies in the Core Strategy that relate to broad strategic design themes, such as those summarised above, should set out what is expected in terms of design quality. The relationship between design policies and infrastructure must be clearly communicated to a wide audience. There should also be an emphasis on how places can be improved.

Key principles that should be addressed include:

- All development proposals in the district will be expected to deliver a high quality of design, in terms of both architecture and landscape, which will help to promote economic, social and environmental benefits;
- Development proposals should be supported by evidence which demonstrates that all relevant aspects of local distinctiveness have been fully assessed and used to inform proposals

Proposals must demonstrate that the following aspects of design have been addressed:

- Having regard for best practice in urban design by using the principles of 'By Design' to ensure the provision of a high quality layout of streets, buildings and spaces
- Having regard to the sensitivity of local character to the imposition of change
- Taking full account of context and opportunities to enhance local distinctiveness
- Implementing the principles of 'Manual for Streets' to ensure urban streets and spaces provide a high quality public realm and an attractive, safe and accessible network

- Ensuring that developments are fully accessible to all members of the community
- Incorporating measures to promote crime prevention and community safety following Secured By Design principles
- Addressing sustainable design principles for energy efficiency, renewable energy generation, recycling and sustainable construction practices

Relevant policies in the Site Allocations and Development Management DPD should address more-specific issues as well as place specific criteria. To ensure that development proposals meet policy requirements, the Design and Access Statements accompanying all planning applications will be expected to follow CABE guidance. This also refers to the principles of good practice in urban design set out in 'By Design', which was published as a companion to PPS1:

- Protect local distinctiveness through the designation of conservation areas, local listing and tree preservation orders
- All development should have the effect of safeguarding and enhancing the special qualities, historic character and local distinctiveness of neighbourhoods in order to maintain their cultural identity and sense of place
- All proposals should aim to sustain and reinforce special character and conserve the historic environment where it is identified as locally distinctive elements

It is therefore recommended that:

- 1 The Council should adopt the UCDS evidence base study, once it has been completed, as an LDF Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)**
- 2 The Council should consider producing a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to support any design policies in the Core Strategy**

By adopting the UCDS the Council can use the document as a material consideration when determining planning applications.