

## DESIGN REVIEW TO ASSIST WITH DETERMINATION OF STRATEGIC PLANNING APPLICATIONS

### Summary

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) encourages independent design review of major projects. The aim of this process is to improve the design quality of new development. This process is collaborative and attended by the applicant. It is most effective if undertaken as part of the pre-application service. Schemes which have gone through design review and taken on board the recommendations are less likely to be refused planning permission on poor design grounds. Officers recommend that design review ought to normally only relate to developments for housing schemes in excess of 50 dwellings (gross) and for any other developments where the floor area exceeds 10,000 sq metres (gross). It is recommended that for applicable cases Design South East (D-SE) is appointed to undertake the design review.

### Portfolio: Regulatory

**Date Portfolio Holder signed off report 12<sup>th</sup> May 2016**

### Wards Affected

ALL

### Recommendation

The Executive is advised to resolve:

- (i) To agree to the use of a design review panel with the indicative threshold set at housing schemes in excess of 50 dwellings (gross); and, any other developments where the new floor area exceeds 10,000 sq metres (gross);
- (ii) To agree to Design- South East (D-SE) as the appointed body responsible for review; and,
- (iii) To agree to the applicant paying for the design review panel service and for a protocol as to how this will work in practice to be agreed at officer level.

### 1. Resource Implications

- 1.1 No additional resources are required, the work can be undertaken within the approved budget for 2016/17.
- 1.2 The administration of setting up panels will have some impact on the planning service's staffing resource. However, organising who attends, the agenda etc. is typically undertaken by D-SE. The fee for D-SE must be met by the applicant either as part of an additional fee, on a case-by-case basis, in addition to the normal pre-application service charge, or be a fee that forms part of a planning performance agreement.
- 1.3 Any in-house staff training required can be funded from within existing budgets.

### 2. Key Issues

- 2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) stresses the importance of good design with this key to delivering sustainable development. To facilitate this paragraph 62 of the NPPF states the following:

*'Local Planning Authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment and support to ensure high standards of design. They should also when appropriate refer major projects for a national design review. In general, early engagement on design produces the greatest benefits. In assessing planning applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the recommendations from the design review panel.'*

- 2.2 The associated national Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) explains in more detail how Design Review can be used as a tool to help achieve good design:

*Design Review is a tried and tested method of promoting good design and is an effective way to improve quality. Local planning authorities should have local design review arrangements in place to provide assessment of proposals and to support high standards of design. Local authorities should, when appropriate, refer major projects for a national design review. Design review is most effective if done at the early stages of an application, and in many cases local authorities charge for this as part of a pre-application service.*

*Local authorities can source design reviews in a variety of ways. They could, for example, choose to appoint their own design review panel or share resources with other local authorities or outsource to external organisations.*

*Developers can apply for planning permission without going through a design review panel. However schemes that have been through the design review process, and have developed positively in response to the recommendations from the design review panel, are less likely to be refused planning permission on the grounds of poor design.*

*The purpose of design review is to improve the design quality of new development. In assessing applications, local planning authorities should have regard to the recommendations from the design review panel.*

- 2.3 There have been a number of high profile applications recently considered by the Planning Authority including, for example, the West End reserve housing sites. It is therefore considered that having an agreed design review protocol in place would have assisted with these projects. In addition, it is of strategic importance to the Borough that the residential redevelopment of Princess Royal Barracks (PRB), Deepcut is subject to the highest design scrutiny and it is considered that design review is a necessity to achieve this.
- 2.4 Design South East (D-SE) is a non-for-profit and impartial organisation with over 10 years. Dependent on the nature of the case this organisation will appoint the necessary independent experts to sit on the design review panel. D-SE has contact with over 80-90 architects and other experts. Typically a panel would consist of 5-6 experts with a chair and the applicant would be invited. Councillors can attend but this is not universal. Half day or full day workshops are normally held with written feedback provided to all parties after the event.

2.5 The Planning Authority has taken advice from other authorities who have adopted design review, including Guildford Borough Council, who use D-SE. To date their experiences have been well received and this has helped to deliver positive outcomes. Independent design review has also been piloted at Surrey Heath on the infrastructure design code application for PRB. This involved a half day workshop which included a site visit followed by a workshop. D-SE appointed landscape and infrastructure experts to sit on the panel. The applicant was invited and attended this panel. This workshop included a presentation by the applicant, planning officer input and a question and answer session by the panel. The workshop was followed up by a written report of recommendations from D-SE which was forwarded to the applicant and officers. The conclusions were well received.

2.6 The design review on PRB referred to above was undertaken once the application was submitted but as explained at paragraph 2.2 above it is most successful when undertaken at the pre-application stage. A protocol would need to be written and published on the website but the intention is that the applicant pays for the design review.

### **3. Options**

3.1 The options for the Executive are to agree or disagree with the setting up of a Design Panel.

### **4. Proposals**

4.1 Good design is recognised as an important consideration in the determination of planning applications. The piloted work on PRB Deepcut has been well received by developers and officers and in the light of this it is proposed to work with D-SE to set up a design panel for the Borough.

4.2 The government does not define what the threshold ought to be for major projects to be subject to design review. This is because each local authority has different local requirements and issues. Guildford Borough Council, for example, has set its threshold at 100 dwellings or more or 10,000 sq m for commercial. It is considered that for Surrey Heath an indicative threshold of 50 dwellings or more (gross) or 10,000 sq metres for other developments would be more reflective of the local issues. This, however, is only indicative as some case smaller schemes may still benefit from design review and so officers have the discretion to recommend review where applicable.

4.3 It is also proposed to work with D-SE on developing a training package for officers to enhance design skills within the service for dealing with smaller schemes.

### **5. Supporting Information**

5.1 None

### **6. Corporate Objectives and Key Priorities**

6.1 Design review is aligned with all corporate objectives 1, 2 and 4 as it helps to deliver good design which is a key requirement of sustainable development. In particular, it will meet objective 1 by making Surrey Heath an even better place where people are happy to live. In addition, it will support objective 3 by improving the planning application process.

## 7. Policy Framework

- 7.1 This approach supports Policies CP2 and DM9 of the Councils adopted Core Strategy and Development Management Policies in supporting good design in new development.

## 8. Officer Comments

- 8.1 It is considered that design review is an important mechanism to achieve the highest quality of design on the major projects. The proposed threshold is set at a reasonable level which would not place too high a burden on developers of smaller schemes, but ensure that the delivery of the most strategic projects is subject to the necessary scrutiny.
- 8.2 The design review process will positively assist the planning service by hopefully reducing the need to negotiate during the planning application and/or refuse planning applications on design grounds. Planning refusals have resource implications in respect of further planning submissions and potential appeals.

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| <b>Annexes</b>                | None   |
| <b>Background Papers</b>      | None   |
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### Consultations, Implications and Issues Addressed

| <b>Resources</b>                      | <b>Required</b> | <b>Consulted</b>  |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Revenue                               | ✓               | <u>01/04/2016</u> |
| Capital                               |                 |                   |
| Human Resources                       |                 |                   |
| Asset Management                      |                 |                   |
| IT                                    |                 |                   |
| <b>Other Issues</b>                   | <b>Required</b> | <b>Consulted</b>  |
| Corporate Objectives & Key Priorities | ✓               | <u>01/04/2016</u> |
| Policy Framework                      | ✓               | <u>01/04/2016</u> |
| Legal                                 | ✓               | <u>01/04/2016</u> |
| Governance                            |                 |                   |
| Sustainability                        |                 |                   |
| Risk Management                       |                 |                   |
| Equalities Impact Assessment          |                 |                   |
| Community Safety                      |                 |                   |
| Human Rights                          |                 |                   |
| Consultation                          |                 |                   |
| P R & Marketing                       |                 |                   |

**Review Date:**

**Version:**