

SCRUTINY COMMISSION – 14 JULY 2010

DESIGN GUIDE FOR COUNTY COUNCIL DEVELOPMENTS

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to:
 - (a) Provide an introduction to the form, content and application of the draft *Leicestershire County Council Design Guide for County Council Developments*;
 - (b) Seek the Scrutiny Commission's agreement that the Design Guide should be submitted for adoption by the County Council pending the outcome of and modifications as a result of the current consultation exercise.

Policy Framework and Previous Decision(s)

2. There is no one specific policy framework within which the Design Guide sits. However, there are strong links to numerous targets and indicators in the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement 2008 – 2011 and the Environment Strategy and Action Plan 2009 – 2010, particularly in relation to emissions targets, but also covering a variety of other environmental, economic, transportation and social indicators.

Background

3. The design of public buildings and their surroundings should contribute to and enhance the quality of the environment, rather than simply respond to funding or contractual requirements. Public buildings should be a source of pride and inspiration, and should help to reinforce the sense of place and character in the neighbourhoods within which they are located. Poor design can result in a legacy for current and future generations and a loss of civic pride in an area contributing towards the deterioration of the urban and social fabric of an area. This is because of the often prominent locations of developments, and the role they have in the lives of the local community.
4. Good design and the provision of efficient services are objectives of the Leicestershire Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS). The provision of well designed buildings and places links and contributes to achieving a

variety of transportation, environmental, educational and social outcomes. To help deliver outcomes of the SCS and sustainable development, planning and design is important to:

- (a) provide homes, jobs, services and infrastructure needed by communities;
- (b) secure the highest viable resource and energy efficiency and reduction in emissions;
- (c) deliver patterns of urban growth and sustainable rural developments that help secure the fullest possible use of sustainable transport;
- (d) reduce waste generation from development projects and secure designs which facilitate sustainable waste management;
- (e) secure new development that provides resilience to climate change in ways that are consistent with social cohesion and inclusion; and
- (f) conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Drivers and Pressures

5. Leicestershire County Council has signed the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change, committing it to tackling climate change and adapting plans and services to future climate conditions and developed a Strategy and Action Plan setting out how this will be done. Under the National Performance Framework the Council will be measured on performance of carbon dioxide emissions from its own operations (NI 185) and the local community (NI 186) as well as preparing for future climate conditions under NI 188 and as such is preparing a climate change adaptation plan.
6. Within the Local Area Agreement there is a target for the Council to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 4% per annum in partnership with the district councils and there is also a County Council specific target to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 30% over the next five years from 2009/10. This feeds into the national government target to reduce emissions against a 1990 baseline, by 34% by 2020 and 80% by 2050.
7. In more recent policy and legislative developments, the Government has set out a programme of progressively tightening Building Regulations to require major reductions in carbon emissions, including for new homes to be zero carbon by 2016. There are similar ambitions to cut carbon emissions from new non-domestic buildings, with the government consulting on policy options to set targets for all new non-domestic buildings to be zero carbon by 2019 (public buildings by 2018). In addition, from April 2010 large energy consuming organisations, such as the County Council, will come under the Carbon Reduction Commitment so will be required to reduce carbon dioxide emissions.

8. There are also significant financial pressures on the County Council over the period of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The County Council will need to develop high quality low carbon buildings with potentially reduced resources than previous years for such projects.

Purpose and application of the Design Guide

9. In response to the present and future challenges the County Council faces, the purpose of this guide is to promote best practice in the design of County Council developments. The document has been prepared by officers across service departments, including Property. It is divided into three broad sections. The first section will outline the design process including an explanation of planning policy. The second section advises upon various attributes of the design of a building or place, and good practice. It includes comprehensive guidance on subjects such as biodiversity, archaeology, sustainable construction and soft and hard landscaping. Finally, the guide provides a number of case studies of good practice to show examples of successful development proposals which exemplify the advice in this document.
10. It is intended that this document is used by all those involved in bringing forward the County Council's building and development programme. These will include property managers, architects, agents, planners, budget holders, managers, Members of the Council and decision makers. By providing guidance to be applied at the early stages of the design process, development proposals can be shaped to be highly sustainable and contribute to the creation of desirable places to live. The guidance will also help applicant departments identify issues to be dealt with at an early stage, which will increase the efficient use of Council staff and financial resources (e.g. by development proposals not suffering delays or being refused planning permission).
11. It is hoped that this document is adopted County Council guidance that will guide project development and will be a material consideration when determining planning applications for County Council development.

Consultations

12. Consultation commenced on 21 May 2010 for a period of six weeks, seeking the views of Leicestershire District, Borough and Parish Councils as well as Members of the County Council. It is intended that the outcomes of the consultation will be considered throughout July.

Resource Implications

13. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on the content of this report. No issues have been raised in respect of resource implications. The Design Guide seeks to provide clarity to officers on work streams that will already be allocated in departmental budgets.

Timetable for Decisions

15. It is intended that the outcomes of the consultation (including the views of the Scrutiny Commission) will be considered throughout July, with any amendments being integrated into a revised guide to be presented to the Development Control and Regulatory Board on the meeting of 19 August. It is anticipated that, subject to the outcomes of that meeting, the Guide will be presented to the Cabinet on 7 September 2010 for approval.

Recommendation

16. The Scrutiny Commission is asked to consider what comments it wishes to make to the Cabinet on the Guide.

Background Papers

17. Leicestershire County Council's Design Guide for County Council Developments.

Circulation Under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

18. None.

Officers to Contact

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List of Appendices

Appendix – Draft 'Design Guide for County Council Developments'

Equal Opportunities Implications

19. There are no specific equal opportunities implications arising from this report.

Crime and Disorder Implications

20. There is a section of the Design Guide titled 'Designing Out Crime' making readers aware of the need to consider section 17 of the Crime & Disorder Act 1998, the Buildings Risk Management Group, and governmental design publications. Raising the awareness of the need to design out crime is likely to have a beneficial impact upon crime prevention, through

new buildings and extensions being considered in that context.

Environmental Implications

21. The Design Guide seeks to raise awareness of, as well as advise and promote, design measures to reduce any adverse impact of the County Council's development on:

- **Climate Change** – through the awareness of the County Council's obligations, resource efficient technologies, utilisation of natural resources and mitigation against the future impacts of climate change;
- **Biodiversity** – through the awareness and provision of advice upon ecological surveys (including evaluation and mitigation) as well as advice on the enhancement of biodiversity on County Council sites and as part of development proposals;
- **Landscape** – through the explanation of landscape character areas, landscape appraisals, and criteria to prepare appropriate hard and soft landscape schemes in both the built and natural environment;
- **Buildings and the Built Environment** – through advice upon architecture and appearance of existing and new buildings, awareness of issues surrounding the historic environment, and how development proposals should seek to maintain and enhance character in areas where this is considered important.