

Report to Planning Services Scrutiny Standing Panel

Date of meeting: 3rd March 2011

Portfolio: Leader

Subject: Harlow Design Guide SPD Consultation

Officer contact for further information: Ian White (x4066)

Committee Secretary: Mark Jenkins (x4607)



Recommendations/Decisions Required:

To agree the officer comments that were sent on 25th January 2011 to meet the consultation deadline of 31st January.

Report:

1. Harlow Council consulted on its Draft Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document from 20th December 2010 to 31st January 2011 – a period of six weeks. This was at almost the same time as the consultation on that Council's Core Strategy Issues and Options (29th November to 28th January) which was reported to the last Planning Scrutiny meeting on 10th January. Work pressures meant it was not possible to report the Design consultation to that meeting. Officers did send comments to meet the consultation deadline, and these are being reported tonight for Members' information and agreement.
2. The aim of the Guide is to make Harlow "an attractive place in which to live, which offers a wide choice of well-designed buildings and spaces that meet the lifestyle needs and choices of all the community, now and in the future". Its objectives are (a) to learn from what works best in Harlow, and (b) to help shape future change whilst remaining true to the distinctive features that give the town and its neighbourhoods their sense of place.
3. The Guide is intended to address a range of development types from new urban areas through to residential extensions, and including employment areas and strategic and local green spaces. Separate design guidance for the Town Centre will be published later.
4. The Guide includes 45 "Design Principles" intended to address the following issues: (a) Urban Structure; (b) Streets; (c) Neighbourhood Centres; (d) Hatches; (e) Employment Areas; (f) Strategic Open Space; (g) Local Open Space; (h) Building Design; (i) Building Interface; (j) Building Performance; and (k) Residential Extensions. Obviously, many of the Principles and subject headings concern issues entirely internal to Harlow, and do not raise matters of consequence to this Council. However, as Harlow is still pursuing an agenda of regeneration and growth, involving urban extensions into this district, officers believe that it was important to respond to the consultation. Para 2.3.2 of the Draft Guide specifically states "This Guide applies to all development including new urban extensions,".
5. Officers had two main concerns about the Design Guide: (a) settlement edge development and impact on open countryside; and (b) the general containment of the town within the landscape bowl of the Stort Valley. In relation to these issues the detailed comments sent by officers were as follows:

- (a) Table 1 (Characterisation Study) – question on Local Landmarks – has the visibility of any potential landmarks within the scheme on the surrounding urban environment and landscape been considered? Officer comment – “It would help to clarify what is meant by ‘on the ... landscape’. The concern is that the document does not seem to directly address the potential impact of urban extensions on the open countryside, especially when these extensions are actually in neighbouring districts where protection of the Green Belt and the character of the countryside are key concerns.”
- (b) Principle DG16 – Improvement of Existing Employment Areas. Officer comment – “Disappointing that this does not address ‘settlement edge’ issues, and seems very inward looking. The Pinnacles Industrial Estate abuts Roydon parish in this district – extensions to the estate and individual buildings dating back to the mid-1980s are very prominent from many rights of way in this rural area. Impact on adjoining open countryside should be a key component of the design guide, either as a stand-alone and general principle, or included in all principles considered to be relevant to the issue.”
- (c) Section 4.6 (Strategic Open Space). Officer comment – “Also very disappointing that there is no mention or discussion of one of the key and generally very successful design concepts for the town, which is hugely important to this district – namely the containment of the town within the landscape bowl of the Stort Valley and subsidiary rivers. This is a fundamental part of Harlow’s overall design, and should surely be reflected in this section and guiding the principle of design of urban extensions.”
- (d) Para 4.6.7 (Landscape Structure). Officer comment – “This para should distinguish between development at the edge of Green Wedges (ie internal to the town) and abutting countryside, especially where this is in an adjoining authority. The phrase ‘at the edge of the built up area’ is ambiguous in this context and should be clarified. The Guide should at least be acknowledging relevant policies of adjoining authorities when dealing with urban extensions (eg Policy LL3 of this Council’s Local Plan (1998) which addresses edge of settlement development.”
6. Minor comments were also made on (i) the revocation of Government guidance on development density; (ii) a contradiction in the text concerning a principle to “create delight”; and (iii) the vagueness of the phrase “a proportion of” in relation to Principle DG41 concerning the provision of Lifetime Homes.

Reason for decision:

To agree the officer comments to try to ensure that this district’s interests are reflected in the final version of the Design Guide.

Options considered and rejected:

Not to respond to the consultation.

Consultation undertaken:

Officer attendance at workshop on 20 January on the Design Guide run by Harlow Council, Harlow Renaissance and the consultants Urban Initiatives

Resource implications:

Budget provision: From existing resources

Personnel: From existing resources

Land: Nil

Community Plan/BVPP reference: GU1, GU4

Relevant statutory powers: Planning Acts

Background papers: Harlow Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document Consultation Draft , December 2010

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: Protection of Green Belt and character of open countryside

Key Decision reference: (if required)