

## **Town and Country Planning ( Local Development ) ( England ) Regulations 2004-Regulation 19: Adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents.**

### **Wealden Design Guide - Consultation Statement .**

This Statement is produced under Regulation 18 of the above Regulations and sets out a summary of the main issues raised in representations made on the draft Wealden Design Guide together with a commentary on how these have been addressed in the final version of the Supplementary Planning Document and now adopted by the Council.

Following consideration by the Council's Local Development Framework Sub Committee and receipt of comments from the Environment Scrutiny Committee a draft of the Wealden Design Guide was agreed for publication for formal consultation by the portfolio member. This consultation period took place from Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> September to Monday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2007 inclusive and copies of the draft Guide, together with its accompanying Sustainability Appraisal and Consultation Report, were made available to the general public and to organisations and individuals with an interest in design issues in Wealden. In addition to the distribution of hard copies of the draft to Councillors, Parish and Town Councils and some statutory consultees, the draft document was also made available at 18 deposit points around the District, on the Council's website and as a free CD on request. Hard copies could also be purchased.

#### **SUMMARY OF THE COMMENTS RECEIVED/ MAIN ISSUES RAISED**

A total of 439 representations were received and 74 individuals/Parish or Town Councils and Agents responded to the consultation process. Whilst the majority (56%) used the on line questionnaire a number sent letters, e-mails or filled out a paper copy of the question set. Many of the comments were of a general nature whilst others responded to each of the 14 sections, often adding free text to explain their views. The total number of comments duly made was in the region of 380. Each section of the draft attracted a response although some had more (51 for the Introduction; 42 for Sustainability) than others which received in the region of 25 responses per section. A complete set of all comments received was made available in the Members rooms at Vicarage Lane and Pine Grove.

Overall the comments were very supportive of the Draft Wealden Design Guide and nearly all of those who responded to the on-line questionnaire gave a positive response to all the questions. There was much praise for the comprehensive and attractive nature of the document and the widespread use of illustrations was felt to be particularly helpful. There were no obvious omissions brought to the Council's attention in terms of content.

The free text boxes provided more scope to make detailed comments and whilst the general tone was complimentary and supportive, certain issues were raised on a number of occasions which indicate where general changes might best be made before the final version of the Guide is adopted. A summary of these comments is set out below

Much praise was given to the widespread use of photos and illustrations and where these were missing or less extensive the sections were less well received. Some sections of the guide were seen to be a little too wordy, and consultees preferred

checklists, bullet points, diagrams and illustrations to make the point as these were quicker and easier to absorb and understand. Those responding also found the idea of using symbols to demonstrate good and bad examples particularly useful but wanted the symbols to be applied more widely throughout the document and where possible, more examples to be used, especially Wealden examples. Without clear use of symbols there was a certain amount of confusion expressed by some as to whether some of the examples in the draft document were considered to be good or bad design. Where such comments were felt to warrant amendments to the final document these were set out as recommendations for consideration by Members of the Council's local Development framework Sub committee.

In response to these comments where relevant/appropriate all photographs used have symbols attached to clearly show whether the example shown is one that is considered to be of good or bad design. In the light of some concern regarding the document being too wordy, text has been condensed where practicable to incorporate wider use of checklists and bullet points throughout the document.

Whilst many supported the retention of local character and distinctiveness by the use of more traditional materials others felt that the draft guide was too prescriptive in this way and did not do enough to encourage modern good quality design. Some respondents suggested inclusion of specific examples of more modern architecture and officers have sought to obtain images, either directly or from respondents.

Further emphasis has been given in the final document to the fact that the guide encourages the use of good quality, modern and innovative design solutions, additional images within the document have also been used to reaffirm this point. The draft guide already made it clear that innovation is encouraged but that justification will be required where schemes are promoted that deviate from the principles contained within the guide itself. This message regarding use of appropriate innovative solutions is reaffirmed within the adopted document.

A number of consultations felt that some sections appeared to repeat themselves and readers found this confusing; others felt that there was scope for condensing the text and for wider use of bullet points. In particular section 5 Character Appraisal of Sites and their Settings seemed to overlap with section 7 Site Appraisal. Various suggestions were therefore made to consider merging or combining sections, the majority being in relation to sections 4 – 8 A number of suggestions were made to incorporate a separate section on "Public realm" or on Movement and place making where it was suggested that this could usefully come towards the front of the document.

In response to these comments sections on character appraisal and site appraisal have been merged into Section 5 Character appraisal of sites and their settings to avoid duplication and within the revised Section 7 on New Residential Development emphasis has specifically be made to place making. The final version of the document has also incorporated a separate Section 8 on Designing the Public Realm.

The summary boxes, where present in the draft Design Guide were well received with many respondents commenting favourably upon there usefulness and several respondents suggested a summary for every section in a shaded box listing the key principles of good design. In response to these suggestions summary boxes have been incorporated where practicable at the end of each section to highlight basic

principles of good design in relation to the subject matter of that particular section of the document

To support the key points made in summary boxes illustrations used within the final document have also been clearly identified with symbols to ensure readers understand whether they are considered good or bad examples of design

A number of responses commented that the numbering of the paragraphs did not seem to tie up with the numbering of the pages or that use of some illustrations was confusing to readers and further thought may be needed on how this can be streamlined and simplified.

This concern has been addressed within the final version of the document by the use of simple page numbering throughout the guide and for each section. This has provided clarity to references made both within the overall document and within individual sections of the Design Guide.

A number of comments were also made about how the guide should be publicised and distributed. There was clearly a wish to see it widely available to as many people as possible and many commented that the guide should be made available as hard copy in individual sections for those who did not need to or did not wish to use the complete document. In order to respond to these concerns the guide is available on the councils website and available to download free of charge. Hard copies of individual sections of the Design Guide are also available at reasonable cost and CDs of the document are also available to purchase.

The status of the Guide and the weight which this document might have in determining the outcome of planning applications was also raised as a key issue. One consultee wanted to see wider use of the active verb rather than the passive in order to give the document a more direct and positive approach. Some felt that the Guide could not outline arbitrary standards or views without having clear policy statements to back them up and these could not be part of the Design Guide unless already Council policy. It was suggested by one parish council, and supported by others that clear reference should be made to the use of the document by Parish Councils when responding to planning consultations.

The status of the Guide as a supplementary planning document (SPD) is made clear within the introduction to the document at Section 1, together with links to those formally saved adopted Council Policies it is intended to augment. (Section 1 page 3, paragraph 2.2).

There appeared little in the document which people strongly disagreed with but the idea of faux details provoked a few consultees to voice strong feelings. In particular there was an objection to the treatment used to mitigate the appearance of "Telecommunication Masts" by disguising them as trees. Others however, were happy to see this method of construction where appropriate but may have wished to see stronger controls over the siting of these structures. Generally the draft was well received and it is considered that the changes outlined above have responded to the general suggestions made.

A programme of awareness raising and education on using the guide was seen as essential by many respondents as an excellent way of raising the profile and making use of the document more widespread. These suggestions have been welcomed

and copies of the Design Guide will be available within local libraries and the Councils offices. In addition a hard copy has been sent to each of the Town and Parish Councils . Initial presentations of the draft have been organised for members, town and parish councils and leaflets explaining the content, and purpose of the Guide will be made available free of charge within the Councils offices, in local libraries and via Town and Parish Councils.

### **Comments received for changes to be made on a Section by Section basis**

In addition to the general recommendations for amendment of the draft document as referred to above the Council received a number of specific suggestions which were made on a section by section basis and which were considered to warrant particular consideration Changes made to the final version of the Design Guide are set out in the following paragraphs, on a section by section basis, and in the light of the comments received .

#### **Section 1 Introduction**

The text has been shortened where practicable but adding reference to use of the document by Town and Parish Councils where commenting upon planning applications.

#### **Section 2 – Character Appraisal**

The treatment of a visual and verbal glossary as separate element has been noted and these are being produced as a separate Volume 2 technical Appendix. As referred to in the general comments above illustrations throughout the document have clearly been marked with symbols to show good and bad practice where practicable. In response to suggestions made specific mention has been made to green lanes, driveways and reference to coastal levels as well as the Pevensey Levels within relevant sections of the document ( Section 2 para 2.6 ). Use of Cross referencing to other Sections of the Guide e.g. landscape ( section 3 ) has been made where appropriate.

#### **Section 3 – Landscape, Trees and Wildlife.**

In response to some comments that the length of this section appeared excessive this section has been condensed by the wider use of bullet points and the production of a summary of guiding principles which is now incorporated at the end of Section 3 landscape, trees and wildlife .

In response to other comments additional examples of public art, public realm, sustainable development and innovative design in Wealden have been placed within appropriate sections of the document. Section 8 of the document now deals specifically with designing the public realm. Revisions have also been made to maps to show the extent of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in relation to landscape character areas and to ensure clarity between these two matters. Some re-wording has been incorporated in respect of the boundaries and description of Ashdown Forest and it's vegetation to ensure accuracy.

## **Section 4 – Sustainability**

In response to some concerns that the examples of sustainable development used in the draft were not especially good, alternative illustrations have been used to show good examples both within Wealden and elsewhere that clearly encourage use of new and more sustainable technologies in successful schemes. A list of materials to illustrate how much embodied energy might be used in their production has been included in the Guide to identify examples of materials considered to be less sustainable than alternatives. All images included are now of high quality with readable text following some expressions of concern regarding the quality of illustrations in the draft document. There is also now clearer emphasis to encouragement of all applicants to complete sustainability checklists for submitted proposals following a recommendation from environment scrutiny committee. The text has also been amended to be more encouraging to use of new technologies, use of local materials, minimising waste arising from development, water conservation and management and sustainable drainage systems.

## **Section 5 - Character Appraisal of Sites and their Settings.**

A number of responses felt that this section should be merged with the section on Site Appraisal since having two sections was both potentially confusing and unnecessary duplication. This would also help reduce the overall bulk of the document. Many also felt that there should be a section, or part of a section that referred to “public realm”. Both of these suggestions have been taken on board in the final version of the design guide with a revised Section 5 combining character appraisal of sites and their settings and a Section 8 dealing with design of the public realm.

## **Section 6 – Design and Access Statements.**

A number of consultees emphasised the importance of referring to green travel plans/ interconnectivity of walkways and cycleways within design and access statements. Generally most felt this section helpful in explaining the new requirements for applicants to produce statements but these should recognise the different requirements in relation to small and large developments. The section on design and access statements now incorporates specific reference to the need to include a green travel plan and also emphasises the need to ensure interconnectivity of and access to the development. The text acknowledges that lesser detail will be required for smaller schemes.

## **Section 7 – Site Appraisal**

Generally the suggestion was to merge with the section on character appraisal and thus help condense text. A number of responses wished to include more examples of local contemporary design where these can be sourced. This section has now been merged with that on Site Appraisal and more examples of modern designs incorporated where appropriate within the Guide.

## **Section 8 – New Residential Development.**

A number of consultees felt that the text should be condensed and more use made of illustrations where appropriate and available. Reference needs to be clear regarding larger community facilities as part of any successful new housing

development, with mitigation to overcome noise pollution, need for composting and recycling facilities, parking standards, cycleways and cycle parking, Green Travel Plans, treatment of corner sites, Life Time Homes requirements, community and recreational space etc. The guide needs to emphasize the need for a mix of house size and tenure and include cross references to other sections as appropriate.

Section 7 on new residential development sets out in detail the guidelines which the Council expects developers to take into account in dealing with these matters .

### **Section 9 – New Non-Residential Development.**

A number of respondents felt it important to emphasise that the principles of good design set out in the guide would apply to development in association with equestrian activity. It was also suggested that the guide should include more examples of well designed community buildings.

The text of the final version of Section 9 makes it clear that good design principles should be applied to all developments. Additional images have been included to show good examples of community/ public buildings.

### **Section 10 – Residential Alterations and Extensions.**

Comments received reflected concerns that the guide should clearly refer to the fact that size of extensions should be considered against principles of good design rather than applying a % figure and the fact that all applications must be dealt with on their merits. It was also felt important to emphasise the use of appropriate materials to ensure successful extensions.

Section 10 dealing with residential alterations and extensions provides general guidance on the likely acceptability of extensions in relation to the size of the parent property however the guide emphasises that all applications for extensions will be determined on their individual merits . Illustrations and sketches e.g. roof dormers and extensions have been widely utilised to help illustrate these principles and to include general reference within the text to the need to give careful consideration to the use of appropriate materials and finishes without being too prescriptive.

### **Section 11 – The Re-use and Conversion of Rural Buildings.**

A number of consultees suggested that the guide should make clear reference to the application of good design principles to all rural buildings including redundant churches and schools. The document should also seek to include more illustrations where appropriate and cross refer to other sections.

Both within the general text and within the summary of the section the Guide clarifies that the principles of good design should apply to re-use and conversion of all rural (and other) buildings. A number of additional illustrations and images have now been included within the section to illustrate the principles of good/ successful design.

### **Section 12 – Alterations and Extensions to Listed Buildings.**

The suggestion was made that the Guide should refer to the forthcoming single national application form for planning approval covering Conservation Areas and

Listed Buildings. Whilst some felt that this section was rather lengthy others commented favourably on the level of detail it contained.

In response to comments received specific reference has been made at paragraph 2.16 of section 12 to the use of a single application form for both planning and listed building matters.

### **Section 13 – Shopfronts and Signage.**

Comments received suggested that more illustrations should be used/sought to show good contemporary design. There was criticism that for one image contained in the draft it was not possible to read the italics used in the accompanying annotation. A few comments suggested a need for less reference to the historic background and more relevant reference to principles, images and examples.

More images have accordingly been included within the final version of the Design Guide to show examples of good modern design and further images clearly marked with ticks and crosses to illustrate clearly what are considered to be successful solutions. The italics accompanying the one specific illustration referred to have been replaced with a more appropriate and readable font. Text has also been condensed where practicable and more use made of illustrations.

### **Section 14 – Telecommunications**

Consultees have suggested that web links should be provided within the design guide to Primary Care Trust Websites to explain the principles of health planning. It was also suggested that pre-application consultation with other institutions such as hospitals, hospices and residential homes for the elderly would be helpful in respect of telecommunications proposals.

The summary of design principles now provided at the end of Section 14 makes it clear that pre application discussions with relevant bodies of e.g. hospitals and schools is strongly encouraged and that evidence should be provided with any application/ consultation that the proposal complies with current guidelines regarding public exposure to radio frequencies.

The above changes to the Wealden Design Guide were considered and supported by the Council's Local Development Framework Sub Committee at it's meeting of 16th January 2008. Appendix A of that agenda item identified and analysed the responses received to the draft document whilst Appendix B set out a schedule of all comments received together with recommendations for amendments to be made to the document in the light of consultation responses. The report considered by Members, together with the two appendices referred to can be viewed at [http://www.wealden.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000534/M00002213/AI00017951/\\$DesignGuidereportconsultationsLDFSub16jan08finalreport.docA.ps.pdf](http://www.wealden.gov.uk/moderngov/Published/C00000534/M00002213/AI00017951/$DesignGuidereportconsultationsLDFSub16jan08finalreport.docA.ps.pdf)

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**This statement on the representations received in respect of the draft of the Wealden Design Guide is produced in accordance with Regulation 18 (b) (i) and (ii) of the Town and Country Planning ( Local Development ) ( England ) Regulations 2004**

**November 25th 2008**