

PC 370-21

NEW FOREST NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

PLANNING COMMITTEE MEETING – 20 JULY 2021

DESIGN GUIDE SPD – CONSULTATION DRAFT

Report by: David Illsley, Policy Manager

1. Introduction

1.1 The adopted New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD (2011) is a key document for the area, promoting high quality design while conserving and enhancing the built heritage of the New Forest. Since it was published, the Design Guide SPD has provided a valuable reference for Authority officers, members of the Planning Committee, developers, residents and parish councils to use when preparing or considering planning applications. However, it is now a decade old and the need for an update is recognised within the Authority’s work programme.

2. Scope of the Design Guide Review

2.1 Last year the Planning Committee approved a programme of works covering several aspects of our building design and conservation function (report PC 320-20). Alongside other work priorities, this included a review of the New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD. Since the current Design Guide was adopted in 2011 there have been significant changes in both local and national policy/guidance in the intervening years and there are clear benefits to be gained from reviewing and updating the document.

2.2 Report PC 320-20 set out the high-level scope of the Design Guide review, including:

- the need to supplement the policies in the adopted Local Plan (2019);
- the need to have regard to the NPPF (2019) and associated NPPG guidance;
- a greater focus on areas such as climate change and sustainability that have risen up the planning agenda since the previous Design Guide was adopted; and
- give consideration to areas of greatest pressure, such as boundary treatments.

3. Preparation of the revised draft New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD

(i) Conformity with updated local and national policy/guidance

3.1 The glossary to the NPPF (2019) states that Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs), “...can be used to provide further guidance for development on specific sites, or on particular issues, such as design. Supplementary planning documents are capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions...”

3.2 Planning law confirms that the weight afforded to SPDs by the decision-maker is proportionate to the degree of consistency between the SPD and the statutory development plan policies. There are therefore benefits from updating the Design Guide with clear references to the relevant policies in the adopted New Forest National Park Local Plan (2019) to ensure it is afforded due weight in future planning decisions.

3.3 There have also been a raft of updates to national planning policy and guidance that the revised National Park Design Guide should have regard to. These are summarised in section 1 of the draft document (Annex 1) and include:

- NPPF (2019): Section 12 of the Framework focuses on ‘Well-designed places’ and confirms that good design is a key aspect of sustainable development. The Framework states, “...*being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this...*”. Paragraph 126 of the Framework supports the production of local design guides and codes.
- National Planning Practice Guidance: The NPPG resource on ‘Design: process and tools’ confirms that appropriate policies can be included within supplementary planning documents, such as local design guides or design codes, which provide further detail on specific design matters. Design Guides are described as, “...*an important way of communicating local design expectations and requirements...to be given as much weight as possible in the decision-making process, local design guides need to be adopted as supplementary planning documents.*”¹
- National Design Guide (2019): This was published by the Government in 2019 and forms part of the Government’s collection of planning practice guidance. The Guide sets out 10 key characteristics of good design which reflect the Government’s priorities. The Guide provides a common overarching framework and structure that can be used for the content of local design guides.
- Consultation draft National Model Design Code (2021): The draft National Model Design Code provides detailed guidance on the production of design codes, guides and policies to promote successful design. It expands on the ten characteristics of good design set out in the National Design Guide (2019). It recognises that the level of detail and degree of prescription within design codes and guides should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place.

(ii) *Informal engagement during preparation*

- 3.4 The intention to update the National Park Design Guide SPD and an outline of the high-level scope of the review has been shared with the 37 town and parish councils within the National Park through the Parish Quadrant meetings.
- 3.5 Member workshops on the Design Guide were held on 25 February and 21 April 2021. These workshops were well attended and provided an opportunity to discuss the format of the revised Design Guide, the consistency of wording and the approach taken to a range of design matters. The feedback given by members at the workshops (and also separately in writing) has been invaluable for officers in preparing the proposed consultation draft document (Annex 1).
- 3.6 Government guidance also highlights the importance of consultation as part of the preparation of local design guidance. In advance of the statutory public consultation that will be held on the draft Design Guide SPD later this year, the decision was taken to informally engage local architects, designers and planning agents prior to finalising the consultation draft document. An early iteration of the draft document was shared and video meetings were held in May 2021 to elicit feedback. As with the comments from members, this feedback has fed into the document set out in Annex 1 to this report.

¹ NPPF ‘Design: process & tools’ - Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 26-005-20191001, revised October 2019

4. Draft National Park Design Guide SPD – overview of contents

- 4.1 The proposed consultation draft National Park Design Guide (Annex 1) reflects the discussions that have taken place both internally and externally over recent months. The document aims to provide design guidance for the whole of the National Park in a form that is consistent with national policy and guidance, while also reflecting the local circumstances and typical profile of new development in the New Forest National Park.
- *Section 1: Introduction* clarifies the status of the guide and how it fits with other published policy and guidance (local and national).
 - *Section 2: Development Context* charts the evolution of the built character of the New Forest, highlighting the area's rich and varied local vernacular architecture.
 - *Section 3: Design Principles* outlines the key principles of good design in the New Forest National Park, linked to the 10 characteristics established in the Government's National Design Guide (2019).
 - *Section 4: A new Building Design Code* is a key component of the revised Design Guide. The key design code elements reflect the New Forest's status as a nationally protected landscape and the scale of planned development set out in the Local Plan. It focuses on the elements that are key to conserving local character, including boundaries, building proportions and outbuildings.
 - *Section 5: Materials* emphasises the influence good quality and well-chosen materials have on the success of a scheme.
 - *Section 6: Sustainability* has been given greater coverage than the current adopted Design Guide (2011). This section sets out details of the types of sustainability measures that can be incorporated into new development, while respecting the environmental protections and local character of the New Forest National Park.
 - *Section 7: Landscape and Ecological considerations* emphasises the importance of considering these matters as an integral part of planned new development. It covers important aspects of design including boundary treatments, signage and lighting.
 - The final sections of the document set out where further information can be found, in recognition that the Design Guide SPD can only go into so much detail on certain aspects. The draft document also includes a glossary of terms following feedback from members at the workshops held earlier this year.
- 4.2 The document at Annex 1 is an evolution of the earlier drafts discussed with members in February and April 2021. Conscious effort has been made to produce a document that covers a broad range of matters – including a new building design code, materials and landscape considerations – in a relatively succinct manner. The proposed consultation draft document is similar in length to several other adopted National Park Authority design guides and aims to provide sufficient detail so that local communities in the New Forest are content that locally important issues are sufficiently well addressed.

5. Proposed consultation and next steps

- 5.1 National planning regulations require a period of public consultation of at least 4 weeks on draft supplementary planning documents. Locally, the National Park Authority is committed to a 6-week period of public consultation on draft documents, which better reflects the meeting cycles of local town and parish councils for example.

- 5.2 It is proposed that the public consultation on the draft National Park Design Guide SPD will commence in September 2021, running for a 6-week period into October 2021. This timetable provides a window for officers to prepare the accompanying documents and finalise the formatting of the draft Design Guide itself prior to the consultation starting. A range of statutory and other local consultees will be directly notified of the consultation and invited to submit their representations during the 6-week period.
- 5.3 All of the representations received will be reviewed and changes made to the draft Design Guide document where appropriate. In accordance with the relevant regulations, a 'consultation statement' will be prepared summarising the main issues raised during the public consultation; and how those issues have been addressed in the final document. The formal adoption of the Design Guide SPD will be a decision for the full Authority meeting, with the meeting in December 2021 provisionally identified as a date for consideration of the final document.

6. Conclusions

- 6.1 The National Park Authority places a strong emphasis on good design through the delivery of our statutory planning function. This is reflected in our annual Building Design Awards; the adopted Local Plan policies on protecting and enhancing the built environment; and the adoption of local design guidance. Recent updates to national planning policy and guidance continue to emphasise the importance of good design and planning authorities are encouraged to produce local design guidance to support the delivery of planned new development.
- 6.2 The proposed consultation draft New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD (Annex 1) has been prepared following a review of national policy and guidance, as well as consideration of feedback provided at the various workshops held with Authority members and local architects. The document at Annex 1 aims to provide comprehensive design guidance for the whole of the National Park area and members are asked to approve the document for the purposes of a 6-week public consultation.

Recommendation:

Members: (i) approved the draft New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD (Annex 1) for a statutory period of public consultation; and (ii) note that the final version of the Design Guide SPD will be considered at a full Authority meeting for formal adoption.

Contact: David Illsley, Policy Manager
david.illsley@newforestnpa.gov.uk, 01590 646672

Papers: **PC 370-21** – cover paper
Annex 1 – New Forest National Park Design Guide SPD – Consultation draft

Equality Impact Assessment: No impacts have been identified.