

5 Demonstrating and Reviewing Design Quality

Pre-application Discussion

5.1 East Staffordshire Borough Council is very keen to be actively involved in the design and development process and not just at the time a planning application is submitted.

5.2 Positive ongoing pre-application discussions are encouraged. Working with Council planning officers from an early stage can help identify opportunities and constraints in relation to a site and development. Additionally, it can assist developers to understand what will be required for planning applications and how best to manage the planning process for a site.

5.3 East Staffordshire Borough Council operates a 'Development Team' approach and will undertake to ensure all relevant Council professionals attend meetings as appropriate to provide effective, accurate and definitive planning and development advice. This will include drawing in other consultees such as Staffordshire County Council Highway Authority and the Environment Agency.

5.4 The following guidance is provided to developers with regard to engaging in pre-application discussions with the Council:

- Have a clear idea of the project brief, but be prepared to recognise legitimate planning issues in finalising the brief for development after initial discussions with the Council;
- Make sure the key planning policy messages in respect of the site and proposal are understood as a basis for the discussion;
- Ensure that an initial site visit has taken place. More detailed urban design analysis will be needed to accompany any application, but a basic grasp of the site issues will be expected as the basis for any pre-application discussion;

- Be positive in responding to advice from the planning officers. Their role is to help ensure high quality and appropriate development in the context of the local planning framework; and
- Be prepared to share early sketch plans and ideas. These will be treated as work in progress and can help to evolve design thinking. It is not advisable to seek pre-application discussions when the 'finished scheme' has been designed, as this may result in abortive work for the applicant.

Design Review

5.5 Design review is integral to a successful design process and should be undertaken both formally and informally, through the evolution of the design of the development.

5.6 Design review allows developers, their designers and the Council to talk about and interrogate the design, individually and together, towards improving and refining the design. It can provide a format for trouble-shooting and conflict resolution.

5.7 Design review can range from informal discussions or take a more formal format such as a design workshop, involving the design team, the client and the Council. Formal pre-application discussion with the Council will form one part of design review. Planning Officers will undertake design review when a planning application is submitted for determination, based on this Guide, utilising the Design Review Framework provided at the end of this section.

5.8 Recording design review, particularly where this has involved the Council, and writing this up succinctly as part of the Design and Access Statement for a planning application is encouraged. This can help explain why certain aspects of a development have been designed in a particular manner.

- 5.9 For major schemes, CABA, as a statutory consultee, may become involved in design review. This will be undertaken through the Council, although CABA may become involved at the request of a developer. Guidance by CABA on 'How to do design review' is provided at www.cabe.org.uk.
- 5.10 More locally, Southern Staffordshire Design Initiative, a project of the Southern Staffordshire Partnership, champions good design across the south of the county and provides advice and a design review service. Developers may seek to engage with South Staffordshire Partnership and should do so in consultation with the Council.
- 5.15 Developer led consultation should be undertaken after discussion with and agreement of the Council. Developers should ensure that consultation is properly resourced in terms of explanatory materials and staff to explain and describe the proposal.
- 5.16 It will be important that any formal and informal consultation is recorded and 'written-up' to explain comments made, and how the design has evolved to reflect local people's concerns and ideas as relevant. This could be included as a stand-alone report and/or as part of the Design and Access Statement.

Consultation and Public Engagement

- 5.11 Consultation is an important stage of the design process. It can help to test out ideas, communicate information and improve local knowledge. The type and nature of consultation will vary with the scale and significance of the development.
- 5.12 The Council's Statement of Community Involvement should inform the approach to public consultation on development projects in the Borough, whether this is led by the Council or developers.
- 5.13 It is recommended that developers undertake public consultation prior to submission of a planning application. This should be timetabled to ensure sufficient time to revise the design before the planning application is submitted.
- 5.14 The form which developer-led consultation might take will range from an informal discussion with neighbours about a house extension, to a formal public exhibition or event. Public meetings should generally be avoided as these are not the most effective means of communicating often complicated information about development projects.
- Making a Planning Application**
- 5.17 When the development proposals are finalised the planning application can be made.
- 5.18 Before this, however, it will be expected that development proposals will have been shared with the Council, and pre-application and design issues discussed with the applicant. This should help to ensure that the design of development is of an appropriate quality when the application is submitted.
- 5.19 Pre-application discussions will also identify the design-related information that will need to accompany a planning application. Without the full range of supporting design information the Council may not be in a position to validate a planning application.

Design and Access Statements

5.20 A Design and Access Statement is required by Government to accompany planning applications for new development, except for householder applications outside conservation areas. The length and level of detail of such Statements should reflect the scale and complexity of the development proposed.

5.21 In general the Statement should cover a number of important aspects of the development, explaining to the Council the design and proposal in terms of the following:

- Design Process, including site analysis, consultation and evolution of the scheme;
- Uses and activities to be developed on site;
- Amount of development, how much development is proposed;
- Layout and the arrangement of buildings, routes and spaces;
- Scale relating to how large the buildings are (height, width, length) and the context;
- Landscaping, including how open spaces will be treated and managed; and
- Appearance, specifically the design, materials and details related to the context;

5.22 Design and Access Statements should provide the narrative for the whole design process and clearly explain the design rationale for the development. These statements need to do much more than simply describe the development.

5.23 The Council will look closely at the content and quality of Design and Access Statements to ensure that they meet the statutory requirements. The recommended source of advice on producing design and access statements is 'Design and Access Statements – How to read, write and use them' produced

by CABE and freely available from their web site (www.cabe.org.uk).

5.24 They should be started early and evolved as the design progresses, not rushed and completed at the end of the process as a tick box exercise. Designers and architects should contribute to the drafting of the Statement to help convey the ideas and principles behind the scheme. Sufficient resources should be directed to ensure the Design and Access Statement is fit for purpose.

Implementing Development

5.25 The design process does not end when a planning application is approved.

5.26 Implementing development to the approved plans and details is imperative, and quality management is needed through this important stage of design and construction.

5.27 Planning conditions may need to be discharged prior to the commencement of development on site, and applicants may wish to discuss conditions with the Council at pre-application discussions.

5.28 In design terms, conditions will be used to control the specification of materials and design of details. The Council will need to be satisfied of the quality and appropriateness of materials and details to discharge such conditions. It may be sufficient to provide sample units of the materials, but in some cases the Council may wish to see larger sections or samples on site.

5.29 Cheapening the design and reducing the quality of the specification after the planning approval and / or discharge of conditions will not be acceptable, and the Council may take enforcement action to ensure quality standards are maintained.



Recognising Good Design – Awards & Standards

5.30 The Council encourages developers to achieve high design standards and demonstrate this through design awards and standards. There are a number of ways that developers and clients procuring development might wish to demonstrate design quality. Three national awards and standards include:

- Building for Life - is the national benchmark for well-designed housing and neighbourhoods in England. It is awarded to new housing projects that demonstrate a commitment to high design standards. Building for Life is managed by CABI and the Home Builders Federation. More information can be found about Building for Life and how to apply for the award, online (at www.buildingforlife.org);
- BREEAM - The 'Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method' validates the sustainability of different types of development. The Council encourages its use in all non-residential development. Development is rated on a scale from PASS, to EXCELLENT and a certificate awarded. More information is provided online (at www.breeam.org); and

- Code for Sustainable Homes - allows home builders to be recognised for going beyond current building regulations in terms of environmental performance. The Code is supported by the Department for Communities and Local Government and the Building Research Establishment. New homes are awarded a rating from 1 to 6 stars, based on performance against sustainability criteria, with six stars being the highest standard, equating to carbon neutral. More information on the code is provided online (at www.communities.gov.uk).
 - Accessible Natural Green Space Standard (ANasst) promoted by Natural England is awarded to schemes which meet its objectives on accessibility, and where 100% of dwellings are within 300m or 5 minutes walk from green space.
- 5.31 More locally, the Southern Staffordshire Partnership Design Awards are part of the Southern Staffordshire Design Initiative. The awards are run every two years and have categories for different classes of development and for sustainability. Also, various Civic societies across the Borough also run their own design awards to celebrate the best buildings in their areas.