

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL – REPORT TO MEMBERS

1.	Meeting:	Delegated Powers
2.	Date:	21 February 2011
3.	Title:	South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide
4.	Directorate:	Environment & Development Services

5. Summary

The purpose of this report is to feed back the key findings of the public consultation for the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide and the resulting changes made to the document. Authority is also sought to use the document as a best practice guide pending future consideration to its adoption (all or in part) as a Supplementary Planning Document.

5. Recommendations

That the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide be approved for use as a best practice guide.

6. Proposals and Details

The South Yorkshire Residential Design guide is aimed principally at housing developments of over 10 units, with its purpose being to update the existing 'Better Places to Live in South Yorkshire' (2002) design guide to provide robust urban and highway design guidance (including technical standards) for planning applicants, agents, developers and designers. It also strongly complements the government endorsed 'Building for Life' assessment approach.

As such, it will represent best-practice guidance across South Yorkshire, and will be used by Rotherham Council to promote and appraise the quality of new housing proposals. The guide will help to improve housing design quality, protect the character of existing urban areas, ensure resident's amenity is protected, and help to meet the Council's priorities for good quality housing in attractive, safe and prosperous neighbourhoods.

The document is the result of cooperation between the four South Yorkshire local authorities and Transform South Yorkshire (TSY), the sub-regional housing and regeneration housing pathfinder.

The benefit of a South Yorkshire wide guide is that it more consistently raises the standards expected of and delivered by residential developers. This brings greater certainty for investors. The house-building industry has been engaged in producing the guide to ensure the requirements are not overly onerous and are deliverable.

Within the 23 April 2010 Local Development Framework Steering Group it was resolved (following a dialogue led by the Planning Services Manager on the document's scope and aims) that Rotherham would act as a facilitator in the public consultation process on the guide. This has now been completed and the feedback gained has resulted in significant amendments being made to the document (see below).

It is proposed to use the South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide as a best practice guide and, following adoption of the LDF Core Strategy, consideration will be given to it being adopted (all or in part) as a Supplementary Planning Document.

7. Finance

All costs incurred in the preparation of the documentation were funded externally by Transform South Yorkshire. The only potential costs to Rotherham MBC are those arising from the printing and distribution of the design guide. These will be contained within approved budgets.

8. Risks and Uncertainties

Transform South Yorkshire, the sub regional Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder are funding production of the revised design guide. Without this support it is unlikely that Rotherham Council would be able to produce guidance to a similar standard, weakening the Council's position in relation to housing design standards.

Without an updated document (which may ultimately be adopted), there is a danger that design issues will not be adequately addressed, which could result in lower quality residential development with long term financial implications and negative consequences for the Borough's economic competitiveness and quality of life for new and existing residents.

Planning Officers could rely solely on the policies of the Unitary Development Plan in the consideration of major residential development proposals. However, the guidance provided by the Unitary Development Plan is inevitably limited in detail and has been generally superseded by modern design standards. Without the design guide, opportunities to secure developments that are acceptable in design terms may be prejudiced due to the limitations of the existing Better Places to Live document, and the fact that it has no real weight in determining planning applications.

Having an up to date guide will facilitate delivery of statutory functions more effectively, encourage greater collaborative working and address common issues that are encountered in assessing development proposals. The guidance is intended for use by local planning and highways officers in their promotion, assessment and management of the development process. This joint approach to development management will enable a consistent approach to development control resulting in greater clarity and certainty for the development industry.

The guide is also intended for use by architects and house builders in the sub-region, as a source of inspiration and a guide to desirable design outcomes which will be acceptable to each local authority. As such, it is intended to minimise delays by promoting positive, transparent and responsive partnership between the local planning authorities and the development industry. Nonetheless, (until its adoption and attachment to Core Strategy policy), the provisions of the design guide will not directly form the basis for refusal of a planning application, but will as necessary be referred to in pre-application discussions and officer reports.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide will:

- Further the Corporate objectives of the Corporate Plan
- Contribute to the Community Strategy Strategic Themes of Rotherham Achieving and Rotherham Safe, as well as the overarching theme of Sustainable Development
- Contribute to the corporate cross-cutting agendas of:
 - Sustainable Development - contributing to economic, social and environmental well-being
 - Regeneration – providing sustainable neighbourhoods of quality, choice and aspiration

It will in addition make positive contributions to a Safer Rotherham through making crime and disorder less likely. As part of the 'Building for Life' assessment one of the questions asks 'are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?' It is intended to continue to seek the advice of South Yorkshire Police as a consultee on proposals for residential development.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

During production of the guide there were 3 stakeholder workshops which were held with Local Authority, house-builder and Registered Social Landlord representatives who are active in the South Yorkshire area. These representatives provided input into the aims and objectives of the guidance.

There was a round of internal Council consultations on the first draft document during 2009. Following another period of internal consultation during March 2010,

changes were made before a period of statutory public consultation and engagement which ran for a six week period between 14 June 2010 and 23 July 2010. During this period the consultation, a press release was produced, the document was available online and hard copies were made available at Rotherham's Central Library and Town Centre Customer Service Centre. All parish councils, statutory consultees, developers and agents on the combined councils' databases, (totalling over 430 contacts), were notified of the consultation and their views sought. Officers also held a targeted consultation workshop for residential developers and agents with over 200 representatives invited. Additional Rotherham specific measures included a members seminar held on 15 July 2010 and discussions at the 5 July Access Group and 12 July Volunteer Board of Rotherfed.

Following the six week public consultation period, officers of the four authorities held a series of clarification meetings with housebuilder representatives who had raised issues with the document during the consultation period (see below).

Overall there were around 20 detailed representations made during the consultation, as well as the discussions that took place at the workshops and post-consultation clarification meetings with developers. Subject to a number of suggested changes the public sector respondents (including Natural England, Yorkshire Forward, Homes and Communities Agency, SYPTE) and the Civic Trusts were supportive of the guide. The Environment Agency and South Yorkshire Police suggested that there needed to be stronger reference to flood resilient design and 'Designing out Crime' respectively. This has been addressed in the final document by providing links to other sources of information and by including a new section on security.

Responses from the private sector agents and house-builders suggested a wide range of amendments to the guide which have largely been taken on board. The developers were more critical of the guide, suggesting it would have a negative effect upon viability and could constrain development due to certain design requirements and standards, although no robust evidence was presented to support these views. Whilst this has to be accepted to a degree, there is strong evidence (refer to appendix 1 to this report) that good design offers a wide range of other benefits, that it can add value to a development and can help to reduce long term costs (e.g. the costs of crime or damage to the environment). Developers' cost appraisals do not take account of these issues due to their focus on maximising short term private profit, and the current viability issues are partly the reflection of a short-term downturn in the economy.

Further investigation of these concerns revealed that the key issues were the cumulative effect of some of the design requirements (particularly Lifetime Homes, Wheelchair Housing and increased internal space standards) being introduced at a time when the housing market is weak, building regulations have been strengthened in respect of the Code for Sustainable Homes and when viability is a real issue for the industry. In response, the design guide makes it clear that whilst meeting these standards is desirable and represents best practice, they are not mandatory unless the council has an adopted policy in place requiring it.

Further targeted engagement with the private sector representatives revealed that they were concerned that the document would be interpreted too stringently by planning officers and that every guideline would be required for every development. This is not the intention of the document which is meant as a *guide*, it uses Building

for Life (BfL) as a flexible design quality benchmark to be met. The Home Builders Federation has signed up to BfL and most private sector respondents recognise the value of it. The guide has been amended to be clearer and to better distinguish between 'essential' and 'desirable' guidelines.

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Appendix 1

Research has been undertaken into the economic, social and environmental value of good residential design by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and others. This research shows that good design does not necessarily cost more, and can result in widespread benefits particularly when measured across the lifetime of the development.

The Beneficiaries of value from good residential design

Stakeholders	Short term value	Long term value
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential for greater security of investment • Higher rental returns • Increased asset value (on which to borrow) • Reduced running costs • Competitive investment edge 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Easy maintenance if high quality materials • Maintenance of value / income • Reduced maintenance costs (over life) • Better re-sales values • Higher quality long term tenants
Developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quicker permissions (reduced cost, more certainty) • Increased public support • Higher sales values and profit • Distinctiveness and product differentiation / development • Increased funding potential • Allows difficult sites to be developed at higher densities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better reputation • Increased confidence • Trademark value • Future collaborations more likely
Residents		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Happier tenants / residents • Reduced maintenance / management costs • Reduced utility bills • Better health • More efficient and adaptable space • Security of investment
Local Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regenerative potential to encourage new development and improve image and reputation of area • Reduced public discord and time spent on planning negotiations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduced expenditure on crime, health, management, maintenance, etc • More time for pro-active planning • Increased economic vitality and viability • Increased tax revenue • Meet sustainability targets
Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvements to safety, attractiveness and functioning of neighbourhood 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better security, less crime, • Safer streets- fewer road accidents • Less pollution, better health • Better quality of life • Less stress • More inclusive accessible public space • Civic pride and sense of community identity • Higher property prices in area