1 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister’s Design Code Pilot Programme
1.1 The Government has placed the importance of high quality design at the heart of its plan to create sustainable communities, and is investigating various models and approaches for developing, adopting and implementing design codes. Rotherham is participating in a major national pilot programme to test the effectiveness of design coding as a tool for delivering high quality places whilst speeding up the planning system. Feedback from design code pilots informed a report by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to the Urban Summit in January 2005.

1.2 A design code is planning guidance which sets out specific rules or requirements to guide the physical development of a site or a place. For example, guidance might include the relationship of buildings to each other and to areas of public space, the scale, height and massing of buildings and acceptable building materials. The aim of design coding is to provide clarity as to what constitutes acceptable design quality, and thereby a level of certainty for developers and the local community alike, that can help to accelerate the delivery of high quality new development. Design codes are not a new phenomenon; however have not been widely used in the UK.

2 Rotherham’s Design Code
2.1 Rotherham’s design coding exercise will focus on the Town Centre River Corridor. The importance of the river corridor and securing a high quality of design in the town centre are key elements of Rotherham Town Team’s Renaissance Charter and emerging Spatial Development Framework (SDF) arising from Yorkshire Forward’s Renaissance Towns Initiative.

2.2 Objective 1 funding from European Union Structural Funds has already financed a Westgate masterplan carried out by consultants LDA, who are currently assisting the Rotherham Town Team with the emerging town centre SDF. In addition the town centre falls within the South Yorkshire Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder area which has secured government funding for projects to address low housing demand. As the focus of a number of initiatives which seek to promote an urban renaissance, this is emerging as a key strategic location for the revitalisation of Rotherham’s urban centre.

2.3 Along with RMBC key partners who have committed themselves to this project are Transform South Yorkshire, Yorkshire Forward, Rotherham Town Team, The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (who have appointed Matrix Partnership to provide the equivalent of 28 days support with the production and adoption of the design code) and Satnam Developments (as owners of the Bathworks site at Westgate).

2.4 The design code will consist of a highly-illustrated, clear written report. A variety of illustrative techniques will be used to convey design requirements including sections, sample elevations, axonometrics and perspectives. The Council will adopt the final design code as an Interim Planning Statement which will eventually form part of the Local Development Framework (the borough’s statutory development plan which will replace the Unitary Development Plan). By agreeing to abide by the design code
developers will receive “fast tracked” planning permissions. Essentially the design code reduces the time needed to determine applications for permission as the standards which the Council will accept have already been established. This also helps to speed up the planning process.

3 Raising design quality
3.1 The design code will provide a key tool for driving forward the town’s renaissance agenda, providing a means of securing high quality development and acting as a catalyst for raising design standards throughout the town centre. It will also be a key influence in respect of the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder Westgate Demonstrator Project. The consultants working on both the design code and the Demonstrator feasibility study (running in parallel) are working together to ensure co-ordination between projects.

3.2 The design code itself will act as a tool to secure high quality development which will act as a catalyst to raise design standards throughout the town centre. As one of only seven pilot areas there is the potential to raise Rotherham’s profile nationally. Aside from Newcastle, Rotherham is the only pilot in the North and is unique in focusing upon an urban area with a mix of existing uses and planned developments from a number of developers. In addition it will bring extra resources to Rotherham (for example 28 free consultancy days to assist in procurement and production of the design code) and provide training on design issues for Members and Council officers.

4 Work programme
4.1 Roger Evans Associates have been commissioned to produce the design code.

Key milestones

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>11 February</td>
<td>Joint Housing Pathfinder Demonstration Project and Design Code consultation event (Bailey Suite)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early March</td>
<td>Stakeholder and public consultation on the draft design code.</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Completion of draft design codes</td>
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<tr>
<td>28 March – 22 April</td>
<td>4 week formal consultation period</td>
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<tr>
<td>April/May 2005</td>
<td>Analysis of consultation feedback and production of the final design code. Adoption of final design code by the Council as an Interim Planning Statement</td>
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5 Design Code Contacts

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