

**Meeting** Executive  
**Portfolio Area** Environment and Climate Change  
**Date** 18 January 2023



## STEVENAGE DESIGN GUIDANCE SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: ADOPTION

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the final Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) (Appendix A).
- 1.2 To seek Members' approval to adopt the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD.
- 1.3 The SPD seeks to maximise the delivery of high-quality design from development in Stevenage and improve the health and wellbeing of the town and its residents, as well as providing sustainable development and mitigating climate change.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the content of the final Stevenage Design Guidance SPD, and public consultation held between 19 September to 31 October 2022, be noted.
- 2.2 To agree the adoption of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD, on 30 January 2023.

- 2.3 That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD document prior to adoption.
- 2.4 That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee, held on the 10 January 2023, regarding the content of this report, be taken into account as part of the Executive's deliberations on the matter.

### **3 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) are produced to add detail to the policies included in an adopted Local Plan [BD1]. They are used to build upon and provide further guidance for development on specific sites or on particular issues. Whilst they are not part of the Development Plan<sup>1</sup> for an area, and cannot add unnecessarily to the financial burdens on development, the contents of a SPD are a material consideration when determining a planning application.
- 3.2 The Council has a Design Guide SPD which was adopted in October 2009 [BD2]. The document was produced to supplement policies in the District Plan Second review (2004) and focusses on traditional design ideas such as the separation distance of homes and the design of suburban roads. The overarching aim of the SPD is to ensure that development in Stevenage results in optimal design for different areas of development including safety, habitat, privacy etc. It requires developments to include aspects of design that provide model conditions for the residents of Stevenage and for the environment.
- 3.3 The SPD provides instructions of what to provide and how to provide appropriate design of different types of development in Stevenage. For residential development, this includes privacy, separation distances and extensions for example. For non-residential development, the design guide includes less guidance and this is an area that has needed refining.

#### *Policy Background*

- 3.4 The procedure to adopt a new SPD is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. In summary, the process runs as follows:
- Prepare draft SPD;
  - Minimum 4-week public consultation (normally 6 weeks);
  - Process public consultation responses;
  - Revise SPD to take account of responses;
  - Publish summary of all consultation responses (consultation statement);
  - Adopt new SPD.

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<sup>1</sup> The Development Plan for an area comprises the adopted Local Plan, the Waste Local Plan, the Minerals Local Plan and any adopted Neighbourhood Plans (of which there are none currently in Stevenage).

- 3.5 The purpose of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD is to give more detail to the current Strategic Policy 8: Good design, in the Stevenage Borough Local Plan, and also Detailed Policy GD1: High quality design.
- 3.6 National Government have a range of documents that consider levels of differing design standards including:
- Technical housing standards – nationally described space standard (2015)
  - Living with beauty: promoting health, well-being and sustainable growth (2020)
  - Creating space for beauty: interim report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (2019)
  - Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (2021)
  - National Design Guide (2021)
  - National Model Design Code (2021)
- These all promote good quality and thoughtful design to enhance environments for residents and biodiversity.
- 3.7 In December 2022, the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities released two letters relating to future planning reform.
- 3.8 In his letter “Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill: Planning and Local Control in England” [BD3], the Secretary of State outlined plans to consult on a “National Planning Policy Framework Prospectus”, which includes a commitment to ensuring that the planning system creates more beautiful and sustainable buildings.
- 3.9 Through the Levelling Up & Regeneration Bill, the Government is seeking to introduce a duty for all local councils to produce a design code covering the same area as the Local Plan, which will set simple clear minimum standards on development in that area – such as height, form and density. This measure will allow Government to empower communities, working with local councils, to have a say on what their area will look like by setting clear standards for new development.
- 3.10 The proposed changes by Government will instruct the Planning Inspectorate that they should no longer override sensible local decision making, which is sensitive to and reflects local constraints and concerns. Overall, this amounts to a rebalancing of the relationship between local councils, Government and the Planning Inspectorate, and will give local communities a greater say in what is built in their neighbourhood. For example, when assessing a local plan, a series of considerations will have to be taken into account, including:
- Character and Design: ‘gentle densities’ need to be pursued, as championed by the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission. The Bill’s provisions for mandatory design codes, which will have the same legal force as the Local Plan, will provide authorities a powerful tool to guide the forms of development that communities wish to see.
- 3.11 In his letter “Creating Beautiful, Popular, Healthy and Sustainable Places” [BD4], the Secretary of State refers to a new “Office for Place”, to champion

design and beauty in placemaking by helping local authorities and communities turn visions for beautiful towns, cities and neighbourhoods into local standards that all new development should meet. As part of this, there are four “asks” of local authorities to support communities:

- Speed up permissions for well-designed places, and turn down applications for badly designed places;
- Prepare design codes now;
- Appreciate the role of placemaking in levelling up by recognising the need for strong leadership within a council; and
- Make use of the tools available to promote beautiful and sustainable development in the local authority area.

3.12 The Council has already adopted a suite of other SPDs, including:

- Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport SPD (adopted October 2020) [BD5]
- The Impact of Development on Biodiversity SPD (adopted March 2021) [BD6]

3.13 These SPDs have been incorporated and referenced in the document to ensure that the SPD remains robust and relevant.

## 4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

**Recommendation 2.1: That the content of the final Stevenage Design Guidance SPD, and public consultation held between 19 September to 31 October 2022, be noted.**

4.1 The final Stevenage Design Guidance SPD is included in Appendix A. A track changes version is included in Appendix B, to show changes since the first consultation version. A broad overview of the key points from the draft version is presented below.

### *Explanation of the purpose of the Design Guidance*

4.2 An introduction to the document, what it relates to and how it sits with the Stevenage Borough Local Plan and its role as a material consideration.

4.3 A consideration of the components for good design, for example the appearance of buildings, the form and creation of new streets and spaces and the functionality and practicality that is embedded in design and the visual quality of buildings.

4.4 An introduction of the ten characteristics as set out in the National Design Guide. This is to ensure consistency and continuity between national guidance and also our own local guidance.

### *The ten characteristics*

- 4.5 **1. Context** – this section deals with the location of development and the attributes of its immediate, local and regional surroundings. An understanding of the context history and the cultural characteristics of a site, neighbourhood or region influences the location, siting and design of new developments. It means they are well grounded in their locality and more likely to be acceptable to existing communities. Creating a positive sense of place helps to foster a sense of belonging and contributes to well-being, inclusion and community cohesion.
- 4.6 **2. Identity** – the identity or character of a place comes from the way that buildings, street and spaces, landscape and infrastructure combine together and how people experience them. It is not just about the buildings or how a place looks, but how it engages with all of the senses. Local character makes places distinctive. Well-designed, sustainable places with a strong identity give their users, occupiers and owners a sense of pride, helping to create and sustain communities and neighbourhoods.
- 4.7 **3. Built form** – Built form is the three-dimensional pattern or arrangement of development blocks, streets, buildings and open spaces. It is the interrelationship between all these elements that creates an attractive place to live, work and visit, rather than their individual characteristics. Together they create the built environment and contribute to its character and sense of place.
- 4.8 **4. Movement** – Patterns of movement for people are integral to well-designed places. They include walking and cycling, access to facilities, employment and servicing, parking and the convenience of public transport. They contribute to making high quality places for people to enjoy. They also form a crucial component of urban character. Their success is measured by how they contribute to the quality and character of a place, not only how well they function.
- 4.9 **5. Nature** – Public open spaces are open to all. They provide opportunities for comfort, relaxation, stimulation and social interaction in a safe environment, to encourage interaction in an open space, its location and structure needs careful consideration along with its activities, versatility and how it can be used and accessed by all groups of people.
- 4.10 **6. Public spaces** – The quality of the spaces between buildings is as important as the buildings themselves. Public spaces are streets, squares and other spaces that are open to all. They are the setting for most movement. The design of a public space encompasses its siting and integration into the wider network of routes as well as its various elements. These include areas allocated to different users – pedestrians, cyclists and cars – for different purposes such as movement or parking, hard and soft surfaces, street furniture, lighting, signage and public art.
- 4.11 **7. Uses** – Sustainable places include a mix of uses that support everyday activities, including live, work and play. Well-designed neighbourhoods need to include an integrated mix of tenures and housing types that reflect local housing need and market demand. They are designed to be inclusive and to meet the changing needs of people of different ages and abilities. New

development reinforces existing places by enhancing local transport, facilities and community services, and maximising their potential use. Where there is rapid social and economic change, such as sustainable growth or diversification in rural communities or town centres, well-designed buildings and places are able to accommodate a variety of uses over time.

- 4.12 **8. Homes and buildings** – Well-designed homes and buildings are functional, accessible and sustainable. They provide internal environments and associated external spaces that support the health and well-being of their users and all who experience them. They meet the needs of a diverse range of users, taking into account factors such as ageing population and cultural differences. They are adequate in size, fit for purpose and are adaptable to the changing needs of their occupants over time. Successful buildings also provide attractive, stimulating and positive places for all, whether for activity, interaction, retreat or simply passing by.
- 4.13 **9. Resources** – Well-designed places and buildings conserve natural resources including land, water, energy and materials. Their design responds to the impacts of climate change. It identifies measures to achieve:
- mitigation, primarily by reducing greenhouse gas emissions and minimising embodied energy; and
  - adaptation to anticipated events, such as rising temperatures and the increasing risk of flooding.

A compact and walkable neighbourhood with a mix of uses and facilities reduces demand for energy and supports health and well-being. It uses land efficiently so helps adaptation by increasing the ability for CO<sub>2</sub> absorption, sustaining natural ecosystems, minimising flood risk and the potential impact of flooding, and reducing overheating and air pollution.

- 4.14 **10. Lifespan** – Well-designed places sustain their beauty over the long term. They add to the quality of life of their users and as a result, people are more likely to care for them over their lifespan. They have an emphasis on quality and simplicity.

### *Appendices*

- 4.15 The appendices in the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD contain more detail and readers are directed to the relevant sections in accordance with the area of interest.
- 4.16 The appendices include:
- Stevenage Urban Character Assessments;
  - Key shopfront components, including security shutters, canopies and awnings, and illumination etc; and
  - Building design features, including scale, sunlight, daylight and overshadowing, and landscaping etc;
- 4.17 The Stevenage Local List of Heritage Assets [BD7] and Public Realm Design Guide [BD8] Design Guidance SPD are appended to this Report. Both of

these documents were originally considered to be a part of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD.

- 4.18 However, following comments from Executive in July 2021 [BD9] and as reflected in the Report to Executive in February 2022 [BD10], it was decided to keep the Design Guidance SPD separate from the Local List of Heritage Assets, which is updated regularly as submissions for new heritage assets in the Borough are received. The Local List was published on the Stevenage Borough Council website in March 2022. The Public Realm Design Guide acts as a supporting document to the SPD.
- 4.19 The Local List of Heritage Assets, in particular, is linked closely to the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD. Applications for any potential new listings can be submitted to Stevenage Borough Council via the following link: <https://www.stevenage.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/local-heritage-asset-register-for-the-borough-of-stevenage>

#### *Consultation on the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD*

- 4.20 Consultation on the draft Design Guidance SPD was initially held between 20 September to 15 November 2021 and was then extended for a further two weeks until 29 November 2021. This brought close to 200 responses from the public and stakeholders; this following a Design Workshop with Members in July 2021 where suggestions were brought through into the draft SPD.
- 4.21 Because the amendments that needed to be made to the document were deemed significant, it was agreed by Executive in February 2022 that the document would need to be consulted upon again, once the amendments had been duly made.
- 4.22 Following approval from Executive in February 2022 [BD10], the second round of consultation was undertaken on the Draft Stevenage Design Guidance SPD for a period of six weeks, from 19 September to 31 October 2022. Consultation was undertaken in line with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement. Consultees who had previously signed up to the planning consultation list were contacted by e-mail, or by post where no e-mail address had been provided.
- 4.23 The second consultation ensured that the Council exercised good practice in relation to the amendments that were required. The second consultation was an appropriate consultation, in line with the Regulations, given the responses from the first consultation. In addition, it provided an opportunity to further publicise the good work that the Council have been undertaking in relation to the design of buildings and public realm in the Borough.
- 4.24 The consultation was advertised on the Council's website home page and Planning Policy pages. It appeared on the Stevenage Borough Council social media pages and a hard copy of the consultation document was available at the Council offices and Customer Service Centre. Representations were submitted via the Council's website.
- 4.25 A total of 43 representations were received from a number of key consultees and stakeholders. Given that there were close to 200 representations to the first round of consultation, and that changes made as a result reflected the

significance of those representations, the number of responses to the second round of consultation was considered reasonable and the majority of comments to the second round were of strong value.

4.26 Responses were received from:

- Members of the public.
- Property developers.
- Stevenage Borough Council (Planning, Housing).
- Hertfordshire County Council (Highways, Minerals & Waste, Landscape & Environmental Service).
- The Coal Authority.
- Historic England.
- Sport England.
- Transport for London.
- Hertfordshire Countryside Management Service & Rights of Way.

4.27 The main topics raised during the consultation were:

<b>Response</b>	<b>Reasons for Amendment</b>
Homes and bedroom sizes	<i>The National Described Space Standard from national government will be included within the SPD as a guide.</i>
Appropriate buildings and forms – reflecting NPPF guidance	<i>The Built Form section will be reviewed in line with recommendation and amendment made in line with the NPPF.</i>
Use of Sustainable Materials – Resources	<i>The use of recycled aggregates within the design stage is a valid request and this will be reflected where appropriate in the Design SPD and align the SPD with HCC’s Minerals and Waste Local Plan.</i>
Refer to new and updated documents from Sports England, HCC and Historic England	<i>To ensure the robust nature of the document Incorporate guidance and best practice from Historic England, HCC and Sport England</i>
Embed ‘Active Design’ into the document	<i>Help to promote a more physically active and mentally stimulating environment in all aspects of design.</i>
Review the proposed species for street tree planting	<i>Biosecurity regulations, for example Ash Dieback.</i>

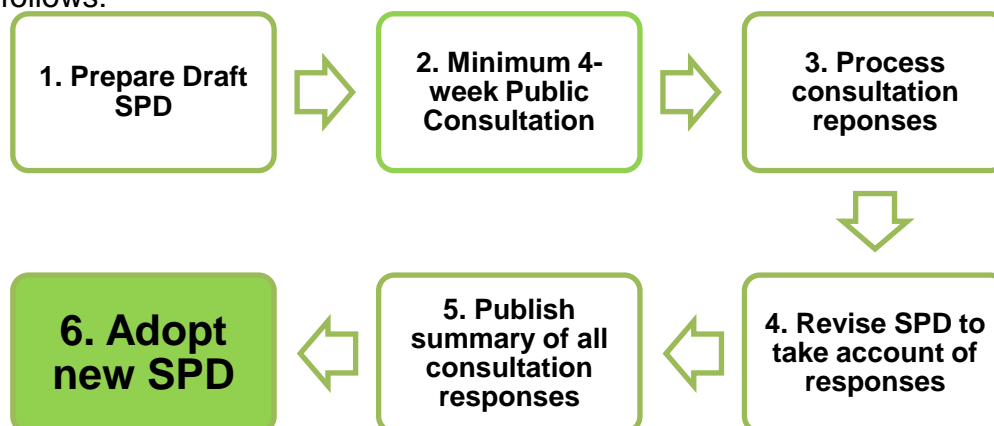


<b>Response</b>	<b>Reasons for Amendment</b>
Review references to hedgerows	<i>The use of the word 'attractive' implies negativity to something that is aesthetically unattractive, would be more appropriate to use alternative language such as 'important' or 'valued'.</i>
Socially Inclusive – Homes for older people	<i>Incorporate SPD in line with HAPPI standards</i>
New guidance from BRE on daylight / sunlight best practice	<i>SPD will update the guidance in accordance with this new document</i>

- 4.28 Officers have taken all comments and views into account in a conscientious manner. This has helped to inform and shape the final version of the SPD being reported to Executive.
- 4.29 The main concepts and principles of the draft SPD have been maintained and brought forward into the final version of the SPD, taking into account a number of significant amendments suggested by respondents' comments.
- 4.30 A complete schedule of consultation responses, the Council's response to the comments and the areas of changes proposed in the SPD are provided in the Consultation Statement (Appendix C).

**Recommendation 2.2: To agree the adoption of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD, on 30 January 2023.**

- 4.31 The final Stevenage Design Guidance SPD is appended to this report (Appendix A). The SPD has been through two public consultations and amended as per the responses received.
- 4.32 The procedure to adopt a new SPD is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012. In summary, it is as follows:



- 4.33 The Council has undertaken two public consultations and the Council has considered the consultation responses, produced a document stating the

main issues raised by respondents, and summarised how the issues have been addressed by the Council (Appendix C).

- 4.34 The Council has produced an Adoption Statement (Appendix D) which is required to notify the public of the adoption of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD.
- 4.35 The SPD is now ready to be finalised and adopted on 30 January 2023.

**Recommendation 2.3: That delegated powers be granted to the Assistant Director: Planning and Regulation, following consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change, to make minor amendments as necessary in the final preparation of the SPD document prior to adoption.**

- 4.36 The Stevenage Design Guidance SPD is appended to this report. However, it may be necessary to make very minor changes prior to final adoption. This might include cosmetic adjustments, the correction of typographical errors and any minor factual changes.
- 4.37 It is recommended that any such amendments be approved via delegated powers.

**Recommendation 2.4: That the comments of the Planning & Development Committee, held on the 10 January 2023, regarding the content of this report, be taken into account as part of the Executive's deliberations on the matter.**

- 4.38 The Planning & Development Committee is due to meet on 10 January 2023. Officers will present a verbal update to Members on the status of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD.
- 4.39 Planning & Development Committee Members have been made aware of the SPD and the process as it has developed since 2020–21.
- 4.40 Any comments and suggestions made at Planning & Development Committee on 10 January 2023 will inform any final decision made by Executive.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The costs associated with producing and consulting on the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD will be met from the agreed departmental budget.
- 5.2 Any potential schemes that are mentioned in the SPD will need to be subject to a business case and / or will require third party funding.

### **Legal Implications**

- 5.3 Consultation on the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD was undertaken in accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.
- 5.4 The outcomes of consultation were conscientiously considered in finalising the SPD, taking responses into account prior to approval by the Executive.

### **Risk Implications**

- 5.5 There are no significant risks associated with producing the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD.

### **Policy Implications**

- 5.6 The Stevenage Design Guidance SPD accords with, and has been produced to supplement policies in, the adopted Stevenage Local Plan (2019).

### **Planning Implications**

- 5.7 The Stevenage Design Guidance SPD will supplement the adopted Stevenage Local Plan (2019).
- 5.8 If adopted after consultation, the document will not form part of the Development Plan for Stevenage. However, it will be a material consideration for planning applications.
- 5.9 The adoption of the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD on 30 January 2023 would position the Council very strongly, ahead of the proposed Planning Reforms by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities as referred to in paragraphs 3.8 to 3.11 of this Report.

### **Climate Change Implications**

- 5.10 The Stevenage Design Guidance SPD has the potential to have a positive impact on climate change through the multiple benefits that prioritising the design of development and incorporating innovative technologies.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.11 The Stevenage Design Guidance SPD does not have any direct equality or diversity implications. When implementing any of the proposals the delivery

body will need to consider the potential impacts on different community groups, in particular those who are less mobile or disabled.

### **Community Safety Implications**

- 5.12 Whilst the Stevenage Design Guidance SPD does not have any direct community safety implications itself, when implementing any proposals, the delivery body will need to consider potential impacts on community safety.

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

- BD1 Stevenage Borough Local Plan, 2011–2031
- BD2 Stevenage Design Guide 2009
- BD3 “Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill: Planning and Local Control in England” (Secretary of State of Communities and Local Government, 5 December 2022)
- BD4 “Creating Beautiful, Popular, Healthy and Sustainable Places” (Secretary of State of Communities and Local Government, 1 December 2022)
- BD5 Stevenage Parking Provision and Sustainable Transport Supplementary Planning Document (October 2020)
- BD6 Stevenage The Impact of Development on Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document (March 2021)
- BD7 Stevenage Local List of Heritage Assets (last updated March 2022)
- BD8 Stevenage Public Realm Design Guide (2019)
- BD9 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Executive, Item 9: Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document 2021: Public Consultation Feedback (February 2022)
- BD10 Meeting of the Stevenage Borough Council Executive, Item 6: Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document 2021: Public Consultation (July 2021)

## **APPENDICES**

- A Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Final Version (December 2022)
- B Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Tracked Changes Version (December 2022)
- C Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Consultation Statement (for consultation held between 19 September to 31 October 2022)
- D Stevenage Design Guidance Supplementary Planning Document: Draft Adoption Statement