

Cabinet Report



Listening Learning Leading



Report of Head of Planning

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Wards affected: South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse Districts

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To: CABINET

Dates: 23 June (South) and 24 June (Vale)

Joint Design Guide

Recommendations

- (a) To adopt the Joint Design Guide for South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district councils as a Supplementary Planning Document ([Joint Design Guide website](#)).
- (b) To delegate authority to the Head of Planning, in consultation with the Cabinet Members for Planning (South) and Corporate Services and Transformation (Vale), to make necessary minor amendments or typographical corrections to the Supplementary Planning Document, prior to publication and undertake any factual updates thereafter (e.g. web links and live neighbourhood plan maps).

Purpose of report

1. Following public consultation, Cabinet is asked to consider comments made about the draft Joint Design Guide supplementary planning document (SPD), agree proposed changes and consider the adoption of the document.

Corporate objectives

2. Three key objectives in the Vale Corporate Plan (2020-2024) that are relevant to the Joint Design Guide are 'Providing the homes people need'; 'Tackling the climate emergency' and 'Building healthy communities'; whilst the four themes relevant to the design guide from the South Corporate Plan are 'Protect and restore our natural world'; 'Action on the climate emergency', 'Improved economic and community well-being' and 'Homes and infrastructure that meet local needs'.

Background

3. In April 2020 it was agreed to produce a new Joint Design Guide that would replace each councils' existing design guides. The aim was to provide an up-to-date, innovative, concise, engaging and interactive document. The new guide would then be used as a tool to ensure developers design and build high quality schemes that respect the local context in the districts of South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse.
4. The draft guide was subject to 4 weeks internal consultation and 8 weeks public consultation. As part of the internal consultation, officers from various council departments and District Councillors were consulted. As part of the external consultation, all relevant statutory consultees and those listed on our register of consultees were notified. There was a page on both our websites with a link to the online version of the draft guide. Social media promoted the consultation and reminders were sent throughout the consultation period. Hard copies of the guide were also available to view in libraries in the main deposit locations (Benson, Berinsfield, Chinnor, Didcot, Goring, Henley, Thame, Wallingford, Watlington, Wheatley, Woodcote, Abingdon, Botley, Faringdon, Grove, Kennington, and Wantage).
5. We received 189 responses, including from local residents, statutory consultees and interest groups. Overall, the consultation feedback has been positive and constructive, and the guide has been amended to incorporate and respond to the submitted relevant comments. The most frequently made comments were:
 - that the guide focused on major development,
 - more guidance was needed on smaller scale/ rural development,
 - more information on householder/ permitted development,
 - improvement needed around navigation,
 - the guide was text heavy,
 - the pictures needed to be more relevant,
 - more guidance needed on renewable sites and domestic scale renewable technologies, and;
 - requests to add references to neighbourhood plans.
6. A report summarising the consultation responses and an officer response can be found at Appendix A2 of the consultation report (which can be found in Appendix A of Cabinet Report, April 2022).
7. The main changes proposed comprise:
 - breaking down the website to make it easier to digest;
 - source more relevant pictures to illustrate principles;
 - reference neighbourhood plans;

- provide further annotations and explanations to diagrams and drawings;
- provide some guidance on design considerations for renewable energy generation sites;
- review language and signpost to glossary;
- illustrate which principles are relevant to small and large scale developments;
- illustrate how the principles of the guide apply to smaller/ rural development;
- provide references/paragraph numbers throughout supporting text; and improve user experience around navigation.

8. A link to the new Joint Design Guide can be found [here](https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/Guide/JDG.html). Full address: <https://data.southoxon.gov.uk/Guide/JDG.html>

9. Cabinet is asked to consider the adoption of the revised joint design guide. If agreed, it will then become a material consideration when making planning decisions at both councils, such as determining planning applications.

Options

10. An option would be to continue using the current South Oxfordshire Design Guide SPD 2016 and Vale of White Horse Design Guide SPD 2015. These documents do not reflect current best practice or development pressures in the districts. The Vale's current guide is long (243 pages) and can be difficult to engage and absorb all the relevant information in such a large document. Neither of the current design guides have specific sustainability and climate sections which does not acknowledge the current climate emergencies declared by both district councils and ecological emergency declared at South Oxfordshire.

11. A more concise, up to date, visually stimulating and innovative web-based guide is suggested. The new guide is easier to read and follow, and the well-established design principles within it are relevant to all scales of development. The new guide follows a different structure from the existing guides, aligning with the National Design Guide themes, taking the reader through a logical design process, and providing them with the information they will need to design, assess and recognise high quality sustainable development.

Climate and ecological impact implications

12. The new Joint Design Guide contains a specific section on the natural environment and climate and sustainability. The Guide will therefore help design proposals to have a positive impact on reducing carbon emissions and in turn help address our corporate plan objectives within both districts.

Financial implications

13. Any council decision that has financial implications must be made with the knowledge of the councils' overarching financial position. For South, the position reflected in the councils' medium-term financial plan (MTFP) as reported to Full Council in February 2022 showed that it is due to receive £2.1 million less in revenue funding than it plans to spend in 2022/23. For Vale, a balanced budget was set in 2022/23 but there is expected to be a budget gap in future years.

14. The funding gap at both councils is predicted to increase to over £3 million by 2026/27. As there remains no certainty on future local government funding, following the

announcement of a one-year spending review by government, and as the long-term financial consequences of the Coronavirus pandemic remain unknown, this gap could increase further. Every financial decision made needs to be cognisant of the need to address the funding gap in future years.

15. Producing the joint design guide has been inhouse and within existing planning budgets. There are no ongoing financial implications in agreeing a supplementary planning document.

Legal implications

16. Preparation of the SPD must be in compliance with the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012, the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes (Amendment) Regulations 2020 and paragraph 129 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Risks

17. This is a project with minimal risks and limited consequences, especially as the service has undertaken both internal and external public consultation and sought to address any issues raised throughout the consultation period.

Other considerations

18. Strategic Environmental Assessment: National planning guidance advises that SPDs do not require a sustainability appraisal, but may in exceptional circumstances require a strategic environmental assessment if they are likely to have significant environmental effects that have not already have been assessed during the preparation of the relevant strategic policies. The Design Guide SPD provides additional advice and guidance to the policies contained within the South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse Local Plans. It does not expand the impact or effects of the policies in the local plan. The document is not strategic in nature, focussing on matters of design only. It is therefore unlikely to have significant environmental effects beyond those already identified and assessed as part of the local plan's preparation. The council has not therefore produced a strategic environmental assessment for this SPD.
19. Following the publication of the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Bill, once it becomes an Act, Members may wish to consider a review of the Joint Design Guide (or parts of it) to move it from a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to a proposed Supplementary Plan. This would enable the Joint Design Guide to be afforded more weight thereby reducing any ambiguity that can arise with the status of SPDs.

Conclusion

20. The Joint Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document will be a useful tool for designers, developers, officers, councillors and the public by setting out the councils' expectations for high quality design and sustainability in developments and how to achieve this.
21. It is therefore recommended that the amended Joint Design Guide as set out on the website is adopted.

Background papers and link

- Appendix A: Joint Design Guide Consultation Report 2022