SPD on Design Quality – production and training

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor George Clements

LEAD OFFICER: Julie Betteridge

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PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update members on the progress and evolving content of the Design Quality SPD.

To approve the commissioning of a training and consultation exercise facilitated by 'Places Matter'.

To consider the structure of the exercise.

RECOMMENDATION

That progress on production of the SPD be noted.

That expenditure on the exercise of £2700 plus expenses be approved.

1.   Introduction

1.1   Production is currently under way of a Supplementary Planning Document covering the topic of design. The purpose of the SPD will be to

- give clarity to the interpretation of Core Strategy policy on design matters, when dealing with planning applications;
- set a framework enabling us to take a stronger line on the quality of development;
- establish a culture which notes and respects the distinctiveness of the Borough, its towns and its localities;
- extend and update guidance given to applicants, particularly householders, on what the Council is looking for and what they need to know (for instance, regarding Design and Access Statements, or Permitted Development rights).

2. The timetable

2.1 The Local Development Scheme proposes that a draft should be published for consultation during late summer 2012, and adoption around the end of the year (though this may be affected by the level of work on the examination of the Core Strategy).

3. Progress so far

3.1 We are currently in the first stage of consultation. The initial exercise consisted of a presentation to the agents' forum, where there was strong support for the ideas of giving more guidance and focusing on design quality. Discussions with the Development Management team have led to a proposed document with the following characteristics:

1. descriptive guidelines on architectural quality and local distinctiveness across the Borough, with its very varied environments;
2. guidance relating to particular types of development, such as housing, employment, shops, advertising;
3. particular design topics such as 'public realm' and 'pre cent for art';
4. quality-related themes – Building for Life, Lifetime Homes standards, sustainable development;
5. assistance on technical aspects, especially Design and Access Statements and more detailed written guidance to householders to supplement the support already given.

4. Next steps; developing awareness

4.1 The SPD will be better and more effective if it has cross-Borough support and is put into operation by members and officers with a clear understanding of its principles.

4.2 It is therefore proposed that, before the Consultation Draft is finalised, a short programme of training and awareness raising be carried out. This would have two elements.

- Firstly, for joint officer-member participation, a training exercise designed to get us thinking about how we approach design quality in planning decision-making.
- Secondly, seminars for 'stakeholders' across the Borough, to get locality-based views on what should be cherished and encouraged.

4.3 Expressions of interest were sought from Places Matter and the Civic Trust. A bid has been received from the former, using a facilitator with experience in West Cumbria (see below).

5. Programme details

5.1   The bid (full text appended) proposes the following:

1. Half day or evening open sessions, aimed particularly at people active in Locality Partnerships but open to all, in four locations across the Borough (Howgate/Distington, Egremont, Cleator Moor and Millom, with mid Copeland and South Copeland covered at Egremont and/or Millom).
2. A 'plenary' half day for 'decision makers' following up the area sessions.
3. A 'Design and Decisions' day for Councillors (especially those involved in planning (development management) and LDF.

5.2   The cost of this will be £2,700, plus expenses. There are funds available in the LDF budget to meet this.

5.3   It is intended that the officer/member exercise be supplemented by exercises focused on getting out and about – probably beyond Copeland – to see examples of quality design and how other authorities foster it.

Making better places in Copeland: a proposal

'Design is a creative process by which complex issues are resolved in order to produce a product that is fit for purpose. Design, when applied to the physical environment, affects everybody's lives. Beautiful places give pleasure and create lasting economic value. Bad design, by contrast, can blight places over a lengthy period of time. Good design when embedded in an effective planning system, binds individual buildings and spaces into functional and sustainable neighbourhoods.'

'The real impact of design in the built environment is felt not only through major projects, but by the design of everyday places and buildings.' [1]

Purpose

The purpose of the Making Better Places programme proposed in this paper is to inform the drafting and agreement of a Design Supplementary Planning Document [Design SPD] by Copeland Borough Council.

Outcomes

The overall aim is to develop planning guidance which gives clear advice to everyone involved with change in the built and natural environment on the Council's approach to design as a significant factor in its use of the planning system to enhance the future prosperity and well being of Copeland as a place to live, work, invest and visit.

The key output of the programme will be to contribute to a Design SPD that is:

- Rooted in and reflects what local people value in their environment
- Respects and responds to the special and distinctive character of Copeland
- Appreciated as significant and valuable by the people who are responsible for planning decisions affecting the future of Copeland

The programme is also intended to increase awareness amongst Council members, staff, local residents and other stakeholders of the impact of decisions made about design on the future prosperity of the borough and the well-being of its people and communities.

Process and Schedule

There are various possible strands that could be included in the programme:

1   Area based 'open sessions'

- Hold half day afternoon or evening sessions in each of the districts excluding Whitehaven i.e. North East Copeland; West Copeland; Mid Copeland; and South Copeland [2]

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[1] Para 2.1. and 2.6. Executive Summary Bishop Review The Future of Design in the Built Environment October 2011

[2] Initially we had discussed using only three areas with West Copeland and Mid Copeland taken together: however is this desirable or feasible logistically given each area has its own centre of population?

- Open access for 'drop in' by 'active citizens'
- Advertise through partnership with local newspaper / radio and use social media/Council website to advertise and receive comment
- Focus on 'What is special and distinctive about where we live .....' possibly using a simple 'past / present / future' framework and 'What is the USP' of each area and Copeland as a whole?
- Need an accessible venue at largest centre of population in each area: preferably somewhere people use as a matter of course e.g. an empty shop in a shopping centre, a library or other community or public space
- Have large sheets with concise explanation of the purpose of the session, what happens to the ideas and comments given by people attending etc.
- This is a structured consultation to record people's views and opinions on the issues to be addressed in the Design SPD. People will also be able to add 'any other points' which they feel are important and that might not 'fit' into the structured questions. People will be able to write directly onto large sheets of paper and onto sticky notes; talk to members of staff from Copeland BC and the Places Matter! facilitator who will simply record what they want to say if this is helpful; people should also be able to write directly on 'postcards' and place into boxes provided if they prefer.
- Supporting material:
  - Large map/s of the area, the borough and its context in Cumbria
  - Large aerial photograph of the area if feasible from Google Maps or similar
  - Large sheets of paper that can be stuck to the walls of the shop/venue – at least flip chart sheet size
  - Sticky notes/ picture postcards of places in Copeland [or blank cards if not available]/ large quantities of felt tip pens in different colours and biros/pencils
  - Chairs and small tables for people to sit at and write
  - Refreshments: biscuits and drinks suitable for adults and children if possible
  - Documents or other material that the LA or partners want to display

This could be supplemented by combining open access with direct invitation of some agencies or interests. Copeland could compile a shortlist of people/ agencies in each area with a particular interest e.g. developers, community groups, Civic Trust, local history society, schools, young people's groups, farmers, architects, Chamber of Commerce, individual businesses, notably Sellafield Ltd. and so on and invite them to attend the session by direct email/letter so that there is a strong possibility of getting a good cross section of people with different interests as well as the 'self selected' individual.

The timing of these sessions could be for e.g.
Day 1
North: in the afternoon
Central: in the evening: although the evening in February may be problematic because of disincentive of dark evenings for some older and younger people
Day 2
Ditto for the other two areas

Area based 'open sessions' plus decision maker event

As above but supplement in each of the 4 areas with a follow up 2 hour session specifically for 'decision makers' [Councillors/ officers] and 'stakeholders' [Developers/ business interest/ architects/ agencies with interest in natural and built environment and including local community networks in each district] for a more structured event. This may have the benefit over the open session on its own of allowing 'design training' information and awareness raising about the importance of design to be targeted at the groups/individuals who will have most influence over the success or otherwise of the SPD in practice.

e.g. Topics could include:
- What do we mean by good design?
- How does design affect me/my agency?
- What is special and distinctive about this area?
- Present outcomes from the open consultation in their area
- What happens next in drafting the SPD?

If this approach was considered useful, the logistics and affordability could be improved by holding a single session for representatives from all four areas *plus* the Whitehaven area: bringing all the 'decision makers' and 'stakeholders' in one place to talk together.

The outcomes from all the sessions will be written up in concise accessible format and/or PP slide presentation: this generally involves transcribing and analysis of comments, drawing out the significant issues and themes arising from the consultation.

2   'Design + Decisions' Day: 1 full day

Follow the completion of the area-based sessions with a day specifically for Copeland Councillors – whether on the planning committee or not - and planning officers:

Programme for the day could include – to be agreed:

Design e.g.
Design – assumptions and principles – presentation.
How do you spot good design?
It's not only about the 'way things look' but also about the creative process by which complex issues are resolved and so on as set out in, for example, the Executive Summary of Bishop Review.

Decision making e.g. how councillors play a crucial part in making good decisions about design
Letting people off the 'taste' hook – it's ok to dislike something whilst acknowledging that the way it looks is good for the area and the place
Case studies – presented on PP or trip to appropriate place/s in Cumbria if time allows

What do people in Copeland think is special and distinctive in the environments where they live and work?
PP presentation of feedback/ key messages about design in the built and natural environment of Copeland derived from area meetings: prepared by SM and

clustered into themes or topics through discussion with CB, which could translate into the content of the SPD

SOAR exercise:
Strengths **O**pportunities **A**spirations **R**esults: for design in Copeland to confirm the principle messages that members and officers – drawing on the consultation material from the open sessions combined with their own views and experience – feel are important messages to be included within the SPD.
e.g. 'Having heard what people have said across the borough and drawing on our own knowledge of Copeland we think that developers in Copeland should take account of .....'

The next steps:
Clarify for members and officers 'what happens next' in terms of the drafting and formal approval process
Confirm what their role/s are and how they can contribute
Identify a small group that might carry on an active involvement of some kind as the drafting of the SPD proceeds – with clear 'things to do': suggested only if this might be supportive of CB in drafting, securing approval and then implementing the SPD.

Costs
Day rate: Places Matter! Standard facilitator day fee £450
Plus reasonable and necessarily incurred travel and other expenses: expenses to be agreed prior to commencement of work.

4 x Half-day area sessions = 2 days
1 x Half-day decision makers and stakeholder session = 0.5 days
1 x Day Members and officers session = 1 day
1 x Day: Preparation including drafting framework and programme detail, preparing PP and texts for use in area sessions and press/media
[Facilitator to liaise with Borough Press Officer: latter to set up and place any advertisement/editorial]
1 x Day: transcription and analysis into agreed format of material from the consultation sessions
1 x Half day: Preparation for Members and officer training day

Total: 6 days / £2,700 plus expenses

Associated costs such as paper, pens and other materials / venue hire [if needed] or press/media costs excluded.
It is assumed that the facilitator will be joined at each session by at least one person from the Copeland planning team who will take an active part in the process.
The facilitator is not VAT registered.   **END**