

JOINT DEVELOPMENT CONTROL COMMITTEE (CAMBRIDGE FRINGE SITES)

Report by: HEAD OF PLANNING
SERVICES

16 May 2012

Parishes/Wards affected: ALL

REPORT TITLE: DESIGN CODES FOR STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT SITES WITHIN THE CAMBRIDGE FRINGE AREAS– INFORMAL GUIDANCE NOTE

1. Executive summary

- 1.1. This report provides an explanation of the attached guidance note entitled “Design Codes for Strategic Development Sites within the Cambridge Fringe Areas– Informal Guidance Note”.
- 1.2. Since August 2007, both Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC) have required design codes for the urban extension developments in the City Fringes. Equally, it is expected that the new town of Northstowe will be “coded”.
- 1.3. This report provides an overview of the attached guidance note in respect of the preparation, content, consultation, approval and monitoring of design codes in the Cambridge Fringe areas. The guidance note represents an update to a previous “briefing note” prepared by officers in 2007 (not approved by the Joint Development Control Committee (JDCC) as it had not yet been constituted at the time).
- 1.4. The guidance note will need to be approved separately by the Northstowe Joint Development Control Committee in due course –at which point it would be appropriate to amend the title of the document to include specific reference to Northstowe. In other respects the document has been drafted with the view that it will be applicable to Northstowe as well.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To agree the use of the updated document: “Design Codes for Strategic Development Sites with the Cambridge Fringe Areas” as informal guidance for the preparation of future design codes for the Cambridge Fringe site developments.

3. Background

- 3.1. Design codes are not new to the Cambridge Fringe areas. Since 2010, there have already been two Design Codes approved by the JDCC. This informal guidance note represents provides an update to an earlier briefing note originally prepared jointly by officers at Cambridge City Council and SCDC. The note cites, and is largely based upon, best practice and government guidance and the original 2007 document is still largely relevant to today's circumstances.
- 3.3. The note explains the process for the preparation of design codes for members, officers and the public, but its primary target audience is developers and their consulting teams. Design coding is a complex technical exercise, involving a range of built environment specialists on a range of topic areas; the guidance is an attempt to clarify key questions before any work begins on a design code.
- 3.4. This updated version of the original 2007 briefing note addresses the important lessons learned since the preparation and approval of the first design code for the Cambridge Fringe areas, the Trumpington Meadows Design Code. More specifically, the guidance note explains that codes should now, amongst other things, focus on the following:
 - Be shorter and more succinct
 - Code for site specific features in a more detailed fashion
 - Fix key elements in respect of movement, blocks and open spaces at the code stage
 - Be underpinned by a proving layout
 - Not be overly demanding of Council officer time and input
- 3.5. Upcoming design codes to be presented to the JDCC are expected to include the NIAB 1 Design Code and the Northwest Cambridge Design Code(s). Additionally, the new town of Northstowe is expected to be coded, and at the appropriate meeting (date to be agreed) a report including the guidance attached will be presented for the consideration of the Joint Development Control Committee for Northstowe.

4. Consultation

- 4.1. Officers in City and SCDC urban design teams and the New Neighbourhoods and New Communities teams have jointly prepared the attached guidance note. In preparing it, officers also reviewed the progress and content of design codes with the Cambridgeshire Quality Panel. Their feedback and suggestions are reflected in the updated

guidance. Equally, through numerous meetings and communications with developers and their consulting teams over the past four years, officers have learned from experience what has worked, and what has not and embedded the lessons learned from that work in the current guidance.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. The JDCC is therefore recommended to agree the attached informal guidance note which provides an updated, detailed and clear explanation of how to prepare design codes for the Cambridge Fringe site developments, all underpinned by experience of coding locally since 2007.

6. Implications

6.1 Financial Implication

The preparation of design codes requires a significant amount of officer time and resource, significantly over and above what would otherwise be covered by the standard fees that would be applicable for discharges of conditions. The issue of recovering local authority officer costs in relation to design coding processes will therefore be considered on a case by case basis. The cost of preparing the actual code itself is borne by the developer in respect of consultant fees, consultation exercises, printing and distribution.

6.2 Staff Implications

As noted in 6.1, a significant amount of staff resource from several services is required to support the negotiation, review and approval of a design code. In future the Councils will have to be efficient with officer time and input to coding, however it is expected that with the advent of potentially charging for officer time as noted in section 6.1, developers will be more efficient in respect of time needed when they request officer input.

6.3. Equal Opportunities Implications

None.

6.4. Environmental Implications

The effective application of this informal guidance through to implementation will assist the delivery of high quality, sustainable environments within the Cambridge Fringe site developments.

6.5. Community Safety

None.

7. Background papers

These background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Design Codes for Major Development Sites within the Cambridge Area
(October 2007)

8. Appendices

Appendix A – Design Codes for Strategic Development Sites within the
Cambridge Fringe Areas – Informal Guidance Note (Updated version, May
2012)

9. Inspection of papers

To inspect the background papers or if you have a query on the report
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