Design

Background

Well-designed places and buildings are not just about aesthetically pleasing places, but about improving the quality of life of our communities, helping create economic and social value by improving sustainability, access, and connectivity. The planning system currently manages the design through strategic and non-strategic policies in development plans. These are supported by Supplementary Planning Documents, Design Guides, and Design Codes. It is clear that the Government places design quality at the heart of planning, with the recent publications of Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC).,The National Design Guide, and National Model Design Code and the recent additions to the NPPF.

The design of buildings and places not only has a key role to play in the aesthetics, character and sense of place but is also a tool in the fight against climate change, which can help places mitigate and adapt to a changing climate. Well-designed places can help promote sustainable patterns of development and influence layout, materials and the siting of development. This will help improve buildings efficiency and energy use which will help to reduce carbon emissions and waste.

Herefordshire is predominately a rural county with several historic market towns and a historic cathedral city. Townscape and building design vary throughout the county, in its towns and villages which have been shaped and developed over time and are all locally distinctive. In 2021, Herefordshire participated in the Herefordshire Design Code Pilot, where Design Codes were tested on a local scale with several parishes. It is anticipated that local communities will be able to develop their own local Design Codes for their parish/town to help define their local character and distinctiveness. It is also expected to have an overarching Design Code for Herefordshire.

In 2019 Herefordshire Council declared a climate emergency and committed to becoming a carbon-neutral county by 2030. Following this planning guidance was urgently required to help shape development in the direction of zero carbon and nature-rich development. The Environmental Buildings Standards Supplementary Planning Document was developed to promote the highest standards of sustainable design through setting out best practice recommendations. It is anticipated the revised design policies will focus on higher environmental standards for developments.

The following sets out how design is addressed through the County Plan and the Local Plan's new vision and objectives.

Herefordshire County Plan

The County Plan, published in January 2020, sets out how the council intends to accomplish its environmental, social and economic ambitions over the next four years. The County Plan vision states that '*Herefordshire will be an exemplar of 21st century rural living, where rural settlements and market towns have resilient communities*'.

Design is key to place making, this helps improve the quality of the built and natural environment as well as the lifestyles for people who live and work in them. Innovative and sustainable building design can help Hereford for 21st century living.

Local Plan Draft Vision

The Local Plan 2021-2041 draft vision highlights the importance of creating an environment to enable residents to have an '*exceptional quality of life and to live and travel in a more sustainable way*'.

It also emphasises the importance of good quality housing and inclusive infrastructure to enable people to live healthy and active lives. Good design is a key tool in creating more accessible, healthier and sustainable places that will improve people's quality of life.

Local Plan Draft Objectives

The Local Plan environmental draft objectives 5 and 9 place a strong emphasis on well-designed, sustainable and efficient places:

- To ensure high-quality design of buildings and spaces that takes into account local character and heritage, in order to create attractive and inclusive places;
- To ensure that development is located and designed in a way that requires less energy use and to increase the amount of energy generated from renewable sources, with a requirement for all new development to be net zero carbon by 2030.

National Guidance

The Government has recently increased its focus on design quality, wishing to see an improvement in the design of new development and to put 'beauty at the heart of the Planning System' in response to this the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission (BBBBC). The commission had 3 primary aims:

- To promote better design and style of homes, villages, towns and high streets, to reflect what communities want, building on the knowledge and tradition of what they know works for their area;
- To explore how new settlements can be developed with greater community consent
- To make the planning system work in support of better design and style, not against it.

A final report Living with beauty highlighted the importance of well-designed, beautiful and safe places to help achieve sustainable development. Several changes have been made to the national guidance in July 2021, placing greater emphasis on high-quality design. It also encourages Local Authorities to prepare Design Guides and Codes with a focus on community engagement when developing design policies.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021

The NPPF places great emphasis on high-quality design which is key to what the planning and development should aim to achieve.

Achieving well-designed places sets out expectations for high-quality places and advises to provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage. The NPPF recommends that all Local Planning Authorities should produce Design Guides consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.

National guidance recommends that Local Planning Authorities give significant weight to development that reflects local design policies and Government guidance on design, as well as Design Guides and Codes. Significant weight should also be given to developments that show outstanding and innovate design, or that helps to raise the standard of design in keeping with an area. It also advises Local Planning Authorities to refuse permission for developments that are poorly designed, especially where if does not reflect local design policies and Government guidance.

Meeting the challenge of climate change, flooding, and coastal change is a key feature in national guidance. The guidance encourages the planning system to transition into a low carbon future to help shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.

National Planning Policy Guidance (PPG)

The PPG has been amended to place emphasis to encourage high-quality design and set out further guidance to ensure developments take a proactive and collaborative approach at all stages of the planning process, from policy and plan formulation through to the determination of planning applications and the post-approval stage.

National Design Guide (NDG) 2020

The National Design Guide demonstrates the Government's priorities for well-designed places setting out how beautiful, well-designed places can be achieved in practice. The guide sets out ten characteristics. That can help inform place making that is beautiful, healthy, greener, and successful can be achieved in practice.

National Model Design Code (NMDC) 2021

Following the National Design Guide, the National Model Design Code was published in 2021. This establishes the ten characteristics of well-designed places and demonstrates what good design means in practice. The National Model Design Code and Guide is part of a wider strategy set out in 'Living with Beauty' report published in January 2020. This forms part of the national planning practice guidance and is to be used alongside the planning practice guidance notes.

The guide sets out 10 design characteristics for well-designed places. That are context, identity, built form, movement, nature, public spaces, uses, homes and buildings, resources and lifespan. Design coding is a tool to help define high-quality design-this tool can be utilised by local planning authorities, developers and local communities.



National Model Design Code -The 10 characteristics of well-designed places

Emerging Future Homes Standards (2020) & Future Buildings Standards (2021)

The Future Homes Standard Consultation 2020, proposes building regulations set out higher building requirements to reduce carbon emissions and waste. The new standards set out in this are:

- Buildings to have a 31% reduction in CO2 from 2021 (interim standards);
- New homes should reduce CO2 emission by at least 75% from 2025;
- No new gas central heating in new homes from 2025;
- Councils can set out more ambitious local targets. For example Herefordshire Council could set out they want to have zero carbon homes rather than zero carbon ready homes.

The Future Buildings Standards made changes to ensure new developments are ‘carbon zero ready’. This is proposed as a minimum standard and it does not prevent Local Authorities from requiring energy efficiency standards above Building Regulations.

Housing Act and Technical Guidance on Space Standards

This document sets out minimum space standards for internal spaces for new dwellings suitable for all tenures. This is not a building regulation but remains within the planning system as a new form of technical planning standard. Requirements are set out to ensure internal rooms are appropriately sized and suitable for human habitation.

Other emerging guidance and legislation to consider are:

- Herefordshire is developing a retrofit guidance documents for a Net Zero Carbon Toolkit;
- The Environment Act 2021 - sets out zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Local Considerations

Existing evidence tells us:

- Climate emergency and aim to get to carbon zero by 2050 needs to be addressed and realised in design policy;
- The existing Core Strategy policies SD1 and LD1 requires updating to reflect the changes to the National Planning Policy Framework;
- The greater emphasis on design within the National Model Design Code and National Model Design Guide need to be reflected;
- The lessons learned from the National Model Design Code Testing pilot need to be reflected.

Feedback from Development Management and Town and Parish Councils raise some areas where the current policy can be improved. Areas for improving the current design policy are detailed below.

- Design policies should place greater emphasis on design, strive for low/zero carbon design, energy-efficient buildings that minimise waste reflecting the current climate context;
- Design policies need to be updated in line with changes to National Guidance;
- Design policies to be updated incorporate Housing Act and Technical Guidance on Space Standards into design policies;
- Further detail included in design policies/codes- to set out local distinctiveness/ provide design solutions for local issues;
- Policies to sit more closely with transportation policies/integration of these;
- State the density for schemes. This has been raised by parishes in rural areas;
- Inclusive design policy for all, including design for gender and disabled people;
- Designing safe spaces and minimising opportunities for crime.

Evidence Base

- Environmental Building Standards Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) sets out best practice guidance to improve efficiency and quality of design through sustainable development. A draft document has been published for public consultation.
- Hereford Design Guide SPD sets out design guidance in Hereford City and its historic core, transport also includes a historic characterisation assessment. A draft document was published in 2019, this is currently being updated.
- Herefordshire Future Homes. This is guidance for developing low carbon council-built homes in Herefordshire.
- Hereford Local Design Code Guidance. This is guidance formed of notes and templates covering the National Model Design Code characteristics of good design, and how this can be used by parish and town councils to develop their own design codes.

Existing Policy

The Core Strategy includes a specific design policy Sustainable Design and Energy Efficiency SD1. This policy is a high-level policy for a large topic area, specific detail and local detail are included in Supplementary Planning Documents, Hereford Design Guide, and Environmental Building Standards SPD along with 113 Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs); most of which include specific design policy. However, there are areas where there are policy gaps in local policy, particularly those areas without an NDP.

This policy approach requires updating, not only to address the changes in national policy and guidance regarding the emphasis on place-shaping design, but also modernised space standards and to formally address the climate emergency.

The first part of the Landscape and Townscape policy LD1, positively influences developments ensuring protection and enhancement of settlements and designated areas. The townscape element could be explored further and include more locally specific guidance for schemes.

Design Policy Options

D1 - A general strategic policy covering the county, supported by local policies in Neighbourhood Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents

This option would see an updated general strategic design policy within the Local Plan supported by local design policies in Neighbourhood Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents (Hereford Design Guide and Environmental Building Standards SPD).

This policy will update the strategic policy in line with the changes to national guidance. Detailed inclusive design criteria covering local issues will continue to feature in Neighbourhood Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents.

D2 - A strategic policy supported by local parish level Design Codes

This option would see an updated general strategic design policy within the Local Plan supported by local design codes at a parish and town level. At a city level, Design Codes will be informed by the Hereford Design Guide SPD.

This has been developed following Herefordshire participating in the Design Code Pilot with the Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities to test the application of the National Model Design Code and have developed guidance and worksheets for parishes to use to develop their own local Design Code. These local codes will vary and be reflective of their local area, most codes cover the character and appearance of area, character and context of the built and natural environments such as typography, historic uses, facilities, green spaces, movement in the area, suitability, and energy.

D3 - Additional specific Hereford and Market Towns strategic design policy supported by Design Code in rural areas

This option would see an additional strategic policy to set design criteria and guidance for Hereford and market towns. This will be supported by parish Design Codes to inform design in the rural areas.

This will provide design criteria for the urban areas in Herefordshire covering Hereford and the market towns. Criteria could cover design issues that feature in urban areas such as the character and design of townscape, high street character, criteria for large sites as well as criteria for extensions and annexes.

D4- Additional policy criteria specifically focussing on environmental building standards, transport and active travel and open space standards

In addition to a strategic overarching design policy, this option would provide additional policy for sustainable and energy-efficient design in new development and reference to retrofit guidance.

This will set out criteria so new development can be developed in the most efficient and low carbon way. This policy could set out higher and more ambitious targets to achieve higher environmental building standards in the county.

This will revise the policy in line with the national guidance as well as space standards and reference to internal room sizes and density, inclusivity and will integrate elements of sustainable transport into the design sections, placing greater emphasis on accessibility and active travel in line with guidance set out in the Manual for Streets Compendium.