DAVID LOCK ASSOCIATES

# BRIEFING NOTE

**SPEL04 Spelthorne Design Code**

**05.08.2024**

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**Shared Definition of the Design Code**

Authority-wide design coding is a relatively new policy tool in the English planning system. DLUHC's Pathfinder programme has found that design codes produced considering the National Model Design Code have varied considerably in scope, specificity and application.

Agreeing at a very early stage a shared definition of design coding and what the Spelthorne Design Code will do is essential to the success of Spelthorne's Design Code, to align members, officers, the public (who will input into the development of the code) and the consultant team.

This note sets out a draft position of what the Spelthorne Design Code should be, for discussion and endorsement by the Project Board.

**What the code will do**

A proposed definition that can be used throughout all engagement and to help define the project is set out below:

> *"The Spelthorne Design Code will set out the design requirements for proposed new development in the borough. It will ensure that new development is locally supported, sustainable and functions well for all its users.*
>
> *The Design Code will be used to determine whether planning applications are acceptable in design terms, and will support the emerging Spelthorne Local Plan. It will contain simple, concise, illustrated design requirements for streets, open spaces and buildings. It will also set out expectations for the process to be followed when proposals are designed. It will be based on wide-ranging input including that from the local community, other stakeholders and wider understanding of the places within the borough, to ensure it is locally-supported, robust and can be used in practice."*

The table below sets out in more detail the topics that will be covered by the design code as the primary planning policy tool, and areas that are better suited to other policy tools.

| Topic | Design Code | Other Relevant Policy Tools |
|---|---|---|
| Development Locations & Amount/Quantum | | **Local Plan Policies** |
| Affordable Housing | | **Local Plan Policy**<br>**Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** |
| Infrastructure Provision | | **Infrastructure Delivery Plan** |
| Open Space Provision Standards | | **Local Plan Policy**<br>**Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)** |

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|---|---|---|
| Open Space Design | **Yes** | |
| Street Design | **Yes** | Surrey Healthy Streets Design Code (Surrey County Council) |
| Layout Design | **Yes** | |
| Densities and Heights | **Yes** – should set out design parameters that can make different development densities and heights work successfully<br>- Can set out acceptable density measures (eg Floor Area Ratio) or acceptable heights in different area types and locations. Coding requirements for density or height measures for allocated sites should ensure anticipated capacity can be delivered.<br>The design code can set out how to deliver higher densities with lower building heights, if this is appropriate for the area and supported by a community-led vision. | **Local Plan Policy** sets out anticipated capacities of allocated sites. |
| Building Design & Environmental Sustainability | **Yes** | Building Regulations (national) Climate Change Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) |
| Water & Flooding | **Yes** - design parameters for the sustainable and effective handling of surface water and how to consider water-related issues | **Local Plan Policy** where flooding issues form a constraint to development |
| Stewardship / Management | **Yes** - where design decisions have an impact on long-term management, e.g. higher density mixed use | |
| Permitted Development Rights | | General Permitted Development Order (GPDO) Regulations (national) |
| Active & Sustainable Transport Provision | **Yes** - spatial/design requirements only | Surrey Local Transport Plan 4 (Surrey County Council) |

**Design Process**

The design code will also include clear information on the work that applicants should undertake as part of a considered and successful design process, including interaction at appropriate moments with the council, stakeholders and the wider community.

This could include an overview of:

- Design studies that should be undertaken

- Baseline information that should be considered and responded to about the local area
- How to document the design process that has been undertaken
- How to approach community, stakeholder and council engagement to deliver the best design outcomes
- How to demonstrate compliance with the design code

**General Principles**

The Spelthorne Design Code will observe the Office for Place's 10 criteria for effective design coding as a benchmark for good practice: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/10-criteria-for-effective-design-coding.

At all times the user experience of the code must be considered – is it easy to use and understand, and is it easy to find the information needed? Ease of use will encourage compliance and early consideration by design teams.

As well as using precise language, such as 'must/should', the code will be prepared on the principle of 'Comply or Justify', with the requirement that deviation from the parameters set out in the code should still fulfil the underlying aims of the code. This ensures that applicant design teams who are seeking to propose innovative and excellent design solutions that address Spelthorne's overall policy aims are still able to do so, whilst ensuring a robust baseline requirement for all other proposals.

**How the code will work**

There are two key parts to a code: the coding plan, and the codes themselves. These work together and are explained below.

***The Coding Plan***

The coding plan of the borough will spatially map what coding is applicable where. At a basic level, this helps applicants and officers understand what design approaches are appropriate and acceptable for their site.

The coding plan will show the area types in the borough, which will be defined through the baseline assessment and the initial community engagement work. These will be agreed by the Project Board.

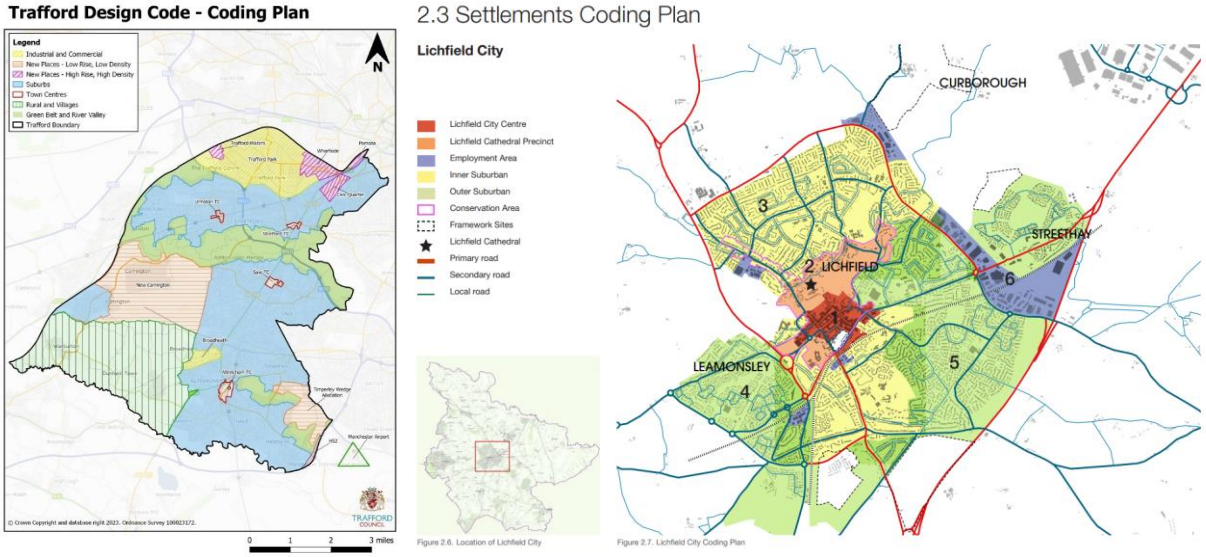



*Figure 1: Examples of authority-wide coding plans*

Although not all authority-wide codes contain coding plans, they are suitable for use in Spelthorne. Including a coding plan will:

- Simplify the use of the code for all users significantly by filtering the information by location, encouraging compliance because it is clear which parts of the code are applicable to each place
- Ensure development responds to the varied and distinctive places within Spelthorne
- Enable targeted guidance for areas of change such as Staines-upon-Thames town centre where higher density development is proposed
- Support the aim for a Digital Design Code for Spelthorne – the coding plan will help users navigate to and filter for the right information by clicking/tapping on the relevant location

***The Code(s)***

Within each of the area types, specific codes will apply to different types of proposed development. These are the 'rules' or defined design parameters that proposals will need to demonstrate compliance with. The rules will be clear, numerical where applicable and graphical as much as possible. They must indicate whether they are mandatory or advisory.

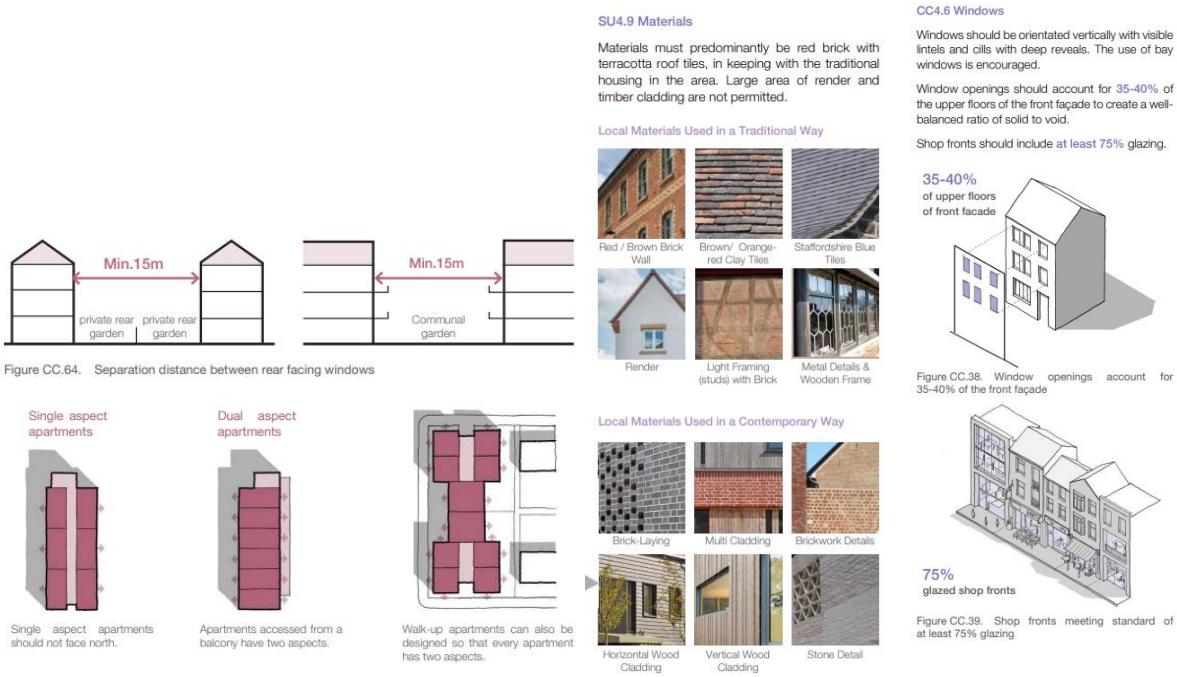



*Figure 2: Examples of clear, numerical, graphical design coding (Lichfield)*

Some area types, such as Staines-upon-Thames town centre, may have specific codes that cover particular forms of development, such as high-density mixed-use development, where the Local Plan supports these forms of development.

Within the defined area types, the codes can be set out in different ways to make them easy to use and appropriate to Spelthorne. This does not need to be decided now, and will come from the baseline assessment and initial community engagement learning about the places of Spelthorne and local priorities. It will be agreed by the Project Board at the appropriate stage of the project.

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