

**DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING GUIDANCE:  
HUNTINGDONSHIRE LANDSCAPE & TOWNSCAPE ASSESSMENT and  
HUNTINGDONSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE  
(Report by Head of Planning Services)**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This report advises Cabinet of the completion of two major studies, and seeks approval for issuing the resulting reports as draft supplementary planning guidance.

**2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 A considerable amount of development is expected to take place in Huntingdonshire over the next 15-20 years. If the character and quality of our towns and countryside is to be maintained and enhanced, it is vital that new development is designed to a high standard. Good design has also become a priority in government guidance, and it is recognised that for this to be achieved local planning authorities will need to show a commitment to this objective. Indeed, it is one element that district councils are expected to demonstrate in the comprehensive performance assessment that is now underway.
- 2.2 Significant improvements in the quality of new development can be achieved if proposals are informed by a proper understanding of both key design principles and the character of the area in which they are situated. With this in mind the consultants Landscape Design Associates were appointed in 2001 to prepare two documents (in addition to other work in support of a review of the Local Plan):
- i. a **Landscape and Townscape Assessment**: to examine broad variations in Huntingdonshire's landscape character, urban form and traditional buildings; and
  - ii. a **Design Guide** for new development that interprets and applies general best practice principles at the local level, and illustrates practical ways in which schemes can add to (rather than detract from) the local 'sense of place'. This guide will, when adopted, replace the interim guidance on house extensions and residential 'infilling' published in 2001. The issues addressed by the interim guidance are subsumed within the new report.
- 2.3 Both documents are now complete, and black & white copies have been circulated to all Members. A small number of full colour copies has also been printed, and samples are available for reference in the Members' room.
- 2.4 These documents are major pieces of work, and their preparation has, inevitably, taken some time. The production process has included a comprehensive analysis of the district's landscapes, urban areas and characteristic building types, workshops with key

stakeholders, and considerable discussion with the consultants about the content of the design guide. This discussion has been important to ensure that the guide addresses key design issues that arise locally.

### **3. CONTENT AND NEXT STEPS**

- 3.1 Brief summaries of the content and intended uses of each document are attached at Annex A.
- 3.2 If the documents are to carry strong weight in the development control process it will be important to adopt them as supplementary planning guidance to the development plan. This, in turn, requires a period of public consultation, following which Cabinet will need to consider whether any changes should be made. As part of this consultation process it is intended to report to Development Control Panel and Overview & Scrutiny (Planning & Finance). Copies of the drafts are also being sent to all parish/town councils, local libraries and key organisations involved in the development process. Development and conservation interests active in the area are also being notified, and the reports are being made available on the Council's web site.
- 3.3 Neither the Landscape & Townscape Assessment nor the Design Guide are ends in themselves. To be effective they need to be read, understood and applied on a day-to-day basis. To assist this process a series of presentations have been given to officers, members of Development Control Panel and parish/town councils. A formal 'launch' event and presentation has also been arranged, to which development, countryside, conservation and other interests have been invited.
- 3.4 The Council has already established the post of Urban Design Officer to drive forward measures to improve design quality. Implementation of the new documents will also be supported by urban design training which is being arranged for all officers involved in this area of work.

### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

- 4.1 Cabinet is recommended to approve the Huntingdonshire Landscape & Townscape Assessment and the Huntingdonshire Design Guide as draft SPG for the purpose of public consultation.

#### **BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Huntingdonshire Landscape & Townscape Assessment: Consultation Draft (2003)

Huntingdonshire Design Guide: Consultation Draft (2003)

Report to Cabinet, 1 February 2001, and Minutes: Appointment of Consultants to Undertake Landscape and Design Work

Interim Design Guidance: Extensions to Dwellings and Residential Infilling  
(2001)

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## **ANNEX A**

### **Huntingdonshire Landscape & Townscape Assessment**

The Landscape & Townscape Assessment contains a systematic analysis of three aspects of the district's character:

- its distinctive landscapes
- each of its five market towns
- its characteristic building types

For each landscape character area the guide identifies its formative influences, physical character, perceptions of it and some key issues that might be addressed in its future planning and management. The sections on each area are preceded by a general discussion of the factors that have shaped Huntingdonshire's landscape, supported by fold-out plans of topography and environmental designations.

The sections on each town consider its overall structure and character (supported by fold-out colour diagrams) before looking systematically at the distinctive character areas that have been identified. Once again key issues are identified for future planning and management.

The discussion of building types adopts a simpler format, with a brief discussion of each type and list of their key characteristics.

The Landscape & Townscape Assessment will be of particular value in providing a context for more detailed assessments of areas or sites (e.g. informing the preparation of village design statements or specific development proposals). It will also inform the development of appropriate policies for inclusion in the new Local Plan, as well as broader countryside management work and town enhancement projects.

More generally, it is an interesting and informative document in its own right, and should help to raise awareness of the distinctive characteristics of the area. A more detailed discussion of its uses is contained in the introduction to the document.

### **Huntingdonshire Design Guide**

The Design Guide sets out 'best practice' principles for new development, with the aim of promoting schemes that:

- are attractive and sit comfortably within the site and its setting
- make a positive contribution to the character of the surrounding area
- provide spaces which function well and feel safe to use
- conserve natural resources through their siting, design and construction
- are accessible to all potential users, including disabled people
- are practical to build, maintain and adapt

These objectives, and the design guide as a whole, do not promote any particular architectural style. Good design – viewed as schemes that meet these objectives – can be achieved with both traditional and modern architectural treatments.

The design guide is divided into five parts, relating to different types and scales of development:

Part 1: introduces the design process, and is relevant to any development proposal

Part 2: deals with house extensions and residential 'infilling'

Part 3: deals with larger housing sites

Part 4: discusses house design and detailing, and as such is relevant to all residential schemes

Part 5: deals with industrial and storage buildings

The coverage of the guide reflects those forms of development that:

- are particularly common in the district;
- would benefit from improved design standards; and
- are not already covered by design guidance (the Council already publishes advice on shop fronts and barn conversions, for example).

The guide is intended to be 'modular' – the final version will be available in loose-leaf format, so that users need only obtain those sections relevant to their scheme. This format will also make it easier to update or add parts in future.

The principles set out in the guide will need to be interpreted and applied in specific situations, as every site and development project is unique. In recognition of this need for flexibility the guide contains very few specific 'standards'.

However, the introduction makes clear that the procedural requirements outlined in Part 1 should always be met – in particular the submission of adequate material to support a planning application, including a statement of the design principles employed.