

MILTON KEYNES PARTNERSHIP PLANNING SUB COMMITTEE
DATE OF MEETING: 22 FEBRUARY 2010
ITEM NUMBER: 10

FOR DECISION

Proposal: New Residential Development Design Guide
Supplementary Planning Document (January 2010)
Application Number: N/A
Application Type: N/A
Expiry Date: N/A
Parish: N/A

Purpose: The purpose of this report is to update the Planning Sub Committee on the New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (January 2010)

Responsible officer: Gerri Smith, Development Control Manager, Milton Keynes Partnership

Prepared by: Gerri Smith, Milton Keynes Partnership

Attachments:

Appendix 1: New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (January 2010)

Appendix 2: Proposed general comments and changes to the New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (January 2010)

Introduction

1. The Design Guide for New Residential Development was reported to Members at the 8 November 2007 Planning Sub Committee in order to advise Members of progress to date and to set out the role of the guide within the development control function.
2. The guide has been prepared by the urban design team within Milton Keynes Council in conjunction with the development control team from Milton Keynes Partnership, with technical input from the Council as Highway Authority, the Council's Development Control and Waste Collection Teams. Input has also been provided by Thames Valley Crime Prevention Officer and members of the Eastern and Western Expansion Area Stakeholders Groups.
3. The purpose of the guide is to assist developers in the preparation of planning applications and seeks to raise the overall quality of residential development in Milton Keynes. It responds to an identified need to address common issues that were regularly arising in pre-application discussions. It is intended to be used by developers and officers involved in evaluating the design aspects of planning applications. The guide is specific to Milton Keynes and will offer more than generic

guidance. It will ensure that new residential development reflects the aspiration of Milton Keynes as an innovative 21st century city.

4. At the 8 November 2007 Planning Sub Committee Members were advised that the design guide was work in progress and that it would ultimately be progressed by the Council through consultation in order that it becomes adopted Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and a material consideration in the determination of planning applications.
5. At the Planning Sub Committee Members agreed that the Residential Design Guide (RDG) be endorsed as technical guidance and that it be used in the determination and assessment of planning applications by Milton Keynes Partnership, as Local Planning Authority with due weight given to the documents status as an emerging SPD.

Current Progress and Consultation To Date

6. Since November 2007 work has progressed on the RDG via a steering group consisting of officers from both MKP and MKC and contributing on aspects of urban design, development control, conservation, highways, street care and waste. Input has also been made by the Crime Prevention Officer from Thames Valley Police.
7. In July 2009 two evening sessions were held for Members of the MKP Planning Sub Committee and MKC Development Control Committee. The first session on the 9 July 2009 was facilitated by TransForm MKSM and focused on principles of urban design. A workshop session looked at what makes a place a good place to live and this raised many diverse and interesting points. The second session on the 16 July 2009 introduced the RDG and aimed to apply the urban design principles covered in the first session to the context of Milton Keynes. It is fair to say that the session generated a number of dissenting views including whether culs-de-sac should be promoted in lieu of the block structure, and what were appropriate densities and form of development. There was no unanimous view amongst members.
8. The Draft RDG was considered by the Council's LDF Advisory Group twice in October and December 2009. Their comments were incorporated and the final draft was agreed by the Council's Cabinet in January 2010 prior to the consultation stage.
9. The Draft RDG is now at the consultation stage and comments are to be fed back to Milton Keynes Council before 12 March 2010. Formal adoption is anticipated in spring 2010.
10. The Draft RDG forms Appendix 1 of this report.

Milton Keynes Partnership Response to the Consultation.

11. Two officer workshops, both internally and externally, have taken place to consider the content and layout of the draft document. The final adopted version will be a joint document between MKP and MKC and serves as a development control tool, therefore it is important that it adequately reflects the Partnership's views and aspirations as Local Planning Authority and that it seeks to encourage the high design standards that MKP strive to achieve. Additionally, it must be robust and sufficiently flexible to allow for innovation in design and must avoid being over prescriptive. Another criterion used to evaluate the content of the Design Guide is that it is realistic in its aims and is defensible in an appeal situation if cited as a reason to refuse a planning application.

12. It is in the above context that a number of minor changes have been suggested by MKP Officers to streamline the document, aid clarification and to change emphasis where it is believed that such changes would improve or simplify it. The main comment relates to the presentation of the document and the benefit of editing the text and improving the graphical element to highlight key points. These views were discussed with Milton Keynes Council officers at a recent workshop. This change would shorten the guide, make it easier to use and avoid the risk of the important design message being lost within a wordy document. Some proposed general and specific changes are set out in Appendix 2. Specific changes are cross-referenced to page and paragraph numbers within the document.
13. Whilst the content of the RDG in terms of the design detail is generally supported, there is one area which raises concern for officers in respect of the suggested approach to *Shared Streets* on page 42 of the document. The RDG suggests at paragraph 4.1.21 that “*shared surfaces will not be allowed within new residential developments*”. Officers believe this to be too prescriptive and a retrograde step which could constrain the provision of a full variety of street types within housing layouts.
14. The rationale for the Council's approach to shared surface streets is not convincingly articulated in the Design Guide. Reasons given refer to past experience where shared surface streets are too narrow and poor parking behaviours have taken place. Whilst it is understood that shared surfaces have been problematic in some instances in recent years, this is not considered to be a sufficient reason to abandon the concept; rather it is an opportunity to evaluate, learn from and correct past mistakes in future layouts. Progressive learning is a feature of the evolution of town planning which is evidenced by the variety and range of buildings and streets which add to the richness and character of our towns and cities.
15. Milton Keynes Partnership is committed to innovation, good design and urban spaces that are attractive for communities. A shared surface street can increase chances for residents to interact in a shared multi functional space and in this way can be a positive feature. Frequently, shared surfaces can create an intimate feel which can make a positive contribution to the places where people live as well as helping to reduce traffic speeds locally.
16. The Residential Design Code recently approved for Area 10.1 Phase 1 of the Western Expansion Area, the approved Highway Design Codes for Areas 10 and 11 and all previous residential design codes approved by Milton Keynes Partnership make provision for shared surfaces and this approach is advocated in Manual for Streets as current best practice. Provided that shared surfaces are used sensitively in the appropriate context where streets are short and do not attract through traffic it is considered that they are a positive feature. The suggestion that shared surfaces will not be allowed within new residential developments would be in direct conflict with the approved MKP Design Codes..
17. It is recommended that Milton Keynes Council is to be informed that Milton Keynes Partnership is unable to support the RDG as a joint document and adopted it as a development control tool unless the section on Shared Streets is amended to reflect the Partnership's views as set out above.

Conclusion

- 18 The RDG, for the most part, builds on the best principles of urban design yet is specific to Milton Keynes context. With the incorporation of the changes discussed above, the RDG will ensure developments are in line with current policy, both national and local and will provide clear guidance and advice to developers and applicants. Once adopted it will be a material consideration in the determination of applications and used by both MKP and MKC to secure development that meets the aspirations of Milton Keynes.

Recommendation

- 19: It is recommended that the MKP Planning Sub-Committee make the following formal consultation response to Milton Keynes Council in respect of the Draft Residential Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document:

- a. That MKP cannot support the RDG in its present form in the absence of a more positive approach to *Shared Streets*. This section of the RDG should be revised or removed to reflect the views of Milton Keynes Partnership.
- b. That Milton Keynes Council note the general and specific recommended revisions to the RDG set out in Appendix 2 of this report.

It is also recommended that the Development Control Manager be delegated to agree the revised wording changes working in conjunction with Milton Keynes Council officers.

Appendix 1

**New Residential Development Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document
(January 2010)**

Appendix 2

Consultation Response - General and Detailed Comments of Milton Keynes Partnership