

Report to: Cabinet
Date of meeting: 7 July 2014
Report of: Jane Custance, Head of Regeneration & Development
Title: Adoption of the Watford residential design guide

1.0 **SUMMARY**

- 1.1 The Planning Policy Team has produced a revised Residential Design Guide for the Borough of Watford. This document provides information on acceptable standards of design for altering existing residential properties or designing new ones. The document forms part of a suite of documents on design, alongside the existing Shopfront Design Guide and Streetscape Design Guide.
- 1.2 The document provides detail on how residential development should be designed, from house extensions to entire new neighbourhoods. There is a mixture of diagrams, pictures and text to demonstrate acceptable approaches to design, while the document includes updated space standards for internal spaces (rooms) and private amenity spaces (gardens). The draft document went out for a public consultation between 4th November and 16th December 2013 and the responses received helped to shape the final version.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 2.1 To adopt the Watford Residential Design Guide.
- 2.2 To delete the Residential Design Guides: Volume 1: Building New Homes & Volume 2: Extending Your Home (2008) and Supplementary Planning Guidance 6: Internal Space Standards (2004), which are replaced by the aforementioned document.

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Report approved by: Jane Custance, Head of Regeneration and Development

3.0 **DETAILED PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 Watford Borough Council adopted its first supplementary guidance on residential development in 2001, while a pair of more detailed Residential Design Guides were adopted in 2008. These existing documents do not reflect the development of other planning documents, such as the Watford Character of Area Study (2011) and staff in Development Management have indicated that these guides are no longer adequate.
- 3.2 Looking at best practise from other local authorities, the new Residential Design Guide provides details on the design considerations relating to residential development. The document features a mixture of text, diagrams and photographs to convey the guidance, with some more generic detail in the opening pages. The Design Guide references other relevant Council documents, such as the Shopfront Design Guide, and will support policy in the Core Strategy and emerging Development Management DPD.
- 3.3 The approach taken for the document is to be as comprehensive as possible whilst remaining brief enough to ensure that it is accessible. The three existing documents that are to be replaced (Residential Design Guides Volumes 1 & 2; Supplementary Planning Guidance 6) total 177 pages, while the streamlined replacement is 54 pages. The smaller size should encourage developers to read it and is sufficiently small to ensure that it is easily downloadable from the Council website. A detailed bibliography provides links to more detailed guidance that is already available, such as the Hertfordshire Building Futures.
- 3.4 Internal space standards are currently in Supplementary Planning Guidance 6, rather than the existing Residential Design Guides. A summary of the rationale for the new standards is included in a separate paper (Appendix A).
- 3.5 The draft document has been subject to internal consultation with staff from Watford Borough Council and a series of changes have been made in response to their comments. Public consultation took place between 4th November and 16th December 2013. The Council directly contacted 571 people or groups; all of whom were given a letter/email explaining the consultation process. This included the Council's consultation list for planning consultations, elected members and local architects/planning agents. In addition, the consultation was featured in 'About Watford' magazine, promoted in the Town Hall and on the Council's website and was included in the consultation events in the Intu Shopping Centre. We received eight responses and have made changes to the document in light of their comments.
- ### 3.6 **DESIGNATION PROCESS**
- 3.7 It is proposed that this document should have the status of a supplementary planning document, as it provides detail to support policy in higher level Development Plan Documents (District Plan and Core Strategy). Local Planning Authorities have the power to develop supplementary planning documents and the Watford Residential Design Guide has been subject to both internal and public consultation.
- 3.8 It is considered that the Watford Borough Council Cabinet is the most appropriate level of public governance for formally assessing whether the new document is suitable for

adoption.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

4.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there are no financial implications contained in this report.

4.2.1 The Head of Democracy and Governance comments that by adopting the guide as a supplementary planning document it will be given due weight when considering applications for planning permission.

4.3 Equalities

4.3.1 Equalities

Watford Borough Council is committed to equality and diversity as an employer, service provider and as a strategic partner. In order to fulfil this commitment and its duties under the Equality Act 2010 it is important to demonstrate how policies, practices and decisions impact on people with different protected characteristics. It is also important to demonstrate that the Council is not discriminating unlawfully when carrying out any of its functions

4.3.2 There are no equalities issues arising directly out of this report.

4.4 Potential Risks

None identified. This is a guidance document which will be used as a reference base for other policy documents, such as the Core Strategy.

4.5 Staffing

4.5.1 There are no staffing issues arising directly out of this report. The document will be available on the Watford Borough Council website, while reference copies will be available in the CSC and the two local libraries. These resources should help reduce the amount of time Council staff spend negotiating with developers.

4.6 Accommodation

4.6.1 There are no accommodation issues arising directly out of this report.

4.7 Community Safety

4.7.1 There are no community safety issues arising directly out of this report.

4.8 Sustainability

4.8.1 The application of the Residential Design Guide in the determination of planning applications should help facilitate sustainable design in new developments. The creation of a high quality and inclusive built environment is a sustainable factor on its own, supporting social, environmental and economic factors in the community, such as health, social inclusion, safety, community identity and cultural heritage.

Appendices

Appendix A Internal Space Standards.

Background Papers

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report. If you wish to inspect or take copies of the background papers, please contact the officer named on the front page of the report.

- Residential Design Guide;
- Residential Design Guide (Consultation Draft) Representations received 4th November – 16th December 2013

File Reference

None