

WYRE FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET MEETING
16th FEBRUARY 2006

Consultation Draft
Worcestershire Transportation & Development Control Guide

| OPEN ITEM | |
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| COMMUNITY STRATEGY THEME | Better Environment |
| CORPORATE PLAN THEME: | Managing the Local Environment |
| KEY PRIORITY: | Forward Planning |
| CABINET MEMBER: | Councillor James Dudley |
| RESPONSIBLE OFFICER: | Head of Planning, Health and Environment |
| CONTACT OFFICER: | Ken Harrison (x2557) Email: ken.harrison@wyreforestdc.gov.uk |
| APPENDICES | Appendix A: Highway Design: Key provisions of the Wyre Forest District Design Quality SPG (2004) Appendix B: Analysis and Recommendations regarding the consultation draft Worcestershire Transportation & Development Control Guide |

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of the publication of the Worcestershire County Council Consultation Draft Transportation and Development Control Guide and to seek approval for the submission of representations.

2. RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet is asked to **RECOMMEND** to Council:

- 2.1 The summary of representations and further detailed comments set out in Appendix B to this report be submitted to the Worcestershire County Council as the District Council's response to the consultation exercise on the Draft Transportation and Development Control Guide.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The County Council indicates that the new guidance will bring the previous document (1994) up to date by taking on board Central Government changes in planning policy.

“In particular PPG3 [2000] and its companion guide Better Places to Live – by Design and PPG13 and Places Streets and Movement.” However, as will be highlighted later in this report, in a number of instances it is unclear how the guidance reflects the latest thinking.

- 3.2 There are two broad areas of guidance provided in the consultation draft. The first relates to development control process and procedures including the introduction of travel plans and an assessment of parking standards. Secondly the guidance seeks to provide a basis for design quality.

4. KEY ISSUES

Development Control:

- 4.1 In terms of processes there have been a number of initiatives to emerge through the publication of PPG13 (Transport) in 1999. These remain very relevant today and include travel plans and maximum (rather than minimum) parking standards. The consultation draft usefully seeks to provide a framework for these issues and should help to provide consistency of approach across the County.

Design Quality:

The national urban design agenda

- 4.2 Design Quality is a recurring theme in the latest national policies including PPS1 (Delivering Sustainable Development) and draft PPS3 (Housing). Particularly strong themes pertaining to highways and streets have emerged that seek to focus attention on creating quality pedestrian environments whereby the street is seen as an extension of public space.
- 4.3 Since the late 1970's, highway design has been underpinned by the standards contained in Design Bulletin 32 (DB32). The appropriateness of these standards is now being called into question through the government's 'Manual for Streets' (www.manualforstreets.org.uk) project. The initial findings of consultants commissioned by the government are suggesting a concerning lack of evidence in support of the standards.
- 4.4 At the same time national good practice is being advanced to redress the apparent imbalance in the priority given to vehicles over pedestrians. These look at the interface between buildings and street and pedestrian and vehicle. In addition to more radical solutions such as homes zones, simple notions are increasingly being recognised including:

- **ACTIVE FRONTAGES**

Ensuring that active groundfloor fronts (i.e. living rooms not dining rooms) face on to the public streets. No longer should inactive back fences front onto public highways as this will undermine the quality of the street. Designing in opportunities for outdoor activity – seating, cafes etc.

- **CONNECTIVITY**

Maximising connections can help to provide more choice for pedestrians and traffic to disperse traffic flows and improve convenience and levels of natural surveillance. All too often cul-de-sacs are seen to limit movement choices and encourage more unsustainable travel patterns.

- **HIERARCHY OF STREETS**

This goes beyond the traditional engineering categories and standards (primary distributor, local distributor, major access road...) but considers the overall sense of place and physical character. In the urban centres of Wyre Forest District the public realm seems dominated by the need for vehicles to travel at two speeds i.e. 30mph and 40mph. Although technically 30mph there is no reason in principle why such streets can not be designed to slow traffic either directly (traffic calming) or indirectly. Principles such as a 'design speed' and desire for constant traffic flows could be argued to magnify the dominance of traffic. In many instances, the pedestrian environment is restricted to a two metre wide footway either side of the carriageway regardless of the category of road. However, logic may suggest that the more important roads should have a wider footway etc.

- **WALKABILITY**

There is a growing emphasis on creating environments that are more conducive to walking and cycling. The towns of Wyre Forest District are generally compact and their commercial centres are within relatively easy walking for many residents. There is perhaps considerable scope to encourage greater levels of walking in the district. However, the walking environment is currently dominated by traffic. The issue of walkability also raises the question of environmental quality, landscaping and the importance of streets as public realm and an extension of public open space.

- 4.5 At present, projects like Poundbury in Dorset and the work of Highway Authorities in Dorset, Oxford City and Falkirk appear to be leading the way in innovative design and a movement away from standardisation.

Wyre Forest District & the Urban Design agenda

- 4.6 The adopted Wyre Forest District SPG highlights a number of key requirements relating to highway design which reflect the national urban design principles outlined at paragraph 2.6. Some of the main provisions are set out at Appendix A of this report.
- 4.7 The District Council's policies were prepared in full consultation with Worcestershire County Council (including the Highways Partnership Unit and the Transport Strategy team) through a series of consultation events including workshops. Despite formal consultation, the County Council did not submit any representations on the consultation draft Design Quality SPG that was formally adopted by the District Council in July 2004. The guidance seeks to help turn the tide away from the vehicular domination of place and as Supplementary Planning Guidance can be afforded significant weight as part of the Development Control process.

- 4.8 The District Council has also adopted a number of site-specific development briefs and design guides including Severn Road Development Brief and Bridge Street Basins Link in Stourport-on-Severn. The briefs add an extra tier of guidance and present the Council's clear aspirations for design quality including highways and public realm.
- 4.9 Despite the clear ambitions of the District Council and the emergence of national good practice, the County Council continues to espouse the virtues of segregating traffic and people as a means of creating safe environments. A growing body of opinion is now questioning this. The priority, speed and constant flow of traffic so evident around the District's urban centres causes significant inconvenience to pedestrians (obstacles, waiting times, pollution, noise, fumes etc) and this does little to encourage more sustainable travel choices.

Summary

- 4.10 Under the new planning system, it is not possible for the proposed Worcestershire County Transportation Development Control and Design Guide to be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document. Therefore, in planning terms its status is proposed to be informal guidance i.e. a daughter document to the Worcestershire Local Transport Plan (2). The County Council is inviting endorsement from the six districts. However, Appendix B to this report highlights that many aspects of the design guidance appear to be at odds with emerging national good practice and either directly or indirectly conflict with many of the provisions contained in the Wyre Forest Design Quality SPG.
- 4.11 The design agenda is calling in to question the conventional wisdom and standardisation of DB32. Development Control Officers within Highway Authorities often rigorously apply these standards and there is no due process and little scope to challenge this conventional wisdom. These standards are now a major contributor to the 'anywhere' syndrome associated with many new developments.
- 4.12 It is perhaps untimely for the County Council to be introducing new design guidance at a time when national policy is in such a state of flux. The Department of Transport and ODPM have jointly commissioned a fundamental review of Design Bulletin 32 (DB32) in recognition of its shortcomings. Despite this, it is these standards that continue to underpin the consultation draft published by the County Council.
- 4.13 There has been a great deal of good practice guidance on design quality. This often relies on a more flexible interpretation of standards and the use of quality materials and landscaping to help create a place rather than simply a movement corridor. However, for these to be realised requires a joined up approach between the District Council as the Local Planning Authority and the County Council as Highway Authority. However, whilst planners are keen to embrace the latest urban design thinking, in reality highway maintenance and the adherence to standards often takes precedence over design quality from an aesthetic and pedestrian perspective.
- 4.14 A number of authorities such as Dorset County Council have demonstrated that guidance can be prepared to encourage innovation and quality design. The question is whether the consultation draft "design" element of the guidance is firmly rooted in

the 1970's or whether there is a genuine move by the County Council towards place making.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 No direct financial implications. However, many of the suggested representations set out in Appendix B may have revenue expenditure implications (highway/ public realm maintenance) for local authorities. Clearly, the District Council will need to work in partnership with the County Council to address maintenance concerns. This will depend on funding priorities and is likely to include developer contributions through commuted sum payments.

6. LEGAL AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The recommended responses are considered to be consistent with the policies of the Wyre Forest District Local Plan and the Adopted Wyre Forest District Design Quality SPG.

7. RISK MANAGEMENT

- 7.1 A failure to respond to the consultation could be taken as a lack of District Council concern regarding the emerging guidance.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.1 The publication of the consultation draft Worcestershire Transportation and Development Control Guide provides an opportunity to make representations on the County Council's proposed approach and to draw attention to inconsistencies with the adopted policies of Wyre Forest District Council and emerging national good practice.

9. CONSULTEES

- 9.1 Head of Cultural, Leisure and Commercial Services.

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Public Consultation Draft Transportation and Development Control Guide (Worcestershire County Council), 2005*
- Wyre Forest District Local Plan, 2004
- Wyre Forest District Design Quality SPG, 2004

*Available in the Party Group Rooms.