

Introduction

9.01 The built environment represents the accumulation of centuries of building tradition and reflects the incremental evolution of decisions, needs, building forms, styles and use of materials. It is a product of great variety, which influences the quality of life and the functioning of Towns, Villages and the countryside. It is one of the most important factors which distinguishes this part of Somerset from everywhere else.

9.02 Town and Country Planning as a formal activity is a relatively recent phenomenon. It is concerned with the location, use and appearance of the built environment, made up of both individual and collections of buildings and spaces. While much new development is brought forward on an individual basis, the planning system should provide an overall framework, which has regard to the cumulative impact of development.

9.03 The Local Plan is the primary means of developing a range of policies targeted at securing the aims of planning for necessary, sustainable and quality development within the built environment. Sedgemoor has particularly varied built and natural landscapes, which have evolved over time. In consequence, the physical context within which new development takes place is extremely important.

9.04 The policy of focussing new development on existing Towns will require prospective developers to assess their development proposals within a much broader context than their individual site. They will need to consider the relationship of the site to its built and natural surroundings and to its place within the existing spatial pattern of the Town. This approach was central to the design guidance work for South Bridgwater.

9.05 Furthermore, a Landscape Character Assessment for the District has been completed. This work identifies those aspects of landscape character, which should influence developers with respect to the location, type, form, design of new development and how their proposal should contribute towards the character of the locality. This will provide the basis for working with local communities in preparing Village Design Statements. These will provide more detailed context for the guidance of development.

9.06 Of equal concern to the promotion of quality new development is the need to conserve and enhance the present character of settlements and rural areas. The Council has already invested considerable resources in a number of environmental improvement schemes throughout the District, which although targeted at the historic environment, also underpin a range of tourism and economic development policies.

9.07 The promotion of sustainable development will require further policy initiatives with respect to what is sometimes called "green design". While many aspects of this are not currently embodied in planning or other regulations, it is likely that such considerations will become increasingly important. The Local Plan, therefore provides a detailed policy with which to guide the assessment of sustainability for development proposals.

Key Objective

To ensure that necessary development is accommodated through an approach which maximises quality and sustainability considerations and which enhances the distinctive character of our built environment.

Sustainable and Quality Development

9.08 A central theme of the Local Plan is to provide sufficient guidance and policy control to promote sustainable and quality development. This approach is particularly linked to the Government's emphasis on the need to ensure that necessary development provides a positive contribution to environmental quality at all levels. This should recognise the importance of adopting a design process which addresses a range of sustainability and quality issues and relates the development to its context. The intention is, that all new development should provide sufficient justification as to how the design process has taken account of a range of issues in leading to the development proposals for a particular site.

9.09 It is clearly recognised that some or all of the issues included in the policy are considered as part of the formulation of development proposals. The intention is that a detailed checklist of development issues is provided so as to explicitly and systematically assess how sustainability has been addressed through design and how the physical proposals relate to these considerations. The emphasis is on the explicit and systematic

assessment of identifying constraints and opportunities for sustainable design for all forms of development.

9.10 Appendix 9.1 provides extensive criteria against which, sustainable design can be assessed together with associated design applications. These have been included to provide strong directions as to how development could be moulded and the various design aspects which could be addressed. It is accepted that the list of issues addressed is extensive. Clearly, there will be varying opportunities for the full consideration of these issues and the various design applications dependant on the nature, size, complexity and impact of development proposed. The intention is that the 'checklist' will serve as a structured and detailed approach to the consideration of development and to allow for the creative application of design principles.

9.11 This approach to development comprises one part of the Council's commitment to promoting sustainable development. It is the intention for this to accompany other initiatives outside the Local Plan including, Local Agenda 21 Forums, Sustainable Design Workshops with the development industry and the promotion of energy strategies.

POLICY BE1

Applicants for planning permission for all development will be required to submit justification as to how the proposal has considered a wide range of design criteria, including sustainable development issues. The detailed design criteria are set out at Appendix 9.1 together with more specific design applications and are summarised under the three headings below:

- a Natural resources;**
 - i) bio-diversity and carbon fixing;**
 - ii) water;**
 - iii) land;**
 - iv) pollution and hazard.**
- b Energy and movement;**
 - i) accessibility and linkages;**
 - ii) energy strategy.**
- c Development structure;**
 - i) concept;**
 - ii) open space network;**
 - iii) built environment.**

Applicants will be required to demonstrate

they have addressed these issues. The extent will depend on the scale and the complexity of the proposal.

Alterations and Extensions to Dwellings

9.12 The alteration and extension of existing dwellings is a widespread process and can often promote sustainability aims by providing a more flexible use of existing housing resources. Whilst the issue of extensions to dwellings is a matter for detailed assessment in each individual situation, the Local Plan provides a basic level of design and principles for the guidance of this form of development.

9.13 It is widely accepted that there can be no universal policy application with which to consider all domestic extension proposals. The appropriate design response will of course be informed by the physical context to each site (for example, established building styles; detached, semi-detached and terraced).

9.14 In particular, careful scrutiny will be given to extensions which result in the terracing effect caused by the complete or partial filling of a gap within a row of detached or semi-detached dwellings and extensions that have a flat roof.

POLICY BE2

Extensions to existing dwelling houses and their curtilage structures should meet all of the following criteria. The proposed extension should:

- a) be physically and visually subordinate to the existing building;**
- b) not compromise the character of the existing building;**
- c) not be visually intrusive upon the street scene, any surrounding development or the countryside;**
- d) not harm the residential amenity of any nearby dwellings (by reason of overshadowing, overlooking or visual dominance); and**
- e) be constructed of external facing materials which respect any locally established building traditions.**

Extensions to converted dwellings in the countryside should respect the form, character, scale and detailing of the original building, such that its character and contribution to its setting are not harmed. This criterion will also be applied to curtilage structures such as outbuildings, garages and boundary enclosures.

Shopfronts

- 9.15** Commercial uses contribute significantly to the character of the built environment, particularly in the core areas of Towns and larger Rural Centres but also to more outlying retail areas (such as at the Edge of Town Centres). The need for advertisement and other expressions of commercialism is accepted and can promote and attract vitality to shopping areas. The essential concern for the Local Plan is to ensure that an appropriate level and sensitivity of design is achieved as part of balancing the necessary promotion of commercialism and environmental impact. For interpretation this relates to shops and any other commercial premises having the appearance of a shop.
- 9.16** The frontage of a shop comprises part of the whole elevation of a building usually within an established street scene. The objective of successful external advertising should be to secure a balance between sufficient visual promotion for the business, a regard for the elevational features of the building frontage and a competitive, but not dominant relationship with the established street. The purpose of the design treatment should, therefore be to create a positive contribution to the quality of the surroundings. The approach requires a specific design analysis and response for each situation and the objective of the Policy is to provide general guidance for installation or alteration of shopfronts and advertisements.
- 9.17** The Council has published a Shopfronts and Advertisements Design Guide as an aid to applicants and will have regard to this in considering proposals whilst continuing to treat each application on its individual merits. Illuminated advertisements are not regarded as an intrinsic part of the village and rural landscape and the Council will exercise its powers of control accordingly.

POLICY BE3

Proposals for new or altered shopfronts should not harm the appearance or character of the building or its setting. They should:

- a) **provide an appropriate relationship to the whole elevation of the building with particular regard to the degree of horizontal and vertical emphasis of the building and adjoining buildings;**
- b) **retain and repair any existing historic features on the shopfront;**
- c) **make any blind or canopy an integral feature of a shopfront so that it is retractable, clear of any vehicular carriageway when open and with sufficient clearance so as not to endanger pedestrians;**
- d) **use either internal lattice or removable grilles if a security shutter is proposed;**
- e) **incorporate shopfront signs which in number, size, presentation and materials preserve or enhance the appearance of the building and its setting;**
- f) **incorporate fascias which are in scale, in their depth and width, with the overall shopfront and the building in particular, do not extend upwards beyond the first floor sill level;**
- g) **ensure any illumination of signs and fascias is by external means or in Town Centres by internal lighting of lettering and logos only; and**
- h) **provide, wherever possible, an acceptable means of access for people with disabilities.**

It should not be assumed that existing "express consents" for advertisements will be automatically renewed or that corporate styles of retail or commercial chains will be acceptable.

Advertisements

- 9.18** Outdoor advertisements are an important part of economic activity by providing information to passers-by. However, the appearance of buildings, streets and the countryside can be spoiled

by excessive or insensitive advertising. Accordingly a regime of advertisement control is in place, similar to the planning control system for development, which aims to control advertisements in the interests of amenity and public safety.

POLICY BE4

Advertisements will be permitted except where:

- a) their siting, appearance, size, design, materials, colour and any illumination detract from their surroundings and any building to which they are attached;**
- b) they harm the character, appearance and setting of Listed Buildings or Conservation Areas;**
- c) they detract from the appearance of the countryside;**
- d) they create visual clutter when viewed with any existing signs; and**
- e) they are a hazard to public safety.**

Poster hoardings will only be permitted in predominantly commercial areas in locations where they will not be unduly dominant and where they are in scale with their surroundings and any buildings to which they are fixed.

Directional Advertising

9.19 Directional advertising will be assessed in the light of Policy BE4. The Council has also published a Design Guide for Directional Advertising.

Areas of Special Advertisement Control

9.20 The Quantock Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, together with an area extending several miles to the east, is designated as an area of Special Advertisement Control. In accordance with the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 it is intended to reassess this order with a view to possible minor modifications. It is also proposed to consider whether any other parts of the District, such as the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should be similarly designated.

Quality of the Public Realm

9.21 The Local Plan provides a range of policies to promote sustainable and quality new development. Of equal importance is the need to ensure that public and other spaces in the built environment, which collectively comprise the public realm, are maintained and developed to the best standard possible and embodies local distinctiveness as part of the different character areas of the District. Whilst responsibility for the quality of the public realm lies with a range of bodies (usually statutory undertakers) the Council has an important role in seeking to co-ordinate appropriate standards of work and facilities. This role is to promote the public attraction of areas, particularly in Conservation Areas and Town Centres and to contribute to physical identity.

9.22 The various statutory authorities are responsible for a wide range of services, the maintenance of which can cause considerable disruption particularly in built-up areas. A major concern relates to disruption of the highway and the various surfaces and the standard and type of reinstatement. This can sometimes be a problem in Conservation Areas where there may be historic pavements and materials. At other times such work may represent an opportunity to seek an enhanced standard of re-instatement at an acceptable extra cost. During recent years several of the statutory undertakers have acknowledged a duty, particularly in Conservation Areas, to give more sensitive treatment to their operations. This is clearly an area where a continued and increased level of dialogue between the Local Planning Authority and relevant statutory bodies is desirable to ensure that satisfactory treatment in Conservation Areas is achieved and also to ensure maximum liaison amongst the authorities to co-ordinate their works to minimise overall disruption.

9.23 Where it is necessary to excavate surfaces the District Council will require statutory undertakers to reinstate to an equivalent or higher standard. In some cases the Council may wish to seek additional funds in order that the works may be carried out to a higher standard or perhaps incorporated into a wider enhancement scheme. The District Council will also attempt to ensure that appropriate arrangements are made for any necessary salvage of materials.

9.24 The quality, safety and degree of accessibility provided by the public realm is of particular importance for those with varying degrees of disability. Clearly, the detailed issues of physical access to individual buildings are part of the initiatives to promote disabled access, but it is important to attempt to promote, wherever possible, a barrier free environment.

POLICY BE5

The Council will seek the co-operation of the statutory undertakers to ensure that:

- a) **the impact of necessary installations is minimised and will encourage the under grounding of overhead cables, rationalising the use, number and size of road signs and replacing unsightly street furniture giving priority to Conservation Areas and Town Centres; and**
- b) **all maintenance and installation proposals promote the principles of a barrier-free environment.**

Mixed-Uses

9.25 As part of the Government’s objectives to promote sustainability in development and particularly to reduce the need to travel, there is encouragement for appropriate development schemes, which incorporate a mix of uses. Whilst there is no clear and detailed guidance as to how this objective is translated into specific Local Plan provisions, the approach is intended to erode the strict zoning of land uses where an appropriate variety and mix of uses would be acceptable. In assessing this issue, the considerations where mixed uses would apply will vary dependent on local circumstances. The Local Plan therefore, identifies a range of situations in which mixed uses will be positively promoted and where this would support other objectives of the Plan.

9.26 In considering specific proposals for mixed-use developments, the onus will be on applicants to demonstrate that there will be no unacceptable impact of the proposed uses on adjacent or surrounding areas.

POLICY BE6

A mix of uses will be permitted in the following circumstances where the proposals will promote the planning objectives identified:

- a) **Town Centres: Proposals which bring into use vacant upper floors of buildings particularly for small scale residential use;**
- b) **Brownfield Sites in Urban Areas: Proposals which provide acceptable ancillary uses to residential development, which do not conflict with retail policies of the Local Plan, which are close to the Town Centre and which do not create an identifiable and unacceptable impact on surrounding land uses;**
- c) **Under-Used Buildings: Proposals which will provide for the economic use of under-used or vacant buildings and which do not compromise other policies or proposals of the Local Plan.**

Open Areas Protected from Development

9.27 Open and undeveloped areas within settlements can be an important element of the character and environmental quality of settlements by enhancing the setting of building groups, adding to a sense of place or identity, or helping to retain links with surrounding countryside. In some case areas which have cherished qualities are excluded from development boundaries, but Policy BE7 below is intended to provide protection to those identified areas which lie within the developed areas of certain settlements.

POLICY BE7

The following areas of open land are considered to make an important contribution to environmental quality and sense of place in their respective settlements therefore, development which would be harmful to their open character will not be permitted.

Biddisham	Land south west of The Old Rectory
Brent Knoll	The Glebe Field, Church Lane
Cannington	Brook area
Catcott	Land north of St Peter’s Church
Chilton Trinity	Land south west of the Holy Trinity Church
East Brent	Village Green at Brent Road
Edington	Land rear of Holywell Road and Broadmead Lane
Shapwick	Land between Manor House and St Mary’s Church

Built Environment

Chapter 9

Shipham	Village Green areas at The Square and land at Hillside Cottage
Stone Allerton	Land at Overbrook, land at Manor Farm and land at Sleepy Hollow
Wedmore	Land at The Close and land at West End.

Local Materials

9.28 Whilst the Local Plan is determined to promote the most locally distinctive forms of new development, it is recognised that there is often particular concern as to the type of materials used for construction. Whilst the type of materials is only one aspect of local distinctiveness, Policy BE8 below is specifically intended to secure the use of characteristic local materials.

9.29 The geography and geology of the Plan area is extensive and varied and this is reflected in the range of construction materials used. Many of the rural settlements, particularly in the older core areas, retain a distinctive local character by use of indigenous construction materials such as, the grey lias stone of the Polden villages or the rich red sandstone of the Quantock villages. The Council is concerned that the individual character of settlements is maintained by the use of natural appropriate materials, wherever possible and particularly for the construction of boundary walls and structures which are often an integral part of the local street or roadside scene. This policy will, therefore help to contribute towards the preparation of Village Design Statements if and when prepared for individual villages.

POLICY BE8

The Council will seek to ensure that indigenous construction materials are employed wherever possible and appropriate, particularly where this is a prominent feature of a locality.

Landscape Design

9.30 The appearance and treatment of the spaces between and around buildings is of equal importance to the design of the buildings themselves. New development should have a spatial and planting structure that reflects and complements the surrounding development. Landscape considerations should therefore, form an integral part of design and layout.

Developments should ensure that existing site assets such as vegetation, topography, water and topsoil are used to best advantage. That the layout has a clearly recognisable structure of useable spaces and planted areas and finally, that types of boundary enclosure, paving and any street furniture are integrated into the overall design.

9.31 Special attention will be required for the landscape design of developments at the periphery of settlements where they meet countryside. This will soften the interface between the landscape and the built development.

POLICY BE9

New development should include appropriate areas of hard and soft landscaping, utilising existing features where possible, to ensure that the local character and biodiversity of the surrounding area is reinforced.

POLICY BE10

Where it is compatible with other policies in the Plan, new development at the edge of a settlement should be carefully designed and landscaped, so as to enhance the character and appearance of both the built-up area and the adjoining countryside.

Planting and Soft Landscaping

9.32 New development, particularly where there is little or no existing vegetation can appear starkly at variance with its setting for a substantial period of time. New planting helps to soften the immediate impact of the development and helps to enhance the immediate surroundings in terms of its appearance and nature conservation value. It is essential that planting schemes are prepared as an integral part of development and considered at an early stage in preparing a planning application.

9.33 It is vital that detailed planning applications provide sufficient information to enable an assessment of the proposed scheme. The design should take advantage of attractive features and the landscaping should be of an appropriate form, location and quantity. Areas set aside for planting should be free of underground services.

9.34 Planning permission will be refused where trees or hedgerows of good quality, landscape or wildlife significance would not be retained.

POLICY BE11

Where appropriate, development proposals should include planting schemes. These should include details of plant species, size and density and should use predominantly native plant species. Where possible, schemes should aim to conserve or enhance locally important biodiversity. Conditions will normally be attached to planning permissions to secure the early implementation and adequate maintenance of approved planting schemes.

Public Art

9.35 The Council has, for a number of years, informally operated a policy for promoting and securing public art in the District. It is intended to raise the profile of art provision in a wide variety of forms to enhance the quality of development, enrich the built environment and provide opportunities, particularly for local artists and trades, to add to the quality of life in Sedgemoor for residents and visitors.

9.36 The provision of art is based on the “per cent for art” concept promoted by the Arts Council and is most likely to be achieved in association with new development (public and private) and whilst a range of work may be considered it could encompass:

- “traditional” or abstract sculpture in a range of materials and subjects;
- provision of space for artistic use;
- provision of gates, arches, seating, bridges;
- specialist treatment of some aspects of a building - stained glasswork, railings, mosaics, floor/wall design, lighting, timber-work etc; and
- major landmark or urban design features.

9.37 The aim is to ensure that the appropriate artist or craft person is commissioned and that their work is an integral part of the project. We would therefore wish to work in partnership with developers, architects and designers at an early stage of development schemes to identify and work up possibilities for art provision, which could be successfully incorporated into the project. The means of provision and its funding or maintenance would be a matter for detailed discussion.

9.38 Experience from similar schemes elsewhere strongly suggests that this approach can produce a more rewarding development, not only for the developer but for its longer term users, whether this involves public or private space. Art within development enhances the overall design and commercial attraction and promotes a sense of identity and local distinctiveness. The important element is a positive attitude towards the possibilities which may be identified.

9.39 We recognise that not all proposed developments would be suitable for this partnership approach and would tend to relate to the more significant projects. Nevertheless, the District Council intends to approach the issue in a constructive and positive way and looks to developers for co-operation to achieve what could be long lasting local benefits.

POLICY BE12

The Council will seek to negotiate a contribution of up to one per cent, or agreed cost equivalent, from the total development value for agreed art provision to comprise:

- a) specific art provision within or as part of the development, or**
- b) an agreed art provision in the public realm; or**
- c) an appropriate financial contribution towards an identified major public art project(s) within the Sedgemoor District.**

This policy shall apply to the following forms of development:

- a) residential:**
 - i) new build units of ten units or upwards; and**
 - ii) significant conversions or refurbishments of existing buildings.**
- b) significant retail, commercial or leisure proposals; and**
- c) significant development proposals by utility operators and Local Authorities.**