

CABINET

17 November 2004

PRODUCTION OF DESIGN GUIDANCE – APPOINTMENT OF CONSULTANTS

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

WDLP32, 'The Implementation of PPG3 Within Winchester District' (WDLP Committee 3.11.2003, Principal Scrutiny Committee 6.11.2003, Cabinet 20.11.2003)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Following a series of 'PPG3 seminars' held for Parish Councils, Members, amenity groups, etc in Autumn 2003, the Council resolved to make a number of changes to the emerging Local Plan Review's policies and its development control practices (see report WDLP32). One of the recommended changes involved the Council taking a more pro-active role in the production of design guidance. Following consideration by Environment and Access Performance Improvement Committee and Cabinet, funding from the 2004-05 Planning Delivery Grant settlement was allocated for this purpose (£55,000 for Neighbourhood and Design Statements).

This report recommends how this funding should be used to improve design advice and the quality of development, especially in areas subject to substantial development pressures. The recommendations are subject to the resolution of uncertainties about the availability of the Planning Delivery Grant settlement for 2004-05, which it is hoped will be clarified by the time of the meeting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That Cabinet endorses the decision to appoint Atkins and Matrix Partnership to undertake work on Village/Neighbourhood Design Statements, Development Briefs, and Local Area Design Statements, as set out in the report.

- 2 That the budget of £55,000 available for this area of work be apportioned as recommended in the report: VDSs/NDSs £17,000, development briefs £10,000, and LADS £28,000, and that the work be undertaken and prioritised as set out in Sections 3-5 of the report.
- 3 That Cabinet considers whether it wishes to continue to contribute to any of these areas of design guidance beyond the end of the current financial year and, if so, takes this into account in the budget-making process.

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DETAIL:

1 Background

1.1 Because of increasing concerns about the implementation of PPG3, especially relating to the density of development, the Council organised a series of 'PPG3 seminars during the second half of 2003. These included a Members training session, facilitated by an independent consultant, in Summer 2003, and two public seminars for Parish Councils, Members, amenity groups, etc in Autumn 2003. Following these, the Council resolved to make a number of changes to the emerging Local Plan Review's policies and its development control practices (see report WDLP32).

1.2 One of the changes recommended that the Council considers taking a more pro-active role in the production of design guidance. The Environment and Access Performance Improvement Committee considered the measures which may be introduced and recommended to Cabinet that funding of up to £100,000 be allocated for this purpose. The Committee identified 3 main areas where additional funding could help to improve design guidance and quality (see report EA12, 4 Dec 2003):

- Providing additional advice for groups producing Village/Neighbourhood Design Statements;
- Providing advice and guidance to landowners/developers in producing development briefs, to help secure comprehensive planning;
- The production of 'Local Area Design Statements' for selected areas of lower density development which are subject to substantial development pressure.

1.3 Subsequently, funding of £55,000 from the 2004-05 Planning Delivery Grant settlement was allocated for this purpose. This report recommends how this funding should be used to improve design advice and the quality of development, especially in areas subject to substantial development pressures. The recommendations are subject to the resolution of uncertainties about the availability of the Planning Delivery Grant settlement for 2004-05, which it is hoped will be clarified by the time of the meeting.

2 Appointment of Staff

2.1 Because of the high workloads within all sections of the Planning Department, and the general shortage of experienced planners and urban designers, it has not been possible to second or recruit staff temporarily to undertake this work. Accordingly, consultants have been invited to tender for the three areas of work outlined above. Six suitably qualified and experienced consultancies

were invited to tender, of which a shortlist of 4 were interviewed. Because the 3 areas of work (outlined in paragraph 1.2 above) involve a combination of giving advice (on VDSs/NDSs and development briefs) and the production of guidance (Local Area Design Statements), the tenders received involved a mix of hourly/daily rates and set fees for the production of a set piece of work. Some consultants' quotes were more expensive than others for some aspects of the work but less for other aspects, making direct comparison difficult. Officers' conclusions after the interviews were that the work should be split between 2 consultancies, to achieve the optimum in terms of cost and quality issues, following clarification of costs during and after the interviews.

- 2.2 It is therefore proposed that Atkins be appointed to provide guidance to VDS/NDS groups and Matrix Partnership be appointed to provide guidance on development briefs and to produce Local Area Design Statements. The Atkins consultant who would undertake the VDS/NDS advisory work is a former Council employee who is familiar with existing VDSs and the District, having produced a dissertation on 'The Use of Village Design Statements in Winchester' as part of her MA in urban design. This consultant is also locally based, thus being more readily available and involving lower travelling expenses, and offered the lowest hourly/daily fee for this aspect of the work.
- 2.3 With regard to the other aspects of the work, it was felt that Matrix Partnership offered the best combination of value for money and relevant experience. Officers were concerned that other consultancies either had gaps in the advice available in their teams (e.g. on transport or commercial issues) or were significantly more expensive. Matrix are already retained by the Council to provide design advice on planning applications and so are familiar with the issues involved, are able to draw on specialist advice as necessary, and their fees were in the intermediate range. Cabinet is asked to endorse the recommended appointment (noting that Matrix were not the cheapest option but offered the best mix of experience and value for money).
- 2.4 A summary of the work that would be undertaken under each heading, relevant issues, and recommended expenditure is set out in the subsequent sections of this report.

3 Village/Neighbourhood Design Statements

- 3.1 The Council has so far adopted 15 VDSs and is about to adopt its first NDS. Whilst officers have sought to give help and advice to VDS/NDS groups, it has not proved possible to spend much time on this and the officers that have volunteered have not necessarily been design specialists. The aim is that the consultant will be paid to provide advice to VDS/NDS groups currently in the process of undertaking VDSs/NDSs, or who are considering producing them. It is understood that about 6-7 groups are actively involved in considering/producing VDSs/NDSs. If every Parish produced a VDS there would be scope for a further 30 or so VDSs, as well as several NDSs within Winchester. However, as funding is only available with certainty for the current financial year, it is estimated that only 5-10 groups may wish to draw on the advice and that the consultant should be limited to spending no more than £1500 worth of their time on any one group (equating to almost 4 days' work), up to a total of £10,000. This would be on a 'first come first served' basis, following notification to all Parish Councils and known VDS/NDS groups of the appointment of the consultants.

- 3.2 Part of the advice that will be needed by VDS/NDS groups relates to the new planning system and the requirements that will need to be followed for the statements, to be capable of adoption as 'Supplementary Planning Documents' (rather than Supplementary Planning Guidance under the old system). The new system came into operation on 28th September 2004, so any future VDSs/NDSs will need to be progressed as SPDs, if they are to be adopted and taken into account in planning decisions.
- 3.3 The new system requires SPDs to be subject to a 'sustainability appraisal' and a more formal process of consultation. It also refers to planning authorities undertaking the consultation, whereas in the past it has been undertaken by VDS/NDS groups. This will be more time consuming and costly for VDS/NDS groups, if only in terms of producing 2 versions of the statement: a consultation draft and a final version.
- 3.4 In the past the Council has contributed £1000 towards publication costs of the adopted documents, but consideration now needs to be given to the publication costs of at least 2 versions. It is also likely that the Council will need to oversee the consultation exercises more directly and consider the comments raised on draft VDSs/NDSs and how they should influence the documents. This may have implications in terms of officer time and costs to the Council, as well as to VDS/NDS groups.
- 3.5 Under the new planning system, no SPDs can be adopted until the Council's Local Development Scheme is agreed by the Government Office. This Scheme sets out the various planning documents the Council will produce and must be submitted by the end of March 2005. It is, therefore, not possible to adopt any SPDs before that time, although some could be progressing through the consultation process. The St Giles Hill NDS remains to be published and the Council should continue to offer up to £1000 towards the costs of this. Given the small numbers involved for the remainder of this financial year, no more than £7,000 is likely to be needed, based on £1000 for St Giles Hill NDS and 6 x £1,000 for up to 6 consultation draft VDSs/NDSs. Consideration should, however, be given to whether the Council wishes to continue to contribute to these costs in future financial years and, if so, to what level and from which budget.
- 3.6 Based on the above, it is recommended that up to £17,000 of the total £55,000 available be allocated to assisting with the production of VDSs/NDSs, split as follows:
- £1,500 worth of consultancy time per VDS/NDS group, up to a total of £10,000. VDS/NDS groups would be free to top this up from their own funds if they require more assistance;
 - up to £1,000 towards St Giles Hill NDS publication costs;
 - up to £1,000 towards the publication costs of other draft VDSs/NDSs in the current financial year, up to a total of £6,000.

Total = £17,000

4 Development Briefs

- 4.1 One of the initiatives agreed following the PPG3 seminars was to promote the production of development briefs to help the comprehensive planning of potential development areas. This was felt to be particularly important in areas which are currently of low density, and where proposals for piecemeal development are tending to arise. There is concern that piecemeal planning of these areas will be more harmful to the character of these areas than comprehensively planned development, and also that future development opportunities may be stifled by piecemeal development. Accordingly, the Council has promoted Pre-Inquiry Changes to the Local Plan Review which, if supported through the Local Plan Inquiry process, would require development briefs to be produced for areas consisting of plots of similar size and character, which may otherwise be developed in a piecemeal fashion.
- 4.2 The Council is already seeking such briefs, where piecemeal development can be shown to be harmful, and landowners/developers who are willing to produce them are seeking help and advice on how to do this. This again is an area where officers are not able to spend sufficient time to provide the advice and the aim is, therefore, to offer consultancy time to advise landowners/developers so as to ensure that any resulting briefs are of an appropriate standard and suitable for adoption as SPD by the Council, or for approval with a planning application.
- 4.3 Consideration has been given as to whether the production of a district-wide guide for the production of development briefs may be more useful and cost-effective. However, it is concluded that there is ample guidance available on this for those who are willing to seek it out and that what would be more helpful is specific guidance directed at actual sites. It is difficult to predict the level of interest and demand for such advice, and the number of sites involved. Also there would be a need for the Council to prioritise and maintain control over where the consultancy time is being directed. Some of the advice may well prove to be an extension of the advice already being provided by Matrix in commenting on planning applications.
- 4.4 Accordingly, it is suggested that a guideline of about £1,500 of consultancy time per site may be appropriate (up to 3 days of consultancy), but that officers be given delegated authority to determine this on a site-by-site basis. It may be that after some initial 'pump-priming' work funded by the Council, the developer/landowner appoints Matrix or other consultants to carry forward the work at their own cost. It is also recommended that the Council contributes towards the costs of consultation and publication although, given the commercial benefits to the landowners/developers, this should be limited to £500 or 25% (whichever is least) of the consultation/publication costs for each site. Therefore, subject to the above general guidance on allocating the consultants time, it is recommended that approximately £10,000 in total be allocated to providing guidance on development briefs.

5 Local Area Design Statements

- 5.1 The term Local Area Design Statements (LADS) has been developed to cover guidance aimed at areas which are somewhere between VDSs/NDSs and development briefs in scale, and where there is strong development pressure of a larger scale than may be considered by a development brief. Perhaps the most obvious example is Chilbolton Avenue in Winchester, where there is

much scope and pressure for development but also concerns about the impact of this on the character of the area. The concerns also relate to wider issues such as the adequacy of infrastructure to serve the scale of development which may cumulatively be possible, especially in relation to transport. The proposal is that the consultants would produce the full LADS document on behalf of the Council, including public involvement and consultation.

- 5.2 LADS are a new 'invention' by the Council and therefore something of an unknown quantity in terms of the costs of production. However, Matrix estimate a production cost of approximately £7,500 per LADS. With expenses associated with public consultation, publication costs, etc an allowance of up to £10,000 may be more realistic. On this basis it is proposed that 3 LADS could be produced within the current financial year.
- 5.3 There are several areas which may be suitable for the preparation of LADS, with perhaps the most suitable candidates being (generally in order of suitability):
- Chilbolton Avenue, Winchester;
 - Sleepers Hill, Winchester;
 - Compton Down area;
 - Springvale area, Kings Worthy.

There are also likely to be other areas within a number of the District's towns and villages which would warrant such an approach. Some areas which have arisen recently include Grange Road, New Alresford, Rareridge Lane, Bishops Waltham, and Quarry Road, Winchester. However, these tend to be smaller areas where there is a likelihood of securing development briefs in association with future proposed development. At Grange Road, New Alresford, officers are aware that prospective developers are seeking to assemble land and may be willing and able to produce a development brief. It should, therefore, be possible to secure development briefs for these areas, as proposed in Section 4 above.

- 5.4 Members may wish to consider whether they would want to seek a financial contribution towards the production of LADS from residents/prospective developers in the areas which it is proposed that LADS would cover. If this were possible to achieve, it may enable additional areas to benefit from the production of Local Area design Statements.
- 5.5 A Neighbourhood Design Statement is currently being produced for the St Paul's area of Winchester, which would cover Chilbolton Avenue. The NDS group are likely to wish to integrate their work with any LADS and this should be encouraged. It may be that the LADS replaces the need for the NDS to cover the Avenue in any detail. Residents of Sleepers Hill are also considering a NDS, but a LADS is likely to be more appropriate, given the area involved and its consistent character.
- 5.6 In view of the above, it is proposed that a flexible approach should be adopted as to how each area is approached and there should not be too prescriptive an approach as to the form of guidance to be provided for each

area. The list of locations at paragraph 5.3 and the order in which they are set out should, therefore, be the proposed priority order, on the basis that other areas such as Grange Road, Alresford can be satisfactorily covered by other initiatives, given that there is only adequate funding for 2 LADS at present. However, in view of the need to secure the use of the available funding within the current financial year, officers should have delegated authority (in consultation with the Planning Portfolio Holder) to adjust the allocations to each type of guidance.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The Council has decided to devote substantial funding in 2004/05 to measures to promote various types of design guidance. In order to progress this initiative, specialist consultants have been interviewed and it is recommended that Atkins be appointed to advise VDS/NDS groups and that Matrix Partnership be appointed to advise on development briefs and to produce LADS. This is felt to be the most cost effective way in which to engage appropriately skilled and experienced consultants to take the work forward.

6.2 A budget of up to £55,000 is available in the current financial year, which it proposed be split between the 3 areas of work as follows:

- VDS/NDS advice and production - £17,000;
- Development Brief advice - £10,000;
- Local Area Design Statements - £28,000

TOTAL - £55,000

6.3 Sections 3–5 above set out the proposals for each area of work, including how work on LADS should be prioritised, and it is recommended that these proposals be approved. If they are, it is expected that the relevant consultants could commence work in early December.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

7 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

7.1 Then Corporate Strategy 2004-2007 seeks to ensure that new homes are provided in safe and pleasant environments, which this work is expected to help achieve.

8 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 As set out in the main body of the report.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None.

APPENDICES:

None.