

Summary of Responses

Design SPD Scoping Consultation



Responses received

A total of 38 responses were received to the scoping consultation. 25 responses were returned online questionnaires (including 5 that were completed offline and submitted via email); two thirds of the total responses received (66%).

The remaining third of response (13) were written responses making comments on the scoping consultation document, mainly following the format of the questionnaire which was also set out in the scoping consultation document. These comments matched with the questions in the questionnaire. It is worth noting that the written responses were slightly more likely to be from developers, planning consultants or public sector organisations and less likely to be from members of the public, parish councils and Neighbourhood Plan groups. As a result it is likely that the responses to the questionnaire questions are slightly unrepresentative of the responses as a whole.

The questionnaire encouraged comments to be made alongside each section of the scoping consultation. The responses to each of the question should be read alongside the comments to give a fuller picture of all the views expressed and this is how this report has been structured.

Please note that a list of all the comments received alongside a Council response has also been prepared, this report is only a summary.

Scope

Table 1: Do you agree that the Design SPD should...	Yes	No
Apply to all types of development	83%	17%
Help interpret and apply design codes	89%	11%
Provides guidance on information required to support planning applications	84%	16%
Provides tools and checklists to help applicants assess design	84%	16%

Respondents to the questionnaire broadly supported that Design SPD should apply to all development types, help interpret and apply design codes, provide guidance on information required to support planning applications and provide tools and checklists to help applicants assess design. Questionnaire support was slightly stronger for help to interpret design codes and guidance. Two developers suggested that a Design SPD was not necessary as the Melton Local Plan policies were sufficient.

Key Issues

The questionnaire asked people to rate a number of proposed objectives to try to understand what people felt the main objectives of Design SPD should be. These have been sorted in the table below with those with the strongest level of support at the top of the table 2.

Table 2: Do you agree with the Council that the Design SPD should set out specific guidance for development to...	Average score %
Create safe, accessible and inclusive environments	96%
Reduce the impact of development on the natural environment and enhance biodiversity	95%
Respond positively to context and setting, including reinforcing local identity and character;	93%
Follow best practice in layout and built form, designing well-defined streets and public spaces that are easy to find your way around	89%
Be physically, functionally and economically integrated into its existing environment in a positive and inclusive manner	89%

Some respondents indicated that they did not fully understand what '*be physically, functionally and economically integrated into its existing environment in a positive and inclusive manner*' meant, this may be why it scored slightly lower. Some people were concerned that '*follow best practice in layout and built form, designing well-defined streets and public spaces that are easy to find your way around*' would reflect urban design best practice and development patterns which may not be appropriate in rural settings and developments. Other comments also highlighted that heritage assets were not (and should have been) specifically highlighted here.

Specific Matters

The questionnaire asked people to rate a number of specific matters that were proposed to be included in the Design SPD. These have been sorted in the table 2 (with those with the strongest level of support at the top of the table). There was strong support for all of the categories proposed, the lowest level of support being 77% of people either agreeing or strongly agreeing with inclusion of design guidance on 'Legible places that are easy to navigate'. The lower score for 'legible places that are easy to navigate' is likely to be in part due to the fact that some respondents highlighted that they did not understand what the term 'legible' meant in this context.

Table 3: The Council proposes that the Design SPD should set out specific guidance for the following matters, do you agree?

	Strongly Disagree /Disagree	Agree or Strongly Agree
Open spaces, landscaping and trees	0%	100%
Movement, accessibility and connections to existing development	0%	96%
Encouraging and respecting local wildlife and biodiversity	0%	96%
A mix of housing that meets local needs including accessible housing	0%	96%
Scale and impact on neighbours, views and heritage assets	0%	91%
Respecting and enhancing local character	5%	91%
Use of appropriate materials	0%	91%
Designing out crime, including lighting, natural surveillance and defensible space	0%	91%
The sustainable management of waste	0%	91%
Sustainable design and building methods	5%	91%
Parking and highway standards	0%	91%
Using topography and important features in the landscape	0%	86%
Locally distinctive design	0%	86%
External storage and amenity space	0%	86%
Supporting energy efficiency and low carbon generation	5%	86%
Promoting health through good design	5%	86%
Legible places that are easy to navigate	0%	77%

Comments made in relation to the specific matters to be included in the Design SPD generally recognised that the relatively long list the Council proposed to include were generally relevant and appropriate, some made suggestions for alterations, additional matters to include or clarifications, a summary of these comments are set out below.

Rural Development

- good design is different in rural and urban areas, e.g. different development layouts and built form
- support, respect and prioritise adopted policies in rural Neighbourhood Plans
- recognise benefits of rural tranquillity and dark skies at night
- set out how development should relate to adjoining open countryside
- address poor commercial and agricultural development design (including GDO)

Environmental Sustainability Issues

- include biodiversity net gain
- promote planting trees
- prioritise wildlife- e.g. bird and bat boxes, hedgehog gaps, wildlife corridors.
- deliver zero carbon/more energy efficient housing (although some developer respondents suggested that building regulations should be left to deliver energy efficient standards)
- include renewable energy, particularly solar panels
- require electric vehicle charging points
- include grey water storage and water efficiency
- address flood risk and water management; guidance on SuDs is needed

Health and Social issues

- Reflect the impact of development on healthcare provision
- Development should meet local housing needs, national space standards
- Need for accessible healthy homes (including for aging population)
- Active Design supported directly or indirectly, proposing that development should be designed;
 - to promote health
 - for sustainable travel – safe and well designed walking and cycle routes
 - with cycle storage

Highways and Parking

- need to think about the traffic impacts (on wider area as well as development site)
- parking is an issue;
 - need to provide enough parking,
 - need to reflect high levels of car ownership in rural areas,
 - need to reduce informal street parking that brings down development
 - against tandem parking,
 - garage should not always be counted as a parking space
- highways;
 - problems with narrow roads
 - problems with shared private driveways
 - how the Design SPD will relate to the Leicestershire Design Guide and achieve good design

Open and Green Space

- involve local communities in what they look like (e.g. landscaping and planting) and how they are maintained, including SuDs
- think about positioning and design as well as amount space required – guidance should be clear,
- highlighted benefit of central (e.g. linear) parks rather than edge of development open space
- set out private garden/amenity space standards

Developer Concerns;

- need to consider economic viability
- concerns about overly prescriptive or constraining design guidance
- need guidance on density parameters and efficient use of land

Use of Design Codes, Guidance and Good Practice Examples

There was strong agreement in the questionnaire that the Design SPD should include guidance on the use of the two design codes that were set out in the Melton Local Plan, Building for Life 12 and Active Design.

Table 4: Do you agree that the Design SPD should contain guidance on Building for life 12 and Active Design? (22 responses) (on a scale of 0 to 100)	
% very strongly agreed (score of 95/100+)	55%
% negative response (score of less than 50/100)	0%
Average rating	81%

Comments made in relation to design codes also generally supported the use of Building for Life 12 and Active Design, neither attracted significant criticism. Other design codes, guidance and good practice were highlighted and included;

- Neighbourhood Plans, importance of them and need for Design SPD to reference and work well alongside, see comments on local character.
- Reference to manual for streets was suggested from a number of respondents.
- Secured by design also reference as a relevant design code in relation to safety
- Other design codes, guidance and good practice highlighted included;
 - Fields in Trust (FIT) standards for design of outdoor play/sport/open space
 - NPPF and accompanying PPG on design
 - Drain hierarchy (PPG)
 - National Heritage List
 - Council's conservation appraisals
 - Council's Landscape and Historic Urban Character Assessment
 - Optional building regulation water efficiency (110 litre) standards
 - Passivhaus Standards
 - NHS Health Building guidance
 - Play England advice for play areas and safe movement
 - Sewers for Adoption
 - SuDs Manual (CIRIA)
 - Government's Water Strategy (Future Water) for surface water
 - Other design guides including, Exeter residential design SPD, Potton Neighbourhood plan, South Oxfordshire Design Guide, Cherwell Design Guide and Central Bedfordshire Design Guide. The North West Leicestershire Design Guide was the most referenced design guide as good practice example

- Biodiversity guidance - RSPB/WWT SuDs guide, Infrastructure Design Guide, RIBA poster (biodiversity) and Guidance on Swift and bird boxes

Other comments made about design codes, guidance and good practice included;

- The need to set out the relationship of the Design SPD to the Melton Sustainable Neighbourhoods SPD
- Need to ensure that the wording of the Design SPD does not become obsolete if any design code relied upon/referenced is updated in the future
- Developers in particular were concerned about the reference to too many different design codes and that development should not be overly constrained with the application of too detailed design guidance.
- Concerns were raised that design codes and guidance was aimed at urban not rural development and that they did not necessarily reflect good design in rural areas.

Structure of the Design SPD

Responses overall agreed that the structure of the Design SPD was probably best set out in terms of types of development.

Table 5: Do you think an approach to provide specific advice for different types of development is useful? (21 responses)	
% very strongly agreed (score of 95/100+)	57%
% negative response (score of less than 50/100)	5%
Average score	82/100

Comments made in relation to the structure of the Design SPD also generally agreed that a by development type approach was probably the most useful; although there were highlighted weaknesses in what ever approach was adopted. The biggest issue in terms of a by development type structure was its application for mixed use development and that rural development might not be best judged against the same criteria as urban development, that good practice and generic guidance may not effectively reflect patterns and forms of development for rural areas. Other comments made are summarised below;

- Good design and standards should apply equally to all developments
- need to acknowledge the significant differences between different residential proposals
- needs to be flexible to cater for full range of development which might occur
- could include use class in by development type approach
- could follow a key issue approach
- could use appendices for specific guidance on matters that don't fall easily into any category
- development type could be further classified by area (e.g. town centre, Sustainable Neighbourhoods, rural villages and open countryside).
- Should have a strong focus on neighbourhood plans

- By development type should include agricultural buildings, farm diversification, equine and tourism proposals
- By development type may result in some repetition
- Include guidance on Class Q development
- Size of residential development categories might need defining better than proposed

Use of Checklist, tools and illustrations

Table 6. How useful it would be to provide the following within the Design SPD?	Neutral	Useful	Very useful	Total
Tools and checklists to help applicants understand and demonstrate a consideration of design	2	8	12	22
Drawings to clearly and simply illustrate design key concepts	2	9	10	21
Guidance on demonstrating design development and the use of design reviews	2	10	10	22
Glossary	1	10	11	22

None of the respondents said that any of the above matters would be not useful in the Design SPD and there was broad consensus that they would be useful or very useful to include in the Design SPD.

Illustrations

- Drawings and schematics useful to understand and demonstrate local design requirements
- There is a risk that drawings to illustrate design concepts could result in producing homogeneous housing if it is slavishly followed.

Checklists

- A checklist would be very useful and has proven useful for the likes of B4L and BREEAM standards.
- Checklist useful for understanding how closely a development adheres to guidance

Other

- Examples of acceptable and unacceptable solutions/good and bad practice would be an effective way to demonstrate what is considered acceptable or unacceptable
- Need to explain how Design SPD will be used to determine planning applications, its weight. Address concerns that standards are not currently being met despite MLP (policy basis of SPD) being in place
- Need for applications to set out how the development proposed has taken local character/design requirements into consideration
- Applicant should have to explicitly considered and will meet the design code standards

- Search engine to navigate document would be useful
- SPD should not introduce new policy, only on implementation of MLP
- Should be simple and clear
- Should be effective - poor design standard are currently being achieved
- Should include a glossary; to ensure agreed definitions and understanding of words. The need for a glossary was also confirmed as a small number of people did not understand some of the words in the scoping consultation.
- Needs to clearly link the Design SPD to MLP (and NP policies),
- Should be specific: e.g. measurements between buildings to prevent overlooking, 45 degree rule, back to back distances– for extensions and new development.
- Should apply to all development, level playing field, not create two tiers of development standards (e.g. sustainable neighbourhoods).
- The Council needs to monitor the impact of the Design SPD (and MLP policies) to ensure that they are effective

Local Character and Context

Table 7. How should the Design SPD provide guidance on local character and context?	
Generic guidance on how to consider local context and character in proposals	11
Identify and provide specific guidance for different character areas	6
Mix of 1 and 2 above	1
Neighbourhood Plans should set out guidance	3

Comments and views were mixed; some suggested that the council should set out very detailed prescriptive guidance on local character, materials and design, whilst others felt that such guidance was not best placed within the Design SPD. There was a strong feeling from people who responded to the questionnaire who lived in Melton's rural areas where a Neighbourhood Plan was in place in particular, that the neighbourhood plan was the most appropriate place to provide local guidance, that local communities should identify and set out design requirements (in Neighbourhood plans), particularly local character, but also other design related issues that were important to local people, for example bio-diversity policies.

Other comments on local character and context included;

- Need to protect heritage assets more strongly than as set out
- Consider setting and impact (on heritage assets, important public and private views, conservation areas and open spaces e.g. scale, height and overbearing and materials used)
- Negative impact of poorly designed extensions
- need to improve Melton Mowbray town centre shop frontages and signage
- Character is often influenced by many factors and it is not possible to list all areas and factors
- A prescribed process is unlikely to give a sound character assessment

- It should be about how to demonstrate consideration of setting and local character. Should not be a tick box exercise, appraisal should not be applied absolutely, set out what needs to be considered when defining local context
- could provide a district level guide in relation to scale, form, density, layout, type and vernacular of development with examples of important local character context
- Leave it to the Neighbourhood Plans, local people know what is special to their areas

Design in areas without guidance set out in a Neighbourhood Plan

The scoping consultation asked for views on an approach to setting out local character and design guidance in areas where there is no (or a lack of) design guidance set out in a Neighbourhood plan, comments were mixed;

- Council should set out local character and this could be basis for developing an neighbourhood plan in the future if required
- Effective consultation on applications can mitigate a lack of design guidance in an adopted Neighbourhood plan, advocate use of design reviews
- Areas without a NP could undertake an village design statement and Council should encourage this or help areas to develop a Neighbourhood plan
- Existing local design guidance for safeguarding conservation areas needs refreshing
- Hard to move large developers away from standard house types and reflect local context and character
- Use Melton Landscape Character Assessment, the Leicestershire Historic Environment Record and Conservation Area Appraisals
- Set out a requirement for development to reflect local character and for applications to demonstrate how they have taken it into consideration
- Local character is varied, with distinct local character across the settlements. It is not clear how this could be properly or usefully addressed through a borough-wide SPD on design
- In some areas of existing low quality, local context may be an insufficient determinant
- Good design is different in rural and urban areas and there is not a one size fits all solution

Strategic Environmental Assessment Screening Statement

A draft Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) screening statement was prepared and consulted upon alongside the scoping consultation. No comments were highlighted in relation to the draft SEA screening statement; this included a response form the statutory consultee the Environment Agency.