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Date	3rd SEPTEMBER 2020		
Report Originator	HEAD OF NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE JOINT PLANNING & DELIVERY UNIT		
Title	NORTH NORTHAMPTONSHIRE PLACE SHAPING SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD)		

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to a proposed approach to progressing local design guidance in North Northamptonshire.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Joint Planning Committee (JPC) has considered the Place Shaping Supplementary Document (SPD) on several occasions, including Member Workshops to consider detailed wording of the SPD.
- 2.2 The JPDU and LPAs are currently reviewing the range of development plan documents, supplementary planning documents and other guidance that the unitary council will need. This will inform our recommendations on which documents should be rolled forward or superseded on vesting day, and what new guidance should be prepared. As part of this exercise, discussions with the Planning Policy Managers and Chief Planning Officers have considered how best to take forward a Place Shaping SPD. This was discussed against the backdrop of the considerable and ongoing changes to the national and local planning context which is set out in section 3 below. The proposed North Northamptonshire (NN) approach in the light of these changes is set out in section 4.

3. CHANGES TO THE NATIONAL AND LOCAL PLANNING CONTEXT AND IMPLICATIONS

National policy and guidance on design

- 3.1 Since work began on the SPD the Government has put a stronger focus on design, with new national policy and guidance published or promised, including:
- National Planning Policy Framework – new section on achieving well-designed places
 - National Planning Practice Guidance (Oct 2019) – guidance on design process and tools
 - [National Design Guide](#) (Oct 2019) sets out 10 characteristics of good design
 - Government Planning for the Future White Paper (August 2020) – puts greater focus on design at the local level (see paras 3.4-3.7 below)

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- Model National Design Code (expected Autumn 2020).
- Manual for Streets (revised version expected 2022)

3.2 In addition to this new policy and guidance from Government, a new version of the Building for Life 12 assessment tool was published in July 2020. [Building for a Healthy Life](#) (BHL) provides an enhanced tool for shaping and assessing housing-led developments, consistent with national guidance and JCS policies.

3.3 The policy and guidance listed above set out the basic principles/characteristics of good design. These are intended to be used as a platform and baseline for understanding the local context and an analysis of local character and identity to assist Local Authorities with the production of new local / place specific design guides and design codes. The Model Design Code and Manual for Streets will provide more detailed guidance with specific standards to guide the delivery of quality places.

Proposed reforms in the Planning for the Future White Paper 2020

3.4 The White Paper places an even stronger emphasis on design at the local level, with proposals that would require specific design guidance for developments in a locality, reflecting both local character and community preferences.

3.5 It states (Proposal 2) that *“Local planning authorities and neighbourhoods (through Neighbourhood Plans) would play a crucial role in producing required design guides and codes to provide certainty and reflect local character and preferences about the form and appearance of development. These could be produced for a whole local authority area, or for a smaller area or site (as annotated in the Local Plan), or a combination of both. Design guides and codes would ideally be produced on a ‘twin track’ with the Local Plan, either for inclusion within the plan or prepared as supplementary planning documents”*.

3.6 Proposal 14 in the White Paper reveals the significance of this, with a “fast-track for beauty” to incentivise and accelerate high quality development which reflects local character and preferences. Schemes which comply with local design guides and codes will have a positive advantage and greater certainty about their prospects of swift approval. The Government also intends to legislate to *“require that a masterplan and site-specific code are agreed as a condition of the permission in principle which is granted through the plan. These masterplans and codes could be prepared by the local planning authority alongside or subsequent to preparing its plan, at a level of detail commensurate with the size of site and key principles to be established.”* As indicated above, the current Place Shaping SPD sets out general principles, now duplicated in national guidance, rather than the fine-grain of local character, preferences, and site-specificity that the Government expects in local design guidance.

3.7 At the local level, tensions between objectives relating to place-shaping and highways engineering have been an issue throughout the preparation of the SPD, as it is not within the power of the JPC or LPAs to amend the policies or standards of the local highway authority (and vice-versa). The creation of the

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unitary authority will allow these objectives to be balanced more effectively. This has also been recognised by Government as an issue nationwide and will be addressed through a National Model Design Code (to supplement the National Design Guide) which will be complemented by a revised Manual for Streets.

Implications for North Northamptonshire

- 3.8 In short, the current draft SPD is no longer aligned with current government thinking. The draft Place-Shaping SPD now duplicates much of the national policy and guidance (given that it pre-dates the above and much of the new national policy and guidance covers the same topics/issues included in the SPD) and it does not provide sufficient local character specific detail by virtue of the extensive area it covers (North Northamptonshire).

4. PROPOSED APPROACH

- 4.1 In view of these factors and recognising the substantial work undertaken to prepare the Place-Shaping SPD, the CPO Steering Group considers that we need to revise our approach and use the SPD as a platform for creating more locally specific NN guidance. It is proposed that the first element of this should be a NN version of Building for a Healthy Life (which is explained in para 4.2 below). A suite of other SPDs and local design guidance will be produced to address key topics in greater detail, using material from the draft place-shaping SPD wherever possible. This will ensure that previous work and issues raised by Members can be taken forward.

- 4.2 [Building for a Healthy Life](#) (BHL) has been written in partnership with Homes England and the NHS England, and is also endorsed by the Home Builders Federation, Design Network and Urban Design Group. The JPDU has worked with a number of the authors of BHL including Stefan Kruczkowski (who has carried out our BfL 12 monitoring) and Sue McGlynn (who assisted with the JCS, urban structures study and Tresham Garden Village), so they are well acquainted with NN design issues. BHL covers key themes that were being addressed in the Place Shaping SPD (Integrated Neighbourhoods, Distinctive Places, and Streets for All) in a visual format that would be hard to better. Feedback on BfL 12 monitoring and training on Building for a Healthy Life will be provided through a seminar on the 10th September, where the JPC will be updated on the timescales for preparing a NN version of BHL.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1 Considerable changes have been made to national policy and guidance on design issues since work began on the Place Shaping SPD. These pick up many of the issues and design principles set out in the draft SPD and emphasise the importance of providing locally specific design guidance that builds on the new national policy and guidance. In short, the current draft SPD was ahead of the game when work began but is no longer aligned with current government thinking. Despite the significant work undertaken by members and officers to

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date, it is not considered good use of resources to finalise the SPD in its current form.

- 5.2 This report seeks to explain evolving thinking on how local design guidance can be produced to implement the place-shaping policies of the JCS, in a way that does not duplicate national policy/guidance and is aligned with Government thinking. Work on the Place Shaping SPD will not be wasted as elements of it will be used in the Building for a Healthy Life document and other SPDs. The JPDU and LPAs are currently reviewing the range of development plan documents, supplementary planning documents and other guidance that the unitary council will need and will identify the suite of additional design guidance through this exercise. This will inform recommendations on which documents should be rolled forward or superseded on vesting day, and what new guidance should be prepared.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 The Head of the NNJPDU recommends that:

- 1. the Joint Planning Committee notes the contents of this report and agrees the proposed approach to providing local design guidance, and**
- 2. Members of the Joint Committee are encouraged to join the briefing on the 10th September in respect of the monitoring of design quality in NN and the potential of the Building for a Healthy Life tool.**

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