

STOCKPORT TOWN CENTRE RESIDENTIAL GUIDE

Report of the Corporate Director (Corporate and Support Services) and Deputy Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Stockport Town Centre continues to change. At the heart of this transformation are ambitious plans to increase and enhance the town centre residential offer. However, to ensure high-quality and sustainable residential growth takes place, we must clearly outline our expectations.
- 1.2. Given our brownfield-first approach, development opportunities in the town centre will continue to have the potential to make a meaningful contribution to the delivery of new homes. Under the Climate Action Now strategy, we are also committed to improving the quality, design, and use of homes to address the challenges of climate change. However, we must protect the heritage and character of Stockport Town Centre by ensuring developments complement and enhance their surroundings.
- 1.3. Further to this, national policy is now placing a greater focus on well-designed places. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act (LURA) sets out a new requirement for authorities to produce design codes for their whole area.
- 1.4. Given this, a Town Centre Residential Design Guide has been prepared to set out the council's design expectations for this area of the borough. While this document is not a design code, we intend to use it as a precursor to our future design coding work.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The document has been prepared by consultants Planit and 5plus Architects. Officers from across the planning team have worked closely with the consultants to ensure that the guide is consistent with Stockport's ambitions. Furthermore, the guide has been reviewed by a range of teams within the council, including the MDC, regeneration, ecology, conservation, highways, drainage and CAN.
- 2.2. The document has been drafted so that it will support both the existing development plan policies as well as the emerging Local Plan policies. The Local Plan will provide a robust and up-to-date policy approach to ensuring sustainable development is delivered throughout Stockport. The Stockport Town Centre Residential Design Guide will support and clarify policies in the Local Plan relating to residential development in the town centre.
- 2.3. The document is made up of four key chapters:
 - A changing town centre - sets out the evolution of Stockport Town Centre and the key priorities for the future.
 - Key components to successful town centre living – general design guidance to be applied to all future residential proposals. This includes factors such as

responding to context and character, prioritising pedestrians and cyclists and ensuring development is green and sustainable.

- The Stockport assets – important features that make up the unique character of Stockport Town Centre, which should be protected and enhanced. This includes (and is not limited to), iconic landmarks, a rich industrial heritage and landscape assets.
- Character area guidance – The guide acknowledges that there is significant variance in the townscape of the town centre. As such, the guide also splits the town centre into 12 distinct character areas and provides specific guidance for each of these areas.

2.4. Efforts have been made to ensure this document is accessible using photographs and illustrations to showcase good practice and explain design concepts. These measures enable a wide range of people to engage with the document.

3. USE OF THE DOCUMENT

3.1. It is intended to be used primarily during the development management process by both developers and council officers/members. Developers will be expected to use the guidance to inform the design of their schemes, whilst officers/members will use it as a decision-making tool and to ensure high-quality design. The design guide can also be used when preparing and reviewing both strategic and detailed masterplanning work within the town centre (such as at Stockport 8). Finally, the design guide also sets a benchmark of what we might want to achieve across other areas in the borough and this can feed directly into future design coding work.

3.2. The document will be published as a technical guide rather than a formal Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). We consider that progressing it as guidance would allow us to apply greater flexibility during the development management process. The guidance would still act as a useful tool to aid discussions; however, it wouldn't be as prescriptive as an SPD, but would nevertheless have weight in the development management process. Progressing this document as guidance will allow us to test it and understand which of the key principles might be included in a town centre design code. It should also be noted that whilst the guide is focussed on the Town Centre area, these principles could certainly be applied elsewhere across the borough. As such we intend that these principles will feed into the authority-wide design code.

3.3. There are several ways for local authorities to progress design codes. They can be adopted as part of the local plan policies or as part of the development plan through a supplementary planning document. Despite this, it is important to note that SPDs appear to have no role in the new planning system being brought forward. Instead, councils will be able to adopt supplementary plans which can include design codes.

3.4. The planning service has recently been successful in obtaining skills funding of circa £35,000 from DLUHC which will be used for design skills. This funding can be spent within the 24/25 financial year. We are currently exploring options on how best to use this funding to maximise the design output.

- 3.5. As outlined above, the role of SPDs in the planning system is changing. Furthermore, there is an incredibly tight timescale for the emerging Local Plan timetable. Given this, it is proposed that the authority-wide design code should be brought forward as a Supplementary Plan following the adoption of the emerging Local Plan. However, subject to resource and capacity, work on the design code will be at least initiated alongside the local plan process. This will include testing the principles of the Town Centre Residential Design Guide in practice, before adopting them as more formal codes.

4. NEXT STEPS

- 4.1. While the document is not intended to be adopted as a formal Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) the council intends to involve the local community in the same way that it would if an SPD was being prepared. As such, the Design Guide has been prepared following the processes set out in the council's Statement of Community Involvement. This includes:
- Screening to determine whether Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
 - Being made available for public consultation for a 4-week minimum period (maximum 6 weeks).
 - Being made available as an online copy and have hard copies available at the council's offices and deposit locations (libraries etc.)
- 4.2. We intend to consult on this document separately to the Local Plan consultation. As such, we plan to go out to consultation post local government elections in May 2024.
- 4.3. Prior to this, the guide is to be presented to the March cycle of Central Stockport and Heaton and Reddish Area Committees, where comments from the members of the Area Committees will be sought.
- 4.4. Following the consultation period, further changes to the document may be required to address comments that are received. Unless those changes have a significant bearing on the content of the design guide (such that a further period of consultation might be warranted) the Cabinet Member for Economy, Regeneration and Housing will be asked to recommend that Cabinet approve its adoption as technical guidance to inform relevant planning and other related decisions.

5. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1. The design guide will have a negligible impact on these considerations. The consultants may require an additional fee following the consultation to make relevant amendments to the document.

6. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 There are no significant legal considerations associated with the design guide.

7. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

7.1 There are no significant human resources considerations associated with the design guide.

8. EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.1. The design guide is supported by an Equality Impact Assessment which confirms that no major barriers identified, and there are no major changes required.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

9.2. The design guide is supported by a Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulation Assessment. This confirms that it is unlikely any significant environmental effects will arise as a result of adopting the design guide. It also confirms that the design guide is not likely to have significant adverse effects on the integrity of sites in the National Site Network or Ramsar sites.

10. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1. The Economy, Regeneration and Climate Change Scrutiny are therefore requested to comment on the consultation Design Guide.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Regulations Assessment: Screening Assessment and Equalities Impact Assessment are attached as background papers.

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Hannah Mitchell on 07815 014590 or by email to Hannah.mitchell@stockport.gov.uk.