

## **Briefing paper on the consultation by RCC and South Kesteven regarding Design guidelines.**

Paper produced and agreed by the NPAG Housing Sub-Group 10<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

### **Introduction.**

A document has been produced jointly by the above two authorities and Uppingham Town Council (via the NPAG initially) has the opportunity to give feedback via an on-line survey. The survey needs to be completed by 12<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The consultation document runs to 85 pages and is said to cover major housing sites (designated as 10 or more dwellings), smaller housing sites and domestic extensions plus Commercial Developments. In the preamble to the document on page 6 at section 1.3 the relationship of this document with other key documents is listed. It is noticeable that the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan is not specifically mentioned at that point although on the following page Neighbourhood Plans more generally are discussed with the comment:-

#### ***Neighbourhood plans***

*A number of neighbourhood plans have been, or are being, prepared in Rutland and South Kesteven. New development in those areas should also consider the planning policies set out in those neighbourhood plans which are 'made' (i.e. adopted) as they are also used by the local planning authorities to determine planning applications.*

Readers are then invited to follow a link to the RCC website where "made" Rutland Neighbourhood Plans are listed (including Uppingham).

The RCC Website has the following statement:

#### ***Neighbourhood Planning***

*Neighbourhood Planning gives local communities the opportunity to shape development and growth in their area through the Localism Act 2011. Once 'made' (adopted), they become part of the statutory development plan for the area, and the policies and proposals contained within them used in the determination of planning applications, including appeals.*

For this reason we believe that it is important to amend section 1.3 to specifically include reference to made and emerging Neighbourhood Plans (and the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan specifically). We wish to see a statement that the Design Guidance for Uppingham will be set by the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan, much in the same way that the Local Plan states that housing allocations will be made by the UNP.

Given the importance of Neighbourhood Plans to the Design Guidelines and Policies it is worth restating below the Design and Access Policy taken from our existing Neighbourhood Plan:-

#### ***Rationale***

*Uppingham is a beautiful market town with many fine buildings. It was the strong view of the community that the Neighbourhood Plan should ensure the town's future development reflects its heritage and that any new development should acknowledge its character and environment. The Town Council acknowledges the duty this puts upon it and the expectation of quality and sustainability in any new build.*

*Dialogue with developers has revealed that there is joint benefit if the Neighbourhood Plan sets out community expectations. These are best defined in a design statement within a new local policy. This policy establishes a framework to guide all future development. Individual site design and access statements will be required from every developer proposing to build on the sites approved in this*

*Neighbourhood Plan. Policy 8 on Design and Access is the foundation upon which these should be based.*

**Policy 8 - Design and Access**

*Developers must demonstrate in a Design and Access Statement how their proposed development reinforces Uppingham's character and heritage. The statement must set out how the proposals follow the policies and guidance in relevant national and local documents as well as this Plan. The Design and Access Statement must address the following:*

*Context and character*

*Historic character*

*Connection with the countryside*

*Quality for pedestrians, cyclists and the physically disadvantaged*

*Development density and build quality*

*Car Parking*

*Landscaping and access to open and green space*

*Occupier controlled access to fibre, copper and other home office services*

*Environmental footprint*

*Play provision*

*The Town Council reserves the right to require an individual design review on any development of 25 houses or more or any single building of more than 3000sqm. Such reviews should be carried out by an appropriately qualified independent body and conducted within the design review guidelines established by RIBA or CABI. The Plan acknowledges existing policy guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and the current and emerging policies of Rutland County Council.*

The Draft Design Guide Document contains the following comment:

**1.5. Engagement**

*The aspirations, concerns and insights of the local community are an important input into the design process. Planning applications should demonstrate how the proposed design has been influenced by them.*

*The first reference point should be the Neighbourhood Plan, where one exists. Many of these contain policies on design and some include a design guide or code. **The policies in a Neighbourhood Plan have the same weight as those in the Local Plan.***

*Depending on the scale of the proposed development and the sensitivity of the context, applicants may be expected to undertake bespoke community and stakeholder engagement. This will certainly be required for major applications. This SPD does not stipulate how engagement takes place as it should be tailored to fit the situation.*

Approaches could include:

- *Design charettes and co-design workshops: hands on, interactive sessions led by skilled facilitators and designers, they are great for understanding context and generating design options;*
- *Exhibitions and public meetings: good for presenting ideas and collecting feedback;*
- *Online: good for reaching those who may not come to an event, but people need to be aware that the exercise is taking place; and*
- *One to one meetings: these can be appropriate for householder and small infill applications to discuss proposals with neighbours before the application is submitted.*

*For large applications or sites with complex issues, like drainage or heritage, pre-application discussions with statutory consultees or agencies such as the Lead Local Flood Authority, Environment Agency or Historic England should be undertaken so that they have the opportunity to shape proposals rather than just react to a submitted proposal. Planning Performance Agreements might also be used.*

*Pre-application discussions should take place before an outline planning application is submitted. The local authorities will not advise on and negotiate significant amendments to poor quality applications where no pre-application discussions were held.*

*Whichever approach is followed, the planning application should be clear on:*

- *Who has been engaged;*
- *How they have been engaged;*
- *What they said; and*
- *How the design has been influenced by the engagement.*

*The Government's advice on **effective community engagement on design** stresses that "local planning authorities and applicants are encouraged to proactively engage an inclusive, diverse and representative sample of the community, so that their views can be taken in to account in relation to design".*

What is encouraging in the draft document is the comment at section 2.2 which says:-

## **2.2. Describing landscape and heritage character**

*Rutland and South Kesteven have a diverse and complex geography. Whilst every settlement has its own qualities, there are observable patterns in the geology, landforms, landscapes and built forms that make up broad character areas. These characteristics are to be considered when developing design proposals.*

*Whilst there are some local differences, particularly in the flatter Fenland and Trent & Belvoir Vale landscapes to the east and northwest respectively, the key characteristics of the area which are of particular relevance to this guide are:*

- *Predominantly rural with a gently rolling, mixed farming landscape;*
- *Distinctive settlements such as Stamford and **Uppingham**;*
- *Geologically varied with a wide range of soil types, from limestone through to heavy clays, and these form the basis of the materials found in buildings;*
- *Individual hedgerow trees providing important woodland character;*
- *Scattered woodland with some important semi-natural and ancient woodlands.*

Details on the two Rutland Market Towns are few and far between in this draft document so it is pleasing to at least see Uppingham identified as a “distinctive settlement” although the sub-group recorded that there seems to be a bias towards Lincolnshire developments at the expense of Rutland in the text and examples. The key exception to this was that RCC have used the potential St Georges development as an “example” in this document on page 22 of a Design Vision.

Our existing design policy of “Clusters” is supported on Page 45 section 5L by the following:-

**5L: Special places - breaks/interruptions/events**

*Residential layouts can often be very highways dominated and also include long stretches of uninterrupted highway lacking in character. Special places / events should be created along longer streets in order to reduce speeds, add character to the street, serve as navigational points and also respond to surrounding features.*

*Street design should respond to the surroundings, such as an adjacent park, a footpath route crossing the street, a school or local centre, a landmark building, a group of buildings, a junction.*

*In order to address these issues special places should be created within the street network and could include for example:*

- *Village greens and other open spaces;*
- *Urban squares;*
- *Change in surface material and street design to respond to surroundings;*
- *Wider pavement with trees; or*
- *Trees in the highway.*

In summary this first part of the draft guide does provide some support for the importance of both Uppingham and its Neighbourhood Plan plus the importance of local consultation, particularly for larger sites of over 10 dwellings. This identification in the Draft Design Guidelines document of using slightly different criteria for larger sites than for smaller and single domestic sites is in accordance with our emerging refreshed Neighbourhood Plan.

On page 7 the following comment is made:-

*Part 2 of the Guide summarises the national design guidance that all applicants will be expected to follow, and then covers common detailed design issues specific to Rutland and South Kesteven for major schemes (greater than 10 dwellings), before covering small and householder applications, and finally, non-residential schemes.*

At Uppingham Town Council we are rightly concerned about and generally supportive of the need for affordable housing. The Draft Document has the following to say at section 5R on page 52.

**5R: Affordable housing**

*Affordable housing is an important component of all major schemes and needs to be designed with care to maximise community cohesion.*

*In market housing-led schemes, dwellings should be pepper potted around the neighbourhood, with groups of no more than 10 affordable properties. There will also be larger affordable housing only development, to which the rest of this document will apply.*

*Designs should be tenure blind. The use of quarter houses should be avoided with a preference for terraces with rear gardens. Specialist housing should be located appropriately to ensure easy access to community and social facilities, health care facilities and public transport.*

There then follows some detailed technical discussions on suitable materials, sustainable buildings and Architecture that I believe UTC would support as being in line with our own Neighbourhood Plan ambitions.

One key area that we feel needs more “fleshing out” in the draft document concerns the smaller sites. Details seem to be wrapped in with section 6G Extensions on page 60 and given the earlier comments on page 7 that we could expect to see a more detailed section we feel that this is an omission to just treat them like small clusters of extension/infill buildings (if this is indeed the intention). The only detail that we can find is on page 28 where two checklists are given, one for larger sites and the other headed up “**Checklist for smaller and household developments**”: which asks

***Has your design...***

- *Considered nearby buildings in terms of their height, position, massing, materials and architectural style?*
- *Protected and enhanced existing views into, through and out of the site?*
- *Provided adequate access to/from the site for users and servicing?*

Summary.

These proposals are made jointly between RCC and South Kesteven. We are concerned to see this, especially as the document seems to have largely ignored the two Rutland Market Towns in any detail in the text of the document and would like RCC to explain the rationale for the joint approach with our much larger neighbour (as none is given in the document). There are important differences in the Planning Approach taken by the two authorities. For example South Kesteven employs its “Design PAD” (see page 9) which is a multidisciplinary approach by experts to larger sites and seems quite akin to the UTC individual design review in our existing Neighbourhood Plan. RCC does not participate in this scheme. We also note that RCC have used the potential St Georges development as an “example” in this document on page 22 of a Design Vision.

We have already said that we should strengthen the reference to the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan at section 1.3 and seek clarification of whether or not it is proposed to have a separate guideline for smaller sites or if these are to be treated in the same way as domestic extensions. Apart from these points we believe that there is much to support in these Design Guidelines and if adopted will help to strengthen our tools for ensuring that development in Uppingham takes place in line with the general wishes of our residents, provided appropriate notice is taken of the Uppingham Neighbourhood Plan.

Typed by Dave Ainslie with the authority of the NPAG Housing Sub-Group  
10<sup>th</sup> February 2020.