

Report to Norfolk Strategic Planning Member Forum
18th October 2021

Report of Subject Norfolk Strategic Framework Programme Manager
Norfolk County Wide Design Guide Feasibility Officer Review

Purpose

To update members on the work completed by officers to understand the Feasibility of producing a County wide Design Guide.

Recommendation

To note the contents of this report and to recommend no further joint working on a County Wide Design Guide is completed at this stage.

Financial implications

No financial implications.

Contact officers

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Further Information

None.

Report

Background

As part of the work to produce new sections of the NSPF around Climate Change and Health it became clear that design and best practice guidance could help with both climate change and healthy living initiatives.

As such two new agreements were introduced into the latest version of the NSPF:

- Agreement 20 – Norfolk Planning Authorities agree to work together to investigate the production of a county wide design guide and produce a brief for this work. This work will help facilitate climate change and healthy living initiatives across the county by providing high level principles
- Agreement 18 – Norfolk authorities agree to consider matters relating to healthy environments and encouraging physical activity, and fully integrate these into a potential Norfolk-wide design guide and local design codes (which will inform local plans and neighbourhood plans), drawing on key guidance such as Building for a Healthier Life and Active Design.

Also the government has made it clear that it wants to see LAs produce local design guides or codes to help ensure that for the first time design is established as a core pillar of the planning process. The Draft NPPF states:

'all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code and which reflect local character and design preferences.'

Local and National work in this area

Neighbouring Authorities have been active in this area:

- Essex Design Guide has been in place for many years and is backed by Essex Planning Officers Association (EPOA).
- Suffolk have produced a Suffolk Design Charter and a Streets Guide

Nationally the government have produced a National Design Guide and a National Model Design code.

Progress

Officers have investigated the areas of design a County Wide Design Guide could cover which could potentially include.

- Movement
 - Street design and street trees - Covering street types, direct access, adoption, pavement width, cycle width, number of dwellings served etc.
 - Parking design and requirements – noting parking standards are dated and should be reconsidered in the context of good design.
 - Layout types accessibility and permeability
 - Essentially Norfolk's interpretation of Manual for Streets
- Nature
 - Incorporation of SUDs into design
 - Biodiversity enhancement
- Resources
- Use
 - Design of educational establishments
- Resources – energy efficiency, passive design etc.
- Public Space

It important to note that a design guide would NOT:

- Address the many aspects of local design like the materials used in terms of local design character
- Require all developments to look the same
- Stop design codes or masterplans being created for neighbourhoods, areas or individual sites.

Potential benefits

A Norfolk Design Guide could:

- Make it easier for developers who work across the county
- Provide consistency against national guidance
- Help to level the cost impacts of design across the county
- Save LPAs time and resources over completing the work individually
- Help LPAs to deliver their commitments on Climate Change and Healthy Living and Wellbeing

Potential disbenefits

- Some local authorities will want to develop local design guides / codes to address more local design issues and specific sites
- Challenge of effective engagement at a County level – potential for more meaningful engagement on design issues at a local level
- May be difficult to reach consensus on a county-wide basis with implications for timescales
- Resource implications. Do local authorities have resources to commit to both a county design guide and local design codes?

Conclusions

During the course of the work completed to date it has become clear that some LAs within Norfolk do not see the benefits of completing a county wide design guide. There are various reasons for this including:

- LAs are at differing points in the planning process
- Some design work already exists in the county and others are already completing or planning their own work
- Because work would not negate the need to complete additional local design work some LAs see no benefit or cost saving in completing two levels of design guide.

Officers met to discuss if there was merit in further work in this area and concluded that without cross county agreement it was not practical to take the design work any further at this stage. Officers therefore recommend that no further work is completed on design and should a further version of the NSPF be completed the agreements will be updated accordingly.