



Cabinet 25th March

Item

Public

West Midlands Design Charter

Responsible Officer

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1. Summary

This report seeks to endorse the West Midlands Combined Authority Design Charter which was launched in Birmingham on 23rd January 2020, to be used to inform planning decisions and policy development, notably the review of the Local Plan. The purpose of the Design Charter is to improve design quality and place-making across the West Midlands region by supplementing existing Local Planning Authority documents, and not to supersede or replace them.

2. Recommendations

That Cabinet endorses the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) Design Charter, attached at Appendix 1, and acknowledges that this can be taken into account as a material consideration to inform planning decisions and to inform policy development, notably the review of the Local Plan

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

Analysis of the effects on equality

The Charter takes into account key accessibility design principles to ensure inclusivity is achieved for a wide range of groups.

Data protection

There are no data protection implications arising from the recommendation of this report

Human Rights

No issues identified

4. Financial Implications

No issues identified

5. Background

- 5.1 Design Quality for new development is becoming increasingly important in planning decisions. The Government has recognised this by publishing a National Design Guide in October 2019 and locally work is underway to capture what we mean by “good design”, a point raised in work emerging through the development of the Big Town Plan where the concept of a “Shrewsbury Test” was launched.
- 5.2 In addition the Council is now highlighting and promoting design quality through its award scheme and furthermore working to respond to the climate emergency challenges which inevitably will impact on building design and place making.
- 5.3 The WMCA Housing and Land Delivery Board resolved to develop a new regional design guide to align Local Authority and WMCA aspirations to and to raise the standard of design quality generally in new developments.
- 5.4 The Board agreed that the Charter would be non-statutory, concise and would seek to supplement and complement, not supersede, the existing documents of Local Planning Authorities.
- 5.5 The Charter’s purpose is not to set local design policies but seeks to provide a clear and consistent understanding of the West Midlands’ place-making expectations and create a level playing field for developers across the region. An additional purpose of the Charter is to enable the WMCA to define ‘good design quality’ when this is included as a funding condition in its investment decisions and in its commercial negotiations.
- 5.6 Since May 2019 the WMCA has been working with local authorities across the region to develop the charter and a number of officer meetings and workshops have taken place to consider the scope, principles and format. Officers from Shropshire Council have attended meetings and supported this process contributing to the development of the Charter. Comments from Council officers have been taken on board in finalising the Charter.
- 5.7 The Charter is consistent with the Council’s Core Strategy and Site Allocations and Management of Development (SAMDev) Plan but goes further in some areas, notably Theme 3 ‘future readiness’ in relation to Principle 6 (Delivering Low Carbon Development) and Principle 7 (Technological Resilience). This is however timely insofar as Shropshire Councils decision to create a task force to deliver a climate change strategy.

5.8 The Charter was received by the WMCA Housing and Land Delivery Board meeting on 30 September 2019 and was formally launched in Birmingham on 23rd January 2020.

5.9 The WMCA Regional Design Charter consists of 12 principles based around the following six themes:

Character

- Principle 1: Regional Ambition
- Principle 2: Local Distinctiveness

Connectivity and Mobility

- Principle 3: Regional Network
- Principle 4: Modal Shift

Future-readiness

- Principle 5: Climate Resilience
- Principle 6: Delivering Low Carbon Development
- Principle 7: Technological Resilience

Health and Wellbeing

- Principle 8: Building Active Communities
- Principle 9: Promoting Wellbeing

Engagement and Stewardship

- Principle 10: Engagement
- Principle 11: Stewardship

Delivery

- Principle 12: Securing Social Value.

5.10 The Charter is capable of being a material planning consideration in the determination of planning applications although the weight that can be attached to it will depend on individual circumstances.

5.11 The Charter is intended to be published in hard copy and digital formats, and is envisaged as being a living document to be reviewed on a biannual basis. It will include:

- A two-page printed format, including the principles only; and
- A longer, web-based version, including principles, supporting information and case studies.

5.12 The WMCA has committed to carrying out monitoring and evaluation of the autumn 2019 Charter to test its impact in practice on specific development schemes, with the expectation that it will be reviewed on a biannual basis.

5.13 A copy of the short form charter is set out within Appendix 1 of this report.

6.0 Climate Change Appraisal

6.1 The Charter is focused on improving quality of life for all residents of the West Midlands region through better place-making and design. It includes 12 principles organised around six key themes. Principles 5 to 7 focus on how developments should address matters of climate resilience, delivering low

carbon development and harness technological innovation under a broad theme of future readiness.

7.0 Conclusions

The Regional Design Charter aims to provide a clear understanding of the West Midlands' place-making expectations, providing a level playing field and baseline of design quality across the region and is presented to Cabinet for endorsement. Shropshire Council officers have played an active role in its development and it aligns with a number of the Council's priorities for place making and climate change. The Charter does not replace or supersede any existing locally set design policies within Shropshire, rather its intention is to complement them and be a consideration to improve design quality outcomes for planning decisions and to inform policy development as part of the review of the Local Plan.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
None
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Councillor Gwilym Butler, Portfolio Holder - Communities, Place Planning and Regulatory Services
Local Member All Members
Appendices Appendix 1 – The West Midlands Design Charter