DONCASTER LOCAL PLAN

South Yorkshire Residential Design Guide
Supplementary Planning Document

CONSULTATION STATEMENT

July 2015
STATEMENT OF REPRESENTATIONS PROCEDURE

The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 – Regulation 12 Public Participation

Introduction

The overall aim of the guide is to create high quality housing which is attractive, sustainable, fit for purpose and durable.

The guide is aimed principally at housing developments of over 10 units. The purpose of the guide is to update the old ‘Better Places to Live in South Yorkshire’ design guide to provide robust urban and highway design guidance (including technical standards) for planning applicants, agents, developers and designers. It represents best-practice guidance across South Yorkshire, and will be used by Doncaster Council to promote and appraise the quality of new housing proposals. The guide will help to improve housing design quality, protect the character of existing urban areas, ensure resident’s amenity is protected, and help to meet the Council’s priorities for good quality housing in attractive, safe and prosperous neighbourhoods.

Process of production of the Draft SPD

During production of the guide there were 3 stakeholder workshops which were held with Local Authority, house-builder and Registered Social Landlord representatives who are active in the South Yorkshire area. These representatives provided input into the aims and objectives of the guidance.

There was a round of internal Council consultations on the first draft document during 2009. Following another period of internal consultation during March 2010, changes were made before a period of statutory public consultation and engagement which ran for a six week period between 14th June 2010 and 23rd July 2010. During this period the consultation was advertised in a local paper, the document was available online and hard copies were made available at Danum House and Central Library. All Councillors, Parish Councils, statutory consultees, developers and agents, on the Council’s databases, (totalling over 200 contacts) were notified of the consultation and views sought. In Doncaster a number of drop-in session days were made available to the public to discuss the document. Officer’s also held a targeted consultation workshop for agents and developers with over 200 representatives invited, including local agents.

Following the statutory six week period, officers held a series of clarification meetings with housebuilder representatives who had raised issues with the document during the consultation period (see below).

Consultation summary and proposed amendments

Overall there were around 20 detailed representations made during the consultation, as well as the discussions that took place at the workshops and post-consultation clarification meetings with developers. Subject to a number of suggested changes the public sector respondents (including English Nature, Yorkshire Forward, Homes
and Communities Agency, SYPTE) and the Civic Trust’s were supportive of the guide. Environment Agency and South Yorkshire Police suggested there needed to be stronger reference to flood resilient design and Designing out Crime respectively. This was addressed in the final document by providing links to other sources of information and a new section on Security.

Responses from the private sector agents and house-builders suggested a wide range of amendments to the guide which have largely been taken on board. The developers were more critical of the guide, suggesting it would have a negative effect upon viability and could constrain development due to certain design requirements and standards, although no robust evidence was presented to support these views. Whilst this has to be accepted to a degree, there is strong evidence that good design offers a wide range of other benefits, that it can add value to a development and can help to reduce long term costs (e.g. costs of crime or damage to the environment).

Further investigation of these concerns revealed that the key issues were the cumulative effect of some of the design requirements (particularly Lifetime Homes, Wheelchair Housing and increased internal space standards) being introduced at a time when the housing market was weak, viability is a real issue for the industry. In response, the design guide makes it clear that whilst meeting these standards is desirable and represents best practice, they are not mandatory unless the Council has an adopted policy in place requiring it (a policy which has been properly tested through the Local Development Framework evidence-base). In any case these standards are now largely superseded by the Housing Standards review.

Further targeted engagement with the private sector representatives also revealed that they were concerned that the document would be interpreted too stringently by planning officers and that every guideline would be required for every development. This is not the intention of the document which is meant as a guide, it uses Building for Life (BFL) as a flexible design quality benchmark to be met. The Home Builders Federation has signed up to BFL and most private sector respondents recognised the value of it. The guide was amended to be clearer and better distinguish between the essential and desirable guidelines.

Since its publication in 2011 the guide has been used by officers through the development management process and it has helped influence the design quality of a large number of new housing developments in Doncaster in a positive way, without significant adverse effects on the viability of development.