

Maidstone Building for Life 12

Final Decision-Maker	Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	Rob Jarman
Lead Officer and Report Author	Rob Jarman
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary:

Building for Life 12 (endorsed by Government and referenced in the revised NPPF) provides a consistent structure for discussions on design principles. A 'Maidstone BC' version has been drafted which maintains the 12 questions but places emphasis on what is important to Maidstone BC.

This report makes the following recommendation to Strategic Planning, Sustainability and Transportation Committee :-

That:

1. The Maidstone Borough Council Building for Life 12, attached as Appendix 1, be approved for use and publication.
2. A Member Design Champion be appointed to work alongside the Head of Planning and Development.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
SPST	12 March

Maidstone Building for Life 12

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Paragraph 129 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018) states that "*Local planning authorities should ensure that they have access to, and make appropriate use of, tools and processes for assessing and improving the design of development. These include...assessment frameworks such as Building for Life*" (Birkbeck D and Kruczkowski S (2015) Building for Life 12: The sign of a good place to live). Strategically, the revised NPPF has an entire chapter dedicated to good design and it is clear that central government are putting great emphasis on delivering good design.
- 1.2 Building for Life 12 ("**BfL 12**") is a national assessment tool giving structure and consistency to discussions on design principles. BfL 12 helps guide development proposals towards better design. It is a mechanism through which local planning authorities can promote good design practice within their administrative boundaries and against which developers can set benchmarks for their businesses. Developments that are based on these principles will help developers demonstrate to local planning authorities that their proposals are well considered and responsive to considerations such as local characteristics specific to a given site.
- 1.3 The latest version of BfL 12 is 2018. The eponymous 12 questions (falling into 3 sections) are:-

Section 1: Connecting to/integrating into the neighbourhood

1. Connections
2. Facilities and services
3. Public transport
4. Meeting local housing requirements

Section 2: Creating a place

5. Character
6. Working with the site and its context
7. Creating well defined streets and spaces
8. Easy to find your way around

Section 3: Street & Home

9. Streets for all
10. Car parking

11. Public and private space

12. External storage and amenity

In relation to apartment blocks of three or more storeys - which create few, if any, new streets and where the key design issues are how blocks respond to their locality, existing streets and movement - alternative prompts are incorporated within the guidance to accommodate such developments.

1.4 Based on a 'traffic light' system the aim is to pass as many of the above 12 questions as possible and passing a minimum of 9 is recommended.

1.5 Design South East were commissioned last year (2018) to produce a Maidstone version of Building for Life 12 and this has been achieved and is produced at Appendix 1. There were design trips with councillors to new housing developments within Maidstone Borough and there was also a member workshop, the purpose of which was to raise awareness of good design in general and stimulate discussion and then focus on what was important to Maidstone Building for Life 12.

1.6 The draft Maidstone version of BfL 12 does not change any of the 12 questions but in the preface and examples emphasis is placed on the importance of :-

- a) Vernacular detailing and materials
- b) Landscaping being integral to good design
- c) The importance of streets for all
- d) Sustainable design principles
- e) Bio-diversity being integral to good design

1.7 The Maidstone BfL 12 has been designed to be used to support consultation and community participation. It will also be used to: guide masterplans and design codes; frame pre-application discussions (applicants will be expected to self-assess their emerging proposals); inform design reviews; structure design and access statements; support local decision making, give a framework to the design section in committee reports (with the full BfL 12 assessment potentially included as an appendix); and where necessary, justify conditions relating to detailed aspects of design, such as materials.

1.8 Good design can only be delivered by, amongst other things, a constructive working relationship between members and officers and so it is recommended that there is a member design champion. There was a member design champion previously at this Authority.

1.9 In terms of operational practice, it is common for major proposals, in particular to be the subject of pre-application discussion normally in the form of a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA). Normally there would be at least one bespoke meeting on the theme of 'design' but it will

become standard practice to explicitly measure the proposal against the 12 questions set out in the Guidance in order to achieve passes on at least 9 as an objective. This will often be an iterative process. Planning Committee reports will highlight this where appropriate. Where schemes are not of an appropriate design standard then they are likely to be refused with the Guidance being explicitly referred to. However, the main thrust of the Guidance will be to provide for a structured and consistent conversation on design rather than a 'box ticking' exercise.

- 1.10 If agreed then the Maidstone Building for Life 12 would form the foundation for further local design guidance, for example, the design of streets in housing developments.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 'Do nothing': this would mean that Maidstone Borough Council is not visibly endorsing central government's emphasis on the delivery of well designed development. Secondly, without using a design assessment tool such as Building for Life 12 there may well be unstructured and inconsistent design discussions. This option would effectively mean keeping the status quo although this would not negate the fact that Building for Life 12 is a material planning consideration given the explicit reference in the revised NPPF.
- 2.2 SPST could approve one recommendation but not the other. This would dilute this Council's commitment to working collaboratively in delivering good design.
- 2.3 Approve both recommendations as this clearly shows that this Authority is committed to the achievement of good design and is seeking to set clear guidance on how this is to be achieved.

3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The preferred option is to approve both recommendations, namely:
 - 1) To approve the Maidstone BC version of Building for Life 12 (set out in Appendix A) for use and publication.
 - 2) Appoint a member design champion to work alongside the Head of Planning and Development to promote good design.

This would show commitment and provide a foundation for informed, consistent and structured discussion on good design and set clear guidance as to how this is to be achieved.

4. RISK

- 4.1 There are risks around not approving the first recommendation in terms of reputation and inconsistent decisions on design.
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5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 5.1 This is not to be adopted as supplementary planning guidance as there is no need to do so.
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6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 6.1 As well as being published on the web site, planning officers will make explicit reference to the document in pre-application discussions and Planning Committee reports as appropriate.
- 6.2 As stated above, the document will form the foundation for further more specific design guidance and there will be further design tours and workshops to discuss and observe best practice.
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7. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	Accepting the recommendations will materially improve the Council's ability to achieve development with a clear sense of place.	Rob Jarman
Risk Management	Already covered in the risk section.	Rob Jarman
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new funding for implementation.	Mark Green
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Rob Jarman
Legal	No direct legal implications arise from this report.	Russell Fitzpatrick, Lawyer

		(Planning) Mid Kent Legal Services
Privacy and Data Protection	No implications arising directly out of this report	Russell Fitzpatrick, Lawyer (Planning) Mid Kent Legal Services
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Policy & Information Manager
Public Health	We recognise that the recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals. .	Rob Jarman
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation will not have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder.	Rob Jarman
Procurement	N/A	Rob Jarman

8. REPORT APPENDICES

8.1 The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Draft Maidstone Borough Council Building for Life 12

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- Revised NPPF (2018)
- Building for Life 12 (2018)