

Committee: Policy, Resources and Economic Development Committee	Date: 27 November 2019
Subject: Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)	Wards Affected: Brentwood North, Brentwood South, and Brentwood West
Report of: Phil Drane, Director of Strategic Planning	Public
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Summary

Brentwood Town Centre is under increasing pressure to meet development needs as the borough's main centre and focus for economic activity. An increase in the number of Town Centre planning applications has resulted in the need for specific design guidance to ensure that development enhances local character, maintains and protects heritage, and improves the quality of design for buildings and spaces.

Work on the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide started in 2017. Public consultation took place between February and March 2019. Responses have been processed and addressed in the final issue of the Design Guide (Appendix A). A Consultation Statement has been prepared, setting out a summary of consultation responses and how these have been considered (Appendix B).

Adopting the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will provide the Council's Planning Development Management Team with the tools to advise applicants on high quality design and determine development proposals in line with this expectation. This is consistent with the Council's emerging Local Development Plan (Pre-Submission Local Plan, February 2019). It is also consistent with the National Design Guide and updates to planning practice guidance on design, published by Government in October 2019.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

R1. Approve the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide (Appendix A) as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).

Main Report

Introduction and Background

1. The Brentwood Pre-Submission Local Plan (February 2019) sets out a spatial strategy for sustainable growth in the borough to meet local development needs. It identifies potential for Brentwood Town Centre to intensify, accommodate new development, and meet projected demands for a range of uses, such as residential, retail, and employment. This is in line with the requirement to maintain a vibrant and healthy High Street. The Plan also requires high quality design for all development consistent with local character.
2. The need for specific design guidance in Brentwood Town Centre was identified when the Council published the more strategic natured Brentwood Town Centre Design Plan (November 2017). The Design Plan was produced to reinforce the Town Centre's role as the focus for economic growth and to complement the Local Plan considering the need for a strategic design-led approach for key development opportunities, some of which Council owned. The work identified the importance of setting design guidelines for any new development that may come forward to create a coherent Town Centre, ensuring that the unique aspects and character of Brentwood are respected and retained.
3. In addition to working on the Design Plan, it became evident that design guidance would provide tools to assist the Council's Planning Development Management Team when determining development proposals within the Town Centre. It would also assist applicants and developers to deliver high quality, sustainable development that:
 - a) Is appropriate to context and compatible with the urban grain and materiality of the surroundings;
 - b) Makes positive improvements to the townscape in which it is located. This may be in terms of the physical built form, social well-being, biodiversity or green infrastructure;
 - c) Creates safe environments where crime and disorder, or fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life;
 - d) Makes a positive contribution to the local economy and the vitality of Brentwood Town Centre; and
 - e) Places the user and the user experience at the heart of design decisions.
4. Urban design specialists Levitt Bernstein were commissioned in June 2017 to prepare the Design Guide. For the guidance to form some weight in the planning decision-making process it was proposed that the Design Guide be

prepared with a view that it be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). According to planning practice guidance, an SPD is a document that adds further guidance to the policies in the Local Plan, capable of being a material consideration in planning decisions but not part of the development plan (paragraph 008, reference ID 61-008-20190315, revision date 15 03 2019).

5. In November 2018 the Council approved that the Draft Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide be subject to public consultation in line with national policy and guidance (Ordinary Council, Item 199, 14 November 2018). Consultation took place for six-weeks between 5 February and 19 March 2019.
6. The Design Guide provides a detailed analysis of Brentwood Town Centre to create four main character areas that development proposals should consider. A character area is defined as a zone within the Town Centre that has its own unique features (such as built form, use and scale of the streets) and a distinct setting. The four identified character areas are:
 - a) Brentwood High Street;
 - b) Other commercial streets;
 - c) Brentwood Station; and
 - d) Residential.
7. Area specific guidance for new development within each of these character areas is provided in the Design Guide. In addition to design guidelines specific to the character areas, the Design Guide includes chapters on density & residential typologies; public realm and materiality; and sustainability.

Issue, Options and Analysis of Options

8. During public consultation a total of nine responses were received via email and letter, seven from residents (a), and two from other local authorities (b).
 - a) In the seven comments from seven local residents, five objected to development in the Town Centre. Two welcomed the introduction of the document, raised reservations (and/or requested more information) regarding transport improvement measures, the Baytree Centre area, affordable housing, night-time economy impacts, and waste disposal.
 - b) From the two local authorities, Chelmsford City Council considered that the Design Guide was clear and comprehensive and had no further comments to make. Essex County Council highlighted the need to refer to the Essex Design Guide and to liaise with Essex County Council during the application process.

- c) In addition, comments received outside the consultation period were received and considered (see Appendix B).
9. These comments were considered and addressed as part of work to prepare a final version of the Design Guide. The Council's Town Centre Member Working Group was tasked with scrutinising the consideration of comments so that the document could be reissued for consideration by the Council before being adopted. The group did this until it was disbanded in May 2019. Since then the Design Guide has been brought to the Local Development Plan Member Working Group has considered the comments and amendments to the Guide as a result. Responses and actions to each of the comments raised during consultation are set out in the Consultation Statement (Appendix B).
10. If adopted as an SPD, the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide will formally form part of the Council's decision-making process, alongside the Local Plan and other adopted guidance.

Reasons for Recommendation

11. Brentwood Town Centre is under increasing pressure to meet development needs. It is the borough's main centre with sustainable transport links and key services. It is the focus for economic activity centred on the High Street. It provides brownfield development opportunities in a Green Belt borough. This has resulted in increased development activity and planning applications in recent years. As a result, design guidance is needed to enhance local character, maintain and protect heritage and history, and improve the quality of design for buildings and spaces.
12. In October 2019 the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government published a new National Design Guide, alongside an update to planning practice guidance on design (Design: Process and Tools). This places a stronger emphasis on the roles of non-strategic policies in providing a clear indication of the types of development that will be allowed in a local area. Planning practice guidance refers to local design guides and highlights their importance in communicating local design expectations and requirements (paragraph 005, reference ID 61-008-20190315, revision date 15 03 2019). It sets out that local design guides should be informed by the 10 important characteristics of good places set out in the National Design Guide. After review, and despite being prepared in advance of the launch of the National Design Guide, the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide is in line with these characteristics.

13. To assist the Council determine planning applications in the Town Centre it is recommended that the Design Guide is adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) so that it holds necessary weight in the decision-making process.

Consultation

14. For the Design Guide to be adopted as an SPD, public consultation is required in line with national policy, guidance, and regulations. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the plan-making framework (paragraphs 15 to 37). Planning practice guidance defines the role of SPDs (see paragraph 4 of this report). Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the SPD procedural requirements. The Design Guide was subject to a six-week public consultation ended in March 2019. Public drop-in sessions were held on Friday 1 March and Saturday 2 March 2019 as part of consultation at the Baytree Centre to give members of the public an opportunity to ask questions.
15. Regulation 12 requires the local authority to prepare a statement setting out all persons consulted, a summary of the issues raised by those persons, and how those issues were addressed in the SPD. A Consultation Statement has been prepared in line with this requirement (Appendix B). As responses were considered Members were consulted through the LDP Member Working Group. If the Design Guide is adopted, training sessions will be organised with Members of the Planning Committee, although this can be open to all Members including local ward Members.
16. The Design Guide has been prepared in consultation with the Council's Planning Development Management Team and other relevant teams, such as Economic Development and Community Safety / Enforcement.

References to Corporate Plan

17. The Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide will provide supplementary guidance to the Brentwood Local Development Plan, which is a key priority in the Council's 'Vision for Brentwood' Corporate Plan 2016-2019. Enabling economic growth and the role of Brentwood Town Centre are also themes prioritised in the drafting of the Council's new corporate strategy.

Implications

Financial Implications

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18 There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

Legal Implications

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19 Regulations 11 to 16 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 set out the procedural requirements to be followed before adoption of a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) by a local authority. Regulation 12 specifically imposes the requirement for a local authority to prepare a statement setting out all persons consulted, a summary of the issues raised by those persons, and how those issues were addressed in the SPD. These requirements have been met by the public consultation undertaken and the Consultation Statement.

Economic Implications

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20 Whilst the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide focuses on design and quality, the overall aim to improve the Town Centre has crossover implications for work relating to Economic Development and Community Safety, among other areas. Relevant teams and partners have been involved in the consultation process to ensure joined-up thinking on local strategies. Aims to improve design quality in the Town Centre will likely have a positive effect on the local economy, individual businesses, and inward investment.

Other Implications (where significant) – i.e. Health and Safety, Asset Management, Equality and Diversity, Risk Management, Section 17 – Crime & Disorder, Sustainability, ICT.

21 Consideration of the design guidance will need to be had for any future proposal involving Council owned assets in the Town Centre.

Background Papers

Brentwood Town Centre Design Plan, Brentwood Borough Council (November 2017) [www.brentwood.gov.uk/towncentre]

National Design Guide, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (October 2019) [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-design-guide>]

Planning Practice Guidance, Design: Process and Tools, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (published 6 March 2014, last updated 1 October 2019) [<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design>]

Appendices to this report

Appendix A: Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide (August 2019)

Appendix B: Consultation Statement on the Brentwood Town Centre Design Guide (August 2019)