

DESIGN PROCESS FOR MAJOR SCHEMES

INTRODUCTION

New development will be required to be of high design quality (Core Strategy Policy EN3). The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) clearly states that 'Development that is not well designed should be refused'.

However, design quality is not just about what a development scheme looks like, important though that is. It is a much wider concept that includes creating places that work well for people and biodiversity, which are robust and adaptable, while responding to existing local character and identity.

To achieve high quality design in Rother an applicant will need to demonstrate an understanding of the site and its context, and that consideration has been given, in a logical way, to how the development can respect and respond positively to that context. This document sets out the Design Process steps Rother District Council (RDC) ordinarily expects development schemes to take from inception to completion. RDC favours the use of the [Building for a Healthy Life](#) (BHL) design code to achieve high quality design.

Pre-Application Advice & Planning Performance Agreements

RDC strongly recommends applicants engage in pre-application discussions with officers, as this can save time and avoid abortive work. There is a charge for such advice and full details of the advice format and relevant charges can be found at [Pre-Application Advice – Rother District Council](#)

Some larger schemes will also benefit from a Planning Performance Agreement (PPA) which include agreed expectations for the different steps of the design process. RDC's PPA Charter can be found at [Planning Performance Agreements](#)

This note, illustrated by figure 1 overleaf, summarises RDC's expectations regarding design process at pre-application/PPA stage for major schemes.

To give meaningful advice, RDC will need to receive all information outlined in the design steps below, in advance of any meeting(s). Prior sight will allow officers time to assess submitted information, considering national and local policies and any other material considerations.

LANDSCAPE-LED DESIGN PROCESS

Definition of Landscape

Landscape is much wider in scope than simply the green elements. It consists of everything, including buildings and townscape in settlements, which comes together to produce the distinctive sense of place.

Definition of Landscape-Led Approach

Design, which is strongly informed by understanding the essential character of the site and its context (the landscape), creates development which speaks of its location, responds to local character, and fits well into its environment. It needs to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, biodiversity and cultural heritage of the area and create sustainable and successful places for people.

DESIGN STEPS

STEP 1. EVIDENCE GATHERING

The landscape evidence (including townscape) is required to demonstrate a thorough understanding of the site's context. A lack of understanding of local character is likely to result in a scheme that will not be rooted in its location and risks being 'anywhere' development. Applicants should gather all evidence for the site and its context. Local knowledge as found in the High Weald Management Plan and Housing Design Guide, Neighbourhood Plans and Village Design Statements should also be used.

The amount and complexity of evidence required to describe the character of the site and its context will depend on the sensitivity of the site and the scale of the development. The net should be cast widely to gather evidence about each aspect of the site and its context.

Rother Planning Validation Checklist

RDC's Validation adopted list can be found at [Rother Planning Validation Checklist](#). Reference should be made to this document in advance of any pre-application meeting to identify the specific information requirements relating to the proposal.

Integrated Neighbourhoods

Active Travel England (ATE) is now a statutory consultee in the planning system. The NPPF and National Design Guide (NDG) also provide a strong context for embedding active travel infrastructure and measures within the design of new development. Active Travel objectives should be considered as early as possible in the planning process.

ATE has produced a [Planning Application Assessment Toolkit](#) that helps applicants gather evidence and assess the active travel merits – walking, wheeling, and cycling – of a development proposal. The toolkit is a public document and ATE encourage applicants and transport consultants to use this when developing their proposals.

Distinctive Places

Landscape elements are the same all over the country. It is their patterns and the relationship between them that are different and change our experience of place.

The [East Sussex County Landscape Assessment](#) gives a sub-regional overview of landscape character. Applications relating to heritage assets (designated and non-designated) will also require an assessment of the significance of such asset(s). Guidance can be found at [Assessment of Significance](#).

STEP 2. ANALYSIS & VISION

The evidence collated needs to be analysed to provide a set of development constraints and opportunities for the design of the scheme.

Vision

The applicant is encouraged to set out their Vision for the development. This should include high level aspirations which respond to all relevant policies in the Core Strategy, DaSA and Neighbourhood Plans. Regard should be paid to Design Policy EN3 of the [Rother Local Plan Core Strategy](#), the 12 considerations of the [Building for A Healthy Life](#) (BHL) design toolkit, and for schemes located in or adjacent to the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, the [High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide](#).

It is important that RDC and the applicant discuss the BHL 12 considerations at the very start of the design process, agreeing what is required to successfully address each consideration. The 12 considerations are a very effective way of structuring pre-application discussions relating to design quality.

Design Workshops

With larger (over 50 dwellings) or more significant schemes, RDC would expect applicants to initially concentrate on the more strategic BHL considerations, i.e. The macro scale 'Integrated Neighbourhoods' considerations regarding 'Natural connections', 'Walking, cycling and public transport' and 'Facilities and services.' Subsequent pre-application discussions would then involve an iterative process, potentially including small design workshops with the council, focussing on design development of the micro scale site considerations.

Consultation and Engagement

From an early stage, and continuing as the design is developed, the applicant should engage with officers and relevant stakeholders in the interests of achieving the best design solution and minimising the likelihood of obstacles to the smooth passage of any planning application. In

more sensitive cases, the draft vision should be shared with the local community to encourage useful feedback.

Draft Design & Access Statement

It is not possible for officers to comment effectively on plans and designs without some understanding of the design process that has preceded their development. The evidence, analysis and vision information outlined in the steps above should be shared as a draft Design & Access Statement, demonstrating the design process taken. This work will inform the final Design & Access statement explaining the evolution of the proposal. Guidance can be found at [Design & Access Statements Guidance Note](#).

Design Review

For significant major schemes the Design South East Review Service may also be used, and the developer will be expected to pay for this service.

Pre-Application Advice From Other Bodies

At the planning application stage, major schemes are likely to involve external consultations with several parties. In particular, the Local Highway Authority (ESCC), Lead Local Flood Authority (ESCC) and the Environment Agency are likely to be significant parties to the planning process. These organisations also offer chargeable pre-application advice. Prospective applicants may wish to contact these parties separately, but it will generally be more beneficial for officers from these bodies to be party to any meeting with RDC so that pre-application discussions can be as comprehensive as possible. RDC will be happy to coordinate such liaison if possible.

STEP 3. LANDSCAPE STRATEGY

The Landscape Strategy is a critical part of the design and is a direct response to analysis of the landscape evidence and the vision. The principles of the landscape strategy must inform the subsequent stages of the design process and should, through the identification of opportunities and constraints, set out the development capacity for the site.

STEP 4. IDEAS & CONCEPTS

The site Vision and Landscape Strategy should lead to different ideas or concepts for how the development could be arranged on the site. At this stage, the applicant should try out different options, assessing their respective pros and cons with reference to Core Strategy Policy EN3, the 12 considerations of BHL, the High Weald AONB Housing Design Guide if relevant, the aspirations of the Vision and consistency with the Landscape Strategy.

STEP 5. SKETCH DESIGN & MASTERPLAN

Once the best Concept Design has been chosen, and ideally been subject to pre-application discussion, the proposal can be worked up into sketch design details.

An iterative design process will involve the applicant reviewing and changing the plans, revising them in response to new evidence or critical feedback, to improve both the design and gains from the site.

Masterplans, more appropriate for the largest development schemes, will set out the arrangement of buildings, streets and access as well as incorporate the landscape strategy.

STEP 6. DETAIL DESIGN

All development proposals will ultimately result in detail design drawings and specifications that set out exactly how the development should be built. This will be in the form of plans, elevations, sections, and three-dimensional views (digital or real models).

STEP 7. MANAGEMENT PLANS

Management Plans should be drawn up to show that the ongoing maintenance and future custodianship of the developments are well considered and adequately resourced.

1
Gathering Evidence



2
Analysis & Vision



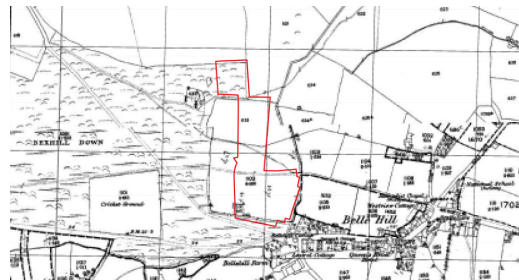
3
Landscape Strategy



4
Ideas & Concept



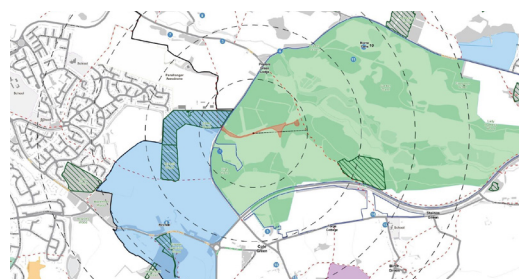
5
Sketch Design



Historic mapping



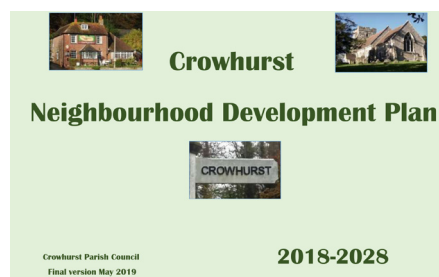
Site Analysis



Landscape Visual Impact Analysis



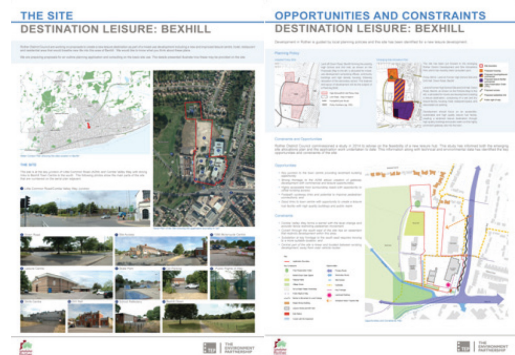
Design Guidance



Local Guidance



Opportunities & Constraints



Consultation & Engagement



Landscape Strategy



Concept



Sketch Design

An illustration indicating the Design Stages 1-5 for a development, showing how each stage forms a milestone in the design narrative and builds on the previous stage.