

SEVENOAKS RESIDENTIAL CHARACTER AREA ASSESSMENT SPD - LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

CABINET - 12 APRIL 2012

Report of the: Director of Community and Planning Services

Status: For approval

Also considered by: LDF Advisory Group (7 December 2011)
Environment Select Committee (20 March 2012)

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary:

The Residential Character Area Assessment for Sevenoaks has been prepared to identify the distinctive local characteristics of the residential areas in different parts of the Sevenoaks urban area and includes guidance on achieving high quality design that responds to local character, in line with policies in the Council's adopted Core Strategy.

The document was developed in conjunction with local residents associations, amenity/historical groups and ward members, who participated in 'walkabouts' in their areas in autumn 2011, to identify positive and negative features in the local streetscene. The draft document was subject to six weeks public consultation (5 January – 16 February 2012), which included three exhibitions to publicise the report and an article in the Chronicle. 51 comments were received from 18 respondents, which are summarised in this report. The vast majority of the comments received were positive and supportive of the aims and content of the document, with a number of suggestions to supplement details in different areas of the report.

This report presents the finalised post-consultation document for approval. It has been revised to incorporate comments received during consultation as per the schedule attached to this report. This report seeks approval to adopt this document as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will form part of the SDC Local Development Framework (LDF). It will then be a material consideration in determining planning applications in that part of Sevenoaks to which it applies.

The schedule of consultation comments and proposed amendments is attached as Appendix 1 to this report and the full revised report is available electronically and in the members room.

This report supports the Key aims of a green environment and safe and caring communities of the Community Plan

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Davison

Recommendation :

That Cabinet be recommended

(a) the revised Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment be adopted as an SPD and that it be printed and published.

(b) copies be made available for sale at a price to be agreed by the Portfolio Holder.

Reason for recommendation: The SPD will assist in achieving the detailed objectives of the Core Strategy.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Residential Character Area Assessment for Sevenoaks has been prepared to identify the distinctive local characteristics of the residential areas in different parts of the Sevenoaks urban area and includes guidance on achieving high quality design that responds to local character, in line with policies in the Council's adopted Core Strategy. This document was subject to public consultation and this report provides a summary of the consultation comments received and how the document has been revised to incorporate and respond to these comments. It is proposed that this document is adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which will form part of the SDC Local Development Framework (LDF) and will be a material consideration in determining planning applications in that part of Sevenoaks to which it applies.

1.2 The preparation of Residential Character Area Assessments is a commitment in the Council's adopted Core Strategy.

2 Area

2.1 The area covered by this document is the Sevenoaks urban area, which includes the developed area of Sevenoaks town, Riverhead, Dunton Green, Bessels Green and Chipstead (see Appendix 2). The boundary coincides with the inner edge of the Green Belt around the developed area. The SPD does not cover Conservation Areas, for which there are separate Appraisals and Management Plans, or commercial areas.

3 Planning Policy Background

3.1 The Adopted Core Strategy (February 2011) states that all new development should be designed to a high quality and should respond to the distinctive local character of the area in which it is situated and that account should be taken of guidance adopted by the Council in the form of local Character Area Assessments. Government guidance advocates that Local Planning Authorities should develop a shared vision with their local communities of the type(s) of residential environments they wish to see and develop design policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the local area. The SPD helps identify the local distinctive character and design guidance to assist the Council in making decisions about the appropriateness of development proposals.

4 Character Areas Assessments

4.1 Tony Fullwood Associates have assisted SDC in preparing the Residential Character Area Assessment. An initial appraisal was undertaken of all areas of the town covered by the SPD and it was evident that a number of areas shared similar characteristics. From this assessment it was possible to identify a typology of 15 character areas:

Victorian/ Edwardian, Inter War Linear Development, Inter War Planned Development, Garden City Influenced Planned Development, Formal Semi-detached Layout, Formal Detached, Formal Avenue, Informal Lane, Open Plan, Bungalows, Compact Terraced and Apartments, Compact Townhouses and Apartments, Clustered Cul-de-sac Developments, Mixed Character and Town Centre Fringe Mixed Use Area.

4.2 The Residential Character Area Assessment for Sevenoaks identifies and defines 170 areas within the town, which fall into these 15 typologies. The assessment identifies positive and negative features within the character areas and includes relevant design guidelines for new development. The intention is that this information will be used to guide the nature of future development and will ensure that the residential character of individual areas within the town is retained and protected. The assessment covers residential typology, architecture and design, street layout and plot size, open space and landscaping, and other elements that contribute or detract from the character of the individual residential areas.

5 Community Involvement and Consultation

5.1 Community involvement in the preparation of the SPD has followed the District Council's adopted Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). There has been close stakeholder involvement in preparing the SPD in order to develop a shared vision with the local community of the type(s) of residential environments they wish to see and to develop appropriate design guidance. Local knowledge has been crucial to this process, to help identify important local features and to develop design principles that will guide future residential development.

5.2 Prior to the drafting of the SPD, several local stakeholder events were held:

- briefing sessions with local Ward Councillors, local amenity and resident groups, Sevenoaks Town Council, Chipstead Parish Council, Chevening Parish Council, Dunton Green Parish Council, Sevenoaks Conservation Council and Sevenoaks Society.
- a series of walkabouts were held involving local amenity and resident associations, local Ward Councillors, Town and Parish Councillors and the Planning Portfolio holder to observe and record the key features which made up the character of individual areas.

5.3 The draft document was considered by the LDF Advisory Group on 7 December 2011 who agreed the consultation draft and suggested that, due to the size of the document, local members should be provided with those sections that related to their ward. The document was then subject to formal public consultation from 5th January to 16th February 2012. Consultation methods included:

- Three public exhibitions were held to publicise the document (14/01, 19/01 and 20/01).
- Notices and an article were placed in the Chronicle,
- Details were sent to statutory consultees, our LDF mailing list and all the groups involved in the walkabouts
- The documents were available on our website and in libraries and council offices.

6 Consultation Responses and Proposed Amendments

6.1 In total, 51 comments were received from 18 respondents, which are summarised below. The vast majority of the comments received were positive and supportive of the aims and content of the document, with a number of suggestions to supplement details in different areas of the report. A summary of all the consultation comments received and the Council's response to these comments is attached at Appendix 1.

6.2 In terms of the split of respondents:

6 responses from local groups (residents associations / historical groups)

5 responses from district / town / parish councillors

4 responses from members of the general public

3 responses from national stakeholders

6.3 The response schedule splits the comments received into general comments and then considers comments received on areas within each of the 15 typologies set out above. In relation to general comments, support for the document was received from the Sevenoaks Society, the Sevenoaks Conservation Council, Sevenoaks Town Council, and a number of residents associations.

6.4 Several parish councils queried the reference to backland development in the document. Backland development is defined as development on land that lies to the rear of existing properties and is normally associated with small scale development (usually one or two plots). There is nothing against the principle of such development in national guidance or the LDF, and therefore no change is recommended to the text.

6.5 A query was also raised regarding the reference to landmark buildings, which are defined for various reasons (such as scale, location, use, materials). Some landmark buildings are listed buildings and many were identified on the walkabouts as locally important to the character of an area. One parish council also raised the issue of the Sevenoaks Urban Area, but this was established in the adopted Core Strategy (Feb, 2011) and therefore is outside the remit of this document.

6.6 The Environment Agency requested reference to the use of permeable surfaces where new driveways are proposed, which has now been included in the document. Natural England supported the document and noted that the document covers public realm and trees, but with less focus on habitats and biodiversity. The document is concerned principally with the physical character of the area but supports the Core

Strategy which covers the issue of biodiversity and a network of habitats in greater detail including Policy SP 11 (Biodiversity). Age Concern sought the retention of bungalows, but this is outside the remit of this document and is covered by Core Strategy: Policy SP 5, which seeks a range of housing types and sizes.

6.7 The reference to Lord Greatness has been removed from the document, as the reliability of the source document has been queried. A number of typographical errors were also pointed out which have been corrected in the final version of the SPD.

6.8 Boundary changes have been made in two areas, to include a small residential area (Quarry Cottages, London Road), which was originally excluded from the SPD due to the adjacent commercial area, and Bullfinch Close area in Chipstead has been sub-divided, as requested by Chevening Parish Council – please see Appendix 3.

6.9 In relation to comments on each of the area typologies, the following comments were received:

A Victorian/ Edwardian – factual date amendment

B Inter War Linear Development – comments from White Hart RA in relation to adjacent protected woodland. The belt of trees is located outside the character area and, because of the disposition of buildings and the sloping gardens, is not prominent when viewed from the public realm of the Weald Road area. For this reason, the tree belt is not mentioned with section B05. However the belt of protected trees is located within the G01 White Hart Area and is depicted on the Townscape Map for this area.

C Inter War Planned Development – no comments

D Garden City Influenced Planned Development – a number of factual and editorial amendments

E Formal Semi-detached Layout – factual amendments

F Formal Detached – additional reference to insertion of over dominant dormers as a negative features (in Montreal Park Area), and the views of the parkland as a positive feature (in St Mary's Drive)

G Formal Avenue – White Hart Estates RA made detailed comments about the White Hart area. The area description has been amended to reflect the roads covered by the area. Detached garages forward of the building line, particularly those close to the front boundary, were raised as a negative feature in this area and additional wording and photograph to this effect has been added. New development which does not reflect the characteristic set back from the road or allow spacing between buildings, is already referenced under negative features, but an additional photograph illustrating such cramped development has been inserted. References to the characteristic low boundary walls and hedging and the presence of semi-detached housing (on Shenden Way) have also been inserted. The document references the surrounding countryside, rural character and views into the countryside. However, since the document covers the built up area of the town, the document does not refer specifically to Green Belt / AONB designations which affect land beyond the built up area. Negative comments were made on the height and style of roof architecture. The walkabout indicated a variety of roof styles within the area. The SPD notes that the building heights in the White Hart area are

varied. The issue of roof heights within the area is also compounded by the subtle and dramatic changes in topography across the area. This results in a varied roof profile within and between streets. For this reason, it would be unreasonable for design guidance in this area to limit all properties to existing ridge heights or to state an in principle preference against front dormer windows.

H Informal Lane – Packhorse Road RA made detailed comments about the Packhorse Road area. The area description has been amended to reflect the roads covered by the area and additional historical context has been added. Reference to the restrictive covenants on the land has been inserted in the introductory section (6) and the text on Sunrise nursing home has been clarified. General traffic noise has been inserted as a detractor and reference to the adjacent Bessels Green Conservation Area has been added. Westerham Road has not been removed from the section (H08) as it exhibits most of the characteristics of this character type including large individually designed well screened detached houses set well back from the road with generally a minimal impact on the street scene. Hedges and trees abut this part of the road and development is generally well hidden by vegetation and narrow entrances. Parts have no footway and an informal edge, which complements its rural character. In relation to building heights, the reference to ‘two storeys with some bungalows’ is factually correct and has not been amended. The issue of backland development was raised by the RA, which suggested that this type of development should be discouraged. There is nothing against the principle of such development in national guidance or the LDF. For the SPD to oppose backland development in principle would be contrary to the planning policies and guidance which this document sets out to supplement. Such development need not result in the loss of the feeling of spaciousness between the properties and would be judged on its impact on the distinctive character of the area as set out in the SPD rather than a calculation of density. The addition of ‘should therefore be resisted’ as suggested would not add to the design guidance and therefore no change is recommended to the text.

I Open Plan – factual amendment

J Bungalows – no comments

K Compact Terraced and Apartments – issue of commuter parking in the Sidings (Dunton Green) was raised. Whilst commuter parking is considered a negative factor by residents, in visual terms, the parking issue is not considered significant to the area and therefore no change is recommended to the text.

L Compact Townhouses and Apartments – no comments

M Clustered Cul-de-sac Developments – no comments

N Mixed Character – an additional detractor (commercial buildings) has been added to the Rye Lane section in Dunton Green. An additional positive feature (view of the North Downs) has been added to the Seal Road section. Chevening Parish Council has requested the Bullfinch Close area to be sub-divided to reflect different characters within the area, and this amendment has been made to the document – please see Appendix 3.

O Town Centre Fringe Mixed Use – the inclusion of this area was welcomed by the RA.

6.10 Following public consultation, the document has been amended to reflect stakeholder comments. The revised document was reported to Environment Select

Committee for consideration, who noted a minor typographical error in section H14, but otherwise fully supported the adoption of the SPD. The document is now reported to Cabinet to agree the adoption of the document. The Council will publish the final document on our website and in document format that will be available in all Council offices and libraries. A summary of all the consultation comments received and the Council's response to these comments will also be made available to the public.

7 Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

7.1 The options are to agree, vary or reject the document. It is considered that the document is appropriate to assist in achieving the detailed objectives of the Core Strategy.

8 Key Implications

Financial

The cost of producing the Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment SPD is met within the approved LDF budgets.

Community Impact and Outcomes

The preparation of this document had close regard to the Community Strategy vision. The document as a whole is consistent with the Core Strategy DPD and Community Strategy and contributes either in a leading or supporting role to the implementation of many of the Community Strategy priorities. Overall the document will facilitate the implementation of the Core Strategy, which should lead to a wide range of positive outcomes for the community.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

The preparation of an LDF is a requirement under planning legislation. The document is a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which provides additional guidance in relation to policies contained in Development Plan Documents (DPD). There are requirements regarding notification of interested parties and the production of a statutory notice at the adoption stage and these procedures will be followed.

Equality Impacts

An updated Equality Impact Assessment was carried out for the Core Strategy in accordance with Council policy. The SPD is in conformity with the Core Strategy.

9 Conclusion

9.1 It is recommended that the Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment SPD is adopted as an appropriate document to assist in achieving the detailed objectives of the Core Strategy.

10 Risk Assessment Statement

10.1 The SPD must be in accordance with the Core Strategy and other parts of the development plan and national planning guidance. In accordance with the Council's Statement of Community Involvement, SDC will seek to adopt the document as an SPD.

Independent examination by the Planning Inspectorate is not required as the SPD is not a Development Plan Document.

Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Schedule of consultation comments and responses – hard copy

Appendix 2 – Map of area covered–hard copy

Appendix 3 – Four new proposed sections–hard copy

Appendix 4 - Sevenoaks Residential Character Area Assessment SPD – electronic copy

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