

Response to the consultation on changes to the Central Bedfordshire Council Design Guide Supplementary Planning Document

Flitwick Town Council

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Comments on Context and Identity

Flitwick Town Council supports the general principle of designing new buildings that respect the context and identity within which they sit. This is particularly important in locations where there is a significant historical character to the proposed development. Within Flitwick, this will include the locations of listed buildings, as well as Manor Park.

Notwithstanding this, it is also necessary to ensure that there is variety in the built environment unless there is a specific historic value to the area. Within Flitwick, there are a wide variety of built forms even within the more historic centre of the town, with former homes built in the 19th and early 20th Centuries converted into retail units, alongside more modern buildings. This variety is also of value and makes for an interesting street scene from the perspective of buildings.

We would therefore recommend that clarity is given within the design SPD that whilst development should be respectful of the context and identity of the area, this does not necessarily translate into constructing buildings that are simply copies of nearby buildings. On occasions, variety in the built environment may be desirable.

The Town Council agrees that the demolition of listed buildings should not be permitted. The only exception being where there is an overwhelming safety case for doing so.

Finally, we would recommend an additional paragraph within this section that recommends that developers engage with local historical societies and groups in designing with the historic built environment in mind. Such local groups can give insight into the history of local buildings that may inspire new ideas and design concepts to be included in those buildings.

Comments on Built Form

The Town Council only strong views on this section of the SPD relates to densities. The Town Council is generally of the view that densities of new developments should be higher in areas that are the most accessible, especially by walking, cycling and public transport, as well as close to several facilities. Doing so creates an economies of scale for local services, and can help ensure that their sustainability is secured for the long term.

Densities may also seek to create a variety of densities across an urban area, as opposed to simply repeating the same density of development within the development's immediate vicinity. We would recommend an additional paragraph stating that developments should consider the built density of the settlement as a whole, and should there be variance with the immediate environment, state why this is so. It is not logical that large sites should have a variety of densities, yet smaller sites be expected to continue the densities of the immediate environment.

We would also recommend that mention be given in this section of the built form minimising the environmental impacts of the development. Not simply in terms of built materials, but in terms of reducing the impacts of extreme weather events. This could include:

- The integration of measures to reduce storm water runoff within the built form;
- Reducing the impacts of hot weather by maximizing shading from the sun;
- Reduce the likely incidence of ‘canyoning’ during times of high winds by considering the distance between buildings and the direction of the prevailing wind.

Under roof design, we would also highly recommend a preference for the integration of renewable energy as part of roofs in new developments. Most notably through the use of solar panels or roof tiles with the ability to generate electricity. This should be actively encouraged in the design guide.

Comments on Movement

The Town Council agrees that the general approach to design should be to prioritise the movement of pedestrians and cyclists, maximising permeability and safety for those who walk and cycle in new developments. What needs to be considered within the context of Central Bedfordshire, and Flitwick especially, is the radial nature of many settlements. This concentrates the majority of movements onto radial roads, leading to conflicts between different types of movement on these corridors.

While the proposals for grid-style layouts would work, and may be welcomed, in more significant developments, designing for movement within Central Bedfordshire requires effectively integrating walking and cycling on the development into the existing street pattern. We would recommend that additional text is added to this section stressing that new developments must also aid existing streets to support the user hierarchy in the document. This can be through funding off-site improvements, or complimenting the existing street layout in the new development.

The Town Council generally supports the section on Street Character. It is essential that new developments do not give the impression of being dominated by cars and specifically parking, making them more attractive developments, and discouraging car use. This requires sensitive design to create a sense of place in new developments.

The Town Council supports the Design SPD in its position on street trees. The Town Council considers that street trees play a number of important functions, and should be an integral part of the design of new developments.

The Town Council supports the rolling out of School Streets and Play Streets in principle, subject to local engagement and securing community support for such schemes. In new developments, streets outside of schools should be designed in a manner that prioritises the sense of place and actively discourages high levels of traffic passing by the school.

With regards to on street parking, the Town Council has raised a number of concerns about the impacts of on-street parking as part of its comments on planning applications. Such parking

should be sensitively designed and be sufficient in quantity to meet the needs of the development, and actively discourage pavement parking.

Comments on Nature

The Town Council supports the principle of designing with nature in mind, and delivering developments which welcome a variety of different types of wildlife, insects, and plant species. Developments should not come at the expense of rare and protected habitats and species, but where they do occur they should positively contribute to biodiversity and provide refuge, safe routes, and habitats for a variety of species.

The Town Council considers that all developments, regardless of scale, should demonstrate how they will achieve a biodiversity net gain of 10% through the development. The design statements contained within the SPD that seek to achieve this are generally supported by the Town Council.

Comments on Public Spaces

The Town Council generally supports many of the design statements with regards to public spaces contained within the SPD. The Town Council itself manages a number of public spaces within Flitwick, and our comments here come from our experience of doing so.

Public spaces should be designed with their management and maintenance in mind. Whilst having accessible and attractive spaces are desirable, they must be easy to maintain and repair, otherwise they become unsafe or unattractive. We recommend that additional text is added into this section stating that developers should discuss with potential public space managers at the design stage so that such matters are considered at an early stage.

Public spaces should also be designed with safety in mind, especially after dark. This can be tackled most significantly through passive surveillance from nearby streets. But we would recommend that as part of the design, ensuring that there is adequate lighting and potentially CCTV coverage is also actively considered.

Comments on Uses

The Town Council has no significant comments on this section of the SPD.

Comments on Homes and Buildings

The Town Council's earlier comments on context are also relevant to this section of the SPD. The Town Council also agrees that in the design of new developments, there should be a significant focus on inclusive design and ensuring that homes and buildings are adaptable to the changing needs of the population over time.

Comments on Resources

The Town Council agrees with the commitment in the SPD to minimise resource use as part of new developments.