

**Test Valley Revised Local Plan
DPD
2011 – 2029
Regulation 22 – Submission to
Secretary of State**

**Policy E1: High quality development
in The Borough**

**Policy E2: Protect Conserve and
Enhance the Landscape Character
of the Borough**

Topic Paper

June 2014

REVISED LOCAL PLAN

POLICY E1- HIGH QUALITY DEVELOPMENT IN THE BOROUGH POLICY E2- PROTECT CONSERVE AND ENHANCE THE LANDSCAPE CHARACTER OF THE BOROUGH - TOPIC PAPER

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The landscape is one of the most readily appreciated features of the Borough. It provides an attractive setting for settlements within the Borough and is worthy of protection.
- 1.2 Local authorities are encouraged within planning policies to base land use decisions on a thorough understanding of landscape. With a greater knowledge and understanding of the landscapes in the Borough there is an opportunity for the Local Plan to seek high quality developments that can protect, conserve and enhance the character of these landscapes. The aim of seeking high quality development should extend further than designated landscapes and should be applicable across the Borough.
- 1.3 The purpose of this paper is to provide background justification to the inclusion of policy E1- "High Quality Development in the Borough" and policy E2- "Protect Conserve and Enhance the Landscape Character of the Borough" within the Revised Local Plan.

2 Policy Context

National Planning Policy Framework

- 2.1 Within The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF,2012) there is an emphasis on high quality development.

NPPF para 57

It is important to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design for all development, including individual buildings, public and private spaces and wider area development schemes.

NPPF para 58

Local and neighbourhood plans should develop robust and comprehensive policies that set out the quality of development that will be expected for the area. Such policies should be based on stated objectives for the future of the area and an understanding and evaluation of its defining characteristics.

Planning policies and decisions should aim to ensure that developments:

- will function well and add to the overall quality of the area, not just for the short term but over the lifetime of the development;*
- establish a strong sense of place, using streetscapes and buildings to create attractive and comfortable places to live, work and visit;*

- *optimise the potential of the site to accommodate development, create and sustain an appropriate mix of uses (including incorporation of green and other public space as part of developments) and support local facilities and transport networks;*
- *respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation;*
- *create safe and accessible environments where crime and disorder, and the fear of crime, do not undermine quality of life or community cohesion; and*
- *are visually attractive as a result of good architecture and appropriate landscaping.*

NPPF para 63

In determining applications, great weight should be given to outstanding or innovative designs which help raise the standard of design more generally in the area.

NPPF Para 64

Permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.

NPPF para 66

Applicants will be expected to work closely with those directly affected by their proposals to evolve designs that take account of the views of the community. Proposals that can demonstrate this in developing the design of the new development should be looked on more favourably.

NPPF Para 109

The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- *protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological conservation interests and soils;*

NPPF para 113

Local planning authorities should set criteria based policies against which proposals for any development on or affecting protected wildlife or geodiversity sites or landscape areas will be judged. Distinctions should be made between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites, so that protection is commensurate with their status and gives appropriate weight to their importance and the contribution that they make to wider ecological networks.

NPPF para 115

Great weight should be given to conserving landscape and scenic beauty in National Parks, the Broads and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, which have the highest status of protection in relation to landscape and scenic beauty. The conservation of wildlife and cultural heritage are important considerations in all these areas, and should be given great weight in National Parks and the Broads.

NPPF para 156

*Local planning authorities should set out the **strategic priorities** for the area in the Local Plan. This should include strategic policies to deliver:*

- *climate change mitigation and adaptation, conservation and enhancement of the natural and historic environment, including landscape.*

NPPF para 157

Crucially, Local Plans should:

- *identify land where development would be inappropriate, for instance because of its environmental or historic significance; and*
- *contain a clear strategy for enhancing the natural, built and historic environment, and supporting Nature Improvement Areas where they have been identified.*

NPPF para 170

Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should also be prepared, integrated with assessment of historic landscape character, and for areas where there are major expansion options assessments of landscape sensitivity

National Planning Practice Guidance

2.2 The National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG, 2014) provides the following guidance for design and landscapes:

Promotion of good design should be sought at all stages of the planning process¹

Design impacts on interaction between people and place. It affects a range of social economic and environmental objectives. Planning policies and decisions should seek to ensure that the physical environment supports these.²

Planning should promote local character including landscape setting³.

Local Planning Authorities should secure design quality through policies adopted in local plans. Good design is indivisible from good planning⁴.

¹ Paragraph: 029 Reference ID: 26-029-20140306

² Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 26-006-20140306

³ Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 26-007-20140306

Develop robust and comprehensive policies setting out the quality of development that will be expected for an area. Need to evaluate and understand defining characteristics of the area as part of the evidence base in order to identify appropriate design opportunities and policies⁵.

One of the core principles in the National Planning Policy Framework is that planning should recognise the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside. Local plans should include strategic policies for the conservation and enhancement of the natural environment, including landscape. This includes designated landscapes but also the wider countryside.

Where appropriate, landscape character assessments should be prepared to complement Natural England's National Character Area profiles. Landscape Character Assessment is a tool to help understand the character and local distinctiveness of the landscape and identify the features that give it a sense of place. It can help to inform, plan and manage change and may be undertaken at a scale appropriate to local and neighbourhood plan-making⁶

3 Context

- 3.1 Test Valley with its predominantly rural. Landscape character assessments have been undertaken by Hampshire County Council and identify a number of unique landscapes within the Borough. These assessments provide the baseline for making decisions and managing change. Through the use of assessments, the Council has identified the characteristics that make the landscapes of the Borough special and worthy of conservation.
- 3.2 As well as the landscapes that are identified within the Borough, there are designated landscapes that have statutory protection. The North Wessex Downs AONB and New Forest National Park are legally protected. Consideration of the impact of development on these two landscapes is required under this legislation and relevant guidance. The National Park Authority is the planning authority for those parts of the designation which fall within the Borough.
- 3.3 Village and Town Design statements which are supplementary planning documents provide detail on what characteristics are considered important by local residents. There are 22 Village and Town Design statements that provide a historical context to the village as well as describing the current form of villages in terms of housing, roads and street layout and open space. These documents provide guidance on what is considered acceptable in terms of design and can assist in the decision making process.

⁴ Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 26-003-20140306

⁵ Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 26-003-20140306

⁶ Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 8-001-20140306

3.4 The Council also recognises the importance of design detail on shop fronts within the borough especially where these are located within conservation areas such as Andover, Romsey and Stockbridge.

4 Revised Local Plan

- 4.1 Policy E1 & E2 set a number of requirements that development needs to meet in order to be considered favourably. These criterion have been informed by the NPPF.
- 4.2 Policy E1 has been drafted to reflect NPPF paragraph 58 bullet point 4 which states that planning policies should ensure development responds to local character and history and reflect the identity of local surroundings.
- 4.3 Furthermore criterion a) ensures that development should reflect local context and identity in terms of layout materials and building style.
- 4.4 Criterion b) meets the requirement of NPPF paragraph 58 bullet point 6 in that it reinforces the relationship between high quality design and the landscape in which it will be located. NPPF paragraph 57 states the requirement to plan positively for the achievement of high quality and inclusive design.
- 4.5 Consideration of the relationship between public and private space is required. This requirement has been met within criterion c).
- 4.6 NPPF paragraph 58 bullet point 1 states that planning policies should aim to ensure developments will function well and add to the overall quality of the area over the lifetime of a development. Criterion d) has been written with this in mind as development needs to respect and take into account the local setting in order for it to integrate into the locality.
- 4.7 For policy E2, criterion a) meets the requirement of paragraph 109. The Council is protecting and enhancing valued landscapes where development is not appropriate. NPPF paragraph 64 is also considered relevant as development will be refused if it does not take the opportunity for improving the character and quality of an area. If these opportunities are not taken, there will be an impact on landscape character.
- 4.8 Criterion b) also reflects paragraph 109 and the need to protect and enhance landscapes. Criterion c) is underpinned by NPPF paragraph 61 as it addresses the connection between people and places and ensures that there is positive integration between new development and the natural, built and historic environment, including consideration of loss of important local features as shown in criterion f).
- 4.9 Criterion d) refers to the importance of long term management. This reflects NPPF paragraph 58 bullet point 1 in that developments should function well in the short term and over the life time of the development.
- 4.10 The role of National Parks and AONBs is considered in NPPF para 115 and subsequently in criterion e).

4.11 A number of comments were made on these two policies during the regulation 19 consultation. These comments can be viewed in the schedule of officer responses.

4.12 The proposed wording of policy E1 & E2 and supporting text is written below.

7.1 The protection and enhancement of the Borough's environment and its resources under the wider objective of delivering sustainable development are key issues for the Local Plan. How the natural and built environment is managed has a significant impact on the character of the Borough.

7.2 Approximately 92% of the Borough is classified as rural. Its high quality landscape provides an attractive setting for the settlements within the Borough and combined with good access, makes for a very desirable location. These circumstances generate significant pressures on the countryside to meet a range of demands. The Local Plan seeks to manage the cumulative impact of development on the character of the countryside over time.

7.3 It is not just the countryside that makes Test Valley attractive. The built environment reflects the Borough's heritage and makes a significant contribution as a place to live and work. Its heritage is a valuable asset and the conservation and enhancement of the historic environment is essential to retain the distinctiveness of the Borough's settlements.

7.4 In protecting and enhancing the environment, consideration needs to be given to a number of detailed matters. Issues such as building materials and layout can have an impact when taken in the context of the local landscape and townscape.

7.5 The Council defines high quality development as being able to provide a positive environment for people to live and work. It should be well designed and attractive; respecting the local context in terms of materials, layout and views; and ensuring that proposals make a positive contribution to people's quality of life.

Policy E1: High Quality Development in the Borough

Development will be permitted if it is of a high quality in terms of design and local distinctiveness. To achieve this development:

- a) should integrate, respect and complement the character of the area in which the development is located in terms of layout, appearance, scale, materials and building styles;**
- b) should not detract from the dominance of, or interrupt important views of, key landmark buildings or features;**
- c) should be laid out to provide connectivity between spaces and a positive relationship between public and private spaces; and**
- d) makes efficient use of the land whilst respecting the character of the surrounding area and neighbouring uses.**

7.6 Much of the identity of an area is derived from a combination of distinctive local building types, materials, layouts, the relationship between buildings and making use

of natural features. The pattern of development varies across the Borough. In the built up areas there will often be a discernible pattern of development with either a historic core and modern estates with a particular style. In the rural villages there is a strong historic pattern with modern changes on the periphery.

7.7 New development should complement these local features and patterns with regard made to orientation and character of the immediate area. The Council has adopted a number of Village and Town Design Statements as SPDs which set out the individual characteristics of the settlements.

7.8 There are some settlements within the Borough that have a distinctive linear character. Development would be acceptable in these locations provided that it was sensitively designed to take account of the siting of buildings and scale.

7.9 The layout of a scheme provides the basic plan on which all other aspects of the development depend. It is important that the layout respects the local context, allows an attractive development to be achieved, enables people to find their way around and is safe and secure.

7.10 All new buildings should be carefully designed to respect and enhance their surroundings. Buildings that are out of scale can detract from the character and amenity of an area. The scale, including its height and massing (the combined effect of its footprint, volume and shape), of a building determines its impact on views, skylines and its relationship with surrounding buildings and spaces.

7.11 New buildings should be of a similar scale to other buildings in the surrounding area, unless they are necessary to reflect a development's function or to create a landmark in an appropriate location. In such cases larger scale buildings may be appropriate provided that important views, especially of landmark features, from public places, including transport corridors and rights of way, are retained.

7.12 Extensions or alterations can have a cumulative impact on the character of the area and can overwhelm an existing building to the extent that its original character and symmetry is significantly eroded. To minimise this the proposal would need to be subsidiary to the original building and not dominate in scale.

7.13 The detailed design of buildings and use of materials provides many local areas with character and identity. When designing new schemes developers need to consider:

architectural or building styles; decorative elements; colours, materials and textures; and how the building relates to neighbouring developments. Where relevant proposals should have regard to Village and Town Design Statements and the Shop Front Design Guide SPD. The Council will seek to maintain and strengthen the character and identity of settlements by ensuring that development is undertaken using materials and styles that complement those found in the local area.

7.14 Developments are generally more attractive if they have a degree of visual interest. The range of styles and materials used should be limited to avoid a disjointed appearance. Visual interest can be provided through detailing, provided this does not detract from the character of an area. Original and innovative designs

can be used to enliven areas of poor design, although it is important that such designs do not detract from the visual unity of areas that already have a successful, compatible mix of styles and materials. The inclusion of art within new development can provide interest and enhance design and opportunities will be encouraged.

7.15 The positive integration between people and places helps establish a sense of ownership of the area. The Council will encourage developers to design layouts that provide a clear distinction between public and private space as this will help to promote community safety and reduce opportunities for criminal activity. The passive surveillance of public spaces also reduces opportunities for crime and people's perceptions of their vulnerability. This can be achieved through 'active frontages', where the windows and doors of buildings overlook streets or other public areas.

7.16 In some parts of the Borough the over development of land is not always appropriate because of the impact on the existing character. In certain places where schemes are in a sustainable location, are well designed and are not out of character the efficient use of land can make a positive contribution and is supported.

Policy E2: Protect, Conserve and Enhance the Landscape Character of the Borough

To ensure the protection, conservation and enhancement of the landscape of the Borough development will be permitted provided that:

- a) it does not have a detrimental impact on the appearance of the immediate area and the landscape character of the area within which it is located;**
- b) it is designed and located to ensure that the health and future retention of important landscape features is not likely to be prejudiced;**
- c) the existing and proposed landscaping and landscape features enable it to positively integrate into the landscape character of the area;**
- d) arrangements for the long term management and maintenance of any existing and proposed landscaping have been made; and**
- e) it conserves the landscape and scenic beauty of the New Forest National Park or the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty where applicable; and**
- f) does not result in the loss of important local features such as trees, walls, hedges or water courses.**

7.17 The landscape is the most readily appreciated feature of Test Valley's built and natural environment. The Borough's landscape varies from chalk downland in the north to the heathlands and woodland of the south. The River Test and its tributaries are a prominent feature in the landscape. These features help shape the settlements of the Borough.

7.18 It is important to conserve and, where possible, enhance the various landscape character areas within the Borough. Any new development should be in keeping with the character of the local landscape in terms of its location, siting and design. The Landscape Character Assessment 2004 was prepared jointly with the County Council and former Countryside Agency. It is an important tool to inform decisions on the impact of development and ensure that development will not be an anomaly in the local landscape.

7.19 Certain areas such as the New Forest National Park and North Wessex Downs AONB receive special protection. The New Forest National Park Authority is the planning authority for that part of the designation which falls within Borough.

7.20 The Council has a duty under Section 85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, to have regard to the purpose of the AONB designation in making decisions as the local planning authority. The purpose (Section 82(1) of the Act) is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the AONB. A Management Plan for the AONB has been prepared by the Council of Partners on behalf of the constituent local authorities. The Council has adopted the Management Plan and will take account of it in its decision making.

7.21 Within nationally designated areas the Council will expect particularly high standards of overall design including landscaping. The setting of nationally important landscapes need to be taken account of when assessing proposals for development outside of these designated areas.

7.22 Smaller, individual features can combine to establish a character and identity of an area. These elements, such as trees, hedgerows and water courses often provide recognisable boundaries to settlements help establish an identity of that area. These features should be protected as their loss either individually or cumulatively, could have a potential impact on both the immediate and wider character of the landscape.

7.23 Development should be designed to ensure the health and future retention of existing trees, including veteran trees, and hedgerows are not compromised.⁸⁶ Proposed development should be designed to avoid the future need to fell trees or otherwise impede their growth. On housing developments, buildings should be placed sufficiently far away from trees to allow adequate daylight and sunlight to reach the proposed properties. Based on past experience a distance of approximately 15 metres should be provided between the dwelling and the outer edge of any mature canopy or canopies of trees.

7.24 The provision of landscaping can visually enhance an area and support local biodiversity. In considering any proposals, the Council will need to be satisfied that they have been informed by and taken into account the Test Valley Biodiversity Action Plan and the Landscape Character Assessment.

7.25 Attractive landscaping and boundary treatment help a development to integrate successfully with the wider area. To ensure this is achieved and continued the future management of landscaping, including the maintenance regime, needs to be agreed prior to permission being granted. Proposed landscaping and boundary treatments which would introduce unnatural features e.g. bunds, or inappropriate vegetation e.g. fast-growing conifers, or are out of character would not be appropriate. The species and location of vegetation included within landscaping schemes and boundary treatments should be appropriate for its location having taken into consideration growth of the vegetation and its impact on neighbouring land uses.

5 Summary

5.1 The inclusion of policies E1 & E2 within the Revised Local Plan is considered justified given the emphasis placed on Local Planning Authorities to ensure development is of a high quality and to contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment. The natural landscape of the Borough has been examined and policies have been written with flexibility to ensure that whilst development may occur, the change does not intrinsically impact on the setting of these landscapes. The built environment of Test Valley also comprises a number of unique characteristics in terms of materials and settlement pattern. Providing the guidance on what is considered appropriate ensures that these characteristics can be conserved and that change is of an appropriate scale.