



# Development Briefs: A Guidance Note

Ashford Borough Council

January 2001



Supplementary Planning Guidance  
to the Ashford Borough Local Plan

**SPG2**

Recent years have seen an increased recognition of the importance of good design in new development. This has resulted in a much improved range of guidance on design issues from central and local government. This guidance is intended to supplement these documents. It serves to highlight what Ashford Borough Council considers to be the key ingredients of an acceptable Development Brief and to inform those charged with the preparation of Development Briefs of the issues, processes and format that the Council will want to see included in a Development Brief. It aims to ensure the production of high quality Development Briefs for sites in the Borough, which can be readily implemented.



## Development Briefs: A Guidance Note



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### 1. Context

#### Master Planning Principles

**1.1** Ashford is increasingly being required to play a key role within the economy of the South East Region and this is bringing with it considerable developmental pressures. In order to ensure the creation of sustainable, attractive new built environments the Council has agreed a number of master planning principles that must be adhered to in the production of development briefs. These principles should act as a checklist ensuring consistency with Government guidance, the Borough Local Plan and where applicable, existing supplementary guidance. The five principles are as follows:-

- the need to embrace principles of sustainable development in settlement layout and density to make best use of both green and brownfield land.
- the importance of learning from and incorporating good practice from elsewhere to establish quality, contemporary, design standards.
- the need for innovation and flexibility to cater for long development timescales and the proper use of design standards.
- the key importance of establishing a 'sense of place' through design and of minimising any negative impact on local residents.
- the need for continuity in design proposals between sites close to each other which may be in different land ownerships.

*5 Master Planning Principles*

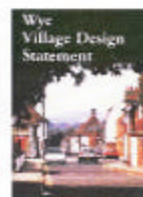
#### Public Involvement

**1.2** In addition to the five master planning principles, there is another important related principle that must be fully considered in the drafting and adoption of development briefs. The involvement of the local community and relevant agencies or organisations is a key factor in providing a sense of local 'ownership' of the finished product. It also enables local people to have a meaningful input into decisions on the future of their local environments. As a rule, local residents and interest groups should be involved in the process as early as possible – ideally during the preparatory stages of the draft brief.

**1.3** How this 'meaningful input' is achieved will depend on the nature and size of the site. There are various techniques available for fully involving the community in development proposals and different circumstances will suit different techniques. One approach which the Council encourages is known as 'Enquiry by Design' which has been piloted by a partnership between DETR, CPRE, English Partnerships and the Princes Foundation. On the bigger sites such design workshops involving local people, designers and developers can help increase community involvement in the design process. Regular liaison with the relevant local parish councils and local residents during the formulation of development proposals can also be an effective method of securing public involvement. Smaller sites, such as those in villages, may also benefit from a similar, scaled down approach tailored to the issues raised by the specific site. Employment allocations may also benefit from this approach, but the criteria applied may differ from those relating to residential areas. Where a Village Design Statement exists this will be an important consideration and it would be good design practice to involve the design group or Parish Council early in the design process.



Source: Barton Willmore Planning Partnership





**1.4** Government guidance emphasises the role of public consultation in the preparation of supplementary guidance. PPG1 Annex A states that the weight attached to supplementary design guidance will be increased where it has been prepared in consultation with the public and those whose work it may affect. PPG12 states that, as part of a development brief, there should be a statement of consultation, and the representations received and the Council's responses should be made available with copies of the brief. The Council supports this approach – the format of a Brief should be devised with public consultation and accessibility in mind (see 4.3) and a Development Brief will only be formally adopted where there has been genuine public involvement in its preparation.

## 2. What makes a good Development Brief?

**2.1** If a development brief is to be worth preparing, it must aim to secure a higher standard of development than would have been achieved without it. Policy DPI10 of the Ashford Borough Local Plan lists those sites where a brief is considered necessary. Other sites which come forward during the lifetime of the plan may require a Brief if special needs arise. It is important to emphasise that a Development Brief will not be required if the development plan and any existing Supplementary Planning Guidance provide adequate guidance.

**2.2** The relationship between a Development Brief and the Borough Local Plan is very important and should be a strong one. PPG12 advises that Supplementary Planning Guidance, such as Development Briefs, should be consistent with the Development Plan and cross-referenced to the relevant plan policy or proposal. The Guidance might, in some circumstances, update adopted Plan policy approaches – for example, where there is new Government guidance on an issue.

**2.3** The Council will expect the authors of Development Briefs to look carefully at both the site policy (if there is one) and other topic policies of relevance contained within the Local Plan. This should not mean a long reinstatement of these policies but Briefs must:

- cross-reference to plan policy so that it is clear where each policy requirement is tackled in the main body of the Brief;
- show explicitly how each of the policy requirements have been addressed or if they have not, explain why this is justified.

**A schedule of Local Plan policies and other items of Supplementary Planning Guidance is available from the Planning Policy Unit. This provides a useful checklist.**

## 3. Key Ingredients

- The content of the development brief should reflect its purpose and minimise uncertainty. It should be clearly expressed and concise.
- It should not contradict, rewrite or introduce new policies but it should show how policies can be implemented.
- A brief should include an explanation as to why it has been prepared, who has prepared it, the consultation process and the status of the Brief.
- The site description should include an OS extract-based **location plan**, clearly located at the front of the document and showing the site in context, including other nearby local plan proposals.



### Aspects of Development Form

LAYOUT – urban structure

LAYOUT – urban grain

LANDSCAPE

DENSITY AND MIX

SCALE – height

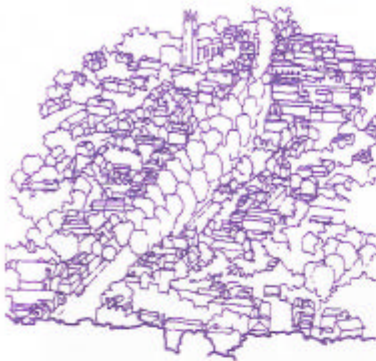
SCALE – massing

APPEARANCE – details

APPEARANCE – materials

From 'By Design', Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment





From 'Highbury Works, Tenderden Design Guide', Tibbalds TM2



### Objectives of Urban Design

**CHARACTER** a place with its own identity

**CONTINUITY AND ENCLOSURE** a place where public and private spaces are clearly distinguished

**QUALITY OF THE PUBLIC REALM** a place with attractive and successful outdoor areas

**EASE OF MOVEMENT** a place that is easy to get to and move through

**LEGIBILITY** a place that has a clear image and is easy to understand

**ADAPTABILITY** a place that can change easily

**DIVERSITY** a place with variety and choice

From 'By Design', Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment

- Provide the **area and site appraisal**. This should include:

- \* The physical context – topography, susceptibility of the land to flooding, adjacent uses, townscape, road, cycleway and pedestrian network, public transport
- \* Site description - vegetation, buildings, access, roads, ground conditions, possible contamination
- \* Public utilities and services and their capacity
- \* Site history including previous uses and planning history
- \* Ownership and any related information, such as covenants
- \* Formal protection or designations, including floodplains, relating to the site or surrounding area
- \* Existing consents and current proposals for both the site and the surrounding area.

Reference should be made to Circular 2/99 on Environmental Impact Assessments. If possible, a Brief should clarify whether an Environmental Statement will be required so that any site appraisal work can reflect Environmental Statement requirements.

- Clarify the **infrastructure contributions and affordable housing provision** required by each site and establish the best means of provision. There may be benefits in reviewing the best ways of providing infrastructure to provide, for example, economies of scale and more manageable facilities. The Brief should show how the Borough Local Plan infrastructure requirements will be provided (and should make reference to the Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance on the subject). It should also demonstrate that the views of relevant bodies have been sought (Health Authorities, KCC Education, etc.)
- Extensive use of **visual material** is encouraged. As much use as possible should be made of visual material, illustrations and diagrams. Such an approach is often the best way of tackling character issues, such as design quality or sense of place and makes a document more accessible to the public. The visual material (as well as text) contained within a Brief should therefore be prepared with the public's involvement and consultation in mind.
- Show how **sustainable design principles** have been incorporated into the development proposed - for example, in the mix of uses proposed, in designing a layout which reduces the need for car travel and encourages alternative means of transport and in promoting environmental sustainability through habitat creation and protection and ecologically valuable water features.
- **Design advice:** PPG1 states that design advice in planning briefs while avoiding unnecessary prescription should provide guidance on issues including scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout, and access. The Brief should set out clearly the design objectives for the site, closely linked to the site appraisal, without actually designing buildings or detailed layouts (in line with policy DPI of the Borough Local Plan) and should establish principles that can be used to assess planning applications.

When considering design issues the authors of Development Briefs should take account of the guidance in a number of recently published documents, including 'Kent Design – A Guide to Sustainable Development' which has been adopted by the Council as Supplementary Planning Guidance and complements this Guidance Note. Another very useful source is 'By Design' published by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.





The Council supports the 'holistic' approach to design advocated in 'Kent Design' and is keen to see such an approach adopted in Brief preparation, alongside innovation in such design matters as sustainable materials. The useful checklist of urban design objectives and aspects of development form, which are contained in 'By Design' is listed in this document and mirrors the requirements of Policy DPI of the Borough Local Plan. The Council encourages the use of these checklists in the preparation of Development Briefs and will assess development proposals in relation to these criteria.

- A development brief's requirements should be specific where they can be, but where more flexibility is needed the Brief should set out how this will be applied in practice. This should be expressed in a way which will make it possible to assess the degree to which a subsequent proposal reflects the brief.
- The Brief should make clear how each of the adopted five master planning principles listed in Section 1.1 have been incorporated. In particular, the Council will wish to see:
  - \* density plans,
  - \* design statements incorporating examples of good practice,
  - \* assessment of possible effects of the development on flood risk, including how the site will deal with its run off,
  - \* long term, phased development programmes for larger sites,
  - \* evidence of layout continuity over land ownership boundaries.

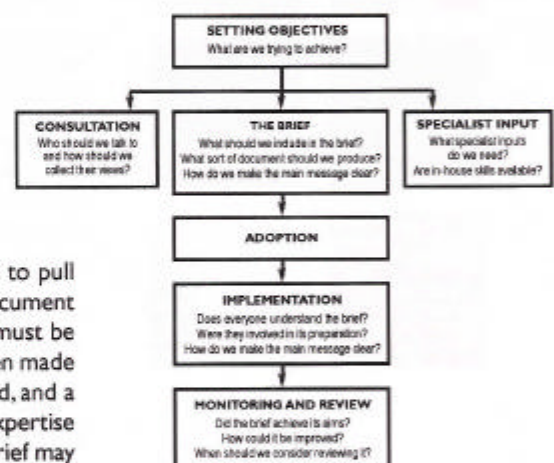


## 4. Process of preparing a Development Brief

**4.1** The decision to produce a Development Brief arises out of a need to pull together diverse elements of an important and/or complex site within one document to assist with its development. It follows therefore, that a range of interests must be reflected in the production of the Development Brief. Once a decision has been made to proceed with a Development Brief, a **Project Team** should be established, and a lead player identified. This team must reflect the diverse range of interests and expertise appropriate to the nature of the Brief required. The lead for a development brief may come from a number of units within the Council, or from the private sector or increasingly through partnership working between the Council and the private sector. The County Council are also likely to be involved on issues such as highways or education.

**4.2** The Project Team should establish objectives of the Brief, and a timetable for its preparation. All members of the Project Team must be committed to the timetable from the outset. The need for specialist input should be agreed early on (typical topics requiring specialist input include: ground conditions, geotechnics, contamination/ remediation, traffic impact assessment, archaeology, nature conservation, property valuation and landscape and urban design). The Brief should indicate whether or not an Environmental Assessment will be required. Methods of public consultation and involvement should be established and built into the Brief preparation timetable.

**4.3** As well as seeking innovation in the content of the Brief and its approach to design issues, the Council wishes to see that thought has gone into the presentation and layout of the Brief. The main messages should stand out clearly. Again, it must be emphasised that the Council wishes to see widespread use of illustrative material. In particular, the format should be devised with public consultation and accessibility in mind (see 1.2). For example, an annotated image (which could be site-plan or diagram based) could be incorporated which summarises key points in the text. Photographs, images, and illustrations could also be overlain on this diagram. Such a 'summary image' could prove flexible in its use, and should be capable of being enlarged into a poster style format for public information, display and consultation purposes.



From 'Planning and Development Briefs: A Guide to Better Practice', DETR (1998)







## Development Briefs led by the private sector

**4.4** The Council is committed to fostering a Development Team Approach to project working and in particular to taking forward work on key sites. In response to interest in the preparation of a Development Brief the Council will:

- enable the prompt establishment of a multi-disciplinary project team and provide the name of an officer who will be responsible for leading the Council's input
- Agree a timescale, including key stages for the project, and do all it can to meet this timescale
- Facilitate initial discussions
- Establish a timetable for reporting progress to councillors
- Assist with the involvement of the local community.

*This Guidance draws from advice and policies in:*

*Ashford Borough Local Plan (2000)*

*Planning and Development Briefs: A Guide to Better Practice, DETR (1998)*

*Kent Design - A Guide to Sustainable Development, KCC (2000)*

*By Design, Urban Design in the Planning System: towards better practice, CABE (2000)*

*Urban Design Compendium; English Partnerships, the Housing Corporation,  
Llewelyn Davies (2000)*

