

APPENDIX E. GUIDANCE ON CHARACTER APPRAISALS

Policy background.

National policy *Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development* sets out key principles that should be applied to ensure that development plans and decisions taken on planning applications contribute to the delivery of sustainable development. One of these principles states that ‘*Design which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area should not be accepted*’. It also states that ‘*Design policies shouldseek to promote or reinforce local distinctiveness particularly where this is supported by clear plan policies or supplementary planning documents on design.*’

It is now necessary to submit a Design and Access Statement (see Appendix D) for all residential development except for householder applications. This should put particular emphasis on how the design of the development relates to the local character and context, as well as accessibility issues. The Local Plan policy *SDP 7 Context* states that proposals that would cause harm to the character and /or appearance of an area will not be permitted. A character appraisal should be prepared as part of the design statement as this will assist applicants in meeting the requirements of these policies.

A key tool for making robust decisions.

A character appraisal is seen as the best method of defining the key elements that contribute to the unique architectural and historic character of an area. The extent of the area to be covered by the appraisal will depend on the nature, scale and sensitivity of the development. The appraisal should be developed from a desk top survey, including research, on site (including the surrounding area) observations and an access audit.

A well prepared character appraisal will be a key tool to assist the applicant and his/her consultants in preparing a well designed and considered proposal for new development and a key tool to assist the local planning authority in making well informed, robust and appropriate planning decisions. A character appraisal may also identify opportunities for future enhancement proposals.

Qualitative and quantitative measures.

The components of a character appraisal can be defined under five key headings; **physical environment, historical environment, experiential environment, biodiversity and visibility**. Under each heading there are a number of components that together contribute to each heading (e.g. under physical environment – built form). These should be assessed using the following qualitative indicators:

- **Significance** – an indication of rarity, and to what extent this component dominates, is distributed or is prevalent and how it contributes to the character of the area (e.g. a unique landmark such as a church);
- **Robustness** – the inherent vulnerability or fragility of the component; is it damageable, replicable, repairable or replaceable and over what time scale may it recover (e.g. original clay tiled roofs);
- **Condition** - an indication of how well the component has been preserved or conserved. It is also a measure of the level and quality of maintenance or management and its potential.

Quantitative measures are as important as qualitative ones. For example, under the physical environment heading: the depth of setbacks to a series of terraced houses along a street where development is proposed should be identified, as well as whether they are of consistent depth or irregular; if setbacks are of consistent depth then they will be visually dominant and therefore of *high significance, high robustness and good condition*, and make a positive contribution to the character of the street. However, if the setbacks on this street are irregular due to ad hoc development (unlike on other adjacent streets) then this feature is of *high significance, low robustness and poor condition* and the contribution to the character is likely to be negative due to the lack of a well defined built edge to the street.

Structure of a character appraisal.

A character appraisal should take into consideration the following topics:

1. **Introduction** (background to the study, scope and structure of the appraisal).
2. **Planning policy framework** (national, regional and local, with reference to the local development framework and specific policies, as well as relevant supplementary planning documents and Conservation Area appraisals that relate to the area).
3. **Summary of character** - a summary of key points listed below including:
 - Special characteristics and/or special interests (positive aspects);
 - Negative Aspects (loss, intrusion, damage, problems and pressures);
 - Key issues to be addressed by future development;
 - Capacity for change (enhancement potential).
4. **Assessment of character** - suggested checklist headings.
 - 4.1 **Physical character (built form, land form, landscape setting and detailed physical character analysis):**

Context analysis.

Location and context:

 - General character and plan form, including types of buildings, density of development, scale, massing, height, orientation, type of street layout, block sizes, plot sizes, footprint of development on plots, depth of setbacks, distance between buildings on plots;
 - Movement networks, including pedestrian and cycle networks, public transport, car and cycle parking provision, connections (both actual and potential in hard or soft landscape);

- Landscape setting, including topography and land form; geology; setting of the area and its relationship with landscape; identification of significant landmarks in the landscape (such as trees and mounds), woodland, stands of trees, street trees, parks, pocket parks, greenways, green corridors, front garden and rear garden structure, depth and width;
- Waterways and rivers, lakes and ponds, waterfronts;
- Character and interrelationship of spaces within the area.

Physical character analysis.

Definition of the character area (or areas if appropriate) of the site - characterisation:

- Activity, prevailing or former uses within the area, and influence of these (and any historic patronage) on the plan form and building types (including socioeconomic factors, such as typical profile of residents or occupants);
- The architectural and historic qualities of the buildings and plot boundaries, and the contribution they make to the character of the area including; walls, roofs, doors and windows, rainwater goods, out houses and garages;
- The contribution made by key unlisted buildings (including any recommendations for locally listed buildings);
- Identification of local details, such as use of bay windows, dormers, front garden brick built dwarf walls;
- Prevalent local and traditional building materials, including colours and textures;

- Landscape character and qualities;
- Waterway/waterfront character and qualities;
- Qualities of the public realm; streets, paving, street furniture, lighting and signing;
- The accessibility of the site and surrounding area.

4.2 Historical character (historic development and archaeology):

- The origins and historic development of the area (urban morphology), including place names and earliest references;
- The archaeological significance and potential of the area (including identification of scheduled monuments, listed and locally listed buildings);
- General condition of the area and built fabric, identification of buildings at risk (BARs);
- An audit of heritage assets (if appropriate).

4.3 Experiential character (feeling of sense of place, urban vs. suburban attributes, vibrancy, noise, accessibility and cultural):

- The experiential perception of the identity of a place as either urban, suburban, town centre, district centre, urban village or rural;
- The vibrancy or tranquillity of the area, including the impact of visual and noise intrusion from development, traffic, natural features (e.g. the sea, trees rustling in the wind) or wildlife;
- The level of accessibility of the area; its movement networks, public realm and open spaces;

- Cultural associations with the area will also affect the experiential character, e.g. areas of religious or civic significance.

4.4 Biodiversity:

- Wildlife and habitat type and form, prevalent species, unusual, rare or protected species (including Tree Preservation Orders);
- The ecological and biodiversity value of public and private open spaces, including amenity space (such as private gardens, roof gardens, courtyards, verandahs and balconies), greenery (including identification of significant species), green spaces, greenways, ponds, waterways and play areas.

4.5 Visibility:

Key landmarks.

- Key views, view corridors and vistas or panoramas (both out of and into the area and key viewpoints).

Key panoramas.

- Prominent features; built form, land form and landscape;
- Extent of enclosure or openness.

5. Maps, illustrations and photos.

A character appraisal should include maps (to scale), illustrations and photos to fully support the textual analysis, including:

- Location map, showing sufficient of the surrounding area to set the context;
- Conservation Area map (if relevant);

- Map showing key landmarks and features;
- Historic maps and illustrations;
- Aerial photographs;
- Photos showing key views, vistas and panoramas and a keyed map showing location and direction of photos;
- Photos to illustrate the physical, historical and experiential environment, biodiversity and visibility, including general photos of the area, key land marks, significant architectural and landscape features.

References:

Guidance on Conservation Area Appraisals
English Heritage 2005

Strategic Landscape Sensitivity (a paper on working
methodology)
Hampshire County Council 2005