

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Planning and Development Management Committee
Date: 14 July 2022
Report for: Information
Report of: Head of Planning and Development

Report Title

Trafford Design Guide and Trafford Design Code

Summary

In August 2019 the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration approved the preparation of a Trafford Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and the first stage of publicity and consultation arrangements. Work began on the Design Guide, and numerous stakeholder events took place, but work was paused during the Covid-19 pandemic. However, it has since been picked up again and a consultation draft of the Trafford Design Guide has recently been approved by the Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration and is now undergoing a period of public consultation between Friday 1 July 2022 and Friday 12 August 2022.

Alongside this, the Council has been successful in its bid for £160,000 of Design Code Pathfinder Programme funding, to deliver a Design Code as an SPD. Government policy is clear that Local Authorities are to deliver design guides and codes, and the funding will enable the Council to produce a Design Code to supplement the Design Guide, with more detail and a series of 'must haves'.

Design Codes are to be community co-designed and a community consultation strategy is proposed which will be both wide and deep and will engage hard to reach groups in a variety of ways. The first 'visioning' stage of this consultation has also begun alongside the consultation on the Trafford Design Guide.

The Design Code Pathfinder Programme expects that consultation on a Design Code will have taken place by March 2023, with the Code adopted in July 2023. Adoption of the Trafford Design Guide will either be concurrently, or if appropriate, ahead of this in autumn 2022.

Members are encouraged to take part in the consultations on both Trafford Design Guide and Trafford Design Code.

Recommendation(s)

The Planning and Development Management Committee is asked:-

- To note the report and its contents;
- To note that Members are encouraged to take part in the current consultation

on the Trafford Design Guide and the visioning exercise for the Trafford Design Code; and

- To note that future reports will come before the Planning Committee as the project progresses, including for approval of the final Trafford Design Guide and Trafford Design Code ahead of adoption by the Executive.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Rebecca Coley / David Pearson
Extension: 4788/3198

Background Papers: None

1. Background

Definitions

- 1.1 A **design guide** is a document which sets out the general design principles and standards that development proposals should follow in the area, building on policies in the development plan. Good local design guides are concise, positive documents which are accessible and use tools such as illustrations and checklists to highlight key design issues and possible solutions. They are most effective when used alongside other relevant design tools (e.g. codes).
- 1.2 A **design code** is a set of simple, concise, illustrated design requirements that are visual and numerical wherever possible to provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. Design codes can provide a more specific steer on what is acceptable when they are visual and numerical, rather than relying on detailed policy wording, as well as being easier to engage with. They can also give developers greater certainty about what may be acceptable when seeking planning permission and can help lead to faster decisions based on whether a proposal complies with a code, which can help to speed up the delivery of development. The content and level of detail in design codes will vary according to the scale at which a code is applied.

The Trafford Design Guide

- 1.3 In August 2019 the Executive Member for Housing and Regeneration approved the preparation of a Trafford Design Guide as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), and the first stage of publicity and consultation arrangements. It was noted at that time that following the consultation process a future report to the Executive Member would seek approval for the content of the consultation draft SPD and the next stage of consultation and publicity. LDA Design Associates had already been appointed through a competitive tendering process to deliver the Trafford Design Guide, working alongside officers.
- 1.4 In autumn 2019 a series of 'design days' and workshops were held in Altrincham, Stretford, Urmston, Sale, Trafford Park, Warburton, Partington and Hale, attended by various interested parties and stakeholders. These workshops began the process of fleshing out specific issues and objectives for each of the character areas, drawing on the experience of stakeholders. Focus group attendees varied depending on the specific stakeholders for the particular character area but included residents, Ward

Members, built environment professionals (generally also attending as local residents), community group representatives (including civic societies), neighbourhood forums, Business Improvement District representatives and landowner representatives.

- 1.5 This consultation process culminated in a Design Symposium in January 2020 which was held at Trafford Town Hall and invited representatives from all the design days and workshops to come together, be presented with some of the preliminary work on the Trafford Design Guide and give their views.
- 1.6 The output from the design days and workshops informed the content of the first draft of the Trafford Design Guide SPD. Unfortunately, whilst in initial draft stage the Covid-19 pandemic led to the work being paused but over the last 12 months officers and LDA Design Associates have picked up the project again and the consultation draft of the Trafford Design Guide (TDG) has now been completed. The document can be found at Appendix 1.
- 1.7 The Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration approved the consultation draft of the Trafford Design Guide in June 2022. Public consultation on the document began on Friday 1 July and runs until Friday 12 August, a period of six weeks. Further detail on the consultation strategy can be found in Section 5 of this report.

The Design Code Pathfinder Programme and the Trafford Design Code

- 1.8 Alongside Trafford's own ambitions, national planning policy places great emphasis on the creation of well-designed places. The National Design Guide was published in October 2019. Reflecting their intentions to embed high quality design firmly within the planning process, the government published the updated National Planning Policy Framework in June 2021, significantly strengthening national design policy, followed by the publication of the National Model Design Code in July 2021.
- 1.9 At that time, and reflecting on progress made with the Trafford Design Guide, it had become apparent to officers that the government's expectations around design coding and guidance went further than the brief for the Trafford Design Guide and that Councils would need to adopt their own specific coding for design – a set of 'must haves' rather than 'should haves', if they were to successfully defend their position on design in the planning process and at appeal. Indeed, this view has been underlined by the recently published Levelling-up and Regeneration Bill which if passed into law will require all Local Planning Authorities to have a design code in place covering their entire area.
- 1.10 In July 2021 the government announced their intention to run a National Model Design Code Phase 2 Pilot. This was to enable Local Planning Authorities and neighbourhood groups to work alongside the Office for Place to be supported to bring forward design codes for their areas, at a variety of scales, in a funded 12 month programme. Funding was to be awarded via expressions of interest in a competitive process. Officers saw an opportunity to obtain funding to build on the work done so far on the Trafford Design Guide to produce a Trafford Design Code and submitted an expression of interest to produce a borough wide Design Code, primarily using in-house resource. The government saw the programme as an opportunity to empower communities to have their say on the development of new homes, buildings and amenities, such as shops and workspace, in their area and help restore people's pride in the places they live. Design is a key element of

sustainable development and the codes are expected to deliver more beautiful and sustainable places and communities.

- 1.11 The disestablishment of the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government and its replacement with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities delayed the consideration of the expressions of interest for the Phase 2 Pilot, with participants originally expected to be announced in October 2021.
- 1.12 DLUHC renamed the project the Design Code Pathfinder Programme and in February 2022 confirmed that Trafford had been selected to participate, along with 25 other Local Planning Authorities and neighbourhood groups. The Council has been awarded the maximum amount of funding of £160,000. Only a handful of other LPAs on the programme are attempting a borough-wide Design Code: Bradford; East Riding; Gedling; Lake District National Park; Reigate and Banstead; Surrey County Council and Uttlesford.
- 1.13 In April 2022, after confirming participation in the Programme, officers submitted, as required, a Project Plan to DLUHC. Feedback was received from DLUHC on 13 May 2022. This feedback was extremely positive, and the Project Plan has been updated in light of the feedback and was resubmitted on 27 May 2022. The 12 month programme started on this date, with an expectation that the Design Code will be consulted on no later than March 2023 and adopted by July 2023.
- 1.14 Since April 2022 officers have also been exploring options for procuring an online platform for the Design Code; obtaining the relevant HR and other approvals for the establishment of posts; and setting up the resource and arrangements needed to deliver the project. In tandem, DLUHC have been running a number of informative online seminars for Pathfinder participants to assist with various elements of the design coding process. Trafford have been matched with the other LPAs attempting borough-wide Design Codes for peer support with two helpful information sharing sessions having already taken place. DLUHC have indicated that they would like to visit Trafford in September and a date for this visit is being arranged.
- 1.15 The 'visioning' consultation on the Design Code has also begun, and further detail on the consultation strategy can be found in Section 5 of this report.

2. Policy Status

- 2.1 Design is a key element of sustainable development and being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. Paragraph 128 of the NPPF states that to provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code.
- 2.2 Paragraph 129 of the NPPF states that design guides and codes can be prepared at an area wide, neighbourhood or site specific scale and to carry weight in decision making should be produced either as part of a plan or as supplementary planning documents.
- 2.3 Design guides and design coding are distinct approaches, albeit much of the baseline work can be utilised as an evidence base for both, and often design guidance underpins a design code and provides the vision for it, with the code building in detailed requirements on top of guidance. A Local Planning Authority may

have either adopted design guidance or coding or both (or coding only in relation to specific sites) but in order to underpin robust planning decision making and deliver quality places, full coverage with both is desirable and will become increasingly necessary in the light of emerging legislation and policy.

- 2.4 It is intended that both the Trafford Design Guide and the Trafford Design Code will be adopted as Supplementary Planning Documents and will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. Both Guide and Code will therefore need to have clear links to the adopted Core Strategy, in particular Policy L7 – Design, although other Core Strategy policies will also be relevant. The Code will also need to hook from the Places for Everyone development plan which will also contain relevant design policies. The emerging Trafford Local Plan will need to follow on with a consistent approach and locally specific policy. There is an area specific Design Code already embedded in the Civic Quarter Area Action Plan (which is a development plan document), which is at Main Modifications consultation stage, with adoption expected later in 2022.
- 2.5 In time, if the government’s proposals for ‘supplementary plans’ are realised (SPDs with the same status as development plans) it may be appropriate to readopt the documents under this procedure. With no certainty about this legislation at present, and with the 12 month programme underway, advice from DLUHC is to proceed as SPD.
- 2.6 The design guide and code is not intended to replicate or supersede existing Conservation Area Appraisals and Conservation Area Management Plans but overarching principles underpinning good design will be as relevant in conservation areas as outside them. The Design Code will complement and build on the existing robust management plan guidance.
- 2.7 The guidance is however intended to replace a number of dated SPGs (mainly dating from the early 1990s) but also the more recent PG1 – Residential Development (2004) and SPG2 – A56 Corridor Guidelines (2007).

3. The Trafford Design Guide - Overview

- 3.1 The primary objective of the Trafford Design Guide is that it is usable by developers, decision makers and the community. Design is a subjective issue which evolves and, therefore, the guide must balance flexibility in interpretation with the robustness of decision making.
- 3.2 Through a landscape and place-led approach the TDG seeks to set a new design standard for the Borough. The consultation draft provides clear guidance for developers, architects, planning officers and Planning Committee members for all development projects including small and large scale residential projects in addition to commercial schemes.
- 3.3 Building upon the ten characteristics set out in the National Design Guide, the TDG then identifies a series of eight Strategic Design Principles which developers will be required to demonstrate they have considered in their project. These principles include: Sustainable Movement; Leading with Landscape; Safe and Inclusive Places; Designing with Character and Beauty; Responding to Place; Designing Together; Connected Neighbourhoods; and Embracing New and Sustainable Ideas.

- 3.4 The TDG sets out six core design objectives which contain a series of components and actions that should be considered in the design and delivery of a project: Connected (promoting sustainable movement); Engaged (community engagement in the design process); Resilient (responding to climate change and supporting healthy lifestyles); Innovative (embracing new design ideas); Green (protecting and enhancing the environment); Locally Distinctive (beautiful and contextually appropriate design).
- 3.5 Following the 2019/20 consultation workshops, seven principal places were agreed, their character analysed, and design cues for those areas identified. Applicants wishing to build will however, be required to undertake their own detailed character analysis prior to any design development. The Trafford Places identified are: Old Trafford and Stretford; Sale and Surroundings; Altrincham and Surroundings; Rural Trafford; Carrington and Partington; Urmston, Flixton and Davyhulme; and Trafford Park.
- 3.6 The TDG then sets out a series of more detailed Design Requirements to guide those wishing to build: Shaping Places including the Public Realm; Designing Streets; Designing New Places and Neighbourhoods; Designing Homes (houses and apartments); Designing Tall Buildings; Designing Commercial and other Non-residential Buildings; Thinking Sustainably; Access and Servicing; Bicycle Storage and Car Parking. New development proposals will be expected to follow the guidance or otherwise provide a clear and thorough justification for any exceptions proposed.
- 3.7 There is guidance throughout the Trafford Design Guide on improving the accessibility of new developments, for example in relation to the provision of Building Regulations M4(3) accessible and adaptable dwellings. It is recognised that the accessibility guidance would benefit from consolidation into a single dedicated section of the TDG. This is an exercise that will take place following consultation, which will also enable officers to take account of any relevant views expressed by consultees.
- 3.8 It is possible that as a result of consultation on the Trafford Design Guide and advice from DLUHC and peer review that some of its content may be considered more appropriate for the Design Code. This is an exercise that will be undertaken as part of the Design Code Pathfinders Programme.
- 3.9 The Trafford Design Guide may be adopted in the autumn ahead of the Trafford Design Code if it is complete and appropriate to be adopted as a stand-alone document. This will be kept under review as the project progresses. The adoption of the Trafford Design Guide, whether with the Code or ahead of it, will be the subject of future report(s).

4. The Trafford Design Code - Overview

- 4.1 There will be a requirement for extensive stakeholder, public and Member engagement throughout the development of the Code over the next 12 months to deliver a code which will empower communities to have their say on new development in the borough. DLUHC expect that the Design Code will be co-designed with the community. The Design Code will build upon the primary themes set out in the Draft TDG as described in Paragraph 3.3 of this report.

- 4.2 The Design Code will be delivered by an in house project team using existing staffing, albeit with the creation of two specific posts to deliver the project. Other officers will devote time to the project as part of their day to day duties. Where officers are utilised full time on the project, their substantive posts are being backfilled.
- 4.3 The remainder of the funding package will be used to procure assistance from external consultants as and when required – for example for the provision of illustrative material, support on landscape and movement strategies, with consultation events, and the provision of an online platform. Royal Pilgrim Communications have been appointed to assist with the first round of consultation. Some monies will be made available for the Manchester Disabled Access Group to provide comments on the Code (and the TDG) as this is a service for which they charge a fee.
- 4.4 The National Model Design Code sets out a staged process for the adoption of a design code. Some of these stages have already been completed as part of the work on the Trafford Design Guide. Further assessment is required of typical character areas across the Borough and to build on the identification of places in the draft TDG. This is in order to determine a vision for each character area and provide a set of design parameters.
- 4.5 The places need to be further defined by area type e.g. town centres; suburbs; rural / countryside; new places (high density); new places (low density); and industrial. A vision needs to be produced for each of the area types, which might be further refined by place e.g. Stretford suburbs and Altrincham suburbs will likely be treated differently. The exception to this are some of the ‘New Places’ which have masterplans or design frameworks at various stages, some of which includes visioning. In particular the Civic Quarter has a vision, specific design policies and a design code set out in the well-advanced Area Action Plan.
- 4.6 The Code will assess the character of existing places and the vision for new places within the Borough, building upon the work already undertaken for the draft TDG. It will look at heritage, urban grain, existing views, local building vernacular, architecture, proportion, façade pattern and proportion, architectural detail and materials. All new development proposals will be expected to respond to their context. Beauty will be embedded into the code, requiring developers to optimise development potential by taking a contextual, landscape first approach. Beauty often results from allowing sufficient space on site for meaningful landscaping, and adopting smaller building footprints for mid-rise and high-rise buildings to make the building form more elegant, and introducing layers of detail into the building façade.
- 4.7 The Design Code would address climate change and sustainability issues through coding for SuDS, energy efficiency and carbon reduction, reflecting the climate emergency. In terms of sustainable movement, the Code will focus on active travel – requiring the design of new places and other large sites to intrinsically link movement and place, identifying an appropriate street hierarchy and shaping development around cycle and pedestrian movement, reducing reliance on the car, and encouraging a mix of uses and open spaces to make these areas more sustainable.
- 4.8 The Leading with Landscape concept will require developers to plan for the provision of quality open spaces and landscape within developments from the outset. The quantitative requirement for new open spaces is set out in the Council’s Development Plan and associated SPD, but the Design Code will set out how open

space and other green infrastructure such as green links are expected to be provided in order to deliver successful and accessible spaces. Linked to open space provision, but with reference to health and wellbeing, the Code needs to set out the importance of well-designed homes, with particular reference to high density, high rise developments and how this should be provided.

- 4.9 In terms of residential amenity, accessibility and wellbeing, the Code would for example, impose minimum space standards, set out how apartment developments should minimise units with a single northerly aspect, require minimum separation distances, and set size requirements for private balcony provision and shared external amenity space. The code will also provide specific standards for accessible development – rather than the higher level guidance in the TDG - to meet the needs of those with disabilities and other protected groups.
- 4.10 The Design Code would go into more detail than the TDG and would set measurable parameters and rules which future developments would have to comply with. A Design Code will give developers certainty on design expectations and ‘must haves’ and therefore the quantum and quality of development that can be achieved on a site. The Design Code can also provide reassurance to residents that engage in the process that future development will be of the highest design quality.
- 4.11 Ultimately, however, the detail of the code would emerge through consultation and co-design with the community.

5. Public Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation on the Trafford Design Guide and the Trafford Design Code will take place in July and August 2022. The consultation materials and explanatory information are available at www.designingtrafford.co.uk. Members of the Planning and Development Management Committee are encouraged to take part in the consultation and to give their views.
- 5.2 The draft Trafford Design Guide is currently undergoing a six week online consultation accompanied by a Citizenspace questionnaire, which began on Friday 1 July 2022 and will close on Friday 12 August 2022. The questionnaire asks for comments on the detail of each section of the Trafford Design Guide and it is expected that respondents would be familiar with the content of the document. Following consultation (and in part depending on the responses received) a decision will be made whether to adopt the Guide in autumn 2022 as a standalone document or to adopt Guide and Code together in 2023.
- 5.3 The Design Guide consultation is also being used as the basis for the visioning exercise for the Trafford Design Code. A number of face to face community consultation events are taking place throughout July to engage residents, visitors and stakeholders Borough wide. Events are taking place in shopping centres or in the case of Old Trafford, a community centre, where there is significant footfall and where people can be engaged who might not normally take part in planning consultations. A hard copy questionnaire and ‘picture board’ exercise is being used which is high level and requires no prior knowledge. It is not expected that respondents would be familiar with the content of the Trafford Design Guide although attendees are being encouraged to afterwards look at the Trafford Design Guide online and give their views.

- 5.4 Consultation events have already successfully taken place in Partington and Altrincham town centres on Saturday 2 July. Further events will take place in Urmston and Sale town centres on Saturday 9 July, Limelight in Old Trafford on Wednesday 13 July, and Stretford Mall on Saturday 16 July. The Design Code questionnaire and picture board exercise will also be made available online and in this format will be kept open for consultation throughout the summer and into September. DLUHC have seen the Design Code questionnaire and have given positive feedback, especially in respect of the picture board element.
- 5.5 The current consultation is only the first stage of the process for the Trafford Design Code and in the autumn further community engagement will take place with targeted workshops and other events (with a mixture of face to face and online options) including with schools, access groups and harder to reach areas of the community. The purpose of the workshops will be to co-design development parameters with communities for each of the specific area types and Borough wide.
- 5.6 Various avenues will be explored so that hard to reach groups can be engaged in the process and their views sought. This will include digital and other means of consultation, including an online platform, and using community and stakeholder contacts. The Pathfinder Programme requires that consultation is both wide and deep. In addition to public and stakeholder consultation, Communications will be engaged to undertake a further round of publicity to ensure the Project is widely advertised across the borough.
- 5.7 The output from the visioning exercise and design workshops will inform the content of the draft Trafford Design Code, which will be subject to a full formal consultation with the public and stakeholders, in accordance with the relevant regulations, likely in spring 2023. This consultation draft will require the approval of the Executive Member for Economy and Regeneration and will be the subject of future report(s) to the Planning Committee. Adoption of the Code by the Council's Executive is expected in July 2023.
- 5.8 Key milestones towards adoption of the Design Guide and Design Code as SPDs are as follows (dates indicative). As the project progresses, more certainty in respect of the exact timescales and milestones will emerge, and Members will be kept informed through both formal and informal means.

Stage of adoption process	Indicative Timescale
Consultation on draft TDG (6 weeks).	1 July 2022 – 12 August 2022
Vision consultation stage for Code.	July – September 2022
Consultation on Draft TDG with Planning Committee.	July 2022
Draft Code taking into account community and stakeholder engagement feedback	July – December 2022
Series of stakeholder and community workshops take place in sub areas.	September / October 2022

Peer review and feedback from DLUHC.	Ongoing
Update Executive / Planning Committee on draft Code and TDG adopted by Council's Executive (if appropriate).	September / October 2022
Refine code taking into account community and stakeholder feedback.	December 2022 – June 2023
Consultation on draft Code including further stakeholder and community workshops (minimum 6 weeks).	Spring 2023
Final Code published and approved by Planning Committee and adopted by Council's Executive.	July 2023

6. Recommendation

6.1 The Planning and Development Management Committee is asked:-

- To note the report and its contents;
- To note that Members are encouraged to take part in the current consultation on the Trafford Design Guide and the visioning exercise for the Trafford Design Code; and
- To note that future reports will come before the Planning Committee as the project progresses, including for approval of the final Trafford Design Guide and Trafford Design Code ahead of adoption by the Executive.