

To: PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE		Subject: DESIGNING PLACES – A POLICY STATEMENT FOR SCOTLAND
From: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENT		
Date: 20th March 2002	Ref: D/PL/42/40/SG	

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks to inform members of the Scottish Executive’s emerging strategy to improve design standards throughout Scotland, embodied within the recently launched document “Designing Places – A Policy Statement for Scotland. It also outlines forthcoming plans to produce a Council wide Design Strategy.

2. Sustainability Implications

- 2.1 The design of buildings and the spaces around them can have a fundamental impact on the environment. Energy efficiency, choice of building materials, linkages with other land uses and effects on local biodiversity are all influenced by design. Through the promotion of good design, as advocated in ‘Designing Places’ there is considerable scope to reduce many of the undesirable impacts of development upon the environment.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Policy Statement argues that throughout Scotland there are numerous examples of poor quality design. This exists at a variety of scales from individual buildings and spaces, to entire housing estates or even town centres, where there is often a lack of identity or sense of place. This is exacerbated by the effects of globalisation, which can undermine local distinctiveness and result in places that are generally unattractive. Prior to the launch of ‘Designing Places’ national guidance on design matters was sparse, comprising a limited number of Planning Advice Notes (PANs) covering The Siting and Design of New Houses in the Countryside, Small Towns and Town Centre Improvement. The lack of a national framework for considering design matters did little to address issues relating to the overall quality of our towns and communities and was recently highlighted in the revised version of NPPG 1 The Planning System, which emphasised the importance of design in making planning decisions. To fill the gap in policy guidance the Scottish Executive launched a Policy Statement for Scotland entitled ‘Designing Places’ in November 2001 with the broad aim of establishing a general statement setting out the Executive’s aspirations for design and to consider the role of the planning system in delivering them.

4. Designing Places: Format and Content

- 4.1 Aimed at everyone who plays a part in shaping the built environment, including politicians, developers, planners, designers, opinion-formers or anyone else whose attitudes influence what gets built, ‘Designing Places’ seeks to consider what makes successful places and to consider what action is required to facilitate better design. The document highlights the fact that the most successful places, those that flourish socially and economically, tend to share key common qualities. These include a distinctive identity, having safe and pleasant spaces, with ease of movement around them (especially on foot), exhibiting a sense of welcome, being adaptable and offering good use of resources. All of these are at the heart of good design for urban and rural places.

- 4.2 The value of good design is reinforced within 'Designing Places'. In particular, it is suggested that this can offer added value to development proposals, establish and maintain a distinct identity to the benefit of users and investors, and create places that actually work. This can support regeneration and bring long term economic benefits. In addition, good design can reduce long term costs of energy use, management and security.
- 4.3 Achieving good design, however, requires a shift in attitudes, expectations and practices about the design of towns, villages and the countryside. The need for change is highlighted within Designing Places, which advocates the need to create successful and sustainable places. The key recommendations from the document include the need for:-
- decision makers who understand the role of design in delivering sustainable development
 - developers, landowners, investors and public bodies who recognise the commercial and economic value of good design
 - effective collaboration between disciplines, professionals, local communities and others in the planning and urban design process
 - development plans with effective design policies, urban design frameworks, development briefs and master plans to provide planning and design guidance
 - developers submitting design statements with planning applications that explain the design principles on which the development proposal is based
 - a high level of awareness and design skills in local authorities, including planners and councillors who are committed to raising design standards and understanding the impact of their decisions
 - a stronger design element in built environment professional education
 - better design education in continuous professional development programmes
 - greater commitment to higher standards of design among public bodies

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The profile of design has been raised significantly over the last year or so. The publication of Designing Places follows on from the revised NPPG 1, and both make it clear that design is a material consideration in determining planning applications. This means that the Council can refuse planning applications, and if necessary defend such decisions at appeal, solely on design grounds. However, until such time as appropriate design standards are established against which proposals can be measured, the ability to make consistent decisions on design will be severely limited.
- 5.2 While the Scottish Executive has made a commitment to produce a series of Planning Advice Notes (PANs) to deal with more detailed aspects of design, councils are encouraged to initiate action to take on board the recommendations set out in 'Designing Places'. To ensure that the Council is able to provide a suitable framework within which to guide and control the quality of what gets built within North Lanarkshire, I intend to commence work on developing a Design Strategy for North Lanarkshire in the Summer of this year. This will set the general principles to be applied in pursued of good design and establish a context within which local plan policies for design can be developed and implemented.

6. Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee:-

- (i) Notes the content of the above report, and
- (ii) Authorises the Director of Planning and Environment to initiate work to produce a Council wide design strategy.



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