



Minutes

of a meeting of the

Joint Scrutiny Committee

held on Monday, 20 June 2022 at 6.00 pm
at the 135 Eastern Avenue, Milton Park OX14 4SB

The meeting was broadcasted live and can be watched here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eg6oqU4ZvQw>

Open to the public, including the press

Present in the meeting room:

Members:

South Oxfordshire District Councillors: Ian White (Co chair, chairing), Kate Gregory, Jo Robb, David Turner

Vale of White Horse District Councillors: Andy Cooke, David Grant and Ben Mabbett (Substitute member)

Officers:

Adrianna Partridge, Deputy Chief Executive for Transformation and Operations (Scrutiny lead officer) and Candida Mckelvey, Democratic Services Officer

Also present: Councillor Sue Cooper as a guest.

Remote attendance:

Marta Bou-Fernandez, Senior Urban Design Officer; Jake Bassett, Senior Urban Design Officer; Adrian Duffield, Head of Planning; Harry Barrington-Mountford, Head of Policy and Programmes.

Cabinet members: Councillors Anne-Marie Simpson (South - Planning) and Debby Hallett (Vale – Planning Policy)

Sc.74 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Councillors Nathan Boyd and Cheryl Briggs. Nathan Boyd was substituted by Councillor Ben Mabbett for this meeting.

Sc.75 Minutes

The minutes from the meeting held on 24 January 2022 were reviewed by committee members and no comments were raised, therefore they reflected a correct record of the meeting.

Sc.76 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Sc.77 Urgent business and chair's announcements

None.

Sc.78 Public participation

There were no public speakers, however chair notified committee members that Councillor Sue Cooper, Cabinet Member for Environment, Climate Change and Nature Recovery, wished to address the committee and would do so under the Joint Design Guide item.

Sc.79 Work schedule and dates for all South and Vale scrutiny meetings

No comments raised. Members encouraged to email the chair if they have any amends or additions to the work programme.

Sc.80 Joint Design Guide

Councillor Sue Cooper addressed the committee, as she was Cabinet Member for Climate, she wanted to share some thoughts. In summary, she felt that the guide was very good and was in support of it, but had some comments as follows:

- The new version circulated was an improvement
- Climate and sustainability section was good, and we should consider this for extensions. It was felt some statements appear to contradict climate change and sustainability principles, particularly the figures 43 to 46.
- Energy inefficient outside walls should be covered during extensions if they lose heat. The diagram labelled red (simple build, covers most of the old wall) would be more sustainable and efficient. Would rather a plain functional extension rather than a more complex build with smaller, multiple compartments.
- Questioned why there was a requirement for a setback by a third.
- Cabinet member considered that the guide and its updates were a great improvement.

This item was introduced by Cabinet Member for Planning (South), Councillor Anne-Marie Simpson. Also supporting the item was Cabinet Member for Planning Policy (Vale), Councillor Debby Hallett. Officers Jake Bassett and Marta Bou-Fernandez were present to answer technical questions, along with Head of Planning, Adrian Duffield.

Cabinet member for Planning (South) explained that the design guide was intended to support high quality development for both districts, containing advice and giving clarity on sustainable design, and supporting out our corporate priorities on climate emergency. It was a Supplementary Planning Document, produced in-house by the hard work of officers, and will support decision making for planning applications. It will have greater accessibility with its online format. The external consultation had led to amendments and then further minor amendments after Cabinet briefing. Councillors had been directed to view those amendments by comparison of the old and new website links. Thanks were given to the Joint Design Guide working group for their input.

Cabinet member for Vale added that she was excited about this document and felt it was an exemplar piece of work. Working together on this planning policy document paves the way for further joint working. Central Government changes in planning policy could lead to further review of the design guide in future and strengthening of climate emergency targets.

The committee asked questions and made comments, of which the main points are summarised below.

- Discussion was had about the amended diagram figures 43 and 44. Officers would check these to ensure they were correctly labelled. Regarding the guidance on suitable home extensions (coded red for not likely acceptable, amber and green for acceptable in principle), some members queried whether this should be so prescriptive. Officers responded to this, explaining that the figures were to give guidance and all planning applications are assessed on their own merits, but they needed to be sympathetic to local character and the original dwelling (well established design principles, as in the NPPF). Permitted development was the figure labelled in green. The other coloured diagrams show examples where permission would likely be required.
- Some members of the committee expressed that there was some difficulty cross referencing the guide that was to be published online. Difficult to search keywords through the whole document. After discussion officers did offer a solution of providing a plain text version that could be searched.
- The committee agreed that the Joint Design Guide was a very good piece of work and thanked the officers involved.
- A member felt that the colour scheme of the document was not always ideal for ease of reading. Officer explained that the document was made to meet the requirements of accessibility guidance for web design.
- Officer confirmed that they would add a sentence into the guide regarding the suggestion to include underground parking (where viable) for residential property development. A member also suggested car club schemes. Head of Planning confirmed that this was secured under Section 106 and not for this design guide.
- A committee member wanted to see strengthening of using hedgerows / soft boundary treatments, as these should be as important as trees. Another idea was to add advice for householders on ways to support 'dark skies' (darksky.org, avoiding artificial lights to support nature).
- Identified some link errors at the beginning of the guide – officers to check.
- A member of the committee asked for strengthened wording, noting that the word ensure was less common and replaced with "if you are considering". Suggested wording was "in order to make your house more sustainable". This was discussed and officers did agree with the desire to strengthen wording, however central policy does not back up stronger wording – at this stage, as district councils, we can only encourage. If we make demands where there was no policy to back up the stronger requests, there could be judicial reviews and appeals as a result, which we could lose (wasting officer time and work). The development of a new Joint Local Plan should assist this strengthening in future, and at that stage we would also update the Joint Design Guide. Overall, the aim was to encourage, and we hope for a shift in central policy to support strengthened wording in our guidance. Our guidance needed to link to our currently adopted local plan. Planning reforms coming may help, but at this stage, any changes made to the design guide would need to go back to consultation then Cabinet.
- Can there be more detail on what was meant by permitted development?
- Request to make weblinks on the document a different, more stand-out colour.
- A member asked officers to check a figure inconsistency – 'no more than £1 million' and 'no more than £1.2 million'.
- Solar and wind renewable energy in AONBs was suggested for the guide. Officers reminded that this was guidance but the Joint Local Plan will help strengthen this. There was high level mention of renewable energy in the guide, under the header 'Natural features and resources'.

Chair concluded the meeting by summarising the key points made:

1. creating a searchable document online – officers had offered a solution
2. a link to permitted development information requested
3. Hedge and soft boundary treatments
4. Look into word strengthening where it was deemed viable to do so.

Officers and Cabinet Members were thanked, along with officers supporting the management of the meeting.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm