

REPORT

Joint Design Guide 2022

Consultation Report

Summary of the public consultation which asked for views on the draft Joint Design Guide, a document that helps make sure new buildings in our area are designed and constructed to the highest quality and sustainability

South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse District Councils

April 2022



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The appendices are available to view in a separate document:

APPENDIX A1 – Survey and full results

APPENDIX A2 – Full list of (unedited) comments with councils’ response included

APPENDIX B – Consultation documents

Note: We only report in percentages when there are more than 100 responses. When stating percentages in the analysis, we are referring to the percentage of respondents that answered the specific question, rather than the total number of responses to the overall survey. Response percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding up over .5 and rounding down under .5. Words that appear in italics are quotes taken from comments received.

SUMMARY

This report provides a summary of consultation undertaken by South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils between **January and March 2022** for 8 weeks on our draft Joint Design Guide. The draft Joint Design Guide was proposed as guidance that sets out principles that should guide the design of future developments within the districts.

The consultation sought the views of statutory planning consultees as well as members of the public. The draft Joint Design Guide was available via its new website. It was also made available electronically upon request and in hard copy and main libraries.

We encouraged statutory consultees and members of the public to provide feedback on the guide by completing a survey which could be completed online or sent to us by email or post. A total of 189 responses were received to the consultation. The majority of responses were received from 39 businesses / organisations and 102 from individuals / members of the public. A total of 1,511 free text comments were received. A range of ideas, views and concerns were identified from the consultation responses received. These included, in no particular order, the following comments:

Main issues reported:

- A. The Design Guide seems to mostly focus on major/ urban development; would like the guide to distinguish between minor and major (and indicate which principles apply to each);
- B. More guidance is wanted on smaller scale/ rural development;
- C. Respondents want more information on householder/ permitted development;
- D. Website is considered a good tool; the user experience could be improve;
- E. Areas that need improvement include the website navigation menus, contents page and search option within the website;
- F. The Guide feels text heavy, and sections would benefit from being broken down;
- G. Pictures need to be more relevant/ more examples from the districts;
- H. Graphics are useful/ clear but require further work/ detail or explanation;
- I. Not enough reference is made to neighbourhood plans;
- J. Respondents want to be able to reference sections/ parts of the Guide as it is currently difficult to do;
- K. More guidance on renewable sites and domestic scale renewable technologies is wanted i.e. solar panels;
- L. Linking design principles with relevant policy in the Local Plans is requested;

- M. Respondents agree with the sustainability guidance (sustainability, carbon reduction, carbon emissions), however are concerned whether it can be implemented;
- N. Some found the Guide easy to understand using plain language; whilst others felt there were still technical terms being used throughout.

BACKGROUND TO THE ENGAGEMENT

The design guide was published in draft by South Oxfordshire District Council and Vale of White Horse in January 2022 for comment.

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils want to replace the existing design guides for both districts (adopted in 2016 and 2015 respectively) with an up to date, innovative and interactive web-based design guide. The new design guide will be a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and together with the design policies in the council's Local Plans, will be the key mechanism for delivering high quality design in the district. The Design Guide will be used in the determination of planning applications. Supplementary planning documents (SPDs) should build upon and provide more detailed advice or guidance on policies in an adopted local plan.

The ultimate objective for the design guide is to raise the quality of design in new development in the districts. The guide seeks to do this by setting out the aspirational standard that we expect new developments to meet. Clear visuals and links to further technical information are set out in each section. Alongside this, plans showing the design development of a residential scheme are included and related to the principles of each section. This is to clearly show how each principle relates to a plan and to illustrate the ideal design process. A series of design principles are then presented at the end of each section for designers and decision makers to use as a tool to work through the design and assess the quality of the development being proposed. The guide also covers different areas and disciplines which need to be considered at the outset of the design process.

We consulted on the draft guide to allow statutory stakeholders and other interested parties including members of the public, the opportunity to comment and make suggestions for improvement before it is formally adopted as supplementary planning advice to the relevant adopted local plans. This was in line with the councils' policy commitment to involve stakeholders in the development of planning policies as set out in our Statement of Community Involvement.

This consultation report provides an account of the feedback we received, as well as our responses to the main comments, issues and suggestions raised.

CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

How we undertook the consultation.

- A total of 6,305 email notifications were sent to the councils' planning and general consultee database, statutory consultees, town and parish councils, district councillors and consultees who requested to be kept informed; they were provided a link to the draft Joint Design Guide website and comment form.
- The email notification was also sent to council teams internally who forwarded on to contacts that may have an interest in the Guide. A copy of one of the email notifications can be found in the appendix.
- 361 letters were issued to those consultees who opted in for postal correspondence, providing details on where they could view the Design Guide and comment form.
- Documentation was made available in all libraries across both districts including a poster to help promote the consultation.
- Updating of the council websites was done with a link to the draft Joint Design Guide website and online comment form.
- An online survey was created, offering participants the opportunity to comment on the following sections of the draft Joint Design Guide: Introduction sections, Key Design Objectives, Maps, graphics and pictures included throughout the website, Design principles, general questions and anything else. A copy of the survey can be found in the appendix.
- A press release was issued, and social media messages (Twitter, Facebook and Instagram) posted during the consultation period.
- A six-week consultation period was given for submitting responses between Tuesday 18 January until Tuesday 15 March 2022, 11.59pm. Please note, the consultation was originally due to close on Tuesday 1 March, but due to several technical issues encountered at the beginning of the launch of the consultation, the councils extended the consultation by an extra two-weeks for the inconvenience.
- An email notification was issued to inform all stakeholders of the two-week consultation extension. Documentation and social media were updated. A copy of the extension email notification can be found in the appendix.

Reporting

- A total of 189 responses were received, made up of 48 email submissions (that were manually added to the survey results) and 141 online submissions. 482 partial responses were received (these are where the survey has been partly completed) but have not been included in the results.
- 1,511 free text comments were received. A summary of the comments is included in this report. Some spelling, grammatical and punctual errors in the original comments raised were corrected in the main body of this report; a full list of unedited comments can be found in the Appendix.
- Any personal information supplied to the councils within the comments that could identify anyone has been redacted and will not be shared or published

in the report. Further information on data protection is available in our planning consultation's privacy statement on our [South](#) or [Vale](#) website.

The consultation was carried out in conformity with the councils' public engagement charter.

KEY FINDINGS – SUMMARY

The councils thank everyone who took part and gave us feedback on the draft Joint Design Guide 2022. This engagement report and its appendices will be published online on the Urban Design page of both of [South Oxfordshire](#) and [the Vale](#) websites, alongside the Design Guide.

189 individuals and organisations responded to the consultation and 1511 comments were analysed. Council officers have reviewed feedback from the consultation and made responses throughout this report. We expect the design guide to be adopted in summer **2022**.

Overall, the Design Guide was well received. The majority of respondents found the introduction sections (54%) and design objectives (52%) either extremely clear or very clear. A high percentage of respondents (63%) found the pictures including captions extremely helpful or very helpful. Drawings, diagrams and interactive maps were also found very helpful. The majority of respondents found the sections of the guide and its design principles useful but expressed concerns on the areas below.

We asked respondents if they had any general comments to make about the design guide. The most frequently mentioned were concerns that the guide felt mostly focussed on major development, more guidance was needed on smaller scale/ rural development, more information was requested on householder/ permitted development, improvement needed around navigation, guide feeling text heavy, pictures needing to be more relevant, more guidance needed on renewable sites and domestic scale renewable technologies, and requests that there are references to neighbourhood plans as well as being able to reference different parts of the guide.

KEY FINDINGS – QUANTITATIVE DATA

Draft Joint Design Guide: we'd like your feedback

The first question in the survey asked respondents to indicate who they were responding on behalf of, followed by the name of their organisation, council or body representing, if applicable. This question was included to give the councils an idea of the type of consultees taking part in this consultation.

The majority of respondents (54%) said they were responding as an individual / member of the public and 21% as a business / organisation.

Q1. Are you responding as:

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	an individual / member of the public		54.26%	102
2	a business / organisation		20.74%	39
3	an agent		3.72%	7
4	a landowner		0.53%	1
5	a developer		2.66%	5
6	a designer (architect, landscape)		1.60%	3
7	a planner		1.06%	2
8	a district, county or town/parish councillor		9.04%	17
9	a district, county or town/parish officer		4.79%	9
10	Other (please specify):		1.60%	3
			answered	188
			skipped	1

Other (please specify): (3)

- and sustainable development resource consultant, now retired
- A sound researcher
- Environmental charity

Q2. Please provide the name of your organisation, council or body you are representing:

96 respondents provided an answer to this question, the list is provided below and organised by: Businesses / Organisations, Councils, South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils and Other.

Businesses / Organisations

arc7

Barton Willmore

Bioabundance Community Interest Company, with over 70 members including 10 parish councils.

Bloor Homes (in the context of its site interest at Ladygrove East, Didcot)

Bloor Homes Ltd (c/o Define Planning and Design Ltd)

CALA Homes Midlands and Legal & General Homes

Canal & River Trust

CBRE (obo Ptarmigan Land)

CEG

Chiltern Society

Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB)

CPRE - Campaigning to project our rural county

David Wilson Homes

Defence Infrastructure organisation **x2**

Dorchester Residential Management (DRM)

Environment Agency

Formerly Cobham Resource Consultants (1971-96); Scott Wilson Resource Consultants (1976-2000), Cobham Resource Consultants International (2000-2014) lutants

Gladman Developments Ltd

Green Factory ltd

Hallam Land Management Ltd

Igloo Planning representing CEG

JCE Planning & Architectural Consultancy

Land & Partners Ltd

Marine Management Organisation

National Highways
Natural England
Network Rail
Oxford Brookes University **x2**
Oxford Farmhouse CIC
Oxford Preservation Trust
Oxford Science Village Partners (OSVP)
Oxfordshire Neighbourhood Plans Alliance
Publica West Oxfordshire
Rotherfield Greys
Oxfordshire Gardens Trust
Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks
Sport England
TARMAC
Thakeham
Thames Water
The British Horse Society
The Coal Authority
Vale of White Horse District Council, Cumnor Parish Council
Wantage Mobility Group

Councils

Ashbury Neighbourhood Plan group/Ashbury Parish Council
Beckley and Stowood Parish Council and neighbourhood Plan Steering Group
Bix and Assendon Parish Council
Blewbury Parish Council
Buckinghamshire Council
Cheltenham Borough Council
Cumnor Parish Council
Cumnor Parish Council Planning Committee

Didcot Town Council
Eye and Dunsden Parish Council
Faringdon Town Council
Gloucestershire County Council
Henley-on-Thames Town Council
Horspath Parish Council
Kidmore End Parish Council
Marcham Parish Council
North Hinksey Parish Council
Oxfordshire County Council
Sunningwell Parish Council
Swyncombe Parish Council
Tetsworth Parish Council
Thame Town Council
Wantage Town Council
Woodcote Parish Council

South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils

Major Applications Team
Minors & Others Development Management Planners
Neighbourhood Planning Team
Planning Policy Team
Senior Conservation and Design Officer
Senior Countryside Officer
South Oxfordshire District Council **x4**
South Oxfordshire District Councillor
Vale of White Horse Councillor
Vale of White Horse District Council **x3**

Other

Individual/ member of public/ local resident **x6**

I'm responding as an individual, but informed by my work with the Thame Green Living community organisation

None **x2**

NA

Home user

Introduction sections

This section of the survey is about the Introduction sections of the website which aim to provide users with information on how to use the draft Joint Design Guide and about the districts, to give users the best chance of securing planning permission with a high-quality development.

Respondents were asked how clear (easy to understand) they think these sections are. A link to the introduction sections was provided in the survey.

The majority of respondents (54%) ticked to say these sections are either extremely clear (12%) and very clear (41%). Only 11% said these sections are not so clear (6%) and not at all clear (5%). Nearly a third of respondents (30%) said it was 'somewhat clear'.

Q3. The Introduction sections of the website aim to provide you with information on how to use the draft Joint Design Guide and about the districts, to give yourself the best chance of securing planning permission with a high-quality development.

How clear (easy to understand) do you think these sections are?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Extremely clear		12.59%	17
2	Very clear		41.48%	56
3	Somewhat clear		30.37%	41
4	Not so clear		5.93%	8
5	Not at all clear		5.19%	7
6	I don't know / I am not sure about this		4.44%	6
			answered	135
			skipped	54

Key Design Objectives

This section of the survey is about the key design objectives. Respondents were asked to consider all the key design objectives at the outset of a proposal as it would help to deliver high quality sustainable development. A link to the key design objectives was provided in the survey.

Once respondents had reviewed the objectives, they were asked how clear (easy to understand) they think they are.

The majority of respondents (52%) said the key design objectives are extremely clear (15%) and very clear (37%). Only 15% said the objectives are not so clear (9%) and not at all clear (6%). More than a quarter of respondents (26%) said they are 'somewhat clear'.

Q4. Considering all of the key design objectives at the outset of a proposal will help you to deliver high quality sustainable development.

How clear (easy to understand) do you think the key design objectives are?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Extremely clear		15.44%	21
2	Very clear		36.76%	50
3	Somewhat clear		26.47%	36
4	Not so clear		8.82%	12
5	Not at all clear		5.88%	8
6	I don't know / I am not sure about this		6.62%	9
			answered	136
			skipped	53

Maps, Graphics and Pictures

This section of the survey is about the pictures, graphics and interactive maps that are included throughout the draft Joint Design Guide.

Once respondents had reviewed the pictures, graphics and interactive maps they were asked how helpful they thought the following are:

- The pictures including captions
- The drawings and diagrams
- The interactive maps

The results are broken down below and the green highlighted sections show the highest number of responses received to that question.

Q7. We have used pictures, graphics and interactive maps throughout the draft Joint Design Guide. How helpful do you think they are?

The pictures including captions

The majority of respondents (63%) said the pictures including captions are extremely helpful (22%) and very helpful (41%). Only 11% said they are not so helpful (5%) and not at all helpful (6%).

Answer Choices	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not so helpful	Not at all helpful	I don't know / I am not sure about this	Response Total
The pictures including captions	22.22% 28	41.27% 52	21.43% 27	4.76% 6	6.35% 8	3.97% 5	126

The drawings and diagrams

The majority of respondents (60%) said the drawings and diagrams are extremely helpful (22%) and very helpful (38%). Only 10% said they are not so helpful (5%) and not at all helpful (5%). More than a quarter of respondents (26%) said they are 'somewhat helpful'.

Answer Choices	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not so helpful	Not at all helpful	I don't know / I am not sure about this	Response Total
The drawings and diagrams	22.40% 28	38.40% 48	25.60% 32	4.80% 6	4.80% 6	4.00% 5	125

The interactive maps

The majority of respondents (56%) said the interactive maps are extremely helpful (21%) and very helpful (35%). Only 9% said they are not so helpful (3%) and not at all helpful (6%). More than a quarter of respondents (28%) said they are 'somewhat helpful'.

Answer Choices	Extremely helpful	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not so helpful	Not at all helpful	I don't know / I am not sure about this	Response Total
The interactive maps	20.80% 26	35.20% 44	28.00% 35	3.20% 4	5.60% 7	7.20% 9	125

Design principles

This section of the survey is about the following design principles:

Place and setting

Natural environment

Movement and connectivity

Space and layout

Built Form

Climate and Sustainability

The design principles bring technical design guidance in line with current revisions of the NPPF, both Council's Local Plans, the National Design Guide and the National Design Code. Throughout the guide we have been sensitive to local design and environmental considerations.

Respondents had the opportunity to provide comments on each of the principles which have been summarised below.

Once respondents had commented on each of the principles, or skipped these questions, they were then asked in general how useful they think they are when assessing a design proposal.

The majority of respondents (53%) ticked to say they think the design principles are extremely useful (18%) and very useful (34%). Only 8% said they are not so useful (3%) and not at all useful (5%). More than a third of respondents (35%) said they are 'somewhat useful'.

Q14. In general, how useful do you think the design principles in the draft Joint Design Guide are when assessing a design proposal?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Extremely useful		19.01%	23
2	Very useful		33.88%	41
3	Somewhat useful		34.71%	42
4	Not so useful		3.31%	4
5	Not at all useful		4.96%	6
6	I don't know / I am not sure about this		4.13%	5
			answered	121

	skipped	68
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Alongside the design principles in the Joint Design Guide are examples and solutions for common design issues. Respondents were also asked how useful they think these are.

Just under half of respondents (47%) said they are extremely useful (17%) and very useful (30%). Only 9% said they are not so useful (5%) and not at all useful (4%). More than a third of respondents (36%) said they are 'somewhat useful'.

Q15. Alongside the design principles, examples and solutions for common design issues are provided. How useful do you think these are?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Extremely useful		16.95%	20
2	Very useful		30.51%	36
3	Somewhat useful		35.59%	42
4	Not so useful		5.08%	6
5	Not at all useful		4.24%	5
6	I don't know / I am not sure about this		7.63%	9
			answered	118
			skipped	71

General questions

This section of the survey is about the overall draft Joint Design Guide. Respondents were asked to think about the Guide overall and indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with the following statements:

- The general layout is good
- The content is easy to understand
- The 'goals' are helpful
- The 'steps' are helpful
- The website is easy to navigate
- All the content is accessible

- I understand how to use the draft Joint Design Guide

The results are broken down below and the green highlighted sections show the highest number of responses received to that question.

Q16. When thinking about the draft Joint Design Guide overall, how much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

The general layout is good

The majority of respondents (73%) strongly agreed (56%) and agreed (17%) that the general layout is good. Only 13% disagreed (8%) and strongly disagreed (5%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total
The general layout is good	16.67% 21	56.35% 71	12.70% 16	7.94% 10	4.76% 6	1.59% 2	126

The content is easy to understand

The majority of respondents (70%) strongly agreed (21%) and agreed (49%) that the content is easy to understand. Only 13% disagreed (7%) and strongly disagreed (6%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total
The content is easy to understand	20.80% 26	48.80% 61	16.00% 20	7.20% 9	5.60% 7	1.60% 2	125

The 'goals' are helpful

The majority of respondents (67%) strongly agreed (21%) and agreed (46%) that the 'goals' are helpful. Only 9% disagreed (5%) and strongly disagreed (4%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total

						a view	
The 'goals' are helpful	21.43% 27	46.03% 58	21.43% 27	5.56% 7	3.97% 5	1.59% 2	126

The 'steps' are helpful

The majority of respondents (66%) strongly agreed (17%) and agreed (50%) that the 'steps' are helpful. Only 7% disagreed (3%) and strongly disagreed (4%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total
The 'steps' are helpful	16.80% 21	49.60% 62	22.40% 28	3.20% 4	4.00% 5	4.00% 5	125

The website is easy to navigate

The majority of respondents (68%) strongly agreed (25%) and agreed (43%) that the website is easy to navigate. Only 12% disagreed (6%) and strongly disagreed (6%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total
The website is easy to navigate	24.80% 31	43.20% 54	16.00% 20	6.40% 8	5.60% 7	4.00% 5	125

All the content is accessible

The majority of respondents (70%) strongly agreed (21%) and agreed (50%) that the content is accessible. Only 8% disagreed (4%) and strongly disagreed (4%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have	Response Total

						a view	
All the content is accessible	20.80% 26	49.60% 62	15.20% 19	4.00% 5	4.00% 5	6.40% 8	125

I understand how to use the draft Joint Design Guide

The majority of respondents (68%) strongly agreed (18%) and agreed (50%) that they understand how to use the draft Joint Design Guide. Only 11% disagreed (5%) and strongly disagreed (6%) with this statement.

Answer Choices	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	I don't have a view	Response Total
I understand how to use the draft Joint Design Guide	18.55% 23	50.00% 62	15.32% 19	4.84% 6	6.45% 8	4.84% 6	124

Our commitment to equal access for all

The last section in the survey is about the councils' commitment to equal access for all. The councils want to provide a service that meets the needs of all of our residents and ask respondents to help us keep track of how successfully we are achieving this by answers a few questions. All questions are optional.

Respondents were asked if they have experienced any difficulties engaging with the planning service, and then asked how they think of themselves and how old they are.

The majority of respondents (89%) told us they had 'no problems experienced with this service'. Respondents also had the opportunity to provide more detail about their answer to this question, 23 comments were received and have been summarised below.

Q20. We want to provide a service that meets the needs of all of our residents. Have you experienced any difficulties engaging with the planning service as a result of the following? Tick all that apply.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Disability		5.00%	4
2	Gender (including transgender, pregnancy and maternity)		0.00%	0
3	Age		2.50%	2
4	Sexual orientation		0.00%	0
5	Rural isolation		3.75%	3
6	Income		2.50%	2
7	Religion / belief or ethnicity		1.25%	1
8	No problems experienced with this service		88.75%	71
			answered	80
			skipped	109

Please use the space below to give us more detail on your answer above: (23)

Some people commented they have found the planning service difficult to contact and slow to respond, whilst others were satisfied. Other comments received included: Public consultation was not easy to find; parish councils regularly informed; local communities’ opinions should be considered; little is done to enforce (amend) schemes that are not policy compliant; development should consider the needs of future occupants based on projected demographics, including green infrastructure to support them. To see the full list of comments, please refer to Appendix A.

Respondents were asked which of the following describes how they think of themselves: Male, Female, in another way or prefer not to say.

46% ticked Male, closely followed by 42% Female.

Q21. Which of the following describes how you think of yourself?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Male		46.40%	58
2	Female		41.60%	52
3	In another way		0.80%	1
4	Prefer not to say		11.20%	14
			answered	125
			skipped	64

Respondents were also asked how old they are, the majority (51%) said they are aged between 55-74. Only 6% said they are aged between 16-34.

Q22. How old are you?

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	16-24		2.38%	3
2	25-34		2.38%	3
3	35-44		4.76%	6
4	45-54		12.70%	16
5	55-64		24.60%	31
6	65-74		26.19%	33
7	75+		12.70%	16
8	Prefer not to say		14.29%	18
			answered	126
			skipped	63

The last question in the survey asked respondents how they found out about draft Joint Design Guide consultation.

The majority of respondents (68%) ticked to say they found out about the draft Joint Design Guide via email.

Q23. How did you find out about draft Joint Design Guide consultation? Tick all that apply.

Answer Choices			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Email		67.88%	93
2	Parish Council		13.87%	19
3	District Council		18.25%	25
4	Poster		0.00%	0
5	Twitter		0.73%	1
6	Facebook		4.38%	6
7	Instagram		0.00%	0
8	Newsletter		2.19%	3
9	Word of mouth		4.38%	6
10	Other (please specify):		7.30%	10
			answered	137
			skipped	52

Other (please specify): (10)

- 3
- You contacted me by letter.
- From a friend who is also disabled
- consultation via the Garden Trust national amenity body
- Posted from the District Council.
- Received letters in the post
- Letter in the post
- I have indicated my willingness to be contacted and am grateful for the opportunity.

- Meetings of local Climate Action Groups
- One of our member parish councils

KEY FINDINGS – QUALITATIVE DATA

Detailed comments

Respondents were also asked if they had any comments to make for each section. The information provided below picks up on the key themes that ran throughout free text comments to questions 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, and 18. These open-ended questions relate specifically to the guide and its content. Questions 5 and 6 have been used to understand what people think constitutes high quality and examples within the districts.

A range of different comments and suggestions were received. We have reported on the most common themes, in no particular order, which can be found in the summary section of this report and provided an officer response/ action where appropriate. Responses shown in this section are presented anonymously. Any personal information supplied to the councils within the comments that could identify anyone has been redacted and will not be shared or published in the report. A full list of comments raised can be found in the appendix.

Out of 189 respondents, 36 made comments were outside the scope of the design guide which is supplementary to the Local Plans or is covered by other regulations. Out of the remaining 153 respondents, the common themes were:

A. The Design Guide feels mostly focus on major/ urban development; distinguish between minor and major (which principles apply)

10 people commented that the Guide was mostly relevant for large scale development. Respondents felt it was not clear which design principles of the Design Guide applied to small or large-scale development.

The vast majority of applications do not require an opportunities and constraints plan, nor a concept plan nor a regulating framework plan. The design guide should reduce the workload of officers by ensuring that applications are acceptable when submitted, not increasing their workload by forcing them to review more useless information. Further, this has nothing to do with small scale development such as householder/minor applications and this is not made clear within the design guide.

The guide, we understand, is intended to cover design principles for any planning application. From a sizable estate of new houses at one extreme to a small alteration to an existing dwelling. However, the introduction focuses almost entirely on issues relating to sizable developments most of which have no bearing on minor applications. We feel that for such applications, applicants are likely to be confused or overwhelmed. It may be appropriate to clarify and simplify the guide for smaller applications.

Would be good to highlight where principles are perhaps more appropriate for Majors or Minors applications, and where they may be more appropriate for householder

development. Diagrams all refer to major sites, but no examples of smaller minor scheme provided. If the principles are genuinely meant for smaller development, these examples are needed of how to implement the principles at smaller scale, including for single dwellings.

Councils' response

Whilst the guide has been written for and tested against a range of scales of development, we appreciate that this may not be that clear as the example shown throughout the guide is of a large residential development. We have therefore included a section on how the guide relates to smaller scale development, providing an example of a smaller site.

We believe good design no matter the scale requires an understanding of the context. A constraints and opportunities plan encourages the applicant to consider all of the issues before developing a design rationale.

B. More guidance on smaller scale/ rural development;

9 people commented that more guidance on smaller scale/rural development would be helpful.

Not really applicable for a small rural Parish Council.

Need to consider the vernacular aspect, especially in rural areas and conservation areas by using appropriate materials which blend with the existing building landscape.

It does not apply, as it takes no account of built form in a rural setting.

Buildings in rural and lower density areas within South and Vale should be integrated into their landscape setting and site contexts in a sensitive manner. Buildings should not be located on ridgelines or exposed sites where the buildings will become a dominant visual feature to the detriment of the existing landscape character.

There is no mention of rural communities which often have very poor or limited local services.

Councils' response

The guide is intended to be applicable to all scales of development and the design principles set out would serve as a guide to best practice even though there is still the flexibility for justification to be provided where they cannot be achieved. The guide places great emphasis on the importance of designing in context and has a dedicated section titled 'About South and Vale' which provides a brief summary of the character of the district. A comprehensive list of links to additional resources containing detailed information about the district and its character is provided.

The use of the term ‘Urban Design’ does not refer only to urban areas but to any built development which could also be in rural or suburban areas. The guide has been updated to set clearer definitions of what we mean by ‘urban design’ and how the criteria relate to a mix of urban, suburban and rural areas of the district. We have also included more examples of developments in a rural context. Suggestion to add wording about buildings in rural and lower density has been added.

C. People want more information on householder/ permitted development;

11 people commented that the Guide would benefit from more information on householder/ permitted development.

A wider range of the plans for extensions of houses with a variety of existing roof styles would be more helpful, as this is the most common type of building which householders undertake without specialist architectural help, and which needs more support in this Guide.

This helps householders and developers understand what is expected of them, and consider factors they may not have thought about.

Create a simpler version for householders.

It merits a ""Good Try"" I wonder if it would be better presented as an essential outline for the potential householder, with more detailed technical sections for the architects and builders.

The basic drawings aid nothing on the extensions, they give far too much leeway for planning officers to reject based on their own bias. There should be more photos of architectural aspects that will be treated more favourably/ unfavourably. There should be more detailed advice so that decisions are objective and not subjective

Councils’ response:

Sections of the Guide will be broken down into their sub-sections, making it easier and clearer to find relevant guidance for householder. More visual examples will help illustrate different types of extensions. We already link to the permitted development guidance on the Planning Portal.

D. Website is considered a good tool; improve user experience;

19 people commented that they experienced some difficulty with website accessible or that user experience could be improved.

It looks very accessible. Congratulations.

I was going through the design guide and I didn’t realise it didn’t just continuously scroll any more. So I couldn’t work out where to find the technical bits at first. I was

wondering if you're able to put one introductory paragraph saying you can move through the guide using the buttons on the left or go directly to specific sections via the menu option at the top or something? That might be obvious to anyone who didn't see an earlier draft maybe but I wasn't aware at first how to find the other parts or that I could skip specifically to building conversions for example.

A joy to use, in spite of some hiccups here and there....will be ironed out eventually.

This is a much clearer way of setting out the guidance than using a printed report. It is easy to focus in on the key issues that apply to a development.

We consider that some of the maps could be more interactive. For example, we consider the landscape character map for South and Vale would be clearer/easier to understand if it were to include the key settlement locations on the map. The graphics within the document are generally clear and show good examples of what developers and consultants should be aiming for.

Councils' response

The following items will be actioned:

- Consistent formatting for links;
- Clear buttons to move between sections (next/ previous) will be added;
- Better explanation to accompany maps and drawings.

E. Website navigation menus/ contents page need improvement/ search option within the website;

14 people commented that the navigation was not intuitive in places and that navigation menus should be made clearer or that a search option within the website would be beneficial.

...asked for a separate clearer contents page, to ease navigation. The three lines in the top right corner were not clear/obvious enough. A contents page needs to be interactive and link directly to the location of the 'Principles' boxes, which are used for assessment. Linked to this...commented that the small navigation circles on the right-hand side were not easy to use. The website felt like a continuous scroll to reach the information needed. A clear navigation panel on the side which set out the different chapters, sections, subsections and principles should be incorporated.

FORMATTING: Needs a chapter number for reference. Could an interactive mini contents list be included under each chapter title/heading for easier navigation? Principles should really be first, and then follow up with explanation text, diagrams and helpful links below.

The navigation is cumbersome. There should be a contents list after the introduction so people know where they are, not on a separate page. the layout requires a large, wide screen to read it and one section is not clearly defined from another.

The online, interactive presentation has benefits offers some benefits over a simple printed document but can be difficult to navigate, in particular to find relevant material. An index would be useful.

The navigation isn't intuitive. I thought it ended at one page. Now I see the coloured dots on the right help me navigate. Now that I see the whole thing, very impressive.

Councils' response

In order to make it easier to navigate the website, we will add a landing page that includes the contents of the Guide which will make it easy to understand. Main menu button will have a clear label and side menus will be restructured. Clear buttons to move between sections (next/ previous) will be added.

F. The Guide feels text heavy, and sections would benefit from being broken down;

13 people commented that the Guide feels text heavy and that the website should be broken down.

Too much text is overwhelming, and difficult to understand.

Too many words.

Too many pages.

Too many concepts.

Too much everything.

I found the sections clearly labelled, and the main text was clear and easy to understand. The use of graphics helped enormously.

My general feeling is that the opening section, down to "How to use this guide", is unnecessarily verbose with the same thing being repeated in various ways.

It could be made more simple (i.e. concise and to the point) and less idealistic more pragmatic with some stringent editing.

Councils' response

The website will be broken down to make it easier to digest. The introduction section will be rationalised.

G. Pictures need to be more relevant/ more examples from the districts;

9 people commented that pictures within the Guide should be more relevant and that further examples within the districts should be provided.

Photos are helpful, but it would be good to have more examples from across both Districts. ...felt that the photographs provided were very South-heavy

- Photos of more contemporary design would be helpful (like Photo 3 under BUILT FORM)

...should have more pictures of good design rather than the current emphasis on interactive representational drawings

Need to use local examples of high-density developments. So many developments are for individual householders, but most pictures shown are for large scale developments.

I found the use of pictures from outside our two districts disappointing and unnecessary. There was at least a dozen, mainly in the built environment sections, of which 4 were from the same village in Northampton!

Councils' response

We will review this. Examples within the district are provided wherever possible. When an example is provided that is outside of the districts, it is just to show examples of what can be achieved in design terms and a local example might not be available in this case.

H. Graphics are useful/ clear but require further work/ detail or explanation;

16 people commented that the graphics were useful but that further explanation to accompany these would be required.

Some of the diagrams need rationalising. The pictures are nice but help much to the understanding of the document.

Really like the look and functionality of the graphics.

Too much text is overwhelming, and difficult to understand.

The use of graphics helps show things in a simple, clear way. I appreciate them, and think they are essential.

Some of the pictures and drawing need some text to explain the icons used - its not always clear what they mean.

*- Diagrams are helpful to cut and paste to applicants and agents as examples
- ... liked the red, amber, green diagrams - but the key needs to be underneath or more clearly outlined so it cannot be missed*

The pictures, drawing and diagrams could be helpful if better explanation were given on what they are supposed to represent and what we are supposed to glean from them. There is not enough explanation.

Interactive maps, are not very interactive. Again could be greatly improved and more useful.

The graphics within the document are generally clear and show good examples of what developers and consultants should be aiming for.

Councils' response

Further explanation/ footnotes will be provided with graphics. More labels will be provided on drawings.

I. Not enough reference on neighbourhood plans;

13 people commented that there was no reference to neighbourhood plans.

Reference should be made to Neighbourhood Plans and taking them into account, so that they can influence the design process at an early stage... Early recognition of a Neighbourhood Plan should prevent a planning officer having to raise queries with a developer. Development should not take place where it is found to be in conflict with a Neighbourhood Plan.

In addition, the guide does not refer to the role of Neighbourhood Plans (NDPs), whether existing or in preparation, where these provide local design guidance or design codes for their neighbourhood.

What is missing from the Design guide is any reference to Neighbourhood Plans - these should be drawn from when any pre application advice is sought as well as during the whole of the planning process, especially for any new development build.

Councils' response

A link to the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse District Councils' neighbourhood plans will be provided within the 'About South and Vale' section of the Joint Design Guide where individuals will be able to find out which neighbourhood plans have been adopted and at which stage they are at if not adopted yet.

J. People want to be able to reference sections/ parts of the Guide as it is currently difficult to do;

5 people commented that it would be useful if the guide had references throughout the supporting text making it easy to refer to in other documents.

These design principles are signposted and set out clearly- it packs in very nicely what must be considered for a contextual analysis.

LABELLING OF CHAPTERS/ REFERENCE POINTS NEEDED -

... commented that there needed to be a point of reference of chapters, rather than just the paragraph numbers. The design guide is often referred to in delegated reports, emails with agents, appeal statements. It is easier to do this with the current design guide at the moment (e.g. Chapter 10 – Householder Development >

Principles DG103/104/105). Could this be incorporated into the JDG. (e.g. Chapter 5 – Built Form > DG5A – General Built Form, DG5B – Apartments etc.)? ... also queried the text alignment in some of the 'Principles' boxes and questioned whether the paragraph points could be labelled 5.01, 5.02, 5.10 etc. rather than 5.1, 5.2 etc).

I have read it one time. The only weakness I cannot test for is how easy it is to find something that I read in the guide when I return six months later to uncover it - the search function.

Councils' response

We will review this and make sure to provide some sort of referencing so that specific paragraphs/ principles can be referenced easily in other documents.

K. More guidance on renewable sites and domestic scale renewable technologies i.e. solar panels;

3 people commented that they would like to see more guidance on renewable sites and domestic scale renewable technologies.

Solar technology should be more than simply an optional extra, and 6.6 and 6.7 should be clearer about this.

We support the principle of sustainable development and in particular use of renewable energy technologies to reduce conventional energy needs.

The need for exploring and using new sources of energy is clear. However we should be taking a balanced and thoughtful approach, especially given all the other points and considerations that go into good design. I would be keen to see something included on the installation of solar panels - be this in existing or new developments, and in particular with respect to any large-scale solar farms on agricultural land which will have a huge impact on the character of the environment. There will also be a huge impact on the ecosystem which should be taken into account. This would similarly apply to Windfarms etc if these were to be considered for the local area.

Councils' response

We will provide where relevant a brief paragraph providing guidance on this.

L. Linking design principles with relevant policy in the Local Plans;

15 people commented that it would be useful if the design principles within each section of the Guide were linked to the relevant policies of each Local Plan.

This is an excellent design guide, which is easy to follow and covers all the relevant factors that need to be considered. It should be a model for other design guides across the Chilterns.

For it to be successful in influencing design, it must be embedded into the policies in the emerging Local Plan.

Some areas of the guide are clear, with additional clarity provided by diagrams. Other areas introduce large amounts of explanatory text and what seem to be new policy requirements that should properly be part of a Local Plan review.

The role of the SPD should therefore seek to provide guidance on existing planning policy contained in the adopted Development Plan. It is important to note that this does not present an opportunity to reinvent existing planning policies contained in the adopted Local Plan.

Councils' response

The Design Guide will outlive the Local Plans; therefore we consider that linking to specific Local Plan policies should not be necessary.

M. People agree with the sustainability guidance however are concerned if it can be implemented.

30 people commented that the sustainability and climate sections were useful guidance but concerned whether it could be implemented.

The guidance is "best in class", but in my professional experience in working with developers, the building regulations must be revised to require sustainable solutions to be implemented.

Some of these are looking like policy by default as they are much more precise than DES10? I support the aspirations in most instances but was a bit concerned that the principles didn't seem to make much allowance for special circumstances, e.g. listed building alterations/extensions.

Strongly support the best practice aims -am concerned that allowing for the possibility of not meeting these standards as the text implies could be highly detrimental to achievement.

I am not convinced that the paragraph about embodied carbon sufficiently firm and clear. "Encouraged" sounds like something which is good to have rather than something which must always be considered.

In relation to the section 'reducing emissions', there is clearly an evolving set of requirements, with the new Building Regulations, requiring a 30 per cent cut in carbon for all new homes, coming into force in June 2022, and the Future Homes Standards to be subject to further consultation in 2023. The Joint Design Guide

should recognise the evolving nature of the requirements, and make it clear how the Council will keep the Joint Design Guide up to date and relevant in relation to national requirements aimed at reducing emissions.

The Joint Design Guide SPD cannot step beyond its role as a document that is supplementary to the adopted development plans for Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils.

The role of an SPD is to provide guidance in relation to existing policies in adopted local plans, and it is not within the remit of an SPD to introduce new policy requirements. The introduction of new policy requirements should therefore be deferred to a future Local Plan review.

In producing an SPD it is important that the document builds on the principles established within the adopted Local Plan but does not seek to introduce more onerous requirements into the process.

Councils' response

We seek to encourage best practice and provide guidance and advice on achieving sustainable development but understand that the Guide cannot introduce new policy or go beyond the policy framework of the Local Plans.

N. Some people found the Design Guide easy to understand using plain language; whilst others felt there were still technical terms being used throughout.

25 people felt that language was still technical in places.

It uses admirably plain language – excellent!

The language is still technical or formal. Is it meant for an architect, a builder or someone who wants a house built? To a householder like me it sounds too idealised; too a cynic like me it sounds like an impossible dream, When I look at the development in our area, though, it should have been available a good while ago.

Clear to understand

There is still a tendency to use professional jargon which is not easily understood by most of us, e.g. " permeable hierarchy of streets" and " inclusive design" .

... commented that the wording of the design guide seemed aimed at planning professionals who know what they would be looking for and what guidance would be applicable to the scale of the development proposed. It may not come across as well to a citizen who is completely new to planning. ... noted that some of the wording/planning jargon used did not have a link to a glossary definition for someone who is new to planning. For example, 'green / blue infrastructure'.

Councils' response

Language will be reviewed. We have as far as possible use Plain English. A glossary is provided within the website for more technical terms. We will make sure to signpost to the glossary.

Other comments

Other comments made include those related to:

- Bin storage/ cycling storage
- Biodiversity Net Gain
- Health and wellbeing
- Dimensions and design of garages
- Green belt
- Parking
- Transport
- Flooding/ drainage
- Light pollution
- Contemporary design
- Low and high density
- Rights of way
- Open space
- Air quality
- Food growing
- Electric charging
- Sustainable technology
- Monitoring and enforcement
- Undesignated heritage assets
- Noise pollution
- Ageing population
- Play spaces
- Loss of agricultural land
- Access

HOW WE HAVE USED THE RESULTS OF THE CONSULTATION

The councils' have used feedback gained from the consultation to make amendments to the guide where appropriate. These include:

Letters in brackets refer to key issues identified earlier in the report.

Amendment's overview:

- Illustrate how the principles of the guide apply to smaller/ rural developments; small masterplans/ pictures/ interpreting character (A/B);
- Refine guidance around extensions and conversions/ what policy is applicable (C/F);
- Break down sections into their sub-sections/ provide a contents page to start from (landing page)/ make menus more obvious (E/F);
- Look into providing a search bar option (E);
- Find more relevant pictures to provide examples to illustrate principles (G);
- Provide more annotations and explanation of what diagrams are showing (H);
- Provide reference to neighbourhood plans in the 'About South and Vale' section (I);
- Add a method of referencing supporting text throughout the guide and linking principles to Local Plan policies (J/L);
- More guidance on design consideration for renewable energy generation sites; more guidance on what is expected/ required for small scale development on-site renewables (K);
- Review language of design principles in the climate and sustainability section; Identify the extent of any overreach of principles against Part 1 and 2 of the Vale of White Horse Local Plan 2031 and the South Oxfordshire Local Plan 2035 (M);
- Signpost to glossary and highlight technical terms that are defined in the glossary (N).

FURTHER INFORMATION

If you wish to discuss the findings of this consultation or learn more about our work on the design guide, please view our websites:

South Oxfordshire: [Link](#)

Vale of White Horse: [Link](#)

or contact:

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