

**Classification:** Public

**Key Decision:** No

### Gravesham Borough Council

**Report to:** Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee  
**Date:** 25 September 2023  
**Reporting officer:** Assistant Director (Strategic Regeneration)  
**Subject:** Design for Gravesham: update and next steps

#### Purpose and summary of report:

To provide the Committee with an update on the development of the borough wide design code, Design for Gravesham. This report summarises the background to the project, stakeholder engagement to date, the latest draft of the document prepared by place-making specialists Levitt Bernstein and the associated next steps in the document becoming a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), subject to approval of Cabinet.

#### Recommendations:

1. That the Committee comments on the emerging vision and principles outlined in Levitt Bernstein’s summary presentation and draft document (appended to this report).
2. That the Committee notes that the final version of the document together with consultation responses will be presented to a future meeting of the Cabinet for approval.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	<p>The Design Code will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), subject to approval of Cabinet. The document will then be used by planning officers in the assessment of planning applications. The development of a borough wide design code responds to the government’s <a href="#">Regeneration and Levelling Up bill</a>, which at time of drafting is in the reporting stage in the House of Lords.</p> <p>Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) contain guidance that expands on the policies within the development plan, showing how the council expects our planning policies to be addressed by planning applications, and how the policies will be implemented by the council when making decisions on planning applications.</p> <p>The relevant legal context for SPD’s is set out in the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.</p>

<b>Finance and Value for Money</b>	The project is funded by an existing budget and a robust procurement process was undertaken to identify a suitable specialist to undertake this important piece of work.
<b>Corporate Plan</b>	The existing Corporate Plan was appended to the Design for Gravesham ITT; it is the foundation for this important piece of work.
<b>Climate Change</b>	This design code will respond directly to the commitments set out in the Climate Change Strategy 2022-2030, setting the standard for sustainable new developments/regeneration in the borough. Key Climate Change Officers have been consulted as part of the development of the code.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Design for Gravesham is a borough wide design code. It is a once in a ten-year opportunity to steward community and place led regeneration by creating a Policy document that sets out Gravesham's expectations for high quality and sustainable regeneration and development that delivers holistically for people and place in Gravesham - responding to the needs of Gravesham's diverse community and the borough's unique identifies, places, towns, villages and neighbourhoods.
- 1.2 The document will be adopted as an SPD, subject to Cabinet approval. SPD's expand on the policies of the development plan. Design for Gravesham is to be used as a strategic document for the planning team in the assessment of planning applications and in both making recommendations to Members for those decisions made by Planning Committee and those made through Delegated Powers (as defined by the constitution).
- 1.3 It will provide clarity to developers/stakeholders on Gravesham's expectations and proudly showcase the unique qualities of the borough. The ambition is to enhance the quality of applications submitted to the council and provide greater efficiency and engagement in the planning process. The code will complement the Borough's existing Development Plan and in particular the adopted Local Plan Core Strategy (2014).
- 1.4 Why is this needed? The Design Code will be adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), subject to approval of Cabinet. The document will then be used by planning officers in the assessment of planning applications. The development of a borough wide design code responds to the government's Regeneration and Levelling Up bill, which at time of drafting, is in the reporting stage in the House of Lords.
- 1.5 The code has been developed through a comprehensive programme of community engagement, based on the council's community engagement strategy and a multi-platform approach involving in person events, outreach and digital questionnaires.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 The brief for Design for Gravesham was developed through engagement with the Strategic Environment Cabinet Committee (SECC) in February (item 92, 15 February 2022) and March (item 97, 30 March 2022). An update was provided to Members as part of the October briefing, (item 113, 10 October 2022).
- 2.2 As part of the development of the brief, Ward Walks were offered by the Assistant Director for Strategic Regeneration to all Members (email invitation, 13 April 2022)

as an opportunity for Ward Councillors to highlight local concerns, challenges and dialogue with local residents.

- 2.3 A comprehensive tender process was undertaken to identify a suitable specialist to develop the code. 39 prospective specialists raised expressions of interest and 11 submissions were made. Interviews were held in November 2022, engaging all specialists that submitted a bid. Interviews were attended by Officers and a Member of the Cabinet. Following a thorough evaluation process, place-making specialists and architects, Levitt Bernstein, were identified as the preferred candidates.
- 2.4 Levitt Bernstein were appointed in early 2023, presenting to the SECC in March 2023 (Item 128, 14 February 2023).

### **3. Stakeholder Engagement**

- 3.1 Design for Gravesham has been developed through comprehensive community and stakeholder engagement as outlined in the draft document.
- 3.2 Stakeholders engaged include Kent County Council Highways/Active Travel, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation and the Port of London Authority.
- 3.3 Key Officers/Services from each Directorate have been engaged as part of the development of the code.
- 3.4 The first stage of community engagement was undertaken in March 2023 with public events and outreach in Gravesend, Northfleet and Higham. This stage involved listening to residents' views of their borough and local neighbourhood, its unique character and identities. What are the positives and what could be improved? A digital questionnaire was also launched, with responses from 2910 people.
- 3.5 The second stage of community engagement was undertaken in August 2023 with public events and outreach in Gravesend, Northfleet and Meopham. Events formed part of the council's 'Big Conversation' initiative and were well attended. Events were advertised on the Members bulletin, the council's website, social media and leaflets/posters. A digital questionnaire was also undertaken (this closed on 12 September and at time of drafting has had 5,334 visits, 1,116 people have left responses and 5,890 pieces of written feedback have been received).
- 3.6 The second stage provided an opportunity to feedback on the first stage, outlining how resident comments had shaped the emerging vision and priorities for the code. The events provided further opportunity to listen to local views, with residents also invited to have their say on the developing vision and priorities.
- 3.7 The draft document included in this pack will be updated to respond to feedback from this second stage of engagement and comments made by Members at the SECC on 25 September.
- 3.8 The draft document has also been peer reviewed by a prominent design code expert.

### **4. Latest draft document**

- 4.1 The latest draft is appended to this report. The summary presentation is also appended, which will be given by Levitt Bernstein on the night of Committee.
- 4.2 The proposed draft Vision for this strategy is as follows:

4.2.1 *Shaped by our shared and unique identities across the borough, along with our history and heritage, Design for Gravesham shall ensure quality of place, infrastructure that meets the needs of residents now and in the future and ensures development is place-shaped, sustainable with people at its heart.*

4.3 Emerging priorities are outlined below:

**1) Community First**

*Promoting meaningful community engagement and ways to empower community in the development and delivery of new buildings, spaces and creating sustainable and cohesive neighbourhoods.*

**2) Quality and Place**

*Improving the quality of new buildings and spaces that best deliver for community, climate and character, with Gravesham's unique heritage, character and identity at the heart.*

**3) Connectivity and Infrastructure**

*Provide a framework of design principles to improve connectivity and access to green spaces and the river to improve health and well-being.*

**4) Future Gravesham?**

*Support holistic regeneration that responds to local needs and supports a rich mix of opportunities to enhance quality of life and livelihoods, place and environment.*

**5. Next steps**

- 5.1 The draft document appended will be updated and refined to respond to comments from the second round of stakeholder engagement and Members views from the SECC on 25 September.
- 5.2 A key ambition is for the document to be easy to navigate and written in a way that is accessible to the wider public, whilst being suitably detailed to meet the requirements of planning/development professionals.
- 5.3 A formal consultation on the updated draft will be undertaken later this year. Following this the document will be updated to respond to feedback from the formal consultation.
- 5.4 A final version of the document, together with a summary of consultation responses received will be taken to Cabinet late 2023/early 2024 for approval.
- 5.5 If approved at Cabinet, the document will be adopted as an SPD and be used by the planning team in the assessment of planning applications.

**6. Appendices**

- 6.1 Summary presentation by Levitt Bernstein
- 6.2 Draft document by Levitt Bernstein (to follow)

## **7. Background Documents**

7.1 There are no background documents.

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