

From: Nick Chard, Cabinet Member – Environment, Highways & Waste
David Hall, Head of Transport & Development

To: EHW Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee
14th September 2010

Subject: Inclusive Design & Placemaking Guidance

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary:

It has been recognised that there is a need for clearer guidance and policy about inclusive design. Inclusive design ensures that the pedestrian environment is accessible for all members of society regardless of ability. In order to address this, a technical appendix to the Kent Design Guide has been drafted. The guidance aims to provide specific detail and guidance on how to address “*accessibility for all*” in Kent’s future built environment. The guidance in this document applies to design of the public realm, including arrival at a building or public space. It does not intend to deal with matters inside buildings that are covered under Building Regulations, nor restate existing highway and streetscape guidance. The members of the Committee are asked to support the development of this guidance and are invited to comment on its contents.

Introduction

Inclusive design ensures that the pedestrian environment is ‘accessible to all’ regardless of ability. It is underpinned by the “Social Model of Disability” which suggests that it is society that disables people by imposing unnecessary barriers to access for different groups and individuals. Importantly, inclusive design is not only critical to meeting the access needs of individual disabled people, but contributes towards social inclusion and quality of life for the whole community.

There are also sound financial reasons to embed “inclusive design” principles into practice. Failure to take into account the needs of different members of society can lead to legal challenge. In addition, retro-fitting aspects of the built environment are not only costly and disruptive but may lead to sub-standard solutions. These issues would be addressed if inclusive design principles are incorporated into design process.

It has been recognised that there is greater need for guidance and supporting policy to ensure that the principles of “inclusive design” are not only understood but are also incorporated into everyday practice. As a result the Kent Design Initiative (KDI) Working Group was set up in September 2009 to produce a guidance document that could act as a technical appendix to Kent

Design Guide. In addition, the document could also be endorsed by Districts as supplementary guidance to their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) or adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document within their LDFs. The KDI Inclusive Design Working Group includes Maidstone Borough Council, Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, Gravesham District Council, and Kent County Council's Mobility Management Unit), and has endorsement from the Kent Planning Officers Group, the client body to the Kent Design Guide.

Progress to date:

The group have developed a draft high level policy document that is concise and useable from a development control perspective. The aim is to ensure that inclusive design is a key material consideration for all planning applications, and can be easily applied by development control officers, developers and designers alike.

It is intended that the document will act as a 'signposting' document. It outlines the legislative framework and links it to inclusive design best practice guidance. The document will be further developed to include current and relevant case studies and examples of good practice across Kent. A draft policy is attached for comment.

In addition to this report, an extensive list of consultees has been drawn up and specialist expert opinion sought, in preparation for a stakeholder and then public consultation, prior to formal adoption. It is intended to present the guidance document for formal Cabinet approval once consultation has been completed. In addition, presentations will be made to all the relevant key-stakeholder groups.

Conclusions and Recommendations:

In order to meet the need for greater guidance and policy about inclusive design a draft technical guidance document has been drafted. The draft is now ready to go out for stakeholder consultation which will be followed by wider public consultation.

Members of the committee are asked to:

- Support the need to produce a cross-county policy on Inclusive Design & Placemaking;
- Advise the KDI Inclusive Design Working Group on any initial comments on the draft policy and technical guidance.
- Endorse the next steps to carry out a thorough consultation process including stakeholder and public consultation; and to finally submit the guidance for Cabinet approval and adoption as formal policy.

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Background Documents:

Inclusive Design & Placemaking Technical Appendix