

From: **David Wimble, Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Special Projects**

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To: **Growth, Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee - 10 March 2026**

Subject: **Kent Design Guide**

Classification: **Unrestricted Past Pathway of report:** Growth,

Economic Development & Communities Cabinet Committee – 17th

November 2020

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Summary: This paper updates Cabinet Committee on development progress of the refreshed Kent Design Guide and the next elements of activity to launch the guide.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to endorse the current approach and note the next steps for publication of the refreshed Kent Design Guide.

Electoral Division: County Wide

1. Introduction

- 1.1 A refreshed Kent Design Guide in digital format is in the final stages of development to replace the 2005 printed version. The refreshed guide aims to create a single, shared online framework of policy and guidance that sets quality standards for new homes and neighbourhoods being built in Kent. The Kent Design Guide framework is intended to work alongside the National Design Guide published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG).¹
- 1.2 A Cabinet Committee paper was presented to GEDCCC on 17th November 2020 to advise on the wider aspects of Design in Kent's Built Environment² and the steps that were being taken to promote and progress the subject. The project was subsequently then paused following a re-evaluation of its priority and uncertainty around the direction of national policy.
- 1.3 The existing National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) covers design through Chapter 14 "Achieving well designed places"³. Specifically paragraph 139 of the NPPF states that "*Development that is not well designed should be refused,*

¹ [National Design Guide – October 2019, updated January 2021 – Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government](#)

² [Design in Kent's Built Environment - Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee 17 November 2020](#)

³ [National Planning Policy Framework - 12. Achieving well-designed places - Guidance - GOV.UK](#)

especially where it fails to reflect local design policies and government guidance on design ⁵⁴, taking into account any local design guidance and supplementary planning documents which use visual tools such as design guides and codes. “

- 1.4 The change in national government in 2024 resulted in a period of uncertainty as to how design in planning would be approached. However, it is now clear that guidance at a more local level remains an important component in assessing planning applications. As part of its measures for planning reform, the government has released two consultations, one to update the NPPF and a second on a proposed [Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#). Through the [NPPF consultation](#) it is intended that the current paragraph 14 will be updated and include key design principles that a development should adhere to. The design principles of the NPPF reflect the seven features of well-designed places proposed in the proposed Design and Placemaking Practice Guidance. The principle that development should be in accordance with local policies remains and it is therefore appropriate and relevant to be updating our guidance at this time.
- 1.5 The creation of the guide to date has required a significant input from Kent's Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), in particular to assemble detailed design codes for their neighbourhoods and / or for specific development sites in their districts but also to ensure that the new Kent Design Guide is up to date, legible, intuitive and ultimately of value to all stakeholders.

2. Kent Design Guide

- 2.1 KCC has worked in partnership with Design South East over the past 18 months to organise a series of workshops, meetings and surveys to ensure that the eventual product offers a stakeholder led solution. The workshops considered the question of how the county's public and private sector could deliver higher design quality more consistently, particularly in housing development.
- 2.2 Collectively, local authorities, developers, housebuilders, agents, consultants, and statutory consultees concluded that there are several ways to achieve meaningful design guidance for Kent's built environment. The suggestions made in these discussions have been incorporated into the new guide.
- 2.3 The new guide is entirely digital and although KCC has been the lead authority in its production, importantly the guide will be hosted externally to reflect its position as guidance for the county council **and** our partner boroughs, districts and statutory undertakers. Whilst not a policy in its own right, it provides a framework for KCC and other stakeholder policy documents. Once available, it will be offered to partner Local Planning Authorities to consider the need for planning applications to comply with its content through the adoption of Local Plans.
- 2.4 Designing the new Guide as an entirely web-based product allows for content to be updated in a far easier and immediate way. With such a depth and breadth of content it became apparent with the 2005 version that policies, practice and legislation change with such frequency that a more adaptable product was needed. Much of the new website has now been populated with content from a range of KCC services and external stakeholders including Kent Police and Kent Planning Officers Group representing the Districts' and Boroughs' Planning Authorities. This engagement will continue throughout the life of the Guide. Images and examples of best practice can also be updated and changed as they become available.

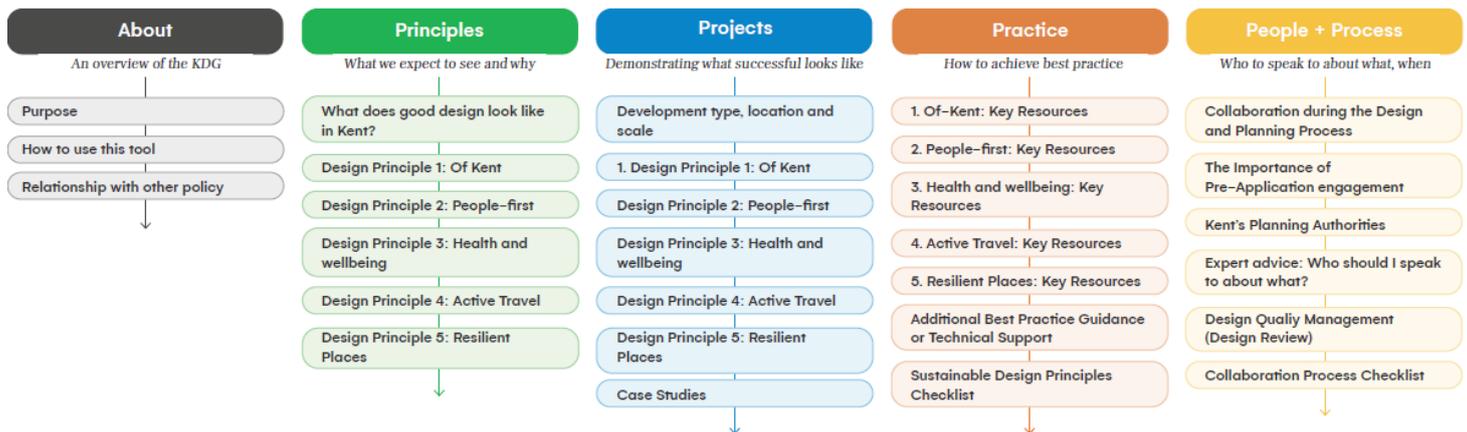
3. How will it work

3.1 The objectives of the new Guide are that it is clear, up to date, technically informative, interactive and easy to navigate. There will be five main “Areas” to navigate from; About, Principles, Projects, Practice, People & Processes.

3.2 To take each in turn;

- About – Provides an overview of the Guide and how to use it
 - Principles - Sets out what we expect to see within five identified “Key Design Principles” that relate to those proposed in the proposed NPPF.
 - Projects - Demonstrates what good practice looks like.
 - Practice - Provides specific policy or best practice guidance on how to achieve best practice.
- People and Process – Information on who to talk to about what and when.

3.3 The image below provides an illustrative example of the proposed website structure and how the page will look, having five main “Areas” to navigate.



3.4 The proposed layout of the guide includes five Key Design Principles that the Projects and Practice areas align to. Users can therefore review a specific Key Design Principle, then can look at projects and examples of that principle in the Projects area. Subsequently, users can then review any policy and good practice guidance in the Practice area, making the journey and search for information uniform and intuitive.

3.5 The five Key Design Principles are;

1.	Of Kent (Identity & Built Form)	Demonstrating the various and unique local design, landscape and historic characteristics, features and vernaculars “Of Kent” to be followed.
2.	People First (Liveability)	Demonstrating design concepts that put “people first” such as the need for privacy, security, space and sustainability. Putting community life first and foremost.
3.	Health and Well Being (Public Space)	Provides design information for living standards, dealing with ageing populations, accessibility and social and community cohesion.
4.	Active Kent (Movement)	Demonstrates design that is well connected and facilitates active lifestyles and walkable communities

		as well as the need for access to green space , recreation and sport.
5.	Resilient Places (Nature & Climate)	Promotes use of sustainable materials, energy efficiency and protection of our natural environment and resources.

3.6 It is important to note that the Guide is proposed as a framework for guidance and policy within Kent but is not in itself a policy. It will instead act as a home for guidance and policy and any KCC policy contained within it will have to have gone through its own governance procedures and approvals from Members.

4. Next Steps

4.1 The project is now in its final stage of compilation. Policies, guidance and content have been collated and the next stage of the process will be to upload to the new site. There will then be a period of soft testing with stakeholders before a formal launch expected in the summer of this year. Initially some areas will have limited content as they may require their own formal routes of governance or that they remain in production. Officers will ensure that sufficient content is included to make it useful, informative and effective from the outset.

4.2 Following the go live date and subject to any spending constraints, a formal launch will be arranged with press notifications and publicity to all stakeholders, including elected members, design consultants, architects, planners, LPAs, developers, housebuilders and Parish Councils.

4.3 Content will then be reviewed, added and deleted on a regular annual basis to ensure it remains up to date, relevant and useful. Ad hoc immediate amendments may also be required should new policies get adopted.

4.4 Appendix 2 to this report provides a slide presentation summary of the project provided by our consultant partner Design South East.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The costs of getting the project to this stage have been incorporated within the core budget of the Strategic Development and Place Group within the Growth and Communities division of Growth, Environment and Transport (GET). Future costs associated with website hosting and other directly linked costs are provided within the annual core budget. Periodic updates to the Guide are expected to amount to approximately £300 per year for web hosting and an annual allowance of £1,100 for any GET pages that would need updating in the future. The overall commitment for future updates relating to changes to policy or guidance would expect to be covered by the respective KCC service area or external partner to which the amend relates. No cost for a launch event has been allocated due to the current spending restrictions.

6. Legal Implications

6.1 The National Planning Policy Framework requires planning applications to be compliant with local design standards and guidance. It is therefore incumbent upon authorities to ensure that such policies are available. The guide also provides a useful framework to ensure that any policy or guidance referring to legal requirements is available and easily accessible.

7. Equalities Implications

- 7.1 An existing EQIA is in place for the current Kent Design Guide and has been updated for the refresh and attached to this report.

8. Data Protection Implications

- 8.1 A DPIA is completed due to the publishing of service area contact details.

9. Other Corporate Implications

- 9.1 The Design Guide is a collaborative project requiring input from multiple disciplines and KCC service areas. Whilst the Strategic Development and Place Group (SDP) retain overall accountability for coordinating the project, those services and stakeholders providing content retain ownership and accountability for it. Notwithstanding that, it is expected that the Development Investment Team (DIT) within SDP will retain a coordinating role with annual reviews of content and the general management of the external hosting and upkeep of the Guide. There is strong interconnectivity between developer contributions and built design requirements required to make sustainable place-making. For this reason the DIT will retain an overarching coordination role of both areas.

10. Conclusions

- 10.1 The project will support officers at KCC & other Local Planning Authorities, design teams (e.g. architects) and landowners/developers/builders through the provision of consistent, clear and accessible design and placemaking guidance.
- 10.2 The refreshed Kent Design Guide will create a single, shared online resource that sets **quality standards** for **new homes and neighbourhoods** being built in Kent, focusing on the design and planning process helping to maintain Kent as an attractive, desirable and sustainable place to live.

11. Recommendation

8.1 Recommendation

The Cabinet Committee is asked to endorse the current approach and note the next steps for publication of the refreshed Kent Design Guide

12. Background Documents

Appendix 1, Existing [Kent Design Guide](#)
Appendix 2, Supporting Design South East presentation slides
Appendix 3, EQIA

13. Contact Details

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