

New Runnymede Local Plan



Topic Area 6: Creating well-designed, high-quality places

Background

- 7.1 Creating high quality buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve, but delivering this in practice can be challenging given the number of considerations which need to be balanced, such as delivering enough homes and making efficient use of land.
- 7.2 Well-designed places should be able to stand the test of time. They should contribute towards local character, enhance the historic environment and reflect what is unique or special about a place, its architecture, built form or landscape setting. They should be designed in such a way as to give a strong sense of place, promote health and well-being, be inclusive, safe and accessible to all. These components all feature in the 'seven features of well-designed places', as defined by the government in the proposed new [Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance](#).

The seven features of well-designed places can help achieve good design quality – these can inform local policies and guidance and decisions on development proposals.



- 7.3 The existing 2030 Local Plan contains policies which aim to create a high-quality and inclusive built environment, including at Longcross Garden Village, where a site-specific design code is being developed. To be clearer on our design expectations for development sites across the rest of the Runnymede area, we published our own design guidance: the [Runnymede Design Supplementary Planning Document \(SPD\)](#) in 2021. The SPD contains a set of design standards, and identifies five different character types – and their typical characteristics - across the built-up areas of Runnymede.

What has changed since the 2030 Local Plan

- 7.4 The latest NPPF contains several NDMPs which aim to create high-quality, sustainable places, including by:
- Making effective use of land, particularly in highly connected locations, with the introduction of minimum density standards in these areas.
 - Emphasising how ‘poorly designed’ development should be refused, when assessed against a new policy for decision-makers (referencing eight key design principles reflecting those set out at paragraph 10.2 above) as well as any local design policies, guides, codes and masterplans in the development plan. In the absence of these locally-produced design tools, decision-makers can rely on principles set out in the national Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance.
 - Encouraging the delivery of tree-lined streets.
 - Encouraging the use of design review and other design tools and processes to inform decision-making.
- 7.5 The Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance no longer expects every local planning authority to produce an authority-wide design code. These can still be produced, but other tools could be more appropriate to inform decision-making (such as masterplans, localised design codes and design guidance) depending on emerging growth scenarios. New national model design codes are expected to be published later this year, which could also be used as a starting point for locally-produced codes, or wholly adopted to be used locally.

What we think is in scope

- 7.6 We want to ensure that design at the authority-wide scale is embedded at an early stage into the plan-making process. To do this effectively, we will need to work with local communities to develop the vision for the next Local Plan in terms of delivering well-designed, high-quality development.
- 7.7 We need a deeper understanding of the key local design challenges experienced in Runnymede, and local design aspirations. We can then set out local design expectations and processes for priority locations or areas for growth or change in the next Local Plan (once these growth scenarios emerge). We can also set out design expectations for certain types of development – such as flats or family homes – in certain areas of the Runnymede area.
- 7.8 We also need to be mindful that design matters can be addressed through Neighbourhood Plans – particularly through design codes – where local communities will be best placed to address the unique character of their areas themselves.

Neighbourhood planning gives a community the opportunity to plan for their local area, to decide what the place they live in should look like and define how their neighbourhood should grow and change in the future.

Neighbourhood Plans have already been adopted in Englefield Green Village, Virginia Water and Thorpe, with a further plan currently being prepared in Ottershaw.

- 7.9 Early feedback from our Development Management team, the local community, and evidence from recently refused planning applications has highlighted a number of design issues which could be addressed by future design tools, including:
- Design of householder development e.g. extensions and alterations, particularly those within the Green Belt.
 - Shopfront design, particularly those in Conservation Areas.
 - Sustainable construction e.g. how development can be designed to reduce emissions and be energy efficient.
 - How new development can respond better to its local context, and maintain or enhance a sense of identity.
 - How noise impacts can be minimised, and air quality improved through well-designed development.
 - How new development can create well-connected places through provision of public transport, walking and cycling infrastructure and parking requirements.
 - How nature and the historic landscape is woven into the design of new development.
 - How places can be designed to be inclusive and safe.
 - Locally-set parking standards.
- 7.10 These represent just a few of the issues that new design policies and tools could address, either through the new Local Plan, or via a future Supplementary Plan. Whilst several of these issues – such as air and noise pollution, and appropriate development in the Green Belt – may now be sufficiently addressed by NDMPs, the NPPF sets out how there is scope for locally-specific design policies or standards to add further detail to the key design principles in the NPPF.
- 7.11 National planning policy is clear that development should make efficient use of land, and that towns and other areas well served by public transport should use minimum density standards which help secure a significant uplift on existing density. We think that this issue could be addressed by new design tools – such as the use of site or area-wide specific design codes to support the delivery of development in those areas of Runnymede that could achieve a significant uplift in density, including by building upwards where appropriate.
- 7.12 However, we will need to conduct further work to fully understand the character of the site(s) or area(s) that design tools may cover, the wider context, and opportunities to strengthen existing character.

What we think is out of scope

- 7.13 Several design and placemaking matters that are currently addressed in the existing 2030 Local Plan are now considered to be out of scope in the new Local Plan, as

these matters are addressed by NDMPs and the supporting Design and Placemaking Planning Practice Guidance. These include:

- Policies which set out key principles for well-designed places in Runnymede (similar to strategic policy EE1 in the existing 2030 Local Plan).
- Environmental protection policies, setting out how development proposals should be designed in order to control pollution (e.g. to mitigate any air quality, noise, land contamination, and light impacts, as these are now addressed by NDMPs in Chapter 17 of the latest NPPF.
- Policies setting out how proposals should be designed in order to conserve and enhance the historic environment, and heritage assets, as these are addressed by NDMPs in Chapter 20 of the latest NPPF (other than any site-specific site allocation requirements).

The following questions are set out in the response form¹:

Q26. Do you agree with what the Council believes is in scope with regards to achieving well-designed buildings and places, which a new Local Plan could address? If not, please explain why.

Q27. Do you agree with what the Council believes is out of scope for this matter? If not, please explain why.

Q28. Do you agree that the focus of Runnymede design tools (e.g. masterplans or codes) should be on areas that provide the greatest opportunities for growth or change?

Q29. Do you have any views on design codes or other design tools for the different settlement areas in the Runnymede area, and whether these should come through the Local Plan, a Supplementary Plan, or Neighbourhood Plans?

Q30. Do you have any views on where in the Runnymede area density could be significantly uplifted and/or where building upwards could help to help meet identified needs?

¹ Available at: www.runnymede.gov.uk/local-plan/scoping