

# **East Herts Council Report**

## **Executive pre-meeting**

**Date of meeting: Tuesday 21 May 2024**

**Report by:** Councillor Vicky Glover-Ward – Executive Member for Planning and Growth

**Report title:** Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter

**Ward(s) affected:** (All Wards);

**Summary** – This report proposes that the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter be endorsed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EXECUTIVE to recommend to Council that:**

- a) The Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter, as detailed at Appendix A, be agreed as a material consideration for Development Management purposes; and**
- b) Developers, landowners and housing associations in the district be encouraged to voluntarily sign and commit to the design and sustainability pledges set out in the Quality Charter.**

## **1.0 Proposal**

- 1.1 The Hertfordshire Growth Board launched the Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter in 2023. The Charter seeks to encourage high quality, sustainable development across Hertfordshire.
- 1.2 It is proposed that the Council formally endorses the Charter as a material planning consideration for Development Management purposes.

## **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 There is more emphasis than ever to achieve a high standard of new development in Hertfordshire. Most Hertfordshire councils have declared a climate emergency, committing to reducing emissions and many have set a target to achieve net zero within a targeted year. In East Herts, the Council approved a Climate Change Declaration in 2019, and subsequently agreed a Climate Emergency in 2023. The Council also has a Sustainability SPD which provides guidance on the implementation of adopted District Plan (2018) policies related to climate change, sustainable design and construction, to improve the environmental sustainability of new development.
- 2.2 The creation of more energy efficient buildings has therefore had a raised profile in recent years, however, whilst Building Regulations require new development to achieve minimum specifications relating to sustainability, such as energy efficiency and water consumption, they do not set sufficiently high standards and are not ambitious despite the known scale of the climate crisis.
- 2.3 Creating a high quality of design for new development is also important to create places in which it is safe, sustainable and desirable to live. The creation of poorly designed development can have negative impacts on people's lives, its surrounding areas and supporting facilities. These negative impacts often create concerns from people about new development, leading to opposition.
- 2.4 The Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter is a document created by the Hertfordshire Growth Board, which intends to improve sustainability and design for new development in the county. The Charter was produced in recognition of the significant housing growth anticipated across the county. The built environment is responsible for 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, therefore one of the priorities for development is to improve the construction, heating, cooling and powering of our homes and other buildings.

2.5 The Charter has the following key pledges at its core:

Design Pledges:

- Developers must submit a design and access statement to demonstrate compliance with national and local planning policies, the National Model Design Code and local design codes.
- Major sites will submit a masterplan which must be agreed in advance or alongside a planning application.
- Major sites will be informed by community engagement and a design review panel as part of the pre-application and planning application process.
- Major sites must explain the long-term stewardship strategy for their development.
- Developers must incorporate environmental management systems, considerate construction, social value and construction skills development into their business models.
- All developments should achieve at least 10% biodiversity net gain for at least 30 years in accordance with the DEFRA toolkit.

Sustainability Pledge:

- Developers must identify a sustainability standard that exceeds minimum current Building Regulations as part of their planning application and then use an industry recognised process to demonstrate compliance with that standard upon completion of their development.

2.4 Endorsement of the Charter will complement existing policies in the District Plan, including for example Policy DES1 (Masterplanning) and Policy DES4 (Design of New Development). Whilst the Charter does not seek to replace or require higher standards than current regulations allow, it does encourage developers to be more ambitious, to demonstrate excellence in design and sustainability.

2.5 In advance of the update to the District Plan and its associated District Design Code, it is important to ensure that the Council

employs as many tools as possible to secure high quality development and set a benchmark for the standards expected. The Charter is considered to be another opportunity to demonstrate this.

- 2.6 At the time of writing the following local authorities have endorsed the Charter: Dacorum, North Herts, St Albans, Stevenage, Watford, Welwyn Hatfield, and Hertfordshire County Council. Two developers have also formally signed up to the Charter: Tarmac, and Thakeham.
- 2.7 The Charter is a voluntary pledge to sign up to. It is hoped that other developers, landowners, and housing associations in the district, will also sign the Charter and contribute to the delivery of a high quality and sustainable places.
- 2.8 A copy of the Development Quality Charter is available to view at **Appendix A** and its Terms of Use at **Appendix B**. Councils, developers and others who sign the Charter will be formally recognised on the Hertfordshire Growth Board website. Developments that comply with the Charter will be automatically put forward for the Hertfordshire Building Futures Awards. There will be a distinct award for schemes that comply with the Charter. ([HGB - Hertfordshire Development Quality Charter \(hertfordshiregrowthboard.com\)](http://hertfordshiregrowthboard.com)).

### **3.0 Reason(s)**

- 3.1 Sustainable development is key to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in providing high quality homes and environments for all.
- 3.2 By formally signing up to the Charter, and it henceforth becoming a material consideration, the Council will strengthen its commitment and position to deliver high quality sustainable developments which will benefit our residents now and in the future.

## **4.0 Options**

- 4.1 The Council could choose not to endorse the Charter as a material planning consideration for Development Management purposes. However, this would mean that the Council would not be able to take account of the design and sustainability pledges set out in the Charter, which are aimed at achieving a new benchmark for high quality and sustainable development in Hertfordshire.

## **5.0 Risks**

- 5.1 The Charter will become a material consideration in planning decision making. It seeks to raise the quality of developments. The weight given to it will be at the discretion of the decision maker to determine how much weight the Charter carries.

## **6.0 Implications/Consultations**

- 6.1 The Charter seeks to improve the sustainability of developments across East Herts. This is an opportunity for the Council to encourage higher standards of development.
- 6.2 The Charter will become a material planning consideration in decision making but does not introduce new matters not already considered by the current District Plan. It seeks to achieve higher standards and greater clarity during the planning process.

## **Community Safety**

No

## **Data Protection**

No

## **Equalities**

No

## **Environmental Sustainability**

Yes. The Charter encourages developers to work collaboratively with the Local Planning Authority to develop higher quality and environmentally sustainable developments.

**Financial**

No

**Health and Safety**

No

**Human Resources**

No

**Human Rights**

No

**Legal**

Yes. The Charter will become a material consideration in planning decision making.

**Specific Wards**

No

**7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material**

7.-1 Appendix 1- Development Quality Charter

7.2 Appendix 2- Development Quality Charter Terms Of Use

**Contact Member**

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