

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK EXECUTIVE PANEL – 7 JULY 2011

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLANNING POLICY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK MORPHOLOGY AND PLACE SHAPING (MAPS) TECHNICAL STUDY

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- The Morphology and Place Shaping (MAPS) technical study aims to embed a settlement-wide approach to design in the East Herts Local Development Framework (LDF). This report seeks endorsement from Members to agree the Project Plan.

RECOMMENDATION TO EXECUTIVE: to commend to Council that:

<p>settlement-wide design based technical work is undertaken to inform the preparation of the East Herts Local Development Framework, and the Morphology and Place Shaping (MAPS) Technical Study Project Plan, contained at Essential Reference Paper ‘B’ to this report, be agreed.</p>
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1.0 Background

1.1 Good design is increasingly being seen as an important part of the planning and plan-making process. Indeed, design is more than simply what a building looks like: design is about the way neighbourhoods function as social environments and how they affect people’s lives.

1.2 It is important therefore, that design is embedded into the East Herts Local Development Framework (LDF). The Council is currently preparing the Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD): the strategic and over-arching planning policy document in the East Herts LDF. Thus, the Morphology and Place Shaping (MAPS) study seeks to embed settlement-wide

design into the Core Strategy.

- 1.3 As Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3) notes, good design can be described as design that is appropriate to its context and makes the most of opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.
- 1.4 It is clear, therefore, that an understanding of context forms the basis of good design. The MAPS study provides that context on a settlement-wide scale by providing an evidential understanding of how a town functions, its character and how it should evolve. MAPS also dovetails neatly with the Government's localism agenda in that it seeks to ensure that development is locally distinctive.
- 1.5 Fundamentally, MAPS is a study of built-form and urban design. Whilst it is acknowledged that the terms morphology and place shaping constitute planning jargon, they do nonetheless (along with the acronym itself) accurately and succinctly describe the purpose of this study. The terms have also been used because the former is the means of achieving the latter. Indeed, one cannot successfully shape places until the morphology of the place has been examined and understood.
- 1.6 Morphology is the study of settlements and built form. It seeks to understand the structure and character of a place by examining the patterns of its component parts and the process of its development.
- 1.7 Place shaping is an aspect of planning that is specifically concerned with creating attractive, prosperous and safe communities; places where people want to live, work and do business. It is about embedding design considerations into the planning process.
- 1.8 The LDF must also be based on robust and credible evidence (Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning). It is considered appropriate therefore, that a Project Plan is prepared that sets out the agreed methodology for undertaking settlement-wide design work. The MAPS Project Plan is attached as **Essential Reference Paper B**.

2.0 Report

2.1 The key aspects of the MAPS Project Plan are set out below. In terms of the methodology itself, a two-stage approach is proposed: Stage 1 - Morphology considers the character, form and functionality (or context) of each settlement and then using this information, Stage 2 - Place Shaping analyses how each settlement can positively accommodate future development.

Extent of the Study

2.2 Using the Issues and Options consultation document as its basis, the MAPS study will initially cover the following settlements.

- Bishop's Stortford
- Buntingford
- Hertford
- Sawbridgeworth
- Ware

Should further settlements be identified for significant growth following the Issues and Options consultation, the study will be extended to cover those settlements.

Resources and Quality Assurance

2.3 This study will be undertaken using existing in-house resources within the Planning Policy Team. It is also proposed that a Quality Assurance Group (QAG) is set up consisting of specialist officers from the Council's Development Control, Conservation and Landscape Services. Whilst these officers will not undertake any of the MAPS work, this group will review the outputs of the study as part of quality assurance.

Stakeholder Engagement

2.4 Following completion of Stage 1 - Morphology, it is proposed to engage with local District Councillors, Town Councils and civic societies in the respective towns to get their feedback and impressions about the characterisation work. It is envisaged that a MAPS working group will be established for each settlement. Each working group will be made up of two or three representatives from each organisation and will then provide feedback on Stage 2 - Place Shaping.

2.5 This engagement will ensure that the study is robust by obtaining valuable community feedback as to the character of the town and how it functions. The feedback will provide an important 'reality-

check' to the study, although when engaging with community representatives, it will be essential to be clear about both the objectives and limitations of the study and reiterate the role and purpose of the Core Strategy. The findings of the study will also be subject to wider public consultation as part of the Core Strategy Preferred Options stage.

Stage 1 - Morphology

2.6 Stage 1 looks at the settlement in its landscape context as well as its built environment or townscape. The work for both aspects of Stage 1 involves a review of existing geographic information (using the Council's existing Geographic Information System (GIS) software) followed by additional survey fieldwork. Survey information will be supported by photographic evidence.

2.7 The following information will be collated:

Landscape Information:

- Geography
- Topography
- Green Infrastructure
- Rivers and flooding
- Agricultural land classifications
- Key landscape features
- Landscape Sensitivity
- Landscape Capacity

Townscape Information:

- Settlement evolution
- Existing land use
- Heritage assets
- Landmark buildings
- Accessibility to key services
- Connectivity
- Network of routes
- Built-form

Stage 2 - Place Shaping

2.8 Utilising the morphology information from Stage 1, Stage 2 will apply it to the settlements to give an analysis of how the settlement can positively accommodate future development (i.e. place shaping). There are also two aspects to Stage 2. The first relates to the existing built-up area and seeks to broadly characterise the settlement into its component parts, providing guidance on how the existing town could accommodate development.

2.9 The following five standard PLACE zones have been identified and these will be applied to each settlement. Whilst it is acknowledged that every town is unique in its appearance and character, when looking at the settlement as a whole there are common features shared by all towns, reflecting the way that market towns have evolved over the centuries.

- **Peripheral Commercial Zone**
- **Living / Suburban Zone**
- **Access Corridor Zone**
- **Core Commercial Zone**
- **Edge of Centre Zone**

2.10 A series of PLACE Zone summaries will provide more detailed descriptions of the specific characteristics of these areas within each settlement. However, these summary descriptions of the zones will not be a detailed account nor will they be prescriptive in terms of built-form and design. Such information would not be appropriate for inclusion in the Core Strategy and should be included in a detailed design Supplementary Planning Document (SPD). Instead the summaries should seek to capture the flavour and atmosphere of the area to inform the principles of design and development in each identified settlement. These summaries will also help inform the design and integration of new areas for development.

Place Shaping and the Green Belt

2.11 The second aspect provides guidance in respect of how development could be accommodated on the periphery of the settlement. This will entail looking at greenfield and Green Belt locations.

2.12 However, it should be stressed that the inclusion of an area within the MAPS study is not an indication that it will come forward for development: that is a policy decision to be made through public consultation and the preparation of the LDF. The MAPS study simply informs that process by providing technical evidence as to which locations (if any) are most suitable from a settlement-wide design perspective.

2.13 It should be noted however, that the MAPS study does not consider Green Belt designation. Importantly, whilst Green Belts often contain areas of attractive landscape, the quality of the landscape is not relevant to the inclusion of land within a Green Belt or to its continued protection.

2.14 Notwithstanding this, whilst Green Belt considerations should not influence a design-based study, it would be disingenuous not to acknowledge the role that Green Belt designation plays when looking at settlement-wide design. It is expected that a separate Green Belt study will be undertaken for East Herts, although the

findings from this study will inform that work as appropriate, particularly in respect of the character of historic towns.

Outputs

- 2.15 The main output will be a MAPS Report for each identified settlement. In addition, to fieldwork and survey information, each report will also make recommendations, presented as follows:
- A plan that identifies the townscape character zones and the locations where development could be accommodated from a settlement-wide design perspective
 - Summaries of each townscape character zone that describe the key features of each zone and any areas of opportunity
 - Design-led principles for accommodating development including peripheral development and setting out how connectivity could be improved
- 2.16 Importantly, it should be stressed that the MAPS study itself does not constitute planning policy nor necessarily represent the intentions of East Herts Council. Once completed, the MAPS Reports will form part of the evidence base for the East Herts LDF and will simply inform decisions in respect of settlement-wide design and shaping the future of East Herts to 2031.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

- Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing (PPS3), CLG, June 2010
- Planning Policy Statement 12: Local Spatial Planning (PPS12), CLG, 2008

Contact Member: Councillor M G Carver, Executive Member for Planning Policy and Economic Development

Contact Officer: Kevin Steptoe, Head of Planning and Building Control - Ext 1407

Report Author: John Careford, Senior Planning Policy Officer

ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i>	<p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the built neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Shaping now, shaping the future <i>Safeguard and enhance our unique mix of rural and urban communities, ensuring sustainable, economic and social opportunities including the continuation of effective development control and other measures.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
Consultation:	Engagement with appropriate stakeholders as required.
Legal:	N/A
Financial:	LDF technical work is being funded from the Planning Policy / LDF Upkeep Budgets.
Human Resource:	Existing Planning Policy staff resources will undertake this study.
Risk Management:	In order to be found sound at examination, it is essential that the Core Strategy should be based on a robust evidence base.