

Draft Code Public Engagement Report

May 2025



Report purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a comprehensive summary of the key outcomes from the public and stakeholder engagement regarding the Spelthorne Design Code. This includes the main areas of feedback received during the public engagement, which took place from 18 March to 8 April 2025, and subsequent proposed changes to the draft Design Code.

Reason for consultation

The Spelthorne Design Code (SDC) is being produced to support the delivery of high quality design of new development in the borough, that is reflective of local character and design preferences. It will set out the design requirements for proposed new development to ensure that it is locally supported, sustainable and functions well for all. The Design Code team wanted to hear community views about the draft Design Code, that had been developed following previous community input, to check if we had addressed the key priorities and if it could be improved. This consultation also formed a part of stage 3 (Test phase) of the project, enabling the public and other key stakeholders to test the draft Code.

Approach

The draft Design Code engagement opportunity was accessible via the SDC Commonplace, an online engagement hub. The consultation was spread over the following three pages for people to read through, understand the draft Code and share their opinions and improvement recommendations on it:

- **What is in the draft Code**: a page for people to find out what is in the Design Code, understand the key elements of the Code and download a copy to read it in full
- **How the Design Code has responded to the community**: a page for people to find out how the Design Code has reflected the views of Spelthorne's communities on key design priorities
- **Survey to get feedback on the draft Code**: a page where local people could tell us what they thought about the draft Design Code and play their part in its creation. While the survey to get feedback on the draft Code has closed, members of the public can still view all of the comments submitted [here](#).

In order to generate public interest and feedback and to enable and encourage local people to have a say at this stage, before a more technical statutory consultation, the draft Code engagement opportunity was extensively communicated.

Stakeholders

The draft Code engagement opportunity was communicated to the following stakeholders, which you can see in the diagram below.

Local Community

- Any interested local resident and regular visitor
- Citizens' Panel- a demographically representative panel of Spelthorne Residents
- Local community centres, libraries and other local groups

Local Businesses

Staff Members/ Internal Teams

- Development Management Team
- Assets Team
- Economic Development Team
- All staff

Elected Members

- Design Code Task Group
- All Councillors

Housing Associations

Resident Associations

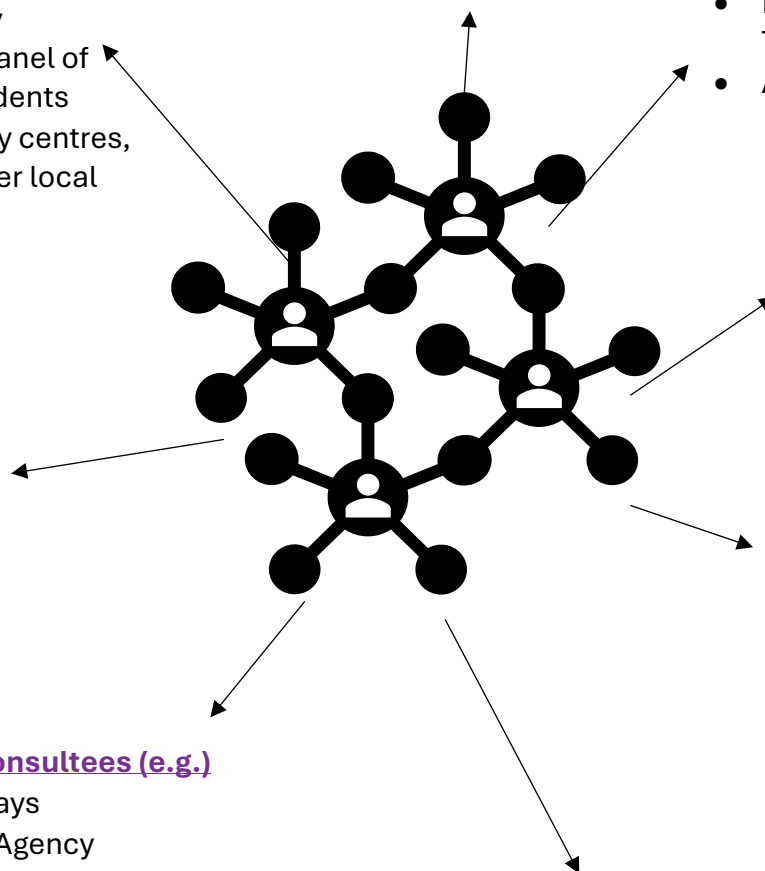
- 60+ Resident Associations and local community groups
- Spelthorne Partnership Assembly

Key Statutory Consultees (e.g.)

- Surrey Highways
- Environment Agency
- Sport England and local Active Partnership
- Surrey Flooding
- Active Travel England
- Surrey Police
- Staines Business Improvement District
- Surrey Developer Forum

Young People

- Schools- Bishop Wand School, The Matthew Arnold School, Thamesmead School, Thomas Knyvett School, St Paul's Catholic College Sunbury Manor School
- Youth Groups- Ashford Youth Club, scout groups
- Citizens' Panel- applicants and Panel members from 13 years old



Communications and promotions

Many communication channels were used, both online and in-person to promote the draft Code engagement opportunity and gather feedback on the draft Code.



SBC social media

What: Social Media Posts (Instagram, Facebook, X, LinkedIn etc.)

- Regular posts throughout consultation
- Countdown posts published to highlight opportunity closing soon

Social Media Stories (Instagram, Facebook)

Social Media Advert

- Ran from 21/03/25- 8/04/25 targeted at whole borough area

YouTube video

Result: lots of people aware and directed to the consultation. Posts, videos and advert generated 130,000+ views, reached almost 300,000 people and had 1000+ local people engage and visit the consultation

Physical display promotion

What: Posters

- On noticeboards, in council offices, libraries, community centres and other key locations



Digital Screens

- In Elmsleigh and Staines High Street

Result: Directed people to the consultation. Over 40 people scanned QR Code and followed through to the Commonplace.



News articles

What: Press release

Spelnet news

Commonplace news stories

- 8 news stories published on engagement

Council e-news

Spring Bulletin

Result: More people aware of the consultation and receiving updates about the progress of the project. Over 300+ people receiving Commonplace news about the engagement opportunity, which translates to more people following along and engaging in the Design Code.

Councillor communication



What: **Emails to Councillors**

- Regular prior to, and throughout, consultation

Presentation at All Member meeting

Member Briefing Note

Result: Regular Councillor contact and communication, enabling them to understand the progress of the project, engagement opportunities for residents and be able to communicate these opportunities.



In-person communication and engagement

What: **Citizens' Panel session**

- Input from the Spelthorne Design Code Citizens' Panel, which was a randomly selected group of 40+ local that is demographically representative of the borough, has been instrumental in developing the draft Code through two in-person sessions held in November 2024.
- A third and final in-person session with the Spelthorne Design Code Citizens' Panel took place in March 2025, where participants collaboratively reviewed and tested the draft Code.
- Activities/ parts of the session included:



1. Explanation from the project team about the content of the draft Design Code, its development and role in planning, how public feedback (including Citizens' Panel input) shaped it and who will use it.
2. Applying the draft Design Code to real-world scenarios by using past developments within the Borough as case studies.
3. Sketching out design principles that could be used to positively influence future developments in Suburban, Town Centre Neighbourhood and New Residential Neighbourhood.

Result: An engaged local resident group could further understand the Code, raise questions, provide feedback and suggest improvements from a diverse range of perspectives. The Panel could also see how their input so far had helped co-produce the Code and that their views were being directly translated into the Code to make it reflective of the Borough's needs and aspirations. Some Panel members expressed in a survey following the last session that:

- “[It’s] good to see ideas from the Panel sessions included in the Code”
- “I learnt a lot and felt that my thoughts and opinions influenced the final product of the code.”
- “I am hopeful that it will result in real urban design change.”
- “I believe all ideas and comments have been considered and implemented where appropriate.”

Key findings:

1. General Agreement: The Design Code is effective for both large and small sites.
2. Smaller Sites: Particularly valuable for guiding development on smaller infill sites, which, though individually minor, collectively shape much of the built environment.
3. Clarity Needed: The Code would benefit from a clearer introductory section outlining how it relates to the wider planning system.
4. Heritage Considerations: The treatment of heritage buildings remains unclear, especially given existing protections like Conservation Areas and Listed Building status.
5. Larger Sites: Ensuring strong foundational principles for larger sites is viewed as essential, especially as a final task.

Feedback: Overall, the Spelthorne Design Code Citizens’ Panel received positive feedback from Panel members, with **95%** of those who answered the survey selecting the **‘3-5’ range** when asked on a scale of 1-5 how they felt the Panel was representative of the wider community. Panel members also appreciated the opportunity for different voices in the community to be heard, with one Panel member saying: *“It has been an engaging experience, very interesting to hear various perspectives from other members”*. Many Panel members also indicated they would endorse this experience, with **79%** saying they would recommend other residents to become a member of a Spelthorne Citizens’ Panel. This demonstrates the high levels of engagement and invaluable diverse local participation, as



well as indicating that different local community members were reached and feel heard.

Other stakeholder communication



What: **Emails to Residents' Associations**

- Regular, prior to, and throughout consultation

Emails to schools

Emails to other community groups (housing associations etc.)

- 15 QR code scans

Presentation at Spelthorne Partnership Assembly

Result: Other people and community members are more aware of the draft consultation and so it was shared with a wider group and range of local people.

Draft consultation survey response overview

- **45 responses**
- Most responses were from the **wider community user group**
- Most common impression of the Code was **neutral** (on a scale of very negative to very positive)
- **80%** respondents felt a neutral to very positive impression of the draft Code
- The most common area for improvement indicated was **scale, massing and density**
- For the design vision and principles (borough-wide and for specific places in Spelthorne), the most common responses were **support**
- The most common rating for how people felt the Code had responded to community priorities was **3** (on a scale of 1-5)
- The community priority people found the Code had responded to the **best** was **Community Priority 1: Importance of green open spaces**
- The community priority people found the Code had responded to the **least** was **Community Priority 5: Climate change and flood resilience**
- Some concerns were: **flood risk, infrastructure provision, green space provision and preservation, height and density, design quality, housing type and affordability, Code weighting, Staines focus, and enforcement**

The next section of this document will further address the key themes and feedback received from the survey on the draft Code, Citizens' Panel and key stakeholders.

In addition, a further section has been included to consider other issues and concerns raised during the engagement that do not directly relate to the Design Code. This section will guide you on the relevant planning policies, guidance or documents associated with those matter, ensuring transparency and clarity.

Key themes and feedback from the public and stakeholders

Heights and marker buildings

You told us...



Confusion was noted around the role and status of 'Marker Buildings' and their potential for additional height.

Clarity needed around height of different types of storeys

Community feedback indicated concerns about height increases, particularly in the Bridge Street Car Park, Debenhams site and Staines Conservation Area

Some feedback suggested a need for clearer definition and distinction between marker buildings and potential height extensions.



The proposed changes include...

- Marker building definition made clearer.
- Marker Buildings will be differentiated from height extensions and will only be designated in areas where a distinctive structure would enhance townscape legibility. Additional height will be visually set back from the street.
- Extend the heights plan to cover the Staines Village Conservation Area, to provide further reassurance of protection.
- Avoid ambiguity in storey heights by including heights diagram and approximate heights throughout text to supplement storey heights.

Information accuracy, presentation and document navigation

You told us...



Feedback from the DM Team and community indicated that some sections of the Design Code were difficult to navigate and understand.

Diagrams could be more clearly presented and labelled in places.

Information needing to be updated in the section about the history and background of Spelthorne's places



The proposed changes include...

- The document will be reformatted to include:
 - graphical highlights
 - cross-referenced definitions
 - specific checklists at the end for clarity.
- Clearer diagrams throughout and labelling improved
- Factual updates to 'Places Past, Present and Future' section for accuracy

Residential extensions and backland development

You told us...



The DM Team emphasised the need to include more comprehensive guidance for suburban infill, apartment, and backland development.



The proposed changes include...

- A specific section on residential extensions will be reinstated, consolidating guidance previously in a separate SPD and ensuring continuity of guidance.
- Removal of 'backland plots' in this area type due to the geometry of plots.

Landscape character and river frontage

You told us...



From Task Group and community feedback, more reference to planting, trees and materiality of the landscape required

More emphasis and design consideration needs to be placed on the river frontage area



The proposed changes include...

- Additional content will be added to emphasise planting, landscape materiality, and river frontage design.
- A new town centre strategy has been created for the river frontage, setting out the character that is intended within different parts of the frontage and potential strategic interventions.

Conservation areas

You told us...



Increased references to Conservation Areas were requested to ensure that the Design Code effectively protects heritage areas.

The proposed changes include...

- Additional clarity will be provided regarding design considerations in Conservation Areas, particularly for Staines village.

Groundwater and flooding

You told us...



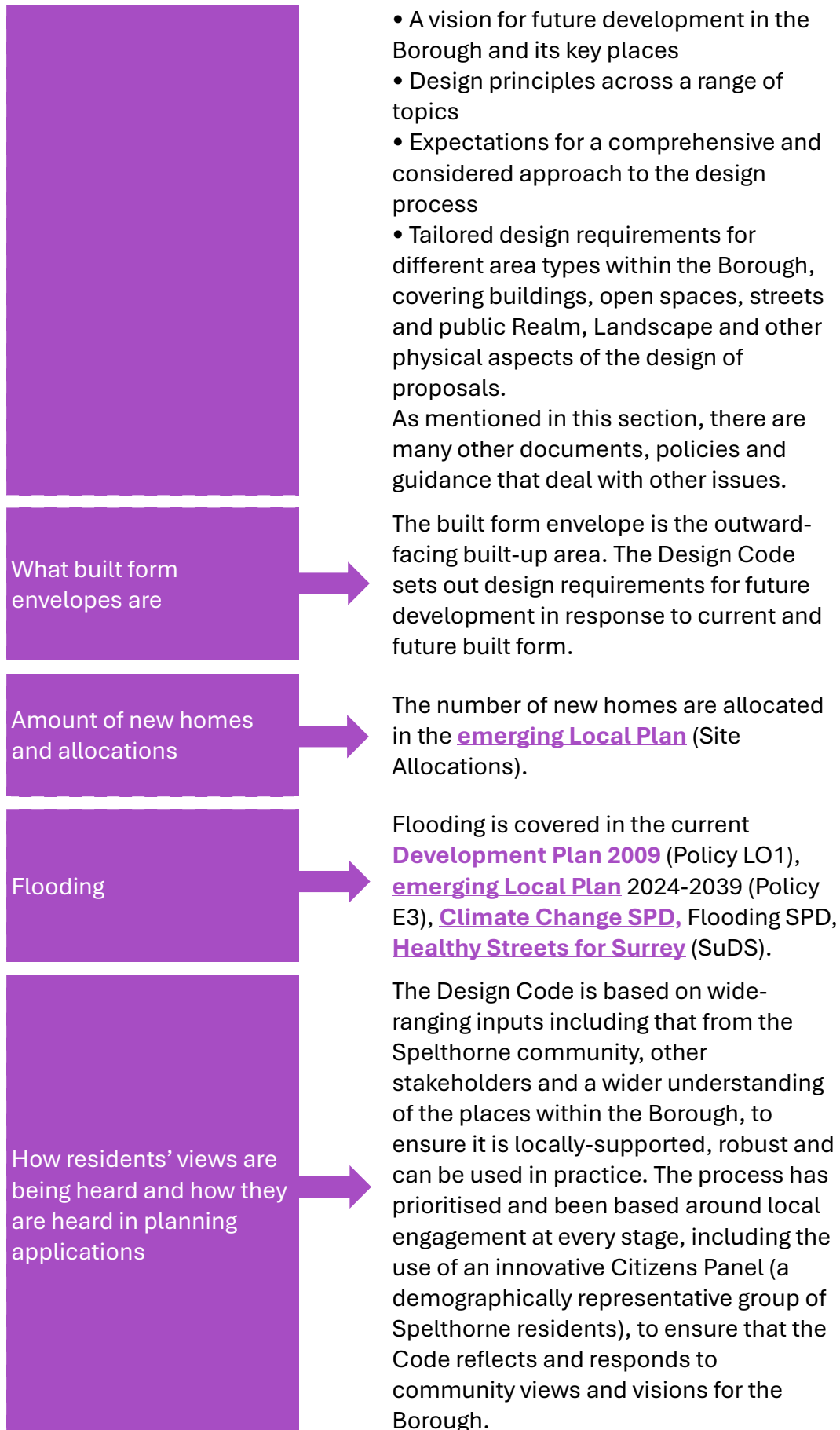
Concerns were raised regarding references to groundwater flooding.

The proposed changes include...

- Highlight references to flood risk and emphasise the need to demonstrate that the scheme does not negatively impact groundwater flows through evidence of an engineering solution as part of the planning application.

Other concerns raised outside the scope of the Design Code

General key concern	Where it is dealt with
Infrastructure provision - Police - Doctors - Schools - Public transport	The delivery of supporting infrastructure is covered by the emerging Local Plan. Healthy Streets for Surrey also covers design principles in relation to road design, integrating public transport and pedestrian and pavement design.
Access and congestion in roads	Surrey County Council's Local Transport Plan and the emerging Local Plan cover transport policies, schemes and other transport matters. Healthy Streets for Surrey also covers accessibility and traffic design principles.
Current buildings and development	The Code will come into play in terms of the design of all future development coming forward.
Scope of the Code	The Spelthorne Design Code will set out the design requirements for proposed new development in the borough. It will ensure that new development is locally supported, sustainable and functions well for all its users. The Design Code will be used to determine whether planning applications are acceptable in design terms, and will support the emerging Spelthorne Local Plan. It will contain simple, concise, illustrated design requirements for streets, open spaces and buildings. It will also set out expectations for the process to be followed when proposals are designed. It will be based on wide-ranging input including that from the local community, other stakeholders and wider understanding of the places within the borough, to ensure it is locally-supported, robust and can be used in practice. The Spelthorne Design Code includes:





Additional statutory public consultation will take place before the final version of the Design Code is officially adopted. In terms of engagement during the planning application process, the Council has produced a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) that set out how and when the community can be involved in the preparation of the planning policy documents and the determination of planning applications. Residents and stakeholders can get involved in the planning application process by viewing and commenting on proposals. The Council encourages applicants to seek pre-application advice and guidance on a development proposal before submitting a planning application.

Next Steps

The revised draft Design Code incorporating the proposed changes based on the above feedback from diverse stakeholders will be presented to the public for a statutory consultation.

Implementation

Design requirements are arranged as follows:

- **Must:** to comply with the Design Code, all proposals must adhere to these requirements
- **Should:** all proposals should comply with these requirements unless non-compliance can be justified, and demonstrating compliance will add supporting weight to the design element of the planning application decision

Some parts of the Code sets out guidance, best practice or design inspiration from elsewhere that could provide the basis for the development of design proposals. These are design ideas that development **could** implement, and are highlighted as such.

The Design Code is to be used following a principle of ‘Comply or Justify’. Deviation from requirements set out will only be permitted with robust and evidence-based justification that any proposed design solutions still achieve the underlying Aim of the requirement. Deviation from ‘must’ requirements will require a very high level of justification.

Proposals that do not comply with these principles and fail to provide compelling justification are likely to be refused.

Conclusion

The engagement process has provided valuable insights into community and stakeholder priorities, leading to substantive changes to the Spelthorne Design Code. These changes aim to enhance clarity, address specific concerns around height, conservation, and residential extensions, and ensure the document is accessible and informative for all users.