Environment and Sustainability Committee

17 June 2025

Title	Approval to Conduct Statutory Consultation on Spelthorne Design Code
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report Author	Laura Richardson
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Environment, Community
Recommendations	**Committee is asked to:** • Agree that the Publication Version of the Spelthorne Design Code be published for a 6-week public consultation under Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012
Reason for Recommendation	The Spelthorne Design Code (SDC) has been created in a collaboration between the public, a Task Group consisting of Members on a cross-party basis, supported by officers in the Strategic Planning Team and the consultant team, David Lock Associates and Feria Urbanism. Its purpose is to support the delivery of high-quality places. The Design Code aims to encourage the delivery of sustainable and locally distinctive development across the Borough. Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 states that (b)(i) before it can be adopted, an Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) must be consulted on for a minimum of 4 weeks, which is also part of Spelthorne's Statement of Community Involvement. However, a 6-week consultation period is proposed to provide residents and stakeholders with ample time to share their views.

1.   Summary of the report

What is the situation	Why we want to do something
• Spelthorne Borough Council has been preparing a Borough-wide Design Code since mid-2024. This code aims to provide clear and locally-specific design guidance for new development, in accordance with the requirements of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. This legislation mandates all local authorities to develop an area-wide Design Code to ensure the creation of high-quality places. Additionally, the SDC addresses concerns from both residents and elected Members regarding the importance of high-quality design in development projects.	• The Government expects all local planning authorities to prepare Design Codes to improve the quality, character and sustainability of development. The SDC will help ensure that new developments are well-designed, respond to local character, and deliver high-quality places that meet the needs and expectations of residents. In order to formally adopt the SDC and make it a material consideration in planning decisions, a statutory consultation must be carried out.
This is what we want to do about it	**These are the next steps**
• Seek approval from the Committee to initiate the statutory public consultation regarding the publication version of the SDC. According to planning regulations, this consultation is essential, as it allows residents, developers, and stakeholders the opportunity to formally provide their feedback on the draft document prior to its finalisation. • The SDC has been developed through a community-led approach. In light of this, it is proposed to extend the consultation period to 6-week, surpassing the minimum 4-week legal requirement. This extension aims to ensure that residents, developers, and	• Secure agreement to proceed with statutory consultation • Begin the 6-week consultation period using online, print and public engagement methods • Analyse feedback received and revise the draft SDC as necessary • Bring the updated SDC to full Council with recommendation to adopt • Upon approval, the SDC will be formally adopted as an SPD and used in planning decision-making

stakeholders have ample time to submit their comments.	

1.1 This report seeks approval to commence the statutory 6-week consultation for the SDC, a document that sets out the design requirements for proposed new development to ensure that it is locally supported, sustainable and functions well for all.

1.2 The SDC is set out in 6 chapters:

Chapter 1: Introduction - provides an introduction to the document

Chapter 2: The Design Process - sets out how applicants and design teams should work to design a development

Chapter 3: Places Past, Present and Future - sets out the history, present day and future design vision for the Borough and the key places within it

Chapter 4: Area Type Design Requirements - sets out different design requirements for different parts of the Borough, reflecting the fact that they have different characters and different anticipated development types

Chapter 5: Areas of Change - sets out more detailed design requirements for development in these 'Areas of Change'

Chapter 6: Preparing your Application - sets out how to prepare and submit a planning application, demonstrating that it is Code-compliant

1.3 Following the public consultation and consideration of the feedback from the Design Code Task Group, the adoption version will be brough back to the Environment and Sustainability Committee for consideration in the autumn, to seek a recommendation to Council for adoption.

2. Key issues

Background

2.1 A design code is "A set of illustrated design requirements that provide specific, detailed parameters for the physical development of a site or area. The graphic and written components of the code should build upon a design vision, such as a masterplan or other design and development framework for a site or area". (National Planning Policy Framework, 2024)

2.2 Paragraph 131 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), updated in December 2024 states: "The creation of high quality, beautiful and sustainable buildings and places is fundamental to what the planning and development process should achieve. Good design is a key aspect of sustainable development, creates better places in which to live and work and helps make development acceptable to communities. Being clear about design expectations, and how these will be tested, is essential for achieving this. So too is effective engagement between applicants, communities, local planning authorities and other interests throughout the process."

2.3 The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) (LURA) sets out the legal requirement for Local Authorities (LAs) to develop area wide Design Codes,

which will allow Authorities, working with their communities, to set out what good design looks like for their area and their vision for the future. Following the enactment of the LURA the updated NPPF (December 2024) sets out the national policy expectation for the development and delivery of Design Codes in Paragraphs 131 – 134.

2.4   As set out above, the focus on the delivery of high-quality places is expressed in national policy but is also a matter of particular concern for both our residents and elected Members.

Bespoke Design Code for Spelthorne

2.5   The SDC has been a collaboration between the public, a Task Group consisting of Members on a cross-party basis, supported by officers in the Strategic Planning Team and the consultant team.

2.6   The SDC sets 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 SDC will be used to determine whether planning applications are acceptable in design terms and will support the emerging Spelthorne Local Plan. It contains simple, concise, illustrated design requirements for streets, open spaces and buildings. It also sets out expectations for the process to be followed when proposals are designed.

2.7   From the outset, the Council has adopted a dynamic, community-focused approach to developing the SDC. The Code is created through an iterative process, which is divided into four stages: Listen, Translate, Test, and Final Code for Adoption. This project includes multiple phases of community engagement, where each phase builds on the findings of the previous one, incorporating feedback loops and continuous refinement. The emphasis on deep community engagement ensures that the resulting Design Code aligns with local values and needs.

Community Engagement and Development of the Code

2.8   The SDC has taken a community-led approach to co-produce a Design Code for the Borough with local people through active community participation. This approach will help ensure new developments which are coming forward meet the real needs of the borough's diverse communities. Throughout the project and development of the Code, there has been continuous community involvement, both in-person and online.

2.9   During the first stage of preparing the Code, the 'Listen' phase, public feedback was gathered to understand the places of Spelthorne in detail, learn about what makes it special, what the key challenges are, and how the Design Code can enhance and improve the Borough in the future. For the online aspect of the public engagement, the SDC Commonplace page, which is an online engagement hub, was set up, which has since welcomed thousands of visitors and a few hundred subscribers keeping up to date with the latest project news.

2.10   One of the key features of the first stage of developing the Code was the Interactive Map on Commonplace, which enabled participants to drop pins on specific locations within Spelthorne and share their thoughts and pictures about that place, area or a more specific design feature. This engagement

opportunity was open to all local people for 14 weeks in autumn 2024 and received over 600 contributions.

2.11   In addition to online community engagement, the information gathered from local people has been enriched by in-person participation. In 6 locations across the Borough (Staines-upon-Thames Town Centre, Staines-upon-Thames Wider Area, Stanwell, Ashford, Sunbury-on-Thames and Shepperton), a series of 2-hour long Walking Tours were held, which were guided by local people to find out their opinions about local buildings, streets and spaces they liked and disliked and to gain an insight into design issues that matter to them. If local people were unable to attend, there was also a digital alternative offered and these Digital Walks, held virtually, allowed residents to share their views about different parts of the Borough that were of interest by guiding the team around an online map. This resulted in 4.5 hours of digital engagement.

2.12   To further ensure comprehensive community involvement, a public drop-in session with interactive activities was held in the Elmsleigh Shopping Centre in November 2025 and provided residents an opportunity to meet the Design Code Team, learn about Spelthorne in detail, engage in discussions, ask questions, and share their perspectives on what makes Spelthorne unique.

2.13   In order to ensure that the design of future development within Spelthorne reflects the diverse perspectives of residents, there has also been lots of youth engagement opportunities. Sessions were held at 2 local schools and Ashford Youth Club. Residents from 13-years-old and up were also welcomed to apply to join, and consequently took part in, the SDC Citizens' Panel.

2.14   During Stage 1, a Citizens' Panel was also established as a crucial element of the Council's community engagement in the development of the SDC. This Citizens' Panel was created to promote inclusivity and reflect Spelthorne's diverse demographics including age, gender, ethnicity, housing situation and geographical location, according to Census data. Any interested resident in the Borough was invited to apply and over 40 Panel members were selected, following a 7.5 week recruitment period, through a blind selection process to be demographically representative of the Borough, with members therefore representing Spelthorne's diverse communities and providing input into the creation of the SDC.

2.15   The Citizens' Panel have been actively involved in the next two stages of the project. Two Citizens' Panel focus sessions with our appointed consultants David Lock Associates and Feria Urbanism were held on 16 November 2024 and 23 November 2024. During the first workshop, public feedback so far was fed in and Panel members explored what makes Spelthorne unique, envisioning a Borough that respects its character while embracing innovation. The second workshop focused on safety and accessibility, discussing how future development can cater to everyone's needs. Members also shared personal experiences and their vision for various edge conditions and building types, considering how development fits within its surroundings. These valuable insights were then taken to be implemented in the Code, so that design rules reflect the values and aspirations of our community.

2.16 During the second stage of the project, the 'Translate' phase, the baseline data and community engagement feedback gathered over from local communities and other key stakeholders, along with the Citizens' Panel, was translated and the draft Code developed.

2.17 As part of continued community involvement, the Citizens' Panel met for a third time during the next stage of the project, the 'Test' phase', on 1 March 2025 to test the draft Code. This session was designed to engage the Citizens' Panel in reviewing and applying the draft Design Code to real-world development scenarios. The project team explained the Design Code's purpose, development and role in planning, how public feedback has shaped it, and who will use it. Panel members also tested the draft Code by reviewing past developments and applying it to real-world scenarios and example sites.

2.18 Overall, during the above-mentioned community engagement periods, there have been several active in-person participation opportunities, with 60+ hours of in-person engagement.

2.19 The project is currently in Stage 3, with a draft Code having been developed and tested by the Citizens' Panel, technical stakeholders and also local people during a public engagement opportunity on the draft Code for the wider community that ran for 3 weeks on Commonplace. Local people could download and view the draft Code, find out what was in the draft SDC, see how the draft Code responded to the community and provide feedback to help refine and develop the Code by answering a survey, which received 45 responses.

2.20 Continuining in the third stage, having amended the draft Code following Citizens' Panel, technical stakeholder, public and Task Group member feedback, a Publication Version of the SDC has been developed. Subject to the approval of the Environment and Sustainability Committee, a 6-week statutory public consultation will be held this summer, with formal adoption of the SDC expected in autumn.

Current Position

2.21 The Task Group met on 19 May 2025 for the final review of the publication draft of the SDC and to take a view on whether the Code can proceed to be considered by the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

2.22 The SDC is intended to be adopted as an SPD which is a planning policy document that builds upon, and provides more detailed guidance to, policies in the Local Plan.

2.23 An SPD forms part of the adopted development plan (also known as the Local Plan) and sets out further guidance to support the implementation of the relevant policies within the Plan. Once complete and having been subjected to the necessary period of consultation, the SDC, upon adoption, can be 'hooked' onto the existing design policy within the current and emerging Spelthorne Local Plan. Thus, it will be used when determining planning applications from the date of the adoption of the SPD.

2.24 The SDC includes a checklist for developers that must be submitted as part of a planning application. This checklist helps to clearly demonstrate how all required, recommended, and optional criteria in the Code have been

addressed. It is essential for the Design Code document to be accessible and easy to navigate for both technical and non-technical users.

2.25 Subject to Committee approval the proposed statutory consultation would take place between 23rd June 2025 to 3rd August 2025, therefore running for the proposed 6 weeks. The proposed dates would ensure that a substantial part of the consultation period is prior to the commencement of the school holidays. The consultation would be run on the SDC Commonplace platform, which is the digital engagement hub. The documents would be published on the Council website, as well as being available for the public to view in public libraries and at the Council Offices during office hours.

2.26 Promotion of the statutory consultation is further detailed in the Appendix 2- Statutory Consultation Strategy.

Digital Design Code

2.27 The SDC team is committed to creating a digital version of the Design Code, which will highlight only the relevant sections for each specific proposal. Funding for the digital element of the SDC has been secured as a one-off growth bid for 2025/26. This will enhance usability, accessibility, and the overall effectiveness of the Code in guiding development. The dynamic content will facilitate a more intuitive understanding of design principles, allowing stakeholders to explore different development options and see their real-time impacts, thereby increasing engagement and comprehension.

2.28 Additionally, the digital format will allow for easier updates and version control, enabling prompt implementation of changes and immediate dissemination of information. Version histories will be maintained and made public to ensure trust and accountability within the development process. It is anticipated that the digital version of the SDC will be available upon adoption of the Code.

3. Options analysis and proposal

3.1 **Option 1 - Recommended option**: The Committee approve the commencement of the public consultation.

Option 2 – Not Recommended: The Committee resolve to seek further amendments to the SDC before commencement of public consultation.

This option is not recommended as any delay in the start of the statutory consultation, outside the window set out at para 2.25 would mean that it would not be advisable to begin the consultation until September, as consulting during summer typically results in lower levels of engagement. The knock-on effect of this would mean the adoption of the SDC would be delayed, likely to late 2025/early 2026.

Option 3 – Not Recommended: The Committee resolve to reject the request for publication of the SDC.

This option is not recommended as in order to adopt the SDC, so that it can be considered as a material consideration in decision making a statutory consultation is required by legislation as set out above. If a public consultation is not held the project cannot move forward and the SDC cannot be adopted.

4.   Financial management comments

4.1   Undertaking and evaluating the consultation to be undertaken by resources covered by existing budgets.

5.   Risk management comments

5.1   A risk register is used in projects to document, assess, and manage potential risks that could impact the project's success, ensuring proactive mitigation and response strategies. The risk register for the project is regularly monitored and updated by the Project Manager.

5.2   Failure to proceed with the statutory public consultation for the final SDC may result in significant reputational damage to the Council, undermining its commitment to community engagement, transparency, and proactive planning.

5.3   The Council has already invested considerable financial and staff resources in the development of the SDC. Not proceeding with the public consultation would render these efforts ineffective, resulting in wasted expenditure without achieving the intended planning and design outcomes.

5.4   Without the adoption of the SDC, the Council will be less equipped to take a proactive approach to development management. This may lead to inconsistent planning outcomes and a missed opportunity to deliver high-quality, well-designed places across the Borough.

5.5   In the absence of an adopted SDC, developers may proceed with proposals that do not align with the Council's strategic vision for high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive places. This could undermine the Council's objectives for placemaking and community well-being.

5.6   The SDC is intended to complement the new Local Plan, currently under examination and anticipated to be adopted in the autumn 2025. Any delay in the adoption of the Design Code risks misalignment with the Local Plan, potentially weakening the overall planning framework and reducing the effectiveness of both documents in achieving comprehensive, cohesive development outcomes.

5.7   In light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), a new unitary authority may have other priorities. There is a risk that if the consultation and adoption of the SDC is not progressed in line with the current project programme, it may not be implemented.

6.   Procurement comments

6.1   No comments received.

7.   Legal comments

7.1   The SDC has been developed in accordance with the National Model Design Code.

7.2   Public consultation required under Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012.

8.   Other considerations

8.1   There are none.

9.   Equality and Diversity

9.1   This will be dealt with as an integral part of the Design Code.

10.   Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

10.1   This will be dealt with as an integral part of the Design Code.

11.   Timetable for implementation

11.1   The project timeline and general information can be found on [Have Your Say Today - SDC - Commonplace](#)

11.2   The proposed dates for the public consultation are 23rd June 2025 to 3rd August 2025.

11.3   If the consultation dates are agreed by the Committee and the project proceeds on the agreed timetable, it is anticipated that the SDC will be adopted in autumn 2025.

12.   Contacts

12.1   Cllr Burrell is the Design Code Task Group Chair. Other members are Cllrs Gibson, Williams and Clarke. Cllr Beecher attends the Project Board meeting as chair of the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

12.2   Queries for Officers can be emailed to the Design Code Team: designcode@spelthorne.gov.uk

12.3   Laura Richardson is the Project Lead: l.richardson@spelthorne.gov.uk

Background papers: There are none*.*

Appendices:
Appendix 1 - Spelthorne Design Code – Final Draft for Consultation (May 2025)
Appendix 2 – Statutory Consultation Strategy
Appendix 3 – The Engagement Process (Stage 1 to Stage 2)
Appendix 4 – Draft Code Public Engagement Report (Stage 3)
Appendix 5 – Executive Summary