Committee Report Checklist

Please submit the completed checklists with your report. If final draft report does not include all the information/sign offs required, your item will be delayed until the next meeting cycle.

Stage 1
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Yes / No	Date
Councillor engagement / input from Chair prior to briefing		
Commissioner engagement (if report focused on issues of concern to Commissioners such as Finance, Assets etc)		
Relevant Group Head review		
MAT+ review (to have been circulated **at least 5 working days before Stage 2**)		
This item is on the Forward Plan for the relevant committee		
	Reviewed by	
Finance comments		
Risk comments	**LO**	**18/12/25**
Legal comments	**LH**	**12/12/25**
HR comments (if applicable)		

For reports with material financial or legal implications the author should engage with the respective teams at the outset and receive input to their reports prior to asking for MO or s151 comments.

Do not forward to stage 2 unless all the above have been completed.

Stage 2
Report checklist – responsibility of report owner

ITEM	Completed by	Date
Monitoring Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	L Heron	12/12/25
S151 Officer commentary – at least **5 working days before MAT**	T.Collier	8/12/25
Confirm final report cleared by MAT		

Environment & Sustainability Committee

Thursday 8th January 2026

Title	Spelthorne Design Code - Final Code for Adoption
Purpose of the report	To make a decision and a recommendation to Council
Report Author	Laura Richardson, Strategic Planning and Projects Manager
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	N/A
Corporate Priority	Community Environment
Recommendations	**Committee is asked to:** 1. Agree that the Spelthorne Design Code be recommended for adoption at Full Council.
Reason for Recommendation	The Spelthorne Design Code (SDC) has been created in a collaboration between the public, technical stakeholders, 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 Spelthorne Design Code aims to encourage the delivery of sustainable and locally distinctive development across the Borough. Following the statutory public consultation on the Spelthorne Design Code, which is a requirement under Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012 (b)(i) and was agreed at the Environment and Sustainability Committee on 17 June 2025, the Code has been amended and the final version prepared for adoption. Public, technical stakeholder, officer and Task Group feedback has fed into the final updated version, which is now proposed for adoption. The recommendation of the Committee is sought before the Spelthorne Design Code is presented to Full Council, to be considered there for adoption.

1.   Executive 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 Spelthorne Design Code 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. • There has been strong political support for this project with Members keen for high quality design in the borough. • The Spelthorne Design Code 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. Before the Spelthorne Design Code is presented to Full Council to seek formal adoption, a recommendation is sought from the Environment and Sustainability Committee.
This is what we want to do about it	These are the next steps
• The recommendation of the Committee, in support of the Spelthorne Design Code is sought before the Code is presented to Full Council, to be considered there for adoption.	• Bring the updated Spelthorne Design Code to Full Council with a recommendation to adopt. • Upon approval, the Spelthorne Design Code will be formally adopted as an SPD and used in planning decision-making.

2.   Key issues

<u>Background</u>

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 Spelthorne Design Code has been a collaboration between the public, a Task Group consisting of Members on a cross-party basis and technical stakeholders supported by officers in the Strategic Planning Team and the consultant team.

2.6 The Spelthorne Design Code 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 Spelthorne Design Code 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 Spelthorne Design Code. The Code is created through an iterative process, which is divided into five stages: Listen, Translate, Test, Statutory Consultation 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 Spelthorne Design Code 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.

Stage 1- Listen (Initial Engagement)

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 Spelthorne Design Code Commonplace page, which is an online engagement hub, was set up, which has since welcomed thousands of visitors and over a four 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 virtually 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 2024 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 Spelthorne Design Code 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 Spelthorne Design Code. 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 Spelthorne Design Code.

2.15   The Citizens' Panel were 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 that had

been gathered up until then 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.

Stage 2- Translate (First Draft Code Development)

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.

Stage 3- Test (First Draft Engagement)

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   Additionally, during Stage 3, with a draft Code having been developed and tested by the Citizens' Panel, the draft Code was further tested by technical stakeholders and also local people during a public engagement opportunity 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 Spelthorne Design Code, 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.

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

2.20   The draft Code was further amended following Citizens' Panel, technical stakeholder, public and Task Group member feedback, a Publication Version of the Spelthorne Design Code was developed. The Task Group met on 19 May 2025 for the final review of the publication draft of the Spelthorne Design Code and unanimously agreed that the Code could proceed to be considered by the Environment and Sustainability Committee.

2.21   The Publication Version of the Spelthorne Design Code was presented to the Environment and Sustainability Committee on 17 June 2025, who approved it for statutory consultation, subject to an amendment in the SDC to reference the recently published article by Dr J Paul in a footnote, with a caveat that the Council did not commission the report. The draft Spelthorne Design Code was updated to reflect the Committees' decision and published for consultation.

Stage 4- Statutory Consultation (Public Statutory Consultation)

2.22   The statutory public consultation on the Spelthorne Design Code - Final Draft for Consultation (May 2025) subsequently ran for 6 weeks from 24 June 2025 to 4 August 2025.

2.23   The consultation was mainly run via the Spelthorne Design Code Commonplace platform, which is the digital engagement hub. The updated draft Code was available to for the public to review by either viewing it or downloading it from the site. Physical copies of the draft Spelthorne Design Code were also available for the public to view in public libraries around the Borough and at the Council Offices during office hours.

2.24   For the public to respond to the consultation, a short survey was available on Commonplace, which contained general questions on the document overall, questions on the applicant self-assessment compliance checklists in the Code and the opportunity to provide further comments or upload document(s) to support a response. The public also had the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Code via email or by post. Overall, there were 81 responses received to the consultation.

2.25   Promotion of the statutory consultation and feedback analysis is further detailed in the appendices (to follow).

Current Position

2.26   The Task Group met on 8 September 2025 for a review of findings from public and technical consultee feedback, following the statutory consultation. The Task Group also discussed changes proposed to be made to the Code. The Task Group met for a final time on 10 November 2025 to agree that the final version of the Spelthorne Design Code should be put forward to Environment and Sustainability Committee on 8 January 2026 for a recommendation for adoption at Full Council.

2.27   Subject to the approval of the Environment and Sustainability Committee that the final version of the Code be recommended for adoption at Full Council. Subject to the approval of the Environment and Sustainability Committee that the final version of the Code be recommended for adoption at Full Council. The Spelthorne Design Code will be put forward for adoption at Full Council alongside the Local Plan in 2026. We are in the Planning Inspector's hands regarding the timing of this. The Further Modifications consultation on the Local Plan closes on 4 January 2026. Once responses have been sent to the Planning Inspector we wait for his report and if, appropriate, will take the Local Plan through Environment and Sustainability Committee and to Council for adoption.

2.28   The Spelthorne Design Code 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.

2.29   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 Spelthorne Design Code, upon adoption, can be 'hooked' onto the existing design policy within the current and emerging Spelthorne Local Plan. The Spelthorne Design Code will be a

material consideration when determining planning applications from the date of the adoption of the SPD.

2.30   The Spelthorne Design Code includes a checklist for applicants 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.

Digital Design Code

2.31   The Spelthorne Design Code 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 Spelthorne Design Code 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.

2.32   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 Spelthorne Design Code will be available upon adoption of the Code.

3.   **Options appraisal and proposal**

3.1   **Option 1 - Recommended option**: The Committee approve the recommendation for the Spelthorne Design Code to be adopted at Full Council.

3.2   This option is recommended, as this will enable the timeline to adoption to be followed and would also allow for the Spelthorne Design Code and emerging Local Plan to be adopted simultaneously.

3.3   **Option 2 – Not Recommended**: The Committee resolve to seek further amendments to the Spelthorne Design Code before recommending the Spelthorne Design Code for adoption at Full Council.

3.4   This option is not recommended, as any delay with making further amendments to the Spelthorne Design Code would have a knock-on effect, where the adoption of the Spelthorne Design Code would be delayed, likely until spring 2026.

3.5   **Option 3 – Not Recommended**: The Committee resolve to reject the request for recommendation of the Spelthorne Design Code at Full Council.

3.6   This option is not recommended. In order to adopt the Spelthorne Design Code so that it can be considered as a material consideration in decision making, it is required to be put to Full Council with a recommendation to adopt, to then be resolved on to be adopted there. If the request is rejected, the project cannot move forward, and the Spelthorne Design Code cannot be adopted.

4. Risk implications

4.1 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. The following risks have been considered:

4.2 Risk of reputational damage: Proceeding with the recommendation for the Spelthorne Design Code to be adopted at Full Council will enable the Council to maintain its reputation and demonstrate its commitment to responding to the community's needs, transparency and proactive planning.

4.3 Council less well equipped to take a proactive approach to managing design quality of new development and lack of clarity for developers regarding the Council's design expectations: With the adoption of the Spelthorne Design Code, the Council will be better equipped to take a proactive approach to development management. This will lead to more consistent planning outcomes and will be an opportunity to deliver high-quality, well-designed places across the Borough. Once the Spelthorne Design Code is adopted, developers can proceed with proposals that align with the Council's strategic vision for high-quality, sustainable, and inclusive places. This would also help to align with the Council's objectives for placemaking and community well-being.

4.4 Lack of alignment of Planning policies if adoption of Design Code is delayed: The Spelthorne Design Code is intended to support the implementation of the new Local Plan, currently under examination and anticipated to be adopted spring 2026, potentially on the same day as the Spelthorne Design Code. Timely adoption of the Spelthorne Design Code would enable alignment with the Local Plan, strengthening the overall planning framework and increasing the effectiveness of both documents in achieving comprehensive, cohesive development outcomes.

4.5 Risk of Design Code not being implemented following LGR: In light of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), a new unitary authority may have other priorities. Progressing with the adoption of the Spelthorne Design Code in line with the current project programme would enable it to be implemented and ensure policy coverage for the area while the planning policies for the new unitary are in development, helping to ensure high quality design outcomes moving forward.

5. Financial implications

5.1 Adopting the Spelthorne Design Code would be undertaken by resources covered by existing budgets.

6. Legal comments

6.1 The Spelthorne Design Code has been developed in accordance with the National Model Design Code.

6.2 The public consultation was required under Regulation 12 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) Regulations 2012.

6.3 Approval of supplementary planning documents is a matter for Council.

Corporate implications

7. S151 Officer comments

7.1 The S151 Officer confirms that all financial implications have been taken into account and that the recommendations are fully funded from within the current and draft 2026-27 budget.

8. Monitoring Officer comments

8.1 The Monitoring Officer confirms that the relevant legal implications have been taken into account.

9. Procurement comments

9.1 There are no procurement implications relating to the adoption of the code.

10. Equality and Diversity

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

11. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications

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

12. Other considerations

12.1 There are none.

13. Timetable for implementation

13.1 The project timeline and general information can be found on Have Your Say Today - SDC - Commonplace

13.2 The date for the Environment and Sustainability Committee, where the Spelthorne Design Code will be considered to be put forward to Full Council with a recommendation to adopt, is 8 January 2026. The Spelthorne Design Code SPD cannot be formally adopted until the Local Plan is adopted. The Spelthorne Design Code will be put forward for adoption at Full Council alongside the Local Plan in 2026. We are in the Planning Inspector's hands regarding the timing of this.

13.3 If it is agreed that the Spelthorne Design Code is recommended to be adopted at Full Council and the project proceeds on the agreed timetable, the date for the subsequent Full Council Meeting is anticipated in Spring 2026.

14. Contact

14.1 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.

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

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

Please submit any material questions to the Committee Chair and Officer Contact by two days in advance of the meeting.

Background papers: There are none.

Appendices:

Appendix A- Spelthorne Design Code (2025)
Appendix B- Consultation Statement: Spelthorne Design Code