

DRAFT PRIVATE SECTOR HOUSING RENEWAL ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Introduction

This financial assistance scheme forms part of a wider private sector renewal strategy to address poor conditions and improve the condition of private homes in Runnymede.

This policy sets out the financial assistance that will be provided to private homeowners and tenants in Runnymede. The Council will use the additional financial freedoms provided by the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 to offer a combination of loan assistance and grant aid.

The underlying principles of our financial assistance policy are:

- Homeowners should, in the first instance, be responsible for improving and maintaining their homes. Financial assistance from the Council is only appropriate where homeowners do not have the means to do so. A homeowner's equity can be a source of financing home repairs and improvements even where the homeowner is on a low income.
- The Council's financial assistance scheme must provide best value. In other words, the Council must use its public funds prudently and effectively. Loans will be provided in preference to grant aid where this is considered appropriate and affordable for the homeowner. Because loans are ultimately repayable, the Council will be able to assist more people and improve more homes by this method. Grant aid will only be provided where loans are not appropriate.
- Any financial assistance scheme cannot assist all homeowners in need, or even all address all cases of unfit homes. The financial resources available to the Council are limited and must compete with other priorities for capital funding such as the provision of new affordable homes and the repair and improvement of the council's own housing stock. Loans and grant assistance are only available in certain circumstances that have been designed to address the priorities set out below.

Priorities

The priorities for the financial assistance policy are :

1. To assist low income homeowners of unfit homes to make their homes fit
2. To assist low income elderly and disabled homeowners and private tenants to adapt their homes to meet their needs.

3. To assist low income elderly homeowners and private tenants to be, and feel, safer in their homes.

1. GRANT AID SCHEME

MANDATORY DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT

Mandatory Disabled Facilities grants are available to homeowners and tenants to cover the costs of works to adapt the home to meet the needs of the disabled person.

- The disabled person must be registered disabled or eligible to be so registered. A recommendation is required from an Occupational Therapist that works are necessary and appropriate for one or more of the following purposes:
 - (a) facilitating access to and from the dwelling or building by the disabled occupant;
 - (b) making the dwelling or building safe for the disabled occupant;
 - (c) access to the principal family room by the disabled occupant;
 - (d) access to or providing a bedroom for the disabled occupant;
 - (e) access to or providing a room containing a bath or shower for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
 - (f) access to or providing a room containing a WC for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
 - (g) access to or providing a room containing a wash hand basin for the disabled occupant or facilitating the use by the disabled occupant of such a facility;
 - (h) facilitating the preparation and cooking of food by the disabled person;
 - (i) improving or providing a heating system for the disabled person;
 - (j) facilitating the use of power, light or heat by the disabled person by altering same or by providing additional means of control;
 - (k) facilitating access and movement around the dwelling to enable the disabled person to provide care for someone;
 - (l) making the dwelling or building suitable for the accommodation, welfare of employment of the disabled person.
- The applicant must be either an owner or a tenant, however in the case of a tenant's application, the agreement of the owner of the property will be required.
- The disabled person and any partner are means tested to determine the amount of their contribution towards the cost of the works. If the disabled person is a child, the parents are means tested.
- The maximum cost of works to which grant can be considered is £25,000.
- There is no distinction as to property type; however, grant applications can only be approved if it is considered reasonable and practicable to carry out the relevant works having regard to the age and condition of the dwelling or building.

DISCRETIONARY MINOR WORKS ASSISTANCE

Small grants are available on a discretionary basis, within an annual budget limit, to assist low income, vulnerable homeowners and private sector tenants to carry out small scale works of repair, improvement or adaptation which address their health, safety and security needs or otherwise essential minor repairs to improve the condition of the home.

- Maximum grant is £500
- Applicants must be elderly, disabled or otherwise vulnerable
- Applicants must be homeowners or private tenants
- Applicants must be in receipt of, or eligible for, a means tested benefit

DISCRETIONARY MAJOR WORKS ASSISTANCE

Grants for major repair work are available in a limited number of cases to homeowners or tenants with repairing responsibilities, who do not have the means to do so themselves. Such grants are available on a discretionary basis, within an annual budget limit. Major works assistance is only available where homes are unfit and will only cover essential works to make the property fit.

- Applicants must be homeowners or private tenants with repairing obligations under their tenancy agreement. Owners of mobile homes and caravans qualify as homeowners where it is their principal home.
- Applicants who would be able to obtain a commercial loan or an RBC private sector renewal loan are not eligible
- Maximum grant is £5,000
- Applicants will be means tested and may have to make a financial contribution
- The property must be 'unfit' within the meaning of the 1985 Housing Act or have serious defects or disrepair that significantly affect the health and safety of the occupant(s).
- Works to be covered by grant must be essential works that make the property fit.

2. LOAN SCHEME

Runnymede Borough Council will provide secured loans on a discretionary basis within a specified annual budget, to assist with essential repairs costing up to £25,000 to elderly and disabled homeowners who would otherwise be unable to carry out the works.

Criteria

- The homeowner must be in receipt of a means tested benefit or otherwise have insufficient capital or income to be able to finance the total cost of the essential

works privately (this will be established by application of the means testing calculation currently used for Disabled Facilities Grants)

- The property must be classified as unfit within the meaning of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended) or have serious defects or disrepair that significantly affect the health and safety of the occupant(s).
- The homeowner must either be disabled or be a person of 75 years or over, (if a couple, the older person being 75 years or older).

Loans up to £5,000

The loan scheme will be structured so that works up to £5,000 will be assisted by way of 'works in default' on the assumption that the property is classified as 'unfit'. This means that a statutory notice will be served under the Housing Act and the council will undertake the works 'in default'. The cost of the works will then be recorded as a charge in the local land charge register as a fixed amount charge against the value of the property. Repayment will be recovered when the property is sold. No interest will be charged although ancillary charges including any Runnymede Care and Repair fee may need to be added as appropriate.

Loans between £5,000 and £25,000

For works in excess of £5,000, the council will provide an interest-bearing loan administered by the Accountancy Section of the Finance Department. The loan will be in the form of either an Interest Only Repayment Loan, or a loan with the interest charges deferred (rolled-up) depending on the homeowner's financial circumstances. Loans can be repaid by the homeowner at any stage but will be required to be repaid when the property is sold.

1. Interest Only Loan.

- Interest is repaid throughout the term of the loan but the repayment of capital is deferred until the end of the term.
- The rates of interest will be the Standard National Rate as set by the government. This rate is broadly an average of the rate charged by major building societies.
- The capital and any unpaid interest will be repayable when the property is sold or when the homeowner no longer occupies the property as their principal or main home. The homeowner can elect to pay off the loan at an earlier stage if circumstances permit. The councils' legal team will recover the capital sum and any outstanding interest.

2. Deferred interest/Rolled up loan

- Interest and capital is deferred until the end of the loan period
- Interest will be calculated by applying the Bank Base Rate to the amount of the outstanding loan at the start of each year. The amount of interest charged in the year will be rolled up into the loan at the end of each year.
- The outstanding loan of capital and interest will be repayable when the property is sold or when the homeowner no longer occupies the property as their principal or main home, or if the homeowner wishes to so at an earlier stage if circumstances permit. The councils' legal team will recover the capital sum and any outstanding interest.

For loans around £5,000 and £25,000

In order to progress a loan application from the enquiry stage it is necessary to estimate the costs of works required in order to establish eligibility for the scheme. The minimum and maximum figures should therefore be taken as approximate figures. The Private Sector Housing Manager will have the discretion to determine what type of financial assistance will be offered in instances that are close to the above figures.

Main Loan conditions

- The maximum amount of any loan must not exceed £25,000 or 30% of the available equity, whatever is the less. Available equity means that not already used as security for other loans/mortgages.
- The works covered by the loan must be limited to that required to remedy the unfitness or serious disrepair.
- Schemes involving works under £5,000 will have the loan registered as a charge using the same principals as registering a charge for works in default. Works in default means that the Council undertake works on behalf of the owner of the property after such works have been identified and required necessary in a notice served under the Housing Act 1985.
- The assisted works must be completed within twelve months from the date of approval, or such further period as the Council may allow, and
- The assisted works must be carried out in accordance with such specifications as the Council determine
- The assisted works must be carried out by the contractors that submitted the estimates upon which the assistance was approved
- The assisted works must be executed to the satisfaction of the Council
- The Council must be provided with an acceptable invoice, demand or receipt for the works and any professional fees or charges.

Exceptional circumstances

There may be cases where grant or loan assistance should be considered where the criteria are not met. Where there are exceptional circumstances, the council will use its discretion to consider grant aid or loan assistance as long as this is still broadly compatible with priorities of the scheme. All such cases will be considered by the Head of Housing Needs & Strategy.

Exemptions from the requirement to repay

In very exceptional circumstances, the council may need to waive repayment of an outstanding loan that becomes due for repayment. Such cases will be considered by the Head of Housing Needs & Strategy. Repayment will be waived only in circumstances where it would not be reasonable to demand repayment. For example repayment would be waived if the owner of the dwelling is elderly or infirm and is selling the property with the intention of funding a move to suitable alternative accommodation, sheltered housing, residential care home or to a similar institution or to somewhere where care will be provided by any person and where the amount due back to the council would be essential to fund the move.

Situations where there are no land registry entries to place a charge against

There are situations in which a homeowner or a private tenant may have repairing obligations and may otherwise be eligible for a loan but it is not possible to raise a charge against the property. Land Registry requirements do not cover mobile homes or private tenancies. Loans will therefore not be appropriate in these circumstances and applicants will be treated as not eligible for a loan for the purposes of consideration an application for grant assistance

Appeals against decisions, and complaints about the service

Any applicant wishing to appeal against a decision on the provision or recovery of financial assistance may appeal in writing to the Head of Housing Needs & Strategy.

Any person wishing to complain about the level or standard of service provided should again do so to the Head of Housing Needs & Strategy.

COUNCILLORS COMPUTER AND PRINTER
PROVISION AND USAGE PROTOCOL

1. A Personal Computer (PC) and printer is provided for Councillors to assist each Member of the Council in carrying out their duties electronically.
2. The cost of the equipment is met in full by the Council and the equipment is available as long as the recipient continues to be a Member of the Council.
3. If a Councillor ceases to hold office for whatever reason then the computer and printer shall be returned to the Council. Provision will, however be made, for the ex-Councillor to purchase the equipment for a sum calculated on the original cost of the equipment depreciated by 33% for each full year that it has been installed in the Councillor's residence.
4. Consumables for the printer (excluding paper) are provided by the Council at no cost to the Councillor.
5. The equipment remains the property of the Council as long as it is provided for Council use.
6. Personal use of the PC and printer is subject to the following code of conduct:
 - 6.1 No use may breach criminal or civil law.
 - 6.2 The equipment is provided to assist the Councillor in carrying out their Council duties. Any use of the computer that compromises this usage is prohibited.
 - 6.3 Backing up of material on the PC is the sole responsibility of the Councillor.
7. Use of the computer for the work of other local authorities or public bodies will be permitted subject to notification to the Chief Executive Officer and the agreement of the Councillor's group leader.
8. The computers and printers are supported by the Council's desktop maintenance agreement. In the event of a hardware fault this will be reported to the Council's IT help desk who will arrange for the hardware to be repaired under the Council wide support contract. If appropriate the equipment will be replaced or a temporary machine delivered to the Councillor until repairs have been completed.
9. The computers and printers will be covered by the Council's insurance policy. The insurance company has issued a set of guidelines on keeping the equipment secure. The recipient of the equipment must read and agree to abide by this guidelines.
10. On termination of their term of office as a Councillor for Runnymede Borough Council the ex-Councillor will have a period of 1 month from the date of the termination to exercise their option to return or purchase the equipment.

1. The broadband (ADSL) and ISDN connections provided for Councillors are installed to assist each Member of the Council in carrying out their duties electronically.
2. The costs of each installation and rental of the lines are met in full by the Council and the lines are available as long as the recipient continues to be a Member of the Council.
3. Use of the lines is subject to the following code of conduct:
 - 3.1 No use of the lines may breach criminal or civil law.
 - 3.2 All communications of a personal nature which use a runnymede.gov.uk e-mail address must unambiguously indicate that the messages are personal and do not represent the views of the Council or commit the Council to any action or expense.
 - 3.3 The lines must not be used for the posting of mass unsolicited communications (ie "spam").
 - 3.4 The Councillor shall be responsible for any additional expenditure incurred as a result of using the installed lines. These must not be charged to the line account that is billed to the Council.
4. Use of the lines for the work of other local authorities or public bodies will be permitted subject to notification to the Chief Executive Officer and the agreement of the Councillor's group leader.
5. Users must at all times run the firewall and anti-virus software provided free of charge by the Council on all equipment attached to the ADSL or ISDN lines.
6. Support for the use of the lines is provided by an appropriate supplier who provide support on line availability and technical support for the connection. This is provided through the supplier's published telephone support numbers and Web sites. In addition support is available from the Council's IT department and their suppliers. This user support can be obtained by telephoning the Council Help Desk, by e-mailing the Council IT Department or by completing an interactive form on the Councillor's Extranet site. The Council's Help Desk will provide support on the services available on the Council's network (principally e-mail and the Extranet) and specified software (currently Microsoft Outlook, Microsoft Internet Explorer 5.5 and above and an appropriate firewall).
7. On termination of their term of office as a Councillor for Runnymede Borough Council the service will be withdrawn immediately but use of the line may be retained by the former Councillor at their own expense providing this transfer incurs no additional costs for the Council.
8. In the case of ISDN lines the Council will provide an external ISDN adapter (i.e. digital modem) which will remain the property of the Council at all times.

**LOCAL PLAN REVIEW (LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK):
REPORT TO PLANNING COMMITTEE, 16TH JULY 2003**

**Design and Density of Development – Issues and Options Paper
First Draft June 2003**

1. Introduction

1.1 This paper sets out the issues and options affecting the design and density of development. It follows the following format:

- National Policy Context
- Regional and County Level Policy Context
- Key Issues and Policy Options for Runnymede

2. National Policy Context

2.1 Since the preparation of Runnymede's current local plan a great deal of new guidance on the built environment has emerged. This guidance has stressed the importance of achieving good design while making the best use of available land. This guidance is subject to further review as it has been announced that much national policy guidance will be revised over the next two years. The government has set down clear guidance on the density that should be achieved in residential development. The current main government publications relevant to this topic are summarised below.

2.2 PPG1 – General Policy and Principles

2.2.1 This stresses the importance of design and states that 'The appearance of proposed development and its relationship to its surroundings are material considerations in determining planning applications and appeals'. It goes on to state that 'Good design should be the aim of all those involved in the development process and should be encouraged everywhere. Good design can help promote sustainable development; improve the quality of the existing environment; attract business and investment and reinforce civic pride and a sense of place.'

2.2.2 It also says that 'Local planning authorities should reject poor designs, particularly where their decisions are supported by clear plan policies or supplementary design guidance which has been subjected to public

consultation and adopted by the local planning authority. Poor designs may include those inappropriate to their context, for example those clearly out of scale or incompatible with their surroundings.'

- 2.2.3 Annex A to PPG1 gives further advice on the handling of design issues. It says that development plans should contain design policies based on a proper assessment of the surrounding built and natural environment and which take account of the defining characteristics of each local area. It goes on to state that such policies should concentrate on guiding the overall scale, density, massing, height, landscape, layout and access of new development in relation to neighbouring buildings and the local area more generally.
- 2.2.4 Annex A also states that development plans may refer to supplementary design guidance including local design guides and site-specific development briefs, which can usefully elucidate and exemplify plan policies, thereby giving greater certainty.
- 2.2.5 In relation to accessibility, PPG1 states that "Local planning authorities, both in development plans and in determining individual planning applications, should take into account access issues. These will include access to and into buildings, and the need for accessible housing."

2.3 PPG 3

- 2.3.1 PPG 3 deals primarily with the provision of housing but it also makes important statements relating to the built environment, particularly relating to the need to promote more sustainable residential environments.
- 2.3.2 Particular points relevant to this topic include the following:

The need to promote mixed use developments – Local authorities should promote developments which combine a mix of land uses, including housing and should identify sites or areas where mixed use development will be required. They should produce development briefs for sites likely to become available for development, assemble sites for redevelopment and adopt flexible standards for car parking and density to facilitate such developments.

The need for a greener residential environment – The government stresses the importance of 'greening' of residential areas to enhance quality, assist drainage and promote biodiversity.

The need to achieve high quality and design places for people - Good design is essential in order to achieve the government's quality objectives while making more efficient use of land.

The need to make the most efficient use of land - The guidance states that local planning authorities should avoid developments which provide less than 30 dwellings per hectare (net), encourage those that provide between 30 and 50 dwellings per hectare (net). They should seek even higher densities at places with good public transport accessibility such as town, district and local centres

- 2.3.3 The guidance on density in PPG3 is reflected in Circular 01/02: The Town and Country Planning (Residential Density)(London and South East England) Direction 2002. This requires local planning authorities in the south-east to consult the First Secretary of State where they intend to approve applications for residential development that have a net density below 30 units per hectare and are on sites greater than one hectare.

2.4 By Design – Urban Design in the Planning System: Towards Better Practice

- 2.4.1 This document was published by the DETR and sets out in some detail how good design can be achieved through the development process and what part local planning authorities should play. It amplifies the requirement in PPG1 that applicants must provide design statements to explain their designs and how they relate to their context. Guidance is given on what issues a design statement should address and the supporting illustrative material that should be provided in order to properly assess the design of a proposal. This information has been adapted to provide guidance for applicants in Runnymede on the design statement that they should provide in support of planning applications.
- 2.4.2 It also describes various aspects of best practice for involving local communities in design and the importance of establishing local design frameworks and producing design briefs for major sites.
- 2.4.3 Much of its guidance is reiterated in greater detail in 'Surrey Design – A Strategic Guide for Quality Built Environments' which relates it to the Surrey context. This document is described elsewhere in this Paper.
- 2.4.4 In relation to planning policies it states that plans should contain clear design policies which have been subject to public consultation. Where such policies are in place developers will be expected to comply with them in order to gain consent.

2.5 Better Places to Live – A Companion Guide to PPG3

2.5.1 This was published in 2001 by DTLR and CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) to provide more detailed guidance on how to achieve the objectives of PPG 3. This is done through the use of case studies of recent developments and examination of established successful residential areas.

2.5.2 The guide stresses the importance of good design in achieving the sustainability and density objectives of PPG3. It says there is a need to move away from exclusive housing developments which turn their back on the wider community. It says that previous reliance by local authorities on the use of highway and design standards to judge applications has resulted in poor quality developments that waste space and fail to create any sense of place or identity.

2.5.3 The following basic principles of good design for residential areas are illustrated in a range of contexts

- Movement – A movement framework that is safe, direct and attractive to all users.
- Mix – A rich mix of housing opportunities.
- Community – A sense of neighbourhood and community ownership.
- Structure – A coherent structure of buildings, spaces, landscape and routes for movement.
- Layout – Street layout and design which is appropriate to use and context.
- Place – Attractive and clearly defined public and private spaces.
- Amenity – Pleasant gardens and private amenity space.
- Parking – Convenient but unobtrusive car parking.
- Safety – A safe and secure environment.
- Space – Well planned homes which provide space and functionality
- Adaptability – Robust housing which is adaptable to changing requirements.

- Maintenance – An environment which can be well maintained over the long term.
- Sustainability – Housing designed to minimize resource consumption in its construction and use.
- Detail – Well considered detailing of buildings and spaces.

The document gives details of successful housing developments in a range of densities from 30 dwellings per hectare up to 100+ dwellings per hectare.

2.6 *A Better Quality of Life – A Strategy for Sustainable Development in the UK*

2.6.1 This document was published in 1999 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR). It sets out the four main aims of the government's strategy as follows:

- social progress which recognizes the needs of everyone
- effective protection of the environment
- prudent use of natural resources; and
- maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

2.6.2 It identifies a number of priorities for the UK. Of relevance to planning policy are:

- reducing the level of social exclusion
- directing development to protect and enhance the countryside and wildlife
- improving energy efficiency and tackling waste

2.7 *Local Quality of Life Counts – a handbook for a menu of local indicators of sustainable development.*

2.7.1 This document was published in 2000 by the DETR and provides ideas for measuring sustainable development and the quality of life of local communities. It is intended to assist local authorities, and their partners, when reporting on their Community Strategies. Where possible it

recommends indicators used for 'Best Value' but includes wider indicators where appropriate

2.7.2 The indicators are based on an assessment of the characteristics of a sustainable society. The characteristics identified in the document that are relevant to the built environment include those relating to

- Using natural resources with care
- Creating or enhancing spaces and buildings that work well, wear well and look well.
- Making settlements 'human' in scale and form.
- Valuing and protecting diversity and local distinctiveness and strengthening local community and cultural identity.

2.7.3 The indicators that follow from these are intended to provide a measure of the extent to which the desirable characteristics are being achieved. Some are directly relevant measures such as the use of energy (which should be measured in terms of the gas and electricity used per household) and domestic water use. Others are less directly related. For example the indicators for spaces, buildings, settlements, diversity and distinctiveness are:

- New homes built on previously developed land
- Public concern over noise
- Recorded crime
- Fear of crime

These are inevitably somewhat limited indicators of the achievement of the relevant characteristics though they are based on measurable statistics including some used for best value assessment.

3. Regional and County Context

3.1 Regional Planning Guidance for the South East (RPG 9)

3.1.1 This guidance reinforces the government's objectives of securing urban renaissance through appropriate densities and high quality design. It has a section entitled 'Form and Design of Urban Development' which states that "Focusing development within urban areas will require careful

attention to the form and design of development. In the South East the design of redevelopment of parts of urban areas is as important as the location and design of new development.”

- 3.1.2 It encourages the use of creative solutions to maximise opportunities for renewal, and achieve a greater mix of building types, land uses and tenures. It also seeks to optimise development density in proximity to public transport hubs in and around existing centres and within a network of multi-functional open spaces. It says there is a need to embrace innovation, for example, in terms of designing energy efficient buildings or organising car-free neighbourhoods.
- 3.1.3 It also states that, at the same time, the best of the Region’s cultural and natural heritage needs to be protected and preserved. The future development of urban neighbourhoods must therefore be based on an understanding of their historic character, preserving and adapting historic buildings to accommodate new uses and provide a focus for urban communities and enhancing the urban rivers, parks and other green spaces
- 3.1.4 In respect of sustainability the Regional Guidance states “The design of individual developments will be a major influence on the extent to which they are sustainable.”
- 3.1.5 Aspects of sustainable design include:
- use of waste prevention and minimisation techniques;
 - installation of pollution abatement technology to reduce emissions to air and water;
 - control measures for surface water drainage as close to its source as possible;
 - building design which facilitates the use of renewable energy;
 - energy efficient installations, including passive solar design for buildings and improved insulation;
 - water-efficient installations, including the use of grey water systems;
 - use of renewable and recycled materials during construction and design to facilitate recycling systems, including combined heat and power and community heating schemes; and
 - use of ‘soft’ construction and maintenance techniques harnessing natural processes.
- 3.1.6 The guidance urges local authorities to provide a more sustainable pattern of development, reconciling the need for dwellings in the South East whilst avoiding unnecessary encroachment into the countryside by encouraging better design and resisting car dependent forms of development. It states that, in general, densities in SE England (outside London) have been

some of the lowest in the country, and this increases the amount of greenfield land taken for new development. There is, it says, considerable scope within the South East for accommodating homes in ways which preserve open land and create viable catchments for local services and public transport.

3.2 Sustainable Communities in the South East – Building for the Future

3.2.1 This document was published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in February 2003. It seeks to promote sustainable development in the south-east while supporting the regional economy, protecting the countryside and tackling social and economic disparities. It reinforces the need to tackle the housing shortage and to ensure that there is a better match between the predicted size of households and the housing provided.

3.3 - Surrey Structure Plan – Deposit Draft December 2002

3.3.1 This document is the latest version of the Surrey Structure Plan. The Adopted Surrey Structure Plan dates from 1994 and the Deposit Draft updates this to reflect recent changes to Government policy and changing lifestyles. The Deposit Plan will be subjected to assessment by an independent panel at an Examination in Public which was planned to have been held in Autumn 2001 but this timetable has now slipped.

3.3.2 In respect of the built environment the County's policy (No. SE3) is that "Development will be expected to contribute to improvements to the quality of urban areas. The design, both of buildings themselves and of the way they integrate with their surroundings, must be of a very high standard. The layout of development should enhance movement choice, giving emphasis to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users. Development will be expected to retain existing features that contribute to sense of place and local character and distinctiveness should be strengthened rather than eroded. The local planning authorities will identify promote and safeguard a framework of open spaces and green corridors for each settlement."

3.3.3 In relation to conservation of the built environment Policy SE4 is "Surrey's valuable cultural heritage of buildings, sites and landscapes will be conserved and enhanced. Development that may harm these resources will only be permitted where it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the heritage interest and that no alternative is possible". It also contains guidance on the need for archaeological assessments and the treatment of archaeological remains.

3.4 Surrey Design – A Strategic Guide for Quality Built Environments

3.4.1 The Surrey Local Government Association has published 'Surrey Design – A Strategic Guide for Quality Built Environments'. This has been adopted by Surrey County Council as supplementary planning guidance following extensive public consultation and is therefore part of the Development Plan for Runnymede. It replaces the four volumes of the previous 'Roads and Footpaths: A Design Guide for Surrey'.

3.4.2 It provides guidance under the following chapter headings:

- *Process*

Objective – to promote good design through the development process.

- *Quality*

Objective – to create attractive and accessible places.

- *Character*

Objective – to ensure that all development contributes to local distinctiveness and character.

- *Resources*

Objective – to conserve energy and water, maintain biodiversity, and reduce waste and pollution.

- *People*

Objective – to encourage vibrant and mixed communities where people feel safe.

- *Movement*

Objective – to create places for people that are safe and easy to move through and are accessible to all.

- *Land*

Objective – to make the best use of available development land.

3.4.3 It also has a Technical Appendix with detailed guidance on design and layout for pedestrian, cycle and vehicular movement.

3.5 Managing Urban Areas

- 3.5.1 As part of the process of reviewing the Surrey Structure Plan, the County Council has also been looking at how the forecast increases in housing can be accommodated with particular reference to the quality and quantity of existing and proposed infrastructure.
- 3.5.2 This work raises common concerns about the lack of capacity of existing infrastructure to cope with significant housing increases in terms of transport capacity, health service capacity etc. It identifies the problem that it is generally easier to secure significant new infrastructure provision as part of major urban extensions rather than through the smaller scale developments likely to result in the proposed approach of building within the urban areas on brownfield land.
- 3.5.3 The approach suggested is that of Comprehensive Urban Strategies (CUSs). A CUS would be based on a comprehensive overview of the needs and priorities of the local authority area. The CUS would help deliver the objectives of the Community Strategy.
- 3.5.4 The suggested components for a CUS include a long term vision linked to the Community Strategy to help deliver urban renaissance, improved design, better use of land, mixed uses and enhancing the urban environment.

4. Local Policy Context

4.1 The Local Plan

- 4.1.1 The main planning policy document for Runnymede is the Borough Local Plan which was adopted in April 2001. This covers design and density issues in a number of its policies.
- 4.1.2 Policy BE2 'Townscape Character' seeks to ensure that developments in the urban area respect their townscape setting by reference to the following matters, existing buildings, street pattern, plot sizes and ratios, building lines, topography, street scene, building height, roof treatment, boundary treatment, open space, trees and landscaping. It encourages visually interesting schemes
- 4.1.3 There are a number of aspects of existing local plan policy that are deficient in the light of current government guidance. These are

- The inclusion of density guidelines in the comment to Policy HO9 that are in conflict with the guidance on density in PPG3
- The inclusion of a minimum garden depth of 10.6 metres does not allow the flexibility of design and the best use of land required by PPG3 and there is no reference to amenity space for flats / apartments.
- There is ambiguity in Policy BE2 about where the policy applies. In practice it has been in general use throughout the urban area of the Borough for development control purposes and this is clearly desirable in order to achieve high quality design in all developments. The policy (or its equivalent in the LDF) should be worded to make it clear that this is the case.
- The design policies in the plan are not presently based on an assessment of the character of the Borough's built and natural environment and do not take account of the defining characteristics of each local area, as required by PPG1 (Annex A). There is clearly a need for any design policies in the LDF to be supported by such an assessment.
- The present policies do not set out any requirements in relation to achieving sustainable development which should underpin all policies in the LDF.
- The existing policies have not been subject to an environmental appraisal which will be an integral part of the development of Local Development Framework policies.
- Existing policies do not set out the requirements under PPG1 and the Disability Discrimination Act to achieve accessible developments.

4.2 Supplementary Planning Guidance

- 4.2.1 The Council has adopted a number of Supplementary Planning Guidance notes (SPGs). These fall into two main types – site or area specific briefs and strategies and those that relate to a specific type of development such as residential extensions.
- 4.2.2 Site-specific SPGs include planning briefs for the Category 1 and Category 2 sites identified in local plan policy HO6 and the Town Centre Strategy for Addlestone (which includes specific guidance for the Civic Offices / Garfield Road site and the Safeways site)

- 4.2.3 SPGs covering specific types of development include guidance on residential development, a householders guide, guidance on shop security and satellite antennae and on trees, woodlands and hedgerows.
- 4.2.4 Under the new format Local Development Frameworks there will be a continuing role for SPGs to augment the core policies. Some of what we would presently refer to as SPGs might become action area plans under the new system – this could include guidance on specific areas such as town or village centres or conservation areas.

5. Issues for Runnymede

5.1 Achieving Consistently High Standards of Design

- 5.1.1 The government stresses in a number of documents the priority that should be given to achieving good design in new developments. It also provides guidance on what information local planning authorities should require from applicants in support of their proposals.
- 5.1.2 In order to achieve consistency in raising design standards there is a need to introduce clear policies in the local plan setting out the need for good design, the requirement for applicants to justify their designs and the criteria by which design will be assessed including accessibility. This should be supported by an assessment of the Borough's built and natural environment including consideration of any particular local characteristics.

5.1.3 *Suggested Approach*

Adopt a clear set of design policies setting out

- the basic design principles to be followed in new development;
- the need for developers to provide a design statement setting out their approach to the design of their development and how it complies with the relevant development plan policies and any other relevant guidance;
- the need to comply with other relevant guidance such as 'Surrey Design', supplementary planning guidance and site-specific development briefs; and
- the need to make new developments and extensions to existing developments accessible.

5.2 Achieving High Densities in the Runnymede Context

- 5.2.1 Runnymede, in common with other Surrey districts, has many suburban areas that are characterised by lower densities than those now required by PPG3, including many relatively recent developments. This is recognised in the Regional Guidance (RPG 9) which identifies the south-east (excluding London) as having had some of the lowest development densities in the country.
- 5.2.2 Planning permissions for residential development in Runnymede during the calendar years 2001 and 2002 were at an average density of 10.9 units per hectare. However, this figure includes a number of replacement dwellings in the Green Belt where the government's density target is not applicable.
- 5.2.3 The County Council's analysis of District data for the completion of housing units show that on larger sites (those with over ten units gross) the average density achieved in Runnymede from April 2000 to June 2001 was 31.6 units per hectare which is just within the government target. The Runnymede figure is very close to the average for the County as a whole which was 30.5 units per hectare. *Note: More detailed data for Runnymede is being prepared to provide an accurate overall density figure for recent residential planning consents within the Borough's urban area.*
- 5.2.4 The current parking standards in the Borough are significantly reduced from historic levels and this has enabled higher densities to be achieved for residential and commercial developments, especially where the sites are accessible by other means of transport.
- 5.2.5 Low-density development is undesirable for a number of reasons. It is wasteful of scarce development land and increases pressure on greenfield land, it creates greater car dependence. It does not create sufficient critical mass of population within an area to support a wide range of other land uses which would contribute to local sustainability.
- 5.2.6 There will inevitably be instances where it would conflict with other planning policies to develop at densities of 30 units per hectare or more. Such cases could include development within certain parts of conservation areas or where it would affect the setting of a listed building. It would not therefore be appropriate to require such densities in every instance.
- 5.2.7 There may also be instances where development at 30 units per hectare or more would be out of character with existing residential character. This does not of itself justify refusal of a high-density scheme. PPG3 makes it

clear that densities of over 30 units per hectare should be the norm. It may also be possible to increase densities without harming an area's important townscape characteristics. A development of apartments, for example, could have a similar scale, setting and boundary treatment to a large detached dwelling and provide a significantly higher density without undue harm to the area's character.

5.2.8 For example the sub-division of large dwellings can increase density without changing the built form. Provided car parking is sensitively handled this can be an acceptable form of development. It is important to understand which features and characteristics provide the special character of an area. It is these characteristics that should be preserved and enhanced through new developments.

5.2.9 Runnymede does not in general have high quality public transport. Travel patterns in the Borough are complex, and there are very high levels of car ownership, factors which tend to result in high levels of car usage. For many of the Borough's residents, relatively low density development is one of the attractions of living in the area and there is resistance to further increases.

5.2.10 In some parts of the Borough the tendency has been for incremental increases in the density of residential areas largely through small scale developments of windfall sites, often in the form of infilling. This type of development is in some ways more acceptable than large scale schemes in that each small scheme has, on its own, a relatively minor impact. Over time, such developments can lead to significant change in the character of residential areas and traffic levels, yet because of their piecemeal nature they do not provide any significant contribution to local infrastructure or services.

5.2.11 There are a number of town and district centres in the Borough offering a range of shopping, public transport and other services. Close to such centres, densities should be as high as possible, subject to considerations of amenity and good design.

5.2.12 The existing local plan guidance on density zones (in the comment to Policy HO9) is in conflict with PPG3. The density zones are not based on any reasoned justification. Their purpose is to seek to preserve the spacious character of certain suburban areas. The impact of these policies is to continue developing at the unacceptably low densities that are criticized in the regional planning guidance. There is a need for a more flexible approach to density. A proper townscape assessment of such areas may identify a range of factors rather than just their density that contribute to their character.

5.2.13 The achievement of higher densities of residential development may increase the need for public amenity space as it is likely that less private amenity space will be provided within the curtilage of residential units. Because of the higher densities being sought and the overall strategy of providing for new housing from within the urban area, more units are likely to be provided on smaller sites. This means that fewer large sites are likely to be developed in the future and it is the larger sites which have generally been the most effective for securing amenity space and other facilities.

5.2.14 There is a need to ensure that the provision of an increasing proportion of new housing on smaller sites does not prevent the achievement of planning benefits including amenity space. A flexible approach may be most appropriate whereby commuted sums contributed from smaller sites might be used to achieve benefits in areas of need in the Borough. This will require review of the threshold development size at which contributions are required and an appropriate formula for their calculation.

5.2.15 Suggested Approach

- Adopt policies which seek to achieve development at as high a density as is commensurate with environmental and amenity considerations. This should be based on a target of achieving an average density in new residential developments across the urban area of the Borough within the range 30 to 50 units per hectare as required by PPG3. Given the suburban character of much of the Borough and nature of its town centres (which are limited in area and are characterised by generally small scale buildings) it is likely that the overall density achievable will be at the lower end of this range, probably around 35 dwellings per hectare.
- Devise policies to encourage high standards of design in order to achieve higher densities without causing undue harm to the amenity of residents.
- Introduce greater flexibility into design policies so that imaginative solutions to designing at higher densities can be implemented.

5.3 Identifying and Preserving the Character of Attractive Residential Areas in the Borough

5.3.1 There are some parts of the Borough that have a well established and attractive character which is worthy of retention and enhancement. Some of these are already protected through their designation as conservation areas. Other areas, such as parts of Virginia Water and Woodham do not

have conservation area status but do have distinctive and attractive character, often due to the dominance of mature trees and hedges, wide verges, large plot sizes and in some cases attractive houses (notably the Tarrant houses on the Wentworth Estate, several of which have been lost through redevelopment).

- 5.3.2 In order to preserve (and if possible enhance) the character of such areas it will be necessary to identify those elements that make up the attractive character and draw up and adopt policies to ensure that they are not harmed by new development. This would help to preserve some elements of these areas' character, but existing houses cannot be protected from demolition unless they are statutorily listed or lie within a designated conservation area. A local listing (which can be made by the Council) does not provide any protection against demolition unless the building lies within a conservation area.
- 5.3.3 The assessment of these areas may identify potential conservation areas which could be designated in accordance with the procedures set out in the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990.

5.3.3 *Suggested Approach*

- Identify 'Areas of High Residential Quality' in the Borough
- Carry out townscape analysis to identify the characteristics that make them attractive.
- Assess whether identified areas meet the criteria for designation as conservation areas and if appropriate seek their designation.
- Develop policies to ensure that important elements and characteristics of identified areas are not harmed by new developments.

5.4 Ensuring that Design and Density Policies Contribute to the Achievement of Sustainable Development

- 5.4.1 There are few established national indicators for the impact on sustainability of the built environment. One indicator is the percentage of housing units built on brownfield land which is related to a government national target.
- 5.4.2 The achievement of higher densities and the use of high standards of design to enable habitable high density development should contribute to

sustainability. Higher densities in locations close to facilities make it easier for more people to access those facilities on foot and they increase the viability of local facilities such as shops. Higher density forms of housing such as apartments and terraced housing are more energy efficient than detached dwellings.

5.4.3 There is a need to establish local indicators, based on the environmental assessment of the Borough to monitor the effectiveness of the policies and guide the review process.

5.4.4 *Suggested Approach*

- Carry out a sustainability assessment of draft policy proposals to identify their likely impact on sustainability.
- Revise, delete or add policies to optimize sustainability performance.

5.5 Setting Targets and Monitoring Performance

5.5.1 A range of targets for the design and performance of the built environment should be established and this should be based on a broad consensus of what sort of Borough people want in the future and what they see as the problems at present. The setting of such broad targets is an area where the Community Strategy will have a key role in involving the local community in establishing long-term targets which can be translated into policy.

5.5.2 It is a requirement in the Planning Bill that LDFs will be subject to regular review including an annual review of key parts of the framework.

5.5.3 *Suggested Approach*

- Use the Community Strategy process to help inform and review targets for the development of design and density policies in the forthcoming Local Development Framework.
- Ensure that data relating to the quality and performance of the built environment (including design quality and density) is included in the base-line environmental assessment of the Borough.
- Use data relevant to the built environment from the base-line environmental assessment of the Borough as a basis for monitoring the ongoing performance and review of policy