

CANTERBURY District COUNCIL – DESIGN CODE CONSULTATION Sept 2025

CCC is initiating a consultation from 27 September to develop a vision for a Canterbury Design Code.

CHDF will be attending, and has initial lines of enquiry.

What is a Design Code, why is one needed (now)

The NPPF, with which all local Plans must agree, has called for local Design Codes as a part of Plans since 2022, and this is emphasised in the December 2024 edition

13 To provide maximum clarity about design expectations at an early stage, all local planning authorities should prepare design guides or codes consistent with the principles set out in the National Design Guide and National Model Design Code, and which reflect local character and design preferences. Design guides and codes provide a local framework for creating beautiful and distinctive places with a consistent and high quality standard of design. Their geographic coverage, level of detail and degree of prescription should be tailored to the circumstances and scale of change in each place, and should allow a suitable degree of variety.

Our initial queries are

- We are glad to see that CCC are initiating steps to develop a Code, although we wonder why it has only done so now. Is this a response to the call for increased density and housing numbers in the NPPF, (despite the fact that at present the new standard method has projected the same number of new dwellings as the 2022 proposed Review: it should not be overlooked that both recent revisions propose a 25% increase on house building over the current Plan targets).
- The cues for consideration on possible contents seem very narrowly focussed on new build estate building, looking at simple built form. Why is the focus so specific – could it not cover all aspects of settlement design including social, economic and environmental issues?

- The emphasis also seems focussed on new settlements – the relationship between new suburbs and the existing settlement should be considered, and the various issues arising from intensification or redevelopment of areas within the City need full consideration, for example as strengthening of the various clauses in the Plan governing building in conservation areas.
- Canterbury has 94 conservation areas, of which 72 are rural, centred on village settlements, which will surely require particular consideration of their special circumstances
- As well as village based conservation areas there are special numerous landscape and habitat areas, eg the AHLV countryside on the skyline surrounding the city, which are likely to be impacted by development whether as new housing areas or as intensification.

Relevant Documents

HMG

The NPPF sets out (in footnotes) the 2021 set of Design Code documents published by MHCLG

- National Model Design Code
- Guidance to National Model Design Code
- National Design Guide

These are exemplary albeit ambitious documents, that envisage systematic analysis of the various interlocking elements of an area – eg Layout, Form, Scale, Appearance, Landscapes, Materials. We view these as a useful framework for the work, although there are obvious omissions from these – for example, infrastructure, employment.

Exemplars

As a consequence of CCC being behind the curve of local design code developments, there are many excellent precedents that would repay study, and we suggest attention is given to Design Codes for

- Durham A relatively small historic Cathedral town with WHS areas
- York The second most important cathedral town, concerned with 'Yorkness'
- Bath A major historic site, also with a WHS area, concerned with 'Bathness'
- Winchester, Exeter – major cathedrals in small towns.

Authors of these studies are often but not always the local authority – some are produced by local civic bodies.

Previous Consultations, ongoing developments.

CCC have consulted relatively recently on the Canterbury Area Conservation Area Management Plan, and the updated WHS management Plan, as well as the 2022 Review of the Local Plan, and a 'focussed' Regulation 18 Draft Review has just been published for the Plan. Detailed responses to these initiatives will contain useful proposals.

We would suggest that inputs to those exercises, as well as other smaller consultations, are reviewed.

In addition, although they are all city centre projects, the various **Levelling Up Projects** that are currently in their construction phases, should be reviewed if the new Design Code is to be properly comprehensive.

Finally, we very much hope that CCC are extending the scope of the Design Code work to include review of **rural areas**, including special landscapes.

Conclusion

We look forward to working with CCC and fellow community organisations on this welcome initiative to give Canterbury a strong framework for the major redevelopment projects that the new Plan period will produce.