

Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Looking After the Environment

12 December 2005

Creating Excellent Buildings – Draft Strategy



Report of Acting Head of Environment and Planning

Purpose of Report

1. To explain a proposed strategy to incorporate high quality design and sustainable development into all County Council buildings and particularly to set standards for the major future construction works in connection with Building Schools for the Future. The views of Scrutiny members are sought about this draft strategy. A presentation will be given at the Sub-Committee.

Background and Aim of the Proposed Strategy

AIM OF THE STRATEGY

2. Durham County Council is an 'Excellent Authority' as assessed through the Audit Commission's Comprehensive Performance Assessment process. The Authority seeks to produce excellent buildings that fulfil the needs of the community, demonstrate quality design and integrate sustainable development principles.

The aim of this Strategy is to assist the Authority to achieve this by:

- Defining our ambition, the vision that the Authority aspires to.
- Looking at how this relates to what is happening nationally, regionally and locally. Agreeing the policies and plans that the Authority should take account of.
- Agreeing what we mean by design quality and sustainable development and how we measure it, ie definitions and performance indicators.
- Assessing how are we performing compared to national/other standards, and identifying the issues that we need to address to improve.
- Recommending an Action Plan to be put in place to achieve the vision.

THE CONTENT OF THE STRATEGY

3. In order to deliver the vision, “Durham County Council will strive for high quality design and sustainable development in new building and refurbishment work”, this strategy sets down a number of issues that need addressing together with an Action Plan.
4. National, Regional and County Council policy is summarised. All these stress the need to embrace sustainable development principles in design and construction and the need to strive for high quality design.
5. Definitions of design quality and sustainable development are included which will assist in assessing whether schemes are meeting expectations.

The Issues

6. The Authority is trying hard to embrace sustainable development in all its activities. More needs to be done however to ensure that this is an integral part of the design process rather than ‘bolt on extras’ that tend to be deleted when costs prove to be a problem. A greater understanding and knowledge is needed of whole life costing and the new technologies that are involved in relation to sustainable design.
7. A process needs to be agreed and integrated within the development of schemes to ensure that design quality is given the prominence it needs when schemes are valued engineered. Quality needs to be considered on an equal footing together with cost and time.
8. Landscape design is often a casualty of cost over-run and the environment suffers. There must be safeguards built into project processes for the landscape elements of the scheme. This is part of the need to comply with planning conditions.
9. Consideration also needs to be given to the future of schools that have been declared redundant but are architecturally and historically important.

Action Plan

10. To address these issues the action plan sets down the need to clarify roles and responsibilities within the design and construction teams. A flow chart is attached which sets down critical tasks and review stages. This highlights the need to involve design, planning and sustainability expertise at an early stage and throughout the project cycle.
11. The involvement of the Authority’s Design Champion is key to the design review process. The Champion’s role is to promote and influence high quality design, ensuring that there is commitment at the highest level to create excellent buildings.

12. Training, research and development are key to achieving our vision. We need to organise training and carry out research on a number of key issues to enhance our understanding of sustainable development in the construction industry.
13. In order to be an intelligent client for our Building Schools for the Future programme we need to take a more visionary stance and be prepared to fully embrace sustainable development and high quality design developing a rigorous process to ensure that we achieve our ambitions.

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

14. It is vital that the different services in the authority work together corporately and with the Strategic Alliance Partnership to achieve excellence in building design and sustainable development

Recommendation

15. You are asked to consider the draft strategy and provide any comments before the strategy is submitted to Cabinet.

Contact: Rod Lugg Tel: 0191 383 3340
