

Cabinet

11 June 2024

Chatham Centre Design Code - Request to Adopt

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Simon Curry, Portfolio Holder for Climate Change & Strategic Regeneration

Report from: Adam Bryan, Director of Place

Authors: Dave Harris, Chief Planning Officer
Lisa Maryott, Head of Business Development & Specialist Service

Summary

This report seeks Cabinet approval for the adoption of the Chatham Centre Design Code.

Medway was awarded £120,000 from the Department of Leveling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) in 2022 to produce an exemplar design code and design code process for Chatham Centre.

The Chatham Centre Design Code establishes a vision and associated design coding to deliver a connected network of distinctive routes and spaces and high-quality, contextual development that contributes to vibrant and urban streetscapes.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Cabinet is asked to agree the adoption of the Chatham Centre Design Code.

2. Suggested reasons for decision

2.1. The Chatham Centre Design Code will contribute to the urban regeneration of Medway's primary centre whilst identifying the expected quality of development to better correspond with local character and enhance the natural environment.

3. Budget and policy framework

3.1. The Development Framework has been prepared and led by BPTW, providing urban design, design coding and architectural services with a range of team support, including, Create Streets on community engagement, HTA

Landscape on public realm and landscape, Urban Movement on transport and highways and Lyall Bills & Young Architects on testing the design code. Direction has been provided by Council officers across the planning service, officers from varying MC departments and national planning policy / guidance. It has been facilitated by, the Department for Levelling Up Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and National Model Design Code, which defines the process to assist local authorities.

- 3.2. The Design Code was subject to formal public consultation in November 2023 and January 2024 following Cabinet approval in September 2023 (decision number 171/2023). Feedback was provided by members of the public, community groups, landowners, and other interested stakeholders.
- 3.3. Results from the public consultation demonstrated support to strong support for each question and, furthermore, detailed comments were received by Officers and key stakeholder groups.
- 3.4. Minor amendments have now been made to the Design Code considering the comments raised. These amendments have sought to provide clarity on certain elements included in the Code, and do not fundamentally change it or the embedded principles.

4. Background

- 4.1. The government has made the creation of beautiful places and improving environmental outcomes a key aim of its Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA). This has included the introduction of Design Codes, that will act as a framework to help ensure new development meets clear design standards which reflect community views, a strengthened framework of environmental outcomes and expanded protection for places people value. The intention is to encourage Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to take action to make sure good design, which reflects community preferences, is a key objective of the planning system.
- 4.2. The National Model Design Code (NMDC) expands on ten characteristics of good design, which reflects government priorities / perspectives and provides a common overarching framework for design.
- 4.3. In January 2021, the government proposed to test the application of the NMDC. A pilot program consisting of 16 Local Authorities undertook initial testing with a further 25 Local Authorities awarded funding to further develop a design code as part of the DLUHC (Department of Levelling Up Housing & Communities) pathfinder program. Medway were awarded funding to undertake the Chatham Centre Design Code.
- 4.4. The codes aim to secure the highest possible design quality outcomes, speed up the process to planning permission and influence land prices to secure development opportunities through a clear deliverable vision. The aim is to secure a local culture of design quality, systematically raising expectations so

that developers and communities know what is expected of change within their town.

- 4.5. Engagement is at the heart of the NMDC model and the LPA has worked with internal Medway colleagues and local communities. Wide engagement has focused on digital approaches, while deep engagement has been facilitated using face-to-face techniques including Chatham walkabouts, co-design workshops and community drop in events.
- 4.6. BPTW have been appointed as external consultants and have been excellent in co-leading the project with Medway's Specialist Team as the hybrid approach agreed upon at Departmental Management Team (DMT). The advantage of a hybrid approach is being able to fill the skills gap by using consultants who have vast experience leading on master planning and leading on the NMDC testing programme, but also having Local Authority project leads to drive the process forward, getting participants enthused, engaged and involved and who will therefore own and be committed to the Design Code output. This has put Medway in control of getting ahead of national policy changes and avoids having to rely on national guidance when negotiating design. Medway has as a result been developing best practice local design codes that serve as an example for others through the DLUHC program, as exemplified by the excellent feedback the team have received from DLUHC and the Design Council Review Panel.

5. Options

- A. Approve the request for adoption of the Chatham Centre Design Code.
- B. Reject the request for adoption of the Chatham Centre Design Code.

6. Advice and analysis

- 6.1. The Chatham Centre Design Code will provide a decision-making tool that sets out what is expected of developers and others in a clear and visual manner, which will lead to a more beautiful and sustainable place.
- 6.2. The Design Code has been prepared in partnership with BPTW and DLUHC, with guidance from Council officers across the organisation, and Statutory Bodies to ensure it meets the requirements of national planning policy and guidance.
- 6.3. Officers' advise that the adoption of the Design Code will help to deliver sustainable, inclusive, and accessible development in Chatham Centre. Diversity Impact Assessment document is appended to this report.
- 6.4. The Chatham Centre Design Code is based on an area-wide vision of how Chatham may develop by 2050. This vision frames a series of qualities as defined in the NMDC Characteristics of a Well Designed Place. These characteristics form the basis of the design codes. This 2050 vision also

addresses a wide range of aspects that can help guide a number of Council departments to deliver a more sustainable Chatham that achieves:

- Movement

Chatham as a place with better streets and spaces for people to walk whilst streets will be designed to encourage cycling and wheeling. The public transport network will be designed with increased frequency and quality whilst car parking will be provided in mobility hubs to link to active and more sustainable transport.

- Open Space and Nature

Chatham's open space network will correspond with and celebrate local heritage within streets and spaces whilst also integrating nature and biodiversity to tackle among other things the urban heat island effects and comfortable street usage through greater canopy cover from trees. Spaces will promote intuitive legibility and streets and public spaces will be designed for greater activity and animation. Wider green links will create stronger links to the River Medway whilst opportunities will be provided to encourage greater use and activity along the riverfront.

- Built Form

New and enhanced buildings will create a place of vibrant streetscapes, where new and existing landmarks will be celebrated and key views framed. New buildings will be of high quality with distinctive design that responds to human scale and promotes qualities of delight, joy and beauty. Sustainability will be promoted, including shading from trees within projects and passive to active principles to define buildings that are low energy and are built to last.

- Use

Chatham centre will develop such that local neighbourhoods have their daily needs within a short walk or cycle. Buildings will promote flexibility in form to enable long life, loose fit principles. New uses will include affordable mixed-uses and incubator spaces to promote local entrepreneurship, whilst meanwhile temporary uses will help to drive local innovation and creative uses through the process as well as products of development. A new, mixed series of neighbourhoods within the centre will cater to a range of types and tenures to support a diverse community.

6.5. These ambitions are being coordinated with the emerging Chatham Cultural Placemaking Strategy to ensure joined-up action is easier than it might otherwise be following adoption of the Chatham Centre Design Code SPD.

6.6. The information and guidance within the Chatham Centre Design Code SPD will support existing and emerging planning policies within the Council's Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including those relating to sustainability, sustainable development, and

mitigating the effects of climate change as well as more compact urban development set within a centre that is more pedestrian & cycle-friendly and based on a greater modal shift to public transport.

7. Risk management

- 7.1. Risk management is an integral part of good governance. The Council has a responsibility to identify and manage threats and risks to achieve its strategic objectives and enhance the value of services it provides to the community. Using the following table this section should therefore consider any significant risks arising from your report.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
Not adopting the Chatham Centre Design Code.	This is a requirement associated with DLUHC funding for the Design Code. Risk of Council not achieving objectives of the Design Code and regeneration of the town centre as a result.	Ratifying the stated project programme to achieve adoption in line with DLUHC funding, ensuring key milestones are achieved, delays minimized and no showstoppers exercised for Chatham's regeneration.	CIII
Lack of community involvement in the development of the Design Code.	The public and key stakeholders/groups are apathetic towards the Design Code and do not get involved in public consultation.	Considerable consultation events have already been carried out. This stage of public consultation will be coordinated by the Council who will advertise the consultation prior to and during the event on Council media.	DIII
Landowners not being supportive of the proposals within the Design Code.	Landowners and developers could oppose the proposals/guidance set out in the Chatham Centre Design Code SPD. This could give rise to development coming forward which is not aligned with the principles and content of the SPD.	Landowners have been engaged with previously for their thoughts and views. If development comes forward which is not aligned with the SPD, Planning Officers will be able to negotiate with Applicants, with refusal of planning permission being a last resort, but a potential, option.	DIII

For risk rating, please refer to the following table :

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely	I Catastrophic
B Likely	II Major
C Unlikely	III Moderate
D Rare	IV Minor

8. Consultation

- 8.1. Consultation has been progressively undertaken on both a deep (face-to-face) and wide (electronic) basis as part of the design code process.
- 8.2. More specifically, engagement has included a range of local community groups, including Arches Local, Medway Urban Greenspaces Forum, Medway Plus, Fort Amherst, St Johns Rochester Anglican, Parkinson's Group and Create Medway as well as Network Rail, Ellandi and a range of landowners within the town centre.
- 8.3. From the start of the process, there has been significant engagement with Medway officers across a number of departments. Liaison with Medway Council's interdisciplinary Specialist Team within the planning Service, Planning Policy and Development Management (DM) Officers, Highways and a range of other relevant officers from other services including, Green Spaces, Climate Change, Public Health, Child Friendly Medway, Culture and Events, Regeneration, Town Centres, Communications and Medway Housing Company. This helped shape the Design Code which is fully coordinated with other adopted policy guidance / SPD's. covering Planning (Policy and DM). An additional series of one-to-one interviews have also been held with a range of Medway Council teams to focus on Child Friendly City and Youth Services.
- 8.4. Engagement has also taken place with and through students from the School of Architecture & Planning (KSAP) at the University of Kent. They were presented with an overview of an earlier stage draft of the Design Code and over the past year have been invited to speculate about how the area could potentially develop in the future. Their involvement will continue through 2024 and hopefully beyond (potentially also through an Urban Room, currently being explored as an initiative to support Chatham Town Centre as well as Chatham Intra).
- 8.5. The public consultation ran from 3 November 2023 to Wednesday 3 January 2024 and feedback was provided from members of the public, community groups, landowners, and other interested stakeholders.
- 8.6. Electronic copies of the Design Code were made available through the Council website, and paper copies made available for inspection at Chatham, Rochester, Lordswood, Walderslade, and Luton libraries.

- 8.7. Statutory consultees have been consulted, as well as local neighborhood forum and amenity groups and the Town Centre Forum.
- 8.8. There were 72 submitted responses, 1 from an elected member, 3 from an organisation, Medway Council's Climate Change Team, Southern Water and Kent Wildlife Trust and 68 from individuals of which 96% live in Medway. A further 5 responses were received by email.
- 8.9. Most comments were supportive of the approaches presented in the Design Code, a summary of responses can be found in Appendix 3.
- 8.10. Some suggestions were beyond the scope of the Design Code and so could not be incorporated into the final content.

9. Climate change implications

- 9.1. The Council declared a climate change emergency in April 2019 - item 1038D refers, and has set a target for Medway to become carbon neutral by 2050.

These priorities sit at the heart of the Chatham Centre Design Code.

- 9.2. The information and guidance within the Chatham Centre Design Code SPD will support existing and emerging planning policies within the Council's Development Plan and the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), including those relating to sustainability, sustainable development, and mitigating the effects of climate change as well as more compact and urban development set within a centre that is more pedestrian and cycle-friendly and based on a greater modal shift to public transport.

10. Financial implications

- 10.1. The costs of producing the document have been met from within the externally funded Design Code Pathfinder programme. There are no financial implications to the Council, other than the printing costs for a limited number of paper copies of the Design Code and officer time, which can be accommodated from within existing revenue budgets.

11. Legal implications

- 11.1. The Design Code document is a proposed Supplementary Planning Document. On adoption, it will be a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. The Council has followed the legal requirements for producing Supplementary Planning Documents, including the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Lead officer contact

Duncan Berntsen
Senior Urban Design Officer
duncan.berntsen@medway.gov.uk
01634 331705

Lisa Maryott
Head of Business Development and Specialist Service
Lisa.Maryott@medway.gov.uk
01634 331102

Appendices

Appendix 1 Chatham Centre Design Code – set out in supplementary agendas 1, 2 and 3 due to large file size
Appendix 2 Diversity Impact Assessment
Appendix 3 Summary of Consultation Responses

Background Papers

None