

Case Study

Design for Development, Supplementary Planning Guidance for Darlington

Summary of Project

Characterisation of Darlington Borough in support of statutory planning policy

Project Partners

Client: Darlington Borough Council working with Building Design Partnership [external urban design consultants], Darlington Civic Trust and CABA @ Tees Valley

Procurement Route

The aim of this project was to support the development of a 'Design for Development' supplementary planning document for Darlington, specifically in the provision of 'client' advice on the commissioning of consultant support, use of in-house resources and the method

There was an emphasis in the characterisation 'evidence base' supporting and working alongside in-house planning and development staff. The programme manager became involved through the introduction of Darlington's in-house urban designer¹ and was briefed to support the production of supplementary planning guidance on urban design appropriate to Darlington – guiding the procurement process, working project brief [where there was involvement with external consultants working through a framework agreement] and officer training and support.

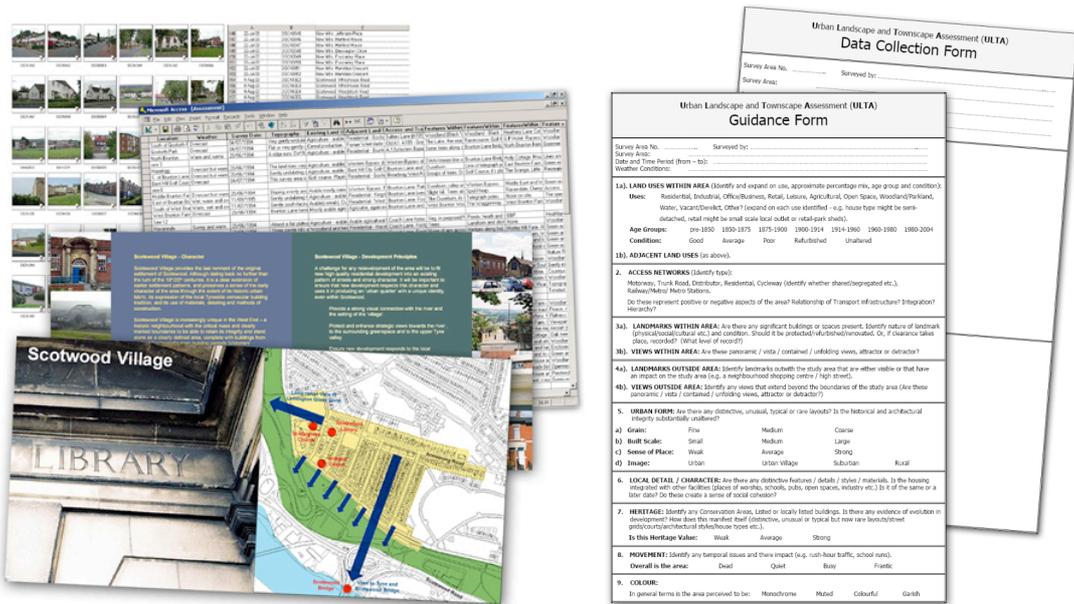
The resources available to the planning authority were limited and the initial involvement was advising the production of the SPD brief and the separation of tasks that would be suitable for in-house officers to undertake and those tasks where the external consultants were to undertake work for the SPD. It was acknowledged that the planning authority required both additional capacity and additional competencies to support the production of the SPD. *CABA* offered to support some of the early methodology and data collection, with associated training for the in-house officers while the small team of consultants would use this material, assisting in some analysis, to put together a draft document. There was a common planning officer contact and co-ordination role for both these parallel work streams.

The key early task in this work was to identify area / neighbourhoods of distinctive character within Darlington and undertake a systematic recording of the physical characteristics of each of these areas. This was to understand local distinctiveness and the defining characteristics of an area as the basis for informing the SPD and managing change to reinforce areas of strong positive character, enhance areas of weak character and to address areas with a negative character. This was the initial preparatory stage in advance of putting forward a policy response to reinforce or enhance local distinctiveness. The characterisation was, in part, based on the work undertaken to support the production of a design code for Central Park.

¹ This was prior to the in-house designer moving post to Yorkshire. *CABA* assumed a similar role in guiding the production with the support of an extended in-house team of planners.



[Range of recent policy guidance and examples of characterisation reviewed as part of the scoping of methodologies, highlighting typical content, extend and research methodology]



[Extracts from the Urban Landscape and Townscape Assessment records for Newcastle; including database of records; and the survey forms used by Gateshead Council]

While there were a few examples of design guidance that has been progressed to the status of supplementary planning guidance², the methodology used was ultimately adapted from the Urban Landscape and Townscape Assessment [ULTA]³ used by both Newcastle City and

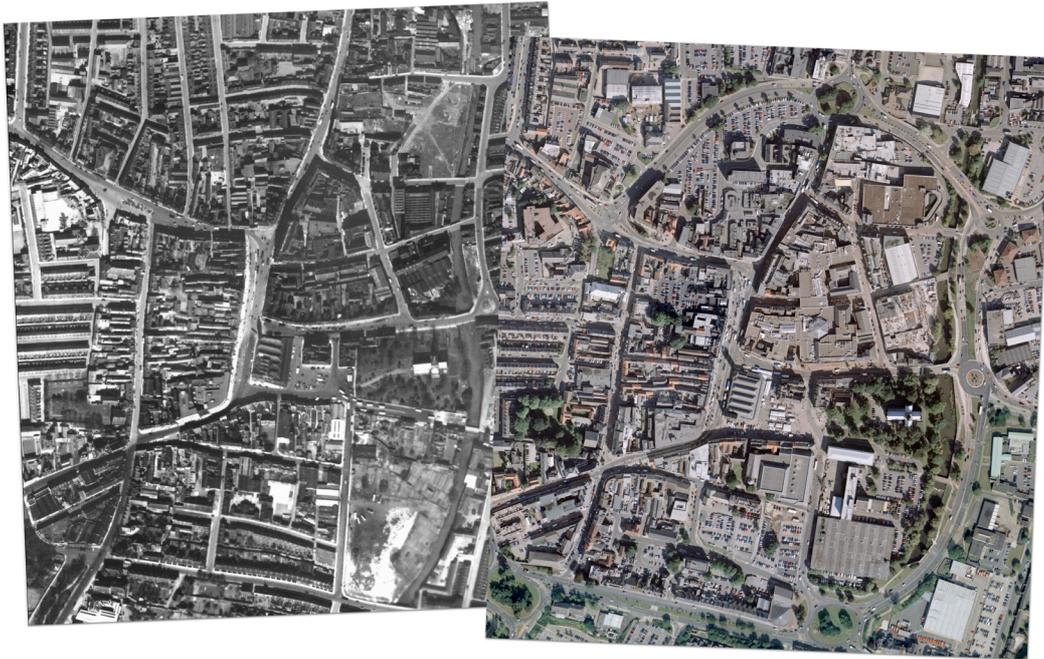
² One useful example being; Huntingdonshire District Council Operational Services, Planning [September 2004] *Huntingdonshire Landscape and Townscape Assessment: Supplementary Planning Guidance* [Huntingdonshire District Council].

³ The approach to strategic characterisation has been advocated in; CABE, English Heritage *et al* [2003] *Building Sustainable Communities: Actions for Housing Market Renewal* [Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, London]; and the ULTA methodology was also referred to in; pp 12-13, CABE [2005] *Creating Successful Neighbourhoods: Lessons and Actions for Housing Market Renewal* [Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, London].

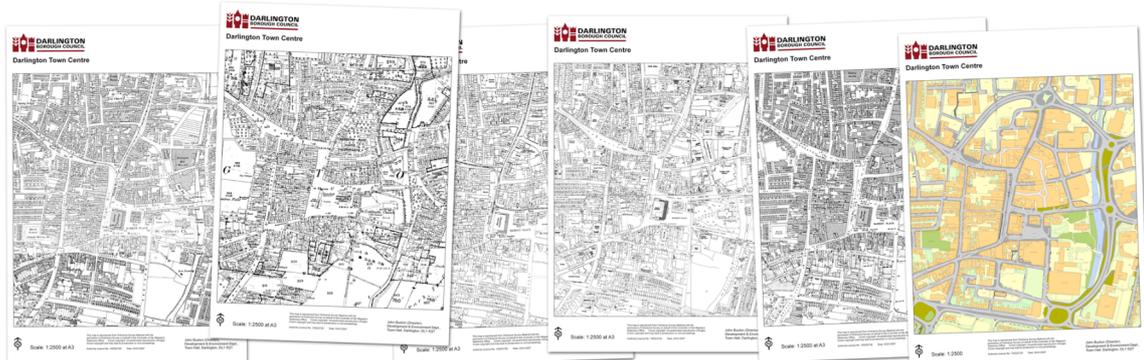
Gateshead Council⁴ as part of their regeneration and housing market renewal activities⁵. This was selected as a starting point as [1] the methodology and documentation was developed in partnership with English Heritage staff within the North East of England [including testing and quality assurance]; [2] it had been tested in practice; and [3] it was the methodology most familiar to the programme officer.

The key tasks involved ...

... desk-top research and preparation undertaken by Darlington Council that included historic / photographic data collection [including aerial images and maps] ...



[Comparative aerial images of Darlington town centre from 1948 and 2005]



[Desk research included the collection of a series of historical maps; 1850's through to Mastermap extract from 2006; to assist the definition of individual character areas]

⁴ Gateshead Council had initially commissioned the North East Civic Trust and then GVA Grimley to undertake an ULTA for their housing market renewal areas between September 2004 and May 2005. Newcastle City Council was carrying out the work in-house. Examples; GVA Grimley [January 2006] *Urban Design, Heritage and Character Analysis Report: Bensham and Saltwell* for Gateshead Council; and GVA Grimley [March 2006] *Urban Design, Heritage and Character Analysis Report: Teams* for Gateshead Council.

⁵ Acknowledgement to Stewart Timmis, Gateshead Council for sharing of research / policy material and advice on the benefits of different characterisation methodologies and procurements – this included a useful review and briefing produced by Gateshead Council for the DCLG of the idea / theory of the ULTA and what worked well in practice.

This example [a mix of photographic record and descriptive text] provided the basis for an extended officer workshop. This was a workshop⁶ that introduced [1] the aims and ideas of undertaking a characterisation study; [2] methodology [introducing the sample pro-forma and including several local / regional examples]; and [3] the relationship with and importance within the statutory planning process.

It also involved a mapping exercise with four small groups, providing the first draft of individual character areas within the town. These areas were aggregated and digitised to provide the basis for the formal consultation exercise for the production of the Supplementary Planning Document.



[Darlington council officers on site with their clip-boards and cameras]

This desktop work was followed by a testing of the methodology on site by small groups within an area to the immediate west of the town centre followed by a group feedback session that had the additional task of adding certain elements to the proforma to ensure a closer fit to the typical areas in Darlington.



[Example of individual character area; Inner Area Victorian Terraces; as a collated record of the workshop case study undertaken by the team from Darlington Council]

⁶ “Characterisation of Darlington Workshop” held at Hotel Bannatyne, Darlington; 10th January 2007. Attendants: Harry Alderton, Highways; Brendan Boyle, Planning Policy; David Chambers, Educational Premises Team; Sarah Cornforth, Strategic Projects; Rob George, Countryside; Alan Glew, Housing; Paula Jamieson, Sustainable Development Officer; Jeremy Smith, Transportation; Louise Toms, Town Centre Manager; Carol Whelan, Environmental Health; Geraint Williams, Pedestrian Heart Liaison.

The examples of these early project steps were written up and supplied to the planning authority along with the survey photographs. Much of this staged material has also been made available on the *IGNITE* web site as an example of an appropriate planning methodology for other local planning authorities.

Since the initial pilot, the SPD has progressed through its public consultation stages and the survey work continues; albeit on an ad-hoc basis when officer time permits; to support and develop the supporting evidence for this document.

Timescale of overall project

The programme manager's involvement began November 2006 and continued post workshop to mid February 2007, with occasional contact at key events beyond this date.

Budget [approx]

The budget was limited to staff time plus hosting of officer workshop [venue hire and catering].

Nature of advice provided

Period of Assistance:

How and at what stage did you assist the client?

There was an invitation to get involved from the outset of the project when the programme and timescale for the SPD was being compiled by local authority officers. There was an opportunity to shape the content of the project and the balance of work split between in-house staff and consultancy. The additional support was then targeted, based upon the programme manager's skills, to facilitate a practical training support that also provided additional capacity to the work being undertaken by the council officers.

Approximate time given to advise [in days]

Approximately 10 days – comprising initial briefing and input into project brief 2 days; research / scoping 3 days, pilot area [survey and write up] 1 day; workshop 2 days plus 2 days recording and review.

Client involvement and the impact of the advice provided

Was there a client commitment to design quality?

There was a good level of grass-roots commitment to design within the local authority officers. Many of the staff had been involved in a number of strategic projects; public art, town centre public realm, regeneration sites; that provided a grounding in the typical work of urban designers and the interface with statutory planning.

What was the design capacity of the client?

The capacity was varied. While there was a dedicated urban design officer within the authority, there was a certain energy and commitment to design as well as capacity. The loss of this post [assumed this was partly due to the rescaling of the post] meant that no individual officer took responsibility for leading on design quality, although the general skill level was high.

How seriously did the client act on your advice? Were you genuinely welcomed into the project team? What was your most valuable contribution?

The client group, at all levels of management from director to planning officers, was very open to listening and responding to enabling advice. The programme manager having a comparative local authority background was helpful in building early trust and understanding with the team, making the team feel like a team. It was genuinely collaborative.

Perhaps the most valuable contribution was the confidence in undertaking the work internally. In addition to saving money, there was an opportunity to learn on the job and to undertake group-based fieldwork. The novelty of this way of working and learning from each other was welcomed.

What part of the support given worked well and what could have been done better?

At one level, the methodology support based in research and contacts / networks and an awareness of who was already doing what in similar areas within the North east of England was valuable. Yet this could have been supported better over the longer term – as there was a project leadership role that was initially adopted in assisting that was unable to continue. So while certain skills were developed through the exercise, the lack of capacity meant that without a project champion, most of the officers reverted back to their day job responsibilities.

Were there any problems encountered and how were they or could they have been overcome – technical, political or procedural?

As above, there was an issue of staff continuity with several individuals who were initially involved in the preparation of the project brief leaving the authority. This was a top-down political issue where the re-grading / down-grading of technical posts; particularly those without management or financial responsibility; was causing many officers to feel undervalued – and with the loss of key individuals, increasingly overworked. Added to this was a frustration that the most interesting work was being undertaken by external staff.

Did the client appoint a Design Champion and/or architectural design advisor?

The early involvement was on the invitation of the officer design champion.

What skills did the client develop during the enabling involvement and will this impact beyond the project?

The skills associated with much of this work were already present in the Darlington in-house staff. The openness to work collaboratively and in multi-disciplinary teams was present. The project simply provided a temporary focus on a 'live' design issue to exercise this openness. Thus, the input was less about skills and more about attitude and organisational culture.

Outcomes

What will your input have on the quality of the end product?

The quality of the finalised SPD; the approach adopted and the level of character analysis; will be more locality specific due to the advocated in-

house approach. The level of embodied experience and local knowledge in the combined local authority team has been tapped and captured in policy through the approach to collaborative working.

Do the procurement design and construction methods used provide lessons for other or best practice for wider dissemination?

The approach adopted is exemplary within the Tees Valley and there is potential to highlight this work, once it is completed, as an important case study in pragmatic approach to developing local policy. As the very least it should provide confidence for in-house teams to pool their knowledge and understanding of place.

Did the project go to CABA / Regional / Sub-regional Design Review?

No, although there is potential to use regional design review to share this project experience with other local authorities within the north-east.

Next stages

What are the next steps in terms of the project's progress?

The production of the SPD is on-going in two streams of internal / external work. The planning department recently underwent their public consultation exercises associated with the required SCI to accompany the SPD.

When will the project be completed?

The completed SPD should be finalised and adopted before the end of December 2007 – fitting into the local development scheme timescale.

Key issues

What were the key issues that came out of this project? - Can you draw out a few summary lessons, core benefits of being involved with this project or key issues that we can learn from?

One of the key lessons in this project is the importance of linking the policy and regulating activities within the local planning authority and in so doing, engendering some sense of ownership over the project. To some extent it is a hypothesis that the design guidance SPD is more likely to be used and more suited to the needs of the local authority planners whenever it has been produced by the same team.

The ability to learn from neighbouring authorities activities in design methods; in this instance it was predominantly Gateshead; through the utilisation of officer 'learning networks' has been an important 'regional' starting point.

Further information

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This case study is based upon a generic *CABA Enabling Project Support Report* and *IGNITE* format.