

SPD 12 Design Guide for Extensions and Alterations
Professional Agents' Forum (PAF)
Hove Town Hall, G87
02 November 2018, 0900-1130

Attendees:

BHCC: Liz Hobden, Paul Vidler, Tim Jefferies, Sujeet Sharma

PAF: Nick Lomax, Liam Russell, Kim Strassman, Paul Burgess

Notes from the meeting

Meeting started with a presentation from BHCC giving an introduction and overview of work undertaken so far, methodology for updating SPD12 which includes a triangular analysis of user perspective (input made by this meeting by PAF), appeal decision analysis (ongoing) and internal review within the Council involving officers and Members (ongoing). Draft contents, timescale and broader approach were presented as an agenda for discussion. PAF members were invited to make general comments as well as detailed observations on seven key elements in the SPD.

General Comments:

- Effective implementation and efficient interpretation of the guidance by Case Officers highlighted
- Less experienced planners can't interpret guidance which needs some clarity
- Impact on streetscene needs clarity. There is inconsistency in guidance and illustration (example illustration does not follow 45 degrees rule)
- Householders have difficulties deciding whether to invest on something like daylight assessment due to vagaries of the decision making
- Potential for the SPD to take up a role of SPD 12-enhanced with greater clarity in what is being sought
- SPD compliance often leads to poor quality outcomes and disastrous internal areas. SPD should ultimately seek to achieve good design
- Over-controlling and prescriptive on certain elements
- Conservation Areas require pushing the boundaries. Heritage sensitive areas can have the highest bar, but there are areas where SPD application can afford to be more relaxed. Variation of architectural styles and streetscene in different areas require different approaches
- SPD needs to catch up with expanding PD rights
- Given the variety of strands of applications there has to be some rules, however it is all about implementation. Principles in the SPD follow established design criteria applicable to all typology of schemes but the emphasis should vary
- Overall the guidance/illustration do not take account of the topography in Brighton and Hove
- A checklist approach might help in bringing this clarity for both applicants/agents and Case Officers. A simplified SPD would obviate the need for extensive guidance
- Guidance should have 10 or 20 examples demonstrating why they are positives and cover range of cases including those that are exceptional
- Either keep it supremely simple if not explain different terminologies used
- More common sense should be applied on objections and lack of objections
- Compliance with SPD 12 could be linked to validation list

Single storey rear extensions

- Emphasis on visual impact on the rear is unduly cumbersome and needs a rethink
- Extension should be seen in its own merits and should be judged in its own right. Some schemes do not have front, back or side. Corner buildings fall within that aspect. SPD however aiming at the common situations
- Clarity in criteria needed. Criteria 5 is an overarching principle and should be the first one to be assessed. It should then obviate the need for applying other more prescriptive criteria
- Overlooking receiving unduly emphasis for single storey rear extensions therefore needs rationalising especially for city centre areas
- More clarity over the meaning of 'overbearing' needed
- Overlooking in city centre is different. Application of overbearing criterion for a single storey rear extension is not appropriate

Two storey rear extension

- In areas with less sensitivity – SPD should be more relaxed
- For schemes not complying with overbearing or 45 degrees rules SPD should be clear about how to mitigate against those. Rules are important to distinguish poor quality schemes from good quality schemes. SPD should have hooks that would enable Officers to suggest solutions Order of how that is processed is important
- When all other conditions are fulfilled roof needing to be below the ridge is too prescriptive
- Flat roof and its impact on the rear of the building needs to be reconsidered, especially looking at the positives - flat roofs often give more light to neighbours; create space for solar panels etc
- The guidance provides some flexibility with the inclusion of 'generally' and 'normally', which is however easy to ignore

Infill extension

- Wrong illustrations in the document
- Causes practical problems with what is being prescribed and an area to review
- Rear of the building - wrap around should be made clear. Diagram showing wraparound as acceptable does not make sense
- Wraparound in Conservation Areas can be less restrictive as long as it follows original forms of the building. Listed buildings is a different matter

Side extensions

- Setback is generally not a bad rule but blanket application may not be appropriate. How much to set back – is an issue. There can be no rule of thumbs on streetscene impact which requires design justification exercise
- 'Balance' is a criterion to be reviewed. It is common in semi-detached extensions, its application on detached houses not appropriate
- Need to think out of the box for some cases - Corner sites/contemporary design solutions are often positively received by Inspectors

Dormers

- Too much emphasis on aligning windows. Everything does not need to be symmetrical. Prescribing style is inappropriate and can be very subjective. Any rationale for design that should be positively looked at
- Dormer policy needs reviewing. It is often described as impacting on the host building which is not necessarily correct
- Page 17 narrative restrictive on box dormers. This needs to be relaxed for areas with less sensitivity
- 'Dormer windows should be as small as possible' needs reviewing. Sense of proportion is what matters
- Guidance on matching materials too prescriptive. It should be the starting point. The latitude given is hidden

Roof alterations

- Illustration in the document is incorrect
- Roof alteration sensitivity differs across different context and guidance needs to be rationalised
- Guidance on roof alteration and dormer windows should be separated. Alternatively, there should be no dormer window policy just the roof alteration
- Roof lights as few as possible and as small as possible contradicting
- 'Cabrio style roof light visually inappropriate' needs reviewing
- Text suggesting distinction on the front and rear dormer windows should be included

Balconies

- Balconies and roof terraces guidance are restrictive and discourage exploiting sea views/garden views. Front balconies have positives and negatives. Visual harm by having a balcony in non- Conservation Areas needs to be reviewed
- Too prescriptive. Balconies should be encouraged as they provide amenity space

Finally,

The panel agreed that it is a good way forward for the BHCC to set the bar higher. SPD update should be priming people for positive intervention. It is recognised that SPD cannot cover everything but overarching pursuit of excellence must surely be the driver.

Sujeet Sharma

BHCC

