

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

PLANNING COMMITTEE

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE DESIGN AWARDS

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To brief members on the implications and benefits of establishing a biennial district design awards scheme.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Good quality housing design can improve social wellbeing and quality of life by reducing crime, improving public health, easing transport problems and increasing property values, both commercial and private. Research conducted by CABI and academic institutions has continually showed the benefits that good design can bring to an area, not only in economic benefits, but also social, with a decrease in anti-social behaviour and improvements in people's wellbeing.
- 2.2 Recently the council resolved to adopt the Building for Life (BfL) criteria for assessing major housing proposals and this is considered an important step in raising the quality not only of dwellings, but also the general quality of the built environment in North Lincolnshire. BfL will become an increasingly important tool in relation to determining planning applications and completing Annual Monitoring Returns and its continued use and promotion should be increasingly important and promoted.
- 2.3 BfL is only one part, however, in the battle to improve the quality of the built environment in North Lincolnshire. Many local authorities now have a plethora of guidance and statutory policy in terms of improving the quality of the built environment and the public realm, including the adoption of building quality/design awards.
- 2.4 The purpose of this paper is to discuss the merits of establishing a district design awards scheme within North Lincolnshire.
- 2.5 There are, of course, many national award schemes, such as that run by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and probably most famously the Stirling Prize for Architecture (administered by RIBA). There are also regional awards such as the RIBA White Rose Awards for Yorkshire. However these awards are mainly for exemplar schemes, many of which cost tens of millions of pounds, which are unlikely to reward the small to medium scale development that a district like North Lincolnshire provides. At a district level, there are few local planning authorities that promote the use of a design awards scheme –

examples include Charnwood Borough Council in Derbyshire, Redcar and Cleveland and Durham City Council.

2.6 The benefits of running an awards scheme are clear – they are extremely useful for:

- (a) celebrating good design: raising the profile of existing good design highlights work which should be brought to a wider audience for its excellence;
- (b) encouraging good design: rewarding good schemes sets benchmarks for future work, encouraging others to match or exceed them;
- (c) promoting good design for everyone: professionals, clients, planners, funders, and the public should be able to understand the benefits of good design, and this is often best demonstrated by using successful examples.

2.7 An awards scheme is currently run by the council's own Building Control service in conjunction with Building Control services from South Yorkshire (Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham and Sheffield) and the Humber (East Riding, Hull and North East Lincolnshire) entitled the Design in Excellence Awards, which is held annually and rewards built schemes that have been approved by the relevant local authorities' Building Control department in the following categories:

- (a) Best Housing Development 1-10 units
- (b) Best Housing Development 11+ units
- (c) Best Social or Affordable Housing Development
- (d) Best Community Project
- (e) Best Domestic Project
- (f) Best Commercial Project up to £1 million
- (g) Best Commercial Project over £1 million
- (h) Best Sustainable Project
- (i) Best Restoration and Conversion
- (j) Best Partnership with a Local Authority

2.8 The categories listed above give an indication of categories that could be included in any proposed planning-related design awards. However, the Building Control awards only consider schemes that have been delivered by the local authority building control service, but of course not every proposal is assessed by local authority building control and therefore some exemplar schemes may not have been put forward for consideration.

- 2.9 It is therefore considered that the introduction of a planning-related design awards scheme would be beneficial in promoting quality in the built environment of North Lincolnshire.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Option 1 – to consult on the establishment of a biennial design awards scheme for planning applications that have been submitted and built. Categories for consideration could include:

- (i) Best single dwelling;
- (ii) Best small-scale housing development (1-9 units);
- (iii) Best large-scale housing development (10+ units);
- (iv) Best public building (either by the local authority, housing association or central government);
- (v) Best commercial/industrial project; and
- (vi) Best sustainable project

3.2 Option 2 – do nothing.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Option 1 – The creation of a design awards scheme will further promote the fact that North Lincolnshire is committed to improving the quality of the built environment in the area, by rewarding those that make the effort to do so. To reward mediocre schemes would be to the detriment of the ethos of the awards, therefore if it was considered that there was no worthy winner, then no award would be given in any particular category. The introduction of such an awards scheme would also help raise the profile of the planning service. It is considered that as part of the awards process any award winning schemes would gain the right to publicise the fact that they are a 'winning' scheme.

4.2 In relation to how the awards scheme is structured and run, the following suggestions are made to prompt debate:

- (i) The awards are held every other year, as it is considered that North Lincolnshire does not have the volume of construction to justify running an awards scheme every year.
- (ii) Consideration should be given to approaching neighbouring authorities in order to set up a sub-regional approach such as the one that is taken by Building Control. If a sufficient number of local authorities agree to the scheme then it may be possible to run an awards scheme every year.
- (iii) The judging panel could consist of a mix of councillors and professional officers. Consideration should also be given to the appointment of a 'public champion' (ie a member of the public).

- (iv) The council could also utilise external independent architectural expertise to provide a valuable boost to the credibility of the awards.
 - (v) The council could explore the possibility of external sponsors for any awards event. This would provide benefits in the form of reducing the cost to the council for hosting any event and enable the sponsor to raise their profile.
- 4.3 Promotion of the awards scheme will be crucial. Promoting the scheme well at the start ensures a high profile to encourage entries. It should be promoted to clients, architects, designers, the public and within the authority. The council could use leaflets, the press and the internet.
- 4.4 Promotion at the end is also crucial to the success of any such scheme. If one of the reasons for running awards is to raise the profile of good design, then the council must celebrate the winners widely. The council could hold an event or an exhibition, or publish a booklet or webpage, or use the media. Certificates are worthwhile and plaques will clearly identify each building, but can be costly.
- 4.5 Option 2 - To do nothing would continue to potentially disadvantage North Lincolnshire in terms of visual quality, due to poorly designed environments. It would also perpetuate the submission of layouts for new development that are replicas or 'clones' of sites elsewhere in the country and which contribute nothing towards the quality and legacy of the built environment that would be created.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

- 5.1.1 None as such, it is expected that any small financial expenditure would be from the existing budget and the appointment of a sponsor organisation should help offset costs further.

5.2 Staffing

- 5.2.1 Members of staff from the council's Development Control team would be involved in the administration, promotion and management of the awards scheme.

5.3 Property

- 5.3.1 Any awards event may be held at a prestigious council venue such as Pittwood House or Normanby Hall.

5.4 IT

- 5.4.1 Any awards event would most likely utilise IT facilities such as projectors.

6. OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 – CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)

6.1 Statutory

6.1.1 North Lincolnshire has a duty to promote good, well-designed developments; poor, badly-designed developments do nothing to improve the fabric of the built environment of the area or raise the area's profile.

6.2 Environmental

6.2.1 None.

6.3 Diversity

6.3.1 None.

6.4 Section 17 – Crime and Disorder

6.4.1 None.

6.5 Risk

6.5.1 None.

6.6 Other

6.6.1 None.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 It is recommended that further consultation work be carried out on the feasibility of setting up a planning design awards scheme for North Lincolnshire.

7.2 That the results of the consultation exercise be reported back to the Planning Committee before any decision is taken to proceed with such a scheme.

HEAD OF PLANNING

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Date: 24 March 2010

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

None