

3 Understanding Character

3.1 For the purposes of this SPD, character is defined as:

'locally distinctive areas that share a sense of place through their physical and functional attributes, which combine to distinguish one part of the Borough from another.' ⁽³⁾

3.2 The idea of establishing the character of a place and responding positively to that character is now a well-established principle of modern planning. Developments should, 'respond to local character and history, and reflect the identity of local surroundings and materials, while not preventing or discouraging appropriate innovation' ⁽⁴⁾

3.3 The Elmbridge Core Strategy embraces the concept of local character and context, containing specific policies for eight distinctive settlement areas across the Borough. This SPD provides more detailed assessments on the character of the urban areas of the Borough on a settlement by settlement basis within the individual companion guides.

3.4 The diagram below reflects the wide range of components that contribute to the character of an area. They will each have different emphasis, depending on the character of a particular place. It is important to remember that the character of a place is evolving; it is different today than it was a century ago and it is still changing. Every place contains remnants of its past (heritage assets) and as they adapt they contribute to its present character.



Figure 3.1 Character components diagram

3 Forum Heritage Services, June 2011

4 National Planning Policy Framework, CLG, March 2012

Why is Character Important?

3.5 The understanding and sensitive response to the character of a place is an essential part of delivering successful development. Your understanding should come from appraising the site and its immediate and wider setting (section 4).

3.6 The context of a site will provide key indicators of character which will inform how the site can be developed in order to maintain and enhance the character of a place. Such characteristics as the general pattern and scale of development; the influence of landscape; short and longer views; skylines; and predominant materials will all have an influence on the character of a place and you will need to consider these issues when proposing change.

3.7 Sites and settings evolve; sometimes over many centuries of overlays of development and use. This can often be subtle elements such as the line of an historic boundary or the survival of remnant sections of a landscape scheme. You can turn these assets to your advantage in creating a place with a positive character which responds to the past, maintains the essential qualities of the present, but looks to creating the character of the future.

3.8 When considering new development, it is important to note that there are other important sources of information that should be referred to in addition to this SPD. These include:

The Elmbridge Local Plan

3.9 This currently comprises the Elmbridge Core Strategy, the proposals map and saved policies from the Replacement Elmbridge Borough Local Plan 2000.

Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans

3.10 These have been produced by the Council for some of its 24 Conservation Areas. They:

- Define the character of the Conservation Area
- Contain development guidelines, and
- Identify enhancement opportunities

3.11 These documents are referenced in the settlement area appraisals and should be referred to should your site fall within a conservation area.⁽⁵⁾

Claygate Village Design Statement

3.12 The Claygate Village Design Statement⁽⁶⁾ was published in 2009 by Claygate Parish Council. This provides a detailed appraisal of the local character of the village and the surrounding land which together give Claygate a unique sense of identity. The Village Design Statement has provided a useful source of information in drafting the Claygate character assessment.

The Envisage Project

3.13 Produced by the local community, the Envisage Project presents an innovative "action plan" for the areas of Cobham, Downside, Oxshott and Stoke D'Aberton⁽⁷⁾. This is a comprehensive document covering a wide range of issues specific to the area including local character.

The Character of Elmbridge (Summaries)

3.14 The following section contains summary pages, which present the key characteristics of Elmbridge and its individual settlement areas. The summaries provide a snapshot of the area and can only reflect key features. For a full analysis of character, please refer to the relevant companion guide.

5 These can be found at www.elmbridge.gov.uk/planning/heritage
6 www.claygate-vds.info
7 www.envisage.org.uk