

**Vicky Smith RIBA**  
City Design Service Manager  
City Design Group  
Bristol City Council

April 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018

Dear Vicky,

The Landscape Institute South West Branch (LISW) is writing to offer suggestions and comments on the **Draft Urban Living SPD** as the document is of interest and relevance to the LISW and our members. We understand the SPD is to replace the former Tall Building Strategy and is to inform the emerging Local Plan.

In general, we support and welcome the document which addresses a significant challenge for society and the built environment professions, in a proactive and well-considered way. However, we feel that the purpose, direction and delivery need further development to make a more robust and concise SPD and notably, draw out a vision for the landscape of urban living in the city, which we believe is important to its identity, function and quality of life.

The primary outcomes from our review are as follows:

1. The term **Urban Living needs a more in-depth definition**, at present is too generic. The aspiration seems akin to a Liveable City; this term would include resilience to climate change, vibrant and diverse culture and history, green infrastructure etc. In its current form, the primary content of the SPD focuses on residential development.
2. There is a lack of a **vision statement**. The vision would deliver direction to what the Council and City aspire to, providing the backbone to the proposals.
3. **A non-technical summary** would assist readers; the document is too long, and critical points are lost in the text
4. The focus on the term 'Tall Building' is emotive; it could be replaced with **Densification** to focus the proposals on density rather than height.

5. The character of Bristol is one of the critical considerations attracting people and investment to the City. However, the document does not describe what this **character and identity** is. In doing so, it would strengthen the proposals set out in the SPD. Potential references to <https://www.preprints.org/manuscript/201708.0100/v1> which concludes that *'landscape underpins place-based attachment and belonging'* and seeks *'Place-making that seeks to draw major inspiration from the natural environment and landscape'*. (Garland and Wells, 2017)

6. The **topography and blue infrastructure** are a key characteristic of Bristol yet are rarely mentioned; they are significant considerations for tall building and future development, the harbourside and critical ridgelines being the location for some of the city's most substantial and distinctive built form. The key principle set out in the Tall Building SPD 2005 is still valid:

“The relationship of the city with the surrounding topography, harbourside and green spaces has greatly influenced the development of the city’s urban pattern and built form. However, post-war reconstruction and particularly post-war tall buildings largely failed to respect and understand this relationship. Hence the need for clear policy guidance to steer future development.”

Page16, Tall Building SPD 1 (2005)

7. **Green and blue infrastructure** is a crucial component of a prosperous city; health and well-being, economic, social and environmental benefits are well documented. Public realm, access to green spaces, pedestrian and cycle networks are essential to successful high-density development. The document would benefit from a form of GI map of Bristol overlaid and related to the various scales. In this respect, we note and applaud the front cover of green/blue infrastructure and public realm to represent a positive image of urban living. We would welcome the inclusion of a whole section/chapter on green and blue infrastructure, this being a valuable component of urban living and therefore design.

8. **Reference to wider relevant policies and guidance**, such as those developed in the JSP, should follow through and be developed in the SPD. The policy document will be quoted upon, critiqued and examined in depth by all interested parties during planning, appeals etc.; the proposals must be led by robust evidence to ensure the SPD retains its integrity.

9. It would assist readers if the **General Principles were repeated and relatable at each scale** (city, Neighbourhood etc.) to demonstrate and emphasise, the strategy’s

proposals.

10. SPD's tend to be a snapshot in time, **future-proofing the document** and an annual steering group meeting may help avoid the report becoming quickly outdated.

In summary, we consider that a vision for the landscape of the city should permeate the Urban Living SPD, providing enduring principles for the retention, enhancement and celebration of the city's unique landscape setting. This would serve all levels of consideration from, at a broad scale level, the location of more substantial built forms to respond to the city's topography; through an intermediary level identifying green and blue infrastructure as a framework for master planning; to, at a local level, more significant consideration of the importance of public and private space in the rapidly-evolving ways of living in an urban area.

We hope that you find these comments constructive and helpful, within the context of an emerging document which is particularly relevant and worthwhile.

Yours sincerely



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