

The logo features a stylized graphic of two overlapping, curved shapes in shades of blue and green, resembling a swoosh or a stylized 'P'.

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**Cam Neighbourhood Plan and Design Code
Entered by Place Studio**

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Award criteria

1. Background

This submission is about the Cam Neighbourhood Plan and the Cam Design Code. This is a joint submission by Cam Parish Council and Place Studio Ltd. It has been drafted mainly by Place Studio who helped the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group produce the Plan and Code.

The Plan (and Code) successfully passed examination in February 2020 and a Decision Statement has been issued after a unanimous vote from Stroud District Environment Committee in June 2020. The Plan is now afforded significant weight in planning decisions ahead of the delayed referendum due to COVID-19 restrictions.

At first glance, the village of Cam looks rather unremarkable. It is located close to but outside the Cotswolds AONB. It has historic roots but no Conservation Areas. More than 70% of its 8,500 residents live in post-war housing estates. However, as work proceeded with the community on their Plan, analysis and evidence work revealed a village loved for its varied and distinct walkable neighbourhoods, thriving community life and shared connection with trees, nature and the surrounding rural landscapes. It became clear why people are proud to call Cam their home.

The adopted Stroud Local Plan identifies Cam and its contiguous neighbour, Dursley, as a first-tier “Accessible Local Service Centre” and a primary focus for strategic growth and development in the southern half of Stroud district. Future strategic levels of development in Cam are expected to come forward through the Stroud Local Plan review, currently well underway and scheduled to deliver new housing and employment requirements in 2021.

Cam Parish was designated as a Neighbourhood Area for the purposes of creating a Neighbourhood Development Plan on 4th February 2014. The Place Studio team were appointed in late 2016 to help the Steering Group NDP Steering Group made up of Councillors and community volunteers drive forward the Plan preparation process. The team worked with the Steering Group to review evidence and to structure a programme of tasks, facilitate community involvement and support the group in the writing of the Plan and, importantly, the Design Code.

The aim of the Neighbourhood Plan is to add local detail to, and coordinate with national and district policy to enable growth that contributes to a sustainable future for the Parish. The Plan contains a suite of sustainable development objectives and policies. Of primary significance to the community, however, is the quality of environment and sustainability, its character and distinctiveness and its quality of pedestrian and cycling connections.

Given the objectives and strategic nature of much of the growth, the Cam Design Code is seen as a vital tool in achieving environmental and connectivity objectives through providing Stroud District and the development industry with positive and clear direction and guidance to inform future place shaping within large scale and strategic growth at Cam.

The Code is underpinned by The Cam Community Design Statement (2018) which provides a comprehensive evidence base that has recorded the unifying characteristics of the village and the particular characteristics within identified character areas.

2. Outcomes

Community

The Place Studio team worked to enable the Steering Group and community volunteers to gather the evidence and write the maximum feasible amount of the Plan content. This ensured that the plan and its evidence base, particularly the Design Code, were informed by local knowledge and values, with priorities being set by the community.

The process of producing evidence to inform the Design Code involved a street-by-street review by volunteers utilising Toolkits designed by Place Studio. These enabled surveyors to articulate their observations and intimate knowledge of their village, and to do so in a way that planners can make use of in robustly assessing environments and schemes.

Cam's Plan and Design Code provide the Parish and the District Council with a thoroughly evidenced, proportionate and locally distinct design and character policy framework, but also a user manual to support future place shaping across Cam. For the Parish Council, and Cam's community in particular, the Plan and Code will provide a tool to enable them to play a much greater role in shaping and assessing both infill development and the form and parameters of strategic allocations and the detailing of schemes that follow.

The Plan and Code are also a source of civic pride for a community and Steering Group that worked very hard to deliver what is recognised as an excellent plan by the Examiner and district council.

Economy

The Cam Neighbourhood Plan has a broader agenda than just design and character, and therefore includes policies to protect employment and bolster the vitality of the village centre. The Design Code is a tangible demonstration of Cam Parish Council's positive approach to enabling appropriate and strategic levels of development. In doing so, the parish is facilitating the delivery of high quality environments for the delivery of affordable housing and new employment opportunities, not only for newcomers but also for Cam's existing residents, around 13% of whom are within the 30% most deprived in the country.

Environment

The primary focus of the Cam Design Code is the protection and extension of Cam's embedded relationship with the landscape, trees and nature. It builds on detailed local evidence on character, with further professional assessment by Place Studio and guidance to inform the delivery of any new development that may be proposed in Cam Parish. The Cam Design Code should be used to inform a locally distinct and sensitive approach to delivering well designed developments in Cam.

As Cam continues to be considered a strategic housing location, outside of the scope of its Neighbourhood Plan, Cam Parish Council wish to ensure that the community's stated understanding of its distinct character is given great weight in all stages of the allocation and design of development.

The Design Code is part of the Cam Neighbourhood Development Plan and can be found in Appendix 3 to this Plan. It underpins policies on environment, local character and distinctiveness as well as access and movement.

3. Planning contribution

Leadership

Because of Place Studio's strong and principled leadership on the Plan preparation process, the Plan and Code are in the vanguard of locally and collaboratively produced place-focused policy, working together with the Local Plan to simultaneously enable strategic economic and housing growth and infuse and reinforce Cam's locally distinctive 'DNA' and values into the design and delivery.

Partnership

Where Neighbourhood Plans are written for towns and villages that are the focus of strategic planning and allocations, the risk of tension and conflict is heightened. This can ultimately result in challenges and delays to both plans and risks unplanned development slipping through. The Cam Plan and Design Code seek to pre-empt this. At the strategic level, the Plan has sought to weave its policies with those of its neighbour's Neighbourhood Plan – Dursley, also supported by Place Studio. The process of preparing the Plan and the Design Code was highly collaborative. Workshops were held as part of the preparation of the Code with a range of invited people, local community as well as District Council. As part of Place Studio's partnership approach, comments and suggestions from development industry representatives were also taken on board to shape the Design Code.

The Design Code is not prescriptive or constraining. The design criteria are carefully shaped to focus on core elements of place-shaping that the community value and that make Cam distinct. They set landscape-led baseline parameters for development in Cam, as expressed in the recent 'Living with Beauty' Report recommendations, enabling development to be sustainably and "beautifully placed" within the landscape. The Design Code recognises the diversity of character areas within Cam, particularly within its 20th century growth, and the quality of highly valued space, landscape and views. It does not impose strict criteria on building form other than those necessary to enable new growth to site comfortably within its landscape setting.

From the start, the Neighbourhood Plan preparation process took a collaborative approach with the Stroud Local Plan strategy and allocations, setting clearly proportionate and distinctly evidenced and locally responsive policy and design criteria at the parish level to complement the strategic policies of the district.

Implementation and Delivery

Now the Plan has passed through all stages except the final one of referendum, it has 'significant weight' that Development Management Officers will apply when considering planning applications in Cam Parish. The detail in the evidence base will provide a valuable Development Management toolkit for both Stroud District Council and Cam Parish Council, together with applicants. In terms of implementation and delivery, Place Studio have been commissioned to run training with Cam Parish Council to give local councillors the skills to ensure that their Plan, and especially the Design Code, have the effect they seek.

According to the Plan Examiner:

"These neighbourhood plan policies add a local dimension which will sit comfortably alongside the Stroud Local Plan. They are distinctive policies which reflects the unique characteristics of the parish, and especially its landscape setting."

4. Sustainable development

Positive Short, Medium and Long Term Public Benefit

Cam's Plan and Design Code focus primarily on the medium to longer term development of the village and parish. The community and Parish Council have an immediate greater say in shaping Cam now the Plan and Design Code have successfully passed all stages prior to referendum. The training as above will help Parish Council members to applying the Plan and Design Code to planning applications and influence the review of the Local Plan. The Plan does, however, contain a list of related practical projects that can help to show the value of the Plan in the short term.

The Design Code provides the District Council and applicants with clear and specific criteria and guidance to enable development that sustains and strengthens Cam's valued distinctiveness. This is founded on the in-depth understanding of character and place gained from the many hours of community engagement. No developer or planning authority would ever be likely to undertake such a refined and locally validated design resource.

A balance of economic, social and environmental objectives

The Plan and Design Code have been developed collaboratively with the District Council and through consultation with the development industry to fashion an enabling document. In doing so, it can assist the Local Plan to deliver its balanced strategic growth agenda addressing economic and environmental issues.

Ultimately, the Plan and Code also provide Cam's community with the tools to help secure the long term protection and infusion of the distinct qualities of place that make Cam special for them – the social objectives. This helps secure well-being and quality of life as the village expands, ensuring that future residents benefit from the special qualities of the village through weaving its DNA into their new neighbourhoods.

The UN's Goals

The Plan, and the Design Code as a key element, contributes to each of 17 SDGs to varying degrees, notably:

- **SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being** - One of the targets for this is the promotion of positive mental health and well-being. The evidence base in the Code relating to the walking and cycling network, green spaces and trees illustrates the benefits of the features for both mental and physical health.
- **SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities** – The Design Code focuses on enabling new development to reinforce and enhance the cultural and natural heritage of the Parish, as well as contributing to non-vehicular movement and hence social cohesion.
- **SDG 15: Life on Land** - The nature of the local biodiversity and the green infrastructure network of the parish is clearly set out and key priorities and ambitions are identified, for example, maintaining and increasing tree canopy coverage.
- **SDG 17: Partnership** - Partnership and community involvement have always been a part of sustainable development principles. The Plan and Design Code set out local aims and valued assets, as well as a clear process for pre-application community engagement (Policy CD4).

5. Community benefit

Engagement and Dialogue with Local People and Businesses

The Plan and Design Code were co-produced together with local people, guided by Place Studio's town planners and other professionals. This has enabled the documents to be recognised by the Examiner as being of the highest standard of collaborative place shaping at the local level.

The Design Code provides direct instructions to investors in Cam to help them conserve, capture and extend the DNA of the village defined by its community. It is founded on evidence produced from the observations, associations and values of local people, facilitated by robust character assessment Toolkits provided by Place Studio, bolstered only where necessary by appropriate professional support from additional urban design and landscape appraisals, which were themselves reviewed, amended and validated by the Steering Group.

The Steering Group recognised the need to build a working understanding and dialogue with investors in Cam through reasonable and deliverable policy, coding and guidance. The deliverability of its policies and coding has been strengthened through outreach and positive responses to criticisms and suggestions raised by the development industry within the informal stages of consultation.

A Better Quality of Life for People, especially for Disadvantaged Communities

Good engagement requires work in breadth (open to everybody, if not in great detail) and depth (targeted to key stakeholders), as well as attention to those often missed out.

The work in breadth for Cam mainly involved open, public drop-ins (often 'piggy-backed' on to local events), regular information updates in local newspapers, newsletters and on social media, and open surveys. The work in depth involved two different strands of work. First, a number of invited, highly interactive stakeholder workshops on all topics at the outset and later on specific topics. Secondly, basic evidence collection by local groups and organisations or individuals, as well as drawing on existing information.

This work was done using Toolkits developed by Place Studio for Neighbourhood Plan groups, making them easily used by lay people while also ensuring coverage of key planning-related information.

The successfully examined suite of community, economic and environmental policies reflect the community's recognition that Cam should continue to welcome new residents and integrated development, whilst seeking to protect and bolster the quality of life for its existing community.

Tangible Benefits

The Cam Code articulates the cohesive qualities and quality of life benefits of Cam's distinct relationship with its environment. It also provides an environmental and landscape pattern book that will help ensure that the stewardship and development of the village sustains and delivers these qualities to its community into the future.

"The Cam Design Code represents a very important added extra to our NDP and I believe its value as a standalone 'reference manual' will become even more apparent as our Parish Council learns to engage constructively, at pre-application stage. Commissioning Place Studio to produce The Code as an adjunct to our NDP has strengthened it beyond measure and has equipped us as ordinary councillors to take an active part in shaping our village". Christina Carter, Chair Cam Parish Council

6. Leading practice

Creative and Innovative

The Code is about cohesion and distinction, providing a clear set of non-prescriptive landscape and connectivity design criteria and approaches to inspire development that is woven into Cam and its landscape, linking neighbourhoods with each other, to the countryside and to local facilities. It recognises the diversity of character areas within Cam, particularly within its 20th century growth, but harnesses their positive shared attributes. It does not seek to impose strict criteria on building form and materials but provides flexibility for developers. By linking to and extending Cam's distinct landscape and green infrastructure, it enables new built form that can be 'beautifully' placed in the landscape.

A Transferable Exemplar

Our planning system has focused on protecting the rare, ancient or exceptional, but most of the places we value and call home are ordinary, full of features that subconsciously make us feel good. The 'DNA' of these places so often slips under the radar of national and district processes, leading to development that might conform with the national guidance, but which fails to respect the locally valued characteristics and references of the host place. This can build community resentment and ultimately resistance to delivering growth.

Cam's Design Code adopts an approach that is positive about local distinctiveness and creates clarity and increased opportunity to deliver strategic development that is shaped by community values and enhances that distinctiveness. This has been done in a collaborative way between community and authority that provides a model for many other places. This cannot be done by one or other party alone and needs skilled facilitators to make it happen successfully.

Promoting Equality and Diversity

The quality and accessibility of the public realm plays a key role in creating inclusive community well-being and vitality. Cam's community recognised that the combination of the village's ancient green infrastructure and "snickets", together with the landscape-led approaches adopted by the most treasured of their 20th century neighbourhoods, combined to create the blueprint for not just extending Cam's distinct environmental character, but also extending and connecting its quality of place to all existing and new residents equally.

The proportionate and positive approach adopted by the Plan and Design Code is aimed at enabling growth and providing a framework that extends Cam's quality of place without restricting Local Plan housing delivery, the application of appropriate mixes of housing types and tenures, or the provision of jobs.

In summary, the Examiner noted that:

"The authors of the plan accept that the parish is going to change through the strategic allocations in the north-east corner of the village and have taken a positive approach which seeks to shape the new development so that it meets the needs and aspirations of the local community."